Guide to the Frederick A. Cook and Robert E. Peary Collection MSS.2017.07.14

Daniel Morales
Archives & Special Collections, Santa Clara University Library

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Santa Clara University Library
500 El Camino Real
Santa Clara, California 95053-0500
Email: specialcollections@scu.edu
URL: https://www.scu.edu/library/asc/
Language of Material: English
Contributing Institution: Archives & Special Collections, Santa Clara University Library
Title: The Frederick A. Cook and Robert E. Peary Collection
creator: Cook, Frederick, 1865-1940
creator: Hubbard, Bernard Rosecrans, S.J.
Identifier/Call Number: MSS.2017.07.14
Physical Description: 0.42 linear feet (2 boxes)
Date (inclusive): 1904-1960
Abstract: The Frederick A. Cook and Robert E. Peary Collection, 1904-1960, documents the controversy surrounding the dual claims of the discovery of the North Pole by Frederick A. Cook and Robert E. Peary. The bulk of the collection consists of multiple drafts of articles written by William Shea, a Cook supporter who began writing about him after meeting with him. A portion of the collection is dedicated to articles written by various authors expressing their beliefs on the issue, and newspaper clippings regarding Cook and Peary. The records also consist of congressional hearing records regarding the debate, and correspondence discussing the controversy sent to Father Bernard Hubbard, a priest, lecturer, and Alaskan explorer who reignited the issue during his lectures in the mid-twentieth century. Fr. Hubbard was of the belief that Cook was successful in the discovery of the North Pole as opposed to Peary, and most of the correspondence sent to him agrees with this sentiment. This collection is arranged into one series: Series I. Cook-Peary Controversy (1904-1960).

Language of Material: English.
This collection is located in Santa Clara University Library's Archives & Special Collections.
Access
The collection is open for research.
Collection Contents
SERIES I: Cook-Peary Controversy (1904-1960).
This series documents the controversy regarding the discovery of the North Pole as claimed by Cook and Peary. The bulk of the series consists of multiple drafts of articles written by William Shea, along with a few single articles written by various authors. The records also consist of congressional hearing records regarding the debate and correspondence discussing the controversy sent to Father Bernard Hubbard.
This series is arranged by format.
Biographical History
Frederick Albert Cook was born in Callicoon, New York, in 1865. He received his M.D. from New York Medical School in 1890, and soon used his newly acquired skills to become a surgeon for Robert Peary’s 1891-1892 Arctic expedition, where he proved to be a valuable asset in preventing scurvy among the explorers. During his time on Adrien de Gerlache’s Belgian Antarctic Expedition of 1897-1899, he visited Tierra del Fuego, where he met Anglican missionary Thomas Bridges, who had prepared a dictionary in Yahgan. Cook borrowed this dictionary and never returned it, later attempting to publish it as his own work. In 1903, he became his own explorer during a trip to the area surrounding Mount Denali, previously known as Mount McKinley, and later returned to supposedly climb it in 1906. Though he claimed he was the first to scale the mountain, Peary supporters during the North Pole debacle noted that he reached the wrong summit, a spot now known as Fake Peak. In 1907, Cook announced he was determined to discover the North Pole, and claimed to have reached it after a 14-month disappearance. Robert Peary then claimed in 1909 to have truly discovered it first. While Cook originally congratulated Peary, Peary purposefully campaigned to discredit Cook’s claims, since Cook had no navigational records of his trip to prove his achievement. After reviewing Cook's limited records, a commission of the University of Copenhagen ruled in December 1909 that he had not proven that he reached the pole. In 1911, Cook published a memoir of his expedition, continuing to assert his success. His reputation as an explorer never recovered, and he died in 1940.
Robert Edwin Peary Sr. was born in Cresson, Pennsylvania in 1856. He earned a civil engineering degree from Bowdoin College in 1877, and later joined as an engineer for the United States Navy in 1881. During his time with the Navy in 1885, he noted in his diary that he would be the first man to reach the North Pole. His first expedition took place across Greenland by dog sled in 1886, and served as a learning experience for future endeavours. He returned to Greenland in 1891 on a larger, more difficult expedition to see if Greenland extended as a land mass to the North Pole. Using Inuit survival techniques, he was able to complete a few more Greenland expeditions before attempting his final expedition from Ellesmere Island to the North Pole in 1909. During this time, he established “Camp Jesup,” allegedly within 5 miles of the pole. However, upon returning from his expedition, he learned that Frederick Cook, a surgeon from one of his previous expeditions, claimed to have reached the North Pole a year prior in 1908. Peary campaigned to discredit Cook, and after a
trial at the University of Copenhagen, Peary was proved correct and Cook’s claim was disproved after he failed to supply proof (though Peary himself refused to submit his records, and the National Geographic Society forbade researchers from seeing them). Later on, Peary would become the leader of the Explorers Club and the Aero Club of America, along with proposing air mail routes that became the genesis of the U.S. Postal Service’s air mail system. He died a successful man in 1920.

