

November 6-11, 1852

244. TO ASA GRAY

Smithsonian Institution
Nov 6th[-11] 1852

My Dear Dr

I hope you will pardon me for permitting your very kind and interesting communication of Sept.¹ to remain so long unanswered. The truth is I have been so pressed with engagements since my return from the north as to be obliged to put aside every letter which did not imperiously demand an immediate reply.

I was unexpectedly recalled to Washington on account of business concerning both the Institution and the government and could not fulfil my engagement to stop at Cambridge. I did hope however to give you a short visit when I went to Albany but in this I have also been disappointed— On my return I found an accumulation of business on my table which demanded immediate attention and before this could be cleared off the duties of the committee on the organization of the Light House Board absorbed nearly all my time. I procured an adjournment of the Board for a few days and embraced the opportunity afforded by this to visit hastily New York and Albany principally on business relative to the affairs of my deceased brother.²

I would not of my own accord have engaged in the business of the Light House Board but as I was especially requested by the President to assist in reorganizing this important part of the executive duty of the government ~~and therefore~~ ↑I↓ could not well decline.

I will now refer to the several parts of your letter in the order of their occurrence. 1st as to the distribution of our publications— The fact you mention as to the tardiness of the packages in reaching their destination shall be communicated to our agent and greater dispatch urged upon him.

2 The fact you mention with reference to ordering the paper has been referred to Professor Baird who has taken note of it and will attend to the settlement of the account.

3 We have in ↑no↓ case given a full set of the Smithsonian contributions to an individual for services rendered the Institution and though it would give me much pleasure to present a set to Dr Wyman yet I would prefer to pay in money for the labour he bestowed on the printing after you left.

4. I did promise to send you copies of all our publications relative to Natural History and requested Professor Baird to see that the promise

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was fulfilled. He now informs me that copies were sent but as these probably did not reach you I enclose a list of all our publications with the request that you will designate such as you would be pleased to receive and if possible they will be forwarded to you.

5 Do not forget the list of botanical books you promised for the Library of Congress.

I have referred the matter of your last letters³ to Dr Foreman & Prof. Baird and I trust before this time you have received the information required.

A number ↑of copies↓ of the book I inquired for were sent to the Smithsonian Institution. I shall not forget to direct that a copy of the list of plants for marking periodical phenomena be sent to you for revision.⁴

All the affairs of the Institution are going on smoothly and prosperously notwithstanding the attempts which are made through the news papers to improve the plan of operation. A few weeks ago a very silly attack was made on us in the New York Times but in an article of this week the editor takes the whole back and commends our exertions.⁵

The trip to the hills of Maine very much improved my health and since I left Cambridge I have been quite well.

Nov 11th Your letter of yesterday⁶ has just come to hand and I hasten to answer it before the accumulation of other business causes a delay—I had heard indirectly of the intended proposition of Mr Berkely⁷ and if he or you will present me with a definite proposition relative to the matter I will give it immediate attention and return an official answer without delay. I am pleased with your suggestions as to the fungi hurtful to animal and vegetable life and hope you will incorporate them with other illustrations of the importance of the work in your letter to me as secretary of the Institution.

I requested Professor Baird to answer your inquires relative to the books you supposed were sent to us instead of the Amer. Acad^y— He informs me that they were not received among our packages.⁸ I regret as I have before said that we cannot give Dr. Wyman a full set of our publications but it will give me pleasure to draw a warrant in his favour for any sum you think we ought to pay him; and also to present him with copies of any of the separate memoirs which may be of special interest to him.

I must again beg your indulgence on account of the long delay of my answer to your letters. So much of my ↑working↓ time has been occupied with the organization of the ↑Light Board↓ since my visit to the north that I have been unable until to day to get up with my official

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correspondence, which to me is a most laborious and unpleasant service. Besides this, for the last year, I have been obliged, to transact all my business, and write all my letters, in the public office, with three persons and some times more, in the same room, and subjected, almost every moment to interruption, from visitors and calls of business. A large room has just been finished in the south tower of the main building of which I have taken possession and devoted to my own special use.⁹ This arrangement, which I was unable to adopt before on account^A of the want of room, will conduce to the better government of the Institution as well as to my own comfort. I can call on my assistants daily for information as to their operations and receive their reports without embarrassment occasioned^B by the presence of a third person. We are now in good working condition and hope to accomplish much for the advancement of knowledge during the coming winter.

