

‡4 Finding the Smoking Gun

The Long-Overlooked Central Document Recovered

by

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A Three intriguing books

A1 Almost no story stands in isolation. This story begins with another, that of the eccentric Arctic explorer, Charles Francis Hall.

A2 In 1971, I was in the U.S. Army and home for Christmas at my parents' house in Mt.Dora, Florida. My father had long been a reader of books about exploration and mountain climbing. Perhaps that's why my sister gave him a book that she had found on the remainder rack in a Chicago bookstore. It was the first biography of Hall, *Weird and Tragic Shores*, by Chauncy Loomis (NY, Knopf, 1971). It was the title that got me to pick it up, and the back of the dust jacket that showed Hall's disinterred body, its ghostly face staring from under a folded-back American flag with which he had been covered before his coffin was placed into the Greenland permafrost in 1871, nearly a century before, that got me to look inside. Though my father had vicariously accompanied most of the famous expeditions up Annapurna or Everest and suffered through many harrowing and failed attempts in the Arctic or Antarctic to reach their poles, I had never read any book on these topics. After reading Loomis's book, that all changed. The mysterious demise of Hall at the farthest place ever reached by a ship up to then on the desolate, barren coast of northwest Greenland left me strangely disturbed and set me to reading other stories of obsession and hardship on the icy fringes of the earth.

A3 I soon found that Hall's bizarre end, which may have come at the hands of his own expedition doctor, was just one of the gruesome and fascinating stories woven around the mad quest to reach the North Pole, a place that is less a place than a mathematical conception. Soon I was frozen in with Elisha Kent Kane at the top of Smith Sound; I watched as most of Greely's men slowly starved to death, one by one, at Cape Sabine, or I was off on one of the innumerable expeditions seeking the solution to the riddle of the fate of Sir John Franklin, who disappeared into the Arctic in the 1840s.

A4 Before long I discovered the smoldering controversy over who had reached the North Pole first. Like so many others, I had simply accepted as a matter of fact that Admiral Peary had, on April 6, 1909. I had never even heard the name of Frederick Albert Cook. When I read about his claim of having attained the North Pole on April 21, 1908, I was curious as to why his story had been initially accepted and then discredited three months later. I quickly found that there were some who still believed that he had told the truth and some who believed Peary was the liar.

A5 The only way, I reasoned, that I could resolve the conflicting opinions was to go to the original sources. I wanted to let the explorers speak without an intermediary. I wanted to put myself in the position of a person in 1909, unconfused by later apologists and advocates, and be convinced by the evidence one way or the other.

A6 I was soon immersed in a copy of the first edition of *My Attainment of the Pole*, which was loaned to me via interlibrary loan by the Peabody Institute in Baltimore. It was little more than a pile of loose pages, really, with the boards joined to it only when the rubber bands that encircled the tattered mass were in place. Because of the condition of

the book, the Peabody specified that I could not take it home, but that it had to be read in the library. Each day for two weeks after work, instead of going home, I detoured to the storefront that then served as the public library in Damascus, Maryland, to read it and soon found myself taking notes from it. The voice of Frederick Albert Cook spoke to me from those crumbling pages, and 35 years after that voice had been stilled, it asked me to believe that it spoke the truth.

A7 When I first read that amazing book, I was unprepared to understand the discussion it contained of incidents once familiar to every reader of the newspapers, but the narrative of the polar journey itself I found irresistible. It was certainly an exciting adventure tale — but was there any truth in it? Still, page by page, it wove its spell: “I felt the glory which the prophet feels in his vision,” the voice whispered, “with which the poet thrills in his dream” — and I, too, felt it.

A8 It was not the last time I would read that book. I obtained a personal copy at an old bookstore I used to visit when I lived near the ancient mill town of Ellicott City. Mr. Deeds, who owned the shop, tracked down a copy of the common third edition on the used book market. I paid him \$10 for it, and \$7 for a copy of Cook’s last book, *Return from the Pole*, published posthumously in 1951, containing Cook’s philosophical account, written in the 1930s, of the winter he spent with his two Inuit companions on North Devon Island in 1908-09 before he returned the following spring to his winter base in Greenland. I reread *My Attainment* several times over the next few years. I became steeped in Cook’s version of events, which essentially argued that he had been cheated of his true accomplishments by a monied conspiracy of the rich and influential backers of Robert E. Peary. In some ways I found *Return* even more compelling, and the excellent bibliography appended to it was a great aid in future explorations into the literature of “The Polar Controversy” between Cook and Peary over who was first to the Pole, helping to answer some of my initial questions about why Cook’s story had been ultimately rejected.

B Accumulating Knowledge

B1 By then I had entered graduate school in the College of Library and Information Science at the University of Maryland, with a goal of becoming an academic librarian. Maryland had a very good collection of original narratives of the famous polar expeditions in its stacks, including *Through the First Antarctic Night*, which, once read, only added to Cook’s mystique. For the required computer project for one of the courses, I spent long hours punching hundreds of cards that when fed into a computer the size of a wardrobe, would print out a bibliography of all of the early expeditions’ original narratives. My 18 months as a graduate student also provided me with the techniques of information retrieval necessary to ferret out scores of articles related to Cook and Peary among the deep periodical holdings in the stacks of McKeldin Library not listed in *Return from the Pole*’s excellent bibliography, and eventually to find and evaluate manuscript materials of primary importance. It was also during this time that I read Andrew Freeman’s 1961 *The Case for Dr. Cook*, the first attempt at a comprehensive Cook biography. The book was effective in establishing “the case” for belief in Cook’s rejected polar claim because it was based on interviews with Cook himself, and because it avoided an obvious and all-out bias for Cook. Instead, it left the door open for the reader to make his own inferences. Its sins, I learned only later, were mostly those of omission.

B2 I had an excellent memory for details, so by the late ’70’s I could recite, chapter and verse, many items, some of them compelling, that had led some to believe that Dr. Cook might well have been cheated of his deserved place in history, just as he said he had been in *My Attainment of the Pole*. In proof of this, one evening I famously kept an old friend who visited our house in Damascus, and a perfect stranger who came with him to see the sights of Washington, D.C., entertained late into the night with an extensive recitation of the “facts” and contradictions of the controversy. As time went on, other people learned it

was a dangerous subject to bring up with me, and it even became a part of my family’s lore. **B3** During the 1980s, on a trip through Pennsylvania, the family went out of its way to visit the statue of Peary at his birthplace in Cresson, and I left signs reading “Dr. Cook Lives!” on the shed that held the groundskeeping equipment for the park that surrounds it. On another occasion I taped a small sign, drawing attention to the claims of his rival, upon the runner of Peary’s actual 1909 sled in Explorers Hall at the headquarters of the National Geographic Society on 17th Street in Washington, D.C.; I wondered many times thereafter how many people might have actually read the sign before it was removed.

