

THE OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY & HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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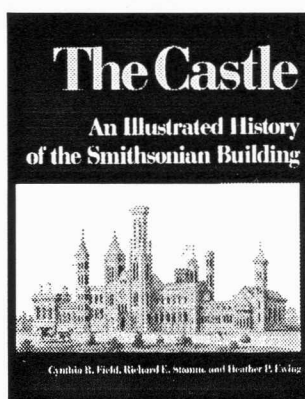
DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

Prologue for the 150th

This issue of the Quarterly brings you a preview of the stories and images treated at greater length in *The Castle, An Illustrated History of the Smithsonian Building*. In this book, we look back over the years of the building's existence, which are roughly equivalent to the age of the Institution itself, as we begin to look forward to the Smithsonian's sesquicentennial. Through analysis of the nearly two hundred images in the book, we try to make the pictures elucidate the history of the building by illustrating how the changes reflected institutional growth. In other ways as well, the book also presages the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Smithsonian.

The Smithsonian Building itself represents the Smithsonian's mission, as identified by the 150th Program Committee guidelines, to enrich people's lives through education and outreach. As the book *The Castle* illustrates, the building

has always had a public function. Early woodcuts show the library and reading room in the West Wing and Range. A succession of



lecture halls has been documented, two in the East Wing and one in the center of the building where the Woodrow Wilson Center is now. The slow but steady metamorphosis from exhibition to the provision of public information services can be seen in the changing appearance of the major public spaces such as the Great Hall.

The very format of this book reflects the Smithsonian's historic interpretation of this mission. In the late nineteenth century Director of the National Museum George Brown Goode identified three Smithsonian audiences: general interest, serious inquiry,

and scholarly investigation. General interest readers can easily find out the explanations for images that capture their interest in the text conveniently located adjacent to all pictures. Serious inquiry into the history of the building will be rewarded by the plethora of reproductions and the abundance of detail. For the scholar, each point is carefully documented, making the sources of textual information available to all.

The image of the Castle has been used as the official letterhead of the Institution and as the symbol that introduces its educational programs, from tours to television programs. As Secretary Langley observed nearly one hundred years ago, in the popular mind the Smithsonian *is* the wonderfully evocative castellated building.

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THE FIRST SMITHSONIAN GUIDEBOOK

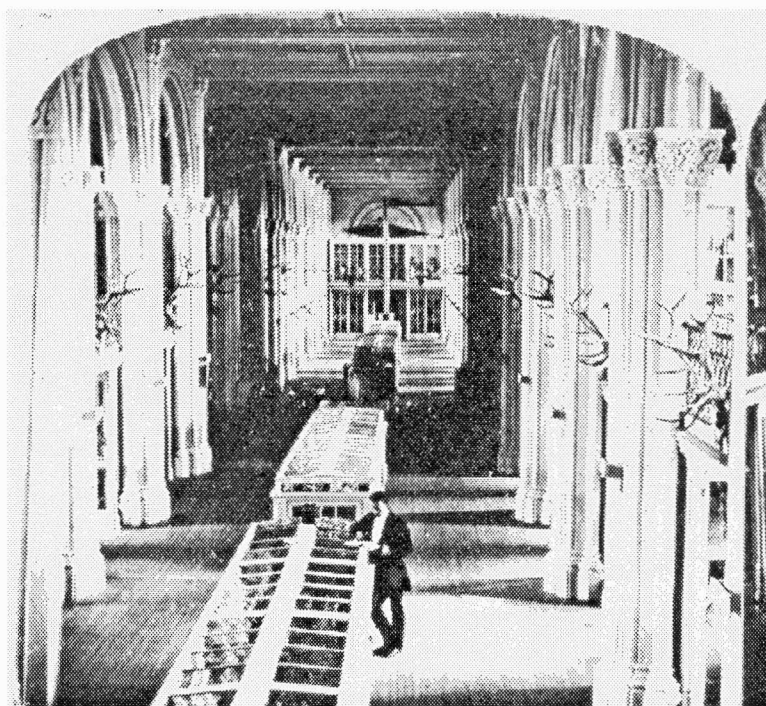
First published in 1857, *An Account of the Smithsonian Institution, its Founder, Building, Operations, Etc....* by William J. Rhees was the first visitor's guide to the Smithsonian. This book, and its later updated versions, proved invaluable resources in writing *The Castle, An Illustrated History of the Smithsonian Building*.

