About Field Museum

Joyce Zibro

Museum staff in 1909. Photograph taken upon the occasion of the visit of Commissioners Wada and Sakai of the Japanese Exposition. *First row, left to right,* Commissioner Wada; Frederick J. V. Skiff, director 1884-1921; Commissioner Sakai. *Second row,* Patrick Brophy, guard, 1894-1923; Charles B. Cory, Zoology, 1906-1921; George A. Dorsey, Anthropology, 1896-1915; unidentified member of the Japanese delegation; Miss Elsie Lippincott, library, 1897-1930; Oliver C. Farrington, Geology, 1894-1933; Charles F. Millspaugh, Botany, 1893-1923; Richard N. Abbey, guard, 1908-1938. *Third row,* Jesse M. Greenman, Botany, 1905-1912; William J. Gerhard, Zoology, 1901-1950; David C. Davies successively served as accountant, recorder, auditor, and director, 1894-1928; Carl E. Akeley, taxidermist, 1896-1909; Edmund N. Gueret, Zoology, 1900-1940. *Fourth row,* Henry W. Nichols, Geology, 1894-1944; Elmer S. Riggs, Geology, 1898-1942; Albert B. Lewis, Anthropology, 1907-1940. *Top row,* Arthur W. Slocum, Geology, 1901-1914.

In his autobiography, Harlow Shapley, the famous astronomer of Harvard University, wrote concerning his early career, "I realized that I could do things other people could not or would not do, and therefore I was useful."

Dr. Alan Solem, curator of invertebrates at Field Museum, applying this statement to natural history museums, asked in the December 1970 issue of this magazine, "What can a natural history museum do that other institutions cannot or will not? Where can we be useful? . . . What are the unique aspects of Field Museum as an institution?"

Dr. Solem answered these questions this way:

Collections, library, trained staff. Our collections of natural history and ethnographic objects bring scientists and students from all parts of the world to study in Chicago and are utilized on a loan basis by scholars in every continent except Antarctica. Our library is equally fine. Our staff of scientists and technicians makes use of these collections and library resources on a daily basis. Their work cannot be done at an institution without these facilities. Only natural history museums provide them. Universities do not, businesses cannot, only museums can.

Sometimes our research involves immediately relevant problems—medically important ectoparasites of Venezuela or a forest resource survey of Amazonian Peru. Usually we work on basic problems whose practical applications may be decades away or undreamt of at the time of study.

But this is not an attempt to justify the research and collection activities of Field Museum. Our acknowledged function is not just to discover, collect and correlate knowledge, but also to disseminate knowledge. This can be through technical literature, through popular writing, but more directly through the parts of the Museum used by the public—the exhibition halls, the school programs, the public lectures, the traveling school exhibits, and university level teaching . . . No one else has the variety of nature and man's work, no one else can show it.

Dr. Solem goes on to suggest, however, that while discovery, collection, and dissemination of knowledge are and should remain prime functions of the Museum, this is not enough. Field Museum can be useful to society in other unique ways. One such unique capability and possibility for Field Museum to further serve society, he suggests, is in the interpretation of the ecology of the earth. "We can show, in environmental exhibits," he says, "how the world functions. How it is based on energy from the sun, converted by plants and either used immediately or stored for future use. We can show with our cultural objects and natural history specimens how climate, soil, water and topography limit the activities and abundance of all species, including man . . . These are things we can do better than others and be useful to society."

In this day when more and more demands are being made on museums in general and Field Museum in particular to serve an ever-increasing and better-educated public, it is perhaps appropriate to review how this great permanent treasure of useful things and knowledge which is Field Museum came to be established in Chicago and how it grew to become one of the four greatest natural history museums in the world.

It is of course the story of people, the human element, which made Field Museum the great institution it is today.

