

# Sandzén Gallery: Archives: Letters

Below are sample letters from the Sandzén Gallery Archives. Additional letters are printed in the quarterly editions of *Gallery Notes*. *Gallery Notes* is mailed four times a year to all current Gallery Members. For additional information about these letter or others, contact Delmar C. Homan, Volunteer Archivist, or Ron Michael, Curator at the Sandzén Gallery 785-227-2220 or [sandzengallery@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sandzengallery@sbcglobal.net).

The letter that follows not only describes Birger's fortieth birthday celebration but also adds his philosophic comments and family news. The complete translation is presented below, with a little editing of form for ease of reading.

February 5, 1911.

Dear Brother!

A hearty thank-you for the letter. I should have answered long ago, but have been terribly rushed. Will now have time to write only a few lines but better some than none.

Mother-in-law [Charlotte Leksell] and Frida fixed a real festive dinner today on my birthday and gave me useful and good gifts. In the afternoon Engströms came with all three of the children [Enoch and Agnes Engström, Harold, Ruth and Selma] from McPherson to congratulate. Four of the teachers (Brase; Thorsén; Peterson, teacher in Swedish; and Welin, teacher in chemistry) were also here, so the cottage was nearly full of people.

It is almost unbelievable that we brothers are middle-aged men. Time passes with an appalling speed. That in itself is nothing to weep over, if it only goes well, i.e., if we use well the years that are granted to us here on earth. A couple of days ago I read in a book a statement that went something like this: "We serve God best by serving our fellow men, because he does not need our service himself." That is a striking truth. Nothing can so ennoble a person, as the act of unselfishly working for his fellow men.

The winter is mild and nice here in Kansas. We have had an abundance of glorious sunshine. Carl and Sigurd [Birger's other brother and his nephew] are in the very best of health. Carl has as yet not rented an office in town, since he is still waiting for the license to practice in Kansas. He has however had several patients.

Tomorrow night Oscar [Thorsén] gives an instructive piano concert in the school's large hall. The music teachers annually give a series of free concerts for the benefit of the students to which, however, visitors are also welcome.

We hope our dear little Mother soon will be really well. That would be a great joy for all of us.

Greet everyone from us. Will we not soon see a picture of little Elsa? If one only could see her and hug her, the dear little thing.

Hastily, Birger

This letter shows Sandzén's money-raising techniques and also describes an unfulfilled dream of a Carl Milles statue by Presser Hall on the campus of Bethany College. It is addressed to his friend Charles Matthews, a professor at Manhattan, Kansas.

Feb. 9, 1928

Dear Friend:

I just had a letter from Professor Weigel, inclosing a letter from Pres. Farrall, in which Dr. Farrall suggests a plan for purchasing my paintings. I appreciate Dr. Farrall's good intention to rush the matter through, but I believe a slow, sure and deliberate method of handling of the matter would be better. Would it be too much to ask you, dear, busy friend, to confer with Professor Weigel, Prof. Robert and a few others about a better plan? Suppose you could meet about twenty minutes to consider the matter. Instead of telling those who subscribe, that unless the matter be rushed through, nothing will be done, I believe those interested might be approached a little differently. Suppose they were told for ex: It is a decided matter to buy the paintings. Let us take all the time needed to raise the money. Let us find a simple and good plan. Would not an appeal to the whole student body and faculty and other art lovers in Manhattan be all right?

Perhaps societies and graduating classes might be interested? Suppose \$500 could be raised this spring and \$500 next fall and winter. I should love to see the two paintings in Manhattan. I may never be able to make an offer like this again.

We intend to have a statue by Carl Milles in front of our new Music Hall [Presser Hall at Bethany College]. Our little Art Club [Smoky Hill Art Club] gave the first \$75 yesterday. We expect to have a special fund for this purpose. It may take us a year and a half, or perhaps two years to raise the money, but we expect to do it.

If you can speak a kind word for the paintings, I know it will go quite far. I shall be profoundly grateful.

