

Jan'y 17th 1829

I promise to give you an account of my visit to Mount Vernon, and tho' I fear you will be disappointed in my description, I am now about to make the attempt.

I started at 9 A.M. in a hackney coach, with three other gentlemen. One from Massachusetts a Dr Fisk, the bearer of the electoral vote of that state ^{who} was a surgeon in the Revolution, and had frequently seen General Washington in the affecting character of a comforter when that great and good man shown as conspicuously as he did in the field of battle or in the councils of his country. This gentleman told us that it was no uncommon sight to see the commander in chief walking thro' the pestilential wards of the army hospital, and bending over every couch however humble, to give encouragement to the disponding, sympathy to the distressed, and pious admonition to all. When will time have disclosed all the benign excellences and more than heroic perfections of this illustrious man?

Dr Fisk carried a letter from Judge Branch to ~~the~~ Judge Wash- ington the present incumbent at Mount Vernon, which was to serve as an introduction for the whole party. The day was beautiful in the extreme, much resembling those clear, calm ~~sun~~ ~~shiny~~ sun shiny days that occur in N.E. toward the last of the September, and nothing was lacking, save a good road; a thing not to be found in Virginia, to make the ride a pleasant one. Tho' the distance from Washington is not more than 15 miles, we were quite four hours on the road, both going and returning. This rate, which to me, would at any other time have been insufferable, now seemed not at all too slow. The scenery was of that somber and dignified cast that ~~educes~~ induces to calm reverie, and [crossed out] beside which you delight to linger. But more than this, we were going to the grave of Washington. I should as quick think of galloping after the corps of a friend, or of racing from a Scottish church on Sabbath, as of hastening on such a pilgrimage. I could not give much for the heart of a young racer who could sport a tandem to Mount Vernon. He might have claims as a fine gentleman, but he must resign all pretensions to general enthusiasm and ~~all~~ the deeper feelings of the soul.

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MMN #28292
Date: Jan. 17, 1829
Description: G.W. Pierce from steamer on Ohio River

You enter upon the grounds of Mount Vernon about half a mile from the mansion house. You pass in thro, a shabby and ricketty old gate on each side of which are two small buildings, that in feudal lands and in other days, might pass for a warden's keep or a porter's lodge. One of them is now occupied by an old servant of Washington's, and who is a carpenter by trade, and assisted in erecting most of the out houses on the place. He is the only male servant of the Generals now living, & the only one whom we saw. He is a grey headed old man, and seemed to feel some enthusiasm when we mentioned his old master. But he seemed most to deplore the neglect into which the fabrick of his own hands had fallen, expatiating upon the former splendor of the stables, and the beauty of the farms & storehouses. "It is nothing now to look upon" said he, but in the General's day it was well worth a bodys trouble, for the General ^{was} a neat and careful man, and couldn't bear to see things out of order. However you can go look at it, but 'tis well that the poor General's dead for it would worry him to death to look on the sight you'll see." The road or lane which traverses the adjacent lands and lead you to the house is wretched, having ^{been} scarcely repaired since the death of Washington. This circumstance would not be worth mentioning save for the disgraceful reasons by which it is to be explained. Judge Washington, the present resident and owner of the estate is proverbially mean in his expenditures, and in thus permitting the road to go to ruin his avarice reaps a double advantage. He is at the same time saved the cost of repairs, and is relieved from a part of the throng of visitors who make a pilgrimage to that sacred spot, which he is so unworthy to inherit.

There is nothing informing or beautiful in the aspect of the manison house as it is approached by land. It stands on a small elevation, rising hastily from the river. But I shall not attempt to describe the buildings, you have seen prints of all the principal ones, and words can do little to convey a correct discription in any case, however skilfully they may be used. The grounds immediately around the house are laid out in fine taste, for they still retain the plan of the General. But both the grounds and buildings are both out of repair, and nothing but the garden seems to have experienced any care or kindness at the hands of the penurious Judge. He was not at home and we saw them around the grounds by the servants.

The garden as I before remarked is in excellent repair, and in a high state of cultivation. It is furnished with spacious hot houses, how spacious and secure you can judge from the fact, that they contained, the coffie & tea plants, lemons & oranges, olive trees and numberless other exotics, the natives of tropical regions.

We were shown into a few of the lower rooms of the house. In the broad entry, preserved in a small glass case, hangs the Key of the Bastille of Paris, a present to General Washington from some of the leaders of the French Revolution. We saw his library, which contains perhaps 2500 vols. in a state of bad disorder

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and the room is decorated with several busts. The one of the Gen. is said to be an admirable likeness. The sitting room & parlour are neatly furnished, and the latter contains a mantle piece of the most exquisite sculpture; full of [?]-ture scenes from classic history. This was also a present; for Washington was not fond of magnificence or prodigality.

