

IN SPEAKING of a museum science department as an organism with definite structural parts and functions, I am aware of the limitations of the metaphor. But such a department is an organism of sorts, and as such it has superficial similarities with real organisms. For example, science departments do evolve, thereby increasing in physical and functional complexity; they also tend to suffer as a whole if one part within them malfunctions; as in real organisms, changes in one part of the body have to be in harmonious relation to the rest if the whole is to function properly. All these things are pertinent to an understanding of the vast changes that are currently under way in the Department of Geology.

The early evolutionary history of the department consisted primarily of (1) filling its maw with food, in the form of collections (in contrast to real organisms, museums ingest a lot, digest some, but eliminate very little); (2) adding brain cells (curators and assistants); and (3) building up the sensory apparatus, in the form of microscopes and a host of other tools for investigation. Since the overall size of the body was clearly defined and limited to the third floor of the northwest quadrant of the Museum building, and since the acquisition of items 1 to 3 above spanned a developmental period of some 69 years, it was no great surprise to discover that the body would hold no more. As a matter of fact, the collections of fossil invertebrates, fossil plants, and rocks had grown well beyond the storage capacity, with the result that large numbers of specimens could no longer be properly housed and had to be kept under tables, on top of tables, and inaccessibly piled on top of storage cases. Even worse, vital research equipment had to be installed in various nooks and crannies all over the department.

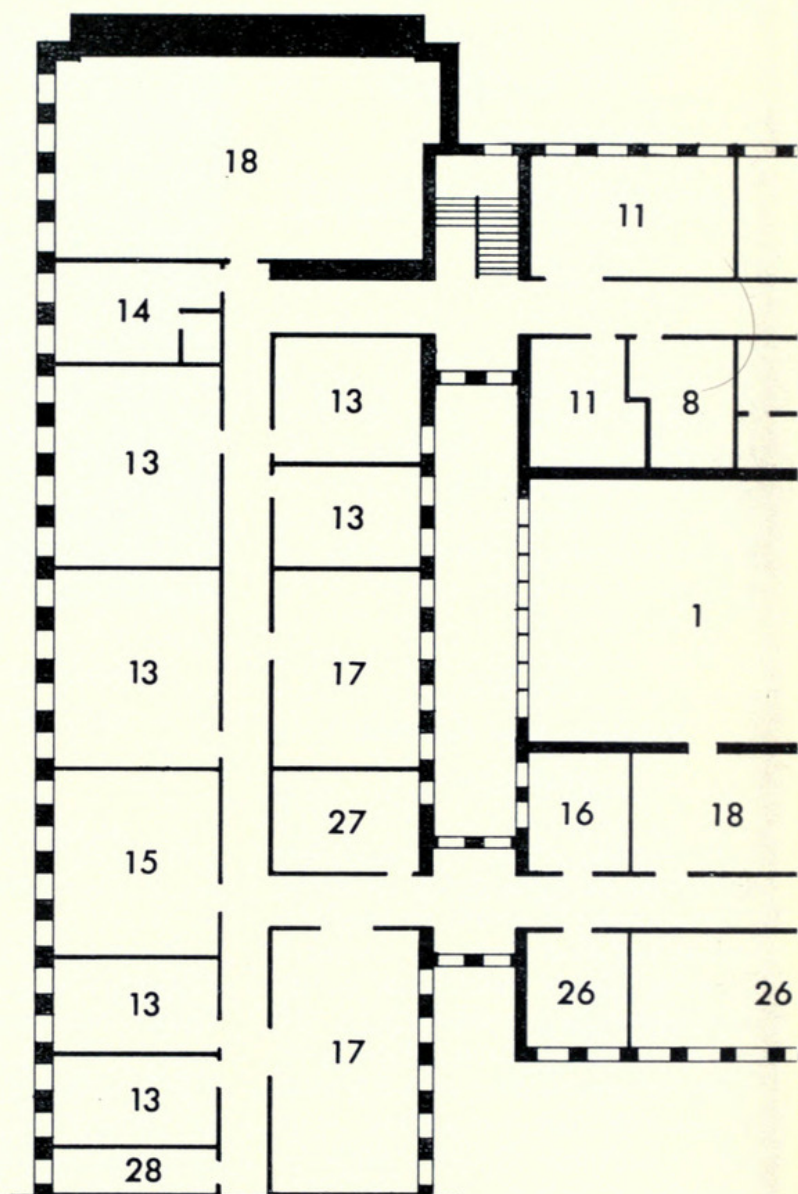
Organisms such as domestic dogs and, even more so, man himself are prone to overindulge if tempted with gloriously succulent vittles, and such a fate befell the Department of Geology when it was faced with the prospect of taking over the famous collection of fossil invertebrates in the Walker Museum of the University of Chicago. The motivation was not all greed, however. Many arguments leading to the decision that this vast collection should come to the Museum had merit beyond the simple and defensible proposition that a museum collection is the more useful to scientific inquiry, the larger it is.

It was perfectly clear at the outset that if this collection were to be accepted the organism would have to undergo further physical growth to nearly twice its former size, and along with this a complete metamorphosis: namely, a profound redesigning of the parts. At this writing the department can best be described as a disaster area. There is building and rebuilding going on everywhere while the former contents of the department have to be shunted here and there as dictated by the demands of the construction. But now the new shapes begin to appear and we can recognize the look of the future.

