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The Georg von Neumayer Polar-Archives in Bad Dürkheim/Germany: A Field of Study of the POLLICHIA-Museum

Kurzfassung

Das Archiv wurde Anfang der 1980er Jahre gegründet und sammelt Unterlagen zu Leben und Werk Georg von Neumayers sowie zur Polarforschung mit dem Schwerpunkt Geschichte der Polarforschung. Der Beitrag informiert über die Entstehung, die Bestände und die Nutzung des Archivs.

Abstract

The archives, founded at the beginning of the eighties, collect documents referring to the life and works of Georg von Neumayer, as well as articles on polar exploration. The paper informs about the origin, the stocks and the utilization of the archives.

Résumé

Les archives, établies au début des années 80, présentent une documentation sur la vie et l'œuvre de Georg von Neumayer et sur l'exploration et l'histoire de l'exploration des régions polaires. Le texte donne des information des archives.

Keywords

Georg von Neumayer, History of polar research, Polar-archives of the POLLICHIA-Museum

1. The Origin of the Archives

In the work of POLLICHIA polar-exploration has played an important role since Georg von Neumayer's activities as a member of the institution (chairman (1867–1873), honorary chairman (1896–1909); compare PREUSS 1988). In 1881, for example, Georg von Neumayer gave a lecture for members of POLLICHIA in Kaiserslautern on "The latest ways of proceeding and plans with regard to a systematic exploration of the polar-regions" (Reprint: KREMB: 50–60).

A century later it was rather a coincidence that led to the systematic collection on Georg von Neumayer's life and works at the "Pfalzmuseum für Naturkunde" (= the Palatinate museum for natural history) in Bad Dürkheim: a weather report from the Neumayer-Station installed in the Antarctic in 1980/81.

2. Stock of the Archives

The main part of the archives comprises the themes:

- Georg von Neumayer's life and works
- Polar exploration with the emphasis on the history of polar exploration

Among the volumes about the life and works of Georg von Neumayer five original photo albums of the 19th century are particularly noteworthy. Two photo albums illustrate Neumayer's stay in Australia from 1857 to 1864. One of them contains personal photos, the other one was presented to him by the German Club of Victoria in 1864 when he left the country. (This album contains photos of many of his friends, partly with their families. Some of the photos are coloured by hand. This album is an excellent historical source, because there are not any further photos of these personalities depicted.)

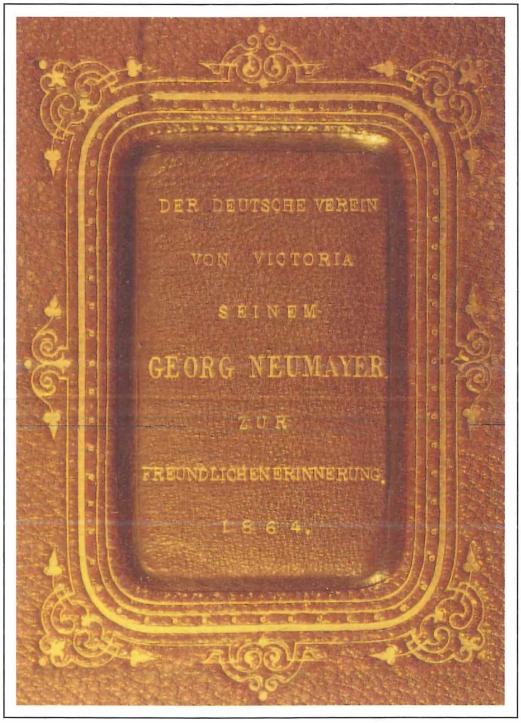


Fig. 1: Dedication in the photo album of the German Club of Victoria, 1864

A third photo album shows numerous personalities active in the second part of the 19th century in POLLICHIA. The fourth album contains a lot of photos of members active during the First International Polar Year in the German station in South-Georgia. The fifth album is particularly well decorated. It was presented to Neumayer by the German Meteorological Society on his 70th birthday in 1896. This album contains photos of about 200 personalities from all parts of the world, most of them scientists somehow connected with Neumayer on the German Marine Observatory.

