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The Building and Establishment of Washington, 1788-1809

Robert C. Harris

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THE BUILDING AND ESTABLISHMENT
OF WASHINGTON, 1788 - 1809

By

Robert C. Harris

A Thesis presented to
The Faculty of the Graduate School
of Western Michigan University
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in History

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PREFACE

The following research concerns the beginnings of our national capital. Of the people who have contributed to its development, many were Americans, while others were immigrants striving for freedom in their newly established nation. To all the most important task was to find a permanent site for their national capital.

Millions of Americans have visited Washington, D. C. since 1800, leaving their beloved city with diversified ideals for its future. Dr. H. Paul Caemmerer has several quotations from famous American personalities regarding the national capital.\(^1\) Herbert Hoover says:

"This is more than making of a beautiful city. Washington is not only the Nation's Capital, it is the symbol of America. By its dignity and architectural inspiration we stimulate pride in our country, we encourage that elevation of thought and character which comes from great architecture."

Andrew Mellon states:

"In the Capital an example should be set

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for the country as a whole in the matter of planning. Our national monuments will attract seekers of the ideal of art. More and more it will become the tendency to establish the headquarters of societies of literature and art in Washington and to make bequests of collections to the national capital. The public buildings, as finally completed and constructed, should place Washington in the forefront of the architecturally beautiful cities of the world."

Every American should make at least one pilgrimage to his national capital during his lifetime. Every citizen has helped to build this great city. To see Washington, D. C. for the first time cultivates a deep sense of pride in the observer. True beauty can be seen in any direction that you look. In Washington can be found attractions to suffice each desire.

I have a deep personal feeling toward our nation's capital. Each time I have been in Washington, I have felt a penetrating spirit of patriotism and delight. In examining the published materials concerning the history of its development, I feel even more inspired and wish to return again soon. Wherever my travels shall take me, I believe that I will never behold a city with more beauty than our nation's capital.

The purpose of this essay is to give a clearer understanding of the situation which confronted the founders of our capital, and to discover, whether or not, their decisions have created a favorable, lasting impression for posterity. Most American citizens are uneducated as to the events which are part of the history
of the national capital. Most people do not realize that Washington was a pre-planned city rather than a settlement.

There has been considerable research concerning Washington, D. C. Most of the emphasis has been focused on the description of the public buildings, monuments and memorials, and other present sight-seeing attractions. The early development of the first twenty years of our national capital has been described only in surveys which have been short, political and uninteresting. To present an interesting and detailed account of the establishment of Washington, D. C. is my ultimate goal.
CHAPTER I
EARLY LEGISLATION

In 1790, Congress selected the Potomac site as the permanent location of the national capital. The selection of this site caused considerable agitation between the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans, and only by compromise was the quarrel finally settled.¹

One of the powers delegated to the United States Constitution under Article I, Section 8, Paragraph 17 of the Constitution of the United States reads as follows:

"To exercise exclusive Legislation in all cases whatsoever, over such District (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular States, and the Acceptance of Congress, become the Seat of the government of the United States, and to exercise like authority over all Places purchased by the Consent of the Legislature of the State in which the same shall be, for the Erection of Forts, Magazines, Arsenals, dock-yards, and other needful Buildings...."

This section of our Constitution gave Congress the right to purchase or receive land for a permanent national capital. After the United States Constitution had been ratified by a sufficient number of states, making it effective in June of 1788, Maryland ceded land

¹The political compromise which involved Alexander Hamilton's financial policies with the selection of the Potomac site as the national capital are not part of this thesis.
to the United States on December 23, 1788. The title of the act read as follows:

"An act to cede to Congress a District of ten miles square in this State, for the Seat of the Government of the United States."\(^2\)

To keep in stride with Maryland, Virginia ceded land to the United States on December 3, 1789. The title of the act read as follows:

"An act for the cession of ten miles square, for any lesser quantity of territory within this State of the United States in Congress assembled for, the permanent seat of the General Government."\(^3\)

On July 16, 1790, Congress, complying with the Constitutional requirement, passed the "Residence Bill", establishing "a district of territory, not exceeding ten miles square, to be located as hereafter directed on the river Potomac, at some place between the mouths of the Eastern Branch and Potomac as the permanent seat of the Federal Government."\(^4\) Six months later on January 24, 1791, President Washington sent a message to Congress, then in Philadelphia, reporting his choice of "ten miles square on both sides of the river Potomac so as to comprehend Georgetown in Maryland and extend to the Eastern Branch."\(^5\)


\(^3\)Ibid.

