THE PATH TO PROMINENCE:
NATIONALISM AND THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, 1835-1897

by

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PROLOGUE

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Americans responded to the emotional call of nationalism. They possessed every prerequisite for a strong national movement including a recognized, central, government, a growing sense of common identity, and a defined though rapidly expanding territory.[1] By 1840, confidence in the political institutions of the United States fostered a strong desire to spread republicanism across the continent in the form of manifest destiny.[2] A sense of mission also arose that generated utmost faith in such American values as freedom and democracy, and believed that America shone as a model for others to emulate.

But if Americans were self-confident, they were also self-conscious. Many intellectuals were acutely aware that America lacked a unique culture compared to European achievements. Cultural nationalism demanded the genesis of an American literature, and the rise of intellectual centers that could rival those of Europe. Independence from

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[1]The works of Hans Kohn are extremely valuable in providing an understanding of American nationalism. Among the most useful are American Nationalism. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957); and, The Idea of Nationalism, A Study In Its Origins And Background. (New York: Collier Books, 1967).

[2]Frederick Merk, Manifest Destiny And Mission In American History (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 29.

European institutions was desired, for it was deemed inappropriate to rely on learning produced by monarchical systems. Fear of excessive foreign influence gave rise to the nativist movement in the United States. In eastern urban areas, xenophobia struck deep in the period between 1835 and 1850.[3] The question arose as to whether American nationality could be preserved with the constant influx of immigrants, who came from completely different political structures and geographic regions, often spoke different languages and practiced foreign customs.

Americans struggled with the question of nationalism throughout the nineteenth century. Manifest destiny, mission, nativism, and cultural nationalism influenced, and helped to define, America and Americans. This long, uneasy process provided the ideological setting for the growth of strong national institutions. The greatest test of American nationalism, however, erupted during the Civil War. The strength of the Union was tested as never before, and the emergence of a central, federal government played a critical role in reinforcing nationalism and developing recognized national institutions.

Manifest destiny was one of the most optimistic expressions of American nationalism in the nineteenth

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[3]John Higham, Strangers In The Land (New York: Atheneum, 1971), p. 4.

century. Coined by John L. O'Sullivan in 1845, the phrase manifest destiny referred in its purest form to the controlled expansion of the United States into other territories under Divine inspiration.[4] Those who understood and supported manifest destiny believed in two fundamental ideas; that America had something of extreme value to share with others, and that it was preordained by heavenly command that Americans do so. A more optimistic, or idealistic form of national expansion could hardly be found.

Manifest destiny originally meant extending the opportunities of freedom and democratic government to other peoples, but was later corrupted by an emphasis on territorial expansion.[5] The doctrine extended a cautious invitation to those already versed in self-government to join the United States.[6] Those admitted to statehood had only to gain from the union. In 1844, Ralph Waldo Emerson captured the feeling of America's optimistic destiny as he wrote,

> America is the country of the Future. From Washington, its capital city... through all its cities, states, and territories, it is a country

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[4]Norman Graebner, ed., Manifest Destiny (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1968), p. xv. This volume includes a collection of primary source material arranged according to the territorial goals of Manifest Destiny.

[5]Merk, p. 24.

[6]Ibid.

> of beginnings, of projects, of vast designs, and expectations. It has no past: all has an onward and prospective look.[7]

Emerson was not alone in believing that the United States was a land of opportunity, with an even greater future on the horizon. Numerous others made it clear that those who joined the union of states would enjoy untold benefits, which applied to economics as well as politics. John Quincy Adams referred to the exploitation of Oregon's natural resources with American aid in terms of making "...the wilderness blossom as the rose...."[8] The United States, in other words, could renew life in regions that had long lain dormant. America was dynamic, and union with it would produce the finest results.

One way of spreading American idealism that appealed to Whigs and countless others was through a sense of mission. The goal behind mission was to spread democracy by example. In 1848, American mission was forcefully expressed as newspapers responded to the revolutions convulsing Europe. Messages of hope addressed those rebelling against Metternich's denial of social and political reforms. One editorial published in the New York Sun captured the feeling of mission particularly well,

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[7]Graebner, pp. 8-9.

[8]Merk, p. 31.

> Our example has been leaven to the millions of the old world -- a light and fire, illumining their souls and warming their hearts and hands until they have dared to shout in the ears of their tyrants, 'we too are men -- we will be free!'[9]

Freedom by example. That defined America's mission in theory if not in fact.

American nationalism did not always take such a positive form. At times, it could produce an anti-foreign reaction. In American cities during the mid nineteenth century, nativism developed as a reaction to a perceived threat to American life by the constant influx of immigrants.[10] Three elements dominated nativist thought: anti-catholicism, a fear of foreign radicals, and racial nativism.[11]

To a predominantly Protestant nation, Catholicism seemed opposed to primary American values such as individual freedom.[12] The authoritarian structure of the Catholic church appeared to be antithetical to American political ideals. As an increasing number of Catholics arrived in the United States, the call to protect American values became louder. In Philadelphia, the aptly named Native American proposed to restrict the participation of immigrants in

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[9]Ibid., p. 200.

[10]Higham, p. 4.

[11]Ibid., pp. 5-11.

[12]Ibid., p. 6.

American society. The newspaper favored lengthening the time required for naturalization, preventing immigrants from holding elective office, and protecting American institutions from foreign influence.[13] Nativism was American nationalism in an unfortunate form, protecting basic political values from an exaggerated foe. One Know-Nothing journal printed in 1855 succinctly captured the urgency behind nativism, as it announced, "the grand work of the American party is the principle of nationality ... we must do something to protect and vindicate it. If we do not it will be destroyed."[14] Nativism was a desperate attempt to build national identity by suppressing foreign influences.

Another form of nationalism tried to curb foreign influence by generating domestic cultural products. Cultural nationalism, the collective artistic and intellectual expressions of a country, was not easily obtained in the United States for education above the elementary level was poorly organized and artistic training was generally reserved for a small portion of society.[15] Cultural centers did exist in the form of museums, theaters,

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[13]Kohn, American Nationalism, p. 144.

[14]Higham, p. 4.

[15]Oscar Handlin, ed., Readings in American History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), p. 297.

lyceums, and libraries, but these neither produced or contained a satisfactory symbol of American culture for the most critical observers. Those who advocated a unique cultural identity for the United States wanted a cultural product that was distinctly American. Intellectuals were challenged to take a large part of this cultural aspiration upon themselves. Early nineteenth century journals and pamphlets implored authors to create a national literature that displayed the virtues of American life. In 1839 John L. O'Sullivan sought immediate action. He asked when American literature would

> ...breathe the spirit of our republican institutions? When will it be imbued with the God-like aspiration of intellectual freedom -- the elevating principle of equality? When will it assert its national independence, and speak the soul -- the heart of the American people?[16]

Cultural independence was essential for a people who wished to preserve "republican institutions" from the corrosive influence of foreign ideas. Americans could not be well-versed in democratic principles as long as they depended upon the works of Europeans who toiled under monarchies. Americans needed to produce a native literature and culture that would unify them as a people and provide a tool to express their national ideals.

Feelings of mission and destiny demanded a strong

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[16]Graebner, p. 19.

national culture. It was essential in making the United States a recognized leader in the practice of intellectual freedom, which in turn reflected upon the virtues of a democratic government. In 1837 Ralph Waldo Emerson ended his oration "The American Scholar" by urging Americans to remove their unhealthy intellectual dependence upon Europe in order to fulfill its cultural and national destiny.

> We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. See already the tragic consequences. The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself.[17]

America's mission could not be realized while its citizens relied on the learning of Europeans. If Americans were perceived as "timid," imitative," and "tame," they surely could not stand as examples for others to imitate.

A more serious consideration was whether Americans could truly remain a free and separate people if they did not actively pursue cultural expression. William Ellery Channing warned the American Philosophical Society that,

> The more we receive from other countries, the greater the need of an original literature. A people into whose minds the thoughts of foreigners are poured perpetually, needs an energy within itself to resist, to modify this mighty influence, and without it will inevitably sink under the worst bondage, will become intellectuall tame and enslaved. The true sovereigns of a country are

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[17]George McMichael, ed., Anthology of American Literature, vol. 1: Colonial Through Romantic (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974), p. 1317.

> those who determine its minds, its modes of thinking, its tastes, its principles; and we cannot consent to lodge this sovereignty in the hands of strangers.[18]

The question then, became how to better facilitate the production of a domestic literature. Channing emphasized the need to "enlarge our literary institutions" and create new centers of learning where thorough research could be conducted.[19] Without these facilities, reliance upon European institutions would be perpetual.

Building centers that symbolized cultural and intellectual achievements on a national scale required federal attention. In his first annual message to Congress, John Quincy Adams declared that knowledge was the critical element in improving "the condition of men" and that a large share of the responsibility for that improvement was in the hands of government.[20] Adams' message was an important step in defining the intellectual responsibilities of the federal government, but the President went further by stating that "to the acquisition of much of the knowledge adapted to the wants, the comforts, and enjoyments of human life public

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[18]William Ellery Channing, "On National Literature," Old South Leaflets, No. 141 (Boston: The Directors of the Old South Work, 1903), p. 13.

[19]Ibid., p. 20. Channing called particular attention to the lack of universities.

[20]Fred L. Israel, ed., The State of the Union Messages of the Presidents, 1790-1966. vol. I. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1967), p. 244.

institutions and seminaries of learning are essential."[21] Adams' speech affirmed that government, in order to serve the intellectual and cultural needs of its constituents, should play an active role in providing the institutions necessary to fulfilling those needs. Adams reminded Congress that George Washington had repeatedly urged the establishment of a national university and a military academy. The military academy had come into being at West Point, but government had not even begun to satisfy the remainder of its responsibility.[22]

As sectionalism developed at mid century, the sovereignty of the federal government began to be questioned. The Civil War was not just a battle between North and South; it was a battle that would decide the fate of American nationalism. Americans were being split geographically and politically. With extreme sectional feeling came a loss of common identity. Abraham Lincoln understood the implications of Civil War as well as any of his contemporaries. Embodying the strength of national sentiment, Lincoln refused to consent to any notion of destroying the union. With war on the horizon, Lincoln delivered his first inaugural address which beautifully

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Adams further emphasized the lack of a national university, and recommended the creation of a national observatory.

captured his defense of the union.

> I hold that, in contemplation of universal law and of the Constitution, the Union of these States is perpetual. Perpetuity is implied, if not expressed in the fundamental law of all national governments.... Physically speaking, we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other, nor build an impassable wall between them....[23]

The essential components of nationalism were all found in Lincoln's address; the alliance of states under one government, the habitation of one geographic space that could not be divided, and the natural bond between those who shared common citizenship. By defeating those who sought to tear the Union in half, the federal government elevated itself to a position of unquestionable status. The States were united in fact, if not in sentiment, under one central, recognized authority. This had enormous implications beyond the political realm.

Given its key position in American nationalism after the war, the government was in a far better position to create national cultural institutions. An observer in the City of Washington noted that

> the lovers of science, literature, and the fine arts, residing in this district... were mortified to perceive that... at the seat of government...

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[23]Henry Steele Commager, ed., Documents of American History. (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1946), pp. 385, 387.

> there existed fewer means than in any other city of the Union of prosecuting those studies.[24]

This situation changed dramatically with the revival of national sentiment and the growth of federal power in the years after the Civil War.

