



# THE SMITHSONIAN TORCH

Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

No. 3, March 1968

## DECLARE VINLAND

### Proposal from Toad Tower

by John White

*Editor's note—John White, an information officer at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, Cambridge, Mass., holds a doctorate in mythology from the University of Edinburgh. He is the lone resident of Toad Tower, N.H. Let it be said that he is also alone so far as the Smithsonian and the TORCH are concerned in offering the following proposal.*

Look Out Vinland Here We Come!

So where was Vinland?

That place has been lost for more than 500 years now—and it must be right under our nose, or our feet—isn't it about time somebody found it again?—or anyway decreed it??

And for "somebody" read Smithsonian. Why?

Why not??

Read on . . .

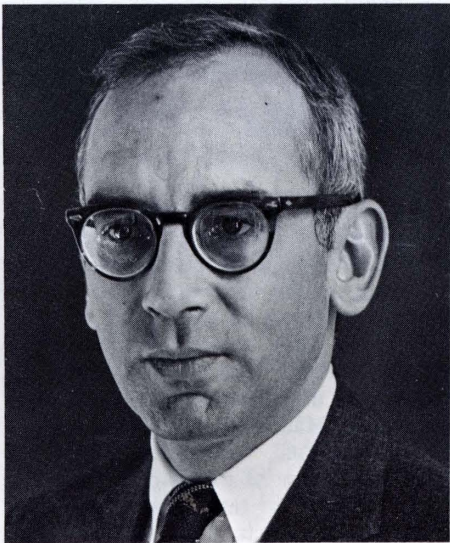
We all know, overflowing, that Columbus was not Numero Uno.

Sagas and other well-publicized evidence including many many books have informed us that the first Europeans to reach the New World were Vikings from Iceland and Greenland. They first saw the North American continent in about 985 AD (all dates approximate); in 1000 Leif Ericson & Co. explored places they called Helluland ("Flat-stone Land"), Markland ("Forest Land") and Vinland ("Wine Land"—a "good" and "very attractive" country of "grapes . . . wheat . . . all kinds of game and fish"); in 1008

Vikings led by Thorfinn Karlsefni started an American colony (the first European born in America was not the English girl Virginia Dare, born in 1588, but the Norse boy Snorri Thorfinnson, born in 1009), but because of trouble with the natives, primitive Indians and/or Eskimos, they soon abandoned that colony.

During the next five hundred years there was little recorded traffic with Vinland. The great Viking push to the west,

(continued on page 4.)



Blitzer

## Blitzer, Ritterbush Named To Top Staff Positions

Secretary Ripley has announced appointment of Charles Blitzer as Assistant Secretary for History and Art and of Philip C. Ritterbush as Director of the Office of Academic Programs.

Mr. Blitzer has been Director of the Office of Education and Training and Acting Assistant Secretary for History and Art. Mr. Ritterbush has been Assistant to the Secretary for Policy Analysis and Planning.

In announcing the appointments, the Secretary said:

"Mr. Blitzer and Mr. Ritterbush, both of whom have served with distinction in their present positions at the Smithsonian, are undertaking increased responsibilities in assignments for which they are eminently qualified through experience, background, and inclination.

"Mr. Blitzer was an outstanding director of Education and Training whose breadth of vision and competence extended to the innovative and highly successful Anacostia Neighborhood Museum

as well as a range of scholarly programs. During the past several months, his performance in meeting broader responsibilities as acting Assistant Secretary for History and Art has been consistent with these earlier contributions.

"Mr. Ritterbush, whose duties in the past three years have ranged widely over Smithsonian policies, programming, organization, and operations, will now turn his full attention and extraordinary talents to the field of education in which the Smithsonian fulfills a unique role both in itself and in cooperation with schools and colleges here and abroad."

### CHARLES BLITZER

Mr. Blitzer, 40, came to the Institution in 1965 from the American Council of Learned Societies, headquartered in New York City, where he served as executive associate for four years.

