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SOME CHARLES F. LUMMIS LETTERS, 1897-1903

J. Manuel Espinosa

CHARLES F. LUMMIS (1859-1928) needs no introduction to readers of the *NEW MEXICO QUARTERLY REVIEW*. The whole Southwest was his stamping ground, and New Mexico in particular inspired some of his best work. Just as Adolph F. A. Bandelier laid the foundation for scientific research in the archaeology and early history of the Southwest, and H. H. Bancroft produced the first rough blueprints of a broad view which later historians could use as a point of departure in Southwest historical investigations, so Lummis played his unique pioneer role as the popularizer of the Southwest. His unique contribution "was the service he rendered in arousing interest in the non-American inhabitants and the half-known regions of the Southwest."¹ This he achieved through his many popular writings, his magazine *The Land of Sunshine*, later called *Out West*, and the organization and development of institutions of both popular and scientific appeal for the purpose of disseminating information about the Southwest.

Of his many books, who has not heard of *The Land of Poco Tiempo* (1893), and *The Spanish Pioneers* (1893)? But how many fully realize the service he rendered in the organization and development of the Landmarks Club of California (1893), the Sequoia League (1902), The Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, California (1905), and as one of the sponsors in the founding of the School of American Archaeology in Santa Fe?² In describing his numerous activities George Wharton James

¹ *Dictionary of American Biography*, XI, 502.

² For further details on Lummis' life and work see: *Dictionary of American Biography*, XI, 501-502; George Wharton James, "Charles F. Lummis, A Unique Literary Personage of Modern America," n.p., n.d., pp. 129-143, in the Newberry Library, Chicago; *The Land of Sunshine*, *passim*; *Out West*, *passim*; *Bulletin of the Southwest Society of the Archaeological Institute of America*, *passim*; *The Works of Charles F. Lummis* (Los Angeles: The Lummis Foundation, 1928).

was not exaggerating when he wrote in the early years of this century:

Certainly the most picturesque figure in American letters today is that of Charles F. Lummis of Los Angeles, California, author, editor, librarian, critic, linguist, scientist, ethnologist, archaeologist, anthropologist, athlete, philanthropist, and many other things too numerous to mention Sweeping assertions of this nature are easy to make, but the proof in this case is as easy as the assertion.³

Some day will be written a well-deserved full length biography of this colorful pioneer student of the Southwest.

The Lummis-McGee letters reproduced below contain a few interesting sidelights on Lummis' views and methods of work. All of them reveal in one way or another his never-lagging sense of humor, and his characteristic "keen, incisive, trenchant and often satiric and sarcastic original comments on men and things."⁴ These original letters were found among the important uncatalogued W. J. McGee papers, in the *McGee Collection*, St. Louis University Library, St. Louis, Missouri.⁵

THE LETTERS⁶

1.

[Los Angeles, Cal.]
Oct. 26, 1897

My dear Mr. McGee:

Thanks for your pleasant note of the 18th inst. I am glad to begin contact.

No apology needs, in reference to the note about Mr. Hodge's

³ James, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁵ McGee, a contemporary of Lummis, well known for his pioneer work in geology, hydrology, and ethnology, was for many years ethnologist in charge of the Bureau of American Ethnology, of which his chief, Major Powell, was director. In 1904 he was in charge of the anthropological and historical exhibit at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis. His library, along with notes, many photographs, and valuable letters from his many friends in the scientific world, he placed in storage in St. Louis. Some years later the collection was for sale, and was purchased by the St. Louis University Library. The whole incident is connected with a series of unfortunate contemporary developments in McGee's life. A good biographical sketch of W. J. McGee may be found in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, XII, 47-48. The author of this sketch, however, could have made very good use of the above cited *McGee Collection* had he known of its existence.

⁶ All these letters are written on pale blue 8½" x 11" Universal Bond paper, folded into 5½" x 8½" double-page letterheads, or on 5½" x 8½" single sheets. The first six letters are written on *The Land of Sunshine* letterheads, the rest under the caption *Out West*. Letters 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are written in ink entirely in Lummis' hand; the remaining ones are typewritten, with Lummis' signature. In letter 6 the postscript is written in ink in Lummis' hand. In several of the letters, especially letters 3 and 4, Lummis has used various informal abbreviations of words. Since their meaning is clear they have been left unchanged and without editorial comment.

