

George Washington to John A. Washington, October 13, 1775, The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799. John C. Fitzpatrick, Editor.

***To JOHN AUGUSTINE WASHINGTON**

Camp at Cambridge, October 13, 1775.

Dear Brother: Your favour of the 12th. Ult. came safe to hand a few days ago; by it I gladly learnt that your Family were recover'd of the two complaints which had seized many of them, and confind my Sister.¹ I am very glad to hear also, that the Convention had come to resolutions of Arming the People, and preparing vigorously for the defence of the Colony; which, by the latest accts. from England will prove a salutary Measure.² I am also pleas'd to find that the Manufactory of Arms and Ammunition have been attended to with so much care; a plenty of these and unanimity and Fortitude among ourselves must defeat every attempt that a diabolical Ministry can Invent to Inslave this great Continent. In the Manufacturing of Arms for Publick use great care should be taken to make the bores of the same size, that the same Balls may answer, otherwise great disadvantages may arise from a mixture of Cartridges.

The Enemy by their not coming out, are, I suppose, afraid of us; whilst their Situation renders any attempts of ours upon them in a manner Impracticable.³ Nothing new has happend since my last worth communicating; since finishing of our own Lines of Defence we, as well as the Enemy, have been busily Employed in putting our Men under proper cover for the Winter. Our advanced Works, and theirs, are within Musket Shott of each

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other; we are obliged to Submit to an almost daily Cannonade without returning a Shott from our scarcity of Powder, which we are necessitated to keep for closer Work than Cannon Distance whenever the red Coat gentry pleases to step out of their Intrenchments. Seeing no prospect of this I sent a Detachment, about a Month ago into Canada by the way of Kennebec River under the Command of a Colo. Arnold, this Detachment consisted of 1000 Men and was Order'd to possess themselves of Quebec if possible, but at any rate to make a diversion in favour of General Schuyler who by this is in possession I expect of Montreal and St. Johns, as I am not altogether without hopes Colo. Arnold may be [possessed] of the Capital. If so, what a pretty hand the Ministry have made of their Canada Bill, and the Diabolical Scheme which was constructed upon it. I have also, finding we were in no danger of a visit from our Neighbours, fitted, and am fitting out, several Privateers with Soldiers (who have been bred to the Sea) and have no doubt of making Captures of several of their Transports, some of which have already fallen into our hands laden with Provisions.

I am obliged to you for your advice to My Wife, and for your Intention of visiting of her; seeing no great prospect of returning to my Family and Friends this Winter I have sent an Invitation to Mrs. Washington to come to me, altho' I fear the Season is too far advanced (especially if she should, when my Letters get home, be in New Kent, as I believe the case will be) to admit this with any tolerable degree of convenience. I have laid a state of the difficulties, however which must attend the journey before her and left it to her own choice. My Love to my Sister and the little ones are sincerely tenderd and I am with true regard Yr. Most Affecte. Brother.

¹annah Bushrod, wife of John Augustine Washington.

²n account of the convention is given in a letter from George Mason to Washington, Oct. 14, 1775. Mason's letter is in the Washington Papers.

³n 3ctober 18 the officers were convened a second time to hold a council respecting an attack on Boston. There was a unanimous voice against it, but there is no record of what was Washington's opinion. The question of attacking Boston had come before the committee of conference, the subject being thus stated by Washington: "The council of war, having, in consequence of an intimation from Congress, deliberated on the expediency of an attack upon the troops in the town of Boston, and determined that at present it was not practicable; the General wishes to know how far it may be deemed proper and advisable to avail himself of the season to destroy the troops who propose to winter in Boston, by bombardment (when the harbor is blocked up), or in other words,

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whether the loss of the town, and the property therein, are so to be considered, as that an attack upon the troops there should be avoided, when it evidently appears that the town must, of consequence, be destroyed?" The committee thought this too important to be determined by them. They, therefore, referred it to Congress, where it hung fire for a long time. "I mean not to anticipate your determination, but only to approve your design to hover like an eagle over your prey, always ready to pounce upon it when the proper time comes. I have not forgot your proposition relative to that city; I try to pave the way for it, and wait for the season, as you do.:— Lynch to Washington, Nov. 13, 1775. It was not until December 22 that a resolution was reached, which appears in the printed journals, although marked "secret" in the manuscript journals. "That if General Washington and his council of war should be of opinion, that a successful attack may be made on the troops in Boston, he do it in any manner he may think expedient, notwithstanding the town and property in it may be destroyed." In communicating this resolve, President Hancock wrote: "You will notice the resolution relative to an attack upon Boston. This passed after a most serious debate in a committee of the whole house, and the execution was referred to you. May God crown your attempt with success. I most heartily wish it, though individually I may be the greatest sufferer." (President Hancock possessed a valuable property in Boston.) It is a little remarkable that each party had conclusive reasons for avoiding to attack the other. "It is inadvisable," said General Gage in a letter to Lord Dartmouth (August 20), "to attempt penetrating the country from Boston. The enemy's forces are numerous, and such an attempt must be made under very great disadvantages; and even if successful, little would be gained by it, as neither horses, carriages, nor other means for moving forward could be procured. Our force is too small to be divided into detachments for this purpose, and success would answer no other end than to drive the rebels out of one strong-hold into another." General Howe used the same arguments on October 9— Ford.