

A cabinet of curiosities: treasure hunting in the collections of the Nova Scotia Museum and the importance of community engagement

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Provincial museums safeguard a wealth of cultural heritage. This cultural heritage includes specimens with incredible scientific and historical significance of interest at the regional, national, and global scale. Fostering this interest in members of the community is of the utmost importance as donations of specimens serve as important sources for artefacts. One such donation led to the acquisition of a portion of the collection of the Nova Scotia Museum's first director and curator: Reverend David Honeyman.

When a gentleman purchased a small, glass-fronted cabinet filled with shells, shark teeth, and other curiosities at an estate sale in the 1970s, he hoped that it would encourage an interest in natural history in his children. Decades later in 2011, he rediscovered this lost treasure trove. Approaching the Nova Scotia Museum, this gentleman wondered if his cabinet was of interest to Nova Scotia's cultural heritage. Little did he know that this little cabinet and its dozens of handmade cardboard trays full of fossilized clams, snails, coral, and teeth represented a portion of the collection used by Reverend David Honeyman when writing his book *Giants and Pigmies: Earth's Order of Formation and Life and the Harmony of the Two Records*.

Among the material in this cabinet are several specimens that Honeyman collected or discussed during, or incorporated into displays at, the International Exhibitions of London (1862) and Dublin (1865) as well as the Universal Exposition in Paris (1867) and the Philadelphia Centennial International Exhibition (1876). These specimens include Megalodon teeth, giant sea snails, irregular sea urchins, and dozens of nummulitid foraminifera.

The acquisition of this collection offers several avenues for study beyond that of the evolutionary and geological history of the specimens. These specimens, and the pages of *Giants and Pigmies* corresponding to them, provide an opportunity to better understand specimen collection and fieldwork in the latter half of the 19th century, as well as the context for important international meetings from the 1860s–1880s. Likewise, this material can help improve our understanding of Honeyman himself, and of the origins of the Nova Scotia Museum. Finally, collections such as these help to encourage community engagement and enthusiasm about provincial natural history, further stimulating interest in provincial museum collections and, perhaps, encouraging further donations.