

of natural history, would form an absorbing chapter in the history of museums in America. C. B. Cory followed Elliot as Chief Curator of the consolidated department in 1906; he was succeeded in 1921 by Dr. Wilfred H. Osgood, who had been a member of the staff since 1909. On Dr. Osgood's retirement in 1940, he was followed by the writer, previously the Curator of Reptiles. Through the several regimes of the department, Mr. W. J. Gerhard, Curator of Insects since 1901, has rendered invaluable aid as unofficial assistant to the Chief Curator. The department is now organized into seven divisions, with their respective curators. Since no museum, however wealthy, could maintain specialists for the entire animal kingdom, it is important that Field Museum should turn to amateur and professional research associates for the study of its collections and for advice on problems of exhibition. Such associates now number six.

Building upon the beginnings in our fruitful first fifty years of exhibition, education, and research, there lies before us a great future program for a still more comprehensive presentation of the beauty and significance of the animal kingdom.

SOME NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE HARRIS EXTENSION

By JOHN R. MILLAR
CURATOR, HARRIS EXTENSION

A consideration of earliest beginnings, like the determination of first causes, brings one to the borders of the metaphysical. Whether



John R. Millar

the beginning of the N. W. Harris Public School Extension dates from 1911 when the late Norman Wait Harris gave the fund that made the Extension possible, or from some earlier time when Museum Trustees and President Stanley Field received the idea that an extension service was a proper enter-

prise for Field Museum, or from 1912 when a Curator was appointed, is a moot question of no great consequence.

Whatever date one chooses, a background of experience in similar extension services had already been provided by institutions of other

cities. Early in 1912, a special committee of eight persons (four from the Museum staff and four from the Chicago school system) investigated methods employed elsewhere. The report of the committee, submitted jointly to the Director and Trustees of the Museum, and to the Superintendent of Schools of Chicago, outlined the plan of organization and the broad objectives that have guided operations since.

OTHER DEPARTMENTS CO-OPERATE

With the appointment of the late Stephen C. Simms, then an Assistant Curator in Anthro-



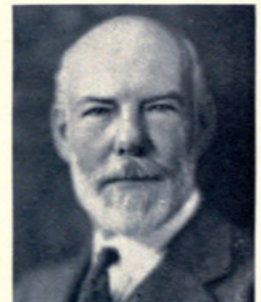
Norman Wait Harris

pology, as Curator of the Extension, a staff was assembled and the work of preparing exhibits soon began. The immediate task was to gather exhibits sufficient to inaugurate the loan service to schools, and to standardize equipment and methods to permit its rapid expansion.

In the solution of the latter problem, Mr. Valerie LeGault, a skillful and resourceful carpenter-preparator in the Department of Geology, must be given chief credit. The portable case he designed is essentially the same as is being used today, and a superior type of case for the purpose is yet to be devised. Similarly, the four scientific departments of the Museum co-operated by furnishing surplus materials and performing numerous services to launch the fledgling Extension.

By the end of 1913 eighty portable exhibits were available, and seven schools had made use of part of the material for two-week periods. During 1914, 207 additional exhibits were prepared, a delivery truck was acquired, and 326 schools were reached. From this point on, there was a gradual increase in the number of exhibits available, and in the number of schools borrowing them.

In its infancy the Harris Extension received considerable aid from other Museum departments, but it soon became self-sufficient. Staff members early began to do their own collecting and preparing of specimens. Some rare and



Albert W. Harris



examples of his skill as collector and taxidermist, and talent as artist, endure among collections being circulated in the schools.

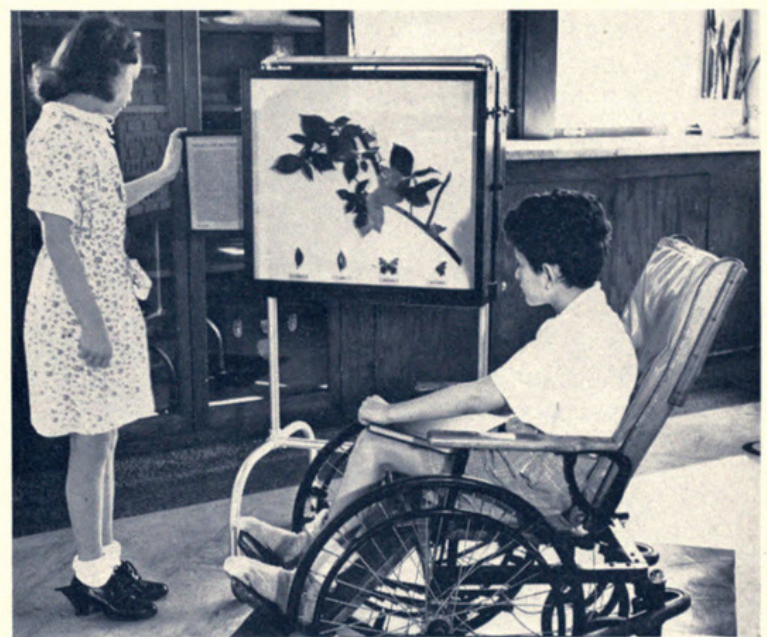
Mr. Stephen C. Simms was Curator of the Harris Extension from 1912 until 1928 when he became Director of the Museum, and he actively supervised the department until his death in January, 1937. Although Mr. Simms had the loyal, competent help of many

