



FROM SMITHSON TO SMITHSONIAN
THE BIRTH OF AN INSTITUTION
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES
FOR GRADES 9-12

©1997 Smithsonian Institution

Published by the Smithsonian Office of Education and the Smithsonian Institution Libraries. Based on the Smithsonian Institution Libraries' exhibition *From Smithson to Smithsonian: The Birth of an Institution*. (<http://www.sil.si.edu>)

LESSON PLAN THREE

MAKING THE CONNECTION—FROM SMITHSON TO SMITHSONIAN

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Evaluate a series of primary source documents
- ❖ Identify the variety of opinions regarding the use of Smithson's bequest
- ❖ Define the legislative compromise embodied in the Smithsonian Institution Act

MATERIALS

- ❖ Copies of Activity Pages 3A–3D
- ❖ Pens, pencils

SUBJECT

Social studies

PROCEDURE

1. Tell your students that they'll now be applying their knowledge of primary source materials to the circumstances surrounding James Smithson's gift to the people of the United States. Stress that at the conclusion of this activity, students will understand the conditions under which Smithson granted his bequest and the many opinions Americans held on how to best utilize Smithson's gift.
2. Divide your class into groups of equal size. Give each group

copies of Activity Pages 3A–3D. Ask your students to carefully examine the images and documents on each Activity Page before answering the associated questions.

Does the evidence tell us why Smithson granted more than half a million dollars to the United States? Under what conditions would the bequest be awarded to the United States? What opinions did prominent Americans hold on how to best utilize Smithson's gift? In the legislation passed by Congress, which views were represented and which were not?

3. When the groups have finished, lead the class in a discussion of their conclusions. Answers will vary, but students should conclude that the available evidence offers no clear insight into why Smithson left his bequest to the people of the United States. Students should also conclude that the United States was to receive the gift only if Smithson's nephew (Henry James Hungerford) died without leaving any heirs. (*You might ask students to speculate as to why*

Smithson left such an unusual provision in his will. Stress that historians have also speculated on Smithson's motives, with almost as little evidence to evaluate.)

Your students should also conclude that there were many different views on how Smithson's bequest could be used by the United States. Students should generally conclude that some Americans favored the use of Smithson's gift to fund scientific research (Alexander Dallas Bache), a national astronomical observatory (John Quincy Adams), a national university (Asher Robbins), and a national library (Rufus Choate).

Direct your students to the excerpt from the Smithsonian Institution Act of 1846 on Activity Page 3D. According to Congress, what was the Smithsonian Institution to be? Students should conclude that the Smithsonian was to be a library; museum (especially for minerals, geological collections and natural history); lecture hall; art gallery; and chemical laboratory.

4. Conclude the activity by telling your students that the formation of the Smithsonian by Congress is an example of legislative compromise (a settlement of differences through mutual concession). Many opinions on what the Smithsonian might be were incorporated into the final legislation. Ask your students to identify which opinions (Bache, Choate) were fully represented, which were partially represented (Robbins), and which were not represented (Adams). Be sure to stress that compromise has been at the very heart of the legislative process in the United States throughout history and remains so to this day. (*To extend the understanding of compromise, you may wish to provide an example of some contemporary legislation.*)

ACTIVITY PAGE 3A

MAKING THE CONNECTION—FROM SMITHSON TO SMITHSONIAN

THE WILL OF JAMES SMITHSON

I James Smithson Son to Hugh, first Duke of Northumberland, &, Elizabeth, Heiress of the Hungerfords of Studley, &, Niece to Charles the proud Duke of Somerset, now residing in Bentinck Street, Cavendish Square, do this twenty-third day of October, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-six, make this my last Will and Testament:

I bequeath the whole of my property of every nature &, kind soever to my bankers, Messrs. Drummonds of Charing Cross, in trust, to be disposed of in the following manner, and I desire of my said Executors to put my property under the management of the Court of Chancery.

To John Fitall, formerly my Servant, but now employed in the London Docks, and residing at No. 27, Jubilee Place, North Mile End, old town, in consideration of his attachment &, fidelity to me, &, the long &, great care he has taken of my effects, &, my having done but very little for him, I give and bequeath the Annuity or annual sum of One hundred pounds sterling for his life, to be paid to him quarterly, free of legacy duty &, all other deductions, the first payment to be made to him at the expiration of three months after my death...

To Henry James Hungerford, my Nephew, heretofore called Henry James Dickinson, son of my late brother, Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Louis Dickinson, now residing with Mr. Auboin, at Bourg la Reine, near Paris, I give and bequeath for his life the whole of the income arising from my property of every nature &, kind whatever, after the payment of the above Annuity, &, after the death of John Fitall, that Annuity likewise, the payments to be made to him at the time the interest or dividends become due on the Stocks or other property from which the income arises.

