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## Guide to the Henry Grier Bryant Papers

**Creator:** Henry Grier Bryant (1859 – 1932)

**Dates:** 1892, 1894, 1906-1907, 1910

**Quantity:** 16 volumes (appx. 1,000 p.)

**Call Phrase:** Bryant Papers

**Provenance:** Donated by Mrs. Richard C. Bull. ISM number: 1972.23

**Processed by:** Megan Hahn Fraser, 2004 (1892, 1894 volumes)  
Judy Stevenson, 2007 (1906-1907, 1910 volumes)

**Biographical note:** Henry Grier Bryant was trained as a lawyer, but never practiced, preferring instead to use his personal wealth to fulfill his ambitions as an explorer. In 1891, Bryant achieved fame in his circle for his expedition to the Grand Falls of Labrador. Bryant was second in command of the Peary Relief Expedition aboard the *Kite*, organized by the Geographic Society of Philadelphia, which resupplied Robert Peary's encampment in Greenland. In 1894, he led the Peary Auxiliary Expedition aboard the *Falcon*. When not exploring, Bryant lived in Philadelphia. Between 1897 and his death in 1932 he served many terms as President of the Geographic Society of Philadelphia.

**Scope and content:** The collection consists of notebooks kept while Bryant was second in command of the Peary Relief Expedition in 1892, and head of the Peary Auxiliary Expedition in 1894, as well as notebooks kept while Bryant traveled around the world in 1906 and 1907, and while he traveled in Northern Europe during the summer of 1910.

The material in this collection is divided into sub-groups by chronology and subject.

**Peary Expedition Notebooks:** The first notebook in the collection dates from the embarkation of the ship *Miranda* from Brooklyn on its way to meet the *Kite* in St. John's, Newfoundland, June 27, 1892. Bryant gives brief descriptions of his companions, his living quarters and how he becomes accustomed to the sea voyage, the weather, and the supplies on board.

The number of rifles & shot-guns displayed together with the quantity of pistols & murderous looking knives exhibited by some members of the expedit [sic] would warrant a disinterested observer in assuming that we had warlike designs on Greenland (July 7, 1892).

After arrival in Newfoundland and transfer to the *Kite*, a barkentine whaler that is to take them to Greenland, Bryant remarks on the changes in atmosphere and weather as the ship draws closer to its destination.

We have hitherto displayed our regular lights during the brief night of this region... the Arctic Circle will admit us to the realm of constant daylight during our visit, and no ship will be encountered on our course (July 9, 1892).

Several of Bryant's entries refer to previous expeditions to the area and their relative successes or failures. One evening aboard the *Kite*, Bryant and others have a long conversation with the ship's captain, Richard Pike, the former captain of the ship *Proteus*, which was engaged by the U. S. Navy to relieve Adolphus Greeley's expedition to the same area in 1883. *Proteus* was crushed by heavy ice floes in Smith Sound, and Pike was summoned to appear before a Board of Inquiry. Bryant's entry relates Pike's recollections of testifying before the Board and his displeasure with the proceedings.

In addition to aiding Peary, one of the missions of the expedition was to supply items such as clothing, household goods, iron and wood for kayaks to the Eskimos. Bryant comments on his encounters with the natives:

We have learned to put a high estimate on the honesty of these people. Although our numerous trinkets were scattered about loosely during our stay nothing was purloined altho' the temptation must have been strong.... I shall never forget the day when I enacted the part of Santa Claus to these poor, uncontaminated "Huskies." All of these so-called Arctic Highlanders were dirty and smell abominably and the insides of their tepees were most filthy; but their kindness and consideration for each other was most delightful (July 23, 1892).

The expedition proceeded successfully until the day that John M. Verhoeff, mineralogist and meteorologist, failed to return from a three-day excursion to collect specimens. The explorers set out on a search and rescue mission, and although they found some footprints and scraps of a label from a can of food, there was no sign of Verhoeff. They agreed that they had done all they could do, and must head back.

We have done a lot of tramping over these dreary ice fields during the week just passed. I for one would not have escaped the ordeal if I could, and yet I never undertook and carried out anything with so settled an impression of its futility (August 23, 1892).

The notebook labeled “Book no. 2” (July 18 – August 1892) contains a map drawn by Peary “to illustrate his route of previous day [August 19, 1892] in search of Verhoff (*sic*).”

When the *Kite* puts in at St. John’s the party learns of the devastating fire that had swept through the city shortly after their departure for Greenland. Despite the majority of the city being in ruins, residents still come out to greet the arrival of the ship. “The presence of Mrs. Peary on the bridge was a gratifying sight to all the townspeople who knew our mission to the North had been successful” (September 11, 1892).

The expedition party soon left Newfoundland and arrived home in Philadelphia on September 23, where Bryant’s journals from this period end.

