

Men and their work

Donald Collier

Field Museum was a direct outgrowth from the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, which celebrated the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus. The first public appeal for extensive anthropological exhibits at the Exposition, which would serve as the nucleus for a permanent museum, was made by Frederic Ward Putnam, Curator of the Peabody Museum at Harvard, in a communication to the *Chicago Tribune* on May 31, 1890. He believed the fair offered a great opportunity to secure and display "a perfect ethnographical exhibition of the past and present peoples of America and thus make an important contribution to science, . . . which will be the first bringing together on a grand scale of representatives of the peoples who were living on the continent when it was discovered by Columbus . . ."

The next year Putnam was appointed chief of the fair's department of ethnology. He made Franz Boas, then professor at Clark University, his chief assistant and head of the section on physical anthropology, and George A. Dorsey, one of his students at Harvard, head of the section on archaeology. He then plunged into organizing, through direct field work and negotiation with foreign governments, the most extensive anthropology exhibit of its kind ever assembled. He was also responsible for securing most of the natural history exhibits at the Exposition, including the great geology and zoology exhibition of Ward's Natural Science Establishment.

On November 28, 1891, in an address before the Commercial Club of Chicago, Putnam again urged the people of Chicago to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the Exposition to found a great natural history museum. He outlined in detail the administrative organization of the proposed museum, the organization and activities of its scientific departments (Anthropology, Botany, Geology, and Zoology), and the nature of its exhibits. These proposals formed the blueprint of the future museum.

In November 1893, two weeks after the close of the fair, the Trustees decided to assemble the accumulating collections in the Fine Arts Building, which became the home of Field Museum until the move to the present building in 1921. The collections consisted of materials assembled and owned by the Exposition, which were presented outright to the new museum, and collections



Dr. Berthold Laufer (at right) and friends in Hankow, China, about 1904.

of private exhibitors, states, and foreign governments, which were obtained by gift or purchase. Franz Boas was appointed Curator of Anthropology and began work on the installation of permanent anthropology exhibits. The Field Columbian Museum was opened to the public on June 2, 1894.

At the time of the opening the anthropology collections consisted of approximately 50,000 specimens (the present collection contains over 400,000 specimens). Because of the theme of the Exposition, the majority of these pertained to the Americas. The scientifically most important collections had been gathered through field work carried out under Putnam's direction by about 100 persons during 1891 and 1892. Also included was the North American Indian collection donated by Edward E. Ayer, a founder of the Museum, plus other private collections purchased at the close of the Exposition, such as the Restrepo collection of prehispanic gold from Colombia, the Montez collection of Inca archaeological material from Cuzco, and the Hassler ethnographic collection from Paraguay.

A partial listing of geographical and tribal sources will give an idea of the scope of the anthropology collection in 1894.

Archaeology: Alaska, Arizona, California, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio (including the great Hopewell collection excavated by Moorehead for the 1893 Exposition), Wisconsin; Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, Guatemala, Ireland, Mexico, Peru. *Ethnography:* Alaskan Eskimo, Polar Eskimo of North Greenland (collected by Lt. Robert E. Peary for the 1893 Exposition), Siberian Eskimo, Apache, Assiniboin, Bella Coola, Chippewa, Haida, Kwakiutl, Malacite, Menominee, Micmac, Muskogee, Naskapi, Navaho, Ottawa, Pueblo Indians, Salteaux; Africa, Bolivia, Brazil, British Guinea, Chile, China, India, Japan, Java, Pacific Islands, Paraguay, Peru, Siberia, Venezuela (upper Orinoco).

The anthropology library began with a nucleus of 1,200 volumes that had been sent to the department of ethnology of the Exposition from various parts of the world in response to a printed circular distributed by Putnam.

Dr. Boas resigned under pressure as Curator of Anthropology early in 1894. The details of the crisis are not known, but there is evidence that it stemmed from a long-standing and bitter conflict dating back to 1891 between Putnam and Harlow Higginbotham, President of the Exposition and an influential Trustee of the new museum. Boas remained loyal to Putnam, his former chief and the man primarily responsible for laying the foundations of Field Museum. (Boas was out of a job for more than a year. Late in 1895 Putnam secured him the post of assistant curator at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. He began teaching at Columbia University and later started the department of anthropology there. It is intriguing to speculate on the course of American anthropology if Boas, who is generally considered the greatest of its founders, had remained at Field Museum and had taught at the young University of Chicago.)

