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History of the University of Northern Iowa Museum, 1890-1975

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HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA MUSEUM, 1890-1975

The museum at the University of Northern Iowa has been an important adjunct of the institution since the last decade of the nineteenth century. The first 65 or so years of its existence are reviewed by the late Mr. Fred Cram, then archivist at the Iowa State Teachers College, in a 15-page paper, "The Museum at the Iowa State Normal School," prepared in 1955 at the request of Dr. Emmett J. Cable, curator of the museum. The information on this era, summarized below, is gleaned from this paper unless otherwise noted.

THE SEERLEY-AREY ERA (Homer H. Seerley, president, 1886-1928; Melvin F. Arey, professor and head of Department of Natural Sciences and curator of the museum, 1890-1917, emeritus part-time to 1931)

This period of establishment and early development of the museum was one of dynamic activity and keen interest on the part of the faculty, administration, alumni, and other friends. It started apparently as a "Cabinet of Natural History" in a science laboratory in Gilchrist Hall with the function of providing instructional material for class use.

The principal thrust of the collections lay in the areas of geology and zoology. Mr. Arey, a recognized geologist, acquired for the museum through purchase, personal collection, or other means, significant specimens of minerals, rocks, and fossils. Although, unfortunately, complete documentation is missing for many of the specimens, at least some of them were collected by Mr. Arey, for the writer recalls Dr. Cable's proud references to Arey's remarkable quartz collection, in which no specimens include Arey's name in their documentation. One of the most valuable specimens at the museum is the magnificent Jurassic cycad he acquired from Prof. MacBride at the State University of Iowa in 1898. This specimen remained undocumented until a University of Iowa paleobotany professor inquired about it in 1971 and brought with him a Xeroxed copy of the original 1898 correspondence regarding it. Another extremely valuable geological collection is that of the Mississippian crinoids which Arey received from Wachsmuth's widow of Burlington, Iowa, presumably about 1927-1928, with the stipulation that some of the museum's duplicate birds be donated to the Burlington High School in exchange for them. (Footnote: In 1965 Dr. Lowell Laudon, professor of geology at the University of Wisconsin, visited the museum, explaining that in summer, 1928, while he was doing his doctoral research on Mississippian crinoids at S.U.I., he had come to the Iowa State Teachers College on Dr. Cable's request to identify the

specimens in this collection. Recalling this vast and superb collection, he returned in 1965, asking whether the State College of Iowa Museum would exchange some of its many, many duplicates for other specimens the University of Wisconsin could send, since the U.W. had none of certain crinoids represented in S.C.I.'s collection and they were no longer obtainable! An exchange agreeable to both parties was consummated in 1968 and 1972.)

Most of the zoology specimens were acquired during Mr. Arey's tenure at the museum. In 1893, as a member of the S.U.I. Expedition to Bahama and the Florida Keys, he returned with his share of marine invertebrates, some of which still bear the official expedition tags.

The outstanding bird collection was developed principally between 1895 and 1905, when Prof. and Mrs. G. W. Walters and their son Jesse did most of the taxidermy. In addition, Cram reports (p. 5) that in 1900 President Seerley stated that Harry E. Fields of rural Cedar Falls had mounted over 100 specimens, presumably mostly birds. The most important specimens in the bird collection are a pair of now extinct passenger pigeons and a very rare whooping crane.

Preparation of mammals followed, with most small mammals having been prepared between 1900 and 1910 probably by Profs. Walters and Newton. John Hodges, staff taxidermist from 1923-1930, prepared all the large mammals (wolf, mountain lion, moose, elk, etc.)

The plant collection, though meager, received one very significant group, that of lichens collected and donated by the late Dr. Bruce Fink, a native of northeast Iowa and one of the world's two most eminent lichenologists.

Other important materials acquired during the Seerley-Arey era include a large, though miscellaneous collection of fossils, Indian arrowheads, antiques, and other items purchased for the museum by President Seerley in 1906 from a Dr. Hoffmann of Oskaloosa. A large and important collection of North American Indian artifacts, antiques, and geological specimens was donated by J.C. and W. H. Hartman of Waterloo in 1928. In the 1920's and early 1930's the Robert Frisby family contributed a sizeable collection of Indian artifacts from Iowa and Saskatchewan.

