

The Papers of George Washington

Documents

Washington's Advice On Love & Marriage

George Washington to Betsey Parke Custis and her fiance Thomas Law, 10 February 1796

[«back](#) | [home](#)

[««« back](#)

[Index of Letters](#)

[next »»»](#)



Elizabeth "Betsey" Parke Custis



Thomas Law

Portraits from *Greenleaf and Law in the Federal City* (Allen C. Clark, 1901).

When Betsey Custis wrote her grandfather to announce her engagement to Thomas Law, an enterprising businessman with two children, Washington gave his "approbation" of the marriage, although the unexpected announcement came as a "Surprize" to him. Betsey's letter, written on 1 February 1796 and received by Washington on Saturday, 6 February, has not been found. Below are the letters Washington wrote in response to the engagement, one to [Betsey](#) and another to her fiancé, [Thomas Law](#).

Philadelphia 10th Feby 1796

My dear Betsey

I have obeyed your injunction in not acknowledging the receipt of your letter of the first instant until I should hear from Mr. Law. This happened yesterday--I therefore proceed to assure you--if Mr Law is the man of your choice, of wch there can be no doubt, as he has merits to engage your affections, and you have declared that he has not only done so, but that you find, after a careful examination of your heart, you cannot be happy without him--that your alliance with him meets my approbation. *Yes*, Betsey, and this approbation is accompanied with my fervent wishes that you may be as happy in this

important event as your most sanguine imagination has ever presented to your view. Along with these wishes, I bestow on you my choicest blessings.

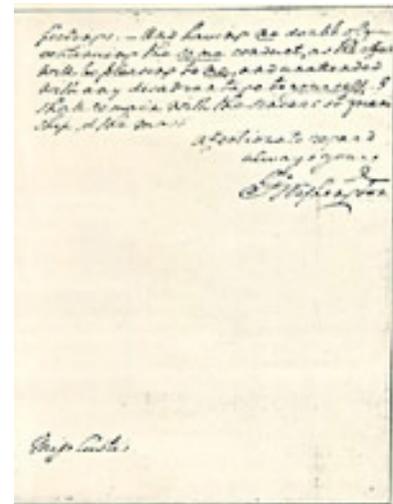
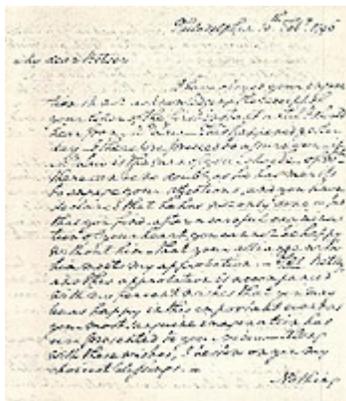
Nothing contained in your letter--in Mr Laws--or in any other from our friends intimate *when* you are to taste the sweets of Matrimony--I therefore call upon *you*, who have more honesty than disguise, to give me the details. Nay more, that you will relate all your feelings to *me* on this occasion: or as a Quaker would say "all the workings of the spirit within."

This, I have a right to expect in return for my blessing, so promptly bestowed, after you had concealed the matter from me so long. Being entitled therefore to this confidence, and to a compliance with my requests, I shall look forward to the fulfilment of it.

If after marriage Mr Laws business should call him to this City, the same room which Mr Peter & your sister occupied will accomodate you two; and it will be equally at your service.

You know how much I love you--how much I have been gratified by your attentions to those things which you had reason to believe were grateful to my feelings. And having *no* doubt of your continuing the *same* conduct, as the effect will be pleasing to *me*, and unattended with any disadvantage to *yourself*--I shall remain with the sincerest friendship, & the most affectionate regard always yours

Go: Washington



Images of Washington's letter to Elizabeth Parke Custis, 10 February 1796
(courtesy of The Morgan Library, New York, N.Y.)
click on images for larger view

To Thomas Law

Philadelphia 10th Feb. 1796.

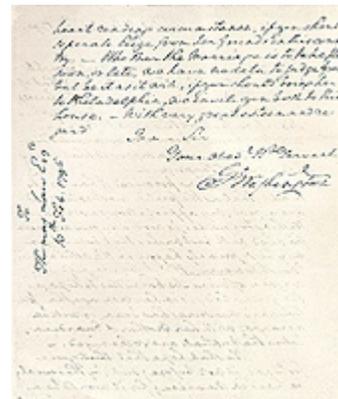
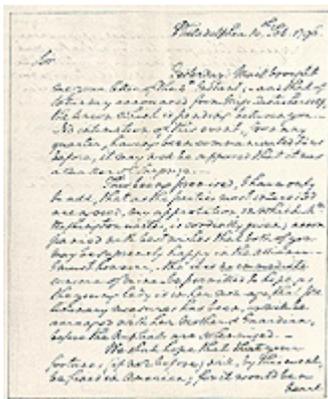
Sir

Yesterday's Mail brought me your letter of the 4th Instant; and that of Saturday [6 February] announced from Miss Custis herself, the Union which is pending between you. No intimation of this event, from any quarter, having been communicated to us before, it may well be supposed that it was a matter of Surprise.

This being premised, I have only to add, that as the parties most interested are agreed, my approbation, in which Mrs Washington unites, is cordially given; accompanied with best wishes that both of you may be supremely happy in the alliance. I must however, tho' it is no immediate concern of mine--be permitted to hope, as the young lady is in her non-age, that preliminary measures has been, or will be arranged with her Mother & Guardian, before the Nuptials are solemnized.

We shall hope that your fortunes (if not before) will, by this event, be fixed in America; for it would be a heart rending circumstance, if you should separate Eliza from her friends in this country. Whether the marriage is to take place soon, or late, we have no data to judge from but be it as it will, if you should bring her to Philadelphia, we invite you both to this house. With very great esteem and regard I am Sir--Your obedt Hble Servant

Go: Washington



Images of Washington's letter to Thomas Law, 10 February 1796
(courtesy of The Morgan Library, New York, N.Y.)
click on images for larger view

Betsy married Thomas Law (1759-1834), a recent arrival in the United States from Great Britain/India and the son of Edmund Law, bishop of Carlisle, on 21 March 1796. Their daughter Eliza, born in 1797, was their only child to survive infancy. By 1804 the couple had separated, and in 1811 they divorced.

