

OLIVER J. LEE (1881-1964) PAPERS, 1930-1964

Series 29/5

Box 1

Biography

Oliver Justin Lee was born December 16, 1881 in Montevideo, Minnesota. In 1901 he graduated from Augsburg Seminary. He received an AB degree from University of Minnesota in 1907, and a MA (1911) and PhD (1913) from the University of Chicago. From 1910 to 1926 he was an instructor, assistant astronomer and lecturer at Yerkes Observatory, Williams Bay, Wisconsin.

Lee came to Northwestern University in 1928 as an assistant astronomer at the Dearborn Observatory. He became Chair of the Department of Astronomy in 1929, and served as Director of the Dearborn Observatory from 1931 until his retirement in 1947.

Lee published many articles describing his discoveries of stellar parallaxes and solar eclipses. One of his outstanding achievements was the classification and charting of 44,000 stars of the faint-red type in the skies of the northern hemisphere. He also studied the planetoid Eros in an effort to measure the mass of the moon and the distance from the sun to the earth. In 1947 he became Professor Emeritus at Northwestern and moved to Santa Cruz, California. There he led an active life substitute teaching and writing until his death on January 13, 1964.

When a reporter once asked Lee, "Of what use are all those years of research to earthlings?" he replied "that question is like asking a child, "Of what worth is a tree?" He has also said that "Astronomers are the timekeepers of the world, indispensable in navigation and fundamental in the survey of large areas. Astronomy is a science of perennial interest to humans from childhood to old age." His philosophic curiosity and sense of responsibility helped him in his search for the elements to unify nature and society.

Many articles of Lee's were published in *Astrophysical Journal*, *Astronomical Journal* and many other scientific journals. He was a member of the Committee on Solar Physics, and a fellow of both the American Association for Advancement of Science and Royal Astronomical Society in London.

After his retirement Lee wrote a popular book on astronomy, *Measuring our Universe* (1949), which enjoyed wide acclaim.

Description of the Series

The papers of Oliver J. Lee fill one half-size box. They consist of several biographical accounts, a small amount of correspondence, a poem, a tribute to his predecessor, Philip Fox, and reprints of his articles.

Provenance: The Oliver J. Lee Papers were separated from the University Archives Biographical Files and from the Records of the Dearborn Observatory (Series 29/2) on May 26, 1982 as Accession No. 82-66.

OLIVER J. LEE (1881-1964) PAPERS, 1930-1964

Series 29/5

Box 1

Restrictions: None.

Separations: None.

Processor: Margaret Faverty and Kaia L. Even; May 1994-January 1995.

Scanned and Reformatted by: Rachel C. Teuer; August 23, 2004.

OLIVER J. LEE (1881-1964) PAPERS, 1930-1964

Series 29/5

Box 1

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	1	Biographical Materials	1931-1964
	2	Clippings	1932-1947
	3	Correspondence	1958-1978
	4	Reprints	1909-1946