B4 My first job as a librarian was not in academia, as I hoped, but for an environmental research company in Towson, Md. One of my duties was to visit Johns Hopkins University’s Eisenhower Library and gather articles for the PhDs of the company in their specialties in marine science. In those pre-internet days, that meant searching various databases to which Johns Hopkins gave free access, and then locating the articles referenced in the print literature stored in its stacks. These in turn had to be shuttled to the copy room, where they were photocopied by staff there. While waiting for my orders to be filled, I occupied my time reading many contemporary articles about the Polar Controversy in the original periodicals, many of which I made copies of for future reference. I also discovered there the library’s copy of Captain Thomas Hall’s landmark book, *Has the North Pole been Discovered?* (Boston, Badger, 1917), which I read with great interest and made numerous photocopies of its pages myself. I thus began to amass a file of original sources, though I never seriously considered writing anything on the subject myself. What else, after Captain Hall, could be said, I reasoned? And even he despaired of ever “unfolding” the truth. Not that there had been a dearth of others who had tried. At the rate of about one a decade, a major book had taken up the dispute, with varying effectiveness.

B5 Eventually I read all of those secondary books that had appeared on the subject since Captain Hall’s, or which touched on it in some degree, but I was still unconvinced of just what the truth was. Although I wanted Dr. Cook to win, I realized that there were very good reasons to doubt his story. After all, the burden of proof in such cases ultimately rests on the explorer himself, and, apparently, he had never provided the evidence such a burden requires. Over most of the 1980’s, however, The Polar Controversy remained little more than an intellectual hobby, still there, but now in the background of workaday life and a growing family.

C The Polar Controversy reawakened

C1 All that changed in 1988, when I groggily awoke one morning to a story on National Public Radio that soon made me sit right up in bed. Conclusive evidence had been found, it said, that the famous claim of Robert E. Peary to have reached the North Pole in 1909 was a fake. Although the story was based on fresh evidence, the chain of events that led to it began in 1962, when the Peary family granted John Edward Weems access to Peary’s enormous collection of personal papers.

C2 In 1960 Weems had published an account of the Polar Controversy favorable to Peary entitled *Race for the Pole* (NY, Henry Holt, 1960). That, and the renewed interest in Dr. Cook engendered by Andrew Freeman’s biography of him the next year, led to Weems’s access for a new biography of Peary, based on his extensive personal papers, long stored at his home on Eagle Island, near South Harpswell, ME. The result, *Peary, the Explorer and the Man* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1967), though sanctioned by them, was not entirely unobjectionable to Peary’s two children, because while it tended to confirm Peary’s polar claims, it revealed more than they wanted about his unpleasant personality. After Weems finished his research, the Pearys donated the papers to the National Archives, but they were closed to all others under the deed of gift until the last of Peary’s children had died.

C3 That changed in 1984 after the broadcast of a made-for-television film, *Cook and Peary: the Race for the Pole*, aired on CBS on December 13, 1983. With the influence of the

Frederick A. Cook Society, a small group of family members and boosters of the discredited explorer, the script proved to be biased in Cook's favor, and just as he had argued, made him seem to have been the true discoverer, cheated of his glory by a conspiracy funded by Peary's powerful backers, including the National Geographic Society, which called the film a "blatant distortion of the historical record, vilifying an honest hero and exonerating a man whose life was characterized by grand frauds."

C4 The National Geographic Society then prevailed upon the Peary family to drop the restrictions on Peary's papers to allow an investigation of his claim, presumably to vindicate "an honest hero." The society commissioned for this task Wally Herbert, a British polar explorer who, among other things, had, in 1969, been the first to reach the North Pole by dogsled since Peary claimed the same feat for himself in 1909. Although favorably disposed to Peary, Herbert, after examining Peary's papers, reluctantly came to the conclusion that Peary's navigation toward the Pole had been faulty, and he had missed it by some 30 miles.

C5 These findings were put into print in the September 1988 issue of *National Geographic* only when the society learned that Herbert was writing a new biography of Peary that would incorporate them into it. At this point Dennis Rawlins reentered the fray.

C6 Rawlins, a physics professor and astronomer, had published his own book on the controversy, *Peary at the North Pole; Fact or Fiction?* (Washington, Luce, 1973). Fiction had been Rawlins's unequivocal conclusion.¹ And he had judged the National Geographic Society as at least carelessly complicit. Now, he said, he had examined a long-secret Peary document, which he believed was proof that Peary had not only not been at the North Pole, but knew he had not. The document was in an envelope bearing an inscription in Josephine Peary's hand saying it contained Peary's original April, 1909, North Pole observations. It had been deemed so important that it had been kept in a safe deposit box along with Peary's original North Pole diary, separate from the bulk of his papers.

C7 Rawlins took this label at its word and, working out the figures, concluded that instead of being at the Pole, Peary had been about 100 miles short of it. Rawlins's discovery got wide press coverage and resulted in the NPR story that had awoken me that morning. Meanwhile, NGS had been quietly trying to find someone who would refute Herbert's findings, choosing Admiral Thomas Davies. Now Davies was asked to look at the observations Rawlins had discovered, and he announced that the paper on which Rawlins based his "proof" was actually not Peary's North Pole observations, but what Davies believed² was a comparatively insignificant set of data known as a time-sight, from 1906. On reexamination, taken in isolation from the 1909 April inscription on the envelope that contained them, Rawlins swiftly admitted (*Washington Post*; www.dioi.org/vols/w11.pdf, *DIO* 1.1 ‡4 §A2), that Davies was correct in claiming that the document was not from 1909 April, but called for National Geographic to admit its own error in 1909 in hastily approving Peary's polar claim without adequate examination of his evidence for it.³

C8 Instead, the society turned to Davies's Navigation Foundation to investigate Peary's papers yet again to settle the matter in an unbiased, independent report grounded in all

¹Primarily from navigational & magnetic analyses, inside witnesses Henshaw Ward & Hudson Hastings, plus cairn records (& etc.), showing Peary's 1906 Crocker Land was a knowing fraud (‡2 §15), and Henson's long-neglected testimony on activities at the final camp. (The book was regarded as convincing to most reviewers, including *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 65:79-82, 1975 March.)

²Rawlins later showed (and since-deceased Davies' son Doug privately agreed: 1991/4/19) that the data were really 1894/12/10 transit-observations of stars Betelgeux & Vega, seen from Peary's Anniversary Lodge, Greenland, 77° 40' N, 68° 35' W, just after 1894/12/10 midnight. But Rawlins stressed that Davies' numerous errors on the document (www.dioi.org/sict.pdf, 1989/8/23; ‡5, 1990/3/30) in no way excused his own.

