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A Rocking Revamp: How an IMLS Grant Brought a Fresh Look to the Sternberg Museum Geology Collection

Byrd C[1,2], Fanks A2, Wilson L2
[1]Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States, 2Sternberg Museum of Natural History, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas, United States

Fort Hays State University's Sternberg Museum of Natural History in Kansas has always had a geology collection, but it was often overshadowed by the larger paleontology and zoology collections. However, a significant donation of mineral specimens in 2017 necessitated that the Museum address the geology collection storage and housing needs to properly curate these specimens. Curation needs included updating the specimen cabinets, rehousing specimens into modern archival materials, digitizing the paper ledger book, and processing the backlog of specimens still wrapped up from a 1999 move. In order to achieve these goals, we applied for and were awarded an Institute of Museum and Library Studies (IMLS) Museums for America grant to improve the collection conditions of the geology area. An essential key to success for this project was specialized staff. Along with the Collections Manager, we hired a part-time student with a strong background in geology. This student was responsible for the day-to-day progress, including packing/unpacking of the geology collection, cataloging, housing specimens, digitizing accession cards and

the paper catalog ledger, and beginning the integration of the geology data to our relational database, CollectiveAccess. Curation and archiving revealed specimens that require specialized care, such as the meteorites and radioactive specimens. After consulting colleagues at other natural history museums, we were able to adapt established methods for specimen care to fit with the needs and resources of the Sternberg Museum. Fitting geologic data into a database with a paleontological framework required consideration of how much data overlapped between the collections and how data storage might need to change to accommodate all recorded data. Though small, this collection is needed for various education and outreach programs, including interpretive exhibits and geology-focused summer camps. Revamping the storage conditions, cataloging all the geologic specimens, and having a searchable catalog will increase the utility of the collection and enable best-practice storage methods for conserving this collection into perpetuity.