Declare Vinland
Proposal from Toad Tower
By John White

Editor's note—John White, an information officer at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, Cambridge, Mass., holds a doctorate in mythology from the University of Edinburgh. He is the lone resident of Toad Tower, N.H. Let it be said that he is also alone so far as the Smithsonian and the TORC are concerned in offering the following proposal. Look Out Vinland Here We Come! So where was Vinland?

That place has been lost for more than 500 years now—and it must be right under our nose, or our feet—can't it be about time somebody found it again?—or anyway decreed it??

And for "somebody" read Smithsonian. Why? Why not??

Read on . . .

We all know, overf ofly, that Christopher Columbus was not Numero Uno. We all know, overflying, that Columbus was not Numero Uno. We all know, overflying, that Columbus was not Numero Uno.

Sagas and other well-published evidence including many many books have informed us that the first Europeans to reach the New World were Vikings from the North American continent in about 1000. Jays sweeper, primitive Indians and/or Eskimos, they soon abandoned that colony. During the next five hundred years there was little recorded traffic with Vinland. The great Viking push to the west, (continued on page 4.)

Vinland led by Thorfinn Karlsefni started an American colony in the first European born in America was not the English girl Virginia Dare, born in 1588, but the Norse boy Njal Thorthorn, born in 1099, but because of trouble with the natives, primitive Indians and/or Eskimos, they soon abandoned that colony. During the next five hundred years there was little recorded traffic with Vinland. The great Viking push to the west, (continued on page 4.)

The Invention of the Sewing Machine

Elias Howe? No, Says Grace Rogers Cooper

Elias Howe? Every fifth-grader knows that he invented the sewing machine. Even such basic college texts as Hicks' The Federal Union give him credit. But not Mrs. Grace Rogers Cooper, curator of SI's Division of Textiles.

"When I disagree with your fifth grade history book, I don't mean to discredit Howe," she says. "He made an important contribution." But Mrs. Cooper has in her collection three U.S. patent models for mechanical sewing devices that pre-date Howe.

The first mechanical device of any kind was English and dates to 1790. Thomas Saint created a machine so unsuccessful that no one even knew about it until the late 19th century, when historians started tracing the sewing machine's development.

Mrs. Grace Rogers Cooper, curator of textiles, shows off two mechanical sewing devices that preceded that of Elias Howe, generally acknowledged as the machine's inventor. In the foreground is the 1842 leather stitcher by John Greenough. Mrs. Cooper holds an 1843 machine by Benjamin Bean.

Americans didn't get into the act until 1832, when Walter Hunt, an inventor who also has the fountain pen, safety pin, and suction shoes for walking on the ceiling to his credit, created the lock stitch. It was the first attempt to create a new machine stitch instead of imitating hand sewing, but, although the development was published, Hunt did not patent the idea.

The first American patent was not taken until 1842. John Greenough fashioned a machine primarily for stitching leather, with a two-pointed needle pulled by pinchers. The patent model is in the Smithsonian collections, but there is no record of any commercial use.

A year later Benjamin Bean came up with a machine designed for conventional sewing. Fabric was fed through a shuttle which crimped it for a bent needle to make a basic running stitch. The Bean model is also in the textile collections, and, like the other models, will be on display in a special room when the textile hall opens in MHT in January. Two more machines—one of them, for sewing leather, is in the SI collections—intervened before Mr. Howe received his patent in 1846. His was, according to Mrs. Cooper, very similar in idea to Walter Hunt's unpatented model of 14 years earlier. It sewed straight seams with a lock stitch made with an eye-pointed needle and shuttle. The fabric was carried on a baster plate that had to be reset every six inches.

Interestingly—though he is now credited with invention of the machine that was the first widely advertised consumer appliance, led to broadscale installment buying and revolutionized clothing manufacture—Howe never made a sale of this model in his own country. Instead, he went to England to market it.

Why, against all of this background, is Howe remembered as the inventor of the sewing machine rather than one major contributor to its development?

