



Smithsonian

Institution Archives

National Museum Building Construction Records, 1890, 1901-1916, 1923

Finding aid prepared by Smithsonian Institution Archives

Smithsonian Institution Archives
Washington, D.C.
Contact us at osiaref@si.edu

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Historical Note.....	1
Descriptive Entry.....	1
Names and Subjects	1
Container Listing	3
Series 1: GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE, 1901-1916, 1923. ARRANGED CHRONOLOGICALLY.....	3
Series 2: SUBJECT FILES, 1890, 1901-1902.....	6
Series 3: PHOTOGRAPHS.....	10
Series 4: NOTES, EXTRACTS, AND COMPILATIONS FROM THE CORRESPONDENCE AND REPORTS, 1901-1910.....	11
Series 5: FRANK F. GRAHAM AND THOMPSON-STARRETT CO. LAWSUITS, 1907-1915.....	12
Series 6: SPACE ALLOCATION FILES, 1908-1911. ARRANGED ALPHABETICALLY.....	13
Series 7: JAMES MILLAR REPORTS, 1909-1912.....	14
Series 8: CARD INDEXES TO CORRESPONDENCE.....	15

Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	National Museum Building Construction Records
Date:	1890, 1901-1916, 1923
Identifier:	Record Unit 79
Creator::	Smithsonian Institution. Assistant Secretary in charge of the United States National Museum
Extent:	6.1 cu. ft. (11 document boxes) (4 3x5 boxes)
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 79, Smithsonian Institution, Assistant Secretary in charge of the United States National Museum, National Museum Building Construction Records

Historical Note

In 1903 Congress authorized the Board of Regents to begin a new museum building, construction to be under the direction of Bernard R. Green, Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds of the Library of Congress. Construction began in June 1904 and ended in 1911. Richard Rathbun, Assistant Secretary, spent much of his time from 1901 to 1911 planning and supervising construction of the new building, including extensive consultation with foreign and domestic museum experts.

Descriptive Entry

These records, together with record units 80, 81, and 187 contain full documentation of construction of the 1911 National Museum Building, from internal planning and contracts to construction details and costs. Rathbun prepared a history of the museum construction, which was published as *A Descriptive Account of the Building Recently Erected for the Departments of Natural History of the United States National Museum*. United States National Museum Bulletin 80, Washington, 1913.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Actions and defenses
- Architectural design
- Buildings -- Maintenance

Buildings -- Repair and reconstruction
Museum buildings
Museums -- Administration
Smithsonian buildings

Types of Materials:

Black-and-white photographs
Manuscripts

Names:

Graham, Frank F.
Green, Bernard R. (Bernard Richardson), 1843-1914
Library of Congress. Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds
National Museum of Natural History (U.S.)
Rathbun, Richard, 1852-1918
Thompson-Starrett Co.
United States National Museum

Container Listing

Series 1: GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE, 1901-1916, 1923. ARRANGED CHRONOLOGICALLY.

Note: This collection division consists of the main correspondence file of Richard Rathbun, as the Smithsonian official charged with overseeing the construction of the new museum building. The correspondence documents the day-to-day planning and construction of the building. Material of particular interest includes correspondence regarding the design and construction of foreign museums, and the role of the Smithsonian's Board of Regents and of the United States Congress in the planning and construction of the building. Correspondents include Bernard Richard Green; the architects Joseph C. Hornblower and John R. Marshall; Samuel P. Langley; Charles D. Walcott, Acting Secretary; Cyrus Adler; William deC. Ravenel, Administrative Assistant; Frederick William True, Head Curator, Department of Biology; George P. Merrill, Head Curator, Department of Geology; and James S. Goldsmith, Superintendent of Construction and Labor.

Box 1

Box 1 of 15

Folder 1 1901. Includes correspondence with Smithsonian Institution curators regarding allocation of space in the proposed building. Material of special interest includes: correspondence with William Harris Ashmead, Division of Insects (02/14/1901) concerning the space needs of the department; correspondence with Frederick William True, Department of Biology (05/10/1901) concerning floor space requirements; correspondence with George P. Merrill, Department of Geology, and Frederick William True (11/11/1901) concerning exhibition and storage space; correspondence with George P. Merrill (12/03/1901) concerning the appropriate size of the proposed building; list of storage from the Department of Anthropology.