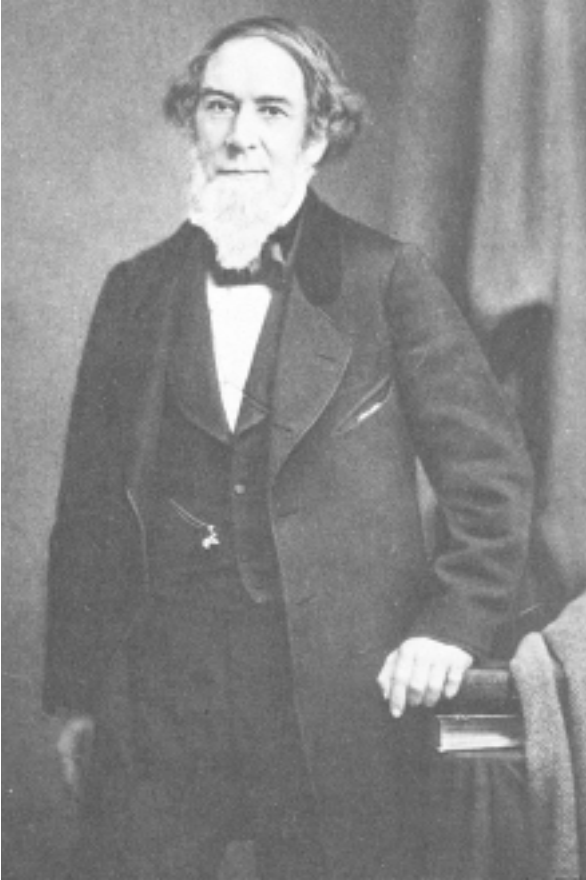
Should the said Henry James Hungerford have a child or children, legitimate or illegitimate, I leave to such child or children, his or their heirs, executors &, assigns, after the death of his, or her, or their Father, the whole of my property of every kind absolutely &, forever, to be divided between them, if there is more than one, in the manner their father shall judge proper, or, in case of his omitting to decide this, as the Lord Chancellor shall judge proper.

Should my said Nephew, Henry James Hungerford, marry, I empower him to make a jointure.

In the case of the death of my said Nephew without leaving a child or children, or the death of the child or children he may have had under the age of twenty-one years or intestate, I then bequeath the whole of my property subject to the Annuity of One Hundred pounds to John Fitall, &, for the security &, payment of which I mean Stock to remain in this Country, to the United States of America, to found at Washington, under the name of the Smithsonian Institution, an Establishment for the increase &, diffusion of knowledge among men...

ACTIVITY PAGE 3B

MAKING THE CONNECTION—FROM SMITHSON TO SMITHSONIAN



“I am most anxious that this fund should furnish means of scientific research in this country & that the institution should thus supply a want which all of us feel to exist unsupplied by our Colleges & Universities.”

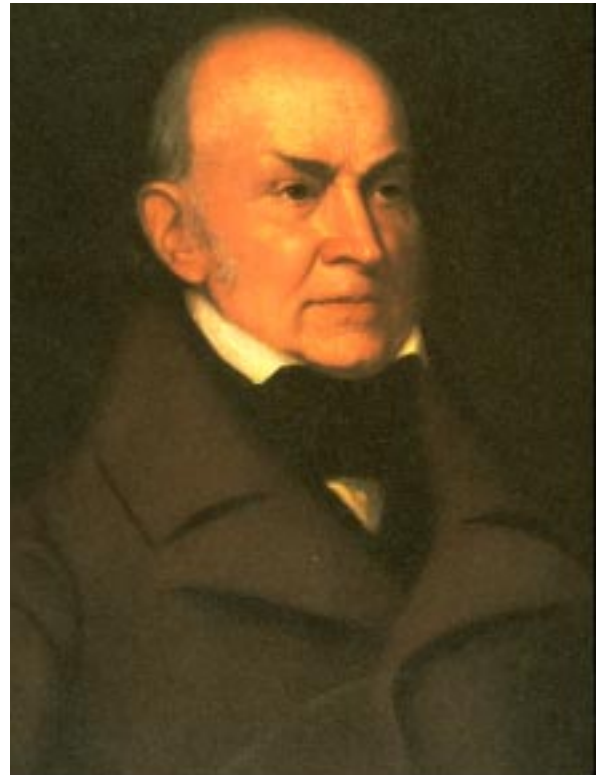
SMITHSONIAN REGENT, ALEXANDER DALLAS BACHE,

SEPTEMBER 15, 1846

“There is no richer field of science opened to the exploration of man in search of knowledge than astronomical observation.”