Once its position was secured, the United States Government expanded, or created institutions designed to better serve its national role. Of those who lobbied for specific institutions, few, if any, had fought as long or as diligently as the advocates of a national library.

The national library movement began exerting pressure in the first decades of the nineteenth century. From the start, it was intricately related to the larger expressions of nationalism. Many of the ideas that underlay manifest destiny, mission, nativism, and primarily cultural nationalism, were among the early arguments for a national library: the desire to create an educated populace that could manage and effectively spread a democratic system; the fear of excessive cultural and intellectual influences from foreign nations; and the need to create a cultural and intellectual center rivaling those of Europe. The link between the comprehensive national movement and the fight

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[24]A. Hunter Dupree, Science In The Federal Government. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 71. This quote is from Joel R. Poinsett, Secretary of War under Martin Van Buren, who fought in 1840 for the establishment of the National Institute for the Promotion of Science.

for a national library was strong, but emotion had to be combined with solid reason in order to produce any action on the library question. The early arguments for a national library united reason and emotion in such a way as to create a most impressive foundation for the long struggle to come.

CHAPTER I

The Ideological Foundations of a National Library

The proponents of a national library prepared for a long, uphill fight. Arguments had to be well thought out and channeled into influential circles. Capable authors needed to write lengthy essays describing the absolute need for a library of national prominence. The scholars and congressmen who rallied in support of the library constructed arguments that captured, and effectively used, the strong national sentiment of nineteenth century America. They uniformly portrayed the United States as a country blessed by a glorious past but lacking the proper intellectual tools to guarantee an equally glorious future. While individual arguments often contained unique approaches to the question of having a library that symbolized the cultural and intellectual strength, they can be safely arranged by the major points that they made.

Three reasons for establishing a national library frequently appeared in the early debates. First, Americans needed a vast collection of books to become properly educated in the democratic principles that formed the basis of their government. Only with diligent study could the example of freedom be passed from one generation to another, and from one people to another. A library that

maintained a narrow selection of books could not effectively supply readers with the materials that were essential to an understanding of the political tradition of their country, or an appreciation of their national heritage.

Secondly, when compared to the great literary stores of European countries, libraries in the United States were shockingly sparse in their collections. Numerous essays appeared in journals, magazines, and newspapers containing detailed statistics that magnified the great disparity between European and American libraries. Until the United States built a national library that was as comprehensive as those across the Atlantic, the ablity to obtain cultural maturity was considered impossible.

This premise led to the third major argument which logically maintained that scholars needed a large number of books in a central, prescribed location in order to produce a native literature and other valuable forms of learning. A substantial increase in the number of scholarly publications, due to the ease of obtaining library materials, would be a visible sign that the country had indeed obtained a higher level of cultural maturity.

The emotional call for an educated citizenry drew upon the pages of history for supporting evidence, and a national link. Advocates of the national library plan reminded listeners that the founders of the United States were learned men, who read voluminously throughout their lives.

They had turned to books when designing the political structure of the country. In April, 1846, Representative George P. Marsh of Vermont told his colleagues in the House that

> the framers of our Constitution were chiefly men of high education and elegant attainments. Jefferson, whose writings are canonical with the democracy, had the best private library in America, and was a man of multifarious if not of profound learning.[1]

Marsh cleverly used strong national symbols, the Constitution and Jefferson, to show that the strength of the nation was to a considerable degree based upon the education of its members.

James Meacham, who was one of the foremost proponents of a national library at mid century, followed the same theme. Meacham was anxious to use the money from the James Smithson bequest to build a library of unprecedented scale in the United States. In a lengthy essay advocating adequate appropriations to create a library at the Smithsonian Institution, Meacham asked about the source of America's libertarian foundation. It had not come about naturally, but through the devoted learning of influential men.

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[1]William Jones Rhees, ed., The Smithsonian Institution, Documents Relative To Its Origin And History, 1835-1899, vol. 1. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), p. 383. This volume contains valuable primary source material on the national library arguments as they pertained to the Smithsonian.

Meacham wrote:

> Our free institutions are not the offspring of ignorant blundering, and sciolistic rashness. Our fathers -- the Jefferson's, the Adamses -- were men of study and thought. They had passed portions of their lives, like recluses, among books.[2]

If the country was founded upon the intellect of the nation's fathers, it followed that to preserve and diffuse the blessing of democracy national institutions dedicated to learning were needed. The spirit of destiny and mission appeared as Meacham wrote:

> The doctrines developed here are destined to spread -- not by sudden outbursts of enthusiasm -- not in the wild tramp of revolutions -- so much as by the silent influence of what thinking and studious men will write and speak. We need the books to aid our students in this noble work.[3]

"Destined" and "spread" were powerful words to describe the immediate value of a national library. American scholars needed access to a large store of literature to supplement their understanding of national "doctrines" and to extend it to others. Phrases like "American liberty," it was argued, were said too easily by those who did not truly understand the principles upon which those phrases rested. Marsh

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[2]Report of Hon. James Meacham, of the Special Committee of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, on the distribution of the income of the Smithsonian fund (Washington: for the Smithsonian Institution, 1854), pp. 50-51. Hereafter referred to as Meacham.

[3]Ibid., p. 51.

declared that the principles of American liberty were illusive without study, and "no more obvious than the physical theory of the universe."[4]

The diffusion of American values depended upon those who understood them on an intellectual basis. As Marsh interpreted history, it was the scholars who wielded "the widest and most permanent influence on... the moral and physical well being of man."[5] A community of scholars, assisted and enlarged by the wealthy collections of a national library, would therefore preserve and diffuse the democratic values of the United States.

The confidence in American values was in sharp contrast to the anxiety of those who feared that the country's cultural position would never rival that of Europe. The early national library arguments were filled with statistical surveys of the libraries of every major European country. By showing with hard numbers the great inequality between foreign and domestic collections, the men behind the national library plan hoped that Americans would be motivated to advance their cultural status. They appealed to national pride in a fundamental way, by simply stating that in the competition for global intellectual prominence, the United States was lagging far behind.

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[4]Rhees, p. 384.

[5]Ibid., p. 383.

The January 8, 1834 edition of the National Intelligencer carried an anonymous article that drove the point home in no uncertain terms.[6] The author invited readers to consider the fact that in thirty-one German libraries there were no fewer than 4,000,000 volumes whereas an equivalent number of American libraries (thought to be the largest) held less than 350,000 books.[7] The University of Gottingen alone held 300,000 volumes, and Vienna, the pride of Austrians, was known to have 590,000 volumes packed in its libraries. Perhaps it was unfair to expect the United States, a country less than a century old, to have a library that challenged those of far older nations. That consideration did not matter, however, to those who viewed America as a land that was ready to fulfill its destiny. As the contributor to the National Intelligencer impatiently asked, "when will the United States, the boasted land of civilization and knowledge, afford to its students such facilities for the advancement of science and learning...?"[8]

In March, 1836, Senator William C. Preston of South Carolina, a member of the Joint Library Committee

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[6]William Dawson Johnston. History of the Library of Congress, vol. 1. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), p. 228. Johnston's lengthy history is largely a topical compilation of primary sources. This article was probably written by educator Francis Lieber.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid.

representing the Library of Congress, furnished a report that continued to contrast America with Europe in providing tools for intellectual improvement. Preston was annoyed that the aggregate collection of books in all the public libraries of the United States, including duplicates, did not surpass the single collection of the Bibliotheque du Roi in Paris.[9] He then estimated that of all the "printed volumes of distinct works in the world," the United States had in its possession about one-tenth of them.[10] It is significant that Preston used statistics based on the collective number of books in the world to demonstrate America's cultural and intellectual position. The statistics demonstrate that he was thinking of the United States competing internationally in such ways before mid-century. But Preston insisted that Americans would never compete successfully unless they were provided with adequate library facilities.

> Here where the foundations of the Government repose upon the aggregate intelligence of the citizens, the assistance afforded by public institutions to the exertions of intellect is but one-tenth of that within the reach of the mind of civilized Europe.[11]

That Europe should possess easier paths to national

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[9]Ibid., p. 240.

[10]Ibid. Preston believed that there were 600,000 such works in the world.

[11]Ibid.

preservation through learning was unthinkable to those fighting for a national library in the United States.

In an address made before the Athenian Institute and Mercantile Library Company of Philadelphia in 1838, Job R. Tyson confessed that when the country's largest libraries, those of Harvard and Philadelphia, were compared with "the magnificent cabinets of Paris, Vienna, London, and many others...the national pride receives a wound."[12] An even more impassioned response came from Senator Rufus Choate in a speech made seven years later. Choate, who was in the middle of yet another debate concerning the establishment of a national library at the Smithsonian, declared:

> ...I acknowledge a pang of envy and grief that there should be one drop or one morsel more of the bread or water of intellectual life tasted by the European than by the American mind. Why should not the soul of this country eat as good food and as much of it as the soul of Europe?[13]

In the minds of the national library advocates, the United States was ready to advance itself immediately. But it needed the intellectual "bread or water" to do so. Scholars were prepared to create impressive works that would not only provide a native literature but also provide their fellow countrymen with a sense of national pride and identity. It

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[12]Ibid., p. 237.

[13]Samuel Gilman Brown, The Works of Rufus Choate, vol. 2. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1862; reprint ed., New York: AMS Press Inc., 1972), pp. 263-64. Hereafter referred to as Choate.

was a national disgrace that American scholars did not have access to enough materials to complete or even initiate meaningful research. To make matters worse, it had become commonplace for Americans to leave the United States in order to carry out their research in European libraries. The situation could be altered if proper measures were taken immediately.

George Washington Green, a United States Consul at Rome, did not believe that the United States was fighting an impossible battle with the great nations of Europe. In a lengthy article published in an 1837 edition of the North American Review, Green conceded that the country had done little for its intellectual community. In the same paragraph, however, he argued that

> ...a prompt and sound judgement... might in the course of a very few years, render the American student nearly independent of those vast collections, which in Europe, have required centuries for their formation. The undertaking, however, in order to be successful, should be a national one.[14]

With national aid, scholars in the United States could produce works that would herald the arrival of cultural maturity and, more importantly, the intellectual independence that Rufus Choate, William Ellery Channing, and others

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[14]North American Review, XCVI, Article VI, (July 1837): 140. Also quoted in Johnston, p. 234. Green believed that the Library of Congress could, with wise additions, become the national library.

considered so important.

To contribute to the broad field of human knowledge, academics needed a large supply of books. While a private library could prove adequate for the narrow research of a more affluent scholar, those who could not afford to buy large numbers of books, or confine their studies to a limited field of learning needed a comprehensive, and accessible public library. Books in every discipline were required to guide scholars in their research. To make a contribution in a given subject area, a researcher needed to know what had already been discovered or accomplished in that area. Librarian Charles Coffin Jewett at the Smithsonian Institution wrote that a scholar

> ...must know the past in order to appreciate the present, and in order to help shape the future. He must not only be able to place himself on the line of demarcation between the unknown and the known, but if he would penetrate the darkness of the former, he must have gained his direction by a careful tracing out of the analogies of the latter.[15]

The ability of Americans to create meaningful works of scholarship was therefore dependent upon the accumulation of an expansive library. A national library would serve the symbolic function of providing all Americans with an equal

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[15]Michael H. Harris, ed. The Age of Jewett: Charles Coffin Jewett and American Librarianship, 1841-1868. (Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1975), p. 84. This same point was made by James Meacham in 1854. See Meacham, p. 49.

chance for intellectual advancement, while simultaneously advancing the position of the United States among other nations. Representative Marsh proclaimed in 1846 that "we need some great establishment that shall not hoard its treasures with the jealous niggardliness which locks up the libraries of Britain."[16] It was time for the country to fully support those who would bring it the glories of international cultural recognition.

