



Well-Known Smithsonian Regents

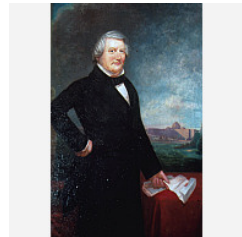
Although the chief justices and vice presidents since 1846 have sat on the Board of Regents, not all are that well-known. The following are regents that were well-known, a description of their tenures as regents, and a bit of information about them. There is a biographical entry on every regent in the [history of the Smithsonian catalog on Smithsonian Collections Search Center](#).



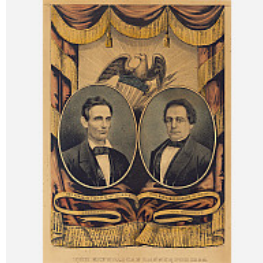
Robert Dale Owen, 08/10/1846–12/1847, citizen regent, was a radical reformer, involved in the development of a utopian community in New Harmony, Indiana. He was inspired by Smithson's gift [<http://www.150.si.edu/smithexb/start.htm>] and played a key role in the design of the first Smithsonian building, the Smithsonian Institution Building, the Castle. [Link to Castle Museums page 3.1.5.20.0.0] *Image courtesy of the [National Portrait Gallery](#).*



Jefferson Davis, 12/30/1847–03/1851, president of the Confederacy, served as a US senator from Mississippi and was a member of the Regents Building Committee and the Committee on Copyright. Davis had a warm collegial relationship with the first Secretary, Joseph Henry, [[link to Henry Secretaries page 3.1.3.1.0.0](#)] and Henry endured some suspicion during the Civil War due to that relationship. *Image courtesy of the [Smithsonian Institution Archives](#).*



Millard Fillmore, 03/04/1849–07/09/1850, US vice president, served as chancellor for only a year before ascending to the presidency upon the death of President Zachary Taylor. *Image courtesy of the [National Portrait Gallery](#).*



Hannibal Hamlin, 03/04/1861–03/04/1865 and 01/18/1870–03/03/1881, US vice president, senator from Maine, and a 19th century political powerhouse, served from 1861 to 1865 as Abraham Lincoln's first vice president. He was re-elected to the Senate in 1870, and rejoined the Board of Regents for eleven years until his retirement from the Senate in 1881. *Image of Abraham Lincoln and Hannibal Hamline courtesy of the [National Portrait Gallery](#).*



Jean Louis Agassiz, 02/21/1863–12/14/1873, citizen regent, was a noted 19th century naturalist, who taught at Harvard University and founded its Museum of Comparative Zoology. A close friend of the first Secretary Joseph Henry, [link to Henry Secretaries page 3.1.3.1.0.0] the two called themselves the "Scientific Lazzaroni," or beggars, and worked to develop federal funding for American science. *Image courtesy of the [National Portrait Gallery](#).*



James Garfield, 12/21/1865–12/1873 and 01/14/1878–03/04/1881, representative from Ohio and US president, served several terms on the board during his nine consecutive terms as a US representative. Having watched the construction of the first US National Museum building, [Garfield chose to hold his inaugural ball](#) in the new building, the first event staged there even prior to its official opening. *Image courtesy of the [National Portrait Gallery](#).*



General William Tecumseh Sherman, 2/2/1871–1874; 3/25/1878–3/25/1885, citizen regent, was a civil engineer and played a major role on the Regents Building Committee and the committee that oversaw the construction of the first US National Museum. *Image courtesy of the [National Portrait Gallery](#).*



Alexander Graham Bell, 01/24/1898–02/20/1922, citizen regent and inventor, was a protégé of the first Secretary Joseph Henry [link to Henry Secretary Page] and a strong supporter of the Institution. When Congress denied federal funds to create an astrophysical observatory [link to Observatory Research Centers page 3.1.6.4.0.0], Bell funded the program himself. When Bell heard that James Smithson's remains were to be moved from his gravesite in Genoa, Italy, to allow rock quarrying, he decided that the Institution's founding donor needed to have his final resting place at the Institution he provided for. . Although the Board declined to support his effort, he traveled to Italy on his own, and delivered Smithson's remains to the Institution on January 25, 1904. Upon his return, however, the board commended him for his efforts. *Image courtesy of the [Archives of American Art](#).*



