

For immediate release

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Vanderbilt Museum Conserves More than 1,000 Rare Marine Specimens

*Major Restoration Project, Funded by Gardiner
Foundation Grant, to be Completed This Summer*

CENTERPORT, NY (February 10, 2017) – During global ocean voyages in the 1920s and 1930s, William K. Vanderbilt II collected thousands of specimens of vertebrate and invertebrate sea life for the museum he was building on Long Island. Now considered the world’s most extensive privately assembled collection of marine specimens from the pre-atomic era, his collection had long been in urgent need of conservation, until recently.



**Amanda Jensen of the Vanderbilt
curatorial staff conducts
conservation work on a marine specimen**

Vanderbilt Museum photo

In 2015, the Robert D.L. Gardiner Foundation gave the Vanderbilt Museum a grant of \$135,000 to fund its Marine Collections Conservation Project. Curators so far have treated nearly 1,100 wet (fluid-preserved) specimens on the second floor of the Marine Museum – what Mr. Vanderbilt called his “Hall of Fishes” – with a few hundred still awaiting attention.

Stephanie Gress, director of curatorial affairs, said, “Fluid preservation problems are extensive and range from evaporation and discoloration to fungal and bacterial infections.

“Conservation efforts have been done in increments over the past 50 years,” Gress said. “But thanks to the Gardiner Foundation, this is the first time that we are able to inspect every marine specimen closely and give the entire collection thorough conservation treatment. We have not undertaken a project of this magnitude since Mr. Vanderbilt and William Belanske created the Marine Museum.”

Most often a jar is opened to clean the specimen, and refill or exchange the ethanol and distilled-water solution, Gress said. Then it is resealed with silicone, tape and beeswax.

“Our goal is to preserve and protect all specimens, even those in dire circumstances,” she said. “We have to prevent further deterioration, so the need for continuing conservation is urgent.”

After all specimens are restored, the curators will complete the final stage of the project in the second-floor gallery: taxonomic organization of the wet specimens; informational signage for visitors; and restoration of the conchological (mollusk shells) display cases in the gallery center.

Creative reuse of the original calligraphy from the 1930s specimen labels is an intriguing project detail. “We took samples of each hand-calligraphed letter to create the alphabet for a typeface for the new labels we’ve made,” Gress said.

“With the original calligraphy as a model, curatorial assistant Kirsten Amundsen fashioned a nearly identical typeface by using existing, computerized calligraphy pen strokes in accurate proportions.”

Lance Reinheimer, executive director of the Vanderbilt, said the Gardiner grant was matched by capital improvement funds from Suffolk County. Before the conservation project began, the Vanderbilt completed a full electrical-system upgrade in the Marine Museum, he said.

Related work includes cleaning, repairing and painting the exterior walls along with restoration of the roof. The Marine Museum specimen display cases have been painted and the glass shelving reinstalled. The final step will be the repair of the exterior staircase to the second floor and refinishing the ironwork. Gallery ceilings will be re-plastered and painted, and the marble floors cleaned and refinished.

“After we restore and conserve the scientific specimens on display in the Marine Museum, we’ll need to look after the marine collection and conduct routine maintenance in the future, but hopefully never on the scale of this project,” Gress said. “This much-needed conservation will sustain the collection for years to come.”

The Vanderbilt collection comprises 13,190 historic aquatic specimens housed in the two-story Marine Museum; in the Habitat, a natural-history diorama hall; and in an invertebrate gallery. The collection, in addition to the fluid-preserved marine life, includes vertebrate and invertebrate specimens, dried or preserved through taxidermy.

The Marine Museum constituted the beginning of today’s Vanderbilt Museum complex. Constructed in 1922, it began as a one-story structure open to the public each Wednesday during the years Mr. Vanderbilt lived on the estate. As the collection grew, Mr. Vanderbilt added a second floor in the 1930s and the fluid-preserved specimens were moved upstairs, leaving the first floor for the taxidermy marine collection.