With warm regards  
and best wishes,  
Cordially and sincerely yours,

Birger Sandzén

In this letter Sandzén responds to an inquiry about his works and gives instructions on how to frame his lithographs. "Black is a little too serious for my pictures."

May 22, 1929  
Mr. J. B. Hill  
Hamlin, Kans.

My dear Mr. Hill:

I wish to thank you very heartily for your postal card. I do not have any catalogue of my work, because so many of my pictures are out to exhibitions a good deal of the time, that a catalogue would

hardly be satisfactory to my patrons. I have paintings from \$65 (12 x 14 in.) up. I also have lithographs, wood-cuts, and etchings. If you should be interested in an oil painting and let me know how much you would care to pay, I shall be glad to send you something on approval. In the mean time I am sending you, matted but not framed, a few lithographs and wood-cuts.

These pictures should be framed with the mat, only the very best glass and a narrow frame in natural color of wood, for ex. Walnut, maple or oak. Dull gold is also "safe" framing or black and gold. Black only is a little too serious for my pictures. The frame for a small wood-cut or lithograph should be about one inch wide, for a large size about 1 1/4 or 1 1/2 in. If you decide to keep one or more of the pictures, you can, I imagine get it framed right at home.

With kindest regards  
Very sincerely yours  
Birger Sandzén

To give an idea of the wide range of materials in the Sandzén Archives, the following four excerpts come from letters written sixty years ago concerning the war in Europe and Japanese occupation of China.

A Swedish friend, Carl Ferlin, working in Paris, is caught up in the European turmoil and writes September 14, 1939, to Margaret Sandzén, who had hoped to be in Europe.

. . . . I cannot say how glad I am that you are far from Europe and even far from the Atlantic and the German pirates. I am more than grateful to your mother for preventing you from coming over. . . . It is nice to think of your quiet little town and imagine all peaceful and industrious people not having anything to do with the war and destruction and being out of reach of such terrible gangsters as Hitler and his followers.

Carl Ferlin

At the same time Margaret is hearing from friends in Europe about the war there, she also has letters from a Chinese friend, Han Dah L. Ling, she had met at the University of Colorado in the summer of 1939.

August 30, 1939  
Shanghai, China

Dear Greta:

Your letter of July 26 with a picture was received. I should have replied to you earlier had the weather not been so hot. Since I came in I have suffered from heat, for I came from cool Boulder. I hate to dress up, for the most of the time I used to be almost half-naked. This is the second cool day we have since the hot tide came to Shanghai on the second of August. You are wrong when you say, "You will think of the U.S. vaguely..." In fact, I still linger at the bus depot.

Your quotations from Shakespeare are too deep for me. I don't know the meanings behind them. Write me plain English, so that I may understand your letter.

Life is hard in Shanghai even for the well to do, not to speak of the poor. Everything is dear in China today except life. Food is scarce, rent high. The price of rice has raised from \$M12 (Chinese dollars) per hundred pound in 1937 to \$50M today. Rent has raised four times since the war started. Formerly we had fourteen rooms, now two rooms only. One big room is used as sitting room, dining room, and

bedroom for my five children and two servants. Two children sleep in a double-bed (one above the other), another two in two single beds, the youngest on a sofa. The two servants make their own beds on floor at night. Lilian and I are lucky enough to share an attic, which is bedroom and study room for both of us. The rent for these two rooms is \$M100. I don't know how to keep on with such kind of life. Before the war I could get several thousand dollars a year from the royalty of the books I wrote. Now the Japanese publish my books without my knowledge. All my copyright was robbed.

The Union University shall begin classes on the fourth of September. I am to teach three classes: two in education, one in English, 15 hours a week at the salary of \$M200 a month, which is equivalent to \$15 American money, the exchange rate being 14 to one!

All of us sent you our best wishes.

