

History of Canadian Geology: Charles Jackson, M.D. (1805-1880) and Francis Alger (1807-1863)

Peter H. von Bitter

Volume 5, Number 2, June 1978

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/geocan5_2fea01

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Publisher(s)

The Geological Association of Canada

ISSN

0315-0941 (print)

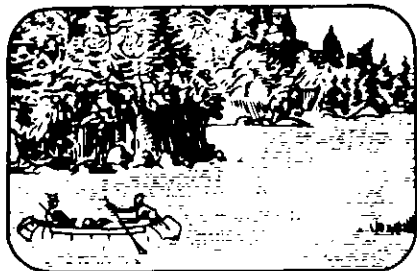
1911-4850 (digital)

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Cite this article

von Bitter, P. H. (1978). History of Canadian Geology:: Charles Jackson, M.D. (1805-1880) and Francis Alger (1807-1863). *Geoscience Canada*, 5(2), 79–82.

Features



History of Canadian Geology

Charles Jackson, M.D. (1805-1880) and Francis Alger (1807-1863)

Peter H. von Bitter
Department of Invertebrate
Paleontology
Royal Ontario Museum
100 Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C6

Further information on their charges of plagiarism against Abraham Gesner (1797-1864).

A document written by the Bostonians Charles Jackson, M.D. and Francis Alger, charging the early Maritime geologist Abraham Gesner, M.D. with plagiarism of their geological work in Nova Scotia was recently described (von Bitter, 1977). This document, a letter sent February 25, 1840 and addressed to the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, requested the government of that province belatedly to recognize and acknowledge their work, and indicated that "A copy of the communication had also been addressed to Governor Sir Colin Campbell, but no acknowledgement of it has ever been received from him; nor are we aware that any note has ever been taken of it". Neither the

Nova Scotia Archives (B. Fergusson, 1976, pers. commun.) nor the Nova Scotia Legislative Library (S. Elliot, 1976, pers. commun.) had any record of either of these communications. (Copies of the 1840 letter have been deposited at the Nova Scotia Museum, the Nova Scotia Archives, the Nova Scotia Legislative Library, the New Brunswick Museum, the Central Library of the City of Toronto and the Canadiana Section of the Royal Ontario Museum.) It was therefore of great interest to discover that the letter to Governor Campbell is still in existence and is preserved in the Baldwin Room Manuscript Collection in the Central Library of the City of Toronto.

This earlier letter to Governor Campbell (Fig. 1) is dated June 10th, 1837, and is written only a year after the publication of Abraham Gesner's *Remarks on the Geology and Mineralogy of Nova Scotia*. It is far more restrained in its charges against Gesner and states only that "it (Jackson and Alger's published work) has evidently served Mr. A. Gesner as the basis of his essay entitled 'Remarks on the Geology and Mineralogy of Nova Scotia' ". Most importantly, the letter of June 10, 1837 supports the authenticity of the later one dated February 25, 1840. It also provides a measure of Jackson and Alger's less hostile initial reaction to Gesner's publication than does that written three years later after their more polite attempts to gain recognition for their pioneering work had been ignored.

Abraham Gesner received immediate and tangible rewards for his book on the geology and mineralogy of Nova Scotia: Jackson and Alger in their letter to Governor Campbell noted that Gesner was awarded the sum of £100 by the Nova Scotia House of Assembly for his services. In my earlier article (von Bitter, 1977) I listed probable reasons why Gesner was given this recognition freely and without question. It is less clear why Jackson and Alger's extensive earlier work was not recognized. One explana-

