SMITHSONIAN
PRESERVATION
QUARTERLY

THE OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY & HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

THE SECOND ARCHITECT OF THE SMITHSONIAN BUILDING

In August of 1853, the Smithsonian's Board of Regents declared that the work of the original architect, James Renwick, Jr., was done. Lieutenant Barton S. Alexander of the United States Army Corps of Engineers was asked to take up the architect's responsibilities for the slowly progressing Smithsonian Building. Under his supervision, the building was finished in 1855. At that time, between 1851 and 1855, Alexander was also the architect for the Soldiers' Asylum (Home) in northwest Washington, then a remote site. Among the structures he designed was the main building, which is still in use and may be visited. The similarity of style and public function of this building to the Smithsonian Building prompts us to ask about possible influences on Alexander.

As a member of the Corps of Engineers, Alexander received his training at West Point. Alexander was a diligent student, correcting his entering weakness in mathematics to graduate 7th in the Class of 1842. Based on the curriculum at the rigorous Ecole Polytechnique in France, West Point's engineering course was the closest to professional architectural education then available in the United States.

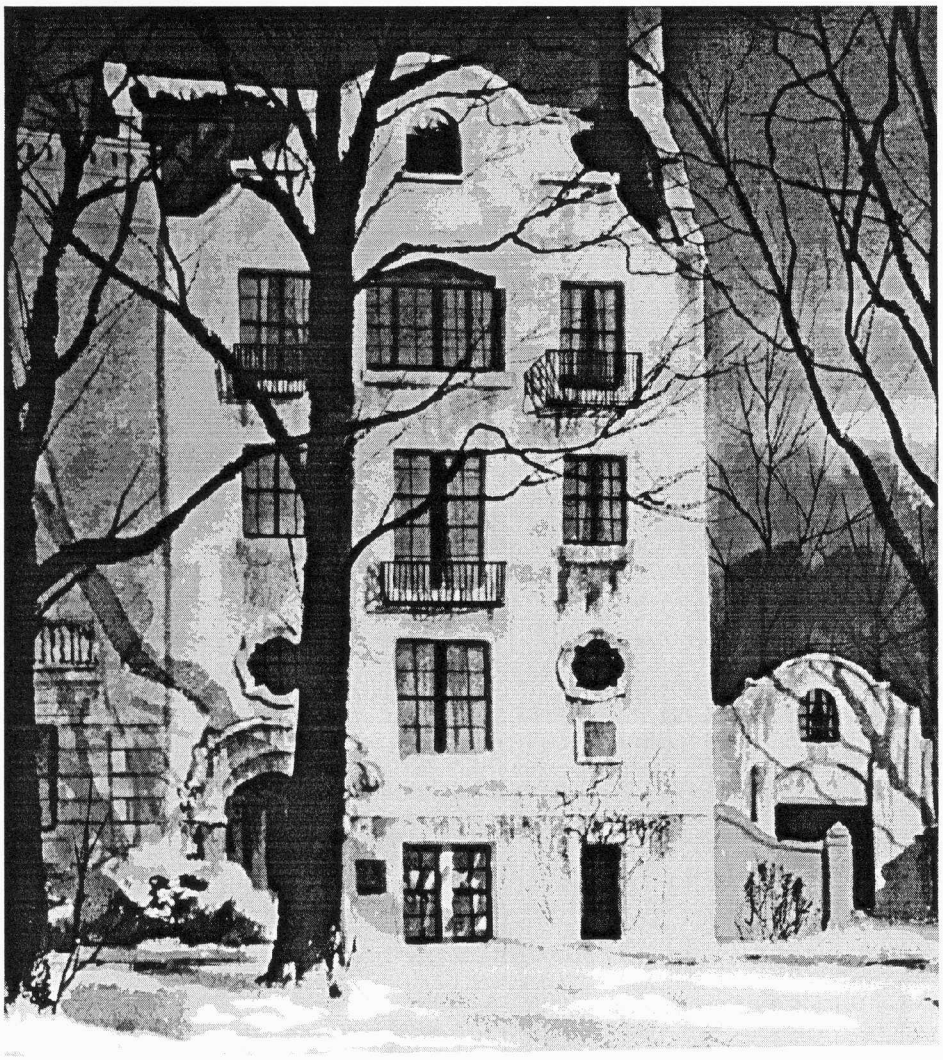
The first West Point design to break with the modest Georgian of the original buildings was the library with classrooms and observatory designed by Robert Mills, the first trained American architect. This building was under construction while Alexander was a student (cadet) at West Point between 1838 and 1842. Before Alexander returned to the campus as Treasurer and Superintending Engineer, the medieval style, favored by then Superintendent Delafield, was used both for the Central Barracks designed in 1840-43 by Frederick Diaper of New York City and for modest support buildings as well.

