

AN ODD ASSORTMENT OF FOREIGNERS IN GREENLAND:

Towards the Political Implications of Arctic
Travel during the Late Interwar Years

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Abstract: The interwar years, 1918-1939, saw an increase in both the number and variety of travelers headed to the Arctic. Employing new technologies that allowed the region to become more accessible, knowable, and visible to the globe, these ventures to the North both reflected and contributed to the widespread geopolitical, social, and economic shifts occurring during this period, laying the foundation for how the Arctic is understood and framed today. However, many of these travelers remain marginal or completely overlooked in discussions of the region. This paper argues that greater attention to the increasingly odd assortment of foreigners traveling to the Arctic between World War I and World War II can offer a more nuanced understanding of both the geopolitical transitions underway in the region during this period and the broader political implications of travel. As an initial investigation of this ongoing research topic, this paper concentrates on three of the slowly increasing number of travelers with direct or close ties to the United States who ventured to Greenland in the late interwar years. It focuses on the travels of American artist Rockwell Kent, wealthy California socialite and amateur scientist Louise A. Boyd, and the Hollywood-sponsored filming expedition of German filmmaker Arnold Fanck, who all traveled to Greenland between 1931-1932. Approached not as singular endeavors but as part of the changing complex of Arctic expedition and travel, this paper argues that attention to these travelers provides greater insight into shifts in colonial policy, increasing cooperation between states, and the upsurge in global interest in the island, as well as the shifting relations between Denmark, the US, and Greenland. It also raises issues about the changing relationship between politics, science, and art.

Key words:
Travel,
Expedition,
Sovereignty,
Art,
Greenland

The interwar years, 1918-1939, mark a period of transition in the history of the Arctic. The era of the North as a mysterious, uncharted, and perilous expanse traversed by heroic individual explorers was gradually coming to an end while new and more varied types of travelers were heading to the region. Utilizing novel technologies that would allow the Arctic to become increasingly knowable, visible, and accessible to the globe, these forays reflected and contributed to the widespread geopolitical, social, and economic shifts that laid the foundation for how the Arctic is understood and framed today. Yet, unlike their romanticized predecessors, many of those who ventured North during the waning years of the interwar period remain peripheral or entirely absent from discussions of the region, their exclusion obscuring our understanding of the rapid changes underway at the time as well as their role in shaping the contemporary Arctic. This paper examines what can be learned about the changing geopolitical terrain of the region by focusing greater attention on this odd assortment of travelers who ventured North during the years immediately preceding World War II and argues that such a perspective can provide a more nuanced understanding of the Arctic as well as the broader political implications of travel.

As an initial examination of this topic, this paper explores just three of the small but growing number of travelers with direct or close ties to the United States who ventured to Greenland during the heated territorial dispute surrounding the island's east coast. In

just a two-year period, 1931-1932, American artist Rockwell Kent, wealthy California socialite and amateur scientist Louise A. Boyd, and the Hollywood-sponsored filming expedition of the controversial German filmmaker Arnold Fanck were among the group of artists, scientists, amateur researchers, and others who voyaged to the ostensibly closed colony with the permission of the Danish government. Examined not as singular endeavors but as part of the changing complex of Arctic expedition and travel, this paper argues that attention to these travelers provides greater insight into shifts in colonial policy, increasing cooperation between states, and the upsurge in commercial, artistic, and scientific interest in Greenland. Focusing on the permissions granted to the Louise A. Boyd 1931 East Greenland Expedition, the Universal-Dr. Fanck Expedition, and to Rockwell Kent, as well as their activities, this paper also explores the nuances of the transforming relationship between Denmark, the US, and Greenland as a means of examining the role of travel in the changing geopolitics of the Arctic.

Understanding Arctic Expeditions

When approaching the political implications of travels in the Arctic and of foreigners venturing to Greenland, specifically, it is necessary to examine the broader relationship between expeditions, colonization, and the state. Historically, the colonial state apparatus can be understood in terms of the establishment of juridical relations of property and the possession of land. Operating

as a “territorializing machine,” it transformed soils into discrete territories by means of violence, law, and cartography.¹ One of the most potent instruments through which this transformative process occurred was the outfit and the deployment of expeditions in order to lay hands on lands supposedly primordial and unclaimed.² Through the practice of “discovery,” which included gathering geographic knowledge of a particular region, identifying and exploiting resources, founding settlements and trading posts, crafting laws and regulations, and generally excluding Indigenous voices—which explorers, soldiers, missionaries, settlers, prospectors, and traders relied upon—from their records, expeditions served as a vehicle of the colonial state through which claims to territory could be formalized. Crucially, though, expeditions also served as a means to support the legitimacy of these colonial “possessions” at home and abroad, a role that would become increasingly significant throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. Through books, lectures, articles, drawings, and later in photographs and films, expeditions transmitted knowledge of regions far away, including their economic potential, to domestic and international audiences. This



Greenland Photo: Rockwell Kent #624
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served to display expertise, bolster national pride, and to support further expeditions.³

In Greenland and other parts of the Arctic, the “discovery” of natural resources such as mineral deposits, furs, and fishing and whaling grounds through expeditions stimulated the interest of trading companies, scientific societies, and colonial administrators and led to a near constant stream of voyages northward, piecing together maps, making claims to land in the region while at the same time demonstrating the expertise of various

1 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis & London: Minnesota University Press, 2015); Stuart Elden, “Land, Terrain, Territory,” *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 6 (2010): 808-812.