³For the ultimate fate of the NGS-Navigation-Foundation's attempted whitewash of public perception of Peary, see ‡5 below. (For the NF's research-reliability, see §G below.) Recognizing NGS-NF's failure: *Scientific American* March & June, 1990, *Nature* 1990/4/26, *Science* 1991/6/11.

the navigational information they contained. Though Rawlins's analysis eventually proved incorrect, that early morning's report also had reawakened my own interest in the Polar Controversy. When I read an article in the *Washington Post* in which Davies and *National Geographic* Editor Joe Judge sounded distinctly biased in regard to the "independent" investigation it had commissioned, I wrote to Judge questioning the society's impartiality. In return I got the standard National Geographic line: Peary was the true discoverer of the North Pole, and Cook nothing but a transparent conman. Judge dismissed many of my points as "intemperate, illogical, and ill informed" and was more than a little outraged at my skepticism of Davies's impartiality. "Admiral Davies is a man of veracity and character, and I find your allegations that he is biased intemperate. If the reasoned study of the data were placed in hands like yours, it would be an Inquisition, so convinced are you that Peary was a fraud and liar." [Letter Joe Judge to the author May 30, 1989.] To this I sent a more lengthy reply pointing out why some of his statements about mine were incorrect and gave the sources of my information, and to Judge's credit I received a much less emotional reply, but no change of stance. "Whatever the Navigation Foundation concludes, we will stand by it, as we were happy to publish Herbert's conclusions. But I truly sense that you will not." [Letter Joe Judge to the author July 30, 1989.]

C9 I also made contact with the Frederick A. Cook Society and asked it if there was any collection of Cook's papers comparable to Peary's at the National Archives. FACS's people referred me to Janet Vetter, Cook's granddaughter, who lived in Florida and owned the explorer's papers and other information gathered by her then-deceased mother, Helene Vetter, Dr.Cook's only natural daughter. I wrote a letter to Janet Vetter and inquired if she ever allowed scholars to view her grandfather's hoard. In a noncommittal reply she said "Yes — I do make Dr.Cook's diaries available to 'bona fide researchers.' As they are kept in a safe deposit box, they can only be seen during banking hours." [Letter: Ms.Vetter to the author, August 2, 1989.] But before I could arrange anything more concrete, Ms.Vetter died suddenly on August 10, at the age of 51. Under the terms of her will, her grandfather's papers were to go to the Library of Congress, just 40 miles from my home. When I read of the gift, I wasted no time in contacting the Library of Congress and was told that Vetter's papers would be arriving sometime in early 1990. A further inquiry revealed, however, that there were no plans to catalog the papers in the near future, but that some of the most important ones, including Cook's original field diaries had already arrived and could be seen by appointment. I was soon in the office of Dr.William Hutson, Chief of the Manuscript Division.

D An intuition

D1 In my initial interview with him, he said that the diaries had been looked at by only one person before me, Dr.Bradford Washburn, the Director Emeritus of the Boston Museum of Science, who was an expert on and thrice conqueror of Mt.McKinley and had long been the most prominent foe of the controversial claim of Dr.Cook to have been the first to climb it in 1906. Many Cook doubters held this claim up as a virtual rehearsal for his fraudulent polar claim announced three years later. Dr.Hutson said Washburn had looked at all the diaries — being most interested in the one Cook kept on his 1906 McKinley attempt — but hadn't spent much time with them. Finding Cook's writing to be nearly indecipherable, he had quickly given up. I was most interested in the diaries Cook kept on his 1908 polar attempt, and these were served up to me when the interview ended. In the first twenty minutes of looking at them I made a significant discovery. My multiple readings of *My Attainment of the Pole* allowed me to recognize that important details in the diaries did not match Cook's published narrative. After that brief encounter, I felt intuitively that Cook had not actually done as he said. I remember returning to my office where the wall bore a portrait of Cook dressed in his polar furs, and feeling I was looking into the clear blue eyes of one of the most self-assured fakers in history. That intuition at first put aside any

thoughts of future research, much less writing on the subject. I felt I had satisfied my own curiosity, which had been at the base of my interest in the matter; Cook's story very probably wasn't true. After all, Captain Hall had said in the 1920 supplement to his analytic book as to material conflicts in an explorer's narrative, "Did all these various writings agree with themselves . . . it would not prove their statements to be true, because they might, nevertheless, be fabrications; but as they contradict each other in every particular, it proves falsehood absolutely. If one is true, the other speaks falsehood. If the other is true, the one speaks falsehood. There is no authority for believing either; and if the author cannot be believed in what he sets out to prove, the author is not entitled to be believed in anything he may say at any time. Truth is a uniform thing." But that didn't put an end to it. Soon a larger question came to dominate my thoughts on the matter that was even more compelling than the simple question of who had first stood at the North Pole. It was no less than the fundamental nature of "Truth" itself; could it ever be ascertained absolutely? And why was the argument over Cook's and Peary's claims so important to so many people? Why had it been so important to me? I wondered, if Cook's story was nothing but a lie, *why* he had lied, and how he could justify those lies to all of those who had placed their trust in him or wanted him to win, as I had.

D2 I called Dr. Hutson and told him I thought that the diaries were extremely important, but not of my intuitions, and that I wanted to have a look at the entire gift. I therefore urged him to have the papers cataloged as soon as possible. Whether this conversation was the motivation or not, the Cook papers were earmarked for early organization, and I was able to start my examination of them during the summer of 1990, served to me as they were processed, still in the transfer files. Not far into this process, I began a parallel examination of the vast Peary gift, housed just seven blocks away from the Library of Congress at the National Archives. For a person as steeped in the published Cook-Peary literature as I was, I quickly realized that despite all the previous articles and books already written on the Polar Controversy, there was much significant that had never been known about the dispute between the two explorers. I was certain that I could make an original contribution to the subject through a systematic and careful examination of these original materials. I decided then and there to write a book evaluating their content and how they related to the historical controversy and the larger question of it as an example of historical truth.

E Writing the resolution

I purchased a Compaq 286 computer to use as a word processor and set to work. The result was published seven years later as *Cook & Peary, the Polar Controversy, Resolved* (Mechanicsburg PA, Stackpole, 1997). It was the fruit of three years of intensive research into not only the papers housed in Washington, to which I commuted three times a week for nearly six months, but just about every accessible collection of primary documentation on the subject, including a detailed reading of much of the massive printed literature, primary and secondary, personal interviews with living connections to the story, hundreds of letters of inquiry, thousands of miles of travel and eventually seven years of writing and revision. All this was documented by more than 2,400 source notes. By 1993 the manuscript, which filled an entire box of continuous-feed computer paper, was in reasonably good shape, and I set off on another three-year quest to find a publisher for it. Many publishers were enthusiastic after they read my cover letter; they were less interested when they weighed my manuscript. Eventually, I sent only the first three chapters to Stackpole Books after getting a positive response to my proposal. There I found an editor on the same page as I; she asked for three more chapters and by the time she had read them, she was hooked. A contract was signed. Even as I prepared my manuscript for actual publication, new things came to light, new leads developed and new revisions were made as a result, some even after the galley proofs were printed.

