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**Inventory
for
Manuscript Collection
MS-423**

**Dickinson Family Papers
Inclusive dates 1854-1951
Bulk dates: 1882-1900**

**by
Anastasia S. Weigle**

February 2009

**Shelf feet: 6.25
Number of boxes: 18
Accession # 2006.087.01**

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ABSTRACT

Dickinson Family

Papers, 1854-1951 (bulk ca. 1882-1900)

18 boxes (6.25 shelf feet)

Prominent family in Phippsburg and Bath, Maine

Papers of the Dickinson Family. Majority of papers belong to **Capt. Wylie Rogers Dickinson (b.1846-d.1918)**, Master of ships *Aryan*, *Rappahannock II* and *Yorktown*. These include both vessels and personal papers. Vessel papers comprise of ownership documents, articles of agreements, insurance, correspondences, captain's log, invoices and account summaries. Personal papers include correspondences between family and friends including his brother, **Capt. John Wesley Dickinson (b.1850-d.1909)**. Also included in this collection are the personal papers of **Emma S. Dickinson (b.1850-d.1926)**, wife of Capt. Dickinson, **Bessie Emma (b.1874-d.1957)** and **Grace Percy (b.1877-d.1950)**, daughters of Capt. Dickinson. These papers are primarily personal correspondences between family and friends. Bessie's Papers include a handwritten manuscript of her sea experiences as a young woman on the *Rappahannock II*.

Bequeathed by the estate of Capt. William J. L. Parker in 2006.

Finding aid available in repository; folder level control

Added entries—persons:

Dickinson, Capt. Wylie Rogers, 1846-1904

Dickinson, Capt. John Wesley, 1850-1909

Dickinson, Emma S. [S. Emma], 1850-1926

Dickinson, Grace Percy, 1877-1950

Dickinson, Bessie Emma, 1874-1957

Minott, Charles V., 1826-1903

Minott, Charles V., Jr., 1867-1936

Sewall, Arthur, 1835-1900

Added entries—corporate bodies (including vessels)

Aryan (Ship)

Lady Dufferin (Bark)

Yorktown (Ship)

Rappahannock II (Ship)

Ridin' Light Lodge

Added entries—key terms:

Families at sea

Ship Captains

Shipping

Ships—Owners

Phippsburg (ME)

Bath (ME)

ACQUISITION

The Dickinson Family Papers were bequeathed to Maine Maritime Museum from the estate of Capt. William J. L. Parker in November and December 2006 and includes the personal papers of Captain Wylie R. Dickinson, his wife Emma S. and their two daughters, Bessie Emma and Grace Percy Dickinson.

PROVENANCE

Capt. Lew Parker communicated with Bessie Dickinson between 1954 and 1956 via personal correspondences. In a personal letter to Capt. Parker dated August 14, 1956 she Bessie says, *“I am sending the accounts you asked for, I presume these papers are what you wanted...we burned and thrown away so much, trying to get rid of the years accumulations.”* In her last letter to Capt. Parker dated September 1, 1956, she said, *“I came across these papers and lest they get mislaid, I am forwarding them to you.”* (These letters are housed in MS-422 Capt. W. J. Lewis Parker Papers—Personal Correspondences.) I believe that during her last years, she loaned or gave Capt. Parker various papers belonging to her father. I believe her relationship as friend with Capt Parker made it possible for him to receive the remaining personal family papers after her death.

RESTRICTIONS

There are no restrictions on the study or use of these materials.

PHYSICAL CONDITION

The majority of Dickinson papers are folded are creased. Other than the expected dirt on such records, the collection was in fairly good condition. Many account summaries and correspondences had paper tears but these were easily repaired with document repair tape. Some letters were on thin tissue paper and the iron gall ink used to write on them burned through the paper on some spots. These should be handled with care. All pins, clasps and staples were removed and plastic paper clips were used instead.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Capt. Wylie R. Dickinson (b1846-d1918). Wylie Rogers Dickinson was born in Birch Point, Wiscasset, Maine to John B. and Mary E. Rogers. When he was a few months old, his family moved to Bath and for a number of years they resided in what was known as the “William Rogers” house at the corner of Bath and High Streets. His father was a mill operator and for a time conducted the saw mill in North Bath with Hugh and Wylie Rogers and later moved his family to Phippsburg where he continued his lumbering operations in the mill of Dromore.

