

OLAQ

OLA Quarterly

Volume 24
Number 1 *The Specialness of Special Libraries*

7-25-2018

Monographs, Manuscripts, and Mountaineering: An Overview of the Mazama Library and Historical Collections

Mathew Brock
Mazama Library

Recommended Citation

Brock, M. (2018). Monographs, Manuscripts, and Mountaineering: An Overview of the Mazama Library and Historical Collections. *OLA Quarterly*, 24(1), 6-12. <https://doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1927>

© 2018 by the author(s).

OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

Monographs, Manuscripts, and Mountaineering: An Overview of the Mazama Library and Historical Collections

by **Mathew Brock, MLIS**
Mazama Library & Historical
Collections Manager,
Mazama Library
mathew@mazamas.org



MATHEW BROCK is the Library and Historical Collections Manager for the Mazamas, a 124-year-old mountaineering organization based in Portland, Oregon. He has a BA in Anthropology and a Master's in Library Science. At the library, he enjoys working with members and learning about all the fantastic places people climb around the world. Mathew's pastimes include hiking, backpacking, and rock climbing. Besides being outdoors, Mathew likes traveling, cooking, and building things with his wife and daughter.

Mountains have always had the power to stir emotions and inspire expression, and over the years mountaineering writers have produced some truly memorable and powerful works. Thus, nonfiction of high literary and poetic quality is unusually prevalent in the literature of mountaineering. The subjects of geography, history, exploration and travel, science, photography, biography, and sport are covered in depth in the field of mountaineering literature, adding to the breadth of its appeal.

—JAMES R. COX

Classics in the Literature of Mountaineering and Mountain Travel from the Francis P. Farquhar Collection of Mountaineering Literature: An Annotated Bibliography

Introduction

In 1908, Claud E. Rusk read the newspaper with a growing sense of disbelief. Rusk was one of the foremost mountaineers in the West and is closely associated with Mount Adams, the second-highest mountain in Washington State: in 1921, he made the first ascent of Adams' challenging east face and he is the namesake for its Rusk Glacier. Rusk, along with many other mountaineers, doubted Frederick Cook's recent claim of having reached the North Pole ahead of Robert Peary. Rusk began to wonder if Cook had in fact also summited Mount McKinley in Alaska as he had claimed. Two years later, Rusk convinced the Mazamas—then a relatively new mountaineering club in Portland—to fund an expedition to Alaska to verify Cook's summit claim. Along with the Mazamas, several national publications helped fund the trip. In exchange, Rusk agreed to give public presentations recounting the journey and his findings. Rusk took along a copy of Cook's book, *To the Top of the Continent: Discovery, Exploration & Adventure in Sub-Arctic Alaska*, as a reference and guide. During the trip, Rusk annotated his copy of Cook's book and took documentary photographs. Rusk ultimately discovered, and proved, that Cook had not reached the summit. As a primary source document, Rusk's annotated copy of Cook's book is unique and histori-





