Elmer Ekblaw Exhibit Interactive Display

Alexandra Brown, 2013

This summer I worked with the Peary Macmillan Arctic Museum on a collection of material recently received from the family of Elmer Ekblaw, the lead scientist on Donald MacMillan’s 1913 Crocker Land expedition. Our overarching goal was to prepare for the upcoming exhibit on Elmer Ekblaw, set to launch in two years. More specifically my goal this summer, with the help of Meg Bunke, was to come up with an interactive display to supplement the physical material in the collection.

Our work this summer can be divided into two categories: the artifacts and the journals. Out of each of these came a concept and the background research for a game. The artifacts led to Pack Your Own Sledge, while the journals led us to come up with The Crocker Land Trail.

Pack Your Own Sledge:

Before we could come up with this game we had to finish inventorying, cataloguing, labeling and photographing the collection. Once each artifact was connected to an accession number and that accession number connected to a photograph and all of the information on Embark (our museum database), we had to house them. Each artifact had to be individually housed so that it was protected, ready to be moved to the collections room. Going through the collection so thoroughly we began to see how each individual artifact had a role to play in the expedition. Pack Your Own Sledge emerged as a way for visitors to the museum to learn more about the artifacts that they see on display. For each piece, they would be asked if they wanted to bring it with them on their sledging trip, or leave it at camp. For instance, snow goggles would be incredibly important in the Arctic and if left behind could lead to snow blindness. A lanternslide projector, however, would just be extra weight. Visitors would come away from the exhibit with a more intimate connection to the material.

The Crocker Land Trail:

We developed The Crocker Land Trail out of the Ekblaw journals, a collection of 41 handwritten scientific and personal journals recording his time in the Arctic. The journals themselves are slated for Bowdoin Library’s Special Collections, but before they go over there, we had to process them as part of the Ekblaw collection. Each journal was inventoried and accessioned, then each individual page was photographed. The photographs were then organized using a program called Portfolio so that we would have day to day access to the journals while planning the exhibit. Meg and I then read through all 41 journals taking notes and creating a comprehensive day to day timeline of the expedition.

As we read we kept track of the day to day decisions which Ekblaw had to make, and how they affected the expeditions. When it is complete, the Crocker Land Trail will simulate one of Ekblaw’s sledging journeys, presenting the player with decisions that explorers actually would have faced in the Arctic. Visitors would come away from this game with a basic understanding of Arctic exploration, as well as a slightly more detailed understanding of the Crocker Land Expedition itself.

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