Wylie Dickinson grew up in the town of Phippsburg with a desire to lead a seafaring life and in 1862, at the age of 17, he shipped on the bark **Comet**, built by Charles V. Minott, and named after the comet of 1858.

Dickinson's next vessel was the ship **Mary E. Riggs**, also built at the Minott yard and commanded by Capt. John S. Lowell of Bath. From there, he went on the bark **C. V. Minott** of which Capt. D. C. Rogers was the master. His first experience in a fore-and-aft was in the schooner **Sabino** which McCobb Morrison was master. His next vessel was a Houghton ship commanded by Capt. Samuel Morrison. With Capt. Morrison's good will, Wylie Dickinson rose to the position of mate of the ship **Dirigo** and in 1870 became commander of this vessel. He then became master of the bark **C. S. Rogers**. This vessel sprung a leak off Nantucket and sunk, but all hands were taken off by the Nova Scotia bark **Protest**.

Captain Dickinson then took command of the new schooner **Bessie E. Dickinson** in 1874, named after his oldest daughter and in which he owned an interest. In 1877, he sold out of her to take command of the bark **Halcyon** built by Johnson Rideout. His next vessel was the ship **Yorktown**, taking command in 1882, relieving Captain James F. Murphy. He commanded this vessel for five years before taking on the Sewall ship **Willie Rosenfeld**. In 1888, he and the Sewalls bought the ship **McNear** at a low figure and after holding her about a year, disposed of her at San Francisco, realizing a good profit.

On returning to Bath, Capt. Wylie Dickinson was offered the command of any one of three Sewall ships but chose to wait until the **Rappahannock II**, then on the stocks, was commissioned. This was, at the time, the largest wooden vessel built in America. Unfortunately, she was destroyed by fire in 1892 under his Wylie's command.

After the **Rappahannock II** incident, Captain Dickinson commanded for a short while the **Dicky Bird**. After that, he took command of the ship **Aryan** in 1893 and after some seven years he was succeeded by Capt. Albert T. Whittier.

Wylie married Emma S. [Sarah] Powers on April 1, 1871 and had two daughters. Bessie Emma Dickinson was born in 1874 and Grace Percy Dickinson was born 1877. Wylie R. Dickinson died at the age of 72 on Sept. 17, 1918 in Phippsburg, Maine.

Capt. John Wesley Dickinson (b1850-d1909). Capt John Wesley Dickinson, brother of Wylie, was born in Bath, December 30, 1850. His seafaring career started at the young age of 14 years, making his first voyage with Capt. John S. Lowell on the Phippsburg ship **Mary E. Riggs**. His first command was the bark **C. S. Rogers** in 1876. His other commands were the **Alice M Minott** and **Berlin** of the Minott Fleet, **Wm. F. Babcock** of the Sewall fleet and **Arabia** of the Houghton fleet and his last vessel was the Sewall ship **B. F. Packard**. For twelve years during his sea life, he was a shipmate with his brother, Cap Wylie R. Dickinson.

John Wesley Dickinson married Margaret Jane Powers (sister of Emma S., Wylie Dickinson's wife) on Feb. 21, 1874 and had three children. Daughter Laura Wesley in 1875, sons John Wiley in 1882 and Vincent Colley in 1888.

Capt. John Dickinson retired from his seafaring days in 1894 and moved his family to California, where he purchased a fruit ranch in Aroma, California. He died on June 7, 1909 in Hanford, California at the age of 59. His wife, Margaret Jane, died October 1936 in Berkeley, California.

