

NATURAL HISTORY STATE MUSEUM

Back in the 30's the late Arthur G. Nord, supervisor of the Ashley National Forest, became impressed with the wealth of geologic and fossil values in the Vernal area. He was also disturbed by the continued removal of this material by outside museums and universities and felt it would be desirable if the state would erect a museum in Vernal to preserve and exhibit this natural wealth near the place of its origin. Accordingly, the Vernal Lions Club museum committee was formed in 1942 to spread the idea among prominent, influential people in the state. This was successful, and in the 1945 Legislature Senate Bill 141 was passed approving the museum idea but requesting no funds.

In January, 1946 Governor Herbert B. Maw made \$200,000 of Department of Publicity and Industrial Development funds available for construction of the museum building. The same month, G.E. Untermann, of the National Park Service, was appointed director of the museum project with salary paid by Vernal City, Uintah County, and the School Board. He was ably assisted by his wife, Billie, who also had background museum experience and who served for the next two years without salary.

By the end of January, 1946 the Untermanns presented original museum plans and drawings. These were used by Salt Lake City architect Miles E. Miller to complete plans which would stay within the funds available. Ed Dorland Construction Company was the successful bidder at \$186,000, the remaining money covering architect's fees.

Governor Maw laid the cornerstone October 16, 1947; the building was completed July 1, 1948 and officially opened as a State Museum. It was dedicated October 29, 1948 by Governor Maw. It has been open every day since.

Having served two years as project director, G.E. (Ernest) Untermann was appointed museum director July 1, 1948, his salary now paid by the Department of Publicity and Industrial Development. Billie Untermann was employed as museum scientist and curator, and Arnold D. Lewis of the Carnegie Museum was employed as preparator.

With the liquidation in 1949 of the Utah Department of Publicity and Industrial Development, the Utah Field House of Natural History, now the Natural History State Museum, was transferred to the State Board of Examiners. In 1959 it became part of the State Park system.

Some of the values that caused Arthur G. Nord (father of the Field House idea) to work so long and diligently are truly fantastic! The geology is represented by rocks dating back to between 2-3 billion years. There are 26 major formations, 20 of which contain fossils and cover a life record of five hundred million years from Cambrian time to the recent. The fossil record includes, besides the dinosaurs, more than 100 species of extinct mammals.

With an elevational range in the Vernal area from 4,500 feet to over 12,000 feet, present day natural history life is represented in the Uinta Mountain and Basin region by over 1,100 species of plants, more than 200 birds (many of which are migrants), and approximately 75 species of mammals. The geologic, fossil, and natural history story is told in the museum exhibits, which cover five halls in 25 floor cases and 107 wall cases.

Ernest Untermann, Sr., "Artist of the Uintas," joined the museum in the summer of 1946 and painted constantly until his death in 1956. His contributions to the museum include over 100 oil paintings, panels and murals which are valued at over \$100,000. These paintings cover a wide range of subjects from prehistoric restorations to landscapes and visualize the story the museum tells.

It is difficult to believe that the museum is now 23 years old. Public acceptance has been gratifying, and visitors are highly complimentary of the museum. It is rated as one of the outstanding small natural history museums in America. Its room of fluorescent minerals is one of the finest such exhibits in this country.

On the west lawn is a replica group of three dinosaurs and a skeleton of Diplodocus, the largest vegetarian dinosaur. The Diplodocus molds were a gift from the Carnegie Museum in 1955, the Vernal Lions Club paying the \$1,000 transportation charges from Pittsburgh. The casting of the 600 pieces was done at the Otto Buehner plant in Salt Lake City by museum personnel. Parts were cast in the museum, and erection of the skeleton on the museum lawn was done by museum personnel. The Vernal Lions Club supplied the chain link fence which encloses the 76-foot long skeleton, which was dedicated on June 6, 1957.

In the spring of 1962 Captain S.A. Dulany Hunter, friend of the Untermanns, offered his collection of exotic china and other unique materials to the museum provided there was an addition built to house them. The Division constructed the 40' x 60' annex at a cost of \$36,000. The new wing was dedicated by Governor George D. Clyde on May 4, 1963. Due to his dissatisfaction with security measures at the museum and some other demands, Captain Hunter withdrew his collection in 1964. Immediately upon the removal of the Hunter material from the museum, the annex was filled with material in storage at the museum. These collections are on exhibit today.

October, 1964 saw the completion of the \$51,000 three dinosaur group by noted Salt Lake Sculptor Millard Fillmore Malin. It is a life-size, life-like action group comprised of Ceratosaurus, a flesh eater, and Stegosaurus and Camarasaurus, both vegetarian dinosaurs. The cost was divided between the Hunter Foundation, State Parks, Vernal City,

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With the gift of land, oil paintings, and thousands of dollars for various projects by local citizens, the Vernal community has contributed over a quarter million dollars to this museum development, which continues to enjoy increased popularity. 1971 will be one of its greatest years.

-- Billie R. Untermann

-- G.E. Untermann

Ed. comment: With well over a half million dollar investment in this museum, it has been and will continue to be one of the leading attractions in the Uinta Basin. Retired Curator Ernest Untermann has worked on a full shift plus basis without pay for nearly a year in the interest of the museum. He plans to continue until Billie retires and can join him in further geologic explorations.

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"A wedding ring is much like a tourniquet, both tend to stop the circulation."

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VACATION AT LAST FOR THE ANDY ANDERSONS

Andy finally broke loose (after the 1972-73 budget was done) and took his family on a well-earned vacation. It proved to be a local vacation, however, due to the unexpected illness of one of the children; but Andy looked refreshed, and maybe a little slimmer, when he got back. We missed you, Andy, but thanks for letting us hold down the fort! You and your family deserve another again soon.