



*New York State Archives*

**New York State Museum of Natural History Geological Chart  
by James Hall B1594**

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## Table of Contents

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Overview of the Records .....	3
Administrative History .....	3
Scope and Contents .....	4
Other Finding Aids .....	4
Use of Records .....	5
Administrative Information .....	5
Access Terms .....	5

## Overview of the Records

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<b>Repository:</b>	New York State Archives
<b>Summary:</b>	This series consists of two almost identical versions of a published geological chart and a small accompanying published key prepared by James Hall entitled "A chart giving an ideal section of successive geological formations with an actual geological section, from the Atlantic, to the Pacific Ocean." The lower half of the chart depicts geological sections, some hand colored and annotated, illustrating the stratigraphy of specific areas. Elaborate representations of characteristic fossils of each formation are depicted on the top portion.
<b>Creator:</b>	New York State Museum of Natural History
<b>Title:</b>	State Museum of Natural History geological chart by James Hall
<b>Quantity:</b>	2 cubic feet
<b>Quantity:</b>	3 items
<b>Inclusive Date:</b>	1852
<b>Series:</b>	B1594

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

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## Administrative History

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In 1849 James Hall was shown a geological chart by a deputy superintendent of public instruction in Albany. "Foster's Complete Geological Chart" had been created and submitted to the superintendent for approval by James T. Foster, a school teacher living in Greenbush, New York. Hall was outraged by the chart, particularly because it did not include any New York rock formations, but instead used European names and fossils.

Hall took the chart and sent it to Louis Agassiz for his opinion. Agassiz wrote a blistering condemnation of it which Hall subsequently had printed (along with his own letter of outrage) in the Albany papers. Foster then sued both Agassiz and Hall for libel (\$20,000 and \$40,000 in damages, respectively). Meanwhile, Foster revised his chart by inserting New York names and including Ebenezer Emmons' "Taconic System", the validity of which Hall strongly opposed.

While Hall and Agassiz engaged lawyers and planned litigation strategy, Foster's chart was copyrighted and printed by a firm in Albany. It was sent by the Hudson River night boat to New York City where it was to be put on the market. Hall booked a passage on the same boat and,

according to legend, surreptitiously dumped the whole shipment into the river. The charts never did reach New York.

Foster's suit against Hall and Agassiz involved some of the most prominent geologists of the day as witnesses for the defendants. Foster eventually lost the case.

Hall was intrigued by the idea of a geological chart and quickly set about making his own, gathering endorsements from such authorities as James Dana, Benjamin Silliman, and, of course, Louis Agassiz. Hall's 1852 chart was both a commercial and scientific success. Although thousands of copies were printed and widely distributed, few copies are extant.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

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## Scope and Content Note

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This series consists of two almost identical versions of a published geological chart and a small accompanying published key prepared by James Hall. It is unclear whether these charts are initial drafts of a later published version or one of several successive versions.

The chart is entitled "A chart giving an ideal section of successive geological formations with an actual geological section, from the Atlantic, to the Pacific Ocean. The whole illustrated by the characteristic fossils of each formation, by James Hall... Albany, N. Y., R.H. Pease, 1852."

Both versions of the chart are lithographed and mounted on cloth measuring 60 x 73 1/4" (144 x 177 cm) overall. The lower half of the chart depicts geological sections, some hand colored and annotated, illustrating the stratigraphy of specific areas. Elaborate representations of characteristic fossils of each formation are depicted on the top portion of the chart.

The legend contains the title of the chart, the author and publisher's name, and date of publication. The significance of the handwritten annotations is unknown.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

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## Other Finding Aids

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### Available at Repository

A published key is part of the series.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Use of Records

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### Access Restrictions

Restricted due to fragile physical condition. Use only with permission of preservation administrator.

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## Administrative Information

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### Custodial History

An old card index from the New York State Museum library catalog suggests that these materials were originally in possession of the New York State Museum. Date of transfer is unknown. The accession results from a project by Archives staff in 1998 to integrate or accession estrayed or unidentified records.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

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## Access Terms

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- Geology--New York (State)
- Providing visual aids
- Paleontology--New York (State)
- Educating
- Publishing geological maps
- Visual aids
- Visual education
- New York (State)
- Maps (documents)
- Hall, James, 1811-1898
- Foster, J. T. (James T.)