

Conservation Corner

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Last week we traveled to Cherokee for a district meeting hosted by Cherokee County Conservation. We began the day with a behind-the-scenes tour of the Sanford Museum and Planetarium. Did you know that, since its opening in 1951, over one million visitors have gazed at the stars under the dome in downtown Cherokee? My husband Ron attended school in Fonda and remembers riding the train to Cherokee to visit the planetarium. Time to encounter the Sanford's legacy.



Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Sanford established a trust fund to build and operate a museum which would be free and open to the public in memory of their only son, Tiel. The museum's first director was also a paleontologist, and they have always had an archeologist on staff. Leading the tours were Director Linda Burkhart, Archaeologist Megan Stroh, and Education Director Kerisa Pingel.

Our tour began in the East Gallery which features displays of the Museum Founders, early Cherokee history and life, as well as an Art Wall featuring a different artist each month. Next stop was the Sanford Room with its mid-1800's setting filled with family and historic artifacts.

Next, alongside wonderful sea fossils, we descended back in time and down into the shallow sea that once covered Iowa. Displays of Prehistoric Megafauna lead to Paleo and Archaic Indian cultures followed by Woodland, Mill Creek, Oneota, Glenwood and Great Oasis displays. We had fun recognizing similar artifacts from the Dunn Collection.

But it was even more fun to go behind the many displays and exhibits into the storage and work rooms. We entered a tunnel that runs under the alley where area artifacts are housed in state-of-the-art storage units and into the basement of a Main Street business. It reminded me of our attic – on steroids! Everything from moose and rhino heads to rockers and baby carriages, you name it. When asked their criteria for accepting items, our guide replied it must be from northwest Iowa, be historical in nature, and have a story. No garage sale finds!

We returned to the surface and entered the planetarium. Recently their Spitz A-1 projector, state of the art in 1951, was replaced by a new Spitz SciDome IQ 2400 projector, and that has made all the difference. Our program was a sampler of the three subject areas now offered. In Astronomy we viewed constellations but also planets, galaxies, and more. In Human Anatomy we traveled through and around the human body giving us a different perspective on our bones and muscles. In Layered Earth, we viewed rocks, land formations, and plate tectonics. Kind of like Google Earth on steroids.

We returned to the Cherokee CCB for lunch and a short meeting before returning down to Earth and back to Poky. In closing, I'd like to encourage everyone to visit or re-visit the Sanford Museum. They're open weekdays from 9:00 to 5:00 and Saturday and Sunday Noon to 5:00 with public planetarium programs each Sunday and Wednesday at 4:00 p.m. Time for you to encounter the Sanford's legacy firsthand!