The guide, which described all the operations of the Institution, included a biography of James Smithson, a narrative of the plan of organization, a catalogue of John Mix Stanley's Portraits of North American Indians, and a "tour" of the building, illustrated with woodcut prints of the various rooms. By 1857, the fledgling Institution had established a firm reputation among scientists, scholars and the general public through its library, lecture hall, sculpture and picture galleries, chemical and natural history laboratories, and its system of exchanging publications with other institutions throughout the world. However, the one facet of the Smithsonian called for in the establishing legislation of 1846 which had not yet been fully developed was the museum. At the time the guidebook was published, plans were afoot for transferring the government collections located at the Patent Office Building (now the home of the National Museum of American Art and the National Portrait Gallery) to the Smithsonian Institution. In anticipation of the arrival of the extensive collections, the guidebook

featured an illustration of how the museum hall would appear when fully occupied. The room which we now call "The Great Hall" was designed to have three tiers of cases running the length of the room, but this arrangement was never built. Instead, one balcony was constructed along the north and south walls of the room. Begun in late 1857 and continuing into the early months of 1858, the construction coincided with the packing of specimens at the Patent Office. By the following August, the

case were described in laymen's terms, leaving all scientific names and classifications for scholarly publications. The cases overflowed with stuffed specimens of birds, fish, reptiles, and mammals, as well as an extensive collection of ethnological specimens, and Egyptian and Peruvian mummies.

The guidebooks of 1857 and 1859 are valuable as historical documents relating how the Smithsonian and National Museum were presented to the public in their ear-



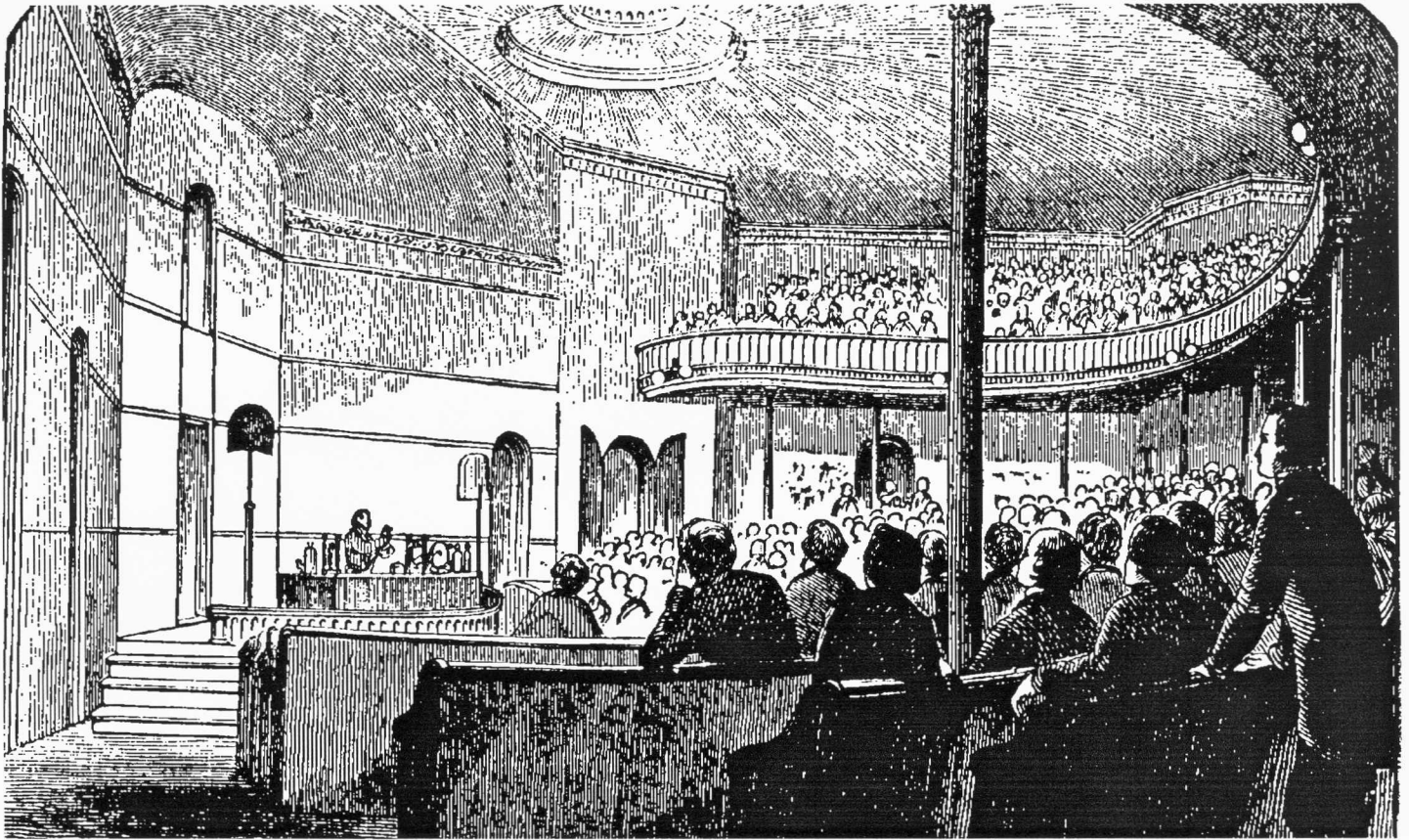
The Museum Hall in 1867.

