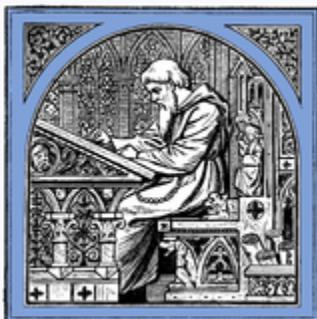


The American Cyclopædia — Smithsonian Institution

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, a scientific establishment in Washington, D. C., organized by act of congress in August, 1846, to carry into effect the provisions of the will of James Smithson. The condition on which the bequest was to take effect in favor of the United States having occurred in 1835, by the death of a nephew of the testator without issue, the Hon. Richard Rush was sent to London to prosecute the claim. On Sept. 1, 1838, he deposited in the United States mint the proceeds in English sovereigns, which amounted to \$515,169. Suggestions were invited by the president as to the mode of disposing of the fund, which was in the mean time lent to Arkansas and other states to aid in internal improvements. The first section of the act of 1846, passed after several years' discussion of conflicting plans, creates an "establishment" for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men, to consist of the president and vice president of the United States, the several members of the cabinet, the chief justice of the supreme court, the commissioner of the patent office, and the mayor of Washington, during their respective terms of office, with such other persons as these may elect honorary members of the institution. The second declares the original fund to be lent in perpetuity to the treasury of the United States at 6 per cent., payable semi-annually; appropriates the interest from Sept. 1, 1838, when the money was received, to July 1, 1846, amounting to \$242,129, or so much thereof as might be necessary, for the erection of buildings, and other current incidental expenses; and provides that all expenditures and

appropriations shall in future be made exclusively from the accruing interest and not from the principal of the fund. By the third section a board of managers is constituted, under the name of “Regents of the Smithsonian Institution,” to be composed of the vice president of the United States, the chief justice, the mayor of Washington, three members of the senate and three of the house of representatives, to be selected by the president and speaker thereof, with six other persons not members of congress, of whom two shall be resident in the city of Washington and the other four inhabitants of the United States, but no two of the same state. This board is required to elect one of its members as presiding officer, to be styled the chancellor of the institution, and also a suitable person to act as secretary both of the institution and the board. To this body is assigned the duty of a general superintendence, and of making an annual report to congress on the operations, expenditures, and condition of the institution. Sections 4, 5, and 6 assign a location and give power for “the erection of a suitable building of sufficient size, with apartments for the reception and arrangement upon a liberal scale of objects of natural history, including a geological and mineralogical cabinet; also a chemical laboratory, a library, a gallery of art, and the necessary lecture rooms;” and provision is made that all objects of art, natural history, &c., belonging to the United States, with such as may be collected from whatever source by the institution itself, shall be deposited in the building. Section 7 devolves on the secretary the charge of the building and property, and the duties of librarian and keeper

of the museum, with the power of employing assistants, subject to the approval and removable at the discretion of the regents. Section 8 defines the visitorial relations of the members of the establishment toward the board of regents, and also limits the expenditure for the library. Section 9 authorizes the managers to dispose of such portion of the interest of the fund as the act has not otherwise appropriated, in such manner as they shall deem best suited for the promotion of the purpose of the testator. On this clause the present organization of the institution principally depends. In accordance with the requirements of this act of congress, a spacious building was erected, making provision for a library, museum, gallery of art, and lectures. The entire cost of the building, improvement of the grounds, &c., has been upward of \$500,000. A library was begun, consisting chiefly of transactions and proceedings of learned societies obtained by exchange, and of other works by purchase necessary for general use, which has become unequalled in this country as a resource for scientific reference. The museum, enriched by the fruits of governmental expeditions and the contributions of individual explorers under the direction of the institution, has attained a magnitude and completeness seldom surpassed in collections for the illustration of natural science. A gallery of art was commenced, consisting principally of Indian portraits, engravings, and such articles as were presented to the institution by foreign governments; and lectures, chiefly on scientific subjects, were delivered up to 1865, when they were abandoned in consequence of a fire which destroyed the lecture room and afforded an