The Robert D. L. Gardiner Foundation, established in 1987 in Hampton Bays, N.Y., supports the study of Long Island history, with an emphasis on Suffolk County. The foundation was inspired by Robert David Lion Gardiner’s personal passion for New York history.

MUSEUM AND PLANETARIUM INFORMATION

(Museum administrative office hours: Monday through Friday, 10:00 to 4:00. Closed weekends and holidays.)

Hours - Museum and Mansion

Through April 10, 2017: Tuesday, Saturday and Sunday, 12:00 - 4:00. Last mansion tour begins at 4:00. *(The Museum and Mansion are closed Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.)* Planetarium open Friday and Saturday nights.

Hours - Charles and Helen Reichert Planetarium

Through April 10, 2017: Daytime shows Tuesday at 2:00, and Saturday and Sunday at 12:00, 1:00, 2:00, 3:00 and 4:00. Evening shows on Friday and Saturday at 8:00, 9:00 and 10:00. *(The Planetarium is closed Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, but is open Friday and Saturday nights.)*

PLANETARIUM SCHEDULE – Winter 2017

January 3 – February 28

Open February 20 — February 24 (Winter Vacation)

Friday Nights

8:00 – Long Island Skies

9:00 – Black Holes

10:00 – Led Zeppelin – *New Laser Show!*

Saturday Nights

8:00 – Night Sky, Live!

9:00 – Stars: Powerhouses of the Universe

10:00 – Led Zeppelin – *Laser show!*

Saturday & Sunday Afternoons – plus February 20-24 Winter School Vacation

12:00 – One World, One Sky

1:00 – Earth, Moon, and Sun

2:00 – Stars: Powerhouses of the Universe

3:00 – Night Sky, Live!

4:00 – Black Holes

Tuesday Afternoons

2:00 – Stars: Powerhouses of the Universe

Vanderbilt Observatory

Night-sky viewing on Friday (weather permitting), 9:00-10:00 p.m. Observation is free to visitors with a planetarium show ticket, \$3.00 for those without a show ticket.

Museum Admission

General museum admission is \$7 for adults, \$6 for students with ID and seniors (62 and older), and \$3 for children 12 and under. General admission includes estate-grounds access to the Marine Museum, Memorial Wing natural-history and ethnographic-artifact galleries, Nursery Wing, Habitat Room, Egyptian mummy and Stoll Wing animal-habitat dioramas. For a mansion tour, add \$5 per ticket. (A video tour of the mansion is available on request.)

Mansion Tours

Guided tours of the Vanderbilt Mansion – listed on the National Register of Historic Places – are available Tuesday, Saturday and Sunday at 12:00, 1:00, 2:00, 3:00 and 4:00.

Planetarium Admission

During the day, visitors to the Planetarium pay general museum admission (\$7 for adults, \$6 for students with IDs and seniors 62 and older, and \$3 for children 12 and under), plus \$5 each for a Planetarium show. Since the museum is closed in the evening, no general museum admission is charged – visitors pay only for Planetarium show tickets: \$9 for adults, \$8 for students with IDs and seniors 62 and older, and \$7 for children 12 and under.

Location and Website

The Vanderbilt Museum is located at 180 Little Neck Road, Centerport, NY. Directions and updated details on programs and events are available at www.vanderbiltmuseum.org. For information, call 631-854-5579.

Images

Available upon request. Call Patrick Keefe at 631-854-5562.

The Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum

The Vanderbilt—a unique combination of mansion, marine and natural history museum, planetarium and park—is dedicated to the education and enjoyment of the people of Long Island and beyond. This mission is achieved through the thoughtful preservation, interpretation and enhancement of the Eagle’s Nest estate as an informal educational facility. Exhibition and program themes focus upon Long Island’s Gold Coast Era and build upon William K. Vanderbilt II’s desire that his marine, natural-history and ethnographic-artifact collections promote appreciation and understanding of the marvelous diversity of life, other cultures and scientific knowledge.

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