

April 13, 1858 (Doc. 9)

Letters Received from the Smithsonian Institution, 1849-1879, Records of the Patents and Miscellaneous Division, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, RG 48, National Archives.

In William Jones Rhees's hand, except for Henry's signature and "S.I." in title. Copy: Committee on Ways and Means HR 35A-D22.19, Smithsonian Institution, Committee Reports and Papers, 35th Congress, Records of the House of Representatives, RG 233, National Archives. Published, with minor variations, in U.S. House, 35th Congress, 1st Session, *Letter from the Secretary of the Interior, Communicating a Letter from Professor Henry, Respecting Collections of Exploring Expedition Directed to be Transferred to the Smithsonian Institution*, House Executive Documents, No. 117 (1858).

1. Secretary of the interior. *Henry Papers*, 9:453n.

2. The history of the transfer of the national collections from the Patent Office to the Smithsonian is given in *Henry Papers*, 9:446-447, 448n, 452, 453n, 468-469.

3. Henry had asked for this appropriation the previous autumn. *Henry Papers*, 9:468-469.

4. Charles Mason.

5. *Henry Papers*, 9:446, 448n.

6. Thompson forwarded copies of Henry's letter to James Lawrence Orr, the speaker of the House of Representatives, and J. Glancy Jones,

chair of the House Committee of Ways and Means. In his covering letter, Thompson wrote that he considered it improper to include the appropriation request in his own estimate now that the collections were no longer in the care of his department. Copy, Thompson to Orr, May 4, 1858; Thompson to Jones, May 4, 1858, Committee on Ways and Means HR 35A-D22.19, Smithsonian Institution, Committee Reports and Papers, 35th Congress, Records of the House of Representatives, RG 233, National Archives.

9. TO JOHN WISE¹

Smithsonian Inst
April 13th 1858

My Dear Sir

I shall be at home on the 16th & 17th inst—and shall be very glad to spend a day with you, in discussing the subject of aerial explorations.

You will find me at the Institution and I shall endeavour so to arrange my business as to have time to devote to you.

I think the investigations you propose are more interesting than any in the whole domain of meteorology and I am acquainted with no person better qualified than your self to undertake them.² Indeed I was about to write you on the subject when your letter came to hand.

I remain very truly
Your ob't serv't
Joseph Henry

John Wise Esq

Facsimile, John Wise, *Through the Air: A Narrative of Forty Years' Experience as an Aëronaut* (Philadelphia, 1873), pp. 598-599.

1. Pioneer American balloonist. During his balloon ascents, Wise had made meteorological observations that he conveyed to Henry, who in turn informed other meteorologists of

Wise's findings. *Henry Papers*, 2:387n; 7:432; 9:242; Henry to Elias Loomis, November 17, 1858, Loomis Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

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2. Wise wanted to use atmospheric electricity as a form of motive power by conveying it to earth via a conducting wire suspended from a balloon. Although Henry was skeptical "whether a sufficient quantity of electricity for practical purposes could be obtained," he was enthusiastic about using a balloon for the scientific research. Wise and Henry agreed that the Smithsonian would provide "gas, conductors, ropes and meteorological instruments" to Wise. In return, Wise would conduct observations of thunderstorms and "other atmospheric phenomena" while also attempting to deliver atmos-

pheric electricity to earth. His balloon, named the "Smithsonian," was ready in late summer 1858, but the initial ascension was delayed until May 1859, according to Wise, due to Henry's workload. On that initial ascension Wise observed the development of a thundercloud. Subsequent experiments never occurred because of Wise's preparations for a transatlantic balloon voyage, Henry's preoccupation with Smithsonian business, and the coming of the Civil War. Wise, *Through the Air*, pp. 580-582 (quotations on p. 580).

10. TO THE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Smithsonian Institution
May 12th. 1858.

To the Committee of Finance
of the United States Senate.
Gentlemen,

By a reference to the last Appropriation bill it will be seen that \$3650 were appropriated for the preservation of the collections of the Exploring Expedition then in the Patent Office,¹ and that the following disposition was to be made of this money, viz. for compensation of keepers, watchmen and laborers \$3450. and for contingent expenses, \$200.

The persons employed have been a keeper, an assistant keeper, a watchman, and two laborers.

The duty of the keeper and assistant keeper has been to keep the collections themselves in order, to go over them case by case several times a year and examine every specimen, rebake those which are liable to be attacked by insects, supply fresh alcohol to the jars, to mount and display new articles, to explain the collections to visitors and take care of the property during office hours.

The Patent Office room is kept open from 9 to 4 o'clock, and a watchman has been employed to protect and guard the collections during the rest of the twenty-four hours.

The laborers have been engaged in keeping the room, floors, cases, windows, spittoons &c. &c. in good condition, and rendering other assistance as required.

The above mentioned sum of \$3650 does not include the lighting and heating of the rooms, which were paid for out of the general fund of the