SYLVESTER AHOLA PAPERS

Creator: Sylvester Ahola; various
Dates: 1923-1995
Quantity: 7.0 linear feet (16 manuscript containers)
Identification: A19 ; Archive Collection #19
Citation: [Document Title]. The Sylvester Ahola Papers, [Box #, Folder #, Item #], Cape Ann Museum Library & Archives, Gloucester, MA.
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Language: English

Biographical Note
Sylvester Ahola’s career was highly productive by any standards. His ability to combine phenomenal technical skill with a feeling for real jazz led to his securing constant work with top dance bands on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1920’s and 1930’s. Not only was he a highly sought-after first trumpet player in resident bands, but also the first choice for thousands
of studio band recording dates, particularly during his extended stay in England from December 1927 until August 1931.

Ahola lived long enough to witness a strong revival of interest in his work amongst jazz and dance collectors the world over. Born in Gloucester (Lanesville) Massachusetts on May 24, 1902, he was raised on a small farm owned by his parents John H. and Susanna Sofia (Loija), both of whom had emigrated to the United States from Finland. Being fluent in Finnish, he is something of a national musical hero amongst traditional jazz fans in that country.

It is the recording work undertaken during his long residence in London that he is best known for amongst collectors. During his stay, Ahola contributed his horn to over 2,000 recording dates. His work extended far beyond the first trumpet chair of Bert Ambrose’s Orchestra, which he held from October 1929 until July 1931, into a variety of studio groups led by the Starita brothers, the Firman brothers, Carroll Gibbons, Ray Noble, Spike Hughes and others. Ahola’s career started with his first professional job as a member of Frank E. Ward’s Orchestra, a jazz-inclined band in Boston. By the age of 25, Ahola was in New York as a member of Paul Specht’s Orchestra.

After leaving the Specht band in January 1927, Ahola held the first trumpet chair in a number of New York and Boston bands and also played an engagement with the California Ramblers. It was the leader of this band, Adrian Rollini, who subsequently gave Ahola the job of first trumpet on the New Yorkers band, which also featured Bix Beiderbecke. Bix respected Ahola’s technical ability and schooled training, while for Ahola, Bix remained the most important influence on his jazz style.

On January 4, 1927, Sylvester Ahola married Saima Sigrid Walkama in the Church of the Transfiguration, 1 East 29th St., New York, NY. He and his new wife went almost immediately to London where he got a job at the Mayfair Hotel with Bert Ambrose’s band. For the next four years he recorded extensively with Zonophone, Columbia, and Decca, then was banned from the studios after a protest of unfair labor practices was brought against him by British musicians. They claimed it was unfair to them that he was getting all the work. Ahola left London in August 1931 and spent most of the 1930’s working in New York, participating in many radio sessions and hotel dates with numerous bandleaders. He retired from New York in the 1940’s, though he remained very active as a trumpet player in and around his home town of Gloucester, Mass. His change in lifestyle allowed him more time for his main non-musical interest, as a “radio ham”. In addition to local dates with his own group, “Sylvester’s Music”, he also worked with the Cape Ann Civic Symphony. As further evidence of his versatility, he established an additional career as the “Poor Man’s Victor Borge”, in a one man show that combined his musical skills with his dry sense of humor.

Ahola died February 13, 1995 at the age of ninety-two in Lanesville, Gloucester, Mass., survived by his wife of sixty-eight years.
Acquisition Note

Addendum I: Correspondence and memorabilia of Saima Ahola (wife)
Accession #: 2005.07; Donated by: Charles M. Putney.
Quantity: 0.5 linear feet (1 manuscript container)
Contents: Magazines, Correspondence Saima Ahola/Charles Putney, Photographs, Miscellaneous newspaper articles, Biography Of Sylvester Ahola by Brian Rust, Reviews, Listing of recordings by Sylvester Ahola, Transcript of Finnish National Radio program.
Processed by: Peter Brown, 2005; supervisor, Stephanie Buck, Archivist.

