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<http://www2.ku.edu/~maxkade/humboldt/subwashington.htm>

"I have omitted to state above the extreme satisfaction I have received from Baron Humboldt's communications. The treasures of information which he possesses are inestimable. . ."

*Thomas Jefferson to Caspar Wistar  
June 7, 1804*

"This country that stretches to the west of the mountains presents a vast area to conquer for science!"

*von Humboldt to William Thornton  
June 20, 1804*

"You will receive a letter from the Governor by this opportunity, put under the care of Baron Humboldt, who from the Character and pursuits I took leave to recommend to your attention and protection while in the U[nited] States, from belief that you would be much gratified by being personally acquainted with him."

*Vincent Gray, Consul of the United States in Cuba,  
to Secretary of State James Madison  
April 28, 1804*

. . . he [Humboldt] will have it in his power to give you much useful information relative to the country adjoining.

*Vincent Gray, Consul of the United States in Cuba,  
to Secretary of State James Madison  
May 8, 1804*

*Upon arrival in Philadelphia from Cuba, Humboldt describes his travels to Thomas Jefferson. He concludes:*

. . . I could not resist the moral obligation to see the United States and enjoy the consoling aspects of a people who understand the precious gift of Liberty. I wish it were possible for me to present my personal respects and admiration to you and to know a magistrate and philosopher whose cares embrace two continents!

*Originally in French, de Terra, "Correspondence", pp. 787-788  
May 24, 1804*

"I had brought [along] sundry Profiles of the Baron . . . these I distributed to such persons I thought they would be most acceptable with.

*Charles Wilson Peale in his Diary  
Selected Papers, II: 2, p. 699*

### *Jefferson to Humboldt:*

"Sir: I received last night your favor of the 24th, and offer you my congratulations on your arrival in good health after a tour in the course of which you have been exposed to so many hardships and hazards. [T]he countries you have visited are of those least known and most interesting, and a lively desire will be felt generally to receive information you will be able to give. [N]o one will feel it more strongly than myself, because one perhaps views this new World with more partial hopes of its exhibiting an ameliorated state of the human condition.

*May 25, 1804  
de Terra, "Correspondence", p. 788*

*The painter and museum director Charles Wilson Peale, acting as host for Humboldt in Philadelphia, also accompanies Humboldt to Washington and comments in his diary:*

"The Baron spoke English very well, in the German dialect. Here I shall take notice that he possessed a surprising fluency of Speech, & it was amusing to hear him Speak English, French and the Spanish Languages, mixing them together in rapid Speech. He is very communicative and possesses a surprising fund of knowledge, in botany mineralogy astron[o]my Philosophy and Natural History: with a liberal Education, he has been collecting information from learned men of a[l]most all quarters of the world; for he has been travelling ever since he was 11 years of age and never lived in any one place more than 6 months together, as he informed us.

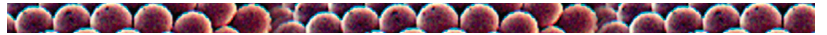
*After May 29, 1804 (Selected Papers, p. 683)*

"[The Baron] has traveled through a great part of South America, that he brought a number of astronomical instruments with him which was carr[i]ed by about 30 mules. It is said that he has discovered errors of two degrees in the latitudes of some parts of that Country—that he was higher up the mountain Chimb[orazo] than any other man ever went."

*(Selected Papers, pp. 684-685)*

*Peale comments in his diary:*

"The Baron came to my room & told me that he had been conversing with the President about me & my Museum, that he wondered that the Government did not secure it by a purchase [of] it—for such opportunities of getting so complete collections of natural subjects seldom occurred. The president repl[i]ed that it was his ardent wish and he hoped that the period was not far distant & he thought that



each of the States would contribute means and thus it might be made a National Museum."

June 2, 1804  
(*Selected Papers II*: 2, p. 691 and

694)

*Margaret Bayard Smith, wife of Samuel Harrison Smith, publisher of Washington's National Intelligencer, recalls:*

"Soon after the Baron's arrival on our shores, he hastened to Washington, and, during his visit to our city, passed many hours of every day with Mr. Jefferson. . . . One evening he called about twilight and being shown into the drawing room without being announced, he found Mr. Jefferson seated on the floor, surrounded by half a dozen of his little grandchildren so eagerly and noisily engaged in a game of romps that for some moments his entrance was not perceived. When his presence was discovered Mr. Jefferson rose up and shaking hands with him, said, "you have found me playing the fool Baron, but I am sure that to you I need make no apology."

