

## MSS. Collection #110

**John R. Larsen Papers, 1918-1998 [bulk 1947-1998]. 3 boxes (36 folders), ca. 225 items.**

NOTE: The numbers cited in parentheses, e.g. 1:5, refer the researcher to the Series#:Folder# in which that name/topic will be found.

### INTRODUCTION

This collection consists of materials relating to John R. Larsen's life and career with Eastern Airlines. He worked for the airline for most of his adult life, accumulating many items that document significant events in local aviation. Of particular note are several histories in written and scrapbook form that chronicle the history of Eastern Airlines, Piedmont Triad International Airport, and local aviation in general, as well as photographs of airplanes, pilots, and other aviation-related subjects. Also included are personal items such as diaries and correspondence. Researchers interested in the history of local aviation, Eastern Airlines, and Piedmont Triad International Airport may find this collection useful.

**Arrangement:** This collection is organized in two series and arranged within series by document type. The series are: **Eastern Airlines**, 1918-ca. 1992; and **Personal**, 1923-1998.

**Provenance:** The bulk of this collection was donated by John R. Larsen in August 1993 and assigned the accession number 1993.61.1. A scrapbook acquired by Ridley Smith at a Larsen estate sale was added in June 2004 (2004.3.2), and the diaries and other personal documents were donated by Friends Homes West in March 2005 (2005.11.1).

**Processing:** This collection was organized and the finding aid was prepared by intern Amanda McBryde in March 2023.

### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Rendleman Larsen (1916-1998) was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, to Georgia Randleman and Lauritz H. Larsen. As a student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he was involved in Theta Chi fraternity, the Interfraternity Council, the Di Senate, the Playmakers, the University Club, the *Daily Tar Heel*, and the *Yackety Yack*. After graduating with a Bachelor of Science in 1939, he started working for Eastern Airlines in 1940 before serving in the Army Air Forces during World War II. He returned to the airline after the war and by 1950 was the Traffic & Sales Manager for the Greensboro-High Point region. Eastern Airlines was established in 1928 as the mail carrier Pitcairn Aviation, Inc. By 1978, it was one of the preeminent American airlines, with a fleet of 250 jetliners and a 35,000 mile route system. The airline was dissolved in 1991 following a series of strikes and other misfortunes. On October 16, 1948, Larsen married Eileen Brown (1912-2003). During his lifetime, he was a member of

First Presbyterian Church, the Greensboro Rotary Club, and the Greensboro Business Club, as well as a president of the Greensboro Sales and Marketing Club.

**Biographical Sources:** The biographical information was acquired from materials in the collection, [UNC Chapel Hill's 1939 yearbook](#), the obituary of John Larsen (*News & Record*, March 30, 1998), and the [obituary of Eileen Larsen](#) (*News & Record*, January 6, 2003).

## **SCOPE & CONTENT NOTE**

This collection includes correspondence, diaries, photographs, scrapbooks, maps, postcards, and assorted printed material relating to John Larsen's life and his work with Eastern Airlines. Of particular interest are several histories of local aviation with a focus on Eastern Airlines, a scrapbook that documents the history of both Eastern Airlines and Piedmont Triad International Airport from the late 1920s to the early 1980s, and photographs of airplanes, the airport, and associated people that span decades. Noteworthy among the personal items are Larsen's birth certificate, letters he wrote to his wife Eileen, and the diaries he kept in the last years of his life. Researchers interested in the history of aviation in the Triad may find this collection useful.

## **SERIES DESCRIPTIONS**

### **1. Eastern Airlines. 21 folders (143 items). 1918-ca. 1992.**

This series consists of several subseries and relates to Larsen's work at Eastern Airlines. Of particular note are several histories of local aviation with a specific focus on Eastern Airlines, a scrapbook documenting how Eastern Airlines and Piedmont Triad International Airport grew over time, and photographs of airplanes, the airport, and associated people.

The correspondence subseries (1:1-2) contains a letter from the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce to the general public regarding new express and passenger airline service, as well as a series of letters between R. Howard Weant and Joe Knox about a newspaper article Knox wrote on the history of local aviation. The article is included among the newspaper clippings along with several others published to mark the 50th anniversary of Eastern Airlines (1:11). Knox also wrote a more robust version of this history that is filed with two histories of Eastern Airlines in this series (1:10).

Larsen collected photographs of airplanes spanning decades, from Captain Eddie Rickenbacker's World War I SPAD to the Pitcairn Mailwing of the late 1920s and the Whisperliner of the 1970s (1:4). The photographs also include interiors of the Whisperliner and other planes of that generation, as well as images of pilots and flight attendants. Other noteworthy photos feature Captain Rickenbacker with a replica of his SPAD and on an early helicopter flight, Captain Dick Merrill next to an Eastern Airlines Constellation, and flight attendants performing their standard duties and modeling how their uniform changed through the first three decades of the position's existence (1:5-6). Photographs of the Piedmont Triad International Airport from the 1920s, when it was Lindley Field, and of the exterior and interior of the airport in the 1970s when it was known as the Greensboro-High Point Airport show how the airport changed through the years (1:4; 1:6).

