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## Robert W. Wilder Papers

1888-2013

2 boxes (2 linear ft.)

Call no.: MS 884



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Born in the Quabbin town of Enfield, Mass., Bob Wilder (1933-2015) rose from a life of poverty to a successful career in the Marine Corps and the aerospace industry. Becoming an avid local historian in his retirement, he drew upon his rural childhood while working later as an interpreter at Old Sturbridge Village and became a popular lecturer on topics in regional history.

This small collection consists of materials relating to Wilder's family and his research into the history of the Swift River Valley and the Quabbin Reservoir. In addition to some Wilder family photographs, the collection includes hand-drawn maps, newspaper clippings, town reports, magazine articles, oral histories, and poems about the towns of the Swift River Valley. Of particular note are several video recordings of Wilder's lectures and an extensive series of oral histories with Wilder recorded by Marc Peloquin.

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Farming and rural life

Quabbin

## Background on Bob Wilder

Born in Enfield, Mass., on August 18, 1933, Robert Wayne "Bob" Wilder knew the hardships of poverty as a young child. The son of Joseph Edward Wilder, Jr., a laborer from old Yankee stock, and his second wife Beulah (Turner), an Eastern Abenaki woman originally from Maine, Bob was raised in Smith Village during the depths of the Great Depression. Rarely traveling further afield than the neighboring town of Ware, the family scraped through the Depression until 1938, when they, like all the residents of Enfield, were evicted to make way for the Quabbin Reservoir.

The trauma of losing their farm and relocating miles from home affected Wilder deeply. Settling among several of their former neighbors in Warren, Mass., the family started over, though as poor as ever. After attending grammar school in Warren and graduated at the top of his class from Brookfield High School in 1951, Wilder joined the Marine Corps, determined to escape the poverty he had always known. A bunkmate of Red Sox star Ted Williams and comrade of the golfer Lee Trevino, he made the most of his time in service. Excelling as a Marine, Wilder gained practical experience in engineering that became the basis for his future career, also earning an associate's degree in military science and hydraulics from the Marine Corps Institute in Quantico, Va.

When he left the Corps in 1960 with the rank of Staff Sergeant, Wilder secured a job in the aerospace industry, working for many years as a quality engineer and rising from production foreman to chief inspector while working on projects related to NASA's moon mission. Retiring at only 52, he returned to Brookfield, where he had the good fortune of running into a woman he had met in town many years before, Nancy Cronin. She became his wife.

A gifted storyteller fascinated with local history, Wilder drew upon his rural upbringing while working for Old Sturbridge Village as an interpreter in their farming operations. Haying, milking, blacksmithing, and working ox teams were part of his repertoire. Wilder was an active member of the Quaboag Historical Society, the Swift River Historical Society, the Friends of Quabbin, and the Ware Chapter of the Marine Corps League, and emerged as a popular lecturer on regional history, giving talks on everything from the Boston Post Road and King Phillips War to life in the Quabbin towns. Wilder died in Brookfield on Nov. 29, 2015, nine months after his beloved wife Nancy.

## Scope of collection

Assembled by Robert "Bob" Wilder, a native of Enfield, Mass., this small collection consists of family papers and research into the history of the Swift River Valley and the Quabbin Reservoir. Focused primarily on Enfield, the collection includes genealogical information, census records, and photographs relating to Wilder's family, along with some of his hand-drawn maps, newspaper clippings, town reports, magazine articles, oral histories, and poems about the towns of the Swift River Valley, with a handful of newspaper clippings and photographs from the other Quabbin towns, Greenwich, Prescott, and Dana. Of particular note is an extensive series of oral histories with Wilder recorded by Marc Peloquin and a number of historical lectures by Bob Wilder.

The effect of the Quabbin Reservoir project on the residence of the Swift River Valley is seen throughout the collection. The scope of the collection documents the impact of both the Great Depression and World War Two on the lives of both the Wilder family and the people of the Swift River Valley.

## Series descriptions

**Series 1: Wilder Family Papers**

1888-2013

Box 1

This series includes: the Wilder family genealogy going back to the 15th century, Flora Wilder's 1934 diary, and copies of Fredrick Brown's World War Two POW papers. Highlights of this series include: historical lectures by Robert Wilder, Wilder family census records from Enfield, Elizabeth Rand's poems about Enfield, and Robert Wilder's oral histories with Marc Peloquin. This series also features the Wilder family photo album with locations in Enfield.