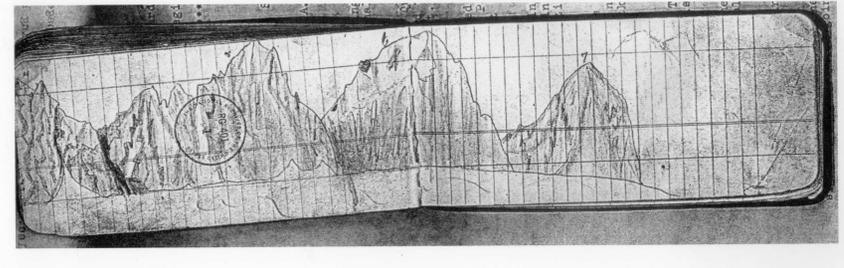


Figure 1: Barrill Diary drawing of the last peaks along Ruth Glacier leading rightward to the Gateway to Ruth Amphitheater, which he & Cook were 1st to see. The rightmost peak of these Cook named "Mt. Barrille." Mt. McKinley's twin summits are beyond at upper right.

F The Big Three

Before I began to write, or knew the content of the sources I would read, based on my sound basic knowledge of the conflicting details of the Polar Controversy, I had made a fantasy list of the most important documents I would like to find. Among many important but lesser items, the top three on that list were the diary kept by Edward Barrill, Cook's only witness to his Mt. McKinley attempt in 1906; an original negative of the photograph that showed Barrill standing on what Cook said was the summit of Mt. McKinley; and the original field notebook which Cook kept on his journey toward the North Pole in 1908. I had already examined all of the notebooks among Cook's papers at the Library of Congress, but none of them appeared to be the original field notebook kept on his journey from his 1907-1908 winter quarters toward his goal of the North Pole. I really never expected to see many of the lesser items on my list, let alone the "Big Three," *as not a hint of any of them had ever been seen by all the others who had ever delved into the documentation of the Polar Controversy* [italics by DR]. There had even been a published plea made by Bradford Washburn for information regarding the whereabouts of the original Barrill diary, but that had never been answered. However, I eventually found every item on that list, and Barrill's diary was the first of the big three that I found.

G The Diary of Edward Barrill

It was among the Peary papers at the National Archives, still attached to Barrill's original affidavit declaring Cook's claim to have stood at the top of the tallest mountain in North America a fraud. Although the Navigation Foundation claimed that at least one of its researchers had looked at every paper in Peary's 235 cubic foot hoard, it had gone undetected up until my recovery of it. Its textual content was not really all that important; that had already been published in October 1909 in the *New York Globe*; even some of its pages had appeared there in facsimile, but the original contained unpublished drawings and other features [www.dioi.org/vols/w73.pdf, *DIO* 7.2 ‡7 Figs. 11, 21, & 23] that provided highly significant evidence that Barrill's declaration was in all of its particulars correct.



Figure 2: Cook's Probable 1907-1909 Route. Base map drawn by Alexandra Kobalenko ©J.Kobalenko, used by permission. Magnetic Pole location modern, not 1908 when near 71°N, 97°W. Despite Bryce 2013 pp.339f (his map: p.348, www.dioi.org/rmbmap.jpg), Publisher DR judges Cook stopped 10 nmi past CTH (vs 92 nmi: *C&P* p.973) & so edits map thusly. Debated at ‡10.

H Dr.Cook's summit photo

An original print of the photograph, although not the negative, turned up in the collections of the Frederick A. Cook Society in Hurleyville, NY in 1991. Although Janet Vetter, by will, had given all of her grandfather's papers to the Library of Congress, for some reason the papers had been divided, and a significant portion of them went to the society instead. On a visit to the Sullivan County Historical Society Museum, where the society was headquartered, I came across a series of original negatives of Cook's 1906 photographs, some unpublished, and a number of prints made from them, including one of his famous "summit" photograph. The uncropped and perfectly exposed print contained conclusive evidence that it was not taken on the summit of McKinley, but rather where Cook's opponents conjectured — at the so-called "Fake Peak," 19 miles from the actual summit and at a height of a little more than 5,300 feet, rather than the more than 20,000 feet of the true summit. Later, the photo I saw in 1991, and all the original negatives, disappeared from the collection and have never been seen again, as well as a tell-tale photo of Ed Barrill standing next to Cook's distinctive silk tent pitched opposite the mountain that now bears his name, exactly the spot that Barrill's affidavit said was the last camp he and Cook made before turning for home, and a place where Cook said they never camped at all. None of these unique negatives or prints were included when the Frederick A. Cook Society donated their portion of the Vetter papers to Ohio State University in 1993, and to this day their whereabouts is still unknown.

I Rediscovering a lost notebook

I1 The North Pole notebook I also discovered in 1991, but at first it escaped recognition for what it was. I made an inquiry to the University of Copenhagen concerning the original materials Dr.Cook had submitted to be considered in support of his claim to have reached the North Pole on April 21, 1908. These had been described in the press as 26 pages of foolscrap containing a narrative basically similar to that which had been previously published serially in the *New York Herald*, and a copy of portions of a notebook containing the field notes Cook had written while on his actual journey. These materials were rejected by the Konsistorium that sat to review them as containing no scientific evidence that Cook had done as he claimed. However, as far as I could determine, no one had since reviewed these same materials to verify their description or that conclusion. In reply, I got a letter from the Rigsarkivet, the Danish Royal Archives, saying that these materials did not seem to be among the holdings of that institution, where the records of the University for that period had been archived. It did say, incidentally, however, that there was a photographic copy of a notebook written by Dr.Cook in the collections of the Royal Astronomical Observatory. I was disappointed by this information, logically concluding that the notebook copy must be of one containing Cook's so-called "field notes," which I had seen the original of in the Cook papers at the Library of Congress. That notebook had a note, however, that it was "copied" during the winter Cook spent at Cape Sparbo. In fact, there were six notebooks in all at the Library of Congress recording events during Cook's expedition, but only one contained any entries made on Cook's alleged journey from his winter base at Annoatok to the North Pole, and those appeared to be for the first few days after he left Cape Thomas Hubbard.

I2 As I reviewed and edited my completed manuscript, however, I noticed references in Cook's other notebooks indicating there was one, and possibly two notebooks not among Cook's papers. In *My Attainment of the Pole* Cook wrote, "My three notebooks were full, and there remained only a small pad of prescription blanks and two miniature memorandum books." There were references in a notebook labeled "N.III" to specific pages in "N.I," and also to "N.II." It then occurred to me that the copy in Copenhagen might be of one of those. Two years after I learned of its existence, I wrote again to Copenhagen asking for a

photocopy of the first few pages and also the last few, to compare them with Cook's other notebooks at the Library of Congress. The copy of the notebook in Copenhagen proved to be "N.I," having the exact match for the references to it in "N.III." Most important, the book was titled on its first page: "From Annoatok Northward and Return." Here then was a photographic copy of the actual diary of Dr.Cook's polar journey containing its complete record, including the originals of the field notes Cook eventually published.

