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THE
NEW ORLEANS FREE LIBRARY.

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*[New Orleans,
1852]*

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REMARKS

It is deemed important, for the educational interests of our City, to lay before the public the following correspondence published several years ago in two of the official Journals of this City, and to call the attention of the Citizens and City Fathers to the present shameful condition of the Fisk Building and Free Library, in order that some immediate action may be taken to redeem the pledges of the city when she accepted this munificent donation.

The letters of the Mayor, Alvarez Fisk and Benjamin F. French, Esquires, set forth what was done to carry out this praiseworthy act, which is destined, no doubt, at some future day, under the protecting care of the Councils of this City, to prove a great blessing to her citizens.

We shall hail the day when the City Councils will settle upon some plan by which this noble institution will rise from her dusty repose and enable New Orleans to vie with her sister Cities in similar institutions, and especially to place in the hands of her citizens, and future generations, ample facilities, *free of cost*, for acquiring information of a commercial, literary or scientific nature.

All that is now needed is but an energetic movement on the part of the citizens and City Councils to give to this city one of the largest Libraries in the United States. Such a Library would put the finishing hand to that system of public education which lies at the basis of her prosperity, and which, together with her charitable and other institutions, must make her one of the most delightful residences in the South. A Public Library, well supplied with books in the various departments of literature, art, and science, and open at all times to the

stranger, to the student, to the youth of our Public Schools, and to the adult citizens, *free of charge*, is now absolutely needed to make our admirable system of Public Education complete, and to continue in some degree through life that happy equality of intellectual privileges which now exists in our public schools, but which, without free Libraries, must terminate with them.

Is it not, therefore, a reproach to our city, that—so far as the means of carrying on the great work of instruction beyond the limits of a Public School education are concerned—no *public* provision has yet been made in favor of those of our citizens who are unable to indulge in the luxury of a large Library, because our City Fathers have hitherto deemed Corporation suppers and dinners, or a public parade, costing thousands of dollars, of more importance than the annual appropriation of a few hundred dollars for the increase and support of a Free Library. I am confident, if the City Councils will but take the initiative, as they are bound to do by the conditions of the donation, this library would soon become an object of Public favor. The people would regard it as one of their own creation, and would make every exertion to build it up. Authors, Publishers, Citizens, Senators, our own and Foreign Governments, would vie with each other in adding something of value, and from time to time important additions might be expected by gift or bequest, which in a few years would more than *quadruple* its size. But if the City will make no appropriation for its support, then I beg leave to suggest that all classes of citizens will call a Public Meeting in its behalf, appoint a Committee to inquire into its present resources and condition; the policy of making the building fire-proof; and memorializing the City Councils for aid and support.

A CITIZEN.

NEW ORLEANS, January, 1852.

CORRESPONDENCE.

NEW ORLEANS, March 9, 1847.

To the Hon. A. D. Crossman, Mayor of the City of New Orleans.

SIR,—I have the honor to inform you that in a few days my very valuable and extensive private Library will be presented to the City for the purpose of putting into operation, immediately, a Free Public Library.

New Orleans will be indebted for this act of munificence to the philanthropy of Alvarez Fisk, Esq., a distinguished citizen of Natchez, who has very promptly co-operated with me in carrying out my long cherished wishes on this subject.

I have the honor to be, respectfully, yours,

BENJAMIN F. FRENCH.

MAYORALTY OF NEW ORLEANS, 10th March, 1847.

*To the Honorable President and Members of the Council of
Municipality No. Two.*

GENTLEMEN,—It is with an unusual degree of pleasure that I have the honor of transmitting to your honorable body a copy of a letter addressed by Alvarez Fisk, Esq., to B. F. French, Esq., in relation to the purchase and donation of the large and valuable Library of the latter gentleman by the former, and its presentation to the City of New Orleans. Also, a copy of a letter from Mr. French to me, in relation to said Library, and my reply, accepting in behalf of the City this valuable donation.

The suggestions of Mr. French are replete with sound views, and if adhered to, will, with the foundation laid through the generous act of Mr. Fisk, lead to the establishment of a free public Library, that will be the pride of our State, and admiration of the numerous strangers visiting our City. Such a noble institution will cause, more promptly, the great reform of our youth, by withdrawing them from the evil paths constantly besetting them, and prepare and qualify them for the highest station in our country, where they may keep the honors and distinctions which alone can be attained through such a channel—and while they offer their gratitude to the generous benefactor of this institution, they will not forget to accord to you the merit of having nobly seconded his views by your prompt aid.