You have been informed that the Secretary of the Navy¹⁰ has called on us for suggestions, as to the scientific operations of the expedition to the northern Pacific.¹¹ He informed me last night that he had appointed your friend Mr Wright as botanist and the assistant of Mr Agassiz as zoologist.¹² There is another expedition to be sent to the River, La Platte¹³ and the secretary has requested me, to name two young men of the proper qualifications ↑as naturalists↓ who would ↑nominally↓ serve in the capacity of master's mates¹⁴ with small compensation.^C I spent several hours with the secretary last night and he promised, to carry out as far, as his means would allow, any suggestions I might offer. If you can give me any hints of importance relative to botany I will incorporate them with those I get from Baird and from other sources, in my report on the subject, to the War Department.¹⁵ The specimens of Natural History which may be collected will be forwarded to this Institution as often as opportunity is offered for their transmission also the records of meteorology and magnetism will be submitted to us. Baird ~~plea~~ is much delighted with the prospect of a large and interesting harvest of new results.

There will also be an expedition sent to Africa in the course of next year, Lieut Lynch¹⁶ of the Dead Sea expedition starts in a few days, for Cape Palmas and will remain there, until he becomes acclimated after which he will make a preliminary excursion into the interior with a company of the inhabitants of the Cape, in order to gain the information necessary, for a more thorough exploration, of the country with a large party.¹⁷ The secretary thinks it best, not to send any one, with Lieut Lynch, at this time, because, the liability to sickness would increase the probability of delay.

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Mr. Kennedy the present secretary^D of^E the navy, is a man of more liberal views, than his predecessors, and is inclined, during his short reign, to make his marks, so deeply that they cannot be readily be effaced.¹⁸

We are rapidly extending our menteorological correspondence and have lately received offers of cooperation from Central America the West Indies and a promise of the same from the British possessions on this continent.

I perceive by the papers that there is a prospect of the election of Felton to the Presidency of Harvard University.¹⁹ If he should be appointed, can he fulfil his engagement to lecture the coming winter at this Institution? If he should be obliged to decline we must insist on your taking his place. We must have a course from you sooner or later.

With a little drawing of the reins and a more frequent calling for repo[rts]^A of operations than I have here to fore been able to do, I shall ~~be able to~~ succeed in ~~be~~ removing the difficulties of which I spoke to you in confidence. The plan ~~plan~~ you have adopted in address[ing]^A your letters to me under cover, is the proper one, and hereafter I shall have a better of writing confidentially to you, than I have had since I saw you on account of want of convenience both in the Institution and at my lodgings.

My family have just returned from Princeton, where they have been spending the summer, and we shall resume housekeeping, in the course of a week or two. We shall be glad to receive Mrs Gray and yourself at any time you can make it convenient to visit us.

I have now inflicted on you, a long and rambling epistle, making up in quantity if not in quality for my loss of time; an^F adjustment of scores which though it may not be quite the thing required, I hope you will accept, as a testimony that I remain as ever

Truly your friend
J-H-

To Dr. G.

P.S I have had no time to make this shorter.

Historic Letters, Archives, Gray Herbarium Library, Harvard University.
Reply: Doc. 253.

1. Not found.

2. After the death of his brother James, Henry had sold James's house on Lydius Street and invested the proceeds for his widow. Orlando Meads to Henry, May 10, 1852, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives; Assignment of

Mortgage, Henry to Mary Platt, October 24, 1853; and Joseph Henry, Declaration of Trust, October 24, 1853, both in the Papers of Joseph Henry, 1853-1857, New York State Library.

3. We have found only one letter from Gray to Henry during this period: that of October 30,

1852, Incoming Correspondence, Assistant Secretary (Spencer F. Baird), RU 52, Smithsonian Archives.

4. Torrey, Foreman, and Baird had collaborated in the spring of 1851 to prepare "a list of plants to be observed for the period of flowering and fruiting." Baird wanted to delete some plants that were not widely distributed and add others. Gray and Torrey finally provided the revised list in December 1853. *Smithsonian Report for 1851*, p. 51 (quotation); Gray to Henry, December 28, 1853, Marcus Benjamin Papers, Smithsonian Archives; *Smithsonian Report for 1855*, pp. 259–263.

5. On November 2, the *New York Times* printed extracts from what it described as "a private letter . . . from an authentic source" defending the institution's priorities. The unnamed writer, responding to the earlier *Times* criticism (see Doc. 240), pointed out that Henry had protested the decision of Congress to construct an expensive building, which was absorbing nearly half of the Smithsonian's annual income. On the positive side, Henry had used the remaining funds to advance the interests of all sciences, particularly meteorology. In the same issue, an editorial expressed agreement with the author of the letter, and blamed the costly building and the unnecessary popular lectures on "the stupid policy of Congress." Henry and his associates, the editorial declared, "should be relieved from all the odium of the ill features; and rewarded for the good with hearty encouragement and applause."

