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## The Museum at the Iowa State Normal School (State College of Iowa)

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THE MUSEUM AT THE IOWA STATE NORMAL SCHOOL  
(State College of Iowa)

by  
FRED CRAM

1955

So far as a careful scanning of the catalogs of ISNS reveals, the first mention of a museum occurs in the 1896 issue, where on page 45 we find that "Natural Science has its museum well stocked with minerals, rocks, fossils dried and alcoholic specimens."

By 1897, we find an elaboration on page 59, with M. F. Arey as Professor and G. W. Newton as Associate Professor of Natural Science. This paragraph reads:

New and convenient rooms have been provided for a museum of natural history, with ample space for its growth for years to come. The material on hand has been classified, mounted and arranged for easy observation and study. Extensive additions have already been made, especially in the line of birds and mammals. It is intended to develop this work as rapidly as funds and opportunity will permit.

This is repeated in Seerley's biennial report.

It appears, however, that Normal was becoming museum-conscious, at least as early as 1892. A news item in The Normal Eyte, issue of December 6, 1892, reveals that a shipment of rocks had been received from Ward's Museum, Rochester, New York, and was being arranged for safe keeping by Professor Arey. Although it is not indicated in so many words, it appears that we may very well assert that Arey is the first person to be mentioned as keeper of the museum, the title "curator" to come later.

We noted above that George W. Newton was the second teacher in the field of natural science. When Newton was an applicant for this position in 1890, he wrote from Grand Island, Nebraska, that if elected he would bring to ISNS a "collection of specimen" which would help develop a museum at the institution. Although he was not at that time elected the collection was with him when he came in 1896. He asserted that this collection consisted of "several thousand specimens." Support is given to this increment to the collection by a statement in President Seerley's report for the fall term of 1896, when he asserts that Newton has done much for the Museum. In the President's report to the Board of Directors dated July 1, 1897, he certifies:

A museum of natural history has begun, which has already acquired a good collection of rocks, minerals, fossils and alcoholic specimens, both land and marine. A beginning has also been made toward collecting the native birds and

other fauna of the region, a limited number of excellent specimens having been mounted and placed in the cases. Additions all being made as rapidly as circumstances and money will allow. The purpose is to make a collection as lowa teachers can profitably use in studying their own environment of nature so as to prepare them to do intelligent and effective science work in public schools.

This was followed by thanks to contributors and an appeal for continued assistance.

That the interest in our museum was becoming widespread is evidenced by a letter from Representative David B. Henderson to Seerley on April 30, 1894. He was sending the Normal School some specimens from the Smithsonian Institution. It is interesting to note that the astute politician who became Speaker of the House of Representatives asked President Seerley not to publish this information. Probably he was trying to protect himself, either against charges of favoritism for Cedar Falls, or against demands from other colleges for similar favors. Seerley wrote a letter of thanks a few days later, assuring Henderson that his request would be carried out "to the letter."

Occasional news items in The Normal Eyte remind us of a developing museum. Reference is made in the issue for September 30, 1893 to the acquisition of two snakes, a rattlesnake from Bremer County and a blue racer picked up locally. The issue for March 17, 1894 refers to specimens collected by Professor Arey from the "briny deep," the intimation being that he had collected them during preceding summers. Arey had accompanied Professor Nutting, Of S.U.I. to Bermudan waters. That alumni were on the job is indicated by an item in the Eyte for September 21, 1895, where it is reported that Lewis Minkel has sent in some long-wanted land lizards, or skinks.

Where the museum was originally situated we have not been able to ascertain, but after South Hall (now Gilchrist) was built, the specimens were in rooms and corridors of that building. An item in The Normal Eyte for May 2, 1896, refers to the removal of the museum, the change to be affected by Professor Arey "as soon as school closes." New cases were to be provided. On September 19, 1896, the editor was congratulating the department of science on its new rooms and equipment "in the third story of the new building." This was what we now know as the Administration Building. The new cases

referred to in the previous article were now in place and the large room provided gave the museum ample space to expand. Beginning with the 1897 catalog, reference to the museum occurs in the description of the buildings.

