

## ‡4 Response to FACS’s “Critical Review”

### “The Significance of this Book to Its Members and Associates”

by Robert M. Bryce<sup>1</sup>

#### A Introduction: A Response, Not a Defense.

**A1** Shortly after the appearance of my book, *Cook & Peary, the Polar Controversy, Resolved*, [Stackpole, 1997] the Frederick A. Cook Society (FACS)<sup>2</sup> published what it called a “critical review” of the book in three parts,<sup>3</sup> arguing my conclusion that its namesake, the American explorer Frederick A. Cook, was never nearer than 12 miles to the summit of Mount McKinley in 1906, nor was ever closer to the North Pole in 1908 than 400 miles, was not only incorrect but, by the tenor of FACS’s remarks, intentionally so.

**A2** Although the comments published by FACS are “critical,” they do not qualify as a “review” in any sense of the word, since although they impugn the book as biased, selective in content and filled with errors of fact and logic, they do not give the reader an appreciation of the content of the book, overall. Instead, FACS’s efforts are almost entirely centered on using various rhetorical techniques in an attempt to bring the book’s integrity and my qualifications to write it into question. In so doing, the three authors of FACS’s “critical review” have actually managed to say more about their own integrity than mine and have shed much light on their own biases, psychology and inability to distinguish between the product of professional research and rubbish. They have also produced a veritable catalog of fallacious reasoning. Their writings contain fallacies of inconsistency, circular reasoning, faulty analogies and fallacies of invincible ignorance. *Non sequiturs* abound: linguistic confusion, causal reasoning, hasty generalizations, wishful thinking and arguments of negative proof litter their texts. Fallacies of irrelevance, such as *ad hominem* and *tu quoque* attacks and appeals to inept authority are everywhere.

**A3** The same could be said of this sort of approach that was said in 1917, when an equally devastating book appeared demonstrating that Robert E. Peary’s claim to having been the first to reach the North Pole in 1909 was a hoax. Its author, Captain Thomas F. Hall, predicted that in its wake: “Interested persons with mercenary ends to accomplish; or implicated partisans desiring to sustain themselves, may by sophistry and personalities attempt to divert attention from the astounding revelation [of the imaginary character of the disputed claim] and thereby break its force. But I venture to say no reasoning from the narrative itself will be resorted to. No reviewing of the facts, or attempts at elucidations will be indulged in, for the sufficient reason, that more light would be thrown thereby upon actions which are now exposed.”<sup>4</sup> Ironically then, the interested persons and implicated partisans of FACS have been left with no other strategy to counter the astounding revelations of *Cook & Peary* and to defend Cook’s claim than that used by those who have sought to defend Peary’s, which FACS dismisses as unworthy of any serious consideration. By use of sophistry and personalities they desperately want to dissuade anyone from reading my book because, as the *New York Times Book Review* said: “Bryce demolishes Cook’s evidence.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Note by DR: Robert Bryce (Head Librarian, Montgomery College, Germantown Campus, telephone 301-353-7855) is author of the widely and well reviewed 1997 book, *Cook & Peary: The Polar Controversy, Resolved* (Stackpole Books, 5067 Ritter Rd, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055, telephone 800-732-3669). *Cook & Peary* has earned permanent rank as prime source on The Polar Controversy.]

<sup>2</sup>The Frederick A. Cook Society is a non-profit educational organization chartered in the State of New York.

<sup>3</sup>*Frederick A. Cook Society Membership News*, v.4, no. 1 [April 1997], pp.3-5.

<sup>4</sup>Hall, Thomas F., *Has the North Pole Been Discovered?* Boston: R.G. Badger, 1917, pp.359-60.

<sup>5</sup>*New York Times Book Review*, April 20, 1997, p.21.

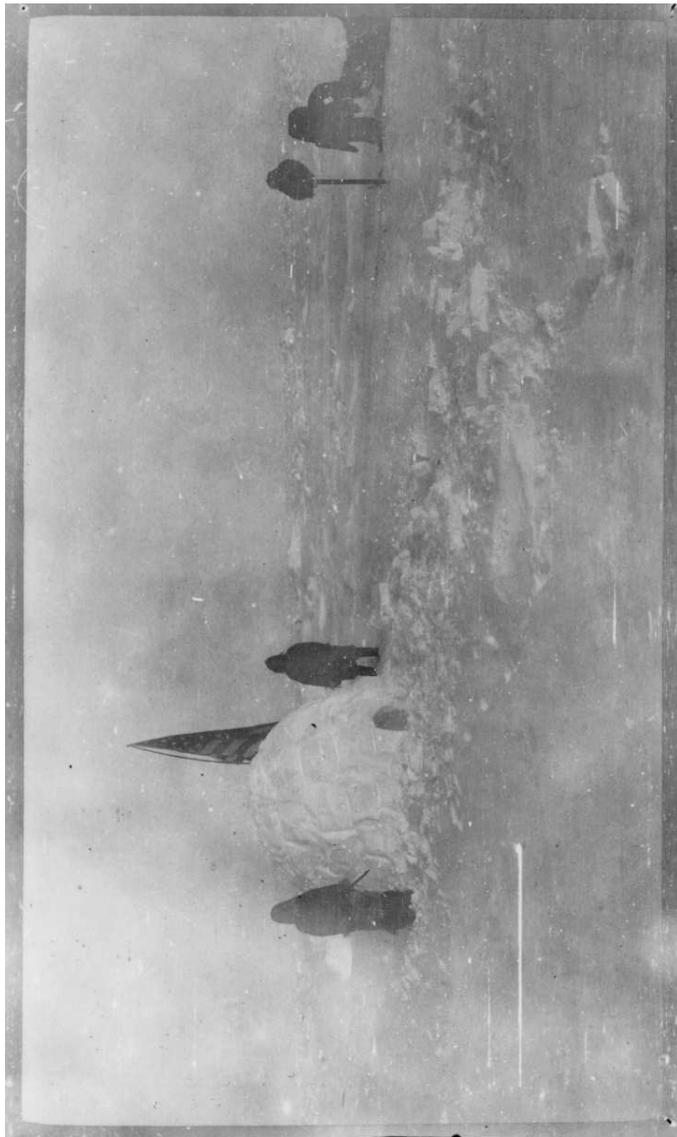


Figure 1: Unretouched reproduction of Frederick Cook print of photograph he alleged was the first taken upon his claimed 1908 April 21 arrival at the North Pole. An even less clear version was published at Cook 1911 opp. p.300. From original 3 1/4 x 5 5/8 print, Library of Congress. The light border suggests it may have been intentionally over-exposed to obscure details. [DIO note. This view is encouraged by a suspicious correlation: for all of the key photos (e.g., Fig.5 and DIO 7.2 Fig.18) connected to Cook's fakes, the negative is (exceptionally) missing. Despite this photo being taken in full sunlight, it exhibits indistinct shadows and horizon. The Eskimos pictured later said (Herbert *Noose of Laurels* 1989 p.316) that the photo was actually taken off east Ellesmere Island during 1909 Spring. Thus, we have yet another instance (see also DIO 7.2 ¶7 Fig. 18) of Cook's poetic penchant for photographing flagraising ceremonies at points far distant from his exploring goals.]

**A4** As Russell Gibbons, the editor of FACS's publications, says in his introduction to its "critical review," he recognizes "the significance of this book to its members and associates." FACS fully realizes that if the conclusions of my book are accepted, then it has little further reason to exist. Even so, in what for it is literally a life and death struggle for justification, FACS's spokesmen are unable to bring to bear a single valid counterargument grounded in evidence that effectively refutes any significant point of the massive documentary evidence detailed in my book's pages, all of which support the conclusion that Cook's disputed geographical claims are false and, indeed, knowing frauds. Therefore, this is a response to the FACS's "critical review" but not a defense of *Cook & Peary*. There is no need for a defense when the attackers' arsenal consists of nothing but blanks and duds. And any attempt to persuade the critics under discussion here would be as futile as St. Anthony of Pauda's sermon to the fishes.<sup>6</sup>

**A5** Subsequent to the appearance of its "critical review," FACS published more material along the same lines in its annual journal, *Polar Priorities*.<sup>7</sup> This material was more elaborate and detailed, though equally defective in logic and inept in effectively refuting the book's evidence. Nevertheless, as a courtesy for past favors, I offered to respond to the various points raised by FACS's material on one simple condition: that my response be published by FACS without editorial revision. Although FACS continues to bill the editorial tampering done by *Hampton's Magazine* (when Dr. Cook agreed to write a series for it in 1911 with "no editorial guarantees, whatsoever") as "the most dastardly deed in the history of journalism,"<sup>8</sup> it asked me to make effectively the same deal with it. My response could not be published as written, according to Russ Gibbons, because it was not "in keeping with journalistic standards" to agree to such an arrangement.<sup>9</sup> Because of this refusal, I have never responded to the "critical review" or anything else published by FACS, as to do so would place my material at the mercy of its editor to tailor and slant its content as he wished. And, then, such a response would fall only on the deaf ears of the society's small membership, anyway, which, like St. Anthony's fishes, would not want to hear it.

**A6** Since then, FACS has put up a website on the Internet, on which it prominently reproduces its "critical review". Because this material has been broadly available to the public, I am making this response to FACS's various remarks and will also post it in that same neutral forum, so that anyone interested may read my comments without editorial tampering.<sup>10</sup>

## B The Frederick A. Cook Society's "Critical Review"

**B1** The "critical review" was authored by three of the society's most prominent spokesmen. The first is Russell W. Gibbons, FACS's Executive Director, formerly a labor organizer & part-time instructor in labor history at the Philip Murray Institute at the Community College of Allegheny County, near Pittsburgh. Gibbons has been one of the most vociferous advocates of Cook's claims since he took them up in his 1954 undergraduate thesis.<sup>11</sup> He has since had several articles and book reviews on Cook published in the periodical literature. For Gibbons, his advocacy of Cook has been "less than an obsession, but it is a sort of commitment in the sense that I've been involved with it for some 40 years,

<sup>6</sup>"The sermon ended, they all swim away. The sermon was splendid; they remain unchanged. Crabs travel backwards, cod remain fat, carp greedy, the sermon forgotten. The sermon was splendid; they remain the same." From Clemens Brentano's *The Youth's Magic Horn*.

<sup>7</sup>Volume 17 [1997].

<sup>8</sup>*Polar Priorities*, v.17 [1997], pp.12-13.

<sup>9</sup>Gibbons to RMB, September 30, 1997, possession of author.

<sup>10</sup>The Frederick A. Cook Society website is at <http://www.cookpolar.org/> DIO is posted at <http://www.adsabs.harvard.edu/Journals/proceedings/DIO/> [and <http://www.dioi.org/>].

<sup>11</sup>*An Historical Evaluation of the Cook-Peary Controversy*. Department of History, Ohio Northern University, March 1954. Privately published.

and there's the satisfaction of seeing an evolution of thought."<sup>12</sup> That evolution has not included Gibbons's thought, however, as he has never gotten very far from his confusion of the basic facts of the Polar Controversy or the conspiratorial mentality he demonstrated in that first naïve undergraduate tract. And although his published material in neutral forums feigns open-mindedness and moderation on the subject of the truth of Cook's controversial claims, he has been unremittingly and severely critical in his privately published pieces of any material that has come out against Cook in even the mildest way.

**B2** Putting aside Gibbons's gratuitous and obviously insincere praise of me<sup>13</sup> and my research,<sup>14</sup> and passing over petty personal inferences and minor quibbles that would take more time to explain than it would be worth to the non-partisan reader, I will attempt to address each of his major criticisms in turn. But first, a word about the "fatal flaw" which he terms "scholarship by girth."

**B3** Gibbons's arguments over the years have shown a tendency to try to have it both ways. On the one hand, he would have his readers believe that my book is padded — that it is intentionally huge to make up for a dearth of content. But still, according to him, its 1,133 padded pages intentionally left out many critical points in Cook's favor that the reader should have been allowed to take into consideration. He hopes that "knowledgeable critics who have some familiarity with the subject will not be impressed with publishers' statistics, but with content." Judging from my extensive correspondence since the publication of *Cook & Peary*, Gibbons's hope has been fulfilled, but not in the way he wished. Instead, it shows the appreciation of my book has been in direct proportion to the knowledge of the subject the reader had. The more knowledgeable the reader, the more he appreciated it, and the more he was impressed by the content. [*DIO* note. See fn 1.] And although those who have not read my book have criticized its length, most of those who have read it felt that the book was neither padded nor, in fact, too long for its exceeding complex subject matter, which it attempts to cover without omission of any pertinent argument, pro or con.

**B4** Anyone who knows anything about publishing knows that the costs of bringing out lengthy books is almost prohibitive, especially if it is the author's first book. Several prominent publishers were impressed by my book's scholarship and were interested in publishing my manuscript, but they eventually passed on it because I did not agree that my text could be reduced to the size they thought commercially viable. So, the idea that a publisher would intentionally favor bulk over content is ludicrous, as the costs of publishing a huge but vacuous volume would virtually ensure the book's failure, and might mean economic ruin for the publisher as well. Stackpole Books agreed that the manuscript should be preserved virtually intact, but conditioned its agreement to publish on obtaining the sale of a number of advance subsidiary rights that would lessen its financial risk. Gibbons's argument is therefore absurd, simply because it is economically impractical. Although a well-endowed non-profit educational organization incorporated in the State of New York may have the luxury of publishing any amount of whatever suits its partisan ends, a trade publisher needs to turn a profit. *Cook & Peary* has sold on the strength of its content, despite the drawback of its extreme length, not the other way round.

**B5** In Gibbons's own words, his criticisms of my book fall into several categories: "[1] ignoring the only scientific conference on Cook and his work at the Byrd Center in 1993; [2] the discounting of other scholars; [3] the denying of European opinion, much of it pro-Cook; [4] the Jean Malaurie factor; [5] the first Eskimo testimony; [6] using novelist Robert Dunn as a McKinley argument and [7] the unsubstantiated oil 'millions' Cook allegedly made in Texas."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, May 26, 1996.

<sup>13</sup> "I have nothing but a deep and abiding respect for Robert Bryce . . ."

<sup>14</sup> He recently told the Baltimore *Sun* what he really thinks: "This guy Bryce sits in his library in Maryland and he's never even been to Alaska." July 24, 1998, p.2A.

<sup>15</sup> *Polar Priorities*, v.17 [1997], p.42.

## C "Fatal flaws in the author's 'fact, lack of care or logic,'" by Russell W. Gibbons

**C1 Ignoring "Cook Rediscovered [*sic*]" in 1993.** In the world of FACS, every argument against Cook's veracity has a "Fatal Flaw," whereas the case for Cook has no flaws at all, and it is also possible to ignore something while discussing it in detail. "Ignore" is a word that comes up over and over again in FACS's material written about *Cook & Peary*.<sup>16</sup> "Ignore" means to willfully neglect something. The word is used rather loosely in FACS's "critical review" however, since each of its authors in turn, acknowledges that every point that he alleges is "ignored" in *Cook & Peary*, is actually mentioned in my book's pages. The symposium referred to is a case in point. It was held at Ohio State University in 1993.<sup>17</sup>

**C2** I attended by invitation, but was not a presenter. Gibbons himself invited me to come at FACS expense<sup>18</sup> and added, "We would hope that you would be a participant in all the sessions as a person who may know more about our subject than anyone else there!"<sup>19</sup> During the symposium he introduced me formally from the podium as a "resource scholar" who was working on a Cook biography. Although Gibbons repeatedly says I "ignored" the proceedings of this conference, he acknowledges that they are, indeed, mentioned in an endnote [p.1076]. His real implication, however, is that something was said at this symposium that should have had some significant impact on my conclusions, but was purposely suppressed by me. However, Gibbons never points out specifically what was "ignored," since to try would expose the fact that this was not the case.

**C3** At the time I attended the symposium, I already had a good draft of *Cook & Peary* finished. (In fact, I brought a copy of it with me to the symposium.) In writing it, my method was to draw material from the original, contemporary primary sources wherever they existed. I intentionally avoided hearsay, opinion, and third-hand debates founded on hearsay and opinion. The symposium was a valuable experience for me, but not because of what I heard said or debated there, as most of the content of its presentations fell into the last of these categories.

**C4** I admired the scholarship of the paper by Kenn Harper, author of *Give Me My Father's Body*, but its conclusion was only speculative, as it should have been, considering the evidence he used in its support, and there was little in his paper that I didn't already know. In fact, I was able to correct his misattribution of the quotation that formed its title, "Liars and Gentlemen," a correction the author gratefully acknowledged. Mr. Harper subsequently requested further documentary material from me, as I did from him, which we supplied to each other without reserve.<sup>20</sup>

**C5** Ted Heckathorn's paper purported to contain "New Evidence about an Old Controversy" in Cook's favor. His "evidence" proved to be no more than his own misguided speculations and unsupported inferences, however. After the symposium I wrote to Heckathorn and pointed out 17 major factual errors in his paper,<sup>21</sup> hoping to spare him the embarrassment of putting such obvious gaffs into print, such as his statement that John Verhoeff, who died on the North Greenland Expedition of 1891-92, was survived by a wife and daughter.<sup>22</sup> I pointed out that Verhoeff was never married, but Heckathorn insisted that

<sup>16</sup>This same line of attack has been used for years by FACS. Virtually the same arguments were leveled against Wally Herbert's *The Noose of Laurels* (1989).

<sup>17</sup>Cook Reconsidered: discovering the man and his explorations, Ohio State University, October 22-23, 1993.

<sup>18</sup>Gibbons to RMB, September 21, 1993, possession of author.

<sup>19</sup>Gibbons to RMB, October 7, 1993, possession of author.

<sup>20</sup>Harper to RMB, October 10, 1994, etc., possession of author.

<sup>21</sup>RMB to Ted Heckathorn, October 30, 1993, copy in possession of author.

<sup>22</sup>The Filson Club in Louisville, Kentucky, has a collection of the Verhoeff family's correspondence and memorabilia. The Verhoeff family was very eminent in Louisville. Among this material is much family history and a complete family tree, which shows this statement to be false.

he had documentary evidence supporting his statement both from Peary's book, *Northward Over the "Great Ice,"* and in Peary's contemporary diary. On my other points, Heckathorn refused to acknowledge any of his mistakes, beyond the most indisputable.<sup>23</sup> When I asked for copies from Peary's diary and the page reference in Peary's book, along with a long list of requests to justify his other contrary assertions to my letter so that I could correct my own manuscript (in case it was I and not he who was mistaken), he failed to send me any proof of his assertions, although he had claimed to possess documentation of each one.<sup>24</sup>

**C6** Probably the most useful piece of information I heard in the symposium's papers was Captain Brian Shoemaker's description of arctic ice conditions based on overflights and meteorological data. This added some physical evidence to the numerous documentary indications I already had that Cook's journey ended about 100 miles to the northwest of his starting point on Axel Heiberg Island in March of 1908, and confirmed the physical conditions described on Donald MacMillan's journey of 1914 over this same area. After further checking and verification, I incorporated these physical descriptions into my evidentiary arguments. None of the presentations at the 1993 symposium added to my already existing text a single fact that was based on primary documentary sources, however.

**C7** Since I gained no new knowledge (beyond non-documentary physical evidence in the public domain) that I could use from the papers presented, there was no need to elaborate on the content of this symposium or to cite it specifically as a source in my book. In fact, to have given a blow by blow description, merely for the record, of a symposium from which no documentary material was cited would not only have been a tedious exercise but would have just added to the burden of readers facing a book already in excess of 1,000 pages. Besides, FACS assured its members that the proceedings would be published by "a university press"<sup>25</sup> in 1995. At this writing, [October 1998] the proceedings have still not been published, however. This would not be the case were they "a watershed exploration of the subject," as Gibbons claims.

**C8** This is not to say that the conference was of no value to me. As already mentioned, it was a valuable experience, but not for its content. It was there that I made contact with a descendent of Clarence Wyckoff, from whom I obtained a copy of the diary he kept on the *Erik* voyage of 1901, of which Dr. Cook was second in command. This diary's content caused me to make major revisions to my chapter covering that voyage. There I also met Keith Pickering, a computer analyst who acted as technical advisor and proof reader for sections of my book dealing with various mathematical and navigational problems related to the Polar Controversy. It also enabled me to ask two of the presenters, Dennis Rawlins and Wally Herbert, important questions in person that they had not answered in my correspondence with them.

**C9** The final reason why a description of this symposium was not included in my book had to do with the book's basic organization. The narrative section (Part 1), which is strictly chronological, ends in 1989 when Cook's granddaughter dies and donates his papers to the Library of Congress. Only then could anyone hope to resolve the Polar Controversy by using the original documents previously unavailable to the scholarly world. There is no attempt in the explicative section (Part 2) at an all encompassing chronology after that date, since few relevant primary documents were produced in that time period, but those that were are covered in detail. In other words, the symposium fell outside of the scope and chronology of the book, but had anything come to light there that had a bearing on the conclusions or content of my already existing manuscript, as with the incorporation of the Wyckoff diary material, it certainly would have been included in my finished text.

**C10** In summary: the insinuation that in confining my comments on the 1993 conference to a passing mention, I had left out something important that might have persuaded a reader

to doubt my conclusions, is without any basis, whatever.<sup>26</sup> This is proven by Gibbons's failure in his part of the "critical review" to cite one documented statement presented in its proceedings that contradicts a single material fact in my entire book. But that was apparently not Gibbons's intent; Gibbons seems not to be interested in facts, since he apparently has none to counter my thesis. He seems only interested in insinuation designed to raise doubts about it. His insinuations are meant to imply that my book was selective in its content, avoiding any contrary evidence to its negative conclusions about Frederick Cook's disputed geographical claims. This theme is expanded upon in the next two points of his "review."

