PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-39

The Crumstown mastodon of 1906: the bones collected for Notre Dame, the priest who started it, and the specimen in Hay's catalogue

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SUMMARY

In July 1906 a wire item from Notre Dame reported that Prof. A. B. Reynolds had "finished collecting the bones of a mastodon," turned up by a steam dredge on a farm three miles southwest of Crumstown, St. Joseph County, Indiana, and that the skeleton was to be set up in Science Hall. The fuller syndicated version of November 1906 adds how it began. While hunting in April, Charles Custer, "a boy of sixteen," found bones and teeth on the bank of a large ditch, where the excavator "had turned them out three years before." The Rev. Alexander Buechler of Terre Coupee was "instrumental in starting, and assisting in the collection of them for the Notre Dame Museum." The Polish daily *Dziennik Chicagoski* printed the story on 5 July 1906, calling the boy ten and the priest "Alex. Beecher." The priest was Alexander A. Buechler, born at Ottawa, Illinois, in 1877, and pastor of St. Stanislaus Kostka at Terre Coupee from 1 May 1901. O. P. Hay's catalogue of 1923 records "considerable remains of a mastodon, found about 1902 in Olive Township," in the Notre Dame museum. The place, the date of the dredging and the institution fit the Crumstown find. Engels in 1933 still listed the mastodon as held at Notre Dame.

THE RECORD

1. **"Mastadon Uncovered," *Plymouth Tribune* (Plymouth, Ind.), 5 July 1906, p. 4**

> *"Prof. A. B. Reynold, of Notre Dame university, has just finished collecting the bones of a mastodon, which was unearthed by a steam dredge on the farm of George Larkowski three miles southwest of Crumstown, St. Joseph county. The skeleton ... is to be set up in Science hall, at Notre Dame university."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn87056244/1906-07-05/ed-1/?sp=4)

2. **"The Bones of a Mastodon," *Chickasha Daily Express*, 7 November 1906, p. 3 (syndicated)**

> *"While hunting in April, Charles Custer, a boy of sixteen, discovered a number of great bones and teeth lying on the bank of a large ditch, where the excavator had turned them out three years before ... The Rev. Alexander Buechler of Terre Coupee ... was instrumental in starting, and assisting in the collection of them for the Notre Dame Museum."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn86090528/1906-11-07/ed-1/?sp=3)

3. ***Dziennik Chicagoski* (Chicago), 5 July 1906, p. 1**

> *"na farmie G. Laskowskiego, 3 mile na południowy zachód od Crumstown ... Przed trzema laty niejaki Charles Custer, chłopak 10 letni ... Ks. Alex. Beecher z Terre Coupe"*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn83045747/1906-07-05/ed-1/?sp=1)

4. **Howard, *A History of St. Joseph County, Indiana* (1907), pp. 900–901**

> *Father Buechler, "in charge of the St. Stanislaus Kostka parish at Terre Coupee ... a native of Ottawa, LaSalle county, Illinois, born on the 12th of March, 1877 ... On the 1st of May, 1901, he became the priest of St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish, Terre Coupee."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/ahistorystjosep00unkngoog)

5. **H. J. Alerding, *The Diocese of Fort Wayne, 1857–September 1907* (Fort Wayne, 1907), Terre Coupee**

> *"... until May 1, 1901, when Rev. Alexander Buechler took charge and is the pastor at the present time."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/dioceseoffortway00aler)

6. **Oliver P. Hay, *The Pleistocene of North America ... East of the Mississippi River* (Washington, 1923), p. 100, no. 46**

> *"Olive Township, St. Joseph County.—In the museum at Notre Dame University are considerable remains of a mastodon, found about 1902 in Olive Township, about 12 miles west or southwest of Notre Dame."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/pleistoceneofnor00hayouoft)

7. **William L. Engels, "Notes on the Mammals of St. Joseph County, Indiana," *American Midland Naturalist* 14 (January 1933)**

> *"Mammut americanus (Kerr). Hay, 1923, Nos. [46] and 47, 100. U.N.D."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/sim_american-midland-naturalist_1933-01_14_1)

WHAT IT CHANGES

The Notre Dame museum's published history and the modern accounts of Crumstown do not mention this mastodon. The 1906 reports recover the find, its place three miles southwest of Crumstown, the boy who first saw the bones, and the pastor who set the collection going, here identified as Alexander A. Buechler. Hay's Olive Township specimen of 1923, "found about 1902," is very probably the same animal, which links the newspaper story to the scientific record.

LIMITS

The two 1906 reports disagree on the boy's age (sixteen in the English, ten in the Polish) and spell the farmer and the priest differently. The Polish report itself uses both "Laskowskiego" and "Larkowskiego." Hay gives Olive Township and "about 1902," while the reports give a dredging about three years before April 1906. The identification of Hay's specimen with the Crumstown bones rests on place, date and institution, and on no catalogue number. The farmer's and the finder's identities from census and vital records are set out in the article, not in this note.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

The Notre Dame Museum of Biodiversity's history page; the *Notre Dame Scholastic*, 1905–1909; Chronicling America and the Internet Archive's full text for Crumstown with mastodon; Hahn (1909); Lyon (1936); Indiana Academy of Science mastodon papers; web searches.

Our standard for calling a finding new is set out in How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/), and how we weigh each kind of record in Scrollsigns (projectscroll.com/scrollsigns/).

"New" means new to print as far as we can tell. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will credit it here and raise the note's version.

WORKS CITED

Earlier work, catalogues and databases named in this note, besides the records quoted above.

1. Michael Urbanski, "Crumstown," *Project Scroll* (2026). https://projectscroll.com/news/crumstown/

2. Museum of Biodiversity, University of Notre Dame, “History.” https://biodiversity.nd.edu/history/

THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in Crumstown: The Point, the Partners and the Mastodon (projectscroll.com/news/crumstown/). In the discoveries register:

- `crum-mastodon-1906` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#crum-mastodon-1906)
- `crum-buechler` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#crum-buechler)
- `crum-hay-1923` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#crum-hay-1923)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

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BibTeX

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