

October 16, 1854

Rush Family Papers, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

In an unknown hand. Of the letters sent to the other regents, at least three are extant: to Alexander Dallas Bache (Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives); to William H. English (English Collection, M98, Indiana Historical Society); to James Meacham (Meacham Papers, Wilbur Collection, University of Vermont Library).

1. Doc. 61.

70. TO ALEXANDER DALLAS BACHE

Smithsonian Inst  
Oct. 16<sup>th</sup> 1854

My Dear B.

I returned to this city after an absence of precisely two weeks—during my absence I met the class at Princeton just 20 times and exhibited a large number of experiments.

I was much relieved with the idea that I had got through with the engagement but found on my return to Washington that I had worked rather too hard. I feel to day however quite well and in good spirits.

I have settled the business with Mr. Blodget or rather brought it to a crisis. Before I went to Princeton I requested him to inform me as to the condition of the materials for the report on Meteorology<sup>1</sup>—he answered that the business of sending off the blanks and keeping up the current business of the office so occupied him that he was unable to give it the necessary attention. To this I replied that I would relieve him from this duty and accordingly, [on]<sup>A</sup> the day I left I addressed a letter to Mr Rhees<sup>2</sup> instructing him to procure from Mr. B. the book of records of the names of the meteorological observers and also instructed Mr. B. by letter<sup>3</sup> to deliver the said book to Mr. R. and to give him any information which might be necessary to him in the discharge of the duty I had assigned him. Mr. B. refused to give up the book and wrote me at Princeton<sup>4</sup> that it would be of no use to Mr. R—that he could not understand it—that the accounts of the returns and sendings had in part been kept on slips of paper &-

To this I replied<sup>5</sup> that I saw nothing in his letter to cause me to change my opinion of the importance of the instructions I had given and that he must give the book to Mr R. On my return I was informed by Mr. R. that Mr B. had refused to deliver up [the]<sup>A</sup> book. I returned on Saturday<sup>6</sup>—waited until Wednesday without receiving any communication from Mr B. On that day I prepared a letter<sup>7</sup> informing him that on account of his refusal to obey my instructions and other conduct of a similar character

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I was obliged to inform him that I could no longer employ him as an assistant and that his connection with the Institution ceased from that day. This letter was prepared in the morning and as soon as he left the building to go to his dinner a new lock was put on one of the doors of the meteorological room and the windows and other doors nailed up. The letter was then sent to him at his boarding house. As soon as he received it he came to the building in full haste but found himself too late.

I have since received a number of communications from him<sup>8</sup> demanding his private papers and the appointment of a commission to decide on the articles held in joint possession between himself and the Institution. I denied a knowledge of any articles in the condition last mentioned but offered to allow him to designate such articles as he considered his own property and such as he thought he had a claim on and to deliver ↑up↓ any of which there could be no doubt. He accepted this proposition with the ↑additional↓ condition which I had proposed namely that I would furnish him with a list of the articles retained. The meeting took place on Saturday<sup>9</sup> and before we entered the room I read to Mr B. the conditions on which he was allowed to enter. To these he agreed but when we came to look over the correspondence he declared<sup>B</sup> that the letters were his private papers and should not be examined. I informed him that they were letters and answers to letters on the business of the Institution and could not be allowed to be with drawn without examination—that if he attempted to remove any of them I would have him put out of the building by force. This was on Saturday afternoon and since then (monday morning) I have nothing more from him.

Lieut Beckworth of the Army<sup>10</sup> was present at our meeting and in order not to appear too harsh I have concluded to allow him to look over the letters and to deliver such of them to Mr. B. as he (the Lieut) may think of a strictly private nature.

I have acted with caution and under Legal advice.<sup>11</sup> You will see by the accompanying letters<sup>12</sup> that I have been some what trammelled by the understanding between Mr Pearce Mr Fendall<sup>13</sup> and myself.<sup>14</sup> The refusal however to deliver up the book was a new cause of action of which I availed myself. The case of Mr Blodget will afford an opportunity of settling the question as to the duty and privileges of an assistant.

The article you saw in the Globe was instigated by Mr. B. and was published without the knowledge of the proprietor.<sup>15</sup>

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I have seen the Secretary of the interior<sup>16</sup> who promised me very cordially to have an eye to the interest of the Coast Survey both as regards the boundary and the forthcoming reports.<sup>17</sup>

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The building of the Inst. is in a state of forwardness and will I presume be finished before the meeting of the Board of Regents. The rooms in the 2<sup>nd</sup> story are completed and I think the lecture room is by far the best in this country.<sup>18</sup> It ought to satisfy the city.