I3 In rejecting Cook's "polar proofs," the University of Copenhagen noted that there were no original data included in them, only copies. Perhaps in an attempt to remedy this, late in 1909 Cook forwarded one of his original polar notebooks to Europe via his wife. The book was delivered to the Konsistorium by Walter Lonsdale, Cook's private secretary, in early 1910. The Danes were not impressed by it. They said its contents not only did not alter their previous rejection of his polar claim, but also it, in fact, raised further doubts about the authenticity of the narrative it was sent in support of. No doubt, the keen-eyed Danes noticed many of the same irregularities and inconsistencies that I discovered in my own examination of it during the writing of *Cook & Peary* (§14). The Cook affair had been an acute embarrassment to Denmark, extending even to the Royal Family (§3 fn 2), who along with the rest of the Danish populace, had taken Cook at his word when he landed in Copenhagen on September 4, 1909 claiming to have reached the North Pole. He had been given high, even unprecedented honors, and now it appeared he had nothing of substance to prove his claim beyond his own word. "Tell it to the Danes" became a catch phrase in response to any dubious statement. Although in turning over his original notebook Cook had specified that no part of it could be copied or published, the Danes wanted no more egg on their faces. They made a complete photographic copy of the book, page by page, and stored it away quietly in the Royal Astronomical Society Library. This was the copy brought to my attention in 1991, where it had lain, apparently unnoticed, for nearly a century. The copy having been rediscovered, it was moved to the Rigsarkivet for safekeeping.

I4 I purchased a complete copy of the notebook so that I could examine it in the way I had already examined the six other notebooks kept by Cook in 1907-1909, which were deposited with the Vetter gift. But in the early 1990's the only type of copies obtainable were standard photocopies, and many of these were insufficiently clear to decipher every word the notebook contained. This was partly due to the quality of the photocopies themselves and partly due to Cook's difficult handwriting and its oft-tiny size. Enough was legible, however, to get an accurate idea of the notebook's content, page by page, and that content, along with some peculiarities of the way the entries were entered into the book, proved strong evidence that Cook's polar journey was more one of imagination than fact. A detailed analysis of why this was so was presented in *Cook & Peary*.

J Resisting resolution

J1 But few absorbed the import of this evidence, let alone that of the whole sweep of my 1,000+ page book, even those with prior knowledge of the subject or those who had the patience to study it thoroughly. It was dismissed out of hand, of course, by Cook's partisans. They had convinced themselves that I was writing a book that would vindicate Cook and were shocked that it produced convincing evidence that he had lied about the results of his McKinley attempt that fell far short of the summit and his equally failed attempt to reach the North Pole. But even some others scoffed at the subtitle, "The Polar Controversy, Resolved." They may not have been Cook partisans, but they had some stake in wanting to see the controversy continue, like proprietors of "adventure" companies that promoted ultra-expensive "Last Degree" treks to the Pole, persons with a previous self-interest in justifying their version of the controversy that they had put into print, or others who simply liked to argue over it interminably. They said there would never be an end to the controversy, simply because it would never be possible to produce actual documentary evidence that proved Cook's story a lie, the proverbial "Smoking Gun" that would end it, absolutely.

J2 In the early 1980s, when Cook's papers were still in the possession of the Veters, William Hunt published *To Stand at the Pole* (NY, Stein & Day, 1981), a book examining the history of the controversy which contained many reasonable perspectives on Cook and his advocates' motivations. Although he concluded that Cook was a damn liar, Hunt believed that Cook's personal papers, even if they could be freely examined, would furnish nothing more conclusive than the weight of the circumstantial evidence already brought for or against him. He reasoned that if they contained any proof of Cook's claims they would have been furnished to his advocates long before, and if they contained any proof of his fraud, they would have been destroyed by Cook or his descendants long since.

J3 Even as late as a decade ago, Richard Sale, in his book, *The Arctic: the complete story* (London, Frances Lincoln, 2008), which contained an accurate summation of the highlights of the evidence for and against both Cook and Peary's claims, had this to say: "At this remove in time the truth of the two claims can no longer be ascertained. No new evidence is likely either from the North or from the diaries and logs of the two men and their expeditions. No one will ever know for certain which, if either, was telling the truth." But Hunt and Sale and the others were wrong. The truth was there all along, written by Cook himself on the pages of his long hidden expedition notebooks.

K *Cook and Peary's Aftermath*

K1 After my book was reviewed widely and was featured in the pages of influential newspapers including the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, reference after reference published subsequently cited *Cook & Peary* [and Rawlins 1973 (‡3 §A6) & W.Herbert 1989] in their evaluation of Cook's claim. By the time of the centennial of the outbreak of the dispute between the two explorers in 2009, it had become a virtual consensus that certainly neither reached the Pole when he said he did or ever. Even the National Geographic Society had nothing officially to say in support of Peary on the 100th Anniversary of his supposed attainment to commemorate it, something they had never failed to do on any significant occasion in the past involving Peary's alleged discovery. (There was a blogpost by David Maxwell Brun on the NGS blog, *Voices*, on April 6, 2009, but it took a neutral stance on the truth of Peary's claim.) Even a feeble rewrite of Andrew Freeman's *The Case for Doctor Cook*, that appeared in 2005 under the title *True North* (see review above: ‡1), probably with the financial aid of The Frederick A. Cook Society, did nothing to stem the trend of dismissing Cook's polar claim out of hand as it had been early on, reversing the trend of a more positive consideration of Cook's polar attempt in the light of the collapse of Peary's claim. In the wake of my publication of Cook's fake "summit" photo in *DIO* in 1997, www.dioi.org/vols/w73.pdf, ‡7 Fig.18, following my recovery of it from a badly faded copy that had indeed made it to Ohio State, and its subsequent publication in the *New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/1998/11/26/nyregion/author-says-photo-confirms-mt-mckinley-hoax-in-1908.html, 1998/11/26 p.1, Cook's McKinley claim that also still had its advocates even beyond The Frederick A. Cook Society, and which was called in mountaineering circles, "The Lie that Won't Die," finally breathed its last. Signs even went up at a viewpoint of the great mountain's southern flank in Denali State Park, Alaska, detailing the evidence explicit in Cook's original photo, which was prominently displayed showing (by dotted-lines) exactly the two revealing side-portions he'd snipped off, next to his published, doctored version of it (Fig.4).

