In the 1880s, methods of teaching science changed dramatically. No longer was the mid-century model of spectacular lecture demonstration by the professor sufficient to teach students about the natural world. Students, it was thought, needed to experience phenomena for themselves.

At the same time as American universities began to allow student to elect courses, they also expanded the frontiers of science education. Practical exercises were not just excuses to tinker; they critically taught students how to be scientists, be attentive to detail, and understand nature. Dartmouth students John H. Gerould, Class of 1890, and Edwin Brant Frost, Class of 1886, were among the first to enter the laboratory. As these two undergraduates would become professional scientists, this addition to Dartmouth’s science curriculum gave them critical scientific training that nurtured fruitful scientific careers. To Gerould, Frost, and other Dartmouth students of the 1880s, these hands-on laboratory experiments amounted to more than just trial and error.

This exhibition was prepared by Matthew Forman ‘11 as part of his Presidential Scholar Research Assistantship with Professor Richard Kremer. The exhibition was prepared with the help of Professor Kremer; Roger Soderberg, Professor of Chemistry Emeritus; Ralph Gibson, Lecture Demonstrations Manager, Department of Physics and Astronomy; and Sarah Hartwell and the staff of Rauner Special Collections Library.