After a few other postings, Alexander returned to West Point in 1848 as Treasurer and Superintending Engineer for the Cadets' Barracks and Mess Hall. Alexander's intimate knowledge of the West Point buildings would have made him familiar with the use of the medieval revival or Tudor style for academic buildings.

Alexander's main building for the Soldiers' Home resembled Diaper's Central Barracks building in style and building material. Both were in the late medieval or Tudor style with rectangular windows marked by flat moldings called "labels" and both were of grey stone, smoothly finished. The Mills building influenced both of the Washington buildings in the use of a prominent central entrance marked by a tower. West Point provided sources for Barton Alexander which made him a good choice for both medieval revival Washington buildings of the 1850s.

CRF

INSIDE:



"Barney Studio House," by F. Petrie, gift of Mrs. L. Turner.

BARNEY STUDIO HOUSE: A NATIONAL TREASURE

The Smithsonian Institution owns two buildings which were once private residences: the Carnegie Mansion (now the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum), completed in 1902 as the New York City home of industrialist Andrew Carnegie, and Barney Studio House, the residence of Alice Pike Barney, a patron of the Washington arts scene in the early 20th century. While both properties are important for their architectural and cultural significance, only the Carnegie Mansion is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register, maintained by the Secretary of the Interior, is the official list of properties in the United States which are worthy of preservation for their important contributions through architecture, history, archaeology, engineering, and/or culture to our Nation's history. On 15 December, the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Review Board heard the petition by the Smithsonian to designate Barney Studio House to the National Register by virtue of its architectural and cultural significance to Washington, D.C. and the nation.

Few Smithsonian staff and members of the public may be familiar with this architectural jewel located on Sheridan Circle and Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. One notices the house immediately - a unique island in a sea of grand Beaux Arts mansions which were constructed at the same time as Studio House.

Alice Pike was born in 1857 to a wealthy Cincinnati, Ohio family. Always interested in the arts, she traveled extensively to Europe before and after her marriage to Albert Barney in 1876. During her European visits, she met and studied with several of the great artists of the day, and attended salons, or gatherings, in their homes.

With her husband, Alice Barney moved to Washington, D.C. in 1889, but the ensuing years saw the couple veer apart in interests, leading relatively separate lives. Shortly before Albert's death in 1902, Alice began to design the house of her dreams, one in which she could entertain and educate Washington, D.C. society in her great love, the arts and letters.

Alice Barney worked closely with young Washington, D.C. architect Waddy B. Wood to design a house which would convey to her guests a sense of her lifestyle. Alice provided Wood with suggestions and sketches gathered from her visits to artists' studios. She was

interested in fine craftsmanship and was on-site during much of the construction of intricately-carved wood balconies and the installation of tile floors, performance stages, enormous mirrors and stained-glass windows. The split-level rooms contained furniture in several styles, including art nouveau, aesthetic and the arts and crafts, which reflected the many interests of Alice. Enhancing the furniture were oriental rugs, Venetian glass, pillows, artwork, and objets d'art collected during Alice's world travels. The whole interior was housed in brick and limestone with a stucco- facade, red-tiled roof and windows of various shapes and sizes, very reminiscent of a Mediterranean villa in the south of France, not Washington, D.C. In July 1903 Alice celebrated the completion of her house by holding an open house to which she invited all the workmen in addition to her friends. Newspapers of the day recount that the house was a resounding success.