**C11** Any student of the Polar Controversy should find it most ironic that those who have contended continuously that Dr. Cook's claims were defeated by distorted attacks upon his motives, credibility and character, driven by innuendo and falsehood and financed by very substantial monetary resources controlled by biased partisans, instead of an objective examination of the merits of the actual facts of Cook's case, are now willing to use those identical methods in an attempt to divert attention from the documentary evidence that must lead to the inescapable conclusion that Frederick A. Cook did not tell the truth about his major geographical exploits.

## D "Discounting Other Scholars"

**D1** Insinuation is one of the principal techniques Gibbons uses to attack my book. And it has been his stock in trade during his long career as a defender of Cook's claims. In 1956 Gibbons wrote a piece which, among other things, implied that Ted Leitzell, a long time advocate of Cook in the 1930s, had been induced to stop writing pro-Cook and anti-Peary material by being bribed with a high paying job at the Zenith Corporation by a former Peary crony, the explorer Donald MacMillan.<sup>27</sup> Leitzell was so outraged by Gibbons's insinuations that he snapped to the publication's editor, "Gibbons should learn his facts before writing such material about anybody . . . . Since you obviously did not check his statements, I am giving you here the facts." Leitzell explained how his "highly-paid publicity job" was actually a position in Zenith's factory as a screw driver mechanic at 80 cents per hour, and that the supposed crony of Peary was not and never had been an officer or director at Zenith, as Gibbons had claimed. "Gibbons has slapped at both Zenith and me in a way I don't like," Leitzell told the editor, and demanded that his rebuttal letter be reproduced photographically and sent to the magazine's entire circulation list.<sup>28</sup>

**D2** Throughout his section of the "critical review," Gibbons shows that his methods have changed little over the past 40 years, so I will, like Ted Leitzell, "give you here the facts." Gibbons insinuates that I know of additional evidence, but neglected to mention it, because it contradicts my viewpoints or conclusions, and accuses me of "seeding doubt" about the intentions of other writers on the Polar Controversy who provided this evidence, to discount those contrary views. The "writers and other scholars" about whose intentions and work Gibbons says I try to "seed doubt" include Thomas F. Hall, William Shea, Andrew Freeman and, ironically, Ted Leitzell, all of whom, except Shea, published magazine articles or books on the Polar Controversy favorable to Cook.

**D3** For a scholar to point out the errors in reasoning, mistakes, or contrary documentary evidence against the conclusions of previous writers in his major field of scholarship is not "seeding doubt"; it is simply honest reporting and his honest duty to the scholarly world. Had Gibbons pointed out such errors or mistakes in my book and if he had the contrary documentary evidence to back his assertions up, then his "critical review" could have been considered his honest duty to the scholarly world as well, rather than a blatantly partisan

<sup>26</sup>For those who doubt this, FACS has available a video tape of the entire conference; watch it for yourself and be convinced.

<sup>27</sup>*Doubt*, whole number 52, p.405.

<sup>28</sup>Leitzell to Tiffany Thayer, May 15, 1956. CSC.

<sup>23</sup>Heckathorn to RMB, November 4, 1993, possession of author.

<sup>24</sup>RMB to Heckathorn, November 10, 1993, copy in possession of author.

<sup>25</sup>*Polar Priorities*, v.14 [1994], p.36.

defense. However, he has not done that, nor can he ever, since his arguments lack any foundation in evidence, and because the “other scholars” Gibbons promotes are misguided or just plain wrong. Gibbons then complains that “[Bryce] totally ignores the existence of critical work by authorities whose conclusions are at variance with his” and cites three of the presenters at the 1993 symposium discussed above: Brian Shoemaker, Joseph Fletcher, and Ted Heckathorn, along with other “authorities” from previous decades: John Euler, Theon Wright, and Hugh Eames. The quality of the work of these last three, who I do not mention by name in my book, he claims, “match[es] Peary’s biographer Weems, who is acknowledged.” Finally, he offers Farley Mowat, who he says I dismiss as an advocate. Let us examine the credentials of the other “writers and scholars” and “authorities” mentioned by Gibbons.

**D4** Thomas F. Hall was a manufacturer of feed grain equipment. His analysis of Peary’s various claims in his privately published book<sup>29</sup> is an amazing achievement of dogged persistence that effectively crushed Peary’s shaky claim to the North Pole by sheer logic. But in examining Cook’s story, Hall was far less logical and was prone to wishful thinking and gloss of significant flaws in Cook’s narrative. FACS never tires of quoting Hall as unbiased fact, but his book is hardly as impartial as it would have others believe. Proof of this exists in documentation that shows that Hall worked directly with Cook on his supposedly unbiased book, even as to its actual content.<sup>30</sup> Hall had a visceral hatred for Peary, which caused him to go so far as to supply anti-Peary material to a congressman bent on preventing Peary’s retirement as a rear admiral. Hall seems to have favored Cook’s claim mainly to prevent Peary’s priority in the race for the Pole, whether he reached it or not. Nearly the same could be said of William Shea, a free-lance writer from Boston who published several anti-Peary articles during the 1920s. He also seemed most interested in Cook as a tool to demolish Peary.

**D5** Ted Leitzell, another free-lancer from Chicago, became quite an expert in polar matters through diligent study in the 1930s. But in explaining his advocacy of Cook, he admitted an even shallower regard for the truth when he declared, “My real interest through it all was to bring a few brief hours of happiness to a tired old man, and I did not really give a damn about establishment of historical accuracy for its own sake.”<sup>31</sup> He proved this by suppressing crucial photographic evidence relevant to Cook’s 1906 claim to have climbed Mount McKinley. On a trip to Alaska in 1938, he was able to duplicate one of Cook’s photographs from the top of a tiny hillock of rock which Cook’s detractors said was the actual location at which the controversial photograph Cook claimed was the summit of McKinley had been taken, despite the doctor’s denial that he had ever visited the spot they called Fake Peak. Cook’s “summit” photograph (D7 Fig.18) has since been conclusively proven to have been taken there, just as his opponents had contended, however.<sup>32</sup> Leitzell realized that Cook had been on Fake Peak, but kept it secret because “it would only give the opposition a chance to confuse the issue.”<sup>33</sup>

**D6** Besides Leitzell, Andrew Freeman, alone among the first group, could be considered anything close to a true “scholar.” His research for a biography of Cook in the 1930s was exhaustive, and when published in truncated form in 1961 as *The Case for Doctor Cook*, it proved very accurate within the limits of his cited sources. But Freeman freely admitted he was more interested by the Polar Controversy as a good story, and in the human interest side of Cook’s life, than in the truth of his claims.<sup>34</sup> A study of Freeman’s correspondence with Cook shows that he struggled to reconcile many unanswered questions and contradictions that weighed against his eventually-published positive conclusions about Cook’s claimed

accomplishments, but in the end he did not mention these contradictions in his book. Despite Hall’s willingness to always give Dr. Cook the benefit of the doubt that he sternly withheld from Peary, and despite Leitzell and Freeman’s suppressions of anti-Cook evidence and conflicts (Shea never published anything advocating Cook), the reader of Gibbons’s “review” will find no accusations of selectivity or bias against their writings.

**D7** Now for the “authorities” whose conclusions are allegedly at variance with mine. Brian Shoemaker, a retired Naval captain with service in both polar regions, gave the already mentioned (§C6) paper on ice conditions, but gave little evidence of having any of the morass of details of the Polar Controversy firmly in hand. He demonstrated that relevant ice conditions in the early spring were consistent with conditions Cook described along the first 100 miles of his route, but gave no evidence that would corroborate Cook’s descriptions beyond that point that was half so credible. Still, he casually concluded that Cook probably reached the Pole. Therefore, although Captain Shoemaker’s *opinion* that Cook might have reached the Pole in 1908 was at variance with my conclusions, his *evidence* was totally consistent with my conclusion that Cook’s actual journey ended about 100 miles to the northwest of Axel Heiberg Island. Rather than ignoring his talk, I asked for a clarification of several of Shoemaker’s relevant points in correspondence after the symposium.<sup>35</sup>

**D8** Joe Fletcher, a retired Air Force colonel who participated in many missions to floating ice islands in the polar basin in the early 1950s, showed film taken on some of these at the symposium and talked about his experiences flying the Arctic. I do not recall that he took any position on Cook’s veracity at all, (perhaps Gibbons could supply such corroboration from the tape of his presentation) although my reading of some of Fletcher’s correspondence during research indicated that he was open-minded on the subject of Cook’s claims.

**D9** Ted Heckathorn, a real estate agent from Washington who claims to be a “polar historian,” made the presentation already discussed, which contained so many errors that it seriously undercut the legitimacy of its title (§C5). Rather than ignoring the differences I had with his paper, as mentioned above, I had lengthy correspondence with him about it.

**D10** There is good reason why I “ignored” the other three “authorities” mentioned by Gibbons (I actually did not “ignore” them; I referred to Euler, Wright and Eames in my text without naming them): I was reluctant to cite their scandalously uninformed writings gratuitously. Euler published little of real consequence about Cook — only a short piece in *Arctic*<sup>36</sup> and an article or two in “men’s” adventure magazines, such as *Bluebook*, in the 1950s.

**D11** As a researcher, Eames was a total amateur, whose book, *Winner Lose All*, originated from a small inheritance he received. It must have been very small indeed, because what is not cribbed directly from Andrew Freeman’s *The Case for Doctor Cook* comes almost exclusively from newspaper accounts Eames read in the New York Public Library. Eames was so impecunious that he could not afford a trip to Fort Worth to read the trial record of Cook’s conviction for mail fraud. His account of the month-long trial was based entirely on a purchased typescript of Cook’s testimony only — a relatively small part of the record, and difficult to understand divorced from the other 10,000 pages of the trial transcript — and, again, newspaper accounts read in New York libraries. When I compared these newspaper accounts with the actual trial transcript during research, I found them to be a very inaccurate record of what happened at the trial.<sup>37</sup>

**D12** Theon Wright’s book, *The Big Nail*, is hardly better. It is rife with errors in names, dates, places and sequences of events that are part of the uncontroversial historical record. When an “authority” can not even keep published facts straight, what can be expected of him on uncharted ground?

<sup>29</sup>*Has the North Pole Been Discovered?* Badger: 1917.

<sup>30</sup>Hall to Cook, August 17, 1916. FCC.

<sup>31</sup>Leitzell to Helene Cook Vetter, April 16, 1954. CSC.

<sup>32</sup>*DIO* 7.2-3, December 1997.

<sup>33</sup>Leitzell to Cook, September 6, 1938. CSC.

<sup>34</sup>Freeman to T.E. Harre, February 15, 1937. FCC.

<sup>35</sup>RMB to Shoemaker, October 30, copy, December 17, 1993; Shoemaker to RMB, November 23, 1993; Note written on mine of December 17, 1993, undated, all possession of author.

<sup>36</sup>“The Centenary of the Birth of Frederick A. Cook,” *Arctic*, v.17 [December 1964]: 219-21.

<sup>37</sup>The author read the entire transcript and all collateral documents at the Southwest Branch of the National Archives, Fort Worth, Texas, in November 1991.

**D13** Witness these mistakes in just four consecutive paragraphs concerning the very well-documented *Miranda* voyage of 1894: “Dr. Frederick Wright, later author of *The Ice Age in America* . . .” (actually, Wright had already written the book); “[the *Miranda*] had to be towed back to St. John’s [after striking an iceberg] . . .” (actually, she steamed there under her own power after laying over in Cape Charles Harbour); “Cook, with two Eskimos accompanying him, piloted a small boat 90 miles to Holsteinborg . . .” (actually, Cook had nothing to do with piloting the boat, and he had three men from the *Miranda* with him along with a crew of six Eskimos, including the pilot Jacob Neilson); “and brought a Danish fishing boat, the *Riegel*” (actually, she was an American schooner, and her name was *Rigel*) “back to the *Miranda* . . .” According to Theon Wright, Dr. Frederick Wright was relieved “at having been salvaged from the icy waters of Baffin Bay,” which is on the other side of Davis Strait, and nowhere near the Greenland coast, where the *Miranda* was stricken, or even where she foundered. Meanwhile, we are told, Peary was “establishing a base on McCormick Bay,” when he was actually erecting a house on Bowdoin Bay. All these errors are on just a single page [59] of Wright’s book. This is the kind of “scholarship” and “authority” Gibbons prefers over mine.

**D14** To equate this or the equally amateurish attempt of Eames to John Edward Weems’s entirely competent, and factually very accurate professional biography of Peary<sup>38</sup> (I know it to be such because I read much of the same material Weems did from Peary’s personal papers) is such a disservice to Weems as to discredit Gibbons’s ability to discern the difference between hack writing and scholarship. It also brings into question the accuracy of Gibbons’s own knowledge of the facts of Frederick Cook’s life and experiences. But, as we have seen by the Leitzell example, Gibbons has little interest in truth or facts; he is only interested in conclusions favorable to Frederick A. Cook and in vindicating himself and his own partisan viewpoints.

**D15** All of Gibbons’s “writers and scholars” are favorable to Cook; that is the all-important criterion to a Cook partisan. No matter that the “facts” used by these writers to arrive at those favorable conclusions are false. It should also be noted that none of these men were “historians” in any academic sense of the word. And none of them, with the exception of Leitzell, ever visited any of the places associated with Cook’s controversial claims.<sup>39</sup> As we shall see, FACS argues that these same deficits disqualify me from writing authoritatively on the subject of the Polar Controversy. Nevertheless, Gibbons cites all of these men as “authorities” on the same subject, solely because they reached the “right” conclusions about Cook’s claims.

**D16** But Gibbons saves his most ironic reference for last, when he advances Farley Mowat as a character witness for Cook. The Canadian writer recently caused a national scandal when he admitted that much of the content of his dramatic “non-fiction” books on the North was entirely made up. He excused himself by saying, “The primary consideration for a writer is to entertain.” Although he has set himself up as an authority on the Northwest Territories, the people native to those territories call Farley Mowat “Hardly Know-What,” and one reviewer assigned him the Inuit title of *Sagdlororsuaq*, which means “teller of tall tales.”<sup>40</sup>

**D17** Mowat’s hugely best-selling books on the Inuit of the Keewatin District (*People of the Deer*, etc.) and one on wolf behavior (*Never Cry Wolf*) were said by him to have been based on his own extensive experiences. Yet Mowat’s diaries, kept during the experiences that supposedly provided the raw material for these books, and other documents now at McMaster University, show that Mowat never set foot in an Inuit camp and abandoned his studies of wolves after a mere four weeks in the field. Mowat concedes this, but contends that when you have “entertainment” in mind, “you can do anything you want,” including

<sup>38</sup> Peary: *The Explorer and the Man*, Houghton-Mifflin, 1967.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Freeman went to Alaska in 1956, but his closest approach to Mount McKinley was Talkeetna.

<sup>40</sup> *Saturday Night*, May 1996, pp.48+, all quotes of Mowat.

calling total fantasy fact. This is a viewpoint Mowat shared with Frederick Cook, whose books on his supposed conquests of McKinley and the Pole are also filled with eminently entertaining lies. Like Mowat’s fantasies, Dr. Cook’s were exposed by a researcher who took the time to examine the primary documents related to the stories he published, including Cook’s field diaries kept during his disputed expeditions. It is that technique of returning to original documents that separates fact from opinion in historical matters, and it separates scholars from popular writers with insufficient research skills, as well. But FACS refuses to differentiate between the two, recognizing the only “authorities” as those who back Cook’s claims.

**D18** Not even John Euler, one of Gibbons’s “authorities,” supports his implicit definition of “scholarship” as that which produces the desired outcome, no matter the means. Euler said: “A larger issue [than the recognition of Cook’s personal achievement] is to determine — if possible — history as it really was and not as some might wish it to have been. The essential requirement — the only requirement, if justice is to be done — is to restrict the discussion to the pertinent facts and their logical interpretation. Hearsay, pseudo-scientific testimonials and evidence not directly related to the case should be rejected.”<sup>41</sup> *Cook & Peary* uses just this approach, restricting the discussion to pertinent facts and their logical interpretation, but in *Cook & Peary* “history as it really was” does not come out the way FACS wishes it to be. To FACS, that is really its “Fatal Flaw.” And although Gibbons quotes Euler as an authority in Cook’s defense, Gibbons’s own arguments abound in hearsay, pseudo-scientific testimonials and evidence not directly related to the case, which Euler says should be rejected. But Russell W. Gibbons doesn’t care. He loves to have it both ways, whenever it suits him.

## E “Denying European Opinion”

**E1** Gibbons accuses me of “denying European opinion.” I am not unaware of the European opinion Gibbons refers to. I have read all of the authors he mentions, and their opinions range from uninformed to inconsequential — in other words, from hearsay to pseudo-scientific testimonials. Furthermore, much of what they wrote was written long ago, when all one could have about Cook was opinion in the absence of the primary documentation that informs *Cook & Peary*. However, in writing my book I studiously avoided “opinion” from any quarter and of any persuasion, European or not, since opinion is valueless as evidence. Opinion, by its very nature, is merely belief stronger than impression and means nothing to history or to truth, especially where there is documentary evidence to the contrary. Therefore, I don’t “deny” European opinion. I simply recognize that these opinions, since they have no basis or support in existing primary documentation, are unsubstantiated, and not worth mentioning. [See ‡6 §N1 item 2.]

**E2** One reviewer of a book based on the Cardiff Giant hoax of the 19th Century remarked on “the peculiarly American superstition that the correctness of belief is decided by the number of people who can be induced to adopt it — that truth is a matter of majorities.”<sup>42</sup> FACS seems to subscribe to this superstition, as if the disputed claims of Dr. Cook were a matter up for a vote, and everyone had an equal vote, no matter how uninformed he was on the subject of the Polar Controversy. I dare say, if a vote was actually taken, however, Cook would not be vindicated by it, but buried under a landslide of negative ballots. Few informed people today, outside of FACS, believe he reached the North Pole, and even a couple of its own members have written to me to say they have recanted their belief in Cook after reading my book. Most of the rest of the world has never heard of the man, and simply doesn’t care. But history is not settled by indifference or voting or opinion or even

<sup>41</sup> Euler, *Arctic* p.219.

<sup>42</sup> Osborne, Linda Barrett, “A Really Big Show,” *Washington Post Book World*, November 9, 1997, page 9.

pseudo-scientific testimonials; it is settled by evidence and documentation. My book *does* settle the point that lies at the heart of the Polar Controversy: that Frederick Cook was at base, a personally charming but dishonest man. This is exactly the reason why Gibbons concentrates on the useless material that *Cook & Peary* does not contain and studiously avoids all of the overwhelming documentary evidence that it *does* contain. He is left with no choice but to call attention to the amateur writings of Americans and the uninformed favorable opinions of Europeans to avoid the necessity of refuting its evidence.

**E3** Gibbons even misses the point of the one specific mention of evidence that he cites. He says “[Bryce] suggests that his findings are original, not giving credit to others who had established the status of Cook’s medal and honorary degree.” Had he read carefully, he would see that my findings about Cook’s medal and honorary degree *are* original. All others before me have merely said that Cook’s medal, given him by the Royal Danish Geographical Society, and his honorary doctorate presented by the University of Copenhagen, were never withdrawn, implying that Cook is still recognized in Denmark as the discoverer of the North Pole. Quite to the contrary, I discovered that Cook is not on the official list as a recipient of the medal because he never provided the promised documentation that would prove his claim. He therefore was given a medal *conditioned on the understanding that he would present such proofs*, but since he never presented the required documentation, he has *no official recognition from the government of Denmark for any specific geographic feat*. The medal has never been physically withdrawn, true, but the official recognition has never been granted, either. In the case of the doctorate, I discovered that the University of Copenhagen set up a review board in 1914 to consider withdrawing the doctorate, but since the degree made no mention of Cook as discoverer of the Pole, the University decided to avoid further embroilment in an issue that had already brought it acute embarrassment, and just let the matter drop.

## F The Missing Jean Malaurie

**F1** I am not quite sure what “the Jean Malaurie factor” is. Gibbons seems to insinuate that I somehow deceived FACS by saying M. Malaurie would write a foreword to my book, and since the book, when published, contained no such foreword, this is evidence of deceit. If this is his inference, then he is again making reckless assumptions, and as Leitzell said of him (fn 27), he “should learn his facts before writing such material about anybody.”

**F2** In his after-dinner remarks at the symposium in Columbus in 1993, the French anthropologist struck a theme that exactly mirrored my conclusions on Cook and the controversy surrounding him. Malaurie offered that “the controversy within the controversy” was over the true character of Frederick A. Cook, and that he believed Cook was a far more complex personality than generally perceived. Cook’s true character lay at the crux of the matter, he thought, and that, in fact, he believed Cook was virtually “a man unknown.” The balance of his remarks, in which he suggested that someone should look deeply into the newly opened primary resources on Cook’s career to find the answer to the controversy within the Polar Controversy, struck me as a plea for the very book I had already written.

**F3** Therefore, I asked M. Malaurie if he would consent to writing a foreword along the lines of his remarks — remarks he prefaced by exclaiming to the audience that based on his over-dinner conversations with me that evening, “Mr. Bryce knows *everything* about Dr. Cook!!” When I asked, he readily assented. But there was difficulty in obtaining a copy of his remarks, which he no longer had. Various attempts on my part to obtain a tape of his comments from Ohio State University proved fruitless, the recording having been inadvertently destroyed. By the time this became known, considerable time had passed, and the deadline for publication of *Cook & Peary* drew ever nearer. But once again he assented by cable:

JULY 1, 1996 DEAR SIR, I THANK YOU FOR YOUR LETTER TWENTYNINE MARCH I CONFIRM I CONSENTING TO WRITE THE FORWARD OF YOUR BOOK

CONCERNING FREDERICK A. COOK PLEASE TELL ME THE DEADLINE THE FORWARD WOULD BE IN FRENCH AND YOU WILL HAVE TO SUBMIT ME THE TRANSLATION

TRULY  
JEAN MALAURIE

**F4** In a subsequent cable to my publisher, M. Malaurie asked for the text of my book. At great expense, my editor duplicated the galleys and forwarded them to him, express, but when faced with the 900+ pages in English, being inexpert in the language, he said he had not the time to read them and asked for the notes, and specifically if they contained references to his own published works. My publisher, because of its sales strategy of holding back the crucial research findings of the book until publication for news value, was not eager to have the proprietary sources of those findings disclosed well in advance of publication. With my concurrence, my editor wrote to M. Malaurie explaining why we could not deliver the notes. Jean Malaurie never replied and did not send the foreword he had twice consented to write. For the exact reason he did not deliver on his promise, he would be the best source. But as with every other dealing I had with FACS during the writing of my book, my report of the correspondence concerning Malaurie’s prospective foreword was truthful and honest in every respect, as the several written confirmations that he intended to write it prove.