tion is that these two authors (Jackson and Alger, 1828, 1829) chose a scientific medium, *The American Journal of Science and Arts*, to publish their findings unlike Gesner (1836) who chose to publish his book privately. Publication in *The American Journal of Science and Arts* by Jackson and Alger probably served to insure its unavailability to a more general readership, while Gesner's book would likely have been widely available from booksellers. After Jackson and Alger republished these four articles in yet another scientific and literary journal, *The American Academy of Arts and Science* (1832a, incorrectly cited as 1831 in von Bitter, 1977), they were republished in book form (1832b) (Fig. 2). Jackson and Alger's letter of June 10, 1837 to Governor Campbell provides important information why the republication in book form could not possibly have resulted in wide-spread distribution. They wrote that "their Memoir was contributed freely to the Scientific World no copies having been offered for sale on their account. The 100 copies extracted from the Transactions of the Academy were freely distributed to learned Societies in various parts of the world". The fact that no copies were sold in bookstores and only 100 copies were available for distribution accounts not only for the fact that their work was not widely acknowledged but also for the fact that this 1832b republication must be among the scarcest of books, not only among Canadian geological literature, but among Canadiana in general. I know of only five copies in existence, these being at the Nova Scotia Museum, the Nova Scotia Archives, the Nova Scotia Legislative Library, the New Brunswick Museum and the Central Reference Library of the City of Toronto.

In my earlier discussion of Jackson and Alger (von Bitter, 1977) I made reference to the fact that it remained uncertain as to who had written the

Boston June 10th 1837

The Excellency Sir Colin Campbell
Major General, Knight, Commander of the Most
Militant Order of the Bath, His Governor &
Commander in Chief of the Province of Nova Scotia
& its dependencies, &c. &c.

May it please your Excellency
to accept from the authors, with their best
respects, a copy of their *Memorandum on the
Mineralogy & Geology of Nova Scotia*
an Essay which was originally published
in the *American Journal of Science* Vols
XIV XV in 1828, the surveys having been
made in 1827 - & subsequently continued in
1829 - The present copy is an extract from
the *Memorandum of the American Academy's*
transactions published in Boston 1832.

While collecting the observations for
this work, the authors devoted themselves for
nine months to arduous geological labours among
the mountains & precipices of Nova Scotia &
expended more than a Thousand Dollars in
the country while promoting their work -

This they did purely for the advancement
of Science without any expectations of pecuni-
ary reward, & their *Memorandum* was contributed
freely to the Scientific world. No copies
having been offered for sale on their account.

The 100 copies extracted from the transactions of the Academy,
were freely distributed to learned Societies in various parts
of the world, & the work was noticed in the most favorable
manner by the *Inspector of Carriers in the British Empire*
at Paris - The world also remarks that the whole
Memoir, from the *American Journal of Science*, was
republished in the columns of one of the Halifax N.
news-papers so as to reach every citizen of the Province
in 1828, as may be seen in looking inside the files of
news-papers for that year -

Your Excellency having been
appointed to the Command of the Province of
Nova Scotia since the period of our labours
on that country, it occurred to us that the
present *Memorandum* might not have reached
your eye since you have been engaged in
the interests of that province, & that you might
perhaps feel willing to look over it again
during your travels in the country.

It is confessedly imperfect, & we beg you to remember
that we were but novices in the Geology of a
new country.

We are more particularly
anxious at the present time, that your
Excellency should look over this work,
since it has evidently served Sir A. Georger
the basis of his essay entitled "*Remarks on
the Geology & Mineralogy of Nova Scotia*"
published at Halifax N.S. 1835 a work for which
the Honorable Assembly at Halifax voted
that gentlemen the Complimentary Present
of £100 as a mark of the estimation in which they
held his services. "We would be more
highly gratified than ourselves by the develop-
ment of the native talent of Nova Scotia, or

Figure 1

Letter by Charles T. Jackson and Francis
Alger of Boston, addressed to Sir Colin

Campbell, Governor of Nova Scotia, dated
June 10, 1837. (Courtesy of the Metropolitan
Toronto Library Board).

document of February 25, 1840 and who
had edited it prior to it being sent to Nova
Scotia. I speculated that the original was
written by Dr. Jackson and edited by
Francis Alger. With the discovery of the
1837 letter, written and signed by
Dr. Jackson, it is now possible to
compare his handwriting and signature
with that of the 1840 letter, as well as with
another known specimen of Dr. Jack-
son's signature. Such comparison sug-
gests that the letter of 1840 was not
written by Dr. Jackson since both the
signature (Fig. 3a) as well as the
handwriting of the 1840 letter (see von
Bitter, 1977) are much neater and more
carefully formed than are the same
features in either the 1837 letter (Fig. 1,
3b) or in the signature dating from an
unknown period (Fig. 3c). The penman-
ship of the 1840 letter as well as the
signatures at the end must therefore be
attributed to an unknown person, possi-
bly a secretary.