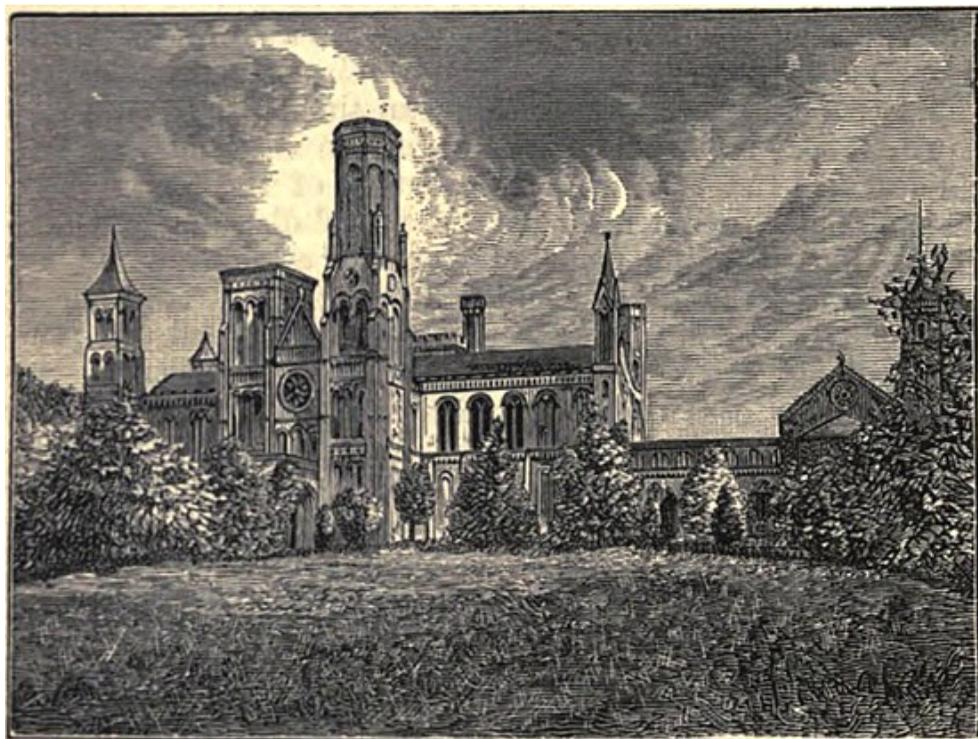
opportunity of making important changes in the operations of the institution. The library was incorporated with that of congress, making the latter at once the largest in the United States, to which the institution annually contributes a copy of the transactions and proceedings of each of the principal societies of the world, and in return receives the use of all the books in the collection. Mr. W. W. Corcoran of Washington having founded a free public gallery of art, the institution has deposited in it its art collection. This is in accordance with the general plan of coöperating with the different establishments in the city of Washington, the institution having transferred to the department of agriculture its botanical collections, and to the army medical museum all specimens relating to medicine and anatomy, while it receives in return from these departments everything which relates to natural history and ethnology. The expense of the care of the grounds around the building, which at first devolved upon the institution, has been subsequently defrayed by government, and congress has been induced to make an annual appropriation for the support of the museum of \$20,000. By these changes the burdens which congress placed upon the institution have been removed, and an opportunity is afforded for the expenditure of the income of the Smithson legacy, in strict conformity with the terms of the will, for the “increase and diffusion of knowledge among men.”—In December, 1846, the board of regents selected Prof. Joseph Henry, then of the college of New Jersey at Princeton, as their secretary, which office he still holds (1876). His assistants are Prof. Spencer F. Baird, formerly of