One more item, though recently transferred to the museum, came to the campus in 1927 and should be noted. This is the Fasoldt Tower Clock, which was exhibited at the Philadelphia International Exposition in 1876, the year the Iowa State Normal School was founded. Acting in President Seerley's behalf, the late Dr. J. O. Perrine approached the Fasoldt family, persuading them to donate the clock to ISTC, where it became the most

significant feature of the campus campanile. In the late 1960's when the set of campanile bells was completed and the tower clock electrified, the Fasoldt Clock was transferred to the museum, which is justly proud to exhibit it along with its framed certificate of award.

The retirement of President Seerley in 1928 and of Professor Arey in 1917 (followed by limited museum service until his death in 1931) brought to a close this important chapter in the establishment and early development of the U.N.I. Museum. The vigorous support and deep personal interest of President Seerley are repeatedly evident in his correspondence with donors, his reports to the Board of Directors, directives to carpenters to construct cases, and even to the extent of personal collecting, e.g., the set of elk antlers collected by him in Montana for the museum. Mr. Arey, as curator of the museum, provided dynamic leadership during these formative years and also collected untiringly for the museum.

Several other names are also prominent in the early history of the museum. A great deal of credit is due Prof. G. W. Newton, who, when he joined the faculty in 1896, brought with him a collection of several thousand specimens for the express purpose of helping to develop a museum. Unfortunately, museum records on Newton's collection are very meager, and one is led to assume that a considerable number of undocumented items are from him. Though Harry E. Fields of Cedar Falls contributed substantially to the development of the bird collection, the superb taxidermy here is largely the work of Prof. and Mrs. G. W. Walters and their son Jesse. A course in taxidermy, offered 1903-1908, was probably taught by Walters, a professor of philosophy, who is so fondly remembered by the older alumni and emeritus staff.

These first 40 years were years of enormous growth, reflecting keen interest on the part of the faculty and the administration in developing the museum. Although established to provide instructional material for natural history classes, it soon became obvious it had some exhibition-quality specimens. Along with its rapid expansion, the museum moved from a classroom and corridors in Gilchrist Hall to a large room on the third floor of the Administration Building in 1896 and an additional room in 1907, and in 1911 it moved to the entire top floor of the then new Library Building (now Seerley Hall).

As this era closed around 1930-31 the museum was well established and secure in its spacious quarters in the Library Building with excellent geology and zoology collections, Indian artifacts, and a miscellaneous assortment of other materials. All the prominent leaders of the past were gone, and the museum entered the second phase of its development.

THE ISTC MUSEUM c.1928-1964

This is the time during which the late Dr. Emmett J. Cable provided leadership to the museum. In succeeding Prof. Arey as department head in 1917, he also became the official head of the museum. After Arey's limited service to the museum came to an end with his death in 1931, Cable carried the burden alone except for occasional student and staff assistance (e.g., Dr. Eugene Bovee) until the present writer's teaching load was reduced in 1958 to allow her to work part time under his direction at the museum. As head of a growing science department, Cable had limited time for the museum until, upon his retirement in 1948, he received the title of "curator" and thereafter worked "half time" at the museum (from 7 a.m. until 1 or 2 p.m. schooldays after Mrs. Cable's passing).

Unfortunately, written accounts of the museum during this time period are very sparse, even in Cram's history. Much of the information in this present report is derived from museum files, correspondence and notes accompanying specimens on exhibit, and from the writer's conversations and correspondence with Cable.

During Cable's long tenure at the museum, 1917 until the early 1960's, the collections continued to grow. Inasmuch as he was a Pleistocene paleontologist, it is not surprising that the geology collection expanded with the addition of particularly fine specimens. Most noteworthy is the 11' 7-1/2" mastodon tusk found in a gravel pit near Hampton, Iowa in 1933. This tusk and the area where it was found are detailed in highly technical terms in Cable's presidential address to the Iowa Academy of Science in April, 1934, and the paper was subsequently published in the Academy's PROCEEDINGS of that year. The present writer's continuing efforts to verify its world size status through correspondence with the Smithsonian Institution and other authorities merely serves to reinforce Cable's claim that to the best of our knowledge this is indeed the largest mastodon tusk in the world ever found. Academy PROCEEDINGS for 1952, 1956, and 1958 contain papers written by Cable on other museum specimens. When in January, 1964, Mr. Allen Liss, formerly a staff member at the Field Museum in Chicago and then a staff member at the S.U.I. Museum, evaluated the S.C.I. Museum at the College's request, he rated the geological collection as the foremost collection at the museum and stated further that it "would be an asset to any institution for its use in exhibition, teaching, and research."

Important additions were made also to other collections during this time. The Robert Frisby family continued donating North American Indian artifacts until the mid-1930's. After

the death of the first Mrs. I. H. Hart, her family donated her beautiful collection of Pueblo pottery, including a very valuable bowl made and signed by the famous Maria Martinez of San Ildefonso.