Those who fought for the rapid creation of a national library in order to encourage a national literature argued that Americans who had already published substantial books were those who had money enough to use the larger libraries of Europe. Washington Irving's book, The Life and Voyages of Cristopher Columbus was written in Spain and "could not, from the absence of materials, have been written in America."[17] Henry Wheaton's History of the Northmen, and History of the Law of Nations were also completed, by necessity, in Europe.[18] Jewett examined the source list of

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[16]Rhees, p. 384.

[17]Johnston, p. 237. Quote from Job R. Tyson, made in 1838. The preface of Irving's biography of Columbus shows that it was written around 1826. As it was based on original documents held in private collections, the book was not a good example for illustrating the poverty of American libraries.

[18]Wheaton's works were a favorite source of evidence for those who argued over the inadequacy of libraries in the United States. Green, Tyson, Meacham, Jewett, and others sited Wheaton's books in their arguments.

the volume on the law of nations to see how many of the major works used by Wheaton could be found in the United States. The result was disappointing. At least thirty-nine of the most important sources used in the book could not be found in the "largest law libraries" of the country.[19]

Some believed that it was impossible even to write a history of the United States within the walls of America's public libraries.[20] Until 1867, the largest domestic collection of Americana remained in private hands.[21] The American scholar found himself confined by the sparse library resources that were available. In the national capital Jewett lamented,

> The complaints of our scholars testify to our deficiency. Their wants have weighed heavily upon them. They have repressed genius. They may have condemned to oblivion names that would have rivalled the brightest in the history of science and letters.[22]

A national library would cure the deficiency, enabling

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[19]Harris, p. 85. From Jewett's first annual report as printed in the Third Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution (Washington: Tippin and Streeper, Printers, 1849), pp. 34-47.

[20]Meacham, p. 52. Specific reference was given to George Bancroft's works.

[21]Archivist Peter Force owned and maintained this invaluable collection. In 1867 it was purchased by the U.S. Government for the Library of Congress. The significance of the purchase is discussed in Chapter III.

[22]Harris, p. 86.

scores of American writers to generate a literature that demonstrated the unique cultural aspects of the United States, and its emergence into the international intellectual community.

The early library arguments successfully harnessed the spirit of nineteenth century American nationalism. Destiny and mission were strongly represented as were nativist feelings that feared European dominance in matters of the mind. Comparing European libraries with those of America, awakened a competitive spirit that strove to liberate citizens of the United States from the libraries of Europe. The exodus of American scholars to other lands wounded the intense geographic element of nationalism. There remained, however, a large number of obstacles to overcome before a national library could be founded.

A great problem that arose before the Civil War concerned identifying a proper location for the library. By 1850, two locations stood out as possibilities. The Smithsonian library, under the direction of Jewett, was quickly becoming a significant research center and a leader in bibliographic studies. Less than a mile away, in the west front of the Capitol, the Library of Congress had grown to 50,000 volumes, and was considered the second largest

library in the country.[23] While the fundamental question of having a national library had not been resolved, the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress were already contendering for the honor. An exegesis of the James Smithson bequest, Civil War, congressional legislation, and a host of other elements would settle the issue in the decades to come.

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[23]John Y. Cole, For Congress and the Nation: A Chronological History of the Library of Congress. (Washington: Library of Congress, 1979), p. 21. These figures are from Jewett's survey of American Libraries as found in the appendix of the 1849 Smithsonian Annual Report. Harvard University's library, containing 84,000 volumes, was the largest single collection in the United States.

CHAPTER II

Contender for Location: The Smithsonian Institution

On April 24, 1800, President John Adams approved an "Act to make provision for the removal and accomodation of the Government of the United States."[1] The transfer of the government from Philadelphia to the sparse new city of Washington made the expansion and creation of new federal institutions possible. The fifth section of the act appropriated five thousand dollars for "the purchase of such books as may be necessary for the use of Congress at the said city of Washington, and for fitting up a suitable apartment for containing them...."[2] The Library of Congress had come into being. Its purpose was clearly defined, and within four days a joint committee was established to select the Library's first books and devise the "rules and regulations" that would govern their use.[3] Two years later the Library's collection had grown to 964 volumes, and was functioning efficiently in the Capitol.

The rapid creation and efficiency of the Library of Congress contrasted with the formation of another

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[1]Johnston, p. 23.

[2]Ibid.

[3]The First Booklist of the Library of Congress, A Facsimile, with a Foreword by Dana J. Pratt (Washington: Library of Congress, 1981).

institution thirty-three years later. In June, 1829, James Smithson of London died suddenly while in Genoa Italy. The will that he had written three years before contained an unusual provision for the dispersal of his property. It stipulated that,

> In the case of the death of my said Nephew [Henry James Hungerford] 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 bequeth the whole of my property, subject to the Annuity of one hundred pounds to John Fitall, and for the security and 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 and diffusion of knowledge among men.[4]

It was odd that Smithson, who had never set foot in the UnitedStates, should make such arrangements. When his nephew died without children on June 5, 1835, a sum equivalent to $500,000 was, in accordance to the will, given to the United States.

For the next decade Congress tried to fathom the meaning of the Smithson bequest. What kind of institution would maximize the "increase and diffusion of knowledge among men?" Who would govern its operation? How would the institution be financed in the future? The answers to these

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[4]Rhees, The Smithsonian Institution, Documents Relative To Its Origin And History, 1835-1899, p. 6. Hereafter cited as Origins.

questions, and those that grew from them, determined that the Smithsonian Institution was not the appropriate location for the national library.

From the very beginning ambiguity and confusion surrounded the Smithson bequest. Once Congress decided to accept the money (there were some who opposed it), debates filled the Senate and the House as to what to do with it. When the Senate considered the question on April 30, 1836, the chamber was a hive of conflicting opinion. William C. Preston somehow assumed that the will specified the establishment of the "Smithsonian University" while John Davis of Massachusettes was attentive enough to question that interpretation. During the same debate, it was wondered whether the Smithsonian Institution would be national or local in scope. Senator B. F. Leigh believed with other members that the bequest was "made simply for the benefit of one of the cities of the District of Columbia."[5] Leigh was promptly assaulted by another faction that asserted that in order to increase and diffuse knowledge among men a national institution was required. The reign of confusion continued.

In a noble attempt to alleviate some of the difficulty in interpreting the Smithson will, President Martin Van Buren in 1838 asked several persons "versed in science and

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[5]Ibid., p. 137.

familiar with the subject of public education" for their opinions on how to best use the money.[6] The result was another collection of conflicting opinion. Francis Wayland of Brown University proposed a university that would teach a variety of foreign languages, in addition to poetry, intellectual philosophy, and the law of nations. Richard Rush suggested a center for seed and plant distribution, the purchase of a printing press for the publication of scholarly lectures, and the hiring of "the best men" to present lectures and pursue special fields of study. John Quincy Adams reported that the money should not be directed toward "the endowment of any school, college, university, or ecclesiastical establishment."[7] Adams envisioned the construction of an astronomical observatory with modern equipment and a small library stocked with the finest books on astronomy.[8] Finally, Dr. Thomas Cooper (formerly of the University of South Carolina) replied to Van Buren's question with another plan for a university, but one open only to graduate students who would be taught advanced mathematics, astronomy, and chemistry. Instruction in

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[6]Ibid., p. 31.

[7]William J. Rhees, James Smithson And His Bequest, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1880), p. 31. Reprinted in William J. Rhees on James Smithson (New York: Arno Press, 1980).

[8]Rhees, Origins, p. 170. Adams made a lengthy speech in favor of a national observatory on March 5, 1840, in the House. Rhees, Origins, pp. 195-204, covers main argument.

foreign languages, literature, medicine, and law would not be included. Van Buren's attempt to quickly establish the Smithsonian Institution by submitting to Congress definite plans for its formation failed. The plans that he received were illustrative of the difficulty of interpreting the will. Unlike the Library of Congress, no clear function for the Smithsonian presented itself. Congressmen had to find a point of compromise in the midst of all their different opinions and goals for the bequest before the Smithsonian Institution could be founded.

In January, 1839, a joint committee of Congress was appointed to further "consider the expediency of providing an institution of learning," and to draft a charter outlining the structure of the Smithsonian.[9] With John Quincy Adams on the committee in the House, it was doubtful that any learning institution would be created. Indeed, little more than a year later Adams remarked that "all institutions of education" were too narrow in their focus to ever fulfill the Smithson bequest. The expansive quality of the will was seen in a bill that Adams presented before the House concerning the disposition of the money.

> A botanical garden, a cabinet of natural history, a museum of mineralogy, conchology, or geology, a general accumulating library -- all institutions of which there are numerous examples among the

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[9]This committee consisted of seven members in the Senate, and nine in the House.

> civilized Christian nations, and of most of which our own country is not entirely destitute; all are undoubtedly included within the comprehensive grasp of Mr. Smithson's design.... nor did the committee [of the House] believe that the moral or political sciences, the philosophy of language, the natural history of speech, the graces of polite literature, the mechanic or the liberal arts, were to be excluded from the benefits prepared for posterity by the perpetuation of this fund.[10]

The complex form suggested above became a reality in the act that formally established the Smithsonian Institution on August 10, 1846. A museum for the display 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" were all provided for in one section of the act.[11] Though a library was mentioned, it could not become the national library with the numerous other divisions of the Institution demanding time and money. The act of establishment gave the Institution a multiplicity of purpose that frustrated those who favored one department over another.

Those who sought to make the Smithsonian the national library were discouraged by the proceedings. Rufus Choate continued his long speeches in the Senate expounding the virtues of the national library plan, while others like George P. Marsh showed visible signs of dispair. Faced with

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[10]Rhees, Origins, p. 195.

[11]Ibid., p. 432.

an establishment that appeared more scientific than literary, Marsh vehemently told the members of the House that instead of having a library that would be the envy of Europe "we are promised experiments and lectures, a laboratory, and an audience hall .... a laboratory is a charnel house, chemical decomposition begins with death, and experiments are but the dry bones of science."[12] The collapse of library plan was further insured by the administrative structure of the Institution.

At first it seemed as if the Smithsonian would be under the direction of a simple congressional joint committee as was the Library of Congress. With the passage of the act of establishment, however, the governing body of the Smithsonian grew substantially. Aside from an honorary "establishment" made up of the President, Vice-President, members of the cabinet, and a host of other major officials, there would be a board of regents to more closely supervise operations. The regents included the Vice-President, the Chief Justice of the United States, the Mayor of Washington, three members from both houses of Congress, two members from the National Institute (a scientific establishment), and four lay members from the States. It was a bulky, and largely ineffectual administrative structure. To

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[12]Ibid., p. 385. Marsh made his speech on April 23, 1846.

define the leadership, a smaller executive committee comprised of three regents was formed. They in turn were presided over by a Chancellor and a Secretary. The Secretary was vested with extensive powers, including the ability to "discharge the duties of librarian."[13] Whoever filled the position would largely dictate the scope and character of the Smithsonian library.

Alexander Dallas Bache was one of the more vocal members of the board of regents who influenced the selection of the Secretary. As a professional scientist, it was natural for Bache to desire a fellow scientist to become Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. On December 3, 1846, a resolution that reflected his interests was submitted and approved by the regents. The resolution stipulated that the Secretary was to be a man of "eminent scientific and general acquirements ... capable of advancing science and promoting letters by original researches and effort."[14] A scientist was not likely to advocate the promotion of literature over scientific discovery.

