

Benjmain H. Latrobe to Thomas Jefferson, August 12, 1817, with Thomas Jefferson Note, from Thomas Jefferson and the National Capital. Edited by Saul K. Padover.

Latrobe to Jefferson

Washington Aug.t 12th 1817.

THOS JEFFERSON ESQR near Lynchburg Va.

Dear Sir

A slight indisposition having prevented my attendance at my office, I did not receive your favor of the 2d (postmark 4th) till the 9.th when you would have left Monticello, and I therefore did not immediately answer it, and now direct this letter where I hope it will soon reach You. I now offer to you, with the utmost freedom, a freedom which your request, as well as your long friendship to me authorizes and invites, such remarks as occur to me on the general plan of your Academy; — and as I write without preparation, you must extend your indulgence to the desultory manner, as well as to the freedom of my observations.

The drawings I have made are still by me, & I now beg you to inform me whether, as you remain so long near Lynch burg, I shall not send them to you there. My letter of the 25.th July you do not appear to have received on the 2d of Aug.t If you have since then obtained it, I beg the favor of you to inform me, whether you will engage the stone cutter whose terms I mentioned, & whom I can throughly [sic] recommend, — as he remains in suspence at present. I employ him now at the Capitol.

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The plan and description which your letter contains perfectly explains the situation, on which your Academy must be located, — and I cannot help beginning my remarks, by calling it a most unfortunate one. — For if the general design contained in your letter be carried into execution, — and at the first view, it is *that*, which appears to be unavoidably imposed upon you, — it necessarily follows that all your apartments must face *East & West*. — Every one who has had the misfortune to reside in a house, — especially if it constitutes part of a range of houses, facing East & West, has experienced, both in Summer and Winter the evils of such an Aspect. In Winter the accumulation of snow on the East, & the severity of the cold on the West, together with the absence of the Sun during $\frac{3}{4}$ th. of the day, and in Summer, the horizontal Rays of the morning Sun heating the East, & of the evening Sun burning the West side of the house, — render such a position highly exceptionable. — In a large Country house, surrounded with Trees, and in which the number of Apartments enables the Inhabitants to emigrate from one side of the house to the other, as the Abyssinian Shepherds, from the forests to the deserts, — in such a house the aspect is of less importance, and the house may be located with a regard to the *View*, to the range of a hill, or of the road leading to it. But where no recourse can be had to opposite apartments, and especially where a long extent of portico on one side only creates an eddy, for the wind to accumulate Snow, & for the Sun the heat the air confined under it, — I cannot help being of opinion that the utmost power of art ought to be employed to force the aspect of the houses into a North & South position. — And from long experience in my profession, and from having witnessed the uniform regret of those whom I have been unable to persuade into my opinion on this head in the position of their houses, — I have learned to consider, the easy access to water to be the *first*, and the North & South position to the *second absolutely indispensable* principle, on which a *good* position of a building depends. I could enumerate so many instances of these regrets, & on the other hand, so many proofs of advantage (especially in the position of new Streets recommended by me in Philadelphia) that they would fill my letter. But to you they are unnecessary & I will at present only ask, whether you are so far committed, as to render

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the adoption of the plan of arrangement irrevocable, and to make any respectful project which I might take the liberty to submit to You useless.

On the receipt of your letter of the 72 I suspended my drawing. It contained a plan of the principal range of building (as I then supposed it) and seven or eight Elevations of pavilions, with a general Elevation of the long range of Pavilions & portico. In this State I will send it to you. If there is any thing in it which you think usefull, it is yours & I particularly beg the favor of you to give me further opportunity of being useful to your establishment, & of testifying my respect for yourself. — I draw with great rapidity, & ease & pleasure to myself, & you must not be deterred by any idea that you give me trouble. — If therefore what I have said seems to you worthy of consideration, it will be a pleasure to me to suggest such a plan, as the principles I think so essential, may dictate.

72 Blank space in original ms.

I have now at the Capitol Nine blocks of the Columbian Marble nearly finished for the Columns of the Hall of Representatives. I have never seen anything so beautifully magnificent. Even the most clamorous opposers of their introduction are now silenced. When the columns are in their places, they will be a lasting proof

of the firmness of the character of the Madison monroe present President of the U. States; who in order to decide on the merits of the opposition of the introduction of this Marble, went himself, in the worst weather, to the quarry, and in person gave those orders, which, altho' they did not quell such opposition as could still be made, will ultimately be effectual, & not only render our public buildings rich in nature's magnificence, but make these useless rocks an article of considerable external commerce.

I dare add no more than that I am very sincerely & truly Yrs

B Henry Latrobe.

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[Ms., *Jefferson Papers*, Library of Congress. An excerpt of this letter appears in Fiske Kimball, THOMAS JEFFERSON, ARCHITECT.]