TO JOSEPH K. BARNES

Dr.: J. K. Barnes,
Surgeon Gen² U.S.A.

Dear Sir:

On the return of the Exploring Expedition under Admiral, then Capt³ Wilkes, the Government established a National Museum consisting of specimens of Natural History and Ethnology which it subsequently placed in charge of the Smithsonian Institution,² with authority to increase [t]he⁶ collections by exchange and oth[er]wise.⁸ The Government, having since established an Army Medical Museum to be composed of specimens to illustrate the various branches of Science connected with Anatomy, Physiology, Medicine and Surgery, and, also, a museum in charge of the Department of Agriculture, to consist of articles intended principally, to illustrate the economical resources of the country, it is important that these establishments should be in harmonious coöperation, in order that the collections, ↑of the Government,↓ in the City of Washington may be complementary to each other, or, in other words, each as perfect as possible in definite lines.³

With t[h]is⁸ view, I address you, at present, in regard to an exchange of specimens which are now in possession of the Army Medical Museum, relative to Indian-Archaeology and anthropology for specimens relative to human and comparative anatomy, in the Smithsonian Institution.

The specimens referred to as now in our possession consist of a series of skulls, which, I am informed, will be required for the preparation of a monograph, under your direction, of the Crania of north-America. Those for which we propose to make an exchange, and which are in the Medical Museum, consist of a collection of objects illustrative of the manners[, customs, and]³⁶ arts of the Indians of this Continent.

Hoping to receive a favorable response to this proposition,⁴ I have the honor to be,

With much respect,
Yours, Etc–
Joseph Henry
Sect. S. Inst.

Smithsonian Institution,
Washington Jan’y. 14. 1869,⁴

OHA 25—Curatorial Records: Smithsonian Correspondence, Otis Historical Archives, National Museum of Health and Medicine, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.
January 15, 1869 (Doc. 107)


2. Charles Wilkes had commanded a major naval exploring expedition to the Pacific (1838–1842). The specimens collected by the expedition’s scientists and naval officers had been stored and displayed in the Patent Office Building until their transfer to the custody of the Smithsonian. *Henry Papers*, 5:285n; 9:446–447: 448n.
3. Henry was eager to establish clear collecting principles for all of the government museums in Washington. The previous year he had agreed to turn over approximately twenty thousand botanical specimens to the Department of Agriculture in exchange for a promise that the department would turn over to the Smithsonian any ethnological or biological objects “not necessary to illustrate agricultural economy.” Agreement with Department of Agriculture, January 1, 1868, Folder 1, Box 31, Subject File, William Jones Rees Collection, Smithsonian Archives.
4. In his reply, Barnes agreed to the exchange, authorizing George Alexander Otis, the curator of the Army Medical Museum, to handle the details. Otis wrote Henry on January 21, offering 399 ethnological and archaeological specimens in exchange for the Smithsonian’s anatomical specimens. Accession Records, Office of the Registrar, 1834–1958, RU 305, Smithsonian Archives.

At the April 1870 meeting of the National Academy of Sciences, Otis presented two papers incorporating the data he obtained from examining most of the skulls in the Army Medical Museum collections, including an undetermined number of the 376 transferred by the Smithsonian. He concluded that Native Americans had smaller cranial capacity than had previously been believed. Lamb, pp. 58–58A.

107. TO HENRY O’REILLY

Smithsonian Institution, Jan’y. 15. 1869

Dear Sir;

Accompanying this I send you two copies of the Report of the Committee of the Regents of the Smithsonian Institution relative to my testimony in regard to the Telegraph. Since this Report was published several documents have been obtained in corroboration of my statements, and in opposition to those of Mr. Morse.

Of late, however, I have given the subject no attention, farther than to read Mr. Morse’s account made at the late banquet given him in N.Y. In this he narrows his claim to the invention of the recording telegraph, but, unfortunately for him, I think he was not the first to bring this into practical use. Steinheil, it is my impression, was before him.

Yours, very truly,
Joseph Henry

Henry O’Reilly
26. Pine st
N.Y.

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