

Finding aid to the
Arctic Club of America Collection
1894 - 1914

The Explorers Club
46 East 70th Street
New York, NY
United States 10021

telephone: +001 212.628.8383
www.explorers.org

Prepared by Karen Kleppe Lembo and Sarah Mendell, Interns
22 December 2002

Updated and edited by Morgen Stevens-Garmon, Project Archivist
14 October 2009

Reference code

US NNEC ACC

Level of description

Collection

Extent and medium of the unit of description

1.67 linear feet

Name of creators

Arctic Club of America
The Explorers Club

Historical note

The Arctic Club of America was organized on September 8, 1894, born out of Dr. Frederick A. Cook's Arctic Expedition of 1894. At the outset membership was limited to members of the expedition and officers of the steamship *Miranda* and schooner *Rigel*. A party of over fifty passengers left New York on July 11, 1894 in the S.S. *Miranda* an iron ship of about 1,100 tons. On August 10, 1894, *Miranda* ran upon an uncharted reef which made a hole in the bottom of the ship. The party returned to Sukkertoppen, Greenland, where the majority of the party stayed aboard the *Miranda*. Dr. Cook organized a party and navigated an open boat across 90 miles of polar sea to obtain rescue. Ten days later he returned to Sukkertoppen with the *Rigel*, a fishing schooner, and the remaining *Miranda* passengers were transferred to the schooner.

The plan was for the *Rigel* to take the *Miranda* and its passengers in tow, but within two days the *Miranda* was sinking. All the passengers were transferred to the *Rigel*. As stated on pages 13 and 14 of *The Arctic Club Manual* of 1906, although crowded "...the company was an especially genial and harmonious one...[a]cquaintances ripened into friendships...[and] out of this intimacy, a more formal association...[arose] for the purpose of keeping alive and perpetuating the pleasant friendships which had been formed on the cruise and cemented by its mishaps."

The *Manual* discusses the circumstances that led to the drafting of the September 8, 1894 letter which gave rise to The Arctic Club of America:

Our organization was a humble one in numbers and purpose, its membership limited to the party on the trip and the officers of the *Miranda* and *Rigel*. Although humble, it was from the first more than merely successful. Others with Arctic experiences met and dined with us as guests and not only were our own friendships strengthened and memories of mutual experiences reviewed, but new friendships were made with other explorers whose experiences in the north had been richer in results than ours...[I]t has been the means of encouraging arctic exploration and of promoting this good cause in a variety of ways. The social features for which it was originally formed go on...and [the club] promotes the personal acquaintance of the explorers (sic) who otherwise might simply know of each other, without actually knowing each other. (page 15).

The Club met over the following years, for dinners and reunions (with explorer-speakers), "Ladies Night Dinners," "Smokers," and to decorate graves of past Polar Explorers. Officers were elected, a newsletter for members was published, as was *The Arctic Club Manual* in 1906. In early 1909 the Club, through its President William Schley, solicited donations to fund an expedition to search for the then-missing Arctic explorer, Dr. Cook.

In 1912 the Club acquired its first permanent residence by renting a room from The Explorers Club. Later that year, the Arctic Club of America folded into The Explorers Club becoming a part of that organization. The Arctic Club continued to host its Annual Dinner but there is known record that this tradition continued beyond 1914.

Scope and content note

Collected here are materials generated by the Arctic Club of America. Information on the Club's formation and organization is included, as well as correspondence related to Club business. The collection contains documentation of Club sponsored events such as the Annual Dinner, and special programs honoring members. Books published by the Club and an uninterrupted run of the *Arctic Club of America Bulletin* are incorporated into this collection. Other published materials include newspaper clippings that announce and describe Club functions and events. Also collected here are photographic portraits of some members of the Arctic Club of America and subject files that focus on the controversies surrounding members Robert Dunn, Frederick A. Cook, and B. S. Osbon.

System of arrangement

The collection is divided into seven series: Organizational records, Publications, Press clippings, Events, Member portraits, Correspondence, and Subject files. Files are arranged chronologically within series or sub-series.

Archival history

The bulk of the Arctic Club of America collection was processed in December 2002 by interns Karen Kleppe Lembo and Sarah Mandell. More materials were subsequently discovered and added to the collection without alteration to Lembo and Mandell's finding aid. In October 2009 the collection was re-organized to incorporate new materials and to include the previously separate *Arctic Club Bulletin*.

