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# The Vertical Integration of American Paleontology

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## Abstract

Session: Outsourcing biomedicine (Birgit Nemeč, Lukas Rieppel, Sophia Roosth, Hallam Stevens) During the 1870s and 80s, American paleontologists such as Othniel Charles Marsh and Edward Drinker Cope acquired most of their specimens from freelance collectors based in the American west. Among other things, the practice of negotiating for the purchase of rare and valuable fossils over long distances required solving a problem of trust. What was to stop a freelance collector from selling a specimen under false pretenses for their own personal gain? The deception and fraud made possible by the vast expanses of space that separated collectors from learned naturalists threatened to undermine both the economic viability of acquiring specimens by purchase and the epistemic credibility of the knowledge produced by learned naturalists. In this paper, I will describe some of the practices that paleontologists such as Marsh developed to establish control over freelance collectors out in the field. I will then use the example of Henry Fairfield Osborn to argue that around the turn of the 20th century, a new generation of paleontologists largely abandoned the practice of outsourcing specimen collection. Rather than continue to purchase their fossils, early 20th century paleontologists preferred to integrate backwards by sending museum curators and their assistants into the field. However, internalizing the market for fossils did not solve the problem of trust on its own. As such, museums continued to develop increasingly sophisticated means to maintain oversight and control over the actions of their employees out in the field.

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