Finding Aid to the Martha’s Vineyard Museum  
Record Unit 333  
Rodman Swift Papers, 1885-1959  
By Karin Stanley and Matthew Friedman

Descriptive Summary  
Repository: Martha’s Vineyard Museum  
Call No.  
Title: Rodman Swift Papers, 1885-1959  
Creator: Matthew Friedman and Karin Stanley  
Quantity: 9 cubic feet  
Abstract: This collection contains personal papers of Rodman Swift; much of it relating to his maritime activities. Logbooks and journals from his sailing voyages, (1898-1959) and his diagrams and sketches of ships and vessel-related items make up a large part of the collection. His personal collection of photographs also forms a substantial part of this record unit. Correspondence, financial records, newspaper clippings, and other miscellaneous papers are also included.

Administrative Information  
Acquisition Information: The documents from The Papers of Rodman Swift were acquired by the Martha’s Vineyard Museum in ______ by _________.  
Processing Information: Matthew Friedman and Karin Stanley  
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Use Restrictions: none  
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Index Terms  
Rodman Swift  
Schooner Tyche  
Ship Astral  
Agnes Swift  
Menemsha

Series and Subseries Arrangement  
Series I: Correspondence, 1807-1974; Bulk, 1922-1959  
Subseries A: Letters from Rodman Swift to Agnes Swift, 1927-1959  
Subseries B: Letters & Postcards to/from Rodman Swift, 1922-1958  
Subseries C: Letters to/from Agnes Swift, 1961-1974  
Subseries D: Swift Family Correspondence, 1807
Series II: Logbooks, 1898-1959
  Subseries A: Logbooks, 1898-1913
  Subseries B: Logbooks: Ship Tangent, 1914-1921
  Subseries C: Logbooks: Schooner Tyche, 1922-1957
  Subseries D: Logbooks: Muskrat, 1950-1955
Series III: Notebooks, 1908-1955, Undated
Series IV: Journals:
  Subseries A: Stone Cabin at Gay Head, 1938-1955
  Subseries B: New House, 1956-1959
Series V. Financial Papers, 1943-1958
  Subseries A: Invoices/Itemized Bills, 1947-1955
  Subseries B: Miscellaneous, 1943-1958
Series VI: Miscellaneous Papers
  Subseries A: Articles, 1922-1946, Undated
  Subseries B: Maritime Related Publications, 1913-1954
Series VIII: Diagrams & Sketches, 1845-1957, Undated
  Subseries A: Miscellaneous Letter/Legal-Sized, 1931-1950, Undated
  Subseries B: Diagrams/Sketches of Tyche, Muskrat, 1922-1953, Undated
  Subseries C: Diagrams/Sketches/Architectural Plans of Wooden House at Gay Head & Various Household Furnishings, 1955, Undated
  Subseries D: Plans of Land Holdings at Gay Head, 1845-1955
  Subseries E: Plans of Land Holdings at Hingham, Massachusetts
  Subseries F: Geodetic Surveys, 1920-1946
  Subseries G: Navigational Star Charts, 1933, Undated
Series IX: Photographs, 1885-1954, Undated
  Subseries A: Rodman Swift, Swift Family & Friends, 1885-1954, Undated
  Subseries B: Martha’s Vineyard, 1934, Undated
  Subseries C: Sailing Vessels, Ships & Boats, 1930’s, Undated
  Subseries D: Swift Family Places of Residence & Household Items, 1931,
  Subseries E: Landscapes & Seascapes, Undated
Series X: Kodak Negative Files (Indexed), 1906-1943, Undated
Series XI: Framed or Mounted Photographs (Black and White), Undated
Series XII: Artwork & Three Dimensional Objects, ????-1966, Undated

**Historical Note:**
Rodman Swift was born February 15, 1880 in New Bedford, Massachusetts. The son of a prominent whaling family, Swift possessed a profound love of the sea. As a recreational sailor, he carefully documented his voyages through his detailed logbooks, letters, and photographs. Swift captured coastal life and sailing in the early 20th century. Practical by nature, he graduated from Harvard University’s School of Mines in 1903. But he soon decided to venture out to sea.
From October 1904 through July 1905 Swift sailed on the Standard Oil Company’s four-masted bark *Astral*. His voyages took him from Philadelphia, around the Cape of Good Hope to Japan, then finally to San Francisco.

