



the

# COOK-WITTER REPORT

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## The Illinois State Museum: A Rich History

Last year, nearly 387,000 people visited the Illinois State Museum's (ISM) facilities throughout the state, which offer educational exhibits and public programs, like lectures and kids' camps. They also preserve 13.5 million objects representing the state's natural and cultural heritage, including archaeological artifacts, Native American materials, insects, fossils, fine art, mastodon bones, and more.

While the ISM is now considered "a leading institution in the country," according to a statement from the American Alliance of Museums, its origin was humble. It all started with some rocks.

The Illinois State Museum came about because of a relatively young America's desire to know more about its enlarging property. In the middle 1800s, many states hired scientists to survey their land. "Surveys...serve(d) the practical purpose of improving the material well-being of the farmer and the manufacturer, as well as that of the capitalist and laborer; at the same time they would advance education and promote scientific knowledge, and the end result of both would be a better and fuller life for all men," writes Walter B. Hendrickson in the September 1961 issue of "The History of Science Society."

While conducting the surveys, scientists located veins of coal and other useful natural resources, and collected specimens to educate a public hungry for knowledge. They also gained information about

soils to help farmers. According to Hendrickson, 20 states conducted geological surveys in the 1830s and 1840s. Illinois and others followed later. Our first geological survey was in 1851.

### From Rocks to Museum

During these surveys, and those of the first Natural History Society, scientists gathered flora and fauna, native rocks, and fossils, among other natu-

ral resources, but they had no place to show them. The materials languished, like scientific refugees. In 1876, then Illinois Secretary of State George Harlow called for them to get a home. The December 6, 1876 Springfield paper, the Illinois State Journal, quoted Harlow's biennial report to the governor. "The valuable collection of specimens accumulated...for the State Geological Survey



*An exhibit about Native American life centuries ago informs visitors at the Dickson Mounds Museum in Lewistown. All photos courtesy of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.*

remain in the same confused state as the last report. The Secretary renews his recommendation that the collection be assigned to some permanent place of deposit and suitably arranged and classified in the interest of the scientific development of the State, and (as) an interesting geological museum for the entertainment and instruction of those interested in natural sciences."

Yale College professor James D. Dana, "among the highest scientists of the country" according to the March 7, 1877 Illinois State Journal, wrote Illinois'

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*Illinois State Geologist, Professor Amos Henry Worthen, was named the first curator of Illinois' state museum when it was created in 1877.*

governor in support of Harlow's proposal. He called it "a scheme of the highest importance to science" and said Illinois' materials "are not to be found equally perfect in any other collection." Dana recommended they be placed in a fire-proof building for "the progress of science."

museum" in the Statehouse. Its curator was Professor Amos Henry Worthen, "one of the leading geologists of his time," according to the University of Chicago Library (<http://worthen.lib.uChicago.edu>), which houses the Illinois State Geological Survey volumes. Worthen had worked on them as the state's geologist. He sent out requests for donations to the new museum. The first, according to the September 16, 1877 Illinois State Journal, came from Henry Talbot, Jr., and "the people of Monroe County." They gave "180 flint and 20 stone implements and 28 fragments of ancient pottery."

"Fifty to 100 people visit the museum daily," reported the April 2, 1878 Springfield paper, the Illinois State Register. Later, the museum moved to a variety of locations around the Capitol complex before it got a permanent home in 1962 -- its own building south of the Statehouse.

### Looking at the Past, Planning for the Future

Today, the Illinois State Museum consists of that main location and its partner, the ISM Research and Collec-

tions Center (RCC), also in Springfield, as well as five other sites around the state. They are the only museums that focus on Illinois. Their mission is to inspire individuals of all ages to discover and care about Illinois' natural and cultural resources, and heritage, in order to ensure a "sustainable future," according to the ISM web site ([www.museum.state.il.us](http://www.museum.state.il.us)).

Forty-three other states have state museums. Seventeen have museum systems like ours, consisting of five or more sites, according to the American Alliance of Museums.

The ISM was one of the first institutions to be awarded a system-wide accreditation by the Alliance.

The guts and brains of the ISM is its Research and Collections Center, a plain, one-story building. Here experts research topics and artifacts that help them create the museum's exhibitions, learn more about Illinois, and address current issues, like global warming. There are three National Science Foundation (NSF) research grants and an NSF education grant currently underway here which ISM scientists received as a result of their specialized expertise.

The museum's 13.5 million artifacts are stored at the RCC. "We have collections because they provide the tangible evidence for Illinois' natural and cultural heritage, and that's what we use to discover and tell the story of Illinois' climate, land, life, peo-

In 1877, the collections got their home. Illinois created a state "natural history



*The Illinois State Museum in Springfield.*

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## The Illinois State Museum...

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ple, and art,” says ISM Director Bonnie Styles. State law requires the museum to “research, study, develop collections, and contribute to the understanding of the cultural and natural heritage of Illinois.”

