Preface to the 2020 Paperback Edition

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I would like to use this Preface to the revised version of *The American Museum of Natural History and How It Got That Way* to update the earlier version with events that have occurred since its release and to include some topics that didn't make their way into it.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Because one of the many themes of the book is President Theodore Roosevelt's connection to the Museum from its founding to his death and beyond, I want to add some topics to that theme here: one from his boyhood, one from his post-presidency, and one from a few months ago.

EARLY DONATIONS

While the earlier version of the book covers the involvement of Roosevelt's father in founding the museum, as well as the future president's earliest boyhood visit, it is also worth noting that the future president donated numerous specimens to the museum as a young teenager, including a bat, twelve mice, a turtle, and a squirrel skull.

ROOSEVELT RONDON SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION

From December 1913 to April 1914, the fifty-six-year-old former president undertook a perilous Brazilian expedition for the museum. In 1908, as his presidency was coming to a close, Father John Augustine Zahm, a priest and old friend, proposed a joint expedition to interior of South America. Instead, Roosevelt began a yearlong expedition to

Africa in 1909–10, where he hunted one of the elephants in the museum's Akeley African Hall, as recounted in these pages. In 1912, Roosevelt had run for president under the "Bull Moose" party label, was shot in the chest by a would-be assassin, and lost the election (along with Eugene V. Debs and incumbent William Howard Taft) to Woodrow Wilson.

In February 1913, Roosevelt received an invitation from Argentina's Museo Social to visit South America for a lecture tour. Ever the naturalist, Roosevelt contacted American Museum president Henry Fairfield Osborn about adding a scientific expedition to the tour, and in June, Roosevelt met with museum ornithologist Frank Chapman, resulting in the museum's sending two naturalists to accompany Roosevelt.

The original itinerary consisted of several well-charted rivers with a variety of landscapes and wildlife without being too strenuous or dangerous. However, almost immediately on Roosevelt's meeting with his Brazilian hosts in October 1913, plans were changed. The new plan was to traverse and map the uncharted River of Doubt, of which Chapman later wrote, "In all of South America, there is not a more difficult or dangerous journey." Roosevelt was to be accompanied by Cândido Rondon, who was, at the age of forty-eight, Brazil's foremost explorer. When Osborn got wind of the change, he wrote to Roosevelt that he would never consent to this trip "under the American Museum flag." Roosevelt's response: "If it is necessary for me to leave my bones in South America, I am quite ready to do so."

In December, after his lecture-tour duties were complete, the arduous two-month wilderness trek to the mouth of the river began, during which specimens were collected for the museum. The journey down the river began on February 27 and lasted until April 26, 1914. There is not enough space here to relate all the hardships that expedition endured, which included extreme heat and humidity, piranha fish, unremitting swarms of attacking insects, insufficient food, and an incident in which a canoe carrying Roosevelt's son Kermit and two boatmen was swept over a waterfall, killing one of the boatmen. At the halfway point, Roosevelt gashed his leg, which quickly became infected, while he also came down with malaria—as had much of the team. From that point on, it was unclear whether he would survive the journey.

Roosevelt's health never fully recovered, and he died less than five years later. Rondon would live to the age of ninety-two, a Brazilian hero in part for his lifelong support for indigenous Brazilians. Rondônia, one of Brazil's twenty-six states, is named for him.

THE STATUE

As noted in the earlier version, the statue of Roosevelt at the museum's Central Park West entrance had been controversial for its depiction of Roosevelt on horseback towering over semi-nude figures of an African and a Native American, which can be seen as suggesting white supremacy. In July 2019, two months after the initial publication of this book, the museum launched an exhibition, curated by museum anthropologist David Hurst Thomas, called "Addressing the Statue," which also examined the museum's exhibitions on eugenics in the early twentieth century.

And on June 21, 2020, in the wake of the George Floyd killing, the museum announced that the statue was to be removed. As museum president Ellen Futter put it, "Over the last few weeks, our museum community has been profoundly moved by the ever-widening movement for racial justice that has emerged after the killing of George Floyd. We have watched as the attention of the world and the country has increasingly turned to statues as powerful and hurtful symbols of systemic racism. . . . Simply put, the time has come to move it." The ultimate fate of the statue is still to be determined.

GILDER CENTER UPDATE

As we were rushing to finish the first version of this book, it was unclear whether the museum would be allowed to build the Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation, the ambitious new Columbus Avenue extension, because of a vigorous legal challenge. Judge Kotler's December 10, 2018, ruling allowing the building came just in time to be included in the book.

But the story had a few twists and turns remaining. Community United, the group opposing the construction, appealed the decision, and on December 18, the group was granted a temporary stay pending appeal. On February 5, 2019, the court overturned the stay, allowing construction to proceed. On April 18, a state appeals court dismissed the appeal, thus overcoming the museum's last legal obstacle. The museum held a groundbreaking ceremony on June 12.

On April 3, 2020, with the museum closed to the public because of the global COVID-19 pandemic, construction was suspended until further notice. On June 15, it resumed. At this point, work on the excavation and foundation is well underway.

CARTER EMMART

When I visited the museum in November 2019 to work on the museum's documentary *Stories in the Sky: A History of Planetariums*, I had the opportunity to spend some quality time with Carter Emmart, the museum's director of astrovisualization, who, besides being an original designer of the Digital Universe, directed all six space shows at the Rose Center: *Passport to the Universe*, *The Search for Life: Are We Alone?*, *Cosmic Collisions*, *Journey to the Stars*, *Dark Universe*, and the recently opened *Worlds Beyond Earth*. In the process, I realized that this book needed more information on his background. Here is my chance to correct that.

Emmart grew up in New Jersey at the height of the space race—he was eight when *Apollo 11* landed on the moon. (Later he would become *Apollo 11* astronaut Buzz Aldrin's illustrator.) He developed his interest in astronomy by visiting the original Hayden Planetarium, where he took classes from the age of ten through high school.

After a Saturday class during the winter of 1973–74, when Emmart was around 13, one of his classmates discovered that he could jimmy open a door in the back of the classroom with his mother's credit card. On the other side of the door was the planetarium library, which at the time was open to planetarium staff only. There, the boys found a stash of photographic plates from the Harvard Observatory. In the following weeks, the boys returned with gloves, flashlight, and magnifying glass in order to study the plates until, as Emmart put it, “a guard came in, threw on the lights, and we were busted.” Seeing how pervasive galaxies were on those images gave Emmart an epiphany that he now feels was a career-defining moment. Later, Emmart recalls, after librarian Sandra Kitt got wind of the incident, the boys did penance by helping her move the library to the planetarium's newly built Perkin Wing. (At the time, co-author Thomas Lesser had just joined the planetarium staff, with his first assignment being to help Kitt move the library.) Kitt now recollects that Emmart, who had become a library fixture, “showed an astonishing talent in art and was really exploring his two main interests and figuring out how to combine them.”

As an undergraduate at the University of Colorado Boulder, Emmart was a co-founder of The Case for Mars, a group that held a series of conferences over a 15-year period to explore the possibility of travel to Mars. Before joining the American Museum, he had careers in architectural modeling and technical space illustration. When Emmart joined the planetarium as an employee in 1998, Sandra Kitt was still the librarian.

This new version also corrects numerous typographical errors that have been discovered since the initial version's release. Finally, I would like to thank my publisher and readers for making this new version possible, and Neil deGrasse Tyson for writing the new Foreword and for his support throughout the project.