

Trent University Archives

Finding Aid - George Mellis Douglas fonds (79-002)

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George Mellis Douglas fonds

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Summary information

Repository:	Trent University Archives
Title:	George Mellis Douglas fonds
Reference code:	79-002
Date:	1928-1957 (creation)
Physical description:	5 cm of textual records 14 photographs 4 prints artifacts

Administrative history / Biographical sketch

Note

George Mellis Douglas was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1875. He moved with his family in 1883 to Northcote Farm on the shore of Katchiwano Lake north of Lakefield, Ontario. In 1900 George went to work for his cousin, James Douglas, who was president of the American Institute of Mining Engineers. In 1911, at the suggestion of his cousin James, an expedition to the Coppermine River and Arctic Sea was planned, and George Douglas along with his brother Lionel and Dr. August Sandberg made the trip. The purpose of the expedition was to search for minerals in the watershed of the Coppermine above the Arctic Circle. What George and his associates discovered were huge copper deposits. Although it was known that the deposits existed since the 18th century, they were much larger than was suspected. George was also one of the first Barren Land explorers to extensively photograph the North-West Territories and the Inuit who lived in the region. Over the following thirty years, Douglas led copper explorations to the shores of the Arctic Sea and around the edges of the Great Bear and Great Slave Lakes. George also wrote about his explorations in the Arctic. He published articles in several professional journals and in 1914 he wrote "Lands Forlorn", an account of the 1911-12 expedition. George Mellis Douglas died at his home near Lakefield, Ontario in 1963.

Custodial history

The fonds was previously in the custody of Mrs. George Douglas until it was donated to Trent University Archives.

Scope and content

This fonds consists of: correspondence with Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Clifford Wilson and others relating to Arctic explorations; several photographs including some of the construction of the Peterborough Lift Lock

and of downtown Peterborough, Ontario circa 1900; and newspaper clippings of book reviews. Also included are artifacts retrieved by Douglas from the area of Coppermine, NWT.

Notes

Title notes

- **Source of title proper:** Title based on the creator of the fonds

Immediate source of acquisition

The fonds was donated by Mrs. George Douglas.

Restrictions on access

None.

Related material

Associated material located at the Library and Archives Canada.

For related records see the Kenneth Kidd Native Studies photographic collection (95-024).

Accruals

Addition to the fonds includes 90-008.

Note [General]

Received with this fonds were artifacts from the area of Coppermine, NWT. They are located in the Vault. (See list of items at the end of the finding aid).

Note [General]

Note: Of interest to researchers is the book, *Unflinching: a Diary of Tragic Adventure* by Edgar Christian, of which two copies are located in Special Collections, Bata Library (see: Christian, Edgar. *Unflinching: a Diary of Tragic Adventure*; with an Introduction and Conclusion by B. Dew Roberts; and a Preface by Major Hon. J.J. Astor, M.P. 1st ed. London: John Murray, 1937).

Copy 1 was George M. Douglas's personal copy, with its red pencil annotations (see F 5905 .C55).

Copy 2 (see F 5905 .C55 copy 2) includes annotations in red and black pencil. Richard Finnie transcribed George M. Douglas's notes from his (Douglas's) personal copy of the book into this copy in red pencil.

The other black pencil notes may be by James C. Critchell-Bullock. This may be Finnie's personal copy since the book was found in an area where Finnie lived in California. Perhaps it was part of his estate. At the beginning, the book is inscribed "Richard Finnie 1938". There is additional material dated as late as April 1970. It was acquired by the Thomas J. Bata Library in August 2009.

Interspersed within the pages of the book are the following typescript pages. They have been copied to lessen wear from usage on the book.

A brief biography of Finnie dated April 1970

A page entitled: FROM GEORGE M. DOUGLAS'S COPY OF UNFLINCHING

4 pages entitled: Notes on UNFLINCHING by J.C. Critchell-Bullock and ending with James C. Critchell-Bullock, London, England 2nd October 1937 (from annotated copy of UNFLINCHING sent to V. Stefansson)

2 pages entitled: UNFLINCHING and ending James C. Critchell-Bullock, 2/10/37

3 pages entitled: GEORGE M. DOUGLAS'S COPY OF "UNFLINCHING": Notes from H.S. Wilson's letter, dated Nov. 9th, 1928.

2 pages entitled: EXCERPTS FROM STEFANSSON LETTERS and ending with Richard Finnie ... April 1970.

The annotations and notes comment on the Introduction and Conclusion and not the text of the diary itself.

