



This bulletin is produced by the collection department of the Musée de la nature et des sciences with the aim of making our objects and specimens better known to the public. These specimens are particularly interesting and are carefully preserved in the Museum's collections. They are not always presented during our various exhibitions.

## Influence of the religious communities in the development of the collection of the Musée de la nature et des sciences

### First part: Acquisitions over time

#### Period from 1879 to 1973: priests from the Séminaire de Sherbrooke took the lead in collection development

During this period, objects and specimens were added for teaching purposes and, as well, for the enjoyment and interest of the public.

The work of several priests would have a major long-term influence on the development of the Museum and its collections. Starting in 1879, Father Pierre Girard mentioned donations of several mineralogy specimens from the Canadian Surveyor General's office. In 1893, Father Pierre-Achille Bégin founded the Société d'histoire naturelle (natural history society) of the Séminaire Saint-Charles-Borromée. He used the collections he built with his students as the centre of his teaching. In 1900, Léon Marcotte, one of his students, became interested in the Museum. He continued his professor's work until 1964, when an illness forced him to end his activities. He gave the collections and the Museum the breadth and scope they enjoy today<sup>1</sup>.

During this same period, as we see in the yearbook of the Séminaire and the register of donations by Léon Marcotte, the founders of the Museum were assisted by various members of the clergy who collaborated through their donations to building the collections. This was the case, for example, of Father Pierre-Achille Bégin who gave the Museum 948 insects and 38 mollusk species from across Canada.



Shadow Darter (2013.X.224), collected by Pierre-Achille Bégin

Monseigneur Edmond-Charles Tanguay, who was the *camerarius a secreti*, the private chamberlain to Pope Léon XIII in 1901, donated a mink that had penetrated into his chambers at the Séminaire de Sherbrooke. François-Napoléon Séguin, 5th priest of the Saint-Edmond de Coaticook parish, donated and left a legacy in 1912 and 1913 of three display cases containing 115 stuffed animals. This donation gave a real boost to Léon Marcotte, in his efforts to develop the Museum and in its evolution.



Red-throated Loon (G-77-2-Hi-S), one of the birds donated by François-Napoléon Séguin

Canon Marcotte also recorded information in his register of the specimens he acquired. We note that several birds were purchased in 1952 from the Institut des Sourdes-Muettes on rue Saint-Denis in Montreal, a specialised teaching institution managed by the Sisters of Providence. We learn, for example, of a *Troglodytes hiemalis*, a Winter Wren, purchased for \$2.00. We also find various anecdotes, including one about a Passenger Pigeon that he had long hoped to acquire from a Montreal taxidermist, Joseph-Aristide Crevier, who was asking \$125, a colossal sum for the

<sup>1</sup> To learn more about the history of the Museum, see the newsletter «The Musée de la nature et des sciences de Sherbrooke turns 130; a unique institution that continues to evolve. »



1940s. After three or four years of negotiation, the Canon finally won. Here is an extract from his register that records their conversation:

"I am coming to get the Passenger Pigeon today.  
Yes! So you have made up your mind?  
Absolutely, but you will also have to decide... I will not give you \$125.00, not \$100.00 nor \$75.00... Here are 5 \$10 bills.  
That's fine ...  
Wrap up the bird for me right away!"

When Léon Marcotte died, the Museum held more than 45,000 objects and specimens divided among various fields, including the natural sciences, fine arts, and coin and stamp collections. With more than 500 stuffed birds and 335 nests and eggs, the ornithology collection represented a good proportion of the species observed in Quebec.

### Development of the collections after 1973

After Canon Léon Marcotte's death in 1969, the Museum's activities slowed until 1973, the year the new corporation, the Musée du Séminaire de Sherbrooke<sup>2</sup>, took up the reins. In the decades that followed, the Museum acquired entire collections given by enthusiastic collectors, and looked after orphan collections from museums that had unfortunately ceased their operations. These collections bear witness to the importance of the religious communities in teaching and research in the natural sciences. The following paragraphs uncover the main strands of this story.

In 1981, the Quebec Ministère des Affaires culturelles turned over to our Museum the collections of the Institution des Sourds-Muets<sup>3</sup> of Montreal and of Mont Saint-Louis, collections that had been developed respectively by the Clercs de Saint-Viateur and the Frères des écoles chrétiennes.