The remaining four volumes in the collection are Bryant’s journals of his experiences leading the Peary Auxiliary Expedition to Greenland in 1894. The first entry in the first volume explains that he lost the notebook in which he had been writing since leaving Brooklyn on June 20, so the journal begins as the ship *Falcon* is 180 miles southwest of Cape Desolation.

Bryant makes reference to his previous trip to the area, comparing his impressions of the landscape and hopes for the outcome of the journey.

One of his tasks is to assist fellow explorer S. J. Entriken with compiling a comparative vocabulary of Eskimo and English words. Entriken has given him a list of words to gather from the natives. “A great many words in this list I will never be able to obtain Eskimo equivalents for: for example, Alligator [and] Honey” (July 21, 1894).

The notebooks include a brief description of Peary’s headquarters at Anniversary Lodge, and the living conditions of Peary, his wife and baby daughter.

Peary asks those in the party for volunteers to stay another winter, but is unable to persuade anyone. Bryant characterizes Peary as:

[D]esperately determined to carry out his plan of crossing the ice cap and says he could remain alone in safety and health in his present quarters, so much does he count on his ability to adapt himself to native life and so confident is he of mastering the subject (August 3, 1894).

Rarely, Bryant deviates from the matter-of-fact and waxes fanciful in his descriptions of the area: “Fantastic ice forms inland & to the North suggesting the spires and temples of a mysterious city not made with hands. All under the pale arctic light of midnight & in a silence which seemed eternal & unchangeable” (August 9, 1894).

The expedition sets out for Jones Sound, an area previously unresearched, but is thwarted by the ice and snowy weather. “This impassible barrier of ice confronts us on the

threshold of the unknown regions and again our hopes of doing original work are shattered.” Forced to abandon their plan, Bryant writes, “Now the question of original work in that region is definitely settled and I have lost much interest in the rest of the voyage although I will do all I can to make it a success” (August 10, 1894).

At the end of the voyage, the explorers make courtesy calls on Danish officials in Godthaab. As on the previous voyage, the ship stops in St. John’s for provisions before sailing to Philadelphia.

The final volume concludes as the ship is close to home. Bryant writes on September 24, 1894 off Delaware lightship, “Our voyage is almost ended and I for one am heartily thankful that we have been permitted to gain a certain measure of success and to return home in safety.”

The volumes also include a few lists of expenses, itineraries, drawings and clippings. “Notebook No. 2,” dated July 1894, includes 8 leaves titled “Notes on the Eskimos by S. J. Entriken.”

**Item list:**

Notebook, June 1892

Notebook, July 18 – August 1892

Notebook, August – September 1892

Notebook, June 20 – July 25, 1894

Notebook, July 1894

Notebook, July 30 – August 15, 1894

Notebook, September 1894

**World Tour Notebooks:** The first notebook documents Bryant’s departure from New York City on a first-class tour of the world conducted by Captain Higgins (referred to as “Capt. H”). The tour group’s itinerary is to sail across the Atlantic, through the Mediterranean to India, up through Asia to Japan, and finally to sail back across the Pacific to America. Bryant writes, “I have lived to see the realization of my desire to circle the globe in one grand tour sailing from East to West.”

The tour begins with a steamer trip from New York to Paris, then into the Mediterranean Sea, past Italy through the Straits of Messina, to Port Said in Egypt. Here the party encounters the US Battleship *Ohio* while passing through the canal into the Gulf of Suez.

We came on deck in time to see the stately battleship *Ohio* glide by, her decks crowded with bluejackets looking formidable & trim. We 8 waved our greeting and felt a thrill at the imposing sight.

The tour continues through the Red Sea, stopping briefly at Djibouti, Abyssinia (Ethiopia), before sailing into the Indian Ocean and arriving at Colombo, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) on November 14, 1906.

The second notebook begins in India on November 30, 1906. The party travels by land from the southern point of India, up to Bombay, on to Agra and Delhi, then over to Calcutta, visiting a number of picturesque ruins. On January 4, 1907, they sail for Rangoon, Burma (Myanmar), where they attend the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting of the Indian Congress.

In the third notebook, the party continues from Rangoon, sailing through the Straits of Malacca to Singapore, then boarding the steamer *La Seyne* for Indonesia. Mountain climbing is a theme throughout Bryant's journals, and in Java, Bryant, Capt. Higgins, and another party member ascend a volcano at Tosari.

Breathless but expectant we gradually neared the rim of the crater which all the while had been expelling a great column of black brown steam and deep continuous detonations. Soon we were on the steep narrow sandy brim and gazing into the pit below where an opening perhaps 30 or 40 ft in diameter belched out a continuous mass of volcanic steam accompanied by a loud rumbling sound. The sense of power was overawing...