Bache had a specific man in mind for the job of Secretary. Joseph Henry, a scientist who had made great contributions in the study of electromagnetism, was prepared to leave his comfortable teaching position at Princeton for

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[13]Ibid., p. 433.

[14]Dupree, Science in the Federal Government, p. 80.

the uncertainties of Washington.[15] Bache and Henry had known each other as students in London, and the friendship had lasted in their later years. But Henry did not hide behind Bache's influence to get the job. Before he was offered the position of Secretary, Henry constructed an outline of his plans for the Smithsonian. It contained some surprising views. Henry said that the Smithsonian was "not a national establishment, as is frequently supposed."[16] Its purpose went beyond national boundaries to the international community. The outline that Henry devised emphasized research and publication as the surest way to increase and diffuse knowledge.[17] As money was a constant restraining element, the Smithsonian under Henry's charge focused on that "which cannot be produced by the existing institutions in our country."[18] The Library of Congress was directly supported by Congressional appropriations that allowed for

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[15]A reliable account of Henry's work at the Smithsonian is found in Thomas Coulson's biography, Joseph Henry, His Life and Work (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950). The Papers of Joseph Henry, are still being published under the general editorship of Nathan Reingold. Four volumes of the series are complete, documenting Henry's activities between 1797 and 1840.

[16]Dupree, p. 81.

[17]Ibid.; Dillon Ripley, The Sacred Grove, Essays on Museums (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1969), pp. 52-53.

[18]Dupree, p. 81.

substantial growth whereas the Smithsonian depended upon the interest drawn from the original bequest.[19] Henry permitted the collection of necessary bibliographic materials in the Smithsonian library, but he would not tolerate any attempt to make it a national library. Space, money, and the broad responsibilities of the Smithson will would not permit it in his opinion. Besides, a large library at the Smithsonian would overlap with the growing function of the Library of Congress. The library question became a major point of contention between Henry and Charles Coffin Jewett who became Assistant Secretary and librarian of the Smithsonian on January 26, 1847.

Jewett was an extraordinarily ambitious man. He came to his new job resolved to make a national library. The regents who approved his nomination were unaware of the conflict in goals that lay between the Secretary and librarian. Where Henry saw use for a well selected reference library, Jewett remarked that "to place American students on a footing with those of the most favored country of Europe, is the design of the Smithsonian Library."[20] The clash in interests between the two men led to explosive results.

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[19]Rhees, Origins, pp. 429-30.

[20]Harris, ed., Charles Coffin Jewett and American Librarianship, 1841-1868., p. 86.

Early in 1847, the board of regents tried to steer a conciliatory path between the library and museum advocates on one hand, and those who favored Henry's plans on the other. A decision was soon made to divide the $30,000 annual income between the two groups.[21] The uneasy settlement lasted for seven years when Henry struck against it. He had watched with dismay as the library expanded beyond the realm of a well stocked reference library. Inside the newly constructed "Smithsonian castle," strange materials were deposited in the library's holdings, and beyond, in accordance with the copyright law.[22] Since 1846, the Smithsonian and Library of Congress had claim to one copy of "any book, map, chart, musical composition, print, cut, or engraving," which was protected by copyright. Inside the Capitol the Library of Congress was large enough to store the books that came to it as a result of the copyright law. Experience had shown Congress that a wide variety of books were needed for reference.[23] Henry, however, did not have the room, or the need for a large number of books. In 1854 he attacked the financial compromise that split the annual income between his program and the museum and library. By a vote of eight to six, the board of regents gave Henry the

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[21]Dupree, p. 83.

[22]Rhees, Origins, p. 434.

[23]Johnston, p. 241.

power to severely reduce the library's annual appropriation.[24] A special committee formed to decide upon the question had said "to describe a library as an institution 'for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men,' would be a preposterous abuse of terms.... it would be the hiving of knowledge, not its increase and diffusion."[25] The library's appropriation, therefore, soon dwindled to $1,500 from an available $15,000 "allowed for the purposes of the institution."[26]

Jewett was outraged by the decision. He tried to bypass Henry in a frustrated attempt to get a group of congressmen to join him in the fight for the library. This strategy led to Jewett's dismissal by order of Henry. According to a report that examined the affair, it was determined that Jewett's "removal was not arbitrary, unjust, and oppresive."[27] The dispute between the two men had come about because of a mutual frustration in trying to mold the Smithsonian into a specific form. The hierarchy of the Smithsonian administration, however, was stacked in Henry's favor because of his higher rank. Unlike the Librarian of Congress who enjoyed considerable freedom under the

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[24]Dupree, p. 84.

[25]Meacham, p. 48.

[26]Ibid., p. 42.

[27]Rhees, Origins, p. 590.

supervision of a small joint committee, Jewett was caught in a structure that basically put him under the control of a single individual. Henry, not Jewett, was in a comparable position to the Librarian of Congress by holding the power to influence the course of a whole institution rather than just a division. Those who observed Jewett's activities prior to being dismissed stated that "he was impatient of the restraints of a subordinate position, and entertained feelings toward the Secretary which made their harmonious cooperation impossible."[28] He had no chance for building a library of national character. Rather than continue a hopeless fight, Jewett left Washington for a new job as Superintendent of the Boston Public Library.

The stir that was caused by Jewett's removal brought the national library question back to the surface in Congress.[29] With the Smithsonian no longer a contender for location, attention began to shift to the Library of Congress as the most appropriate place for a national library. In March, 1855 the House of Representatives was presented with a variety of questions that demonstrated an increasing interest in the Library of Congress as the national library.

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[28]Ibid., p. 591.

[29]Choate resigned his position as a Smithsonian Regent in protest to Jewett's dismissal.

> If a national library be a national want, who should supply it? Can not Congress, which represents a population of 25,000,000, with resources almost incaluable, and with a treasury not exhausted or impoverished, but overflowing with revenue? Can it not spare out of this abundance whatever may be necessary? Is it not now supplying that want in the great library of Congress, to which in the last three years they have appropriated more than $90,000? It is accessible now to every scholar who may be at Washington, and will in a few years be so increased under the policy of its present administration as to supply many of the wants of the student and the scientific investigator. Shall a nation such as ours depend for this national want upon the bounty of a stranger?[30]

Joseph Henry and the board of regents had already answered the last question. In 1859 Henry rid himself of the troublesome copyright deposits by having the 1846 copyright provision repealed. The repeal also brought a halt to the deposit of materials in the Library of Congress.[31] For the next eleven years the Patent Office received the copyright deposits, though in 1865 the Library of Congress did have its deposit provision reinstated.

The demise of the national library plan at the Smithsonian hastened the rise of the Library of Congress. There was no longer two contenders for location. But the formation of a national library required far more than the loss of a competitor. An essential element was a unified

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[30]Rhees, Origins, p. 579.

[31]Librarian of Congress John Silva Meehan consented to the repeal. Cole, For Congress and the Nation, p. 26.

nation symbolized by a recognized central government. The aftermath of the Civil War provided the United States with a government that prepared for an expanding national role. Sectional barriers were broken down to government intervention and responsibility. With the additional responsibilities came the need for expanding institutions that would aid national administration and provide visible signs of unity and strength. The Library of Congress grew with the federal government and obtained national rank largely because of its attachment to the Country's legislative body. The close relationship with Congress provided the Library with liberal appropriations, and the legislation that was critical for its rise to national prominence.

CHAPTER III

The Library of Congress becomes the National Library

The process by which the Library of Congress became the national library was a gradual one, made up of a number of specific events that took place in an atmosphere of nation building. In 1865, the United States emerged intact after half a decade of Civil War. While sectional feelings between northern and southern states never completely vanished, the country was unified under a central government and a strong feeling of progress. Railroads were being laid across the land at an amazing speed, enabling extensive economic growth and the dispersion of the population over an ever widening geographic area. Industry boomed with the call for rails, and the Bessemer process ushered in a new age of steel production. As the United States expanded so did government institutions. The post bellum period is known, in part, as a time of vast bureaucratic organization in response to enlarged national needs. It was in this environment that the Library of Congress grew to national significance within the Capitol.

Four major events combined to make the Library the literary center of the country. First, a large congressional appropriation in 1865 made the expansion of the Library's quarters within the Capitol possible. The

appropriation showed that Congress recognized the inclusive nature of the Library of Congress, and set a precedent for future growth. Secondly, the transfer of the Smithsonian library to the Library of Congress symbolized the further definition of the two institutions, with the latter becoming the nucleus of literary deposit. The transfer brought to the Library a broad selection of scientific works which made the collection in the Capitol more comprehensive and national in character.

A third event that is related to the first and second was the purchase of the Peter Force library of Americana in 1867. The Force library was an unparalleled assemblage of books, maps, and documents relating to the history of the United States. Congress agreed to pay, at the urging of the Librarian, a handsome fee for the Force collection, supplying another example of its willingness to expand the Library and its role.

The final act that made the Library of Congress the national library was the copyright law of 1870. Once passed, this law centralized copyright registration and deposit at the Library. The Library of Congress became the only location where every literary and artistic work protected by the copyright law was housed, and available for use. The collection of materials became national in scope and significance. But with the massive influx of books came

a problem with space and location. The Library grew far beyond the storage capacity of the Capitol, creating the need for a new building that would symbolize the literary glory of the country.

In 1864, the Library of Congress was cramped inside of a large room on the west front of the Captiol. The room was an impressive iron gallery measuring 91 feet in length, 34 feet in width, and 38 feet in height.[1] Vertically, it was divided into three "galleries," one at floor level and two in the form of balconies that overlooked the central reading area. Approximately 40,000 volumes were stored in the room, though not all were on shelves. By necessity, books were being stored on the floor in growing piles. In October, a letter written by Assistant Librarian Ainsworth Rand Spofford was sent to the Secretary of the Treasury asking for an appropriation that would allow the Library to expand in two wings running north and south from the main room.

In his typically methodic fashion, Spofford, in the absence of Librarian John Gould Stephenson, outlined the reasons for the expansion. The primary reason given was to make all of the printed material in the Library accessable. Books could not be easily used if they sat in massive heaps upon the floor. Spofford remarked that a valuable set of British Parliamentary Documents "numbering about 3,000

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[1]Cole, For Congress and the Nation, p. 24.

volumes in folio," and "daily wanted for reference... are all upon the floor, because no shelves can be provided for them in the present Library."[2] Also, out of a total collection of 87,000 volumes, approximately 47,000 books were being "stored in the dark corners and passage ways of the old capitol, surrounded with wood-work, and liable to accident from the firing of a flue or other causes."[3] To serve a national role, all of the books needed to be available for use. Without additional room, the Library could not serve Congress by providing it with materials necessary for effective national legislation. Spofford wrote that:

> The constant donations, from the State governments and from foreign powers, of works illustrating the history, statistics, politics and legislation of our country and of the other parts of the world, cannot any longer be accommodated. These donations might be largely increased without expense to the Library fund, and a vast amount of valuable information, useful in the practical legislation of Congress, could be obtained, catalogued and permanently filed for the use of members.[4]

The first function of the Library, to serve Congress, could not, then, be completely carried out without expansion.

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[2]Spofford to William P. Fessenden, 22 October 1864. Librarians Letter Book p. 587. (Covers period between June 12, 1862, and December 22, 1865), Library of Congress Archives. Hereafter cited as Letter Book.

