

A. E. Seaman Mineral Museum History Summary

The Beginning of Michigan Tech

Senator D. J. Hubbell was instrumental in securing passage of the Act 70 of 1885 that established the Michigan Mining School (predecessor to Michigan Technological University). Act 70 of 1885 mandated that "... it shall be the duty of said board to provide for obtaining and establishing a complete collection of minerals of the upper peninsula and properly classifying the same. . . ." Michigan Mining School began in the fall of 1886 in the Houghton Firehall. In the 1886-87 school catalog, a drawing of the second floor plan included a room labeled "museum and lecture room," but it was relabeled "physical laboratory" in the catalog for the following year. There was a mineralogical laboratory in this building, which was needed for a fast-growing collection of reference minerals and rocks. In 1889, the school (and geological collections) moved into Hubbell Hall.

Assembly of a Collection by A. E. Seaman

Meanwhile, Arthur Edmund Seaman came to the Upper Peninsula. He started work as a timberman but developed a knowledge of rocks and minerals on his own and was taken into the Michigan Geological Survey by C. E. Wright in 1885. After Wright died, Dr. Wadsworth of the geological survey and also director at the Michigan Mining School retained Seaman as a teaching assistant. He later earned a BS degree and then quickly advanced to full professor and head of the geology department. He was recognized as a gifted teacher and popular with students in spite of his rigorous expectations. In 1930 the rare mineral, seamanite, was named in his honor.

The 1890-91 school catalog states that "20,000 mineral specimens were added to the mineralogical collection during 1889 and 1890, making this institution second to none in its means employed in giving instruction in practical Determinative Mineralogy. The entire collections number over 27,000 specimens of minerals." Each Michigan Mining School student was expected to be able to identify, by sight, over 300 mineral species.

The catalog for 1891-92 not only described courses taught, but actually listed the minerals used in the lecture collection, arranged according to the sixth edition of Dana's System of Mineralogy. For the crystallography courses, 1,800 natural crystals were used, as well as models. For the other mineralogy courses, there were 10,000 specimens in the lecture collection and over 17,000 comprising the practice collection and unlabeled test specimens. In addition to donations, the mineralogy and geology department continually built up the collections by purchases, field collection, and trades. At one time, students were assessed \$1.00 per course, which was to be used for mineral purchases; but according to old invoices, the state paid for most of the minerals during this period.

Becoming an Official Museum

The acquisition of some of the most outstanding specimens, presumably purchased just at the turn of the century, must have been the result of a very special invitation. Professor Seaman wrote a formal note to college President F. W. McNair, telling him that A. C. Baker, Lieut. US Navy, had asked if the college could take part in the Paris Exposition of 1900. An outstanding collection of top quality museum specimens from classic localities went to Paris in 1900. The fine case in which the collection was displayed was made in Paris and returned with the specimens. This exhibit won awards for displays of minerals, maps, and mine models at Paris and other exhibitions, such as Pan

American Exposition at Buffalo, New York, 1901, and Louisiana Purchase Exposition at St. Louis, Missouri, in 1904.

The geological-mineralogical museum became a reality in 1902. It was mentioned in the 1902–03 Michigan College of Mines catalog as being set up in the former Qualitative Laboratory room. " The museum inventory for 1908 listed minerals totaling \$6,700 and polished marbles totaling \$300.

In 1932, the museum itself was officially named after its first curator, A. E. Seaman.

Homes of the Museum

The collection was initially housed in Hubbell Hall. In 1907, the legislature provided for a fire-proof building to house the library, administrative offices, and "the geological and mineralogical museum collection. This new library-museum building (later known as the Administration Building) was constructed in 1908, and the museum specimens were moved from their crowded quarters in Hubbell Hall to their new home, using the entire second floor of the new brick building, according to the 1908–09 catalog. In 1932 the museum was relocated to the Hotchkiss Hall and it remained in Hotchkiss Hall for 42 years until the building was raised in 1974 for construction of the Electrical Engineering and Resources Center on the main campus of Michigan Tech. In June of 1976, the museum collections were relocated to its 5th floor. At the time, this location was intended to be a temporary home for the museum yet it was in this location for 34 years.

Beginning in the early 2000s the museum sought to relocate to renovated mine buildings on Quincy Hill adjacent to the Quincy Mine Hoist Association property. The university purchased the property from the Quincy Mine Hoist Association and one of the old mine buildings was stabilized. However, this concept was hampered by the high costs involved in renovating old buildings and by lack of funding.

In 2010, Michigan Tech approved a newly constructed building for housing the museum which was made possible through the generous support of Thomas D. Shaffner, a Michigan Tech alum. The groundbreaking for the current building was on October 27, 2010. The contents of the museum was packed during the summer and early fall of 2010 and with the museum closed in October all of the contents were put into storage by the end of November 2010. The museum began occupation of the new building in May 2011 and reopened with limited exhibits in about 10 months from closing on July 1, 2011. The current home of the A. E. Seaman Mineral Museum was dedicated August 4, 2011. By the summer of 2012 the exhibit hall was in full operation. When constructed the current location was the designated as a temporary home of the museum. It became the permanent home in February, 2014 after Michigan Tech abandoned the Quincy Hill option by selling the Quincy Hill property with old mine buildings back to the Quincy Mine Hoist Association.

The A. E. Seaman Mineral Museum complex now consists of three structures and gardens. The main museum building houses the Thomas D. Shaffner Exhibit Hall, the museum gift shop, the mineral collection itself, a collection conservation laboratory, and staff offices. Adjacent, on the east side, of the main building is the Mineral Preparation Annex building. Adjacent to the front of the main building is a garden and to the west is the Phyllis and John Seaman Garden. Further to the west is the Copper Pavilion.

Principal Museum Professional Staff

A. E. Seaman was the first curator of the museum and as curator he was not only responsible for the collection but the administration of the museum. A. E. Seaman continued as curator after his retirement in 1928 until his death in 1937. After Seaman's death, Kiril Spiroff was appointed curator in 1938 and retained this position until 1942 when he left the Michigan College of Mines to become Superintendent of the Isle Royale Mine. During Spiroff's time away, from 1943 to 1948, Professor Wyllis Seaman (son of A. E. Seaman) held the position of curator. After returning in 1949, Kiril Spiroff served as acting curator until 1964 when he was formally appointed as curator. Spiroff remained as curator until his retirement from teaching in 1975. In October 1975, Jean Peterman Kemp, one of Spiroff's best mineralogy students, was appointed curator. Upon Kemp's retirement in 1986, Stanley J Dyl II was made curator. In 1992 Dr. John A. Jaszczak, assistant professor in the Department of Physics, was named adjunct curator.

In 1996 the museum separated the administrative duties from the position of curator to a director. Stanley J Dyl II was appointed as the first museum director in 1996. A subsequent search resulting in hiring Dr. George W. Robinson as curator. Dr. Robinson came to the museum from his position as curator at the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa, Canada. He was an internationally recognized mineralogist and curator. (In 2012, the mineral georgerobinsonite was named after him.) In 2003 Dr. Theodore J. Bornhorst, a professor of economic geology, joined the museum as co-director. Stan Dyl retired in 2008 and Bornhorst was appointed sole director. In 2013 Robinson retired as curator and Dr. John Jaszczak was made interim curator until arrival of a new principal curatorial professional staff person later in 2013. Dr. Chris J. Stefano was hired as the associate curator in 2013. In 2015 Bornhorst was made executive director of the A. E. Seaman Mineral Museum.