During Alice's residence in her studio house, she entertained a glittering array of guests from President Theodore Roosevelt to Sarah Bernhardt, the most famous actress of her day. She held theatrical productions, art exhibitions, teas and dinners in her studio house to further the cause of the arts in Washington, D.C. It was at a dinner in 1916 at Barney Studio House that Alice sowed the seeds for the funding and construction of the Sylvan Theatre on the grounds of the Washington Monument. She also founded Neighborhood House, an arts and crafts school with one of the first day-care centers, and sponsored benefits for the victims of the San Francisco Earthquake and the soldiers and their families of World War I.

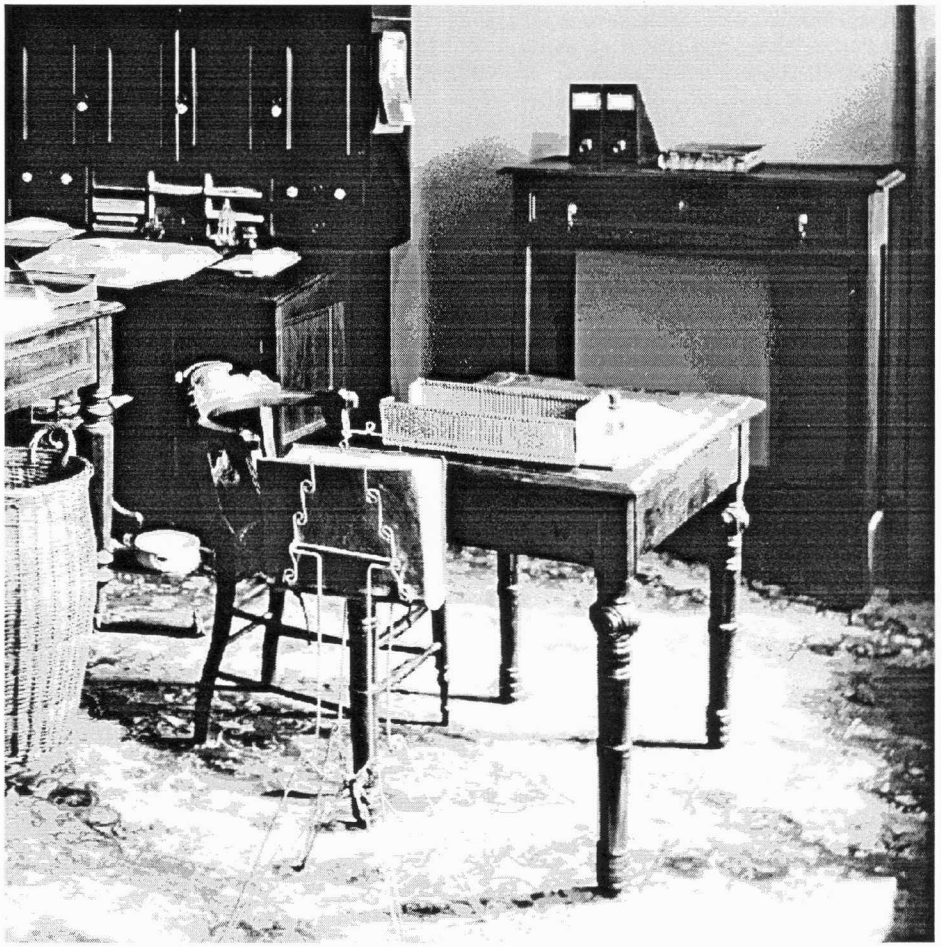
Alice Barney died in 1931. In 1961 her daughters Laura and Natalie gave Studio House to the Smithsonian for use as an art center. The house, administered by the National Museum of American Art, housed guest scholars and a variety of Smithsonian offices during the next several years. In addition, lectures, art exhibits and theatricals were held in the house, very much as Alice Barney did in the early 20th century. Today, Barney Studio House is vacant except for its furnishings and a guest scholar in residence.

