
Presidential Documents

Title 3—

Proclamation 6865 of February 7, 1996

The President

150th Anniversary of the Smithsonian Institution

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

When James Smithson, an English scientist, died in 1829, he gave his entire estate “to the United States of America, to found at Washington, under the name Smithsonian Institution, an Establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men.” This extraordinary gift, amounting to one and one-half times the Federal budget of the day, led to passage of an Act of Congress establishing the Smithsonian Institution. Signed by President James Polk on August 10, 1846, this legislation created a Board of Regents to oversee the execution of Smithson’s trust.

Today, 150 years later, the Smithsonian Institution is famed around the globe, and its collections are enjoyed by thousands of Americans and foreign visitors every day. Through dedicated original research, the preservation of an unequaled collection of artifacts, and the presentation of public exhibitions and programs, the Smithsonian truly embodies its benefactor’s dream. As one of the foremost repositories of American heritage and culture, the Institution provides unique insight into our history and the development of our vibrant national character.

As we celebrate the sesquicentennial of the Smithsonian Institution, let us recognize the work done by its many museums, research facilities, and educational endeavors and rededicate ourselves to the “increase and diffusion of knowledge” James Smithson sought to advance. In doing so, we can more fully explore the wonders of our world and continue to bring people together for the common pursuit of knowledge.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, and in honor of the memory of James Smithson and to commemorate the accomplishments of the Smithsonian Institution, do hereby proclaim August 10, 1996, as the 150th Anniversary of the Smithsonian Institution and urge the people of the United States to observe this anniversary with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this seventh day of February, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twentieth.

