

May 6, 1854

Regents<sup>B</sup> for a violation of the law organizing the Institution, in spending any of the income otherwise than in establishing a museum and library and other objects of a local character.<sup>4</sup>

I am, very respectfully  
Your obed't serv't  
Joseph Henry  
Sec<sup>y</sup> S.I.

Lyman C. Draper. Esq.  
Cor. Sec'y. Wis. Hist. Society.  
Madison. Wis.

Draper Correspondence, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

In William Jones Rhees's hand, with signature and title by Henry.

1. Not found.

2. Nicolas Marie Alexandre Vattemare was a French ventriloquist and actor who had first come to the United States in 1839 to promote an international exchange of publications and specimens of nature and art. Although his energy and powers of persuasion gained him a certain amount of success, including being named an agent by Congress for the exchange of government documents, his system was already faltering by this time. *Henry Papers*, 7:331n; Nancy Elizabeth Gwinn, "The Origins and Development of International Publication

Exchange in Nineteenth-Century America" (Ph.D. diss., The George Washington University, 1996), pp. 92-163.

3. For an examination of the antecedents of the Smithsonian exchange system, see Gwinn, *Exchange*, pp. 92-163. See also *Henry Papers*, 8:417-418.

4. This is the first indication that the questions facing the Board of Regents concerning the division of funds between the collections and the active operations would ultimately be addressed in Congress.

## 25. SPENCER FULLERTON BAIRD TO GEORGE PERKINS MARSH<sup>1</sup>

Washington May 6<sup>1</sup> 1854

My Dear Mr. Marsh.

I acknowledge with humblest penitence the receipt of the third letter from you this day (the last of April 10)<sup>2</sup> without a single line in reply. My excuse must be that, hoping from day to day that the vexed question of Smithsonian operations and policies would be speedily settled, I desired to write you in full on the subject. The business has however dragged on week after week until the present time, and nothing yet done. The committee on the compromise has had but two meetings on the subject.<sup>3</sup>

I do not know how far you may be posted up on this business, but the affair is now in an exceedingly complicated condition. The committee about two months ago called upon Prof. Jewett and myself to communicate what we might have to say, in writing through the Secretary. I made



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a brief statement and sent it in. Prof. Jewett however drew up an elaborate memorial, involving a discussion of all the points at issue, and covering some 60 pp. of manuscript. This was sent in on Tuesday, and on Wednesday, a meeting of the committee was to be held. The chairman (Mr. Pearce) however on Wednesday morning notified the committee that a communication has been received from Prof. Jewett of so extraordinary a character as to require a reference to Prof. Henry for answer, and accordingly ~~adjourned~~ postponed the meeting until this should be received. Six weeks elapsed without action when a call for a meeting was signed by Messrs. Meacham, Stuart and English, and held a week ago. (April 29). The committee apologized for and excused its delay, but promised faithfully to report next Saturday, May 13.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Choate came on on Saturday night, of April 29, too late for the meeting, but will possibly be back next Saturday. How the matter will turn out, "Quien Sabe" as we Mexicans say. Much will doubtless depend on Mr. Choate's presence.<sup>5</sup>

Prof. Jewett and Prof. Henry are in a condition of apparently irreconcilable warfare: the connection of one or the other ↑with the Institution↓ will probably cease after the final settlement. My relations with Prof. H. are quite pleasant, although we have occasional clouds. I do not think he has treated me justly or kindly on all occasions, though I acknowledge many obligations. I have found it a difficult matter to avoid improper entanglement with one side or other. I agree and disagree with both. I have the active operations as so termed by Prof. Henry much at heart, such as publications exchanges &c, while I want as much support to museum as possible, and a sufficient Library. On all these point however I will write more fully again after more can be said.

My natural History operations are expanding prodigiously. You would be astonished to see the hosts of things pouring in from the ↑Pacific↓ Rail Road explorations & private enterprise.<sup>6</sup> With the very limited sums allowed by Prof. Henry,<sup>7</sup> I am somewhat like the magicians apprentice who knew the word to cause the broom to bring a buckets of water, but could not stop ~~him~~ ↑it↓, and cutting the imp into many pieces only called into action so many buckets.<sup>8</sup> I want to shew all these things to you, and more too, and do so long to have you and dear Mrs. M.<sup>9</sup> back again. When are you coming.