**Series 2: Swift River Valley/Quabbin Reservoir**

1908-2013

Box 1

This series includes: hand-drawn maps, newspaper clippings, town reports, magazine articles, and oral histories. This series focuses on the hometown of Robert Wilder, Enfield Massachusetts This series focuses on the hometown of Robert Wilder, Enfield Massachusetts; however, it does include clippings and photographs of Greenwich, Prescott and Dana. This collection includes many local newspaper clippings written during the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir as well as oral histories by Swift River Valley Residence. Highlights of this series include: Being a Kid in the Pre-Quabbin Swift River Valley photography exhibit from 2009, the DVD copy of the 1916 Enfield centennial celebration, and the 2012 DVD *Exodus from Enfield*.

## Inventory

Series 1:Wilder Family Papers

1888-2013

Box 1

Brown, Fredrick

1944-1945

Box 1: 1

Rand, Elizabeth

1927-1931

Box 1: 2

Rand, Silas

1888

Box 1: 3

Wilder Family Genealogy

1956-2006

Box 1: 4

Wilder Family Genealogy Census Records

Box 1: 5

Wilder Family Photo Album

2012

Box 1: 6

Wilder, Flora

1920-1939

Box 1: 7

Wilder Robert

1930-2013

Box 1: 8

Chronicle: Bob Wilder and Friends at the Quabbin

1994

Videocassette

Box 2

Conversation over Quabbin Bob Wilder and Elizabeth Rand

1995

DVD

Box 2

Madam Jumel

undated

DVD

Box 2

Lecture: Wheelers Surprise

undated

DVD

Box 2

Lecture: Destruction of Brookfield in King Philips War

2007

DVD

Box 2

Lecture: Maps of Greater Brookfield

2007

DVD

Box 2

Lecture: Conflicts in Brookfield Churches

2007

DVD

Box 2

Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 1: Hard Time Letting Go, Henry and Charlie Smith, Land and Loss

2008

CD

Box 2

Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 2: Haying How to, Unk-Hunk Story, Ware Nipples 2 copies

2008

CD

Box 2

Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 3: Moonshine, Ned, Linda, Bill, Town Hall and Changes of Life

2008

CD

Box 2

Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 4: Farm Stories, Food Friends Family, Graves and Last Child

2008

CD

Box 2

Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 5: Sheeping, Get Into a Better School, Last Dog Hung

2008

CD

Box 2

Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 6: Poetry

2008

CD

Box 2

Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 7: Grandmother's Diary

2008

CD

Box 2

Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 8: Milking and Plowing

2008

CD

Box 2

Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 9: Howe's Book and Enfield Map

2008

CD

Box 2

Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 10: Remembrance and More

2008

CD

Box 2

CD Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 11: Stick Map and Recollections 4 CD set

2008

Box 2

Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 12: Pigs and Bees

2009

CD

Box 2

Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 13: The Great Sadness

2009

CD

Box 2  
Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 14: Quabbin: Open Discussion  
2009  
CD  
Box 2  
Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 15: Being Poor  
2009  
CD  
Box 2  
Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 16: Oxen Know How  
2009  
CD  
Box 2  
Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 17: Saw Mills of the Valley  
2009  
CD  
Box 2  
Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 18: Radio  
2012  
CD  
Box 2  
Oral History: Conversations with Bob Wilder and Marc Peloquin 19: April 19 2012  
2012  
CD  
Box 2  
Channel 57 Interview with Bob Wilder  
2013  
DVD  
Box 2

