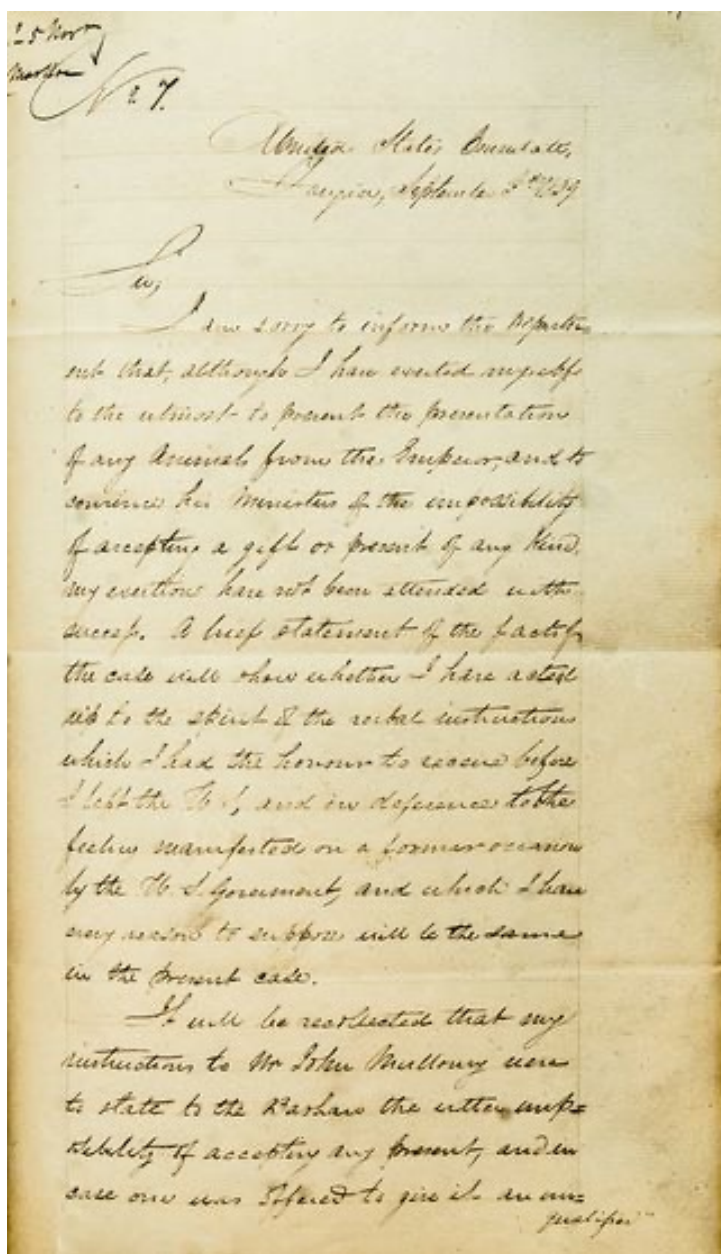


The Return of the Legation Lions



The "Legation Lions" refers to the rather cumbersome gifts that U.S. Presidents once were given by Moroccan Sultans back in the 1800s. And the plight of the poor Tangier consuls who had to deal with the furry beasts.

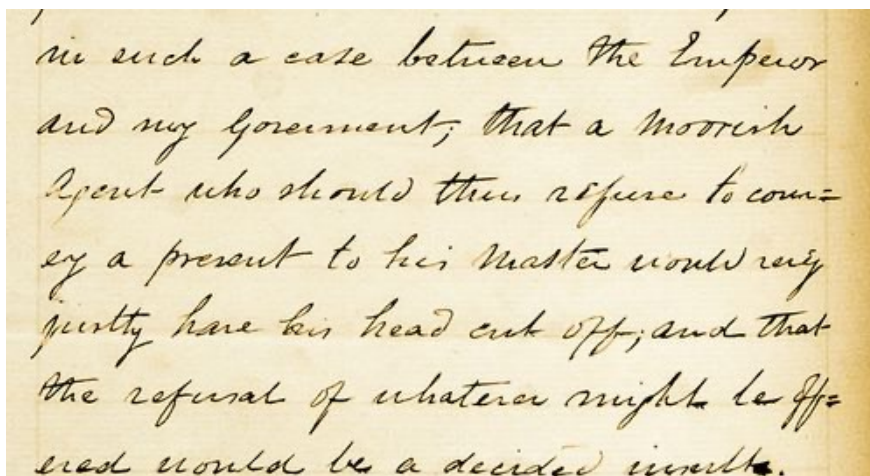
From the U.S. State Department Office of the Historian:

In 1834, the Sultan presented Tangier U.S. Consul James Leib with a lion and two Arabian horses as gifts for the President. He had to house the lion until he could persuade his superiors to transport it and the horses to the United States. After much debate, Congress passed a resolution calling for the animals to be sold at auction. The "Numidian Lion" fetched \$3,350, with the proceeds being divided between two Washington orphanages.

Leib's successor Thomas Carr was faced with a similar quandary. Again from the State Department's Office of the Historian:

The Sultan of Morocco presented Carr with two lions and two horses. Congress passed another resolution authorizing the President to "dispose in such time and manner as he shall see fit of all such of the presents as cannot conveniently be deposited or kept in the Department of State, and cause the proceeds to be placed in the Treasury of the United States." The animals were duly sold when they arrived in Philadelphia in 1840.

For years, the scanned letter where Carr plaintively writes of lions eating him out of house and home on his meager Consul's salary has enchanted Legation museum visitors. Especially amusing is the "gift you can't refuse" aspect: giving the lions back would have resulted in the messenger's decapitation! Not an option for a Consul with a conscience.



*in such a case between the Emperor
and my Government; that a Moroccan
Agent who should then refuse to receive
a present to his Master would very
quintly have his head cut off; and that
the refusal of whatever might be offered
would be a decided insult.*

The previous scans' sickly green hue (maybe it was the early scan technology) finally became an eyesore, and we vowed to put up more presentable images. Enter Kristen Kouttab and the Moroccan American Cultural Center in Washington. With her colleague Dave Bloom, they went to the U.S. National Archives in College Park Maryland and, with the help of friendly NARA archivist David Langbart, located the original letter and took these stunning photographs. We only regret that we don't have an action photo of Dave Bloom climbing on tables and chairs to get the right shot in challenging lighting conditions.

The National Archives contain the "lion letter" and many other treasures of American history that are there waiting for other Legation friends to explore.

There's even an exhibit (sans lions) of famous gifts to U.S. Presidents. We greatly appreciate Kristen, Dave, and MACC help on getting this piece of American history in Morocco.

Perhaps it was the pressure of dealing with successive sets of lions, but Consuls Leib and Carr later succumbed to Demon Rum and exhibited rather odd behavior on Zankat Amrika ("America Lane," the street address of the Legation in Tangier).

The Legation's tales never cease to fascinate.

Blog article by Gerald Loftus (former Resident Director of the Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies, or TALIM).

Original version at: <https://legation.org/the-return-of-the-legation-lions/>