Many thanks for your confidence in my rectitude in any matters at issue, especially in the A.<sup>10</sup> affair. This is not as bad as you infer, and our relationship is perfectly friendly, at least on my part, and as far as I know, on his. How much I shall have to tell and talk about in reference to a



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thousand and one matters, on your return. Your wishes respecting the note to Gilliss<sup>11</sup> shall be observed. I will carry it to him this afternoon. He has been very busy during the meeting of the American Scientific Association, which adjourned last Wednesday after a session of eight days. He was Local Secretary, and discharged the duties admirably. He read several interesting and valuable papers,—extracts from his report.<sup>12</sup>

Dont descend from the high horse of science as you threaten. Your learned letter<sup>13</sup> was a feast of good things. When a man [...] in him, should he be selfish in refusing [...] out for the benefit of weaker minds, we can [...] name by striving for what is beyond us: otherwise shall go round in a circle. Why dont you prepare a paper for the next meeting of the Scientific association on the bicipitous saints.<sup>14</sup> The Smithsonian would publish; as the substantiation of the fact would greatly increase knowledge.

Nothing more of the chrystal Palace plan, but it is said to be maturing.<sup>15</sup> I have heard nothing lately. The mall is healthy enough for its location there. Washington has improved much in its sanitary conditions.<sup>16</sup>

My dear Polly<sup>17</sup> has not been at all well this winter. She has had a kind of intermittent cough or bronchitis for several months. She is I hope much better of it now. I sent her to New York last Friday afternoon where she will spend a week or two, and then return. I will however send bushels of love on her account, as I keep it in large quantity, ready for use.

I cannot write more now, as the dinner bell is ringing and I must attend to what Lucy<sup>18</sup> calls the "Joyful sound." Write soon again and in your next do give a poor starving mortal a crumb of comfort by telling him when you will be back in America. With warmest love to Mrs. Marsh as well as yourself I remain

Ever yours  
Spencer F Baird

Hon. Geo. P. Marsh  
Rome.

Marsh Papers, University of Vermont Library.

Retained copy: Letterpress copy, Baird Papers, Smithsonian Archives. The upper right-hand corner of the third page has been torn off, resulting in missing words in the sixth paragraph.

1. Marsh had left his post as minister to Turkey in December. Without a position to return to at home, he was urged by friends to succeed Henry as secretary of the Smithsonian if Henry failed to survive the conflict with Jewett. *Henry Papers*, 6:465n; *BDAC*; David Lowenthal, *George Perkins Marsh: Versatile Vermonter* (New York, 1958), pp. 169–170.

2. Written from Rome, the April 10 letter is in the Baird Papers, Smithsonian Archives, as are letters of January 14 and March 21.

3. The minutes of the special committee do not survive. The committee apparently met for the first time sometime before the March 11, 1854, regents' meeting. At that time, it offered a resolution, similar to one James Meacham



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had offered on January 28, that the secretary and executive committee present an estimate for each year, and stated that a full report on funding questions would follow. On April 26, the committee met a second time to receive Jewett's March 1854 statement and Henry's reply to it. Rhees, *Journals*, pp. 97-98; U.S. House, 33d Congress, 2d Session, *Smithsonian Institution*, House Reports, No. 141 (1855), p. 175.

4. At the special regents' meeting of April 29, the executive committee presented its budget and explained that appropriations were not evenly divided between the collections and the active operations, as called for by the compromise of January 1847, because the Smithsonian Building was not yet finished. Pearce announced that the special committee would be ready to report at the next meeting, which was scheduled for May 13. Rhees, *Journals*, pp. 99-100.

5. Choate did not attend the May 13 meeting. With only six regents present, Pearce announced that the special committee was ready to report but moved that the board adjourn as it was desirable that the subject be discussed before the full board. The board adjourned until May 20. Rhees, *Journals*, pp. 99-100.

6. In his report for 1854, Baird noted the receipt of 350 lots of specimens, as well as individual items, including two live wildcats from the upper Missouri, a live rattlesnake from Virginia, and two live alligators from Texas. Listing around 85 principal donations for 1854, Baird credited both public and private expeditions as well as individuals and scientific societies for the unprecedented levels of donations, noting in particular valuable specimens from Army Lieutenant W. P. Trowbridge's exploration of the California coast.

The specimens had to be received, unpacked, recorded, and acknowledged to the donors, prepared for examination and sorted, and exhibited or stored. If duplicates were received, they were distributed to other institutions. Baird wrote that the work took up a great deal of his and Charles Girard's time during the year. *Smithsonian Report for 1854*, pp. 36-46.

7. In addition to \$2,000 for salaries, museum expenditures for the year were \$250 for "explorations, museum," \$157 for "expenses of collections for museum," and \$537 for "incidentals." *Smithsonian Report for 1854*, p. 61.

8. Baird is referring to the legend of the sorcerer's apprentice, upon which Goethe based his popular 1797 ballad "Der Zauberlehrling." Henry and Mary Garland, *The Oxford Companion to German Literature*, 3d ed. by Mary Garland (Oxford, 1997), p. 940.

9. Caroline Crane Marsh. *Henry Papers*, 8:81n.

10. A reference to Louis Agassiz (*Henry Papers*, 6:530n), probably in connection with his criticism of Baird and Girard's *Catalogue of North American Reptiles*. In his letter of April 10, Marsh expressed wonder that anyone could quarrel with the meek Baird and speculated that a "certain person—Gilliss will guess whom I refer to—had a hand in it, for the sake of doing you a mischief." *Henry Papers*, 8:454, 458n.

