

**Benjamin H. Latrobe, Surveyor of the Public Buildings to Thomas Jefferson, April 29, 1807, Partial Transcription Available, from Thomas Jefferson and the National Capital. Edited by Saul K. Padover.**

**Latrobe to Jefferson**

*Washington, April 29, 1807.*

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

*Sir:* At the President's house I have laid out the road on the principle of the plan extended to you. A small alteration of the outline of the inclosures to the south was necessarily made, which renders the whole ground infinitely more handsome and accommodates the public with an easier access from the Pennsylvania Avenue to the New York Avenue. In the plan submitted to and approved by you a semicircle was struck to the south from the center of the bow of the house. The semicircle carried the inclosure too far to the south. Mr. King will lay before you the new plan, which differs from the other in being of oblong figure instead of a semicircle.

By this alteration many very important objects are gained:

1. The Pennsylvania and New York avenues are by the wall and gate opposite to them at right angles.
2. A direct access is obtained from the New York to the Pennsylvania Avenue and on the shortest line.
3. The wall is straight from point to point, and thus all circular work is avoided.

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4. The nature of the ground is consulted so far as to obtain the best level for the road with the least removal of earth.

5. The road runs in such a manner that the President's house is not overlooked from the *low* ground and is covered by the rising knolls as the road rises.

Having laid out the ground with the assistance of Mr. King, to whose kindness and skill I am under the greatest obligations, the next consideration was how to do the greatest quantity of business with the fund appropriated, and if possible to get at least the south half of the wall built this summer. I therefore bought a cargo of lime, made a contract for stone, and preparatory arrangements for the work itself.

The next step was to get down to the foot of the wall on the south side by cutting out the road to its proper width, leaving the internal dressing of the ground to the last. The building of the wall rendered it necessary to go to the permanent depth of the road, otherwise I should have contented myself with laying it down on its right place, removing only so much earth as would have made the declivities convenient to the carriages. But this could not be done, and I contracted to loosen the ground from the first walnut southeast of the President's house to the War Office, the width of the road, footpath, and wall.

The next consideration was to execute your directions as to the north side of the President's house, and to level the ground regularly and gradually from the level of the stones in front of the steps, which nearly agrees with the site of the offices, sloping in their direction toward the inclosure. The earth which was to effect this necessarily was removed from the site of the offices between the President's house and the War Offices.

B. H. Latrobe

[THE JOURNAL OF LATROBE, pp. 135–137.]