## G “The Eskimo-Witness-Version Bias”

**G1** The so-called “first Eskimo testimony” was later refuted by the Eskimos themselves, and so should be moot. However, FACS avoids bringing forward anything, even recanted testimony, that might be unfavorable to Dr. Cook, yet it accuses me of “bias” and selectivity.<sup>43</sup> Since this “first Eskimo testimony” is the essence of the material published in criticism of my book by Sheldon S.R. Cook, I will defer my detailed comments on it until I take up his below. However, I will correct several more of Gibbons’s fallacies before moving on, since his erroneous statements bring into serious question his ability to follow logical arguments or understand the relationship or importance of documentary evidence to the events being discussed.

**G2** Gibbons says “some 80 years ago, Thomas F. Hall made the first objective analysis of the ‘Eskimo Testimony’ versions.” This is true, and Hall concluded that the conflicting accounts of what the Eskimos said, sometimes to the same person, had made the Eskimo testimony worthless as evidence. These were essentially my own conclusions. Gibbons is right that I thanked Sheldon Cook-Dorough [he has recently had his name legally changed to Sheldon S.R. Cook] in my acknowledgements for providing me with “positive evidence” (perhaps it would have been more accurate to have said “positive interpretations of evidence”) for Cook, yet he says I used none of it. This is untrue. Much of it appears in Chapters 28 and 29 in the form of positive proposals and speculative scenarios favorable to Cook put up for testing, such as the elaborate theories about Cook’s McKinley climb of Hans Waale, with whom Sheldon had lengthy personal conversations over the years. In every instance and nearly every detail, these proposals and scenarios failed, since they were contradicted by actual evidence.

<sup>43</sup> Although it publishes its own “critical review” of my book, it has yet to reprint any of the professional reviews, all largely favorable, that have appeared in the legitimate press. The book was reviewed in *The New York Times Book Review*; *Book World*; *Library Journal*; *Naval History*; *American History*; *The American Alpine Journal*; as well as *NewsStead*, *Adventure West*, *Explorers Journal* and other less available publications. It was also reviewed unfavorably by Russell Gibbons in *Arctic*, which printed my rebuttal as a letter to the editor in June 1998.

**G3** Finally, he says: “Amazingly, Bryce does not pursue the significance of ‘Cook’s seized Annoatok letters’ said to be found with the Peary diary in a Maine safe deposit box.” On the contrary, one of these letters is quoted in full on page 326 of my book, and the other is fully summarized there. It is a mark of Gibbons’s inability to grasp my complex book that he fails to realize that the “significance” of these letters is that both are dated at Annoatok, February 20, 1908, *one day after Dr. Cook claimed to have left his camp at Annoatok to start for the North Pole*, and that in those letters he says he is not even about to leave for the North. The misdating by Cook of his starting time (by a full week according to evidentiary sources) is integral to showing the fantasy of his eventual narrative of his polar journey of 1908. These letters are direct evidence from his own hand that, from its very outset, *his narrative is false*. Cook’s original diary, which I recovered from Copenhagen, supports this misdating and, along with its other details, brands Cook’s polar journey as a fictitious account. But Gibbons fails to mention this astounding recovery of a diary lost for 84 years, because he wishes to avoid all evidence against Cook. Gibbons’s mention of the condemning Annoatok letters simply appears to be a blunder on his part. From this it seems evident that he still does not fully appreciate the complete contents of my book or the depth of the evidence it contains, by which it objectively dismantles Cook’s fabulous contentions about his accomplishments at both the North Pole and Mount McKinley.

## H “Dunn In on McKinley”

**H1** Gibbons calls Robert Dunn a novelist. His non-fiction works outnumber his novels, however, and even his novels are only thinly disguised autobiographical material. *The Shameless Diary of an Explorer*, which is the book by Dunn quoted *exclusively* in *Cook & Peary* in relation to Cook’s Mount McKinley expeditions, is a non-fictional blow-by-blow eyewitness account of Cook’s first attempt to climb Mount McKinley in 1903, which failed. Gibbons’s remarks are designed to imply that Dunn’s account is fictional because what it contains is a very unflattering portrait of Cook in the field. It is important to note that this book was written in 1904, however, long before Cook became a controversial figure, and years before he became the object targeted for destruction by what FACS is so fond of calling the “Peary Cabal.” So Dunn’s book could have no ulterior motive along the lines of a pro-Peary conspiracy.

**H2** On the contrary, there is documentary evidence that Dunn’s book, rather than being fictional, is very close to the truth. It comes not from one of Dr. Cook’s enemies but from one of his best friends, Louis Bement, who wrote to Dunn after reading it, “Your description of him and his ways is so perfect that had I not known he was on the trip I could have named him. And since he is so real, the others must be. I trust you will not think that I am knocking on the Doctor, as I am very fond of him and consider him one of my best friends.”<sup>44</sup> But like every book, then and now, that depicts FACS’s hero in a bad light, it rejects Dunn’s *Shameless Diary* as unworthy of consideration as fact.

**H3** Nothing in *Cook & Peary* is brought to bear directly from Dunn in the examination of Cook’s 1906 claim,<sup>45</sup> except a quotation of Dunn commenting about the 1906 climb in a contemporaneous interview. In it, Dunn *supported* Cook’s claim to have made the climb as truthful. Therefore, Gibbons’s statement that “Bryce builds his case against Cook on McKinley in both 1903 and 1906 through Robert Dunn” is utterly false. There is no case to build against him in 1903, since he made no false claims. My case against his claim to have climbed McKinley in 1906, as is every other factual discussion in the book, is built entirely upon documentary evidence. Although none of that evidence comes from Robert Dunn, much of it comes directly from Frederick A. Cook, himself, in the form of his forged

<sup>44</sup>L.C. Bement to Robert Dunn, quoted in Dunn’s manuscript autobiography, p.356, Dunn Papers, Dartmouth College.

<sup>45</sup>Dunn is only mentioned twice in the entire chapter examining this claim in *Cook & Peary*.

diary and his faked photographs, including his famous picture of the “summit” of Mount McKinley, taken 19.5 miles away from and 15,000 feet below its actual summit.

**H4** Only one quotation from any of Dunn’s fictional works is used anywhere in *Cook & Peary*, and this is clearly labeled as fiction in my book. It is quoted in a discussion of Cook’s psychology, and could as easily be termed “cogent analysis,” in that context, rather than “psycho-babble,” as Gibbons would have it. This is simply another example of how Gibbons loves to have it both ways.

**H5** At the end of his “review” he quotes William James as saying “Down with psychology, up with logic.” However, in 1968, Gibbons wrote an article whose theme was “Frederick Albert Cook, an Enigma in Polar History,”<sup>46</sup> and he has often alluded to Cook’s obscure personality while he milks the psychological aspects of Cook’s story. When it suits him, then, Gibbons plays up the “enigma” of Dr. Cook, but when I make an examination of Cook’s private writings seeking to come to an understanding of that enigma in his own words, Gibbons condemns such an approach as “psycho-babble.” Instead he calls for logic; however, anyone reading this commentary to this point should already have serious doubts as to whether logic is one of Gibbons’s stronger suits.

**H6** In Gibbons’s article he quotes L. P. Kirwin, former director of the Royal Geographical Society as saying “the strange case of Dr. Cook is a subject for psychological rather than for historical study” but Gibbons suggests that a historical re-evaluation is really what should be in order.<sup>47</sup> In *Cook & Peary*, the world has been given both, since the latter without the former leaves many questions unanswered. Those questions center on the inscrutable personality of Frederick Albert Cook. As Dr. Kirwin said, “there is still an interesting psychological problem to be solved in the strange case of Dr. Cook,” which L.H. Neatby defined as “a fundamentally brave and worthy man, [who] suffered from some extraordinary mental quirk.”<sup>48</sup> By defining that mental quirk, *Cook & Peary* is able to resolve the Polar Controversy by solving the “interesting psychological problem” that lies at its heart. As Jean Malaurie realized, it is Cook’s personality — that “controversy within the controversy” — that holds the key. A study of Cook’s psychology to discover the “man unknown” is thus indispensable and entirely appropriate to unlocking the controversy within the Polar Controversy.

**H7** My relegation of FACS’s 1994 Alaskan expedition aimed at bolstering Cook’s climb to the source notes<sup>49</sup> is not, as Gibbons terms it, “an amazing show of bias,” but an appropriately concise summary of an event that proved nothing beyond the lengths FACS will go to indulge its fantasies. My recent article in *DIO* 7.2-3 fully addresses the contentions FACS has made as a result of this expedition, so there is no need to repeat them here. Upon analysis, all of FACS’s contentions proved as baseless as my note cited by Gibbons says they were. His subsequent statement that I ignored the material published in FACS’s 1996 reprint of Cook’s 1908 book, *To the Top of the Continent*, including the Cook and Barrill diaries and the photographs it contains, is also incorrect. The shortcomings of the reprint are discussed in some detail on page 1083 of my book, including the serious errors in the transcriptions of the diaries as published by FACS, and the significant photographs in Cook’s book are discussed in excruciating detail in *Cook & Peary*, both in the text and notes of Chapter 28. All of them, and all of Cook’s drawn illustrations depicting his “climb” in his book, proved to be fakes. Unlike Gibbons, this fact was not lost on the reviewer of the *New York Times Book Review*, who said Cook’s ascent of McKinley was “now definitively refuted by Mr. Bryce’s meticulous scrutiny of Cook’s bogus ‘summit’ photographs.”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup>*Polar Notes* 3 [June 1968], pp.48-67. Dartmouth College Library.

<sup>47</sup>*Polar Notes*, p.50.

<sup>48</sup>*Polar Notes*, p.52.

<sup>49</sup>*C&P*, pp.1089-90.

<sup>50</sup>April 20, 1997, p.21.

## I “Cook’s Oil ‘Millions’ ”

**I1** From this section, we can only surmise that Gibbons, who claims to be an editor, must be a poor reader for content. He again has missed the point entirely in the matter of the “unsubstantiated” millions Cook made in Texas. However, they are substantiated fully in the testimony of the expert accountant H.B. Matheny, who was hired to examine Cook’s oil company books.<sup>51</sup> What’s more, in his own sworn testimony at his trial, Cook readily accepted Matheny’s figures as being accurate. It is true that Cook never showed any evidence of great wealth after his release from prison, as I noted in my book. But I also explain that no one has ever been able to trace what happened to all of the money Cook raked in from his gigantic stock reloading and pyramid schemes during his time as a Texas oil speculator.

**I2** Gibbons quotes me as contradicting myself in the *Washington Post* by saying “It’s clear that he had to have made millions of dollars. But what happened to the money? [There is no indication he ever lived extravagantly, and] no trace of it ever turned up,” and calls this “a somewhat reckless, or at least, an unwarranted and absurd charge to make.” Notice Gibbons’s “journalistic standards” at work here. He leaves out the portion of my quotation bracketed above that says that Cook always lived modestly after his release from prison — exactly what he uses to justify his criticism of my statement as “reckless”, “unwarranted”, and “absurd.” Then he goes on immediately to criticize *me* for “lack of care or logic.” This being so, is *that* not “a somewhat reckless, or at least, an unwarranted and absurd charge to make”?

## J “‘Of fact, lack of care or logic’ ”

**J1** No statements in my book in any way suggest, as Gibbons would have it, “that any error [in *Cook & Peary*] — which must be demonstrated to [Bryce’s] satisfaction — would be of fact, lack of care or logic.” What I actually wrote on page 977 in acknowledging those who assisted me was that “[the author] is responsible for whatever errors the book may contain — whether of fact, lack of care or logic.” Two pages later, in an entirely unrelated Notice to Correspondents, I wrote “anyone who wishes to correspond with the author, especially as to factual errors, is welcome to do so and will receive a response if a self-addressed stamped envelope is included. The author declines, however, to debate points and theories based on hearsay evidence, or his own clearly labeled opinions and speculations, unless the correspondent has documentary evidence to the contrary.” This is hardly a statement that any error “must be demonstrated to [my] satisfaction,” but only a further example of Gibbons’s “journalistic standards,” which apparently not only allow him to quote out of context to distort meaning, but also to string together whatever unrelated paraphrases he chooses to, then draw from this created “quotation” his own inference, not only to distort its context and meaning, but also to misrepresent it as my original thought. Can the reader blame me for not placing my response to FACS’s material in the hands of an editor who holds such “journalistic standards” as these?

**J2** Gibbons’s subsequent piece in *Polar Priorities*,<sup>52</sup> more or less repeats all of the above arguments, but elaborates on them further. In so doing, he delivers more evidence of his own poor grasp of the details of the Polar Controversy, despite his long years spent in Cook’s defense. Here are some of the highlights of what he doesn’t know, or what he wants to mislead the reader into believing:

- The National Geographic Society was not Peary’s “original sponsor” as Gibbons claims. They contributed only \$1,000 to his expedition in 1907, a mere drop in the bucket compared to the more than half a million 1908 dollars the expedition cost.

The National Geographic Society’s significance came later in its subsequent approval of Peary’s claim in 1909, without proper examination of his evidence.

- I did not say that Dennis Rawlins “ ‘contributed little’ in scholarship” to the Polar Controversy, as Gibbons would like to quote me. What I said was that his book “contributed little that was really new to the subject beyond salvaging the unpublished work of Henshaw Ward.” Gibbons, who complains bitterly about the selectivity of my quotations, proves here and numerous other places that he knows first hand how to be selective in what he misquotes in paraphrase. And he misattributes this “quote” to page 737 when it is actually on page 757.
- Likewise, he practices other distortions. He follows his distorted paraphrase on Rawlins with a another on Herbert, of whom he says I say: “The reader is told that Herbert’s motivation was to achieve his own polar priority by dog sledge to the Pole.” What this passage actually says is: “The Navigation Foundation’s report [a group hired by *National Geographic* to examine Peary’s claim] attributed Herbert’s rejection of Peary’s claim to a motive similar to the one Stefansson had imputed to Amundsen in 1926 — trying to eliminate Peary as a claimant so that Herbert himself would be recognized as the first man to have led a dog sledge expedition to the North Pole.” Once again, Gibbons’s “40 years as an editor” do not prevent him from misattributing the reference to the wrong page. It is on page 760, not 758 as he claims.

**J3** He then goes on to say that “Bryce thus seeks to establish himself as the first to ‘seriously’ debunk Peary, setting the stage for his subsequent vilification of Cook.” Even if Gibbons had represented my statements accurately in the instances above, this would hardly be the case. I actually spent very little time debunking the Peary claim for the very reason that, as I say in my book, “Five major books have devoted themselves to showing that Peary’s narrative does not hold up on its own internal evidence. Though one may differ on their authors’ individual points, it is difficult to deny their common conclusion: Robert E. Peary did not reach the North Pole,”<sup>53</sup> so why bother? How could an author who acknowledges five major books that have discredited Peary long before he ever wrote a word (and who discusses each of them in some detail in his text) possibly be seeking “to establish himself as the first to ‘seriously’ debunk Peary” ?

**J4** As for my “vilification of Cook,” one cannot vilify someone whose own writings and deeds have already led many to the conclusion that he was villainous, and many persons do label Cook’s actions as such. However, in my book I make no moral judgment about Frederick Cook at all, but leave that to the reader. Many of my readers, in fact, rather than believing my book vilifies Cook, have easily recognized that it is sympathetic to him. As a result, they have come away with a very favorable impression of him as he really was. As one said, “Through [*Cook & Peary*] I rediscovered the Dr. Cook that so many have felt compelled to support and defend — courageous, kind, capable and convincing — a modest man of great personal charm.”<sup>54</sup> This is vilification?

**J5** Gibbons condemns my study as “psycho-history” for seeking the motives within the minds of the perpetrators of these grand frauds from their own private writings, yet swallows Cook’s preposterous story of “mental disability” to innocently explain away all of his seemingly inexplicable actions in the wake of his claim’s collapse in 1909. He accepts what Cook said about everything, apparently, without exception, even though much of it is totally contradictory. He even repeats Cook’s precious story about how he and his Eskimo companions “lived like Stone Age cavemen in an underground den” on Devon Island over the winter of 1908-09.

<sup>51</sup>See *C&P*, pp.655-67.

<sup>52</sup>“Polar Mists” v.17 (September 1997), pp.42-43.

<sup>53</sup>*Cook & Peary* p.880.

<sup>54</sup>Review of *C&P* by Randall J. Oszcewski, *Polar Priorities*, v.17 [1997], pp.39-41.

**J6** As I explain in detail in my book, an examination of Cook's own diary kept at the time shows that he lived in a comfortable standard stone igloo, had plenty of ammunition, food and all the comforts the Arctic could provide through his two skilled Eskimo hunters. He acknowledged this in the letter he wrote to his wife immediately after returning to civilization by saying "we finally made ourselves very comfortable in an underground den."<sup>55</sup> But Gibbons truly ignores all this, because he has always preferred Cook's fantasies, and his own, to any contrary documentary proof of Cook's deceits, of which his account of a "Stone Age" winter in 1908 is one of his greatest.

**J7** In his article in *Polar Notes*, Gibbons had this to say:

The unresearched papers and collections in a dozen universities and archives may yet provide a more likely road toward ultimate solution of the Cook enigma [than a trip over the Polar pack following Cook's route]<sup>56</sup> . . . . It is to be hoped that the unique collection of Cook papers and materials, which is an as yet untapped record of much of Cook's turbulent and complex career, will be made available to professional historians . . . . Cook's diary, for instance, has yet to be fully transcribed, and this document alone — closely written and almost illegible — represents a special challenge to any researcher . . . . To the knowledge of the writer, no one with a primary interest in Cook the man as well as the explorer has researched the several collections or manuscripts available which would have significant material.<sup>57</sup>

**J8** Those once-unresearched papers have now been thoroughly studied by one with a primary interest in Cook, the man as well as the explorer. That challenging diary has now been deciphered, and together they have indeed provided the ultimate solution to the Cook enigma. That solution can be found in the pages of *Cook & Peary, the Polar Controversy, Resolved*. Incidentally, all of this material also indicates that Cook's claims to having climbed Mount McKinley and reached the North Pole are false.

## **K "The triumph of selective Mount McKinley & Polar research," by Ted Heckathorn**

**K1** As a whole, the FACS "critical review" of my book shows an extreme tendency to what is called by psychologists "projection": the imputation of one's own characteristics or tendencies to others. Gibbons's section has given ample evidence of this already, and Ted Heckathorn's continues the trend. The title of his section, in fact, would be wonderfully apt for his own arguments.

**K2** Heckathorn, a real estate agent from Woodinville, Washington, who describes himself as a "polar historian," seems almost willing to entertain the notion that my book raises some serious doubt about Cook's polar claim, but he stoutly denies the similar evidence against Cook's Mount McKinley climb, which was almost a dress rehearsal for his polar hoax. This is because Heckathorn has a personal stake in it, having gone on record representing his own premature assumptions and theories as facts, which are now refuted by the documentary evidence I uncovered and subsequently published. He has thus become, in Captain Hall's words, an "implicated partisan desiring to sustain [himself]." Unwilling to admit his errors, he has been forced to rely on many of the same techniques as Gibbons's critique, starting with his gratuitous praise of my research abilities, though, according to his title and subsequent remarks, those techniques have produced nothing more than "a triumph of selective . . . research," which, by implication, is false in its conclusions.

<sup>55</sup>Cook to Marie Cook, May 8, 1909. FCC.

<sup>56</sup>Notice Gibbons having it both ways again. Here he advocates primary sources over field research; today he says just the opposite.

<sup>57</sup>*Cook & Peary* p.66.

**K3** Like Gibbons, Heckathorn avoids every substantive point of documentary evidence my book contains, yet he faults my failure to cite every writer who favors Cook, no matter how slight his credentials or how shallow the foundations of the evidence he based his writings on. He also faults what he believes is my neglect to give the right proportion of credit to some supposed scholarly "priority," no matter how unimportant the fact first noted. He interprets this as an attempt to establish myself as a paramount and primary authority on the subject rather than as a result of my true and practical desire to spare the average reader of my book from such tedious details, which would be of no interest to him, and to spare my publisher further expense in publishing them. While he is on this subject, his remarks on what I said about Dennis Rawlins show that he also has in common with Gibbons an inability to make an argument without flatly contradicting himself.

**K4** Heckathorn at least correctly quotes me as saying of Rawlins's book that it "contributed little that was really new beyond salvaging the unpublished work of Henshaw Ward," but then goes on to say that I blithely proceed to quote items first published by Rawlins and others without giving proper credit. Typically, as we shall see, he gives no examples of what items these may be.<sup>58</sup> Then he mentions Rawlins's 1970 article, which is cited in my book, and lists the Rawlins book's accomplishments: "Indeed, had it not been for Rawlins, there is little doubt that history would have lost Henshaw Ward's manuscript, plus many other key letters and documents." Notice that this is exactly what I said Rawlins's accomplishments were myself. Beyond that, and some of Rawlins's technical explanations, there really is very little really new in *Peary at the North Pole; Fact or Fiction?* that was not in Captain Hall's book. (Anyone who has read Hall's book would know how difficult it would be to have come up with anything really new!) And any direct reference to Rawlins's material that I used was fully cited in my notes.

