

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FIELD MUSEUM

By Dr. Oliver C. Farrington, Curator of Geology

(Continued from last month)

On January 22, 1894, the Board of Trustees of the Museum formed a permanent organization. Edward E. Ayer was chosen President, and Frederick J. V. Skiff, who had been chief of the department of mining and metallurgy of the World's Columbian Exposition, was appointed Director of the Museum.

Since the closing of the exposition made it necessary to evacuate most of the buildings, it became imperative to transfer such of their contents as had been assigned to the Museum to some more or less permanent location. As it was not possible in the limited time available to construct a building for this purpose, the Palace of Fine Arts of the exposition became such a repository. As soon as space could be obtained the varied objects which had been received were assembled there. The arrangement of these was, of course, tentative at first.

Since the scope and function of the Museum had not yet been fully outlined, the Trustees decided not to limit them within narrow boundaries at the beginning. Material illustrative of the natural sciences—anthropology, botany, geology, and zoology—had become available in considerable quantities. There were also obtained a sufficient number of exhibits along other lines to enable divisions of industrial arts, transportation and the railway, and a Columbus Memorial to be organized.

The transfer of all these materials and their assembling and arrangement into instructive and attractive series was a great and difficult task. The exposition buildings had been constructed for a summer's use only and hence were without heat, light or other facilities for winter work. The removal of exhibits and their installation in museum form was therefore carried on under a considerable handicap, but nevertheless with characteristic Chicago enterprise and energy.

Experts from the exposition staff and individuals with museum training from other institutions were called in to assist in the work of organizing and installing the exhibits. Among those who participated and the work they undertook were: Dr. Franz Boas of Clark University, anthropology; Dr. C. F. Millspaugh of the West Virginia Commission, botany; V. C. Heikes of the Colorado Commission and Dr. O. C. Farrington of the United States National Museum, geology; F. C. Baker of the Rochester Academy of Sciences, zoology; J. E. Watkins of the United States National Museum, industrial arts; Willard A. Smith of Chicago and J. G. Pangborn of Baltimore, transportation and the railway; J. E. Webster, the Columbus Memorial, and E. L. Burchard of the department of mines of the exposition, the library.

On May 21, 1894, the Trustees voted, in recognition of the founding of the Museum by Marshall Field, to change the name "The Columbian Museum of Chicago," under which it had been incorporated, to "Field Columbian Museum."

By this time it was felt that the installation of exhibits in the Museum was sufficiently advanced to permit opening its doors to the public and dedicating the Museum to its future task. Saturday, June 2, 1894, was the date chosen, and on the afternoon of that day between eight and ten thousand persons assembled at the north steps of the institution to witness the opening ceremonies. Mr. Field and members of the Board of Trustees received a number of invited guests and members of the Museum Staff in a hall of the building, and then appeared on a

platform in front of the building. An address recounting the history of the enterprise was given by Director Skiff. Another on "The Message of the Museum to Chicago and the World" was delivered by Edward G. Mason. At the close of these addresses there were calls for Mr. Field, who acknowledged them by rising and bowing amid the applause of the audience. President Ayer then declared the Museum open.

(To be continued next month)

RAYMOND PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN

Nine free motion picture entertainments for children, provided by the James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Public School and Children's Lecture Division of Field Museum, will be given on Saturday mornings during March and April in the James Simpson Theatre of the Museum. There will be two showings of each, one at 10 A.M. and one at 11. Following is a complete schedule:

March 1—Across St. Gothard Alps, A Fossil Cycad, Making Cement, Fish and Fowls, Mollusks.

March 8—Glimpses of Japan, and Old Moose Trails.

March 15—The Doings of "Turp" and "Tine," Strip Mining, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, Among the Naskapi Indians.

March 22—Transportation Through the Ages, Bedouins in the Sahara, Jewels of Industry, Whistling Swans.

March 29—Story of Paper and Printing, Romance of Rayon, The Rook.

April 5—Persimmons in China, Magic Yellowstone, Knights of the Air, The Ant, Our Spring Birds.

April 12—King of the Rails, Wireless, The Butterfly, Our Spring Wild Flowers.

April 19—Getting Canada's Goat, Edison, the Wizard, Lions and Other African Animals.

April 26—Daniel Boone (film presented by the late Chauncey Keep), The Grand Canyon, A Baby Bear.

Children from all parts of Chicago and suburbs are invited to attend these entertainments.

BANANA WAIFS

By Karl P. Schmidt, Assistant Curator of Reptiles

Field Museum frequently receives inquiries about strange snakes or spiders found in bunches of bananas. The animals most frequently reported are spiders. These are usually thought to be "tarantulas" and regarded as extremely poisonous.

A bunch of bananas affords such excellent shelter for tropical spiders and cockroaches that it is not surprising a few individuals become stowaways for the long journey from Central America.

It is more startling to find larger animals, even less familiar in Chicago, traveling here by the same means. One or more juvenile boa constrictors turns up in Chicago every year. These are also usually thought to be venomous, but in reality are the most harmless of snakes. A green tree frog arrived in bananas on one occasion. Two kinds of geckos, or tropical lizards, have also reached Field Museum from this source. Most remarkable of all is the rather frequent occurrence of the little mouse opossum, an especially interesting creature if it happens to be a female accompanied by a litter of young which cling to their mother by means of their grasping feet and prehensile tails, after they have outgrown her pouch.

Such "accidental" spreading of animals throws light upon the possibility of fortuitous dispersal of animals under natural conditions. Floating vegetation of various sorts, acting as a means of transport, seems to afford the best explanation of the varied and erratic combinations of animal forms found on remote oceanic islands.



1930. "New Lecture Course Begins March 1." *Field Museum news* 1(3), 3–3.

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