To begin with, the collections, formerly stored in various rooms along the corridors of the third floor research area,

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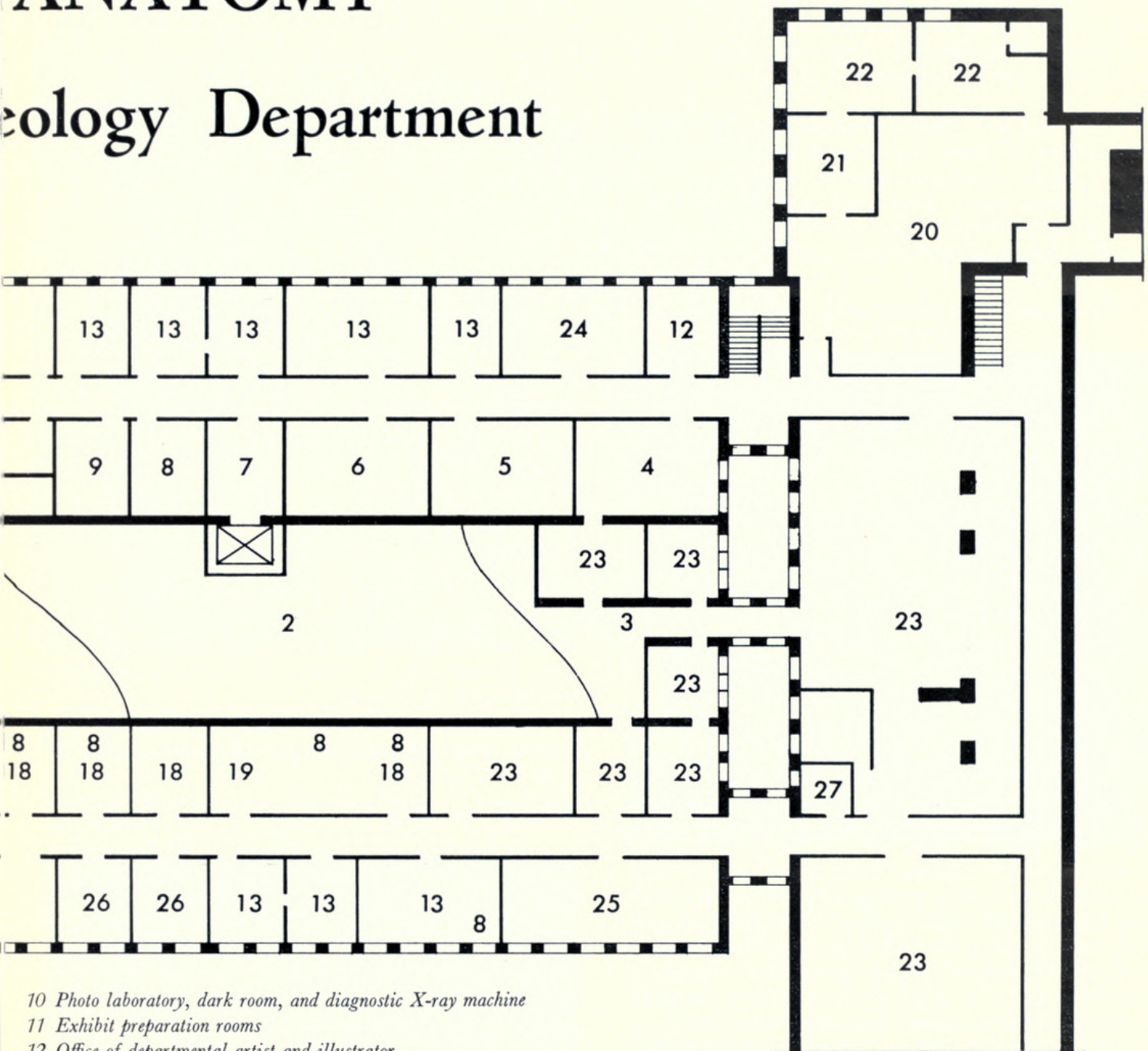
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- 1 Second floor collection storage area
- 2 Mezzanine collection storage area
- 3 Third floor stack room, General Library
- 4 Geology map room
- 5 Geochemical laboratory
- 6 Rock-sectioning laboratory
- 7 Shipping and receiving room and elevator
- 8 Student and assistant offices and study areas
- 9 Thin-section laboratory

ANATOMY

Geology Department



- 10 Photo laboratory, dark room, and diagnostic X-ray machine
- 11 Exhibit preparation rooms
- 12 Office of departmental artist and illustrator
- 13 Offices and workrooms of curators, University of Chicago professors, assistants, and visiting scientists
- 14 Chalmers X-ray spectrograph laboratory
- 15 Divisional paleontology library
- 16 Maurice L. Richardson fine-preparation laboratory
- 17 Preparation laboratories
- 18 Collection areas for biostratonomy, fossil fishes, fossil amphibians and reptiles
- 19 Classroom
- 20 Geology library

- 21 Geology office
- 22 Office and workroom of Chief Curator
- 23 General Library
- 24 Museum artists
- 25 Editors of scientific publications
- 26 Harris Extension
- 27 Washroom
- 28 Supply storage
(Drawing by Lido Lucchesi)



Zangerl, Rainer. 1965. "The New Anatomy of the Geology Department."
Bulletin 36(2), 4–5.

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