THROUGH THE HARRIS EXTENSION, EXHIBITS LIKE THIS . . .

unfamiliar forms, such as the Arctic three-toed woodpecker, are present in the Extension's collections largely through the activities of Mr. Herbert L. Stoddard, one of the earliest preparators in the department.

The methods of preparation and quality of workmanship employed in producing school exhibits paralleled the development of museum techniques in general, and in at least one instance made a contribution. Mr. Leon L. Walters, now a staff taxidermist in the Department of Zoology, and renowned as the inventor of the famed Walters' "celluloid" process for the production of well-nigh perfect models of amphibians, snakes, and other types of animals that had previously defied the efforts of taxidermists to achieve life-like results, did his early experimental work while employed in the Harris Extension. His first successful work was the production of feet for mounts of the 13-lined ground squirrel, or gopher. Celluloid casts of snakes were a logical development in the application of the process, and several such specimens were made for school exhibits. These earliest examples of the Walters technique are still in good condition after more than twenty years of service under conditions much more severe than those that are encountered in Museum exhibition halls.

Mr. Arthur G. Rueckert, present Museum Staff Artist engaged principally in painting backgrounds for large habitat groups, also began his Museum career as a taxidermist in the Harris Extension. Numerous



. . . REACH EVEN CRIPPLED YOUNGSTERS . . .



. . . ON REGULAR SCHEDULE

individuals, such as Mr. Albert B. Wolcott, who was Assistant Curator until his retirement in 1942, the large measure of success that has crowned the work of the department is the result of his skillful, devoted direction of its activities.

Today the Harris Extension has more than 1,100 portable exhibits, and is currently lending them on regular schedule to nearly 500 schools and other educational and social agencies of Chicago. The quality of these exhibits is nowhere surpassed by similar material, and the plan of distribution is believed to be the best compromise with a difficult problem. Nevertheless, all that has been done must be regarded as only preparatory to a new period of increased usefulness in enriching the experience, and thereby contributing to the education, of Chicago's young people.

MUSEUM STAFF LECTURERS FILL A VITAL PUBLIC NEED

By MIRIAM WOOD

CHIEF, RAYMOND FOUNDATION

Fifty years ago, visitors who entered Field Museum looked at the exhibits at their leisure; they read the labels, looked back at the



Miss Miriam Wood

exhibits, wondered a bit about many things and continued on their way. There were no tours conducted by guide-lecturers to help explain the material on exhibition. Groups of school children came in and the teachers tried to explain and relate the exhibits to the things the children were studying in

school. In the Museum the children could actually see these things, and thus the exhibits meant more to them than mere classroom reading. It was almost like taking a journey around the world, or back into early civilizations and prehistoric times. This was a new kind of school room where geography, history, and science lessons came to life.

It soon became generally known among the schools in the Chicago region that there were many worth-while things in this new Museum, not just curiosities. In fact, some teachers believed that an hour spent in the Museum was worth more than an hour over a text book.

For many years these early teachers used the Museum exhibits without much help from the Museum, but they had so many things to learn as well as to teach that they could not possibly discover all the interesting stories and facts about these exhibits. Occasionally the Museum staff men would talk to the students, but finally requests for such help became so numerous that the scientists could not cope with this problem unless they were virtually to abandon their other duties. Therefore, after twenty-eight years, the first guide-lecture division was established on February 15, 1922, with one guide-lecturer. It was her duty "to conduct school children, clubs, societies and other visitors through the Museum halls, and to give information and lectures on the various exhibits."



Mrs. James Nelson
Raymond

After this beginning, it was decided to develop a program of lectures, tours and entertainments for children from the elementary schools, and to follow closely the courses of study used in the schools. School superintendents and teachers were consulted in making plans to provide the most beneficial use of the Museum for the children.

In the following year (1923) the first free entertainments were presented for children.

CHILDREN ARE MUSEUM'S MOST RAPID VISITORS





Millar, J. R. 1943. "Some Notes on the History of the Harris Extension." *Field Museum news* 14(9), 22-24.

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