



FINDING AID

STEPHEN TYNG MATHER FILM COLLECTION

1920-1929 (bulk dates: 1925-1929)

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National Park Service
NPS History Collection
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HISTORY

Stephen Tyng Mather was born in San Francisco, California on July 4, 1867. His parents were Joseph Wakeman Mather, a business merchant with ties to the borax industry, and Bertha Jemima Walker. A descendant of Richard Mather, a prominent Puritan minister in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, Mather attended Lincoln Grammar School and Boys' High School in San Francisco.

In 1887, he graduated from University of California, Berkeley. He moved to the East Coast and worked as a journalist for the "New York Sun" for the next five years. In 1893, he married Jane Thacker Floy and the Mathers had one daughter, Bertha Floy Mather. Following the marriage, Mather joined his father in the borax business at the Pacific Coast Borax Company, working in advertising and as a sales promotion manager. Talented at marketing and publicity, Mather helped Francis Marion "Borax" Smith make the brand name 20 Mule Borax synonymous with borax in the United States. In 1898, he and partner Thomas Thorkildsen created Thorkildsen-Mather Borax Company.

In 1904, Mather hiked the Swiss Alps, followed by climbing up the icy side of Mount Rainier with the Sierra Club in 1905. He credited such experiences not only with making him into a committed mountaineer but also with inspiring ideas to improve national parks in the United States. Mather found that the parks had poorly maintained trails and roads, and no protection from private lumber and cattle interests. In 1914, after hiking in the High Sierra, he wrote the secretary of interior, Franklin K. Lane, to complain about the management of the parks. The story goes that Lane, who was looking for someone to administer the parks, invited Mather to come to Washington, D.C., and "run them yourself" as assistant to the secretary of the interior.

Mather came to Washington from Chicago in January 1915 as special assistant to secretary of the interior for national park concerns. There, he met Horace M. Albright, who became his assistant and together they laid the groundwork to establish a system of national parks. That summer the Mather took a group of influential individuals on a back country trek through the High Sierras. The "Mather Mountain Party" as it became known engendered significant support for the mission to establish a bureau to manage the parks. Within a relatively short time, Mather brought together a broad coalition in support for national parks, including the railroads and other business interests; writers and journalists; environmental groups such as Sierra Club, American Civic Association, and Save the Redwoods; and members of Congress, to secure passage of the act establishing the National Park Service (NPS) on August 25, 1916.

An appropriations act on April 17, 1917 provided funds for NPS operations and Mather became the first director on May 16, 1917. Albright became assistant director. However, Mather became incapacitated by depression shortly after the NPS was established, leaving Albright to serve as acting director and get the new bureau up and running. As Mather recovered, he continued to promote park access, development, and use and contributed generously to the parks from his personal fortune. He traveled regularly to the parks, often bringing government officials, senators, and representatives with as guests, to showcase the national parks and their needs. During his tenure the Service's domain expanded eastward with the addition of Shenandoah, Great Smoky Mountains, and Mammoth Cave National Parks.

Around 1924, Mather purchased a Bell and Howell 16mm Cine camera and Filmo Cine Projector. He used the camera to create home movies that document his family life, national parks he visited, and

special events. From 1925-1928, he made dozens of films while traveling to national parks as part of his annual inspection tours, as well as during trips to Alaska and Hawaii.

Mather began talking about retirement in January 1927, saying that he was tired and had accomplished all that he had set out to do. However, that phase passed quickly and, following a trip to Central America, he refocused on “all that’s got to be done” and continued his work and his strenuous travel schedule. During a spring 1927 trip to Hawaii, Mather had a heart attack on the outbound boat journey. Although he recovered and appeared fit when he returned to California, others remained concerned about his health. He suffered a stroke on November 5, 1928 and retired from the NPS on January 12, 1929. He remained in the hospital until May 1929, when he returned to the Mather homestead in Darien, CT.

