
Hope College

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/collection_registers

Part of the Archival Science Commons

Recommended Citation


February 4, 2014.

This Register is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives and College History at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Collection Registers and Abstracts by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.
Papers, 1942-1984. 0.50 linear ft.

**Abstract**

Hope College class of 1936; professor of African languages at the University of California-Los Angeles, visiting professor of linguistics at Hope, 1966. Collection primarily consists of professional journal articles on a variety of African languages, but also includes biographical information, correspondence, clippings, book reviews, and photographs. Correspondents include Calvin VanderWerf, Paul Fried, and Carol Juth.

**Accession No.:** H88-0197  
**Provenance:** William E. Welmers  
**Donor:** Hope College  
**Photographs:** 2 images  
**Processed by:** Rebecca A. O’Shesky, February 1992

**Biography**

William Evert Welmers was born in 1916 to Dutch-American parents in the small farming community of Orange City, Iowa. He grew up in Holland, Michigan, where he lived until the age of twenty. There he attended elementary schools, Hope College High School and Hope College. At Hope College, where his father taught Greek, he graduated summa cum laude with a major in philosophy in 1936, and met his future wife, Beatrice Fairbanks. They were married in 1940.

After graduating from Hope College, Welmers attended Westminster Theological Seminary, where he received his Bachelor and Master of Theology degrees. He received a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1943.

During World War Two, he supervised instruction of Chinese and Japanese for the United States Army, and to collaborate in the preparation of a Chinese dictionary for the War Department. After the war, he went to Africa with his wife and son to do linguistic research for the Lutheran Mission in Liberia. This was the beginning of his association with the Kpelle people, which resulted in numerous publications dealing primarily with the language, but also with other cultural topics.

After two years with the Lutheran Mission, Welmers became a fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies. In this capacity he traveled overland with his wife, son, and daughter from the westernmost to the easternmost point of Africa doing linguistic research in what was then French West Africa, the Gold Coast, Dahomey, Nigeria and Eritrea. This resulted in further publications on Mande languages (Maninka, and Kpell), on languages in two other branches of Niger-Congo: Gur (Senadi, Sup’ide and Bariba) and Benue-Congo (Jukan and Kutep), and on Saho, a Cushitic language of the Afro-Asiatic language family spoken in Eritrea.

After two years, Welmers returned to America to assume a research position at Cornell University. Welmers remained at Cornell for four years, and then returned to Liberia, once again with the Lutheran Mission. This resulted in further publications on Mande languages.
The next five years, 1955-1960, saw Welmers at the Hartford Theological Seminary as associate professor of linguistics. During this period he became widely recognized as an expert on African languages, and was consequently called upon to write a number of encyclopedia articles.

In 1960, Welmers moved to the University of California at Los Angeles, where he was professor of linguistics and African languages. During the next ten years, he turned his attention to the analysis of a number of West African languages and produced articles and pedagogical materials. Much of this was done at the request of the United States Peace Corps for the intensive language instruction of Peace Corps trainees, and included work on Efik, Ewe, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. In 1970, he began work on his magnum opus, African Language Structures, which brought together much of the knowledge that Welmers had acquired over the years, some of it never before recorded, as well as that of some other Africanists, into an internationally recognized survey of some types of widespread structural phenomena that occur commonly in African languages.

After suffering from a serious illness in 1972, Welmer’s health rallied sufficiently to permit him to return to Liberia and Sierra Leone, where he continued his research and writing.

Welmers was an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and served many churches. He was honored by Hope College in 1967 with an honorary Litt. degree. He also was a visiting professor there in 1966. He passed away in 1988.

Scope and Content

The Welmers collection primarily consists of professional journal articles on a variety of African languages, but also includes biographical information, correspondence, clippings, book reviews, and photographs. Correspondents include Calvin VanderWerf, Paul Fried, and Carol Juth. The folders are arranged alphabetically by subject.

Container List

Biographical, 1976, 1982 (includes bibliography)
Book Reviews, 1952-1972
Clippings, 1948-1967
Journal Articles and Unpublished Papers, 1940-1949
   The Phonemes of Fanti, 1942
   A Descriptive Grammar of Fanti, 1946
   Hints from Morphology for Phonemic Analysis, 1947
   Secret Medicines, Magic and Rites of the Kpelle Tribe in Liberia, 1949
   Tonomes and Tone writing in Maninka, 1949
Journal Articles and Unpublished Papers, 1950-1959
   New Light on Consonant Change in Kpelle, 1950
   Notes on Two Languages in the Senufo Group
     Senadi, 1950
     Sup’ide, 1950
   Notes on the Structure of Saho, 1952
   African Language and Christian Missionaries, 1953
Polyglotismanship, ca.1958 (Hope College address)
Analyze or Flounder: A Study in Kpelle Syntax, 1959
Tonemics, Morphotonemics and Tonal Morphemes, 1959

African Languages, 1961
Learning Yoruba in Nigeria, 1966
The Phonology of Kpelle, 1962
The Syntax of Emphasis in Kpelle, 1962
Associative a and ka in Niger-Congo, 1963
Yoruba Scripture Readings, 1966
The Morphology of Kpelle Nominals, 1969
Noun Modifiers in Igbo, 1969
Structural Notes on Urhobo, 1969

The Derivation of Igbo Verb Bases, 1970
Igbo Tonology, 1970
Language Change and Language Relationships in Africa, 1970
The Typology of the Proto-Niger-Kordofanian Noun Class System, 1971
Historical Implications of the Vai Consonant System, 1975

Journal Articles and Unpublished Papers, Undated
Checklist of African Language and Dialect Names
Christian Missions and Language Policies
Niger-Congo Mande

Photographs, William Welmers, n. d. (2 images)