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Thomas Narven Lewis Collection
Collection 62-1

Prepared & Revised by:
Wilda D. Logan
June 1980

Manuscript Division

Scope Note

This collection which spans ½ linear foot, relates to Thomas Narven Lewis a Liberian who was educated in America, and returned to his country to make major contributions to their education and culture. The papers were donated and compiled by Augusta H. Clawson who sorted these materials from the papers of her father, Frank Clawson. Frank Clawson befriended and aided young Lewis while he was a struggling student in America. In fulfillment of an academic requirement, Augusta Clawson researched Lewis using the letters in her father's possession and made inquiries to the institutions Lewis attended. The result being an excellent biographical sketch on Lewis, dated 1934.

Most of the letters in the collection are from Lewis to Frank Clawson while Lewis was a student at Lincoln University from 1898 to 1903. There are also letters written to Frank Clawson from 1909-1932 after Lewis returned to Lower Buchanan, Grand Bassa, Liberia as a physician and educator. This group of correspondence describes life in Liberia and the effect of World War I in Liberia, plus other political issues.

Also included are correspondence between Augusta Clawson and individuals from whom she requested information on Lewis. Included in her research notes are some personal papers relating to his educational pursuits at Lincoln University and transcripts listing exact courses and grades. Also included is a picture of Thomas Lewis with his three sons dated 1931.

One of Lewis' major contributions to his Liberian culture was the reduction of the BASSA language to a written one. After considerable effort he had the matrix made for a character that would fit a printing machine.

Scope Note

The highlight of the collection is a book printed in BASSA, a Bassa alphabet chart and other printed material in Bassa plus notes on the Bassa Alphabet. In his correspondence to Clawson, Lewis explained how the alphabet was made printable and the controversy it created with the British Authorities in Liberia who authorized only the English language to be taught.

Series Description

- Series A**
Box 62-1
Correspondence
Letters from Lewis to Frank Clawson while a student and after his return to Liberia. Most of the letters were transcribed by Augusta Clawson in pursuit of her research on Lewis. Letters by Ms. Clawson making inquiries about Lewis and other correspondents.
- Series B**
Box 62-1
Lincoln University
Official grades and transcripts of Lewis from Lincoln University, and commencement programs from Lincoln dated 1902.
- Series C**
Box 62-1
Manuscripts
A document research project by Augusta Clawson, an excellent biography of Lewis plus notes, dated 1934.
- Series D**
Box 62-1
Photographs
Six black and white prints of Lewis with his three sons, plus the negatives.
- Series E**
Box 62-1
Bassa Language
A book, an alphabet chart of the BASSA language with other sample material in the dialect.
- Series F**
Box 62-1
Printed Material
Printed material from Storer College and a copy of a poem "The Christian Battlefield" by T.N. Bli

Container List

- Series A Correspondence**
Box Folder
62-1
- 1 General Correspondence - Bishop
 - 2 General Correspondence - Clawson-1898 to 1899
 - 3 General Correspondence - Clawson-1900
 - 4 General Correspondence - Clawson-1901
 - 5 General Correspondence - Clawson-1902
 - 6 General Correspondence - Clawson-1903 to 1921
 - 7 General Correspondence - Clawson-1923 to 1925
 - 8 General Correspondence - Clawson-1926 to 1932
 - 9 General Correspondence - Randall
 - 10 Other Correspondents - Augusta Clawson
 - 11 Other Correspondents - Geo. L. Squirer Mfg. Co.
- Series B Lincoln University**
12 Lincoln University - Official grades and transcripts 1898 to 1902
13 Lincoln University - Commencement Program 1902.
- Series C Manuscripts**
14 Manuscript-Biographical sketch of Lewis - 1934.
- Series D Photographs**
15 Photographs of Thomas N. Lewis and sons 1931.
16 Negatives - Thomas N. Lewis and sons 1931.
- Series E Bassa Language**
17 Bassa Language - Alphabet Chart
18 Bassa Language - Booklet/Primer
19 Bassa Language – Samples
- Series F Printed Material**
20 Printed Material - "The Christian Battlefield"
21 Printed Material Storer College.