

The Departments Tell Their Story

FIFTY YEARS OF ANTHROPOLOGY

By PAUL S. MARTIN

CHIEF CURATOR, DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

The Department of Anthropology, along with the present Departments of Botany, Geology and Zoology, was inaugurated in 1893, and was a direct outgrowth of the Department of Ethnology of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893.

Much of the material now in the possession of this department was acquired from the exposition or from the exhibitors, by gift and purchase. These acquisitions, collected from many parts of the world, formed the nucleus of the original exhibits. While the primary acquisitions are still valued as collections of materials in bulk, from the modern point of view they leave much to be



Paul S. Martin

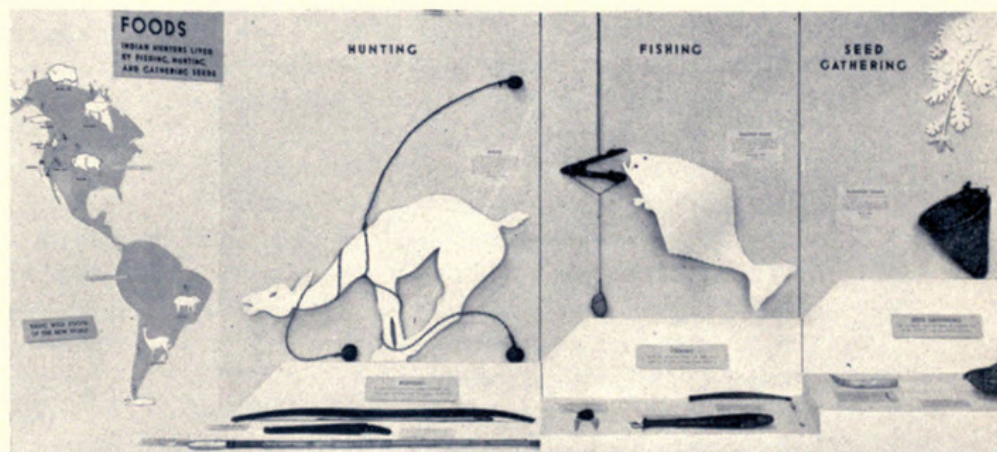
desired. For the most part, the specimens gathered for the exposition were collected hurriedly and without much regard for accompanying data such as what the specimens were used for, what meaning they had to the owners, and other historical information. Therefore, the early collections gathered for the exposition are not so valuable as they might have been.

The first Chief Curator of the Department, from 1894 to 1897, was Dr. W. H. Holmes, who had been associated with the exposition. When Dr. Holmes took charge, he had the difficult task of creating a well-defined department out of a mass of heterogeneous, uncatalogued material which poured into the Museum after the close of the exposition. He successfully discharged this duty in a very short time. Immediately after the Museum was formally opened, Dr. Holmes also organized several expeditions to collect more specimens which were needed to fill gaps. He led an expedition to Mexico, the results of which were embodied

in a scholarly report published by the Museum. In 1897 Dr. Holmes resigned to accept a post at the United States National Museum.

Dr. George Dorsey, who had joined the staff of the Museum in 1896, succeeded Dr. Holmes as Chief Curator of the Department. Dr. Dorsey had been associated with the exposition as a leader of collecting expeditions. Under his vigorous leadership, the department expanded greatly. Expeditions were sent out to various parts of the world. From these expeditions, covering a period of sixteen years, a tremendous number of specimens were collected. As a result of all these activities, the exhibition halls were rapidly filled with materials which cannot now be duplicated; and many noteworthy monographs were published by the Museum. This was undoubtedly the greatest period of expansion that this department has ever experienced.

After Dr. Dorsey's resignation in 1915, Dr. Berthold Laufer was appointed Chief Curator of the Department. Dr. Laufer had been a member of the Museum staff, in charge of Asiatic Ethnology and Archaeology, since 1907. During that time he conducted several



NEWEST TYPE OF ANTHROPOLOGY EXHIBIT—HALL B

highly successful expeditions to the Far East.