K2 The controversy was, it seemed for all practical purposes, indeed resolved, the record corrected. But it had always been my intention to return some day to the Copenhagen copy of Cook's notebook and do a complete transcription of it. I felt that although it had already been decisive in destroying the credibility of Cook's claim, it might yield yet further information if subjected to a more detailed examination than I was able to do from the poor photocopies I had already examined. My long experience with the original documents of the controversy and my familiarity with Cook's difficult handwriting placed me in a unique position to see the connections of its content with other sources and allowed me to explain

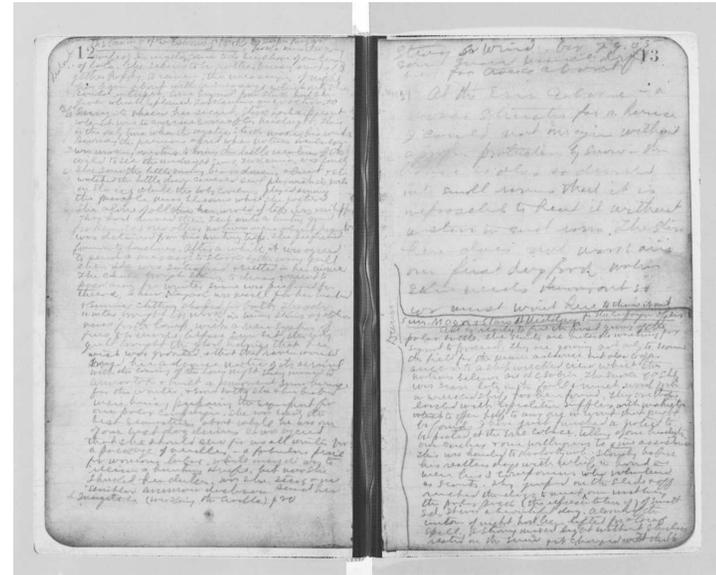


Figure 3: Typical Pages of Cook's Semilegible Scrawl in Polar Notebook.

what those connections meant. Consequently, although there was absolutely nothing to be gained from a personal financial standpoint, I felt that it was almost a scholarly obligation to do a transcription of the notebook and publish such a detailed analysis.

L *Decoding the Lost Notebook*

L1 I applied for a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to work on the project. Although my proposal was given serious consideration, one of the limited NEH grants was not forthcoming. It was deemed not to be a topic of wide enough interest to merit one. Without such a grant, I felt it prudent to wait until the copyrights expired on Frederick Cook's unpublished writings before taking up the task. Under the revisions of the Copyright Act of 1976, that would come 70 years after the death of the author, or 2010, which coincided with my retirement, leaving me with an open-ended amount of time to work on the study at my leisure, which from the first, I planned to self-publish.

L2 In preparation, I again wrote to the Rigsarkivet. Since my last inquiry, the notebook had been moved again, this time to the "Black Diamond," the newly built Royal Library in Copenhagen. After some negotiations on technical difficulties, I was eventually able to purchase a digital copy of the Danish photographic copy of Cook's notebook.

L3 Using various digital techniques to enhance the copy, I was able to make a virtually complete transcription of every word in the notebook with the exception of a very few that were either illegible or could not be deciphered because of Cook's idiosyncratic penmanship. The transcript took about a year to finish and check against the original.

L4 The analysis took longer. In preparation for this phase, I purchased digital copies of significant portions of four of Cook's polar notebooks, held at the Library of Congress,

using my extensive notes on them to identify the portions I would need. These, along with Cook's several published accounts of his polar attempt were all used for comparison of the lost notebook's content. I say "lost" because the Danes' copy is the only known source for the book's content. The original has never been seen since it was returned to Cook's private secretary via a power of attorney in 1911, although there is some evidence to suggest that Cook may have still had it as late as the 1930s. This exhaustive comparison took the project into the early part of 2013.

L5 Just as I considered likely, the notebook shone new light into many of the still dark corners of the Polar Controversy. I realized in the transcription, for instance, how closely many of the pages in the after-the-fact narrative sections written on the left-hand pages, which had been too small to read in detail on the photocopies, matched the finished content of *My Attainment of the Pole*. This settled conclusively the fundamental question regarding the authorship of that book: it was almost entirely written by Frederick Cook himself; thus, the portion contributed by T. Everett Harré, Cook's editor, was as minimal as Cook said it was in his introduction to the third edition. But it was the actual daily diary entries on the right-hand pages that produced the evidence that irrefutably destroyed Cook's claim and decisively branded it a premeditated fraud.

M A New Calendar

M1 As had already been deduced in *Cook & Peary*, a pattern of deception in his reported dates, many of which were rubbed out or written over in the notebook, when compared to his other manuscript and published writings, showed that Cook's reported leaving-date of February 19 was not accurate. This was confirmed by several entries referring to phases of the moon which would not coincide with the dates Cook substituted for them. Still, I found that by analyzing what remained of the content of his actual entries (many were altered, some erased or written over, and some destroyed outright), it was possible to follow his actual progress after leaving his winter headquarters in Greenland and estimate his chronology with good, if not precise accuracy. Because Cook apparently failed to rub out two of his entries' original internal dates, they could be used as checks against his actual progress. Therefore a careful reading of the diary entry content allowed a fairly close estimate of the actual dates, and a telling remark concerning the weather at one point confirmed that the date estimated in this manner was within two days of the actual date as of March 29. Using this method, a calendar was worked out to estimate approximately where Cook was during his journey from his winter quarters in Greenland to his starting point for the Pole at the north tip of Axel Heiberg Island. This follows, including miles since the last camp.

M2 In *Cook & Peary* it had already been deduced from existing evidence that Cook had set back his date of departure from his winter quarters by seven days. This the diary confirmed, but his timetable actually lagged behind his published reports even more than that, due to delays along his route. The entries in the diary revealed that that his journey just to Cape Thomas Hubbard took nearly twice as long as he later reported. It therefore was undoubtedly clear to Cook that he had no chance to reach the Pole long before he arrived in Nansen Sound, some 120 miles from his jumping off point. This placed him at Cape Thomas Hubbard [81°22'N, 94°.1 W] about April 11, give or take three days, and indicated that he did not start across the circumpolar ice until about April 13, 1908. [Versus March 18 claimed: *MAP* pp.200&569. Full *MAP* vs Notebook comparison: Cook 2013 p.396.] He reported that he arrived at the North Pole on April 21 of that year, which all of his field reports and observations supposedly corroborated. Obviously, he could not have made the 518 nautical mile [ideal bee-line] trip from Cape Hubbard to the North Pole in a mere eight to eleven days, or even if the proposed calendar was off by as much as a week, which it surely was not because of the diary entries' internal evidence. This alone was proof of Cook's failure to have obtained his goal. But the notebook also contained evidence of premeditated deceit, and that long before he reached Nansen Sound he was already erecting the means by which to perpetrate a fraudulent polar claim.