The answer, Mrs. Rogers reports, lies in a series of law suits he brought against other manufacturers for infringement of his patent after he returned from England in 1849.

The courts upheld Howe's right to control the use of needle and shuttle to form a stitch, and from then until 1867 in cooperation with his machines carried the Howe name to show that royalties had been paid. From this use of his name, Howe's reputation was made.

Mrs. Cooper's account of Howe's role is included in a new book by her to be published by the Smithsonian Institution Press. The book, The Invention of the Sewing Machine, will come out in May.
BOOK REVIEW

The Naked Ape: Titillating Title Inaccurate

by John Napier

What's in a title? A great deal if it happens to be "The Naked Ape." —a splendid, provocative title that could only be improved upon according to the traditional tenets of journalism by substitution of the word "made" for "naked." Salaciously redolent of juvenile, titillating sex suggestive of the beast in man and late-night horror movies, "The Naked Ape" must be the all-time Title of the Year. Unfortunately, however, as a title, it is wholly inapposite in every particular, standing with "The"

Desmond Morris draws all his human comparisons from the typical behavior of the typical naked apes (my italics) by which he means "ordinary (sic), successful" members of major cultures. He excludes primitive tribal groups from consideration on the grounds that they are not primitive but live in cultural backwaters, his judgment based largely on civilized Western myth and custom. Thus his comparisons rest on the ethological significance of certain behavior patterns, meaningfully be made as representations of a viable sample of mankind? Is it really true, for instance, that mutual hair-grooming behavior, or "aloof-hairiness" as it might be called, is as heavily loaded with erotic significance as the "aloof-hairiness" in the movie "Ben Hur," or is it in Hampstead Garden Suburb? Survival value, in Desmond Morris' view of this sort, which Morris would condemn as improper in a zoological context, cannot be judged as a reliable philosophy in an anthropological one? Man himself, in the past, is a book about one of them. My first amendment, therefore, is to replace "ape" with "man."

It is unnecessary to elaborate on the numerous misrepresentations of mankind, e.g. the "naked". The relative lightness of the human pelt is admitted, but there is so much variation at racial level, ranging from the hirsute Ainu to their ghastly mongolian neighbors; there is also considerable variation at individual level (a matter of common observation) that the term is, to say the least, tendentious. Amendment 2: Replace "naked" with "Hairless."

Ape? Anthropologists have for years been striving to erase the missing-link concept from evolutionary thinking. Man descended from the ancestors of apes, ergo man is a make-over ape. This trap innocently set by Darwin and persistently fed by the wry humor of Huxley and Haackel has consistently enmeshed its victim ever since. Man's ancestors were not apes. Man is not any kind of ape any more than a monkey is a monkey or a lemur is a lemur. Ape are today's chimpanzees, gorillas, orangutans and gibbons, the evolutionary outcome of the ape way of life, a specialization that when preyed upon modern apes, is a book about one of them. My first amendment, therefore, is to replace "ape" with "man."

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Thus in the cause of scientific ac­curacy Desmond Morris' book should have been entitled "A Hairless Man"—but what could the Sunday papers have been able to do with that?

In many ways, zoological criticism notwithstanding, "Naked Ape" is one of the most important books of the decade. Man is an animal, a vertebrate, a mammal, a primate; and it is in the awareness of this ancestry that Man learns to exist. He learns to exist in the role in which, simply stated, is pre-eminent and therefore totally re­lative to his group. "The Naked Ape" had to be written.

Dr. Napier, like Morris a Britisher, is at the Smithsonian to establish an inter­national program in primate research.

March Lunchbox Speakers Listed

March speakers for the National Air and Space Museum's lunchbox talks on Wednesdays at noon on the second floor of A&I, will include:

March 13—Dr. Jane Phillips, associate professor Howard University, and former UNRAA officer, "Refugee Problem in the East."


March 27—Paul E. Garber, assistant director, NASA, "The Robert J. Collier Trophy Story."