11. James Melville Gilliss (*Henry Papers*, 7:406n) spent the years following his return from the United States Naval Astronomical Expedition to the Southern Hemisphere working on the expedition reports. Wendell W. Huffman, "The United States Naval Astronomical Expedition (1849-1852) for the Solar Parallax," *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, 1991, 22:213-214.

In his letter of April 10, Marsh had requested that Baird hand an enclosed note to Gilliss privately as it contained information of a sensitive nature for Mrs. Gilliss.

12. The American Association for the Advancement of Science held its annual meeting at the Smithsonian from April 26 to May 3. Gilliss presented three papers, one on his astronomical expedition to Chile, one on earthquakes in Chile, and one on the climate of Chile. AAAS, *Proceedings*, 1854, 8:iv, v, vi.

In a letter to Marsh of May 8, Gilliss commented on his activities during the meeting and on the "puffs" in support of Henry which Henry and Bache had extracted, according to Gilliss, from a "clique" of the association. He continued:

What do you think of Prof. Peirce of Cambridge, the retiring President, asserting in his annual address that Bache & Henry were the Alexander and Humboldt of American science? The Humboldt indeed! A man whose knowledge is at best a limited one on Electricity & Magnetism alone! Bache winds Henry about his finger and in fact controls the Smithsonian as well as the Coast Survey. A more thorough Jesuit it would have been difficult for Loyola himself to have created.

Marsh Papers, University of Vermont Library.

13. Marsh's letter of January 14. Marsh complained in his March 21 and April 10 letters that he hadn't received any response and in the latter letter promised to "come down to the common level hereafter."

14. Marsh had jokingly written in his March 21 letter that the "most interesting fact established" by osteological collections in the convents and churches of Italy was



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the existence of a bicipitous variety of the human family (for it does not appear to have been a distinct species) within the historical period. Many of the saints of the calendar belonged to this race, and John Baptist is cited as having possessed no less than three heads, all now extant, for the confusion of sceptics, but whether these heads were successive or contemporaneous, I cannot ascertain.

15. On February 5, Baird had written:

There is earnest talk of constructing a great iron crystal Palace on the vacant Square between the Smithsonian and the monument in which to place all the government collections in Natural History and to include the Patent office and its appurtenances. Whether this will go I cannot tell, but it is strongly backed.

Marsh Papers, University of Vermont Library. We have not been able to find anything further about this proposal.

16. In his letter of April 10, Marsh wrote that he hoped the Crystal Palace plan would be adopted and that the building would be large enough to hold all the collections in question, and that it would be capable of "indefinite extension." But he questioned whether the Mall

was a healthy location, expressing concern in particular about the area's reputation as a breeding ground for malaria. Fears about unhealthy conditions, especially their impact on occupants of the White House, continued to be expressed at this time and for many years thereafter. Possibly Baird was alluding to improvements resulting from the installation of underground drainage along the Mall between Seventh and Twelfth Streets by Andrew Jackson Downing in 1851. There were also some improvements stemming from the dredging and walling of the Washington Canal, which was essentially a sewer. Wilhelmus Bogart Bryan, *A History of the National Capital*, 2 vols. (New York, 1916), 2:309-312; *Henry Papers*, 8:200, 201n, 261; "The Sessford Annals," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, 1908, 11:344, 348, 354; Byron Sunderland, "Washington As I First Knew It, 1852-1855," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, 1902, 5:198.

17. Baird's wife, Mary, whom Marsh had known since she was a child. *Henry Papers*, 8:113n; E. F. Rivinus and E. M. Youssef, *Spencer Baird of the Smithsonian* (Washington, 1992), pp. 36, 50, 51.

18. Baird's six-year-old daughter, Lucy. *Henry Papers*, 8:114n.

## 26. TO ALEXANDER DALLAS BACHE

Smithsonian Inst  
May 6<sup>th</sup> 1854

My Dear Sir

The whole number of Smithsonian observers to whom copies of Mr Alexander's paper might be sent is about 350.<sup>1</sup>

Mr John Randel formerly of albany<sup>2</sup> has sent me a communication<sup>3</sup> intended for the Association relative to a sudden change in the declination of the magnetic needle observed by himself about the time of the occurrence of the great eclipse of 1806.

He wished to call attention to the importance of observations on the needle at the time of the approaching eclipse. If there is no reference to observations of this kind in Mr Alexander's paper it may be well to append one.<sup>4</sup>

Cannot you direct observations to be made on the needle at some of your stations and cannot the photographic apparatus be put in operation at the Institution about the period of the eclipse.<sup>5</sup>

On Monday we are to meet at the Light House Board and in the