It is hoped as a result of the public hearing that the importance of Barney Studio House and Alice Pike Barney will become evident to a wider audience than ever before.

AB

LOST AND FOUND

In the last issue of Preservation Quarterly we reported on four auctions held in the 1930 and in 1955 to dispose of unwanted furniture in the Smithsonian's oldest building, the Castle ("History For Sale," Spring/Summer 1994). Not all of the Institution's nineteenth century furniture was lost to these auctions; some pieces have been identified from old photographs and accessioned into various Smith-



Library table in Spencer Fullerton Baird's office, 1878.

sonian collections. In the photograph accompanying the article, taken in 1878 of then secretary Spencer F. Baird's office, two pieces of furniture were visible which today are part of the Smithsonian's collections. Baird's Wooten desk is in the collection of the Division of Political History and his swivel chair is in the OAHP Castle Collection. The Wooten desk can be seen in the Centennial Exhibition in the Arts and Industries Building. Recently, a third piece of Baird's furniture, long thought to be "lost," has surfaced: a small library table.

The table had been in use in the curatorial offices of the National Museum of American History (NMAH) for the past thirty years, moved there in 1964 from the Smithsonian's second oldest building, the Arts and Industries Building. It had never been an accessioned collection object. When the air conditioning systems in NMAH were upgraded last summer, many offices were forced to relocate temporarily during construction. As a result, we were notified that there were a few pieces of unwanted nineteenth century office furniture which might be of use in the Castle Collection. Since the collection's primary function is to furnish the offices of the Castle with period furnishings (see "Happy Anniversary," Preservation Quarterly, Spring/Summer, 1994,) we examined the pieces, found them to be appropriate to the collection, and accepted the transfer.

Unknown at the time of the transfer was the table's historic significance. It appeared at first to be just one of many mass-produced tables dating from the 1870s or 1880s of which we have several in the collection. That it happened to match a table visible in the 1878 photograph of Baird's office was first thought to be a coincidence. However, during the cataloguing process, physical evidence began to surface which led us to conclude that our table and the one pictured in Baird's office were one and the same.

Examination of the photograph of the office through a 20-power magnifying glass revealed a distinguishing feature (or more accurately an imperfection) on the table... a triangular shaped gouge in the right side apron of the table. The accessioned table has a gouge of the same shape and size and in the exact location.

Recent research conducted in the Smithsonian Archives on an early inventory system for Smithsonian property further strengthened the attribution. Numbers were stamped onto the Smithsonian's furniture in the 1870s to distinguish them from furniture belonging to the National Museum, which occupied space in the building. Several memos and inventories exist in the archives documenting the process. Although no inventories of the secretary's office bearing this particular number have been located to date, one has been found of the Chief Clerk's office, which in 1878 adjoined the Secretary's office. The furniture in that office was identified with a brief description and their identification numbers were listed - beginning with #322 and ending with #353. The Castle Collection table is stamped #301. While such circumstantial evidence is not conclusive by itself for an attribution, when it is combined with the visual evidence, it becomes more compelling.

With the approach of the Smithsonian's 150th anniversary in 1996, the discovery of a "lost" object from the Smithsonian Building is especially fortuitous. We hope to locate more Smithsonian-related furniture from the nineteenth century, as the study of the Institution's material culture is a tangible way to learn more about the way the building was used during its first decades.