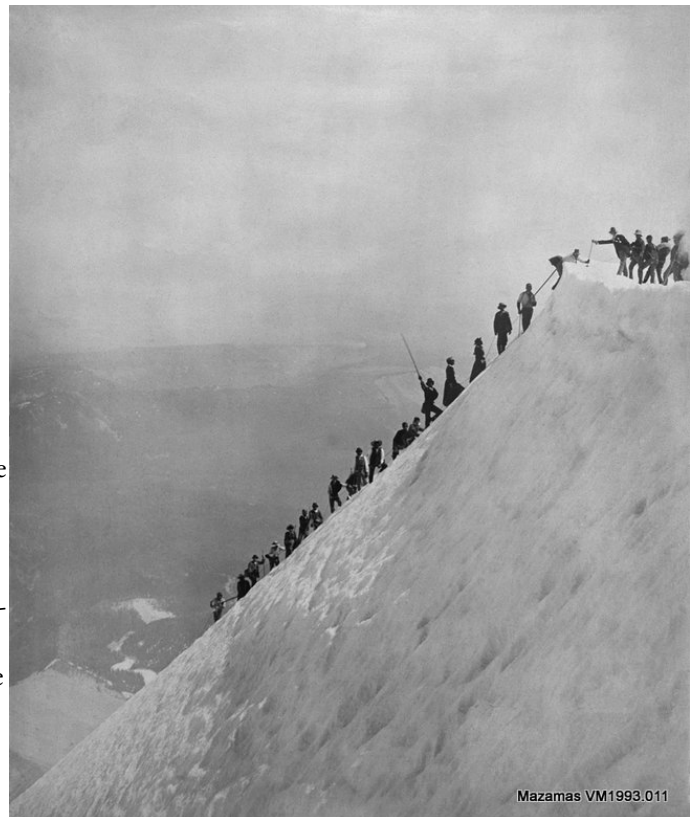
Lantern slide from the C.E. Rusk Collection.

cally valuable to Pacific Northwest mountaineering.

Upon his return, Rusk wrote several articles for the *Pacific Monthly* and toured the United States giving talks and presenting lantern slides about the trip north. Rusk's annotated copy of *To the Top of the Continent*, as well as his original lantern slides, are some of the most treasured items housed within the Mazama Library and Historical Collections, which today holds one of the top mountaineering collections in the country.

Founded on the summit of Mount Hood in 1894, the Mazamas is a non-profit mountaineering organization with a legacy of promoting the Northwest culture of exploration and stewardship of its mountain environments. Headquartered in Portland, the Mazamas leads over 700 hikes and 350 climbs annually. It offers a variety of classes and activities for every skill and fitness level, all of which are open to both members and non-members.

Capturing the history of this mountaineering legacy and providing a variety of contemporary resources for Mazamas members and the public is the aim of the Mazama Library and Historical Collections (LHC). Occupying most of the lower level of the Mazama Mountaineering Center, the circulating library, established in 1915, is joined by a collection of climbing artifacts and an archival collection. It makes available a wide range of records that chronicle the history of the Mazamas and the organization's place in Pacific Northwest outdoor recreation. Additionally, the LHC serves to document and preserve the actions and activities of the Mazamas committees and past and current members.



Mazamas VM1993.011

Cooper Spur party nearing the summit of Mount Hood during the Mazamas inaugural climb, July 19, 1894.



The original Mazama Constitution charter created the office of the historian to “collect, classify and preserve in a suitable form, all obtainable written or printed accounts of the society and its expeditions,” among other duties. Over the years, the office of historian gave way first to an appointed librarian, then later to the formation of a library committee. Eventually, the library and archives were joined by a museum collection in the 1970s. The three were merged into the Mazama Library and Historical Collections in 2010. In 2015, the Mazamas created and hired for the position of Library and Historical Collections Manager to oversee the LHC, only the second paid employee to do so and the seventh librarian to manage the collections.

The Mazama LHC acquires and preserves a broad range of materials about the organization. Besides the procedural records from 28 active committees, the LHC also retains files and documents from the Executive Council, Executive Director’s office, and staff. These records of merit portray the inner workings of the organization and include committee minutes, policy revisions, and significant changes in the structure, direction, and culture of the Mazamas. On a selective basis, when they fit the collection development policy, the LHC also takes in manuscripts and photographs from members and, in some cases, non-members as well.

The Library Space

The Mazama Library, one-third of the Mazama Library and Historical Collections, is one of the few standalone mountaineering libraries operating in the United States today. Early photographs of the Mazama Clubrooms, as they were known then, reveal a small glass-fronted bookcase that showcased the first books in the Mazama Library. Over the next 102 years, the library acquired guidebooks, technical how-to titles, and rare books on mountaineering. Today, the library is significantly more extensive and strives to meet the varied needs of members, researchers, and the interested public.