"The human element is the only force which is, in the last instant, responsible for the *combination* of forces which made Chicago not only large, but great," wrote J. Christian Bay (Librarian of John Crerar Library) back in 1929. "Anybody who scans the lists of residents of our early days will stop again and again at names, each of which signifies some important departure in the city's life, some great and generous act or some small beginning of things that grew significant in time."

The idea of a great permanent museum for Chicago was neither suddenly born nor quickly realized. That idea developed from 1890 onward together with plans for the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893 to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the landing of Columbus in America.

The first published suggestion that a permanent natural history museum be formed as a result of the Exposition was an article by Frederic W. Putnam in the *Chicago Tribune* of May 31, 1890. Putnam was curator of the Peabody Museum and professor of anthropology at Harvard University and served as chief of the Department of Ethnology and Archaeology at the Exposition. He successfully brought together the most extensive anthropology exhibit of its kind ever assembled, and was also responsible for most of the natural history exhibits at the fair. He advocated that these collections and exhibits should be kept together to form the nucleus of a great natural history museum. In November 1891, in an address to the Commercial Club of Chicago, he outlined 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 were to become the blueprint of the future museum.

Putnam's views were shared by many leading citizens, including Edward E. Ayer, Norman Ream, and James Ellsworth. The interest of Chicagoans was aroused and in a public meeting held on August 7, 1893, and attended by about one hundred leading citizens, a committee was appointed "to adopt measures to establish in Chicago a great museum that shall be a fitting memorial of the World's Columbian Exposition and a permanent advantage and honor to the city."

A charter was obtained on September 16, 1893 under the title Columbian Museum of Chicago, with sixty-five citizens as incorporators and fifteen as trustees.

Officials of the Exposition who had become actively interested in the plan

for the museum solicited and procured from exhibitors gifts and transfer of desirable exhibits. Meanwhile, enthusiastic sponsors of the museum instituted a campaign to raise funds. But the country-wide financial stringency which developed to alarming proportions in 1894 was already beginning to be felt, and by the middle of October, in the words of the Museum's first director, Frederick J. V. Skiff, "A period of discouragement came upon those at work for the Museum. Nothing but the faith, devotion, and courage of a few men prevented the disintegration of the preliminary organization and the practical abandonment of the Museum enterprise."

Marshall Field, probably the richest man in Chicago, had been approached several times to give one million dollars. He always responded, "I don't know anything about a museum and I don't care to know anything about a museum. I'm not going to give you a million dollars." Edward E. Ayer, who was to become the first president of the Museum, made one last attempt to persuade Field to change his mind as the closing time for the Exposition approached in late October. "You have an opportunity here," he told Field, "that has been vouchsafed to very few people on earth. From the point of view of natural history you have the privilege of being the educational host of the untold millions of people who will follow us in the Mississippi Valley. There is practically no museum of any kind within five hundred miles; and these children who are growing up in the region by hundreds of thousands haven't the remotest opportunity of learning about the ordinary things they see and talk about and hear about every day of their lives. . . ."

This time Field agreed to go through the Exposition with Ayer before saying no. On October 26, the day following his visit to the Exposition, Field announced he would donate one million dollars to start a museum. As a single

Prince Frederick and Princess Ingrid of Denmark and Iceland visit the Museum on April 25, 1939.

gift for museum purposes it shattered all precedents and ensured the establishment and permanence of the Museum. Other early benefactors of the Museum included George M. Pullman and Harlow Higinbotham, who each gave $100,000, Mrs. Mary D. Sturges, who contributed $50,000, and Tiffany and Company, McCormick Estate, and many others who gave $10,000.

On November 1 the finance committee sent a circular to Exposition stockholders repeating an appeal made in the *Chicago Evening Post* of September 14 for the donation of Exposition stock to the fund for a museum. 1,100 stockholders came forth to donate stock from which the Museum ultimately realized $193,000.