2 Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Malden & Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

3 Driver, *Geography Militant*; Russell Alan Potter, *Arctic Spectacles: The Frozen North in Visual Culture, 1818-1875* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2007); Martin Thomas, “What Is an Expedition? An Introduction,” in *Expedition into Empire: Exploratory Journeys and the Making of the Modern World*, ed. Martin Thomas (New York and London: Routledge, 2015).

colonial states.⁴ Yet by the first decades of the 20th century, what is commonly thought of as the age of “discovery” in the Arctic was slowly coming to an end with the practices and the technologies of expeditions changing. The aura of romance and adventure that had once given shape to ventures northward had already begun to fade during the 19th century with very public catastrophes such as the disappearance of the Franklin Expedition after 1845, the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition (1881-1884), or the disappearance of German scientist Alfred Wegener in Greenland in 1930. Combined with unrest in Europe and a shift in political attention to more southerly regions with greater accessibility, public interest and governmental sponsorship of large-scale Arctic expeditions in countries like the US and Britain had begun to wane, especially during World War I.⁵

The familiar trope of the white, male explorer endangered by the harsh, alien environments

of the North was also reaching its apogee by the turn of the century, embodied by larger-than-life figures such as US admiral Robert E. Peary, Knud Rasmussen, or Frederick Cook, explorers who were elevated to national heroes for their pursuits in the Arctic region. They served as proxies for their respective colonial states in international contests such as the famous race to the North Pole. Individuals, not the work of collective expeditionary groups or Indigenous Peoples, who often aided and participated in such efforts, were the focus of increased public attention. Carried by national presses, by lectures and travelogues, and in exhibitions and museums, these individuals and their adventures allowed for domestic audiences to experience the danger of expedition and partake in international competitions for territory, prestige, and economic expansion.⁶ Explorers’ narratives served as key “technologies of travel” legitimizing the activities of these explorers and their respective states

4 Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press & University of Washington Press, 2005); Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013); Katja Göcke, *Indigene Landrechte im internationalen Vergleich* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2016), 282; Potter, *Arctic Spectacles*, 3-8; Andrew Stuhl, *Unfreezing the Arctic: Science, Colonialism, and the Transformation of Inuit Lands* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

5 Shelagh Grant, *Polar Imperative: A History of Arctic Sovereignty in North America* (Vancouver: Douglas & MacIntyre, 2010), 193-216; Nancy Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations, 1900-1932: A Period of Expanding International Interest* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1992), 29-38.

6 Lisa Bloom, *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Michael Bravo and Sverker Sörlin, “Narrative and Practice – an Introduction,” in *Narrating the Arctic: A Cultural History of Nordic Scientific Practices*, ed. Michael Bravo and Sverker Sörlin (Canton, MA: Science History Publications/USA, 2002), 3-32.; Alexander Kraus, “Scientists and Heroes: International Arctic Cooperation at the End of the Nineteenth Century,” *New Global Studies* 17, no. 2 (2013): 101-116; Robert Petersen, “Udforskningen af det lukkede land fortsætter.” in *Kalaallit Nunaat/Gyldendals Bog om Grønland*, ed. Bent Gynther and Aqigssiaq Møller (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag A/S, 1999); Beau Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer: The Press, Sensationalism, and Geographic Discovery* (London and New York: Belhaven Press, 1993); Thomas, *Geography Militant*.

while at the same time excluding other members of expeditions and the Indigenous knowledge on which they heavily depended.⁷ The activities of these Arctic travelers also contributed to an already heightened atmosphere of suspicion between colonial states during the early years of the 20th century as expeditions could be used to both support and legitimize territorial claims. However, the start of World War I put a halt to almost all expeditions in the Arctic, with the exception of those led by US naval officer Donald MacMillan and Vilhjalmur Stefansson.⁸

Expeditions to the Arctic that resumed after 1918 were largely supported by private funding from individuals, scientific societies, and universities requiring the cultivation of a new type of sensationalism to both secure and maintain attention and political support. As historian Nancy Fogelson has convincingly argued, over the first decades of the 20th century, colonial states were deliberately disengaging from direct funding of Arctic expeditions, generally confining their support to diplomatic assistance, in order to avoid direct conflict over polar regions. Scientific expeditions, like those that became increasingly common during the late interwar years, instead became an indirect means of

projecting geopolitical power and influence.⁹ The expeditions North that resumed after 1918 were also more diverse than their prewar predecessors, reflecting the widespread use of once novel technologies that had been refined during the War, a greater scientific and commercial interest in the Arctic, and transformations in Arctic geopolitics. The use of aircraft, wireless communication, and cameras along with other once-marvelous technologies altered the speed of travelers and of information opening the region to entangled scientific, artistic, economic, and military interests. Once-slow processes like mapping the shape and contours of the landscape, for example, accelerated dramatically with flight and film, as did knowledge of the mineral potential of the Arctic, of its strategic importance for transatlantic air transportation, and its significance for meteorology, oceanography, geology, anthropology, and other disciplines.¹⁰

Voyages North during the late interwar years reflected and contributed to these broader transformations even as they began to appear less like the prototypical expeditions of previous eras. The character of the lone, hardened adventurer, which had exemplified Arctic expeditions in the past, was

7 Bravo and Sörlin, "Narrative and Practice," 4-5.

8 Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 193-246; Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations*, 29-44.

9 Nancy Fogelson, "The Tip of the Iceberg: The United States and International Rivalry for the Arctic, 1900-25," *Diplomatic History* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 131-148.

10 Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations*, 4-5; Nancy Fogelson, "Greenland: Strategic Base on a Northern Defense Line," *Journal of Military History* 53 (January 1989): 51-63; Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 217.

supplanted by a more diverse set of figures headed towards the region.¹¹ As Christopher Ries points out, “in a massive endeavor like the Three-Year-Expedition [1931-1934], with teams of scientists from many different disciplines working in a co-ordinated effort, there was little room for individual achievement, let alone heroism.”¹² In addition to these larger groups of scientists, however, there was also a growing number of artists, photographers, and filmmakers who traveled to the region. While some were members of larger groups, others trekked alone producing rich visual, auditory, and written accounts that brought new sights, sounds, and understandings of the Arctic to audiences at home and abroad. Among these heterogenous groups were travelers who resided in Indigenous communities for months or, occasionally, even for years. The works they produced carried depictions of Indigenous Peoples as well as colonial practices that, while coded in personal or societal biases, began to demystify many aspects of life in the North and occasionally shed a critical light on colonial practices. The numbers of women traveling northward, although not common, were also increasing, including both female artists as well as female scientists.

