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Title: Letter from Benjamin Latrobe to Hugh Henry Brackenridge

**Date:** May 18, 1803

**Location:** RG 1/1 - 5.4.1

## **Contact:**

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Philadelphia, May 18 2 1803. Dearlin for wite herewith receive the designs for Dickinson College which Opromised you. In form ing them, Thave endeavored to take all the circum. Hances which you stated to me mite consideration, and to do the best for you which they would permit. I will beg leave to state to you the principles which have governed me in the distribution, & arrangement of the apartments .-The two aspects, the most impleasant moun dinate are the north East athe North West. The extreme cold of the North West winds in winter, or their drynes, which causes a rapid evaporation so thoroughly chills the walls of every house, expofed to them, that when the wind, as is almost always the case, changes afterwards to the West del. W, & becomes warmer amoisters, - the water is precipitated upon the Walls from the air, by Their coldness, - as upon the auticle of a Glass of cold Water in warm weather, - and they toon' Theam with humidity. The north East winds bring along rain affect, - & their violence

drives the moisture into every wall of which the material will permit it. The impleasantrefo of the winds is aggravated, by the rapidity Juddennes with which the Northwest commonly preceeds the Porth East. Thave stated these things, which are indeed known to every body, to in order to explain a law, which is thereby imposed upon the architecture of our Country: It is, - to reserve the Southern aspects of every building in the exection of which the choice is free, for the inhabited apartments, and to occupy the Northern aspects by commun cations, as Fairs, Lobbies, Lales, Vertibules of This Law governs the designs herewith prefeater toyou. On the north aris the Vertibule & lobbies, or papage They protect the Southern rooms from the effect of the Northern winds. In this despect I have also Staced the dining room, a room only occasionally occupied to for a fort time, - athe Schoolsooms above it, - which by means of Noves, of the

concourse of Students are early kept warm. There are indeed two Chambers in the M. Ewing on each story . - of there Chambers he inhabited by receptors, the one as a stridy, the other as a Bedehamber, the disaboantages of the aspect mift be overcome by such means, of aurtains slarpets, as attudent does not to early again The fauthern tront affords on each story 6 rooms for Students. The angle rooms will accompate 3, and each of the other, 2 Students; in all 1A on each floor. He Hall is intended to occupy two Stories. above the Hall a room of equal size may be appropriated to a Library, or may furnished for b Students rooms, to to the Louth and as many to the north. The usual mode of planning colleges, by arranging the rooms on each side of a long popage, has many disadvantages, - the chief of which are the noise, the necessary danking, of the Capage, and the bad aspect of one half of the rooms .- There inconveniences do not, She

lieve exist in the plan opresent to you , or hour at a future period, the celebrity of your institute encrease the number of your students, as it no doubt will, - it will be better to erect new accomodations, than to obtain room by connecting the wings, in order to face oppence; as has often been done . -In respect to material, I would certainly recommend that you should build of the time Hone of your Valley, rather than of brick. The internal Walls, may with more advantage he built of brick. - It will be objected that Limestone is to pervious to Water, that no Hairtering will frand upon it. - I do not know that it is more to than common brick, but if it were, I must observe, than no material whatrower, unless the wall be 246' think will prevent the damp appearance of the Walls towards the North aspects, unless they be battered Splaistered upon Lath. The batters are meant Trips of 1/2 inches thick fixed & about 2 inches

wide, which are fastened by Walto hooks, upright to the Walls, at the distance of 15 inches from each other, xupon which laths are nailed as upon framed work. The such precaution is ne-the air thus enclosed between Between cepary upon the internal walls. Between the Plaistering upon Laths, of the folid Wall there exercises thurses of the dans of daing as Soil he Ing a non conductor, prevents either Reat or the cold of the external wall from matoually affecting the temperature of the room, and the Plaintening itself will always be dry. This method has also the advantage that theplais tung of the external Walls is early made fair astraight, - whereas the roughness airre. quelarity of a stone Wall, is not easily gotour by plaistering ? Thank said thus much in order to give the mustees an opportunity, - should they adopt the plan proposed, - of procured their prince pal materials at once. Int Should they contem plate to carry it execution either with or without alteration, I shall expect that you

