Did You Know?

- There were two owls who lived in the Smithsonian Castle towers, named Increase and Diffusion. Their names came from the Smithsonian’s mission specified in Englishman James Smithson’s last will and testament that founded the institution.

- The Smithsonian Castle caught on fire in 1865, destroying much of the interior as pictured here. Today, the Castle looks quite different inside!

- A group of young scientists lived in the Castle in the mid-1800s, called The Megatherium Club (after an extinct type of sloth). They used to hold sack races down the Castle hallways!

#COLOROURCASTLE
An engraving of the north facade of the Smithsonian Castle, based on the official Smithsonian letterhead in 1892.
Image ID: SIA2011-2247
An engraving of the north central towers of the Smithsonian Castle, published in the Smithsonian Guidebook of 1857.
Image ID: SIA2011-2829
An engraving of the Smithsonian Castle gateway, published in the Smithsonian Guidebook of 1857.
Image ID: SIA2011-2830
An engraving of the chemical lab in the Castle published in the Smithsonian Guidebook of 1857.
Image ID: MAH-43804E
An engraving of the Gallery of Art, above the Great Hall in the Castle, published in the Smithsonian Guidebook of 1857.
Image ID: 93-9501
An engraving of visitors examining display cases in the Castle's Great Hall, published in the Smithsonian Guidebook of 1857.

Image ID: SIA2011-2816
Did you know?

• There are over 640,000 specimens in today’s National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) bird collection. The collection is the third largest in the world, and has items representing about 80% of the world’s known bird species.

• There has been a long history of Smithsonian Secretaries conducting field research about birds. Secretaries Spencer Fullerton Baird (1878-1887), Alexander Wetmore (1945-1952) and S. Dillon Ripley (1964-1984) were ornithologists.

• The NMNH’s oldest mammal specimens came to the Smithsonian from the U.S. Exploring Expedition (1838-1842) and from second Smithsonian Secretary Baird’s personal collection, also from the 1840s.
12. CORAL REEFS.
Image ID: 95-20351
Image ID: 95-20352
Image ID: 95-20353
The Smithsonian’s collections were first stored in the Castle, which finished construction in 1855. The collection soon outgrew its space, and was moved to the new US National Museum in 1881 (now known as the Arts and Industries Building).

Within two years, the US National Museum needed more space, too. In 1902, legislation was passed to build a new museum on the National Mall, across from the Smithsonian Castle.

An architectural plan showing the location of the “new” National Museum of Natural History on the Mall. 1903. Image ID: SIA2009-2367
A preliminary drawing of the US National Museum (now the Arts and Industries Building). 1876.

Image ID: 97-1602
A preliminary architectural plan for the US National Museum (now the Arts and Industries Building), 1878.

Image ID: 2002-10710
An architectural plan for reconstruction on the East Wing of the Castle, 1883-84.

Image ID: 2002-10676
Thanks for adding some new colors to our collections! Tweet us your favorite designs!