In November 1928, Mather entered the Corey Hill Hospital in Brookline, Massachusetts to work with Dr. Joel Goldthwaite to regain mobility in the leg, arm, and fingers affected by the stroke. He had a second stroke while at the hospital and died on January 22, 1930. Following his death, sympathy messages poured in to Mrs. Mather and newspaper obituaries praised his good works. Numerous locations and geographic features were named in his honor, including Mount Mather in Alaska; Mather Point at the Grand Canyon; Mather Memorial Highway in the Cascades; Mather Memorial Arboretum of redwoods in Strawberry Canyon at the University of California; and a 10,000-tree Mather Forest was developed at Lake George, NY, among others.

Bronze plaques, known in the NPS as “Mather plaques” were designed by sculptor Bryant Baker and installed in 23 national parks and 33 national monuments. Memorial trees were planted in numerous national parks and monuments. On July 10, 1932, the Bohemian Club of San Francisco, through the courtesy of NBC, made a National Memorial Broadcast in honor of Mather. In 1969, the scenic gorge of the Potomac River below Great Falls was renamed in his honor. Mather's legacy continues to be acknowledged in books, journals, newspaper reports, and documentaries that address the history of the National Park Service and conservation in the United States.

Sources:

American National Bibliography Online, "Mather, Stephen Tyng", available at <http://www.anb.org/articles/20/20-00648.html>

Sellars, Richard West (1997), “Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History” available at https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/sellars/chap3c.htm

Shankland, Richard (1951), "Steve Mather of the National Parks", New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

STEPHEN TYNG MATHER FILM COLLECTION

1920-1929 (bulk dates: 1925-1929)

CATALOG NUMBER HFCA 1883

VOLUME 40 EA

DESCRIPTION 16mm, silent, black and white films taken by NPS Director Stephen T. Mather with his Bell and Howell Cine camera. Films document trips to national parks from c. 1924-1929, including Yosemite, Grand Canyon, Redwoods, Isle Royale, and Rocky Mountain as well as trips to Hawaii and Alaska. Rocky Mountain film features Fall River Road and imagery by Fred Payne Clatworthy. Films include shots of Mather, his wife Jane Floy Mather and their daughter Bertha Floy Mather; Horace M. Albright; Mr. and Mrs. Arno B. Cammerer; Roger Toll; Oliver Mitchell; secretaries of the interior; and others. Subjects include wildlife such as deer, bears, moose, and buffalo (bison); Superintendents' Conference at Yosemite; opening of the Gardiner Gateway at Yellowstone; 1926 Coordination Commission at Yosemite; views of the High Sierra; Lake Tahoe; and the 1926 national parks visit by the Crown Prince of Sweden. Also contains films not created by Mather but developed between 1920-1929 to promote national parks, including Great Northern Railroad films of Glacier National Park and Horsley Productions films of Carlsbad, Yosemite, and Grand Canyon. Cine library films of Mount Rainier and Native Hawaiian hula dancing are also included.

Reel numbers are those given by the Mather family. They are not consecutive and not all films were assigned reel numbers. Undated films have been given approximate dates based on Mather's known travel schedule, whenever possible. More general films taken by Mather are presumed to date from between 1924 (when Mather is believed to have purchased his 16mm film camera and projector) and 1929 (as Mather died in January 1930).

ORGANIZATION Organized into two series: Series I: Mather's Home Movies; Series II: Film Productions.

PROVENANCE Collection donated to the National Park Service by Stephen Mather's three grandchildren. Films of a more personal nature were retained by the family.

RESTRICTIONS No

*ASSOCIATED
MATERIALS*

Assembled Historic Records of the National Park Service, NPS History Collection;

National Park Service Historic Photograph Collection, NPS History Collection;

Mather's 16mm film projector, NPS History Collection;

Archives, Yosemite National Park;

Stephen Tyng Mather Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley; and

Fred Payne Clatworthy Collection, History Colorado.

HIERARCHY

SERIES I: MATHER'S HOME MOVIES, c. 1924-1929

SERIES II: FILM PRODUCTIONS, 1920-1929

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

SERIES I: MATHER'S HOME MOVIES, c. 1924-1929

Arranged alphabetically by park or subject.