RS

MOMENTO MORI

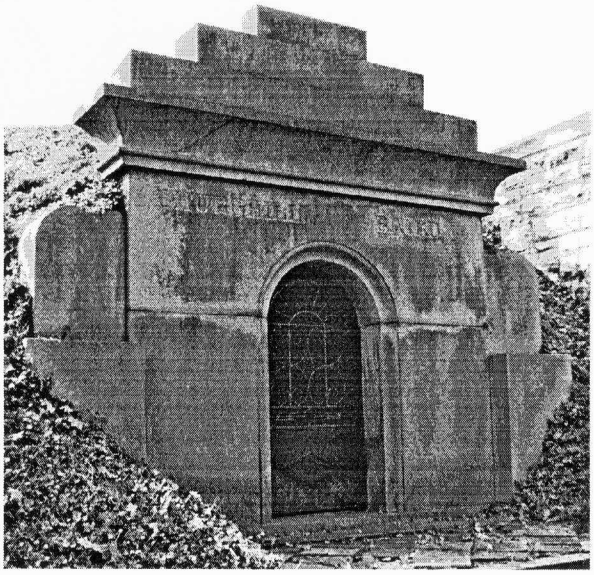
During the late 1840s and 1850s, a Romantic vision was taking shape on the National Mall: James Renwick, Jr.'s Romanesque Smithsonian Building was rising, to be surrounded by a "naturalistic" urban park designed by Andrew Jackson Downing. At the same time, W. W. Corcoran employed the same vision in planning Oak Hill Cemetery in Georgetown. The

Granite marker on Joseph and Harriet Henry's grave.

Rural Cemetery Movement was taking hold across the country, in fact changing the American landscape. The idea was to provide restful, pastoral settings where city dwellers could bury and memorialize their dead. The Cemetery of Père Lachaise opened outside Paris in 1804, inspiring Boston's Mount Auburn (1831), Philadelphia's Laurel Hill (1836), Brooklyn's Greenwood (1838) and Richmond's Hollywood (1849). People of that time enjoyed cemeteries as parks, which provided picturesque landscapes, an atmosphere of history and spiritual communion, and instructive, uplifting memorials. Oak Hill Cemetery is a beautiful and carefully-preserved example of the movement, and is linked to the Smithsonian for two reasons.

Firstly, James Renwick, Jr. was working at Oak Hill while supervising the construction of the Smithsonian Building. He designed the cemetery's iron fence, gate posts, and chapel. The gate posts are nearly identical to those Renwick designed for the "Castle," but only recently constructed at the entrance to the Enid A. Haupt Garden in the Castle's south yard. The chapel at Oak Hill was built in 1849 of black granite, in a handsome but restrained Gothic Revival style. The exterior trim on this structure, as well as the gate posts, is the same red Seneca sandstone used in the Castle's construction. The details and workmanship of this stonework, including colonnettes, corbels and finials, are entirely consistent with the Castle's decorative stone work.

Secondly, the first two Secretaries of the Smithsonian Institution are buried in Oak Hill Cemetery. Joseph Henry died in his bedroom in the Castle in May 1878. His grave is marked with a squat, capped obelisk of rough-cut pink granite, accented with polished panels. This also marks the grave of his wife, Harriet. Their three unmarried daughters, Mary, Helen, and Caroline, were later buried on the same plot. Mary, the eldest, died in Seville, Spain in 1903, but Caroline, the youngest, specified in her will of 1912 that Mary's remains be brought to Oak Hill. This will also provided that the siblings' graves have markers of the same stone and lettering as their parents'. Names and dates of death are the only inscriptions. The family plot is on a knoll above Rock Creek, called "Henry Crescent" due to its shape. (Henry's only son, Will, had died in the Castle in 1862 of unspecified causes, and was buried in Princeton, N.J. His remains were not, however, re-united with those of his immediate family.)



The Churchill/Baird mausoleum in Oak Hill Cemetery.

Spencer Fullerton Baird, who succeeded Henry as Secretary of the Smithsonian, died in 1887 at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, where he had established a marine biological laboratory. He was buried at Oak Hill after funeral services were held in the cemetery's chapel. Baird shares a mausoleum with his wife's family, the Churchills, including his wife Mary, and their daughter Lucy. Both family names are inscribed on the grey granite facade, which is a severe example of an ancient tomb form. The iron gate provides the only ornament, and those who seek funerary iconography may see the Holy Trinity in the tripartite grille, and the new life of resurrection in the sunburst which surmounts it. The eight white marble markers inside the mausoleum cite dates and places of birth and death, as well as family relationship or title. (Baird's marker imprecisely records that he died at "Wood's Hall," not "Woods Hole;" unfortunately, the process of "writing in stone" does not preclude typographical errors!)

