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THE PAPERS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON



From “Nicholas Geffroy”

New-Port August 1st 1801.

Encouraged, great & good Sir, by the character you sustain of being accesible to all of your fellow Citizens, I take the liberty of obtruding myself upon your precious time, to offer you my homage, & to assure you of the sentiments of veneration & respect with which I have been inspired by your wise, virtuous, & popular administration. The People of America would have gained but little by placing you in the presidential chair if the abuses of the past administrations had been continued, & you having commenced the correction of them (with the hope of your making a complete reform) have filled with contentment & delight all good men in this State.¹ Under the administration of John Adams very extensive fortifications were commenced & nearly completed in this harbour, merely I believe for the purpose of benefiting Genl Knox. How, you will ask, was Genl Knox to be advantaged by the building of forts at New-Port? The fact is, Sir, the engineer had it in charge from the President to obtain all the materials from Genl Knox—Colo Toussard went, at the public expence, to St. Georges river to make contracts which were paid for in advance, & the forts here were built of timber Bricks &c &c sent here in vessels by Knox all the way from the province of maine & at an enormous expence—the very lime was brought here in barrels from Knox’s estate, & when the engineer was once asked at our Coffee-House why he did not refuse it on account of its badness, he answer’d “because my orders are to take all my materials from Knox’s estate.” This as you can easily imagine greatly scandalized the honest part of our community. After fort Adams was built eight acres of land were bought in that neighbourhood for the accommodation of the Garrison, *as ’was said*, at the price of two hundred dollars the acre—this was an unheard of price for land here, and the purchase was made of an old lady of Massachusetts who is Sister to Mrs. Adams.² All the offices here have been filled by persons who were recommended only

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by their violence of character—the rule of appointing violent & hot headed men has governed from the office of Collector downwards. The system of which these things were parts have greatly disgusted a great majority of the People of this State—particularly the Quakers who make a large portion of 'em—Your beginning to correct the abuses of your Predecessor gives us infinite joy. Stopping the building of forts here is highly satisfactory.³ The appointing Mr Howell attorney receives general approbation, tho' the appointment of Mr Barnes does not—Barnes is feeble in point of talents, & in politics is any thing every thing & nothing—with Tories a tory & with Wigs he is a wig. This State is at present decidedly in the wig interest (in the Genl Assembly we have a majority of more than one third) & there is a prospect of its being permanently so. In Connecticut New-Hampshire & Massachusetts political heresies are so rooted, & priestcraft is so fully in operation, that you cannot conciliate those States—but some attentions from you may do much here; & in Vermont may be useful tho' in a less degree. Gov Fenner, Mr Christopher Ellery (a Senator in Congress) Gen Joseph Staunton, Mr Paul Mumford & Wm Vernon senr are vastly influential characters in Rhode Island. The union of their interests in the parts of the State they respectively reside makes a majority of our People. I don't know if there be any reason for it but 'tis confidently said here that either Christopher Ellery or Paul Mumford will be the successor of the present Collector old Mr Ellery—they are both of them excellent men & the promotion of either would give equal pleasure. The answer you condescended to give to the remonstrance of the Satellites of old Hillhouse at new Haven, has afforded us much pleasure; & even some of our most high toned Tories acknowledge the correctness of the principle which requires that the subordinates should be of the same politics with the chief. Some young englishmen who scribble for the Papers at Providence will censure this as they will every measure of yours, but the great bulk of the People in this State think 'tis your duty to take care of yourself—that you should give fair play to your own administration—that wig principles ought to go freely into operation—that the measures of administration ought not to be fettered by being entrusted to those who disapprove 'em. These sentiments are universal among the wigs of New England. They are anathematized by Tories, but depend upon it Sir *you* cannot please *them*! Every thing from *you they* will censure (I mean the leaders of the party) Some time past they said you did not *dare* to turn men out of office, for that your nerves were too weak, now they begin to shake in their shoes & suppose you will turn 'em all out. Unless Sir the Tories are dismissed

