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## MOUNT WEATHER, WEATHER BUREAU STATION

JANUARY 9, 1928.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. McNARY, from the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry,  
submitted the following

### R E P O R T

[To accompany S. 1531]

The Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, to whom was referred the bill (S. 1531) authorizing the Secretary of Agriculture to sell the Weather Bureau station known as Mount Weather, in the counties of Loudoun and Clarke, in the State of Virginia, having considered the same, report thereon with the recommendation that the bill do pass.

This legislation was sought by the Secretary of Agriculture, in order that he might have authority to dispose of the Mount Weather property. His reasons are set forth in the following letter addressed to the chairman of the committee and in the statement which accompanied Secretary Jardine's letter:

DECEMBER 9, 1927.

HON. CHARLES L. McNARY,  
*United States Senate.*

DEAR SENATOR McNARY: The department desires again to bring to your attention the great desirability of making some disposition of the property known as Mount Weather, located in Loudoun and Clarke Counties, Va. You will no doubt recall previous efforts in this direction, but for the purpose of putting the matter clearly before you again, I attach a statement giving the history of the acquisition and use of Mount Weather and the several suggestions which have been made for its disposition.

The property is costing the United States about \$2,000 a year for maintenance and upkeep. Inspection made in October, 1927, by officials of the Weather Bureau shows that the buildings and grounds are in good condition, but the property is of no use to the Department of Agriculture and diligent inquiry has failed to find another branch of the Government which can use it to advantage.

It is therefore recommended that legislative authority be given to advertise the property for sale and to sell the same to the highest responsible bidder, reserving to the Secretary of Agriculture the right to reject all bids if in his judgment it is in the public interest to do so. Below is a suggested wording of legislation to accomplish this purpose:

"That the Secretary of Agriculture be, and he is hereby, authorized and directed to advertise for sale and to sell to the highest responsible bidder the

premises known as Mount Weather, in the counties of Loudoun and Clarke, in the State of Virginia, and comprising eighty-four and eighty-one one-hundredths acres of land, more or less, together with the buildings and other improvements thereon, including laboratories, cottages, sheds, stables, shops, heating and power plant, kite shelter, and other buildings of whatever nature, together with all rights, easements, and appurtenances thereto belonging, at such time, in such manner, and upon such terms as he may deem for the best interests of the United States; to convey such property to the purchaser thereof by the usual quitclaim deed, and to deposit the proceeds of such sale in the Treasury of the United States as a miscellaneous receipt, after deducting the expenses incident to such sale; but the Secretary of Agriculture shall reserve the right to reject any and all bids if in his judgment it is in the public interest to do so; and in the event of a general rejection of bids, to readvertise the property under conditions provided herein as often as may be necessary to accomplish sale."

A duplicate of this letter and of the accompanying statement is being forwarded to Congressman Haugen.

Sincerely yours,

W. M. JARDINE, *Secretary.*

STATEMENT REGARDING MOUNT WEATHER, VA.

In 1902 and 1903 the Department of Agriculture purchased 84.81 acres of land on top of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Loudoun and Clarke Counties, Va., about 20 miles south of Harpers Ferry and 47 miles in a direct line west of Washington. Buildings were subsequently constructed on this site, for the purpose of establishing an aerological and meteorological observatory and laboratory for study by the Weather Bureau of upper air conditions and solar radiation and for making magnetic observations. This site and group of buildings is known as Mount Weather. A very important line of work was established and conducted there, namely, the exploration of the upper air by means of kites and balloons. With the exception of short-period observations many years ago at Blue Hill Observatory (near Boston, Mass.) and a series of observations for a few months in 1898 at several stations in the United States, the important investigations of conditions in the free air that were conducted at Mount Weather represented the only observations of this character made anywhere on the western continent up to that time.

In 1913 it became apparent to the administrative officers of the Weather Bureau that the maintenance of this observing station was unduly expensive because of its comparative inaccessibility and isolation. The nearest railroad station is  $6\frac{1}{2}$  miles to the north at Bluemont, Va., the present terminus of the Washington & Old Dominion Electric Railway line. The conditions surrounding the conduct of scientific and investigative work at this point were also unsatisfactory, as it was found that the particular geographic location of the site was unfavorable with respect to the occurrence and passage of great cyclonic and anti-cyclonic atmospheric conditions. The observations secured, while very valuable, were limited to certain portions only of this atmospheric phenomenon, and the removal of the station some years ago to another site in the Middle West where observations could be secured in all quadrants of the disturbances in question resulted in greatly increased knowledge of the subject, as well as economies in the conduct of the work.