Scientists and other scholars from around the world have come to Springfield to study the Museum’s collections. Many of the items have been donated by Illinoisans, including wedding dresses, art, and furniture. Others have been collected by scientists, such as fossils, animal bones, and soil. Some sediment samples were excavated from archaeological sites to help curators understand what happened there long ago, others were taken from Illinois lake bottoms. Within these soil samples are pollen and other remains that help scientists understand climate changes. “The next generation of scientists is going to have all kinds of approaches and technology that we don’t,” Styles says. “Who knows what they will be able to learn from these artifacts and specimens.”

## Native American Ties

Among those artifacts are many from Native American groups. They include human remains, such as those at Dickson Mounds Museum, an ISM branch and National Historic Site in Lewiston. It’s built over an 800 to 1,000 year old Native American burial site. Displays at Dickson Mounds and the ISM in Springfield teach visitors about Illinois’ Native



*About 40,000 schoolchildren visit the Illinois State Museum and its sites each year. These children are learning about bison, which used to populate the state, from an exhibition at the Illinois State Museum in Springfield.*

Americans and their lifestyles, using authentic artifacts, like stone tools and ceramics.

By federal law -- the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act -- the ISM is obligated to do a number of things for the Native American remains and artifacts. It must inventory them and negotiate with the federally registered tribes about their proper disposition. In addition, the ISM has an agreement with the Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma to curate and manage their archaeological collection and keep it available for research and education.

## Helping Teachers and Students

About 40,000 schoolchildren from around the state visit Dickson Mounds Museum and the other ISM sites for free each year. Exhibitions at the ISM in Springfield are designed for all ages. Some features, like kid-high specimen drawers and the Play Museum, are designed for young children. In the Play Museum, children dig for fossils, drive a play jeep, and view specimens through a videomicroscope. Families bring their kids to the Play Museum, as well as ISM programs like story time, summer camps, family events, Saturday children’s programs, and the RCC’s open houses. The ISM and its sites offer educational and cultural events for adults, too, including art shows, lectures, monthly archaeology talks, and special events.

Last year, 1.5 million people learned about Illinois through the ISM web sites. This information has been researched by ISM scientists and historians, and crafted into 196 lesson plans for teachers; all of which correspond to Illinois Learning Standards and

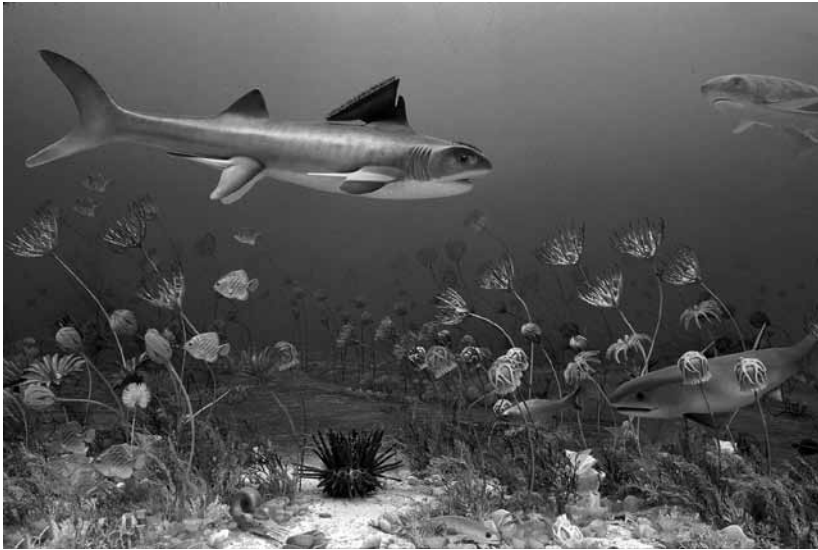
## ISM Branches

- ISM - Chicago Gallery
- Illinois Artisans, Chicago, James R. Thompson Center
- Lockport Gallery, Lockport
- Dickson Mounds Museum, Lewistown
- Southern Illinois Art and Artisans Center, Rend Lake
- ISM Research and Collections Center, Springfield

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*This diorama of a 340 million year old Mississippian sea is from an exhibition at the Illinois State Museum in Springfield.*

are available via the ISM web sites.

Professor Worthen probably never imagined that the museum he began 138 years ago would become a nationally recognized institution whose exhibits and research could be viewed by people around the world on something called “computers” and “smart phones.” In all likelihood, he was just happy to have one room in the Statehouse for a new state museum. One that started with some rocks.

To learn more about the Illinois State Museum and its sites, visit:

**[www.museum.state.il.us](http://www.museum.state.il.us)**



*The Illinois State Museum was housed for a time in the Centennial Memorial Building, now the Howlett Building. This was its natural history hall.*

## In Memoriam

On July 11, former Democratic Illinois State **Representative Henry Woods Bowman** died. He was from Chicago and served in the House of Representatives from 1976 to 1990.



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