The school paper is replete with items about the museum during the fall of 1896. On September 26, reference was made to Professor Newton's work in classifying and assorting. It was his intention to make the collection more useful as a teaching aid. It may be said that the ideal in building the ISNS Museum was not to present an exhibition so much as to provide instructional material. However, in the nature of things, there was found to be some accumulation of "show pieces." An editorial on November 14 had reference to the improved conditions as to room and usability. For the first time, Professor G. W. Walters is mentioned. Mr. and Mrs. Walters made outstanding contributions from this time on, both as taxidermists and as collectors. Later, their son, Jesse, did much work as a taxidermist. Several people are given credit for contributions. On February 20, and in an article initialed "G. W. N." (Newton?), great credit is given to Mr. and Mrs. Walters. This interested couple, after a full teaching load by Professor Walters, and a full day of housekeeping or social activities by Mrs. Walters, often worked far into the night, expecting no "overtime" or other financial remuneration and getting none. The Normal Eyte continues to express appreciation from time to time for additions. In these early days, the Fields family of Cedar Falls did much to develop the Museum.

In President Seerley's report to the Board of Directors, biennium 1895-97, he suggests an appropriation of \$1000 for "cases, fixtures and furniture for museum, library and laboratory." It appears that this was the first time the Normal had mentioned the museum by name in requests for funds. In view of the improvement that had been brought about by Professor Arey, Newton, and Walters, with the assistance of students, alumni, and others, no doubt, the President now thought that objective evidence would convince anyone who questioned the expenditure. When the President came to look to the future and suggest buildings visioned for expansion, among his proposals was a building to house the museum as well as the greatly developing library.

An item of unusual interest carries us back to the Old Orphans Home and one of its occupants, as given in The Normal Eyte for January 14, 1899. Mr. Kirk Whited, at the time an attorney in Ellensburg, Washington, sent a collection of plants from the Rocky-Cascade Mountain region. He did this in appreciation for what the State of Iowa had done for him as the orphaned son of a soldier. His hobby was botany, and he wanted his old home to share in his interest through this token of his gratitude.

By 1902, the summer session had become an established institution. This museum is referred to in language as follows, Summer Term Bulletin, Vol. II, No. 4, May 1902:

3. A museum of mineral, (sic) plants, animals, fossils, etc., particularly arranged and organized to teach Iowa teachers the mineralogy, the land flora with which they come into daily contact. The collection of native animals is remarkable for its completeness as to variety and also for its usefulness in the class work. It is possible for a teacher to know in a short time the Iowa animals by studying in this museum.

In his "Official" notes, provided for The Normal Eyte and published on page 54 of the issue for November 29, 1900, President Seerley comments as follows:

It was decided by the Board to continue the collection of material for the museum, and Harry Fields was selected as assistant taxidermist to aid the biological department faculty and Professor G. W. Walters in advancing their interest. Mr. Fields has shown great capability in this direction and is distinguished for his specimens already mounted and in the museum. The museum is a very fine one for the time and money spent upon it. Professor Walters deserves great credit for the program (progress?) already made, as his technical skill and knowledge has made the organization a possibility. His time in all being gradually absorbed by class work and hence the need to give him assistance.

This appears to have been the result of a report to the trustees, as the President refers to their quarterly meeting in the immediately preceding paragraph. In a special report in letter form to the trustees, November 19, 1900, the President stated that H. E. Fields has mounted over 100 specimens and should be paid for his services.

