Washington Sept. 12. 1836

Sir, I have been informed by the Secretary of the Senate that he has apprized the Senators of his intention to resign the office which he holds at the commencement of the Session.

Although aware of the importance of the trust to which I aspire, and the number, character & influence of those who will be solicitous to obtain it, I cannot permit the occasion to pass away without offering my name to the consideration of the Senate, in the appointment of his Successor.

The attempt, however, I feel assured, must be useless, unless some of the enlightened members of the body, whose suffrages I ask, can be induced to consider the peculiar position in which I am placed, and the grounds upon which I, perhaps, might predicate my humble pretensions. And, among all the members of this body, I am induced to look with more confidence towards you than any other, not only as the Representative of the State where are still my earliest and strongest associations, but from the certain conviction that you will at least extend to my application a liberal indulgence.

It is known, perhaps, to many of the Senators that I have spent the prime, and some portion of the vigor of life, in the performance, occasionally, of all the duties of the Secretary's Office. It is now nearly twenty six years since, compelled more from necessity than choice, I reluctantly entered it. Even then I felt how greatly I hazarded prospects with which I had nourished a too credulous fancy.

During this long period I have performed to the utmost of my ability, the unremitting labors of the office, and often others, in addition, by which I hoped to acquire the good will essential to success.

During the greater portion of the last Session I have been called, in consequence of the lamented

indisposition of Mr. McDonald, devolved on me the performance of the duties of principal Clerk. The manner in which I have performed them must be left to the judgment of the Senate.

In entering the office, I was not wholly insensible to the claims which my friends, my family, and society had upon me: the hours of relaxation from physical toil, though not sufficiently improved, were not wholly misapplied; and I cherished the hope that, in time, even diligence and labor might qualify me to rise to a different sphere.

Hitherto, however, these youthful aspirations have not been realized. In the lapse of a quarter of a Century a single advance in the line of promotion, (and even that unattended with any increase of pecuniary emolument) has alone contributed to animate effort, or allay the bitterness of blighted expectation.

At length however, by the resignation of Mr. Lowrie, an incident has occurred which will serve to show whether, when all the Elements of society are instinct with activity and life, and wherever I turn my Eyes I behold the associates of my early and maturer days enjoying reputation, acquiring wealth, and rising to Eminence, I alone must maintain a Stationary existence, and be content to end my days at the very point where manly effort first commenced.

In the position in which I now am placed two alternatives only are before me. If I decline to offer for the vacant office, after the devotion of so long a period to the uninterrupted discharge of its incidental duties, — some will attribute my conduct to pusillanimity, and others to a consciousness of incompetency or demerit. If, on the contrary I apply, and fail — the prostration of all hope of future preferment

in the path I have chosen, will be the least painful of the consequences of this decision by the Senate. The duties of the Secretary and those of his principal assistant are not greatly dissimilar. Both should possess, in an equal degree, the confidence of the Members: and either should be competent, in the event of absence, to perform the duties required of the other. If then, when a vacancy stands just before me, another should be preferred, could I with usefulness, honor and self respect, remain in the secondary office longer than stern, inexorable necessity may enforce? Ought I not rather to infer that an unfavorable decision by the Senate was as applicable to both as one? I need not — I will not anticipate an event which may so deeply involve the prospects and happiness of those dearer to me than life: But this, perhaps, I may be allowed to say; That he who remains in a subordinate station while others, possibly with qualifications no greater than his own, ~~who have~~ are advanced in honor and emolument before him, must forfeit the respect of all honorable men; gradually loose his own; and, in time, become as incapable of manly principle and generous purpose as the lowest reptile of the Earth.

It may perhaps be said that the higher offices of Government should be filled by those only who have some claim upon their Country, or who have at least acquired, in other pursuits an honorable reputation. In point of distinguished reputation I can make no boast: for it has never been my fortune to be placed in a sphere where Fame could be acquired. But perhaps on the score of Service, I may, on this occasion, be permitted to put in an humble suit: — It is to me, providentially, that the Senate and the Country are indebted for the preservation of Records, the loss of which no money could restored; and which, if lost, would have reflected a deeper

and more indeliable disgrace than the Burning of a hundred Capitols, or the Capture of every Seaboard City of our Land.

It would be tedious and perhaps unprofitable to dwell on all the circumstances of an event too deeply impressed upon my memory ever to be effaced: Its prominent points, however, I will briefly relate.

Early in the year 1814, I was induced to purchase a small Farm 8 miles distant from Washington not only as a means of relief from the perpetual monotony of a public office, but to add something by additional labor, to a narrow income. To this farm I removed my family. By this removal, loosing my City residence, and acquiring a legal right of domicile in Maryland, I was informed by the Colonel of the Regiment of Militia in which I held a Commission, that an objection had been raised to the legality of my holding it - and that therefore, when the Militia were called out my name was omitted. I felt the force of the objection and a resignation followed - expressing the ground on which it was made.

Thus debarred from Militia duty, in Washington, except as a Volunteer, and not enrolled in Maryland, I hesitated whether to join the ranks of the Company I had commanded or to keep myself at liberty in order to assist, if necessary, in any duty which the Officers might require. The peculiar state of the Office induced me to decide on the latter course.

