PEARY-MACMILLAN ARCTIC MUSEUM
AND ARCTIC STUDIES CENTER

The Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum was founded in honor of two famous Arctic explorers and Bowdoin alumni, Admirals Robert E. Peary (Class of 1877) and Donald B. MacMillan (Class of 1898). On April 6, 1909, after a lifetime of Arctic exploration, Peary became the first person to reach the North Pole. MacMillan was a crew member on that North Pole expedition. Between 1908 and 1954, MacMillan explored Labrador, Baffin Island, Ellesmere Island, and Greenland. Most of his expeditions were made on board the Bowdoin, a schooner he designed for work in ice-laden northern waters. MacMillan took college students on the expeditions and introduced them to the natural history and anthropology of the North. He was not the first to involve Bowdoin students in Arctic exploration, however. In 1860, Paul A. Chadbourne, a professor of chemistry and natural history, had sailed along the Labrador and West Greenland coasts with students from Williams and Bowdoin.

The museum’s collections include equipment, paintings, and photographs relating to the history of Arctic exploration, natural history specimens, and artifacts and drawings made by indigenous people of Arctic North America. The museum has large collections of ethnographic photographs and films recording past lifeways of Native Americans taken on the expeditions of MacMillan and Robert Bartlett, an explorer and captain who sailed northern waters for nearly fifty years. Diaries, logs, and correspondence relating to the museum’s collections are housed in the Special Collections section of the Hawthorne-Longfellow Library.

The museum, established in 1967, is located on the first floor of Hubbard Hall. The building was named for General Thomas Hubbard of the Class of 1857, a generous benefactor of the College and financial supporter of Peary’s Arctic ventures. The museum’s original galleries were designed by Ian M. White, former director of the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, who sailed with MacMillan in 1950. Generous donations from members of the Class of 1925, together with gifts from George B. Knox of the Class of 1929, a former trustee, and other interested alumni and friends, made the museum a reality. Continued support from friends of the College and the Kane Lodge Foundation, and federal and state grants have allowed the museum to continue to grow.

The Arctic Studies Center was established in 1985 as a result of a generous matching grant from the Russell and Janet Doubleday Foundation to endow the directorship of the center, in recognition of the Doubledays’ close relationship to MacMillan. The center links the resources of the museum and library with teaching and research efforts, and hosts lectures, workshops, and educational outreach projects. Through course offerings, field research programs, employment opportunities, and special events, the center promotes anthropological, archaeological, geological, and environmental investigations of the North.