My speculation, however, that the
1840 letter was edited by Francis Alger
prior to it being recopied and sent to
Nova Scotia is substantiated. When
known specimens of Alger's handwriting
and signature (Fig. 4) are compared with
that of the edited and added portions of
the 1840 letter (Fig. 5) it is clear that
Francis Alger corrected and edited this
letter.

Before concluding, a word or two
about the less well-known Francis Alger
(Fig. 6) are in order. Although without
formal education beyond "common
school" (Jackson, 1865), Francis Alger
became interested in mineralogy in
1824 at the age of seventeen. In 1826 he
accompanied his father to Nova Scotia
where his father was to erect a furnace
for the smelting of the bedded iron ores
of Devonian age which occur
at Clementsport.

Francis Alger enthusiastically collect-
ed minerals in Nova Scotia and on his
return to Boston published the first

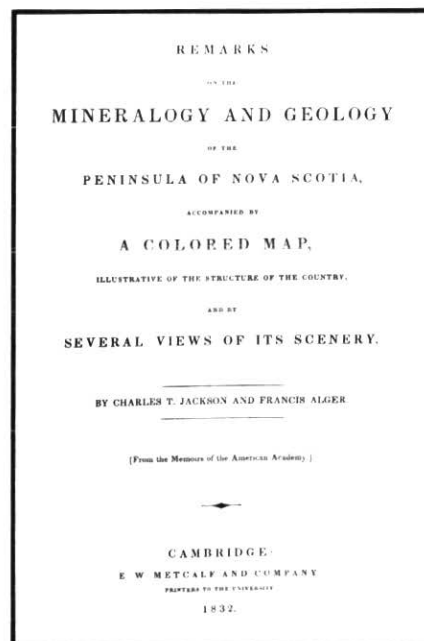


Figure 2

Title page of book entitled "*Remarks on the
Mineralogy and Geology of the Peninsula of
Nova Scotia, accompanied by a colored map,
illustrative of the structure of the country, and
by several views of its scenery*", published in
1832. (Courtesy of the Metropolitan Toronto
Library Board).

would more heartily rejoice to learn that merit was duly appreciated by Government, & we confidently hope that many original discoveries will yet be made by your citizens, for the field is but just entered & a full harvest of discovery is yet to be reaped.

Since we found the Province as pioneers in its Geology, the past & present history of your mining interest prove that our researches have been of great value to the Country; & the history of that department of Commerce & the arts will satisfy you that the Mineral Wealth of Nova Scotia began to be appreciated from 1827: we should be wanting in justice to ourselves & ~~the Province~~ did we not humbly claim that our services should be acknowledged in a similar manner to those of the Gentlemen whose names we have noticed. Indeed one of the Merchants of Halifax has already claimed for us such an acknowledgment, which we should be happy to receive as a testimonial of the good opinion in which our services are held by your enlightened Government.

With the most profound respect
we have the honour to be
Your Excellencies most Obedt Servt

Charles T. Jackson

Francis Alger
per C.T. Jackson

No 21 Green Street
Boston -

Dear Sir,
I believe you told me that Mr Archer of Liverpool had been made a corresponding member of our Society. To I have informed him. I have just got a letter from him from which I give you an extract which you will oblige me by reading at the next meeting. "At the last meeting of our Society I made application for a set of casts of the Christchurch fossils for your Society which was granted, and we should be glad of both a cash and drawing of the impressions of the orthidontia gigantea of the coral would not be very much." You know he sent me the drawings on them of the fossils of the Christchurch which I gave to the Society. And as he proposes to send the plaster casts, I should advise the Society to obtain them from Kitchcock, of which we have one in our collection, and forward it with a drawing to Mr Archer - on receipt of which he will return the casts to me. He adds "it will take some little time to prepare, but by the first opportunity which offers after they are ready, I shall send them". Please let me know what the Society think of this plan -

Yours very truly
F. Alger

& sent by Kitchcock
on Springfield

Figure 4

Francis Alger's handwriting and signature. Letter sent by Francis Alger to Thomas Bouvé of Boston. No date, but after 1841. (From BSNH Manuscripts, Boston Museum of Science).