Local Academic Affairs Office Set

The Institution has established a spe­cial office for local academic affairs, to cooperate with the Consortium of Uni­versities of the Washington Metropolitan Area and help its member institutions and to assist in the development of the American School of Classical Studies and a number of other organizations. The Academic Affairs Committee on the Preservation of Manuscripts and Sites. All interested staff members are invited to attend.

Howland Lecture

Dr. Richard H. Howland, newly named Special Assistant to the Secretary and former director of the Division of Civil History, will speak to participants in the American Institute for Pre- and Early History, American School of Classical Studies and a number of other organizations.

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The Delean Gallery of the NPG features vaulted ceiling and sandstone columns. At the end of the corridor is the office of NPG director Charles Nagel.

'Greatest Building in World' Awaits Crowds

The Old Patent Office, called "the greatest building in the world" by architect Philip John­son, is one of Washington's most historic structures. It also is the home of the National Collection of Fine Arts and the National Portrait Gallery. The former will open its doors to the public the first week in May. NPG will follow in September.

Actually, neither Smithsonian museum would be housed in the 128-year-old structure had Congress passed a proposed bill in the 1950's to tear down the building to make room for a parking lot!

That piece of proposed legislation caused such a stir that Congress transferred the build­ing to the Smithsonian and appropriated $546,000 for repairs and construction.

The imposing Greek Revival building was conceived at a time when the Nation's Capital was little more than a swamp, when Pennsyl­vania Avenue was mud in winter, dust in sum­mer, and livestock ran through the streets.

The site selected for the building was a green common on the hill originally designated by Major Pierre L'Enfant for a great national cathedral.

Modeled after the Parthenon and designed primarily for use of the Patent Office and ex­hibition of patent models, the structure also was used for the government's collection of science, history, and art.

It was, in effect, the first federal museum.

The Old Patent Office

After all these years and myriad occupants the Old Patent Office Building will, in form and function, again display evidence of Amer­ican creativity for the millions of persons who visit Washington and its historical and cultural attractions each year.

A spiral staircase leads to the old Model Hall.

Photos by James Duggins

Abraham Lin­coln's second in­augural ball was held in this NCFA gallery, columned with shafts of solid marble discovered by restorers under layers of "gov­ernment green" paint.

The elegant third-floor foyer of the National Portrait Gallery, part of the 1880's restoration area of the building.
Incoming Mail Has Always Brought Bizarre Requests
by Gayle Gordon

Throughout his history the Smithsonian has repeatedly received hundreds of requests for information, scientific papers, applications for employment and other materials concerning the day to day operation of the Institution. In each batch of incoming mail there have always been a few non-conformists requesting bizarre questions that test the ingenuity of the Registrar's Office, whose duty it is to direct the mail.

Today, they usually go either to the Office of Public Affairs, the Archives, or to the curatorial office directly concerned.

In the early years of the Institution, however, all mail went directly to the first Secretary, Joseph Henry, who painstakenly answered every question, no matter how outrageous or ridiculous the letter. Later, as the Institution grew, the letters were directed to one man, designated by employees as "F.K." or the Fool Killer. Concerning tests he had to reply to people who wrote, for instance:

"What would you pay for a genuine petrified body of a Mexican man that had been buried for 2,000 years in the desert of Arizona? Has one mouth, 4 eyes, 8 legs and 2 tails?"

The general answer to such offers was often times:

"We do not have in stock, nor can we order one. The Institution has no funds to pay for such items."

Not all of the especially interesting letters were rejected of course. Employment application requests for employment and other materials generally got through. Sometimes, if you were a well known scientist or someone with a reputation for sending letters requesting or giving only information—such letters may be put on file for future reference. I may be permitted to say, however, that they are occasionally amusing.

"I am seeking data concerning the efficiency of man, regarding him as a heat engine. The efficiency is at best 
\[\text{\textfrac{1}{4}}\text{ or } \text{\textfrac{1}{3}}\] of a heat engine."

"I have a grat curiosity of a cat that was killed by a car 117 years ago. Its feet is neither with nor without."

I have no doubt that you will find my efforts to be of little financial value to the Treasury of the United States, and their value should be appraised for all future generations."

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