In honor of the man who had made the dream of a permanent natural history museum in Chicago possible, the name was changed in 1894 to Field Columbian Museum, and finally, after several other changes, to Field Museum of Natural History in 1966. Permanent honor is thus given to the Field family, which has been extraordinarily generous to the Museum throughout the years, and particularly to Stanley Field, a nephew of Marshall Field, for more than fifty years (1908-1964) president and chairman of the board.

Marshall Field enjoyed the Museum very much during his lifetime and made contributions estimated at $430,000 toward current operating expenses. On his death in January 1906, he bequeathed a further sum of $8,000,000, of which $4,000,000 was allotted toward the erection of the present building and $4,000,000 toward endowment which to this day helps to sustain the activities of the Museum.

Large and important collections and exhibits that had been shown at the Exposition were purchased. Such purchases included the Ward natural history collection, the Tiffany collection of gems, the Restrepo collection of pre-Hispanic gold ornaments from Columbia, the Montez archaeological collection from Cuzco, Peru, the Hassler ethnological collection from Paraguay, collections representing Javanese, Samoan, and Peruvian ethnology, and the Hagenbeck collection of about 600 ethnological objects from Africa, the South Sea Islands, British Columbia, and other areas.

In addition, collections and exhibits of great value were received as donations in large numbers. Edward E. Ayer donated his extensive anthropological collection of North American Indian material. Special collections made by the Department of Mines, Mining and Metallurgy of the Exposition were donated, together with the exhibition cases, and from the Agriculture, Forestry and Manufactures Departments of the Exposition, collections of timbers, oils, gums, resins, fibers, fruits, seeds, and grains were contributed in so large a quantity and variety as to insure for the first time in any general natural history museum the formation of an adequate department of botany.

The Palace of Fine Arts building (now housing the Museum of Science and Industry) of the Exposition was obtained at the close of the Exposition

Left, the original N. W. Harris Extension truck at the Museum's first home in Jackson Park. *Right,* Harris Extension driver Gerald Hardison loads some travelling exhibits in the present-day truck.

as a temporary repository and became the first home of the Museum.

By June of 1894, with the help of experts from the Exposition staff and individuals with museum training from other institutions, the installation of exhibits in the Museum was sufficiently advanced to permit opening the doors to the public. On the afternoon of Saturday, June 2, 1894, between eight and ten thousand persons assembled at the north steps of the institution in Jackson Park to witness the opening ceremonies.

The *Times* of June 3 reported the opening like this:

> It was all like a memory of the fair. There were the hurrying expectant crowds of people, there were the many flags and the orators, there was the noble art palace itself, the most beautiful of the wonder houses of the white city and the only one untouched by the wrecker, every object within its mazes a memento of the day when the world looked toward Jackson park.
>
> So Chicago has what will be the greatest of all museums, an institution magnificently endowed by the liberality of its own citizens, a permanent memorial of the glories of the summer of '93.

On the day following the opening of the Museum, some 16,000 people flocked to see the great collections and unique treasures of the Exposition that were to be permanently preserved in Chicago.

During that first year, the main lines of future activities were established. Curators were appointed to the various departments and as early as October expeditions and field work to expand the collections, to fill in the gaps, were organized. A series of popular illustrated lectures was instituted on Saturday afternoons from December to May. These lectures continue today as the free Edward E. Ayer Lecture Series, in fall (October and November) and spring (April and May), each of which usually fills the James Simpson Theatre to its capacity of 1,000.

The Library was organized as early as March 1894, with 1,390 titles from the Department of Ethnology, and 350 titles from the Department of Mines and Mining of the Exposition. Before the year was out the Kunz collection of books on geology, gems and metallurgy, and the Cory collection on ornithology (consisting of 587 volumes) were purchased, and the fine ornithological library of Edward E. Ayer was added as a gift. The Museum's exchange program with other institutions began about this time, and has provided the bulk of the Library holdings. Today, the Library contains 175,000 volumes, many of them rare and priceless, all of them important to scientists, students, and researchers in the field of natural history.

