

Building Containing A&M History Constructed for Unusual Purpose

Museum Originated as Factory For Hog Cholera Serum in 1917

By CHUCK MAISEL

Museums are usually noted as points of interest because of the material inside of them. The most interesting thing about the A&M Museum however is the building which houses it. The little squat brown structure arouses little admiration as an architectural masterpiece, but it has quite a history. Among other things, this unimpressive looking shrine to science gave birth to A&M's Veterinary School.

The museum was built for what might seemingly be an insignificant purpose today — the manufacture of a hog cholera serum. This was during the first World War and the serum—whose world supply was at A&M—was hailed to be as much a scientific miracle as penicillin was in the recent war.

The project was started by the late Dean Mark Francis and Dr. R. C. Dunn of the School of Veterinary Medicine. They had the building—then only one room—erected as far from the main campus area as possible for fear of infection spreading among the students. The nearest building was Francis Hall.

The venture proved so successful that the building was enlarged many times, which is the reason the rooms today are arranged in such a haphazard fashion.

The income from the sale of the serum was considerable—so much that the Legislature passed a bill compelling the closing down of all such operating projects by state schools and turning over the formulae to private interests.

Profits Aided Vet School

Profits that had accumulated were used in the erection of the entire present day plant which houses the School of Veterinary Medicine with the exception of Francis Hall. Most of the equipment used today by the veterinary students was bought from the fund which had started in this little structure across from the Administration Building.

The building then began to lead a varied existence. First it was used for several years as a storage place for college equipment. At one time it was the site of a privately-owned cafeteria for the use of those who grew tired of Sbsisa's offerings.

Although not open to the public for many years the museum began its history as such when Dean Francis was instructed on his retirement to move his massive collection of fossils to the brick building. It took Dr. Francis and his co-workers over a year to move the magnificent collection. The better specimens were classified and stored on the ground floor while tons of poorer material were discarded, given away, or placed in a vault which lies now sealed under the floor of the museum. If the floor were to be removed in future years, the authorities of that day are apt to think they have discovered another Pompeii so much museum material has been abandoned there.

Museum Closed—No Curator

After Dr. Francis' death, the museum was closed while the college authorities attempted to find a curator with no success. Then in 1937 Dr. Oscar M. Ball became the first official curator and served until his death in 1942. Ball had come to A&M in 1903 as a professor of biology. His old home across from the Campus Corner is one of the oldest college landmarks.

Dr. Ball had worked side by side with Dean Francis in the collection of fossils. While Francis was interested primarily in fossil animals, Ball specialized in fossil plants. He brought with him to the museum one of the finest collections of botanical fossils ever assembled in the United States.

Following Ball as curator was Curtiss J. Hasse who first made the museum effort at A&M popular. He was responsible for most of the additional material now in the museum other than the two fossil collections.

H. B. Parks Is Present Curator

The present curator is H. B. Parks, a spry 70-year-old who has been with the A&M System 32 years. With the museum since 1945 he has been interested and active in research on A&M's own history. Parks is the nephew of one of A&M's most famous commandants—Captain "Bull" Sargent. When Sargent died, Parks fell heir to all of his old pictures and letters. The lot includes letters from several presidents of the college, official memoranda, the earliest photographs of the college, and other interesting items which gave a very accurate picture of the college in its earliest years. Many of these are now on display at the museum.

Parks has been quite the globe-trotter in his time. In 1902 he went to Alaska where his children were born. He established a training school for native children in Sitka, Alaska and later became editor of a paper there printed on a press that had lain idle for 35 years before his coming.

Although by his own admission he is "getting along in the years" he not only cares for the museum but is kept constantly busy naming plants for people by comparison with those of the Tracy Herbarium of which he is also in charge. His only help comes from secretary Mrs. L. M. Vaughan, a student-veteran's wife.

"Everything Here Is A Relic"

Parks centers his life around the museum. To him it is a constant source of interest and he never tires showing visitors about. When a visitor enters, he will probably find Parks sitting in Dean Francis' favorite chair behind a desk belonging to one of the presidents. "Everything here is a relic," he says smiling, "including me."

The museum is made up of the three main collections—the Tracy Herbarium, the Ball fossil plants, and the Francis fossil animals. There are many other smaller collections of educational value. Among these is the anthropological room where there are 101 casts, all taken from living models, which represent the variations of types of tribes and individuals of the South Sea region. Each cast is a full portrait bust and colored from nature to reproduce the actual color of the skin.

These casts represent, for those who can see beyond the opaque faces, living and impressive records of studies and observations. Each face has a timeless living quality that reveals intimate glimpses of a drama of life and struggle, of peace and adventure, a drama told in 101 versions. No one can look at the collection and fail to be impressed by the range of details. It is like a travel book with a wide background.

Not Enough Visitors

Parks says the museum has enough material to completely change every display case once a week for 52 weeks, but that not enough people visit the museum to warrant the change.

To the casual visitor the museum might seem small and its interesting items soon exhausted. To him who undergoes this feeling, the best advice is to stop in Parks' office and ask to be shown around. A second bit of advice, though: don't go near him unless you have the whole afternoon free—he likes to talk.