collections were in transit to the building and were subsequently installed over the next four years, thus establishing the National Museum in the Smithsonian Building.

In 1859, at the suggestion of the museum's first "keeper," John Varden, William J. Rhees included in the Smithsonian's guidebook a detailed guide to the National Museum. The contents of each exhibit

liest days. However, a side of the Museum seldom seen by visitors can be found in John Varden's diary. His September 18, 1862 entry noted: "Took the rounds this morning[,] found the Peruvian mummy very soft & one of the leggs had separated from the boddy[,] tide it up with a peice of twine."

Note: the spelling is as written by Varden. ^{RS}



The Lecture Hall in the Smithsonian Building 1855 - 1865.

THE UPSTAIRS LECTURE HALL

Imagine visiting the Smithsonian Institution Building within ten years of its opening. In those days, there was no elevator to the third floor area occupied by the Woodrow Wilson Center today. To reach that level, visitors and staff climbed one of the twin staircases (the equivalent of two of the present flights), to a door at the top, set in an angled wall. Beyond it was a large auditorium three times the capacity of Baird Auditorium.

The "lecture room" was one hundred feet wide, sixty-two feet deep, and twenty-five feet tall. Angled walls in the corners hid

staircases leading to a horseshoe-shaped balcony. Pew-like bench seats held over 1,500 (twice the capacity of the East Wing lecture hall Secretary Joseph Henry had designed in 1849). The north tower stair landing outside today's Wilson Center reception area was the site of the lecture room's speaker's platform, and above it the ceiling was arched and coved. The room had gaslights, an oval skylight and two tall windows in the south wall. The design of the room afforded clear sight-lines and evidently superb acoustics. In the Smithsonian's *Annual Report for 1854*, Henry stated that "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." This room superseded the earlier lecture room, allowing Henry to renovate

the East Wing as his family living quarters.

For ten years, the lecture room was used for scientific demonstrations, free public lectures, meetings and concerts. Requests (always denied) were even made to use the room for political meetings during the Civil War. The fire of January 1865 destroyed all the upper rooms of the building. The upper floor was finally rebuilt in 1872 as one huge open room, the "Museum Hall" as originally conceived by Smithsonian architects. This has since been divided into two floors of offices and meeting rooms, but the original scale was retained at the far west end, providing a hint of a vanished, but important, space of nineteenth-century Washington.

MCH

Q. Was the Smithsonian Building always called the "Castle?"

A. No. Reference to the building as the "Castle" came into general use during the 1960's as a term of endearment. In fact, the Smithsonian Building bears only slight resemblance to a real medieval castle, lacking the fortifications characteristic of its namesake.

RS



Castle, Manzanares el Real (15th C.) in Central Spain.

JACOB KAINEN

Smithsonian Curator and Artist

In our examination of the history of the Smithsonian building, the contributions of many figures notable in the development of the Institution have come to light. The photograph at right depicts Jacob Kainen, curator in the division of

Graphic Arts from 1946 to 1966, standing with an antique printing press in the "chapel" of the Castle circa 1960.

