

JULY · 1897

From Seth Low¹

New York July 8th, 1897

My dear Mr. Washington: I am glad to learn that you have secured the \$30,000 necessary for your Trades School Building. I enclose my cheque for \$1,500, in accordance with my pledge, with pleasure. Yours sincerely,

Seth Low

I shall be glad to know who have joined me in this enterprise.

TLS Con. 130 BTW Papers DLC.

¹ Seth Low (1850-1916) was a trustee of Tuskegee Institute from 1905 until his death, and after 1907 was president of the board of trustees. After graduation from Columbia University at the head of his class in 1870, he entered his father's shipping firm and became a senior member of it by the time of its dissolution in 1887. Thereafter he devoted his time to public service and politics. An active Republican, he was elected mayor of Brooklyn in 1881 and 1883. He reformed the city's civil service, school system, and finances. In 1884 he was a Mugwump supporter of Grover Cleveland, a defection that denied him the further support of many Republicans. From 1890 to 1901 he was president of Columbia University, where he centralized graduate training and arranged for the affiliation of Barnard College and Teachers' College with the university. In 1901, in a reaction against Tammany corruption, Low was elected mayor of New York. He sought to reduce patronage corruption by civil service reform, and sought to make more efficient the transportation and electrical services of the city. Low served only one term as mayor, but he remained a leading figure in Progressive politics in the state.

As a trustee of Tuskegee, Low was obsessed with a mission to bring greater efficiency into the operation of the school and particularly its agricultural operations. As a gentleman farmer in upstate New York in his spare time, Low claimed some expertise in operating a farm. Believing that blacks were disdainful of work because of their reaction against the labors of slavery, Low sought through Tuskegee and Tuskegee methods to bring blacks into the American mainstream by teaching them how to work hard and effectively. Low's energy and devotion as a trustee were equaled within BTW's lifetime only by William H. Baldwin, Jr. Low's behavior, however, was sometimes overbearing toward BTW and members of the Tuskegee staff. In his obsession with efficiency and detail, he failed to lead and encourage, and his concern with training for agricultural pursuits left little room for the higher aspirations of blacks or for technological changes of the future. (Kurland, *Seth Low*, 323-27.)