

September 23, 1856

Mr Clarke is in Va to See Dr- K-  
no more at present

Your H O B Servant  
Solomon

Excuse Such a Letter.

I am be called on all sides and have to write in hast

Remember Lucinda<sup>9</sup> & my Self—  
to Mrs- Baird.

Baird Papers, Smithsonian Archives.

1. Brown (1830?-1906), the first African-American employee of the Smithsonian, worked at the institution in various capacities as a laborer and clerk from 1852 to 1906. This letter is one of many in the Baird Papers indicating he was a "trusted confidant" (Conaway) of Baird. In 1856, according to Smithsonian payroll records, he rendered "services in [the] museum" (Smithsonian Daybooks, vol. 2, p. 32). Terrica M. Gibson, "There are whole lots of things I know but I never say anything...": African American Employees and the Smithsonian, 1852-1920," unpublished paper and notes on file at the Institutional History Division, Smithsonian Archives; Gibson, "Solomon G. Brown," in James Conaway, *The Smithsonian: 150 Years of Adventure, Discovery, and Wonder* (Washington, 1995), p. 95.

2. Not found.

3. September 23.

4. A reference to the Smithsonian's large collection of fish specimens, consisting of "a greater number than is to be found in any cabinet, except that of Professor [Louis] Agassiz,"

according to Smithsonian clerk William J. Rhees. The proximity of natural history specimens to the recently completed living quarters for the Henry family created problems, as the foul odors proved to be an annoyance. William J. Rhees, *An Account of the Smithsonian Institution, Its Founder, Building, Operations, Etc.* (Washington, 1857), p. 20 (quotation); Cynthia R. Field, Richard E. Stamm, and Heather P. Ewing, *The Castle: An Illustrated History of the Smithsonian Building* (Washington, 1993), p. 26.

5. William R. De Beust.

6. Roger Sullivan was a laborer at the Smithsonian from 1852 until 1873. Smithsonian Personnel Card File, Smithsonian Institution Archives; Smithsonian Daybooks, vol. 2, p. 32.

7. John Connor, a laborer at the Smithsonian. *Henry Papers*, 8:219n.

8. Charles Girard.

9. Lucinda Adams Brown. Paul E. Sluby, Sr., and Stanton Wormley, *Blacks in the Marriage Records of the District of Columbia*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1988), 1:42.

225. ALEXANDER WINCHELL TO CHARLES MASON

University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor 23 Sept. 1856

Hon. Charles Mason  
Commissioner of Patents  
Sir

I send by today's mail a copy of my meteorological observations for January and Feb'y of the present year. I do this to apprise<sup>A</sup> you that a nearly complete series<sup>B</sup> may be expected from me at or before the close ~~the~~ of



September 23, 1856

the year although I have not, during the year so far, made any report to you or signified my intention to make observations.

I have taken meteorological observations systematically<sup>C</sup> since the beginning of 1848 and have since Aug. 1850 reported to the Smithsonian Institution. Previous to 1850 I reported to the Regents of the University of the State of N.Y. & felt encouraged to observe from the fact that abstracts<sup>D</sup> at least of observations were annually published in the Reports of the Regents. For years I observed for the Smithsonian Institution furnishing myself with instruments & reporting monthly under the vain hope of seeing eventually some abstract of my observations in a published form in connexion with the observations of other observers. A copy of ↑all↓ the observations rported<sup>E</sup> annually to the Smithsonian Institution would have been a sufficient recompense and inducement. Instead of this I, in common I suppose with other observers received only the promises of the Institution and an occasional cheap pamphlet.

At the close of 1855 my fine instruments passed out of my hands and being thoroughly disgusted with the dilatoriness of the S.I. I firmly resolved to report no more observations. In consequence I made few observations in Jan. 1856. During the month I received your forms & which with the feeling of uneasiness caused by the interruption of observations which I had continued for 8 years induced me to recommence with February. But now I had only imperfect thermometers & no barometer. Still I resolved to do what I could. Since Feb. 1st. my observations have been uninterrupted & I shall send a copy to your office in the hope of seeing something done with them. Not having any rain gage I have not been able to enter the amounts of precipitation. With August however I commenced the measurement of the rain with a gage of my own construction on the principle of the Smithsonian Gages.<sup>1</sup> Had I a good sett of Instruments I should delight as heretofore to attend carefully & fully to all the observations. The university is in possession of a complete sett but they are under the control of the Professor of Physics.<sup>2</sup>

Hoping you will overlook the imperfections of my present observations and that I shall be permitted to see hereafter at least an abstract of all the observations reported to your office I am

Respectfully yours  
A. Winchell  
Prof. Geol. & Nat. Hist.

Letters Received, Records of the Smithsonian Meteorological Project, Records of the Weather Bureau, RG 27, National Archives.

Reply: Doc. 230.



September 25, 1856

1. The Smithsonian had issued guidelines for measuring rainfall in *Directions for Meteorological Observations, Intended for the First Class of Observers* (Washington, 1850) and in a revised edition published in the *Smithsonian Report for 1855*, pp. 227-228.

2. William Guy Peck (1820-1892). Peck had

replaced Winchell as professor of physics and civil engineering at the University of Michigan. *Appletons' Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, 1887-1900); Howard H. Peckham, *The Making of the University of Michigan* (Ann Arbor, 1994), p. 41.

226. TO HARRIET HENRY

Boston Thursday  
Sept 25<sup>th</sup> 1856

Dearest

I returned to this place last night after an absence of two days. We had a very pleasant and profitable time at Minots Ledge which is about 20 miles from Boston. Capt Alexander at whose house I stopped is building the light house on a rock three miles from Land. The rock is covered except at neap tide that is when the sun and moon are in conjunction and consequently the men can work at present on the foundation but a few hours each month. The lowest tides occur about day-break in the morning or after dark in the evening. The whole space is not more than about 30 feet in diameter and yet the foundation will require the labour interrupted as it is of about 3 years. The stone work of the tower is made on land and each stone cut to its proper form and marked for its place. When the time is favourable as many men as can stand on the rock are at work—I went off to the rock twice but could not land the waves were mountains high and the appearance was such that it seemed astonishing that human ingenuity and human power could ever place a structure on such a place. The light house which was on this spot before was constructed of iron 5 large iron posts nearly a foot in diameter were fastened into the rock and on the top of these the lantern and the keepers house were placed. The structure was however not sufficient to withstand the force of the waves—the iron posts were broken off as if they had been slender rods of wood and the house lantern and keepers were swept into the deeps of the ocean. This is the most difficult spot on the coast to erect a tower and when the structure is completed it will redound much to the skill and enterprise of Capt Alexander<sup>1</sup>—

I have done good service in the way of sleeping and eating. I stoped with Capt Alexander— We shall start tomorrow for Nantucket— I am quite well and I think shall be much improved by the trip.