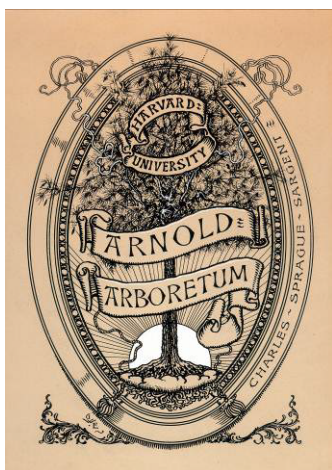


Archives III FNM

Frank N. Meyer (1875-1918), papers 1906-1914: Guide



Archives of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University

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Archives of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

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Descriptive Summary

Repository: Arnold Arboretum, Jamaica Plain, MA.

Call No.: III FNM

Location: Archives

Title: Frank N. Meyer (1875-1918), papers 1906-1914: Guide

Dates: 1906-1914

Creator: Meyer, Frank N., 1875-1918

Quantity: 5 linear inches

Abstract: When Frank Meyer sailed for China in 1905, he began a 13-year odyssey that that included four major expeditions that resulted in the introduction of more than 2,000 species and varieties of a wide range of economic plants. He also took hundreds of images that illuminate the passion that he held for nature. The collection contains a small amount of correspondence, and two field books, but primarily consists of photographs taken by Frank N. Meyer while collecting plants for the United States Agricultural Department and the Arnold Arboretum between 1905 and 1918.

Note: Access to Finding Aid record in [HOLLIS](#).

Preferred citation: Frank N. Meyer papers. Archives of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University.

Additional Material: Additional Frank N. Meyer correspondence may be found by searching the [Arnold Arboretum Correspondence Database](#). Additional information can be found in the USDA, Bureau of Plant Industry publications, [Plant Immigrants](#), [Seeds and Plants Imported](#) and the [Bulletin of Foreign Plant Introductions](#). See also [1905-1918: Campaign in China and Central Asia](#).

Processing Information

Lisa Pearson, November 2001; revised, Jessica M. Parr, July 2003; revised, Sheila Connor, 2012; revised, Larissa Glasser, January 2023, August 2024.

Acquisition Information

Provenance: Part of this collection was transferred from the Arnold Arboretum's departmental holdings to the Arboretum's Archives in 1984; the images are held in the Arboretum's Historic Photograph collection.

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Biographical Note



Frank Nicholas Meyer with *Elaeagnus angustifolia*, Turkestan, 1910

Frank N. Meyer (1875-1918), was born Frans Nicholaas Meijer in Amsterdam in 1875. His family was not well off financially and at age fourteen he began work as a gardener's assistant at one of the oldest botanic gardens in the world [Hortus Botanicus Amsterdam](#). At the garden his talents attracted the attention of eminent botanist Hugo de Vries (1848- 1935) who took an interest in Meyer, teaching him French and English, as well as botany. He proved an apt student, and quickly rose through the ranks, becoming head experimental gardener within 8 years.

Meyer set out for America, by way of England, in 1900. In October of 1901, he left Europe for New York aboard the "S.S. Philadelphia." He arrived in the United States in late 1901 and the education he received under Hugo de Vries enabled him to find employment in the greenhouses at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in Washington, D.C. where he worked for about a year. He travelled the United States and went to Cuba and Mexico over the next four years, studying and collecting plants and working in greenhouses to support himself. Upon his return to the States in 1904 he was approached by David Fairchild (1869-1954), the head of the Foreign Plant Introduction Section of the USDA, who asked if he would make a collecting trip to China for the department. Through an arrangement worked out between Fairchild and Charles Sprague Sargent (1841-1927), Director of the Arnold Arboretum, Meyer would also collect seeds of trees and shrubs of ornamental value along with herbarium specimens, and photographs of plants and landscapes for the Arboretum.

When Frank Meyer sailed for China in 1905, he began a 13-year odyssey that included four major expeditions that resulted in the introduction of more than 2,000 species and varieties of a wide range of economic plants. He also took hundreds of images that illuminate the passion that he held for nature. Meyer's captions reflect his empathy with the subject matter and reflect his enthusiasm about the potential for improvements in economic botany in the West based on his exploration of the East.