Boas was succeeded by William H. Holmes, an archaeologist from the Smithsonian Institution. In December 1894 Holmes set out with Charles F. Millspaugh, Curator of Botany, on the Allison V. Armour Archaeological and Botanical Expedition to Yucatan and Mexico, which lasted four months. The party traveled with Armour on his steam yacht *Ituna*. Holmes visited various sites in Yucatan, assisted by Edward H. Thompson, U.S. Consul in Merida, who had made casts of Maya monuments for the Columbian Exposition and later secured important collections for Field Museum from Chichen Itza and Uxmal. Holmes also visited Palenque, Mitla, Monte Alban, the Valley of Mexico, and Teotihuacán. This work resulted in the addition of 1,000 archaeological specimens to the Museum's collections, including important Aztec sculptures and a unique engraved stone tablet from Teotihuacán (exported legally under Mexican laws of the period). Holmes published a now classic two-volume report, "Archaeological Studies Among the Ancient Cities of Mexico," illustrated by his superb bird's-eye-view drawings of Yucatecan sites, Palenque, Mitla, and Monte Alban (*Fieldiana: Anthropology*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1895 and 1897).

Holmes resigned late in 1896 to return to the Smithsonian Institution as chief of the Bureau of American Ethnology. His successor at Field Museum was George A. Dorsey, who had been appointed Assistant Curator the year before. (Dorsey, who received his Ph.D. in 1896 under Putnam at Harvard, was the first curator with a doctorate in anthropology. Boas was trained as a physicist; Holmes as an artist who came into archaeology after working for the U.S. Geological Survey as a field illustrator.) Dorsey held the post until 1915. During his incumbency the anthropology staff was



Dr. Fay-Cooper Cole and Philippine Negrito, on Luzon, 1909.

expanded and a very active field program was carried on among the North American Indians and in Oceania. Between 1908 and World War I, Fay-Cooper Cole and Albert Lewis, both Assistant Curators, assembled the Museum's great ethnographic collections from Melanesia and the Philippines, and Cole worked on a series of monographs on the Tinguian and neighboring Philippine tribes. Lewis later published a handbook on the peoples of Melanesia based on his three years in Melanesia. In 1909 Dr. William Jones was killed by Ilongot tribesmen in the Philippines while on a Museum expedition. He was the Museum's only American Indian staff member—Sauk and Fox—and also the only museum anthropologist to be so martyred.

Dorsey was succeeded by Berthold Laufer, who had been appointed Associate Curator in 1908. Laufer served as Curator until his death in 1934. He had received his Ph.D. in oriental languages from the University of Leipzig in 1897. Laufer was a sinologist who read and spoke Chinese and half a dozen European languages, and knew in addition Hebrew, Sanskrit, Pali, Malay, Japanese, Manchu, Mongolian, Dravidian, and Tibetan. He was a traditional German scholar of wide interests and great erudition. He conducted the Blackstone Expedition to Tibet and China (1908-10) and then the Marshall Field Expedition to China (1923), during which he acquired the basic part of the Museum's important collections of Chinese archaeological and ethnographic material and the outstanding Tibetan collection. His more than 250 publications included monographs, papers, and leaflets in the Museum's *Fieldiana: Anthropology* series and articles in English and German in numerous scholarly journals. Probably his most influential works, both published by the Museum, were "Jade: A Study in Chinese

Archaeology and Religion" (1912, 370 pp.) and "Sino-Iranica: Chinese Contributions to the History of Ancient Civilizations in Iran" (1919, 446 pp.).

During the Laufer era the Anthropology staff was further enlarged, and besides Laufer's field work, there were extended Museum anthropology expeditions to various parts of the Americas and the Old World, which resulted in scholarly publications and important additions to the collections. A partial listing will convey the scope of the field work done by staff members during the period.

Fay-Cooper Cole—Indonesia and Malay Peninsula, ethnography (1922-23).

Henry Field—Europe, archaeology (1927-28, 1930); North Arabian Desert, archaeology and physical anthropology (1928); Near East and Soviet Union, archaeology and physical anthropology (1934); he also participated in three of the five field seasons of the Field Museum-Oxford University Joint Expedition to Kish (1923-30).

