



Curators: Behind the Scenes of Natural History Museums

Lance Grande

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Over the centuries, natural history museums have evolved from being little more than musty repositories of stuffed animals and pinned bugs, to being crucial generators of new scientific knowledge. They have also become vibrant educational centers, full of engaging exhibits that share those discoveries with students and an enthusiastic general public.

At the heart of it all from the very start have been curators. Yet after three decades as a natural history curator, Lance Grande found that he still had to explain to people what he does. This book is the answer—and, oh, what an answer it is: lively, exciting, up-to-date, it offers a portrait of curators and their research like none we've seen, one that conveys the intellectual excitement and the educational and social value of curation. Grande uses the personal story of his own career—most of it spent at Chicago's storied Field Museum—to structure his account as he explores the value of research and collections, the importance of public engagement, changing ecological and ethical considerations, and the impact of rapidly improving technology. Throughout, we are guided by Grande's keen sense of mission, of a job where the *why* is always as important as the *what*.

This beautifully written and richly illustrated book is a clear-eyed but loving account of natural history museums, their curators, and their ever-expanding roles in the twenty-first century.

Curators: Behind the Scenes of Natural History Museums Details

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Kirsten says

I am in love with this book! Lance Grande is one of my academic idols. Informative, humourous, and fascinating!

Rachel Rogers says

This should be a must-read for anyone hoping to become a curator of collections in any museum. I spent 15 years working in history museums and this explained the hows/whys so well. What everyone does, with great respect for the expertise of his peers. How to interact with the public, your peers, other departments, the press - all extremely important to the position. INteresting content too, the behind the scenes stories of SUE and other developments at the Field Museum.

Rachel (Kalanadi) says

This was an impulse read from my library because the physical book was so pretty. Oh so pretty. The book's design is lovely and it features 5-10 pages of full color pictures for every single chapter.

I learned something too about curators and research work at natural history museums. There seems to be a mismatch between the title and the content... mainly that Lance Grande spends most of the book talking about his own experience and one natural history museum (the Field Museum), and that's definitely in the singular rather than the plural of the title. This wasn't really an attempt to define and explain a curator's job, but a series of examples from his own career and some of his colleagues. Which ended up being OK.

The writing is very dry, almost lifeless in places, but the excitement and immensity of the work still manages to shine through sometimes. For example, the saga of legal troubles surrounding the T. rex SUE is a highlight of the book - it could have been the entire book! (I'm sure one has been written.)

Amy says

Excellent take on science penetration in the United States today and the remarkable Field Museum. Grande's growth from an undergraduate with interests in fossils to a senior curator shows the interplay of social and academic experiences that have made him an adept interpreter.

I'm horrified to read that 42% of Americans believe creationism is science; there's a lot of work to do.

Readable, engaging, and a strong invitation to visit SUE (T Rex), Grainger Hall of Gemstones and Minerals, and much more at the Field Museum. I'm in!

Cathy Wiegand says

I loved this book, but it is definitely ment for people who are already interested in science and natural history museums. It was interesting to learn more about field work and how curators do their jobs. I briefly interned in the Field Museum's dinosaur collection and met several curators, but I still learned a lot about the smaller details of the job and now appreciate it much more. If you ever wondered what it's like to do field work in rural Mexico or how museums work with communities to increase their research capabilities then this book is for you.

Maggie says

This book is a love letter to the Field Museum, as well as museums across the world and the important, amazing stories they have to tell. As a passionate admirer of all three, I can't recommend it enough!

Curtis Schmidt says

A superbly written book in which Dr. Lance Grande recounts the various stages of his professional journey to become a very successful research scientist and Curator at the Field Museum in Chicago. Each chapter depicts different adventures from his time in graduate school, to his time as Vice President of Research and Collections, to Curator of Paleontology. Anyone who works in a museum will enjoy this read.

Megan says

Interesting and accessible, despite its considerable heft. Simultaneously an overview of the workings and impact of natural history museums and the sort of stories that a curator buddy might relate to you over a couple of beers.

Edward Sullivan says

A fascinating, insightful behind-the-scenes and historical look at the Field Museum in Chicago by a veteran paleontologist.

Joan says

A fascinating read about the career of one of the curators (and senior managers) of the Field Museum. This is a 2-book marker book - one for the text and one for the end notes, and there are both citations and suggested reading if you want to go further into a topic. There are also photographs that follow each chapter as well as an intro to the next.

Steven says

"Curators: Behind The Scenes of Natural History Museums", the title of this book caught my eye upon walking the stacks of my local library. I love history museums, especially the archival process of the depository storage basements that contain high shelves of boxes and each box is uniquely labeled.

While I found this book interesting, I was hoping the author was going to proceed into more unabridged detail. Perhaps there is a "gag order" on some of the more specific technician processes. Or perhaps the author thought that a person would be bored by such details.

m says

The author of this book is a scientist/curator who has a passion for the natural world, affection for the colleagues who share his calling, and a gift for storytelling. As one who has spent many hours in the natural history museums, I found Dr. Grande's book about these institutions, the people who keep them going, and the challenges they face both fascinating and highly entertaining.

Shannon Lange says

This book was a great read, especially since I studied public history and took classes that prepared me to (in the future) become a curator. Learning more about the history and functionality of the Field Museum was also a very interesting and exciting feature of the book. I would have read through it faster had I been able to sit and read for hours on end!

Olga Vannucci says

Smarts and respect
Serve to protect
Earth's complex nature,
Our children's future.