Bryant's party is frequently invited to meet with various foreign officials and dignitaries. In the city of Soerakarta, the group is received by a prince of Java, and in Djogjakarta, the prime minister invites them to a reception at his home.

The fourth notebook begins on February 25, 1907 in Saigon, Cochichina (S. Vietnam). The group travels north to the city of Hue, where they meet the king of Vietnam.

His majesty is 28 yrs. old and has ruled for 15 or 20 yrs. His oldest son by a concubine is 14. He is almost 5 ft 7 in height and has a native cast of features & complexion. His eyes have a decided squint which does not give a pleasing expression to his face.

After Hue, the party travels to Hanoi, whence they sail across the China Sea to Hong Kong and on to the Philippines. In Manila, they tour a cigarette factory, a prison, and a military hospital.

The fifth notebook begins in Canton, China. Bryant's party sails from Canton to Shanghai, then up the Yangtze River to Nanking. From here, the group travels north overland, visiting various tombs, temples, and palaces, arriving in Peking on May 4, 1907. They continue on through China to Korea, then sail to Japan on the *Santo Maru*. While staying in Kobe, Bryant receives word that his brother Walter had died suddenly. This news leaves Bryant in poor spirits for the remainder of the tour through Kyoto, Nagoya, and Shizuoka.

The final page of the fifth notebook contains a list of all the steamers taken by Bryant during his tour around the world.

In the sixth notebook Bryant's party travels to Tokyo, but the trip is marred by a conflict between two members of the party that nearly ends in fisticuffs. As a result of this unpleasantness, some members of the tour group decide to sail immediately for San Francisco. Bryant continues on to Lake Yumoto with the remaining members of the touring party. The group spends several leisurely weeks fishing and hiking before departing Japan for San Francisco aboard the *Silveria*.

The trip from Yokohama, Japan to San Francisco takes two and a half weeks. Upon reaching San Francisco, Bryant travels to Yosemite for several days before setting out on a month-long sojourn in Canada.

The seventh notebook records Bryant's account of his trip on the Canadian Pacific Railroad from Vancouver to Glacier, Field, and Banff, camping and hiking along the way. Finally, on August 28, 1907, Bryant embarks on the final leg of his journey, from Banff to Fort William, across Lake Superior to Toronto, and then to Buffalo. Bryant's journal concludes as he boards a train bound for Philadelphia.

**Item list:**

Notebook, October 18, 1906 – November 29, 1906

Notebook, November 30, 1906 – January 8, 1907

Notebook, January 9, 1907 – February 23, 1907

Notebook, February 25, 1907 – April 13, 1907

Notebook, April 14, 1907 – May 31, 1907

Notebook, June 1, 1907 – August 8, 1907

Notebook, August 9, 1907 – September 1, 1907

**Northern Europe Notebooks:** The first journal begins with Bryant embarking on a three-week cruise of the Northern Atlantic and Arctic Oceans on the *S.S. Oceana*.

The *Oceana* travels first to the Orkney Islands, then to the Faroe Islands, and on to Reykjavik, Iceland. On July 15, the steamer crosses the Arctic Circle and passes Jan Mayen Island, which Bryant explains is uninhabited and seldom seen by tourists. The ship continues north to Spitzbergen, where Bryant and another passenger go ashore to hike up a glacier.

After departing from Spitzbergen, the *Oceana* turns south, traveling down the Norwegian coast. The ship stops at Hammerfest, Tromsø, and several small villages, before concluding the cruise at Bergen, Norway.

Following this cruise, Bryant remains in Scandinavia for several weeks, touring the countryside and visiting acquaintances. He travels by train to Christiania (Oslo), where he meets with Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, an oceanographer and explorer, and recipient of the 1922 Nobel Prize for Peace. Bryant's journal records an extensive discussion with Dr. Nansen regarding arctic exploration, notably Robert Peary's 1909 journey to the North Pole.

On August 5, Bryant arrives in Stockholm, Sweden. He soon departs for Kiruna, where he joins a group of professors and scientists on a walking tour along the Luleälv (Lule River).

The second journal contains an account of Bryant's walking tour along the Luleälv from August 11 to 13. The group of 4 tourists and 4 porters departs Kiruna and travels by foot to Porjus, where they observe the construction of a hydroelectric plant at one of the areas many waterfalls. The tour continues to the village of Ligga, then by rowboat on the Luleälv to Vollurin, where the walking tour concludes.

Bryant takes a steamer to Boden, then a train to Stockholm, where the journal ends.

Bryant includes several notes in the last few pages of the second journal, including notes on photographs taken between August 11 and 13, notes on geographic features seen during the walking tour, and a record of expenses incurred during the walking tour.

**Item list:**

Notebook, July 9, 1910 – August 10, 1910

Notebook, August 11, 1910 – August 16, 1910