As Assistant Secretary for History and Art, Mr. Blitzer will coordinate the plans, programs, and requirements of the National Portrait Gallery, National Air and Space Museum, National Collection of Fine Arts, Freer Gallery of Art, the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Museum of History and Technology, and the National Armed Forces Museum Advisory Board.

Mr. Blitzer, who holds an A.B. degree from Williams College and the Ph.D. from Harvard University, was on the faculty of the department of political science at Yale University from 1950 to 1961.

He also has been a lecturer at the New School for Social Research; visiting professor, City University of New York; and staff director for the National Commission on the Humanities.

He has written a number of books including *An Immortal Commonwealth*,

(continued on page 2.)



Ritterbush

## —INVENTOR OF SEWING MACHINE—

### Elias Howe? No, Says Grace Rogers Cooper

Elias Howe? Every fifth-grader knows that he invented the sewing machine. Even such basic college texts as Hicks' *The Federal Union* give him credit.

But not Mrs. Grace Rogers Cooper, curator of SI's Division of Textiles.

"When I disagree with your fifth grade history book, I don't mean to discredit Howe," she says. "He made an important contribution." But Mrs. Cooper has in her collection three U.S. patent models for mechanical sewing devices that pre-date Howe.

The first mechanical device of any kind was English and dates to 1790. Thomas Saint created a machine so unsuccessful that no one even knew about it until the late 19th century, when historians started tracing the sewing machine's development.



Mrs. Grace Rogers Cooper, curator of textiles, shows off two mechanical sewing devices that preceded that of Elias Howe, generally acknowledged as the machine's inventor. In the foreground is the 1842 leather stitcher by John Greenough. Mrs. Cooper holds an 1843 machine by Benjamin Bean.

Americans didn't get into the act until 1832, when Walter Hunt, an inventor who also has the fountain pen, safety pin, and suction shoes for walking on the ceiling to his credit, created the lock stitch. It was the first attempt to create a new machine stitch instead of imitating hand sewing, but, although the development was published, Hunt did not patent the idea.

The first American patent was not taken until 1842. John Greenough fashioned a machine primarily for stitching leather, with a two-pointed needle pulled by pinchers. The patent model is in the Smithsonian collections, but there is no record of any commercial use.

A year later Benjamin Bean came up with a machine designed for conventional sewing. Fabric was fed through gears which crimped it for a bent needle to make a basic running stitch. The Bean model is also in the textile collections, and, like the other models, will be on display in a special room when the textile hall opens in MHT in January.

Two more machines—one of them, for sewing leather, is in the SI collections—intervened before Mr. Howe received his patent in 1846. His was, according to Mrs. Cooper, very similar in idea to Walter Hunt's unpatented model of 14 years earlier. It sewed straight seams with a lock stitch made with an eye-pointed needle and shuttle. The fabric was carried on a baster plate that had to be reset every six inches.

Interestingly—though he is now credited with invention of the machine that was the first widely advertised consumer appliance, led to broad-scale installment buying and revolutionized clothing manufacture—Howe never made a sale of this model in his own country. Instead, he went to England to market it.

Why, against all of this background, is Howe remembered as the inventor of the sewing machine rather than one major contributor to its development?

The answer, Mrs. Rogers reports, lies in a series of law suits he brought against other manufacturers for infringement of his patent after he returned from England in 1849.

The courts upheld Howe's right to control the use of needle and shuttle to form a stitch, and from then until 1867 sewing machines carried the Howe name to show that royalties had been paid. From this use of his name, Howe's reputation was made.

Mrs. Cooper's account of Howe's role is included in a new book by her to be published by the Smithsonian Institution Press. The book, *The Invention of the Sewing Machine*, will come out in May.