Addendum II: Personal papers, photographs, memorabilia of Sylvester Ahola
Quantity: 1.5 linear feet (4 manuscript containers, items in Flat File)
Contents: Personal photographs, films, slides, School records, Personal documents, Finnish life, Home recordings
Processed by: Peter Brown, 2005; supervisor, Stephanie Buck, Archivist

Addendum III: Personal papers, photographs, memorabilia of Sylvester Ahola
Accession#: 2006.19; Donated by: Paul and Sandra Kenyon.
Quantity: 0.5 linear feet (1 manuscript container)
Contents: Photographs, Cassette tape, Record album, Scrapbook of newspaper clippings, Birthday posters, Manuscript – The Gloucester Gabriel
Processed by: Peter Brown, 2005; supervisor, Stephanie Buck, Archivist

Addendum IV: Papers pertaining to Sylvester Ahola.
Accession #: 2007.16; Donated by: St. Paul Lutheran Church, John Bjorlie, Pres.; Estate of Viola Ray.
Quantity: 1 linear foot (2 manuscript boxes)
Contents: Cassetts, Letters, Reviews, Newspaper clippings, Poems
Processed by: Peter Brown, 2007; supervisor, Stephanie Buck, Archivist.

Addendum V: Tapes, Newspaper Clippings, and Correspondence pertaining to Sylvester Ahola.
Accession #: 2010.55; Donated by: Sally Sulloway.
Quantity: 1 linear foot (2 manuscript boxes)
Contents: Cassetts, Letters, Newspaper clippings.
Processed by: Peter Brown, 2010; supervisor, Stephanie Buck, Archivist.

Addendum VI: LP Records & Tapes pertaining to Sylvester Ahola.
Accession #: 2016.021; Donated by Joyce McCormick.
Contents: 2 LPs, 3 Tape cassetts.
Processed by: Stephanie Buck, CAM Archivist, 2016.
**Addendum VII:** Newspaper cuttings, 1960 & 1963, from Sylvester Ahola to Erland Jura
Accession #: 2016.001.31; Donated by Mariann Ahola.
Quantity: 2 envelopes
Processed by: Stephanie Buck, CAM Archivist, 2016.

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**Scope and Content of the Collection**

The Ahola papers were donated to the Cape Ann Historical Association by his wife, Saima. The consist of personal correspondence, a diary, publications, a biography of Sylvester, recordings by Sylvester and miscellaneous photographs. Also included are newspaper and magazine articles and books that are about Ahola or refer to him in connection with the music of his time.

The Museum holds in store the following:
- Conch shell, steer’s horn, ram’s horn and puppet used by Ahola.
- Trumpet and three mutes used by Ahola.
- Portrait of Ahola by Ted Hoague (oil on canvas) c1990.
- Hanger with names of Band Leaders Ahola played with

Original collection contains:
- 26 dance band/music photographs
- 30 shortwave radio group photographs
- 46 record albums with Sylvester performing
- 2 audio cassettes with Sylvester performing
- 11 audio cassettes of oral history by Sylvester
- correspondence between the museum and Brian Rust
- correspondence between the museum and Dick Hill

Additional papers were donated by Charles M. Putney. These consist primarily of correspondence between Mr. Putney and Saima Ahola

Additional material was donated by Kathleen Adams. These consist primarily of Ahola’s personal papers (school reports, passport, etc.), photographs, slides, films, and ephemera.

Additional material was donated by Paul and Sandra Kenyon
These consist primarily of Personal papers, photographs, memorabilia of Sylvester Ahola

Additional material was donated by St. Paul Lutheran Church, John Bjorlie, Pres., estate of Viola Ray.
These consist primarily of Papers pertaining to Sylvester Ahola
Additional material was donated by Sally Sulloway. These consist primarily of cassette tapes of Sylvester Ahola’s music.

Additional material was donated by Joyce McCormick. These consist of 2 LP records and 3 cassette tapes.

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**Series Description**

The Ahola papers have been divided into six series:

I. Correspondence with Brian Rust in the 1950’s and 1960’s, who is credited with re-discovering Ahola. Correspondence with Dick Hill in the 1980’s and 1990’s which resulted in the biography *Sylvester Ahola, The Gloucester Gabriel*. Ahola’s diary as transcribed by Saima Ahola.