The elevated platform at center and displays in the vertical cases in the background were part of the newly renovated Graphic Arts exhibition, later installed in the halls of the new Museum of History and Technology (now the National Museum of American History). At the time of the photo-

graph these displays exemplified the vanguard of museum exhibition theory.

Before 1960 numerous glass cases filled with prints, photographs and machinery had packed the West Wing and Range of the Castle. This older style of exhibition, critically dubbed "visual storage," displayed the holdings of the National Museum without attempting to explain their significance (see the photograph, next



Jacob Kainen in the West Wing Hall of Graphic Arts ca. 1960.

page). The new, didactic exhibits, however, were comprised of a few choice examples from the Graphic Arts collection, selected, arranged and labeled for the purpose of educating the museum visitor about the graphic arts. Through the renovation campaign spearheaded by Dr. Leonard Carmichael, the seventh Secretary of the Institution, and Frank A. Taylor, the Director of the new Museum of History and Technology, curators like Jacob Kainen were allocated funds to rework the exhibits of various departments from Numismatics to Agricultural Machinery before their move into the History and Technology building.

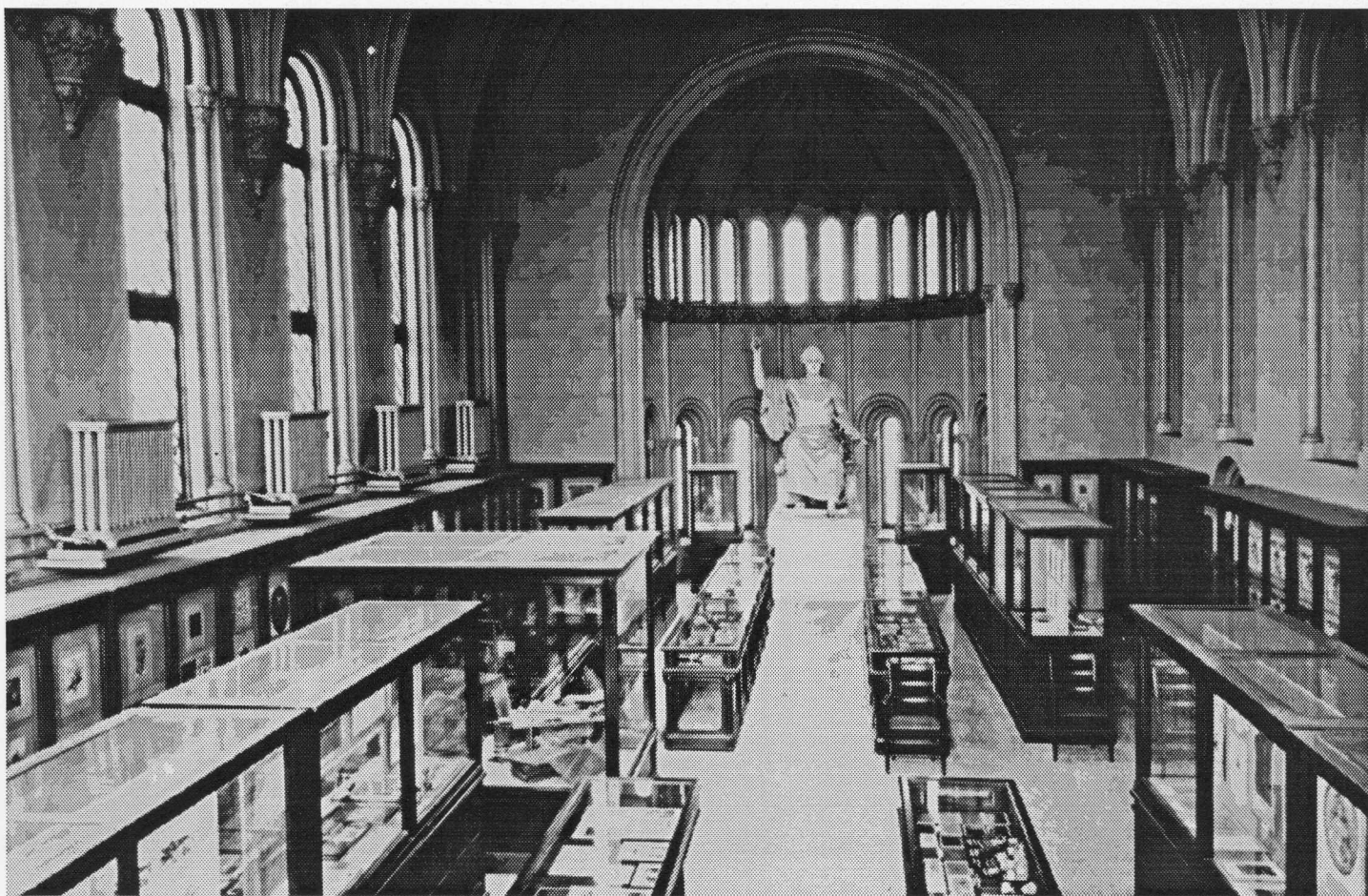
Jacob Kainen made his greatest contribution to the Fine Arts