A scrapbook created by Larsen documents the history of both Eastern Airlines and Piedmont Triad International Airport from the late 1920s to the early 1980s (1:17-21). It features photographs of Charles Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis* at Lindley Field in 1927, the interior and exterior of the airport in 1953, and the 50th anniversary of Eastern Airlines in 1978, as well as other significant events. Newspaper clippings announce Eastern Airlines expansions, important milestones in local aviation like the 25th anniversary of air mail, and other related news, or feature Larsen as part of his work with the airline. The scrapbook also contains aviation-related ephemera such as the program from the banquet at which Larsen was honored for 25 years of service and a menu from the launch of the Boeing 727 in 1964.

The printed material subseries contains a booklet documenting the first thirty years of the Greensboro-High Point Airport Authority as well as a pamphlet and gala program showcasing the new airport terminal built in 1982 (1:9). Items that provide context for the world of aviation at the time include maps of air routes from both Eastern Airlines and Transcontinental and Western Air (later Trans World Airlines or TWA; 1:3) along with timetables from Eastern, Capital, and Delta Airlines (1:13-16). Promotional materials produced by Eastern Airlines include a pamphlet entitled "What Every Woman Should Know About Air Travel" (1:12), as well as postcards and brochures advertising new planes in the Eastern fleet, such as the Silver Falcon and the L-1011 Whisperliner (1:7-8).

## **2. Personal. 15 folders (83 items). 1923-1998.**

This series comprises items relating to John Larsen's life outside of his work with Eastern Airlines. The correspondence subseries (2:1-3) contains several years of letters he sent to his wife, Eileen, in which he discussed his daily life while he was traveling for business and events he found significant. His diaries (2:4-8) document his life after retirement, including people he knew and books he read. A portrait of Larsen and photos from a family beach vacation can be found in the photographs subseries (2:9-10), while a safari in East Africa is chronicled in a scrapbook containing photographs and written descriptions of the trip (2:13-15). The printed material includes John Larsen's birth certificate, Eileen Larsen's diploma from Queens-Chicora College, and their wedding service and certificate signed by the officiant, as well as a script from a school play put on by Eileen Larsen's class when she was in second grade (2:11-12).

### **FOLDER LISTING**

<b><u>Series</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	<b><u>Contents</u></b>	
1	1	Eastern Airlines	-- Correspondence -- Greensboro Chamber of Commerce (1937)
	2	"	-- Correspondence -- Weant, R. Howard and Joe Knox (1973)
	3	"	-- Maps -- Air routes (1930s)
	4	"	-- Photographs -- Airplanes and airports (1918-1970s)
	5	"	-- Photographs -- Flight attendants, pilots, etc. (1920s-1970s)
	6	"	-- Photographs -- Lindley Field (1928-1930)
	7	"	-- Postcards (ca. 1950s)
	8	"	-- Printed material -- Brochures (1940s-1970s)

<u>Series</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>	
1	9	Eastern Airlines	-- Printed material -- Greensboro-High Point-Winston Salem Regional Airport (1972-1982)
	10	"	-- Printed material -- History (1965-1978)
	11	"	-- Printed material -- Newspaper clippings (1968, 1978)
	12	"	-- Printed material -- Promotional (1945-1960s)
	13	"	-- Printed material -- Timetables (1936-1954)
	14	"	-- Printed material -- Timetables (1956-1971)
	15	"	-- Printed material -- Timetables -- Capital Airlines (1948)
	16	"	-- Printed material -- Timetables -- Delta Airlines (1940)
	17	"	-- Scrapbook pp. 1-20 (ca. 1992)
	18	"	-- Scrapbook pp. 21-40 (ca. 1992)
	19	"	-- Scrapbook pp. 41-60 (ca. 1992)
	20	"	-- Scrapbook pp. 61-80 (ca. 1992)
	21	"	-- Scrapbook pp. 81-98 (ca. 1992)
2	1	Personal	-- Correspondence -- Larsen, John R. to Eileen Larsen (1947-1948)
	2	"	-- Correspondence -- Larsen, John R. to Eileen Larsen (1948-1949)
	3	"	-- Correspondence -- Larsen, John R. to Eileen Larsen (1951)
	4	"	-- Diaries (1990-1991)
	5	"	-- Diaries (1992-1993)
	6	"	-- Diaries (1994-1995)
	7	"	-- Diaries (1996-1997)
	8	"	-- Diaries (1998)
	9	"	-- Photographs -- Portrait (ca. 1980s)
	10	"	-- Photographs -- Vacation (ca. 1960s)
	11	"	-- Printed material -- Certificates (1934-1948)
	12	"	-- Printed material -- "The Wishing Ring: A Play in Two Acts" (1923)
	13	"	-- Scrapbooks -- Safari to East Africa (1982)
	14	"	-- Scrapbooks -- Safari to East Africa (1982)
	15	"	-- Scrapbooks -- Safari to East Africa (1982)