Important historical materials from the Jackson Kinsie family were donated in 1939 by Mrs. Charles Freeburg of Weaver, Iowa. In 1941 the museum received a particularly large and valuable collection of Cedar Falls historical items from the estate of the Rownds, a local pioneer family. In 1946 Dr. Eugene Bovee, an alumnus and then faculty member, donated his extensive collection of World War II personal items and also 2 groups of extremely rare and valuable Chellean stone chips about 200,000 years old, which he had personally collected in France and which were much admired in 1964 by Mr. Liss, a former anthropologist at the Field Museum.

From 1928 to 1964 the museum's function remained primarily educational, for it served as a laboratory for geology, vertebrate zoology, and art classes. Elementary classes were also frequent visitors, and, from the time she arrived in 1958, the present writer persuaded teachers to organize their visits around specific museum areas related to their ongoing classroom studies. To focus the children's attention on meaningful observations, she prepared numerous picture study-guides to the exhibits and distributed them to the children on their arrival, much to the delight of both children and teachers. As an accommodation to any prospective visitors who could not come on school days, the museum was open Thursday evenings during the academic year.

Throughout this long period of steady development and enrichment of the museum program and collections Dr. Cable provided distinguished leadership and stands alone as the most outstanding individual there. His tenure was marked by notable additions particularly to the geology area and by increased use of the museum by school classes and scout groups, both of whom he enjoyed immensely. By the early 1960's it became difficult for him to climb the 90 steps inside the library to the museum. Therefore, in May, 1963, at the age of 86, he finally resigned his part-time emeritus position after 58 years of continuous service to the College, a record to date, and in February, 1964, following cataract surgery, life quietly ebbed away from him at the age of 87.

During this long period of time the museum remained secure on the top floor of the Library Building. As the years advanced and the library became increasingly crowded, the museum lost the two north rooms to the library around 1960. Then with the approaching move of the library to its new building and plans for remodeling the old building for the

business education department, a crisis arose when it was discovered that no one had made plans for the future location of the museum

Dr. McCollum, then head of the Science Department, where the museum was administratively located, presented this problem to the Faculty Senate on November 4, 1963 with a recommendation that it establish a committee to study this problem and present its recommendations at the conclusion of its deliberations. Thus a committee was formed, Mr. Liss of the S.U.I. Museum came to visit the museum and presented a most kind and generous evaluation, and the museum's continuity on the campus was assured.

As this period in the museum's history came to an exciting and somewhat uncertain close, leadership had been transferred to the present writer. In 1962, during Dr. Cable's prolonged absence due to advancing age, she became the unofficial acting curator of the museum. Following his resignation in 1963, the College named her curator in 1964.

With its presence on campus assured, the museum received the necessary funds to employ many student assistants to catalog, type, and otherwise aid the curator in preparing the museum for its move to temporary storage. Before this task was accomplished the museum held one final open house on the evening of July 14, 1964. This memorable event was widely advertised in the news media, and the library counted 2,384 visitors who entered the building that evening for one last look before the exhibits were dismantled for temporary storage. This move was accomplished between December 16, 1964 and January 8, 1965, thus concluding the second phase in the museum's development.

THE MUSEUM, 1965-1975

Between January, 1965 and August, 1966 the museum was stored first in Seerley Hall and, after the Central Hall fire, part of it was transferred elsewhere on campus. With completion of the area it was to occupy temporarily in the new Physical Plant Shops Building, it was finally moved to its present location in August, 1966. Here it had the advantages of a ground floor location, windowless galleries and storeroom, and convenient parking for visitors. By late 1968 cases and furniture had been suitably positioned in the gallery, storeroom, preparation room, and office; vertebrate animal cases had been freshly painted, specimens cleaned, and exhibits redesigned and installed; and so the museum again opened its doors to the public on December 4th.

During the first years, the museum was open to the public afternoons only during the academic year. This provided much-needed time for cataloging the vast number of

specimens recently donated, having cases open, and preparing exhibits. From 1971 to 1973 the museum was also open half-days for the 8-week summer session. In July, 1974 it went to a full-time 12-month schedule, reflecting increased recognition of and interest in the museum on the part of the university administration, faculty, and community. As an accommodation to weekend campus visitors the museum has been open two Sundays a month since March 1, 1970 and, by special appointment, it is open evenings and Saturdays for groups of 40 or more.