Mazama Library, Mazama Mountaineering Center, Portland, OR.



Currently, the circulating collection contains more than 7,500 volumes on mountaineering, climbing, bouldering, hiking, canyoneering, trekking, and other outdoor activities. Also, the library's reference collection maintains full runs of all the major alpine journals and periodicals including the (British) *Alpine Journal*, *the American Alpine Journal*, *Rock and Ice*, *Outside*, and *Backpacker*, to name just a few. The library's extensive biography section holds works by many prominent mountaineers including Sir Edmund Hillary, Lynn Hill, and Reinhold Messner. Rounding out the circulating collection is a small DVD library of mountaineering and climbing films and a selection of oversized works highlighting climbs, climbers, and mountains from around the world.

The collection development policy strives to add books that respond to three mountaineering-related questions: *How to do it?* (technical guides), *Where to do it?* (guidebooks), and *Who did it?* (histories, biographies, and expedition accounts). To a lesser extent, the library collects fiction and poetry works related to mountaineering and climbing. The Mazama Library's non-circulating Special Collection contains rare mountaineering titles from around the world. Several notable books in the collection include a unique, turn-of-the-century copy of *Scenes from the Snowfield* by Edmund T. Coleman, a first edition of *Search for the Apex of America* by Anna Smith Peck, and the aforementioned *To the Top of the Continent* by Dr. Frederick Cook.

Archives

The archives contain not only Mazamas institutional records, but also preserved manuscripts, photographs, and other documents related to the Pacific Northwest's history of mountaineering and climbing. A few of the more historically-important photograph collections include those of Mazamas founder William Gladstone Steel, early member Rodney L. Glisan, and the photographer Edward Curtis. William Steel, in addition to founding the Mazamas, was also the driving force behind the creation of Crater Lake National Park. Steel was deeply honored when, in 1896, the ancient mountain whose caldera now holds Crater Lake was named Mount Mazama in honor of the organization he founded. Steel loved Crater Lake and worked for 17 years to have the area declared a National Park.



Mazama Library, Mazama Mountaineering Center, Portland, OR.



He later served as the park's second superintendent. His 20-volume scrapbook collection, compiled from the late 1880s through the 1920s, details the early mountaineering history of the Pacific Northwest as well as his role in establishing first the Oregon Alpine Club and, after its demise, the Mazamas.

The Glisan Photographs Collection spans the 1910s through the late 1930s, and documents a wide range of outdoor activities such as skiing, snowshoeing, and hiking in addition to alpine mountaineering. Edward Curtis, known for his photographic and ethnographic work among American Indians, was also an early mountaineer and Mazamas member. The Mazamas own nearly fifty original Curtis prints that illustrate the Mazamas annual outings to Mount Rainier and Mount St. Helens in 1897 and 1898 respectively. In addition to capturing two early Mazamas outings and climbs, the St. Helens collection contains what several specialists consider one of Curtis' earliest photographs of Native Americans. Rounding out the important photograph collections is the C.E. Rusk Lantern Slide collection. Comprised of over four dozen slides, the collection recounts Rusk's trip to Alaska and Mount McKinley to verify the first ascent claim of Dr. Frederick Cook in 1912.

The two most-used collections in the Mazama archives are the summit register and glacier research collections. For almost eighty years, the Mazamas managed the registers on the summits of all the principal peaks in the Northwest. The logs, many in custom-made aluminum boxes designed and manufactured by the Mazamas, record the names of climbers and the date they reached the summit. The registers also encompass a wealth of observational data on the climate, geology, and glaciology of the mountains on which they resided. Beginning in 1895, the Mazamas undertook scientific research and observations of glaciers around the Northwest. The Mazamas were early pioneers of using aircraft to document glaciers and their movement. Covering roughly thirty years, this collection offers climate researchers a snapshot in time of these Northwest glaciers.