## BOOK REVIEW

## 'Naked Ape's' Titillating Title Inaccurate

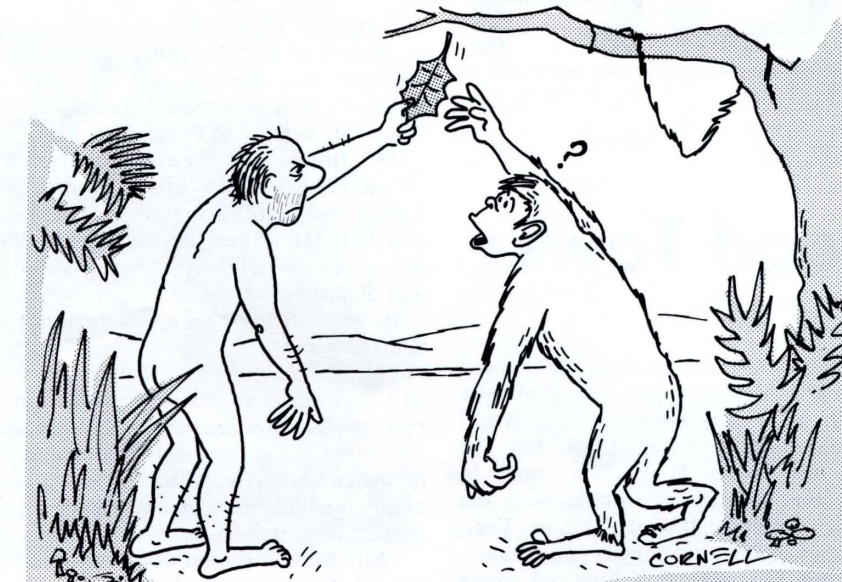
*The Naked Ape*. Desmond Morris  
McGraw-Hill 1967. 252 pp. \$5.95

by John Napier

What's in a title? A great deal if it happens to be "The Naked Ape"—a splendid, provocative title that could only be improved upon according to the traditional tenets of journalism by substitution of the word "nude" for "naked". Salaciously redolent of jungle-sex, titillatingly suggestive of the beast in man and late-night horror movies, "The Naked Ape" must be the all-time Title-of-the-Year winner. Unfortunately however, as a title, it is wholly inaccurate in every particular, starting with "The".

Desmond Morris draws all his human comparative material from the "typical behavior of the typical naked apes" (my italics) by which he means "ordinary (sic), successful (sic) members of major cultures." He excludes primitive tribal groups from consideration on the grounds that they are not primitive but live in cultural backwaters. In any event, his observations are based largely on civilized Western man. Can generalizations on the ethological significance of certain behavioral patterns, meaningfully be made on such a narrow sample of mankind? Is it really true, for instance, that mutual hair-grooming behavior, or "allo-hairdressing" as it might be called, is as heavily loaded with erotic significance in Nigeria as apparently it is in Hampstead Garden Suburb? Surely typological thinking of this sort, which Morris would condemn as improper in a zoological context, cannot be regarded as a respectable philosophy in an anthropological one? Mankind comprises many naked apes, this is a book about one of them. My first amendment, therefore, is to replace "The" with "A".

It is unnecessary to elaborate on the inappropriateness of the epithet "naked". The relative lightness of the human pelt is admitted, but there is so much variation at racial level, rang-



ing from the hirsute Ainu to their glabrous mongolian neighbors; there is also considerable variation at individual level (a matter of common observation) that the term is, to say the least, tendentious. Amendment 2: Replace "Naked" with "Hairy".

Ape? Anthropologists have for years been striving to erase the missing-link concept from evolutionary thinking. Man descended from the ancestors of apes, *ergo* man is a made-over ape. This trap innocently set by Darwin and industriously placed in the path of the unwary by Huxley and Haeckel has consistently enmeshed its victims ever since. Man's ancestors were not apes. Man is not any kind of an ape any more than an ape is a monkey or a monkey is a lemur. Apes are today's chimps, gorillas, orang-utans and gibbons, the evolutionary outcome of the ape way of life, a specialization that they alone have pursued for 20 million years or more, a specialization that man, by chance, escaped. Apes still dwell in Morris's Garden of Eden, living in a permissive, fruit-and-vegetable-rich environment, insulated by the womb of the forest from the knocks and challenges of life in the

open. Man has learned to be neophilic in the grass jungles—and later—concrete jungles of his world. Apes are neophobic, eschewing the new. What, after all, is the point of discovering new worlds, Columbus-fashion, if the Old World satisfies your needs? Man is not an ape. Man is a man, a monkey, a lemur, a primate—but not an ape. Amendment 3: Delete "Ape", insert "Man".