[3]Ibid., p. 588.

[4]Ibid., pp. 588-89.

The growth and diversification of the Library's collection was also jeopardized by the lack of room.

An appropriation of $160,000 was sought to enlarge the Library's quarters. Using a tactic that was common to the early arguments for a national library, Spofford mentioned that the appropriation was not "unreasonably high" when compared to "similar library accomodations elsewhere."[5] After all, the British Museum's new reading room cost half a million dollars, and the construction of the Boston Public Library amounted to $240,000. Congress agreed that the appropriation was necessary, and on March 2, 1865, President Lincoln gave his consent.[6] The Library would come to occcupy all of the Capitol's "west extension above the basement floor."[7]

Three months before the appropriation was approved, Spofford was appointed Librarian. He was an energetic man, fully dedicated to the Library and its national role. The day after approval was given for the Library's expansion, Spofford successfully regained the right of copyright deposit at the Library. The anticipation of materials flowing into the Library from all over the country gave

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[5]Ibid., pp. 589-90.

[6]Cole, For Congress and the Nation, p. 30.

[7]Glen Brown, History of the United States Capitol (New York: Da Cappo Press, 1970), p. 148.

him ample reason to closely oversee the construction of the new wings.

The dramatic enlargement of the Library inside of the Capitol was at best a difficult task. In his 1866 annual report Spofford wrote:

> The progress of the new library extension during the vacation of Congress, though not so rapid as was expected at the commencement of the work, has resulted in the completion of one entire wing, measuring ninety-five feet in length by thirty feet in width, which is now opened and fully occupied with books. It is expected that the remaining wing will be completed and occupied during the coming month.[8]

A careful estimate of total shelving space showed that 21,360 feet was available for the proper maintainance of approximately 170,000 volumes.[9] The generous congressional appropriation for the Library expansion gave it the capacity to accumulate a far wider range of books than was possible before. That fact became evident with the transfer of Smithsonian library in 1866.

Joseph Henry watched the proceedings at the Library of Congress with interest and was impressed by what he saw taking place. The expansion of the Library's "fireproof" apartments caused him to wonder in March 1865 if "it may not be expedient to request that the Smithsonian collection be

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[8]Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress, 1866. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), p. 1. Hereafter cited as Annual Report, 1866.

[9]Ibid.

received and arranged as one of its [the Library of Congress'] departments."[10] The Smithsonian would remain the guardian of the library after its removal to the Capitol, but the books that it owned would add to the national function of the Library of Congress by giving it a much fuller scientific division, and recognition as the literary core of the United States.

The legislation required for the transfer was completed in April, 1866, and by December Spofford reported that one-half of the 40,000 volume Smithsonian library had arrived. The remainder would come with the completion of the south wing.[11] Spofford was convinced that "the union of the two libraries will prove doubly advantageous to those heretofore resorting to either, and will insure the rapid growth of a great and truly national library."[12] The Library of Congress became the only national institution that functioned as a comprehensive library. The Smithsonian was for the time a scientific establishment, and the Patent Office, which continued to receive copyright deposits, was little more than a warehouse in the Department of the Interior. In 1867, Spofford sought to give the Library of Congress increased national meaning through the purchase of

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[10]Cole, For Congress and the Nation, p. 30.

[11]Annual Report, 1866, p. 3.

[12]Ibid.

the Peter Force library of Americana.

The Force collection was known to be a treasure house of American history. As an archivist and historian, Force had spent a lifetime carefully acquiring and preserving primary source materials that dealt with the history of the country. By 1866, however, Force was ready to sell the library to a worthy institution. A number of interested parties vied for the purchase of the library including the Long Island Historical Society, the Librarian of Harvard, Francis Parkman on behalf of the New York Historical Society, and Spofford at the Library of Congress. Knowing that a congressional appropriation could turn the purchase of the Force collection in his favor, Spofford prepared a special report for the Joint Library Committee that argued for the necessary funds.

Spofford's thorough familiarity with the contents of Force's library was apparent in his report, and gave to it a confident legitamacy. For two months he had spent about three hours per day examining "every book in the library."[13] The contents of the collection were astounding. There were 8,310 pamphlets printed before 1800, and approximately 35,000 that came after that period. A volume of the Virginia Company records were found showing its activities

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[13]John Y. Cole, Ainsworth Rand Spofford, Bookman and Librarian, The Heritage of Librarianship Series, no. 2 (Littleton: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1975), p. 65.

between 1621 and 1682. Another find of particular interest were "two autograph journals of George Washington, one dated 1755, during Braddock's expedition, and one in 1787, at Mount Vernon."[14] There were other items of similar interest and value within the 60,000 volume library. Few could doubt that the Force books would give the Library of Congress a wealthy foundation in its American history division.

Spofford made another appeal to national pride while asking Congress to appropriate $100,000 for the purchase of the Force collection.

> Congress represents the richest and most liberal people in the world, and may safely be asked to do once in a century what the British Government does every year of its existence, namely, to devote $100,000 to increase its national repository of knowledge. It is not creditable to our national spirit to have to admit the fact -- which nevertheless is true -- that the largest and most complete collection of books relating to America in the world is that now gathered on the shelves of the British Museum.[15]

The appropriation was a large one, especially coming so soon after the large sum granted for the Library's expansion. But a national library could not exist in a meaningful or symbolic way without a comprehensive department devoted to the history of the country it represented.

Spofford's argument in this direction was effective, and on March 2, 1867, the money needed for the purchase of

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[14]Ibid., p. 67.

[15]Ibid., p. 69.

the Force library was appropriated. It was a clear sign that Congress recognized the importance of enlarging the Library far beyond the realm of legislative concerns, and into broad divisions of knowledge that would be of use to the national citizenry. The transfer of the Smithsonian library, (though requiring no capital investment), indicated the same movement toward diversifying the contents of the Library, and increasing its national role. Of greatest importance, however, in making the Library of Congress the national library was the copyright law of 1870.

Charles Coffin Jewett is often credited as being the first American to see the opportunity of building a national library from the deposit of copyright materials.[16] In one of his final reports as Librarian of the Smithsonian Institution, Jewett wrote:

> There ought... to be in every country one complete collection of everything published -- one library, where everything printed should be garnered up, and treated as of some importance; for, although in the multitude of libraries everything may be preserved somewhere, yet, from being scattered about, and from there being no one place where the student would be sure of finding all that he might seek, many books would be practically lost.[17]

By trying to impose the potential fruits of the copyright on the Smithsonian, Jewett was fired. Little more than a

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[16]Ibid., p. 33.

[17]Harris, Charles Coffin Jewett and American Librarianship, p. 106.

decade later, Spofford pursued the same goal that Jewett had, but with greater diplomacy and the appropriate facility.

Though the Library of Congress had been the recipient of copyright deposits since 1865, the law was inefficient, and easily bypassed by authors or artists who wished to avoid the burden of mailing their work to two agencies. As a result, only "836 volumes of books, 386 pieces of music, and 202 maps, engravings, and photographs" were received by the Library through copyright in 1866.[18] Without some way of enforcing the law, the Library of Congress could not build a collection that represented the intellectual and cultural products of the nation.

Spofford observed that the English imposed a five pound penalty for noncompliance with their law of copyright desposit.[19] Believing that a similar penalty would induce American publishers to forward their works, he asked the Joint Library Committee to endorse a $25.00 fine for those who failed to deposit copyrighted works in the library.[20] The fine was sanctioned by Congress and became law on

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[18] Annual Report, 1866, p. 5.

[19] Ibid.

[20] John Y. Cole, "Ainsworth Spofford and the Copyright Law of 1870," Journal of Library History 1 (January 1971): 37.

February 18, 1867.[21] By the end of the year, Spofford's Annual Report showed that 1,493 books had arrived under the new law. It was a substantial increase over the previous year (657 volumes), and Spofford believed that "a proportion exceeding three-fourths of all publications copyrighted under the law, are received at this library."[22]

The copyright law, however, remained difficult to enforce. An unwieldy administrative network confused the entire copyright system. Referring to the $25.00 penalty, Spofford wrote,

> the statute... is so far from being a self acting one, that multitudes of publications in all parts of the country are never furnished to the library until after the official demand provided for in the law has been made. This requires incessant vigilance, not only to obtain authentic evidence of all copyrights issued in the numerous judicial districts of the United States, but to transmit the requisite notice of all delinquent proprietors of copyrights, and to record the results. With the utmost diligence it is found impracticable to secure for the library all copyright publications that are issued.[23]

The entire system needed vast reorganization. Spofford was frustrated that the Library could not receive what was legally its property, and knew that a national library should hold every available literary work that came from the

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[21] Benjamin W. Rudd, compiler, "Notable Dates in American Copyright," The Quarterly Journal Of The Library Of Congress 28, No. 2 (April 1971): 139. The law also provided for the free postage of copyrighted materials.

[22] Annual Report, 1866, p. 3.

[23] Ibid.

people it represented. To simplify copyright administration, and make the Library of Congress the only center of national literary reposit, Spofford submitted plans for a radically new copyright law in 1870.

One of Spofford's many talents as Librarian was identifying individuals who could help him accomplish his goals for the Library. Samuel S. Fisher, a newly appointed Commissioner on Patents, was in charge of the office that registered copyrights and supervised the gathering of deposits.[24] Aware that Fisher was also dissatisfied with the copyright system, Spofford conversed with him about making changes in law. At the time, copyright registrations were made through a disorderly web of 44 district courts, followed by the forwarding of single copies to the Patent office and the Library of Congress. What Spofford envisioned was centralizing all registration and deposit activities at the Library. Fisher was receptive to the idea declaring, "the time has come when a radical change should be made in the system of registering copyrights."[25] Having won the Commissioner's support, Spofford soon gained a congressional ally in the person of Representative Thomas A. Jenckes.

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[24]John Y. Cole, "Ainsworth Spofford and the National Library" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The George Washington University, 1971), pp. 132-133.

[25]Ibid., p. 133.

As Chairman of the Committee on Patents, Jenckes was in an ideal position to aid Spofford in removing the copyright business from the cluttered patent office. Jenckes was busy drafting a bill that would revise and consolidate the patent laws when the Librarian approached him in April 1870 with "a hasty outline" that presented "some leading reasons why the transfer of the entire copyright business and books to the care of the Library of Congress would promote the public interest."[26] In reality, the "hasty outline" was a complex letter made up of six well reasoned points that formed the crux of Spofford's national library plan.

The first two arguments put forward in the letter revolved around the chaotic system of issuing copyrights, a problem that in theory would be solved by placing the whole business in one office. If the Library of Congress were the only center for copyright registration and deposit, the dozens of district courts would be removed from the process. The Library would be further assured of receiving all deposit copies, and becoming the recognized national library. Spofford began the third point of his letter with that argument in mind. He explained:

> The advantage of securing to our only National Library, a complete collection of all American

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[26]Spofford to Jenckes, 9 April 1870, Librarian's Letterbook, Library of Congress Archives. Also quoted in Cole, Ainsworth Rand Spofford, Bookman and Librarian, pp. 70-73.

> copyright entries can scarcely be over-estimated. If such a law as that proposed had been enforced since the beginning of the Government, we should now have in the Library of Congress a complete representation of the product of the American mind in every department of science and literature, as represented in books.... We should have one comprehensive Library in the country, and that belonging to the nation, whose aim it should be to preserve the books which other libraries have not the room nor the means to procure. And it is well worth considering... whether we may not have reached a point where the Library of Congress should receive a more truly national designation.[27]

All of the essential components for a national library were present in Spofford's argument. The revision of the copyright law, though by no means insuring the complete representation of America's literary production, was the surest way of making the Library of Congress the undisputed national library.

