



Heritage Preserved

By the time the doors opened on May 1, 2000, throngs of spectators were straining at the bit to get inside the new Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History. After all, the magnificent facility had dwelt in the minds and hearts of its supporters for decades; the actual funding campaign had lasted most of the '90s; construction had taken three years, and the packing and moving process another year. The SNOMNH was—and is—a big-time project, not merely its size at 195,000 square feet with 50,000 in exhibit space, but big in importance to the state and the University, and as a valuable resource for scientists and museum lovers throughout the region—and, indeed, nationwide.

The imposing structure on Chautauqua Avenue, between Imhoff and Timberdell Road, is a textbook example of the blending of private funding with city, state, and institutional resources. To thank the citizens of Oklahoma, admission was waived for the first two months. By June 23, 2000, more than 100,000 visitors had streamed through the exhibit galleries. Before the first year of operation had passed, more than 250,000 had been admitted. They came from 75 of Oklahoma's 77 counties, from 35 different states and several other countries.

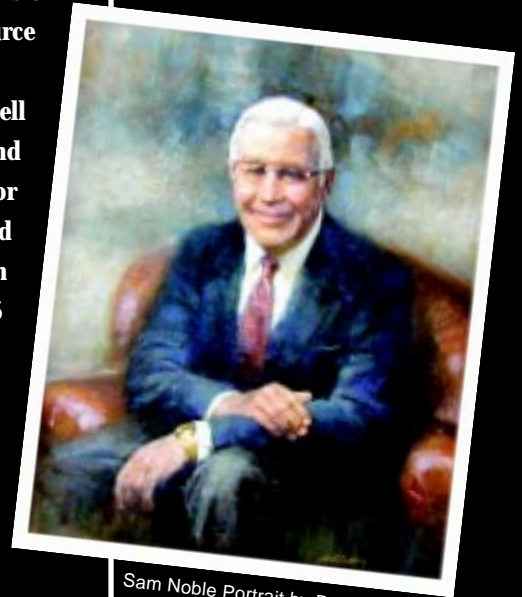
To find the museum during the academic year, travelers have only to follow the steady procession of yellow school buses. From September 2000 to May 2001, more than 30,000 school children representing nearly 200 state communities stared in wonder at the big dinos, played paleontologist in the Discovery Room, experienced a bison hunt, and operated the interactive exhibits. Families on summer excursions park their SUVs in the spacious lot and spend the day; senior citizen groups stroll leisurely from gallery to gallery.

Inside the museum, the excitement is almost palpable. The curators—now a full complement of 14—their research assistants and graduate students are giddy about their new resources, inspired to new levels of productivity. Lecture series and educational programs for all ages are ongoing. More than 250 volunteers—the equivalent of 16 full-time positions—contributed more than 28,000 hours in the past year. Membership in the Friends of the Museum numbers more than 1,200.

Thousands of new guests will make the trip to the SNOMNH every year, but return visits also are in order—because museums, especially this one, are never finished. Several years and approximately \$6 million will be required to complete all the permanent exhibits in the halls of Ancient Life, Natural Wonders, and People of Oklahoma, but Museum Director Michael Mares promises that the result will be an incomparable visual tour of Oklahoma across both time and space and will present an extremely rich and unique visitor experience.

In an unusual move, the museum will mount an exhibit during the fall football months devoted to memorabilia from the Sooners' seven national championship seasons. What, you ask, does football have to do with natural history? Fall . . . Football . . . Oklahoma? What could be more natural or more historic?

—Carol J. Burr



Sam Noble Portrait by Robert K. Albett

The Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History is named for an honored alumnus whose family has played a major role in the development of the University of Oklahoma for nearly 70 years. The late Samuel Russel Noble, of Ardmore, was a prominent oilman, civic and state leader, philanthropist, and OU Regent. A total of \$10 million from the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation, founded by his father, Lloyd Noble, Samedan Oil Corp., and Noble Drilling Co. formed the cornerstone for the new museum's private funding campaign. Sam Noble's widow, Mary Jane Noble, is a current OU Regent.