These monuments are unlike the many exuberant Victorian memorials in Oak Hill Cemetery. Here are no wordy epitaphs, florid carving or decorative plantings; no symbolism, sentiment or Romance. These markers are simple, noble and austere: fit reminders of the scientific, thoughtful men who shaped the Smithsonian Institution in its early years.

Oak Hill Cemetery is located at 30th and R Streets, N.W., and is open to the public Monday through Friday, from 10 to 4 o'clock. OAHP thanks the Superintendent and the Board of Directors for allowing photography privileges.

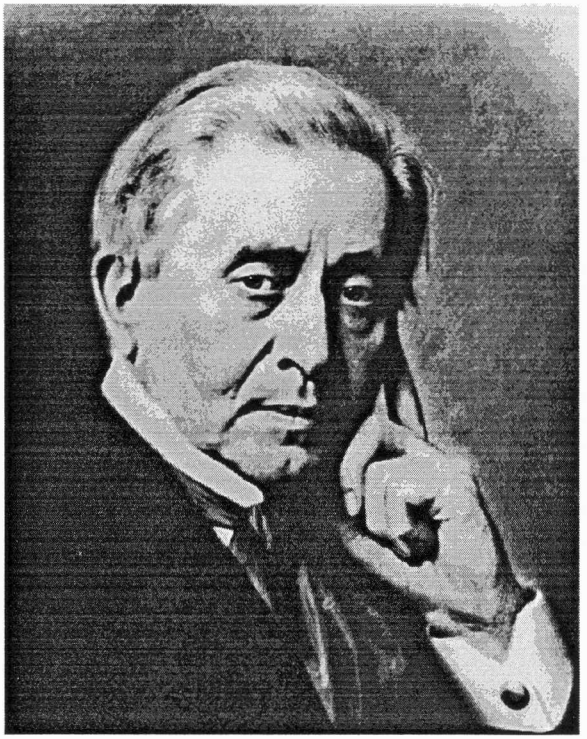
MCH

AN EXHIBITION OF SECRETARIES' PORTRAITURE HONORS THE INSTITUTION'S HISTORY

With the arrival of I. Michael Heyman to the helm of the Institution as the tenth Secretary of the Smithsonian, it is fitting to reflect on the Office of Secretary and direct our attention to the displays of Secretaries' portraiture which are located on the second floor, East Wing of the Castle, in the Secretary's Parlor, and on the third floor of the south tower, in the Regents' Room.

The offices of the Secretary are located in the space formerly occupied as living quarters for the first Secretary, Joseph Henry and his family on the second floor of the East Wing. The rooms of the Henry apartments were demolished in the 1884 renovation and fireproofing of the East Wing. Additional floors were constructed in the wing, but the 1884 floorplan ressembles that of the Henry apartments with the rooms arranged around a central hallway. Today, this hallway is furnished with examples of the American Empire period, to create an historical ambience which compliments this great building and serves as an appropriate setting for this exhibition.

The portraits of the secretaries are arranged chronologically along the second floor hallway with two important exceptions. One is the portrait of William Jervis Hough which hangs over the fireplace in the Regents' Room, overlooking the Enid Haupt Garden. The other exception is the portrait of Joseph Henry above the mantle of the Secretary's Parlor, a meeting room adjoining the Secretary's office.

