

1994

African-American Museum (1993-1994):Correspondence 01

Reed Martin

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6431 79th Street
Cabin John, Maryland 20818
August 26, 1994

Senator Claiborne Pell
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Pell:

I am writing you about the proposed Smithsonian African-American Museum.

I have been a Smithsonian employee for 7 years and a Smithsonian admirer all my adult life. It is heartbreaking to me--and to many other Smithsonian lovers--that passage of S.277, to establish a National African-American Museum, means the death knell for the Arts and Industries Museum.

Are you aware that the new African-American Museum will be using 100 percent of the space of the present Arts and Industries Museum? There will be no more Arts and Industries Museum.

The present Bicentennial Exhibit, the finest Smithsonian exhibit in my opinion, took years to assemble. It represents 100 years of American creativity and inspired labor--the fruits of the U.S. Industrial Revolution. The steam engines and other artifacts have been painstakingly restored, the plumbing and electrical systems are installed and ready to operate. (The steam engines are not presently running, a decision I find appalling, but they could be.)

Once this marvelous assemblage of machines is removed from the building, it will never again be collected together. Some machines will be returned to the owners from whom they were on loan, too many will end up in the vast storage buildings in Silver Hill, where they are unlikely ever to be shown again.

And the talented employees who set up the Bicentennial Exhibit are retiring or being transferred. Who would know how to recreate the present ready-to-run situation?

Do you know what a great interest in steam engines exists in this country? I have the current 200-page catalog of 715 steam shows taking place this summer. This is tangible evidence of the strong interest and hobby of thousands of steam engine enthusiasts.

Of the nation's museums, the Arts and Industries building is perhaps the best example of Victorian architecture. After the Castle, it is the second oldest building of the Smithsonian Institution. The floors and walls of inlaid tile mosaics are a treasure; but all that will disappear, covered over with plywood and paint.

There are several art museums that are part of Smithsonian. Couldn't two of these be combined and another building be designated for the African-American Museum?

Please don't let the Arts and Industries Museum be destroyed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Reed Martin". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name and phone number.

Reed Martin
(301) 229-3482