

# Benjamin H. Latrobe, Surveyor of the Public Buildings to Thomas Jefferson, February 27, 1804, from Thomas Jefferson and the National Capital. Edited by Saul K. Padover.

## Latrobe to Jefferson

*Washington, February 27, 1804.*

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

*Dear Sir:* I judged very ill in going to Dr. Thornton. In a few peremptory words he in fact told me that no difficulties existed in his plan but such as were made by those who were too ignorant to remove them, and though these were not exactly his words, his expressions, his tone, his manner, and his absolute refusal to devote a few minutes to discuss the subject, spoke his meaning even more strongly and offensively than I have expressed it. I left him with an assurance that I should not be the person to attempt to execute his plan, and had I been where I could have obtained immediate possession of pen, ink, and paper, I should have directly solicited your permission to resign my office.

I owe, however, too much to you to risk by so hasty a step the miscarriage of any measure you may wish promoted, and I shall devote as before my utmost endeavors to execute the disposition in the committee, to which I am summoned to-morrow morning, in favor of the appropriation.

In respect to the plan itself, it is impossible to convey by words or drawings to the mind of any man the impression of the practical difficulties in execution which twenty years' experience creates in the mind of a professional man. I fear I have said too much for the

## Library of Congress

respect I owe your opinions, though much too little for the force of my own convictions. The utmost praise I can ever deserve in this work will be that of *la difficulté vaincue*, and after receiving your ultimate directions all my exertion shall be directed to gain this praise at least.

My wish to avoid vexation, trouble, and enmities is weak compared to my desire to be placed

among those whom you regard with approbation and friendship. If you, therefore, under all circumstances, conceive that my services still be useful, I place myself entirely at your disposal.

In order to pass my accounts it will be necessary to produce a regular appointment from you to my office. May I beg you to give the necessary directions for this purpose? I ought to leave Washington on Wednesday morning. I am, etc., etc.

[ B. H. Latrobe ]

[THE JOURNAL OF LATROBE pp. 119–121]