A Brief Introduction to the Redpath Museum

What you see at the Redpath Museum is only the tip of the iceberg- most of the collection is not on display, but resides in the basement of the building for research purposes. This is the oldest museum building in Canada built with the purpose of being a museum. It was opened in 1882 by the Principal of McGill Sir William Dawson, whose interests and specialties were natural science, geology (the study of the Earth and its movements) and paleontology (the study of fossils). This tradition of scientific variety is carried on today: this hallway features three specimens that exemplify some of the Redpath’s diversity, and subjects which constitute the material of today’s tour.

The First Director, John William Dawson, was also the 5th McGill principal. He went to the university of Edinburgh and was originally from Pictou, Nova Scotia. During his life, he wrote 25 books and in 1860 Dawson became an archaeologist. He took an interest when human remains were found at the bottom of the McGill campus and came to the conclusion that the Hochelaga village used to be right there- which is still highly contested.

The benefactor of the museum was Peter Redpath- the sugar baron, and founder of Redpath sugar. The museum cost $140, 000 to build. Today the museum holds close to 3 million objects (including unique fossils of extinct animals, fossils of the earliest known vertebrates, and the 2nd largest collection of Egyptian antiquities in Canada.