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from Office (& all offices in New England are occupied by Tories) you will be betrayed. Your meeting the wishes of the People (as expressed at the late election) and putting the government into the hands of Wigs is deemed essential here to our well doing. A purification is necessary, & we cannot be purified unless you cleanse the Augean Stable *completely*. The People of new-Haven (set on by old-Hillhouse) bluster about the appointment of Mr Bishop, because (as they *say*) he is old, & yet these very People abuse you, *in advance*, for the dismissal of old Ellery here & Genl. Lincoln in Boston (taking it for granted they will be dismissed) & both of these gentlemen are as old, and much more infirm than Bishop. I had the honor of being presented to you Sir, when you accompanied Genl Washington in his visit to this town, & I wish you may think that circumstance & my wish to give you some local information an excuse for troubling you with this letter & of assuring you of my respect & veneration. Should your Excellency visit this country it will give me unspeakable delight to tender my respect & services in person. Your time is so fully & usefully employed that I can hardly expect the honor of an answer from you, but should you deign in some moment of leisure to favor me with a line 'twill gladden the heart of an old man now sixty nine years of age, whose heart is sound with affection for you, & who seeing the affairs of this Country deposited in your Hands, says, sincerely, *now* good Lord let thy Servant depart in Peace for the first object of his wishes is complete. With unfeigned respect & esteem, great & good Sir, I am your humble Servant

NICHOLAS GEFFROY—

Printed in the Newport *Rhode-Island Republican*, 18 Sep. 1802; at head of text: "Rutledge's Letters To the President of the United States." RC recorded in SJJ as received 13 Aug., but not found. PrC (Charles M. Storey, Boston, 1958), being an extract consisting of several sentences (see notes below); entirely in TJ's hand; faint and frayed; at head of text: "Extract of a letter from Newport dated Aug. 1. 1801." Extract enclosed in TJ to Dearborn and TJ to Madison, 14 Aug.

The *Rhode-Island Republican* described Nicholas Geffroy as a native of France, about 40 years of age, and a jeweler and watchmaker of Newport. Although he possessed some mastery of spoken English, it was doubted that Geffroy could write, "with any degree of correctness, a single sentence of the language" (*Rhode-Island Republican*, 18 Sep. 1802).

TJ appointed David HOWELL U.S. attorney for Rhode Island in May 1801. He appointed David Leonard BARNES U.S. district judge for the state in April (Vol. 33:675).

A brigadier general of the Rhode Island militia, JOSEPH Stanton (STAUNTON), Jr., represented his state in the U.S. Senate from 1790 to 1793 and in the House of Representatives from 1801 to 1807 (Heitman, *Register*, 514; *Biog. Dir. Cong.*). Newport lawyer PAUL MUMFORD was a former chief justice of Rhode Island and a member of the state senate (*National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 63 vols. [New York; Clifton, N.J., 1898-1984], 9:393; Dexter, *Yale*, 2:346). William VERNON, Sr., was a prominent Newport merchant, who chaired the Eastern Navy Board during the American Revolution. In 1790 he sought TJ's assistance in securing the return of his

son from France (DAB; Vol. 17:483-4; Vol. 19:247).

A signer of the Declaration of Independence, William Ellery, the PRESENT COLLECTOR at Newport, was appointed in 1790 and remained in office until his death in 1820 (ANB; JEP, 1:51).

TJ accompanied George WASHINGTON on a brief VISIT to Newport on 17-18 Aug. 1790 (Washington, *Papers, Pres. Ser.*, 6:281-2; Vol. 17:390, 402).

REMONSTRANCE OF THE SATELLITES: see the Remonstrance of the New Haven Merchants, printed at 18 June 1801, and TJ's reply to them of 12 July.

On 20 Aug., TJ received another letter from Newport, dated 7 Aug. and signed "Nics Jeffroy." The second letter informed TJ that Henry Dearborn had just visited Newport and declared that additional forts would be completed there. The news gave "much uneasiness" to residents, the author stated, who feared that the project would inflate local wages and inundate the town with "Bands of licentious Soldiers." The letter also claimed that TJ's reply to the New Haven merchants was well received in Boston, although the "Essex Junto write against it." Republicans were a solid majority in the Rhode Island legislature, but Federalists still held the federal offices in the state. The author recommended that the collector at Providence, Jeremiah Olney, be replaced by Arthur Fenner, and he again recommended Christopher Ellery, Mumford, and Vernon to TJ's attention. He also claimed to share TJ's interest in botany, and offered to send "some bushes of the *Daily Rose*" if TJ wished. The letter concluded by reporting that David Leonard Barnes spoke "unhandsomely" of TJ at a recent public dinner and

claimed that he owed his appointment to the federal bench to his friend Levi Lincoln (printed in the Newport *Rhode-Island Republican*, 18 Sep. 1802; at head of text: "Rutledge's Letters To the President of the United States"; RC recorded in SJL as received 20 Aug., but not found).