16mm films made by Stephen T. Mather as part of his travels and work as director of the National Park Service. In some cases, films may have been sent to him by others. Most of the films feature specific parks, including Grand Canyon, Isle Royale, Redwoods, Rocky Mountain, Mt. McKinley, Yosemite, and Yellowstone, as well as parks in Alaska and Hawaii. Films were also made at conferences and at the Mather Homestead in Darien, CT. People featured in the films include Stephen T. Mather, his wife Jane, and their daughter Bertha; Arno B. Cammerer and Horace M. Albright; Oliver Mitchell, Mather's attorney and business associate; Yellowstone Superintendent Roger Toll; secretaries of the interior; and Crown Prince Gustav Adolf of Sweden. Films featuring more than one park are arranged as "Parks, Various."

SERIES II: FILM PRODUCTIONS, 1920-1929

Arranged alphabetically by park or subject.

16mm films made by people other than Stephen T. Mather or commercially-produced to showcase and promote national parks. Includes travelogues of Yosemite, Carlsbad Caverns, Grand Canyon, and Yosemite by Horsley Productions. Two films about Glacier National Park produced by the Great Northern Railroad are present. Cine library films on Mount Rainier and hula dancing in Hawaii are also included.

CONTAINER LIST

STEPHEN T. BOX 01
 MATHER FILM
 COLLECTION SERIES I: MATHER'S HOME MOVIES

Conferences, State Park Convention, c. 1928
 Conferences, Superintendents' Conference #38, 1927-1928
 Mather Homestead, "Babby" #9, c. 1926-1927
 Mather Homestead, Summer #65, 1929
 Parks, Alaska--Alaska #2, c. 1926
 Parks, Grand Canyon National Park--North Rim, 1927
 Parks, Grand Canyon National Park--North Rim, c. 1927
 Parks, Grand Canyon National Park--North Rim and Kaibab, c. 1927
 Parks, Hawaii--Hawaii 1 #46, c. 1927
 Parks, Hawaii--Hawaii 2 #47, c. 1927
 Parks, Isle Royale National Park--Moose #66, c. 1924
 Parks, Mt. McKinley National Park--Animals, c. 1926
 Parks, Redwoods --Mather, Jane Floy at Redwoods #39, 1927
 Parks, Rocky Mountain National Park and Fall River #67, c. 1925
 Parks, Various--Bears #59, c. 1926
 Parks, Various--Crown Prince of Sweden Visit #44, c. 1926
 Parks, Various--Giant Forest and Yosemite #50, c. 1924-1928
 Parks, Various--Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone #41, 1926
 Parks, Various--Stills of Parks #49, c. 1924-1929
 Parks, Various--Western Trip #8, August-September 1928

BOX 02

Parks, Yellowstone National Park--Animals #60, 1927
 Parks, Yellowstone National Park--Buffalo [Bison] #61, 1927
 Parks, Yellowstone National Park--Wildlife #68, n.d.
 Parks, Yosemite National Park--Coordination Commission #42, 1926
 Parks, Yosemite National Park--Mather Address #42a, October 1927
 Parks, Yosemite National Park--Trip Through Yosemite National Park #57, n.d.
 Parks, Yosemite National Park--Yosemite with Oliver Mitchell #45, 1927
 People--Mather, Jane Floy and the Townsends #40, May 5-6, 1925
 People--Mather, Stephen T. #1, n.d.
 People--Mr. Cam and Mr. Albright, n.d.
 People--Purdy at Lake Tahoe #48, 1927
 People--Secretaries of the Interior #37, n.d.

BOX 03

SERIES II: FILM PRODUCTIONS

Carlsbad Caverns National Park Travelogue #56, n.d.

Glacier National Park--Fishing Scenes at Lakes #64, n.d.

Glacier National Park--Fishing Scenes at Streams #63, n.d.

Grand Canyon National Park Travelogue #58, n.d.

Mount Rainier National Park "Above the Clouds", c. 1927-1929

Native Hawaiian Hula Dance, c. 1927

Yosemite National Park--Ranger Club #62, 1920

Yosemite National Park Travelogue #55, n.d.