

University of Oklahoma College of Law

University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons

American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899

6-12-1888

Fire-Proof Building for the National Museum

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/indianserialset>



Part of the [Indigenous, Indian, and Aboriginal Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

S. Rep. No. 1539, 50th Cong., 1st Sess. (1888)

This Senate Report is brought to you for free and open access by University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899 by an authorized administrator of University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact Law-LibraryDigitalCommons@ou.edu.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

JUNE 12, 1888.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. MORELL, from the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds,
submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill S. 3134.]

The Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds beg leave to submit the following report on the bill for the erection of an additional fire-proof building for the use of the National Museum:

To demonstrate the pressing necessity for additional accommodations for the vast amount of materials which has been accumulated for exhibition in the National Museum, it will perhaps be sufficient to present the communication of the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and the statements made showing the immense number of entries to the catalogues of the Museum since 1882.

The plans presented, viz, the basement, ground-floor, and second story plans, with front elevation, do not give all the decorative features of the building, but are complete enough to be the subject of careful estimates, and although competitive estimates have not been made, the estimators on these figures agree to give bonds that the work shall be efficiently done without exceeding the amount. It is probable if the work is let out by contract that it would be completed for something considerably less.

Your committee therefore recommend the passage of the bill.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM,
Washington, June 2, 1888.

MY DEAR SIR: I send herewith, in accordance with your suggestion, a plan of one of the floors of the proposed Museum Building, together with a perspective drawing in color on a smaller scale. I have also plans for the basement and first floor, together with an elevation and transverse section. These are at your service if you desire them. They have been prepared with the utmost care, and represent the results of an exhaustive study—which has extended over several years—of the plans of the best modern museum buildings in Europe and America, nearly all of which have been personally inspected by officers of the Smithsonian Institution.

The building, as proposed, covers the same area as the present Museum, but is intended to consist of two stories and a basement, thus affording nearly three times as much accommodation under the same area of roof as the building now in use. The arrangement of the interior of the proposed new structure is, however, considerably modified, as the result of the experience of seven years' occupation of the present building. The eighteen exhibition halls on the two main floors are completely isolated from each other, and are capable of subdivision into smaller halls. The lighting will be equally as good as in the present building, the ventilation will be much better, and in other important respects the sanitary arrangements will be far more satisfactory.

A basement story is absolutely necessary, not only with a view to promoting the comfort and health of visitors and employees as well as for securing greater dryness and better preservation of the specimens, but also for the purpose of providing large apartments for store-rooms and workshops. These proposed improvements in arrangement will not, however, interfere with the possibility of constructing a building which shall conform in the essential points of exterior proportion with the main features of the present building.

The present building contains about 80,000 square feet of floor space available for exhibition and storage. The building proposed will contain about 220,000 square feet. The amount of room for offices and laboratories would be about the same in each. The net area in the new building available for exhibitions, storage, and office rooms, as estimated, would be between 5 and 6 acres.

For the construction of the present Museum Building an appropriation of \$250,000 was made. This sum was supplemented by the following special appropriations: \$25,000 for steam-heating apparatus; \$26,000 for marble floors; \$12,500 for water and gas fixtures, and electrical apparatus; and \$1,900 for special sewer connections. The total amount expended on this building was therefore \$315,400, and it is generally admitted that the cost of its construction was considerably cheaper than that of any other similar building in existence; in fact, perhaps too cheap to secure the truest economy.

The proposed structure can be erected at a proportionately smaller cost. I have obtained from responsible bidders, who are willing to give bonds for the completion of the work in accordance with the bids which they have submitted, estimates for the erection of the building complete, with steam-heating apparatus and all other essential appliances excepting the electrical equipment, amounting in the aggregate to \$473,000; bids upon which the estimates of cost have been made were not competitive, and it is possible that something may be saved through competition. It is, however, necessary to provide also for the architect's superintendence, and for the removal and reconstruction of the Smithsonian stable, which now occupies the site. I therefore think it advisable to make request for the sum of \$500,000, in order that these additional items and other contingencies may be covered.

The sketches of the exterior of the proposed building were made in great haste, and by no means exhibit its architectural possibilities. The main entrance is far less imposing, for instance, than a proper arrangement of the steps and arches would make it. The "lovers" or dormer windows, which will appear in the roof, are absent, and the variety of color, which in the actual building will be given by the use of colored brick and terra cotta, is not shown.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,

S. P. LANGLEY,
Secretary.

Hon. J. S. MORRILL,
U. S. Senate, Washington.

P. S.—With the other plans herewith transmitted I send a copy of the plan of the Smithsonian grounds, showing the location of the present buildings and that of the proposed structure, whose site is indicated by a dotted line.

UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM,
WASHINGTON, June 7, 1888.

MY DEAR SIR: I take pleasure in responding to your request for information concerning the character and extent of the materiel which renders necessary the construction of a new building for the accommodation of the National Museum.

Since the erection of the present Museum Building there have been more than 12,000 accessions to the collections, chiefly by gifts. From the year 1859 to 1880 the accessions numbered 8,475. It is thus evident that within the last eight years the number of accessions has been half as large again as during the previous twenty-one.