On 28 Aug., Christopher Ellery wrote TJ to inform him that the letters of 1 and 7 Aug. were not written by Nicholas Geffroy, but were in fact forgeries. He hinted that the actual author was John Rutledge, Jr. TJ apparently gave the original Geffroy letters to Ellery sometime in 1802. The letters were printed on 18 Sep. 1802 in the *Rhode-Island Republican*, whose editor invited the public to examine the original copies for themselves. The publication of the Geffroy letters touched off a brief but rancorous public contest over their authorship, which culminated in a physical assault on Ellery by Rutledge in January 1803. Although Rutledge vehemently maintained his innocence in the affair, including sending a written appeal to TJ on 20 Oct. 1802, the negative publicity resulted in his decision not to seek reelection in 1803 (Elizabeth Cometti, "John Rutledge, Jr., Federalist," *Journal of Southern History*, 13 [1947], 201-11; Robert Kent Ratzlaff, "John Rutledge, Jr., South Carolina Federalist, 1766-1819" [Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1975], 212-20; Ellery to TJ, 28 Aug. 1801, 29 Apr. 1802; TJ to Ellery, 17 Sep. 1801; Rutledge to TJ, 20 Oct. 1802).

¹ PrC extract begins here.

² PrC extract breaks off here.

³ Sentence included in PrC, ending extract.

From Philippe de Létombe

MONSIEUR LE PRÉSIDENT, Philadelphie, 1er aoust 1801. (v. St.)

J'ai reçu la lettre dont Vous avez bien voulu m'honorer le 15 du mois dernier, en réponse à la mienne du 11 précédent.

Monsieur Bingham devant partir incessamment, Le Maire est venu me dire, avant hier, à mon arrivée de New york, qu'il accepte l'honneur

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de Vous servir à *trente* dollars par mois, son voyage d'ici à Washington à vos frais. il pourra se rendre, dans quinze Jours ou trois Semaines, auprès de Rapin qui lui a promis de le mettre, en peu de tems, au fait des fonctions de maître d'hotel. Monsieur de Ternant (qui l'a amené ici) m'a dit que Vous ne pouvez avoir un Officier plus fidèle, plus actif et plus habile. Je serai très flatté, Monsieur le Président, que Vous vouliez bien m'adresser vos ordres pour les lui transmettre.

Monsieur Livingston se trouvant à Clermont, à mon arrivée à New York, je lui ai écrit. Mais je n'en ai reçu encore aucune réponse. J'aurai l'honneur de Vous informer de l'époque de mon départ et d'attendre, avec confiance, la dépêche dont Vous daignerez m'honorer à ce Sujet.

Je Vous supplie, Monsieur le Président, de vouloir bien agréer l'hommage de mon profond respect.

LÉTOMBE

EDITORS' TRANSLATION

MISTER PRESIDENT, Philadelphia, 1st Aug. 1801 (old style)

I received the letter with which you kindly honored me the 15th of last month in reply to mine of the 11th of the preceding one.

Mr. Bingham being about to leave very shortly, Lemaire came to tell me, the day before yesterday, upon my arrival from New York, that he accepts the honor of serving you at *thirty* dollars per month, with his travel from here to Washington at your expense. He will be able to arrive within two or three weeks at Rapin's, who has promised to acquaint him in a short time with his functions as maître d'hôtel. Monsieur de Ternant (who brought him here) told me that you could not have an officer in your service more faithful, more active and more skillful. I shall be most flattered, Mister President, should you be willing to address to me your orders to transmit to him.

Mr. Livingston, being at Clermont upon my arrival in New York, I wrote to him, but I have not yet received any answer. I shall be honored to advise you of the time of my departure and to await confidently the dispatch with which you will deign to honor me on that subject.

I beg you, Mister President, kindly to accept the homage of my deep respect.

LÉTOMBE

RC (DLC); endorsed by TJ as received 13 Aug. and so recorded in SJL.

From Peyton Short

DEAR SIR, Cincin[nati]—1st. Augst. 1801

I beg leave to return my thanks for the Letter you were so good as to forward me from my Brother, some short time ago—

I am sorry you shd. have thought it necessary to give me any explanation respecting the Seal— Even had I not conceived of you far more highly than of the best of Characters, I shd., not have thought

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of ascribing the Circumstance to any other than the Cause assigned by you—and divested of that Consideration, I could not have had the Vanity to suppose any thing in an epistolary intercourse in which I was a party, worthy of your Observation—

I again take the Liberty of enclosing you another Letter to my Brother, as he still assures me that I may continue to use that freedom on Acct. of the Friendship that subsists between yourself & him—

Accept, Dr Sir, Assurances of the highest Respect & Esteem of Yr. Obt. Sert.