*The First Forty Years. pp. 395-396*

*Dolley Madison's impressions of von Humboldt:*

". . . We have lately had a great treat in the company of a charming Prussian Baron von Humboldt. All the ladies say they are in love with him, notwithstanding his want of personal charms. He is the most polite, modest, well-informed and interesting traveller we have ever met, and is much pleased with America. He sails in a few days for France with his companions, and is going to publish an account of his travels in South America, where he lived five years, proposing to return here again. He had with him a train of philosophers, who, though clever and entertaining, did not compare with the Baron."

June 5, 1804  
*Friis, "Visit," pp. 23-24; Friis, "Besuch," p. 175*

*Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury, writes in a personal letter:*

"I have received an exquisite intellectual treat from Baron Humboldt Prussian traveller, who is on his return from Peru and Mexico, where he travelled five years, and from which he has brought a mass of natural, philosophical, and political information which will render the geography, productions, and statistics of th[ose] countr[ies] better known than those of most European countries. We all consider him a very extraordinary man, and his travels, which he intends

publishing on his return to Europe, will I think, rank above any other production of the kind. I am not apt to be easily pleased, and he was not particularly prepossessing to my taste, for he speaks . . . twice as fast as anybody I know, German, French, Spanish, and English all together . . . I must acknowledge, in order to account for my enthusiasm, that he was surrounded with maps, statements, &c all new to me and several of which he has liberally permitted us to transcribe."

June 6, 1804  
*Friis, "Visit," p. 26; Friis, "Besuch," p. 176*

*Jefferson's evaluation of Humboldt in a Letter to Caspar Wistar:*

"I have omitted to state above the extreme satisfaction I have received from Baron Humboldt's communications. The treasures of information which he possesses are inestimable and fill us with impatience for their appearance in print."

June 7, 1804  
*Friis, "Visit," pp. 26-27; Friis "Besuch," p. 177*

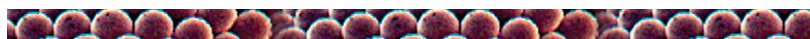
*Jefferson seeks Humboldt's Help and asserts U.S. claims Beyond Louisiana*

"Tho[ma]s Jefferson asks leave to observe to Baron de Humboldt that the question of limits of Louisiana between Spain & the U.S. is this, they claim to hold to the river Mexicana or Sabine & from the head of that Northwardly along the heads of the waters of the Missi[ssipp]i to the head of the Red river & so on. We claim to the North river from its mouth to the source either of its Eastern or Western branch, thence to the head of Red river & so on. Can the Baron inform me what population may be between these lines of white, red or black people? And whether any & what mines are within them? The information will be thankfully received. He tenders him his respectful salutations."

June 9, 1804 (probable date)  
*Moheit, p. 296; Friis "Besuch," p. 178*

*Humboldt to Jefferson in an undated manuscript, originally in French:*

"The president wishes to have information about the population, the area, and the mineral resources of the Spanish provinces ceded, assuming that Rio Brave de Norte [Rio Grande] should be the border of Louisiana? The king of Spain would cede in this case 2/3 of the immense administrative area of Saint Louis Potosi; he would lose a terrain of 11,756 leagues [ . . . ]; he would lose the entire province of Texas, 7,006 leagues; half of the province of Nuevo Santander, 1,900 leagues; two-thirds of the province of Cohahuila, 2,850 leagues; the entirety of this terrain



equals 2/3 of the area of France. But the political value of this land, considering it before the joining of Louisiana to the United States, is almost nil. . . The picture of the 11,756 leagues that I am tracing is not bright, but let's take into account that this is a virgin and uninhabited land. . . ."

*Margaret Bayard Smith:*

"Another time [Humboldt called in the] morning and was taken into the Cabinet; as he sat by the table, among newspapers that were scattered about, he perceived one that was always filled with the most virulent abuse of Mr. Jefferson, calumnies the most offensive, personal as well as political. 'Why are these libels allowed?' asked the Baron taking up the paper, 'Why is not this libelous journal suppressed, or its Editor at least, fined and imprisoned?' Mr. Jefferson smiled, saying, 'Put that paper in your pocket Baron, and should you hear the reality of our liberty, the freedom of our press, questioned, show this paper, and tell where you found it.'

*The First Forty Years, pp. 395–397*

*Margaret Bayard Smith in a private letter:*

". . . a charming man, and we have had the singular pleasure of enjoying a great deal of his company. His hours have been full occupied by attentions which I have no doubt will make some impression on his heart. An enlightened mind has already made him an American, and we are not without hopes, that after having scratched his curiosity with travel he will spend the remainder of his days in the United States. This will be a great acquisition . . ."

