

# A Finding Aid to the Magda Polivanov Collection

## Record Unit 420



Finding aid prepared by Joyce Cooper in March 2014 with assistance from Insley Julier and Lara J. Ullman.

Edgartown, Massachusetts  
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## Descriptive Summary

**Repository:** Martha's Vineyard Museum  
Gale Huntington Research Library  
59 School Street  
P.O. Box 1310  
Edgartown, MA 02539  
508-627-4441

**Call Number:** RU 420

**Creator:** Polivanov, Madga (1899-1985)

**Title:** Magda Polivanov collection

**Dates:** 1918-1985

**Physical Description:** 1 box (0.504 cubic feet)

**Language(s):** The materials are in English.

**Abstract:** Magda Polivanov, 1899-1985, was an artist who immigrated to the United States in 1934 from Russia. This collection holds some of her legal papers, a Certificate of Citizenship, passports, and a will, as well as photographs of her work and family.

## Administrative Information

**Access Restrictions**

There are no restrictions, with the exception of documents containing Social Security numbers.

**Use and Reproduction Restrictions**

Requests to reproduce material from this collection should be directed to museum staff. Reproduction fees may apply.

**Preferred Citation**

Martha's Vineyard Museum, RU 420, Magda Polivanov Collection.

**Acquisition Information**

Gift of Ebie Wood in 2007. (Accession no. 2007.041).

**Related Materials**

For pieces of artwork by Magda Polivanov, see accession number 2003.040.

**Index Terms****Subjects - Names**

Kay, Michael V.  
Polivanov, Magda

**Subjects - Places**

Martha's Vineyard (Mass.)  
Oak Bluffs (Mass.)  
Russia

**Form/Genre Terms**

Paper money  
Photographs

**Biography/Historical Note**

Born Magdalina Agafonoff Polivanoff on February 15, 1899 in Russia, the artist is best known as Magda Polivanov. She is the daughter of Constantine Polivanoff, a staff general in Tzar Nicholas II 's Russian Army. Her mother was a lady in waiting to the Dowager Empress. During the Russian Revolution of 1917 her family was killed by the Bolsheviks. Magda and a sister managed to escape to Siberia. Her sister died of influenza before they could get out of the country. Magda found her way to England via Constantinople in 1919 where family friends took her in. While in London, she

started studying art at the Royal Academy and the Slade Arts School. Later studies brought her to Florence and Paris. In 1931 she married an American, William Edwin Ziegler, while in England. The two traveled around France and Italy before returning to the United States in 1934. Magda received her United States citizenship and US passport in 1936 showing her as Magdalena Polivanov Ziegler. She found her uncle, Michael V. Kay (formerly Koudriavzeff), in New York City. Kay had immigrated to the United States in 1916 while he was on business. He helped her find an apartment in Greenwich Village. Magda referred to Kay as Uncle Mischa and the two remained close until his death in January 1969.

In 1938, Magda started going to Providence, Rhode Island. She found it was a good area to do her artwork so she took an apartment there and split her time between New York and Rhode Island. Through friends Magda made frequent visits to Martha's Vineyard. On one visit in 1943 a friend told her of a house for sale in the Oak Bluffs Campgrounds and she bought it immediately. She maintained her three residences through the 1960s when she gave up her Providence apartment. Magda's artwork consisted of several mediums. In the 1940s Edwin Ziegler and his brother Carl put on elaborate marionette shows, for which Magda did the costuming and scenery. Magda's block print textiles were used by such designers as Halston and items are held at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. Her interest in various religions led her to create icons not only of her native Russia but of Celtic and Jewish faiths as well. Magda also worked with oils on canvas, her favorite subjects being her dogs. Magda Polivanov died in January 1985 in New York City, New York.

## **Scope and Content of Collection**

The collection includes Magda's immigration and naturalization documents from the 1930s as well as documents from later in her life. Magda wrote a short story about the history of her Oak Bluffs cottage and, with the help of I.A.R. Wylie, had it published in the June 1944 issue of *Cosmopolitan*. A large portion of the collection consists of photographs that are mostly undated but clearly cover a wide range of her life. Photographs of Magda's artwork include her textiles, religious icons, and oil painting. There are also photographs of her work with marionettes. Also included in this collection are resumes of Michael Kay as well as a diary he kept while traveling throughout Russia by railroad. There are seven paper bills of Russian currency from 1918 and 1919 that Magda probably took with her when she left the country. The newspaper articles are from various interviews meant to capture her personal story.

## **Arrangement**

The collection is arranged chronologically.

## Collection Contents

<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Date(s)</b>
1	1	Russian Currency	1918-1919
1	2	State Department Documents	1931,1936
1	3	Temporary Passport	1931
1	4	Short Story	1944
1	5	Resumes of Michael V. Kay	1950, 1960
1	6	Newspaper Articles, Preservation Copies	1954-1985
1	7	Newspaper Articles	1954-1985
1	8	Legal Papers	1974-85
1	9	Gift to Rhode Island School of Design paperwork	1987
1	10	Photos of Artwork	undated
1	11	Photos of Marionettes	undated
1	12	Photos of Dogs	undated
1	13	Photos of Magda	undated
1	14	Photos of Family and home	undated
1	15	Photos of Michael V. Kay	undated
1	16	Manuscript by Michael V. Kay	undated