

**Sturgis Library Archives
Town and Local History Collection**

**Swift Family Whaling Letters
MS. 109**

Extent: 1 box

Scope and Content Note: The collection consists primarily of letters (with accompanying transcriptions) written by three brothers -- Asa K. Swift, Charles H. Swift, and H.A. (Holmes A.) Swift, mainly to their parents, Charles H. and Hannah Swift of Holmes Hole, Tisbury, Martha's Vineyard. The collection also includes letters from Franklin Luce (to his wife Martha), E. E. Norton, and A. D. Wells. Also included in the collection are photographs of ships in the "1898 storm," a photograph of Swift Brother's Store, the birth record of Franklin Holmes Swift (son of Holmes Swift and Rhoda Luce), and a note, on company letterhead, from Pelham E. Swift regarding the sale of a lumber wagon. Genealogy and historical research information found online are included with the collection to put it in context.

Biographical Information: The Swift family resided in what was known as Holmes Hole in Tisbury on the island of Martha's Vineyard. The letters in this collection are poignantly written accounts of life onboard a whaling ship, and express the longing for home, the excitement of the catch, the interesting sights, ports, and other ships they encountered. Asa K. Swift's last letter was written on Christmas Day of 1868, and according to online sources he died at sea in January of 1869 -- at age 18 --and was interred at sea near "Robinson Crusoe's Island." His last letter urges his parents not to let his brother Holmes go to sea: "If they should make that shoe factory there tell Holmes to go into it and not go a whaling if he does he will be sorry for it and wish himself safe back home again." Letters from Charles and Holmes also speak of their longing for home and their wish that other young men not follow in their footsteps.

The whaling ships that the brothers served on were the Ship Niger, Barque Mary Frazier, and the Ship Emma C. Jones. Numerous other ships are referred to throughout the letters, and crewmen and Captains referred to by name.

Franklin Holmes Smith went on the serve in the military and then to establish Howe's Clothing Company, which was in business on Martha's Vineyard from 1919 to 1949. (See folder 1).

It is not known how the letter writers in the last two folders are related to the others. E. E. Norton writes news from Holmes Hole "To Benja." A. D. Wells writes from Gloucester to Mrs. S. H. Verrill and notes that "Charles P. Verrill was one of the crew that left the bay the day before the heavy gale, it is and has been understood that the vessel, with all hands, is lost." According to an online resource (see folder 1), the Schooner Samuel Crowell left the bay on August 23, 1873 and foundered. Her crew of 15 was lost.

Access: Unrestricted. Credit Sturgis Library archives for publication.

Acquisition: Acquired from Sandwich Antiques and Fine Arts auction, July 31, 2013.

Related Collections: See Luce and Swift Family Correspondence, 1858-1930, MS 293, University of Kansas, Kenneth Spencer Research Library.

Processed by: Lucy Loomis, September, 2013.

CONTENTS:

- Fldr 1 Family genealogy information, ship data, and other research material found online
Fldr 2 Miscellaneous documents
- Franklin Holmes Swift birth record
 - Pelham Swift store receipt
- Fldr 3 3 ship photographs “1898 storm”
Fldr 4 Swift Brothers Store photograph

LETTERS

- | | | |
|---------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Fldr 5 | Asa Swift | Jan 29, 1867 |
| Fldr 6 | | Sept 16 and 20, 1867 |
| Fldr 7 | | June 29, 1868 |
| Fldr 8 | | Dec 16, 1868 |
| Fldr 9 | | Dec 25, 1868 |
| Fldr 10 | Charles H. Swift | No date |
| Fldr 11 | | July 28, no year |
| Fldr 12 | | March 11, 1865 |
| Fldr 13 | | Sept 19, 1868 |
| Fldr 14 | | Nov 22, 1868 |
| Fldr 15 | | May 22, 1869 |
| Fldr 16 | | July 8, 1869 |
| Fldr 17 | | Nov 29, 1869 |
| Fldr 18 | | July 1870 |
| Fldr 19 | | Aug 5, 1870 |
| Fldr 20 | H.A. (Holmes A.) Swift | No date |
| Fldr 21 | | Mar 1877 |
| Fldr 22 | | Apr 4, 1878 |
| Fldr 23 | | Sept 27, 1878 |
| Fldr 24 | | Apr 21, 1878 |

Fldr 25	Franklin Luce	June 12, no year
Fldr 26		Sept 28, no year
Fldr 27		Nov 9, no year
Fldr 28		Nov 27, 1862
Fldr 29		Nov 29, 1863
Fldr 30		Feb 12, 1865
Fldr 31	E. E. Norton	Sept 14, 1856
Fldr 32	A. D. Wells	Jan 15, 1874