Thus in the cause of scientific accuracy Desmond Morris' book should have been entitled "A Hairy Man"—but what could the Sunday papers have been able to do with that?

In many ways, zoological criticism notwithstanding, "The Naked Ape" is one of the most important books of the decade. Man is an animal, a vertebrate, a mammal, a primate; and it is in the awareness of this ancestry that Man will learn to rationalize his role in the world, which, simply stated, is pre-eminent and therefore totally responsible. "The Naked Ape" had to be written.

*Dr. Napier, like Morris a Britisher, is at the Smithsonian to establish an international program in primate research.*

## About SI People Ortner Given Research Grant

Donald J. Ortner, museum technician in MNH's Division of Physical Anthropology, has been selected by Secretary Ripley as recipient of a Smithsonian Institution Advanced Research Fellowship. He will use it to complete his studies for a Ph.D. in physical anthropology at the University of Kansas. The fellowship consists of advanced study and research for one full academic year, with full pay, tuition, and traveling and moving expenses for the recipient and family. No more than two such awards will be made each year.

## Biographer Wright

Karl Patterson Schmidt was one of America's most influential naturalists. In his special field of herpetology, he made many fascinating discoveries about the habits of snakes and their environment. A. Gilbert Wright, assistant chief of the Smithsonian Office of Exhibits, has written a biography of Dr. Schmidt, just released by M. Evans and Company, Inc. Titled *In the Steps of the Great American Herpetologist*, this 123-page hardback follows Dr. Schmidt's exciting career from his boyhood in Lake Forest, Illinois, through his college days at Cornell, his participation in geological expeditions, his first job as a herpetologist at the American Museum of Natural History, and his later expeditions which took him all over the world. Himself a well-known naturalist, Gil Wright was a friend of Dr. Schmidt for more than 20 years.

## Freer Chinese Bronzes

The first of a three-volume catalogue, which has been described as a "monumental work", *Freer Chinese Bronzes* will be published sometime next month by the Smithsonian Press. The volumes are being written by John A. Pope, director of the Freer Gallery of Art; Rutherford J. Gettens, head curator of the Freer; Noel Barnard, National University of Australia; and James Cahill, formerly with the Freer, now at the University of California. Chinese bronzes, along with Chinese paintings and ceramics, form especially strong parts of the Freer collection. In all, the gallery possesses more than 350 bronzes.

## Numismatic Forum

Smithsonian numismatists Elvira and Vladimir Clain-Stefanelli will participate in the 1st Annual Washington Numismatic Forum to be held on March 23 at 10 a.m. in the Steel Hall of MHT. Designed for a broad range of numismatic interests, there will be an impressive array of exhibits and guest speakers, including Mendel Peterson, chairman of MHT's Department of Armed Forces History. SI employees are invited to attend the sessions.

## Dunkle Departs

David H. Dunkle, since 1945 the associate curator of MNH's Division of Vertebrate Paleontology, has accepted an appointment as curator of the new Department of Paleontology at the Natural Science Museum in Cleveland, Ohio. The Cleveland assignment will lead to studying and developing the Museum's renowned collection of more than 15,000 specimens of fossil fish.

## Snakes Alive!

Arthur M. Greenhall, research associate in the Division of Mammals, is never sure what the mail will bring. Son Peter has sent home such treats to the family as hermit crabs and small snakes from Trinidad. But even Greenhall was taken aback at the latest gift from Vietnam—a five-foot python. Wary postal workers had turned it over to San Francisco's Steinhart Aquarium, but Greenhall has told them to send it on. "I think I know someone at the Zoo who will be very happy to get a call from me," he said.

## Blitzer, Ritterbush Named

(continued from page 1.)