The collection is artificial. How, when, and in what capacity the materials were originally gathered is not known.

Immediate source of acquisition or transfer

A portion of the material may have been donated by Henry Brewer, son of Arctic Club president William H. Brewer. (*Explorers Journal*. Vol 10, no. 1, page 9.)

Conditions governing access

Collection is open to the public by appointment. To make an appointment or request permission to publish, please contact Curator of Research Collections. Contact information is available on The Explorers Club website: www.explorers.org.

Preferred Citation:

Archives of the Arctic Club of America, Accession #2003-003, Series #, Box #, File #, The Explorers Club Research Collections.

Conditions governing reproduction

Copyright is retained by The Explorers Club. Scanning, digital photography, and/or photocopying is permitted at curator's discretion and performed by curatorial staff or other professionals as time permits.

Language of material

English

Finding aids

A finding aid dated December 22, 2002 was prepared by Karen Kleppe Lembo and Sarah Mandell in fulfillment of requirements for an archives management course taught by Anthony Cucchiara at Pratt Institute.

Related Collections/Units of Description

The following collections are known or believed to contain related information:

- Archives of the Peary Arctic Club (at The Explorers Club)
- Archives of The Explorers Club (at The Explorers Club)
- Albert J. Operti Collection (at The Explorers Club, as well as Operti related items in The Explorers Club Museum)
- Alexander Parker Rogers Collection (at The Explorers Club)
- *Edward Guild Wyckoff papers, 1899-1910*, Kroch Library Rare Books and Manuscripts, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.
- *Henry G. Bryant Letterbooks*, American Philosophical Society Library, Philadelphia, PA.
- *William Henry Brewer Papers, 1830-1927*, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

Access points

Name

Arctic Club of America
Cook, Frederick Albert, 1865-1940
Dunn, Robert, 1877-1955
Explorers Club
Operti, Albert, 1852-1927
Osbon, Bradley Sillick, 1827-1912
Peary, Robert E. (Robert Edwin), 1856-1920

Subject

Arctic regions -- Discovery and exploration.
Arctic regions -- Societies, etc.
Correspondence.
Explorers -- Societies, etc.
New York (N.Y.) -- Clubs.
Portraits.

Place

Arctic regions
Greenland
New York (N.Y.)
North Pole

Series descriptions

Series 1: Organizational records

1894 – 1912, 12 folders.

This series consists of materials related to the formation, organization, membership, and insignia of the Arctic Club of America. Included is the 1894 letter written aboard the *S.S. Miranda* describing the club's inception and the meeting minutes from 1912 that discuss a potential merger with The Explorers Club. Also in this series are several folders of original artwork created by Albert Operti to serve as Arctic Club of America insignia.

Series 2: Publications

1898 and 1906 – 1912, 33 folders.

Series 2 is made up of print materials published by the Arctic Club of America and is divided into two sub-series.

Sub-series 1: Book publications

Includes two books, a compilation of short biographical sketches published in 1898 and the 1906 *Arctic Club Manual*.

Sub-series 2: *Arctic Club of America Bulletin*

This sub-series contains an uninterrupted run of the *Arctic Club of America Bulletin*. The *Bulletin* was published from 1907-1912 and provided members with news from the Board of Directors, membership information, summaries of lectures given at the Club, and other events. Later editions of the *Bulletin* contain reports from expeditions, poems, and other information submitted by members. In files 1-30 issues are separated according to publication date. The last file is a bound volume containing one copy of each published bulletin.

Series 3: Press clippings

circa 1896 – 1909, 1 folder.

Collected here are newspaper clippings that announce and describe Arctic Club of America functions and events.

Series 4: Events

1894 – 1914, 28 folders.

Files focus on events sponsored by the Arctic Club of America such as the Annual Dinner, special programs honoring members, and organization functions. Folders 1-19 contain menus from the Arctic Club of America Annual Dinner from 1894 to 1914. Folders 20-27 are menus and programs from special dinners honoring members or occasions. The items in folder were originally part of a scrapbook. Items include Annual Dinner menus, special dinner programs, election announcements, memorial service notices, and club functions. Among these are a guest list for the dinner on September 23, 1909 to honor Frederick A. Cook as "Discoverer of the North Pole".

Series 5: Member portraits

circa 1900 – 1913, 19 prints in 2 folders.