Particularly Neumayer's original notes concerning the meteorological elements temperature and pressure made during his voyage to Australia and his voyage back are of scientific interest. At that time it was extremely unusual for scientists to use self-registering instruments aboard ships.

Unfortunately there are hardly any instruments and gear available. Two wars and their aftermath have destroyed a lot. But, on the other hand, the archives contain an extensive collection of certificates of honour and four water-colours of a Hamburg artist depicting epochs in Neumayer's life. Besides there are hundreds of photocopies of letters sent to Neumayer or written by him which have not been transcribed yet and which should be looked into.

A great number of articles from newspapers and periodicals about Neumayer are placed in 60 files arranged according to matters and places. Since the establishment of the archives members of POLLICHIA have succeeded in buying second-hand almost all the books published by Neumayer. Some of them were privately-owned and are autographed.

A collection of about 1000 books acquired gradually comprises the whole range of polar exploration and particularly its history. Some maps of the Antarctic region of the late geographer Hans-Peter Kossack's estate are relevant to Antarctic exploration. Further rarities of importance to historians concern, for example, publications Neumayer made during the time he spent in Melbourne or volumes recording the results of polar-expeditions.

In accordance with the function of a museum the library also contains popular literature. However, in order to save space, a special collection of 300 children's books on polar-themes was given to the Georg-von-Neumayer school in Neumayer's native town Kirchheimbolanden as a permanent loan.


Das Freie Deutsche Hochstift

Frankfurt am Main,

Ehrenmitglieds und Meister

Georg Neumayer

Melbourne.

Namens der Verwaltung

Fig. 2: Neumayer's appointment as "Ehrenmitglied und Meister" by "Freies Deutsches Hochstift", Frankfurt/Main

The picture department is also remarkable. It does not only store original photos from Neumayer's time. In the course of time a lot of repros were made for travelling exhibitions, most of which are available as slides, but also as prints or negatives. Posters on polar-exploration are also filed, but in order to save space they are stored in the general poster archives of the museum.

A particular collection of newspaper and magazine articles referring to all the themes of polar exploration and oceanography comprises at present about 60 files. While sifting through magazines contributors find, again and again, articles which are of general scientific interest. In the meantime the polar archives contain a collection of about 400 files encompassing all the fields of natural sciences.

Among the publications based on this wide range of articles H.-J. KRETZER's book "Windrose und Südpol", published in 2001, has gained recognition.

3. Utilization of the Archives

The polar archives are primarily used by visitors of the museum and by members of POLLICHIA, but also by pupils, students and scientists in quest of material far from the big institutes. Of course, the archives are also available to people from all parts of the world.

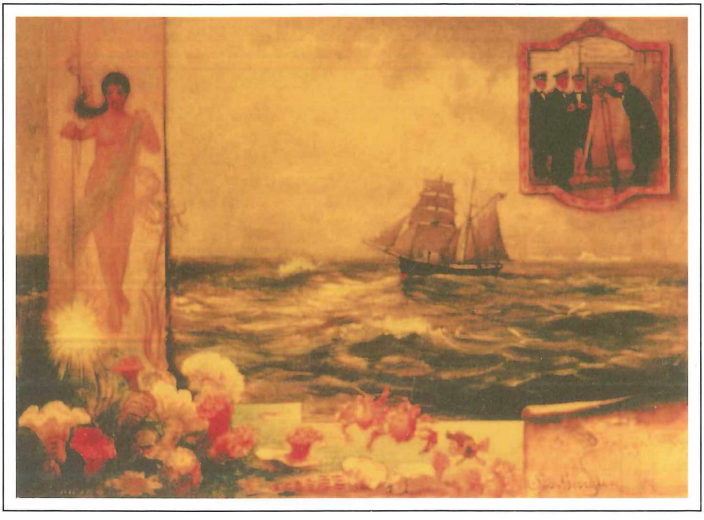


Fig. 3: Watercolour-picture to the 1st international polar-year 1882/83. The painting shows the corvette "Moltke", which took the expedition from South America to South Georgia. (Right up: Georg von Neumayer teaches the participants of the South-Georgia-expedition.)

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ZOBODAT - www.zobodat.at

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