Upon Swift’s return to California he was hired as a surveyor by North Star Mines, a gold mine in Grass Valley. In June 1906 he married the mining superintendent’s daughter, Elizabeth Foote, who gave birth to two daughters: Agnes and Sarah. But longing for home and the New England waters, Swift moved the family in 1910 to Hingham, Massachusetts. There he designed the family house atop a steamship wharf jutting into Hingham Harbor. Swift was soon hired by the Submarine Signal Company, which manufactured navigational instruments. Swift served in the testing division, a vocation that allowed him to essentially work at sea—sailing out to test the underwater bells that acted as beacons of various navigational hazards.

In 1922 Swift designed his most famous sailing vessel, the schooner *Tyche*. The craft was small enough that he could sail it solo. It was almost completely black in color and painted only on the hull and bottom. After a long struggle with cancer, Swift’s wife Elizabeth died in 1942 and Rodman Swift retired to Gay Head, where he lived in a solitary stone cabin. In the winters he would often cruise aboard *Tyche* to Florida. On October 15, 1959 at the age of 78, Rodman Swift collapsed in his motorcar outside the Chilmark Post Office.

**Scope and Content**
The Papers of Rodman Swift are arranged in 12 series. This collection consists of correspondence, some business papers, logbooks and journals, diagrams, plans, and sketches of his home and boat, and an extensive collection of photographs and negatives. Also included are some framed photographs. In most cases the documents are arranged chronologically.

The correspondence collection is primarily letters written to his daughter Agnes between 1927-1959. The bulk of the logbooks are from trips on his schooner *Tyche*. He also kept journals and various notebooks recording his daily activities, trips, purchases, etc. The logbooks and journals are arranged both by chronology and name of ship, sailing vessel, or place of residence. The notebooks are arranged only by chronology.

The diagrams and design sketches are arranged first by size and then alphabetically by subject or title. Most of these documents were handmade by Rodman Swift on the verso of published nautical charts that he cut apart and re-used. These documents are housed in oversized boxes. The articles, news clippings, newsletters and periodicals comprise a small part of the collection, and are arranged by record type and then alphabetical where applicable. The
photographs are arranged in topical files, then alphabetically by subject or geographical location. The negatives are arranged according to Rodman Swift’s original numerical system. Along with his papers, the Rodman Swift Family also donated a selected number of published works relating to maritime history. These books can be found in the Gale Huntington Library.

**Series I. Correspondence, 1807-1974; Bulk, 1922-1959**

**Subseries A: Letters from Rodman Swift to Agnes Swift, 1927-1959**

Box 1 of 22
Folder 1: November 25, 1927-August 8, 1932
Folder 2: July 16, 1934-December 10, 1942
Folder 3: April 23, 1943-September 3, 1943
Folder 4: December 3, 1945-February 12, 1946
Folder 5: February 15, 1946-June 16, 1946
Folder 6: July 5, 1947 September 1, 1947
Folder 7: March 4, 1948-December 28, 1948
Folder 8: January 17, 1949-October 12, 1949
Folder 9: January 24, 1950-February 24, 1951
Folder 10: March 9, 1951-December 13, 1951
Folder 11: January 12, 1952-June 3, 1952
Folder 12: June 10, 1952-November 23, 1952
Folder 13: February 16, 1953-August 4, 1953
Box 2 of 22
Folder 1: August 6, 1953-December 11, 1953
Folder 2: January 4, 1954-June 20, 1954
Folder 3: October 24, 1955-September 3, 1959

**Subseries B: Letters & Postcards to/from Rodman Swift, 1922-1958**

Box 2 of 22
Folder 4: Letters & Postcards to/from Rodman Swift, 1922-1958

**Subseries C: Letters to/from Agnes Swift, 1961-1974**

Box 2 of 22
Folder 5: Letters to/from Agnes Swift, 1937-1961

**Subseries D: Swift Family Correspondence, 1807**

Box 2 of 22
Folder 6: Letter from George [Sumner?] at Rue de Beaux Arts in Paris, 1807