Dickinson college, Carlisle, Pa., in the natural history department (appointed in 1850), and William J. Rhees as chief clerk (appointed in 1853). The board of regents from its composition has necessarily changed to some extent almost every year, and of its original members none now remain. Soon after his appointment Prof. Henry submitted to the board a “programme organization” of the proposed operations under the 9th section, which was adopted, and still constitutes the basis of management. He suggested that men of talent and erudition should be afforded the means of conducting researches, and stimulated to exertion through facilities of publication and occasional compensation; and for its diffusion, the publication of such works as, while adding materially to the sum of human knowledge, would not find a remunerative sale in the ordinary channels of trade. He insisted that it ought to be a rule of the institution to do nothing which can be equally well done by any organization or instrumentality already in action. The results are as follows: 1. *Researches*. The claims of different classes of scientific research to the countenance and aid of the institution have always been pressing and difficult of adjudication; yet a preference has been given to those of widest influence and benefit to the race. Ethnology was believed to be one of these, and a valuable and expensive memoir on the archeology of the Indian tribes was the first to receive assistance. In connection with this, aid was extended to the compilation of a Dakota grammar and dictionary, and a grammar of the Yoruba language. The circulation of these has led to other researches in ethnology

and kindred branches of science, some of which are receiving or will receive assistance. Astronomy has also engaged the earnest and continued efforts of the institution for its promotion theoretically and practically, and pecuniary assistance has been furnished to expeditions undertaken with a view to astronomical and other observations. It has not only furnished instruments for physical observation to expeditions, but in most cases has defrayed the expense of the reduction and publication of the results. In meteorology it had for many years 500 regular observers scattered over every part of the continent, and accumulated data through this and other measures steadily and systematically pursued for developing the laws which govern the phenomena of the weather. In accordance with the plan of coöperation adopted, this system has been transferred to the United States signal service. The natural history, geography, climatology, geology, mineralogy, botany, and archæology of this continent have through its aid received a greater impulse, and more material has been collected for increasing and diffusing the knowledge of them than through all other instrumentalities during the national existence. 2. *Publications.* These are of three classes. 1st. "The Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge," comprised up to 1875 in 20 large quarto volumes, and in many cases expensively illustrated. No memoir is admitted into this series which rests on unverified hypothesis, or which does not offer some positive addition to the sum of existing knowledge; and the pretensions of each in this respect are decided by submission to the judgment of two or more

arbiters of unquestionable competence and impartiality. The volumes thus far issued form a series for the publication of which no learned society in this country possessed the means, and which have only been equalled by foreign societies when aided by their governments. They have been distributed gratuitously among all the important libraries and learned associations of the world, and have afforded the means of obtaining by exchange those invaluable sets of the "Transactions" of foreign learned societies, not otherwise to be found in this country. 2d. The "Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections," an occasional series comprising meteorological and physical tables, treatises on subjects of practical or scientific interest, and manuals for the collection and preservation of objects of natural history, as well as methods for various physical observations. This series includes 12 octavo volumes. 3d. The "Annual Reports" to congress, which, besides a popular analysis of the memoirs to be contained in the several forthcoming volumes of the "Contributions," are accompanied by a synopsis of lectures and original or translated articles, which introduce the student to information and topics of discussion much above the range of those usually presented even to the educated public. These are printed at the expense of congress, and are circulated through the members of both houses, as well as by the institution itself. 3. *Exchanges*. The institution now acts as the principal, and is gradually becoming the exclusive means of communication between the literary and scientific associations of the old and the new world. 4. *Scientific Correspondence*. The correspondence of the Smithsonian

institution with all quarters of the globe is vast and constantly increasing. Almost every day brings narratives of real or supposed discoveries which are referred to the institution, inquiries on scientific topics of all kinds, or unusual phenomena, &c. These letters are all answered.—In 1865 a residuary legacy of Smithson was received, amounting to \$26,210 63; and in 1874 a bequest of \$1,000 from James Hamilton of Carlisle, Pa. With these, and savings of income and increased value of investments, the total permanent Smithson fund in the United States treasury, drawing interest at 6 per cent. in gold, now amounts to \$651,000. There are besides depreciated investments valued in January, 1875, at \$35,000, which with a cash balance on hand of \$15,909 99 made the total resources at that time \$701,909 99.



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