*The Commonwealth of England, and Age of Kings.*

### PHILIP C. RITTERBUSH

Mr. Ritterbush, 31, appointed special assistant to the Secretary in 1964, formerly served as legislative assistant to U.S. Senator Thomas J. McIntyre (D-N.H.).

As Director of Academic Programs, Mr. Ritterbush will assume responsibility for Smithsonian programs aimed at making the Institution's collections and facilities for study and research available to students and other qualified investigators from universities and other educational institutions.

Under these programs the Smithsonian maintains cooperative agreements with universities throughout the United States and abroad, and offers visiting research appointments at the undergraduate, predoctoral, and postdoctoral levels.

The Office develops and makes available to primary and secondary schools

special teaching materials under the guidance of the Institution's professional research staff.

It maintains a program of seminars, conferences, and symposia in fields of research and popular education, and also administers the Belmont Conference Center in Elkridge, Maryland.

Before joining Senator McIntyre's staff, Mr. Ritterbush served as a Technical Assistant in the Office of Science and Technology of the Executive Office of the President, and also has been a lecturer in the Yale Department of History of Science and Medicine. He is the author of *Overtures to Biology* (1964) and articles and reviews on the history and cultural relations of science.

Mr. Ritterbush holds the D.Phil. in the History of Science from Oxford University, where he was a Rhodes Scholar, and a B.A. from Yale University.

## March Lunchbox Speakers Listed

March speakers for the National Air and Space Museum's lunchbox talks series, Wednesdays at noon on the second floor of A&I, will include:

March 13—Dr. Jane Philips, associate professor, Howard University and former UNRRA officer, "Refugee Problem in the Near East."

March 20—J. Earl Painter, OGO Project experiment coordinator, NASA, "The Romance of the Orbiting Geophysical Observatory."

March 27—Paul E. Garber, assistant director, NASM, "The Robert J. Collier Trophy Story."

April 3—F. C. Durant, III, Assistant Director, NASM, "Some Notes on the History of Rocket Development, 1800-1939."

## Local Academic Affairs Office Set

The Institution has established a special office for local academic affairs, to cooperate with the Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area and help its member institutions increase their contacts with other area universities and the city's many research organizations.

Michael M. George, recently named Coordinator of Academic Affairs, will direct the new office, which hopes to make people aware of the vast resources of the Smithsonian and how they can be exploited for scholarly purposes.

As its initial project, the office is preparing to publish an academic bulletin and calendar of events, which will appear every two weeks. It will contain informa-

tion on Washington area lectures, seminars, academic meetings, and visiting American and foreign scholars. The publication will be distributed in the Washington Academic Community.

George has a Master's degree from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Before coming to the Smithsonian he worked for two years on State Department programs in educational and cultural exchange.

"Once the academic bulletin starts appearing," George told the TORCH, "I will be delighted to receive prompt information from staff members about lectures or other events they are either conducting or know about."

He may be reached on extension 5686 or, if there is no answer, on 5540.

## Howland Lecture

Dr. Richard H. Howland, newly named Special Assistant to the Secretary and former chairman of the Department of Civil History, will speak to participants in this summer's tour to Greece and Turkey March 7 at noon in the MHT Docents' Room. Dr. Howland is chairman of the managing committee of the American School of Classical Studies and a co-founder of the International Committee on the Preservation of Monuments and Sites. All interested staff members are invited to attend.





The Delean Gallery of the NPG features vaulted ceiling and sandstone columns. At the end of the corridor is the office of NPG director Charles Nagel.

## 'Greatest Building in World' Awaits Crowds



A spiral staircase leads to the old Model Hall.

The Old Patent Office, called "the greatest building in the world" by architect Philip Johnson, is one of Washington's most historic structures.

It also is the home of the National Collection of Fine Arts and the National Portrait Gallery. The former will open its doors to the public the first week in May. NPG will follow in September.

Actually, neither Smithsonian museum would be housed in the 128-year-old structure had Congress passed a proposed bill in the 1950's to tear down the building to make room for a parking lot!

That piece of proposed legislation caused such a stir that Congress transferred the building to the Smithsonian and appropriated \$5,465,000 for repairs and construction.