collection of the Smithsonian in his dedicated acquisition of 19th and 20th century prints. Prior to his arrival as curator, the Smithsonian had not augmented its print collection in nearly half a century. Kainen began to fill the gaps in the collection, buying the museum's first Daumier and assuring that previously neglected modern artists, such as Bonnard, Picasso and Jasper Johns, were also well represented.

In addition to his reputation for fine arts scholarship built during his twenty-year tenure at the Smithsonian, Jacob Kainen has gained some degree of fame in the Washington area as an exceptional artist in his own right. He has produced numerous powerful paint-

ings in the tradition of many major modern American art movements from Social Realism and Expressionism to Abstract Expressionism and Color Field painting. Kainen's distaste for self-promotion, however, has obscured his contribution to the American art scene. The current retrospective exhibit in the National Museum of American Art helps to counterbalance this longstanding oversight. Finally, the curator best remembered for his diligent promotion of modern printmakers receives some of the attention due him as an influential American artist. His paintings will remain in the gallery until January 22.

JO



The West Wing with Graphic Arts exhibits, ca. 1925.

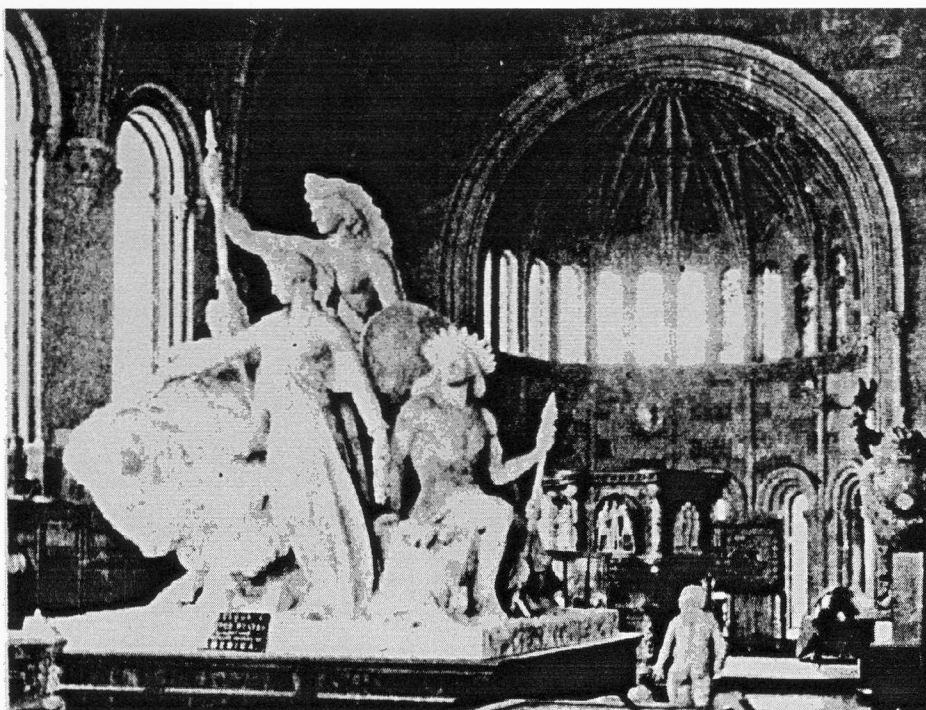


PHOTO-OP

WHAT: Pictured is the colossal sculptural group *America*, a symbolic tribute to the nation on the event of its centennial. This large-scale terra-cotta sculptural group reproduced one of the four marble corner pieces from the Albert Memorial in London's Hyde Park by English architect George Gilbert Scott. The reproduction was fashioned by the English ceramics firm of Henry Doulton & Co. in glazed terra-cotta ware, properly referred to as faience, or Lambeth faience, known for its qualities of delicate rendering and soft tonality. The group *America* exemplifies a nineteenth-century European conception of the naturalistic virility of the New World.