With great respect, I am, gentlemen, your ob't serv't,
A. D. CROSSMAN, Mayor.

NATCHEZ, March 9th, 1847.

Benjamin Franklin French, Esq.

MY DEAR SIR,—The motive which actuated me in the purchase of your valuable and extensive Library, containing many rare works, was that it might be preserved to the City of New Orleans (with which place I have been connected in a commercial way for a great number of years) and also to carry into effect the object of my late brother's bequest of establishing a public Library for the benefit of the reading community, and to afford a pleasant resort to the numerous strangers who visit that great and growing commercial metropolis, from every quarter of the world.

That this purpose may be promptly commenced, and ultimately extended, until it shall become, in some degree, commensurate with the resources and magnitude of its population, I now embrace the occasion which this purpose presents, of tendering the entire Library to that City, and of assuring you of the very great pleasure I derive in making you the organ of communication, to its Mayor and Aldermen; knowing, as

I do, the deep interest you take in founding and carrying out an enterprise of this nature, so connected with the intellectual and commercial, as well as classical and scientific reputation of that great City; and entertaining the hope that the advantage of your great experience and travels in Europe, as well as scholastic attainments, will be cheerfully bestowed, in systematizing and furthering this undertaking, and placing the Library in a position for immediate use, I am, very truly, respectfully your friend and humble servant,

ALVAREZ FISK.

NEW ORLEANS, March 10, 1847.

SIR,—Having long been solicitous that my rare and extensive collection of books should be rendered serviceable in the cause of literature and science, and that New Orleans, so far behind her sister cities, in the cultivation of letters, and in the establishment of public Libraries, should have the benefit of it, I am pleased to announce to you that my wishes can now be gratified. The bequest of the late Abijah Fisk, Esq., a distinguished merchant of this City, contemplating the establishment of a free public Library, for the use of the citizens of this great and growing commercial emporium, and the numerous strangers who annually visit it from every part of the world, has enabled me, through his brother Alvarez Fisk, Esq., of Natchez, to consummate my long cherished desire, and I am honored with a letter from him, appointing me the organ of communicating his wishes and presenting to the City of New Orleans, in his name, which I now have the honor to do my large and valuable library of books, for this purpose.*

In order, therefore, that the object of this useful and greatly needed institution should be fully carried out, and not meet with the fate of others so often attempted in this city, within the last half century, the *donor* of this practical and useful

*No Catalogue of this library has yet been published, but it is supposed to contain over six thousand volumes of rare and costly works.

collection of books, in the ancient and modern languages, adapted by its variety to the wants of the population of our city, as well as being rich in works relating to history, natural and physical science, commerce, finance, statistics, biography, voyages, travels, &c. &c., expects from the city, accepting this gift, *that you will recommend*, to each of the councils of the municipalities to appropriate at least five hundred dollars per annum, and to the city of Lafayette a like sum, to be laid out annually in the purchase of books, as well as to defray the current expenses of keeping it open, for *reference and consultation free of charge*, to the citizens of both cities.

That the councils of each municipality shall annually elect three persons, *resident citizens*, to compose a board of managers, whose duties will be to purchase books, elect a librarian, superintend its fiscal concerns, pass by-laws and regulations for its government, and publish on the third Monday in January of every year, a report of its condition. The Mayors and Records of both cities to be ex-officio members of the board of managers.

That the commissioners of the general sinking fund, to whom is now confided the care and revenue of the property bequeathed by the late Abijah Fisk, Esq., for a library building, will cause as many of the rooms in the second story of said building, with as little delay as possible, to be appropriately fitted up, with book cases, in the gothic style, out of the funds in their hands, and apply any surplus remaining, together with the rents of any portion of the building, to be expended in the purchase of books, under the direction and superintendence of the board of managers.

I would here respectfully remark, before closing this communication, that the present time appears to be the most auspicious that could have been selected, for the successful establishment of a public Library in this city, for both a beautiful building and a splendid collection of books have been gratuitously provided for it, by two liberal and enlightened individuals, which, under ordinary circumstances, and in the usual mode, would have taken many years to have accomplished.