II. Correspondence with short-wave radio operators following World War II.

III. Photographs showing Ahola playing with a variety of bands in the 1920’s and 1930’s.

IV. Recordings of Sylvester playing and talking about his career.

V. Correspondence between Saima Ahola and Charles Putney

VI. Other personal papers, photographs, misc. correspondance, recordings, slides, and films

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**Container List**

**Box #1, Series I**

Folder 1: Incoming correspondence with Brian Rust, 1963-1968  
Folder 2: Incoming correspondence with Brian Rust, 1968-1976  
Folder 3: Correspondence between Sylvester, Saima and Dick Hill, 1988-1994  
Folder 4: Correspondence between Sylvester, Saima and Dick Hill, 1981-1987  
Folder 5,6: Miscellaneous material collected by Waino Ray on Ahola’s career.  
Folder 7: Ahola diary; cables - job offers. Copies of Shellac Stack

**Box #2, Series I**
Folder 1:  Correspondence between Saima Ahola and Waino Ray.
Folders 2-6: Correspondence with short-wave radio operators.

Box #3, Series II
Folders 1-6: Correspondence with short-wave radio operators.

Box #4, Series III
Folder 1: Band photographs.
Folder 2: Short-wave radio group photographs.
Folder 3: Miscellaneous.
Folder 4: Sheet Music.

Box #5 Series IV (Oversize Container)
Other records and tapes; audio cassettes of Oral History by Ahola.
Albums
(2) Sylvester Ahola - "The Fabulous Finns Vol. 1"
Single Record - "Until," cornet solo - Sylvester Ahola - "Somewhere a Voice Is Calling"
"Happy Days" - Ambrose & His Orchestra - 1929-1930
The Philip Lewis Rhythm Manias Sessions, 1928, Vols.1 & 2

C.D.'s
'S Wonderful - Ambrose & His Orchestra - 1929-1930
The Philip Lewis Rhythm Maniacs sessions - 1928, Vol. 1
The Philip Lewis Rhythm Maniacs sessions - 1929, Vol. 2
The Fabulous Finns, Vol. I - Sylvester Ahola

Cassettes
Zonophone Salon Orchestra - Sylvester and Saima Ahola
Brian Rust on Sylvester Ahola, 5/24/81
Sylvester Ahola - trumpet solos (1929-1931)
Private recording - Saima, Sylvester - Miriam Niemi Lane
Sylvester Ahola - Edison Lab, Oliver Lane
Sylvester Ahola in America - 1925-27

Cassette Album
10 cassettes - Sylvester Remembers, his autobiography for Dick Hill, author of Sylvester Ahola, The Gloucester Gabriel

Recording Cylinder (Edison Lab)
Country Bred and Chicken Fed - 1926
Blue Amber - 1926
Records (Edison Lab)
(Side 1) Country Bred and Chicken Fed - circa 1926
(Side 2) So Long North I'm Heading South - circa 1926

(Side 1) Crazy Words - Crazy Tune - circa 1926
(Side 2) A Lane in Spain - circa 1926

(Side 1) Take in the Sun - Hang Out the Moon - circa 1926
(Side 2) Look at the World and Smile - circa 1926

(Side 1) Lonely Eyes - circa 1926
(Side 2) It Made you Happy When I Made You Cry - circa 1926

Records Stored in Record Folder - circa 1927-1931

Old Time Favorites, Part I - London Orchestra
Old Time Favorites, Part II - London Orchestra
Show Boat, Part I - London Orchestra
Show Boat, Part II - London Orchestra
Song of the Sea, Part I - London Orchestra
Song of the Sea, Part II - London Orchestra
P and O Polka - International Novelty Quartette
Black and Tan Polka - International Novelty Quartette
My Mother’s Eyes - Maurice Elwin
I'll Always Be in Love with You - Maurice Elwin

Addendum I

Box #6 Series V
Folder 1: 13 Magazines  Shellac Stack
Folder 2: Correspondence, Saima Ahola/Charles Putney
Folder 3: Photos, articles, biography by Brian Rust
Folder 4: Reviews – “The Gloucester Gabriel”; Listing of Recordings;
Radio Transcript – Finnish National Radio

