



ArchivesSpace

Josephine Diebitsch Peary papers, 1861-2003

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Maine Women Writers Collection

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Summary Information

Repository:	Maine Women Writers Collection
Creator:	Peary, Josephine Diebitsch, 1863-1955
Title:	Josephine Diebitsch Peary papers
ID:	0283
Date [inclusive]:	1861-2003
Physical Description:	9 linear feet 338 folders, 5 artifacts
Language of the Material:	English

Preferred Citation

Josephine Diebitsch Peary papers, Maine Women Writers Collection, University of New England, Portland, Maine

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Biographical/Historical Note

Josephine Diebitsch Peary was born May 22, 1863 in Washington, D.C. She was the daughter of Herman Henry Diebitsch of Prussia and Magdalena Augusta Schmid Diebitsch of Saxony. Her father was a clerk at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. Josephine was raised in a loving family that encouraged her to explore the world. In 1885, while attending dancing school in Washington, Josephine met Robert Edwin Peary, the future Admiral who would lead arguably the first successful expedition to the North Pole. Three years later, on August 11, 1888, Robert and Josephine married and began a life of discovery together. Josephine Peary's eagerness to explore the world prompted her to accompany her husband on his second expedition to Greenland, from 1891-1892. Josephine Peary was an active participant in all her voyages to Greenland, showing her talent as a hunter of reindeer, ptarmigan, and other game for food and clothing. She also provided hearty meals to the entire party, and on holidays made a special feast to lift the spirits of the crew who could not be with their families. The letters she sent to her husband, while he remained in the Arctic, show the unconditional love and support she gave him throughout all of his endeavors. He gave her much of the credit for all of his achievements. During the 1891-1892 expedition, Josephine Peary wrote *My Arctic Journal* (1893), which provided the world an accurate, elaborate picture of Arctic geography and Inuit culture. In 1893, Josephine again accompanied her husband to Greenland, and during this journey, she gave birth to a daughter, Marie Ahnighito Peary, less than thirteen degrees

from the North Pole. Marie was nicknamed "Snow Baby" and would remain famous all her life for this distinction. Her middle name honored the Inuit woman who made Marie's first fur suit. Josephine and Marie Peary made another voyage to Greenland in 1897, and in 1900, when she received word that Robert's toes were frozen and had to be amputated, Josephine quickly set sail with a crew on the *Windward*. An iceberg damaged the vessel, and caused Josephine and the crew to spend the winter in Greenland, 300 miles south of her husband's camp. During that winter, Josephine met Allakasingwah, Peary's pregnant Inuit lover. No matter how much Peary's infidelity privately pained her, Josephine remained a staunch public supporter of her husband throughout her life. Robert joined Josephine in Greenland on May 6, 1901. A final voyage in 1902 to visit the Admiral completed Josephine's journeys to Greenland. The following year, she gave birth to a son Robert E. Peary, Jr. She published two additional books as a result of her Arctic experiences, *The Snow Baby* (1901) and *Children of the Arctic* (1903). After Admiral Peary reached the Pole in 1909, the Pearys spent most of their time at their summer home built on Eagle Island, off Harpswell in Casco Bay. During the winter months, they lived in Washington, D.C. During her lifetime, Josephine Peary was active in many organizations. She was a charter member of the National Geographic Society, the Philadelphia Geographic Society, the Appalachian Mountain Club, and an honorary member of the Woman Geographers. On May 6, 1955, the National Geographic Society awarded Josephine Peary its highest honor, their Medal of Achievement. This solid-gold, custom-designed award is one that very few women have ever received. After Admiral Peary's death in 1920, she settled into a permanent home on Baxter Boulevard in Portland. She made a few public appearances, mostly to advocate for her husband's achievements or to tell stories of the Arctic. She spent most of her time with her children and grandchildren. She died on December 19, 1955.

