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Smithsonian Philanthropy Initiative To Examine Impact of Giving on America *National Museum of American History to Document, Exhibit History of Philanthropy*

Philanthropy has been a driving force in founding, shaping and strengthening the United States. James Smithson (1765– 1829), who never set foot on American soil, believed so strongly in the America’s ideals and ideas that he founded an institution dedicated to the increase and diffusion of knowledge. With the announcement of a Philanthropy Initiative Dec. 1 during the 250th anniversary year of Smithson’s birth, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History is committing to a long-term plan for collecting, researching, documenting and exhibiting materials on the country’s philanthropic history and its role in shaping the nation.

The museum kicks off its 2016 theme of “America Participates” with the opening of a display, “Giving in America,” which provides a preview of the types of stories that will be explored when a long-term philanthropy exhibition opens on the museum’s third floor in late November 2016. The “America Participates” theme encompasses citizens’ desire to shape their world through giving, voting and volunteering. Exhibitions around these themes of civic engagement will open at the museum throughout the year, culminating in the philanthropy exhibition.

“Philanthropy has made a profound difference in defining who we are as individuals, a nation and how the world views us,” said John Gray, director of the National Museum of American History. “Exploring the success and failure of individual and charitable giving and how it has shaped our culture from the 1700s to the present is in keeping with the museum’s mission of helping Americans understanding the past in order to shape a more humane future.”

The Smithsonian Philanthropy Initiative is made possible through a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and a gift from David M. Rubenstein, co-founder and co-CEO of the Carlyle Group and a member of the Smithsonian Board of Regents. The funding supports an annual symposium, a long-term space to display the history of philanthropy and will endow a curatorial position as well as provide for the addition of artifacts to the national collections. Public outreach will

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occur through the museum’s website, programming and social media engagement. The long-term philanthropy exhibit will have a section exploring an annual theme and the 2016 topic will center on giving and the environment.

The museum will open preview cases Dec. 1 for “Giving in America,” which will be on view through Nov. 20, 2016 and provides a look at how philanthropy has shaped American civic culture in two eras – the Gilded Age (1870s-1900) and the present day. The display showcases the role of philanthropy in creating some of the nation’s most enduring museums, libraries, orchestras, universities and hospitals. It also examines the involvement of women in 19th-century philanthropy. Artifacts include a register book showing the 1,600 libraries financed by Andrew Carnegie, an 1881 gown designed by Charles Frederick Worth for philanthropist Mary Eno Pinchot, an early edition of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 used for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s inaugural concerts in October 1891, a nurse’s cap worn by a student at the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, circa 1945, and more current civic philanthropy stories.

Also featured in the preview cases and the permanent philanthropy exhibition will be a rotating presentation of letters from signers of the Giving Pledge and a kiosk where visitors can view additional letters on loan to the museum. The Giving Pledge is a commitment by the world’s wealthiest individuals and families to dedicate the majority of their wealth to philanthropy.

Through incomparable collections, rigorous research and dynamic public outreach, the National Museum of American History explores the infinite richness and complexity of American history. The museum helps people understand the past in order to make sense of the present and shape a more humane future. For more information, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu>. The museum is located at 14th Street and Constitution Avenue N.W., and is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). Admission is free. For Smithsonian information, the public may call (202) 633-1000.

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