

Converging Content Between Archives and Museums Using Existing Resources: T.D.A. Cockerell and the Florissant Fossils

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Specimens from the Florissant Fossil Beds, collected by University of Colorado professor and naturalist T. D. A. Cockerell (1866-1948) in the early twentieth century and held at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History (CUMNH), have significant interest in the biological and paleontological research communities. Starting in 2018, staff at The University of Colorado Museum of Natural History (CUMNH) and the University Libraries at the University of Colorado Boulder began collaborating on a pilot project to digitally integrate fossil specimens located at the museum with associated archival material found at the Libraries. The project was inspired by two current trends in the management of natural history collections: 1) convergence, or the digital integration, of collections between museums and libraries; and 2) the expansion of digitized specimen data to include non-traditional types of material, an approach championed by the Extended Specimen Network. The principal challenge of the pilot project was the lack of technical integration between the database platform used to manage the specimen data in the CUMNH Invertebrate Paleontology (IP) Collection, Specify 6, and the digital collections platform in use at the Libraries, LUNA. After exploring several options, staff opted to use stable URLs (ARKs) for items from the Libraries' collection of digitized archival Cockerell material; the ARKs were added to relevant specimen records in the CUMNH's IP Specify 6 database. The URLs were included in the CU Invertebrate Paleontology dataset available on GBIF (Global Biodiversity Information Facility) making the archival library resources accessible to a much wider community of end users. The final approach of the pilot project required a low level of technical expertise, partly out of necessity, but also with the hope that the approach could be utilized by other collections with limited IT resources and technical knowledge. There are still some unresolved issues with storing and sharing linkages to archival materials within the existing natural history collections data landscape, but ultimately a successful partnership between the University of Colorado Libraries and the CUMNH was achieved using the most basic metadata (stable URLs) to connect users of Florissant specimens with associated materials found in the library.

