**Pierson Wildlife Museum Learning Center Newsletter & Welcome**

Welcome to the Pierson Wildlife Museum Learning Center. The Pierson Wildlife Committee has worked hard to make the dream of Dr. Kenneth and Margaret Pierson a reality. The Pierson's dream was to give the animals Dr. Pierson had collected over the years to the community to enjoy for generations. The committee, made up of several diverse members, took the challenge and have become the "keepers of the vision" for the wildlife exhibit. Through a process that took many hours of volunteer labor, supportive donations of time, energy, supplies and money, the first floor exhibit was opened to the public on July 4, 2002.

**Pierson Family History**

Dr. Kenneth Pierson came to Neligh from a surgery residence at City Receiving Hospital at Detroit, Michigan (Wayne Medical College).

Dr. Pierson had the first surgical patient and delivered the first baby in the new Antelope Memorial Hospital in Neligh, Nebraska which was dedicated in May, 1952 and started admitting patients in June of 1952. He was born in western Nebraska, on January 17, 1921, his father came from Sweden and his mother was born in a log cabin in southern Missouri. He graduated from Kearney State College and the University of Nebraska College of Medicine; interned at Temple, Texas; and practiced a short time at Ada, Oklahoma, and Kearney, Nebraska before entering surgery residency at Detroit.

Doctor was in the army reserves for a number of years; served two years active duty stationed at Paris, France at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe where he treated many prominent admirals and generals both of the U.S. and Allied Powers. Family members include his wife Margaret, Daughters Susan Hoppel, Nancy Christatos, Karen Rathje (deceased 2007) and son Eric Pierson, all of Lincoln NE. There are several grandchildren.

**Pierson Collection**

The trophy collection of Edwin Kenneth Pierson was professionally appraised by Steve Hendricks, Ft. Worth, Texas. Mr. Hendricks appraisal included 189 full or shoulder mounts plus other artifact and skins. The mounts came from South Africa, Zambia, Kenya, Spain, Australia, Slovenia and North America, including Alaska.

The identification numbers on the animals in the learning center correlate to the number listed in the appraisal book. The descriptive information on the species, with measurements, habitats, behaviors and habits, was taken primarily from the following sources: 1.Dorst, Jean & Dandelot, Pierre. *A Field Guide to the Larger Mammals of Africa.* Collins Clear-Type Press, London and Glasgow (1972. 2nd Ed.); 2. S*pectrum Guides:African Wildlife Safaris* First published 1989 by Facts On File, Inc 460 Park Avenue South New York, NY 10016, Printed and Bound in Hong Kong; 3. *Wild Animals of North America Another Volume in Natural Science Library*. Edited & prepared by National Geography Book Service, Merle Severy, Chief Editor, 1960 National Geographic Society, Washington D.C.

**Did Dr. Pierson hunt all the animals?**

Dr. Pierson did not have the time or money to have hunted all the animals in his collection. In 1981 a large collection was auctioned at Christie’s, 20 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10020. Dr. Pierson saw this as an opportunity to buy some animals which he knew he could never otherwise get - some animals were simply too expensive to hunt. That day his collection went from an already good one of many life size mounts from his five trips to Africa and many places in North America to a great collection with some rare animals worldwide.

The wisdom of his purchase was further shown six months later when he had his first bypass heart surgery. This confirmed his statement that day of the auction that he was getting older and could no longer hunt at 20,000 feet. Some of the animals added the day of the auction were the ibex, tahr, markhor, Jaguar, bongo, second leopard, colobus monkeys and extra mountain sheep. The Bengal Tiger was purchased from the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha (about the same time) after three or four tigers suddenly died there. The polar bear was purchased at auction in 2002 and is not listed in Hendricks appraisal.

**What was Kenneth Pierson's first mount?**

This collection of wildlife trophies began over seventy years ago with a mount of a great horned owl. The owl, taken in 1939 with a .22 short cartridge at 200 yards, was mounted for a charge of two dollars. The owl is now a protected bird of prey and cannot legally be hunted or sold. Dr. Pierson had said, "As I grew up in a rural area where there wasn't much else to do in spare time, I developed a great interest in the outdoors and have since a young age, been interested in hunting and observing wildlife. An advantage at the time (during the Depression) was that my hunting added to the family's food supply - pheasant, rabbit, squirrel and duck. Most often I brought home jack rabbits which my mother prepared with tomatoes and rice - a modified Spanish rice - which was tasty and nourishing.”

When Margaret and Kenneth were married in 1946, the owl was his one and only mount. After a taxidermy course by correspondence while interning, Dr. Pierson mounted his own specimens including those obtained while living in Texas and Michigan and his early years in Neligh. The mounts included two small deer and an Armadillo from Texas and his first Nebraska deer. Specimens have been collected on many trips in the United States and foreign countries both north and south of the equator. The big game consist mostly of the largest specimens of each animal Dr. Pierson could find, which is customary in hunting. A number of specimens are high in world records and some are rarely seen in collections. Some licenses are no longer available because of scarcity of animals or because of political changes. The meat from game taken, except for that used in camp, was given to local natives. Generally only the oldest adult males are hunted, so in no way does this deplete the herd. In fact, biologically, it improves it. Licensure fees are often the only monies available to combat poaching and to improve wildlife habitat.