11 Christopher Ries, “Lauge Koch and the Mapping of North East Greenland: Tradition and Modernity in Danish Arctic Research, 1920-1940,” in *Narrating the Arctic: A Cultural History of Nordic Scientific Practices*, ed. Michael Bravo and Sverker Sörlin (Canton, MA: Science History Publications/USA, 2002), 202-208; Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations*, 39-40.

12 Ries, “Lauge Koch and the Mapping of North East Greenland,” 208.

While appearing less like earlier forays North, the groups and individuals who headed to the region during the late interwar years represented a continuation of many of the practices associated with past expedition. “Discovery” remained a key aspect of travel, though instead of land it was a mixture of scientific data, sources of wealth and commerce, and the sights and sounds of the Arctic that waited to be claimed. Expertise was established through these activities and reflected back not only on individuals, organizations, and institutions but also on their respective states. Travel to the North in the late interwar years continued to have very real political implications—marking, legitimizing, and displaying the claims of southern states to Arctic territory while also serving as a recognition of the slowly coalescing geopolitical shape of the Arctic. In Greenland, for instance, the Danish expedition headed by Dr. Lauge Koch (1931-1934) was more than a scientific venture; it also served to mark and display Danish authority over the disputed east coast of the island.¹³ Yet analysis of expeditions during this period also display the nuances of these changes underway in the Arctic and the delicacy with which they were navigated as they took shape. This is particularly visible in areas of the North, where foreign entry was heavily restricted, such as Greenland. The increase in travelers to the country, such as those with ties to the US, highlighted not only shifts in the governance of the island but the changing relationship between states in the Arctic.

13 *ibid.*

From Suspicion to Cautious Cooperation: The US, Greenland, and Denmark in the Early 20th Century

While the Danish colonial presence in Greenland had existed for almost 200 years by the beginning of the 20th century, its colonies remained primarily concentrated on the island's west coast, with the exception of the newly established colony of Angmagssalik (Tasiilaq). This lack of a formal presence in other regions of Greenland, combined with foreign travel and activity in these areas, contributed to a growing concern in Copenhagen of possible rival territorial claims.¹⁴ On the east coast of Greenland, Norwegian activity was seen as posing the greatest possible threat to Danish sovereignty over the entirety of the island, but in northern Greenland, it was repeated American expeditions that prompted most concerns. Among the American explorers who traveled to the island at the turn of the 20th century, Peary was a particular source of consternation. His repeated expeditions to northwest Greenland and his prominent role in the international contest to reach the North Pole, a feat that was heavily published in the United States and abroad, could be used to support a possible American claim to a portion of Greenland. Peary himself was a vocal advocate for the American acquisition of the island. He cited Greenland's resources,

14 Erik Beukel, "Greenland and Denmark before 1945," in *Phasing Out the Colonial Status of Greenland, 1945-54: A Historical Study*, ed. Erik Beukel, Frede P. Jensen, and Jens Elo Rytter (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2010): 19-20; Janice Cavell, "Historical Evidence and the Eastern Greenland Case," *Arctic* 61, no. 4 (2008), 434.

including coal and cryolite, the potential of its glacial streams for hydroelectric production, and its future military value as vital to American interests. He also believed the US Monroe Doctrine should be applied to the island, finding Greenland should not be a European colony but an American possession.¹⁵ In 1916 he wrote in the *New York Times*:

*The abundance of native coal and the numerous glacial streams which come tumbling into the southern fjords from the great interior ice sheet represent enormous potential energy which might be translated into nitrate and electrical energy, to make Greenland a powerhouse for the United States. Greenland represents ice, coal, and power in inexhaustible quantities. And stranger things have happened than that Greenland, in our hands, might furnish an important North Atlantic naval and aeronautical base.*¹⁶

However, Danish concerns regarding American interest in Greenland were not only the result of Peary's expeditions or advocacy. Since the second half of the 19th century, the notion of

15 Dawn Alexandra Berry, "The Monroe Doctrine and the Governance of Greenland's Security" in *Governing the North American Arctic: Sovereignty, Security, and Institutions*, ed. Dawn Alexandra Berry, Nigel Bowles, and Halbert Jones (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillian, 2016), 107-116; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 113-116.

16 Robert E Peary, "Greenland as an American Naval Base," *New York Times*, September 11, 1916. New York Times Historical Database.

the US acquiring the island had been an intermittent topic of discussion in Washington. US Secretary of State William Seward, for instance, had considered purchasing the whole of Greenland along with Iceland in the 1860s for its resource potential as well as the possibility the island opened for the US's extension into territories claimed by Canada, an action advocated by some expansionists at the time.¹⁷ The potential US acquisition of Greenland was also broached in 1910 by the American Ambassador to Denmark, Maurice Francis Egan, as part of a scheme that would see the US trade a portion of the Philippines to Denmark in exchange for Greenland, but this proposal, like other efforts to purchase Greenland, failed to gain much support.¹⁸

By 1915, however, any nascent American interest in acquiring Greenland had been eclipsed by the US's desire to obtain the Danish West Indies. American recognition of Danish claims to all of Greenland was a stipulation of the sale of Saint Croix, Saint Thomas, and Saint John, considered to be of strategic importance to the US given their proximity to the newly opened Panama Canal.¹⁹ American negotiators did attempt to include a provision that would allow free trade for all nations in Greenland, which fell in line with the broader

shift in US policy toward commerce.²⁰ However, Denmark objected to this provision, as it would have undermined the existing trade monopoly in Greenland maintained by the colonial Royal Greenland Trade Company (*Kongelige Grønlandske Handel*). This opposition from Denmark, combined with the push for a quick resolution to the sale by US President Woodrow Wilson, resulted in the removal of the trade provision from the treaty. The purchase of what are today the US Virgin Islands was concluded in 1916 for USD 25 million. With the sale came an official statement by the US Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, announcing the US would not object to the extension of Danish political and economic interests to the entirety of Greenland.²¹ Yet the word "sovereignty" was not used in the American declaration, and the US included an additional caveat stating it would not accept the sale or ceding of the island to any third party.²² According to historian Bo Lidegaard, the speed with which the agreement regarding Greenland was reached and the flexibility of the US were due, in part, to the perceived benefits of the arrangement to both parties. Danish control over all of Greenland was likely the best option for the US in the absence of a full American take-over of the island, as it was unlikely that Denmark, a small and relatively weak European state

17 Berry, "The Monroe Doctrine and the Governance of Greenland's Security," 107; Brainerd Dyer, "Robert J. Walker on Acquiring Greenland and Iceland," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27, no. 2 (1940).