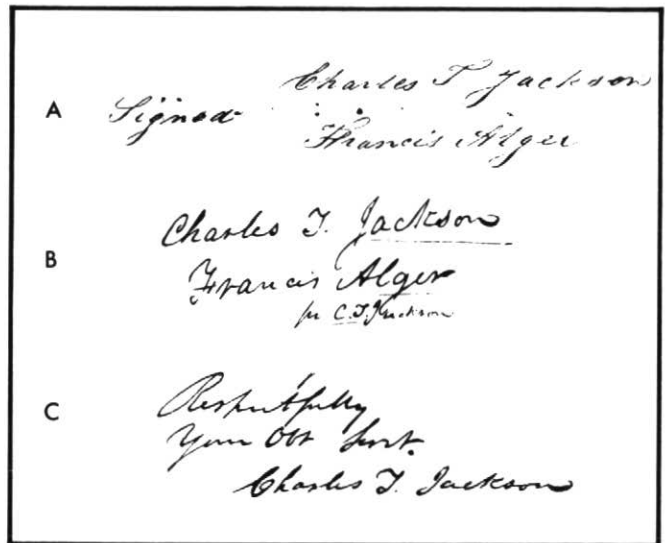


Figure 3

a) Signatures from letter sent to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly February 25, 1840. (Described by von Bitter, 1977; b) Signatures from letter sent to the Governor of Nova Scotia, Sir Colin Campbell, dated June 10, 1837. (Courtesy of the Metropolitan Toronto Library Board); c) C. T. Jackson's signature. (From Woodworth, 1897).

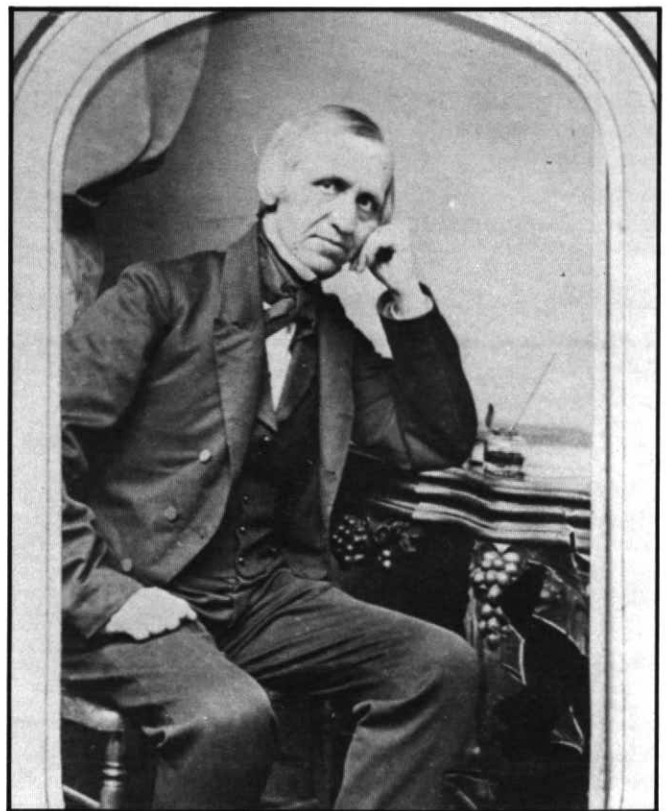


Figure 6

Francis Alger (1807-1863). (From Photograph Album of the Boston Society of Natural History Collection, Boston Museum of Science).

