

December 30, 1860–January 4, 1861 (Doc. 99)

Pennsylvania, issued an 800-page report in 1860. The report investigated charges of corruption at the Philadelphia Navy Yard and charges that President James Buchanan had offered bribes to members of Congress for votes on proslavery legislation. *ANB*, s.v. "Covode, John."

3. Henry is evidently referring to the scientific lecture series that Frazer oversaw at the Franklin Institute. Some of the institute's activities, including the lecture series, were affected

by the Panic of 1857 and the impending war. Bruce Sinclair, *Philadelphia's Philosopher Mechanic: A History of the Franklin Institute* (Baltimore, 1974), pp. 298, 299–300, 302–307.

4. Fairman Rogers (1833–1900) was a lecturer in mechanics at the Franklin Institute and a professor of civil engineering at the University of Pennsylvania. In January of 1861, he gave five lectures at the Smithsonian on the construction of roads and bridges. *ANB*; *Smithsonian Report for 1860*, p. 53; *Washington Star*, January 15, 1861.

99. TO JOHN TORREY

Smithsonian Institution

Dec 30th 1860[–January 4, 1861]

My Dear Dr

Your note¹ of the 24th has been received and I hasten to say that what ever assistance you may require in a moderate way for the arrangement of the plants will be allowed.

I am anxious to go on with the distribution of our duplicates as rapidly as possible. Natural History has been by far the most expensive part of our operations. It has cost us more in proportion to the credit we have received on account of it than any other branch of knowledge and I am therefore desirous of making our duplicates tell in the way of an early and liberal distribution for scientific and educational purposes.²

In carrying out my policy in regard to Natural History I am liable to be misrepresented on the supposition that I am opposed to the extension of this branch of science. I have ever been opposed to expending the Smithsonian income^A in the support of a museum which ought to be maintained by the General Government not because such an establishment is not of value in itself but because it does not comport with the liberal spirit of the bequest and would absorbe in a single object the whole of the proceeds of the Smithsonian fund.

Were we to ask for specimens in return for what we distribute our collections would soon exceed our means of taking care of them. We now receive 4000 dollars from Government for the care of the show museum and the duplicate specimens of the expeditions; but this scarcely pays one half of the actual cost.³ You can have but little idea, without experience, of the expense of keeping up an establishment like this particularly in the city of Washington where every one is habituated to the liberal expenditures of the Government. Our funds however will be in a good condition

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if Government pays our semiannual interest and the states in the bonds of which our extra fund is invested do not repudiate their debts. We cannot however foresee the future and I shall be obliged to make provision for a storm by contracting as much as possible our operation and diminishing the number of our assistants.⁴

Jan'y 4th 1861

The foregoing was written several days ago. Since then the Government has succeeded in procuring a loan which secures the payment of our interest and enables us to discharge all our debts. I think it doubtful however as to whether Congress will make an appropriation on account of the museum. In that case that is, if the appropriation is not made, we shall be obliged to close the doors or charge an admittance to visitors.

We have fallen on very dark times and I fear our present condition will be followed by one of civil war.⁵ Nations as well as individuals are subjected to mental epidemics analogous to physical ones and these in many cases do not subside until after a bloody depletion. We were at one time in much danger from the attack of lawless mobs but I think measures have been taken to insure the safety of the Federal City.⁶

Miss Chollet⁷ left us last evening to return to Virginia after spending about ten days—She left with her cousin Mr Grandpeau who has received an appointment on some public works at the south. We have also had ↑a↓ very pleasant visit from Miss J Alexander⁸ and her nephew the son of Henry Alexander⁹ of New York.

I am sorry to learn that you cannot get a purchaser for your house. I should think that since there is abundance of capital at present in the country seeking safe investment that houses in New York would command a good price.

Mrs Henry is in the office while I am writing this letter and joins me in kind regards to the girls Herbert¹⁰ and yourself.

I remain as ever truly
your friend
Joseph Henry

Dr John Torrey
New York

Torrey Papers, Archives of the New York Botanical Garden.

1. Not found.

2. In the report of the assistant secretary (dated December 31, 1860), Baird wrote, "In accordance with your [Henry's] wish, the preliminaries to a distribution of the duplicates of the collection in the museum have been pushed forward as fast as possible during the year."