18 Berry, "The Monroe Doctrine and the Governance of Greenland's Security," 107.

19 *ibid*, 108.

20 Bo Lidegaard, *Overleveren: 1914-1945* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal Leksikon, 2003), 178.

21 Berry, "The Monroe Doctrine and the Governance of Greenland's Security," 109.

22 Beukel, "Greenland and Denmark before 1945," 19-20; Lidegaard, *Overleveren: 1914-1945*, 177-178.

at the time, would interfere with US interests.²³ For Denmark, it was assumed that US acknowledgment of Danish claims to the entirety of Greenland would help sway the opinions of other states and could be leveraged to secure similar recognitions.²⁴

In July of 1919, Denmark approached Norway to gain a sense of the latter's attitude on acknowledging Danish sovereignty over the entire island, citing the American statement. At the initial meeting between officials no response was received but during later discussions, on 22 July, Norwegian Foreign Minister Nils Ihlen stated there would be no issues raised by the Government of Norway in the resolution of the case. This statement was never delivered in writing and would become a matter of considerable contention in the future dispute over Norwegian claims to territory in east Greenland.²⁵ Diplomatic correspondence was also sent to Britain, Italy, France, and Japan between March and May 1920 regarding Denmark's sovereignty over all of Greenland, with all acknowledging Denmark's position by June of that year apart from the United Kingdom, which was concerned over the status of Greenland possibly influencing future foreign claims to lands

considered to be part of the Canadian Arctic.²⁶ The British raised the option of adding the right of first refusal to their acknowledgement, which would allow for their negation of any arrangement to sell Greenland to a third party. This demand, however, conflicted with the US acknowledgment and prompted further debate in Washington over the importance of Greenland for American national defense. After a series of meetings in which the US affirmed it would not accept the right of first refusal in the hand of any other country, the British finally issued their acknowledgment in September of 1920. With recognition of Danish control over all of Greenland, with the exception of Norway, the Danish Government began freely to exercise authority over the whole of the island, including new regulations for travel in and around Greenland.²⁷

The overall Danish policy toward Greenland had been that of isolation throughout the colonial period. Travel to the colonies, even from Denmark, was highly restricted and trade was almost completely prohibited outside of activities conducted by the Royal Greenland Trading Company.²⁸ With the acknowledgment of Denmark's authority over the entirety of Greenland, many of these restrictions were

23 Lidegaard, *Overleveren: 1914-1945*, 178.

24 Beukel, "Greenland and Denmark before 1945," 19-20; Lidegaard, *Overleveren: 1914-1945*, 177-178.

25 Cavell, "Historical Evidence and the Eastern Greenland Case," 434; Oscar Svarlein, *The Eastern Greenland Case in Historical Perspective* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1964), 29-30.

26 Beukel, "Greenland and Denmark before 1945," 19-20; Cavell, "Historical Evidence and the Eastern Greenland Case," 434.

27 Lidegaard, *Overleveren: 1914-1945*, 178-180.

28 Beukel, "Greenland and Denmark before 1945," 14-15; Daniel Thorleifsen, "Det lukkede land," in *Kalaallit Nunaat/Gyldendals Bog om Grønland*, ed. Bent Gynther and Aqigssiaq Møller (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag A/S, 1999), 217-222.

officially extended to the whole of the island and additional regulations were formalized or crafted. In 1921, for instance, Denmark issued a decree restricting the navigation of foreign ships in all Greenlandic waters in line with regulations that had been in force in west Greenland since 1776.²⁹ Official regulations regarding travel and activities in Greenland followed. On 7 August, 1930, the Ministry of Shipping and Fisheries in Copenhagen under the direction of Danish Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning released "General Rules for Travel to and from Greenland."³⁰ They stipulated that travel to Greenland required special permission from the Danish Government and that such permissions were generally limited to those engaged in scientific or artistic study. The application for such travel was to be submitted through the government of the prospective travelers' home country to Denmark and include attestation of the applicants' qualifications as well as a recommendation from that government. Additionally, the dates of travel and other specifics, assurance of travelers' ability to support themselves and their activities, and medical certifications indicating the absence of contagious diseases that could be spread to the Greenlandic population were among the requirements.³¹ The

formalization of these regulations did more than simply routinize rules about foreign travel or hint at a slight shift in Denmark's policy of isolation in regard to Greenland. They served as an assertion of Danish sovereignty over the entirety of Greenland and required the acknowledgement of Danish authority by other governments through the state-to-state application process. Yet they also opened the way for new and varied types of travelers to venture to the island.

An Odd Assortment of Foreigners in Greenland

Scientists, painters, photographers, filmmakers, and aviators contributed to the increasing number of foreign travelers in Greenland in the late interwar years. While sometimes approached by historians as part of individual biographies or in regard to their contributions to a particular field of study, many of those who traveled in Greenland during this period receive little attention in discussions of Arctic expeditions or in histories of the island. Yet taken as part of the changing practice of travel, their activities illustrated not only a new and growing interest in Greenland and the Arctic or the porousness of boundaries between art, science, and commerce but also the nuances of the changing geopolitical shape of the region. The following section briefly examines the political implications of only a small segment of those foreigners traveling through Greenland in the late interwar years, focusing on Louise Boyd's 1931 East Greenland Expedition, the Universal-Dr. Fanck Expedition, and Rockwell Kent's first

29 Lidegaard, *Overleveren: 1914-1945*, 181-183.

30 Anthony K. Higgins, *Exploration history and place names in northern East Greenland* (Copenhagen: De Nationale Geologiske Undersøgelser for Danmark og Grønland (GEUS), 2010), 13.