That the Normal School was not entirely dependent on gifts is revealed by an item in The Normal Eyte for January 19, 1901. Reference is made to purchases from "the firm of Ward's, Rochester, New York." Specimens consisted of material presumably

desired and not likely to be contributed, such as chambered nautilus, "rain prints," lava, etc. Likewise, on page 585 of the issue for March 23, 1901, in the column for local news, the reporter refers to purchased acquisitions of gneiss from New York, limestone from South Dakota, onyx from Mexico, flos ferri from Greece, Amazon stone from Pike's Peak, a "volcanic bomb" from France, a stone from Italy, and Oriental marble from Algiers.

A news item, peculiar in its being signed by Professors Newton and Arey, occurs in The Normal Eyte for November 2, 1901. It is in the form of the acknowledgement of receipt of a collection of insects from Burma, including a praying mantis. It was sent by a former student, Miss Luella Rigby, engaged in missionary work in Nandaung, Burma. The two sponsors express appreciation for both the thoughtful and the tangible indication of Miss Rigby's contribution. The Mesozoic Era came to be represented in the museum when, as reported in the Eyte for February 1, 1902, some dinosaur bones were sent from near Fort Meade by Lieut. L. A. I. Chapman, Professor Page having a hand in their transportation. Miss Lulu Bovee, class of 1900, was the donor of some fossils from Custer County, Montana, according to the college journal for March 22, 1902. Among them were representatives of the oyster family. So the museum grew, through the helpful hands of its alumni.

The worth of a museum is constantly affirmed in Seerley's biennial reports, but he seldom greatly stressed the matter. He preferred to take the point of view that the value afforded by a collection in the nature of a museum was taken for granted by those informed. In his financial reports and those of the Secretary of the Board and the Treasurer there is little reference to expenses in this connection. Such meager outlay as the museum necessitated must have been hidden in "furnishing fund," "contingent fund," etc.

Taxidermy was considered of enough importance to deserve a special certificate upon completing a course. In the catalog for 1903 this special certificate is referred to on page 78, and then the catalog goes on to say:

## VII TAXIDERMY

A teachers' school should give instruction in all lines that go toward making a teacher a help in the community where he works. A course in the preparation of specimens for museums is given every term, in which students with a reasonable knowledge of natural history can be taught the means and methods used to care for specimens as well as the best methods of preserving them for school work. A good museum of Iowa birds, mammals and insects is already collected, so that students who study taxidermy have access to good samples of work to aid them in study and investigation. There is no expense for the student in this course except what is necessary to pay for the material used. One credit on the science courses is granted for completing the prescribed course.

It is rather strange, however, that no mention is made of the subject in the outline of natural science courses. It is probable that the course was handled by Professor Walters, but since Walters was a teacher in the Professional Department the subject is not mentioned there. By the next year the long paragraph as above recorded had been cut down to six lines, but all the essentials are contained. The course is included under a heading SPECIAL ELECTIVE STUDIES, under which, with taxidermy last, we find Professional Studies in Education; Greek Language and Literature; French; Methods of Teaching; and Advanced Penmanship. By 1908, the subject of taxidermy has only a brief mention, sufficiently full, however, under THE LABORATORIES. In only one place does a superficial examination reveal any mention of the subject under "electives." Through all the years that Professor Walters and others were doing such mounting, there was little indication in the teachers list that anyone taught taxidermy. A Note under Special Manual Training Teacher's Course, Page 75, catalog for 1908, indicates that taxidermy was to be one of the electives. This does not occur in the 1907 catalog, though the course (curriculum) is outlined, nor is the Note appended in 1909. In the nine orders detailed descriptions of courses in the catalogs, although the Museum was largely made use of for samples in the various fields, little or no mention of the Museum is made, though "collections" and laboratory works enter into the subject matter.

One may be permitted to wonder how many of the specimens now in the Museum are really the property of someone else. An item in the March 19 issue of The Normal Eye, 1904, refers to the loan of a mastodon's hip bone. The bone was the property of



Bert H. Collison, and had been since he found it in the Kansas plains some years before.