Baird's report gives an indication of the priority Henry gave to this work. Eight naturalists, led by Philip P. Carpenter, sorted and labeled a huge collection of shells, in addition to mounting a portion "upon many thousand glass tablets." Two other naturalists helped Baird sort and catalog specimens in other branches of natural history

so that duplicates could be separated and distributed. By the end of the year, the scientists had compiled 18,192 entries on twelve categories of specimens for the record books of the Smithsonian natural history collections. *Smithsonian Report for 1860*, pp. 72–73.

The naturalists were unpaid volunteers, except for Carpenter, who received \$300 for his services in 1860. Smithsonian financial ledgers on museum expenditures for the year show that nine other persons were paid a total of \$4,484 under the category of "museum assistants." Baird's salary of \$2,000 is also included under museum costs. Together with various "incidental" expenses, museum expenditures totaled \$9,123, according to the ledgers. These expenses are evidently what Henry has in mind when he states that "Natural History has been by far the most expensive part of our operations." By way of comparison, the Smithsonian spent \$4,431 in 1860 on meteorology (which, unlike natural history, is listed as a separate item in the annual reports). Henry may also have in mind the high costs of producing illustrations of natural history specimens for publication in *Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge*. Museum Expenditures Daybook, pp. 65, 73, Box 82, RU 100, Smithsonian Archives; *Smithsonian Report for 1860*, p. 107.

3. During most of the 1860s, the annual reports of the Smithsonian routinely mention that the annual appropriation for keeping the national collections is used "in assisting to pay the expenses of extra assistants in the museum, and the cost of arranging and preserving the specimens." The reports also routinely complain that while this sum "has served to diminish the amount of expenditures for that object on the part of the Institution," the amount "has by no means been sufficient to defray all the expenses to which the establishment has been subjected, on account of the preservation and public exhibition of the specimens." The reports, however, do not specify a shortfall for any year except 1867, when the executive committee states that in addition to the congressional appropriation for the expense of the National Museum, \$7,600 of the Smithsonian's own income was spent on the museum. *Smithsonian Report for 1861*, p. 90 (quotation); 1867, p. 101.

By contrast to the published annual report, the Smithsonian's financial ledgers record each year how much of the Smithsonian's own income was spent on the museum. The ledgers

also record the amount actually received in congressional appropriations. Thus for the year 1860, the financial records show a total of \$9,122.58 in museum expenditures, of which \$6,165.67 came from congressional appropriations and \$2,956.91 from Smithsonian income. During the prior year, museum expenditures totaled \$8,063.36, of which \$1,990.09 came from congressional appropriations and \$6,073.27 from Smithsonian income. Despite the precision of these numbers, it is not always clear how Henry drew a line between expenditures on behalf of the government collections and those on behalf of Smithsonian collections. Museum Expenditures Daybook, pp. 63, 73, Box 82, RU 100, Smithsonian Archives.

4. According to the annual reports, Henry would reduce Smithsonian expenditures from \$37,100 in 1860 to \$29,100 in 1861. *Smithsonian Report for 1860*, p. 107; 1861, p. 89.

5. South Carolina had seceded from the Union on December 20 and had occupied the federal arsenal at Charleston on December 30. Long, *Civil War Day by Day*, pp. 12–13, 17.

6. Ever since Lincoln's election in November, rumors had circulated of a conspiracy to destroy the federal government by attacking Washington. Concern for the city's fate increased as South Carolina seceded and as Southern states seized federal forts and arsenals. On December 25, the *Richmond Examiner* asked: "Can there not be found men bold and brave enough in Maryland to unite with Virginians in seizing the Capital in Washington?" On January 2, Charles P. Stone, the newly appointed colonel of staff and inspector general of the District, was directed to organize the city's militia and defend the capital. Long, *Civil War Day by Day*, pp. 20–21; Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *Symbol, Sword, and Shield: Defending Washington during the Civil War* (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, 1991), pp. 6 (quotation), 10.

7. Apparently a niece of Arnold Guyot. Historical Society of Princeton, private communication.

8. Possibly the daughter of Archibald Alexander, late professor of the Princeton Theological Seminary (*Henry Papers*, 2:437n–438n).

9. Probably Henry Martyn Alexander, a lawyer in New York City and brother of James W. Alexander. *Henry Papers*, 6:337n.

10. John Torrey's daughters, Jane, Eliza, and Margaret (*Henry Papers*, 7:274n) and his only son, Herbert (*Henry Papers*, 4:145n).