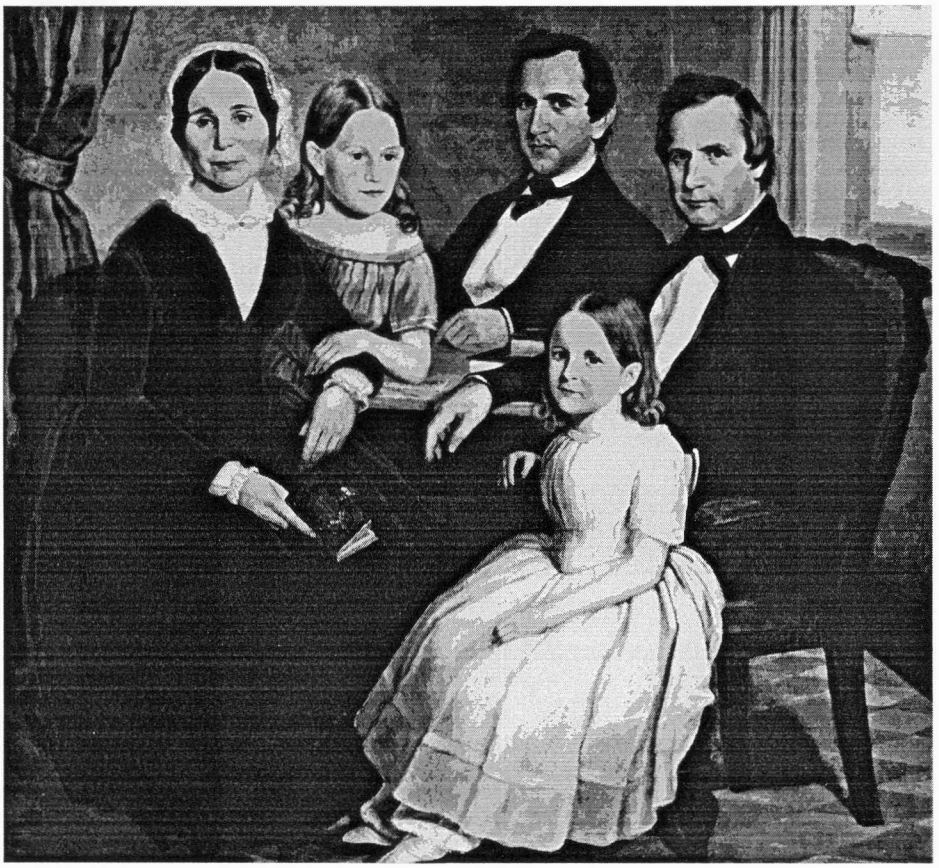


Joseph Henry, by Henry Ulke, 1875, NPG.

The Honorable William Jervis Hough (1795-1869), was one of the first Regents of the Smithsonian. After drafting the final legislation establishing the Institution in September 1846, Hough was elected to serve as interim-Secretary until Joseph Henry was installed three months later. The Hough family portrait, which depicts Hough, his wife, son and two daughters, was painted by J. Brayton Wilcox in about 1848, after expiration of the New York Congressman's single term in the U.S. House of Representatives.

First Secretary Joseph Henry, a physics professor from Princeton University and one of the preeminent scientists of the nineteenth century in the field of electromagnetism, held the position of Secretary from his appointment in 1846 to his death in 1878. Secretary Henry struggled to focus the resources of the fledgling Institution on original scientific experimentation and research, emphasizing the Institution's mission to increase the store of human knowledge. Henry's 1875 portrait, by Henry Ulke, hangs in the Secretary's Parlor, which is centered within the East Wing, facing the Capitol.The Henry portrait is a large painting of the Secretary, pensively seated in a scroll arm chair with the left hand supporting his head, finger on temple. Mr. Henry, holding a quill pen in his right hand, appears to pause in correspondence and focus on the viewer. On his desk are sheets of stationery, early "Smithsonian Annual Reports" and volumes of the Institution's "Contributions to Knowledge."

The eight succeeding Secretaries' portraits are displayed in an adjacent arrangement on the second floor hallway. Here the portraits, all of which are on loan from the National Portrait Gallery, offer an outline of the Institution's history. Each portrait has a biographical label prepared by a curatorial team led by Susan Bradley of the Secretary's office. The display begins to the left of the landing with the 1887 portrait of Spencer Fullerton Baird, painted in the last year of the Secretary's life by Henry Ulke, and ends with the 1994 portrait of Secretary Emeritus Robert McCormick Adams, by



Wm Jervis Hough Family, by J. Brayton Wilcox, ca. 1848, NPG.