Retinospora obtusa, Yokohama, Japan. Conifers of various species, dwarfed, trained and shaped in all forms, some representing several centuries of painstaking work. In the compound of the Yokohama Nursery Company, Nakamura. October 11, 1916, photograph by Frank Meyer

Meyer accepted Fairchild's proposition and began preparations for the trip arriving in Peking in September 1905. The expedition would last two and a half years and would take him to the Ming Tombs Valley, Mongolia, Manchuria, Korea and Siberia. It was during this

expedition in February 1907 in Shanghai, that Meyer had an awkward meeting with E.H. Wilson concerning collecting requirements; however, they later became good friends. Meyer concentrated on collecting seeds and scions of fruit trees and other edible plants such as the Chinese pistachio (*Pistacia chinensis*), wild peach trees (*Prunus davidiana*) and a dwarf lemon (*Citrus x meyeri*), as well as ornamentals such as a maple (*Acer truncatum*), a columnar juniper (*Juniperus chinensis* 'Columnaris') and the Amur lilac (*Syringa amurensis*.)

In China, on April 24, 1907, Meyer photographed a "group of spruces near an ancient temple, about 7,000 ft. elevation. Wu-tai-shan, Shansi," two months later on June 1, 1907, while in Fengtai, Meyer saw and photographed a group of small spruce which he noted had "blue-green foliage and were very rare." In a second image, taken the same day, Meyer is seen standing beside what he described as "An old specimen of the rare, blue spruce. This apparently small tree is about 45 years of age. The cost of it is \$60 Mexican, but the risk of losing it is too great to remove it to the U.S. although it is a singularly beautiful specimen." On February 26, 1908, Meyer would photograph a branch with cones of a spruce in Shansi in Wutai-shan, near the temple of "Tchai-ling-tse.



April 24, 1907



June 1, 1907



February 26, 1908

In 1914, in [Plantae Wilsonianae](#), Alfred Rehder and Ernest Henry Wilson would describe and name a new species of spruce, *Picea meyeri* based on the specimen Meyer collected on February 25th 1907. The April 24, June 1, and February 26 images were all then identified as *Picea meyeri* and the Harvard University Herbaria holds the [holotype](#), the specimen used by Rehder & E. H. Wilson to identify the species.



Viburnum macrocephalum. Grown in tub; could be utilized very well as a decorative plant by our florists. It does not stand any great cold. Shanghai. May 4, 1908, photograph by Frank Meyer [photograph is double exposed and includes an image of Meyer]



[Viburnum macrocephalum](#)

Meyer returned to the United States in the summer of 1908 and spent the next year visiting agricultural experiment stations and sorting the photographs from his expedition. In the fall of 1909, he returned to the Far East by way of Europe, where he visited Kew and other botanical gardens on the continent. Meyer continued to Crimea, where he made several significant discoveries and continued to Azerbaidzhan, Armenia, Turkmenistan, and Chinese Turkestan (now Xinjiang), all the while collecting numerous specimens for the USDA and the Arnold Arboretum.

The beginning of 1911 found Meyer and his party exploring and collecting along the border of Mongolia and Siberia. Political unrest forced him westwards instead of continuing into China. He journeyed up the Volga and then on to St. Petersburg and western Europe. He returned to the United States in April 1912 on the "Mauretania," one day behind the ill-fated Titanic. After a brief sojourn in America, Meyer prepared to return to Asia. The U.S. Office of Forest Pathology tasked him with finding out whether chestnut blight was of Asian origin. He was able to prove that it had indeed developed in China. In December 1913, he and his party left Beijing for Shaanxi Province, then on to Shanxi and Henan Provinces, all the while collecting numerous specimens, scions, and seeds. He had intended to explore Gansu, but the loss of his interpreter and the presence of bandits curtailed his activities. The expedition returned to Beijing, but soon set off again for the same area of country from which they had just returned, journeying on to Gansu and the Tibetan borderlands (now Qinghai). News of the outbreak of World War I upset Meyer badly. That, combined with difficulties he had been having with his interpreter and collie laborer, led to an incident in the remote town of Siku in which Meyer either pushed or threw the pair down a flight of stairs. The matter ended before the local

magistrate and through the intervention of Reginald Farrar, who was also plant hunting in the area at the same time, Meyer was acquitted. In November 1914, he journeyed north to Lanzhou to collect more specimens and finally began the return trip to Beijing at the beginning of 1915. After packing his specimens and collecting additional materials at Fairchild's request the party traveled south to Hangzhou by way of Nanjing, and on to Shanghai and Japan and finally to America.



