Australia's first public museum was established in Sydney in 1827 with the aim of procuring "many rare and curious specimens of Natural History."

In 1829 William Holmes was appointed the first custodian of the fledgling collection, then located in the old post office building in Macquarie Place. Initially known as the Sydney Museum or Colonial Museum, the institution was formally named the Australian Museum in 1836. It was also stipulated that the Museum and Botanic Gardens be jointly governed by a 'Committee of Superintendence' made up of eminent men of the colony.

The collection was housed in various buildings around Sydney until colonial architect Mortimer Lewis designed a dedicated museum building. Construction began in 1846 on a site in William Street near Hyde Park, and the new museum opened to the public in 1857 with just one exhibition gallery. Since then the site has been modified many times to accommodate the growing needs of exhibitions, collections and staff. In 2008 a new wing to the east of the site was built to house scientific staff and collections.

Today the Australian Museum continues its dual roles in research and education.

From a "beautiful Collection of Australian curiosities", the Museum has grown to an internationally recognised collection of over 21 million cultural and scientific objects. The Museum plays a leading role in taxonomic and systematic research, and at its research station at Lizard Island conducts significant research on coral reef ecology. Through

exhibitions and other public programs the Australian Museum continues to inform and amaze generations of visitors about the unique flora, fauna and cultures of Australia and the Pacific.