Plans for Museum publications were inaugurated, the decision being to confine them to scientific and technical subjects, especially as related to Museum exhibits and collections. The first of the more than 1,100 issues of *Fieldiana,* as the continuing series of scientific papers and monographs dealing with anthropology, botany, geology, and zoology came to be named, appeared in 1895.

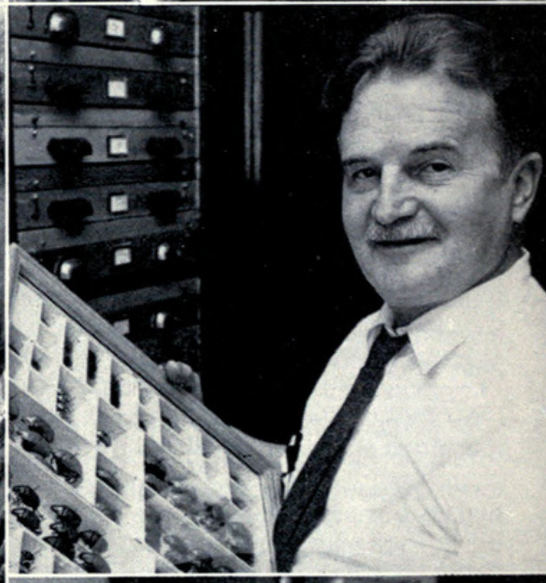
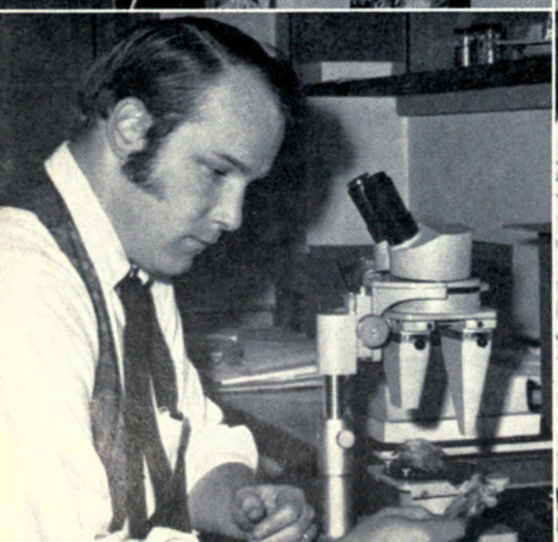
A system of memberships was instituted and privileges were established for members similar to those existing today. During that first year 723 members were enrolled, an encouraging indication that the continued support of the citizens of Chicago could be counted on. Today membership numbers over 21,000, a figure which has doubled in the past five years.

From the beginning it was desired to extend the advantages of the Museum








MUSEUM
ROOSEVELT & So LAKESHORE




A few members of the scientific staff today. *Left column, top to bottom,* Mr. Hymen Marx (left), associate curator of reptiles and amphibians (with Marx is Shedd Aquarium Director William Braker); Dr. James W. VanStone, chairman, Department of Anthropology; Dr. Phillip H. Lewis, curator of primitive art and Melanesian ethnology; Dr. John B. Kethley, assistant curator of insects. *Center column, top,* Dr. John Clark, associate curator of sedimentary petrology; *bottom,* Dr. Edward Olsen, curator of mineralogy. *Right column, top to bottom,* Dr. Eugene Richardson, curator of fossil invertebrates; Dr. Louis O. Williams, chairman, Department of Botany; Mr. Henry Dybas, associate curator of insects; Dr. Emmet R. Blake, curator of birds.

to all school children by providing free admission at all times and lectures by Museum staff. In 1925, Mrs. James Nelson Raymond became interested in the work for children in the Museum and provided an endowment to develop and broaden the guide-lecture program started in 1922. The guide-lecture division of what was to become the Department of Education was named in honor of her and her husband, the James Nelson and Anna Louise Raymond Foundation for Public School and Children's Lectures. The Raymond Foundation grew rapidly, adding staff and new programs until today the seven-member staff, aided by 27 volunteers, provides guided tours and classroom instruction in the Museum to over 100,000 school children each year, offers children's workshops in the fall, an anthropology course for high ability students in the summer, free children's movies, and many other programs. In all, over 400,000 school children now visit the Museum in organized groups in each year.