Box 1 of 15

Folder 2 1902. Includes numerous correspondence concerning descriptions of foreign museums and the construction and maintenance cost of each. Material of special interest includes: transcripts of the hearings before the House of Representatives (03/08/1902, 04/12/1902); correspondence concerning the Sundry Civil Bill, especially the Congressional Record of the House of Representatives (03/31/1902) and correspondence with Sen. Platt (04/05/1902) regarding the cost of the proposed building.

Box 1 of 15

Folders 3-4 1903. Includes correspondence with heads of foreign museums regarding the physical structures and finances of their buildings. Includes correspondence between Samuel P. Langley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and John Brooks Henderson, Jr., Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Smithsonian Institution Board of Regents, (03/10/1903) proposing the formation of a special committee having the power to construct the new building. Also included: hearings before the subcommittee on appropriations for the National History Museum (01/24/1903, 02/21/1903); correspondence from Langley to the United States Congress (01/23/1903, 01/28/1903) concerning the

recommendation for appropriation; correspondence to Sen. William B. Allison, Chairman on the committee for appropriations, and Senators O. H. Platt, Shelby Moore Cullom, and F. M. Cockrell (02/11/1903) suggesting an authorization for the construction of the building to be added to the Sundry Civil Bill for 1904; and correspondence regarding the bonding of Bernard Richardson Green, Superintendent of Construction.

Box 1 of 15

Folders 5-6 1904. Includes correspondence regarding the approval of Prof. S. Homer Woodbridge as mechanical engineer for the proposed building. Includes correspondence regarding the anonymous gift to the Museum of a John Elliott painting. Also included: Rathbun's account of the ground breaking ceremony (06/15/1904); numerous correspondence on the subject of foreign museums; correspondence regarding the permanent establishment of a farmer's market directly south of the new building; correspondence from William deC. Ravenel (06/29/1904) regarding the annual amount of energy required by the National Museum, the Smithsonian building, and workshops attached to each project.

Box 2

Box 2 of 15

Folders 1-2 1905. Includes correspondence regarding reports from foreign museums on plans, publications, and finances. Material of special interest includes correspondence with Samuel P. Langley (05/29/1905) regarding the contents and placement of the cornerstone; correspondence between Green and Langley (08/22/1905) regarding the submission of the heating and ventilating system plans for approval, the artificial interior illumination, and the glazing of the windows; and correspondence with Hornblower and Marshall (09/19/1905) regarding the desirability of a dome and the alternatives to one.

Box 2 of 15

Folder 3 1906. Includes numerous correspondence concerning the development of an artificial green patina for the roof of the USNM.

Box 2 of 15

Folders 4-5 1907. Includes much correspondence regarding the delay of granite shipments due to poor transportation. Material of special interest includes: correspondence of Ravenel and James S. Goldsmith (02/08/1907) describing in detail the wiring, heating, and plumbing; correspondence with Green (01/19/1907) regarding the progress of the construction; correspondence between Green and Charles D. Walcott (12/28/1907) regarding the installation of an electrical plant.
[Digital Content: Letter to Samuel Langley from Bernard Green, dated February 19, 1907 \(Folder 4\). \[Image Nos. SIA2013-02590 through SIA2013-02593\]](#)

Box 3

Box 3 of 15

Folders 1-7 1908. Includes correspondence regarding allocation of space to individual departments; correspondence regarding fire alarms, call boxes, and fireproofing; numerous correspondence describing the electrical apparatus and the installation of the electrical plant; and correspondence concerning the proposed telephone system. Material of special interest includes: correspondence between Bernard

R. Green and Charles D. Walcott (04/06/1908) regarding the water system; correspondence between Cyrus Adler and Green (08/07/1908) regarding the meeting of the International Congress of Tuberculosis at the auditorium of the new building; correspondence between Walcott and Green (10/31/1908) critically detailing the construction of the new building; correspondence between Walcott and Green (12/21/08) regarding future work to be completed; and a resolution passed by the House of Representatives establishing a permanent location for the Farmer's Market.

Box 4

Box 4 of 15 Folders 1-6 1909. Includes correspondence regarding the doors, floors, and leaks in the roof of the USNM. Includes financial statements from Bernard R. Green (05/08/1909, 06/30/1909). Material of special interest includes: correspondence to Green (01/23/1909) containing a statement regarding the electrical installation for lighting and power.

Box 5

Box 5 of 15 Folders 1-2 1910. Includes correspondence regarding locks, keys, and the numbering of rooms. Includes correspondence relative to roads, paths, and the lawn adjacent to the new building.

Box 5 of 15 Folder 3 1911. Includes correspondence regarding the acoustics and slope of the aisles in the auditorium. Material of special interest includes: correspondence between Green and Charles D. Walcott (02/17/1911) announcing the completion of the building.

