

Dear Mr. Banneker by Blake

These are a series of letters that my cousin, Major Andrew Ellicott, and I, George Ellicott wrote. We are talking about Benjamin Banneker, nicknamed the Black Man of Science.

Dear George Ellicott,

February 1791

Today Mr. Banneker was asked by Thomas Jefferson to survey the land where the District of Columbia and nation's capital would be placed. Another person, Pierre L'Enfant, was fired and was the one who had the plans. Mr. L'Enfant also took the plans with him! Surprisingly, Mr. Banneker recreated the plans from memory. He had seen the plans when we first started. I'm amazed by Mr. Banneker's memory.

Sincerely,
Maj. Andrew Ellicott

Dear Maj. Andrew Ellicott,

March 5, 1791

I know that Mr. Banneker is smart. Have you heard about the clock that he built from wood? I have visited him and he has always thought up something new. I have heard some of his ideas and theories. I can't remember them since he tells me a new one almost every day.

Sincerely,
George Ellicott

Dear George Ellicott,

March 20, 1791

Yes, I have heard about the clock that Mr. Banneker made. I think it is a mechanical wonder. How on Earth did he make it? Has he borrowed anything from you? Has he published any books? Please write back as soon as you get this letter.

Sincerely,
Maj. Andrew Ellicott

Dear Maj. Andrew Ellicott,

April 3, 1791

Mr. Banneker borrowed a pocket watch from a friend, and then he took it apart. He took a look at the pieces and wrote all the essential facts down in his journal, and he drew a picture of every piece. He set a marker on the day that he made the clock. He was the first person to make a clock in America. Yes, he has borrowed some items of mine. He borrowed most of my astronomy equipment. He tried madly to get his first almanac published, but it was already the New Year. Then he successfully got his first almanac in 1792. If you have any other questions, please include them in your next letter.

Your cousin,
George Ellicott

It was almost a whole year before he replied. I don't know why it took that long.

Dear George Ellicott,

February 3, 1792

I'm sorry that it's been so long since I replied to your letter. We have been very busy with constructing the new state capital. I'm not sure if Mr. Banneker's plans were the same as Mr. L'Enfant's. I think Mr. L'Enfant's plans were something like the Versailles of Paris. Is there anything else that you think I might find interesting?

Sincerely,
Maj. Andrew Ellicott

Dear Maj. Andrew Ellicott,

February 14, 1792

Yes, There is more you might want to know. He was born on November 9, 1731, very close to my birth. Later on, he was taught by his grandmother to read and write. He used to go to every school that came by. He also was self-educated in astronomy. He was born a free person because his mother was a free person. I think, later on, Mr. Banneker will predict future solar and lunar eclipses. After all, he was able to construct an almanac by himself. Mr. Banneker sent a copy of his almanac to Thomas Jefferson, along with a letter defending the rights of African Americans. I personally

think that he must be very courageous. If he wasn't, he wouldn't be showing what African Americans can do. Mr. Banneker told me that Thomas Jefferson was so impressed by the almanac that he sent a copy to the French Academy of Sciences.

Sincerely,
George Ellicott

Benjamin Banneker died on Sunday, October 9, 1806 at the age of 74. At the time of his burial his house burned to the ground. Everything in his house was destroyed, including his clock. On February 15, 1980, the postal service issued a stamp in his honor.

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