Have you seen the article in the North American Review? It was written by young Hale and is very abusive in regard to Mr Pearce.<sup>19</sup> I have some thoughts of answering some points of it in a letter to Mr Seaton the Treasurer of the Institution.<sup>20</sup> I shall confer with him on the subject.

My family are in Princeton. Mrs H. will probably return this week.

I have not as yet seen the secretary of War<sup>21</sup> but hope to have an interview with him in a day or two.

I remain as ever  
truly yours  
H.

NB Return the letters I send you.<sup>C</sup>

I will send copies of letters tomorrow.

Bache Papers, Smithsonian Archives.

1. That is, for the section on the meteorological program in the annual report for 1854.
2. Not found.
3. Not found.
4. Letter not found.
5. Letter not found.
6. October 7.
7. Not found.
8. Not found.
9. October 14.

10. Probably Lieutenant Edward Griffin Beckwith (1818–1881), who had returned to Washington on September 12 from commanding a Pacific Railroad survey near the 41st parallel. In the preface to his report on the 38th and 39th parallel routes, from Missouri to Utah, Beckwith stated,

The computation of altitudes has been conducted since my arrival in Washington under the superintendence of Mr. Lorin Blodget, and the barometrical observations discussed by him with great care and superior intelligence, which will be apparent by a reference to his notes and the tables in this report.

Beckwith seems to be referring to the observations and tables in chapter nine of his report. *Appletons' Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, 1887–1900); George Leslie Albright, *Official Explorations for Pacific Railroads, 1853–1855* (Berkeley, 1921), p. 100; E. G. Beckwith, "Report of Explorations for a Route for the Pacific Railroad, by Capt. J. W. Gunnison, Topographical

Engineers, near the 38th and 39th Parallels of North Latitude, from the Mouth of the Kansas River, Mo., to the Sevier Lake, in the Great Basin," U.S. House, 33d Congress, 2d Session, *Reports of Explorations and Surveys to Ascertain the Most Practical and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean*, House Executive Documents, No. 91 (1855), 2:3 (quotation), 89–112.

11. In a letter to James H. Coffin of October 21, Henry attributed the mechanics of Blodget's dismissal to James M. Carlisle, the attorney for the Board of Regents (*Henry Papers*, 8:44n). Correspondence with James H. Coffin, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives.

12. Not found.

13. Philip R. Fendall, a Washington attorney who was representing Blodget. *Henry Papers*, 8:32n.

14. The understanding was apparently that Henry would not take any action in the Blodget matter until the executive committee, to whom it had been referred on July 8, had reported. Henry to James H. Coffin, August 21, 1854. Correspondence with James H. Coffin, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives.

15. Possibly a reference to an unsigned article in the *Washington Daily Globe* that was critical of Henry's management. The article blamed Henry for the slow progress in completing the Smithsonian Building, particularly the areas intended for a lecture room and museum. It asked

why a lecture room and museum are provided in the building by a secretary who looks upon both as not in the design of Smithson's bequest, and regards the building as not needed, and that all the money of the fund should be spent in original investigations, and in the publication of them?

It also reported that the original lecture room was "soon to be converted into a dwelling-house for the secretary, whose salary, of nearly \$4,000 per annum, is said to be inadequate for his support." The *Daily Globe* was a Democratic newspaper published by John C. Rives, who also published the Congressional Globe. *Washington Daily Globe*, August 30, 1854; *DAB*, s.v. "Rives, John C."

16. Robert McClelland (*Henry Papers*, 8:490n).

17. Apparently to ensure the Coast Survey received credit for any work done in connection with the surveys. Emory's report on the Mexican Boundary Survey, for example, clearly credited J. E. Hilgard of the Coast Survey for recomputing the magnetic observations and identified additional observations from Texas and California as being made under Bache's direction. William H. Emory, *Report on the United States and Mexican Boundary Survey* . . . , U.S. House, 34th Congress, 1st Session, House Executive Documents, No. 135 (1859), 1:250-257.

18. Instead of the vast museum hall originally envisioned for the space, the second story contained a large lecture room in the center of the building flanked by an apparatus room on the east and a picture gallery on the west. This was the third lecture hall built in the Smithsonian Building. A lecture hall in the east wing that seated 1,000 had replaced a smaller room in the same location but itself proved too small to accommodate audiences for the Smithsonian's lecture series. The new room, which seated 2,000 and was first used on December 26, 1854, was designed by army engineer Barton S. Alexander, who had succeeded James Renwick as architect. Henry worked with Alexander to incorporate in the design of the room the acoustical and optical principles he and Bache had developed with the goal of achieving "accurate hearing" and "distinct seeing" (Henry, "Acoustics," p. 133). In the annual report for 1854 (p. 27), Henry echoed his comment in this letter to Bache: "It is believed that this room is the most perfect of its kind in this country, and that it will serve as a model for apartments of a similar character."

