

Henry Papers: Works of Joseph Henry To Be Collected

A comprehensive collection of the previously unpublished papers of Joseph Henry, widely regarded as the most influential figure in 19th-century American science, is now being prepared for publication at the Smithsonian Institution. The project is expected to take about 15 years and to result in a collection of approximately

20 volumes containing some 45,000 papers. A noted physicist, founding secretary of the Smithsonian, president of the National Academy of Sciences, and president of the AAAS, Henry was intimately involved in the substance of science, in building some of the nation's most significant and enduring scientific institutions, and in developing relations between the scientific community and the federal government.

The Henry Papers project is jointly sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, and the Smithsonian Institution. It was encouraged by the National Historical Publications Commission (NHPC) and is being supported by a \$60,000 5-year grant awarded by the NSF in April.

Nathan Reingold is the principal investigator and editor of the project. He formerly was in charge of the development of current and historical collections in science and technology at the Library of Congress, and is the editor of *Science in Nineteenth Century America: a Documentary History*.

In addition to Henry's own writings, the publication will in some cases contain letters written to Henry, as well as papers about him and his work. Supplementing the printed edition will be a microfilm of all Henry manuscripts located by the project. This will be accompanied by a publication which will discuss the nature of the sources and have various lists and indexes.

Since becoming editor of the project, Reingold has begun preliminary surveys of the Henry papers. "The Henry documentation is not only large, but unevenly distributed in time. An 1865 fire in the Smithsonian Institution destroyed most of Henry's official correspondence for the years 1846-1865," Reingold said.

Henry is largely remembered for his role in setting up the Smithsonian, but he was also an exceptionally successful scientific researcher. While a teacher at the Albany Academy, he discovered induced current in electricity independently of Michael Faraday, and his improvements in the design of the electromagnet improved the quality of research in physics and paved the way for the development of the telegraph.

When he joined the Princeton faculty in 1832, Henry told the trustees that his interests lay "principally in a course of study and investigation intermediate to pure mathematics . . . and . . . the more detailed parts of chemistry." In addition to his work in electromagnetism, Henry studied cohesion in liquids and solids and capillary action of liquid metals. He also investigated the phenomena of aurora and of phosphorescence and measured the heat radiated from the spotted areas of the sun.

Henry joined the Smithsonian as its secretary in 1846. It was he who resolved the controversy of what the institution's benefactor meant by "an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men."

While at the Smithsonian, Henry implemented a system for collecting and disseminating weather reports and meteorological observations by telegraph. He also investigated various sound phenomena, as a member of the federal Lighthouse Board, which provided the scientific basis for an improved method of signaling under foggy conditions.

Concerning the compilation of Henry's writings, Reingold said in a written outline of the project, "While it is too early to specify any set of detailed canons of selection . . . the nature of the known Henry documentation clearly leads to the conclusion that few, if any, documents of the Albany period are omittable; a somewhat larger number of the Princeton period manuscripts need not be reprinted; surviving incoming letters of the 1846-1865 period are rare and will receive preference for printing over many of the routine, official outgoing letters found in many depositories; and only the choicest documents of the years 1865-1878 merit printing and editing.

"Correspondence constitutes the largest single kind of surviving Henry document. He was a past master at writing full proper statements of his intentions to correspondents, and was also given to writing clear, blunt statements of his views to close friends. The public Henry, bland and fulsome, often appears in private letters as a witty, ironic person who reacted strongly to criticism."—KATHLEEN SPERRY



HENRY PAPERS: Nathan Reingold is the principal investigator and editor of the papers of Joseph Henry. The influential 19th-century American scientist's portrait is shown behind Reingold. [Smithsonian photo]