*June 10, 1804*

*Friis, "Visit," p. 30; Friis "Besuch," p. 179*

*Jefferson to Isaac Briggs:*

". . . but that the idea [determining the longitude by the observation of the moon] was not new, that even De la Caille had proposed it and De la Lande had given all explanations necessary for it, I think he [Humboldt] said in his 3rd vol. I have not the book here but presume you can consult it in Philadelphia . . ."

*June 11, 1804*

*Friis "Visit," p. 32; "Besuch," p. 180*

*Jefferson to William Dunbar:*

"While Capt Lewis's mission was preparing . . . I knew that a thousand accidents might happen to that [chronometer] in such a journey as his, & thus deprive us of the principal object of the expedition, to wit, the ascertaining the geography

of that river, I sat myself to consider whether in making observations at land . . . Before [Brigg's] confirmation of the idea however, Capt. Lewis was gone. In conversation afterwards with Baron Humboldt, he observed that the idea was correct, but not new & that I would find it in the 3rd vol. of Delalande."

*May 25, 1805*

*Jackson, pp. 244–245*

*Charles Wilson Peale's autobiography:*

"After they arrived at Philad[elphi]a. And meeting again with the Baron [I] painted a Portrait of him to be placed in the Museum. . . . The portrait however m[e]t with the approbation of every one that had seen it and the Baron Humboldt[t]."

*June 13, 1804*

*Selected Papers, V, p. 333*

*Humboldt requests a passport from James Madison and the return of his maps from Gallatin:*

". . . I feel I will return to this beautiful country in a few years. The path from the Missouri to the Pacific Ocean will then be open. . . ."

*June 19, 1804*

". . . Through the same courier, I entreated Mr. Gallatin to remember my maps of Mexico."

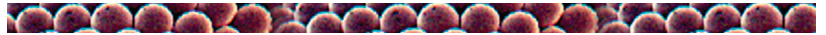
*Moheit, p. 298*

*Humboldt to the Architect William Thornton (originally in French):*

"This abominable law that permits the importation of Negroes in South Carolina [until 1808] is a disgrace for a state in which I know many level-headed people to live. Conforming to the only course of action dictated by humanity, undoubtedly less cotton will be exported at first. But alas! How I detest this politics that measures and evaluates the public welfare simply according to the value of its exports. The wealth of nations is like the wealth of individuals. It is only secondary to our welfare. Before one is free, one must be just, and without justice there is no lasting prosperity."

*June 20, 1804*

*Moheit, pp. 299–300*



*Humboldt returns to Europe with passport from Madison:*

"The Bearer hereof Baron Humboldt a subject of His Prussian Majesty and Member of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Prussia with his Secretary Mr. Bonpland, being about to return from the United States, with forty boxes of plants and other collections relating to Natural History, all his own property, by way of France to Berlin, from an expedition into South America and Mexico, undertaken at his own expen[s]e for the improvement of Natural History."

June 26, 1804  
*Moheit, p. 302*

*Humboldt to Jefferson (originally in French):*

"My departure is scheduled for tomorrow, and it shows me quite clearly that I achieved the purpose of my visit. I have had the good fortune to see the first Magistrate of this great republic living with the simplicity of a philosopher who received me with that profound kindness that makes for a lasting friendship."

June 27, 1804  
*de Terra, II, p. 789*

*Humboldt praises the Lewis and Clark Expedition:*

"Captain Lewis undertook this admirable journey with the support of Mr. Jefferson, who has again won the gratitude of all scholars everywhere for this important service to science."

*Humboldt, Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain, originally in French, 1811*

*Jefferson to Humboldt:*

". . . You will find it inconceivable that Lewis's journey to the Pacific should not yet have appeared, nor is it in my power to tell you the reason. The measures taken by his surviving companion Clark for the publication, have not answered our wishes in point of dispatch. I think however, from what I have heard, that the main journal will be out within a few weeks in 2 vols. 8<sup>o</sup>. These I will take care to send you with the tobacco seed you desired, if it will be possible to escape the thousand ships of our enemies spread over the ocean. The botanical & zoological discoveries of Lewis will probably experience greater delay, and become known to the world thro[ugh] other channels before that volume will be ready. The Atlas, I believe, waits on the leisure of the engraver."

December 6, 1813  
*de Terra, p. 794*