The collection of the Institution des Sourds-Muets had 951 specimens to which were added the archives of Brother Florian Crête, c.s.v., curator of the museum of the institution and one of the distinguished figures in the history of the natural sciences in Quebec. These archives, which give information about the many specimens in the collection, show both the passion of Brother Crête, and the habits and customs of the period. The collection built at Collège du Mont Saint-Louis included 359 specimens, the majority of which were eggs, but it also included several mammals, reptiles, invertebrates and fish. Many insects, which are not yet catalogued, also come from this institution. An exhaustive work to document and enter specimens in the database remains to be done for these two collections and the archives related to them.

In 1987, the natural science collections from the Musée du Séminaire de Nicolet were added. Canon Henri Bernier, professor at this institution, had set up a natural history and antiquities museum in 1916. Students and



Vertebra of a blue whale (G-88-419-Hi) dating from the Champlain Sea – Donation of the Musée du Séminaire de Nicolet

visitors could observe shells, birds, fossils, rocks and minerals as well as stamp collections and coins. When the Séminaire de Nicolet was closed in 1969, the natural science collection was loaned to the Musée d'Odanak, then given in 1987 to the Musée du Séminaire de Sherbrooke. In all, 167 specimens, mostly of birds, enriched the collections.

In 1988 and 1989, an important donor of the Museum appeared on the scene. He was Allyre Couture, also known as Brother Allyre before the secularisation of the community of the Frères du Sacré-Coeur in 1953. He was a teacher of natural sciences, an enthusiastic botanist who played a major role in the Museum's collections development by donating more than 2500 vascular plants, as well as mosses and liverworts and mushrooms which had not, until then, been well represented in the collections of herbariums of the period. In 1999, he also donated his notebooks recording botanical excursions for the years 1937 to 1972, leaving us a legacy of very valuable information on the plants he had donated ten years earlier. Finally, in July and December of 2000, the year of his death, he and his estate donated various volumes and slides in the natural sciences.

Given these important donations, the scientific rigour of Allyre Couture and the fact that he had taught natural sciences for many years

<sup>2</sup> In 2002, this corporation took the name of the Musée de la nature et des sciences.

<sup>3</sup> Note that two separate institutions existed in Montreal, the Institut des Sourdes-Muettes, situated on rue Saint-Denis, and the Institution des Sourds-Muets, rue Saint-Laurent.



in Sherbrooke, and in many other places in Quebec, the Museum named the new storage facilities in his honour in 2002.

In 1995, the Université de Montréal gave the Museum the specimens that had been presented in the 1980s to the Musée d'histoire naturelle Georges-Préfontaine. It had been built in large part based on the collections developed by Sister Marie-Jean-Eudes at the Museum of the Sisters of Saint Anne in Lachine between 1931 and 1945. The Musée de la nature et des sciences thus became the guardian of this impressive collection of birds, mammals and fish. Sister Marie-Jean-Eudes had patiently assembled them with the advice of Brother Crête. Assisted by other nuns, she had taken the greatest possible care to represent the species in their natural setting, as we see in the photograph of the diorama below.

In 2000, 2007 and 2015, the Sisters of Saint Anne Historic Center<sup>4</sup> ceded its most recent natural sciences collections to the Museum.

In 1995, 2009 and 2014, collections of a total of 948 objects, mostly plants and minerals, were given by Father Jean-Paul Sainte-Marie, priest at the Séminaire de Sherbrooke. He had studied at the Séminaire and also served there as professor from 1960 to 1992. He was a collaborator of Allyre Couture at the beginning of the 1960s.

All the objects and specimens acquired by donation over these years are, of course, associated with donors, but also with scientists and committed amateurs, several of whom are well known in the natural sciences. We will introduce you to some of them in the second and third parts of this newsletter.



The Long-billed Curlew (1995.1718.205). One of the birds from the Museum of the Sisters of Saint Anne



The Long-billed Curlew in its display case of the period

<sup>4</sup> In 2005, the administration of the Sisters of Saint Anne brought together its two museums and interpretation centre. It assumed the name: Sisters of Saint Anne Historic Center. The Center closed its doors in December 2014.



## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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## CREDITS

Research and preparation: Serge Gauthier, curator, and Marie Chapdelaine, collections technician  
Linguistic revision: Michelle Bélanger and Manon Lebeau  
English translation: Christina Davidson and Gary Richards  
Infographics: Manon Bureau

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CULTUREL  
NUMÉRIQUE  
DU QUÉBEC

NOTRE CULTURE, CHEZ NOUS, PARTOUT