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## Inventory

Series 2: Swift River Valley/Quabbin Reservoir

1908-2013

Box 1

Barlow Goldmine

ca.1928

Box 1: 9

Being a Kid in the Pre-quabbin Swift River Valley exhibit

2009

Box 1: 10

Belchertown Photographs

1927-1932

Box 1: 11

Dana

1921-1939

Box 1: 12

Daniel Shay's Highway

1938

Box 1: 13

Daverson Tunnel Project

1932-1940

Box 1: 14

Enfield, Church Fire

1935

Box 1: 15

Enfield, Evictions

1942

Box 1: 16

DVD Exodus from Enfield

2012

Box 2  
Map: Enfield families remaining in 1934  
1934  
Box 2: 1  
Enfield, Firemen's Ball  
1938  
Box 1: 17  
Enfield, Garage Fire  
1935  
Box 1: 18  
Enfield, Last Days  
1937-1938  
Box 1: 19  
Enfield, Last Days Boston Globe Pictorial  
1938  
Box 1: 20  
Enfield, Obituaries of Former Residence  
ca.1940-2013  
Box 1: 21  
Enfield, Photographs  
1927-1940  
Box 1: 22  
Enfield, Pre-Quabbin Reservoir  
1908-1919  
Box 1: 23  
DVD Enfield, 1916 Centennial Celebration  
1916  
Box 2  
Enfield, Soil Testing/Water Quality Laboratory  
ca.1940  
Box 1: 24  
Friends of the Quabbin  
1994-2013  
Box 1: 25  
Greenwich  
1928-1940  
Box 1: 26  
Homemade Radio with email  
1920-2012  
Box 1: 27  
New Salem  
1928-1945  
Box 1: 28  
Pelham Photographs  
1932-1938  
Box 1: 29  
Petersham Photographs  
1937-1943  
Box 1: 30  
Prescott  
ca.1930-1939  
Box 1: 31  
Ware Photographs  
1932-1935  
Box 1: 32  
Quabbin Aqueduct to Boston  
1938-1941  
Box 1: 33  
Quabbin Club

1936-1938  
Box 1: 34  
Quabbin Park Cemetery  
1933-1948  
Box 1: 35  
Quabbin Reservoir  
1939-1946  
Box 1: 36  
Quabbin Reservoir Construction  
1930-1948  
Box 1: 37  
Quabbin Reservoir Hunting/Fishing  
ca.1940  
Box 1: 38  
Quabbin Reservoir Legislature Newspaper Clippings  
ca.1935-1940  
Box 1: 39  
Quabbin Reservoir Munitions Testing  
ca.1940-1941  
Box 1: 40  
Quabbin Reservoir Project Deaths  
ca.1936  
Box 1: 41  
Quabbin Reservoir Project News and Local Reaction  
1920-1935  
Box 1: 42  
Quabbin Valley Clearing Project "Woodpeckers"  
1936-1939  
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Quabbin Valley Historic Interest  
1928-2006  
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VHS Quabbin Valley Oral Histories  
1994  
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Quabbin Valley Reforestation Project  
1936-1948  
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Swift River Company Auction  
1912  
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Swift River Flood  
1936  
Box 1: 47  
Swift River Valley Buildings, Demolition/Transportation  
1928-1939  
Box 1: 48  
Swift River Valley Historical Society  
1981-2005  
Box 1: 49  
Swift River Valley Memorials  
1938-1948  
Box 1: 50  
Swift River Valley Post Offices  
1937-1939  
Box 1: 51  
Swift River Valley, Railroad  
ca.1927-1940  
Box 1: 52

Swift River Valley Town Auctions

1938

Box 1: 53

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## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Gift of Robert W. Wilder, Nov. 2015.

### Processing Information

Processed by Jennifer Momaney, June 2016.

### Language:

English

### Copyright and Use (More information )

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## Search terms

### Subjects

Dana (Mass.)--History  
Enfield (Mass.)--History  
Greenwich (Mass.) --History  
Prescott (Mass.)--History  
Quabbin Reservoir (Mass.)--History  
Swift River Valley (Mass.)--History

### Contributors

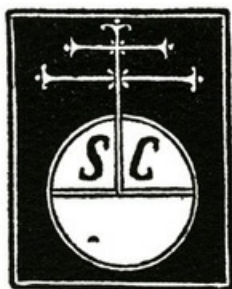
Wilder, Robert W. [main entry]

### Genres and formats

Diaries  
News clippings (information artifacts)  
Oral histories  
Photographs  
Sound recordings  
Video recordings

### Link to similar SCUA collections

Farming and rural life  
Quabbin



Special Collections & University Archives  
University Libraries : UMass Amherst  
154 Hicks Way : Amherst, Mass. 01003-9275  
Ph. 413-545-7282 (545-SCUA)