ascent. The matter of who recorded the tradition is entirely a minor one, & I am glad you did not bother to make a correction. Nor would my own correction have seemed to me worth while except for two things—when Prof. Libbey “disenchanted” the mesa so definitely, it was “my” legend that caught it—in some places by implication, in some by name—& so having the brunt for so long as the rock was “exploded,” it seemed just as well that the legend (that version of it—& I know no detailed version anywhere which was not directly derived from mine) should be “in at the death.” And it was also a good opening to show the methods of Bandelier as opposed to those of a gentleman who seems never to have heard of him.⁷

Ever since Mr. Hodge first mentioned the possibility, I have been hoping, with great interest, for the Seri article. This little magazine tries to be “popular” enough to live, & substantial enough to *deserve* to live—not always an easy adjustment.⁸ Such articles, well illustrated, are precisely in its line. We believe it a magazine’s duty to teach as well as tickle; & we believe the ordinary “intelligent reader’s” soul is worth saving. I shall be more your debtor for that article than I can well say; & I hope leisure to prepare it will come your way soon. So, too, I hope to be able to get even. We can pay but small sums; but it may be that outside that we can sometime cut down a little the extra debt of appreciation.

I take the liberty to send you some copies of the magazine in which there may be (I hope) something to interest you—or at least to show you that we are trying to teach the multitude an appreciation & interest in the work of our real scholars.

Sincerely yours,

Chas. F. Lummis

Mr. W. J. McGee,
Bureau of Ethnology,
Washington.

⁷ For a discussion of this matter see F. H. Hodge, “The Verification of a Tradition,” *American Anthropologist*, X (1897), 299-302; *idem*, “The Enchanted Mesa,” *National Geographic Magazine*, VIII (1897), 273-284; *idem*, “The Enchanted Mesa,” *Century Magazine*, LVI (1898), 15-31.

⁸ Lummis is referring here to his magazine *The Land of Sunshine*.

2.

[Los Angeles, Cal.]

Nov. 23, 1897

My dear sir:

Your letter of the 16th inst. gives me much pleasure—as much by its personal tenor as by the very flattering invitation you extend me to speak before the National Geographic Society.⁹

Nothing could be more to my liking than to address such a body on such a theme as California; & in spite of the conviction that others could be found to do much more even justice to the audience & to the theme, it is a topic so dear to me, so indriven by years of comparative observation of the development of peoples by their environment, that I should swallow my apprehensions & say “yes” at once if the thing seemed practicable otherwise.

But my contracts with the Harpers, on top of my own poor (but hungry & exigent) little magazine, can hardly be fulfilled by May first, even with the best of luck to complement the hardest work. *Then*, there is strong probability that I shall have to take a year's journey on a still harder errand.

An offer from the East of \$1,000 for a lecture to some houses would not be nearly so tempting to me as the one you make; for money will not buy results, & I like results. The matter is not a financial one at all. I could not give myself the luxury; but modest expenses would be as good as more. The only thing is, it does not seem physically possible to make such a trip in any conceivable hiatus of my work already engaged. Shortest day I have had in a year & a half was nineteen hours & fifty minutes; & as a matter of religion I never overstep the 20-hour boundary by very far.

If later there appears a loophole, in time, you shall know of it; but now it seems impossible for me to accept the honor you offer me & I am most heartily sorry. I shall very likely never get East again, for my work is in the West, & life is short.

Thanking you & your associates, I am

Sincerely yours,

Chas. F. Lummis

Prof. W. J. McGee,
Bureau of Ethnology.

⁹ McGee was for a time acting president of the National Geographic Society. See the *McGee Collection, op. cit.*

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3.

[Los Angeles, Cal.]

Ap. 8, 1901

My dear Prof. McGee:

Good for you! The article is extremely interesting & worth while, & I shall start it off at once—tho' we, with our small mouth, must make two bites of this large cherry. The photos will work pretty well; & I shall gather a few things from the book. What a whopper it is! In bulk, of course. I have seen enough to be deeply interested in it, & will read it in form as soon as possible.^{9a} Just now I'm harder driven than ever—wh was needless. Will try to get proofs to you in time, but will be very careful of the reading anyhow.¹⁰

Thank you heartily for remembering us. If we had had the article a year ago we wdn't have the pleasure ahead of us.

I hope you'll be getting out this way again. You wd hardly know the corner where you passed up cement. There are seven stone rooms now done, & the place "looks like something."

Hastily but

Sincerely yours,

Chas. F. Lummis

4.

[Los Angeles, Cal.]