Addendum II

Box #7 Series VI
Folder 1: Report Card, Grade 9; Perfect attendance cards, 1913/17
Music note cards
Pictures/News clippings, expenditure of Leverett St. house
Passport, Marriage certificate of Sylvester’s parents
News clippings Quarry slot machines
Folder 2: McClellan family albums; Lanesville snow scenes; Airplane negatives, 1926; Gloucester sheet music, 300 years; Quarry ponds; Quarry frogmen

Box #8 Series VI
4 Film canisters [removed, digitized & archived 2013]
10 Scrolls – Gloucester High School Graduation, photos 1923; Diplomas; Wedding certificates; Birth certificate

Box #9 Series VI
31 cassettes – home recordings
4 small film cannisters
Stereo slides – Brian Rust
Stereo View finder
Loose Cassettes
(4) Lane's Cove Concert - July 1961
Boudini Brothers Records - circa 1914-1917
Sylvester Home Recordings - Lane's Cove Solos
(2) Miriam Lane - Trumpet/Drums
(5) Private Recordings - Saima Sylvester, Miriam Lane
Home Recordings - Waino Band
Home Recordings
Home Recordings
Tribute - 4/13/80
Trumpeter - styles, Sylvester
Lelia J. Golub - Organ

Box #10 Series II, III, VI
Posters advertising performances & Short Wave Radio
Crystal Goblet advert
Photograph album
Two Cassettes: Finnish life remembered
Two Cassettes: Tribute on Ahola’s 90th birthday [Addendum IV]
Three Cassettes: Recordings [Addendum IV]
“The Gloucester Gabriel,” biography by Dick Hill [Addendum IV]
Cassette
The Better Land - trumpet solo, Sylvester Ahola

Record Folder
Perfection Polka, International Novelty Quartette - circa 1927-1931
Three Blind Mice, International Novelty Quartette - circa 1927-1931
Just Keeping On - Paul Robeson
Mighty Lak’a Rose - Paul Robeson
Addendum III & VII

Box #11 Series VI

Folder 1: Early photographs:
   Radio operation 1918-1920s
   Family Photographs
   Post cards – Lanesville
   Later photos – Sylvester
   Cassette: Trumpet Solo
   Newspaper clippings and letters

Folder 2: Birthday posters for Sylvester and Saima
   Photos: Early musicians

Folder 3: Loose:
   Manuscript “The Gloucester Gabriel” Dick Hill
   Photo Album: Sylvester at home – retirement
   Photo Album: Brian Rust
      Home
      Quarry
      Niemi Sisters
      Mother
      Ham Operators
   Record Album: Paul Robeson
   Scrapbook: Early sylvester music bookings; Frankie Ward Orchestra
      1920s Sylvester in England
      Correspondance with Paul Specht

Folder 4: [Addendum IV]
   Manuscript “Trip from Finland”, Hjalmur Johnson
   Two newspaper clippings, GDT April 16, 1992
   Review of “The Gloucester Gabriel” by Dick Hill
   Letter praising Ahola and Hill’s book
   Review: “Sylvester Ahola” by Warren Vache Sr., the Miss. Rag, Aug. 1994
   Poem dedicated to Ahola by Capt. A. Drlen Cushman Jr., Aug. 1987
   Advertisement for a talk by Dick Hill, CAHA, April 18, 1992
   Letter to editor of GDT by Waino Ray re: Dick Hill
   Reprint of article on Ahola by Warren Vache, Jersey Jazz, June 1991
   Photocopies of Waino Band c.1915; New Yorkers Band 1927; Saucy Orpheans
1928.