**Series II. Logbooks, 1898-1959**

**Subseries A: Early Logbooks, 1898-1913**

Box 3 of 22
Folder 1: “Log of the Good Ship Will”, 1898
Folder 2: “The Yacht Alcida”, August 1900
Folder 3: “The Yacht Alcedo” (sic) by H.R.S. Scudder, 1901
Folder 4: Unidentified Log, July 5, 1910-Oct. 3, 1913

Subseries B: Logbooks: the Ship Tangent, 1914-1921
Box 3 of 22
Box 4 of 22
Folder 2: “Log of Tangent”, March 12, 1921-Aug. 8, 1921

Subseries C: Logbooks: the Schooner Tyche, 1922-1957
Box 4 of 22
Folder 3: “Log of Schooner Tyche”, July 16, 1922-Sept. 31, 1922
Folder 5: “Tyche”, April 29, 1924-Oct. 11, 1924
Box 5 of 22
Folder 1: “Tyche”, March 1, 1925-Sept. 27, 1925
Folder 2: “Tyche”, May 13, 1926-Oct. 23, 1926
Folder 4: “Tyche”, Feb. 5, 1928-Nov. 11, 1928
Box 6 of 22
Folder 2: “Tyche”, April 19, 1930-Sept. 6, 1930
Folder 3: “Log of the Tyche”, Sept. 7, 1930-Aug. 27, 1931
Folder 4: “Log of the Tyche”, Aug. 27, 1931-July 24, 1932
Folder 5: “Log of the Tyche”, July 25, 1932-Aug. 20, 1933
Box 7 of 22
Folder 1: “Log of the Tyche”, Aug. 21, 1933-Aug. 21, 1934
Folder 4: Unidentified Log: [Tyche?], Jan. 17, 1936-May 19, 1936
Folder 5: “Tyche Log”, July 29, 1936-Aug. 28, 1936
Folder 6: “Log of Tyche”, Aug. 27, 1936-July 3, 1938
Box 8 of 22
Folder 3: “Log of Tyche, Trip to Maine”, July 14, 1938-Aug. 8, 1938
Folder 4: “Log of Tyche”, March 10, 1940-Oct. 1, 1941
Folder 5: “Log of Tyche”, Nov. 4, 1941-April 15, 1948

Box 9 of 22
Folder 2: “Schooner Tyche, April 21, 1947-July 6, 1947
Folder 5: “Log of Tyche”, May 10, 1951-Nov. 4, 1952

Subseries D: Logbooks: Muskrat, 1950-1955
Box 10 of 22
Folder 1: “Muskrat”, Nov. 28, 1950-March 15, 1952

Series III: Various Notebooks, 1908-1955, Undated
Box 10 of 22
Folder 3: Notebook, 1908
Folder 4: Nautical/Navigation Notebook, 1908
Folder 5: Compass Readings Notebook/Various Unidentified Notebooks, 1936-1947
Folder 5: “1941 Plymouth”, 1941-1953
Folder 6: “Coal”, 1944-1950

Box 11 of 22
Folder 1: Address Book, ca. 1946
Folder 2: Various Unidentified Notebooks, 1940’s-1954, undated
Folder 3: Various Trips North and South (1950)/(1951), (1951), (1952)
Folder 4: Gay Head-Florida Trips, 1952-1955
Folder 5: Muskrat Engine Book (Gas, Speed, Engine, Compass, Water), 1952-1954
Folder 6 “1953 North, 1953 South”, 1953
Folder 7: Weather Notebook, undated
Folder 8: “Figures Used for Plotting Stations”, undated
Folder 9: Fragment from Tyche notebook, undated