One commentator has written that the first major advances in architectural acoustics as an engineering science were made by Henry in connection with this room (Shankland, p. S12).

Henry had lectured on acoustics at Princeton and had reported his investigations of what he termed the "limit of perceptibility," or precedence effect, to the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1849 and 1851. In 1853, Henry and Bache had evaluated Montgomery Meigs's plans for the new chamber of the House of Representatives in terms of acoustics and had toured public buildings in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston for that purpose. Henry alluded to the principles he had developed and the design of the not yet completed lecture room in a paper presented to the AAAS in May 1854 (not published but reported in *Scientific American*, May 27, 1854, 9:294) and described them in more detail before the association in August 1856. The lecture hall was destroyed by the 1865 fire in the building and was not rebuilt.

*Henry Papers*, 7:550; 8:179, 436, 450n, 462-463; *Smithsonian Report for 1854*, p. 27; Joseph Henry, "On Acoustics Applied to Public Buildings," *AAAS Proceedings*, 1856, 10:119-135; Robert S. Shankland, abstract of "Architectural Acoustics in America to 1930," *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 1976, 59: supplement no. 1, p. S12; Emily Ann Thompson, "Mysteries of the Acoustic: Architectural Acoustics in America, 1800-1932" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1992), pp. 56-60.

19. The October 1854 issue of the *North American Review* (79:441-464) included an anonymous review of the report of the special committee chaired by James A. Pearce and of the minority report by James Meacham. According to the *National Union Catalog and Poole's Index* (C. Edward Wall, comp. and ed., *Cumulative Author Index for Poole's Index to Periodical Literature, 1802-1906* [Ann Arbor, 1971]), the author was Charles Hale (1831-1882, *DAB*), a recent Harvard graduate and nephew of Edward Everett. Hale's father Nathan was owner and editor of the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, for which Charles Hale wrote editorials.

Hale accused the Board of Regents of not carrying out the provisions of the act that established the Smithsonian and of spending almost half of the annual income on "objects not sanctioned by Congress" (p. 459), that is, on Henry's "active operations." In particular, he accused them of frustrating the clear intent of Congress to establish primarily a library.

Hale began by suggesting the Smithsonian might as well be abandoned if it was to be "merely a vehicle for personal aggrandizement and special favoritism,—if its care implies the abuse of a weighty public trust, and the appropriation of its funds for uses not authorized by law" (p. 442). He analyzed the composition of

the Board of Regents and concluded that the turnover on the board was so high that Congress must have intended it to merely carry out the plan provided by Congress, not initiate and carry out its own plan for the institution.

He criticized in detail the plan of financing the Smithsonian Building, which deliberately delayed the completion of the building to reduce the drain on the accrued interest, the remaining \$150,000 of which could be added to the principal of the Smithsonian fund and thus raise the annual income by some \$10,000. He argued that the entire annual income of \$31,000 should have been spent on programs from the beginning, and that the goal of permanently adding to the Smithsonian's endowment had too high a price: "Instead of bursting at once into the vigor of full life, as was intended, it has struggled through a cramped and painful infancy" (p. 452).

Hale cited the act of establishment to argue that the Smithsonian should have been spending an average of \$25,000 a year on a library from its inception, or \$200,000 over eight years. Contending that only \$12,000 had been spent on books, he found a "deficit" in spending on the library of around \$188,000 and one of around \$155,000 in total spending on the library, museum, and gallery of art. He found these to be "heavy deficits, even in these modern days of mammoth defalcations" (p. 454). In a footnote he complained that the secretary was "sadly behindhand in his reports" (p. 455), and that information available to the public about the institution's finances was at least twenty months old. Using figures from Meacham's report, Hale presented a table with three categories of expenditures to date: cost of the building (\$244,393), "Total expenditure authorized by the act of Congress" (\$84,273; including the museum, library, gallery of art, and lectures), and "Total expenditure for objects not sanctioned by the act of Congress" (\$76,360; including publications and the meteorological program). He found no justification for an expenditure on the library of less than \$2,000 a year when the legislation called for "a sum *not exceeding on an average* twenty-five thousand dollars" (p. 456).

