

Inventory of

Leo B. Olson
DeKalb, Illinois

Collection

in the

Regional History Center

RC 338

INTRODUCTION

Yvonne Johnson donated the Leo B. Olson Collection to the Regional History Center on July 31, 2014. Additional materials were donated in 2015.

Property rights in the collection belong to the Regional History Center, literary rights are dedicated to the public. There are no restrictions on access to the collection. Twenty- four hours advanced notice is requested for the audio-visual material due to the need of special equipment.

Linear feet of shelf space: 3.75; 1 digital file (6.11 MB)

Number of containers: 8

Northern Illinois Regional History Center

Collection 338

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Leo B. Olson Collection consists of materials related to Leo Olson's community involvement, professional activities, and military service from 1911 to 1990. The collection also includes a small amount of materials related to Olson's family and the history of DeKalb County, which make up Series I. The first series also consists of materials of his wife, Elaine (Johnson) Olson and family history (the Nelson and Johnson families). Researchers interested in family history should see the Yvonne Johnson Collection, RC 337.

The bulk of the collection consists of the papers of Leo Olson, which are divided into two series: Personal Papers (Series II) and Military Service (Series III). The Personal Papers consist of biographical information of Leo Olson and papers related to his community and professional activities. This includes diplomas, obituaries, photographs, awards, certificates, and a number of artifacts. Also included are portraits of Leo Olson and two home movies on 8mm film. His professional activities make up only a small portion of this Personal Papers Series. There is very little related to his time as communications director at DeKalb AgResearch. Researchers interested in his professional activities should see the DeKalb AgResearch Collection, RC 190.

Series III documents the military service of Olson, who served in the United States Air Force in the Pacific Theater during World War II. Included are military records; correspondence to his wife, Elaine Olson; souvenirs from Australia; and military pins and patches. Of particular interest is the Bronze Medal awarded to Olson, as well as the photographs and scrapbooks of his military service. Reproductions of Finches of Australia (1944), drawings Olson completed while in service, is also a part of this series.

Addendum: It is evident that Olson was a skilled artist and intrigued by birds, particularly parrots and finches, as he has several sketchbooks and loose drawings of avian that were compiled during his time of service in the Pacific Theater. Olson often completed his works of

art by using watercolors to paint his bird drawings. Many of the sketchbooks and scrapbooks in the addendum contain taxonomy and species descriptions in addition to Leo's drawing and watercolors. Also included in the addendum are photographs, mostly portraits of Leo or of trips with his wife, Elaine.

A digital image of Leo's Bronze Medal display is part of the collection and may be accessed in the Center's reading room.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Leo B. Olson was born November 24, 1911 in Shabbona to Oscar and Minnie Olson. His family roots in DeKalb date back to before 1850. He was raised by his aunt and uncle and married Elaine Johnson in 1943. Leo attended DeKalb schools and graduated from Northern Illinois State Teachers College in 1932. To pay for college, he painted signs for a local business that led to a lifelong interest in sketching and painting. After graduating, he became a faculty assistant and went on to teach in a one room schoolhouse for four years. In 1937 he became the Advertising Manager at DeKalb Ag, where he put his design and promotional skills to use. Olson helped the company move to advertising on the national stage through issuing sales manuals, full page farm paper advertisements, radio and TV advertising, and use of field signs. He played a part in the design of the iconic DeKalb "Winged Ear" flying corn logo. He served as the Communications Director until his retirement in 1977. After his retirement, he taught at Kishwaukee College for one year and taught in the journalism department at Northern Illinois University from 1978 to 1986.

Shortly after his marriage to Elaine Johnson in January 1943, Leo enlisted in the United States Air Force during World War II. He served in the Chemical Warfare Service in Australia, New Guinea, and the Phillipines, attaining the rank of staff sergeant when he was honorably discharged in 1945. During his service he was part of the Philippine Liberation and was awarded the Good Conduct Medal and the Bronze Star Medal.