31 Kongelige Grønlandske Handel, *Beretninger og Kundgørelser Vedrørende Kolonierne i Grønland For Aarene, 1928-1932* (Copenhagen: Trykt Hos J.H. Schultz A-S, 1933), 607-608.

prolonged stay on the island. Venturing to Greenland in 1931 and 1932, all three were relative novices to Arctic exploration with close or direct ties to the US that combined both art and science in their efforts. They were also permitted to enter the country at a time of increased tension with Norway over claims to a portion of Greenland's east coast. Their presence on the island was a marker of Danish authority in Greenland, US acceptance of this position, and more broadly the nascent cooperation beginning to coalesce in the region. However, their activities also illustrate the delicacy of the situation on the ground.

Louise Arner Boyd Arctic Expedition, 1931

Louise Arner Boyd led her first expedition to Greenland in 1931. Although the wealthy California-born socialite had already ventured to the Arctic in 1924 and 1926, visiting Franz Josef and Svalbard, and had been part of the effort to rescue Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, this would be her first voyage to Greenland. With the aid of the American Geographical Society, which had supported previous Arctic expeditions, she planned the venture and recruited a group of friends and associates to take part in the effort. Participants included botanist and horticulturalist Robert Hewett Menzies and his wife, Swedish cartographer Carl-Julius Anrick and his wife, and American sportsman and big game hunter Harry Whitney, who had traveled to Greenland previously and had been connected to the controversy surrounding the race to the North Pole. The self-funded expedition was planned as a preliminary visit

to the island and a photographic reconnaissance.³² Boyd was convinced of the utility of photography for the mapping and survey of geographical features, especially in regions where weather and other factors limited access, and she planned to test these ideas with her work on Greenland's east coast.³³

Chartering the Norwegian sealing vessel the *Veslekari*, Boyd obtained the necessary permissions from Denmark as well as medical examinations for all passengers and crew and then her expedition set out.³⁴ Both the weather and the political situation of east Greenland in 1931 would take careful navigation. Norway had been the only state to fail to provide an official acknowledgement of Denmark's claim to all of Greenland, and tensions between the two countries over claims to portions of east Greenland had been on the rise throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. Public sentiment supporting a claim to part of the island had been on the rise in Norway, and while the Norwegian government was hesitant to take action, it did endow three of its citizens in east Greenland with police authority. The Danish government objected, declaring Norway had no rights to grant such powers on Danish territory, and informed the Norwegian government that the leader of a forthcoming Danish

32 Joanna Kafarowski, *The Polar Adventures of a Rich American Dame: A Life of Louise Arner Boyd* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2017), 125-136.

33 Louise A. Boyd, "The Louise A. Boyd Seven Arctic Expeditions," *Photogrammetric Engineering and Remote Sensing* (December 1950), 652-653.

34 Kafarowski, *The Polar Adventures of a Rich American Dame*, 132-136.



The wireless stations at Myggbukta (East Greenland). Photograph taken by Louise A. Boyd on 18 July 1931. From the American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

expedition would be granted police authority over all persons in east Greenland.³⁵ By December of 1930, the situation heated further as news of the upcoming three-year Danish expedition by Lauge Koch had spread, with some in Norway viewing it as a covert means to subvert future Norwegian claims. The Norwegian government again rejected calls to formally occupy part of east Greenland, but on 27 June 1931 a group of Norwegians on the island raised the flag above Myggbukta Station and claimed the

coast between 71°30' and 75°40'N in the name of King Haakon VII. News of the event reached the Norwegian media two days later and resulted in a series of exchanges between the Norwegian and Danish governments, in which Denmark again asserted it would not compromise as to the issue of sovereignty. Faced with even greater public pressure, the Norwegian government officially claimed portions of east Greenland on 10 July 1931.³⁶ Boyd's expedition garnered some suspicion among those in Norway, as it

35 Svarlein, *The Eastern Greenland Case in Historical Perspective*, 37.

36 Cavell, "Historical Evidence and the Eastern Greenland Case"; Peter Schmidt Mikkelsen, *North-East Greenland 1908-60: The Trapper Era* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2008), 59.

had departed Ålesund, just 9 days before this claim and was headed toward the epicenter of the unfolding international dispute.³⁷

The *Veslekari* entered Greenlandic waters at the same time as ships carrying the Danish Three-Year Expedition led by Koch and the Norwegian expedition headed by Dr. Adolf Hoel. All three faced difficult ice and weather conditions and Boyd was in radio contact with both men. She was cognizant from the start of her position as an American and that of her government and made efforts to remain diplomatic and neutral in these communications, as the former was the representative of Danish authority in east Greenland and the latter was one of the main architects for the plan to force the Norwegian territorial claim.³⁸ Boyd was the first to reach the coast, entering what she described as the "zone of dispute."³⁹ Arriving at Myggbukta Station, Boyd was issued her visa by Hallvard Devold, who had been granted police authority by the Norwegian government, and during her short visit she managed to absent herself from any potentially heated political discussions. However, she was again reminded of the political situation when she later arrived at the Danish colony of Scoresbysund (Ittoqqortoormiit). Permission for the *Veslekari* to land was slow in

coming, and there was concern that her ship, being a Norwegian vessel with a Norwegian captain, crew, and flag, could be the cause, even though Boyd had obtained all appropriate Danish permissions. However, the delay turned out to be the result of engine issues experienced by the colony's boat, which arrived later. Boyd and her compatriots were then permitted on shore and greeted by the population as well as German pilot Wolfgang von Gronau, who had stopped at the colony as part of his attempt to find a commercial flight route between Europe and North America.⁴⁰ The Boyd expedition departed from Greenland in September 1931 carrying masses of photographs as well as botanical samples and other materials. Of the expedition, the *Christian Science Monitor* noted: "Just when the Danish-Norwegian dispute makes real Greenland information all important, the women produce it."⁴¹