- Article on Ahola, CAHA Timeship, Vol. 11
- Article on Ahola by Warren Vache, Miss. Rag, 1980
- Article on Ahola by Brian Rust, Jazz News & Review June 1963
- Newspaper article “Girl Scouts visit Sylvester”, GDT 1952
- Poem to Ahola, Willard Brownlee
- Article on Ahola “Forgotten Giant,” Jersey Jazz, July 1980

Addendum V

Box #12 Series VI

- (2) Framed photos - Sylvester playing trumpet (Saima in background), Sylvester and friends

- Book - Put It in Writing - Memoir that mentions meeting with Sylvester and Saima in Gloucester

- CD - Sylvester Ahola - The Gloucester Gabriel, His American Recordings

- Letter by Saima to friends - photos of quarry, 1/3/93
- Manchester Cricket - Talk by Richard Hill, Cape Ann Historical, 4/10/92
- Advertisement for talk by Richard Hill, Cape Ann Historical
- Letter to Alvah and Susan Solloway from Saima, 2/13/91
- Letter from Saima to Alvah and Susan Solloway, 4/12/93
- Copy of article by Brian Rust about S. Ahola, Jazz News and Review, Vol. 7 No.20
- Article on S Ahola, The Mississippi Rag, Oct. 1980
- Obituary, 2/14/95
- Vintage Jazz Mart, July 1967
- Article - The Gloucester Daily Times, April 16, 1992
Letter from Nick Dellow 6/2/92
Transcript - tribute to S. Ahola, 90th birthday, Finnish National Radio
Letter - Saima to Alvah and Susan Solloway, 10/13/92
Letter - Saima to Alvah and Susan, 1/2/92
Letter to Cricket Press re: publication of *The Gloucester Gabriel*
(4) invoices to Alvah Solloway
Letter to Cricket Press re: publication of *The Gloucester Gabriel*
Tribute to Sylvester - 90th birthday, *Gloucester Daily Times*, June, 1992
Letter - Waino Ray to Alvah Solloway, 4/12/93
Letter to Saima to Alvah and Susan Solloway

Box #13 Series VI
Cassette Suitcase
Sylvester Ahola in England - 1928-1929
Kool's Chorus
Sylvester Ahola: Paul Jones
Sylvester Ahola: Palm Court Recordings

Sylvester Ahola Papers – A19 – page 11

27 Pleasant Street, Gloucester, Massachusetts 01930 USA
+1 978-283-0455
capeannmuseum.org
S. Ahola, "Early Years"
S. Ahola, London radio - 5/24/81
S. Ahola on Ray Smith - 2/9/86
S. Ahola at Home - 10/7/82
Dick Hill interview on BBC about Sylvester - 12/6/94
Sylvester's 90th Birthday - Ray Smith, "Jazz Decades"
S. Ahola #1
An England Xmas - 1983
Ethel Merman
Ahola: "The Fabulous Finns"
Ahola: "The Better Land," cornet solo

Box #14
Records

The Bert Firman Bands 1925-1931 (two records)
My Baby Loves to Charleston, circa 1929
Ambrose and His Orchestra - 1929 season
The BBC Presents British Jazz, Vol. I, circa 1941
A Lonesome Road: Paul Robeson, circa 1932-
Hits of 1931 - Ambrose and His Orchestra, 1931
Those Dance Band Hits, circa 1930's
His Broadway and Hers - Harry Richman, Sophie Tucker, 1972
Piccadilly Nights - British Dance Bands of the 1920's, circa 1920's
Music for Collectors, English Jazz Bands, circa 1935
Music for Collectors - New Mayfair and Ray Noble, circa 1930's
Music for Collectors, Columbia Gems Recordings, 1925-26
Jazz with a British Accent
Those Dance Band Years, 1927-1931
Jazz in Britain - the 30's
Ambrose and His Orchestra, 1928-1932
The Philip Lewis Rhythm Manics Sessions, Vol. 1, 1929
The Philip Lewis Rhythm Manics Sessions, Vol. 2, 1929
The Best of Ambrose and His Orchestra, 1928-1930
"'S Wonderful" - Ambrose and His Orchestra, 1928-1930
Ambrose and His Orchestra - 1928-32
Ambrose and His Orchestra, Dance Music of the 30's
Ambrose and His Orchestra, Hits of 1931
Ambrose and His Orchestra, 1930-1932
Rhapsody in Rhythm, Ray Starita and his Ambassadors Band
Spike Hughes His Deca-Dents & His Dance Orchestra, Vol. I, 1930
Bert Ambrose and His Orchestra, "The Original Ramblers"
Jazz in Britain - the 20s
Sylvester Ahola: Fabulous Finn, 1979