Leo was a dedicated and active member of the DeKalb Community as evidenced of his involvement with numerous organizations. He was a member of the First Lutheran Church and served on its council for six years. He was active in the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce, a member of the DeKalb County Farm Bureau, and served on the NIU Foundation Board of Directors. He was a member and president of the NIU Friends of the Library and received many awards and honors during his service. From the early 1970's to 1987, Leo was an active member of the Kishwaukee United Way, where he served as president in 1987. After his death, the Kishwaukee United Way established the Leo Olson Award in 1989 to honor his many contributions to the organization.

SUBJECT TRACINGS

Aerial Photographs
Advertising – Agriculture
DeKalb County (Ill.) – History

Kishwaukee United Way
Northern Illinois University (N.I.U.)
Olson, Elaine V.
Olson, Leo B.
Sycamore (Ill.)
United States. Air Force.
Veterans
World War II
World War, 1939-1945 – Campaigns – Pacific Ocean

COLLECTION INVENTORY

<u>BOX</u>	<u>FOLDER</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
Series I. Olson Family History & Local History		
1	1	Cemetery Lot Claim for Oscar Olson and minnie Olson, 1971
	2	Death Notice, B.C. Nelson and John Nelson, 1921
	3	Public School Documents for Kenneth Johnson, Lavinia Nelson, 1910-12, 1928
	4	"Incidents at the Miller Farm and DeKalb County," by Emil Nelson, n.d.
	5	Obituary, Maria Johnson [in Swedish], 1924
	6	Obituary, Mr. John Johnson, written by Virginia Nelson Johnson, n.d.
	7	School photographs of Kenneth Johnson and Virginia Nelson Johnson (2), n.d.
	8	Northern Illinois State Teachers College Diploma, Elaine Virginia Johnson, June 9, 1933
	9	Inauguration of Rhoten A. Smith, Northern Illinois University, Alumni Ribbon, Mrs. Elaine Olson, May 24, 1968
	10	DeKalb County History Slide Presentation (69), ca. 1985
	11	Recollections of Dave Smith, 1915
	12	DeKalb High School Photograph and Transparencies, ca. 1960 Photocopied articles
	13	"The Schools of DeKalb County," ca. 1924
	14	"The Story of Chief Shabbona," n.d.
	15	"The Superior: Barbed Wire Journal, 1889," n.d.
	16	"These Eighty-one Years" by J.H. Biggar, 1935
	17	Train Photograph, n.d.
Series II. Personal Papers		
	18	Birth Certificate, 1911
	19	Funeral Card, July 25, 1988
	20	Obituaries, 1988-1990
	21	Teaching Certificate, 1933
	22	Country Life Insurance Company Receipt, March 30, 1946
	23	Notecards for NIU Class Lecture, ca. 1980
		Awards and Certificates:

<u>BOX</u>	<u>FOLDER</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	5
	24	Award of Distinction from Annual Hoards Dairyman Cow Judging Contest, April 1961	
	25	Kiwanis Club of DeKalb Certificate of Appreciation, 1962	
	26	Certificate of Appreciation from Chicago Area Agricultural Advertisers Association, 1977	
	27	Kappa Tau Alpha Initiation Certificate, 1979	
	28	Kishwaukee Community Hospital Tree of Life Certificate, Leo and Elaine Olson, 1984	
	29	Northern Illinois University Foundation President's Award, 1986	
	30	Kishwaukee Community Hospital Tree of Life Certificate, In Memory of Leo B. Olson, 1988	
	31	History of the Kishwaukee United Way Leo B. Olson Award, 1989	
	32	Photograph of First Leo Olson Award Winner, 1989	
	33	Flower Print Negatives (2), n.d.	
		Photographs:	
	34	Leo Olson (10), 1961, 1966, 1972, n.d.	
	35	Wedding Photographs (2), 1943	
	36	Photographs of Joe Gardner (Leo Olson Nephew), (2), n.d.	
	37	DeKalb Area Agricultural Association Group Shot, ca. 1926	
	38	Mesa Verde Vacation Trip Photographs (16), ca. 1952	
	39	Sunset Photograph (1), n.d.	
	40	Notes for speeches, n.d.	
Oversize			
Drawer 35	6	Diplomas, 1928, 1932	
	7	Pet Photographs (2), n.d.	
	8	Ink Portraits of Leo Olson (2), 1975, n.d.	
		Personal Artifacts	
2		Patches from DeKalb Organizations (3), n.d.	
		Pins from DeKalb Organizations (6), n.d.	
		Plate with Leo B. Olson engraving, n.d.	
		Doorknocker with LBO initials, n.d.	
		Northern Illinois University President's Club Member Plaque, Mr. And Mrs. Leo B. Olson, 1975-1980	
		Key Protector with LBO initials, n.d.	
		Northern Illinois University Book End, n.d.	