The tomb of Washington, the chiefest object of my curiosity and veneration stands close upon the banks of the Potomac. So close indeed, that were it not for the certainty that waters, given in her angriest moods most wanton and angry moods, could not dare intrude upon the sepulchre of the Father of his country, you would have lost the Potomac would wear away the soil by digrees, or in some swollen moment overflow the sacred spot. Without exception it is the smallest tomb I ever saw. It is built of common brick, with a rough door of pine door, and soiled with green turf. It is inclosed by a simple little fence of oak rails, nailed perpendicular to a rude framework, the whole white washed with lime. Within the inclosure and directly above and around the tomb, stand evergreen cedars cypresses and funeral cedars. This is all that holds the dust of an unequalled patriot, this all that marks the spot, where reposes the best and greatest man of his own age, or perhaps, of any other whatsoever! and yet this is not all. For round this simple monument winds a narrow footpath, deep worn thro' the bordering greensward, by the footsteps of many a traveler. This is a more honorable ^{than} memorial ^{than} that statues of marble or monuments of brass. I would not have it altered. It is a more affecting testimonial of departed worth than a nich in Westminster Abby. With this emblem of a nation's sorrowful & remembrance, it is holy as a shrine — it is a prouder burial place than the eternal piramids that hold the never decaying forms of Egypt's ancient kings. I shall never forget the feelings that agitated ^{me} while standing there, the mingled and undefinable emotions that filled my bosom almost to bursting. I shed tears without knowing why. I longed for something great, some thing that should take all the energies of my soul, and end in the acquisition of glory.

At some future period will delineate Mount Vernon and all the feelings associated with it. It is now but a spot, for never did a spot awaken so many and such emotions.

I am now on board the steam boat Reindeer, about one hundred miles from Cincinnati and am travelling about 18 miles per hour. Before I leave Ohio I shall write you, and tell you my prospects & plans for the future. I am still in fine health and spirits, and hope I am making

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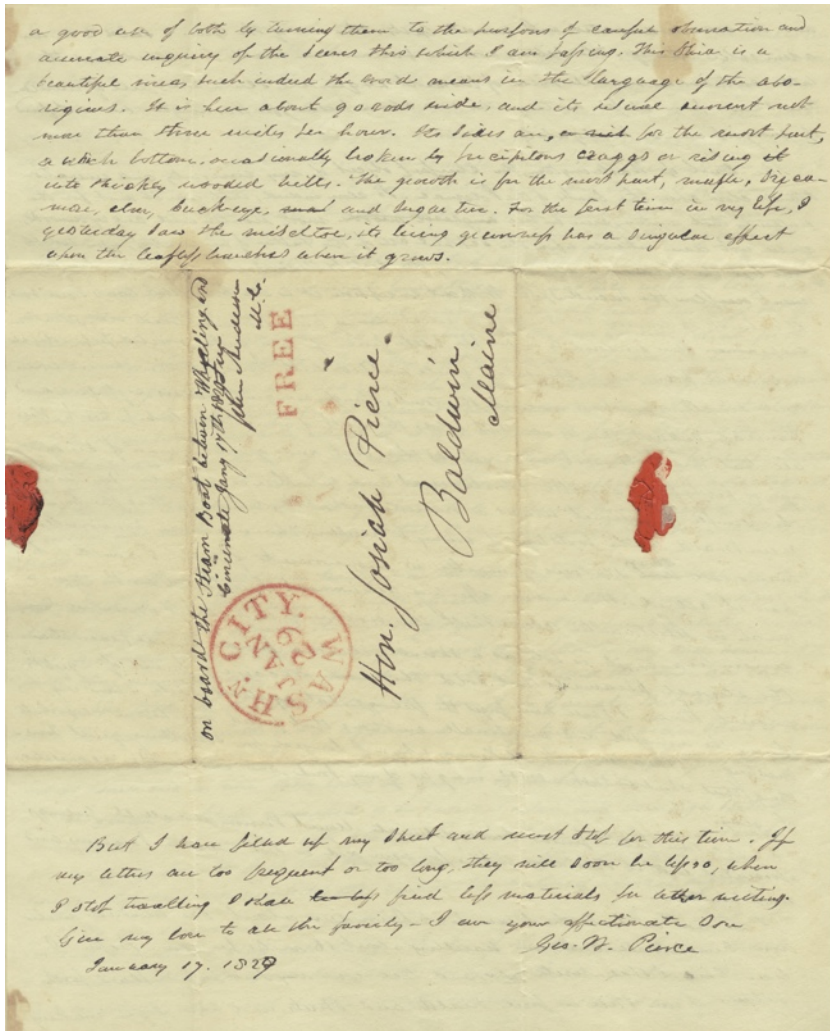
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a good use of both by turning them to the purposes of careful observation and accurate inquiry of the scenes thro' which I am passing. This Ohio is a beautiful river, such indeed the word means in the language of the aborigines. It is here about 90 rods wide, and its usual current not more than three miles per hour. Its sides are, a rich for the most part, a which bottom, occasionally broken by precipitous craggs or rising it into thickly wooded hills. The growth is for the most part, maple, sycamore, elm, buck-eye, ~~mul~~ and sugar tree. For the first time in my life, I yesterday saw the miseltoe, its living greenness has a singular effect upon the leafless branches where it grows.

[Written sideways as address]

on board the Steam Boat between Wheeling and Cincinnati Jan 17th 1829 Free
 [?] Anderson
 M.C.

Hon Josiah Pierce
 Baldwin
 Maine

But I have filled up my sheet and must stop for this time. If my letters are too frequent or too long, they will soon be less so, when I stop travelling I shall be less find less materials for letter writing. Give my love to all the family. I am your affectionate Son
 Geo. W. Pierce

January 17. 1829