The permission Boyd received to venture to the east coast was an act of Danish authority that hints at a broader understanding between the US and Denmark in relation to Greenland. Although Boyd was an amateur scientist and photographer traveling from Norway with a hired Norwegian vessel and crew at the time of rising tensions between the two Scandinavian countries, as an American endeavor her expedition was permitted

37 Kafarowski, *The Polar Adventures of a Rich American Dame*, 137.

38 *ibid*, 142-143; Frode Skarstein, "Erik the Red's Land: the land the never was." *Polar Research* 25, no.2 (2006): 174-175.

39 Louise A. Boyd and Robert H. Menzies, "Fiords of East Greenland: A Photographic Reconnaissance throughout the Franz Josef and King Oscar Fiords." *Geographic Review* 4, no. 2 (1932): 535.

40 Boyd and Menzies, "Fiords of East Greenland," 535-536, 557-559; Kafarowski, *The Polar Adventures of a Rich American Dame*, 145-153.

41 Quoted in Kafarowski, *The Polar Adventures of a Rich American Dame*, 153.

entrance. Yet her experience also indicates the delicacy of her position as an outsider amidst the dispute and the need to project neutrality as expeditions remained a means of establishing a presence and gaining expertise which, in turn, could be used to support territorial claims. The activities of Norwegian and Danish expeditions on the east coast, for instance, were used as evidence of each country's territorial claim during the dispute, and Boyd had to ensure her venture would not be misconstrued as favoring either claim or indicating any change in the American position regarding Greenland. Boyd's 1931 expedition, put in the context of other American ventures, including her own, also illustrates a growing US military interest in Greenland. The strategic importance of Greenland had already been the subject of discussion in Washington and with the advent of trans-continental aviation became even more pronounced. The Macmillan Expedition, for instance, carried US Admiral Robert Byrd along with an aircraft provided by the American Navy for reconnaissance in 1925, an effort that was granted permission and provided assistance by Danish authorities.⁴² With the rumblings of war in Europe, Boyd's photographs, maps, and materials produced from her 1931 expedition, as well as subsequent privately funded ventures to Greenland in 1933, 1937, and in 1938, were turned over to the US Government. She was also requested to delay the publication of materials from the latter two expeditions by Washington in

42 Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations*, 91-98.

the interest of national security.⁴³ In 1941, she was requested to lead an expedition to the west coast of Greenland by the US National Bureau of Standards. Details of the purpose of this final expedition were initially left vague in publicly released information, as the data being gathered was considered of interest to national defense during the War, relating to anomalies in radio communication in high altitudes.⁴⁴ Of her activities during the War, US Maj. Gen. Roscoe B. Woodruff remarked, "Miss Boyd's contributions and her exemplary service were highly beneficial to the cause of victory."⁴⁵ While Boyd's 1931 venture highlights the increase in US interest in Greenland as well as the security of Denmark's authority over the island, the Universal-Dr. Fanck Expedition, less than a year later, served to display that authority to the globe.

The Universal-Dr. Fanck Greenland Expedition
Seeking to build upon the commercial success of the film, *Igloo* (1932), then-president of Universal Pictures Corporation, NY, Carl Laemmle, commissioned a cinematic

43 Kafarowski, *The Polar Adventures of a Rich American Dame*; Joanna Kafarowski, "'From Boots On 'til Boots Off': Collecting Greenland with Explorer Louise Arner Boyd (1887-1972)," *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals* 14, no. 4 (Fall 2018): 491-492.

44 Audrey Amidon, "Women of the Polar Archives." *Prologue Magazine* 42, no. 2 (Summer 2010): Online. <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2010/summer/polar-women.html>; New York Times, "Gains Data on Radio on Arctic Expedition," *New York Times*, November 29, 1941, 12. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

45 New York Times, "Woman Explorer Honored by Army," *New York Times*, March 19, 1949, 12. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

expedition to Greenland through Universal's Berlin branch, Die Deutsche Universal. In April 1932, Laemmle met with the German director Dr. Arnold Fanck, renowned as a pioneer of the Bergfilm genre, at Universal City in California and hired him to helm the project. Fanck traveled to Copenhagen afterward and secured permission from the Danish Government to travel and film in west Greenland. During this visit he also met with Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen, who agreed to act as a technical advisor for the film and aid the venture while in Greenland.⁴⁶ In exchange, Rasmussen would be paid for his stipulated maximum of 10 days with the Fanck contingent, funds that would go to support his future expedition.⁴⁷ The initial plans for the Universal-Dr. Fanck expedition called for three films to be shot during its time in Greenland: *SOS Eisberg* (a German-language version for the German market), *SOS Iceberg* (an English-language version for the US market), and a third film under the direction of Andrew Marton, which would become *Nord-Pol Ahoi!* (1934); unfortunately, no copies of the third film survive

today.⁴⁸ On 25 May 1932, the expedition departed Hamburg, Germany, aboard the English whaler *S.S. Borodino*, briefly stopped in Copenhagen, and then headed to Greenland. Noted simply in the colonial record as "travels to Greenland with the main task of filming footage in Greenland,"⁴⁹ the venture was the largest of its kind to be permitted in Greenland prior to World War II. Arriving in Uummannaq on 4 June, the *Borodino* carried Fanck with his crew, including World War I pilot Ernst Udet, actress and later infamous director Leni Riefenstahl, and scientists Dr. Ernst Sorge and Dr. Fritz Loewe, along with two motorboats, two biplanes, a stunt plane, three polar bears, and two seals. The films were shot simultaneously over the next five months based on a script by Edwin H. Knopf. The crew worked in various locations in and around the Uummannaq area, including the villages of Illorsuit and Nuugaatsiaq, while some of its members such as Dr. Ernst Sorge, a former member of the Wegener Expedition, carried out scientific research while on the island. Over 175,000 feet of film was shot

46 John Andrew Gallagher, "S.O.S. Iceberg: Arctic Wastes, Antic Adventures," *American Cinematographer* 73, no. 11 (1992), 86.