**K5** Heckathorn's title accuses me of "selective Mount McKinley and Polar research," then, like Gibbons, he uses his own interpretation and emphasis of selected quotes from my book to illustrate this. From these he draws conclusions that no one who reads my full text could possibly draw. Some of his inferences are quite grotesque. Again, like Gibbons, all this is designed not to answer the evidence I present [suggesting by implication that it is unanswerable], or even to review the book, but only to raise doubts as to my motives and credibility and to allege my supposed anti-Cook agenda.

**K6** Even though he declares that the chapter which exposes Cook's Mount McKinley hoax (his self-proclaimed specialty) is "laced with factual errors and distortions," Heckathorn uses none of his space to identify a single one of them. After he first made this charge in a call to the Diane Rehm Show on February 25, 1997, in which he claimed the same chapter was full of "factual errors," I immediately wrote him a letter in which I offered to make revisions in a future printing of my book correcting any error he could document in the chapter. My letter went unanswered.<sup>59</sup>

**K7** He claims I slighted the FACS expedition to Ruth Glacier he was associated with in 1994 and omitted its "pertinent data." Actually, as mentioned above by Gibbons, I addressed it in one of my notes and concluded there that it produced no original or "pertinent data" of any kind, and that the unsupportable suppositions that grew out of it are not only unoriginal but incorrect. He also says I "ducked" the 1994 evidence by using the researcher Hans Waale's "unrealistic theories" as a "blocking dummy." I can't claim to follow this thought,

<sup>58</sup>Dennis Rawlins contends this is so, himself. Perhaps it is. I did not take time to note the first mention of each fact I cited, as stated above. Then again, authors sometimes think they were the first to discover a fact, but are simply unaware that it had already been discovered before (Wally Herbert's "discovery" of an "uncropped" version of Cook's "Glacial Island" photo being one that comes to mind. This photo was discovered and appreciated for its implications by E.B. Baldwin in 1913). In any case, I am unaware of any major "discovery" which I falsely claim to have been the first to publish. All significant documentary "discoveries" made by others have, so far as I was aware of them, been attributed to others.

<sup>59</sup>RMB to Heckathorn, February 27, 1997, copy in possession of author.

but actually, Hans Waale's theories were far more reasonable than Heckathorn's, which, in any case, have now all been fully addressed by me in *DIO* 7.2 §G.

**K8** Like Gibbons, Heckathorn studiously avoids the evidence in *Cook & Peary* that contradicts his personal points of view. Most significantly, he fails to address my recovery of an original photographic print that proves conclusively that the picture Cook always claimed represented the summit of Mount McKinley is actually "Fake Peak," just as all of Cook's detractors since 1910 have asserted. This is the picture Heckathorn was still defending as genuine up until the publication of *Cook & Peary*, and those detractors are the same men he has openly accused of a dark conspiracy to trump up evidence aimed at debunking Cook's 1906 climb and destroying Cook's personal reputation. As late as 1996, he also was asserting in print that the diary of Edward N. Barrill, Cook's climbing partner, "has disappeared" and hinted that this fact was part of the conspiracy against Cook.<sup>60</sup>

**K9** According to FACS, every unpleasant inconsistency that points to Frederick Cook being a liar can be explained away by this conspiracy of the "Peary Cabal," which has survived the death of every person who had any personal involvement in the events of 1909 and persists intact to this very day. FACS claims that the original denial of Cook's claim in 1909 and its failure to gain widespread credence since, is a result of this never-ending conspiracy and avoids mentioning that Cook's downfall was actually due to his inability to present any verifiable evidence that he climbed Mount McKinley or reached the North Pole.

**K10** Even 1,133-page books that bend over backward to consider every reasonable piece of favorable counter-evidence before declaring Cook's claim a fake are seen as part of this "vendetta." As Heckathorn recently told the Baltimore *Sun*, "I call it McKinley-gate."<sup>61</sup> Heckathorn is as wrong about this as he was about the authenticity of Cook's summit picture or the disappearance of Barrill's diary. These are examples of Heckathorn's tendency to leap to fantastic conclusions or to believe whatever fantasy fits his purposes when his limited research abilities fall short or lead him astray.

**K11** As Ted Heckathorn was weaving the Barrill diary's "disappearance" into his imagined "McKinley-gate" conspiracy theories, I was studying Barrill's diary at the National Archives, where it has been, along with the rest of Peary's papers, for the last quarter-century. Heckathorn said *he* had been unable to find it among Peary's papers or anywhere else, and therefore it no longer existed. I found it quite easily in 1990. The difference in the result of these searches for the same item in the same place is the difference between the skills of a professional researcher and an amateur.

**K12** A stark example of this came at my very first meeting with Heckathorn in 1990. As a result of that meeting, as an unsolicited favor, I supplied him with a copy of Vilhjalmur Stefansson's "The Problem of Meighen Island," which he also could not find anywhere, and around which he wove a hilarious conspiracy plot on Stefansson's part. He wrote to me detailing his fantastic theories about the genesis of this work, which was nothing more than a chapter deleted from Stefansson's book, *Unsolved Mysteries of the Arctic*. Heckathorn claimed the story that it was dropped from Stef's book in 1938 because of a threat of a libel suit from Dr. Cook's lawyer was a ruse, that Stefansson had made use of "Dr. Cook's copyrighted works without his permission," and that Stefansson did not in fact ever want this material to be made public. That was because (according to Heckathorn) Stefansson's real reason for writing this item was to create a tool he could secretly use to undermine Dr. Cook's claim.<sup>62</sup> Apparently, Stefansson's method of subterfuge was utterly unique: He

<sup>60</sup>Heckathorn, Ted, "Reopening the Book on Mount McKinley," in the FACS reprint of *To the Top of the Continent*, pp.237-262. Just after my book was published, Heckathorn called to ask me for a free copy. During the conversation I mentioned to him that I had an original print of Cook's "summit" photo and had discovered Barrill's diary. It was easy to judge by the long and deathly silence that followed these revelations, that he had no prior knowledge of either.

<sup>61</sup>July 24, 1998, p.2a.

<sup>62</sup>Heckathorn to RMB, September 17, 1990, possession of author.

would use it to "secretly" undermine Cook's claim by having 300 copies privately printed in 1939 and then give them away to major libraries and anyone who expressed an interest in one!

**K13** Once again, these illogical imaginings are completely contradicted by primary documentation in the form of extant correspondence between Stefansson and Cook's lawyer, Stanley Boriss, now at Dartmouth College, which clearly shows that far from being a secret text, Stefansson had asked Cook's permission to quote from his publications for inclusion in this chapter, and that he gained Cook's approval (Cook even went so far as to ask him to make a correction to his text in *My Attainment of the Pole*), only to have Cook change his mind and make a threat of a suit, which prevented the material's use in Stef's book.<sup>63</sup> The deleted chapter went to press exactly as it had been set up for the book, complete with page numbers in accord with its intended placement. The first page is numbered 257. Stef's private printing has this "Explanatory Note" at the front:

The material between these covers was originally written as a chapter of *Unsolved Mysteries of the Arctic* but was not included in the Special Edition of that book, published by The Explorers Club, because (without justification, I think) an action for libel was feared.

There is even now no thought of any formal publication of this material. Three hundred copies are being privately printed through the generosity of my friend, Mr. Joseph Robinson. Of these the odd numbers, from 1 to 299 will be in the possession of Mr. Robinson, and the even numbers, from 2 to 300, in my possession.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson.

January 25, 1939

**K14** Heckathorn told me at our first meeting that the only copy of Stefansson's deleted chapter was in the Library of Congress, which would not permit him to copy it. When I said I thought I would have no trouble getting him a copy, he looked incredulous. Within a month, I obtained it through the most elementary of basic research tools, an interlibrary loan from the Portland University Library in Heckathorn's neighboring state of Oregon. In thanking me, he said he was "surprised" at this because Oregon State University's Library did not have one. Any "researcher" who does not know that what one library holds has nothing whatever to do with what another holds, has very little idea of the nature of library resources. And any "researcher" who does not know how to arrange an interlibrary loan has no right to that title, let alone that of "polar historian."

**K15** As already related (§C5), after the Cook Symposium in Columbus in 1993, as a courtesy, I sent Heckathorn a long list of suggested corrections to his paper "New Evidence About an Old Controversy," in the hope of saving him the embarrassment of seeing his name attached to a paper filled with so many factual errors. But he refused to admit that anything I said that differed from his paper was correct, beyond several very obvious mistakes. Since he insisted he had documentary evidence that my points about his paper were what was actually in error, I asked for this evidence so that I could correct these points in my own manuscript. When asked to back up his statements with documentation, he failed to supply any. If Heckathorn was unable to execute an interlibrary loan, or locate available resources, such as Barrill's "missing" diary, or was inaccurate or mistaken in all these instances in his paper, can he be trusted to be giving an accurate assessment when he declares *Cook & Peary* is fraught with factual error? If he was unwilling to correct his own errors in the face of contradictory documentary evidence in the past, and was unwilling to supply documentation to the contrary, which he claimed to possess, why should we expect more of him now? With such a history, until his claimed evidence is forthcoming, we must assume

<sup>63</sup>A friend of Cook's was financing actual libel suits against several others at the time, so Cook's threats were taken seriously by Stef's publisher.

that he is unwilling to provide such evidence that would refute my book because he is unable to do so.

**K16** When he characterizes the philosophical preface to *Cook & Peary* as an “indignant” attack on my predecessors or draws any of his other embarrassingly preposterous conclusions about what it means, there should even be serious question whether Heckathorn is generally capable of objective interpretation of evidence at all or of following a logical argument based on evidence. In reading my preface, anyone with even ordinary perception will see that the only advantage I claim to possess over previous writers on the Polar Controversy is that I had what none of them had the opportunity to see — the primary documents in the dispute — and that I made no such claim “as to possess sufficient moral integrity to recognize and proclaim the real truth,” as Heckathorn puts it. On the contrary, I said in my preface that I found the whole truth lay hidden, not “on those pieces of paper, as I had naively believed,” but rather was “locked away forever only in the hearts of the men who lived it.” And could anybody but Heckathorn not understand that a person who “never intended to write this book,” once he had read those documents, felt compelled to do so by the magnitude of the discoveries he made, even though his original intent was merely to satisfy his own curiosity? And does Heckathorn really believe that every librarian with a compelling interest in a subject, or anyone else so interested, writes a book about it? Although the skills of librarians are absolutely indispensable to anyone who attempts to write a book such as mine, librarians actually write very few such books.

**K17** About the only statement in Heckathorn’s piece that is a logical assertion is that a “1100+ page book does not materialize overnight.” It took eight years of very demanding effort for *Cook & Peary* to “materialize.” However, many of his other statements demonstrate that he has no idea whatever about the processes by which such a book is created or comes into physical being.<sup>64</sup>

**K18** Heckathorn complains of my index without saying that it was I who pointed out to him in a phone conversation its absolute inadequacy and my own deep disappointment with it.<sup>65</sup> His statement that producing an adequate index would have delayed the book’s publication by “a week” shows how little he knows about legitimate publishing.<sup>66</sup>

**K19** Of all the examples of Heckathorn’s limited research abilities, the most amusing is his vignette attempting to illustrate the superiority of field research over the study of primary documentation, since his account of the “fable” about where the Golden Spike was driven is, ironically, a perfect example of just the opposite. The error in identifying the place the Golden Spike was driven is trivial, but Heckathorn never states exactly what the error was in order to give it more importance. The mixup was probably due to no more than an honest confusion of two very similarly named places in the same proximity, yet he treats

<sup>64</sup>In 1999, the Oxford University Press published a major biographical work, to which Heckathorn contributed an article on Robert E. Peary, which takes a decidedly anti-Peary view, and one on Josephine D. Peary, which tells us precious little about Mrs. Peary, but is used rather to continue criticizing Peary; Russell Gibbons wrote the Cook biography. Both authors’ articles contain a number of errors, but Gibbons’s article is by far the least sound factually. By any objective criteria, one must wonder what scholarly standard was used in making the choices of contributors. [*DIO* note. Further on the legitimacy of scholarship currently published by Oxford University Press, see *DIO* 8 p.2. Note added 2002/2/28: *DIO*’s publisher regrets a lapse here in earlier editions, where Ted was scorned for minor (pre-1999) publication, a point neither accurate nor relevant to his output’s occasional very high value.]

<sup>65</sup>A new, meticulously exhaustive index is available, postpaid, at cost (\$3) from the author.

<sup>66</sup>*Cook & Peary* went to press in December 1996. An index cannot be written until the book is in page proofs. Since the illustrations in the book were laid into the text, until the pictures were positioned, page proofs could not be produced. Printers have schedules that must be met. If their deadline is missed, the printing might be delayed by months. Complicated arrangements had also been made with Barnes & Noble to have the book in its stores on the release date of February 17, 1997. Because of difficulties that arose with the illustrations, the page proofs were delayed. Thus the indexer simply did not have enough time to finish an adequate index and still meet the production schedule, and the book had to go forward with as much as she was able to finish if the publisher’s other commitments were to be met.

it as a mighty error with massive implications for the understanding of truth and history.

**K20** The Golden Spike was driven at Promontory, Utah, on May 10, 1869, during the ceremonial joining of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific R.R.s. But, Heckathorn tells us, his high school and college text books, and even the likes of Henry Steele Commager and Samuel Eliot Morison stated that the Golden Spike was driven at Promontory Point, because “naïve authors and historians” (the eminent Mr. Commager and Mr. Morison, by implication, among them, we must suppose) have perpetuated this mistake down to the present time because they never took the trouble to check it out “in the field.” Only by going into the field, Heckathorn tells us, was he cured of this “smug belief;” and he uses this as an indictment of “arrogant historians (or librarians)” who refuse to abandon their primary sources for field research. He finishes by chiding that “Not all truth is in the library.”

**K21** I would agree: not all truth is in the library. Sometimes you need only to go to your own bookshelf, or perhaps as far afield as your telephone to access the primary documents that hold truth about documented historical matters. In the case of the Golden Spike, there is certainly no need to visit Utah personally.

**K22** When the Golden Spike was driven, it was one of the first events reported “live” via telegraph. All primary accounts of the ceremony clearly state that the messages are coming from Promontory, Utah. And any good book that uses primary documents states this.<sup>67</sup> The confusion arose later when some second-hand accounts confused the town of Promontory with Promontory Point — a peninsula 35 miles to the southwest. A check of *Johnson’s New Universal Cyclopedia: a Scientific & Popular Treasury of Useful Knowledge*, which was published in 1874, and which I happen to have a copy of on my reference shelf, lists Promontory as a village in Box Elder County, Utah “at the highest point of the Union Pacific R.R., population 43,” confirming that Promontory lay on the railroad line in that year, well before the railroad arrived at Promontory Point in 1903.

**K23** To straighten out the exact facts of this slight historic confusion, I phoned the Golden Spike National Historical Site and spoke to Rick Wilson, head ranger there. He confirmed that many books still have Promontory Point as the site of the ceremony because “they have just copied the incorrect information from other sources.” This is exactly my point.

**K24** Heckathorn had his “smug belief” because he had only consulted erroneous *secondary printed sources* — his high school and college histories.<sup>68</sup> I had no difficulty at all in finding the truth by reading accounts that used *primary sources*, checking a near-contemporary secondary source and then confirming the details by consulting an expert. And I *did not have to leave my living room to do so*. In fact, Mr. Wilson was so taken with my 1874 encyclopedia that he had me look up several items he was curious about in it (and ran up a hefty phone bill in the process). But as a librarian, I was pleased I could help him with his information needs. That’s what I do for hundreds of people every week.

**K25** Heckathorn cautions his readers about accepting at face value the writings of arrogant or naïve historians and librarians, yet swallows whole Hugh Eames’s half-truths and innuendoes about Judge John Killits, the trial judge at Cook’s Texas mail fraud trial, and says I “wimped out” on the “strange” judge’s background. In *Winner Lose All*,<sup>69</sup> Eames mentioned that the judge had been investigated for possibly taking bribes and had been given a contempt citation by the Supreme Court. He also mentions that Killits left his wife an estate of only about \$3,000, yet she died some years later leaving an estate of \$82,000. Eames closes this selective biographical sketch of Killits by saying “There is no indication that she had been independently wealthy.” Obviously, Eames was trying to imply that the judge might have been less than honest and that this monetary disparity was suspicious. But

<sup>67</sup>One such source on my bookshelf is Jensen, Oliver, *The American Heritage History of Railroads in America*, New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1975.

<sup>68</sup>These are the same sort of sources that Russell Gibbons heartily recommends to his readers for “balance” against my book.

<sup>69</sup>Pp.300-01.

was Eames hinting that the Judge who was alleged to have taken bribes, received a large payment from the ever-present “Peary Cabal” for throwing the book at Cook at his mail fraud trial, which he then hid in his wife’s name? If so, this has no known corroboration in the historical record.

**K26** If Heckathorn ever looks into the primary sources on Judge Killits’s career on the bench, including his easily obtainable obituaries, he may cure himself of this smug belief as well. The judge was exonerated of all charges brought against him during his judicial career and retired honorably from the Federal Bench. Mrs. Killits’s money could have come from investments over the fourteen years between their deaths or a thousand other innocent and honest means that had nothing to do with any payoff. Such unfounded suggestions of wrong-doing are typical of amateur researchers and partisan defenders like Eames and Heckathorn, who fill in the blanks however they like when they don’t know the truth and don’t know how, or don’t want to find it out, either. And it is clear from Eames’s book that he could never have found it out.

**K27** At one point in his book, Eames states: “No daily record exists of [Cook’s] movements in 1911, 1912, and most of 1913 . . . .”<sup>70</sup> Eames said this because Andrew Freeman, from whom Eames cribbed most of his book, spent little time on these years in his *The Case for Doctor Cook*. Thus there was nothing to crib, and since Eames depended so heavily on Freeman’s research, being no researcher himself, asserted there was “no daily record” to excuse the gap. To the contrary, I found a wealth of material on these years during which Cook traveled the Chautauqua and Vaudeville circuits presenting himself as a wronged man to millions. *Cook & Peary* devotes more than 50 pages to these three years (a sixth of the length of Eames’s whole book), and they represent a mere fraction of the hundreds of pages of material from which they were synthesized. The material was there; Eames just couldn’t find it.<sup>71</sup>

**K28** Heckathorn still has his “smug beliefs” about Frederick Cook’s McKinley claims because he would rather go into the field, which contains no primary documents and in which even the conditions on the ground are now significantly different than those at the time of the events in question. If he ever gets around to an objective reading of the primary materials of the 1906 expedition on which Cook claimed to have reached the summit of the mountain, he will find that they, in fact, point unerringly to Cook’s climb being a fake. Arrogance does not come from objective study of primary documents in preference to traipsing around the sites of historic events, it comes when an individual continues to defend myths like the Cook climb in the face of overwhelming documentation to the contrary that he has not yet bothered to consult.

**K29** Before Heckathorn first “went into the field” in 1994, or FACS required you to be a “polar historian” (or at least have its certification that you were one) to write about the Polar Controversy, he was singing a different tune. In a review of David E. Fisher’s *Across the Top of the World*,<sup>72</sup> Heckathorn warned: “Let those who write about the Cook-Peary Controversy beware. In this field, academic degrees, institutional standing and reputation mean nothing. Only documented facts and sound analysis count.” Heckathorn asks at the outset of his review, “What happens when a nuclear physicist and professor of cosmochemistry invades the field of polar history?” “The historical equivalent of a Three Mile Island Disaster.” is Heckathorn’s answer, because this “polar historian” detected “more than 40 factual, historical errors” in Dr. Fisher’s book. Collaterally, the reader of this response might ask, “What happens when a real estate agent invades the field of polar history?” On a comparative basis with Heckathorn’s analogy the answer is: “Meltdown at Chernobyl.” Too bad Heckathorn didn’t take his own advice to heart while he still had some standing in

<sup>70</sup> *Cook & Peary* p.272.

<sup>71</sup> It is true that there was very little coverage of Cook’s movements in the New York newspapers at this time because the Peary Arctic Club had arranged an embargo on all news about Cook, but local newspapers published in the towns he visited have plenty of details.

<sup>72</sup> “Cosmochemistry at the North Pole,” *Polar Priorities*, v.12 [September 1994], p.42.

the research community. With each issue of *Polar Priorities*, he is becoming its laughing stock instead. Whatever credibility he may have once enjoyed there, has now, surely, totally vanished.

**K30** The theme of my book is not “a pox on both your houses — both fakers and liars” as Heckathorn and Gibbons both say it is. The theme of the book is fairness: giving Cook and Peary credit for what each actually accomplished, but giving them none for what they only said they accomplished. The book is not without compassion for two men swallowed up by their own irrational dreams, and for Cook more so than Peary. Because they were both fakers and liars in their most sensational claims, each brought the pox on his own house and to his unfortunate descendants, some of whom were unable or unwilling to see that the documents bequeathed to them from their ancestor’s own hands embodied convincing evidence against his claims. As the *New York American* editorialized in the wake of Cook’s downfall, “No money can buy comfort for a ruined life. No reminiscent glow of passing repute can console eternal shame.”<sup>73</sup> And yet, in the aftermath of Cook’s ruined life, he left counsel to others so that they might learn a lesson from his choice of passing repute. In this he succeeded, more or less, and so, I think, saved himself from eternal shame. That, in the end, is the real lesson of my book, to the extent that it can be perceived by the reader. Obviously, it has been lost on Ted Heckathorn and Russ Gibbons.