Juniperis chinensis. Kamakura, Japan. A remarkably large specimen of Chinese juniper in the grounds of the Kenchoji (?) temple, many centuries old. September 15, 1915, photograph by Frank Meyer

Meyer's fourth, and last, expedition set off in mid-1916 and was tasked with collecting wild pears (*Pyrus ussuriensis* and *P. calleryana*) because they were found to be the only varieties capable of withstanding fire blight (*Bacillus amylovorus*). Meyer and his interpreter and guide, Chow-hai Ting, journeyed up the Yangtze River (Chang Jiang) in search of the Callery pear (*P. calleryana*), and later traveled to Jingmen, where he collected 5,000 pounds of pears. Meyer returned to Yichang and was trapped there by civil unrest, being forced to spend the winter of 1917. In May 1918, he and his guide managed to return to Jingmen and collect his belongings and catch a ship down the Yangtze (Chang Jiang) bound for Hangou.

From Hangou, he and his guide boarded a steamer for Shanghai on June 1, 1918. That evening, Frank Meyer either fell or jumped from the steamer to his death. His body was found in the Yangtze, 30 miles from Wuhu, and was buried in Shanghai. Meyer's four lengthy expeditions (1905-1908, 1909-1911, 1912-1915, and 1916-1918) across China, Korea, Manchuria, Gansu, and Russian Turkestan brought a wealth of knowledge, the introduction of approximately 2,500 plants, and thousands of herbarium specimens to the west.

The collection contains photographs taken by Frank N. Meyer while collecting plants for the United States Agricultural Department and the Arnold Arboretum between 1905 and 1918. His primary interest in economic plants allowed him to attend to the routine aspects of daily life including farmers and others going about their work, manufacturing techniques and scenes of marketplaces all were captured in his photographs. Even his images of specific plants often include local people or architectural backgrounds.

In 1920, his former associates at the USDA had a medal struck as a tribute to Meyer with funds he had left to them as a bequest. In recognition of Meyer's contributions, dedication, and service to humanity, The Frank N. Meyer Medal for Plant Genetic Resources is presented each year for distinctive service to the National Plant Germplasm System.

Frank Meyer's Itinerary 1905-1907

1905

- Nagasaki: August 28, 29
- Yokohama
- Shanghai
- Chefoo (Yantai)
- Tientsin (Tianjin): Mid-September - October 9
- Changli: October 11, December 15
- Shan Hai Kwan (Shanhaiguan): October 17
- Tientsin: October 20, 21

- Peking (Beijing): October 22
- Tangshan hot springs: (30 mi NW of Peking), October 25
- Tshang ping taho: October 25
- Ming Tombs Valley: October 26
- near Huai-jou: November 6
- Leaves for western Mountains: November 29
- Shan Hai Kwan, Chili Prov.: November 29, 30, December 1
- Between Shan Hai Kwan and Chnag-li: December 3
- Gopo, near Chang-li, Mongolia?: December 5
- Lama Temple Peking: December 25
- Temple of Agriculture, Peking: December 25
- American Legation, Peking: December 27
- Palitswang, China: December 29
- temple in mountains West of Peking: December 30
- temple garden in the Wei tsan Mts., west of Peking: December 30

1906

- Near Matou: January 1
- Fangshan, Chili Prov. China: January 2
- near the Wei tsan Mts., west of Peking: January 4
- Scha ho: January 4
- Pee-san, North China: January 5
- Ming tomb valley: January 5
- near Chu-ma, 400 miles south of Peking, along railroad line to Hanchau: February 4
- near Sinyang, 0 miles north of Hanchau, on the Peking-Hanchau railroad line: February 4
- Near Tang hsi: February 27