Jenckes was impressed by Spofford's letter, and recognized the burden that would be taken off the Patent Office if the thousands of copyright deposits were removed from its rooms.[28] He therefore condensed the major points of Spofford's argument into an effective speech made in the House on April 14. The absurdity of the copyright system was readily apparent in the graphic descriptions that Jenckes made part of his presentation.

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[27]Ibid.

[28]Spofford had emphasized the loss of utility by keeping the copyright materials in the store rooms of the Patent Office.

> The result of the existing law has been to place in the store-rooms of the Department of the Interior from thirty to forty thousand volumes, beyond the reach of consultation, and which with difficulty can be found even with the most diligent inquiry. Some of them, and the greater portion, are in a store-room accessible only by clambering up a narrow staircase and over an archway -- a room which has no light, and where, if the books are to be examined, they must be examined by candle-light. -- In the Library of Congress there is room for all these books, and they will be useful in that place, whereas they are useless now.[29]

Free and easy access to all of the country's copyright materials would give the Library a national quality that no other library or institution in the United States had ever enjoyed.

The provision for copyright centralization at the Library was fastened by Jenckes to his bill for the revision of the patent laws.[30] On April 24, the House passed the bill, and one month later the Senate did the same.[31] President Grant completed the process by signing the bill into law on July 8. At the Library of Congress the effect of the copyright law was immediately felt. Two copies of every book, periodical, map, print, photograph, dramatic and musical composition protected by a copyright were to be

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[29]Congressional Globe, 14 April 1870, p. 2683.

[30]John Y. Cole, "Of Copyright, Men, and a National Library," The Quarterly Journal Of The Library Of Congress 28, No. 2 (April 1971): 126.

[31]Cole, "Ainsworth Spofford and the Copyright Law of 1870,": 34.

forwarded to the Librarian. One copy was for library use, the other as a legal record. In 1871 20,000 works were received under the new law.[32] Combined with the transfer of copyright records and deposits from the Patent Office and the district courts, the Library was flooded with material.[33]

The copyright law of 1870 brought an unparalleled collection of books and artistic matter to a central location in the United States. With expanded apartments in the Capitol that were able to accomodate the copyright business, prior recognition as an important literary center as seen in the acquisition of the Force Library and the transfer of the Smithsonian collection, and attachment to the largest representative body in the country, the Library of Congress became the national library. It represented the product of the American mind, and the cultural advancement of the nation.

There soon developed, however, a problem with housing the national library inside of the Capitol. The book collection expanded so rapidly with the copyright law that all available shelving space was exhausted in two years.

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[32]Annual Report of The Librarian of Congress for The Year 1871. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871), p. 4.

[33]Ibid., p. 1. The Patent Office transferred 23,070 books to the Library of Congress.

Adding more library rooms to the Capitol was possible, though undesirable from a practical and symbolic point of view. In 1871 Spofford began advocating a new separate library building that would stand as a monument to American learning and culture. It was a controversial idea that provoked years of heated debate. National themes emerged with renewed strength and were later preserved in the architecture and decoration of the building that came to house America's library.

CHAPTER IV

Building A National Library

Shortly after the passage of the copyright law of 1870, Ainsworth Spofford recognized the need for a separate library building. The library rooms in the Capitol had returned to the chaotic state of 1864 when books littered the floor for lack of shelf space. A new building would alleviate this problem and enable the Library to function efficiently as a national institution. Confinement within the Capitol not only hindered the utility of the Library, but also its symbolic importance. Until it was removed from the halls of the Capitol, the Library remained an appendage of Congress rather than a comprehensive library that served and represented the whole nation. Furthermore, a separate edifice could stand as a monument to learning, symbolizing through architectural means the strength of the American mind and the cultural attainments of the United States. The need for a large amount of space and a symbolic structure generated the drive for a national library building.

Surveying the Library's condition for his 1871 Annual Report, Spofford recognized an impending crisis. The shelves in every department of the collection were nearly filled. In the galleries, one hundred temporary cases accomodated "light materials," while store rooms under the

Library groaned under the weight of burdensome duplicate copies.[1] Two flights below the main floor, hundreds of folio volumes containing valuable copyright records lay scattered about.[2] As for the copyright business itself, the lack of room forced delays in registration, and considerable confusion in cataloging materials. The panorama of printed material strewn wherever space allowed influenced Spofford to "suggest the expediency of a separate building" in 1871.[3]

Whether unnoticed or ignored, Spofford's suggestion for a library building did not elicit congressional action, and a year later the crowded conditions transformed his request into an impassioned plea for more room. Angered by the lack of care on the part of congressmen, Spofford blamed the disarray of the collection on their inaction. Spofford's 1872 Annual Report presented a vivid description of the confusion.

> Masses of books, pamphlets, newspapers, engravings, &c., in the course of collation, cataloguing, labeling, and stamping, in preparation for their proper location in the Library, are necessarily always under the eye and almost under the feet of members of Congress and other visitors. Until Congress shall provide adequate space for performing these varied labors, they must of necessity go on directly under the public eye; and if the marble floors are littered

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[1] Annual Report, 1871, p. 4.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 5.

> with books in various stages of preperation for use, it is because that body has not yet provided quarters where processes can be separated from results....[4]

If nothing else, the operation of the copyright law was in Spofford's opinion "a conclusive argument... of the absolute necessity of erecting a separate building."[5]

Not everyone, however, was convinced of the need for a new structure. Congressmen asked about expanding the Capitol as a means of giving the Library more space. If done for a reasonable price and without endangering the architectural beauty of the building, the thought of keeping the national library in the Capitol seemed worthy of careful consideration. Spofford patiently listened to various proposals to enlarge the Library rooms, and noted the impracticality of each. None could adequately supply enough room for the collection beyond two decades.[6] Spofford therefore boldly submitted construction guidelines for a separate building.

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[4]Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress Exhibiting the Progress of the Library during the Year ended December 1, 1872 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), p. 6.

[5]Ibid., p. 7.

[6]Ibid., pp. 7-8. Spofford outlined three proposals concerning expanding the Library in the Capitol. One proposal involved converting one wing of the Capitol into the Library chamber and the other wing into a room for the Supreme Court and Court of Claims. A new Capitol would then be constructed for legislative uses.

The Librarian presented "three ruling considerations" to the Joint Committee as a basic outline for the library building. The structure had to be built of fire proof materials, arranged to insure the "highest utility and convenience," and provide room for the later growth of the Library.[7] Spofford specifically envisioned a circular reading area surrounded by books arranged in tiered alcoves. This design would enable a book to be delivered to a reader in a minimal amount of time, and with far less exertion than a series of reading rooms allowed. High above the reading room would rest a massive "dome of iron and glass, thus yielding adequate light at all seasons, and in every part of the Library."[8] Externally, the walls of the building were to be placed far enough from the outer rim of the central enclosure to allow room for later expansion of the book stacks. The entire plan was based upon convenience and economy. Spofford optimistically asserted that the building he proposed could be constructed in two or three years for one million dollars. The costly and dangerous process of enlarging the Capitol could be avoided by erecting a separate edifice and allowing the Library to grow in an organized fashion.

Spofford's appeals for a new building went directly to the Joint Library Committee who in turn placed pressed Congress for appropriations. In March 1873, the Committee

received congressional authorization to sponsor a design competition for a library building. A three man commission comprised of the Secretary of the Interior, the Architect of the Capitol Extension, and the Librarian of Congress was directed to "select a plan and supervise the location and erection of a building."[9] The commission's power seemed surprisingly strong considering the ambivalence of Congress toward the Library's condition in the Capitol. In reality the commission had very little authority, aside from the initial screening of designs submitted by architects. There was no guarantee that Congress would approve the commission's selection of a plan or appropriate the money required to commence construction. The design competition was only a sign that Congress considered the question of a library building worthy of further consideration.

Congress appropriated five thousand dollars to aid the commissioners in their work. Advertisements appeared in major newpapers across the United States inviting architects

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[7]Ibid., p. 9. Spofford thought the building should be large enough to shelve a minimum of three million books.

[8]Ibid., p. 10.

[9]Cole, Ainsworth Rand Spofford, Bookman and Librarian, p. 36.

to forward plans for a library building.[10] Spofford rejoiced in his role as a commissioner and fully immersed himself in the task of finding a capable architect. To provide "guidance for those who may submit designs," he formulated the dimensions necessary for proper shelving and reading space within the national library.[11] Spofford's specifications called for a central reading room measuring 100 feet in diameter, and massive exterior walls enclosing an area of 270 by 340 feet. To ensure maximum participation among the architectural community, the commission offered cash awards for the three best designs.[12]

When the competition closed on November 15, 1873, twenty-eight designs were on file. The entries displayed a vast range of architectural styles. Some exhibited ornate rotundas or towering spires, while others generated a vision of quieter dignity.[13] On December 22, the firm of Smithmeyer and Pelz was declared the winner of the

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[10]Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress for the Year 1873. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1873), p. 5. Hereafter cited as Annual Report, 1873.

[11]Cole, Ainsworth Rand Spofford, Bookman and Librarian, p. 36.

[12]Annual Report, 1873, p. 5.

[13]Examples of the designs that were received by the building commission are illustrated in John Y. Cole, "Smithmeyer & Pelz, Embattled Architects of the Library of Congress," The Quarterly Journal Of The Library Of Congress 29, No. 4 (October 1972): 284.

competition and the $1,500 first prize award. The library building commission believed that the firm's simple Italian renaissance design displayed all of the most essential qualities for a national library building. There was room for the Library to grow over many decades, and the building's style represented a period of cultural and intellectual strength. With design in hand, the commission (especially Spofford) looked forward to acquiring land near the Capitol, and commencing construction at the earliest possible date. They could not forsee the innumerable delays that lay ahead.

Oddly enough, one of the first impediments to constructing the library came from Senator Timothy Howe, chairman of the Joint Library Committee. After viewing the great national libraries of Europe in 1874, Howe thought the Smithmeyer and Pelz design was too "small and plain."[14] Howe insisted that the United States needed a library building "more in keeping with the standing of our nation among the great powers."[15] The chairman's argument provided a noticeable shift from concentration on utilitarian qualities to an emphasis on symbolic importance as a factor in the Library's design.

In 1874, Spofford issued similar statements about the

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[14]Ibid., p. 283.

[15]Ibid.

symbolic role of national library buildings. An important element in propelling a country toward global recognition as an intellectual power was the ability to identify national institutions devoted to the preservation of knowledge. With the Library of Congress concealed within the Capitol, the United States was deprived of a physically defined repository of knowledge. In effect, the Library was still a legislative rather than national institution. A separate building was needed to elevate the Library to full national and international status. As Spofford observed,

> In no country in Europe, of the first rank, is it attempted to keep the library of the government under the same roof with the halls of legislation. In London, in Paris, in Vienna, in Munich, in St. Petersburg, there exists a national library having its own separate building....[16]

Concern for the symbolic enhancement of the Library was manifested in Congress by a $2,000 appropriation in June 1874, "to procure additional designs" for a library building.[17] The new design competition proved inconclusive, however, for some Congressmen placed personal preference above group compromise in the selection of a plan. Other members of the House and Senate remained unsure of the need for a

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[16]Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress for The Year 1874 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1874), p. 7.

