

NOTE TO TRAINEES: This history is one section of Part Five, which in final form will include other information about MNA.

## **HISTORY IN BRIEF: THE MUSEUM OF NORTHERN ARIZONA**

Scientific and artistic interest in the Colorado Plateau had begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century even before John Wesley Powell's landmark explorations of the Grand Canyon in 1869 and the early 1870s. Archaeologists and other scientists conducted expeditions that yielded significant artifacts which often found their way to universities or museums in the East. By the turn of the century, in Flagstaff and nearby, local scholars and laymen with a deep interest in their locale and its history, wondered why northern Arizona could not become a hub for the collection and study of the sciences and cultures that exist in Northern Arizona and other parts of the Colorado Plateau.

**The Coltons Find Flagstaff:** Harold S. Colton, born in Philadelphia in 1881, was already on the way to a distinguished career in science, when, in 1912, he married Mary-Russell Ferrell, who seemed had already achieved prominence as an artist, also in Philadelphia. Harold was, in 1909, teaching marine zoology, and establishing a small museum in that field, at his alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania.. Mary had distinguished herself at the Philadelphia School of Design, then as a professional artist with her own studio. Though also born in Philadelphia (1889), Mary met Harold in Philadelphia in preparation for a backpacking trip to British Columbia, where they came to know each other and appreciate mutual interests.. They married in 1912, and their honeymoon included mountain climbing on the San Francisco Peaks near Flagstaff. Summer visits to northern Arizona followed, and in 1926 the Coltons and son Ferrell moved to Flagstaff..

**The Museum Takes Shape:** Flagstaff, founded in 1882, had a somewhat "Wild West" reputation as it evolved during its railroad, timber, and grazing eras. But, even as early as the 1850s, it had stirred scientific interest. Subsequent surveyors' reports and articles about the Grand Canyon and other wonders of the Colorado Plateau had attracted educators, scientists, and artists. The Coltons, who by the 1920s had already made significant archaeological and other discoveries, joined others who wanted a local repository and learning center. "Flagstaff residents, reported one history of the museum, "watched with resentment as 'their' artifacts disappeared when the men [archaeologists from elsewhere) boarded the trains to return to eastern museums with their finds." The Coltons totally agreed, and worked with others to enlarge a small museum that had begun in a downtown room at the Flagstaff Woman's (cq) Club. On May 15, 1928, a Board of Trustees named the "Museum of Northern Arizona," Harold Colton became Museum Director..

**A New Exhibits Building--** North of downtown Flagstaff, the Coltons had built a home, started a farm, and acquired buildings on what would become a museum "campus.". They donated a site for a Museum Exhibits building, which opened in 1936. Additions followed, including wings, a photographic studio and archive, an auditorium and fine arts gallery, and a book store. Collections grew. Old buildings across the highway were pressed into service; new cinder block structures quickly became jammed. (In late 2004, a \$3 million pledge promised a start on construction of a much-needed Collections Center to help relieve storage needs for 500,000 whole artifacts and smaller fragments that



bring the total to 5 million objects). MNA also is a repository for several federal and tribal collections.

**“This Museum Displays Ideas Not Things”**– The Coltons , their staff, and supporters insisted upon respect for Colorado Plateau cultures—their arts, technologies, and beliefs—past and present. One means of recognition—Native American Craftsman Exhibitions— became an MNA hallmark attracting regional and national note. Hopi, Navajo, Zuni, and Pai crafts and arts are on yearly display, now in a “Heritage Program” dedicated to Native American creativity.

Research programs have contributed to the Museum’s prestige. An Anthropology Division encompasses ethnology and archaeology. A Biology Division includes botany and zoology. Fine Arts, in the 1960s, became a major component, through efforts of then MNA Director Edward B. Danson.. It includes several paintings by Mrs. Colton and other significant works

Scholars who come to MNA on a mission or visit often develop a lasting relationship. Among them was Dr. Edwin H. Colbert, who, while Curator of Fossil Reptiles at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, helped generate widespread interest in dinosaurs and their times.. He took up residence near the Museum and became MNA’s honorary Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology in 1970.

**Putting Science to Work:** MNA founded the Colorado Plateau Institute of Natural Sciences in 1998 to coordinate and manage scientific workshops, seminars, field schools, and other public educational programs related to natural science concerns of the Colorado Plateau. At a January 2000 conference, attendees tapped all available scientific data to consider the possibility of reintroducing the river otter to the Grand Canyon.

MNA also practices “contract science,” or work for clients in need of information or advice. The museum pioneered in this field in the 1950s, when staff surveyed a route proposed by El Paso Natural Gas for a pipeline crossing the Colorado Plateau. Their mission was to identify and excavate cultural resources that might be put at risk. MNA Environmental Solutions continues contract operations. Its clients include developers, engineering and architectural firms, law offices, and government agencies.

**Reaching Out: The Many Faces of Education:** ~~Present~~ <sup>FORMER</sup> Museum Director Robert V. Breunig began its Education Program during an earlier tour of duty at the museum from 1975-1982. He established MNA’s docent program, a children’s and adult education program and expeditions/ventures programs. Community outreach to public schools in Flagstaff and nearby include puppet shows, special gallery tours, and in-class events. The Museum is a participant in, or sponsor of, annual events which often attract widespread community participation. Among them in early 2005: a Native American Youth Art exhibition and “Aha! Archaeology Month.”

MNA is continuing to “tell the world” about northern Arizona and the Colorado Plateau.

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