The other division of the Department of Education, the N. W. Harris Public School Extension, dates from 1911 when Norman Wait Harris gave the fund which made possible loan service to schools of traveling exhibits. Today over 1,000 traveling exhibits are circulated annually to over 600 Chicago schools, hospitals, and community centers through the Harris Extension.

The early years were a period of growth, organization, and consolidation. Acquisition of one important collection after the other occurred by expedition, purchase, or contribution. In 1909 an important line of work in the Department of Botany was inaugurated in the establishment of facilities for modeling plants, flowers, and fruits in natural colors and permanent form. Frank Boryca, who has been making plant models since joining the staff in 1941, is well known for his expertise by members of the Museum who flock to see demonstrations of this craft on the annual Members' Night.

Long before meteorites became of popular interest the Museum was collecting and studying them. 1913 saw the acquisition of the Ward-Coonley collection of meteorites, then the largest private collection of these celestial bodies in existence. This, combined with other purchases, exchanges, and collections, and most recently with the acquisition of over 75 percent of the Murchison Meteorite which fell in Australia in late 1969, make Field Museum's collection one of the three most important meteorite collections in the United States. Dr. Edward Olsen, curator of mineralogy, who does research work on the meteorites, feels they may ultimately give us a clue to the origin of the solar system and to the existence of life in other parts of space.

The Department of Zoology from the earliest years acquired zoological research collections which now rank among the most important and largest in the world. The Museum's collection of birds, which numbers over 300,000, will make possible the preparation for posterity of the *Manual of Neotropical Birds,* a monumental work now being written by the Museum's curator of birds, Dr. Emmet Blake. When completed, the *Manual* will provide for the first time and under one cover, taxonomic information, descriptions, appropriate keys, and the distribution of more than 3,200 species and over 8,500 races or subspecies of Central and South American birds and will have great potential applied value in the field of tropical medical research.

The period 1896 to 1915, under the leadership of Dr. George Dorsey, who served as chief curator of the Department of Anthropology, was an era of tremendous collection of anthropological materials which cannot now be duplicated. It is to Dr. Berthold Laufer, who succeeded Dr. Dorsey in 1915 and headed the department until his death in 1934, that the Museum owes fame as a repository of one of the most extensive and valuable Oriental collections in the world. Dr. Laufer understood more about the peoples of China and Tibet than perhaps any other man of his time. Under Laufer's leadership the department became distinguished for scholarship and research, and more scientific papers were published during his nineteen years as head of the department than ever before. An obituary article on Dr. Laufer in the October 1934 issue of this magazine paid this tribute to a great man of science:

> From the vast depths of his esoteric knowledge he upset, with quaint narratives and facts gleaned from little-known sources, many a set of smug notions of a too self-satisfied generation. To a world in which knowledge of aviation generally dated little further back than the Wright brothers, he showed that flying had been thought of and attempted for centuries in China, Persia, and elsewhere, and was able to write an entire volume on the subject. The idea of television, still awaiting perfection by modern engineers, he proved had germinated centuries ago in Oriental minds.

From 1918 to 1921, the efforts of the entire staff were devoted to packing the collections and preparing them for transfer to the Museum's new and permanent home in Grant Park. The beautiful structure of white Georgian marble, inspired by the Erechtheum, a temple in Athens which is recognized as the finest of the Ionic order that has been preserved from ancient times, was built over a five-year period at a cost of $7,136,866. The difference between the total cost of the building and Marshall Field's bequest of $4,000,000, plus its accretions during the years from 1906 to 1920, amounted to approximately $828,000. This sum was made available by gifts.