The principal function of the museum remains educational, with elementary schools comprising about 30 % of its total attendance, preschool and high school classes another 5%, and college and university classes 23%. Elementary and high school classes receive guided tours on specific topics planned in advance cooperatively by the respective teachers and the director. These tours are conducted by the director and on occasion also by her very capable part-time assistant, Mrs. Dorothy Grant. Preschool classes sometimes visit informally in small groups, though some teachers prefer to have the director or Mrs. Grant (both former nursery school teachers) show the children the animals. University classes come with specific objectives in mind: to study animals, geology specimens, or cultural objects; to sketch; or to hear special lectures or programs on such topics as the preparation of exhibits for high school science teaching. For special classes, such as Decorative Textiles, materials are removed from storage for students' examination during a lecture on these materials, or the director may present her slides on appropriate countries to classes in Latin-American Civilization. Every attempt is made to provide meaningful experiences for students from preschool to university level. In 1974-75 several academic departments requested museum courses for their interested students, and as soon as the university provides much-needed secretarial assistance at the museum, it can consider these requests.

In addition to its educational function, the museum also serves as a cultural center where many visitors with diverse interests may view a wide variety of exhibits or enjoy illustrated lectures two Sunday afternoons a month. These programs presented since spring, 1970, are on subjects ranging from "The Geology of Iowa," to "Pioneer Women," "Winter Birds," or "Back-Packing Around the World." So popular are they that 20% of the visitors come on Sundays, and it is normal to have an overflow crowd in and adjacent to the lecture area which seats 709, and not at all unusual to have to repeat the program immediately for the second audience. In addition to these "casual" weekday and Sunday visitors, many come

with groups, such as children's clubs, women's clubs, senior citizens' clubs, Sunday school classes, and, on request, special programs are presented for their enjoyment. There is never a charge for admission or for any museum services or programs.

During the past ten years the museum and its programs have been widely publicized both on and off campus. Museum posters and postcard-size schedules are prepared and distributed each semester and summer to publicize the hours, exhibits, and programs. Letters are sent every year to all school administrators within driving distance of Cedar Falls inviting them and their teachers and their classes to visit the museum and informing them of the museum's services. Various campus publications, including the student newspaper, regularly carry items of interest on the museum, as do also local and regional news media, including the Waterloo and Cedar Rapids television stations. Through the kindness of KWWL-TV, Waterloo, the museum is assembling its TV film tapes on the museum for the museum files. In 1969-70 the museum published a MUSEUM NEWSLETTER, which is distributed to several thousand friends, but due to pressure of other work and absence of secretarial help, this was discontinued. National recognition came in 1974 when the distinguished magazine, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, published a detailed map of Central United States with its March number, in which the only cultural attraction pin-pointed for Cedar Falls was the "University of Northern Iowa Museum."

The museum collections have increased greatly in the past ten years by the addition of valuable materials in all areas of its interest. Its already excellent geology collection was enriched by beautiful specimens received in 1968 and 1972 from Dr. Lowell Laudon of the University of Wisconsin in exchange for some of its valuable crinoid duplicates, in 1970 by purchase of the 5000+- specimen Bengston geology collection, and in 1974 by the superb materials personally collected by retired geologist Harry B. Fields (son of Harry E. Fields, who had contributed so richly to the bird collection at the turn of the century). All of the above were exceptionally well documented. The most notable addition to the zoology collection was the Bengston shell collection of some 27,000 meticulously documented specimens of world-wide distribution. The history collection received many items from alumni and other friends, including the exquisite demitasse cup collection donated by Miss Inez Radell, B.A. 1916.

The greatest expansion in the museum collections was in the field of cultural anthropology, a relatively new area in the museum, though there were some good pieces from donors in earlier years.

With financial backing from both the U.N.I. Foundation and the director [museum], James Kies, B.A. 1966, accumulated an awesome collection of African native materials while serving in the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone between 1966 and 1968. As a true and avid collector himself and a former museum assistant, and spurred by his financial backing in Cedar Falls, he contributed vastly more purchased from his own meager salary and his personal biological collecting, shipping some 50 cartons and crates to the museum during the last year-and-a-half of service there. Unfortunately, limitations of space prohibit the museum from exhibiting more than a minimum of his spectacular collection, which came with complete documentation including the native dialect name for each item written in the local type with American pronunciation indicated! This collection includes such diverse items as the robes of two different tribal chiefs, a collection of ceremonial masks, Benin bronzes, soapstone sculptures, and an enormous python skin too large for any existing case at the museum! Someday the voluminous correspondence between Kies and the director should be prepared for publication, as it is awe-inspiring, breathtaking, instructive, and entertaining (and also includes newsy bits about current happenings at U.N.I.).