Hale attacked the opposition's interpretation of section nine of the act, the so-called "elastic clause," which he claimed was being "relied upon as a sort of universal 'indulgence' which excuses all misdoings" (p. 456). Hale argued that the regents had discretion only over any money not appropriated by the act or required for the purposes specified in the act and not over the entire income of the Smithsonian.

The only justification for the regents assuming discretion over the entire annual income

would be if the act of establishment failed to carry out Smithson's intent, a supposition that would be "an insult to Congress" (p. 457). Hale alleged that although the Pearce report did not directly so accuse Congress, it in fact hinted that Congress had failed to carry out Smithson's will, and that the regents had a responsibility to take it upon themselves to carry out his intentions. Hale praised the dissection of Pearce's arguments by Meacham, "who exposes his logical fallacies with the hand of a master" (p. 458).

Hale then turned to the legislative history of the act. After pointing out that Pearce had strongly supported Rufus Choate's amendment in 1845 providing for at least \$20,000 a year for a library, he wondered how Pearce could have changed his views so radically and speculated that someone else had written the Pearce report. Hale thought that once Pearce realized what a "ridiculous" position he was in, he would "scarcely hesitate to avow publicly the fraud of which he has been made the dupe" (p. 460).

Hale's argument was weakest at its conclusion, where he stated that of the various activities the Smithsonian was engaged in, the library was "almost the only object which is not likely to be attained in any other way" (p. 462). Henry might have agreed with him that "it is manifestly better to spend [Smithsonian funds] chiefly for some one thing that cannot be so well done with a less fund, than to separate it into portions for several objects" (p. 462), but would have disagreed over what that "some one thing" was. Hale continued by contending that "a library of 200,000 volumes is a great deal more than twice as good as a library of 100,000 volumes" (p. 462), but that a publication fund of \$600,000 would be as well or better spent by twelve institutions with \$50,000 each than by one. He concluded,

We may safely leave to the numerous respectable societies and other organizations the work of publications and researches; but there is no way in which the loss of the Smithsonian library—as it should be—can be replaced. [p. 463.]

Hale accused the regents of having pursued almost from the beginning an "illegal" policy with "evil results," the public being duped as to what the institution was actually doing and being told to wait until the building was completed. He found the Pearce report

an elaborate specimen of special pleading,—an attempt to justify, by quibbles worthy of a police-court practitioner, a policy of which he must know that Congress never dreamed, even though he may have persuaded himself

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that the law is defective enough to allow it.  
[p. 463.]

He found Meacham's minority report a full and effective reply.

20. That is, a letter to the editor of the

*National Intelligencer*, published by William Winston Seaton (*Henry Papers*, 6:470), a former ex officio member of the Board of Regents. We have not found such a letter.

21. Jefferson Davis.

71. TO J. H. LEFROY<sup>1</sup>

Smithsonian Institution  
Washington Oct<sup>r</sup> 17. 1854.

My Dear Sir,

I regret exceedingly that I was absent from Washington during the visit of your friend, Mr. Weld.<sup>2</sup> I read some years since with much pleasure and instruction his history of the Royal Society,<sup>3</sup> and was very anxious to have some conversation with him relative to the bequest of Smithson, on which point I understand he has ~~some~~ information. He however visited the Smithsonian Institution and received from my young assistant Mr. Rhees an account of our operations and present condition. You will probably learn from him that the Institution is at this time encountering quite a storm that has been raised by the influence of my principal assistant Mr. Jewett the librarian.<sup>4</sup> He commenced a series of anonymous articles on the present administration of our affairs, and placed himself in such an attitude with reference to me that I was obliged to dismiss him from his office. He is widely connected, has considerable influence in New England, and will leave nothing undone to change the whole policy of the Institution.

I have also within the last week been obliged to dismiss a Mr. Blodget, the assistant in meteorology, who joined the standard of revolt and attempted to publish in his own name the results of the materials collected at the expense of the Smithsonian bequest.

You see therefore that at present I am sailing in rough water, but I am determined, if possible, to ride through the storm. If I am unsuccessful I shall return to Princeton College and resume my original researches. I trust however that there is honesty and intelligence enough among our countrymen to prevent a catastrophe of the kind I have mentioned. If there is not I shall be relatively elevated in my own estimation or in other words have a lower opinion of the moral character of our country. I have always said that to appropriate the bequest of a foreigner, intended for the good of mankind, to local objects, would be a violation of the trust and a lasting disgrace to our government in the eyes of the world.