Organizational History
Santa Clara University was founded in 1851 by the Society of Jesus as Santa Clara College and is California’s oldest operating institution of higher learning. It was established on the grounds of Mission Santa Clara de Asís, the eighth of the original 21 California missions. The college originally operated as a preparatory school and did not offer courses of collegiate rank until 1853. The institution became known as the University of Santa Clara in 1912, when the schools of engineering and law were added. For 110 years, Santa Clara University was an all-male school. In 1961, women were accepted as undergraduates and Santa Clara University became the first coeducational Catholic university in California. The number of students and faculty tripled over the next decade and the university began the largest building program in school history with eight residence halls, a student union, and an athletic stadium. In the early 1970s, the Board of Trustees voted to limit the size of the undergraduate population, an action that was intended to preserve the character and ensure the quality of the university for generations to come. In 1985, the university adopted Santa Clara University as its official name. Bibliography: Santa Clara University. “About SCU - History.” www.scu.edu/about/history.cfm (Accessed Nov. 23, 2010) McKevitt, Gerald, S.J. The University of Santa Clara: A History, 1851-1977. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1979.

Preferred Citation

Processing Information
Collection processed by Daniel Morales and finding aid EAD encoded by Michelle Runyon in 2017. Additional descriptive information added by Mia Hope in 2018.

Related Material
Hall, Thomas F., Has the North Pole Been Discovered?: An Analytical and Synthetical Review of the Published Narratives of the Two Arctic explorers, Dr. Frederick A. Cook and Civil Engineer Robert E. Peary, U.S.N.. Boston, Massachusetts: R.G. Badger, 1917. https://sculib.scu.edu/record=b1232741
Morris, Charles. Discovery of the North Pole; Dr. Frederick A. Cook’s Own Story of How He Reached the North Pole, April 21, 1908, the Story of Commander Peary's Discovery, April 6, 1909. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: G.A. Parker, 1909. https://sculib.scu.edu/record=b1104193

Scope and Content of the Collection
The Frederick A. Cook and Robert E. Peary Collection, 1904-1960, documents the controversy surrounding the dual claims of the discovery of the North Pole by Frederick A. Cook and Robert E. Peary. The bulk of the collection consists of multiple drafts of articles written by William Shea, a Cook supporter who began writing about him after meeting with him. A portion of the collection is dedicated to articles written by various authors expressing their beliefs on the issue, and newspaper clippings regarding Cook and Peary. The records also consist of congressional hearing records regarding the debate, and correspondence discussing the controversy sent to Father Bernard Hubbard. This collection is arranged into one series: Series I. Cook-Peary Controversy (1904-1960).

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Subjects and Indexing Terms
Hubbard, Bernard R. (Bernard Rosecrans), 1888-1962
North Pole (Alaska)
Discovery and Exploration
Explorers -- United States -- Biography
Cook, Frederick Albert, 1865-1940
Peary, Robert E. (Robert Edwin), 1856-1920

SERIES I: Cook-Peary Controversy, 1904-1960
Scope and Content
This series documents the controversy regarding the discovery of the North Pole as claimed by Cook and Peary. The bulk of the series consists of multiple drafts of articles written by William Shea, along with a few single articles written by various authors. The records also consist of congressional hearing records regarding the debate and correspondence discussing the controversy sent to Father Bernard Hubbard.
Arrangement
This series is arranged by format.

Box 1: Correspondence and W. Shea Manuscript, 1910-1960
Folder 1: Correspondence, 1949
Folder 2: Correspondence, 1950-1960
Folder 3: W. Shea, The North Polar Epic, MS, undated
Folder 4: W. Shea, The North Polar Epic, MS, undated
Folder 5: W. Shea, The North Polar Epic, MS (facsimile), undated

Box 2: Correspondence, Newspaper Clippings, Congressional Record and Other Miscellaneous Documents, 1904-1936
Folder 1: W. Shea, "IS The North Pole Still Undiscovered", 1925
Folder 2: Congressional Record, 1915
Folder 3: Shea/Cook Correspondence, 1927-1936
Folder 4: Leavenworth New Era, 1926-1929
Folder 5: J. Stowell, Ross Martin; W. Shea, "Ross Marvin's Death", undated
Folder 6: T. Hall, "Confessions of the Murder of Prof. Marvin", 1926
Folder 7: News Clippings re: Cook-Peary Controversy, 1925-1934
Folder 8: News Clippings re: Lincoln Ellsworth Expeditions, 1925-1935
Folder 9: News Clippings re: Roald Admunsen Expedition, 1925
Folder 10: News Clippings re: Richard Byrd Polar Expeditions, undated
Folder 11: News Clippings re: George Wilkins Polar Expeditions, 1925-1928
Folder 12: News Clippings re: Polar Exploration, 1904-1926