WHERE: The West Wing of the Smithsonian Building, now referred to as the Commons.

WHEN: This photograph, ca. 1879, appearing on page 107 of *The Castle, An Illustrated History of the Smithsonian Building*, shows the sculptural group as it was placed in the Smithsonian at the conclusion of the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

WHY: After the completion of the Centennial Exposition, several specimens and exhibits were donated to the United States National Museum and placed on view in the exhibit halls of the Smithsonian Building. The Henry Doulton & Co. of Lambeth, England loaned this work to the Smithsonian where it was displayed in the West Wing. *America* filled a prominent position in the center of the exhibition hall.

PLM

"OTHER DUTIES AS ASSIGNED"

Does your job description include the words "other duties as assigned"? If so, the following tale may be of interest as you ascend the heights of career development. "Other duties as assigned" may even earn you a place in history.

I came to work at the Smithsonian about a year out of college for James Goode, the 'Keeper' of the Smithsonian Building. At that time, our office dealt exclusively with all concerns about the building. The concerns were far-ranging, from preparing for the visit of Queen Elizabeth II, purchasing a piece of antique furniture, ordering carpet for the Great Hall, or taking care of barn owls.

Secretary S. Dillon Ripley, an ornithologist, determined that a nest of barn owls in one of the towers of the Castle would add even more of a nineteenth-century ambience to the building than mere Victoriana alone. The first pair of barn owls was brought to the Castle in 1971 and left to roost in the southwest tower off the Commons. For whatever reason, they flew the coop. Undeterred, Mr. Ripley decided that we must try, try again, and arranged for a second pair of owls to be delivered from the National Zoo. Since my office dealt with all things concerning the building, it naturally fell to us to take care of the two owls.

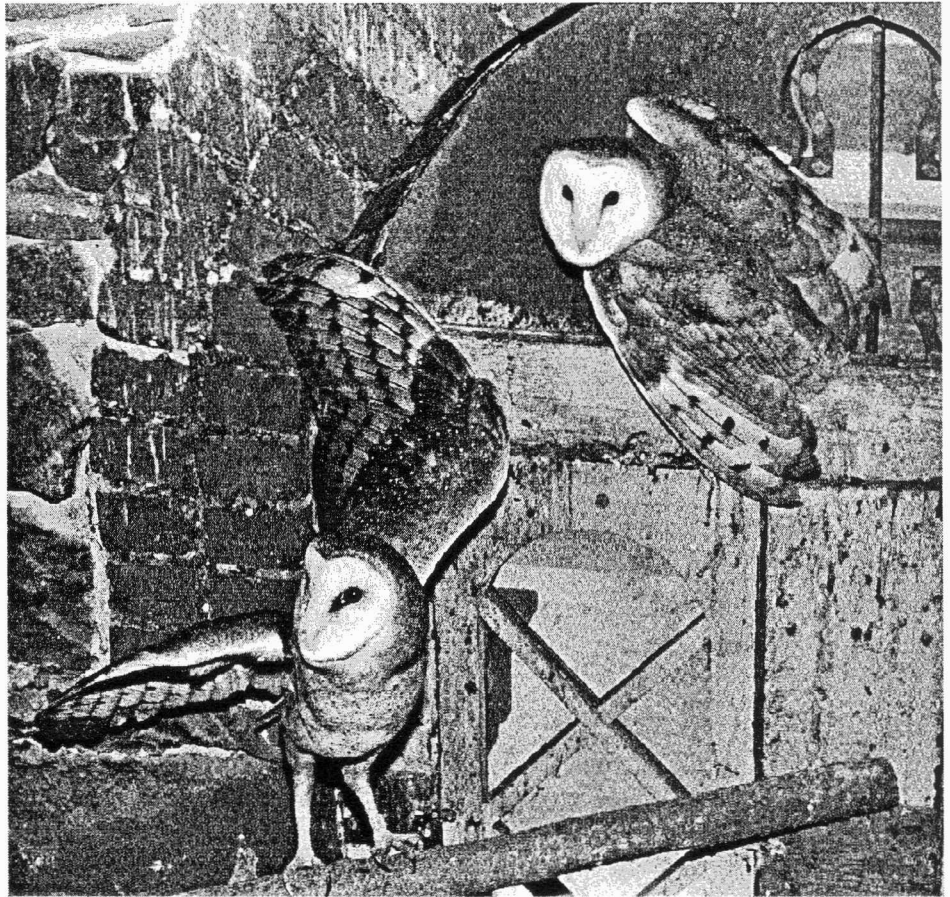
Remember the words "other duties as assigned"? Since I was the junior member of the staff, these words were particularly applicable to me. I was told that I