Series IV: Journals: 1838-1959
Subseries A: Stone Cabin at Gay Head, 1938-1955
Box 11 of 22
Folder 10: “Stone Cabin at Gay Head”, Nov. 1, 1938-Oct. 24, 1940
Box 12 of 22
Folder 1: “Stone Cabin at Gay Head”, Aug. 15, 1942-Sept. 27, 1943
Folder 2: “Stone Cabin at Gay Head”, Sept. 28, 1943-July 6, 1944
Folder 3: “Stone Cabin at Gay Head”, July 7, 1944-April 24, 1945
Folder 4: “Stone Cabin at Gay Head”, April 25, 1945-May 6, 1946
Folder 5: “Stone Cabin at Gay Head”, May 22, 1946-April 7, 1948
Folder 6: “Stone Cabin at Gay Head”, April 8, 1948-Nov. 5, 1952

Subseries B: New House, 1956-1959
Box 13 of 22
Folder 2: New House, March 24, 1958-April 22, 1959

Subseries A: Invoices/Itemized Bills, 1947-1955
Box 13 of 22
Folder 3: Invoices and Bills, 1947-1955

Subseries B : Miscellaneous, 1943-1958
Box 13 of 22
Folder 4: Cancelled Checks, May 18, 1943-Nov. 18, 1958
Folder 5: Tax Records, Notes, 1946, 1947. *Note: These items were enclosures to the Rodman Swift letter to Leonard F. Vanderhoop, Jan. 22, 1947 in Folder 4, Box 2
Folder 6: War Ration Books, Coupons, 1943-1945, undated

Series VI: Miscellaneous Papers
Box 13 of 22
Folder 7: Lists of bird and flower sightings, 1942-1959
Folder 8: Instructions on “Submarine Distance Finding”, undated
Folder 9: Insurance Company Yacht Papers for Agnes Swift
Folder 10: Mariner’s Compass Table, undated
Folder 11: “Ownership of Ship Nassau” (List of owners), 1846
Folder 12: Postcards (not used as correspondence), undated
Folder 13: Recipes (handwritten), undated
Folder 14: Sailing vessel (unidentified), reprint of photograph, undated
Folder 15: Telescope instructions, 18th century
Folder 16: “Tyche of Antiocheia”, reprint of photograph
Folder 17: Tyche stationery (not used), undated

Series VII. Articles and Maritime Related Publications, 1922-1954
Subseries A:  Articles, 1922-1946, Undated
Box 13 of 22
Folder 18: Articles, 1922-1946

Subseries B:  Maritime Related Publications, 1913-1954
Box 13 of 22
Folder 19: Yachting Power and Sail, May 1954, See page 49 for article on Tyche
Folder 20: Hurricane Pictures, 1938, 1954
Folder 21: The Best of Darrell McClure, 1954
Box 14 of 22
Folder 1: The Boy, Me and the Cat: Cruise of the Mascot 1912-1913, 1914
Folder 2: Catalog of U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, 1937, 1945
Folder 3: Dead Reckoning Altitude and Azimuth Table, U.S. Navy Dept., undated.
Folder 4: Donald McKay and the Ships He Built, 1925
Folder 5: Whaling publications, 1886, 1915
Folder 6: Nature and Extent of Fouling of Ships’ Bottoms, 1928
Folder 7: Ships and Shipmasters of Old Providence, 1919
Folder 8: Some Famous Privateers of New England, 1928
Folder 9: Merchants and Sea Captains of Old Boston, 1918-1919
Folder 10: Some Ships of the Clipper Era, 1913 (Two copies)

Series VIII:  Diagrams & Sketches, 1845-1957, Undated
Subseries A:  Miscellaneous Diagrams & Sketches, 1931-1950
Box 14 of 22
Folder 11: Sketches, notes regarding Gay Head property, 1950, undated
Folder 12: Skiff drawings and patterns, 1931, undated
Folder 13: Tyche: diagrams and sketches, Dec. 1936, undated
Folder 14: Miscellaneous diagrams, charts, sketches and notes