It cannot be denied that without such institutions among us, with its rapidly increasing population, and its other improve-

ments, this city can never attain to any greatness that gives power and influence, or commands respect.

But let this Library once begin to shed its genial rays upon us, and other literary and scientific institutions will rise into existence. To make this city a desirable place of residence, other attractions must therefore be held out than those of money-making. It should not merely have the show of wealth, but its refinements. It should not be known only as a trading community, but as a refined and intelligent one, giving to mind its due influence, and cherishing those objects that are worthy of the liberal and enlightened citizen.

It is now time, too, that we should have other temples than those of dissipation, where the virtuous and aspiring youth of this and other cities, who come to reside among us, may spend their leisure hours in the pursuit of knowledge and science, inasmuch especially as the success of commerce depends on the intelligence and character of the men who engage in it.

It will not be denied that the high moral standard of the merchants of our country is in part to be attributed to the support and interest they uniformly take in fostering and encouraging the dissemination of knowledge, and the establishment of literary and scientific institutions in our cities.

Then let the example now set by the munificence of the founders of this Library have its due influence, and their suggestions be fully carried out by the unanimous voice and support of the people, and it will be the means of supplying the only link now wanting, to complete the chain of our system of public education, so happily conceived and successfully put into operation by the councils of this city.

I have the honor to be, respectfully, your ob't serv't,
BENJAMIN F. FRENCH.

To A. D. Crossman, Esq., Mayor of the City of New Orleans.

MAYORALTY OF NEW ORLEANS, March 13th, 1847.

SIR,—I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter, dated 10th inst., communicating Mr. Alvarez Fisk's in-

tention of presenting to the City of New Orleans your valuable Library, for the purpose of carrying into effect the object of the bequest of his brother the late Abijah Fisk.

Fully appreciating this intended gift and the liberal and praiseworthy motives of the donor, I deem it my duty to state that I will, as soon as practicable, lay your communication before the different councils in order that they may become acquainted with Mr. Alvarez Fisk's intentions, and with *your own sound suggestions*, relative to the establishment of a *free public Library* for the use of the citizens of New Orleans. In behalf of the City of New Orleans, I accept the donation.

I am, respectfully, your ob't servant,

A. D. CROSSMAN, Mayor.

Benjamin F. French, Esq., New Orleans.

NEW ORLEANS, March 23, 1847.

SIR,—I am this day honored with a letter from my friend ALVAREZ FISK, Esq., of Natchez, requesting me to present in his name, and which I have the honor to do, the following valuable Philosophical Instruments and my collection of plants of Louisiana, to be deposited in the Library, presented by him to this City.

1. A brass mounted Refracting Telescope;
2. A brass mounted Compound Microscope;
3. A brass mounted Case of Mathematical Instruments;
4. A brass mounted Case containing my Louisiana Herbarium, 6 vols. fol.

This important addition to the Fisk Free Library of New Orleans will greatly enhance its value, and render it not only more attractive to the scientific student, but to strangers visiting this city.

The spirit which has actuated Mr. Fisk, in promptly co-operating with me, in founding this Library, on a liberal and enlightened plan, must ever do honor both to his heart and head; and if carried out in the same spirit by the Councils of this

city, it will doubtless become one of the greatest ornaments both of the City and State.

The appropriation now asked for from the city, to place it on a permanent foundation, is comparatively trifling when we take into consideration the amount of good that will be effected by it, and, if apportioned among its inhabitants, would scarcely amount to a contribution of one cent from each person, while even this small sum will be lessened every year, with the rapid growth of this city, until it will be reduced to less than *half a cent* per head per annum, from each one entitled to make use of this Library.

It now rests with the people, therefore, and with those who represent them in the Councils, to avail themselves of this only cheap and practicable mode of securing a magnificent Library for their free use, and of strangers visiting our city; and rest assured that if no narrow and selfish policy springs up in the Councils to retard its progress, or destroy its usefulness, this Library will, in less than half the time it has taken the Philadelphia Library to become established, boast of a collection of 80 or 90,000 volumes of Books, dispensing, in the mean time, its rich treasures to all who will seek to enter its portals in search of knowledge.

The success of this institution will also, doubtless, wield a powerful influence over the destinies of this State, for let it be but once generally understood that it is a *city institution*, and not dependent on yearly subscriptions, or the caprice and favor of individuals, it must soon attract the attention, and receive the cordial support of wealthy individuals, who will esteem it an honor to have their names associated with it, by legacies and donations of books.