The present building opened on May 2, 1921. Three days before, Carl Sandburg wrote in an article in the *Daily News* titled "World Wonders are in Field Museum":

> The navy recruiting slogan for young men is "See the World." An older admonition is, "See Rome and Die." But the one heard

most often in this country in recent years is, "See America first." Before starting, however, to see either the world or Rome or America first, a few good long trips around the Field Museum are worthwhile. The Museum has a number of specimens and articles rather difficult to find even in a trip around the world. Also there are a few bits of paraphernalia not to be found anywhere in the whatsoever rambles a tourist might choose to make between the equator and either of the poles.

John R. Millar, former deputy director of Field Museum and former chief curator of botany and now retired and a volunteer in the care of the economic collections in the Department of Botany (he joined the Museum staff in 1918), gave this account of the 50 years in the present building (June 1971 *Bulletin,* "Forward and Backward Glances"):

But almost as soon as the spacious building was occupied, things placed according to plan, and the Museum once more open to visitors, a new and vigorous growth began like that of a seedling in spring. There ensued a period of unusually active field and expeditionary work in all departments made possible by an enlarged scientific and preparatory staff and the generous financial support of a number of individuals, especially Mr. Stanley Field, president, Mr. Marshall Field III, and other trustees of the Museum. Central and South America, Africa and Asia, as well as various areas of the United States and subarctic Canada were the locale of numerous expeditions that resulted in large scientific collections as well as studies and specimens for exhibition. With this impetus an accelerated program in all manner of Museum activities followed—research, publications of scientific reports, exhibitions and education—that continues to the present.

To tell the entire story of Field Museum would fill volumes. Many of the exhibits for which the Museum is world famous can only be mentioned in passing: such as dioramas of Stone Age man; seven halls covering the history and cultures of the Indians of the Americas; the world's finest hall of reptiles and amphibians made possible by techniques of mounting developed at Field Museum; the lifelike murals of prehistoric animals painted by Charles R. Knight; the hall of fossil vertebrates featuring the 72-foot Brontosaurus skeleton; the hall of plant life; the great display of Melanesian Art; the construction of the coal age forest of 240 million years ago; the sculptures of Malvina Hoffman; habitat groups of animals in naturalistic settings equal to the best that can be seen anywhere; the exhibit of Benin bronzes from Nigeria; a rare, first edition copy of John James Audubon's *The Birds of America*; the great collection of Chinese jade. The names of the famous scientists who have devoted a lifetime to the collections and research efforts of the Museum, the trustees, presidents and directors, and private individuals who have donated time, money, and great collections to the Museum, would fill many pages.

Dr. Robert F. Inger and Mrs. Inger record frog calls in the Congo in 1960. Dr. Inger was Curator of Reptiles in the Museum's Department of Zoology when this photo was taken. He is now Chairman of Scientific Programs.

Even though we have over ten million specimens in our collections, less than one percent of which are on display, we are still collecting, filling in the gaps. The Botany Department, for example, which has one of the largest collections in North America and the finest in the world on tropical America, estimates it will take another 25 years before all the flora of Latin America are described and published for the benefit of generations to come. The demands on the Department of Education are increasing rapidly, and some way will have to be found to enable those demands to be met. Required will be additional staff, new classrooms, ramps for school buses, additional programs. This fifty-year-old building must be repaired and modernized to accommodate the millions of visitors to come in the 1970s and after. We must provide them with adequate cafeteria and rest room facilities and escalators.

Our Department of Exhibition, which has been responsible for the beautiful display and graphic techniques applauded in such exhibitions as the Fiesta Mexicana in 1969 or Color in Nature in 1971 or the continuing 75th Anniversary Exhibit, is anxious to modernize many of the halls which have not been touched for decades.

Millar called Field Museum a living museum. "A living museum is never finished," he said. "It serves its community and the natural sciences as no other social institution can and to continue this service is the purpose and function of Field Museum of Natural History."

Joyce Zibro is editor of the Field Museum Bulletin.