**Were there other taxidermists?**

Yes, there were other taxidermists who contributed to the collection. The list that follows is incomplete. However, the Piersons offered the following names and states as they remembered:

Ralph Tichota (Clearwater NE); Carl Hubel (Ewing NE); Jack Atcheson (Montana); Jonas Bros (Denver CO); Jack Jonas (Broomfield CO); Fred Hoppe (Nebraska); Frontier Taxidermy (Cheyenne WY); Klineburger (Washington); Jim Johnson Artistic Wildlife Mounts (Tucson AZ); Wildlife Creations (Temecula CA); and Lewon Taxidermy (Randolph NE).

Also some work was done in Omaha east of 16th Street. The Roebuck was mounted in Austria - the only taxidermy work done outside the USA. It was not required by the country to have it mounted there, but at Dr. Pierson’s request. It can take one to six years in receiving specimens from the taxidermist. The smaller of the two leopards in this collection took nine years to get into the USA because of political restraints. As a result in the delay of shipment, the Piersons feared the skin would never reach the USA, so they purchased a second leopard in 1981. By the time the leopard he had hunted arrived, the skin was considerably smaller because of shrinkage due to the long delay. In reality, the second mount should be similar size to the purchased mount.

**Where did the Pierson’s keep the collection before it arrived at the museum?**

The only time the Pierson’s house was overrun with trophies was when the first African trip trophies arrived. Margaret, was completely unprepared for the enormity of the U-Haul truck load! Luckily all the children were “gone” from home by then - Susan and Nancy married, Eric in his residency at Rochester MN and Karen at college in Denver. So the animals were unloaded into the empty bedrooms and in the recreation room. Daughter Karen remembers a trip home that fall to see the baby llama and found wart hogs on her dresser. Having the large group arrive was an unmistakable signal to build a trophy room and the Piersons started to work on a three car garage just north of their original three car garage which then became the trophy room.

Margaret stated that this probably had been planned from the first - the cathedral ceiling in the garage was just what was needed to mount the elephant. Eventually both garages were filled with trophies. For many years the Piersons welcomed schools, clubs, family groups and individuals to their private museum. There was never a charge. They believed everyone, children especially, should have the opportunity to see the animals of the world. People were very appreciative and many thank you notes were received. A favorite was from a little boy who said, “I saw animals I didn’t know *was.*”

Eventually though all the space was taken and there was not room to walk through so they had to stop the visits. It was so crowded that by the time the collection was moved to the Pierson Wildlife Museum Learning Center, there were skins the Piersons had forgotten they had.

**What could it cost to mount an animal?**

Prices have increased since 1939. Though price lists may vary, the Piersons shared a price list they had on file from Wildlife Creations Taxidermy (CA) dated August 1, 1990.

HEAD LIFE SIZE

Musk Ox $825. $3,250.

Caribou $595. $2,325.

Springbok $475. $1,750.

Rhino $1,950. $15,375.

Elephant $11,000. Quote

Fur Rugs: Leopard and Cheetah: $1,025.00

The prices do not include the cost of the hunt or travel expense. The horns, skin and hooves are from the original animal. The skin of the elephant mount in this collection is the actual elephant’s skin.

**What animals can no longer be hunted?**

As of November 7, 2000, the Professional Zoological Appraisal by Steven Hendricks, 3805 S. W. Blvd Ft. Worth TX 76116 listed the wild dog, tiger giant sable, leopard seal and black rhino as species listed in the collection that could no longer be hunted.

**Dr. Pierson’s comment on his collection**

In an interview Dr. Pierson stated, “In traveling to many places, I’ve learned a good deal about the various people of the worlds and the way they’ve adapted to the living conditions and climate. To observe [animal] life in the desert, the jungle, in a swamp, on an iceberg —it’s all an education for someone living in Antelope County. These trophies represent my best efforts in meeting lots of challenges — miles and miles on foot, horseback, in a land rover, boats and float planes; camps set up in all kinds of weather; mountains climbed and rivers waded. I have enjoyed the hunts and hope you enjoy seeing the collection.”

**Publications available:**

***The Pierson Wildlife Museum Learning Center Animal Facts Guide Book*** published 2008. Text and descriptions by Gloria Christiansen, photos by Kathy Steinkamp.

***From Owl to Elephant: A History of the Pierson Wildlife Museum Learning Center***by Marie Krohn Rev. 2014.

**Reach us online at:**

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**Dr. Pierson died on February 10, 2005 in Lincoln NE. He was 84 years old. Graveside services were at 5 p.m. on Monday, February 14, at Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln. Visitation services were held prior at Neligh United Methodist Church in Neligh, Nebraska.**

*Published by Gloria Christiansen*