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The Fort Hays Museums

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THE FORT HAYS STATE MUSEUMS

The two departments that make up the Fort Hays State Museums are the Sternberg Memorial Museum and the Museum of the High Plains. The former is an internationally-known exhibit museum which also contains paleontological research collections. It occupies the first floor of McCartney Hall. The latter is a research and teaching museum with no public exhibits. It is located in various rooms on the second, third, and fourth floors of Albertson Hall.

History of the Museums.--The museum that later would become the Sternberg Memorial Museum officially was recognized by President W. A. Lewis in 1926. In 1927, President Lewis convinced George F. Sternberg (a famous paleontological collector) to assume responsibility for its development. During his 34 years at Fort Hays State, Sternberg (deceased) amassed one of the world's most spectacular collections of fossil vertebrates and other materials. He was succeeded by Myrl V. Walker (deceased), and he by Dr. Richard J. Zakrzewski (the present Director of the Sternberg Memorial Museum).

The Museum of the High Plains has its roots in the Department of Biological Sciences. The first collection (a herbarium) was established in 1929 by Dr. Elam Bartholomew. After his death in 1934, the herbarium was curated by Dr. Fred W. Albertson (deceased), who eventually was succeeded by Dr. Howard C. Reynolds (retired). The present curator is Dr. Joseph R. Thomasson. Other collections of the Museum of the High Plains (arthropods, fishes, amphibians and reptiles, birds, and mammals) were amassed beginning in the 1960s. The Museum of the High Plains (including the Elam Bartholomew Herbarium) was elevated to the status of a department separate from Biological Sciences in 1973, at which time Dr. Jerry R. Choate was appointed Director. The Museum of the High Plains and the Sternberg Memorial Museum, although retaining their separate identities,

were merged for administrative purposes in 1980. As a result of that merger, Choate was appointed overall Director of Museums.

Mission of the Museums.--The mission of the Fort Hays State Museums, as initially authorized in 1980 and published in *University Forum*, is as follows:

"1) to collect and properly preserve scientific specimens of animals and plants (both living and extinct), historical and ethnological materials, and geological and archeological objects to serve as the focus for other activities of the museums; 2) to provide educational exhibits and programs, based at least in part on the collections of the museums, for the enrichment of students and the general public; 3) to conduct scholarly research, both applied and pure, based on the collections of the museums; 4) to employ the collections as a teaching resource in graduate and undergraduate education; 5) to offer training programs for students who wish to pursue careers in preservation, maintenance, exhibition, and administration of museum collections; 6) to provide services to the citizens of western Kansas and to society at large based on the collections and the expertise of their curators and staff members."

Museum Staff.--The staff of the Sternberg Memorial Museum consists of one full-time classified position (Preparator/Conservator) and one half-time classified position (Artist/Registrar). The Director has a half-time appointment in the Department of Earth Sciences. Two additional curators have full-time appointments in academic departments (one in Earth Sciences and the other in Biological Sciences). The staff of the Museum of the High Plains consists of six curators with full-time appointments in the Department of Biological Sciences. The staff of the museum administrative office consists of one full-time classified position (Museum Educator) and the Director, who has a half-time appointment in the Department of Biological Sciences.

Museum Collections.--The Sternberg Memorial Museum houses more than 3,000,000 specimens representing the disciplines of paleontology (one of the

finest fossil collections in the world), natural history, geology, history, archeology, and ethnology. Less than 10% of the specimens are on exhibit; the remainder are used in research and teaching or are in storage awaiting space for exhibition. The Museum of the High Plains houses approximately 655,000 specimens, including the world's largest collection of fossil grasses and one of the largest collections of mammals in the United States. All collections of the Museum of the High Plains are used extensively in research and teaching.

Museum Programs.--Museum programs focus on the exhibits of the Sternberg Memorial Museum and the expertise of the curators in both museums. Exhibits constantly are being renovated or replaced. One exhibit hall was completely renovated (with private funding) two years ago, and another exhibit hall was converted into a gallery for traveling exhibitions (with private funding) earlier this year. It opened with a Smithsonian traveling exhibition to coincide with the retirement ceremony for President G. W. Tomanek. Also, our new museum gift shop opened at that time. Preparation of a permanent outdoor exhibit (with private funding) was begun earlier this year, and construction of a new diorama (with private funding) is scheduled to begin this August.

Enthusiastic support for museum programs is provided by the FHS Museums Association, which consists of more than 100 interested citizens and contributors. At least 80,000 persons from around the world visit the Sternberg Memorial Museum each year. This number includes thousands of school children and other groups from western Kansas that receive guided tours of the museum.

Strengths of the Museums.--The strengths of the museums include the size and quality of their collections, the expertise and productivity of their staff, and their excellent reputations. The collections rank among the largest and best known at any academic institution in the world; few other universities, and none the size of Fort Hays State, have collections comparable to ours. The

staff of the museums includes three curator/scientists who are regarded as tops in their fields, and two of those persons have received major Federal grants to support museum activities. So far as reputation is concerned, the Fort Hays State Museums are much better known in this country and abroad than is the university as a whole.

Weaknesses of the Museums.--The principal weaknesses of the museums are inadequate space, an inadequate number of staff members, and inadequate funding. All space available to the museums is filled to capacity, and this seriously hinders growth and curation of collections and opportunities for public programs based on those collections. Staff members with full-time appointments in academic departments have little time to contribute to museum functions, and staff members with museum appointments therefore are spread so thin that they find it nearly impossible to complete essential tasks. The operating budget of the museums, minus salaries, is less than \$17,000 (!) and has not increased appreciably in several years.

The Next Five Years.--The Sternberg Memorial Museum is scheduled to occupy the remainder of McCartney Hall when the School of Business moves to Picken Hall. This will relieve crowding, enable continued growth, and enhance capabilities for innovative museum programming. Greater use of volunteers will help alleviate problems resulting from inadequate staff members, but the half-time museum appointment for the Artist/Registrar should be made full-time. Also, certain staff members with full-time appointments in academic departments should be given split appointments (0.5 FTE) in the museums to enable better curation of collections and more participation in museum programs. An even greater effort will be made to develop private and federal sources of funding (we presently receive nearly \$40,000 each year from sources other than the State), but substantial increases in State funding are essential if we are to continue improving our public programs.

Concluding Comments.--The Fort Hays State Museums are the best known campus attraction and the most visible university department in terms of provision of educational and cultural services to taxpayers. They serve to distinguish Fort Hays State University from nearly all other like-sized academic institutions. As such, the Fort Hays State Museums historically have received outstanding administrative support, and we hope this continues in the future. In the future, the programs the museums provide will be an important consideration in recruitment of new businesses and economic development of the region. Accordingly, we hope to be an integral part of any long-range plans to improve and expand the services provided by the university.