Diu Bror

Han Dah

September 9, 1939

Terrorism reigns in Shanghai. Murders are heard everyday. The pro-Japanese are in danger of being assassinated by the Chinese patriots and the anti-Japanese are in danger of being murdered by the Japanese terrorists. Last week some principals and teachers of a certain school and an editor of a local newspaper were assassinated. Murder is carried on systematically. But I am afraid of nothing, for I am an unimportant creature, just a common plain civilian. I shall continue to be an unimportant man, interested only in art and books which have nothing to do with politics. I can assure you that I am calm, sensible, and careful in my work, which is teaching and studying. Don't worry about me.

Han Dah L. Ling

In early January 1940 a letter arrived for Margaret Sandzen from a friend, Nicholette H. Dawson, in Suffolk, England. She reported lengthily on the English "home front."

November 30, 1939

Dearest Margaret,

I do not know when I should write to you for Christmas as I have no idea how long the mails take now. But I hope you will have a very happy one. Your New Year has more certainty in it than ours, but I expect the war has prevented any hopes of visiting Europe again till it is over. . .

Many people optimistically think it will be over by Christmas, but though an optimist by nature I cannot make myself think it will be so short. I am terribly sorry for the German people and hate the thought of the waste of money and war materials on our part. The whole world seems to be suffering from an enormous upheaval and I cannot see how we can foresee how it will end. It certainly is an extraordinary war and so far most of us feel it very little. The shipping disasters off our bit of coast are the only thing that really brings it home.

Dec. 4th

A good deal has happened in the world and to us since I started this letter a few days ago. Now Finland is defending herself. The leaders of Germany and Russia make me simply boil with rage. How any human beings can be so brutal and so distort the truth when they mention such words as the as the cultures they are fostering in their regimes, is past my understanding. It looks as if the whole of S.E. Europe will be involved in the war soon too. I wish one wasn't so helpless in one's rage! Meanwhile I have been at home since war broke out. . . .

I soon found various voluntary war-work jobs in the town. Most of them were connected with the evacuees. They are communally fed at a canteen and my mother cooks there on Sat. and Sun. and I help with tea at their socials. I also suggested that they make clothes for their children. Everything is being done for them and I thought it was about time they did something for themselves! I have two or three helpers and we teach them to sew and make up nightdresses, sleeping suits and petticoats etc. They simply love it and are very pleased with selves. About 20 mothers come. Many have gone back to their homes - incautious women.

We sew twice a week in the afternoon in their big warm sitting room at the canteen. It was a big shop and it has now been turned into a perfect evacuee depot with a big dining room, sitting room, kitchen's larder, store room, clothing depot room, then upstairs, a big clothes work-room which I am to be in charge of, another room for the babies and toddlers to play in on welfare days, with a waiting room for the mothers, doctor's room, nurse's room and the office of the Woman's Voluntary Services, which the whole lot comes under. If the house had been built for the purpose it could not have been better planned. It was in a bad state of disrepair and dull and dark inside but buddies have done the main repairs, and we have colour-washed the whole place down and the dining room and sitting room have the most enchanting wall paintings which are most original. In fact we are rather proud of our canteen, as it is the best run one several Mayors of the London suburban towns have seen. It is run by an awfully nice girl of about 30, who has exactly the right way with the women and wins their cooperation in the most splendid way.

I am now to run the clothing of the mothers and children. There is an old clothing fund and any garment that is worn out in parts, I and my helpers, have to unpick and remake to fit a child. My work-room is being fitted up now - electric light, a stove, shelves, tables etc. It is a lovely big room and I am very encouraged - we shall really get going directly after Christmas and it will be a whole time job. . . .

After the [Cub Scout] meeting at 11 I trudge round the town with a builder's barrow and 6 of my scalawags and we collect paper for funds for the Red Cross. The waste paper is valuable, and every district has its paper collection for some war fund. Then I rush back to lunch and then go off again to another Pack, bicycling to a village two miles away. These boys are all evacuees. Sat's a hard day, especially when there is a dance in the evening given by the British Legion to cheer up the local troops. All the lads and lasses of the town come. . . .