[17]John Y. Cole, "The Main Building of the Library of Congress, A Chronology 1871-1965," The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress 29, No. 4 (October 1972): 267.

separate building. Frustration marked the efforts of the Librarian and the Joint Committee to resolve the controversy surrounding the design and location of the Library. Meanwhile, Spofford reported that every inch of shelf space in the Capitol was exhausted. Library materials were "being piled upon the floor in all directions."[18]

As the delay in providing accomodations for the Library stretched from months into years, the problem received presidential attention. In his second State of the Union address, delivered on December 2, 1878, President Rutherford B. Hayes recognized the great national importance of the Library of Congress by expressing concern for its condition in his speech.[19] Hayes implored Congress to take immediate action in providing for the wants of the Library.

> This invaluable collection of books, manuscripts, and illustrative art has grown to such proportions, in connection with the copyright system of the country, as to demand the prompt and careful attention of Congress to save it from injury in its present crowded and insufficient quarters. As this library is national in its

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[18]Ibid.; U.S., Congress, Senate, Report of the Joint Committee on the Library, S. Rept. 387, 44th Cong., 1st sess., 1876, p. 2.

[19]Hayes was a well known supporter of the Library of Congress. As former chairman of the Joint Library Committee, Hayes was instrumental in the purchase of the Peter Force Library in 1867. Henry Barnard, Rutherford B. Hayes And His America (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), p. 243; Charles Richard Williams, The Life of Rutherford Birchard Hayes, Vol. 1. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1914; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), p. 282, n. 1.

> character,... it can not be doubted that the people will sanction any wise expenditure to preserve it and enlarge its usefulness.[20]

Hayes' address widely publicized the need for a separate library building, but it did not motivate Congress to act with sufficient speed. Two years passed before a "Joint Select Committee on Additional Accomodations for the Library of Congress" was formed.

The select committee was led by two men determined to construct a national library building. Committee chairman David W. Vorhees was known among his Senate colleagues as an animated devotee of the Library, and Senator Justin S. Morrill possessed the fine rhetorical skills necessary for combating the opponents of a separate building. Deciding to confront a major problem first, the select committee asked three well known architects for their frank, professional opinions as to whether the Capitol should be expanded, or if the expansion of the Library demanded other accomodations. Their response came quickly. Architect of the Capitol Edward Clark, Alexander Esty, and John L. Smithmeyer were unanimous in deciding that the Capitol could no longer serve

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[20]Israel, ed. The State of the Union Messages of the Presidents, 1790-1966. vol. II, p. 1370.

the needs of the Library.[21] A separate building was the only answer.

Clark, Esty, and Smithmeyer prepared new designs for the Library. The select committee gave them guidelines comparable to the 1873 design competition except that the dimensions of the building were enlarged to cover an area 450 feet long and 300 feet wide.[22] In planning the "interior arrangement" of the Library, the architects turned to Spofford for direction.[23] The large central reading room remained the crux of the interior design. Smithmeyer was at a definite advantage in the competition against Clark and Esty for a new architectural plan. Experience in the 1873 design contest taught Smithmeyer that the library building must project national pride and intellectual confidence. In 1880, he submitted four plans displaying elaborate ornamentation and attention to symbolism. Smithmeyer's efforts were rewarded. At the commencement of the American Library Association convention held in Washington in 1881,

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[21]U. S., Congress, Senate, Letter from The Architect of The United States Capitol, transmitting a report of the commission appointed by the Joint Select Committee on Additional Accomodations for the Library of Congress, June 17, 1880, S. Mis. Doc. No. 3, 46th Cong., 3d. sess., 1880; Cole, "Smithmeyer & Pelz ...," p. 287.

[22]Cole, "Smithmeyer & Pelz ...," p. 287.

[23]Ibid., p. 288.

Spofford announced that the Smithmeyer and Pelz Italian renaissance design had once again won the approval of the select committee.[24]

The Washington Library Convention gave Smithmeyer the opportunity to express his views about the importance of the national library's architecture. Though an outsider in a hall full of librarians, Smithmeyer spoke authoritatively about library design. He declared that the "National Library of the United States" required an architectural scheme that made it "more of a museum of literature, science, and art, than strictly... a collection of books."[25] As a national symbol, the Library of Congress was a unique component of the American library community. Unlike other domestic libraries, it represented the sum of national intellectual and cultural achievments. The Library, therefore, required a building that stood apart from all others as a monument to learning.

Smithmeyer's plans did not gain unanimous approval from the assembly in Washington. William Frederick Poole of the Chicago Public Library was convinced that the emphasis upon monument building endangered important functional considerations. Poole disliked large, single reading rooms no matter how dramatic they were. Instead, he advocated a

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[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid.

series of smaller reading areas, each supplied with books on a specific subject. There was no reason, in Poole's opinion, for placing every book and library patron in one central location. It only encouraged noise and an awkward shelving system. Poole's supposed utilitarian concepts of library construction came under attack when it became clear that he wished to incorporate them in the national library building plans.

Spofford refused to sacrifice the majestic beauty or symbolism of the Library structure to suit Poole or any other member of the American Library Association. In reference to Poole's architectural ideas Spofford wrote, "I am not willing to have the interior plans of a library building of national importance dwarfed to the dimensions of a prolonged series of packing boxes."[26] The Librarian agreed with Smithmeyer that the Library of Congress had to display visually the power and value of learning. In a list of eight essential rooms that Spofford said "a National Library must embrace," the first mentioned was

> a grand central hall, sufficiently impressive in height and proportions to show at once, by its well-lined walls, the wealth of its literary stores, and to appeal to public taste as something worthy of the country.[27]

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[26]"Proceedings [of 1883 American Library Association Convention]" Library Journal 8, Nos. 9-10 (September - October 1883): 270.

[27]Ibid.

The sight and location of the hall was intentionally designed to arouse national pride in the cultural and intellectual progress of the United States. Massive walls filled with books projected a feeling of strength and comprehensiveness. The central position of the hall denoted the radiating power of learning and its primary importance in the lives of men.

The combined need of extra space for Congress, and particularly the Library, brought the separate building question to the forefront of congressional attention in 1886. Photographs of the Library taken in the the late nineteenth century document the incredible state of crowding in the Capitol. Mountainous piles of books clogged the reading areas and blocked passages in the upper galleries.[28] Spofford's thorough familiarity with the chaotic stacks was often the only salvation for a reader seeking a particular book. The Senate agreed that a new building was in order, but the House repeatedly failed to give its support.[29] The Senate identified the land opposite the east front of the

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[28]The Library of Congress Photograph Division contains a number of detailed prints of the Library's rooms during this period. John Cole has published some of them in "The Library of Congress in the Nineteenth Century: An Informal Account," Journal of Library History 9, No. 3., (July 1974): 2966-67.

[29]Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress for the year 1885 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885), p. 8.

Capitol "separated therefrom by the eastern park and by the line of First street" as an appropriate location for the Library as early as 1884.[30] In the House, Representative Thomas Holman of Indiana created opposition to the building by arguing that the Library was founded, and should be preserved, as a legislative library. Constructing a building and enlarging the collection diffused the original purpose of the Library. Holman ignored the fact that the Library of Congress had become comprehensive in nature and national in scale. During the spring of 1886 Holman was temporarily silenced, and the House approved the act granting a new library building.

On April 15, President Grover Cleveland signed the document enacting

> that a fire-proof building, for the accomodation of the Library of Congress, shall be erected east of the Capitol,.... and the construction of said building, substantially according to the plan submitted to the Joint Select Committee... by John L. Smithmeyer, in the Italian renaissance style of architecture, with such modifications as may be found necessary or advantageous, without materially increasing the cost of the building....[31]

Spofford was elated. He joined yet another commission given

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[30] Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress for the year 1884 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884), p. 5.

[31] [Public - No. 21] An act authorizing the construction of a building for the accomodation of the Congressional Library, p. 1, Library of Congress Archives.

charge of making contracts with construction companies for the purchase of building materials. Congress appropriated five hundred thousand dollars to begin construction.

The day after the building was approved, the Library Building Commission met in the Department of the Interior to discuss purchasing land for the construction site.[32] Privately-owned houses dotted the landscape of the chosen area that laid a few hundred yards east of the Capitol. The owners of the property were asked to submit "proposals for the sale of their premises." A portent of later trouble appeared in May when the commissioners found that the combined price asked by the property holders greatly exceeded the money appropriated by Congress. The appeal for an extra $35,000 raised a number of eyebrows in both houses of Congress. Spofford and Interior Secretary Lucius Lamar spent an anxious day on August 5, watching Congress debate and vote upon the bill authorizing additional money for the Library site. That evening Spofford wrote,

> I was on the floor of the House three hours, and Secretary Lamar was there about two hours, watching its chances, removing objections, taking care of Holman,... and others -- for a single member's objection would have killed it at any stage.[33]

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[32]Record, Library Building Commission, p. 29, Library of Congress Archives.

[33]David Mearns, "The Library of Congress: The Early Years," Reader in American Library History, Michael H. Harris, ed. (Washington: NCR Microcard Editions, 1971) p. 113.

The bill passed both houses, and by 3:10 in the afternoon Spofford was at the White House to get Cleveland's signature. The president obliged and granted the appropriation. Spofford proclaimed himself "the happiest man in Washington -- the last obstacle in the way of the Library Building being removed."[34]

Spofford's optimism was premature. Shortly after the ground was cleared, a new problem arose. Somehow the question of how much money should be expended on the building had never been settled. Holman quickly announced that the building should not exceed $2,323,600, a figure based upon a report made in 1886 after consultation with Smithmeyer.[35] Bernard Green, the superintendent of construction, was sure the expansive Italian renaissance design would entail a figure between seven and ten million dollars. Charges of deception naturally followed. Holman said that Smithmeyer willfully gave an inaccurate estimate regarding the total cost of the building.[36] Defending himself, Smithmeyer claimed that he submitted the $2,323,600 price as an indication of the amount needed to begin active consruction. The controversy over building costs spread through the House and once more endangered the future of the

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[34]Ibid.

[35]Cole, "Smithmeyer & Pelz ...," p. 294.

[36]Ibid., pp. 294-95.

Library of Congress as a national institution.

On June 19, 1888, the House passed a resolution that brought work on the library building to a halt.[37] Construction would not resume until the cost of the building was determined. Five architects were called upon to provide new alternate plans for the Library. Debates in the House over money for the building and the adaptation of designs to fit a smaller appropriation created a charged atomosphere where national themes collided with staunch frugality. On the day that work stopped on the building, Representative Newton W. Nutting made a speech that emphasized the symbolic importance of the Library building. Nutting's defense of the building as a national monument to learning deserves extensive quotation.

> You [Congress] have erected in this city of Washington a great building to express your idea of war by land and sea [the State, War, and Navy Department building]. You paid $11,000,000 for that building. That is all right. I am glad you did it. That building was erected for the purpose of illustrating and emphasizing your idea of the physical protection of the principles upon which your Government is founded. You have built a Treasury building here which today is overflowing with money, and you have expended seven or eight millions for that....
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> But Mr. Chairman, neither in your capital city of Washington nor anywhere else in this broad and beautiful land has the Federal Government erected a building for the accomodation of a public

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[37] Daily Journal, 1886-88, Library of Congress Archives. This journal of construction activities was kept by Bernard Green, Superintendent of Construction. The vote to suspend construction was passed by a vote of 114 to 50.