The imposing Greek Revival building was conceived at a time when the Nation's Capital was little more than a swamp, when Pennsylvania Avenue was mud in winter, dust in summer, and livestock ran through the streets.

The site selected for the building was a green common on the hill originally designated by Major Pierre L'Enfant for a great national cathedral.

Modeled after the Parthenon and designed primarily for use of the Patent Office and exhibition of patent models, the structure also was used for the government's collection of science, history, and art.

It was, in effect, the first federal museum.



The Old Patent Office

After all these years and myriad occupants the Old Patent Office Building will, in form and function, again display evidence of American creativity for the millions of persons who visit Washington and its historical and cultural attractions each year.



The elegant third-floor foyer of the National Portrait Gallery, part of the 1880's restoration area of the building.

Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural ball was held in this NCFA gallery, columned with shafts of solid marble discovered by restorers under layers of "government green" paint.



Photos by James Duggins





Drs. Betty J. Meggers and Clifford Evans, MNH anthropologists, examine the potsherd manual they have written for translation into Portuguese. The manual will be used in their training program for Brazilian archeologists.

## Program Filling Brazil's 'Archeology Gap'

Brazil occupies more than half the area of South America, but until three years ago its prehistory was virtually unknown. Today, a beginning has been made toward filling that gap, through a cooperative effort of the Smithsonian and the government of Brazil.

The gap existed partly because there were no Brazilians with the necessary training in scientific archeology. A pilot program directed by MNH scientists Clifford Evans and Betty Meggers will, when complete, leave the nation with a nucleus of individuals trained and equipped to carry on their investigations independently.

The program began in 1964 with a one-month intensive seminar, under Fulbright auspices, in the basics of archeology. A dozen Brazilians from all over the country worked daily from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. under Drs. Evans and Meggers at the University of Parana and at excavation sites visited on Sundays.

Following the seminar the two SI scientists toured the country, visiting each university from which a participant had come, examining the modest facilities with which they had to work, and discussing individual projects that have been under way since within the broad outlines of the program.

Then the two drafted an austere but effective program of support under the Smithsonian Research Awards Program.

The seminar had provided what Brazil had lacked before, archeologists familiar with the basic techniques of excavation and oriented to the use of a standardized terminology to describe their finds. The standardization is vital if discoveries from various parts of the country are to be compared meaningfully.

In addition, the cooperative Brazilian-Smithsonian program provided the impetus that archeology needed to achieve necessary acceptance and support in the Brazilian university system, say Meggers and Evans. There is much to be discovered, but because it is not of a "spectacular" nature—no gold or big ruins—archeology had enjoyed little prestige in the past.

The program has concentrated on Brazilian river drainages, because aboriginal man used the river for travel. Each year, each participant has surveyed a specified area and taken samples from as many sites as he could find, in order to reconstruct the prehistoric sequence. In June, when Evans and Meggers make their second inspection trip, the participants will be brought together to coordinate their discoveries.

Pottery with the same general features has been found all the way down the coast. The group will seek to determine if this indicates a migration and, if so, how long the movement took and how much readaptation was required because of markedly different ecological conditions.

Throughout the program, Evans' and Meggers' role has been an advisory one. The program's goals, says Dr. Meggers,

are threefold—to get the necessary research begun, to strengthen archeology in Brazilian universities, and to provide some professional literature in Portuguese. The couple has written a very simple and basic field guide, with instructions on how to improvise equipment inexpensively and on such elementary techniques as how to make out a catalog card. The National Research Council of Brazil, a co-sponsor, is paying for its publication.

*Potsherd Language and How to Read It*, a manual on the classification of pottery and interpretation of the patterns of discovery, will be published by the SI Press, as well as in Portuguese. It will be useful to the amateur archeologist in the U.S. as well as in Brazil, Dr. Meg-

gers predicts, because scientific archeology is too new as a profession for such manuals to exist in English.