The two folders in this series contain photographic portraits of some members of the Arctic Club of America.

Series 6: Correspondence

1895 – 1912, 55 folders.

Series 6 consists of letters written regarding Club business. The bulk of the correspondence is addressed to the Secretary and concerns attendance at Club dinners. According to Club regulations a formal notice must be sent to the Secretary if a member is unable to attend a Club dinner along with a note to be expressed to those members in attendance.

Series 7: Subject files

1898 – 1910, 25 folders.

The three sub-series that make up Series 7 focus on the controversies surrounding Club members Robert Dunn, Frederick A. Cook, and B. S. Osbon.

Sub-series 1: Robert Dunn

In the summer of 1903, Robert Dunn led an expedition to the highest unscaled part of Mount

McKinley. Dunn published the notes of his expedition as a series of articles in *Outing* magazine. *Outing*, according to bibliographic records found in the New York Public Library's catalog, is described as "an illustrated monthly magazine of recreation" and "the outdoor magazine of human interest." Some members of the Club took exception to the fact that Dunn made the story about his expedition available to the general population in a mainstream publication. At the time, most Club members and other explorers published their works in peer-reviewed journals of science. Many Club members felt that Dunn had lowered the value of the work done by true scientists and explorers by choosing to publish in *Outing*.

Supporters of Dunn claimed that Dunn's articles provided a broader understanding to the work of scientists and explorers. To quote from a letter written by Mr. Steffens, "You do not object to dry, scientific observations made in a dull, scientific way. The moment the style becomes interesting, literary and full of what I call the science of humanity, then the Arctic Club does object." (Letter dated January 17, 1905) A few members of the Club resigned, including Mr. Steffens, over Dunn's ousting from the Arctic Club.

This series covers the debate that ultimately led to the Executive Committee to demand Dunn's resignation. File 1 contains Robert Dunn's published articles as they appeared in "Outing." No bibliographic information is available from the original articles (no title page, no date/issue information, etc.), and it is unclear whether all articles are included in this file. File 2 contains correspondence on the resulting controversy. The last item in this folder is Dunn's letter of resignation.

Sub-series 2: Frederick A. Cook

This sub-series consists of 12 folders of correspondence, telegrams, a postcard, a circular, a map and other materials connected with the Arctic Club of America expressing support for Dr. Frederick A. Cook. Some examples include Club President W. S. Schley's circulated memo dated March 3, 1909 concerning Dr. Cook's near two-year absence. Schley asks for donations to enable Dillon Wallace and a group to go search for Dr. Cook. (File 3). Arctic Club member William H. Brewster, a Professor at Yale University's Sheffield Scientific School, wrote in 1909 and 1910 to Rudolf Kersting and B. S. Osborn on the "Cook-Pearry controversy." (File 2). In File 10 an unsigned speech or paper (February 1911 is scrawled in pencil atop the first page) and a letter presumed to be by B. S. Osborn express support for Cook's claims of attainment of the North Pole and Mount McKinley.

Sub-series 3: B. S. Osborn

Found in this sub-series are correspondence and other items pertaining to Captain B. S. Osborn, Secretary of the Arctic Club of America from 1907-1910.

Some examples of items in this sub-series include a program dated December 7, 1909 from an Academy of Music benefit performance for Captain B. S. Osborn. (File 3). The program contains short biographies of patrons, such as Henry Biederbick, Dr. F. A. Cook, and Rudolf Kersting, Treasurer of the Arctic Club. Three issues of "Tourist Magazine" featuring an article series by Osborn on the Cook-Pearry controversy are in File 7 along with a cover letter from Osborn to Cook dated October 1, 1910.

This sub-series also contains letters from Arctic Club members questioning Osborn's character and his financial practices with Arctic Club funds. Evidence was gathered, and at the Board Meeting held on February 23, 1910, B. S. Osborn was "ousted" from the Arctic Club. A copy of the transcript of that meeting, along with correspondence from H. Biederbick to Osborn, can be found in File 5.