## L “Sins of Omission and Contradiction,” by Ted Heckathorn

**L1** Heckathorn subsequently published an elaboration of his “review” of my book, which only buried his credentials as an authority on the subject at hand deeper than ever before. Again, its title is a good reflection of its own content. Fortunately, for the present reader, half of it dealt with Heckathorn’s feud with Bradford Washburn, which spares me the need of commenting on it to any great extent. It may be relevant to the present discussion to mention, however, that Washburn is acknowledged throughout the world as the foremost expert on Mount McKinley. And although Heckathorn dismisses me for not having been on the ground, he does not dwell on Washburn’s vast experience “in the field” around the whole Alaska Range or atop many of its peaks, including Mount McKinley (thrice) and even above all of them with an aerial camera. By comparison, Heckathorn has made one brief visit to Ruth Glacier and reportedly was unable to reach even the 12,000 foot ridge of the East Buttress. Yet Heckathorn dismisses Washburn nearly as out of hand as he does me, accusing him of suppressing evidence and carrying on a vendetta inspired by the “Peary Cabal.” Though I found in my personal dealings with Washburn that he is not always the rational scientist when it comes to Dr. Cook, in retrospect he looks like a paragon of objectivity compared with Ted Heckathorn.

**L2** In the original “critical review” and on several other occasions, as we have seen, Heckathorn has stated that my McKinley chapter is “laced with factual errors and distortions,” but that he carefully avoided pointing out even a single one of these that “insider folks will enjoy a few laughs at [when reading] . . . some of [Bryce’s] blunders.” In his elaboration in *Polar Priorities*, he is more talkative about what he considers “a host of errors — large, small and even some ridiculous ones.”

**L3** He says, “[Bryce’s] comments about Cook’s failure to find a workable route overlooks the fact that had Cook gone about 20 miles north from Mt. Yenlo in 1903, he would have reached the Kahiltna Glacier. This leads to the West Buttress route used today by nearly all climbers.” This is typical of Heckathorn’s muddled reasoning. What possible relevance does this have to the accuracy of my book? The *fact* is Cook *didn’t* go 20 miles north from Mount Yenlo in 1903, and the *fact* is that the popular West Buttress route *was not worked out until 1951*, by Bradford Washburn. So any such “if” statement has no *fact*

<sup>73</sup> *NYA*, December 22, 1909.

in it that has anything to do with the discussion he refers to, since it is about something that was unknown in Cook's time. The *fact* remains that Cook failed to find a workable route in 1906. The discovery of a workable route 45 years later has no relevance whatever, then, to Cook, as he could have no knowledge of it.

**L4** Heckathorn also says I mix up the East Ridge with the East Buttress. This is hair-splitting. [*DIO*: for substantial confusion, see ¶6 §J5!] The use of terms describing the topography of Mount McKinley in Cook's time was very inconsistent, as it always is in early accounts of unexplored territory before names for various features become standardized. It is clear to anyone who has read my book and its notes, that I attempt to describe the mountain as the early explorers did, not as it has since come to be known and described today, clarifying their descriptions only when it could make a difference to the reader's understanding. The term East Ridge was often used for the whole East Buttress in those days, and even in the modern literature, the terms are by no means used consistently.<sup>74</sup>

**L5** Heckathorn also apparently measures "blunders" in inches. He complains [vs. ¶5 fn 51 !] that Walt Gonnason's height is elevated to "six-foot-four," but, as usual, does not tell us how tall he really is, so we can measure the true magnitude of this "blunder." I have never met Mr. Gonnason, so I don't know how tall he is, but I took the estimate of his height directly from this passage in an eyewitness account written by Dr. Cook's daughter: "It took Gonnason longer to disentangle his six feet, four inches [from the cockpit of the plane]."<sup>75</sup> My repetition of Mrs. Vetter's apparent misjudgment of Gonnason's height only shows how faithful I was to my original, if occasionally inaccurate, primary sources. So where are all these "ridiculous" errors that insider folks are chuckling over? The world still waits for Ted Heckathorn to point them out, even though he has had several opportunities to do so and let us outsiders in on the purported joke.

**L6** Heckathorn's drum beat (and that of FACS in general) that I am unqualified to write about Mount McKinley because I have never been over the ground would, as we have seen, disqualify every single one of the proponents of Dr. Cook whom Gibbons said I ignored, but one. It would also disqualify both of the other Cook proponents who have been quoted liberally in Cook's defense, namely Edwin Swift Balch and Ernest C. Rost. Yet no such warning is given about the writers Gibbons and Heckathorn urge on their readers for "balance." They don't tell them, for instance, that Rost was Cook's personal lobbyist, paid by Cook himself to carry out a campaign on his behalf in Congress, at the very time Rost wrote the tract about Cook's summit photograph which FACS is so fond of quoting as impartial expert testimony.<sup>76</sup>

**L7** Even so, one must ask: should the reader of a book that describes what the Eiffel Tower looks like be suspicious of the accuracy of the description if the writer has never been to Paris? Are the only men who are qualified to write about the surface of the moon former members of an Apollo mission? Must one cross the Alps on an elephant to write "authoritatively" about Hannibal's campaign? Can anything be learned about the Battle of Gettysburg by standing in line to buy a hamburger in the MacDonal'ds that now stands directly across the path of Pickett's Charge? As we saw in the case of the Golden Spike, field research is not necessarily superior to the study of primary documents. Conditions in the field change with season and time, but primary documents are immutable.

**L8** If it was necessary to write only from experience "in the field," few writers would be qualified to take up a pen on any subject. It is possible to write competently about

<sup>74</sup>It should be noted that Cook always termed the ridge he said he climbed to the summit of Mount McKinley, the "Northeast Ridge." Was this a "ridiculous error" on Cook's part? Or was it because he actually mistook the East Buttress for the true "Northeast Ridge" in working out his fantasy route? [See *C&P*, pp.824-26.]

<sup>75</sup>Vetter, Helene Cook, "Talkeetna Encounter," unpublished manuscript written for *Esquire*, c.1956, page 17. CSC.

<sup>76</sup>Rost later sued Cook for more than \$3,000 in back wages when Cook fired him without paying him. He won [Bryce 1997 pp.601, 791].

places one has never been after careful study of contemporary documents, topographical maps and relevant photographs. Witness what Jerry Kobalenko, a Canadian journalist who has traveled alone on Ellesmere Island, said about my descriptions of that place, which I have never seen either: "In reading your book I was astonished by how I couldn't find any travel errors, despite your supposed lack of field experience. Over the past 12 years, I've accumulated about 2,500 foot miles on Ellesmere — probably as much as either of your two subjects — so I'm certainly qualified to say that your book reads true in that regard. (Earlier books during the height of the North Pole controversy, on the other hand, were full of confident but mistaken assertions by armchair experts who had a poor grasp of the conditions up there.)"<sup>77</sup>

**L9** As we have seen, I was able to ascertain the truth about the Golden Spike without opening my front door. The truth about Dr. Cook was not that easy; it took thousands of hours of study and weeks of travel, not to view the sites of Cook's disputed claims, but to visit the repositories of the crucial documents he left in evidence of those claims. And as one reviewer of my book noted, "Now that Dr. Cook's notebooks are available, his polar claim seems so transparent that it can easily be assessed without such understanding. Bryce's vast archival experience seems to have more than compensated for his lack of arctic experience."<sup>78</sup> And as my *DIO* article shows, the same can be said of Cook's McKinley claim as well.

**L10** So where are the blunders? Honest mistakes of little consequence, perhaps, blunders, no. In any case, Ted Heckathorn should be the last one to accuse someone of "blunders." His, in print and out, are legion. Take this single paragraph from his piece in *Polar Priorities* (v.17 [1997], p.24):

If, as critics claim, Cook's motive was to raise cash or obtain backing for future exploration, then he knowingly shot himself in the foot with his 1906 claim [to have climbed Mount McKinley]. As an experienced explorer, he knew that a "heroic failure" would reap much bigger financial rewards than a final success, as evidenced by the experiences of Peary, Nansen, Scott, Shackleton and other explorers. A "near miss" would guarantee him an expedition somewhere in 1907.

**L11** You do not have to be among the "insider folk" to chuckle over this one. You only need a fair working knowledge of the major highlights of polar history. While accusing me of "startling leaps from fact to fantasy," apparently Heckathorn not only believes in such fantasies as Cook climbing McKinley and reaching the North Pole, but he also believes that Cook could see into the future. Of the "heroic failures" he alludes to in this paragraph, only Nansen's had occurred when, according to Heckathorn, Cook "shot himself in the foot."

**L12** Cook made his claim to have conquered McKinley in September 1906. Peary's "heroic failure" of falling short of the Pole but claiming a new "farthest north" record only became known in November of that year. Shackleton's "near miss" of falling short of the South Pole by 97 miles didn't happen until 1909. But according to Heckathorn, Cook did better yet, foreseeing Scott's "heroic failure" of losing the race to the South Pole to Amundsen six years in advance of the date it happened — 1912! This tangled chronology is not much of a creditable performance for someone who advertises himself everywhere as a "polar historian." Here, in this one paragraph, Heckathorn has made three blunders larger than any he has yet pointed out in all of my 1,133 pages, and in so doing he has shot his credibility in the head.

**L13** Even more amusing is that although Heckathorn says "there simply is no evidence to justify the claim that a profit motive existed for either Cook or Barrill in 1906," he does not tell his reader that, largely on the strength of his claim to have climbed McKinley, Cook

<sup>77</sup>Jerry Kobalenko to RMB, March 12, 1998, possession of author.

<sup>78</sup>Review of *C&P* by Randall J. Oszcewski, *Polar Priorities*, v.17 [September 1997], page 41.

received full funding for his Polar trip from the millionaire gambler John R. Bradley in 1907 — exactly the opposite result of what he has been building this “better a heroic failure than a final success” thesis on. It is typical of the twisted reasoning of a Cook partisan in the wake of my book that Heckathorn could spend several paragraphs arguing that what he knows has already happened, couldn’t happen!

**L14** That he thinks Barrill lied for nothing shows how little Heckathorn absorbed from my pages. As I explained there, Barrill wanted his back pay, and by going along with Cook’s fraud, he was the only one on the entire expedition who received it, plus \$200 extra for his trouble. Cook also sent him \$200 more in 1909 when the Peary forces closed in, probably hoping to keep him from spilling the beans. But in 1906, Barrill could not possibly have imagined what the truth about Cook’s McKinley story would be worth to Peary’s wealthy backers three years later. In 1906 he just wanted his back pay, which was the only reward on the horizon then. But in 1909 he saw an opportunity to earn far more, honestly, by simply recanting his former lies. Who wouldn’t jump at such a chance?

**L15** Some of Heckathorn’s other past assumptions about Barrill are equally misguided. For instance, he has maintained that Barrill certainly had prior experience traveling on glaciers, since he had once visited Glacier National Park. Perhaps Heckathorn does not realize that Glacier National Park was not even organized until 1910 and that it is called that because the landscape was created by the action of Glaciers during the Ice Age, not because it is chock full of them today. The few small glaciers it still holds (the largest covers only about 200 acres) are all very far off the beaten track. Perhaps Heckathorn is suffering from another of his “smug beliefs” because he hasn’t even bothered to look at a primary document, say, a map of the park. Or could it be he has no “field experience” in Montana?

**L16** As evidence of his authority on polar matters, Heckathorn likes to practice a technique I would call “reference dropping” — the mention of sources without an ounce of evidence that they are relevant to his argument. As we have seen in several examples already, he loves to tell his readers what these references say without quoting them. This method of establishing himself as an expert runs throughout his writings for *FACS* and might work with people who accept him at his word. But it fails to impress anyone familiar with the actual sources he cites. Often these sources are completely irrelevant to his discussion; at other times they flatly contradict his interpretation of them. A good example is the so called “recently discovered Inuit testimony and other evidence” he mentions, which “differed materially from what [the Peary interests] reported to the media.” I have had a copy of this “recently discovered” material since 1989, and I can say that it does not “differ materially” (though it is not exactly the same in all details) from the published Peary version.

**L17** An amusing incident arising from this material occurred during the reading of Heckathorn’s paper in 1993. He referred to the notes of an interview with Cook’s Eskimos taken down in Greenland by George Borup, one of Peary’s assistants, where he stated that the Eskimos had said that Dr. Cook was “shaglahutee.” He paused at this point, beamed around the room, and asked if there was an Eskimo interpreter in the house. What he didn’t know was that “shaglahutee” was Borup’s phonetic attempt at the Polar Eskimo’s version of the word that has the same root as the one mentioned above in connection with Farley Mowat — a “teller of tall tales” — an enormous liar.<sup>79</sup> It seems obvious that Heckathorn thought (and perhaps still does) that a translation would vindicate Cook. I don’t speak Inuit, but I knew this word from my study of primary documents, including early accounts about the Polar Eskimos. The term was so well known, even to white men in 1909, that Borup didn’t bother to translate it in his notes.

**L18** Although Heckathorn elaborates his imaginings into whatever he wants, he discounts in the most casual way the most crucial evidence that is actually “recently discovered.” He characterizes my recovery of the original notebook that Cook kept on his

<sup>79</sup> Apparently, he still hasn’t found a translator, as he innocently repeats this same passage in *Polar Priorities*, v.18 [September 1998], p.14.

polar journey in 1908, which contains documentary evidence indicating that Cook’s eventual narrative was a fabrication, as merely “a forgotten Cook notebook in the Copenhagen archives” which provided “interesting new material.” He then goes on to say that “Bryce’s case [against Cook reaching the North Pole] is heavily based upon the premise that Cook faked his 1906 [Mount McKinley] claim.” No one who reads my chapter on Cook’s North Pole fake could possibly come to such a conclusion as this. In fact, I state the very opposite at the outset of my lengthy evidentiary examination of Cook’s polar claim: “Leaping to conclusions [about whether Cook faked his polar claim] based on Mount McKinley is neither logical nor just. Dr. Cook’s Bradley Arctic Expedition of 1907-09 must be judged on its own merits, whatever may have happened in Alaska.”<sup>80</sup>

**L19** It is also a completely unperceptive and wishful analysis for him to state that “the latter portion of Bryce’s book is filled with extensive quotations of dubious relevance, personal opinion and gossip immaterial to Cook’s geographical claims . . .” of interest only to “polar trivia buffs,” when it actually contains all of the extensive documentary evidence that proves Cook a fraud and a fake. There is nothing of dubious relevance in it (although Heckathorn may be unable to understand what the relevance is), there are no personal opinions that are not clearly labeled as such, and there is absolutely no immaterial gossip of any kind.

**L20** Heckathorn says it is “incredible” to believe that Cook tried to reach the North Pole without knowing how to navigate by sextant. But as *Cook & Peary* shows in a very credible way, there is strong evidence that is exactly what Cook did, and it also explains why he thought he could do it. As I demonstrate in my book, Cook didn’t “overlook” the need to navigate. He thought he could navigate along a “magnetic meridian” with a magnetic compass, obviating the use of a sextant, which he did not know how to use. Of course, Cook also did not know this will not work — at least the way he intended to do it. When that explanation has been made, the belief that Cook would dispense with his sextant is not “incredible” at all.

**L21** The argument that Cook could not have graduated from high school and college without ever taking courses in trigonometry or solid geometry is a further example of Heckathorn’s own thoughtless assumptions. I graduated from high school in 1964, and I never had a minute of solid geometry, even in college, though I earned a Bachelor of Science degree. I did have a trigonometry course in high school, but not so much as an equation of spherical trig, which is the type used in celestial navigation. Trigonometry did not become a standard part of most high school curricula until the early part of this century, and even today many students who are not college bound are not required to take it. Cook graduated from public school in 1887. A record of the coursework needed for his medical degree shows no mathematical requirements whatsoever.

**L22** In attempting to excuse the errors in Cook’s published navigational data, Heckathorn alludes to errors in Amundsen’s navigation, but, as is his usual pattern, does not tell his reader that Amundsen’s are relatively minor by comparison. Cook’s, however, are the sort that prove he had no real knowledge of the use of a sextant at all, because they are absolutely fatal, not to mention ridiculous. As Dennis Rawlins said in his book, “No one who had used a sextant and artificial horizon once — anywhere — could have made [such mistakes].”<sup>81</sup>

**L23** Heckathorn attempts to be ironic by saying that I try to prove Cook’s claim of 15.3 miles per day average sledge speed to the North Pole impossible by citing MacMillan’s much greater speeds. But MacMillan went nowhere near the Pole and returned to land with nearly empty sledges. Even so, Cook’s speed was similar to MacMillan’s over the same route going out, even though Cook was necessarily much more heavily equipped,

<sup>80</sup> *Cook & Peary* p.847. [DIO comment: Similarly, it would be wrong to devalue Byrd’s genuine later accomplishments because he faked a 1926 claim. Or to devalue Cook’s or Heckathorn’s genuine earlier contributions because of later misadventures.]

<sup>81</sup> Rawlins, Dennis, *Peary at the North Pole; Fact or Fiction?*, p.87.

since he was attempting to reach the Pole and return with what he could carry on two sleds — a round trip of in excess of 1,000 miles — whereas MacMillan’s journey totaled slightly over 240 miles. That was the point of my comparison: Since I contend that Cook’s and MacMillan’s journeys were very nearly the same, I compared apples to apples. When Heckathorn compares the two with the assumption that Cook went to the Pole, he is comparing watermelons to grapes. But Cook’s supporters, just like Peary’s, love to use comparative sledge journeys to distort and confuse, since they are not really interested in truth, but only in seeing their man win, and themselves vindicated.<sup>82</sup>

**L24** In the case of Heckathorn’s comparison of MacMillan’s speed from Greenland to Cape Stallworthy vs. Cook’s, they did not follow the same route, but MacMillan and Cook both took 32 days. Cook reported 25, as Heckathorn says, but as I show in my book, Cook set back his starting date by one week. So,  $25 + 7 = 32$ . Cook went a shorter route, yet took the same amount of time. Therefore, by actual comparison, Cook went slower than MacMillan, not faster, as Heckathorn says.

**L25** Also, contrary to what Heckathorn says, Captain Shoemaker demonstrated in Columbus in 1993 that there is relatively little current in the area traveled by both MacMillan and Cook. Again contradicting Heckathorn, Cook makes it clear that he planned to head northwest, not due north upon leaving the coast to make up for an expected easterly drift (§C6). When Heckathorn gets to comparing MacMillan’s trip to Cook’s beyond that, he has no basis for doing so, and he is simply accepting Cook’s word that he actually traveled beyond the point that all evidence other than Cook’s bare word indicates he actually went. (A tactic all Cookites roundly condemn when it is used by Pearyites to justify Peary’s polar claims.) Heckathorn contends Cook’s preparations for his journey were “superior to MacMillan’s.” Unlike Cook, MacMillan was not outfitted for the Pole but only to reach “Crocker Land,” which supposedly lay about 100 miles to the northwest. So Cook’s preparations *should* have been “superior to MacMillan’s” in personnel, food, dogs, and equipment, since he had 800 extra miles to go! And to say Cook’s average speed on his entire alleged trip to the North Pole would be as good as MacMillan’s short sprint of 120 miles over comparatively undisturbed ice toward the mythical Crocker Land is preposterous; furthermore, there is no credible evidence of any kind that Cook ever made such a journey.

**L26** If the above examples weren’t enough, there are many others in Heckathorn’s articles that bring into question his ability to make a rational analysis. Take, for instance, the statement in his “critical review” that insinuates that my research purposely left out primary material that would have helped Cook’s case: “This reviewer also is aware that our author omitted pertinent documentation from Dr. Cook’s diary and navigational papers that would tend to support Cook’s story.” As usual, this “pertinent documentation” is not identified, but in Heckathorn’s *Polar Priorities* piece, he reveals what it is and takes another pratfall in the process. He asserts, “Critics expect us to believe that Cook would somehow overlook any preparation to navigate on the Arctic Ocean. The data contained in his papers indicate that he did indeed make such preparations.” The only evidence he presents to back up this statement is a copy of a page from Cook’s 1907 diary, which contains a list of compass variations for various places in the Arctic written in Cook’s hand. All this proves, however, is Heckathorn’s illogic and how nonpertinent this evidence is to his argument. This list of magnetic variations is no evidence at all that Cook planned to “navigate on the Arctic Ocean.” All of the data on the page displayed was taken down by Cook *before* he left home, and they were all made by *other explorers — none of it is original*. Not one original datum among them, not even a compass variation for his base at Annoatok, where he spent several winter months preparing for his dash to the Pole. All this page of data proves is that Cook was able to locate and copy data existing in the public record. Not only did he make none of them himself, *there are no such original observations of his own in any of his extant notebooks, including the actual one he kept on his polar journey that I recovered*

<sup>82</sup>See the discussion of Sheldon S.R. Cook’s material below (§R) for more on this point.

*from Copenhagen*. Rather, this material tends to support the thesis advanced in my book that Cook planned to “navigate” by following a “magnetic meridian,” which he naïvely thought would lead him to the North Pole by the use of his compass alone. Perhaps he took all known variation values along, as reference points to check the accuracy of his compass.

