Olav Hammarstrom (1906-2002)

Papers, 1930-1956
2 linear ft.

Acquisition Number: 1995-19

Acquisition: Drawings and renderings were donated by Olav and Marianne (Strengell) Hammarstrom in 1995, with subsequent additions in 1991 and 1996. Records were also donated in June 2003 from the estate of Olav Hammarstrom.

Access: Access to the collection is unrestricted.

Copyright: Copyright to this collection is held by the Cranbrook Educational Community.

Architectural Drawings: All were removed from the collection, rehoused with the Architectural Drawing collection, and cataloged in Horizon (Series 15).

Index: None

Processing: Processed by Cheri Y. Gay, September 2011

History
Olav Hammarstrom, architect and furniture designer, was born July 16, 1906 in Heinola, Finland. He received degrees from the University of Technology and the Athenaeum in Helsinki and worked for several leading architectural firms in Finland. He managed the firm of Alvar Aalto while Aalto was in the U.S. and in 1948 joined Aalto to work on the Baker House dormitory at M.I.T.

Hammarstrom decided to stay in the U.S. and shortly after the M.I.T. project, married fellow Finn Marianne Strengell, whom he had known in Helsinki. Previously married to sculptor Charles Dusenbury, she was head of the weaving department at Cranbrook Art Academy from 1937-1961, and a major figure in textile design and weaving. At Cranbrook, Hammarstrom joined Eero Saarinen in his architectural firm and from 1949-1954 was in charge of interiors and furnishings of the General Motors Technical Center, the majority of the textiles designed by Strengell. He left the firm in 1954 but rejoined it again in 1962 at its new location of Hamden, Conn. During this time he was in charge of the interior space redesign of the 36-story CBS office building in New York City, and the design of a Bloomfield Hills, Mich. residence for Loja Saarinen, wife of Eliel.

Along with his wife Strengell, Hammarstrom was part of a U.N. field study tour in Japan, from 1951-1953, where he studied the manufacture of bamboo and rattan furniture without power tools, and in the Philippines, where he was an adviser in the design and manufacture of rattan furniture. He wrote a report, “Design and Manufacture of Wood and Rattan Furniture in the Philippines,” which is included in the collection. He also worked on similar projects in Jamaica.

Hammarstrom was the architect for several churches including the contemporary designs of the Chapel of St. James the Fisherman in Wellfleet, Mass., for which he received the A.I.A. award for design, and St. Anselm’s Mission Church in Lafayette, Calif. The Hammarstroms purchased property in Wellfleet and in 1952 he designed their home, where they at first vacationed, then beginning in the 1970s, lived full-time. The design was lauded for its “one with nature” feel, built without removing one tree from the property, and was filled with Hammarstrom’s bamboo and rattan furniture and Strengell’s richly textured rugs and textiles. He designed over 50 residences, the majority in Wellfleet and on the East coast, including a Wellfleet summer residence for Lily Saarinen, first wife of Eero Saarinen. Today, several of these houses, including Hammarstrom’s, Lily Saarinen's, and one designed for Laszlo Tisza, fall under the protection of the Cape Cod Modern House Trust.

The Hammarstroms made extensive study tours throughout the world; many slides of this travel are in the Strengell collection. They lived in Wellfleet until their deaths. Strengell died in 1998 and Hammarstrom on December 10, 2002.
Scope and Content of Collection

The majority of Hammarstrom’s papers were donated to the Archives of American Art in 1983. Over 100 architectural renderings, donated to Cranbrook in 1995, are cataloged and can be accessed through the online catalog. The papers come from items donated jointly by the Hammarstroms, the bulk of it relating to the work of Marianne Strengell, for whom a separate collection exists. The materials relating to Olav Hammarstrom’s life and career consist of some articles on his architectural designs, the United Nations Report on Hammarstrom’s rattan and bamboo furniture in the Philippines, and photographic images of furniture and architectural design projects. The collection is arranged into three series, **Papers, Publications, Photographs** and **Oversize**. Also, in the Marianne Strengell Papers, there are three framed collages of wood, cork and fabric, possibly by Hammarstrom, per a reference in the finding aid to his papers in the Archives of American Art.

**Series I: Papers** contains correspondence and a one-page appendix to his resume.

**Series II: Publications** consists primarily of magazine articles relative to Hammarstrom’s architecture, as well as the United Nations Report.

**Series III: Photographs** has over 70 black and white prints of furniture, design drawings, and architecture. The slides are of architectural renderings and as-built projects.

**Series III: Oversize** contains a 1996 feasibility study for the renovation of M.I.T.’s Baker House. Hammarstrom was interviewed by the M.I.T. Planning Office in 1991, in preparation for the study, regarding his part in the original design and development of the project. Also included are project folders containing images of prototypes and small conceptual sketches of various architectural projects.

Related Collections

- Architectural Drawings (Series 15 and Series 21)
- Marianne Strengell Papers (1991-07)
- Audio Cassette Tape Collection (1990-09), Tape 78. There is also a transcription of this interview.

Box Number--Description

SERIES I. PERSONAL PAPERS

Box 1
1. Personal Papers

SERIES II: PUBLICATIONS

2. Articles, 1952-1961

SERIES III. PHOTOGRAPHS

4. Furniture – Bookcases and cabinets, c1956
5. Furniture – Chairs, c1956
6. Furniture – Drawings, c1956
7. Furniture – Miscellaneous, c1956
8. Furniture – Sofas, c1956
9. Furniture – Stools and tables, c1956
10. Projects – Air Force Museum (not realized)
11. Projects – Churches
12. Projects – Eric Saarinen Residence
14. Projects – Newcomb Beach Hollow
15. Projects – St. Anselm Episcopal Church
16. Projects - Negatives

Box 2

Slide box 1
Air Force Museum
Anderson residence
Angove residence
Cape Cod shots
Ellis residence
Farnsworth
Floor plans
Furlong residence
Gaensbauer residence
Hammarstrom residence
Harvard
Hotel/resort
Immanuel Lutheran Church
King Moss subdivision
Leighton studio
Missionary churches projects
M.I.T.?

SERIES II. PHOTOGRAPHS (cont.)

Box 2 (cont.)

Oakland Museum?
Ossabaw Museum?
Nurme residence

Slide box 2
Restaurant
St. Anselm
St. James Church
Schrage residence
Shawmut Bank
Tisza residence
Unidentified churches
Unidentified projects
United Nations/Harrison
Wellfleet (town)

SERIES III: OVERSIZE

Box 3

Prototypes for Missionary Churches in California
Holy Faith Lutheran Church, Oak Ridge, NJ
The Chapel of St. James the Fisherman, Wellfleet, MA
Newcomb Beach Hollow, Wellfleet, MA