There are many instances in which the Normal School paid carriage expenses upon gifts, and perhaps loans. In a letter to Mrs. Charles Blake, October 19, 1915, President Seerley offered to pay expense of transportation for a spinning wheel that the lady proposed to give the Museum. On the first of October, 1910, a draft was sent to an American consul in Denmark to pay the freight on a "case of Danish minerals." On October 30, 1913, thanks were extended to Isabel Cowan for an offer of specimens, which might be sent at College expense. A rather disturbing letter is found in the files, one from Seerley to W. E. Morse, in Mississippi, under date of December 21, 1914. In this letter the President tells Mr. Morse that ISTC is not interested in specimens from places outside the State of Iowa. This is not in accord with known facts. It was probably a subterfuge on the part of Mr. Seerley to discourage correspondence respecting specimens in which he was not interested.

Not always did the College depend upon chance to extend the quantity and quality of exhibits. On the fourth of February, 1904, President Seerley wrote to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, asking that official, John F. Riggs, to write a letter of identification for H. E. Fields, so that Fields might collect specimens while on a visit to Canada's Northwest Territory. It appears that Seerley thought that a letter from a State official might have some weight. In a letter to the Department of Agriculture, Northwest Territory, February 4, 1904, Seerley says he will appreciate cooperation with H. E. Fields, who is looking for items for our museum. In a letter to the Department of the Interior of Canada, Mr. Seerley asked, on January 22, 1926, that Robert Irish, a Cedar Falls man whose father at one time had wide property holdings in Saskatchewan, be permitted to take out of the country some Indian relics he had acquired. As early as 1905, the President recommended, in a letter to I. J. McDuffie, Chairman of the Board, that \$500 be used to employ a man to find specimens.

B. F. Osborn, a member of the Board, wrote in similar vein to McDuffie, adding the interesting comment that the man employed would "get his pay out of duplicates."

Robert Frisby should be mentioned as a leading contributor to the Museum. His collection of arrowheads is outstanding. These specimens came from Canada, before that country finally informed Frisby that he must cease his activities in shipping his acquisitions out of the country. Frisby spent months in studying the different types of arrowheads in the neighborhood of his farm and south to the border. He was trying to be able to identify the arrowheads by tribes. Another man who has only brief mention herein is John S. Hodges, who was taxidermist in the Department of Natural Science from 1923-1930. Many of the splendid specimens of mounting date from his period here.

An outstanding contribution to the museum was made by Albert Loughridge, for several years a member of the faculty, after he left the Normal School to enter missions work, first at a Negro school in Texas and later in India. Reference is made to a collection which was sent from California by Mr. Loughridge, in The Normal Eye for May 30, 1906. In a letter to Seerley from Vinuconda, India, June 25, 1905, Loughridge, who had previously hoped to send the museum some snakes, wrote as follows:

I'm sorry not to be able to bring the snakes I have collected – one fine Cobra de Capello and a fine python are the special prizes. I am forbidden to put explosives or combustibles in my baggage. It would be risky to attempt to send in glass bottles or jars. Hence, the only safe way would be to put them in well-made tin cans and solder tight. This tin work I cannot get done here, and there is no chance to send to a place where the tin work is done.

Later there was correspondence relating to having these snakes brought back by a returning missionary. When Loughridge reached Mt. Pleasant, where he went to join his wife, he sent a "club for the museum."

On December 25, 1905, Loughridge offered to send some Californian specimens of star fish, sea anemones, devilfish and abalone—if desired. Seerley replied to this letter in an optimistic vein, saying that the Normal would pay up to \$100 for museum specimens. He went so far as to detail directions for preserving and shipping. Loughridge refused to accept any pay of a personal nature, but Seerley at one time sent him \$89.80, and expressed delight at the good condition

of the specimens and the care Loughridge took in packing. Later, an additional check was sent and another offer to pay the collector for his time. In 1909, while Loughridge was at Des Moines College, he sent some Indian snakes and scorpions to Cedar Falls. They arrived in good condition, according to Seerley's letter of November 12. Later, there was reference to a bill of \$4.50, which the President pays "if this is your total bill." Loughridge refused consistently to accept any pay for his time, but refers in several letters to specimens sent, with occasional reference to the actual cost.