**L27** Heckathorn’s attempt to pass off Cook’s cropped picture of the glacial fringe along a solid coast as a “glacial island” far out in the polar sea is just as deceptive, and, like the allusion to the page of magnetic data, is aimed at deceiving the ignorant, unless Heckathorn is so ignorant (or illogical) as to believe it himself. That Cook’s picture is a photograph of a genuine ice island was a notion punctured ten years ago when Wally Herbert published Cook’s lantern slide version of this image showing substantial shoreline attached to his “glacial island,” even though Cook alleged his picture was taken within two degrees of the Pole, hundreds of miles from any dry land.<sup>83</sup>

**L28** Heckathorn exhibits (*Polar Priorities*, v.17 [1997], p.26) a photo of the ice island ARLIS II, which had a hump of rock debris on it (from ARLIS II’s Ellesmere Island origin). Yet Heckathorn tries to persuade his readers that this photo and Cook’s are similar: “Note the apparent mountain range in the background.” [See ¶6 fn 65.] Heckathorn does not tell his readers the height of the boulder pile on ARLIS II, and in the picture he prints, there is nothing to judge relative scale to give a clue as to how high it is, either. Data from the records of the International Quiet Sun Year (1965) state that the “mountain range” on ARLIS II was 41 feet high. But in Cook’s picture of his supposed Glacial Island as published in *My Attainment of the Pole*, which Heckathorn is careful *not* to show his readers (reproduced here as Fig.2), his two Eskimos can be seen driving his sleds in the distance.<sup>84</sup> Another version of Cook’s picture exists as the lantern slide referred to above [fig 2], that prints more of the right margin of this image, including a bare expanse of land<sup>85</sup> Using the Eskimo drivers for scale, it can easily be seen that the land pictured here is far more substantial than a mere 41-foot pile of rocks lying on a broken piece of glacial fringe. Besides, as early as the 1920s, even in Cook’s carefully cropped published version, the distinct rise of the ice in Cook’s picture tipped off J.M. Wordie, who was familiar with arctic terrain, that Cook’s picture was taken near the shore of some island. No island exists where Cook says he took this picture. And the original from which Cook’s published version (Fig.2) and his lantern slide (Fig.3) were cropped is missing. [See also analytic caption to Fig.4.]

**L29** Heckathorn says that I ignore the opinions of experts like Joe Fletcher that Cook saw an ice island and cites a piece of private correspondence between Fletcher and Russell Gibbons from 1956 as evidence, as usual, without quoting it. Here is another glaring example of Heckathorn’s reference-dropping technique. Fletcher’s opinion should be seriously considered, as he has had a great deal of experience with ice islands. Unfortunately for

<sup>83</sup>Herbert (*Noose*, 1989 p.319) thought this is the full image, but it is not: see Fig.4.

<sup>84</sup>Curiously, although the two sleds are seen coming toward the camera [blowups show that the dogs are in front of the sledges], a sledge track can clearly be seen running out of the foreground. Dr. Cook claimed to have taken only two sleds with him on his polar journey, so why would there be a sledge track in the immediate foreground when his two sleds are still coming *toward* him? There are at least two plausible explanations, neither of them helpful to Dr. Cook’s reputation for veracity. It is possible that Cook sent the sleds back in order to stage this shot, and we are seeing their former tracks. But would this be expected of an explorer who was risking everything to reach the North Pole as fast as he could? Would a serious man spare that kind of time and energy? And if this is the explanation, why are there not *two sledge tracks instead of one in the foreground*, since it would seem reasonable to expect that both sleds reached this spot before he ordered them back? Another possible explanation is that the picture was taken when Cook still had more than two sleds with him. This could have been at any time before he left land, or it could have been during the three days when he was accompanied by two additional Eskimos and two additional sleds after leaving Axel Heiberg Land. If it was taken at any of these times, and the last seems the most likely, then it was taken nowhere remotely near the 88th parallel, as Cook claimed.

<sup>85</sup>Part of the donation of lantern slides and glass plate negatives given to the Library of Congress in 1973 by Helene Cook Vetter.



Figure 2: Glacial Island as published in *My Attainment*, 1911 ed., opp. p.244.

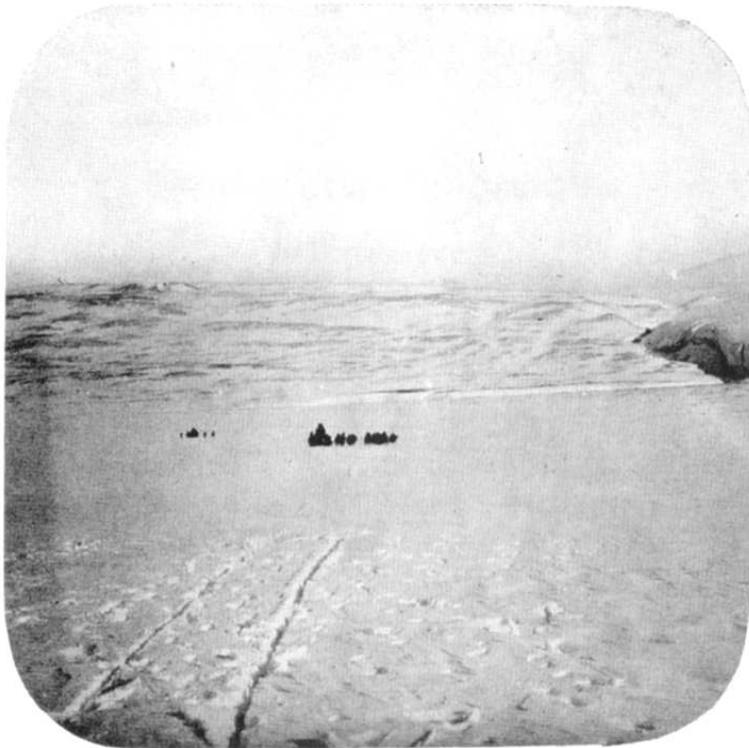


Figure 3: Cook's lantern slide of the Glacial Island, scanned from Herbert 1989.

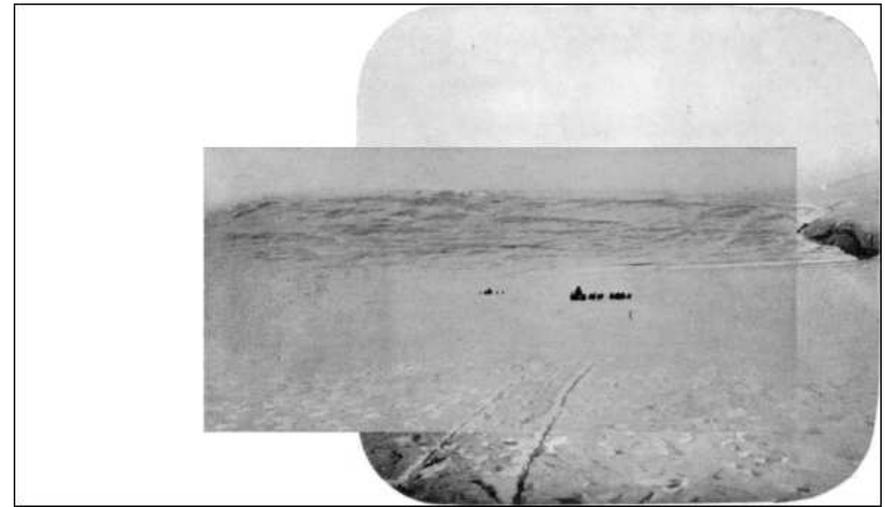


Figure 4: Each of the extant versions of Cook's fake Glacial Island photograph has a portion unique to it, but neither represents Cook's full original image. Even when the two versions are put together to form a composite, as here, there is a problem: the composite has a ratio of 1:1.36, height to width, but Cook's extant photographs taken with the same portable "postcard camera" that took the "Glacial Island" image show a ratio of 1:1.73, the camera's image-size being 3 1/4 x 5 5/8. [Determined by the author from the original prints donated to the Library of Congress by Janet Vetter in 1989. This collection is uncataloged and not available to the public. The author was granted a special scholar's exception to view this material.] Thus, unless the upper portion of Fig.3 was stretched by artificially-added fake sky, even the composite cannot represent the full breadth of the original image. This situation is indicated by the above figure, in which the Glacial Island composite is formatted within a circumscribing rectangle having the actual 1:1.73 height-width proportion of the image that Cook's camera would have produced, according to the further assumption that the height of the lantern slide version represents the full height of the original. (The right margin has been aligned flush with the frame, though it is not known whether the right or left margin, or both, are incomplete.) This assumption is lent credence by the nearness of the horizon to the frame's mid-horizontal line (as in Figs.1&5); if it is true, then roughly 20% (or over 1 inch in the original format) of the original image's width is not seen in the composite. (If the lantern slide does not represent the full height, then proportionately more of the width is missing.) [Bryce note added 2001/6/13: Even that ever-ready source of anti-Cook evidence, Dr. Cook himself, does not agree with Heckathorn's §L28 bringing up ice-island boulders to exonerate Cook. Instead, Cook clearly stated of his "Glacial Island" (1911, pp.265-266): "it was quite impossible to determine whether we were on land or sea ice. . . . my combined tabulations do not warrant a positive assertion of either land or sea". Now, if there was anything resembling a 41-foot boulder-pile (much less the enormous rock face in Figs.3&4), anywhere in sight, it hardly seems likely that Cook would write thusly. And he would surely say *something* about a big piece of dry land adhering to the place he photo-represented (Fig.2) as the "Glacial Island" described in this text. Thus, Cook's "Glacial Island" claim is (as Rep. Robert Bruce Macon said of Peary's 1909 trip) "a fake, pure and simple". *DIO* 2001/8/31 comments: [a] On the issue of deceit, the reader should note (in the above superposition) how very *close* the right side of Fig.2 is to Fig.3's rock; the cropping was *unquestionably intended to hide the rock*. [b] Did Cook get his "land-ice" idea (above) from visiting Meighen Island? Bill Stevenson (*Friendly Arctic* 1922 p.519) reported that the island's official 1916/6/12 discoverer, H.Noice, after exploring it for a few miles "was unable to say whether he had been walking over land or snow-covered ice."] ]

Heckathorn's argument, I have in my files a copy of the very Fletcher letter Heckathorn cites. In it, rather than supporting Gibbons's theory that Cook saw an ice island, Fletcher says: "There *can be* doubt about what Dr. Cook saw . . . . The exploration of ice islands has *not proved without doubt* that Dr. Cook was the first to observe them . . . . I prefer to wait until we understand more before reaching final conclusions."<sup>86</sup> (Fletcher's emphasis.) In this same letter Fletcher also complains that Gibbons's quotation of him in a letter he is planning to send in support of Cook "actually omits several words from the last sentence" and also that he misquotes Father Hubbard and others in the letter. (Early examples of Gibbons's budding "journalistic standards," no doubt.)

**L30** Finally, Heckathorn contends that I have made gross misjudgments of Cook's character, even though all my inferences about it are drawn directly from Cook's own private writings. He attempts to illustrate this by saying that Cook was only making a joke when he told Felix Riesenbergr "My claims and records were presented to a committee of the Congress of the United States and they found that I had reached the North Pole." Heckathorn considers this Cook's satire on the Peary claim's questionable acceptance by the Naval Affairs Committee in 1911. But this only shows how very little Heckathorn knows of Cook's true character himself.

**L31** Frederick Cook was not a humorous man. In the hundreds of thousands of pages of material I read in research, I never found recorded, either by Cook himself or anyone who knew him personally, a single instance of him telling a joke. Although his step-granddaughter remembered him in his old age as someone who could make people laugh, during his prime he was always described as extremely sober at all times, especially in public. As Georges Lecointe recorded during the *Belgica* voyage of 1898-99, that because of Cook's "calm and cold temper" he thought the doctor was "the most rigid American the New World has ever had; he could little enjoy our jokes *à la française*."<sup>87</sup>

**L32** In his original "critical review," Heckathorn said of me, "the author also was, and is, a non-factor in the Mount McKinley controversy." Evidently, he has read more of my book since then, as I had come up in his estimation by the time he wrote his *Polar Priorities* piece. There he says, "Bryce has made a valuable contribution in both research and historical analysis. Many facts gleaned from archival records are published for the first time." The two statements obviously don't square. Perhaps if he reads more of *Cook & Peary*, with more objectivity, he will eventually agree that Cook's claim to having climbed Mount McKinley has no basis in fact.

## M "Ignoring the First Eskimo Witnesses in Cook's Journey," by Sheldon S.R. Cook

**M1** Sheldon Shackelford Randolph Cook is a soft-spoken lawyer from Atlanta of no relation to Frederick Cook's family. As I understand it, he was born Sheldon Dorough, but later changed his name to Sheldon Cook-Dorough, then finally dropped his surname entirely in favor of his hero's. He has recently declared Dr. Cook's cause his "life's work." To avoid confusion with Dr. Cook, I will call him Sheldon, as I came to know him over the years I worked on *Cook & Peary*.

**M2** To his credit, Sheldon at least devoted his part of the "critical review" to disputing something of evidentiary substance, though he keeps up the mantra of the previous two authors that I "ignored" evidence and was "selective" in what I chose to present. In fact, he concentrates on what he calls "the most blatant instance of selective scholarship in the book: ignoring the First Eskimo Testimony, and giving credence to the long-discredited Peary-MacMillan version of the journey of Cook and his Eskimo companions in March to June, 1908."

**M3** Sheldon then acknowledges, like the others before him, that I cover this "ignored" testimony in my book.<sup>88</sup> What is more, *Cook & Peary* gives considerable space to not just this "first" version, but to *all* of the contemporary versions of the testimony allegedly given by the Polar Eskimos concerning Cook, or said by others to have been given by them. Not only is this "first testimony," which was given to Knud Rasmussen by members of the tribe to which both of the Cook's Eskimo companions belonged, covered in my pages,<sup>89</sup> but I also fully detail the later favorable report given to Rasmussen in September 1909.<sup>90</sup> I even give an account of what Cook had to say on this subject in his unverifiable memoirs.<sup>91</sup> Although these quotes from Cook's memoirs are repeated by Sheldon in his "review" as if they were fact, objectively, they must be considered in the light of being written by a man whose veracity is seriously in question, and therefore cannot be assumed to be true. When every version of the Eskimos' testimony in Cook's favor has thus been covered in the pages of my book, I am at a loss to understand how I can be said to have "ignored" it, or how this can be considered "selective scholarship" against Cook.

**M4** I did not even "discount this significant 'First Testimony' of the Eskimos" as Sheldon contends. I simply agreed with Captain Thomas F. Hall, a Cook supporter, who in *Has the North Pole Been Discovered?* said that the various versions of the Eskimos' testimony, being conflictual, were worthless as evidence for either side. It should be pointed out, however, that all of this favorable "first testimony" came from third parties — men of the tribe to whom Cook's companions belonged, but *not from the two men who actually accompanied Cook*. When Rasmussen did obtain the testimony of the two Cook Eskimos themselves through Danish-Eskimo missionaries, they gave him a story which largely *contradicted* Cook's version of events and generally agreed with Peary's.

**M5** Why should Sheldon favor the testimony given by third parties over the testimony of the witnesses themselves, when both testimonies were given to the world by very same man [Rasmussen]? And if he thinks the negative testimony that Cook's actual companions gave is a lie, the lie was told by Rasmussen; why then should the earlier favorable testimony, also reported by Rasmussen, be accepted as truth? The answer, of course, is that the third parties' testimony was favorable to Cook, and the eyewitnesses' testimony was unfavorable. Therefore, just as third-hand favorable opinions are valued at FACS over negative primary documentation from Cook's own hand, third parties' testimony is valued over eyewitness testimony *simply on the basis of its favorability to the required conclusion that Cook reached the North Pole*. That is all that matters to a Cook partisan. Sheldon says not a word about this negative testimony from Cook's companions' own lips — he ignores it — just what he accuses me of doing. And in so doing he is guilty of exactly the kind of "selective scholarship" he undeservedly projects on me.

**M6** In the case of what he terms the "Peary-MacMillan" version (a pairing of two entirely different accounts separated by nine years) I do not give them credence or say that they are entirely correct, nor do I agree that they are "long-discredited." I do demonstrate, however, why these versions are far better supported by documentary evidence than Cook's version of his journey, which is refuted by both physical and documentary evidence, including the contents of Cook's own contemporaneous polar notebooks. Peary contended Cook did not go out of sight of land and MacMillan that he turned back about 12 miles north of Axel Heiberg Island. I conclude that Cook turned back between 92 and 100 miles northwest of Heiberg Island. As always, my conclusion on this point is firmly grounded in the primary

<sup>88</sup> Sheldon previously made this very same argument, which is here lifted nearly word for word from a paper he wrote in the wake of Wally Herbert's dismissal of Cook's claim in his 1989 book, *The Noose of Laurels*. See: Cook-Dorough, Sheldon: *Frederick Albert Cook: discoverer of the North Pole, April 21, 1909. The First Eskimo Testimony, April 1909 — August 1909*, Hurleyville, New York: Sullivan County Historical Society, 1990.

<sup>89</sup> Pp.346-47.

<sup>90</sup> Pp.439-40.

<sup>91</sup> *Cook & Peary* p.347.

<sup>86</sup> Fletcher to Gibbons, June 22, 1956. CSC.

<sup>87</sup> *Le Messager de Bruxelles*, October 23, 1899.

documents, and not designed to give “credence” to any predetermined viewpoint.

**M7** In summary then, all of Sheldon’s contentions about my book are untrue: I did not ignore the “First Eskimo Testimony,” which he acknowledges himself; rather than giving credence to the “Peary-MacMillan” version(s), I show that both are evidently only partially true; the Peary version, rather than being “long discredited,” is still generally accepted as true; rather than being selective, I present all of the testimony about Cook’s 1908 polar journey from whatever source, positive or negative, and I allow the primary documents to dictate the most likely conclusion. What could be more fair than that?

## N “Sextant, Speeds and Drift; assessing the evidence from Cook’s Polar Journey of 1908,” by Sheldon S.R. Cook

**N1** In his *Polar Priorities* piece (v.17 [1997]), Sheldon takes up several other contentions that he believes counter the negative conclusion of my book. His comments are rather repetitious and involved, but boiled down, this is what he says:

1. My contention that Cook did not possess the skills necessary to navigate to the North Pole is false because there is evidence that Cook was competent with a sextant and knew full well how to use it to find his positions by celestial observation.

2. That Cook’s compass reading at the Pole as given in his narratives was reasonable and “almost certainly” correct, and that, in any case, we have to accept it, as there is no way to disprove it scientifically today.

3. That Cook’s narrative of his polar journey has been strongly supported, even proven, by the corroboration of later explorers of the physical descriptions Cook gave of arctic conditions along his route, which he could not have known unless he actually made the trip.

4. That Cook’s reported sledging speeds, although he terms them “magnificent,” were possible based on the actual later experiences of other explorers on the Arctic Ocean since Cook’s journey.

5. That the manner in which the notes are written in Cook’s notebooks does not necessarily cast doubt upon their having been written at the time of his journey, as I contend.

6. That the westerly drift experienced by Cook over part of his route proves he reached the Pole, since it has now been confirmed to exist.

7. That although it is “undeniable” that recent studies of the ice in the area where Cook says he was adrift in June of 1908 show it never broke up at that time of year during any of the times studied, but remained solid, there is contemporary evidence that the ice conditions in 1908 were extraordinary, and that this corroborates Cook’s account of drifting between the islands of the Queen Elizabeth Archipelago.

**N2** Some of these contentions are as old as the Polar Controversy itself, and all of those are completely addressed in the text of *Cook & Peary*. Nevertheless, I will briefly take up all of these points in turn, and then refer the reader to the appropriate pages in my book for further discussion.

## O Could Cook Navigate?

**O1** Sheldon says the answer is yes because: a. Cook was interviewed by Professor Olafsen of the Royal Danish Geographical Society and Commander Hovgaard of the Royal Danish Navy, and Cook satisfied them that he could navigate.

**O2** This cannot be stated as a fact. I found no reference to such a meeting anywhere but in Cook’s own book, *My Attainment of the Pole*. In any case, the man whose word is being questioned cannot be accepted as a witness in his own behalf without outside corroboration. This meeting allegedly took place in September 1909. However, in December 1909, after reviewing Cook’s written “proofs” that he had reached the Pole, Professor Olafson, who sat on the reviewing panel, and who is alleged by Sheldon to have been totally satisfied that

Cook could navigate just three months before, was quoted as saying, “As an explorer there seems to be no doubt Cook is absolutely unreliable.”<sup>92</sup>

**O3** Sheldon says yes because: b. Cook was interviewed by Professor Torp and Professor Stromgren of the University of Copenhagen with the same result.

**O4** There is a record of this meeting, which Sheldon quotes in part. However, it is clear from the quotation that Torp, himself, had no way of judging Cook’s navigational qualifications. He says that is the very reason that he brought Stromgren with him “as there were certain questions of a special astronomical nature with which I myself was not sufficiently acquainted.” Stromgren was unable to make up for Torp’s insufficiency, however. In 1978, Stromgren’s son told Dennis Rawlins that his father had not enough ability with English to question Dr. Cook thoroughly on technical matters. Rather, it may be inferred from the quotation used by Sheldon that it was the calm and self-confident manner in which Cook conducted himself during the interview that actually convinced the two: “He showed no nervousness or excitement at any time. I dare say, therefore, that there is no justification for anybody to throw the slightest doubt on this claim to have reached the Pole.”

**O5** Sheldon says yes because: c. Cook was observed taking navigational sights by John R. Bradley and Rudolph Franke as they made their way toward Greenland in 1907 on Bradley’s ship. And he quotes Bradley to that effect.