Emma S. Dickinson (b1850-d1926). Emma Sarah (Sarah Emma) Dickinson was born November 20, 1850 in Bath, Maine. The daughter of Sophia Percy and Andrew L. Powers, Mrs. Dickinson married Capt. Wylie Rogers Dickinson in 1871. Emma S often accompanied her husband on many long voyages to Europe and the Far East, but preferred the quiet of her Phippsburg home. In 1920, Emma purchased the Fred H. Low home in Bath and lived there until her death on January 21, 1926.

Bessie Emma Dickinson (b1874-d1957). Bessie Dickinson was born in Phippsburg, Maine on Feb. 22, 1874. She loved the seafaring life and wrote many stories about her experiences on the *Aryan* and *Rappahannock II*. She lived for a short while in Hanford, California before returning to Bath where Bessie and Grace opened their home on 732 High Street to visitors. They established the “Ridin’ Light Lodge” and accommodated many well-known visitors. The lodge operated between 1929/30 and 1950/51. After Grace died in 1950, Bessie closed the Lodge and soon after moved to the Mariner’s Family Home in Staten Island, Long Island, New York. In 1957, at the age of 83, Bessie Emma Dickinson died and was buried in Oak Grove Cemetery, Bath.

Grace Percy Dickinson (b1877-d1950). Grace Percy Dickinson was born in Phippsburg, Me., March 14, 1877. She attended Bradford academy while the family was at sea. Later she finished her school education at Westbrook Seminary where she received a L.A. (Liberal Arts) degree. Following graduation, she began teaching school in the Percy district of Phippsburg in the old stone schoolhouse, under Superintendent J. W. Doughty. She also taught in the school at Dromore and later went to Brunswick where she was a teacher for several years.

Grace was a member of Winter Street Congregational church and for years was chairman of the Mother’s Day Flower committee. She served as secretary of the first Woman’s Republican club organized in Sagadahoc County. She was a member of Genesta chapter of the Eastern Star and secretary of the Dromore Burying Ground Association.

She and her sister, Bessie E. Dickinson, opened the first tourist home in Bath and were co-hostesses of Ridin’ Light Lodge in Bath where they entertained many distinguished visitors representing the W. C. T. U. (Woman’s Christian Temperance Union).

After a long illness, Grace Percy Dickinson died at the age of 73 on September 1, 1950.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTES

The contents of the Dickinson Family Papers were originally housed in Capt. Wylie’s ditty box. Most of the vessel papers belonged to Capt. Wylie R. Dickinson when he was master of a number of vessels including the large ships **Aryan**, **Rappahannock II** and **Yorktown**. Vessel papers include ownership papers, insurance, registration, construction invoices, correspondences (mostly incoming) account summaries, labor and wage receipts and protest papers. Not all vessel papers are complete. There are vessel papers (dividend statements) of ships the family had an interest in. Other vessel papers have no reference to the Dickinson name, so it is difficult to determine if they had a vested interest or not.

Two small sewing kits were in Wylie’s ditty box. One is a square tin and the other in a very small round wicker basket with lid. (Crewman carried little sewing kits known as “housewives.” These usually small tin cans or boxes contained needles, buttons, threads, cloth and pins.) Wylie’s sewing kits contained needles, pins, threads, buttons, hooks, nails, beeswax, and pieces of cloth.

Other papers found in the box were general and personal letters written by Wylie Dickinson, John Dickinson, wife Emma S. Dickinson and daughters Bessie Emma and Grace Percy Dickinson.

Research notes and articles on local history were also found in the ditty box belonging to Bessie Dickinson. It was a bit difficult to determine if some of these papers were hers or taken from articles as she did not sign any of her work. If the story was written in first person referring to her father, then I assumed these were written by Bessie. The date she wrote these is unknown. A large unpublished manuscript written in long hand by Bessie Dickinson was also found in the box. It details her sea experiences on the **Rappahannock II** during its trip around Cape Horn. She takes liberty of using many of her father’s diary entries to build her own story and even admits this in her foreword “*our journals and ship papers have been saved, and many of these I*

have copied for this tale.” There is also a typewritten copy but both are not complete, have missing pages and many extensive additions and editorial changes made by Bessie. Bessie sent a copy of her manuscript to Maine author, Hugh Pendexter for review and received a reply in 1938. This may help date the manuscript around the 1930s.