I now beg leave to close this communication, by presenting to the city, for the *use of this* Library, my brass-mounted Reflecting Telescope.

A small collection of Southern shells and minerals. A manuscript history of the Revolution in England, 1688.

A manuscript history of the proceedings of the first American Congress, which met in New-York in 1765, presented to me by the late Hon. Charles Thompson, Secretary of the first Congress, held in Philadelphia in 1774, with an autograph let-

ter of the Hon. Edward Livingston, Secretary of State, addressed to me, on the historical importance of this document, stating, that no copy of it could be found in the archives of the department of State.

Two fine paintings, and my large map of New Orleans. A copy of my Lives of Distinguished Americans, (*Biographia Americana*), and two copies of my Historical Collections of Louisiana, translated from copies of original French documents, deposited in the Marine Department, Paris.

I have the honor to be, respectfully, your ob't serv't,
BENJAMIN F. FRENCH.

To A. D. Crossman, Esq., Mayor, New Orleans.

MAYORALTY OF NEW ORLEANS, 26th March, 1847.

COUNCIL OF MUNICIPALITY No. One, Sitting of Monday, 22d March, 1847.

Resolved,—That the thanks of this Council be voted to Mr. Alvarez Fisk, for his donation of Books to the City of New Orleans, and that the Committee on Education be appointed to confer with a similar Committee from the Second and Third Municipalities, to take such measures as may be deemed necessary to carry out the object of the donation.

Provided it be done according to law.

Signed, JOSEPH GENOIS, Recorder.

Approved 23d March, 1847. }

Signed, A. D. CROSSMAN, Mayor. }

MAYORALTY OF NEW ORLEANS, March 29th, 1847.

Benjamin F. French, Esq.

SIR,—Inclosed I have the honor to transmit to you herewith copies of the Resolutions passed by the several Municipal Councils, expressive of their sincere thanks for the valuable donation of Books presented, through you, to the City of New

Orleans, by Mr. Alvarez Fisk, for the purpose of carrying into effect the object of the bequest of the late Abijah Fisk.*

It devolves on me to tender, through your channel, to Mr. Alvarez Fisk, in behalf of the Councils and of the citizens of New Orleans, their grateful acknowledgments for this truly munificent gift. In accomplishing the task, I feel the utmost pleasure and gratification, from the circumstance that no tribute of gratitude and admiration can be found too great to be awarded to the liberal and public-spirited citizen who has thus endowed our city with an extensive collection of useful and scientific books. Mr. Fisk has very justly felt that a Public Library, accessible to all, had become necessary in this marketplace of trade, where the votaries of traffic are prone to be engrossed by naught but the pursuits of sordid interests. He has felt, too, that a few hours snatched from the bustle and from the dusty path of commerce would have the beneficial tendency of awakening in many a noble and high ambition of intellectual improvement. To him will our youths be indebted for the means of developing their mental faculties otherwise doomed, perhaps, to lie dormant in obscurity and oblivion, for want of proper cultivation and nourishment.

We hear ever and anon of great and extraordinary public services which call forth the admiration, and are greeted by the applause of the multitude, but in my humble conception, he deserves the very highest encomiums, and has more solid claims, than all others, to the gratitude and veneration of his fellow-creatures, who, with a generous hand, distributes the wealth for which he has toiled through life, to let flow in abundant streams among all classes of society, the fountain of science and of learning. The names of Messieurs Abijah and Alvarez Fisk will long live in the hearts of their fellow-citizens as public benefactors.

I am, respectfully, your obedient servant,
A. D. CROSSMAN, Mayor.

* The late Abijah Fisk, Merchant, bequeathed by will a large building at the corner of Custom-House and Bourbon Streets, to the City of New Orleans, for the use of a Public Library.

MAYORALTY OF NEW ORLEANS, 13th Sept., 1847.

SIR,—In acknowledging the receipt of your letter of 23d ult., making still further valuable donations to the "Fisk Free Library" by the founders thereof, Alvarez Fisk, Esq., and yourself, permit me to express my warmest feelings of gratification in being the instrument, on the part of the City of New Orleans, to return thanks for this continued and determined effort to erect a fountain of knowledge in our city, whence shall flow intelligence and usefulness, and affording the gratuitous means of elevating to the highest pinnacle of fame those whom their position and narrow circumstances would otherwise have kept in ignorance and mediocrity.