1907

- Hanchau, China: March 1906 - January 3
- Shanghai, China: March 31
- Chefoo, Shantung Prov.: April 12
- garden of C.Y.Sun, Tientsin: April 14
- Peking: April 18, 19
- Temple of Heaven: April 20
- Victoria Park, Tientsin: April 23
- Dalny, Manchuria: May 16
- Imperail East Tomb near Mukden, Manchuria: May 22
- Mukden, Manchuria: May 25, 26
- Imperail East Tomb near Mukden, Manchuria: May 28, 29
- Liao River between Mukden and Leaoyang: May 31
- Liaoyang, Manchuria: June 4, 5
- Tchien shan Mts. Manchuria: June 7-9
- S. Manchuria: June 24
- Sai-mai tsi, S. Manchuria: June 27
- Near Ai-djou, North Korea: July 15

Scope and Content

This collection consists of correspondence, photographs, and two field notebooks.

Arrangement

The Meyer collection is organized in 4 series:

Series I: Biographical Material

Series II: Correspondence

Series III: Field Notebooks

Series IV: Photographs

Container List

Box 1

Series I: Biographical Material

Folder

1: Biographical Materials

- "[Frank Meyer: Agricultural Explorer](#)" by Isabel Shipley Cunningham. *Arnoldia*, 44 (3) 1984.
- Obituary placard of Frank Meyer (1875-1918)
- "American Missing on Yangtze Trip: U.S. agricultural expert may have fallen overboard, belief," newspaper clipping, undated [1918]
- "A Hunter of Plants" by David Fairchild, *National Geographic Magazine*, v 36 1919, pp. 57-77, photocopy
- Information on the National Archives and Records Administration holdings of Meyer archives at the National Archives at College Park. See [NAL Call Number: SB63.M55 C86 1984](#)
- "In the Footsteps of Plant Explorer Frank Meyer" by Kenneth Setzer. *The Tropical Garden*, Spring 2014.

2: Images of Frank Meyer, three of the four include his assistant, J.J.C. de Leuw. Also Included is a separate image of de Leuw taken on February 6, 1915. Described as: "J.J.C. de Leuw, the field assistant with the American rifle which he carried for over seven months. Mr. De Leuw is a Hollander and has been very faithful throughout all the rough times we made. Had it not been for him our difficulties in Kansu, at the Tibetan border, would have been much more aggravating than they were. Photograph by F. N. Meyer, Feb 6, 1915 (#13187)"



a.



b.



c.



d.

a. "Mr. Meyer, the explorer after a successful raid in the high mountains "Tired by satisfied" Wu tai shan, Sansi, China, February 26, 1908"

b. "In suitable exploration dress as worn in winter time in the interior of northern China, February 6, 1915"

c. and d. [labeled the same]

"Meyer, Frank Nicholas and Leuw, J.J.C de, Agricultural explorer of the Department of Agriculture, Washington and his field assistant, Mr. J.J.C. de

Leuw, in Peking, China, February 6, 1915, after a long trip in the interior of northern China"

Series 2: Correspondence

Folder

- 1:** Meyer's letters to Ernest Henry Wilson while Frank N. Meyer and E. H. Wilson were on their respective botanical expeditions in Asia, the letters provide details about Meyer's first expedition, including his route and plant sightings, photocopies, originals are held in the [Ernest Henry Wilson \(1876-1930\) papers, 1896-1952](#).
 - May 7, 1907
 - October 25, 1907
 - November 2, 1907
 - January 9, 1908
- 2:** Meyer's letters to Charles Sprague Sargent during 1913 [there is also 1 letter from Meyer to Alfred Rehder March 23, 1916 held in the [Alfred Rehder \(1863-1949\) papers, 1898-1949](#).
 - February 16, 1913
 - August 18, 1913
 - December 7, 1913
- 3:** David Fairchild letter to Meyer, formally introducing Ernest Henry Wilson and discussing revised logistics for collecting in China. December 26, 1906.

Series III: Field notebooks

The two notebooks covering the period 1906-1914 contain numbered, brief 1-2 line entries with the Latin names, and often a note on the altitude at which he observed the plants, trees, and shrubs growing. Both notebooks are together in 1 box and are extremely brittle and fragile and must be handled with care.