Camp#	Date	1908 Camp Name Given by Cook (if any)	Miles
1	Feb 26	On the ice of Smith Sound about 20 mi NE of Annoatok	20
2	Feb 27-28	At Peary's caboose at Payer Harbour on Pim Island	30
3	Feb 29	6 miles above Cape Rutherford on Buchanan Bay	18
4	Mar 1	Cape Koldevey near the Weyprecht Islands	20
5	Mar 2	On a small island off Cape Koldevey	6
6	Mar 3	In Flagler Bay off the coast of Knud Peninsula	18
7	Mar 4-6	A mile from the head of Flagler Bay	25
8	Mar 7-8	"Divide Camp" 20 mi into Sverdrup Pass	21
9	Mar 9-10	"Musk Ox Camp" 25 mi into Sverdrup Pass	5
10	Mar 11-12	"Storm Camp" 45 mi into Sverdrup Pass	20
11	Mar 13-17	"Glacier Camp" on east side of glacier blocking the valley	7
12	Mar 18	On the west side of the same glacier above Bay Fjord	19
13	Mar 19-22	In Irene Bay, 3 mi into Bay Fjord	23
14	Mar 23	"Bear Camp" 30 mi into Bay Fjord on the south shore	27
15	Mar 24	Near the junction of Bay Fjord and Eureka Sound	25
16	Mar 25-26	Near the north cape of Vesle Fjord	15
17	Mar 27	Northeast of Depot Point	35
18	Mar 28	Near the northeast cape of Slidre Fjord	38
19	Mar 29	Near the junction of Eureka Sound and Greely Fjord	21
20	Mar 30	In upper reaches of Cannon Fjord NE of Cape Lockwood	40
21	Mar 31	Near Caledonia Bay on the eastern shore of Cannon Fjord	26
22	Apr 1	Near the location of Camp 20	26
23	Apr 2-3	"Berg Point" at the mouth of Greely Fjord	35
24	Apr 4	On the west coast of Schei Peninsula	35
25	Apr 5	At the cache site at the SW corner of Schei Peninsula	20
26	Apr 6	Near the cape of Stangs Fjord	40
27	Apr 7	Off Grant Land [north Ellesmere] near Stangs Fjord	26
28	Apr 8	Near the north cape of Otto Fjord	25
29	Apr 9	Near White Point	20
30	Apr 10	At the base of the Svartevoeg Cliffs	27
31	Apr 11-12	"Cache Point" near Cape Thomas Hubbard	22
	Apr 13	Cook & 4 Inuit depart Cape Hubbard, onto the Arctic Ocean	

N Suspicious side trips

N1 This came not only in the form of changes made to dates within the daily entries that were inconsistent with the record of events therein (e.g., some entries clearly recorded events that could not possibly have happened on a single day, but are given the same date), but also the inconsistency of internal references to dates at various points within them to manipulate the time of his arrival at Cape Thomas Hubbard that would be in keeping with his eventual story of arriving at the Pole on April 21. Most revealing was evidence of actions no explorer needing to reach his jumping off place for a journey to the North Pole as soon as possible would have taken. Chief among these was a planned detour far out of his way to lay caches in Cannon Fjord [Cañon Fjord on Fig.2]. This was necessary to allow Cook and his "polar party" to return by a different route than he had taken outward-bound and thus avoid contact [‡3 fn 34] with any members of his supporting party who would travel back along the same route by which they came. This was a completely new revelation provided by the notebook that proved Cook had already given up any thought of a serious attempt to actually reach the North Pole in 1908, long before he reached Cape Thomas Hubbard.

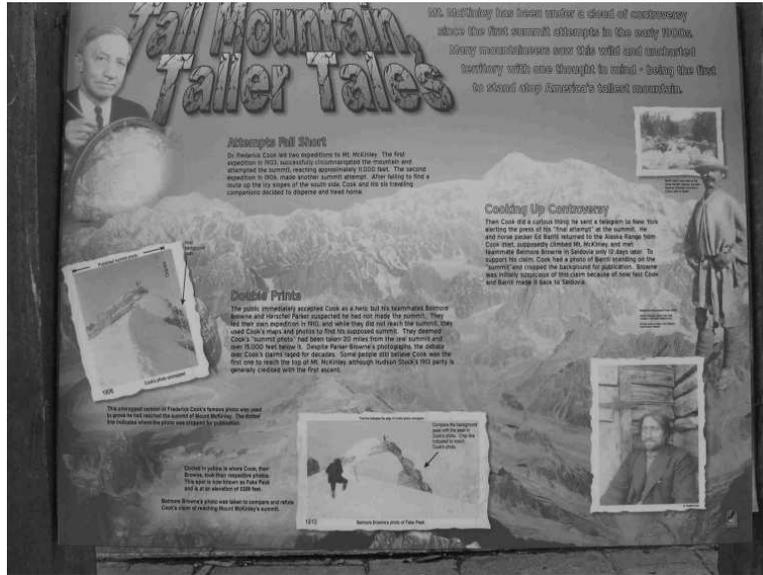


Figure 4: Cook Sign at Denali State Park, detailing his tall tales.

N2 Cook had closely read Otto Sverdrup's account of his crossing of Ellesmere Island in 1899 in his book, *New Land* (London, Heinemann, 1904). He noted Sverdrup's difficulties with poor snow conditions and an intervening glacier that blocked his route. He hoped to avoid these by gaining Ellesmere Island's icecap from Flagler Bay (south of Bache Peninsula) and descending into Cannon Fjord as the route to Nansen Sound rather than Sverdrup's more southern route via Bay Fjord [just west of Sverdrup Pass]. To this end Cook had sent a party of Inuit out before he left his winter quarters with instructions to scout out a suitable route onto the icecap from the head of Flagler Bay. The Inuit were unable to find such a route, however, and Cook was forced to follow Sverdrup's old one. Because of this he was delayed by a general lack of snow cover and was forced to spend five days clearing a way across the same glacier that had blocked Sverdrup in 1899. The day he finally overcame this obstacle was probably March 18, the day he said he set out on his journey across the Arctic Ocean. Even so, up to then, Cook had been delayed only by circumstances beyond his control. That would soon change.

N3 As Cook explains in the narrative account written in the lost notebook, but not in *My Attainment of the Pole*, he laid a cache at the head of Greely Fjord [eastward extension of Nansen Sound] with the intention of returning to Greenland by crossing the Ellesmere icecap via Cannon Fjord and descending on the head of Flagler Bay, the reverse of the route he had hoped to take outgoing. This route over Arthur Land [east of Cannon Fjord] would avoid a return via the already snowless Sverdrup Pass over which he had come, but even later in the season. Such a return route would also ensure that he did not run into his support party, whom he had instructed to return along the outward route via Flat Sound. Separating himself from any other witnesses was important to a hoax because he needed to keep out of sight long enough to simulate a lengthy trip to the Pole and back.

