



UAF photo by Theresa Baker.



Photo courtesy of Hudson Stuck's book, *The Ascent of Denali*.

▲ Tatum's journal, dated June 7, 1913: "Today stands a big red letter in my life."

◀ Robert Tatum, Esaias George, Harry Karstens, Johnny Fredson and Walter Harper.

▼ Hudson Stuck.



THE FIRST ASCENT OF DENALI: CHASING THE LEGACY

By Theresa Bakker

Angela Linn, '99, wears bright purple gloves so she can handle the century-old artifacts without leaving any fingerprints. She opens the flat FedEx box and removes the documents, carefully preserving each layer of protective wrapping until she comes to a black, hardbound book with the words on the cover handwritten in an almost ghostly white — *Journal of Archdeacon Hudson Stuck Recording Ascent of Mt. Denali (Mt. McKinley), June 1913*.

Stuck had kept a faithful accounting of that year, important to history because it included the culmination of his dream to climb the highest peak in North America in honor of the 25th anniversary of the Episcopal Church in Alaska. But this book did not include any entries from the critical last days of the climb. Stuck left the heavy book at the 10,800-foot camp. For his impressions of the final push to the top of McKinley, Stuck had kept a second journal, a slim pad about the size of a reporter's notebook.

"This is what I'd been waiting for," Linn says. "I had read Stuck's 1913 diary, so it was familiar to me. But

I was truly excited to receive the smaller journal. That diary had never been scanned."

Stuck's 1914 book, *The Ascent of Denali*, is the official record of the climb. It's what historians refer to when they discuss the details. It's how the four climbers are remembered. Now for the first time, Linn was able to compare the book to the original journal and learn about the personal experiences of Stuck.

That's why Linn wanted to have all four of the journals kept by the men who reached the summit of McKinley during that 1913 expedition. She imagined displaying them together — for the first time in 100 years — as part of the UA Museum of the North's special exhibit, "Denali Legacy: 100 Years on the Mountain."

Stuck's journals had been archived by the American Geographical Society since 1922. Linn managed to track down the rest of them at various archives. The tiny diary kept by Harry Karstens arrived next, from the American Alpine Club library. Karstens went on to become the first superintendent of Mount McKinley National Park (now known as Denali National Park and Preserve).

The final two diaries, almost identical in appearance, arrived at the museum near the end of January. They were school notebooks, the kind where students wrote their lessons. One belonged to Walter Harper, a young Athabascan man who accompanied Stuck on his many travels. The other was kept by Robert Tatum, an Episcopal missionary from Tennessee who hoped to join the priesthood. Both men were protégés of the charismatic Archdeacon Hudson Stuck. Harper's journal is housed at the Rasmuson Library's Alaska and Polar Regions Collections and Archives, while Tatum's is archived in the Special Collections at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

"Having the actual pages with the words written on them brings the story to life in a new way," Linn says. "We're incredibly lucky that the archives that hold these precious

documents agreed to lend them. Works on paper are fragile and sensitive to light. This is likely the only time these documents have been exhibited in their lifetimes."

Linn had never seen Tatum's journal entries before. In fact, of all the members of the expedition, his story was the least known. "He was kind of a mystery man," she says. "Tatum signed on as the official cook but also reached the summit of the mountain himself. He was the only member of the team without a Wikipedia entry. I felt a sort of obligation to fill out his story and make the world more aware of his contributions."

As the guest curator for the museum's exhibit, Linn wanted to fill in these gaps, so she hunted for connections to Tatum. She researched archives, talked to countless relatives and experts. Eventually, she found family members who still reside in Tennessee.

One of them, Robert's grandnephew Doug Tatum, didn't learn about his great-uncle's accomplishments until he was an adult. "I had never, nor did any of my siblings know, that my dad's father's brother was Robert Tatum and had summited Denali," he says. "We didn't know that. Dad said he was a very modest, quiet-spoken gentleman."