Wilfred Hambly—Angola and Nigeria, ethnography (1929).

A. L. Kroeber (Research Associate)—Peru, archaeology (1925, 1926).

Ralph Linton—Madagascar, ethnography (1925-27).

Paul S. Martin—Colorado, archaeology (four seasons, 1931-34).

J. Alden Mason—Colombia, archaeology (1922).

W. Duncan Strong—Labrador and Baffinland, ethnography and archaeology (1927-28).

J. Eric Thompson—British Honduras and Guatemala, archaeology and ethnology (1927, 1928-29, 1931, 1933-34).

Paul S. Martin was appointed Acting Curator after Laufer's death in 1934 and was given the new title of Chief Curator in 1936. The time was the depth of the Depression. Never again was the Museum able to fund numerous expeditions from its own income and gifts from private supporters. It was also soon after the beginning of the shift of the center of gravity of American anthropology from the museums to the universities. From 1935 to 1941 there were only four anthropology expeditions, and none during the four years the United States was in World War II. After the war, expeditions were resumed, but as operating costs rose and the endowment did not increase proportionately, the Museum depended more and more on research grants from private and governmental foundations. This change has resulted in new research orientations and the need for greatly increased lead time in planning field work.

During Martin's incumbency as Chief Curator (1934-1964) the Museum's geographical interests in anthropology did not change markedly, but on field expeditions there was much less emphasis

on collecting per se and much more on documentation and obtaining significant research data. Again, a partial listing will indicate the scope of field work.

Donald Collier—archaeology: Ecuador (1941-42), Peru (1946, 1956), Mexico (1949).

Phillip H. Lewis (University of Chicago Museum Fellow)—New Ireland, ethnography (1953-54).

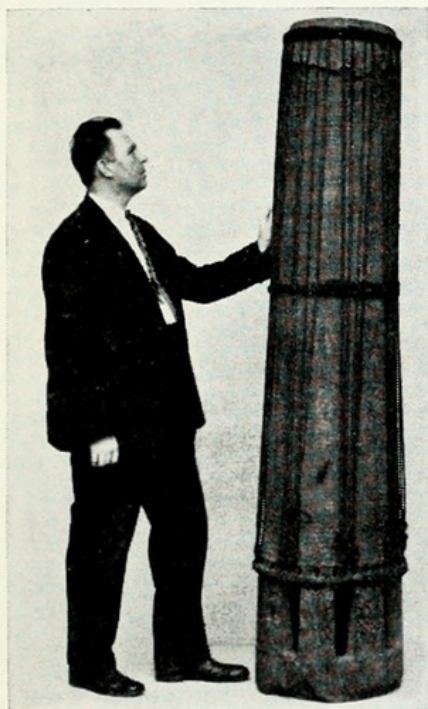
Paul S. Martin—archaeology: Colorado (1937, 1938), New Mexico (12 seasons, 1939-55), Arizona (9 seasons, 1956-64).

George I. Quimby—archaeology: Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota (9 seasons, 1955-64), Louisiana (1949, 1954), Norway (1952).

Alexander Spoehr—Majuro, Marshall Islands, ethnography (1947); Saipan, archaeology (1949-50).

Kenneth Starr—Taiwan, archaeology and ethnology (1960).

Elaine Bluhm—archaeological survey of Cook, Du Page, and Lake Counties, Illinois (1954-56).



Dr. Ralph Linton with temple drum from Marquesas Islands, 1928.

In 1958 the Museum purchased from Captain A. W. F. Fuller his great collection of 6,500 ethnographic specimens from Oceania. This major acquisition was enthusiastically supported by Stanley Field. After Captain Fuller's death in 1961, Mrs. Fuller gave the Museum her husband's very important collection from Benin in Nigeria. This gift, combined with previous holdings, made Field Museum's collection of Benin materials next in importance to those in the British Museum and the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin.