H. B. PARKS curator of the Museum and his secretary, MRS. L. M. VAUGHAN, attempt to identify a plant by comparison with specimens from the S. M. Tracy Herbarium. PARKS has been official curator of the Museum since September, 1945. He has been with the A&M System for 32 years.

Mammoths, Mastodons Vied with Saber-Tooth Tigers for Brazos River Bottom Supremacy

By BILL ROSE

The Brazos River Bottoms have often been accused of being the home of wild animals by Texas people when referring to Aggies. There was a day however when the area was truly a no-man's land. Mammoths and mastodons competed with saber-toothed tigers to see which was to reign supreme in the prehistorical society of College Station.

But these bygone monsters gave up the ghost (whether it was the advent of the Aggie or not is in dispute by authorities) and their only remnant are fossils.

Two of the most complete fossil collections ever amassed in the United States now rest in A&M's museum. They are the O. M. Ball collection of plant fossils and the Mark Francis collection of fossilized animals.

Brazos County has long been a happy hunting ground for the fossil seeker. At one time the area was under the Gulf of Mexico and the bones were washed down with the silt from the north by inland rivers. Very seldom is a complete fossil of an animal found and never in Texas. The water assorted them so that bones of the same weight appear together. For instance, a deposit may contain as many as 50 skulls of animals but not a single other bone.

Dr. Francis obtained most of his specimens from Fuller's earth pits dug by companies in that industry near Bryan. All the animals in the Museum are from the period when land animals first began to out-

number water life. The first large fossil dominant in this area were the mastodon and the mammoth. The most perfect example of these early forbears of the elephant in the museum are thought to have come from as far north as the site of Cairo, Ill., which was then the coast of the Gulf.

The inexpert museum visitor may have some trouble distinguishing the mastodon from the mammoth. The best way to separate them is by their teeth. The flora of the time was brush and the mammoth was a strict vegetarian; therefore, his teeth resemble two washboards in order to grind his daily hors d'oeuvres. The mastodon, on the other hand was carnivorous, and his teeth are like those of a hog.

With the coming of the Brazos a new group of animals began to leave their fossils in this vicinity. These have been found far inland probably deposited there by the river which was then 50 miles wide.

Some of the more modern specimens which the museum has on display are ancient bisons, huge turtles with shells up to 10 feet in diameter, and pre-runners of the armadillo. This latter has left shells four inches thick and as big as a barrel.

The most rare single item in the Francis collection is one of the three existing fossils of a muskox. It is still not understood by paleontologists exactly how the fossil came to be in this area. The

muskox lived far west of the Rockies.

One very interesting display is a case showing the evolution of the horse. Fossils representative of each geological age and each major change of anatomy are in the case with comments made by Francis alongside.

The South Room is the permanent home of Ball's plant fossils. Not only does this group contain specimens of all the major flora in this geological outcropping, but also representative of all the major geological periods from over the world. Dr. Ball spent 20 years gathering the plants.

There are two types of fossil plants. They are either imprints of the plant in stone, or raised on the stone by the slow exchanging of the plant material with the silicon and other minerals of the rock. The popular term for this last type is "petrified." The color of the imprints which make the fossil appear life-like comes from the minerals which were in the leaves.

Logs—particularly of palm trees—up to 70 feet long have been found nearby and are now in the museum. These palm logs turn partially to coal and part to flint, the outside being the coal. One such log gave visitors to the museum quite a shock whenever the coal would be struck by sunlight. As soon as it became fairly warm the log would explode with the noise of a blockbuster. The curator and his secretary would never raise an eyebrow, however.

A&M's Tracy Herbarium Features One of Best Native Plant Collections in the Southwest

By MARVIN RICE

The S. M. Tracy Herbarium, located in the east wing of the College Museum, is one of the best collections of native plants in the Southwest. The collection is largely restricted to plants growing in Texas, but there are hundreds of others gathered from other states.

The various plants are grouped by their relationship into families, genera and species. Each genera is housed in a separate compartment within a large case and labeled according to family. Each species of plant is mounted on a separate card, and the name, date found, and the location are entered on this card.

The Tracy Herbarium, as a whole, contains approximately 200,000 species of plants. At present, in the main room provided, 50,000 pressed plants are available for instant reference. The remainder are all classified and labeled, but are stored in insect-proof boxes because of the lack of room for correct housing.

The herbarium represents the work of many collectors and contains specimens collected and named by almost every well-known botanist in the world. A number of specimens were collected more than 200 years ago and are still in excellent shape.

The first attempt to investigate plants at A&M was in 1882, when a man by the name of Neely was employed by the College to make a collection of grasses within the College area. Two different collections were made by Neely, and the remainder are all classified and labeled, but are stored in insect-proof boxes because of the lack of room for correct housing.

So far as is recorded, Helge Ness, botanist for the Experiment Station, was next to carry on the idea of plant collection. He and a group of students gathered hundreds of specimens of flora growing in Brazos County.

About 1920, The U. S. Department of Agriculture decided that a botanist should accompany each soil surveyor and col-



The remains of an early Brazos County resident, skull of ancient mammoth, attracts many visitors to the South Room of the Museum. Other large skulls visible are those of mastodons.

lect specimens of the flora in the district being surveyed. This added greatly to the existing collection. Enough funds soon became available to mount all the plants and place them in standard herbarium cases.