A few days before the invasion of Washington, whilst riding to the Office, meeting a Waggoner whom I knew, I enquired whether in case of emergency I could obtain his Waggon & Team. Although not the owner of the Team, his answer induced me to think I could.

The third day, only, before the destruction of the Capitol by the British, all in the City was doubt, confusion, and dismay. The Citizens were absent, under Arms; Business was suspended. Every means of

transportation was either engaged or in use;
and no certain intelligence of the enemy
was either communicated or known.
Some Executive Order, was expected;
but none was given. No one appeared
to give direction for the removal of any
thing appertaining to the Capitol. The Venerable
Secretary of the Senate had recently
paid the Debt of Nature. The Principal
Clerk was absent from the City; and
the responsibility of an erroneous decision
was devolved on two young Men,
recently appointed in the Office, and
naturally unprepared for an Emergency like
this. In this situation I suggested to
Mr. McDonald, the third day before the
entry of the British, the propriety of taking
steps for the removal of the Books and papers
of the Office. The responsibility of such a step,
and the contradictory intelligence which
constantly arrived, were well calculated
to produce hesitation in us both.
About 12 o'clock of that day I expressed
to him my increasing apprehensions, and at
the same time my determination, if he did
not concur in the propriety of immediate
removal, to proceed to act, and take the
responsibility on myself. He thereupon
assented: But the means of transportation
were wanting, and not easily procured.
I informed him of the conversation I
had had with the Waggoner of Mr. Scholfield;
and that no time might be lost, and no
unnecessary hazard incurred, I proceeded
immediately to procure the Waggon. I
found the Driver absent from his House
and the Waggoner scrupulous of the
propriety of complying with my request.
Finding that merely reminding him of his
Engagement made no impression, I at

length informed him that if he hesitated longer I must be compelled to use the power of impressment. He yielded to this ~~and~~ declaration, brought the Horses from the place in which they had been concealed, and accompanied me to the Capitol.

Mr. McDonald having in the morning departed from the Capitol for the purpose of making some arrangements for his family, I was prevented from seeing him again during the day.

With the aid of the Messenger of the Office, (a black man named Tobias) and the waggoner, I engaged in removing from the Office all the Books and papers ~~of the Office~~ which I considered of most value: and when the sun was nearly setting our vehicle ~~could~~ being able to contain no more, I departed, with it, for my residence in the country.

On the way, two unpleasant occurrences took place. Before we passed the boundary of the City one wheel of the waggon gave way: and when only two miles from my dwelling, the waggon was upset. The first was remedied by borrowing, without leave from the owner, a wheel from a Black Smith's Shop: but a delay of several hours occurred before we were able to recover from the second.

About 10 o'clock of the second day Mr. McDonald joined me, and as my residence was considered less secure than Brookville, he conducted the waggon ~~there~~ to that place, where ~~the~~ the Records & papers remained until a place was provided for the meeting of Congress.

Among the papers thus preserved were the Confidential and Executive

proceedings of the Senate: And if I do not greatly mistake, they constituted at that time, the only evidence in existence of the Executive doings and votes of the Senate, during a period of twenty five years. The Value of the Files and printed Documents, above was in some measure discovered, during the recent compilations, & publications, ordered by the Senate. — But what would have been the the feelings of every intelligent individual, at home, or abroad, had the Executive History of the Senate, for a period of twenty five years, been blotted forever from the Knowledge and Memory of Man.

It is far from my wish to arrogate to myself more than properly belongs to me. From the merit of Mr. McDonald as an efficient and valuable officer I cannot if I would in the least detract. A train of providentiae circumstances induced and Enabled me to procure perhaps the only conveyance which could have been obtained: all that happened to be saved was deposited in that Conveyance by my exertions and directions: and it is certain that if the impending danger had proved less real, and the confidentiae papers of the offices (one of which I know to contain the number and positions of the entire American Military Force) thus withdrawn from the place of legitimate deposit, and exposed in an open waggon to the contingencies of a nocturnal transportation, had been subjected, by my means, to damage and loss, the full weight of responsibility

would have fallen on me: the facts of my being the Junior in the Office, and receiving no absolute directions from a competent Superior, would have been weighed: and the motive with which I had acted would not have averted the withering ~~[illegible]~~ glances of an indignant public; eternal approbrium would have rested on my name; and deprivation of office, with inevitable ruin, would have been the least punishment I could have expected to receive for an unauthorized removal of the Confidential Archives.

Hitherto, content with the approval of my own mind, and desiring no other reward, I have scarcely ever ~~whispered~~ uttered the facts of this transaction even to the ear of friendship: now, however, I have thought, a suitable occasion had occurred when I might properly ~~was not an unsuitable occasion~~ ~~to~~ mention any circumstance which can ~~properly~~ operate in my favor.

Knowing your honorable and liberal sentiments I have trespassed, I fear, most unreasonably on your patience, and disclosed my feelings with a fullness and unreserve, which I would not hazard with any other individual with whom I have not the honor of a personal intimacy. — I take the liberty, also, to enclose a letter which I have addressed to other Senators; and should consider myself highly honored of, consistently with public duty, you could give ~~my~~ humble pretentions the weight of your support.

With the highest respect
I have the honor to be, Sir,
Yr Obt. Servt.
L. H. Machen.