Between 1941 and 1964 under Paul Martin's leadership, the Department of Anthropology completely reinstalled six American Indian halls and the halls devoted

to Ancient Mesopotamia, Roman archaeology, Polynesia (incorporating the most important Fuller specimens), and Ch'ing Dynasty China; and a new hall of primitive art was created. This was the period of the gifted dioramist Alfred Lee Rowell, the Chicago painter Gustaf Dalstrom, and preparator Walter Reese. Together they formed a congenial and creative team which set the style of new anthropology exhibits for twenty years. This was also the time (1950-52) of the conversion of an exhibit hall on the ground floor to the unique Pacific Research Laboratory, with its excellent storage and study facilities for all of the Oceanic collections and a duplicate set of the 50,000 catalog cards. The space that was provided for future expansion later made possible efficient incorporation of the Fuller collection into the various Oceanic collections. The laboratory—PRL, as it is called—was a favorite project of Stanley Field.

Paul Martin became emeritus in 1964 and was succeeded by Donald Collier. Dr. Martin has continued to be active at the Museum and has maintained his archaeological field program in Arizona, supported by the National Science Foundation. This program has involved a field school for a dozen undergraduate students and an interdisciplinary research design in which hypotheses about ecological adjustments, settlement patterns, and social structure are tested by systematic sampling and statistical analyses with the aid of the computer.

Between 1964 and 1970 James W. VanStone conducted three archaeological expeditions to Alaska (1966, 1967, 1969) to investigate Eskimo culture change during the Russian and American periods, and Phillip H. Lewis spent a year in New Ireland (1970) in continuation of his museum and field research on New Ireland culture and art. Glen Cole excavated paleolithic sites in Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia in 1966, and Fred Reinman spent a year excavating on Guam in 1965-66.

Staging a Festival of American Indian Art in 1968 and a Fiesta Mexicana in 1969 was a new departure for the Department of Anthropology and the Museum. The purpose of these festivals was to put the Museum into a meaningful relation with the 16,000 American Indians and the 120,000 Mexican-Americans in the Chicago area and to make better known to all the people of Chicago the cultural background and contemporary life of these important ethnic groups. There were special exhibits of both past and contemporary arts and crafts, photographic essays on the life of these people in Chicago, live artists and craftsmen at work, performances of dancing and singing, lectures and movies, and a sales

area where high quality contemporary arts and crafts could be purchased. These events were made possible by generous financial support from private and government foundations, government agencies in the United States and Mexico, and Air Canada and Mexicana Airlines; by the loan of exhibit materials from individuals, museums, and government agencies; and by the enthusiastic support of the Chicago Indians and Mexican-Americans. Each festival, under the general direction of Donald Collier, took a year to plan and arrange and a major effort on the part of the Museum staff to bring off. Their success in terms of response of the people of Chicago, including the Indians and Mexican-Americans, seems to have justified these efforts.

Establishment of a centralized Department of Exhibition was another development of this recent period, followed by staging of numerous special exhibitions and the beginning of planning for overall revision of the Museum's permanent exhibits. Since Anthropology has more than twice as much exhibit space as any other department and has been involved in the greatest number of special exhibitions, these changes have had more impact on it than on the other scientific departments. Obviously, considerable curatorial energy and time have had to be diverted from research to these new and stepped-up activities.

James VanStone became the first Chairman of Anthropology in January 1971. This new system of rotating chairmanships, which replaced the old chief curatorships, was in line with the desires of the curators and is consonant with the previously established system of standing committees of the scientific staff whose functions are to investigate problems and make policy recommendations to the Museum administration and the scientific departments.

All of these changes have moved the Museum a long way from a traditional cloister of research. They are on the whole healthy and they are necessary for the future development of the Museum.

REFERENCES

Donald Collier. "Chicago Comes of Age: The World's Columbian Exposition and the Birth of the Field Museum," *Field Museum Bulletin*, May 1969.

Donald Collier and Harry Tschopik, Jr. "The Role of Museums in American Anthropology," *American Anthropologist*, 56:768-799, 1954.

Ralph W. Dexter. "Frederick Ward Putnam and the Development of Museums of Anthropology and Natural History in the United States," *Curator*, 9:151-155, 1966.

Dr. Donald Collier is Curator of Middle and South American Archaeology and Ethnology at Field Museum.



Collier, Donald. 1972. "Men and Their Work." *Field Museum of Natural History bulletin* 43(8), 7–9.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/23800>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/375787>

Holding Institution

University Library, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign

Sponsored by

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with permission of the Field Museum of Chicago.

Contact dcc@library.uiuc.edu for information.

Rights Holder: Field Museum of Natural History

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.