

George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, March 15, 1795, from Thomas Jefferson and the National Capital. Edited by Saul K. Padover.

Washington to Jefferson TO THOMAS JEFFERSON

PHILADA, 15th March, 1795.

Dear Sir,

I received your letter of the 23d ultimo; but not at so early a period as might have been expected from the date of it.

My mind has always been more disposed to apply the shares in the inland navigation of Potomac and James Rivers, (which were left to my disposal by the legislature of Virginia) towards the endowment of an University in the United States, than to any other Object it had contemplated. In pursuance of this idea, and understanding that other means are in embryo for establishing so useful a seminary in the Federal City, I did, on the 28th of January last, announce to the Commissioners thereof my intention of vesting in perpetuity, the fifty shares I hold under that act, in the navigation of Potomac, as an additional mean of carrying the plan into effect, provided it should be adopted upon a scale so liberal as to extend to and embrace a *complete* system of education.

I had little hesitation in giving the Federal City a preference of all the places for the institution, for the following reasons. 1st On account of its being the permanent seat of the Government of this Union, and where the laws and policy of it must be better understood than in any local part thereof. 2d, because of its centrality. 3d, because one half (or near it) of the District of Columbia is within the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the whole of the State not inconvenient thereto. 4th, because, as *part* of the endowment, it would be useful,

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but *alone* would be inadequate to the end. 5th, because many advantages, I conceive, would result from the jurisdiction, which the general Government will have over it, which no other spot would possess. And, lastly, as this seminary is contemplated for the *completion* of education and study of the sciences, (not for boys in their rudiments,) it will afford the students an opportunity of attending the debates in Congress, and thereby becoming more liberally and better acquainted with the principles of law and government.

My judgment and my wishes point

equally strong to the application of the James River shares to the same object at the same place; but, considering the source from whence they were derived, I have, in a letter I am writing to the Executive of Virginia on this subject, left the application of them to a seminary *within the State*, to be located by the Legislature.

Hence you will perceive, that I have in a degree anticipated your proposition. I was restrained from going the whole length of the suggestion by the following considerations. 1st, I did not know to what extent, or when any plan would be so matured for the establishment of an University, as would enable any assurances to be given to the application of M. D'Ivernois. 2d, the propriety of transplanting the professors *in a body* might be questioned for several reasons; among others, because they might not all be good characters, nor all sufficiently acquainted with our language: and again, having been at variance with the levelling party of their own country, the measure might be considered as an aristocratical movement

by more than those, who, without any just cause that I can discover, are continually sounding the bell of aristocracy. And, 3d, because it might preclude some of the first professors in other countries from a participation, among whom some of the most celebrated characters in Scotland, in this line, might be obtained.

Something, but of what nature I am unable to inform you, has been written by Mr. Adams to M. D'Ivernois. Never having viewed my intended donation as more than a part of the

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means, that were to set this establishment afloat, I did not incline to go too far in the encouragement of professors, before the plan should assume a more formal shape, much less to induce an entire college to migrate. The enclosed is the answer I have received from the commissioners; from which, and the ideas I have here expressed, you will be enabled to decide on the best communication to be made to M. D'Ivernois.

My letter to the commissioners has bound me to the fulfilment of what is therein engaged; and if the Legislature of Virginia, in considering the subject, should view it

in the same light I do, the James River shares will be added thereto; for I think one good institution of this sort is to be preferred to two imperfect ones, which, without other aid than the shares in *both* navigations, is more likely to fall through, than to succeed upon the plan I contemplate; which, in a few words, is to supersede the necessity of sending the youth of this country abroad for the purpose of education, (where too often principles and habits unfriendly to republican government are imbibed, and not easily discarded,) by instituting such an one of our own, as will answer the end, and associating them in the same seminary, will contribute to wear off those prejudices and unreasonable jealousies, which prevent or weaken friendships and impair the harmony of the Union. With very great esteem, I am &c.

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