Box 5 of 15 Folder 4 1912-1913. Includes correspondence with William DeC. Ravenel (01/26/1912) regarding electric lighting.

Box 5 of 15 Folder 5 1914-1916; 1923. Includes correspondence regarding the total amount of weight one cubic foot of flooring can withstand (1915).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: SUBJECT FILES, 1890, 1901-1902.

Note: This collection division consists of correspondence regarding general topics on the construction of the new museum building. Subjects include roof construction, mechanical and electrical plants, interior layout, and other details of construction.

Box 5

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Box 5 of 15 | Folder 6 General Plans. Includes correspondence regarding the preliminary plans, revisions, and adaptations of the new National History Building. Includes John R. Marshall's description of the plans and his notes on foreign museums. Also includes James Millar's report on the plans and mass of the building. |
| Box 5 of 15 | Folder 7 Roofs, Skylights. Includes correspondence regarding the various plans for the construction of the roof. Includes numerous correspondence regarding leaks found in the roof and skylights. Detailed descriptions by James Millar on the materials used and the construction of the roof and skylights. |
| Box 5 of 15 | Folder 8 Interior Structure and Finish. Includes correspondence regarding natural lighting, partitions, plastering, and the interior finish. Includes James Millar's interior descriptions of the new building. |

Box 6

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Box 6 of 15 | Folder 1 Division of Space. Includes correspondence regarding the allotment of space to individual departments. Includes correspondence regarding this space, as areas of exhibition, storage, laboratories, and offices. |
| Box 6 of 15 | Folder 2 Cost and Area Estimates. Includes correspondence regarding financial estimates for the year 1890. |
| Box 6 of 15 | Folder 3 Grounds and Roads. Includes correspondence regarding the construction of roads and pathways surrounding the new National History Building. |
| Box 6 of 15 | Folder 4 Basement Layout. Includes correspondence regarding preliminary divisions of the basement. Includes correspondence regarding storage rooms, partitions, and entrances. |
| Box 6 of 15 | Folder 5 Vacuum Cleaning. Includes correspondence regarding the mechanics of the vacuum cleaning system and the location of its outlets. |
| Box 6 of 15 | Folder 6 Third Floor Layout. Includes correspondence regarding the partitions and divisions of space. |
| Box 6 of 15 | Folder 7 Ventilation. Includes detailed descriptions of the ventilation system by C. R. Denmark and James Millar. |

Box 6 of 15	Folder 8 Dates of Occupation. Includes correspondence regarding the transferring of storage from rented units into the new building. Includes correspondence concerning the estimation of storage space needed for each department. Also includes correspondence regarding the occupation of the third floor and then of the main building itself.
Box 6 of 15	Folder 9 Telephones, Clocks, etc. Includes correspondence regarding the locations of telephone conduits and fire alarm boxes and their installation process. Also includes Rathbun's description of the watch clock system and the master clock system.
Box 6 of 15	Folder 10 South Pavilion, Approaches, Vault. Includes correspondence regarding specifications for the dome and the ceilings of the lobby and auditorium. Includes Millar's description of the south approaches and Rathbun's manuscript on the south pavilion, the rotunda, and the dome of the rotunda. Also includes the correspondence regarding the marble and limestone work, the south entrance doors, and the auditorium and its vaulting.
Box 6 of 15	Folder 11 Fire Service. Includes correspondence regarding fire plugs, fire alarm boxes, and fire lines. Includes descriptions by Denmark and Goldsmith concerning the fire system.
Box 7	
Box 7 of 15	Folder 1 Doors, Transoms. Includes correspondence debating the use of wooden or fireproof metal doors. Includes specifications for doors, the total number needed, and the different styles designed. Includes correspondence regarding the locks and master key system. Includes Millar and Rathbun's descriptions of the doors.
Box 7 of 15	Folder 2 Furniture and Fixtures. Includes correspondence regarding exhibition and storage cases. Includes correspondence regarding office and laboratory furniture. Includes correspondence concerning scales, clocks, and electric lighting fixtures.
Box 7 of 15	Folder 3 Plans of Doors Includes the mechanics and detailed sketches of the doors.
Box 7 of 15	Folder 4 Corner Stone, Flag Staff. Includes correspondence regarding the ceremony for the placement of the corner stone. Includes a list of content placed within the stone. Includes correspondence regarding the placement of the flag staff.
Box 7 of 15	Folder 5 Legislation. Includes drafts of the proposed amendment in the Senate concerning the Sundry Civil Appropriation Bill for 1904. Includes drafts of resolutions prepared for the meeting of the Board of Regents. Includes documents regarding the passage of bill H. R. 17202 making appropriations for sundry civil expenses. Includes several letters from Secretary Langley addressing the House of Representatives regarding the proposed building.