N4 Oddly, Cook's genuine discovery that Sverdrup was mistaken when he announced the existence of Schei Island also weighs against his intention of making an actual polar attempt. Cook's discovery that Schei was actually a peninsula (west side Eureka Sound's mouth: Fig.2) did not come from the passage through what Sverdrup called "Flat Sound" [southeast off Schei Pen.] below the supposed island, as Cook later claimed to have done in *My Attainment of the Pole*. Actually, evidence in the lost notebook shows that Cook nearly circumnavigated the supposed island after crossing over to it from Ellesmere Island at the peninsula's northern tip and then proceeding down its western coast to the southwest corner, where he found the "island" was attached to Axel Heiberg Island proper by a low, narrow neck of land. His reason for following this route instead of going directly up Nansen Sound to Cape Thomas Hubbard, was again to lay a cache. This time it was for the use of his supporting party, which he wished to return through Flat Sound rather than via Cannon Fjord as he intended to do. In *My Attainment of the Pole* (e.g., p.203), Cook leaves out all these suspicious side trips. (See Cook's key unmentioned side-trip in 1906: DIO 9.3 ‡6 §H2.) There he says he crossed Eureka Sound from near Slidre Fjord, and via Flat Sound reached Nansen Sound, leaving out both the detour into Cannon Fjord and his actual route to the point of discovery that Schei was not an island, because both were not only incompatible with his published route and time schedule, but also incompatible with the motivations of an explorer bent on making an actual attempt to reach the Pole.

N5 Cook did actually depart Cape Thomas Hubbard, on about April 13, heading NW [vs MAP pp.285, 291, & 570], probably to acquire 1st hand experience of sea-ice travel, which he would have needed to write a convincing account of an actual journey toward the Pole; or, maybe in hopes [‡3 §C3] of avoiding navigational math by traveling over solid land, which Peary in 1907 reported he'd seen in 1906: Crocker Land, lying c.100 miles to the NW, but which, in actuality did not exist at all. He might also have hoped to convince his Inuit witnesses he'd reached the Pole, of which they had no concept so far as its geographical location. But if not the North Pole, where did Cook actually go after leaving the cape?

N6 Another notebook now at the Library of Congress seems to hold the answer. It appears to contain the actual record of his experiences on the Arctic Ocean. According to this account, he turned back about April 19 having gone approximately 114 miles to the northwest of Cape Thomas Hubbard and making perhaps 60 miles net northing. If so, he was thwarted by impossible ice conditions when still about 460 miles from the goal he later said he was the first to attain. It seems probable from circumstantial evidence that, after turning back, his subsequent route was very close to that drawn for Peary on a copy of Sverdrup's map in 1909 by Cook's two 1908 Inuit companions.

N7 In summing up Cook's claims and narrative of his attainment, Captain Hall had written in 1917: "I have not seen a copy of the papers which Dr. Cook left with the Copenhagen University. There may be something in them that would indicate, or possibly that might prove, that Cook has practiced deception. But if this were true, I think that the University would have considered it their duty to have shown, for the benefit of science and of history, wherein the deception exists. But having only the published report that the university found nothing deceptive in the papers — nothing that they could condemn, I conclude that nothing exists in those papers that indicates deception." But Captain Thomas Hall had also written "the Truth is a uniform thing." He never saw Cook's notebooks, but if he had he surely would have agreed that because they contradict his published narrative and one notebook account contradicts another, "it proves falsehood absolutely." With the 2013 publication of the author's *The Lost Polar Notebook of Dr. Frederick A. Cook*, the Polar Controversy of which Cook was the major player, for his part, is absolutely over: the "Smoking Gun" is found. The simple truth is that Frederick A. Cook did not attain the North Pole in 1908, nor was it possible for him to have done so. Whatever his original intentions, he simply ran out of time. As to those larger questions of if there is really such a thing as Truth itself, the quest for Absolute Truth is a goal even harder to attain than the Geographical North Pole was by dogsledge in 1909. And even that was impossible.

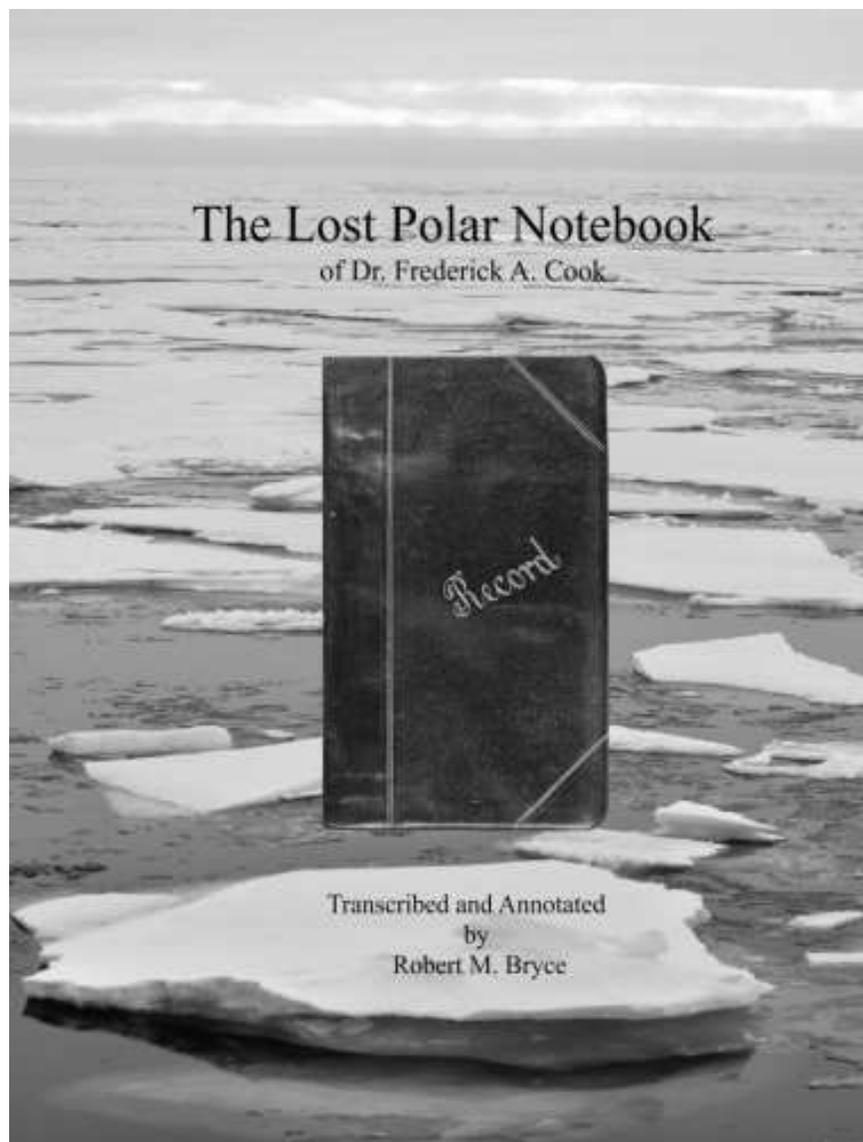


Figure 5: *The Lost Polar Notebook of Dr. Frederick A. Cook*, R.M.Bryce, 2013.