The appointment of Dr. Laufer to the staff, and later as Chief Curator of the Department of Anthropology, was an especially happy one. His interest centered primarily in research, and, as a result of his stimulation, more scientific papers were published during his nineteen years as head of the department than ever before. Likewise, during his curatorship,

many expeditions were sent into the field, the exhibits were all completely revised, and many new collections were purchased.

Under Dorsey the department had rapidly expanded; but under Laufer's leadership it became distinguished more especially for scholarship and research.

In previous regimes, some of the leaders of expeditions had been wont to collect furiously and without much thought or selectivity. In a way, this is understandable, because the department was young and had many gaps to close and large halls to fill. But under Laufer, things were different. Collecting was done on a more judicious basis, and emphasis was not on collecting *per se*. Laufer believed that specimens without complete documentation and history were valueless, and that collectors who failed to achieve at least these minimal requirements were no more professional than stamp or arrowhead collectors. They were merely antiquarians.

To Laufer goes credit for placing the department on a scientific basis, for bringing great distinction and honor to the Museum both because of his own high scholarly achievements and because of the work he inspired his staff to accomplish; and for creating a tradition in museology and anthropology. His premature death in 1934 was a blow to the Museum.

The last nine years have brought about profound changes in our outlook concerning the Museum and the place of anthropology in the world today.

For one thing, we are no longer interested in expeditions which collect well-documented materials. We are interested in obtaining information about the totality of a given culture—tangible and intangible facts; material and non-material aspects of a culture; data on language, physical types, ecology, arts and crafts, religion, mythology, history, techniques, and economy.

And why are we interested in studying past and present cultures?

Anthropology, although a young science, is one of the most important to the world today. So much is known of the world apart from man, while comparatively little is understood about man himself and his psychological makeup. And it is about his relation to other men that the average man knows least—a fact which is responsible for most of our present world difficulties.

The anthropologist, using psychology and other helpful disciplines, is interested in investigating and clarifying man's social relationships. What happens when two races and two differing cultures meet? No proper solution of the world's problems and psychoses can be made without the aid of anthropological studies.

GREAT STRIDES MADE IN BOTANY DURING FIFTY YEARS

By B. E. DAHLGREN

CHIEF CURATOR, DEPARTMENT OF BOTANY

At the World's Columbian Exposition many nations were represented by displays of agricultural and forestry products that constitute their main natural wealth. The aggregate of



B. E. Dahlgren

such material was very great. There were woods, rattans, lacquers, dyes, gums, resins, starches, oils, and medicinal plants of India, Johore, and Siam; agricultural products, and an exemplary collection of the woods of Japan; the agricultural products of Russia; Spanish olive oil and cork; grains, oils,

waxes, gums, fibers and woods from Mexico, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Trinidad, Colombia, Ecuador, and almost all other South American countries. Brazil alone sent a thousand specimens of its tropical woods and almost as many other botanical items from its immense rain-forests, plains and semi-deserts. In addition there were products exhibited by the United States Department of Agriculture—crop-plants, cotton and other fiber plants, tobacco, and a great variety of woods.

The assembling and preparation of these many items had obviously cost much time and planning, and the work of hundreds of men. When the idea of a permanent depository and exhibit was realized with the founding of Field Museum, all this material was freely contributed. The new Museum was thus provided with a huge nucleus for botanical collections. Perhaps never before had such an array of diverse vegetable material been brought together under one roof.

The vast accession, much of it perishable, brought an immediate problem of care and



Martin, Paul S. 1943. "Fifty Years of Anthropology." *Field Museum news* 14(9), 13–14.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/25717>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/365182>

Holding Institution

Field Museum of Natural History Library

Sponsored by

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the Chicago Field Museum.
For information contact dcc@library.uiuc.edu.

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>.