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Memorial of George Catlin, praying Congress to purchase his collection of Indian portraits and curiosities.

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MEMORIAL

OF

GEORGE CATLIN,

Praying Congress to purchase his collection of Indian portraits and curiosities.

JUNE 5, 1846.

Referred to the Committee on the Library, and ordered to be printed.

To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States:

The subscriber, a citizen of the United States, and now in the city of Paris, begs leave most

RESPECTFULLY TO REPRESENT:

That his extensive and unique collection of Indian portraits, customs, costumes, weapons, &c., the extent and interest of which are known to most of your honorable body, and which cost your memorialist the entire exertions of eight years of his life, and an expenditure of more than 20,000 dollars in collecting, is now in Paris; and, under the flattering patronage of the king, has, for more than two months past, occupied a large gallery in the Louvre, for the private views of the royal family and royal guests; that, in making this collection, the subscriber received no government or individual aid, but, entirely unaided, has pursued and completed his object, supported by the ambition of procuring a full and complete pictorial history of a numerous and interesting race of human beings rapidly sinking into oblivion, encouraged with the confident belief that the collection would be eventually appropriated and protected by the government of his own country as a monument to a race of people who will soon have yielded up their country and their existence to cultivating man; that the subscriber, several years since, crossed the Atlantic with his collection, not with a view to alienate himself from his native country, nor to change the nationality of his collection, but to seek support for a numerous and expensive family from its exhibitions in London and Paris: that the best evidence of the interest with which his works have been received, and the value that has been set upon his collection in Europe, is the fact that several very respectable offers have been made for it, but which he has been unwilling to accept until the government of his own country shall have had the opportunity of adding the collection to the records of the nation, which opportunity it is the object of this memorial to afford: that the collection contains nearly 600 paintings of portraiture and customs of forty-eight different tribes, and the most extensive and valuable collection

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of costumes, weapons, and other manufactures of the North American Indians, that has ever been made—to the latter department of which several very valuable collections have been added in England, by purchase—and the paintings have been ultimately completed, and all arranged in durable and appropriate frames; that the collection will also contain, when fully arranged, forty full length figures of Indians completely costumed, the heads of which are *fac simile* casts, from the life of distinguished Indians on the frontier, and colored from nature; and, besides these, there are nearly two tons weight of minerals and fossils of an interesting character, brought from the Indian regions in America.

Your memorialist further represents that, during the whole time he has been laboring to make this collection, he has been stimulated by the ambition of making it the nucleus of a *museum of mankind*, to contain eventually the records, resemblances, and manufactures of all the diminishing races of native tribes in various parts of the globe; that the very flattering and advantageous proposals now offered to your memorialist for the foundation of such an institution on this side of the Atlantic, and the contemplation of the vigorous part of his life passing away, and which it is his desire yet to devote to the full accomplishment of his design, are considerations producing in his mind extreme anxiety at present for some expression, if possible, during the present session of the Congress of his own country; that, in the session of 1837 and 1838, a resolution on the subject of its purchase was introduced into the House of Representatives by the Hon. Mr. Briggs, of Massachusetts, which resolution was referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs, of which committee the Hon. Mr. Bell, of Tennessee, was chairman, and which committee, your memorialist believes, prepared a unanimous report in favor of the purchase, but which report, too near to the close of the session, was never acted upon.

Your humble memorialist would, therefore, most respectfully propose at this time (as the certain means of restoring the collection to the United States, and of securing the ambitious exertions of the lifetime of its author for its enlargement) the sale of the entire collection as above named to the government of the United States for the sum of \$65,000—the same sum proposed to the committee in 1837 and '38, and subject to the conditions then named. And for some early expression of your honorable body on this proposition your humble memorialist will ever pray.

GEO. CATLIN.

LOUVRE, PARIS, OR PLACE MADELEINE 21,
April 2, 1846.