The reservation is roughly square in outline and lies on both sides of the ridge, the top of which is 1,725 feet above the sea level. It overlooks to the west the entire Shenandoah Valley from Strasburg to Harpers Ferry and to the east all that portion of the Piedmont Valley between the Blue Ridge and the Bull Run Mountains. The grounds are inclosed by a stone wall along the highway and by a wire fence along the rest of its boundaries.

The cost of the land to the Government was \$2,513.15, the cost of the buildings erected thereon (including an administration building destroyed by fire) being \$209,527.70, as follows:

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|---|-------------|
| Administration and observatory building; erected 1909; brick, tile, and concrete; 3 stories and cellar; 18 rooms.....   | \$49,898.41 |
| Machine shop and balloon shed; erected 1904; 2-story frame and stone building; 8 rooms.....   | 8,817.00    |
| Central heating and power plant; erected 1909; 1-story stone building; boilers and electrical equipment sufficient for supplying heat, light, and power for the entire plant..... | 11,964.74   |

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|--|-------------|
| "Absolute" and "variation" buildings; erected 1906; two 1-story frame buildings, used in connection with investigations in terrestrial magnetism; cellar under each; walls about 4 feet thick, of double construction, packed with sawdust to secure constant temperature conditions within..... | \$15,904.55 |
| Stables, one 2-story frame and stone and one 2-story frame.....  | 2,800.00    |
| Farm cottage for dwelling purposes, remodeled 1905, 2-story frame building, 9 rooms.....   | 1,300.00    |
| Physical laboratory, erected 1909, 3-story stone building, 16 rooms...   | 37,521.51   |
| Cottage for dwelling, erected 1909, 3-story frame building, 15 rooms...  | 11,246.34   |
| Reel house and kite shelter, a circular frame building, 9 feet in diameter.....  | 1,738.69    |
| Repairs and permanent improvements.....  | 37,823.31   |
| Administration building destroyed by fire.....   | 28,000.00   |
| Cost of buildings.....   | 209,527.70  |
| Cost of land.....  | 2,513.15    |
| Total cost to Government.....  | 212,040.85  |
| Or, omitting fire loss (\$28,000), original cost remains.....  | 184,040.85  |

Since the discontinuance of the use of this property in 1914, the cost of its care and upkeep has been approximately \$2,000 per annum.

Under date of December 9, 1914, at the direction of Congress, the Secretary of Agriculture transmitted a report to the Speaker of the House of Representatives containing an itemized statement of the cost of the land and buildings and an estimate of their then condition and value. The valuation placed on the property at the time this report was made was \$112,000. In his report the Secretary expressed his opinion that the location of the property was such that neither the buildings nor the grounds could be leased to advantage. It was also his view that the property could not be disposed of to advantage at forced sale at that time, and he recommended that it be held for sale later when a reasonable price might possibly be had.

Later it was determined to make further effort to dispose of the Mount Weather property to some other branch of the Government service. The bureaus of the Department of Agriculture were canvassed, and during the war representatives of various branches of the War and Navy Departments, the Public Health Service, and other Government organizations visited Mount Weather, but none of these agencies found the property suited to its purposes. Accordingly in the estimates for the fiscal year 1921 authority was requested for the Secretary to dispose of the property at public sale, but the House Committee on Agriculture substituted the following paragraph appointing a commission to examine the property and report to Congress on the feasibility of using Mount Weather as a sanitarium or home for disabled soldiers, or in connection with any other governmental functions.

"A commission composed of the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of War, and the Secretary of the Navy, is hereby appointed to make an examination of the premises known as Mount Weather, in the counties of Loudoun and Clarke, in the State of Virginia, and comprising eighty-four and eighty-one one-hundredths acres of land, more or less, together with the buildings and other improvements thereon, including laboratories, cottages, sheds, stables, shops, heating and power plant, kite shelter, and other buildings of whatever nature, together with all the rights, easements, and appurtenances thereto belonging, and to report to Congress on the first day of the next session thereof whether said premises can be suitably used as a sanitarium or as a home for disabled soldiers, sailors, or marines, or can be profitably utilized in any other way in connection with any other governmental function, and to make such recommendation in the premises as in the judgment of the commission may be deemed to be the best interest of the Government."

This commission submitted a report to Congress on December 28, 1920, in which it questioned the feasibility of maintaining the Mount Weather station as a home for disabled soldiers, sailors, or marines, because of its isolation and inaccessibility, with consequent heavy fixed charges for maintenance and operation. The commission pointed out further that after necessary alterations and repairs not more than 120 patients could be accommodated and the overhead expenditures per patient therefore would compare very unfavorably with like expenses for the operation of other similar governmental institutions. The commission also stated that the matter of utilizing the station was brought to the

attention of other governmental agencies, all of which reported adversely, and that it did not seem feasible or desirable to make use of the station in the prosecution of any features of the work of the Department of Agriculture.