Box 7 of 15	Folder 6 Lofts. Includes correspondence regarding the use of the loft as a storage area and its weight capacity. Includes correspondence regarding the openings between the wings and ranges and the resulting need of increased fire protection.
Box 7 of 15	Folder 7 Electric Plant. Includes correspondence regarding electrical lighting, outlets, and wiring. Includes specifications for engines and dynamos. Includes correspondence regarding the individual needs of each floor and section of the new building. Also includes correspondence concerning placement of switches and overhead fixtures.
Box 8	
Box 8 of 15	Folder 1 Mechanical Plant. Includes Rathbun's preliminary papers revised by Denmark on the character and layout of the mechanical plant and descriptions of the heating, ventilating, and electrical systems.
Box 8 of 15	Folder 2 Elevators. Includes specifications for electrical elevators. Includes correspondence regarding dimensions and the possibility of freight elevators. Includes several descriptions about the elevators by Millar and Rathbun and revised by Denmark.
Box 8 of 15	Folder 3 Water Supply, Plumbing, Toilets, etc. Includes correspondence regarding stop sinks, drinking fountains, and water pressure for fire protection. Includes description on water supply, plumbing, and toilets.
Box 8 of 15	Folder 4 Windows, Ceiling Lights, Borrowed Lights. Includes correspondence debating ground versus clear gloss. Includes correspondence regarding raising of the third story floor, partitions, and leaks in the skylight. Includes specifications for all window designs and all lights. Includes Millar's descriptions of windows and lights.
Box 8 of 15	Folder 5 Floors. Includes correspondence regarding the laying of wooden and tile floors, and the debate concerning the wooden sleepers. Includes specifications for the flooring and lumber. Includes correspondence regarding the raising of the floor of the third story. Includes descriptions of all flooring by Rathbun and Millar.
Box 8 of 15	Folder 6 Mechanical Plant. General & Miscellaneous. Includes correspondence regarding the mechanics of the heating and ventilating systems. Includes correspondence debating the possibility of one major power plant servicing all the Smithsonian buildings and the various possible placement of the radiators. Includes specifications for the ventilating system.
Box 8 of 15	Folder 7 Auditorium. Includes descriptions of the auditorium, its dome, the plastering, and the lobby by Rathbun and Millar.

Box 8 of 15

Folder 8 Exterior Walls. Includes descriptions of the basement granite, the exterior walls, and the court by Rathbun and Millar.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: PHOTOGRAPHS.

Box 9	
Box 9 of 15	Folder 1 Photographs for Bulletin 80.
Box 9 of 15	Folder 1A Photographs for Bulletin 80.
Box 9 of 15	Folder 2 Plates for Bulletin 80.
Box 9 of 15	Folder 2A Plates for Bulletin 80.
Box 9 of 15	Folder 3 Etchings for Bulletin 80.
Box 9 of 15	Folder 4 Progress Photographs, 1908.
Box 9 of 15	Folder 5 Progress Photographs, 1904-1909.
Box 9 of 15	Folder 6 Progress Photographs, 1907-1909.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: NOTES, EXTRACTS, AND COMPILATIONS FROM THE CORRESPONDENCE AND REPORTS, 1901-1910.

Box 10

Box 10 of 15

Folder 1 Important extracts from the correspondence. This folder contains typewritten copies of sections of important correspondence presumably contained in collection division 1, mainly concerning revisions and approval of the preliminary plans. Includes: correspondence from Bernard Richardson Green (1/13/1905) regarding the need to increase the height, and consequently, the cost of the building; correspondence from Green (9/12/1905) regarding his plans for partitions to make the basement adaptable to laboratory space and storage areas; correspondence from Hornblower and Marshall (9/19/1905) regarding the advisability of a dome; correspondence to Charles D. Walcott (6/15/1908) regarding the need for workrooms and storerooms in the basement; correspondence from Green (10/26/1908) regarding the layout of the basement; correspondence to Walcott (4/05/1909) regarding the deficit created by the default of the granite contractors; correspondence to Walcott (7/09/1909) regarding the need for increased appropriations; correspondence to Green (8/23/1909) suggesting construction alternatives in order to avoid a deficit; and correspondence from Green (9/02/1909) resolving himself of improper handling of building funds.