1915 Mount Hood summit register, Mazama Library and Historical Collections.

Realia

Begun in the early 1970s, the Mazama realia collection contains historic mountaineering gear from the Pacific Northwest and beyond. The collection was started by Vera Dafoe, a longtime Mazama volunteer, who noticed that material objects of historical value were being discarded and lost and thus took it upon herself to collect and save them. Over the last four decades, the collection has grown significantly, having amassed more than 8,000 objects.

Since the organization's formation, Mazama members have made hundreds of first ascents on peaks and rock formations regionally and around the world. The realia collections include objects from those first ascents, including early hand-forged pitons, Army surplus carabiners, and the first set of crampons made in Oregon. The collection features not only items used on climbs, but also unused gear in pristine condition, such as a Goldline climb-



ing rope and a set of climbing shoes from the 1970s. With a primary focus on Mazama history, the collection contains the 124-year-old alpenstock used by founding member Frank Branch Riley on the Mazamas inaugural climb in 1894 and again during the 100th-anniversary climb in 1994. The collection also holds an ice ax once owned by Argentinian dictator Juan Perón and later given as a gift to Mazama member William Hackett. Objects from the collection are frequently on display at the Mazama Mountaineering Center and loaned out to other institutions for exhibits and shows.

Conclusion

In the mid-1980s, two volunteer Mazama librarians conducted a survey of mountaineering libraries and mountaineering collections in the United States. Through their research, they found 13 specialized libraries and eight specialized collections

held by universities and other institutions. At the time, the Mazama Library ranked eighth in collection strength. Today the number of specialized mountaineering libraries stands at only a handful. On the West Coast, the Mazama Library is joined by the Sierra Club library in Oakland, California. On the East Coast, the Explorer's Club library in New York City is complemented by the Appalachian Mountain Club library in Boston, Massachusetts. Numerous universities, including the University of Washington and the University of California at Berkeley, boast sizable mountaineering collections. The largest mountaineering library in the United States is the American Alpine Club library in Golden, Colorado. To learn more about the Mazama Library and its collections visit, www.mazamalibrary.org.

Many climbing organizations have either significantly reduced their collections or eliminated their libraries entirely. The Mazamas have chosen a different path. In 2014, the executive council opted to expand the library and historical collections. The Mazamas have always been strong proponents of their history and have long supported their library. Surveys over the years uphold this assertion. The most recent, conducted in 2017, shows that 86 percent of the membership believes that the organization's collection of photographs, archival papers, and museum objects have strong historical value. Additionally, 60 percent of the membership is either aware of or has visited and used the library.



Historic ice ax collection, Mazama Library and Historical Collections.



Letter from the Librarian

The Mazama LHC continues to receive strong support for the library, its staff, and long-term goals. In February of 2015, the Mazamas hired me as part-time librarian to assume management of the library from the dedicated core of volunteers who had overseen it for many years. I was pleased when, in October 2017, my position was expanded to full-time status. Since being hired, I have aspired to reinvigorate the library and historical collections by increasing awareness of and access to the collections. In June 2017, with the help of a hardworking group of volunteers, the library catalog was put online, and the entire circulating collection was barcoded. The new system has broadened collection awareness, and circulation is up month after month.

Every day, I am amazed at the scope and depth of the collections. I am astounded by the deep roots that Mazamas have in the history of Portland and the Pacific Northwest. From William Steel's advocacy for Crater Lake to Henry Pittock's zeal for climbing, the Mazamas profound influence on our regional history is tangible. Each time I wander the stacks helping patrons, I encounter wonderfully obscure titles, many out of print or unique to this collection. I enjoy the opportunities I have to work with some of our earliest photograph collections. The images of women climbing in petticoats and men in suit jackets amaze me in their formality and inspire me to delve deeper to understand their motivations. Mostly, however, I am driven to come to work every day to help tell the story of this fantastic organization, its history, and its inspiring members. 