REPRESENTATIVE JOHN QUINCY ADAMS (MASSACHUSETTS)

MARCH 5, 1840



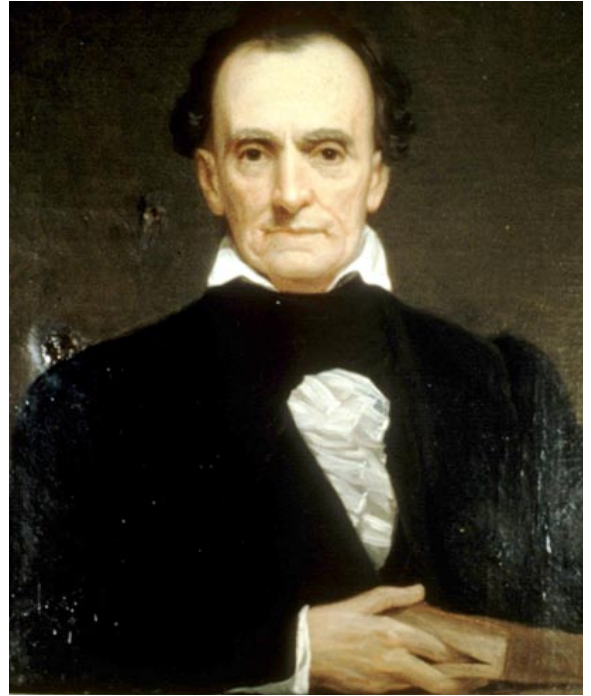
ACTIVITY PAGE 3C

MAKING THE CONNECTION—FROM SMITHSON TO SMITHSONIAN

“We have only to tread the path that led the Athenian to his glory, and to open that path to the youth of our country.”

SENATOR ASHER ROBBINS (RHODE ISLAND)

JANUARY 10, 1839



“Why should a German or an Englishman sit down to a repast of five hundred thousand books, and an American scholar, who loves the truth as well as he, be put on something less than half allowance?”

SENATOR RUFUS CHOATE (MASSACHUSETTS)

JANUARY 8, 1845

ACTIVITY PAGE 3D

MAKING THE CONNECTION—FROM SMITHSON TO SMITHSONIAN

EXCERPT FROM THE LEGISLATION ESTABLISHING THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

(As adopted by Congress and signed into law by President James K. Polk, August 10, 1846)

SEC. 5. *And be it further enacted,* That, so soon as the board of regents shall have selected the said site, they shall cause to be erected a suitable building, of plain and durable materials and structure, without unnecessary ornament, and of sufficient size, and with suitable rooms or halls, for the reception and arrangement, upon a liberal scale, of objects of natural history, including a geological and mineralogical cabinet; also a chemical laboratory, a library, a gallery of art, and the necessary lecture rooms...

SEC. 6. *And be it further enacted,* That, in proportion as suitable arrangements can be made for their reception, all objects of art and of foreign and curious research, and all objects of natural history, plants, and geological and mineralogical specimens, belonging, or hereafter to belong, to the United States, which may be in the city of Washington, in whosoever custody the same may be, shall be delivered to such persons as may be authorized by the board of regents to receive them, and shall be arranged in such order, and so classed, as best [to] facilitate the examination and study of them, in the building so as aforesaid to be erected for the institution; and the regents of said institution shall afterwards, as new specimens in natural history, geology, or mineralogy, may be obtained for the museum of the institution by exchanges of duplicate specimens belonging to the institution (which they are hereby authorized to make) or by donation, which they may receive, or otherwise, cause such new specimens to be also appropriately classed and arranged...

SEC. 7. *And be it further enacted,* That the secretary of the board of regents shall take charge of the building and property of said institution, and shall, under their direction, make a fair and accurate record of all their proceedings, to be preserved in said institution; and the said secretary shall also discharge the duties of Librarian and of keeper of the museum...



SEC. 10. *And be it further enacted,* That the author or proprietor of any book, map, chart, musical composition, print, cut, or engraving, for which a copy-right shall be secured under the existing acts of Congress, or those which shall hereafter be enacted respecting copy-rights, shall, within three months from the publication of said book, map, chart, musical composition, print, cut, or engraving, deliver, or cause to be delivered, one copy of the same to the Librarian of the Smithsonian institution, and one copy to the Librarian of Congress Library, for the use of the said Libraries.



ACTIVITY PAGE 3E

MAKING THE CONNECTION—FROM SMITHSON TO SMITHSONIAN

Directions: *Examine each of the primary sources on Activity Pages 3A–3D and then answer the questions below.*

What were the terms of James Smithson's will? (Who got what?)

What was the special provision in James Smithson's will regarding the United States?

What were some of the opposing views as to how the United States might make use of James Smithson's gift? (*Be sure to refer to the individuals profiled on Activity Pages 3B and C*)

According to the Act that established the Smithsonian Institution, what was the Smithsonian to be? What functions did Congress wish for the Institution to assume?

Which views as to how the United States might make use of James Smithson's gift were represented in the final legislation? Which views were not represented? Which views were partly represented?