6. Not found.

7. British botanist Miles Joseph Berkeley (1803–1889), who specialized in the study of fungi. Berkeley proposed to prepare a memoir on the fungi of the United States for the Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge. It did not appear. Henry to Berkeley, July 19, 1853, Botanical Department, British Museum (Natural History); *DNB*.

8. In his letter of October 30, Gray asked Henry whether French journals destined for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and mistakenly sent to the Smithsonian had been forwarded to Boston.

9. Henry is referring to the uppermost room of the south tower, above the Regents' Room. Prior to this, he had worked in a room in the east range of the building. Cynthia R. Field, Richard E. Stamm, and Heather P. Ewing, *The Castle: An Illustrated History of the Smithsonian Building* (Washington, 1993), pp. 123, 140.

10. John Pendleton Kennedy.

11. Funding for the United States Naval Expedition to the North Pacific, a survey and re-

connaissance on the model of the Wilkes Expedition, was approved by Congress in August 1852 and the expedition departed the following summer. Kennedy had interpreted the legislation as allowing for a scientific corps to accompany the expedition. He asked Baird and Henry to assist in the selection of the scientists. The expedition was to send specimens of natural history to the Smithsonian Institution; the Navy Department would pay for their transportation, care, and preservation. In utilizing the Smithsonian, Kennedy had to overcome opposition from Matthew Fontaine Maury, who wanted the scientific collecting to be done by naval officers, not civilians. Kazar, *Navy and Scientific Exploration*, pp. 186–230, 346–357; Vincent Ponko, Jr., *Ships, Seas, and Scientists: U.S. Naval Exploration and Discovery in the Nineteenth Century* (Annapolis, 1974), pp. 206–230.

12. This was William Stimpson (1832–1872), who remained with the expedition until its return in 1856. He was in charge of the Smithsonian invertebrate collections from 1856 until 1865. *DSB*.

13. The United States Exploring Expedition to Paraguay left the United States in the spring of 1853 to conduct reconnaissance, exploration, and scientific collecting along the Rio de la Plata. Baird provided materials for the expedition and on November 16, 1852, asked Gray to draw up some instructions for botanizing. Kazar, *Navy and Scientific Exploration*, pp. 145–152, 333.

14. No naturalists accompanied the expedition, although Edward Palmer, a horticulturalist, did. *Smithsonian Report for 1852*, p. 62; Kazar, *Navy and Scientific Exploration*, p. 146.

15. Henry's report has not been found.

16. William Francis Lynch. *Henry Papers*, 7:240n.

17. Lynch set sail on November 13 for Liberia to explore possible sites for the colonization of former American slaves. He spent less than two months in West Africa, fell ill, and was back in the United States on May 1, 1853. In his report, he recommended that future exploration be conducted by Liberians. Congress refused to authorize any additional expenditure, marking the end of American interest in African exploration until after the Civil War. Ponko, pp. 199–205; *Smithsonian Report for 1854*, pp. 92–93.

18. Kennedy, who had taken office in July 1852, was seen both by contemporaries and later historians as a strong advocate of the use of the navy for exploration and scientific discovery. Ponko, p. 15.

19. Henry is referring to reports of Jared Sparks's pending resignation from the presi-

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dency of Harvard. James Walker succeeded Sparks. *New York Times*, November 6, 1852; Samuel Eliot Morison, *Three Centuries of Har-*

vard, 1636-1936 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1936), p. 293.

245. TO JOSEPH LEIDY

Smithsonian
Institution
Nov 16th, 52

My Dear Sir

I write to jog your memory as to the popular account you promised me of your memoirs for my next report to the Regents.¹ The time of its presentation is approaching and I wish to be getting ready.

Please give me if you can do so the number of pages of each memoir & also the number of plates. The approximate number of pages will answer—

I wish you would look over my Report of last year. I have had a number of extra copies struck off for more general distribution.² In the copies sent to Congress there are errors which on account of not seeing the proof I could not correct.

I shall look to you as one of my defenders provided my plans of the Smithsonian are attacked.

I remain very truly
your friend
Joseph Henry

Dr. Leidy

Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Henry, Joseph, New-York Historical Society.

1. In the *Smithsonian Report for 1852*, Henry gave a précis of Leidy's memoirs on extinct species of ox and on the extinct giant sloth (pp. 17-19). The former appeared in volume 5 of *Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge* (Washington, 1853) and the latter in volume 7 (Washington, 1855).

2. Five thousand copies of the *Smithsonian Report for 1851* were printed, of which two thousand were for the institution. In contrast, only 3,000 copies of the *Smithsonian Report for 1850* were printed, with 1,000 for the Smithsonian's use.