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TO THE  
Honourable the Mayor, Aldermen and Assistant Aldermen  
OF THE  
CITY OF NEW-YORK.

THE Trustees of the American Institute of the city of New-York and others, a Special Committee, being required to apply to you for aid to carry into effect a plan proposed at a late meeting, promising, as we believe you will be satisfied, great public good, would briefly, but most respectfully, represent,—

That in 1829 the American Institute was incorporated by the Legislature to encourage Agriculture, Commerce and the Arts, in this State and the United States.

And while our neighbouring cities have extended a fostering care to their societies, which embrace only a part of the beneficial purposes comprehended in the charter of this Institute,—while Boston has given the free use of Faneuil and Quincy Halls; and Philadelphia, besides large sums of money, has given the fee simple of a full square of ground,—yet New-York, though outnumbering both in population, has done comparatively nothing to aid the Institute in its praiseworthy efforts.

The triumphant success which has attended the efforts of those engaged in the laudable objects of the American Institute has made it, we believe, one of the most popular and useful Institutions in our country. From its first organization to the late Anniversary Exhibition, which collected about 250,000 visitors, its popularity has been extending, and the sphere of its usefulness continually enlarging; observation and experience have, notwithstanding, been constantly suggesting new and practicable means for extending its usefulness.

In the operations of the Institute, the peculiarity of the age in which we live is too manifest to be overlooked, not as once of war and conquest, but it is an age of discovery, invention, industry and improvement. Competition is actively and vigorously employed in the application of these means in perfecting and multiplying the necessaries, comforts and luxuries required in civilized society.

The productions of those countries which do not advantageously employ these means of improvement, being imperfect, become unsalable as well in the foreign as in the home markets. If knowledge is power, ignorance is weakness; and therefore the termination of every contest between competitors, where knowledge is essential, must be in favour of the former; neither numbers nor superior muscular strength will avail without knowledge. Labour-saving machines and steam defy numbers, and are too potent for human strength. How cogent the illustration which England and Asia afford! The price of labour is four times as great in England as in Hindostan; still Englishmen manufacture from cotton grown in India, after being transported 10,000 miles, and carry it back, and then undersell that people in their own markets.

The improvements of the present age are not only wonderfully great, but they are following each other in rapid succession. England stands foremost; Scotland, France, Germany and the United States are also in the field, advancing with accelerating speed. Incredible amounts are expended in experiments, and in researches at home and abroad. Millions of minds are constantly on the rack to invent something to save labour and render its productions more perfect. Every accession of knowledge, wherever made, is recorded; and the wisest among the competitors apply this knowledge with all practicable despatch to swell their productions.

Most of the results, often the minute details of knowledge, from these efforts and expenditures are published in the periodicals of some of the countries which have been named; frequently they are described with mathematical accuracy, and often accompanied with drawings so skilfully made that the artist of a distant country can at once go on with the process or complete the construction of machinery, or whatever it may be, with as much perfection as if he were in the laboratory to witness the whole process, or in the shop by the side of the machinist and his workmen.

The design of the American Institute is to establish a READING ROOM, where the principal Periodicals of Art and Science from the countries named, shall be found accessible at all times to the public. Also, to obtain other recent, select publications, embracing the same objects. The great necessity of such an establishment, suggested by experience, has determined the Institute to attempt its accomplishment. Applications are continually made at the Repository for information which has been sought for in vain in the public and private libraries of our city, and which could readily be obtained from the proposed establishment. No doubt most of the publications referred to are in the country, but they are scattered, and are of no use, except to the owner, and perhaps to a few of his friends. Most important agricultural experiments made in England and on the Continent, and improvements in science and mechanism, at the sacrifice of time and labour and vast expenditures, though minutely recorded in foreign journals, are to this country a dead letter. They may be noticed in a general manner in our newspapers, but not so detailed as to afford information of any practical use.





The tardiness of the spread of the knowledge of improvements, from inattention or ignorance, has been almost incredible. It was forty years after it had been in operation in England, before Arkwright's spinning machine was to any considerable extent, in use in our country, though with it one man can accomplish more than fifty by the old process. The machine which our countryman, Whitney, invented, accomplishes in another way quite as much; and though simple in construction, and though it has been in most successful operation in the United States for more than one third of a century, is now hardly introduced into Asia, the greatest cotton-growing country in the world. Even the Plough, that most essential instrument in procuring sustenance for the human race, is still in use in an imperfect state within a few miles of London, where approved models have been continually for sale for years, which would save in teams full thirty-three per cent. That country which obtains and avails itself of the earliest information of improvements in this age of intense and extended competition, will be foremost in the arts and in civilization, and be best supplied with the necessaries and comforts of life.

In what conceivable way can so much useful knowledge be brought together and disseminated, as by the plan proposed? It is apparent, that such a Reading Room should be accessible to as great numbers as possible; and what city is better for this purpose than our own, where three hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants may be found together; and in addition to which, where the stranger visitors probably average daily, the year round, thirty thousand; making a total of 380,000; where the inhabitants are continually communicating by means of rail-roads, canals, and river and ocean navigation, with every part of the Union?

The Repository of the Institute has been for years a place of daily exhibition of models and machines, of specimens of art, invention and discovery—the resort of ingenious men and the friends of improvement—with a library, mostly works of science and practical mechanics, numbering about 5000 volumes. Is not this an appropriate location for the proposed establishment, where all will be under one roof?

For the purpose of carrying fully into effect this plan, the aid of the city authority is invoked; and with that view the undersigned are empowered, in the name of the Institute, respectfully to petition for permission from the City Corporation to use, for the above purpose, for ten years, the room and appurtenances now occupied by that Association; and on the condition of such petition being granted, the AMERICAN INSTITUTE will cause a floor to be constructed on the west end of the room, extending from gallery to gallery, so as to afford a space of about 1600 square feet; and said Institute will also furnish the same with chairs, tables, &c., suitable for a Reading-Room; and, at the same time, procure as early as practicable, the most important periodicals of the United States, and of England, Scotland, France and Germany; and also the leading state papers of the United States, with other recent practical books and publications, embracing modern discoveries and improvements. And, as a further consideration for the proposed lease, the Mayor, Aldermen and Assistant Aldermen, and their clerks; also, the Comptroller and Street Commissioner of the city, shall, during the continuance of the privilege, at all times enjoy, free from expense, the use and benefits of said Reading-Room, as well as free admission to the Lectures and Addresses and Public Exhibitions or Fairs of the Institute.

The Reading-Room to be likewise open to non-residents visiting our city, free of expense at all times. Wisdom cannot fail to suggest to your Honours, that it would be policy at an extraordinary expense to establish such a Reading-Room in connection with the Library, and the specimens of Invention and Art already in the Repository; as the benefits, which we think numerous and palpable, would all tend to our city, where most of the valuable products of Agriculture and the Arts naturally centre; and thereby supply additional materials for an increasing trade and commerce. But as it can be effected without any sacrifice to the city, or at the most a mere nominal one, we with confidence pray that such conditional privilege as is proposed, may be extended to the American Institute at an early day, that the requisite arrangements may be entered into forthwith thereafter.

All which is respectfully submitted.

JAMES TALLMADGE, *President.*

T. B. WAKEMAN,  
GEORGE C. DE KAY, } *Committee.*  
MARTIN E. THOMPSON, }

December 19, 1842.