Teddy Roosevelt, 03/04/1901–09/14/1901, US vice president and naturalist, began corresponding with the Smithsonian in his youth, donating specimens and seeking advice about his natural history research. He served on the board only six months, assuming the presidency after William McKinley's assassination in 1901. As president, however, he was [a strong supporter of the Institution](#), with passage of the appropriation for the new US National Museum [link to National Museum of Natural History Museums page 3.1.5.15.0.0]. He also urged a reluctant Board of Regents to accept James Lang Freer's gift to the nation of his art collection [Link to Freer Page 3.1.5.12.0.0]. Before he left office in 1909, he arranged for funding for the Smithsonian's 1910-1912 Biological Survey of Panama, prior to the construction of the canal. After he left the White House, he led the Smithsonian Roosevelt African Expedition and collected thousands of specimens for the new museum, including live animals for the National Zoo [link to 3.1.5.14.0.0]. *Image courtesy of the [Smithsonian American Art Museum, Inventories of American Painting and Sculpture](#).*



William Howard Taft, 10/12/1921–02/04/1930, chief justice after he served as US president, was an exceptionally active chancellor of the board, involving himself in day-to-day activities of the Institution, and even holding all-staff meetings. Notably, after his inauguration as president, his wife, Helen Herron Taft, donated the first dress [<http://tinyurl.com/3mq3p7c>] in the First Ladies gown collection, initiating one of the Institution's most popular displays. *Image courtesy of the [National Portrait Gallery](#).*

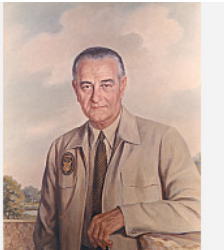


Clarence Cannon, 02/21/1935–05/12/1964, representative from Missouri and Speaker of the House for whom the Cannon House Office Building is named, played a major role in Smithsonian management in the second third of the 20th century. A former history teacher who was still very interested in history, Cannon was a regent for almost thirty years and served on executive committee from February 17, 1941 to May 1964. Most notably, he shepherded the legislation for the National Museum of History and Technology (now National Museum of American History) [Link to NMAH Page 3.1.5.6.0.0] through the Congress, in his role as chair of the Committee on Appropriations. *Image of Clarence Cannon at Board of Regents meeting courtesy of the [Smithsonian Institution Archives](#).*



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John Nicholas Brown, 03/14/1957–1979, citizen regent from Rhode Island, and a real estate executive, served on the board for twenty-two years. Brown was instrumental in establishing the National Portrait Gallery [Link to NPG Page 3.1.5.16.0.0] at the Smithsonian, and served as chair of the National Portrait Gallery Commission. Brown also served as chair of the National Armed Forces Museum Advisory Board, a planned museum that was never built. *Image courtesy of **TBD***



Lyndon Baines Johnson, 01/20/1961–11/22/1963, US vice president, was a former history teacher and retained his interest in the Smithsonian when he assumed the presidency after John F. Kennedy's assassination. Johnson presided over the opening of the National Museum of American History [Link to NMAH Page 3.1.5.5.0.0] and later personally courted Joseph H. Hirshhorn [Link to HMSG Page 3.1.5.13.0.0] to convince him to donate his art collection to the nation. *Image courtesy of the [National Portrait Gallery](#).*

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Thomas Watson, 1967–1979, citizen from New York and president of IBM, was an influential member of the regents' Executive Committee from 1972 to 1979, and continued as a member of the Investment Policy Committee from 1980 to 1990 as a regent emeritus. He was also a major donor to the Institution, providing seed money for key initiatives.



Barry Goldwater, 01/10/1977–01/03/1987, senator from Arizona, played a key role in securing appropriations to build the National Air and Space Museum [Link to NASM Page 3.1.5.3.0.0], an initiative that had languished for almost thirty years until he took interest in it. *Image courtesy of the [National Portrait Gallery](#).*



Lindy Boggs, 03/04/1977–1978, senator from Louisiana, was the first woman to serve on the Board of Regents, and sponsored the legislation to transfer the National Museum of African Art [Link to NMAA Page 3.1.5.2.0.0] to the Smithsonian. *Image courtesy of the [Smithsonian Institution Archives](#).*



Daniel Patrick Moynihan, 1987–01/03/2000, senator from New York, was a close friend of Secretary S. Dillon Ripley [Link to Ripley Page 3.1.3.8.0.0]; a key supporter of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden [Link to HMSG Page 3.1.5.13.0.0]; and served on many other Smithsonian boards and councils. *Image courtesy of the [Smithsonian Institution Archives](#).*