PEYTON SHORT

RC (MiU-C); torn at seal; addressed: “Thomas Jefferson Esquire President of the U. States City of Washington”; franked; postmarked 4 Aug.; endorsed by TJ as received 21 Aug., but recorded in SJJL as received 27 Aug. Enclosure: Peyton Short to William Short, 30 July 1801, acknowledged in summary of William

Short to Peyton Short, 19 Dec. 1801, in William’s epistolary record in DLC: Short Papers; see also TJ to William Short, 3 Oct. 1801.

SO GOOD AS TO FORWARD ME: see note to TJ to William Short, 17 Mch. 1801.

From Benjamin Waterhouse

Cambridge August 1st. 1801.

Vaccine matter on the tooth-pick taken July 31.st. in the evening. The thread taken at the same time.—The two plates of glass, which he¹ have covered with lead is just come to hand from Dr. Jenner being taken May 19th. in London. Two other plates containing some of the virus taken at the same time has been proved to be perfectly active. It adheres to the glass like gum. water, warm steam, or a little hot water is necessary to dilute it for use.—Dr Waterhouse is anxious to hear from Washington respecting the success of his endeavours—

RC (DLC); endorsed by TJ as received 13 Aug. from Waterhouse, and so recorded in SJJL.

supplies of smallpox vaccine, or cowpox, that Waterhouse sent to TJ, see Waterhouse to TJ, 24 July.

VACCINE MATTER: for two previous

¹ Word interlined in place of “I.”

From George Douglas

SIR,

Petersburg, 2d. Aug. 1801

Some time ago I took the liberty of sending you a copy of our last year’s *Register*—It was put under the care of a young Gentleman, who promised to have it delivered at the Presidential house as he passed thro’ Washington—

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Two reasons made me hesitate in writing to you along with the Book—I was apprehensive lest you should think that I wished to force myself upon your notice—and, I was fearful of intruding in the important avocations of your present high & very arduous office—

Finding at length, by the News-papers, that you had left the Federal City & gone to Monticello, I have seized the opportunity of acknowledging my grateful obligations for the honor you did me in writing your letter of the 21st. of Decr. last—

Agreeable to my plan, I had a drawing, or front elevation of the Capitol taken by a person in Richmond, & I got it engraved by one of the most eminent Artists in Philadelphia—The work was completed in the month of Decr. & I had every reason to expect the copies, or impressions, here in January—After waiting two months for them, in March they sent me the plate itself, but the copies, by some unlucky accident or other, were lost or mislaid, & have not yet been found—

I need scarcely say, that this very unpleasant affair has given me much uneasiness—And it has shewn me that I am placed in too remote & too inconsequential a situation, to execute such a plan with any sort of propriety, and or with any rational prospect of success—

I hope you will not think this letter an intrusion on your great or necessary employments, but that you will believe I thought it an incumbent duty on me for your goodness in writing on this subject.—

I most sincerely pray, that your Presidency may not only be a source of inward satisfaction & public honor to yourself, but that it may tend to illustrate the *theory* & establish the *practice* of Republicanism in the United States of America to the remotest posterity.

G: DOUGLAS.

RC (DLC); endorsed by TJ as received 13 Aug. and so recorded in SJJL.

Douglas had earlier sent TJ a COPY of his *Annual Register, and Virginian Repository*, and a BOOK, *Washingtoniana: A Collection of Papers Relative to the Death and Character of General George Washington*; see Vol. 32:220-1.

TJ left Washington for MONTICELLO on 30 July (Vol. 34:684-5).

The DRAWING of the Virginia Capitol

was done by the Richmond miniaturist Lawrence Sully, older brother of Thomas Sully, and was ENGRAVED by Alexander Lawson. The engraved plate did not arrive from Philadelphia in time for Douglas to use in his 1801 almanac, but it was used for his *Virginia and North Carolina Almanack for the Year 1802*, published by Douglas and Ross in 1801 (Fiske Kimball, *The Capitol of Virginia: A Landmark of American Architecture*, rev. ed. [Richmond, 2002], 31-32, 78).