Box 10 of 15

Folder 2 Contracts between Green and Contractors, 1903-1908. Includes extract from contracts for the construction of the National History Building. Includes the recommendations of Superintendent Green and the approval of the Secretary.

Box 10 of 15

Folder 3 Space Allocations. Includes tables proposing the dimensions of each floor. Includes tables proposing the division of each floor into the offices of the administration and into the departments of anthropology, biology, and geology. Includes tables proposing space allotments within each department for offices, exhibition halls, and storage areas.

Box 10 of 15

Folder 4 Structural Description of MNH by James Millar, September 1910. Architectural description of the new building by an employee of the architects Hornblower and Marshall. Includes precise measurements and detailed descriptions of the building. It includes an individual survey of each floor, describing the engineering involved, the materials used, and its architectural design. It also includes a comprehensive description of the mechanical workings of the building.

Box 10 of 15

Folder 5 Description of the Mechanical Equipment and installation by C. R. Denmark, June 25, 1910. Includes technical descriptions of the mechanics of the engines, dynamos, generators, and other electrical machines within the building.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: FRANK F. GRAHAM AND THOMPSON-STARRETT CO. LAWSUITS, 1907-1915.

Note: During the construction of the new National Museum building the Smithsonian contracted with Frank F. Graham and the Thompson-Starritt Co. to supply cut granite for the building. Evidently both parties failed to fulfill the terms of their contracts and were sued by the Institution. These records document those suits.

Box 10

Box 10 of 15	Folder 6 Frank F. Graham and Thompson-Garrett Co. Suits, 1907-1908.
Box 10 of 15	Folder 7 Frank F. Graham and Thompson-Garrett Co. Suits, 1909-1915.
Box 10 of 15	Folder 8 Papers prepared from the Graham trial. Includes correspondence regarding the duties and obligations of the Secretary of the Smithsonian to the Board of Regents.
Box 10 of 15	Folder 9 Default on Graham contract and deficiency appropriations.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 6: SPACE ALLOCATION FILES, 1908-1911. ARRANGED ALPHABETICALLY.

Box 11

Box 11 of 15	Folder 1 A. Includes correspondence regarding alcoholic storage and correspondence regarding the attic as a possible storage area.
Box 11 of 15	Folder 2 B. Includes correspondence regarding the arrangement of specimens for the Department of Biology, correspondence regarding criticisms and suggestions of the proposed building plan, and correspondence regarding the possible number of bookcases needed for each division.
Box 11 of 15	Folder 3 C, D. Includes a tentative layout plan for the coral exhibition.
Box 11 of 15	Folder 4 E, F. Includes correspondence regarding the proposed number of exhibition cases desired by each department, correspondence regarding the style and dimensions of the cases, and lists from each division regarding the office equipment needed for its operation.
Box 11 of 15	Folder 5 G. Includes ground plans for the new building with the possible space dimensions of each department.
Box 11 of 15	Folder 6 H, I, J. Includes correspondence regarding insect drawers, heaters, and exhibition jars.
Box 11 of 15	Folder 7 K, L. Includes correspondence regarding the number and style of locks for the building.
Box 11 of 15	Folder 8 M. Includes correspondence regarding map cases for individual divisions within each department and correspondence regarding the different motors necessary for the operation of the Department of Biology.
Box 11 of 15	Folder 9 N, O. Includes correspondence regarding office space.
Box 11 of 15	Folder 10 P, Q, R. Includes correspondence regarding the number of personnel in the Department of Biology.
Box 11 of 15	Folder 11 S. Includes correspondence regarding the laboratory and office space either occupied or desired by each division, discussions on space assignments for each department, correspondence on storage quarters for several divisions and the collections stored elsewhere in other Smithsonian buildings from each department.
Box 11 of 15	Folder 12 T-Z. Includes correspondence regarding windows and their ability to efficiently ventilate the rooms.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 7: JAMES MILLAR REPORTS, 1909-1912.

Box 11

Box 11 of 15

Folder 13 Measurements of New Building, by James Millar, 1909-1912. Also includes Measurements of New Building made by R. Rathbun and others, May 12, 1912 (these are the measurements used in Bulletin 80).

Box 11 of 15

Folders 14-15 Description of the New Building of the National Museum from the Structural Standpoint, by James Millar, September 1910.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 8: CARD INDEXES TO CORRESPONDENCE.

Boxes 12-15

Boxes 12-15 of 15

Card Indexes to Correspondence

[Return to Table of Contents](#)