In Stuck's diary is a reference to a flag made by Robert Tatum, "which he hopes to hoist on top of the instrument tent on the summit," using "two silk handkerchiefs and the lining of a padded noodle can." Linn thought those kinds of artifacts were long gone, either left on the mountain in the rush of the descent or lost to time. But one day, as he was helping his mother clean out the attic, Doug Tatum had discovered this evidence of his great-uncle's achievement. "It wasn't kept very well. I found it in a shoebox with some other items while

Making the mountain

Artifacts from the first ascent are



UAF photo by Theresa Bakker.

◀ **Hundreds of 1/8-inch-thick pieces of plywood were used to make a 28-layer model of Mount McKinley.**

**Museum staff reach new heights ▶
to put the finishing touches
on the scale model of Mount McKinley.**



UAF photo by Theresa Bakker.



UAF photo by JR Ancheta.

◀ **The finished model of Mount McKinley, with routes taken by climbers over the last century.**

**Visitors follow a timeline on the ▶
exhibit walls featuring passages
from all the climbers' journals.**



UAF photo by JR Ancheta.

going through some stuff with my parents. I hand carried it to the Chicago conservatory.” That flag (pictured at far right) is part of the temporary Denali legacy exhibit, and hangs near the last remaining climbing pick used by the climbers.

In contrast, Eugene Karstens knew from an early age that it would be his responsibility to keep the story of his grandfather alive. He knew because his mother told him so. “His climbing pick was one of the early things my mother trusted me with. It went up on my wall over one of those classic Sierra Club posters [with] the five people in a row walking up a razor ridge, and that pick just looked great over that. Right above a kid’s bed, and that was always a symbol of, well, you have got something to live up to, kid. My mom wasn’t stupid in that regard.”

Eugene personally took that ice axe from Colorado to Fairbanks so it could be on display in the exhibit. He couldn’t trust it to strangers. It has been his mission to protect the legacy of his grandfather, to make sure his name wouldn’t be forgotten by history.

Linn says that from the very start, this story longed to be told. “Personal connections that started with a few emails and phone calls have grown into an exhibit full of artifacts and the faces of the climbers’ descendants.

“Now the precious histories of Hudson Stuck, Harry Karstens, Walter Harper, Robert Tatum and John Fredson will once again be reconnected to the mountain they first set foot upon a century ago.”

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Learn more about the first ascent of Mount McKinley at www.uaf.edu/museum/exhibits/special/legacy/.

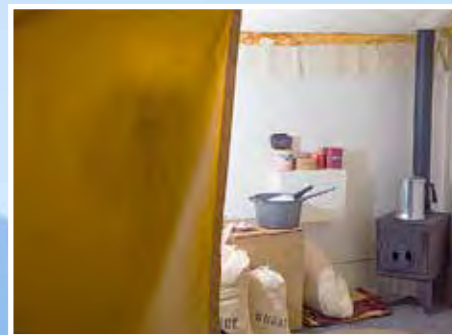
on exhibit at the UA Museum of the North through April 12, 2014.



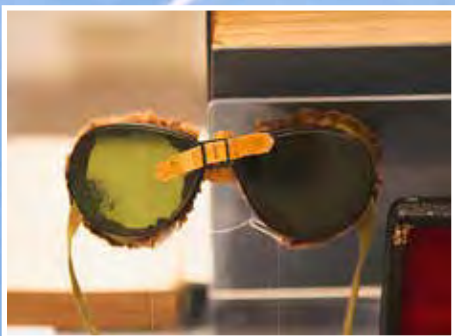
UAF photo by JR Ancheta.

◀ A pair of handmade crampons left on the Muldrow Glacier by the Sourdough Expedition’s unsuccessful attempt to reach the summit of Mount McKinley in 1910. They were recovered by the Lindley-Like expedition 22 years later.

A model of the base camp kept by ▶ John Fredson at 4,000 feet on Cache Creek is equipped with a stove and pretend food.



UAF photo by JR Ancheta.



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◀ Harry Karstens’ snow goggles.

Archdeacon Stuck records holding a ▶ religious service at 10,800 feet, which probably included this Eucharist set. It did not summit with the men, however.



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