

SOONER MAGAZINE

A SPECIAL ISSUE
Spring/Summer 2001
Volume 21 ■ Number 3



SOONER SPOTLIGHT



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ON THE COVER

The most dramatic view of the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History is an exterior one—from the back. At night, after the crowds have departed, lights play on the bronze sculpture of the Columbian Mammoth, dominant feature of the Pleistocene Plaza and fast becoming the symbol of the new museum.

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Sooner Magazine is published quarterly by the University of Oklahoma Foundation Inc. with private funds at no cost to the taxpayers of the State of Oklahoma. The magazine is printed by the Transcript Press, Norman, Oklahoma, and is intended primarily for private donors to the University of Oklahoma and members of the University of Oklahoma Association.

Opinions expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official position of the University of Oklahoma or the University of Oklahoma Foundation Inc.

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The Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History

OU Western History Collections



J. Willis Stovall

The University of Oklahoma had natural history holdings prior to the coming of J. Willis Stovall in 1930 as the faculty's first paleontologist to concentrate on vertebrate fossils. But the collections did not approach museum quantity and quality until Stovall set out on field expeditions that would reap thousands of specimens of dinosaurs and other reptiles and mammals.

His work became a project of the W.P.A. (Works Progress Administration) from 1935 to 1942, making possible the collection, cataloguing, and restoration of an enormous amount of material. Stovall's teams unearthed many of the skeletons on display in the new Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History, including the *Apatosaurus*, *Saurophaganax*, Columbian Mammoth and *Pentaceratops*. He was the first to begin restoring and mounting fossils and constructing dioramas for a museum that had no real home until acquiring the old ROTC building and its stables in 1947.

A Texas native with degrees from Union and Vanderbilt universities in Tennessee and the University of Chicago, Stovall was the museum's first director, 1943 to 1953. Upon his retirement, the old museum was given his name, as was the Preservation Center in the SNOMNH and the drive leading from Chautauqua Avenue to the new museum's front door.