Very respectfully I am your obedient servant,

A. D. CROSSMAN, Mayor.

To *B. F. French, Esq., New Orleans.*

2 Feb, 1852.

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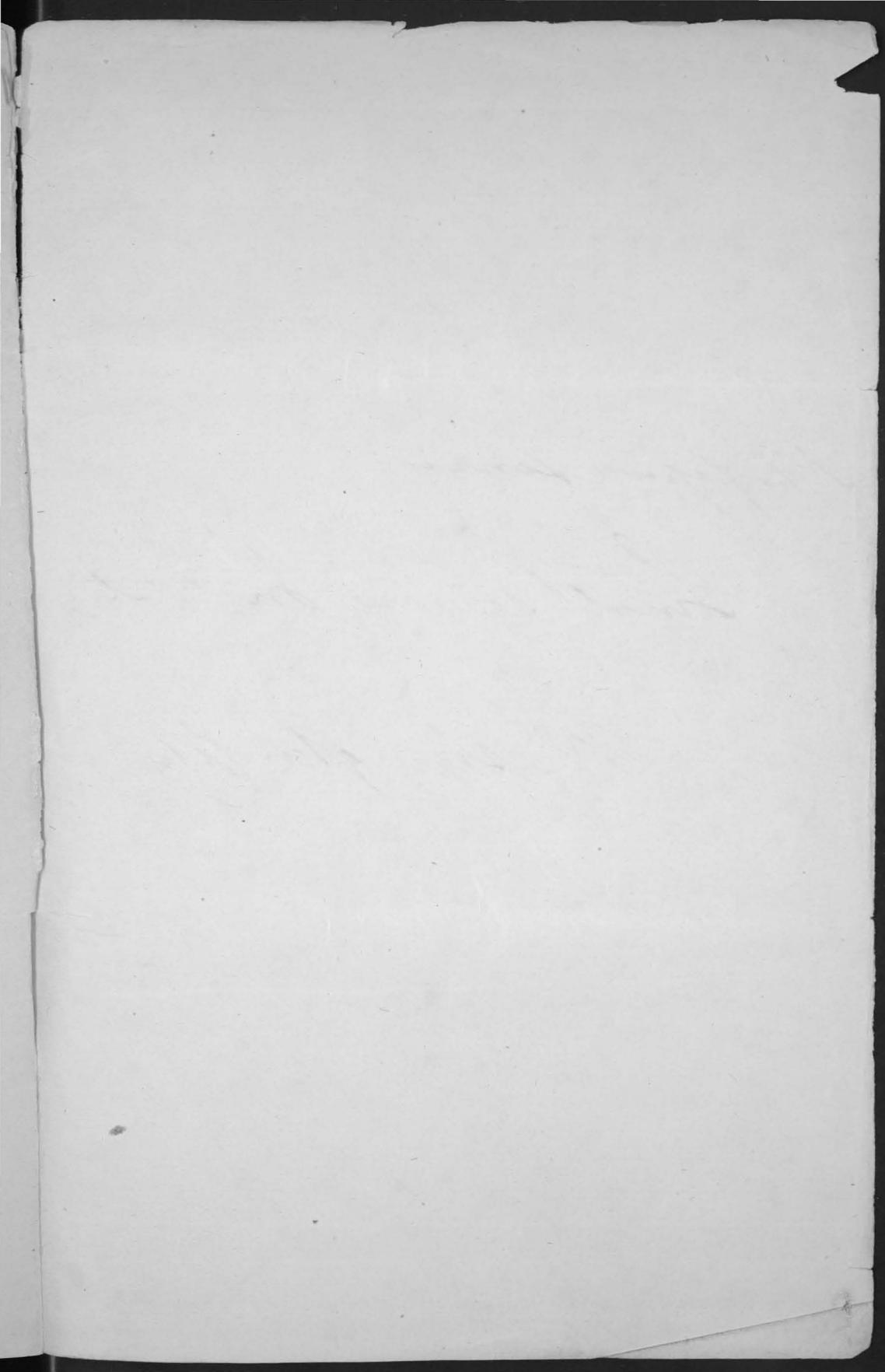
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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



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Professor Henry

Smithsonian Institute

Washington City

2 Feb, 1852