would have the task of feeding the owls, a "very great honor and responsibility" as it was described to me by James Goode. Not only would I ascend career heights on a wooden ladder to the nest of owls, I would also have the privilege of wearing a jumpsuit that said "National Zoo Birds," and a motorcycle helmet for protection against the owls in case they became alarmed and began to swoop down on me. As I climbed the ladder of success, I would hold a plastic water bottle, and the owls' food, a sack of a dozen freshly-electrocuted dead white mice or six dead white rats, depending on what was available.

In 1977 the owls arrived at their new home in the southwest tower off the Commons. Four times a week the Zoo delivered the owls' food to our basement office, tastefully placed in a black plastic sack. Donning the jumpsuit and gathering my gear, I climbed the ladder (after lunch) and threw open a trap door to the owls' nest. After hoisting myself up, I cleaned up the remains of the previous feeding and placed the fresh food in a corner with some water. I listened for sounds of movement and wrote in a logbook how much food was eaten and the general state of owl life.

It soon became apparent that I could do with some help. I enlisted some volunteers and told them, of course, of the 'very great honor' I was about to bestow upon them. As summer approached, the heat became unbearable, and so did the smell; so I was relieved to become a once-a-week feeder.

Besides creating a nineteenth-century atmosphere, an-



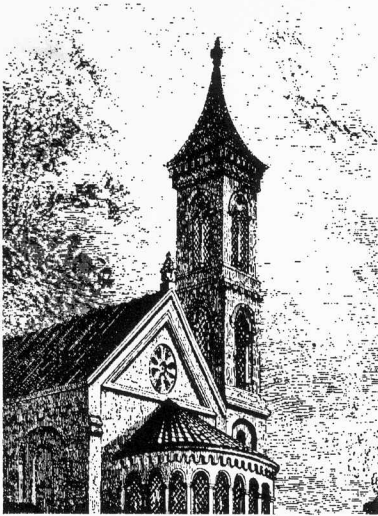
The owls in the West Tower, named "Increase and Diffusion."

other objective to having the owls was for them to have a family. In mid-summer our hopes were rewarded with the arrival of several owlets. The parents became extremely protective so it was necessary to wear the motorcycle helmet at all times. The owls, who were docile up to this point, descended upon me and began to peck at my covered head. Terrified, I quickly climbed down the ladder for the last time.

The brave volunteers kept placing fresh food in the tower and noted the progress of the little family. The Zoo decided that the time had come to open the window and see if the owls would roost. We soon learned that the owls never thought of the tower as their home.

After a few returns to the roost, the owl family beat a very hasty retreat and never returned.

Andy Warhol is cited in Bartlett's Quotations as saying "everyone is famous for fifteen minutes." A few weeks after the owls left the tower, Andy Warhol visited our office. As a collector of Empire furniture, he wanted to see part of our furniture collection. He came to our basement office with his vast entourage. After mumbling hello and shaking hands, his eyes averted to the pile of owl paraphernalia--the jumpsuit, helmet and waterbottle--lying forlornly in a corner. He asked what everything was, and I told him about the owls. He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a tiny instamatic



The West Tower of the Castle.

camera. Before anyone knew what had happened, he took my picture next to the owl paraphernalia. I was told later that he took out his camera at every opportunity during his tour of the Castle. For fifteen minutes, I was "famous" in the eyes of Warhol. In the new book *The Castle, An Illustrated History of the Smithsonian Building* you won't see the Warhol photograph, but you will see a photograph of me obeying the mandate "other duties as assigned" as I ascend the ladder of fame.

AB

Notice

Movement or breakage of any "Castle" collection objects should be reported at the earliest convenience to the OAHP Preservation Studio. E-Mail may be addressed to AHHPEM01, or phone messages may be left at 357-1409.

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