New York artist Burton P. Silverman. The Adams portrait is complimented by an Empire pier table, which stood for ten years in the front hall of his Washington home during his tenure as the ninth Secretary.

The second, third and fourth Secretaries, Baird, Langley and Walcott, are portrayed in three-quarter views against deep atmospheric backgrounds in gilded frames. The face of each man is the central subject of these portraits, projecting luminously from darkened, obscure backgrounds. Continuing along the hallway, the portrait of Secretary Charles Greeley Abbot, painted by Nicholas Brewer in 1935, is the largest painting in the group. Abbot is shown seated in an armchair against a background of library books, expressing the learned sitter's intellectual interests and pursuits.

The next three portraits were painted by the artist Albert K. Murray. The portrait of Secretary Alexander Wetmore was painted in 1959, and both Secretaries Leonard Carmichael and S. Dillon Ripley were painted by Murray in 1968. With the addition of various pictorial attributes, such as bird specimens, an academic robe or books, these portraits, and the Adams portrait by Silverman, employ the canvas to tell something more about the men they portray. All of these portraits and their biographical labels, arrayed within the historical ambience of the East Wing, second floor hallway, form an interesting and attractive exhibition of Smithsonian history. Anyone with an interest in the history of the Institution may wish to seek out this small exhibition.

PLM

THE LAST ACT: PART ONE

The Enola Gay has become a central figure in a recent debate over historical accuracy and perspective, as an artifact from a very controversial event in American history: the dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The planned Air and Space exhibit, "The Last Act", which includes a section of the fuselage of the plane, has received much criticism for its attempt to interpret the significance of this event. This debate is not unique to this decade, however. Neither is the Enola Gay's role as the center of controversy. One fragment of this artifact, the Norden bombsight produced by the Victor Adding Machine Company, has already proved a problematic subject for Smithsonian historians in at least one past exhibition, as a correspondence between Secretary Ripley and a Smithsonian visitor dating to August 1975 reveal.

In 1975 the bombsight was featured in an exhibit on World War II aircraft installed in the metal shed which was for many years located behind the Castle building. The exhibit included the bombsight as an important advancement in the technological development of bombing equipment. Two letters were displayed along with the artifact itself: one from the bombadier praising its ease of operation and precision, the other from the manufacturer expressing his honor at having his instrument selected for the historic drop. A visitor to the Smithsonian wrote a brief letter to Secretary Ripley expressing his distress at this display. He added that his discomfort increased when "... I realized I was

standing next to several Japanese nationals (tourists) who were visibly shaken by what they saw."

The Secretary's written response made two main points. First, he indicated that the Smithsonian had no intention of celebrating the bombing of Hiroshima and that the emphasis of the exhibit was on the technological development of bombsights. Second, he agreed that "...the two letters are superfluous..." and added that "...they are to be removed shortly when this exhibit is dismantled and redone in the Hall of World War II Aviation of the new National Air and Space Museum that will open 4 July 1976." He also indicated that the photomural of the mushroom cloud included with the letters would be removed. The exhibit, as it exists today, displays the Norden bombsight but refrains from commenting extensively on its use in the bombing of Hiroshima.

The visitor concluded his letter by stating that "...this exhibit shows none of the perspective gained in the nearly thirty years since the event took place..." and suggests that a "moral reevaluation" of the bombing of Hiroshima is needed. No easy task, as recent events at the National Air and Space Museum indicate, even with twenty additional years of perspective.

RJO

CONTACTS IN OAHP

» Cynthia R. Field, Director, OAHP.....357-2064

» Amy Ballard, Historic Preservation Specialist.....357-2571

» Rick Stamm, Keeper, OAHP "Castle" Collection.....357-4986

» Peter Muldoon, Restoration Specialist, OAHP "Castle" Collection....357-1409

» Robert J. Orr, Architectural Historian.....357-2064

» Michael Hendron, Restoration Specialist OAHP "Castle" Collection...357-1409

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