Another excellent addition to the collections was that of Latin-American artifacts collected and donated by Dr. Waldemar Albertin, then assistant professor of biology, and his family. This collection includes not only contemporary native articles, but a large and impressive variety of Pre-Columbian ceramics, textiles, and related materials from Costa Rica and Peru. A very significant collection of artifacts from seventeen jungle tribes along the Amazon River in Peru was purchased by the University for the museum from a local missionary. Most of the types of materials in both of these Latin-American collections are no longer available, and the museum is most fortunate to have received them when it did.

In 1968 a large and very well-documented collection of world-wide cultural artifacts and scientific specimens was received from the estate of the late Dr. Martin L. Grant, Professor of Biology, and in 1974 Harry B. Fields, a retired geologist, donated his valuable and also superbly documented collection of world-wide anthropological artifacts and geology specimens. In the past ten years excellent materials have been donated by many other friends, too many to list in this brief account.

Within the past ten years the administration of the museum has undergone several changes. From the time of its establishment around 1890 it had always been an adjunct of the Department of Natural Sciences (later renamed Science Department). With reorganization of the State College of Iowa as the University of Northern Iowa and

fragmentation of the Science Department into several separate departments in 1968, the museum was assigned to the Biology Department, since the director held faculty rank there. For a number of pressing reasons, including the fact that the museum collections and programs embraced much more than biology, a better administrative location seemed advisable. To solve this problem and any others the director wished to present to them, a museum advisory committee was formed in 1969. On their recommendation the museum was transferred administratively to the Field Services Division in 1971. On July 1, 1975 with some university administrative reorganization the museum became a free-standing entity in the Division of University Relations and Development. The title "curator", which had been bestowed on museum administrators Arey in 1911, Cable in 1948, and Sauer in 1964, became more accurately that of "director" in 1965.

Although the public views exhibits and programs, most of the activity at the museum occurs behind scenes, unnoticed except by the museum staff. Endless hours are devoted to meticulous cataloging of all accessions; typing catalog, item, and donor cards; typing donor thanks and, on occasion, loan receipt forms, recording on its individual card the specific location of each item as it is placed in storage or on exhibit from time to time, thus enabling one to locate any of some 80,000 items instantly by referring to its individual card; designing and preparing exhibits; preparing publicity releases; leading class tours; and other related work. These are a few of the types of work essential to the operation of a truly professional museum. Although most of the work is done by one person, the museum was very fortunate to have had the superb part-time assistance of Mrs. Dorothy Grant from November 1, 1973 to August 1, 1975, and, to a more limited extent, student assistants from time to time.

Professionalization of the museum is a slowly developing process. Since 1964 the director has been a member of the most important regional, national, and international museum organizations and has received enormous inspiration and assistance from their journals, conventions, and contacts with other museum professionals. In 1972 the U.N.I. Museum took another step forward by becoming an institutional member of the American Association of Museums. These contacts have provided fresh insights, new directions, widening horizons, encouragement, and a helping hand along the way.

During the past ten years the museum has benefited from friends on every hand: increasing support of the University administration, faculty, supporting staff, and students; alumni and other friends; the news media; and many generous donors, including the U.N.I. Foundation, which has contributed substantial funds toward purchase of the African, Latin-

American, and Japanese collections and paid the entire cost (\$1,200) of the Bengston geology collection. The progress that has been made has been a joint effort, which will hopefully continue.

As the museum approaches the University centennial, it reflects on its long years of development and its aspirations for the future. The most pressing needs are full-time secretarial help, more steady student assistance, and a truly adequate building of its own. Perhaps in time they will come. They can't come too soon.

In conclusion, the present writer paraphrases two paragraphs from Raunkiaer's PLANT LIFE FORMS:

From the point we have reached, paths can be seen that lead forward, yet the distant goals of which glimpses are caught lie so far away that one director can never reach them.

Many paths lead to these distant goals, and when one goal is reached, indeed often long before, fresh ones loom forth, firing the traveler with enthusiasm to reach them. As it has been the destiny of every director, so shall it continue to be; his mind is not filled with apprehension, but rather braced for fresh efforts, and the strings of his heart are tightened and tuned in harmony, let us hope, with the unknowable. Only a short way does each director lead the museum into its future; but his efforts are not in vain, for the satisfaction of daily progress, happiness in his work, and joy of pleasant contacts are his wages and his daily bread.

Pauline L. Sauer

Museum Director

June 17, 1975