Subseries B:  Diagrams/Sketches of Tyche, Muskrat, Sails, Boathouses, Vessel-Related Items, 1922-1953
Box 15 of 22
Contents
1. “Cabin Hatch Board”, 11-7/8 x 19-1/8 in., undated
2. “Jib Cover”, 11-7/8 in. x 24-1/2 in., undated
3. “Foresail Cover”, 11-7/8 in. x 23-1/2 in., undated
4. “Mainsail Cover”, 12 x 24-7/8 in., undated
6. Oil Barrel, 28-7/8 x 32-3/8 in., undated
10. Tyche, dimensions for sails, 17-1/2 x 21-1/4, [March, 1937?]
11. Tyche, mooring of boat in low and high waters, 8-1/2 x 21-7/8 in., undated
15. Water tank, 21-1/2 x 22-1/4 in., undated

Subseries: C. Diagrams/Sketches/Architectural Plans, 1955,
Box 16 of 22
Contents
1. “1938” (Sketch of numerals), 11-1/8 x 14-1/4 in., undated
2. “Bookcase for NE Corner of Cabin”, 18-3/4 x 23-1/2 in., undated
3. “Cedar Box for Helen”, 18-7/8 x 23-1/2 in., undated
5. [Wooden House at Gay Head?], 20-7/8 x 32-3/8 in., undated
6. [Wooden House at Gay Head?], 21-5/8 x 35-3/8 in., undated
7. [Wooden House at Gay Head?], 22-1/2 x 28-1/2 in., undated
8. [Wooden House at Gay Head?], incomplete plan, 19-7/8 x 24-5/8 in., undated

Subseries D: Plans of Land Holdings at Gay Head, 1845-1955
Box 17 of 22
Contents
1. “Maps of Gay Head”, 18-1/4 x 18 in., undated
2. Original Gay Head survey, 17-7/8 x 23-7/8 in., 1845-1853
5. “Subdivision Plan of Land in Gay Head”, 24 x 17-7/8 in., 1955

Subseries E: Land Holdings at Hingham, Massachusetts, 1920, 1957
Box 17 of 22

Subseries F: Geodetic Surveys, 1920-1946
Box 17 of 22
9. “U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, New York to Key West”, 33-1/2 x 11”, 1920

Subseries G: Navigational Star Charts, 1933
Box 17 of 22
11. Chart from *American Nautical Almanac*, 9-7/8 x 13 in., undated
12. Unidentified, 9-7/8 x 12-1/2 in., ca. 1933

**Series IX: Photographs (Black and White), 1885-1954, Undated**

**Subseries A: Rodman Swift, Swift Family & Friends, 1885-1954**
Box 18 of 22
Folder 1: Images of Rodman Swift, 1913, undated
Folder 2: Rodman Swift with Elizabeth, children (Agnes and Sarah), unidentified,
Folder 3: Swift children, 1920’s, undated
Folder 4: Rodman Swift, Elizabeth Swift, horseback riding, California, undated.
Folder 5: Various Swift family, friends (most unidentified), undated
Folder 6: Rodman Swift with mother, relatives/unidentified children, 1885,
Folder 7: Enclosures from letter to Agnes Swift, Jan. 5, 1954

**Subseries B: Martha’s Vineyard, 1934**
Box 18 of 22
Folder 8: Chilmark landscapes, with oxen, undated
Folder 9: Menemsha, undated
Folder 10: Photo booklet with images of Rodman Swift at Stone Cabin
Folder 11: Stone Cabin at Gay Head, Jan. 1934, undated

**Subseries C: Sailing Vessels, Ships & Boats, 1930’s**
Box 18 of 22
Folder 12: Tyche, Muskrat, various ships (including Alice C. Wentworth)
Folder 13: Two mounted photographs of sailing vessels, undated
Folder 14: Two sets of Florida boats, sailing vessels, undated

**Subseries D: Swift Family Places of Residence & Household Items**
Box 18 of 22
Folder 15: Various Swift houses
Folder 16: Unidentified houses
Folder 17: Various model ships, paintings of ships, undated
Folder 18: Swift children’s doll houses, doll house furniture, undated

**Subseries E: Landscapes & Seascapes**
Box 18 of 22
Folder 19: Atlantic Mine, undated
Folder 20: [California?], undated
Folder 21: [Panama?], undated
Folder 22: [Panama Canal?], undated
Folder 23: White Fish Point, Michigan, undated
Folder 24: Various unidentified landscapes, undated
Folder 25: Various unidentified seascapes, undated

