What do a killer bear, a not-so-regal eagle, and the massive bones of an extinct elephant have in common?

Come learn with the museum mouse as she spins a tale of her ancestor's life in America's first successful public museum.
“Cheese—still proceeding from the Milky Way, is nature’s purest, plain and simple food; cheese is a luxury, when like this, ‘tis good.”

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Quote excerpted from Thomas Kennedy’s poem “To the Mammoth Cheese” presented to Thomas Jefferson, president of the United States, by the inhabitants of Cheshire, Massachusetts and dated January 1, 1802.
References


DUGATON, LEE ALAN (2020) BEHIND THE CRIMSON CURTAIN: THE RISE AND FALL OF PEALE'S MUSEUM. BUTLER BOOKS, LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY.


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1794

MOVING DAY ALREADY?

1801

A mastodon skeleton is unearthed by Charles Willson Peale. It's displayed for the first time on Christmas Eve.

1802

Peale's Philadelphia Museum expands to the Pennsylvania State House, known today as Independence Hall.

1810

The Philadelphia Museum is completely moved into Independence Hall.

1814

Rembrandt Peale opens a museum in Baltimore, Maryland, now known as the Peale. This is the first building in the United States designed and built to be a museum.
1776
The Peale family moves from Maryland to Pennsylvania. Lucy and Scarborough Williams, the Peale’s enslaved servants, accompany them along with their son Moses.

1782
A room is added to Charles Willson Peale’s home so that he can display his portraits. The art gallery develops into a collection with preserved insects and animals.

1783
After drawing mastodon bones in the portrait gallery, Charles Willson Peale is inspired to transform his gallery into a public museum.

1786
Charles Willson Peale announces that part of his home will be opened as a "repository for natural curiosities". Lucy and Scarborough Williams are freed. Moses Williams remains enslaved, working in the newly established Philadelphia Museum.

The family was invited to live in a newly constructed building that housed the American Philosophical Society.

They had more space for their growing family and growing collection.
SMACK

But enough of my great-grandmas museum...

I want to show you mine!

It's not the same one that my great grandma lived in, of course.

My museum is in Baltimore, not Philadelphia.

Things have changed!

Humans don't live here anymore.

And there's definitely no bears breaking in!

Some things are similar—we have a mastodon too!

And it's the best home I could ask for.

A massive mastodon skeleton was the museum's pride and joy.

So that's what happened to Uncle Fred...
The first science museum in America quickly became popular.

Step right up!

They held scientific lectures.

And added to their impressive collection.

Performed artistic demonstrations.

But at the end of the day, the museum was also a home.

Sometimes, she would see other animals at the museum.

Is that cake? Eek!

George!
So how are you?

I was wondering what that sign was about.

Feed me well and I'll live 100 years.

Yeah....

Not very good.

I'm 15, and that's long enough for me.

My feathers are ratty, my claws ache...

I'm even too old to fly like I used to!

Well, I'll miss you when you go.

Aww, don't be sad! I'll never really leave you.

In the end, he was right.

Over the years, many animals lived in the museum's menagerie.

But the bear scared my great-grandma the most.

One night, he broke into the house!

Get the door!

SLAM

Oh my goodness! What are we going to do?

The bear was quieter once he joined the permanent collection.

Spooky.

The bald eagle never really left the museum's collection.