ANNUAL REPORT ON THE PROGRESS AND CONDITION OF THE U. S. NATIONAL MUSEUM FOR THE YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 1907

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UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM

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WASHINGTON
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1907

UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM,
UNDER DIRECTION OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION,
Washington, D. C., November 8, 1907.

SIR: I have the honor to submit herewith a report upon the present condition of the United States National Museum, and upon the work accomplished in its various departments during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1907.

Very respectfully,

RICHARD RATHBUN,
Assistant Secretary, in Charge of the National Museum.

DR. CHARLES D. WALCOTT,
Secretary, Smithsonian Institution.

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By Richard Rathbun,
Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, in charge of the U. S. National Museum.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS.

INCEPTION AND HISTORY.

The inception and history of the National Museum have often been discussed in the opening pages of the annual report. Congress, in the act of August 10, 1846, founding the Smithsonian Institution, recognized that an opportunity was afforded, in carrying out the large-minded design of Smithson, to provide for the custody of the museum of the nation. To this new establishment was therefore intrusted the care of the national collections, a course that time has fully justified.

In the beginning the cost of maintaining the museum side of the Institution's work was wholly paid from the Smithsonian income; then for a number of years the Government bore a share, and during the past three decades Congress has voted sufficient funds to cover the expenses of the Museum, thus furthering one of the primary means "for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men" without encroaching upon the resources of the Institution.

The museum idea was inherent in the establishment of the Smithsonian Institution, which in its turn was based upon a ten years' discussion in Congress and the advice of the most distinguished scientific men, educators, and intellectual leaders of the nation of seventy years ago. It is interesting to note how broad and comprehensive were the views which actuated our lawmakers in determining the scope of the Museum, a fact especially remarkable when it is recalled that at that date no museum of considerable size existed in the United States, and the museums of England and of the continent of Europe were still to a large extent without a developed plan, although containing many rich collections.

The Congress which passed the act of foundation enumerated as within the scope of the Museum "all objects of art and of foreign

and curious research and all objects of natural history, plants, and geological and mineralogical specimens belonging to the United States," thus stamping the Museum at the very outset as one of the widest range and at the same time as the Museum of the United States. It was also fully appreciated that additions would be necessary to the collections then in existence, and provision was made for their increase by the exchange of duplicate specimens, by donations and by other means.

If the wisdom of Congress in so fully providing for a museum in the Smithsonian law challenges attention, the interpretation put upon this law by the Board of Regents within less than six months from the passage of the act can not but command admiration. In the early part of September, 1846, the Regents took steps toward formulating a plan of operations. The report of the committee appointed for this purpose, submitted in December and January following, shows a thorough consideration of the subject in both the spirit and the letter of the law. It would seem not out of place to cite here the very first pronouncement of the Board with reference to the character of the Museum:

"In obedience to the requirements of the charter,[a] which leaves little discretion in regard to the extent of accommodations to be provided, your committee recommend that there be included in the building a museum of liberal size, fitted up to receive the collections destined for the Institution. * * *

"As important as the cabinets of natural history by the charter required to be included in the Museum your committee regard its ethnological portion, including all collections that may supply items in the physical history of our species, and illustrate the manners, customs, religions, and progressive advance of the various nations of the world; as, for example, collections of skulls, skeletons, portraits, dresses, implements, weapons, idols, antiquities, of the various races of man. * * * In this connexion, your committee recommend the passage of resolutions asking the cooperation of certain public functionaries, and of the public generally, in furtherance of the above objects.

"Your committee are further of opinion that in the Museum, if the funds of the Institution permit, might judiciously be included various series of models illustrating the progress of some of the most useful inventions; such, for example, as the steam engine from its earliest and rudest form to its present most improved state; but this they propose only so far as it may not encroach on ground already covered by the numerous models in the Patent Office.

[a] Since the Institution was not chartered in a legal sense but established by Congress, the use of the word "charter" in this connection would seem to be unauthorized. It was not subsequently employed.