<u>BOX</u>	<u>FOLDER</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	6
3		8mm Film (2) (color, no sound), n.d.	
Series III. Military Service			
4	1	Letters from New Guinea, 1945, n.d.	
	2	Tree Poem by Joe O'Donnell, n.d.	
	3	Japanese Cartoon from World War II, n.d.	
	4	Koala Bear Photograph, n.d.	
	5	<u>Australian Alphabet</u> by Hal Missingham, 1942	
	6	<u>The Koala Bear</u> by C.B. Barrowcliff, ca. 1943	
	7	Ration Cards, Stamps, and Certificates, 1943-1945	
	8	Correspondence, Leo Olson to Elaine Olson, July 2-4, 1943	
	9	Telegram from Leo Olson to Mrs. Leo Olson, probably December 22, 1943	
	10	Newspaper Articles and Poems, n.d.	
	11	Military Newspapers and Clippings from USA and UK, 1944- 1945	
	12	Leo Olson Military Records, 1943-1945	
	13	Bronze Star Medal Display, Patches (2) and Photo (2), n.d.	
	14	Hand Painted Japanese Handkerchief, n.d.	
	15	Military Portrait of Leo Olson, ca. 1944	
	16-17	World War II Photographs (72) (1 negative), 1943-1945	
	18-19	World War II Gun Camera and Aerial Photographs (44), 1943-1945	
	20	Finches of Australia and New Guinea (25 reproductions), 1944	
Oversize Drawer 35	9	Military Aerial Photograph (1), n.d.	
5		Military Artifacts Ammunition casings (3), n.d. Military patches (9), n.d. US Armed Forces Service Ribbons (6), ca. 1943-1945 Military Pins (10), n.d. Bronze Star Medal, n.d. Decoration Medal, Good Conduct, 1944 Medal, Campaign and Service, Victory, WWII, 1946	
6		Military Scrapbooks:	
	Vol	Photo Scrapbook, Australia, New Guinea, Philippines, 1944-1945	
	Vol	Military Service Scrapbook, 1943-1946	

<u>BOX</u>	<u>FOLDER</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	7
	1	Loose Ephemera found in Military Service Scrapbook, n.d.	
	2	Loose Cards and Military Records found in Service Scrapbook, n.d.	
	3	Loose Photographs from Military Service Scrapbook (10), n.d.	
	4-5	Loose Scrapbook Pages, ca. 1944-1945	

ADDENDUM

Series II. Personal Papers

7		Photographs	
	1	Leo Olson (12), 1966, 1977, n.d.	
	2	Trips, Leo and Elaine Olson: Hawaii, 1974 (1); New York, n.d. (3)	
	3	Donna Klatt and Elaine Olson, n.d.	
	4	Men in car in front of house, circa 1940	
	Item	Plaque, Leo Olson portrait, n.d.	

Series III. Military Service

	5	"Parrots" sketchbook	
	6	Psittacidae [true parrot family] drawings with taxonomy and species descriptions	
	7	Loose drawings and watercolors of birds	
	8	Scrapbook of birds, 1944	
8 OV		Loose pages from a publication about birds (12)	
		Loose drawings and watercolors of birds (12)	
		Sketchbooks containing bird drawings and watercolors (4)	