



Speer Gift Honors Memory of Explorer Charles H. Stoll, Who Established Vanderbilt Museum's Natural-Habitat Wing

\$100,000 Gift Endows Restoration of Stoll Wing Animal-Habitat Dioramas

CENTERPORT, NY (July 25, 2012) – Charles H. Stoll (1887-1988), a trustee and benefactor of the Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum, was a noted explorer, naturalist and big-game hunter who created and financed the strikingly detailed Stoll Wing animal-habitat dioramas – featuring wild game he had brought back from around the world – which the museum opened to the public in 1970.

In Stoll's memory, his granddaughter, Lynnda Speer, and her husband, Roy, through the Roy M. Speer Foundation, have given a gift of \$100,000 to the Vanderbilt to endow the restoration and modernization of the Stoll Wing dioramas. The wing was built to complement the natural-history galleries and the Habitat Room built by William K. Vanderbilt II.

Stephanie Gress, the museum's director of curatorial services, said "It's wonderful that Mrs. Speer and her family have reconnected with the Vanderbilt Museum and their grandfather's legacy. The Stoll Wing and the Vanderbilt Planetarium opened within months of each other. The renovated Planetarium will reopen this fall. So it seems like fate that their generous gift, geared toward the future of Mr. Stoll's animal dioramas, would arrive now."



Vanderbilt Museum Archive photos

Charles H. Stoll

Lance Reinheimer, interim executive director, said, "The Speer family's spectacular gift will enable us to restore the Stoll Wing and its amazing specimens, key elements of our education programs. Although it is unclear whether Stoll and Vanderbilt ever met, their interests and expeditions had remarkable parallels. They also shared a love of the natural world and a deep commitment to public education."

The eight Stoll Wing dioramas display 15 animals – brought home by Stoll and his wife, Merle, between 1922 and 1969 – plus 30 mounted heads.

The Stolls brought the animals back from Africa, Alaska, the American West, the Arctic, British Honduras (now Belize), Canada, India and Nova Scotia. Specimens range from a blue wildebeeste, polar bear, walrus and Cape buffalo, to a kudu, ostrich, jaguar, Bengal tiger and leopard.



The Stoll Wing Bengal Tiger diorama

Stoll was also a lawyer and Nassau County judge whose boyhood dream, his granddaughter said, was to become an explorer. He realized that dream when he financed and led the famous 1928 Stoll-McCracken Siberian Arctic Expedition, undertaken under the auspices of the American Museum of Natural History. Interestingly, in 1928, when Stoll and McCracken went northward, Vanderbilt, aboard his yacht *Ara*, headed southward to explore South America and the Galapagos Islands.



Charles H. Stoll and the Polar Bear diorama

Stoll joined the Vanderbilt Museum Board of Trustees in 1967, was elected chairman in 1971, and served until 1975.