Series X: Kodak Negative Files (Indexed), 1906-1943
Box 19 of 22
Folder 1: Unidentified Negatives
Negative Album 1A: Images include R. Swift, various mines/shafts (1-94)
Negative Album 1B: Images include Agnes Swift, Tyche, Menemsha
Negative Album 1C: Images include Sally, Lorrain, Eagles Nest, Acadia
Negative Album 2A: Images include Russian Hill, Bear Valley (95-200)
Negative Album 2B: Images include Tyche, Gay Head, Swift family (101-200)
Negative Album 3A: Images include R. and Agnes, Menemsha, Tyche (201-300)
Negative Album 3B: Images include Bear Valley, Lautzinhauser Ranch (200-300)
Negative Album 4A: Images include Menemsha, Gay Head (301-400)
Negative Album 4B: Images include Swift family children (300-400)
Negative Album 5A: Images include Bear Creek, Hay Press Valley, (400-500)
Negative Album 5B: Images include Gay Head, Tyche (401-500)
Negative Album 6A: Images include Tyche, Menemsha (501-600)
Negative Album 6B: Images include Lakeville house, Swift family (500-600)
Negative Album 7A: Images include Sierra Nevada, Swift family (600-700)
Negative Album 7B: Images include Tyche, Menemsha, (600-700)
Negative Album 8A: Images include Whitefish Point, White Shoals (700-800)
Negative Album 8B: Images include Stone Cabin, Tyche, Mystic Shipyard

Box 20 of 22
Negative Album 9: Images include Stone Cabin, Gay Head
Negative Album 12: Images include Tangent
Negative Album 13: Images include Tangent, Cape Cod Canal
Negative Album 14: Images include Swift family, Tangent
Negative Album 15: Images include Stone Cabin at Gay Head, Edgartown
Negative Album 16: Images include Tyche (1501-1600)
Negative Album 17: Images include Cuttyhunk, Menemsha (1601-1700)
Negative Album 18: Images include Tyche, Menemsha
Negative Album 19: Images include Tyche, Gay Head
Negative Album 20: Images include Swift family, horseback riding (1901-2000)
Negative Album 21: Images include Swift family, horseback riding (2000-2100)
Negative Album 22: Images include Foxhollow School (2100-2200)
Negative Album 23: Images include Foxhollow School (2200-2300)

Series XI. Framed or Mounted Photographs, Undated
Box 21 of 22
1. Menemsha, 7-1/2 x 9-1/2 in.
4. Rodman Swift, 7-1/4 x 6-1/4 in.
5. Rodman Swift, 8 x 10 in.
6. [Tyche?], 5-3/4 x 7-3/4 in.
7. Tyche in Menemsha Harbor, 7-1/2 x 9-1/2 in.
8. [Tyche?], 8-1/2 x 6-1/2 in.
9. [Tyche?], 9-1/2 x 7-1/2 in.
10. Unidentified ship in storm, 8-1/4 x 9-3/4 in.
11. Unidentified ship, 9-7/8 x 4-1/2 in.
12. Unidentified ship, 10 x 6-3/8 in.

Series XII: Miscellaneous Papers, Artwork, and Objects
Box 22 of 22
1. Tin plate with color photographic reproduction of Tyche, Menemsha Harbor
2. Breton Fisherman’s Prayer, framed, 3 x 4-3/8 in., undated
3. Poster of Rodman Swift on Tyche, Menemsha Harbor, 10-7/8 x 13-7/8
4. Unidentified [navigational?] tool, (plastic), diameter approx. 8-5/8 in., undated
5. “Running Off” (framed painting of schooner, 8 x 11 in.) by [Cullen?], 1947
6. Astral (Ship), 11-1/4 x 14-1/4 in.
7. Astral (Ship), 12-5/8 x 15-1/8 in.
8. Unidentified ship (mounted, not framed), 13-1/4 x 11-3/4 in.
11. “Return of the wildfowl”, Bill Wolf, unidentified periodical, undated