Note [General]

#Box listing

##Box 1

###Folder 1:

Correspondence mainly between George M. Douglas and Vilhjalmur Stefansson

1. Douglas's copy of a letter to Stefansson from L.T. Burwash on Baillie Island dated Oct. 11, 1928 (the original dated Aug. 17, 1928) describing a four day gale which raised havoc with the shipping
2. Letter from Stefansson to Douglas, dated Dec. 20, 1932 concerning Charlie Klengenberg's (Christian Klengenberg) autobiography Klengenberg of the Arctic in which Klengenberg alleged that Stefansson had belittled him in his book Hunters of the Great North
3. A note dated Dec. 19, 1938, concerning the publishing of the Explorers Club special edition of Stefansson's Unsolved Mysteries of the Arctic. Some comment also on the Peary- Cook controversy about who reached the North Pole first
4. Stefansson to Douglas, dated March 22, 1939, regarding Douglas's annotations in copy of Edgar Christian's diary Unflinching
5. Douglas to Stefansson dated Sept. 22, 1950. Further comment on Douglas's annotations in Unflinching and discussion on John Hornby - Edgar Christian incident
6. Presentation copy from Stefansson to Douglas of Stefansson's book review of John Rae's Correspondence with the Hudson's Bay Company on Arctic Exploration, 1844-1855. Much on the disappearance of Sir John Franklin. The review is dated April 13, 1954
7. Douglas to Stefansson, dated June 6, 1954, commenting on Stefansson's article on the John Rae Correspondence and the loss of Sir John Franklin and his crew
8. Douglas to Clifford Wilson, editor of The Beaver commenting on Stefansson's review of the Rae Correspondence, dated June 6, 1954

###Folder 2:

Correspondence between George Douglas and Clifford Wilson, editor of The Beaver, 1952-1957

1. Douglas to Wilson, Dec. 6, 1952, commenting on various books on the Arctic that had been published recently. Also a long discussion on Robert E. Peary's claim to have reached the North Pole
2. Wilson to Douglas, Aug. 27, 1953. More discussion of Peary and the North Pole
3. Douglas to Wilson, Jan. 29, 1953. Commenting on the Peary-Cook controversy
4. Douglas to Wilson, May 19, 1954, congratulating Wilson on the excellence of his book North of 55
5. Wilson to Douglas, May 26, 1954. More discussion of North of 55
6. Douglas to Wilson, June 6, 1954. Further comment of North of 55 and references to George Whalley
7. Douglas to Wilson, March 3, 1956. Discussion of a book review in the Jan. 28 issue of the Times Literary Supplement of the Samuel Black volume in the Hudson's Bay Record Society series. Also an extract of a letter written by Peter Deane to Samuel Black dated McKenzie River, Jan. 31, 1829
8. Douglas to Wilson, Nov. 10, 1957. Thanking Wilson for an inscribed copy of his book Pageant of the North. Mentions Edward Preble, James Mackinlay and Ernest Thompson Seton

###Folder 3:

Miscellaneous correspondence. Includes letter from Douglas's brother Lionel, a sea captain, dated at sea, June 18, 1927, on board his ship S.S. Empress of Asia. It contains a description and a photograph of

the great explorer Roald Amundsen, who was a passenger. There is also a letter to Douglas, dated Dec. 10, 1953 and probably from G.H. Needler, criticizing General Middleton's leadership during the Riel Rebellion of 1885 and his attitude toward the North West Mounted Police.

###Folder 4:

Miscellaneous postcards, photographs, maps, newspaper clippings mainly containing book reviews of a number of books on Arctic exploration. A copy of J.C. Critchell Bullock's notes on Edgar Christian's Unflinching. Extracts from a letter by H.B. Wilson dated Nov. 9, 1928, describing the discovery and the camp of the ill-fated John Hornby party. The checklist of the G.M. Douglas Arctic Collection

##Boxes 2 and 3 (in vault)

(Detailed list of artifacts below provided through the generosity of Laura Peers)

Artifacts from Coppermine, N.W.T.

Mittens: 3 (2 as pr + 1 lone): thin caribou hide, stitched with heavy thread; pattern markings drawn in ? ink visible on thumb of one of the pair as a blue line. All 3 mittens have moderate gauntlets extending past wrist.

Babiche game bag: finely netted hide strips with decorative horizontal lines in dark colour; end gussets are of solid hide panels, with gusset seams outlined in commercial heavy woven linen/cotton striped material (dark ground with lighter stripes); panel on top all the way around bag is edged top and bottom of panel with mauve printed cotton strip; wide hide ties on top of bag. No staining indicating use. All hide looks to be caribou (or very thin moose); smoked.

Waxed cotton [ditty/wash] bag with stenciled initials G.M.D., machine sewn, drawstring with cotton twill tape at top.

2 arrow/spear tips (detachable end parts). Heads look to be recycled steel. Bone shafts. *copper rivets.

Moccasins: 1 pr, plain smoked [caribou] hide with vamps outlined in coloured bands of thread.

Knife: bone handle. *copper blade, heavy. Oversized. Handle very polished and worn with use.

Small hide bag, smoked [caribou] hide

Bone tool fragment: round, with polished tip. Bigger than standard awl and not as sharply pointed.

Small bone fragment, flattened in profile, polished with use/wear.

Small ulu with steel blade and bone handle, with cord joining to a curved flattened bone with decorative carving, polished with use.

Dog whip. Wooden handle, plaited hide cord. Whip bound to handle with rawhide, now a bit loose.

Piece of wood, notched both ends, blackened at one end.

Other notes

- **Publication status:** Published

Access points

- Textual records (documentary form)
- Photographs (documentary form)
- Prints (documentary form)
- Objects (documentary form)
- Northern Studies (subject)
- Indigenous Studies (subject)
- Arctic (place)

- Peterborough Lift Lock (place)