A measure of the impact the program has had was provided at a meeting of archeologists in 1966. Before that time no Brazilian had ever spoken on Brazilian archeology at an international meeting. But at the 37th International Congress of Americanists in Argentina that year, a day-long symposium was devoted to Brazilian archeology, presented by Brazilian archeologists based upon field research projects conducted by Brazilians.

The results so impressed other Latin American archeologists that the Smithsonian has begun to receive requests for similar kinds of research-training programs from several other countries.

## Vinland Proposal

(continued from page 1.)

which flowed over Iceland, Greenland, part of France (Normandy—1011), and England (1066), petered out, and when Columbus "discovered" the New World the once-sturdy colony in Greenland was dying or dead, and the "very attractive" land to the west was hardly a memory.

So where was Vinland the Good?

Nobody knows.

The Icelandic sagas are so worded that Vinland could have been almost anywhere on the northeast coast, and valiant efforts have been made to put it practically everywhere between Canada and Connecticut. Of late, however, the range of probability seems to have narrowed—a little. Consider these 6½ conclusions concerning the location of Vinland reached in 7 books published in the last 5 years:

Tryggvi J. Oleson, *Early Voyages and Northern Approaches* (Canadian Centenary Series, 1963): "probably 'the region of Cape Cod.'" Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People* (Oxford, 1965): "... no further south than Nova Scotia..." Farley Mowat, *Westviking* (Little, Brown, 1965): "Tickle Pond Cove... Newfoundland..." Frederick J. Pohl, *The Viking Explorers* (Crowell, 1966): "... the south shore of Follin's Pond... on Cape Cod..." J. R. L. Anderson, *Vinland Voyage* (Funk & Wagnalls, 1967): "Cape Cod—Nantucket—Martha's Vineyard area..." Daniel Cohen, *Myths of the Space Age* (Dodd, Mead, 1967): "... L'Anse au Meadow... Newfoundland..." Richard Deacon, *Madoc & The Discovery of America* (Braziller, 1967)—Madoc was an historically elusive Welshman who came to America, this author believes, in 1170: "... Labrador, or Newfoundland..."

Providing matter for some of those books, and one supposes many more to come, you may be confident, were four important to-do-with-Vinland events:

- 1) Norwegian archeologists found Viking artifacts at L'Anse au Meadow;
- 2) Congress in 1964 decreed October 9 to be "Leif Ericson Day";

gers predicts, because scientific archeology is too new as a profession for such manuals to exist in English.

A measure of the impact the program has had was provided at a meeting of archeologists in 1966. Before that time no Brazilian had ever spoken on Brazilian archeology at an international meeting. But at the 37th International Congress of Americanists in Argentina that year, a day-long symposium was devoted to Brazilian archeology, presented by Brazilian archeologists based upon field research projects conducted by Brazilians.

The results so impressed other Latin American archeologists that the Smithsonian has begun to receive requests for similar kinds of research-training programs from several other countries.

3) Bibliophiles found an old map, apparently derived from pre-Columbian sources, of Helluland, Markland and Vinland—a scholarly book about it, *Vinland Map and Tartar Relation*, published two days after Leif's Day and one day before Columbus' Day, 1965, stirred a most unscholarly uproar, and

4) The map was exhibited at the Smithsonian's Museum of History and Technology, and was the principal topic of a scholarly conference in 1966.

People involved in those happenings had and have strong opinions about where Vinland was. But not one of them knows. Not for sure.

Homeland, Legislature, Vale of Academe, Megamuseum—*privatim et seriatim*, with all their marvelous modern detecting devices—unable to locate a little spot that simple sailormen, without a compass, found, repeatedly, a thousand years ago...

Isn't that hell?

Poor old Vinland. Loster than The Lost Colony.

And the real hell of it is, it seems unlikely that anybody is going to find Vinland, to the satisfaction of everybody (anybody?) else, for a long time. Maybe never. This great country seems doomed to rock along without a Viking site to match our Viking date, October 9, for years. Or centuries. Or Odin knows how long.

Ought we—can we—go on this way? No!

