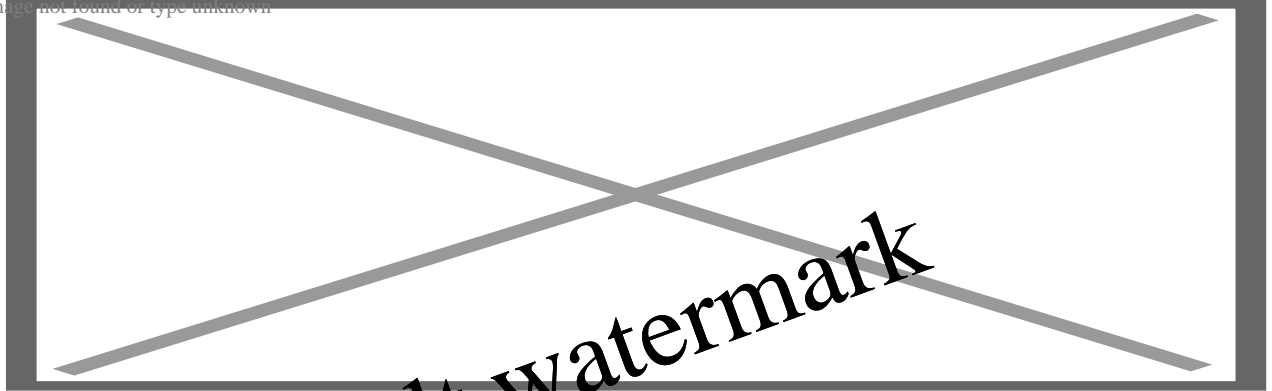


Albion College Natural History Museum

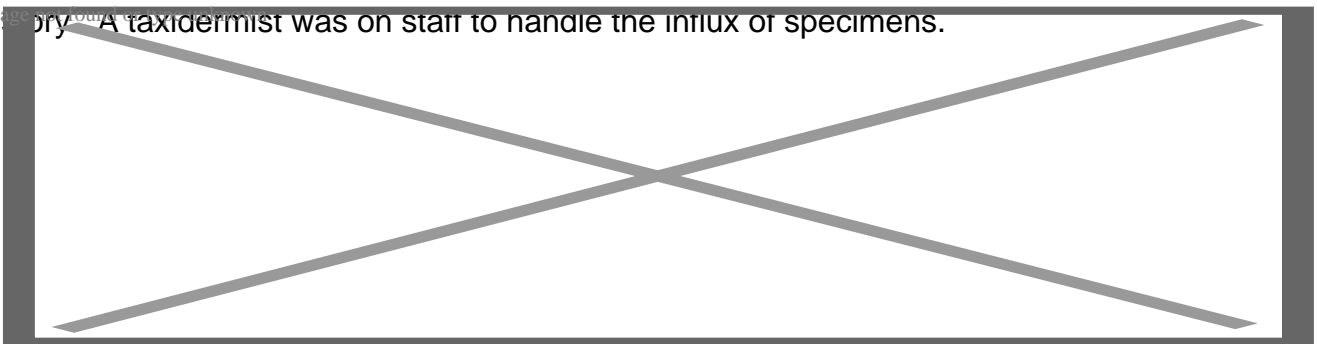
Description

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“The only shark in Albion College is on the third floor of Robinson Hall. Professor Ewbank is not the individual in question, but the voracious sea-fish of that classification which swings so jauntily from the ceiling of the college museum across the hall from Professor Ewbank’s recitation room”.

Between 1881 and 1922, Albion College maintained a natural history museum. The museum began with a donation of copper specimens by Revs. W.H. Brockway and J.H. Pitezel. In c1860, State Geologist Dr. Alexander Winchall donated over 1,000 mineral samples. The material was housed in cases around Central Hall (now Robinson), and in 1881, the college created the first permanent exhibit space. The museum occupied the second and third stories of Central Hall. At the time of the opening, the college partnered with Hillsdale College and the Battle Creek Public schools on an expedition to South America to collect artifacts. These artifacts made up the majority of the museum’s collection. The museum’s focus was mainly natural history, but also spanned geology, zoology, and botany, and history. A taxidermist was on staff to handle the influx of specimens.



In

1881, the museum boasted:

- 2,100 Geological Specimens
- 365 Birds
- 60 Mammals

- 400 Insects
- 850 Clam Shells
- 150 Corals
- 40 Sea Urchins
- 35 Starfish
- 1 Shark
- 1 Boa Constrictor
- 1 Alligator
- 1 Alcoholic Specimen
- 250 specimens of Woods, Fruits, etc., from South America America, California, and Michigan
- Ancient Coins
- 200 Marine Invertebrate (donated by the Smithsonian)
- Sioux Chief Spotted Tail's war dress, saddle, horse trappings, bows, arrows, etc. (donated by Prof. H.A. Mills)



1892, the museum had over 200 hundred visitors a year. However, popularity seemed to decline; a 1920 *Pleiad* article writer hoped to pull it out of its "Rip Van Winkle" status on campus. Unfortunately, timing was not on the writer's side: on December 17, 1922, a fire claimed Robinson Hall. The building was completely destroyed, including the museum housed inside. The *Albion Evening Recorder* reported on the following day that:

A number of shells, relics of the Spanish-American War, were included in the museum material on the third floor, and when the flamed reached them an effect similar to a military bombardment was produced, the explosions lasting intermittently through about a half hour.

The fire marked the end of the museum's existence on campus. Because so many invaluable items were lost, the college did not try to reconstruct the museum. A full inventory of the museum's collection has never been found, so the full extent of the loss remains a mystery.

Category

1. College Archives

Tags

1. Albion College History
2. Battle Creek Public Schools

3. botany
4. Delos Fall
5. Hillsdale College
6. history
7. museum
8. natural history
9. Robinson Hall
10. zoology

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