Many of the more recent accessions are of very great extent, as for instance the bequest of the late Isaac Lea, of Philadelphia, which contains 20,000 specimens of shells, besides minerals and other objects; the Jeffries collection of fossil and recent shells of Europe, including 40,000 specimens; the Stearns collection of mollusks, numbering 100,000 specimens; the Riley collection of insects, containing 150,000 specimens; the Catlin collection of Indian paintings, about 500 in number; the collection of the American Institute of Mining Engineers, for the transportation of which to Washington several freight-cars were required.

There are also the extensive collections obtained at the Fisheries Exhibitions at Berlin and London and at the close of the New Orleans Cotton Centennial; the Shepard collection of meteorites; the Wilson collection of archæological objects

(more than 12,000 specimens); the Lorillard collection of Central American antiquities, and very many others nearly as extensive. In addition to these are the annual accretions from the work of the U. S. Fish Commission, the U. S. Geological Survey, and the Bureau of Ethnology, as well as the contributions from several expeditions of the Government, from army and navy officers, and from other Government officials. These are very extensive, and are yearly increasing in bulk and value.

In the Armory Building are stored many hundreds of boxes of valuable material which we have not room to unpack, and the great vaults under the Smithsonian Building and many of the attic and tower rooms are similarly occupied.

For several important departments of the Museum no exhibition space whatever is available, and no portion of the collection can be publicly displayed. Indeed, the growth of many of the departments is in large measure prevented by the fact that we have no room for additional exhibition cases, or even for storage. Many valuable collections elsewhere than in Washington are at the service of the Museum, but we have no space for their reception.

At the close of the last fiscal year (June 30, 1887) a very careful estimate showed that the collections were sixteen times as great in number of specimens as in the year 1882. I desire to call your attention especially to the inclosed statement bearing upon this point.

The Museum is growing, as it is fitting that the National Museum of a great country should grow, and it is not only necessary to care for what is already here, but to provide for the reception and display of what is certain to be placed in our hands within the next few years.

The present Museum Building is not more than large enough for the ethnological and technological material already available. The proposed new building will afford accommodation for the natural history collections which are at present very inadequately housed. For instance, the amount of space assigned to the collection of mammals, is about 6,500 feet. At least double that amount of space will be needed to accommodate the material now on hand as soon as the taxidermists of the Museum shall have been able to prepare it for exhibition, it being our desire to have mounted groups, similar to the buffalo family recently finished, in order to preserve for future generations representations of the large quadrupeds native to this continent, which are on the verge of extinction.

The collection of birds, which, so far as North America is concerned, is the finest in the world, is very inadequately shown, and requires double the case-room now available.

The collection of mollusks, which is one of the most complete in the world, and contains more than 450,000 specimens, is at present almost entirely unprovided for.

The collection of insects, which, though smaller, is, so far as North America is concerned, equally perfect, is also practically without any exhibition space. And so I might continue.

It should be borne in mind that under the roofs of the Smithsonian and new Museum buildings are grouped together collections which in London, Paris, or any other of the European capitals, are provided for in a group of museums, for the accommodation of which a much larger number of equally commodious buildings is found needful.

Yours, very respectfully,

S. P. LANGLEY,
Secretary.

Hon. JUSTIN S. MORRILL,
United States Senate.

Number of entries* in the catalogues of the National Museum since 1882.

Name of department.	1882.	1883.	1884.	1885.†	1885-'86.	1886-'87.
Arts and industries:						
Materia medica.....		4,000	4,442		4,850	5,516
Foods.....		1,244	1,580		822	877
Textiles.....			2,000		3,064	3,154
Fisheries.....			5,000		9,870	10,078
Animal product.....			1,000		2,792	2,822
Naval architecture.....			600			
Historical relics.....					1,002	13,634
Paints and dyes.....					77	100
" The Catlin Gallery ".....					500	
Physical apparatus.....					250	251
Oils and gums.....					197	198
Chemical products.....					659	661

* In very many instances an entry in the catalogue represents a large number of individual specimens.

† No census of collections taken.

Number of entries in the catalogues of the National Museum since 1882—Continued.

Name of department.	1882.	1883.	1884.	1885.	1885-'86.	1886-'87.
Arts and industries:						
Musical instruments;					400	417
Modern pottery					2,278
Coins, medals, paper money, etc.					1,055
Ethnology			200,000		500,000	503,764
American aboriginal pottery			12,000		25,000	26,022
Archæology	35,512	40,491	45,252		65,314	101,659
Mammals (skins and alcoholics)	4,660	4,920	5,694		7,451	7,811
Birds	44,354	47,246	50,350		55,945	54,987
Birds' eggs			40,072		44,163	48,173
Reptiles and batrachians			23,495		25,344	27,542
Fishes	50,000	65,000	68,000		75,000	100,000
Mollusks	33,375		400,000		480,000	425,000
Insects	1,000		151,000		500,000	585,000
Marine invertebrates	11,781	14,825	200,000		350,000	450,000
Comparative anatomy:						
Osteology	3,535	3,640	4,214		10,210	11,022
Anatomy	70	103	3,000			
Palæozoic fossils		20,000	73,000		80,482	84,491
Mesozoic fossils					69,742	70,775
Cenozoic fossils			100,000		(*)	(*)
Fossil plants		4,624	7,291		7,429	8,462
Recent plants					30,000	320,000
Minerals		14,550	16,610		18,401	18,601
Lithology and physical geology	9,075	12,500	18,000		20,647	21,500
Metallurgy and ores		30,000	40,000		48,000	49,000
Total	183,462	265,143	1,472,600		2,620,834	2,901,507

* Included with mollusks.