As the investigation of the commission failed to develop a profitable use of the Mount Weather premises by the Government, it recommended that the property be sold at public auction. In the opinion of the commission, the natural beauty of the location, the delightful climate during the summer months, and its comparative proximity to Washington, made it peculiarly suitable as a resort for tourists or boarders, and believed that its disposition for this purpose might be possible. It was therefore suggested by the commission that the following provision be inserted in the agricultural appropriation bill for the fiscal year 1922:

"That the Secretary of Agriculture be, and he is hereby, authorized and directed to sell to the highest bidder, at public or private sale, the premises known as Mount Weather, in the counties of Loudoun and Clarke, in the State of Virginia, and comprising eighty-four and eighty-one one-hundredths acres of land, more or less, together with the buildings and other improvements thereon, including laboratories, cottages, sheds, stables, shops, heating and power plant, kits shelter, and other buildings of whatever nature, together with all rights, easements, and appurtenances thereto belonging, at such time, in such manner, and upon such terms as he may deem for the best interests of the United States; to convey such property to the purchaser thereof for the usual quitclaim deed, and to deposit the proceeds of such sale in the Treasury of the United States as a miscellaneous receipt, after deducting the expenses incident to such sale; but the Secretary of Agriculture shall reserve the right to reject any and all bids if it is in the public interest to do so, and to readvertise the property under conditions provided herein as often as may be necessary to accomplish sale."

The report of the commission was referred to the House Committee on Agriculture, but no action has yet been taken on its recommendations. However, on June 10, 1921, a hearing was held by the Committee on Agriculture on H. R. 5901, a bill to permit the Soldiers' Institute to occupy Mount Weather in connection with its work for the care, education, and rehabilitation of soldiers, sailors, and marines of the late war. This bill made no provision for the upkeep and maintenance of the place while under the tenancy and occupation of the Soldiers' Institute and its patients. The department's position with respect to the proposed transfer was stated at the hearing by the Assistant Chief of the Weather Bureau, as follows:

"It is submitted that the most desirable plan for the disposition of Mount Weather at this time would be for the Congress to pass necessary legislation authorizing its sale according to the recommendation of the commission, composed of the Secretaries of Agriculture, Treasury, War, and Navy, made to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, December 28, 1920. This land was bought and the buildings erected by the United States Government, which owns and holds them. The Weather Bureau of the Department of Agriculture is custodian and responsible for the plant and those buildings. We must care for them, and we must maintain them and we are doing that, but it is not believed desirable to transfer the use and custody of this reservation to any institution unless same be responsible for its maintenance and care \* \* \*. There is nothing in the bill that obligates the occupants to care for and maintain the property in proper condition. If the Government were legally safeguarded in its custody of the property, we would have no objection to the transfer of this property to this institute or to any responsible establishment."

At these hearings, Mr. Haugen, chairman of the Committee on Agriculture, suggested that the department prosecute informal inquiry in regard to a possible purchaser and to ascertain, if possible, the price that might be expected for the Mount Weather Reservation, so that the committee might have definite information on which to base authorization for a sale. Carrying out this suggestion, the Weather Bureau has communicated with and interviewed the owners of properties near the Mount Weather station, others who are familiar with the property and its possible utilization and sale, as well as real estate dealers with large clientele who are familiar with the property. A representative of the Weather Bureau has visited the villages and towns in the vicinity of the reservation with a view to ascertaining whether anyone could be found who might be interested in the property and might be prevailed upon to make a preliminary offer for its purchase. Although these inquiries were diligently prosecuted, no definite proposals have yet been received.

In the meantime, the department is expending about \$2,000 annually for the care and upkeep of the property, although no use whatever is made of the station. The buildings and grounds are inspected periodically by officers of the Weather Bureau and repairs necessary for their maintenance in good condition are made from time to time. The property at the present time is in a good state of preservation, as disclosed by an inspection made in October, 1927.

It is very difficult to estimate the present valuation of the land and buildings at this isolated and nonagricultural location on the Blue Ridge Mountains. However, the present value may be roughly estimated at \$82,000—\$4,000 for the land and \$78,000 for the buildings. After exhaustive and diligent inquiry as to a possible purchaser for this property, it is believed that the Government could not expect to receive more than about \$50,000 from its sale.

This matter has been presented to the Federal Real Estate Board with a request for a clearance on this tract of land and buildings which are no longer required for official use by the United States Department of Agriculture (Weather Bureau), in order that legislative authority for the sale of the property may be sought. In response thereto the surveyor general of real estate, under date of March 9, 1926, authorized such a clearance.