- [Volume 1](#): Entries 1-950: June 4 1906 to May 28-1913
- [Volume 2](#): Entries 951-2016: September 15, 1913 to May 28, 1914

Series IV: Photographs

Folder

- 1:** "Legends by Mr. Frank Meyer for his Chinese Photographs" from the United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Plant Industry. Typed manuscript, heavily annotated in pencil

List is organized in 11 separate sections and consists of 712 entries. Numbers 12348-12370 describe images taken by Meyer in Japan.

[1] No. 5912-6000: [1]-16p. Prefaced with letter from David Fairchild, Agricultural Explorer in Charge to Professor C.S. Sargent, October 25, 1916

[2] No. 13001-13058: 17-29p.

[3] No. 13059-13145: 30-49p.

[4] No. 13146-13223: 50-69p.

[5] No. 13224 [crossed out in pencil]-13261; 70-[followed by 12 unnumbered pages in different format]

- 2:** "Legends by Mr. Frank Meyer for his Chinese Photographs" continued.

[6] No. 12001 [crossed out in pencil]-12087: 71-86p.

[7] No. 12088-12158: 87-100p.

[8] No. 12159-12226: 101-116p.

[9] No. 12227-12305: 117-133p.

[10] No. 12306-12365: 134-145p.

[11] No. 12369-12383: [15 unnumbered pages with a single entry on each]

Please note: This list represents a fraction of the Arboretum's holdings of 1,283 of Meyer's images of China and 25 of Japan

The Arnold Arboretum's Frank N. Meyer photograph collection consists of approximately 1,600 various sized black and white photographs mounted on boards, often with several images mounted together on one board, and 150 small, various sized, black and white sleeved photographs. The mounted images include Meyer's detailed descriptions on the verso. The images are filed in the Arboretum's historic photograph collection with photographs of specific plants filed alphabetically by genus and species and general subjects filed alphabetically by country then by local place name. In 2005, the Arboretum digitized [1,344 of Meyer's images of eastern Asia](#).



Phaseolus aureus. Peking, China. A cart full of tubs of bean sprouts, produced by the humble mung bean. These bean sprouts are eaten as a vegetable, when scalded, and they are a very tasteful product when served cold as salad with some soy-bean, vinegar and oil sprinkled over them. Sixteen or seventeen catties of dry beans supply from fifty to sixty catties of sprouts. June 28, 1913, photograph by Frank Meyer

As of 2012, most of the Arboretum's holdings of Meyer's photographs of central Asia have not been digitized. However, although it may not be a complete record, a [searchable list](#) is available of Meyer's images taken in parts of Russia, Siberia, Mongolia, Turkestan, and the United States and includes date, country, plant name, and description of the image. The description of the image usually includes plant name(s), more information about the plant(s), Meyer's observations on the subject, a detailed location where the picture was taken, and its date. The following eight images are a representative sampling of Meyer's images of central Asia.



Russian Caucasus. Tea house on an imperial estate, Chakva, where one may order a cup of tea, February 23, 1910, photograph by Frank Meyer



Russian Caucasus, A motley crew of woodchoppers. These men are mainly Turks, hardworking and sober, but they do not earn much over 60 to 80 Ropesks per day, Chakva near Batorim, February 23, 1910, Photograph by Frank Meyer



Two Views: Siberia, Irtysh River. The beautiful scenery along the Irtysh River. With the irrigated vegetable gardens of Krasnoyarsk lying at the foot of the cliffs, this is an arid country and it is only where water is in reach of the roots that one finds trees of any size. September 29, 1911, photographs by Frank Meyer



Siberia, Alati, The Russian settlement of Ak-Selan, June 6, 1911, photograph by Frank Meyer



Siberia, Alati, Our camping place near some tall larches, June 7, 1911, photograph by Frank Meyer



Siberia, Altai. The road leads north and Northeast, June 11, 1911, photograph By Frank Meyer



Siberia, Altai. As we march further north we pass a rolling country, June 9, 1911, photograph by Frank Meyer