**O6** Bradley had no idea of how to take celestial observations himself. This is evident from how he qualifies his testimony throughout the quoted passage: “I am no scientist”; “I think that Dr. Cook knew very well what he was doing”; “I think that scientists will agree that he was sufficiently versed in the knowledge necessary for him to tell whether or not he had arrived at the North Pole.” Bradley simply assumed Cook was capable, mistaking his “wonderful mechanical skill,” which both he and his brother Theodore definitely possessed, for scientific competence, thus mistaking him for a “trained scientist,” which he definitely was not. There is simply not a jot of evidence other than such hearsay by interested parties (Bradley financed Cook’s try for the Pole) that Cook knew how to handle a sextant. And when Cook submitted his “proofs” that he had reached the North Pole to the scientists (not withstanding Sheldon’s attempt to put the best spin on their findings in his sidebar “The Copenhagen Verdict”), far from agreeing that Cook was sufficiently versed in the knowledge necessary for him to tell whether or not he had reached the North Pole, they found that his “proofs” had “a not permissible lack of such guiding information which could show the probability that the mentioned astronomical observations had actually been undertaken” and that they “did not contain observations or information which could be considered to prove that Dr. Cook had reached the Northpole.”<sup>93</sup> After Cook’s rejection, Bradley said, “If I had been fooled, well I am not the only one.”<sup>94</sup>

**O7** Likewise, Franke, who was Cook’s only white companion over the winter of 1907-08, was as easily deceived as Bradley. Franke had not even a grade school education and knew no more about celestial navigation than the Polar Eskimos, who Sheldon tells us could not have had “the slightest knowledge of navigation, of the use of the sextant or of celestial observations in the plotting of a course.”

**O8** Sheldon says yes because: d. Roald Amundsen said that Cook could navigate.

**O9** There is no known record that Amundsen said specifically that Cook was navigationally competent. At the time of the Polar Controversy, Amundsen had not seen Cook in ten years. By his various quoted statements, it seems that he just assumed Cook was navigationally competent, on the same premise that Sheldon does here: that it was common sense that no one would set foot on the treacherous drifting arctic pack without such knowledge, because it would be sure suicide. However, Cook planned to navigate by compass alone along a “magnetic meridian,” so he thought he had no need of the sextant — but

<sup>92</sup> *New York World*, December 22, 1909.

<sup>93</sup> Aarbog for Kobenhavns Universitet, *Kommunitetert og den polytekniske Laereanstalt, indeholdende Meddelelser for det akademiske Aar 1909-1910*, 1914.

<sup>94</sup> *NYT*, December 22, 1909.

this is a technique that cannot possibly work without taking celestial observations. That is how ignorant Cook was of navigation, and there is abundant evidence that he was deficient in mathematical skills in general, as well.<sup>95</sup> After the rejection of Cook's "proofs" by the University of Copenhagen, Amundsen was quoted as saying, "the important question now is whether [Cook] is a swindler, or merely ignorant,"<sup>96</sup> showing Amundsen had come to doubt that Cook could navigate. From the documentary evidence, the answer to Amundsen's question about Cook is: "both."<sup>97</sup>

**O10** Sheldon says yes because: e. "Common sense" supports this "authoritative" eyewitness testimony of Bradley, Franke and Amundsen.

**O11** On the contrary, common sense rejects what is unsupported by a shred of documentary evidence. And as illustrated by the foregoing, the eyewitness testimony is not authoritative, but entirely assumptive and biased, too. It is very clear that Cook did not know how to navigate. The only observations he ever published prove that.<sup>98</sup>

## P Cook's Compass Reading at the Pole

**P1** In his next point, Sheldon seizes upon a passage in *Cook & Peary* and uses it to justify Cook's scanty scientific evidence. This is the general pattern followed by Cook partisans of "any [favorable] port in a storm." They choose to believe absolutely any scrap of information they think can be turned to his good (even in a book whose conclusions are entirely negative on Cook's polar claim), but reject without argument or avoid every major piece of negative documentary evidence that cannot be rationally refuted.<sup>99</sup>

**P2** In this instance, Sheldon grasps for one point in my book having to do with Cook's navigation and elaborates on it, in an attempt to prove, as this lawyer often couches his arguments, that Cook "almost certainly" reached the North Pole. That passage reads: "It is impossible to reconstruct past magnetic force fields with any certainty, unless data exist on which to construct them. In 1908 magnetic data in the region through which Cook said he traveled were virtually nonexistent."<sup>100</sup>

<sup>95</sup> *DIO* note. See, e.g., ‡6 §M10. Bryce has helped recover a short 1911 film, "The Truth About the Pole" (Bryce 1997 pp.527-28), featuring awesome machinations by the dastardly "Arctic Trust", a conspiratorial club composed entirely of antique ham actors. *DIO*'s cover takes us frameup-by-frameup through the persecuted-hero saga. Despite all the Trust's vile, sinuous work, Cook arrives at the Pole (his hair & navigationally-able companions neatly parted), in the company of natives (of Chicago) & sledge dogs (two adorable pet collie-types), sextant in hand. He intently searches the horizon for something. The something turns out to be his camera cue. He finally picks up on it. Frame 1: He suddenly flips the sextant broadside to look at the arc-vernier. Then goes prone to shoot Sun. (Actual procedure is shoot-then-vernier.) Swift but masterly computation on notebook, capped by Saturday-Night-Livesque we're-outta-here flourish of pencil. Frame 2: Crass, wicked Peary meanwhile supervises burglary of Cook's hut. (Peary disappoints only by neglecting moustache-twirl.) Frame 3: Barrill pockets "Arctic Trust" bribe in Tacoma bank. Frame 4: Bright-eyed collie (lower left corner), Cook, & Illini cheer starznstripes. Frame 5: "Arctic Trust" goes apoplectic & physically shreds *Herald* announcing Cook's happy-ending victory over natural elements — and over the most unnaturally satanic of all the universe's forces. . . .]

<sup>96</sup> *NYT*, December 22, 1909.

<sup>97</sup> That Amundsen didn't really believe that either Cook or Peary had reached the North Pole is implicit in the entry he made in his diary at the South Pole on December 16, 1911: "It is quite interesting, to see the sun wander around the heavens at so to speak the same altitude day and night. I think we are the first to see this curious sight." [Quoted in Huntford, Roland, *Scott and Amundsen*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980, p.491.]

<sup>98</sup> For a full discussion see *C&P*, Cook's Observations pp.861-64; The Magnetic Meridian pp.864-67; Shadows pp.867-69.

<sup>99</sup> Another good example of this is that FACS continues to distribute my article, "Dr. Cook and the Yahgan Dictionary," as a pro-Cook tract. However, in the latest issues of *Polar Priorities* Russ Gibbons exercised his journalistic standards to delete any mention of me as its author.

<sup>100</sup> *C&P*, p.865.

**P3** Unfortunately for Sheldon's argument, it has come to my attention that this statement is *incorrect*, having been based on outdated information. Although this passage was reviewed by both of my technical consultants on geomagnetism, neither of them caught it, and both were apparently unaware of the new information that would have shown the statement was false until after *Cook & Peary* was published. When the statement is corrected, Sheldon's contentions about Cook's magnetic observations and Cook's claim to have made them at the Pole are shown to be impossible, thus immeasurably strengthening the thesis of *Cook & Peary* that Frederick Cook was never even in the remote vicinity of the North Pole in 1908.

**P4** Just as I asked Keith Pickering to check several technical aspects of my book in which I was not an expert, I asked him to read Sheldon's arguments concerning navigation and magnetic variation for accuracy and, based on up-to-date information, write a critique. He responded as follows:

At its core, [Sheldon's] argument is based on this fallacy:

"It is impossible to determine today, it seems, what the direction of the prevailing magnetic field at the North Pole was in 1908 except from Cook's own report. Cook's statement that the needle of the compass at the North Pole pointed south can neither be confirmed nor denied by data available to science today."

This statement is false. In the 1960's geophysicists began to model the earth's magnetic field in a new way, known as spherical harmonic analysis. This method uses a large set of coefficients to mathematically describe the magnetic field. Every five years, the International Association for Geomagnetism and Aeronomy (IAGA) uses geomagnetic data from around the world to update these coefficients and create a new International Geomagnetic Reference Field, or IGRF. The IGRF has been validated as being accurate to within 1 degree (in declination) over continental areas and half a degree over the ocean. Since the IGRF is a mathematical model, it can be used<sup>101</sup> to determine magnetic declination [compass variation] in places too remote to visit [easily].

Once this method became available, geophysicists began to apply it retroactively to geomagnetic data from the past. For dates within the twentieth century, enough data is available to model the earth's magnetic field to within IAGA tolerances. To put it simply, it is indeed possible to determine the direction of the magnetic field at the North Pole in 1908. . . .<sup>102</sup>

The only meaningful statement Cook made is that at the North Pole, the compass pointed along the 97° west meridian. We can use the National Geophysical Data Center computer program (GEOMAG) to test the veracity of Cook's claim. We find that on 21 April 1908, the compass at the North Pole pointed along meridian 133 degrees [and a half] west. . . .<sup>103</sup>

<sup>101</sup> *DIO* note. Modern magnetic charts (checked for extrapolation-validity by comparison to genuine early arctic data of, e.g., Nares, Markham, & Peary) were first used for evaluating polar expeditions by DR, who rejected the claims of Cagni 1900, Cook 1908, & Peary 1909 due to their false and-or absent statements on compass variation: Rawlins 1973 pp.65, 91, & 234, respectively. (Regarding *ibid* p.131 on Peary's 1909/3/11 compass course: the datum was from his 1902 diary. As to the physical impossibility of Cook's & Hall's "magnetic meridian" [‡5 fn 4], see Rawlins 1993 [paper's publication-history: ‡6 fn 18 parenthesis] p.54 & fn 34, or video of 1993/10/22 OSU talk [transcript pp.16-17].)

<sup>102</sup> [This model is available as GEOMAG at <http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/seg/potfld/magmodel.shtml> — ed. (DR hint: Put file IGRF into subdirectory GEOMAG.)]

<sup>103</sup> [Ed. note. The overall accuracy of the model is 0.5 degrees over oceanic regions when measured spherically. Projected onto the horizontal plane, with the high dip angle present at the North Pole, the error in declination is about 8 degrees — which, in spite of its looseness, still easily convicts Cook, whose "reading" was 36 degrees off.]

It is also possible to evaluate [Sheldon's] oft-repeated statement that it is "very probable" that the compass pointed south along the 97° west meridian in 1908. This statement is also false. The magnetic declination along the 97 west meridian in April 1908 varied from 151 degrees west to 143 1/2 degrees west between latitudes 82 and 90, considerably different from the 180 degrees declination that Cook believed and [Sheldon] has assumed.

This leads to an inescapable conclusion: Cook did not actually determine magnetic declinations. If he had done so, he would not have claimed that the compass pointed south along the 97 west meridian. This conclusion is hardly surprising, since:

- Except for the North Pole report, he did not claim to have determined magnetic declinations;
- There is no mention in his surviving diaries that he did so; and
- There is also no observational record in his diaries for magnetic declination. . . .

To support his claim that the compass pointed south along the 97 west meridian, [Sheldon] uses three arguments. (Which he calls "evidence." The author is evidently not a lawyer.)<sup>104</sup>

First, [Sheldon] argues "[Cook] read his compass at Svartevog. He knew the direction in which the needle pointed." But HOW did he know? The compass tells you magnetic north, not true north. [By itself], magnetic north is a stunningly useless datum in the Arctic. To find true north, you need to make celestial observations and you need to make computations. As stated above, there is no *evidence* that Cook did so. Only when you have found true north can you determine magnetic declination, and only then is a magnetic compass useful in Arctic navigation.

Second, [Sheldon] states that "there can be no question that Cook knew the direction in which the compass needle pointed for a number of miles north of Svartevog." This is the same argument all over again [with the same answer]. . . .

Third, [Sheldon] argues that Cook must have been able to navigate accurately in order to accurately describe the physical conditions in the high Arctic. All of Cook's physical descriptions fall into three [categories]:

1. Repetitions of, or reasonable conclusions that can be drawn from, existing accounts of previous travelers. Into this bucket we can throw the Big Lead, the improvement in ice conditions about 87 north, and the direction of ice drift near the Pole.
2. Things Cook could have observed himself without leaving sight of land. Into this bucket we can put the direction of ice drift offshore, general conditions of the pack ice, and the absence of Crocker Land.
3. Things Cook could only have observed if he had actually gone far into the high Arctic or to the Pole. Into this bucket we can put Bradley Land, the submerged land ice, and the direction of the compass needle at the North Pole.

Only the items in 3 are useful in determining the truth of Cook's claim, and *all of these items are false*. A reasonable person would draw a reasonable conclusion from this.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>104</sup>[Note by KP: Bryce had deliberately hidden Sheldon's name from me before asking my opinion, so that my statements would not be biased. I was therefore unaware of the irony that the critique's author was indeed a lawyer.]

<sup>105</sup>Pickering to RMB, October 1, 1997, possession of author.

## Q Cook's Observations of Physical Conditions in the Arctic

**Q1** It might be added to Pickering's last point that Thomas Hall, whose book the Cook partisans quote as Gospel on all of its positive assertions concerning Cook, made this very strong and final assertion about the importance of Cook's claim to have seen "Bradley Land": "If Bradley Land is proven non-existent, Cook is eliminated [as the discoverer of the Pole]."<sup>106</sup> And Edwin Swift Balch, whose books they likewise cite as strong evidence in Cook's favor said "If [Bradley Land] does not exist, [Cook's] case is demolished forever."<sup>107</sup> Bradley Land does not exist, and none of FACS's attempts to excuse this fact hold any water. For instance, FACS contends what Cook saw was actually a drifting ice island. But Cook's published photograph of "Bradley Land" (Fig.5) has no similarity to an ice island whatsoever, but is undoubtedly a photograph of solid land.

**Q2** FACS has also produced lame arguments concerning Cook's submerged glacial island, claiming it too was an ice island, and it attempts to justify Cook's fake picture of this feature by such deceptive arguments as the boulder pile on ARLIS II noted previously in the discussion (§L28) of Heckathorn's criticisms. But Cook's picture is incontestably a fake, just as are his pictures of "Bradley Land" and his photograph of the "summit" of Mount McKinley. It is both illogical and unnecessary to fake a photograph of a place one has actually visited with a camera. But Cook visited none of his famously-claimed places (some of which do not even exist!), and so had no genuine pictures of them, only fakes made at other places he had actually been to.

**Q3** Cook also made several other descriptions of conditions based on the best evidence he had in his era, but which have proven false with more time. [See *DIO* 7.3 ¶9 fn 41.] As usual, Sheldon ignores these, which include some of the ones reported by previous travelers in the Arctic cited by Pickering, which were copied by Cook:

The high arctic is rich in animal life above the 85th parallel, although Cook said it was a barren waste, with no life whatever. The polar ice, contrary to Sheldon and Dr. Cook, does not always improve the closer you go to the Pole. The effect on the ice due to its crushing against land tends to diminish about 240 miles offshore, but the improvement of ice conditions nearer the Pole is not a hard and fast rule. It varies considerably in any given year and season and is not totally predictable.

Modern data show that the so-called Big Lead, that both Peary and Cook said marked the boundary between shore ice and pack, is not a permanent feature of the Arctic.

There is no flattening at the Pole to make up for an equatorial bulge, as Cook strongly implied, but rather there is a bulge at the Pole as well.

Modern observation has also shown that the ice between the islands where Cook said he was helplessly adrift never breaks up in June. This point is taken up in detail at §U.

**Q4** Contrasting strongly with these incorrect reports are Cook's very accurate observations of things he really saw. He was the first to realize that Sverdrup's Shei Island is actually a peninsula, for instance. The conditions described in Cook's diary for the first 6 days of his journey match very well with the conditions prevalent in the area north of Axel Heiberg Land in the early spring, even today, and MacMillan encountered the same conditions on his very similar trip six years after Cook, including noting the strong westerly drift at the place he turned back. Furthermore, Cook's meteorological descriptions for those same days were verified by contemporaneous Danish weather records.<sup>108</sup> All this indicates that Cook made a journey of about 100 miles northwest of his starting point before giving up. But as we have seen, his observations beyond the point he turned back are generally inaccurate and were simply based on what was considered most probable in 1908, much of which has now been proven incorrect, however.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup>Hall to Stefansson, October 19, 1926. SCD.

<sup>107</sup>"Polar Controversies. II. Cook's Claims," *Independent*, November 28, 1925, p.608.

<sup>108</sup>For details see *C&P*, pp.974-75.

<sup>109</sup>For more detail on these points see *C&P*, Dr. Cook's Narrative pp.883-89.

## R Cook's "Magnificent" Speeds

**R1** In his third section, Sheldon takes up another time-honored tradition of the Polar Controversy: the comparative sledge journey. As I said in my book, comparisons of sledge journeys "present limitless opportunity for understandable honest confusion as well as intentional dishonest obfuscation; in nearly every such discussion . . . can be found errors introduced by one or the other." Sheldon's has quite a bit of the latter. Still, I hesitate to get involved with sledge speeds and distances, since it takes far longer to explain to the reader what is wrong with the analysis under discussion than it is worth, not to mention that it is dreadfully tedious. However, a few comments on Sheldon's statements justifying Cook's "truly magnificent" speeds are in order. I will try to spare the reader the balance of the numbing details.

**R2** Simply put, no matter what argument you want to make, the fact is, no one has ever done what Cook claimed to have done (that is, make an unresupplied dogsledge journey to the North Pole and return to any point of land) in *any* amount of time, right down to today. And no one driving dogs, before or since, has ever come close to Cook's claimed sustained speeds over the Arctic Ocean pack ice for even a fraction of the time of his alleged 88-day round trip daily average.

**R3** When Sheldon makes the point that "On no single day of Cook's sledge journey to the North Pole and his return across the pack did he attain a speed or achieve a distance which is impossible or unfeasible," this is utterly meaningless. The point is not that what Cook claimed to do on any given day is fantastic (or "magnificent" if you like); it is what he claimed to do *on the average, day after day, week after week, month after month* that is not just fantastic, but impossible.

**R4** When Sheldon cites the journeys of MacMillan & Steger as justifications for Cook's speeds, that is equally meaningless. MacMillan's journey cannot be compared to Cook's entire claimed journey because:

(a) MacMillan only went 120 miles onto the Polar Sea and turned back. He had no intention to try for the Pole and therefore did not need to carry nearly as many supplies as Cook. MacMillan could naturally travel faster because he had less to carry.

(b) MacMillan made such fabulous speeds on his return from 120 miles out because he abandoned almost all of his gear at the beginning of his return journey and came back to land with nearly empty sledges. Cook had no such luxury.

**R5** Likewise, Steger's 1986 expedition, though it reached the Pole, did not have to return (he was airlifted out), so he also did not have to haul nearly as much gear. Steger, like MacMillan, made his best speeds when he abandoned his supplies in a desperate attempt to increase his speed as he neared the Pole, hoping by this to justify Peary's claims of increased speed over this area in 1909, and thus please his wealthy sponsor and key Peary advocate, the National Geographic Society. When he arrived at the Pole, hardly a morsel of food was left on Steger's sledges. Cook had no such option; he had to return unaided.

**R6** Furthermore, as I show on page 1102 of *Cook & Peary*, the speeds quoted by Steger in the appendix of his book, *North to the Pole*, are artificially inflated to make Peary's speeds look more plausible. So what Steger reported was not comparable to Peary's or to Cook's speeds in any way.<sup>110</sup> Yes, Steger had a few days where he matched or exceeded Cook's best claimed speed on any one day, but Steger's *average* speed was *less than 9 miles per day, as opposed to Cook's claimed 14*. To the uninitiated reader, that may not sound like much of a difference, but it is actually enormous in practical terms, especially when you consider that Cook claimed this, on average, for every day of a round trip, while Steger did not return.

<sup>110</sup>Ironically, though Sheldon brings forward the same false arguments Steger used to bolster Peary's claims as evidence in favor of Cook, he and the rest of FACS see no merit in them as evidence in favor of Peary, as *National Geographic* says they are.

**R7** There is no *independent documentary record* that Cook was a "superb sledger," as Sheldon claims. There is *no evidence* that he could even handle a dog team well. There is, however, *documentary evidence* that he rode the sledges as a passenger when traveling with the Eskimos at other times. His crossing of Ellesmere Island was not exceptional; and, as we have seen above (§L24), MacMillan exceeded his speed in 1914. In fact, Cook had never been on the Arctic Pack at all before 1908, and thus *he had absolutely no prior experience, whatever, traveling with dog teams over arctic pack ice*. His sea-ice experience was limited to the antarctic pack, which is considerably different in character and less chaotic in the area he traveled through. Even there he made very ordinary times in his brief excursions across it, none totaling more than 25 miles in two consecutive days. And this speed was only accomplished *without* sleds. At all other times in the Antarctic, he man-hauled relatively light loads compared to his North Pole attempt with dogs and sledges loaded to a weight of more than 600 pounds each. Nor are Sheldon's other statements supportable.

**R8** As already discussed (§Q), Cook's descriptions of the conditions on the way to the Pole *have not been confirmed* in every detail by later exploration, and the so-called "first Eskimo testimony" may have expressed his Eskimo companions' admiration for him as a sledger and a man, but the second Eskimo testimony said that Cook was "a teller of tall tales." Take your choice.<sup>111</sup>

## S Cook's Polar Notes

**S1** In the fourth section, Sheldon attempts to discount the evidence from Cook's own hands, as written in his various polar notebooks. And this evidence is not limited to the tense or style of the entries, as Sheldon implies. The actual substance, including directly contradictory statements about events on the same days, completely different supposed recorded geographical positions at a specific time and date, and even different dates for the same events, not to mention contradictory insertions, deletions and substantial erasures brand this material as a fabrication. So, it is not just the fact that Cook's notebooks are written in the past tense that marks them as fakes, as anyone who reads the detailed material about them contained in *Cook & Peary* will see.

**S2** Sheldon's comments, however, are limited to the style of the entries and are entirely rhetorical. He attempts to justify the use of the past tense by quoting Cook as saying he wrote his entries at the end of the day. That is irrelevant. Unlike the excerpts reproduced in the appendix of my book, which, as Sheldon notes, are mostly written in the present tense or speak of circumstantial events just past, the majority of his entries about his polar journey in his notebooks are written in what might be called "story form"; that is, they are highly organized summaries, as if the events being described were long over and done and are being recalled in a remembered, edited fashion. There is little unimportant circumstantial detail left in these entries; the detail they do contain is literary. This distinguishes them completely from Cook's genuine diary entries, like the ones made over the winter of 1907-08 at Annoatok or at Cape Sparbo over the next winter. As can be seen in the reproduced passages in my book, in the genuine entries Cook has not started to condense events in his mind — or dream them up already condensed. He is recording them fresh and unedited. Also, the format and handwriting of the fabricated portions of Cook's notebooks are too neat and well organized to have been written in the field — the same characteristics that FACS readily agrees condemn Peary's so-called polar diary as a fake. Cook's genuine field notebook entries have a totally different look about them; the handwriting is large and sprawling, not neat and compact.