A large number of personal letters written to Grace and Bessie are from David S. Kindell a past shipmate on the **Aryan** when both girls were on board during their youth. Mr. Kindell became close to the Dickinson Family. There are references to his experiences on the **Aryan** in these letters and other interesting Maritime tidbits. Personal letters to Grace and Bessie from Abbie Minott give an interesting commentary on Bath social life.

It is important to note that this is not a comprehensive collection of the Dickinson Family Papers. As noted previously in a letter written by Bessie to Capt. Parker in 1956, many papers were “*burned or thrown away.*”

Related material available at repository:

- MS-18 Mark W. Hennessey Collection 1784-1953
- MS-22 Sewall Family Papers
- MS-53 Mark W. Hennessey Research Papers 1928-1965
- MS-90: Charles V. Minott Collection
- MS-157: Percy & Small Shipyard records (**Cora F. Cressy**)
- MS-422: Capt. William J. L. Parker Papers

ORGANIZATION OF SERIES MS-423 Dickinson Family Papers (1854-1951)

SERIES I. VESSELS PAPERS (1854-1950)

Subseries IA. Capt. Wylie R. Dickinson, Master 1873-1907

Subseries IB. Vessel Interests 1896-1950

Subseries IC. Other Vessels 1854-1909

SERIES II. FAMILY PAPERS

Subseries IIA. Capt. Wylie R. Dickinson 1872-1924

Subseries IIB. Emma S. Dickinson 1880-1906

Subseries IIC. Bessie Emma Dickinson 1890-1951

Subseries IID. Grace Percy Dickinson 1890-1947

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

SERIES I. Vessel Papers (Date range: 1854-1950 / 13 Boxes) This series is grouped into three subseries:

Series IA: Capt. Wylie R. Dickinson, Master. Wylie commanded several vessels from 1872-1900 including the **Aryan**, **Yorktown** and **Rappahannock II**, carrying cargo to Kobe, England and San Francisco. These are papers belong to Capt Wylie R. Dickinson when he was master of the following vessels:

- **Aryan** (Ship)
- **Bessie E. Dickinson** (3M)

- **C. S. Rogers** (Bark)
- **Dicky Bird** (*originally William C. French*) (3M)
- **Halcyon** (Bark)
- **McNear** (Ship)
- **Rappahannock II** (Ship)
- **Wm [William] F. Babcock** (Ship)
- **Willie Rosenfeld** (Ship)
- **Yorktown** (Ship)

Subseries IB Vessel Interests. These are vessel papers the Dickinson Family had interest in. Most of these papers are dividend statements and ownership (Bill of Sale) papers. The vessels listed in this subseries are:

- **Ada F. Brown** (4M)
- **Alex Gibson** (Ship)
- **Ben Hur** (Ship)
- **Cora F. Cressy** (4M)
- **Frances M.** (Ship)
- **Frank M. Deering** (5M) (*formerly Jerome Jones*)
- **Isabel B. Wiley** (3M)
- **Jerome Jones** (5M)
- **Mary F. Barrett** (6M)
- **Maude M. Morey** (5M)

Subseries IC. Other vessels. This subseries is vessel papers the Dickinson family did not have a direct interest as there is no documentation at this point saying otherwise. One “common denominator” is the name “Oliver Moulton, which appears on a number of these papers. I am speculating this is the same Oliver Moulton that owned a sawmill on the Togus Stream in Kennebec between 1864 and 1874. I chose not to separate papers with Moulton’s name from the others. Instead, I listed vessels in this series in alphabetical order and cross-referenced his name to those specific folders in Appendix C. The vessels listed in this subseries are:

- **Gardiner G. Deering** (5M)
- **Horatio L. Baker** (3M0)
- **Lady Dufferin** (BNA Barque)
- **Malcolm B. Seavy** (4M)

All other miscellaneous vessel papers go into this series. In particular, there are two bills for payment of hauling lumber. Payment is made to A. C. & C. Buffum. Charles Buffum, born in Palermo, Me., in 1820, came to Orono with his father in 1832 and for several years worked in the lumber mills. He was educated in the common schools of Orono, at China Academy, and at the Maine Wesleyan Seminary, at Kent's Hill. In May, 1844, he formed a partnership with his brother, Albert C., under the firm name of A. C. & C. Buffum, and went into trade in Orono, and in connection with this they became manufacturers of lumber, which continued until his brother's death, in 1855, when he succeeded to the whole business, which he continued until recently. The two bills are dated 1954.

NOTE: Organization of all vessel papers:

Vessel papers in Series I are organized as follows. Please note not every vessel has papers in each category, but the organization has been standardized to simplify access.

- Ownership. *This includes dividend books, bill of sales, correspondences relating to dividend payments or ownership. You may also find information on the disposition of a vessel.*
- Registration. *(Includes any vessel registrations or surveys)*
- Insurance. *Includes insurance policies during construction of vessel or delivery of cargo. This may also include any correspondences or insurance receipts.*
- Construction accounts.
 - a. *Invoices, including any building account summaries*
 - b. *Labor (during construction or operation)*
- Accounts.
 - a. *Summaries*
 - b. *General accounts (by voyage and date)*
 - c. *Charter parties*
 - d. *Freight & Cargo*
 - e. *Crew (this may include wages, article of agreements, pay slips, portages, etc.)*
 - f. *List of stores*
 - g. *Slops*
- Protests. *This may include claims for lost goods, collisions, and/or damages. You may also find information on the disposition on a vessel.*
- Ships Logs/ Captain's Logs
- Miscellaneous. *I placed anything that does not quite fit into the above categories. This may be news clippings, obscure notes, ephemera, empty envelopes*

SERIES II. Family Papers (Date range: 1872-1951 / 5 boxes) This series contains all the personal papers of the Dickinson Family and were grouped into four subseries. Family papers are organized in a hierarchical order with Wylie first as head of household, Emma, his wife, is second, Bessie next and Grace is last as she was the youngest.

Subseries IIA. Capt. Wylie R. Dickinson. Wylie's papers includes family letters, business related letters, insurance papers for personal property, personal bills and receipts, examination papers for License Master of Ocean Passenger Steamships, booklets, souvenir and ephemeral items. There are also two small sewing kits.

Subseries IIB. Emma S. Dickinson. Although Emma and the girls have taken trips with Wylie on the **Aryan** and **Rappahannock II**, she stayed home when the girls were quite young and attended to domestic matters. She was not of good health and was susceptible to migraines. Her letters are from her husband while out at sea or the girls when they were attending boarding school. There are also letters from her sister Margaret Jane. There are a few miscellaneous papers—mostly ephemeral.

Subseries IIC. Bessie Emma Dickinson. Bessie's papers include family correspondences, business related letters, a few photographs and ephemeral papers. There are letters to Bessie from David S. Kindell, who was a shipmate on the **Aryan** when Bessie and Grace were aboard. There few papers pertaining to their lodge establishment called "Ridin' Light Lodge" on High Street in Bath. The Bath Directory lists the Ridin' Light Lodge being in business between 1929/30 and 1951/52. You will also find Bessie's research notes and a number of papers she has written on the local history including maritime history. An unpublished manuscript written by Bessie detailing her sea experiences on the Rappahannock II is also in this subseries. I placed all other papers that that did not seem to fit in any category under miscellaneous.

Subseries IID. Grace Percy Dickinson. Grace's papers are mostly personal letters between family and friends. Most letters are from David S. Kindell who was a seaman on the **Aryan** when Grace and Bessie were aboard. He became a good friend of the family and there are interesting stories and references about the **Aryan** in his letters to Grace