Container list

Series 1: Organizational records

File	Title	Date
1	Letter on Club's inception.	8 September 1894
2	Constitution and by-laws of the Arctic Club.	January 1901
3	Membership application, blank.	circa 1911
4	Membership application, blank.	Undated
5	List of members of the Arctic Club of America.	10 February 1909
6	Board members listed on stationery headings.	1898 – 1912
7	Insignia and flags.	1901 – 1906
8	Arctic Club Insignia, original artwork.	circa 1894
9	Polar bear insignia drawing.	circa 1894
10	Bear-in-Strait. [artwork]	circa 1894
11	Arctic Club of America Bulletin artwork, oversize.	1909
12	Meeting minutes re: amalgamation with The Explorers Club.	20 November 1912

Series 2: Publications

Sub-series 1: Book Publications

File	Title	Date
1	A biographical list of its members for the year 1898.	1898
2	The Arctic Club Manual: published for the members.	1906

Publications

Sub-series 2: *Arctic Club of America Bulletin*

File	Title	Date
1-30	Issues 1-30.	1907-1912
31	Bound volume of Arctic Club Bulletins.	1907-1912

Series 3: Press Clippings

File	Title	Date
1	Press Clippings	circa 1896-1909

Series 4: Events

File	Title	Date
1-18	Annual Dinner programs	1894-1914
19	Photocopy of Annual Dinner photo.	circa 1905
20-27	Special Dinner programs. [includes Ladies' Night and dinners in honor of the Baldwin-Ziegler expedition, Brainard and Cook]	1901-1909
28	Pages from scrapbook containing Arctic Club dinner programs, announcements and notices to the membership. [a list of individual items may be found at the front of the folder]	1900-

Series 5: Member Portraits

File	Title	Date
1-2	Individual member portraits, many with signatures	circa 1894-1910

Series 6: Correspondence

File	Title	Date
1-2	1895.	Nov.-Dec. 1895
3-4	1896.	Dec. 1896
5-7	1897.	May-Dec. 1897
8-34	1898.	Jan.-Dec. 1898
35-42	1899.	1899
43	1899-1912.	1899-1912
44-55	Undated correspondence.	Undated

Series 7: Subject Files**Sub-series 1: Robert Dunn**

File	Title	Date
1	<i>Outing</i> Magazine Articles	circa 1904
2	Correspondence between Rudolf Kersting and Robert Dunn	1904-1905

Subject Files**Sub-series 2: Frederick A. Cook**

File	Title	Date
1	Letter from Evelyn B. Baldwin to Rudolf Kersting	5/5/1898
2	William H. Brewer correspondence to Rudolf Kersting and B. S. Osbon	1/20/1909-10/17/1910
3	Circular from W. S. Schley	3/3/1909
4	Letter from Wallace Dillon to Rudolf Kersting	4/8/1909
5	Telegrams from New York American to Charles H. Townsend and Dr. George B. Grinnell	9/3/1909
6	Letter from Dr. W. H. Axtell to B. S. Osbon	9/14/1909
7	Postcard from B. Hamilton to F. A. Cook	9/20/1909
8	Photo – “The Engine Room of the Cook Reception and Banquet”	circa Sept. 1909
9	Letter with article from Robert Stein to B. S. Osbon	11/9/1909
10	Letter from W. S. Schley to B. S. Osbon	11/13/1909
11	Map of the Musk Ox Lands by Clark Brown	1910
12	Letter/speeches presumably authored by B. S. Osbon	February 1911

Series 7: Subject Files**Sub-series 3: B.S. Osbon**

File	Title	Date
1	Unsigned letter to Ralph Shainwald, Jr.	5/11/1905 (?)

2	Letter from Stephen Konicka to B. S. Osbon with 11/4/1909 typed note thereon from A. W. Greeley to B. S. Osbon	10/29/1909
3	Program from Academy of Music's Benefit Performance for B. S. Osbon	12/7/1909
4	M. F. Westover correspondence to B. S. Osbon and Rudolf Kersting	12/9/1909 – 2/18/1910
5	Board Meeting Transcript as to B. S. Osbon (with letters from Henry Biederbick to B. S. Osbon 3/23/1910 – 5/16/1910)	2/23/1910
6	Letter from B. S. Osbon to Schley	4/16/1910
7	Letter from B. S. Osbon to F. A. Cook (including copies of September- November 1910 issues of Tourist magazine)	10/1/1910
8	Letter from George L. Norton to Mr. Bridgeman	Nov. 18 ?
9	News clippings re: B. S. Osbon's testimony/story	Undated
10	Correspondence	1899-1900?
11	Osbon Committee (arrangements for Osbon's widow)	1912