May 31, 1901

My dear Prof. McGee:

I trust you got the May nos. sent you, with a piece of yr. article; & that you found it all right. Herewith a small honorarium, with larger thanks. We cannot pay properly, but do the best we can.

I am hoping to see you this summer in yr own lair.

Sincerely yours,

Chas. F. Lummis

5.

[Los Angeles, Cal.]

Sept. 13, 1901

My dear Prof. McGee:

Herewith our small check for the 2nd Seri article— & with the check our thanks.

^{9a} McGee apparently had sent Lummis a copy of his recent volume entitled *The Seri Indians* (Washington, D. C., 1898).

¹⁰ This refers to McGee's article published in *The Land of Sunshine*, XIV (1901), 364-376, 463-474, entitled "The Wildest Tribe in North America, Seriland and the Seri."

Turbesé & I have come home alive & thanking "Whatever Gods may be." I trust we shall next see you out this way.

Sincerely yours,

Chas. F. Lummis

6.

[Los Angeles, Cal.]

Dec. 31st, 1901

My dear Prof. McGee:—

I have been a good deal interested in Mr. Fellows' poem but it is too long for us and its treatment seems to me also long for its length. The Hiawatha business is by now rather robbed of its bloom.

Old Ignacio's sermon could be made a mighty fine thing and I would like to print it if it could be put as I imagine he said it.

I have been wrestling hard about a name for our League.¹¹ As I told you, I am structurally against three and four word names. Your word "work" is one that I would like to include but it doesn't seem possible without using a long title. Further than that, Indian work or Indian workers has an unfortunate sense beyond its proper meaning. The Indians have been *worked* too much already. My ideal is a name of two words, easily pronounced, euphonious, and with as much significance of our aim as can be got in so short a title. The three possible candidates thus far nominated are: Wampum League, Calumet League, Sequoya League. I need not argue with you as to their relative merits. Anyone of them would be better than a name on such lines as "Indian Rights Association." All of them are easily pronounced, all reasonably significant and for that matter I think we can rely on making the public understand what we mean so long as the word is not at the outset too obscure.

Let me know, please, what you think of these suggestions, for I want to get into shape as promptly as possible. Everything is in good shape out here with the work. Good people are getting interested all the time, and as soon as we are ready to lift the standard and beat the drum I think we shall have a very large and influential rally.

You will see the new magazine within a few days now, and I know you will be pleased with it.¹²

¹¹ Reference to the Sequoya League, which Lummis was at this time organizing with the avowed object of "making better Indians by treating them better."

¹² Lummis is referring here to his magazine *The Land of Sunshine*, now enlarged and the name changed to *Out West*. The letterheads of the new magazine proudly carried, among others, the following quotation from President Roosevelt: "I always read it, for I am heartily in sympathy with so many of the things for which it works." And from *The Dial*: "The best there is in periodical literature on the Pacific Coast."

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With all good New Year wishes,

Sincerely yours,

Chas. F. Lummis

[P. S.] I favor Sequoia (or Sequoia) League. The Indian Cadmus is a good godfather.

7.

[Los Angeles, Cal.]

March 5, 1902

Dear Dr. McGee:—

I think the name matter is finally decided. "Sequoia" had an overwhelming majority of supporters among those that we consulted, and no other name had more than two. Richard Everett Hale, President Jordan, Mrs. Hearst, Miss Fletcher and several others, besides all the local members of the Executive Committee, myself included, entirely preferred it to any other name, although it is not quite my ideal; but as you will see by the March number (which ought to reach you in a day or two) the thing is practically a fixture. If we *do* get a divine revelation of some unquestionably better name there would be no disability in changing before incorporation.

Tecumseh is not a bad name, but I see no essential fitness in it; and to open the subject for a doubtful word would simply mean (at the long range at which we have to work) another month or so delay. I don't think there will be a Sequoia League for the big trees, particularly if we come in first with a nearly similar name. Everything seems to be going very well and I hope mighty soon to have things ready for a specific and general advance. It is troublesome to have to wait on many slow people, but as we are here for patience I am not going to be the first one to lose it.

Sincerely yours,

Chas. F. Lummis

8.

[Los Angeles, Cal.]

Sept. 8th, 1902

My dear Mr. McGee:—

Thanks for your bully letter and for the thoughtful enclosure. I am sure the Lord *will* be merciful to you and won't lay up against you the paving stones you mention; and as the Spanish say: "He never comes too late who comes." The Sequoia League has not any official

stationery yet, so I beg you to accept this as my personal receipt for \$3.00. The office receipt for the subscription is enclosed.

