

James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, November 1, 1784, from Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe Correspondence, Transcribed and Edited by Gerard W. Gawalt, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson

Trenton Novr. 1. 1784.

Dear Sir

Two days since I arriv'd here after performing a tour up the North river by fort Stanwix down the wood-creek, thro' the oneida Ontario & (by the Niagara falls) part of lake Erie, thence back by Niagara thro' the Ontario by Coolton Island thro' the St. Laurence to Montreal & from Montreal over lake Champlain by Albany to N. York again. You find I have taken a route different from the one I intended, as my object was to take in my view the practicability also of a communication from Lake Erie down the Potowmack, But from this I was dissuaded by an accident wh. happen'd to some of the party upon lake Erie, with whom I came from fort Stanwix to Niagara. I had seperated from them by accident three days before the event. They landed near some Indian huts (a Mr. Teller from Schenactady with four men in a batteaux) & were fir'd on by those Indians, Mr. Teller & two men killed & a 4th wounded; the latter with the 5th made their escape. The indian chiefs highly reprehended the act & were , at the earnest instigation of the gentlemen of the Brith. garrison, endeavoring to detect & bring the villains to justice. Upon advice of this disaster Colo. Depeister, commanding at Niagara, sent an Express to me just entering upon Lake Erie advising my return, with wh. I complied & took the above route to this place. My excursion hath been attended with great personal exposure & hardship & much greater expence than I had expected. It hath, however, I hope been advantageous to me

Library of Congress

in some respects. I have ascertain'd I believe with some accuracy the different degrees of difficulty from Michelemachinac down the Grand river to Montreal, thro' the Lakes to Montreal and by the North river. *The preference*

is, at least so far in favor of the North River.. The first leisure time I have I will take the route of Fort Pitt to Lake Erie & from some estimate in that direction.

Here I find the country from Montreal much richer than I had expected although I am of opinion L'd Sheffield's expectations are visionary in his calculation that it will supply the Islands with flour & lumber. Still I think it has great resources in those articles, but the best timber is high up the river, wh. together with the difficulty of getting it down the rapids & thro' the gulph of the St. Lawrence to the West Indies must make it an expensive trade to them, more expensive I am told than that from the Baltic. If I were to estimate the present or the probably future value of Canada to the Brith. dominion, consider'd in a commercial light and compare it with the expense necessarily incurr'd if they keep up a military establishment in supporting it, I shod think Britain wod act a politic part in relinquishing it and he not doing it satisfies me she either has or will have other objects. Under the bounds of the U.S. by the late treaty, the principal part of the fur trade must leave it & run in some channel within the U.S. The merchants established or connected in it, the batteaux men and other dependents will take the same course. This will increase the expense of their government in supplying their upper ports in Canada as the price of hands will be higher and the means scarcer. In addition to those difficulties which nature has thrown in her way, others will exist under their government to which ours will be a stranger at present No merchant is allowed to build vessels on the lakes, but must, if he takes the course, avail himself of those of government and this exposes them to constant and most oppressive impositions. Their peltries are subject to duties and preference passes from Lake Superior to Montreal. The duties may be taken off but the preference passes can not be prevented;.while the restraints on their trade are high it will be our policy to increase them in every instance wherein they depend on us; while we give those within our bounds great indulgences we must prohibit under high penalties all commerce

Library of Congress

between the U.S. and Canada; prohibit their landing or storing their goods on our side under at least thirty per cent ad valorem at the place where landed. Canada I consider as standing upon different ground

with regard to use from any other part of the Dominions. A free intercourse between us and the people of Canada can, in my opinion, only be advantageous to them & will defeat any political arrangement we can adopt respecting them. By prohibiting them the participation of the advantages which we possess, we occasion them great difficulty. Their merchants might get their goods much cheaper up the North river than the St. Lawrence and until we permit them to navigate on our shore from the commencement of the Ontario they are deprived of the possibility of navigating it except in vessels of considerable burden. If they take the North instead in batteaux they must go round the lake seventy miles above Niagara & down the other side before they reach it for the passage is impracticable there. I submit to you these observations that you may judge what right they should have in forming a treaty of commerce. The English ministry will, I am satisfied, readily agree it shall be so framed as to exclude the U.S. from a free intercourse with Canada. Their jealousy will tell them to beware how they admit it lest the sweets of those rights which we enjoy might invite them to us; but the people of Canada will be more sensible of our blessings by the restraints laid on them. They will feel their own misfortunes and envy the blessings to be attained under the protection of the federal arm. In the meantime the acquisition of Canada is not an object with us, we must make valuable what we have already acquired & at the same time take such measures as to weaken it as a British province.

As yet we have not a representation of the States but expect it in a few days. *This will certainly be a very important and interesting session. In Canada I was informed that the commanding officer had received orders not to evacuate the posts and that many of the vessels laid aside under the provisional treaty had again been put in commission on the Lakes, a measure which should be founded upon the supposed violating of the treaty by New York and Virginia. The latter in not repealing the laws prohibiting the recovery of British debts & the former in confiscations. But if their conduct is unauthorized is this the way to*

Library of Congress

obtain redress? I trust that the conduct of Congress upon this occasion will be firm though temperate but indeed we are in a poor condition for war, we may lose

*much but can gain nothing. The minister of finance has arriv'd here to present his comm'n to Congress. Those lately appointed in his stead are too diffident I am told of themselves to succeed him; two I hear have resign'd; the situation is difficult but the road for Congress to take appears to me a plain one; an arrangement superseding his office hath taken place. He must bid us farewell; if those already appointed will not serve, others must be appointed in their stead. Our Indian commissioners have quarreled with the State of New York: the State also held a treaty with the Indians which preceeded ours: to this they took exception; the affair will, same; however, easily be accommodated. The delegations are generally the Williamson is here, but it is said Spaight will dispute his right to sit. Pinckney instead of Beresford; Georgia has a Houston and Gibbons here, the former has been to Europe to leave behind him what little wit he had, and the latter I believe never had any, or very little; he is, however, a married man & I hear well intentioned. The court of Pennsylvania sentenc'd the man who made the attack on Mr. Marbois to pay the fine of 200 dolrs & to suffer two years imprisonment. *With this he is dissatisfied. Will the court of France be so.* I will write you very fully so soon as we have a Congress & by every packet & private opportunity & beg of you to do the same. I have not heard from you since you left Phil'a; perhaps your letters to me are in Virga. If you have wrote. I reach'd New York 10 days after Mr. Short left it. I wish'd to have seen him. I hope yourself & Miss Patsy are well. Where shall I address to you? I am with the greatest respect & esteem, Dear Sir, your friend & servant,*

Jas. Monroe

RC (Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress). Words in italics were written in cipher by Monroe.