47 Niels Barfoed, *Manden Bag Helten: Knud Rasmussen på nært hold* (Gyldendal, Copenhagen, 2011), 363-367; Anders Jørgensen, "Primitiv film? Knud Rasmussens ekspeditionsfilm," *Kosmorama* 232 (2003), 203.

48 Gallagher, "S.O.S. Iceberg," 86-88; Lill-Ann Körber, "See the Crashing Masses of White Death...': Greenland, Germany and the Sublime in the 'Bergfilm' *SOS Eisberg*," in *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, ed. Scott MacKenzie and Anna Westerståhl Stenport (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 148-155; Werner Sperschneider, "Landet bag isen. Grønland i 1920'ernes og 30'ernes kulturfilm," *Kosmorama: Tidsskrift for filmkunst og filmkultur* 232 (2003), 116-117.

49 Kongelige Grønlandske Handel, *Beretninger og Kundgørelser Vedrørende Kolonierne i Grønland for Aarene 1933-1937* (Copenhagen: Trykt Hos J.H. Schultz AS, 1933), 21. Translated by Vanek.

while the expedition was in Greenland, but could not be edited into a coherent feature as some scenes could not be shot as initially scripted and new scenes were added while on the island. To overcome these obstacles, American director Tay Garnett was hired to work on the film, and a new script, written by author Tom Reed, was composed around the already existing footage with additional scenes shot in Switzerland and the German Alps. Fanck completed his own German version of the film, *S.O.S. Eisberg*, while Garnett's work produced the English-language version, *S.O.S. Iceberg*. While differing in length and tone, both versions center on the harrowing search for a fictional scientific expedition lost in Greenland, based loosely on the actual death of Alfred Wegener, a German geophysicist who disappeared on his trip to Greenland in 1930. The Wegener Expedition is specifically referred to in the German film. *S.O.S. Eisberg* premiered in Berlin on 30 August 1933 and its English counterpart, *S.O.S. Iceberg*, opened in New York on 22 September 1933. Although the films received some initial praise by film critics, they were not commercially successful.⁵⁰

For the purposes of this article, it is the permissions received by the Universal-Dr. Fanck Expedition to sail to and shoot in Greenland, the ways in which the films displayed these permissions, and the timing of the films' production that are of significance. Jens Daugaard-Jensen, Director of the colonial Greenland Administration, did not favor foreign film expeditions. He had already

rejected the German-Belgian 'Robinsonade'-project in 1923 and did not allow another large-scale film crew into Greenland after Fanck's endeavor.⁵¹ But the Universal Dr. Fanck Expedition was permitted to venture to Greenland and was to be provided aid while there, "taking into account the service and the interests of the Greenlandic population."⁵² The involvement of Knud Rasmussen and to a lesser degree scientists Sorge and Loewe, both former members of the Wegener expedition, contributed to the film crew being allowed into Greenland, as did the dispute with Norway over the east coast. As Anders Jørgensen notes, at the time "it was crucial to create good foreign relations through actions which could happen in relation to an international film production."⁵³ Connected to the US through the funding and support of Universal Studios and Carl Laemmle and filmed by the well-known German director, the aid and permissions granted to the expedition can be viewed as a demonstration of cooperation between states. Yet, it also served to display Danish sovereignty and benevolence to audiences abroad. At the start of both the English and the German versions, before the opening credits, viewers are reminded in bold letters

50 Gallagher, "S.O.S. Iceberg," 87-91.

51 Carl Nørrested, *Blandt eskimoer, eventyrere, kolonisatorer og etnografer – Grønlandsfilm/Amongst Eskimos, Adventurers, Colonisers and Ethnographers – Greenland on Film* (Copenhagen: Forlaget North, 2012), 39, 45.

52 Jens Daugaard-Jensen, Letter. 24 May 1932. Folder: Dr. Fancks Filmexpedition 1932, Landsfogeden i NordGrønland, Ekspeditioner og rejsende, Box A 01-02 19.50 15. Nunatta Katersugaasivia Allagaateqarfialu (Greenland National Museum & Archives), Nuuk, Greenland.

53 Jørgensen, "Primitiv film?," 203-204.

that the movie was produced with the support of the Danish Government and under the care of polar explorer Knud Rasmussen, thus associating the film with not only the Danish government but also with the famed national hero.⁵⁴ In doing so, Denmark's authority over all of Greenland was projected to the globe only months after the International Court at The Hague ruled in Denmark's favor against Norway's claims to east Greenland in April 1933.

Rockwell Kent's 1931-1932 Stay in Greenland

If the permissions granted to Boyd's 1931 venture to Greenland and the Universal-Dr. Fanck Expedition highlight the shifting relationship between the US and Denmark regarding Greenland and sparks of what would become Arctic cooperation, Kent's time on the island highlights some of its limits. American artist and writer Rockwell Kent returned to Greenland in the summer of 1931. This was his second trip to the island and would be of a much longer duration than his initial visit, which was the result of a shipwreck in 1929.⁵⁵ Voyaging to Greenland aboard the colonial ship *M/S Disko*, Kent was permitted to reside for over a year in the settlement of Illorsuit, where he built a house, traveled by dog sled and boat, hunted, and became a part of the community's life. His wife Frances would later join him for a portion of this stay,

54 *SOS Eisberg*, directed by Arnold Fanck (Deutsche Universal-Film/Universal Pictures, 1933); *SOS Iceberg*, directed by Tay Garnett (Universal Studios, 1933).