The Hoffman collection from Oskaloosa was an important addition to the Museum during 1906. The Normal Eyte for May 30, 1906, refers to this cabinet of scientific specimens. It is altogether likely that Seerley had long known of the collection assembled by Dr. D. A. Hoffman, for he was a resident of Oskaloosa. We first hear of this matter through a letter written to Mr. Seerley by Hoffman on February 4, 1905. At that time the owner offered his collection to ISNS for \$2500, half of its estimated value. The doctor said he was eighty years old, and was anxious to have his "cabinet in good hands." On November 15 he wrote Seerley that he had not yet disposed of the property. The President had written Hoffman that much as he desired to obtain the collection he had no funds. But he promised to put the matter before the Board. It appears that Seerley had told the doctor that he would have someone take a look at the cabinet.

The upshot of the matter was that Hoffman finally agreed to sell the collection to ISNS for \$1800, and it was purchased at that price. Hoffman offered to present an inventory. Whether or not this was done is doubtful, or if it were provided, it must have become lost. Our opinion on this is bolstered by a claim that came from one John W. Wright, of Knoxville. Seerley wrote Wright in October, 1906, that the Hoffman collection had not been unboxed, since they had no proper place to put the contents. This matter was still hanging fire as late as March 13, 1913, when the President wrote Wright that his claimed specimens had never been located. Presumably this matter was never straightened out. As of this writing (1955) we find some fossil specimens in the Museum marked "from the

Hoffman collection.” But these are in cases with other fossils. The arrowheads referred to in the correspondence are identifiable at this time. Dr. E. J. Cable, the Curator, has all these items cataloged.

In The College Eye for October 5, 1927, there is a cut showing a case in the Museum, with a brief article of description and some propaganda. In this write-up, there are these lines:

Much of the material was acquired from the famous Hoffman collection and is extremely rare and valuable.

The Officiary of the Museum at that time consisted of E. J. Cable, Head of the Department of Natural Science; M. F. Arey, Curator; G. W. Walters; Alison E. Aitchison; Winfield Scott; and John S. Hodges, Taxidermist.

So far as we have been able to ascertain, the first picture of the Museum in any publication of the institution was in the enlarged special edition of The Normal Eyte, a sort of yearbook, for 1905. Two views are shown, pages 64 and 65. There is a description of the Museum, which was at that time situated on the third floor of the Administration Building. The information has to do with the picture, plus an enumeration of some of the contents of the room. At that time there were 500 mineral specimens, 250 birds and 75 mammals. “Of reptiles, fish, corals, marine and fresh water life there are some 500 specimens.” Some of the items shown in the cuts are named. The use to which some of the specimens are put is indicated by a classroom picture, where a group of “special primary teachers” are studying algae under high power microscopes. One of these pictures is repeated in The Pedagog, the annual gotten out by the Senior Class of 1906. The first Old Gold, published under the auspices of the Senior Class of 1907 did not carry a picture of the Museum. Since those days the Museum has not been of such nature as to lure the annual photographer. Even when the collections were moved to the third floor of the new Library Building, the publishers of Old Gold made no note of it.

During the summer of 1907, the sciences were able to move into their new laboratory building. As a result, President Seerley was able in the first issue of

The Normal Eyte for 1907-8 to refer to possible expansion of the Museum. An additional room on the third floor of the Administration Building was made available. In his official article making reference to this, the President made an additional appeal for continued interest and contributions.

In the list of Faculty members for the 1909-10 academic year, Professor G. W. Walters is listed as follows:

G. W. Walters, B. S., 1879, M.S. 1882, Iowa Wesleyan. Professor of History of Education, Philosophy of Education, and Taxidermist, 1895.