**S3** More important than any of this, however, are the already noted changes, erasures, adjustments, internal conflicts, and several versions of the same day's happenings in separate notebooks that differ considerably and cannot be reconciled as accounts of a single day's

<sup>111</sup>For details see *C&P*, Cook's Speed, pp.881-82.

events. These are the badges of fraud and fantasy. Examples of some of these changes can be seen in the reproduced notes in the appendix to my book, and in its textual examples in the pages cited below. Thus, the form and content of Cook's polar diaries, not the narrow matter of tense, condemn them to even a greater extent than Peary's, which at least seems to be an actual copy of the authentic diary that Peary wrote in the field, to a point. The same cannot be said of Cook's. Even the unpublished portions of Cook's "field notes" (the balance of which were published in *My Attainment* pp.569-77) do not match his actual diary entries from the time he left Annoatok until he jumped off for the Pole from Cape Stallworthy. No amount of lawyerly rhetoric can explain away that kind of hard evidence.<sup>112</sup>

## T The Westerly Drift

**T1** Cook, like MacMillan in 1914, could have easily observed the westerly drift which Cook supporters have never tired of citing in his favor, and which Sheldon cites here as proof that Cook went to the Pole. MacMillan only went a little more than 100 miles to the northwest of the same starting point as Cook, and MacMillan noted that the ice was torn asunder by the action of a strong current at the point he abandoned his journey.

**T2** On this basis, since MacMillan noted the same westerly drift Cook reported, it would be as logical to credit MacMillan with reaching the North Pole in 1914 as to credit Cook with the same feat in 1908. Of course, that would be silly, since MacMillan never claimed he went to the Pole. But the fact remains that the westerly drift can be observed by a journey of no more than 100 miles to the northwest — exactly what Cook's diary indicates he did. On the basis of this westerly drift, the only reason to credit Cook and not MacMillan with reaching the Pole is Cook's bare word that he *did* reach the North Pole.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, the fact that Cook observed a westerly drift supports a trip of 100 miles to the northwest, but it proves absolutely nothing about where he went after that.

## U The Ice in Crown Prince Gustav Sea

**U1** Sheldon then takes space to acknowledge (p.37) that "there is no question that the modern studies [Bryce] cited have indeed shown that during the years which have been investigated the pack ice of the Crown Prince Gustav Sea, Peary Channel, Sverdrup Channel and the northern segment of Hassel Sound did not melt during the summer and that [*sic*] by such an early date as June 13 in those years reflected no effects" of warmth. On this date in 1908 Cook claimed he could not return to his outward caches because of "small ice," and thus helplessly drifted south and was compelled to spend the winter away from his base of supplies. However, like all good Cook supporters, Sheldon adds the inevitable "but": "Fortunately for history and for Frederick Albert Cook, there is evidence observed and gathered during the summer of 1908 in the High Canadian Arctic which strongly indicates that the pack ice in the Crown Prince Gustav Sea and Hassel Sound did in fact melt extensively and that there was much open water there in the Summer of 1908 . . . exactly as Cook reported."

**U2** This "evidence," we are told, comes from the Canadian sea captain Joseph Bernier, who was surveying the Sverdrup Islands that summer in the steamer *Arctic* in order to assert Canada's sovereignty over them. Sheldon tells us that Bernier found the conditions along his route far more fortunate than those reported by Edward Parry in 1819-20 or Robert McClure in 1851, both of whom encountered much more ice in their attempts to navigate

<sup>112</sup>See *C&P*, *The Polar Notebooks*, pp.893-900.

<sup>113</sup>Borup's notes of what the Eskimos said, taken down in Greenland in 1909, mention that Cook went to the northwest and that they noted a westerly drift there, but deny that he went to the Pole. These notes were taken *before* there was any opportunity for anyone on Peary's expedition to have read Cook's account of his journey where he first mentioned the westerly drift. As noted above (§L16), Ted Heckathorn cites these same notes as evidence in Cook's favor.

the Northwest Passage. He infers from Bernier's report "from Lancaster Sound west to McClure Strait that the pack ice had largely melted and that even in segments of the Passage where ice was generally solid and thick, such as McClure Strait, there was open water." Sheldon then cites the ice-less photograph of McClure Strait taken by Bernier on August 27, 1908, showing open water "as far as the eye can see" as "clear and convincing evidence that the ice conditions in the Canadian High Arctic were most unusual in that summer." Yet, at the same time, he acknowledges that "Bernier did not get as far north as Crown Prince Gustav Sea and thus there is no report from him specifically on ice conditions there." So much for the "evidence" being "clear and convincing."

**U3** Sheldon quotes Bernier: "No ice was visible to the westward, but heavy Arctic ice was seen to the southward; we were then about half-way through McClure Strait . . ." And indeed, Bernier turned back at the middle of McClure Strait for winter quarters, a point nowhere near the area critical to the Cook narrative. Fortunately for history, but not for Frederick Albert Cook, Bernier's report still has an important implication.

**U4** The same source that Sheldon accepts "without question" concerning the typical ice conditions in all of the areas through which Cook passed,<sup>114</sup> says this about ice conditions in McClure Strait in a typical year:

The ice in the western end of this strait moves throughout the winter because it is in contact with the ice in the Arctic Ocean. Early in July the ice in the western third of the strait has broken and this break-up continues toward the east until the entire area may be broken by late August.

**U5** In other words, even today, *ice-free conditions are typical from the middle of McClure Strait westward at the time of the year Bernier was there in 1908*. Notice that Bernier says that although the strait ahead was ice-free to the west, heavy ice was visible to the south. Therefore, the ice conditions he reported were not "most unusual" at all; *they were typical*. Of the other places Sheldon mentions that Bernier visited, our unquestionable source says Lancaster Sound breaks up entirely early in the summer. Cook himself confirmed this. It was Cook's intention to try to link up with the Scottish whalers, who visited the sound nearly every year, and return to Europe with them. Again, 1908 was *typical*. Viscount Melville Sound is generally clear of ice in August, with the center breaking last, and Barrow Strait usually begins to break up at the beginning of August and has an ice-free passage along the shore of Bathurst Island, but rarely is ice free in the south. In short, 1908 seems to have been a *typical year* in all these areas, and as Sheldon himself acknowledges, in a *typical year* the ice never breaks up in June in the areas Cook said he was adrift and prevented from reaching his outward caches by large expanses of open water. Therefore, as Sheldon himself says, "On this basis, it would follow logically that Cook was not in the Crown Prince Gustav Sea at the position which he specifies on June 13, 1908."

## V Randall J. Oszcewski's Review

**V1** To this date, the only dissenting view of my book from its own that FACS has printed is that of Randall J. Oszcewski, a Canadian student of the Arctic.<sup>115</sup>

**V2** Unlike FACS's, his is a true review of *Cook & Peary*, and in my opinion, the best written by anyone. However, in printing it, Russell Gibbons (he of the "journalistic standards") ran six banner excerpts throughout its text, each of them taken out of context to imply the worst possible connotations from Oszcewski's favorable text. What further evidence would anyone need of the blatant bias of this group of boosters, family members and implicated partisans which make up the Frederick A. Cook Society? Anyone reading

<sup>114</sup>Lindsay, D.G. *Arctic Islands Sea Ice Movements: Analysis from Ice Reconnaissance and Satellite Imagery Data*. A.P.O.A. Project No.92, Ottawa: January 1976.

<sup>115</sup>*Polar Priorities*, v.17 [1997], pp.39-41.

those banners would think the review was negative. However, all who read Mr. Oszcewski's entire review will not possibly miss that he thought very highly of my book. In the interest of "balance," here is a brief excerpt to illustrate to FACS what a real review looks like:

In the first part of the book, Bryce reviews the lives and exploring careers of two extraordinary men. . . . I cannot do justice to these 750 pages in a few sentences. I can only say that although I longed desperately to peek ahead at the final third of this eagerly-awaited book, Bryce's story of Cook's rise and spectacular fall and of Peary's frustrations and failings, held me firmly to its pages.

Part Two is a fascinating and disturbing mystery story. The evidence, old and new, is presented and examined. . . . [Here] Bryce finally lays out his cards. It looks to me like he has a winning hand.

Must Cook supporters "read 'em and weep," or is the game not really over? Some of the regulars at the table claim it was a misdeal. Russell Gibbons, Sheldon Cook and Ted Heckathorn panned the book in the April issue of the *Frederick A. Cook Society Membership News*. They questioned Bryce's methodology and his ability to be as impartial and objective as he claimed to be. I do not agree with their tone of general condemnation. Robert Bryce's book most certainly deserves to be read and studied by everyone who is interested in this great controversy and the lives of two great men.

**V3** Oszcewski goes on to lodge his own criticisms against *Cook & Peary*, some of them valid.<sup>116</sup> In the end, however, he concludes: "No polar collection should be without [*Cook & Peary*]. Besides being a fascinating story, it is a rich source of information and controversial conclusions that should fuel lively debates for years to come. Don't be left out."

## W Summary and a Conclusion

**W1** Now that the confusing facts of the Polar Controversy have been untangled and the falsity of Dr. Cook's claims have been documented by evidence, much of it from Cook's own hands, it is hard to believe that anyone can any longer believe that Frederick Cook reached either the summit of Mount McKinley or the North Pole. It is also difficult to believe that anyone will ever again take a simplistic view, good or bad, of the very complex man who made these fabulous claims. However, no one should expect the defenders of Dr. Cook to admit defeat.

**W2** In his opening remarks to FACS's *Membership News* [April 1997], Russell Gibbons states that he has marshaled more than 100 years of research and publication experience to write a three-part "critical review," which dismisses my book as biased and inaccurate. This is perfectly understandable. Imagine the resulting unwillingness to accept, after acknowledging spending more than an average human lifetime without being able to discern fact from fiction, that all that effort has been wasted on belief in a man who was unworthy of it. It must be very difficult to admit to an aggregate 100 years of delusion. Certainly no one in their position would welcome the resolution of the Polar controversy as revealed in *Cook & Peary*. Given this and FACS's "critical review," it is safe to say that partisans like its three critics will never admit their error. "There will be a 'Cook Party' to the end of time," one editor declared in 1909, "no matter how strong the evidence brought against him in the future, no matter if he made public confession to fraud . . . this sentiment of personal devotion and championship once aroused is one of the most powerful and indestructible of human motives."<sup>117</sup>

<sup>116</sup>He is the only reviewer to point out in print an important factual error in the book; however, when corrected, it actually *strengthens the case against Frederick Cook*, instead of diminishing the book's credibility.

<sup>117</sup>"Psychology of the Cook Fake," *Independent*, December 30, 1909, pp.1513-14.

**W3** But the evidence in *Cook & Peary* offers any non-partisan, open-minded person the opportunity to decide individually the true merits of Frederick Cook's claims for the first time, and it will always offer that opportunity to anyone wishing to do so. Once read, now, or a century from now, for any objective reader, the Polar Controversy will be resolved. The Cook partisans realize *that* is "the significance of this book to its members and associates." They should also realize that it will remain forever as an insurmountable impediment to FACS's goal "to gain official recognition for the scientific and geographic accomplishments of . . . Dr. Frederick Albert Cook." Now that *Cook & Peary, the Polar Controversy, Resolved*, exists, that can never happen.

**W4** The bankruptcy of the arguments of FACS's "critical review" doubly guarantees it. Its failure to refute even a single significant point of the documentary evidence that *Cook & Peary* contains only proves that the 100 years of biased research and baseless opinion Gibbons cites, which has been aimed at proving, at all costs, a predetermined outcome, no matter if all evidence weighs against it or if all reason would dictate another, is no match for 8 years spent by a professional researcher studying the primary sources in this near-century old dispute, all the while, as Dennis Rawlins says [*DIO* 7.3 ¶9 fn 42], "listening to the evidence, not talking to it."

**W5** This evidence said clearly that Cook was a fraud in his claims at Mount McKinley and the North Pole, and a generally dishonest man throughout his life. But it also said that he was a complex man of immense personal magnetism and charm; a near genius capable of uncommonly deep thoughts and unusual understanding of human psychology, and also that he was a real explorer with real, if not so spectacular as he claimed, achievements for which he should be given full credit.

## X Postscript: Of Real Historians, Real Editors and Real Librarians

**X1** *Cook & Peary* should have resolved the Polar Controversy. But it will never be resolved for some, because they do not want it to be resolved. Their empty and inaccurate arguments will never end, although in the wake of my book, the audience for them should be severely diminished. Though still unable to refute the book's evidence, Gibbons continues to attempt to cast doubt on my credentials to write it. In a piece entitled "Frederick A. Cook and 'Psychohistory': a discussion,"<sup>118</sup> the opening sentence is "'I am not a historian, but a librarian,' admitted Cook critic Robert M. Bryce after a scheduled exchange with Sheldon S.R. Cook" at the *Belgica* Symposium at Ohio State in September 1997.

**X2** The statement quoted was made voluntarily to correct a member of the symposium's audience who had made the logical assumption, based on my book, that I was an academically trained historian. But I have never claimed to be a historian, in the academic sense, to anyone, anywhere. In making the quoted statement, therefore, I did not "admit" to anything. I simply stated my true occupation. An admission would be Sheldon saying, "I am not a historian, but a lawyer." An admission would be if Ted Heckathorn said "I am not a polar historian; I am a real estate agent," since both bill themselves as the former everywhere they go without any additional disclaimer as to how they actually earn their livelihoods.

**X3** In the same article, Gibbons describes Sheldon, unambiguously, as a "long-time historian for the Society and a published advocate for the explorer's prior attainment of the North Pole." Perhaps Gibbons feels that it is better to pretend you are a historian than to "admit" you are a librarian, just as he pretends that publication in the house organ of FACS makes you a "published" author. I disagree; real historians and real editors with real integrity and real journalistic standards understand the invaluable rôle of librarians and respect their real professional research abilities. Rather than being arrogant, librarians are characteristically generous with their time and open in sharing their knowledge. As a result, librarians and archivists stand at the head of almost every acknowledgement list in

<sup>118</sup>*FACS Membership News* v.4, no.3 [December 1997], p.6.



Figure 5:

The full, uncropped version of Cook's "Bradley Land" photograph. Original print: 3 1/4 x 5 5/8 in. Courtesy the Library of Congress.  
[Allegedly taken at 85°N, 102°W, where no real land exists within 200 mi. The Eskimos said (Herbert 1989 p.316) that the land in the photo is west Axel Heiberg Land.]  
[Print found at the Library of Congress by Rob't Bryce. For *DIO* inductions from the image, see below at ¶6 fn 65.]

any serious non-fiction book. That is because real historians know that librarians make the writing of such books possible for them.

**X4** The acknowledgement by David McCullough [formerly a Cook sympathizer: see *DIO* 2.2 fn 22], in his Pulitzer Prize winning *Truman*, might be considered a good example of what real historians think of real librarians:

The staff archivists, librarians, and other specialists at the Harry S. Truman Library have been helpful in countless ways, instructive, patient, generous with their time, generous with ideas and advice . . . . Though they are in no way responsible for any errors of fact or judgment in these pages, there is no part of the book in which they have not played a rôle, but in what they have helped to uncover in the library collection and in what they themselves know of Truman's life from years of interest and study. . . . I am grateful to them all.<sup>119</sup>

I am grateful to my fellow professionals as well; that is why I dedicated my book to librarians and archivists.

**X5** Although I am not a polar historian, I am a very thorough scholar of the incident in polar history that has come to be called the Polar Controversy. My evidence of this is represented in the content of my book, and especially in the 2,040 source notes it contains and from which its text was constructed. I am confident that real historians and scholars, now and in the future, will be impressed, not by its bulk, but by its substance.<sup>120</sup>

## Y Finis, but Never a Finish

**Y1** Even my declination to respond to the many unwarranted statements made in FACS's publications up until now has been termed arrogance, when it was simply a practical decision on my part, considering the thankless task of responding to such a voluminous barrage of baseless innuendo and fallacious reasoning. Nothing I have had to say here will make any difference to the partisans of FACS, anyway. Nor did I write this response for them. Truth does not matter to the faithful of FACS, but it may to others.

**Y2** In his message to the Society's members in the April 1997 issue of *Membership News*, FACS's president, Warren B. Cook, Sr., predicted in the wake of its criticisms of my book, "naturally, we will be accused ourselves of partiality." If the trend of the many letters I have received is any indication, this is exactly what people who have read both my book and their "review" think. I will quote just one:

"Russell Gibbons' review . . . was and is nonsense. He avoided all mention of Cook's deceit in his review and is critical of you for not referring to the secondary authors. He is dead wrong. Your book has merit because it is based on the documentary sources themselves, the writings, diaries, field notes and observations of Cook and Peary, many of them in print for the first time . . . . Your book is a great documentary source on Peary and Cook. The research is amazing, the writing style excellent, the conclusions fair and logical."<sup>121</sup>

<sup>119</sup>*Cook & Peary* p.993.

<sup>120</sup>[Apparently they are impressed. Bryce was personally requested by the Librarian of Congress, the Honorable James H. Billington, to write a contribution dealing with his work with the Cook papers to be included in the special issue of the Library's journal, commemorating the Library of Congress's bicentennial: *Civilization* 7:53-68.]

<sup>121</sup>Letter Robert Fuit to RMB, no date, but postmarked October 8, 1998, possession of author, written in response to Gibbons's review in *Arctic* [v.50, no.4, December 1997, pp.369-370.], which is a condensed and toned down repetition of his views expressed in the "critical review." My rebuttal was published in *Arctic* in June 1998.

**Y3** Gibbons, in his most recent editorial, says my method of combating FACS is to "reduce your opponents as off-the-wall partisans or true-believers and zealots." I have not had to make that reduction; they prove what they are themselves by nearly every argument they make. The society's reputation, which had been on the rise recently with its creditable symposium mounted in co-operation with the Byrd Polar Research Center in 1993 and its subsequent placement of its portion of the Janet Vetter papers in the Ohio State University Archives, can't help but have been seriously compromised by the barrage of boosterism that each new issue of *Polar Priorities* contains in the wake of *Cook & Peary*.

**Y4** As I said in my introduction to *Cook & Peary, The Polar Controversy, Resolved*, "Those who are convinced need no conviction; those who have faith and believe do not need the truth," and the tripartite "critical review" of my book by FACS illustrates, if nothing else, the truth of my statement. In it, three faithful followers of Frederick A. Cook try to persuade their readers in four pages, without any original documentary support to the contrary, why those same readers should not believe the conclusions set out in detail in a 1,133 page book supported by 2,040 notes largely based on previously unavailable primary documentation, most of which none of these three have ever examined at all. Obviously, this was an unequal task, but no matter how much they had written and no matter how much documentation they had at their command, I feel confident that the unconvinced, having read both, could not agree with their interpretations of my book's methods or its content.

**Y5** By its very length and scope, by its thoroughness and the openness of its documentation, it leaves little room for selectivity, bias or falsehood to hide. Therefore this paper has not been a defense of my book, but an exposition of the desperate futility of the type of attacks made against it by FACS. I do not have to defend *Cook & Peary*. Its integrity speaks for itself. That is why I encourage anyone who is interested in the truth about Frederick A. Cook and the truth of what the society which bears his name has said about my book, to read *Cook & Peary* carefully and fully, then decide for himself whether my book is fair, based on solid evidence and comes to supportable conclusions or whether it is biased, incomplete or written with the preconceived purpose to vilify Frederick Cook as Russell W. Gibbons, Sheldon S.R. Cook and Ted Heckathorn variously claim.

**Y6** They are partisans, whose own biases are now starkly clear. For them, the Polar Controversy will never be resolved unless it is resolved in Dr. Cook's favor. But I did not write *Cook & Peary* for the partisans; they will never be convinced. As Franz Werfel said, "For those who believe, no proof is necessary; for those who do not believe, no proof is possible." No, I wrote it for everyone else for whom truth matters, no matter what the truth might be.

**Y7** Read *Cook & Peary* so you can decide for yourself. As Dr. Cook said at the end of his book, and as I might have said at the end of mine, "In this book I have stated my case, presented my proofs . . . . I shall be satisfied with your decision."

[*DIO* notice on Brad Washburn's long-awaited full analysis, *The Dishonorable Dr. Cook*, and the BBC series, "The Mountain Men".]

[In 2001 Autumn, the Mountaineers published *The Dishonorable Dr. Cook*, by Brad Washburn & Peter Cheric, a gorgeously illustrated book,<sup>122</sup> undoing Cook's McK hoax in expert detail, and including Brad's now-famous photographs, perfectly matching every one of the controversial 1906 photos in Cook's 1908 book.]

[BBC-TV has completed a 2001 film, "The Mountain Men", which checks out Cook's 1906 McKinley hoax, including a filmic-visit to the lofty top of Fake Peak, plus on-site vista-comparisons, verifying the Washburn-Carter-Okonek identifications of the sites of Cook's 1906 photos.]

<sup>122</sup>[*DIO* note: Data on the forthcoming Washburn-Cheric book: 192 pp, 80 photos, 8-page photo insert, 6 maps: ISBN 0-89886-804-1, \$29.95, www.mountaineersbooks.org, tel 800-553-4453. (The book's biographical section has some debts to uncited Bryce 1997; see, e.g., p.64 & Bryce p.428.)]