55 Frederick Lewis, "The Stormy Petrel of American Art," *Scandinavian Review* (Summer, 2012): 12-14; Rockwell Kent, *N by E* (Middletown, CT USA: Wesleyan University Press, 1996 [1930]).

and both would return to the US in 1932. During his residence, supported in part by Pan American Airlines, Kent would produce some of his most iconic works as well as what would become two books about his time on the island. He would return to Illorsuit with his son from 1934-1935.⁵⁶

Prior to Kent's 1931-1932 venture, he was described in the Danish press as "one of the great men of the United States in the field of culture" and his trip to Greenland, the plans for his wife's visit, as well as the potential of his proposed book to display Denmark's stewardship of its colonies sparking excitement. As Danish explorer Peter Freuchen wrote in *Politikens Ugeblad* in 1931, "Denmark should be happy with such a notable guest in Greenland. Through his books, America will learn what we do for the Eskimos, what his views are on our ability to colonize, and his praise of our culture will reach out to regions that still barely know us by name."⁵⁷ However, the praise and enthusiasm surrounding Kent would be short-lived. His book *Salamina* was released in English in 1935, with a Danish translation following in 1936.⁵⁸ The book, which recounted his visit in short vignettes,

56 Rockwell Kent, *Greenland Journal* (New York: Ivan Obolensky, Inc, 1962); Rockwell Kent, *Salamina* (Middletown, CT USA: Wesleyan University Press, 2003 [1935]); Scott R. Ferris, "Forward: In the Presence of Light," in *Salamina*, author Rockwell Kent (Middletown, CT USA: Wesleyan University Press 2003 [1935]).

57 Peter Freuchen, "Rockwell Kent overvintret i Grønland." *Politikens Ugeblad*, June 10, 1931. Translated by Vanek.

58 Rockwell Kent, *Salamina*, trans. Estrid Bannister (Copenhagen: Berlingske Forlag, 1936).

was highly critical of the Danish colonial system, including discussion of what he saw as the economic exploitation of the Greenlandic population, the inequalities between Danes and Greenlanders, and the mismanagement of day-to-day operations of the colonies. Speaking of Danish employees in Greenland, he wrote, "For people, hired, put there, to remember things and to get them done they're dismally incompetent."⁵⁹ Kent's very public criticism was met with shock in Denmark both for its content and the ways in which that content was employed by certain Danish publications. For instance, Kent very briefly recounts the visit of the Universal-Dr. Fanck Expedition to Illorsuit, in relation to which the author described episodes of drunken parties. This was interpreted by some in the Danish media as referring to the activities of Danes in Greenland and was the source of outrage with accusations that Kent's account was being employed to mislead the Danish public and the world about Denmark's role in Greenland. It should also be noted that during World War II, Kent was also critical of a possible US presence in Greenland, finding that the island and its resources belonged to the Greenlandic people.⁶⁰ While the permission for Kent to reside in Greenland for such an extended period, like those of Boyd and Fanck, highlights a more comfortable relationship between the US and Denmark in regards to Greenland, the brief uproar

surrounding Kent's book demonstrates the limits of this early cooperation. Kent would not visit Greenland again after the Danish publication of *Salamina*.

Conclusion

Taken individually, the Louise Boyd Expedition, the Universal-Dr. Fanck Expedition, and the long-term stay of Rockwell Kent appear unusual. Boyd, a California-based heiress and amateur scientist, was one of the few women traversing the Arctic at the time; she led her own privately funded expeditions to east Greenland and would later travel to the west coast in the service of the US Government during World War II. The Universal-Dr. Fanck Expedition was the largest international filming effort permitted in Greenland; it carried a crew that included renowned and later infamous individuals and would produce two of the last Arctic adventure-melodramas.⁶¹ Finally Kent, already a famous and outspoken writer and artist in the US, was allowed to reside in Greenland for almost two years in a small northern community. Individually, they appear to be an odd assortment of foreigners to be in Greenland. Yet positioned within the shifting practices of Arctic expeditions and within the context of broader changes unfolding in the region, they appear less unusual and shed light on the reshaping geopolitical landscape of the North as it moved from a region of rivalry and dispute to one of increased cooperation.

59 Kent, *Salamina*, 2003[1935], 43.

60 Inge Kleivan, "Rockwell Kent – en engageret amerikansk kunstner i Grønland i 30'erne," *Tidsskriftet Grønland* 35, no. 6-7, (1987): 178-183.

61 Scott MacKenzie and Anna Westerståhl Stenport, "Introduction: What Are Arctic Cinemas?," (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2014), 6-7.

Attention to this history seems particularly important today, as the potential for rivalry in the region appears to be on the rise again. The examination of the Louise A. Boyd 1931 East Greenland Expedition, the Universal-Dr. Fanck Expedition, and Rockwell Kent's time in Greenland presented in this article is cursory, at best. This discussion illustrates only brief aspects of how travel in the North reflected and influenced aspects of the changing relationship between Denmark and the US, shifts in American interest in the region, and the broader cooperation that was only beginning to take shape in the Arctic. Much more can be gleaned from analysis of the travels of Boyd, Fanck, and Kent, as well as the other foreigners traveling in Greenland in the years between World War I and II. For instance, Scottish geologist and filmmaker Isobel W. Hutchison, Romanian naturalist and geologist Dr. Constantin Dumbravă, and English doctor and mountaineer Dr. T. G. Longstaff,⁶² as well as numerous aviators and others, were among the various unusual foreigners permitted to travel to Greenland in the interwar year. Further explorations of these ventures within the broader context of travel, their intersections with each other, the Greenlandic population, and the colonial administration can provide a depth to our understanding of the often-overlooked years between the World Wars and illuminate how the shifting political, economic, and social

landscape of the Arctic was negotiated on the ground at a time of nascent cooperation.

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62 Kongelige Grønlandske Handel, *Beretninger og Kundgørelser Vedrørende Kolonierne i Grønland for Aarene 1928-1932*, 16-17, 229.

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