My sister is doing a tough man's job - let alone a woman's job, by driving lorries and cars of every description in huge convoys all over the country. She is at a very big distributing depot. I should love to try it but it would soon kill me off, and then I should be a liability to the country, not an asset. . .

Nicholette H. Dawson

Aldeburg, Suffolk England

Birger Sandzén, a charter member of the Lindsborg Rotary Club, received this letter from the Judge of the 31st Judicial District (Dodge City, Kansas), after showing Judge Miller and his wife through the studio. The letter, dated **December 13, 1939**, emphasizes the Rotarian goal of Service. Judge Miller graduated from Bethany College in 1904.

My dear friend:-

It was wonderful of you to show us thru your Studio last evening. Mrs. Miller and I enjoyed it very much I assure you - and you are so generous in your time and attention.. And I can estimate the demands made on your time in this manner.

We are nevertheless hoping that it may not be long until we can have more time with you and bother you again. A visit to your studio is such a delight to some of us from out here where the dust and West begin.

On my way home last evening, after our fine Rotary meeting, I thought of so many fine things I should have said about you and the grand service you have rendered to KANSAS. You have brought more of Kansas beauty to her citizens, than any other individual. Without you, it seems to me, there were no Kansas Art. And I am so happy to name you as one of my friends, associates and former Professors. It is a charming remembrance.

We all have our fields of Service. What a grand field you have, and how you have SERVED with your Art in that field.

May it not be long until we enjoy another visiting spell with you and the lovely wife. And regards to Margaret.

Most cordially,

Karl Miller.

**Letter to Dr. Ernest F. Pihlblad, President of  
Bethany College, Lindsborg, Kansas, Sept. 7, 1942**

Dear Ernest:

Some time ago you asked me to write a brief report on our art school. I enclose a sketch which you may use for a more complete write up.....

With best wishes  
Your old friend

Birger

Bethany College Art School.

The founder of Bethany College, Dr. Carl Swensson, was a lover of art in all its various expressions. In the late eighties [1880's] Miss E. Cavell was called to teach drawing and painting at Bethany, and one of the large rooms on the top floor of the Main building was set aside as a studio. In 1893 the art school developed a more professional character when Olaf Grafström, a graduate of the Royal Academy of fine Arts in Stockholm, Sweden, who for some years had lived and painted in San Francisco, was called to take charge of the instruction. Olaf Grafström was a gifted painter and able teacher, mainly known for his landscapes, especially motives from his native Norrland, and for his altar paintings which have been placed in many churches of the Augustana Synod. The first College building was for about ten years used as a studio.

In 1894, another teacher was called to give instruction in painting and drawing, Sven Birger Sandzén, who also assisted in the language department and School of Music. Birger Sandzén received his early training in drawing and painting under Olof Erlandsson in the College of Skara in Sweden, where he graduated in 1890. Later he studied in the Art School of the Artists' League in Stockholm, Sweden, with Anders Zorn and Richard Bergh, and with Aman-Jean in Paris.

In 1897 Olaf Grafström was called to teach in the art department of Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, where he served with considerable distinction for many years. A gifted artist from Lidköping, Sweden, Carl Lotave [Carl Gustafsson Lotave, 1872-1924], a student of the Artists' League of Stockholm and of Academie Cobarossi in Paris, known as a figure and portrait painter was in 1897 added to the faculty of Bethany College. In 1899 Carl Lotave settled down in Colorado Springs where he

enjoyed considerable patronage as a portrait painter. After some time he moved to New York where he became a popular magazine illustrator.

Olaf Grafström spent the last years of his life in Sweden. Carl Lotave died in New York in 1929 after a long period of illness. In 1899 Birger Sandzén was made the director of the Art School of Bethany College. He is known mainly as a interpreter of the great west, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, etc., in various media, oils, water color, lithography, etching and wood engraving. He has also been active as a painter of portrait and of western types. In the course of the years Bethany Art School has had a number of highly gifted assistants, such as Mary Marsh, Anna Keener, Samuel Holmberg, Myra Birggerstaff, Lydia Deere, Katherine Watts and Gladys Hendricks.