Wishing you all good luck and thanking you heartily for your good words on our pet causes.

Hastily but

Sincerely yours,

Chas. F. Lummis

9.

[Los Angeles, Cal.]

Nov. 29th, 1902

My dear Prof. McGee:—

I have been meaning for a long time to write you about the Directorship and to express my personal regret that it did not come where I felt it logically belonged. I have the best feeling in the world for Mr. Holmes. He is a noble fellow and a most able man; but it seemed to me that you were the proper heir-apparent, and I should have been very much gratified to see you receive the honor.¹³ We cannot expect things to please us, however, so long as the Head of Things is an impossible ass.

But your fine talents and zeal will still be for the good of science; and that, after all, is the chief thing. It is fortunate that you have a man to work with whom you can respect.

Do you personally chance to know anything about C. E. Burton, Agent at Keam's Cañon? If you do, and anything to his disadvantage, I wish you would communicate with me at once. The League has business with him.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

Chas. F. Lummis

10.

[Los Angeles, Cal.]

Jan. 30th, 1903

My dear Prof. McGee:

Sure thing! This is *just* the place for a progressive series of portraits of Major Powell, from early manhood to the end; and the more

¹³ Reference to the directorship of the Bureau of American Ethnology, of which some believed McGee to be the "heir apparent." McGee had served as right hand man to his chief, Major Powell, and during Powell's last illness he assumed the administrative work, and at the time of Powell's death in 1902 he was serving as acting director. However, on Powell's death, W. H. Holmes was appointed to succeed him. See Richard Olney to Professor Frank Russell, Boston, December 5, 1902, in *McGee Collection, op. cit.*

of them the better. So I sincerely hope that you can gather them. We will, of course, take the utmost care of them and return them safely to you. I am sure you understand just the kind of articles we want, familiar as you are with our peculiar brand of "science." We wish, of course, something that is sound and sane from the scientific viewpoint; but we certainly don't want to tie it down to that timidity of so many scientists who are so afraid that they may say a generous thing, and that high honor to another man is not exactly scientific. And I feel free to say this to you, because I know that you are of the kind yourself that is not afraid in these cases, and that you have a capacity (which has dried out of a good many students) to appreciate a Man and to say so.

I am sorry indeed that you have been having typhoid. That seems out of place altogether in your robust frame, and I hope by now you have fully evicted the unwelcome tenant.

With all good wishes,

Hastily but

Sincerely yours,

Chas. F. Lummis

11.

[Los Angeles, Cal.]

June 13th, 1903

Prof. W. J. McGee, (D—! the stenog!)¹⁴
Washington, D. C.

Dear Prof. McGee:—

Thanks for your bully letter, which came only an hour or so after Newell and I were talking about you. And I *have* heard worse things said about people than came out there. The little Reading List on Indians was designed, of course, only for lay use, but I am glad to hear you enjoyed it, and am sorry it is not more on the line that would be useful to you. If I had nothing else to do, I would be glad to increase the list to pretty reasonable proportions, and put it out in a "separate" as you suggest, but it would not be available stuff for the magazine. It would hardly pay for the expense of independent printing by us, and I really have not time now for the collation. Perhaps, sometime, I can do it. In the meantime, any better man is welcome to use my skeleton

¹⁴The comment in parenthesis is in Lummis' handwriting, with reference to the initials "W. J.," heavily written in ink by Lummis over the stenographer's erroneous "J. W." McGee himself must have enjoyed the whole incident, because he always insisted on signing his initials "W J," without periods.

to put flesh on. I am very sorry that the typhoid has treated you so discourteously, and hope that you will soon leave it behind you altogether. I shall be very glad to have an article on Major Powell as soon as may be.

With all good wishes, hastily but always

Sincerely yours,

Chas. F. Lummis

TROUBLED ONE

This day is tonic; beautiful indeed
the falling flake, flame filtered light
designed to magnify creative greed
of him who witnesses the flight
of sparrow lifting a defiant wing
to easy triumph of ascendant swing.

The lens that slowly burn the frost
create exultant challenge to his wit.
The woodland drift and fields are lost
unless defined in metronomic feet.

Restless and keen with a consuming lust
he poses questions to the dazzling dust . . .

. . . fretful, not finding data for his dream!
Instead of cleanly peace, a mental rust.
Such vacant hungers gnaw the soul of him
who seeks not beauty's pulp but beauty's crust.

WILLIAM PILLIN