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Collection Scope and Content

The collection consists of a large variety of historic items including four important scrapbooks compiled by Rear Admiral and Mrs. Peary's daughter, Marie Peary Stafford, which place in chronological order, papers and photographs telling the story of their lives, the majority of the contents focusing on Josephine Peary. As in the scrapbooks, the collection contains letters of correspondence between Josephine and Robert as early as 1884 through 1910, publication and speech manuscripts, early personal and historic photographs of all family members, travel diaries, newspaper and magazine articles, ephemera, and much biographical information. Items of interest among the artifacts from the Pearys' lives and travel are pieces of personal and household silver, textiles, some which relate to the family's Arctic experience, and a shotgun belonging to Admiral Peary to name a few. The four scrapbooks focus on the lives of Robert and Josephine Peary, the first one beginning with photographs as early as 1861 and concluding with the fourth scrapbook as a memorial to Mrs. Peary after her death in 1955. Throughout the scrapbooks, clippings, diary entries written by Josephine, photographs, ephemera and a large amount of correspondence to and from Josephine Peary document the family's remarkable achievements and network of contacts such as the National Geographic Society. There is also material relating to the books published by Mrs. Peary about the family's life while in the Arctic, mementos, both personal and professional, historic correspondence including Peary's letter to her husband relating news of

their daughter, Francine's, death, documentation of a tourmaline necklace, and citations from National Geographic.

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Arrangement

This collection is organized into three series: I. Josephine Diebitsch Peary Files; II. Scrapbooks; III. Artifacts

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Maine Women Writers Collection

Abplanalp Library
University of New England
716 Stevens Avenue
Portland, Maine 04103

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URL: <http://www.une.edu/mwwc>

Access

Collection is open for research.

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Related Materials

Related Materials

Marie Ahnighito Peary collection, Maine Women Writers Collection, University of New England, Portland, Maine

Josephine Diebitsch Peary papers, National Archives, College Park, Maryland

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Controlled Access Headings

- Explorers
- Women explorers
- Genealogy
- Inuit
- Greenland
- Portland (Me.)
- Eagle Island (Cumberland County, Me.)
- Arctic regions
- Arctic regions -- Discovery and exploration
- Arctic regions -- Description and travel
- Greenland -- Description and travel
- Manuscripts
- Correspondence
- Photographs
- Book jackets
- Ephemera
- Clippings
- Obituaries
- Negatives
- Reproductions
- Scrapbooks
- Memorabilia
- Diaries
- Invitations
- Menus
- Greeting cards
- Peary, Josephine Diebitsch, 1863-1955
- Peary, Josephine Diebitsch, 1863-1955

- Peary, Robert E. (Robert Edwin), 1856-1920
- Peary, Marie Ahnighito, 1893-1978
- National Geographic Society (U.S.)

Collection Inventory

Josephine Diebitsch Peary Files		
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Manuscript for Children of the Arctic, undated	Box 1	Folder 001a
Letters from JDP to REP, 1900 March-April 3	Box 1	Folder 001b
Letter from MAP to REP, circa 1900	Box 1	Folder 001c
Letters to JDP from her mother, also other relatives, 1900-1943	Box 1	Folder 001d
Newspaper article transcription re: Harpswell, 1907	Box 1	Folder 001e
Autograph album; tintype, 1878-1881	Box 1	Folder 002
Program for Bowdoin's engineering exhibit drawings, 1876	Box 1	Folder 003
Photographs: J. Peary in her home (6 views), circa 1890-1899 <u>Digital Object:</u> Josephine Peary at piano <u>Digital Object:</u> Josephine Peary reclining by window <u>Digital Object:</u> Josephine Peary seated, at home <u>Digital Object:</u> Josephine Peary reading by window <u>Digital Object:</u> Josephine Peary posing with furs <u>Digital Object:</u> Josephine Peary posing at home	Box 1	Folder 004a
Photographs: interior of Peary home (7 views), circa 1890-1899 <u>Digital Object:</u> Interior view of window in Peary home <u>Digital Object:</u> Peary fireplace <u>Digital Object:</u> Interior of Peary home <u>Digital Object:</u> Interior corner of Peary home <u>Digital Object:</u> Interior of Peary home <u>Digital Object:</u> Photographs in the Peary home <u>Digital Object:</u> Furs in the Peary home	Box 1	Folder 004b
Photographs: JDP in arctic furs; 2 of JDP in elegant attire, undated	Box 1	Folder 004c
Photographs: two 3" views of JDP and others in outside setting attire, undated	Box 1	Folder 004d
Photographs: Lt. and Mrs. Peary, Lt. Peary, family portrait, circa 1890-1910	Box 1	Folder 004e

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Leather case which held the photos of Marie from the Christmas package, 1896-97	Box 1	Folder 005b
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Josephine Peary Diary (Photocopy courtesy of the U.S. National Archives), 1891 June 6-July 17

Box 2 Folder 044

Photo of Josephine's apartment, Baxter Blvd., Portland, ME, 2010

Box 2 Folder 045

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