This is the first time that the Walters' responsibility in the field of taxidermy is officially recognized. He carried this special title only two catalog years. But undoubtedly this does not mean any great diminution of his interest in the field. Strange to note, the Museum is not mentioned in the 1910 catalog, and taxidermy is mentioned only as the subject for a special certificate, page 36.

In a letter to the Faculty Committee of the State Board of Education on May 18, 1911, President Seerley recommended that Professor Melvin F. Arey, since 1890 a teacher of sciences and since 1908 Head of the Department of Natural Science, be named Curator of the Natural History Museum. Action was taken by the Board, and Arey held the title until 1928. Thereafter he was in "detached service" until his death on March 20, 1931. As a matter of fact, Arey had been acting in this capacity almost from the time of his arrival on the Campus, and no doubt his last two years of emeritus standing were devoted to the Museum whenever his health permitted. The President further suggested in his communication in 1911 that the Professor be relieved from two of his four class hours each day to devote his time and energy to work on the collections.

Following up the matter of Curator, we find that upon the death of Mr. Arey, the full responsibility for the Museum fell upon the shoulders of Dr. E. J. Cable. However, the impact of the load was not sudden or onerous, since Cable had been really carrying responsibility for the collections as Professor Arey

relinquished responsibilities during his declining years. There was no one with the title "Curator of the Natural Science Museum" from 1928 to 1949. Our authority for this is the catalog and conversations with Dr. Cable. Professor Arey was not listed as Curator during his last two years, and Dr. Cable was not definitely designated with the title until he went upon the emeritus basis in 1949. Recapitulating, it appears that the term "Curator" was not applied until it was given to Arey in 1911; he held the title until 1928; it then went into abeyance until 1949. But over the years where the title was not assigned there was always someone in authority, and someone doing the work and carrying the responsibility. Professor Malcolm Price, President of ISTC from 1940 to 1950, states that he personally designated Dr. Cable as Curator of the Museum. The title was not passed on in 1949 or at any later time, by the Board of Education (now Board of Regents).

The Museum of Iowa State Teachers College attracts many visitors. Most of the casual callers are merely interested in the display as historical, entertaining, or merely interesting. But more and more the exhibits are attracting delegations of school children of different ages, brought by teachers and parents to promote their education. The original point of view is still maintained; namely that the purpose of the Museum is to supplement and foster instruction on an objective and scientific basis. Dr. Cable emphasizes that ideal as obtaining now as it has in the past. He has a complete catalog of the exhibits, and is now the only man who can immediately take the inquirer to any given item in which he is interested. A recent change made by Dr. Cable is the segregation of historic materials. Recently they have been placed in the north alcove of the Museum, so that the history student can avail himself of the items in that field without having to waste time on other features. As schools outside Cedar Falls make more and more use of the Museum it is probable that a descriptive pamphlet will be published and made available so that visitors can know beforehand what they may expect, in this, one of Iowa's very best collections.

While our Museum has usually been referred to as one of natural history, there has accumulated over the years a miscellaneous collection of other

materials. There are items of historical value, such as swords, guns, and uniforms. There are old documents, coins, and curiosities. There are boats and other items from river and sea. Industrial exhibits are helpful in the geography field. Antiques and relics are numerous. "The world's first reaper" is on exhibit. There are examples of ceramics and household utilities. You can see enough old money to make you feel like a millionaire as part owner. You will see many samples of jewelry from everywhere – some no doubt very valuable. Petrified works are in evidence in various forms. Handicrafts of many peoples have been donated by missionaries and world travelers. A modern America Indian visiting the Museum would no doubt marvel at the ingenuity of his ancestors. We must not fail to look at the walls as we go about, where pictures reveal scenery and historic spots of many descriptions. Indeed the Museum can be almost considered as "all things to all men." And never forget that we have the largest mastodon tusk of which man has knowledge!