

ACROSS THE POLAR SEA: WITH ROBERT E. PEARY ON THE NORTH POLE EXPEDITION



In the summer of 1908, Arctic explorer Robert E. Peary boarded his ship SS Roosevelt and departed New York bound for the high Arctic to make one last attempt to reach the North Pole. He was accompanied by a small group of men selected for their courage, strength, and intelligence. One of these men was Donald B. MacMillan. MacMillan was 33 years old when he agreed to accompany Peary as a member of the expedition, and like most members of Peary's scientific staff, he had a camera with him to record his participation. He took over 200 photographs in 1908-09, marking the beginning of a long-term interest in documentary photography and cinematography.

Following the North Pole Expedition, MacMillan abandoned a successful teaching career to focus on Arctic exploration, ultimately leading 26 expeditions, the last in 1954. He returned again and again to the places he visited in 1908-09, and maintained life-long friendships with the people he met. Although largely forgotten today, at the height of his career in the first half of the twentieth century, MacMillan was a nationally known figure who traveled throughout the country delivering illustrated lectures and showing films taken on his expeditions. The photographs taken on his first expedition served him well throughout those years. They represent a newcomer's view of the north, and so have a fresh quality that belies their age. Today, they are particularly relevant as they are of a region and people facing extraordinary challenges due to global warming and increased contact with Western cultures.

The exhibit is made up of digital enlargements of a selection of the hand-tinted lantern slides MacMillan used in his lectures. The texts accompanying the images are MacMillan's own words, drawn from published and unpublished sources. The narrative follows the expedition from the departure from New York City in 1908 through its return in the fall of 1909. It highlights the people and places MacMillan visited, from Cape York, in northwest Greenland, where he first met the Inughuit inhabitants of the region, to Battle Harbour, Labrador, where reporters interviewed Peary about his accomplishments. More than a simple account of Peary's "dash" to the Pole, the photographs and texts convey the excitement and joy of a man discovering his own love of the far North.

MacMillan's lecture notes and journals are preserved among his papers in the George J. Mitchell Special Collections and Archives at Bowdoin College. His lecture slides and other photographs are in the collections of The Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum.

Exhibition Information

Number of photographs: 33

Sizes: various from 18x28 to 26x28 inches

Linear feet: 160

Rental fee: \$3500

Listed fees are for a standard 8-week exhibition period. Additional weeks may be booked for an extra 10% per week.