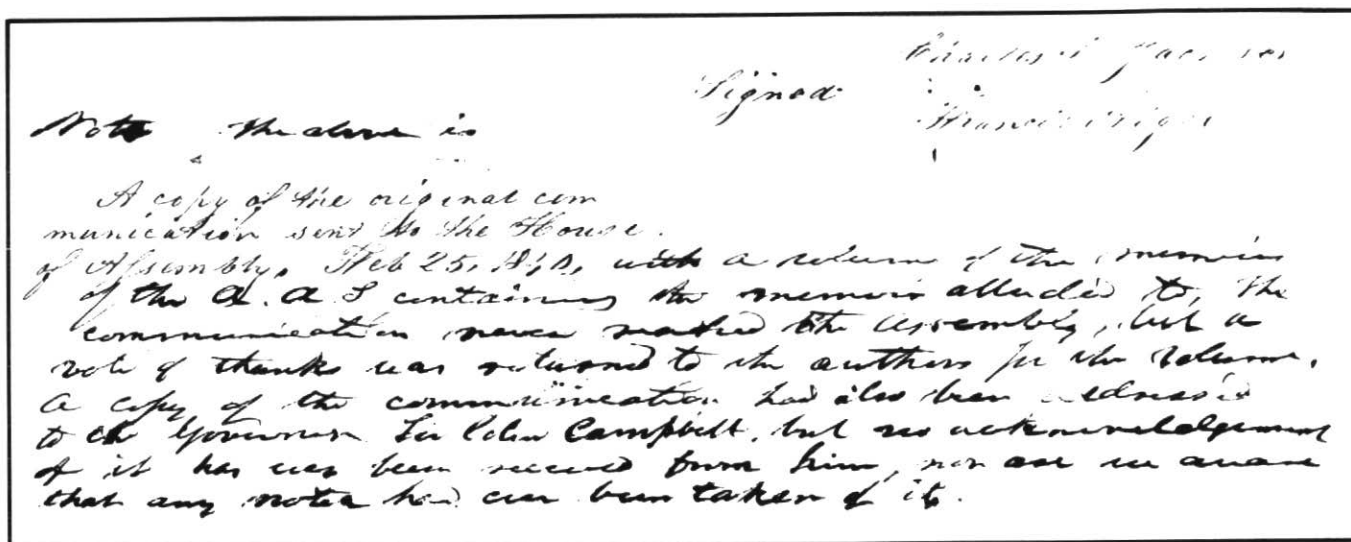


Figure 5

Portion of letter by Charles T. Jackson and Francis Alger of Boston to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. The part shown is

believed to have been added by Francis Alger sometime after the letter was sent on February 25, 1840. It also seems likely that the letter described by me (von Bitter, 1977) is

the original which was edited and corrected by Alger prior to it being recopied and sent to Nova Scotia.

reports on the mineralogy of Nova Scotia (Alger, 1827). He returned to Nova Scotia in 1827 in the company of Dr. C. T. Jackson and the geological explorations and observations made by them in that year and again in 1829 resulted in a series of joint publications (Jackson and Alger, 1828, 1829, 1832a,b) on the mineralogy and geology of Nova Scotia. Francis Alger remained an assiduous collector of minerals for many years and he contributed a number of mineralogical articles to the scientific journals of the day (Jackson, 1865). He was the Curator of Mineralogy to the Boston Society of Natural History for a number of years, until the pressure of business forced him to resign. Although none of his obituary notices (Anonymous, 1864, 1865; Jackson, 1865; Bouvé, 1880) have stated what the nature of this business was it appears, from his father's concern with iron furnaces, his own interest in the iron and zinc mines of Sussex Co., New Jersey, as well as the fact that he died as a result of exposure while "perfecting shrapnel to be employed in restoring the union of our divided states" (Jackson, 1865), likely that Alger was engaged in a family business concerned with the mining, smelting or manufacture of iron.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Miss Joan Burke, ROM, for editing and typing the manuscript and to Mrs Hilary Geberl, ROM, for assistance in the preparation of figures.

Ms Sharon Hick, Librarian, ROM, kindly assisted in locating the Alger portrait and correspondence. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the assistance of Mrs. Barbara Wiseman, Reference Librarian, Boston Museum of Science in making this portrait and correspondence available. Similarly I wish to thank Miss Sandra Alston, Central Reference Library of the City of Toronto for making a copy of Jackson and Alger's letter to Governor Campbell available.

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