will have the good nep to apprise me of their resolution in the course of this month, that I may furnish meh working plans as wile be immediately necepary. I beg have also to suggest to you and to the mustees, - that it will be impossible to Conduct your building with mecep, occord. my a fatisfaction, unles some intelligent, experienced, abonest Than, - as superinten. dant of the Work, have contract over every part of it . - This intuation is after given to some respectable, but superannuated Workman, from motives of benevolence. They, a presentendant is indeed adequate to the counting of bricks, the measurement of Home deline, the keeping an account, a often to the decipsion on the quality of the materials the goodness of the Norkmanship. But these thing, Though necessary, - are not all that are want ed. The great auxeful burness of a Super intendant, - or as he is commonly called, after

afthe Works, comists in so directing acombi ming the Labors of a variety of Workmen, they they shall all produce the building, without Lop of time or waste of material, or dispute among themselves, or disadvantage in the performance of their contracts, by want of material, or the Macepity of waiting for each other. Inch an office requires vigor of mind whody, as well as knowledge amanual kill, and whether and these you may meet with a person liberality or capable of filling it, the occonomy of compensation will in part determine. I donot think you will get a fit man under from 12 to 15 Dollars & Wacker - Hepay here 18 Dollars They to repeat what I before mentioned interest & toyou, - that as I conceive it tobe the duty of wery good citizen to promote, - quoad virile, the education, and civilization of the fociety mi which he whii children are to live, Twill with pleasure contribute to the reestablishmens

of Dickenson college, every popible gratuitous personal afristance: - and should you accept of this fort of contribution, - nothing will charge against hut much actual expenses as may arize in the course of my giving it toyou. Dam with the respect yours truly Attenry Labrobe , Inveyor of the U. States building, allashings, Philadelphia May 18h 1803. Smust reofuert that you will excuse the evident marked facte in this letter; which would have been more Explanatory, had not the time to which you have limited me, been so short

## [Editor's Note: All strike-throughs and misspellings have been retained.]

Philadelphia, May 18th 1803.-

Dear Sir

You will herewith receive the designs for Dickinson College which I promised you. In forming them, I have endeavored to take all the circumstances which you stated to me into consideration, and to do the best for you which they would permit. — I will beg leave to state to you the principles which have governed me in the distribution, & arrangement of the apartments.

The two aspects, the most unpleasant in our climate are the North East & the North West. The extreme cold of the North West winds in winter, & their dryness, which causes a rapid evaporation so thoroughly chills the walls of every house, expose to them, that when the wind, as is almost always the case, changes afterwards to the West & S.W. & becomes warmer & moister, – the water is precipated upon the Walls from the air, by their coldness, – as upon the outside of a Glass of cold Water in warm weather, – and they soon stream with humidity. – The North East winds bring along rain & sleet, – & their violence drives the moisture into every wall of which the material will permit it. – The unpleasantness of the winds is aggravated by the rapidity suddenness with which the Northwest commonly succeeds the North East. – I have stated these things, which are indeed known to every body, to in order to explain a <u>law</u>, which is thereby imposed upon the Architecture of our Country: It is, – to reserve the Southern aspects of every building in the erection of which the choice is free, for the inhabited apartments, and to occupy the Northern aspects by communications, as Stairs, Lobbies, Halls, Vestibules etc.

This Law governs the designs herewith presented to you.

On the North are the Vestibule & Lobbies, or passages. They protect the Southern rooms from the effect of the Northern winds. On this Aspect I have also placed the dining room, a room only occasionally occupied for a short time, — & the School rooms above it, — which by means of Stoves, & the concourse of Students are easily kept warm. There are indeed two chambers in the N. E wing on each story. — If these chambers be inhabited by Preceptors, the one as a study, the other as a Bedchamber, the disadvantages of the Aspect must be overcome by such means, of Curtains & Carpets, as a Student does not so easily acquire. The Southern Front affords on each story 6 rooms for Students. The

angle rooms will accomodate 3, and each of the other, 2 Students; in all 14 on each floor.

