

LETTER FROM LeCONTE TO ALEXANDER AGASSIZ

PHILADELPHIA, April 28, 1875
1625 SPRUCE STREET

MY DEAR SIR:—For the better preservation of the types of North American Coleoptera contained in my collection, I wish to have it placed, after my death, in the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

I am moved thereto, not only by the belief that the organization of your Museum, and the climate of Cambridge, are favorable for the preservation of perishable objects of natural history, but also because I desire, in illustrating the Museum established by Prof. L. Agassiz, to testify the strong affection I had for him.

I need not mention the value which my collection has for the future study of the Coleoptera of the United States; for, besides type specimens of nearly all the species described by me, it contains specimens carefully compared with those described by Say, Harris, Melsheimer, Haldemann, and Ziegler, and all the unique types of the three last-named authors.

It has been also enriched by the extreme liberality and courtesy of many distinguished European entomologists, who have sent to me even the second specimens of many of the North American species, which were otherwise unattainable, at that time. I have thus a nearly complete series of those species described from the western coast by Eschscholtz, Mannerheim and Mäklin.

I trust that it may be consistent with the funds of the Museum to retain permanently the services of an experienced entomological curator, with sufficient assistance to keep in order and protect the vast collection now being assembled.

I would suggest that, for ordinary study, type collections should not be opened freely, but that, by accurate comparison with authentic types, a separate collection for easy reference should be formed as rapidly as by purchase, or otherwise, material may be procured.

When these separate collections become tolerably perfect, as must result after a moderate time, the typical collections would be seldom consulted, only by those who were engaged in monographic work, or in authenticating specimens for the more public collections.

It is also important, for the preservation of entomological collections, that a rigid inspection should be made of each box of specimens, at least twice a year; and I would therefore suggest that it should be a permanent and stringent rule of the Entomological Department, to have such an inspection regularly made, and its results reported to the Director of the Museum.

In addition to the recommendations above made, I would urge strongly the necessity of preserving, in type collections, all the original labels of the author; these are sometimes removed for the sake of producing uniformity of appearance, which, however pleasing to the eye, occasionally gives rise to confusion.

If these views be acceptable to you, please signify to me your approval, and I will, without delay, send you an order upon the executors of my estate, to deliver to you, or your successors in office, my entomological collection. This order will be available, in case of my death, if the collection is not sooner placed in the Museum.

I would mention, the boxes used by me are very convenient for constant study, and for permanent protection could be readily placed, by pairs, in tight glass-covered drawers, similar to those now in use in the Museum.

With my best wishes for the future extension and prosperity of the Museum, I remain, as ever,

Very sincerely yours,

JOHN L. LeCONTE

Alexander Agassiz, Esq., Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: *The above letter was first published in the report of the Museum of Comparative Zoology. It was suggested by Dr. Melville H. Hatch that it should be reprinted; for that purpose it was submitted to the editor by Dr. P. J. Darlington, Jr., Curator of Insects, Museum of Comparative Zoology.*)



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