Box #15

Record Album Binder - late 1920's - early 30's

2 sides - Our Village Concert
1 side - The Lost Chord (cornet solo - Sylvester Ahola)
2 sides - The Better Land (cornet solo - Sylvester Ahola)
2 sides - Show Boat - The New Mayfair Orchestra
2 sides - Rose Marie - selection - The New Mayfair Orchestra
1 side - Good News - selection - The New Mayfair Orchestra
1 side - Chloe (Song of the Swamp) - Paul Whiteman
1 side - That's a Good Girl - New Mayfair Orchestra
1 side - The Yellow Mask - New Mayfair Orchestra
1 side - Will O' the Whispers - New Mayfair Orchestra
1 side - So This Is Love - New Mayfair Orchestra
2 sides - Lady Mary - New Mayfair Orchestra
1 side - Blue Eyes - New Mayfair Orchestra
1 side - This Year of Grace - New Mayfair Orchestra

Record Album Binder - Sylvester Ahola recordings in London, 1927-1931

1930 - Perfection Polka - The Eight Musical Notes - cornet solo, Sylvester Ahola
Cuckoo in the Clock - The Eight Musical Notes
Somewhere a Voice Is Calling - cornet solo, Sylvester Ahola
Until - cornet solo, Sylvester Ahola
Absent - cornet solo, Sylvester Ahola
The English Rose - cornet solo, Sylvester Ahola
Because - cornet solo, Syl Hooley (Sylvester Ahola)
Roses of Picardy - cornet solo, Syl Hooley (Sylvester Ahola)
The Holy City - cornet solo, Syl Hooley (Sylvester Ahola)
Abide with Me - cornet solo, Syl Hooley (Sylvester Ahola)
Mattinata - cornet solo, Sylvester Ahola
Beneath Thy Window - cornet solo, Sylvester Ahola
Abide with Me - cornet solo, Syl Hooley (Sylvester Ahola)
The Holy City - cornet solo, Syl Hooley (Sylvester Ahola)

Record Album Binder - (Sylvester Ahola recordings in London, 1927-1931

Zonophone Salon Orchestra
I Kiss Your Hand Madam
Love Sends a Little Gift of Roses
For You Alone
Come Sing to Me
Love's Garden of Roses
Might Lak' a Rose
Love's Garden of Roses
Might Lak' a Rose
Narcissus
Simple AVEV
Destiny Waltz
Ecstasy Waltz
Because
Where My Caravan Has Rested
Because
Where My Caravan Has Rested
A Perfect Day
The Wedding of the Painted Doll
Old Rustic Bridge
Killarney
Ave Maria
Serenata

Loose

Q.R. Quality Records - Sylvester Ahola, "The Fabulous Finn"

Loose Series IV
#1 Cassette Album
   Cassettes #1, #2, #3
      Finns in Lanesville by Sylvester Ahola
      Maxims on Alphabet by Sylvester Ahola
      Copy of Maxims
#2 Cassette Album
   Maxims
#3 Cassettes re: Short Wave W2 C.D.'s
   Cassettes #1, #2, #3 - Finnish Life in Lanesville by Sylvester Ahola
   Ahola 70th Birthday/Capt. Lars Cushman, Swedish

Individual Cassettes
(2) Sylvester's 90th Birthday/Ray Smith tribute - WGBH
Sylvester’s 90th Birthday/A Helsinki tribute/Finnish with typed translation
Sylvester Ahola - Recordings in the U.S. - 1926-1927
Addendum IV

See Box #10 Series II, III, VI
and Box #11 Series VI Folder 4

Addendum V

See Box #12 Series VI
and Box #13 Series VI

Addendum VI

Box #13 Series IV
Cassettes

The Zonophone Salon Orchestra with Sylvester Ahola.

Box #14 Series IV
The Fabulous Finns Vol. I signed “To my friends Helen and Manuel Cardozo, Sylvester ‘Hooley’ Ahola, 2/25/79”
The University Six, no date

Addendum VII

See Box #11 Series VI
Folder 1: Newspaper clippings and letters