> library. Neither in the District of Columbia nor anywhere else in the United States has the United States Government erected a building to emphasize its regard for the education of the people.
>
> Therefore I say the time has come to erect a building here that will be a proper and sufficient monument to education, an object of use and source of pride to the whole nation.... It is stated that this Library building is to be the largest in the city of Washington. I am glad of that. The structure which emphasizes the value that we set upon the education of our people, upon the means which can put our people in a position to understand the principles upon which our Government is founded, ought to be our largest and best building. The monument that is erected to the enlightenment of the people, the monument that is erected to the symmetrical formation and development of the minds of the people, should be the largest and most beautiful monument of all.[38]

Nutting's speech united the ideological origins of the national library with the symbolic function of the library building. The early proponents of a national library argued that a vast collection of books was necesary for the education of the American populace in the democratic foundations of the United States. To later proponents a well designed library building symbolized the value of that education and projected the strength of free institutions.

As Nutting resumed his chair, debates ensued over the cost of making the Library a monument equal to those of Europe. Critics argued that it was inexpedient to expend large sums of money in imitation of European national libraries. Georgia Representative Judson C. Clements

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[38] 50th Cong., 1st sess., 19 June 1888, House, Congressional Record 19: 5392.

remarked that he was not opposed to a "reasonably handsome building," but was unwilling to "squander three or four times the necessary amount in order to follow in the footsteps of the oppresive and extravagant monarchies of the Old World."[39] James B. McCreary of Kentucky saw no reason for the building to exceed $3,000,000, and thought "we ought to know exactly, before going on ..., precisely what the cost is to be."[40]

To resolve the controversies that hindered construction of the library building, Congress assumed the role of the building commission on October 2, and dismissed Smithmeyer as architect on October 3. General Thomas Lincoln Casey of the Army Corps of Engineers was given direct charge of building operations. Casey was known as the engineer who took charge of the construction of the Washington Monument in 1878, and rapidly brought it to completion in 1884. His reputation for efficiency and exactitude was the best possible cure for the problems that surrounded construction of the new Library.

Congress asked Casey to plan a building that would cost no more than $4,000,000 to erect. The General immediately did so and submitted the plan for congressional review in November. The $4,000,000 restriction limited the size of

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[39]Ibid., p. 5397.

[40]Ibid., p. 5393.

the building to an area of 333 feet by 318 feet. There would only be enough shelving space for about thirteen years growth.[41] In December, Casey put forward a second plan that simply modified the 1886 design drawn by Smithmeyer and Pelz. The Italian rennaisance style was preserved, a dome was shown towering high above a circular reading room, and the exterior walls encompassed a rectangular area 470 feet long and 338 feet wide.[42] Constructing the library building according to the second plan involved a $6,000,000 appropriation. Supplied with two definite plans and estimates of cost, Congress decided on March 2, 1889 that the $6,000,000 design was the most appropriate for the Library.[43] Construction resumed, and by mid September the massive cement foundation of the Library was complete.

Under Casey's direction, the new building rose from the ground with considerable speed. By December 1891, the front walls of the Library had reached the level of the second story.[44] One year later, the drum of the reading room was "ready to receive the framework of the dome,... already

[41]Cole, "Smithmeyer & Pelz ...," p. 296.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Cole, "The Main Building of the Library of Congress, A Chronology 1871-1965," p. 268.

[44]U.S., Congress, Senate, Letter of The Chief of Engineers, United States Army transmitting The report upon the construction of the building for the Library of Congress, during the year ending December 1, 1891, S. Mis. Doc. No. 15, 52nd Cong., 1st sess., 1891, p. 1.

under construction in steel and iron, including both the interior and exterior shells and the lantern."[45] Painters and sculpters soon arrived to embellish the interior and exterior of the building with ornate decorations that expressed the cultural advancement of the United States.

Decoration of the building commenced when General Casey's son Edward was made architect of the Library in December 1892 at age 28. In addition to his duties as architect, Edward Casey was given charge of all interior decoration.[46] The grand entrance hall and expansive reading room provided fertile ground for symbolic art forms. In the vestibule of the entrance hall, statues of Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, the arts, invention, and strength, guarded the entrance to the Library. Designed and executed by sculptor Herbert Adams, each Minerva figure was assigned a symbolic function.[47] One of the statues held the "torch of learning" in a way comparable to the Statue of Liberty to

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[45]U.S., Congress, House, Letter From The Chief Of Engineers Of The U.S. Army, Transmitting A Report Of The Construction Of The Building For The Library Of Congress For The Year Ending December 1, 1892, H. Mis. Doc. No. 9, 52nd Cong., 2d sess., 1892.

[46]Helen-Anne Hilker, Ten First Street, Southeast: Congress builds a Library, 1886-1897 (Washington: Library of Congress, 1980), p. 15.

[47]Herbert Small, Handbook of the new Library of Congress in Washington (Boston: Curtis and Cameron, 1897; reprint ed., Boston: George E. Crosby & Co., 1980), p. 22. Hereafter cited as Handbook.

emphasize the glorious role of knowledge and its ability to light the path of inquiring men.[48] Another figure grasped a globe and scroll to symbolize the universal power of the written word. The statues artistically portrayed learning as a magnificent force, and were designed to make the United States appear as an intellectual power.

The supreme example of decorative symbolism, however, was found in the central reading room. The statuary, murals, and other artistic pieces, depicted the broad divisions of human knowledge.[49] They were incorporated into the Library's design to present a feeling of comprehensiveness, and a sign of cultural maturity. Gazing down into the reading room from pedestals high atop upper gallery ballustrades stood sixteen bronze statues of men who made great contributions to "human development and civilization."[50] Christopher Columbus and Robert Fulton represented commerce, while Homer and William Shakespeare presided over the art of poetry. All of the statues that encircled the reading room suggested intellectual strength and dignity. Their presence in the Library inspired the pursuit of knowledge and excellence in all fields of study.

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[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid., p. 71; Hilker, Ten First Street, Southeast..., p. 29.

[50]Small, Handbook, p. 64.

At the apex of the dome, a lantern brought the Library to its full height of 190 feet. The ceiling of the lantern held a painting that symbolized the Library's purpose. Artist Edwin H. Blashfield painted a

> beautiful female figure representing the Human Understanding, lifting her veil and looking upward from Finite Intellectual Achievement... to that which is beyond; in a word Intellectual Progress looking upward and forward. She is attended by two cherubs, or geniuses; one holds the book of wisdom and knowledge, the other seems, by his gesture, to be encouraging those beneath to persist in their struggle towards perfection.[51]

So too, the Library of Congress was designed and built to influence the creation of scholarly works that advanced knowledge to new, unforeseen levels of academic excellence. The new building, with its elaborate ornamentation, symbolized the value placed on learning in the United States, and the cultural wealth of the nation. While writing the Handbook to the New Library of Congress in Washington, journalist Herbert Small proudly noted that the new building marked the first time that the Government "called upon a representative number of American painters and sculptors to help decorate, broadly and thoroughly, one of its great public monuments."[52] Small emphasized that "the nearly fifty sculptors and painters" at work in the Library were all Americans, a fact given to demonstrate the

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[51]Ibid., p. 72.

[52]Ibid., p. 8.

high cultural and artistic level attained in the United States.

General Casey stated in his 1894 construction report that approximately 400 workmen were busily employed in completing the Library.[53] The ornamental work on the vault of the dome neared completion, and by 1896 all but a few ornaments were finished. Thousands of volumes in the Capitol were packed in preparation for their transfer to the new building. Slowly, "one-horse express waggons" moved 800 tons of books across First street to the completed Library.[54] On November 1, 1897, the new Library opened it's doors to the public.

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[53]U. S., Congress, House, Report Upon The Construction Of The Building For The Library Of Congress During The Year Ending December 1, 1894, Submitted By The Chief Of Engineers, H. Mis. Doc. No. 4, 53d Cong., 3d sess., 1894, p. 2.

[54]Cole, "The Library in the Nineteenth Century: An Informal Account," p. 233.

CONCLUSION

The completion of the Library of Congress building marked the end of the struggle to create a national library in the United States. The Library's national designation never came from a congressional act, but emerged from basic components of nineteenth century American nationalism. Manifest destiny, mission, nativism, and cultural nationalism provided the impetus to build an institution that preserved, symbolized, and spread national thought and ideals. The Library of Congress achieved national status through a combination of five major events that centralized the country's literary and artistic products at the Library, and supplied the room, location, and symbolism necessary for the intellectual and cultural representation of the United States.

The spirit of manifest destiny and mission appeared in the early arguments for a national library. A desire to spread the democratic principles of the United States across the continent in order to build a "model republic" linked the idealistic goals of manifest destiny and mission to those of the library advocates. A national library would, in the opinion of those who supported it, diffuse democratic principles through a populace educated by its literary stores. Large numbers of books were required to instruct

the citizenry about the glorious origins of the United States and its future mission.

Many intellectuals believed that national preservation depended upon the power of knowledge to offset dangerous foreign influences. Nativism arose in response to a fear that immigrants would destroy the foundations upon which the United States rested. Their customs, religious beliefs, and political background appeared antithetical to basic American ideals. A national library filled with works by American authors would preserve and defend the country's cultural and intellectual character from corrosive foreign influences. Similarly, a large domestic library could liberate American scholars from European collections and aid in the creation of a national literature.

Cultural nationalism influenced the construction of intellectual centers and the genesis of cultural products that displayed the artistic and intellectual strength of the country. A national library provided the opportunity to unite artistic and intellectual works in a single institution. The literary center of the nation, elaborately decorated by the work of American artists, came into being at the Library of Congress.

National fervor had to be channeled into congressional legislation before the Library of Congress emerged as the national library. Five major acts of Congress can be

identified as giving the Library its national character. The expansion of the Library's rooms within the Capitol demonstrated a willingness on the part of Congress to allow the book collection to grow far beyond legislative needs. This willingness was further illustrated by the transfer of the Smithsonian library and the purchase of the Peter Force collection of Americana. The vast assortment of scientific and historical materials diversified the contents of the Library of Congress and extended its national role. With increasing frequency, scholars found works that previously had only been available in European libraries.

The copyright law of 1870 guaranteed the national status of the Library of Congress. The deposit of every artistic and literary work protected by copyright in the United States made the Library the intellectual center of the country. No other institution represented the American mind as comprehensively as the Library. A magnificent building was needed, however, to symbolize the value of learning, and the cultural maturity of the nation.

National themes reappeared in the construction of the new library building. The architecture and decoration of the edifice projected a sense of mission and destiny. A towering gold dome, surmounted by a torch glistened as a beacon to those desiring intellectual freedom. The completion of the new building enabled the Library to

fulfill its national role, and stand as a permanent monument to the power and enduring value of learning.

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THE PATH TO PROMINENCE:
NATIONALISM AND THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, 1835-1897

by

Robert Karl Poch

(ABSTRACT)

Basic components of nineteenth century American nationalism influenced the creation of a national library in the United States. Manifest destiny, mission, nativism, and cultural nationalism provided the impetus to build an institution that preserved, symbolized, and spread national thought and ideals.

Five major congressional acts made the Library of Congress the national library. The expansion of the Library's rooms in the Capitol (1865), the transfer of the Smithsonian Institution library (1866), purchase of the Peter Force collection of Americana (1867), the copyright law of 1870, and approval of a new library building (1886), made the Library the center of literary deposit, and the cultural, intellectual representative of the United States.