Therefore, we hereby make this Modest Proposal: the Smithsonian Institution, in its responsibilities to the nation and the world, now step forward and Decree Vinland!!

That is, establish a location for the New World's earliest Old World outpost by fiat—simple, straightforward, decisive, satisfying, issue—closing fiat.

Just point, and say the word: VINLAND!

Anywhere south of the North Pole and north of Rhode Island will do. So why not make it a convenient and pleasant place like, say, Newburyport, or Gloucester, or Wellfleet?

## Incoming Mail Has Always Brought Bizarre Requests

by Gayle Gordon

Throughout its history the Smithsonian has daily received hundreds of requests for information, scientific papers, applications for employment and other materials concerning the day to day operation of the Institution. In each batch of incoming mail there have always been a few letters containing bizarre requests that test the ingenuity of the Registrar's Office, whose duty it is to direct the mail.

Today, they usually go either to the Office of Public Affairs, the Archives, or to the curatorial office directly concerned.

In the early years of the Institution, however, all mail went directly to the first Secretary, Joseph Henry, who painstakingly answered every one, no matter how outrageous or ridiculous the letter. Later, as the Institution grew, the letters were directed to one man, designated by employees as "F.K." or the Fool Killer. Countless times he had to reply to people who wrote, for instance:

"I have been told by a Government official that I could get Ten-thousan \$10,000 for a double pig it is grown together from its under gaws down as far as its brisket bons. that is belley to belley and from brisket down is too District bodys it has one mouth 4 eyes 4 ears 8 legs and 2 tales..."

"What will you pay for a genuine petrified body of a Mexican man delivered in Washington? He has been buried 12 years weighed when buried 115, weight now about 300—should you not care for him will you kindly give me name of some party or parties in N.Y. or Boston or Phil. whom I could probably dispose of same to..."

"Smithsonian Institute. Professor Sir i have a grat curocity of a cat that was kitten with 8 lags but the old cat destroyed 1. it has 7 Now it has 2 boddys, 2 tayles and 1 head its feet is neather! i wish to know if you wish to by it or what it is wirth."

"What would you pay for a Kalf, bordn with no ies and no tail. Now 1 month old, cow kalf."

The general answer to such offers was often times:

"We... have to say, in reply, that the Institution has no appropriation for the purchase of monstrosities..."

Not all of the especially interesting letters of the early days fell in this category of course. Employment applications, too, required attention. One young man, not at all unsure of himself, wrote:

"By natural ability, liberal education and large experience, it may not be deemed extravagant for me to say, that I am qualified to discharge any duties you may assign me, with credit to myself and entire satisfaction to you. I may be permitted to add, without egotism, that, for culture, refinement and urbanity of manners, I compare favorably with the best of men and society. My political influence and friends are of the best class. The commendations from my ministerial and church brethren and friends are too numerous to mention here. I will lay all my papers before you in a few days and have my friends see you in person."

Unfortunately, the Institution's reply to this young man cannot be located.

Finally, there have been the letters requesting or giving only information—but such information!

"I am seeking data concerning the efficiency of man, regarding him as a heat engine. I wish to determine 1, the heat involved by the combustion of a unit weight of butter, fat, potatoes, flesh, milk, &c., 2, the total mechanical work, intereal and external, performed in a day," etc., etc.

"When I put our great surplus [in the U.S. Treasury] to the scientific test of the crucible and balance I cannot find it. Enclosed is a paper on our great financial error. Too many millions of financial perpetual motion dollors in the Treasury of the U.S. and elsewhere."

What can you say to that one hundred years later?

Then think of the souvenir shops and things that will spring up fitly to honor our past history and strengthen our present economy—the annual parades and speeches—the heart-stirring manifestations of regional, national, and international pride!!

We can get somebody to make us a statue, the tallest statue in the world, the most fully mechanized and winterized and automated and everything statue, a sort of Statue of Limitations, of little Snorri Thorfinnson. That statue, visible in technicolor and audible in stereo for 100 miles in all directions, will stand in the grand plaza of the One-and-Only, Certain Vinland.

When they find the real Vinland they can move it.