Bethany Art School has gradually become a well equipped, modern art school offering courses in art history, painting, modeling, design and crafts. In the present revival of crafts Bethany had taken a lead and created an interest in good design, metal craft, weaving, book binding, wood work, etc. The majority of the graduates of the Bethany art school become art teachers in public schools, colleges or universities. The distinguished director of the Art School of the University of Oklahoma, one of the largest and best known in the West, Oscar Jacobson, is a graduate of Bethany Art School. A number of Bethany graduates have also become commercial artists of high standing. There are three active art societies on the campus of Bethany College, The Smoky Hill Art Club with a membership of about 200, organized in 1913, The Delta Phi Delta, national intercollegiate art association, of which a chapter was founded in 1916, and The Prairie Water Color Painters, with fifty members in several states, established in 1934. The Prairie Print Makers was organized by ten artists in the Sandzén studio in 1932 for the purpose of promoting an interest in the graphic arts. Its present membership is about fifty and its headquarters is Wichita, Kansas.

A small but carefully chosen art exhibition was held in the old art studio, the first college building, in 1897. During the next seven years either the old studio or one of the large classrooms in the Main building was used for the annual spring exhibition held during Easter Week as a part of the "Messiah Festival." Beginning in 1904 the west room of the second floor in the new Carnegie Library was used by the Art School and the annual exhibitions filled the West and central rooms on this floor.

The Swedish Building [Swedish Pavilion] of the World's Fair of St. Louis, consisting of a main hall and two wings, built in the style of a country manor house in Sweden after drawings of the well-known architect Ferdinand Boberg, was at the close of the fair bought by United States Minister to Sweden, Mr. W.W. Thomas, Jr., who was an intimate friend of Dr. Carl Swensson, and presented to Bethany College. The "Swedish Pavilion" was first used as Bethany's Domestic Science Hall for about ten years and then made the home of the art school and the annual art exhibitions and the many smaller exhibitions held during the school year, such as displays of ceramics, textiles, metal work, prints and paintings.

The Art Pavilion is an attractive building with good light and ample wall space. The Smoky Hill Art Club has for a number of years been sponsoring the art exhibitions of Bethany College. It has also in the course of the years purchased a number of works of art for the permanent art collection of Bethany College, which includes about thirty oil paintings, and 200 etchings, lithographs and engravings.

Among painters represented are Carl Lotave, Olaf Grafström, Charles Hallberg, Henry Varnum Poor, Alfred Johnson, Raymond Jonson, Birger Sandzén, Nathaniel Malm, Samuel Holmberg, and many others. The graphic collection represents many well-known names: Dürer, Rembrandt, Nanteuil, Whistler, Strang, Nordfeldt, Hall, Badmin, Legros, Jacque Lalanne, Haskell, Haig, Bernhard, Arms, Reed, etc.

There are two private art collections in Lindsborg, those of Oscar Thorsén and Birger Sandzén. In many homes are found works of art, paintings, prints, craftwork, a large number of "membership prints" [prints by members of the Prairie Print Makers - made by a member of the group each year], woodcuts distributed by the Smoky Hill Art Club, etc.

There are several artists in and around Lindsborg active in the line of painting or craftwork - in

painting: Maude Cooper Berglund, Dolores Gaston Runbeck, Alba Malm Dahlquist, Lydia Sohlberg Deere, Margaret and Birger Sandzén, Oscar Gunnarson, Carl Peterson, and in crafts - Oscar Gunnarson, doing character studies in cement or plaster, Anton Pearson, known for his realistic, often humorous, figures in wood limestone; John Altenborg [John Altenborg Sr.], master of art furniture and woodcarvings, Gladys Hendricks, art weaver and metal worker, John Kubitschek, who lives in Salina but exhibits his iron work in Lindsborg, C. Matheison, doing gem cutting, Stella Matheison, art jewelry, and others.