The Hall is intended to occupy two stores. Above the hall a room of equal size may be appropriated to a Library, or may furnish <u>4</u> or <u>6</u>Students rooms, <del>2 or 3</del> 2 or 3 to the South and as many to the North. –

The usual mode of planning colleges, by arranging the rooms on each side of a long passage, has many disadvantages, – the chief of which are the noise, & the necessary darkness of the Passage, and the bad aspect of one half of the rooms. – These inconveniences do not, I believe exist in the plan I present to you, & should at a future period, the celebrity of your institution encrease the number of your students, as it no doubt will, – it will be better to erect new accomodations, than to obtain room by connecting the wings, in order to save expense; as has often been done. –

In respect to material, – I would, certainly, recommend that you should build of your external walls of the lime stone of your Valley, rather than of brick. The internal Walls, may with more advantage be built of brick. – It will be objected that limestone is so pervious to Water, that no Plaistering will stand upon it. – I do not know that it is more so than common brick, but it if were, I must observe, than no material whatsoever, unless the wall be 2f 6i thick will prevent the damp appearance of the Walls towards the North aspects, unless they be battened and plaistered upon Lath. By battens are meant strips of 11/2 inches thick fixed & about 2 inches wide wide, which are fastened by Wallhooks, upright to the Walls, at the distance of 15 inches from each other, & upon which laths are nailed as upon framed work. No such precaution is necessary upon the internal walls. The air thus enclosed between – Between the Plaistering upon Laths, & the Solid Wall [expunged and illegible] being a non conductor, prevents either, the Heat or the cold of the external wall from materially affecting the temperature of the room, and the Plaistering itself will always be dry. – This method has also the advantage that the plaistering of on the external Walls is easily made fair & straight, – whereas the roughness & irregularity of a Stone Wall is not easily got over by plaistering.

I have said this much in order to give the Trustees an opportunity, – should they adopt the plan proposed, – of procured their principal materials at once. – But Should they contemplate to carry it into execution either with or without alteration, I shall expect that you will have the goodness to appraise

me of their resolution in the course of this month, that I may furnish <u>such</u> <u>working plans as</u> will be immediately necessary.—

I beg leave also to suggest to you and to the Trustees, – that it will be impossible to conduct your building with success, oeconomy, & Satisfaction, unless some intelligent, experienced, & honest Man, – as superintendant of the Work, have controul over every part of it. – This situation is often given to some respectable, but superannuated Workman, from motives of benevolence. Such a Superintendant is indeed adequate to the counting of bricks, the measurements of Stone and Lime, the keeping an account, & often to the decision on the quality of the materials & the goodness of Workmanship. But these things though necessary, – are not all that are wanted. The great & useful business of a Superintendant, – or as he is commonly called, a Clerk of the Work, consists in so directing & combining the Labors of a variety of Workmen, that they shall all produce the building, without Loss of time or waste of material, or dispute among themselves, or disadvantage in the performance of their contracts, by want of material, or the necessity of waiting for each other. Such an office requires vigor of mind & body, as well as mechanical knowledge & manual skill, and that whether you may meet with a person capable of filling it, the liberality or oeconomy of compensation will in part determine. I do not think you will get a fit man under from 12 to 15 Dollars / Week. – We pay here 18\$ Dollars at the public works.

I beg to repeat what I before mentioned to you, — that as I conceive it to be the interest & duty of every good citizen to promote, — quoad virile, the education, and <u>civilization</u> of the Society in which he & his children are to live, I will with pleasure contribute to the reestablishment of Dickinson college, every possible gratuitous personal assistance: — and should you accept of this part of contribution, — nothing will be charged against you, but such actual expenses as may arise in the course of my giving it to you.

I am with true respect Yours truly

B Henry Latrobe Surveyor of the U. States buildings at Washington

I must request that you will excuse the evident marks of haste in this letter, which would have been more explanatory, had not the time to which you have limited me, been so short.