During this time, the herbarium of S. M. Tracy was acquired by purchase from the Tracy estate, and his name was given to the entire collection.

The Tracy collection of 10,000 specimens, consists primarily of Gulf Coast plants, but also contains specimens from all over the world, which Tracy obtained in exchange for specimens of his own. One comes across plants (See HERBARIUM, Page 4)



Important item to A&M Fish is "oldest man on the campus"—the Egyptian mummy and case. The occupant is thought to have been a tax collector, and archeologists place his birthday as being near 2000 B.C.

Museum Collection Includes Egyptian Mummy, Rare Fossil Collection, And Antique Beehive

By FRANK WELCH

For centuries man has found the evidence and customs of his ancestors an interesting field for study and enjoyment. Archeological societies all over the world are constantly searching for lost civilizations and remnants of the world's past. It is not necessary however to be a student of the First Ice Age to enjoy the objects of interest found at the College Museum.

Many of the exhibits at the museum were built by the college for use in the Texas Centennial in 1936. One of these exhibits is the Geological Time Scale found in the room of fossils. This scale, developed through the "radium clock" method, traces the existence of the earth back to the earliest date.

By determining the amount of disintegrated radioactive material in the world, geologists are able to approximate the age of earth as 1,500,000,000 years. This scale also dates the appearance of life on earth at about 5,000,000,000 years ago and the appearance of vertebrates 2,000,000,000 years later.

Another exhibit, used in the Centennial is the late Dr. Mark Francis' collection of fossils showing the complete evolution of the horse. This is housed in a glass case and is described with drawings of the early horses as they looked millions of years ago. Included in the collection is the fossil discovered by Francis himself which brought him high acclaim in veterinary circles. This skull

and leg formation was the first of its kind ever uncovered and served as a "missing link" in the complete study of the animal's evolution.

Another collection that Dr. Francis left to the college is the huge assemblage of mammal bone fossils. These are kept in several tall cabinets of drawers. All pieces have been checked with the Museum of Natural History in New York and it is considered one of the finest collections in the country.

A German made Skep, or beehive, which was brought to this country over a hundred years ago is another of the Museum's acquisitions. Early German settlers imported the skeps to Texas as when they learned that there was no way to raise sugar here. The early beehive which was made of woven grass, rye straw, and rattan bark, resembles a large wicker basket.

On one of the walls of the building is the skin of 19 foot python. The skin was sent from Sumatra by Bruno Winkler, formerly of A&M.

A fine collection of early Babylonian cuneiform tablets is housed in one of the many exhibition cases. Cuneiform is the name given to the writing done by the early Babylonians, and letters were made by impressing a wedge shaped stylus in soft clay. When dry the tablets resembled a small rock and were used for correspondence. Samples include a receipt for the sacrifice of a cow and inventory of a temple's supplies, a

tablet used for writing practice in a grade school, and a butcher's bill for a ram and a sheep.

An authentic Egyptian mummy, complete with case, occupies another corner of this room. To archeologists the case suggests that the mummy dates back to 2000 B.C. The lid is suspended above the other half of the carved covering, enabling the observer to see the remains of this Egyptian dignitary, probably a tax collector. The inscription on the ancient coffin sounds not unlike present day epitaphs:

"May the deceased by the grace of the local Gods, who are lords of Thinis and who occupy a high place in front of the chief God of Egypt, Amoun-Re, receive food, drink, and clothing for ever and ever."

Close inside the entrance to the museum are glass cabinets containing early pictures and data in A&M's history. One picture shows the first Cadet Corps. Another shows the first faculty under president Gathright. Here is found a letter from President Gathright. The letter-head has an engraving of the first building with horse and buggy teams traveling in front.

Here is also a rare snapshot of Dean Kyle taken 10 days after he entered A&M as a Fish. His room is turned topsy-turvy and young Kyle is standing in the midst of the mess. The caption reads: "Fish" Kyle after a "rough house."



Museum Curator Former Editor of 'Thlinget'

H. B. PARKS, Museum curator, was the curator of the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka, Alaska in 1910.

The purpose of the Sheldon Jackson Museum collection was the preservation of natural history and ethnological specimens from all over Alaska. In October, 1910, Parks took over the job of classifying and cataloguing the specimens which had been collected during the previous 25 years.

Museum Building was made to represent the ancient Alaskan house and was built with money collected by Dr. W. A. Kelly of the Indian Training School at Sitka.

The Museum exhibits gave tourists in

1910 a "very complete idea of the native Alaskans in their former conditions," and acquainted them with "the peculiar forms that nature takes in Alaska," according to "The Thlinget," Indian School newspaper. Parks published The Thlinget in addition to his work as museum curator. The mast-head of the paper, with a November, 1910, dateline is pictured above.

The Thlinget is the name the Indians applied to themselves, Parks said, and means literally, "The People." The November issue carried one lone advertisement set in old English type. First issue of The Thlinget was published on a press that had been out of operation for 35 years.