\(^4\)"Story of Its Development, 1774-1878."

\(^5\)Ibid.
George Washington knew the region along the Potomac River very well. He had explored, in the interests of the Potomac and James River Land Improvement Companies, the entire length of the Potomac from its source to the tidewater. In the months that followed the passage of the Residence Bill, President Washington, mounted on horseback, rode along the banks of the Potomac which he knew so well. "He inspected many sites and made careful surveys." Each time that he returned to his beloved Mount Vernon from Philadelphia, he would pass through the region which he later chose for the national capital. He thought that the land between the Potomac, Connoquenessing, and Eastern Branch was the ideal choice for the national capital to which Congress agreed.

The legal transactions were now completed, but still remaining were the jealousies and misunderstandings over the selection of the Potomac site as the national capital. The compromise had been completed between the leaders of each political party. However, the majority of each party felt that their leaders had sacrificed their ideals and principles in order to fulfill this compromise. The agriculturalists of the South were


7 "From Swamp to World Capital," Senior Scholastic, CVI, (March 1, 1950), p. 5.
suspicious of the money-changers of the North; and the
financiers of the North had very little in common with
the southern planters. 8

Perhaps the men who received most of the criti-
cism was George Washington. To Washington, the beautiful
Potomac brought back pleasant memories of his life, since
his place of birth and his beloved Mount Vernon were lo-
cated along its banks. There is no doubt that Washington
loved the Potomac River, but aside from that he had nothing
to gain from the national capital being located along the
Potomac River.

Many people, who were unacquainted with the
region, thought that a portion of the land within the
district was owned by George Washington and that he would,
therefore, be able to receive much profit from selling his
land to the national government. This could have been
true, except that Washington insisted that the buildings
of the national government be built upon the Maryland
side of the Potomac River, thus eliminating any doubt to
his honesty.

Another criticism of President Washington was
that he was involved in a big land swindle. Since he
knew everybody in this region, it was rumored that he

8. T. Frary, They Built the Capitol (Richmond:
    Garrett and Massie, 1940), p. 6.
had organized a secret arrangement between the landowners in the district, and that they had agreed to sell the land at exorbitant prices, thus receiving a tremendous amount of money from the sale of land. This reasoning couldn't be further from the truth.

The most radical of these critics of Washington was William Maclay, a vehement Republican, who made several untrue accusations about Washington's intentions. He could have said justly that George Washington personally hoped the valley of the Potomac would be chosen as the site of the new capital. Beyond that, Maclay could not have cited any evidence, so far as it is now known, that George Washington sought to influence the decision of Congress, concerning the proposed site for the capital of the national government.9

There were several reasons why the Potomac site was selected. Probably the most potent were the facts that this site was really the most central and proper location and that Washington must have favored it. Thomas Nelson Page says:

"The name and influence of George Washington carried the day...Other commissioners had dallied and fooled about the business, and finally Congress, worried by the delay and bickering, placed the matter in Washington's hands, with three commissioners

Washington did his best to bring into reality his dreams of a permanent national capital located along the banks of the beautiful Potomac. Although there was delay in completing necessary legislation, combined with the fact that Washington and other leaders were being criticized, the nation's capital was begun regardless of many false impressions. By July 1790, the preliminary arrangements had been completed.

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CHAPTER II
PRELIMINARY ARRANGEMENTS

Under the Act of July 16, 1790, President Washington was authorized to appoint three commissioners to work with the President in defining and limiting the district along the Potomac River. These commissioners, or any two of them, had the power to purchase or accept any quantity of land which the President should find suitable for the use of the United States. Suitable buildings and public offices for the government of the United States were to be ready by the first Monday in December in the year 1800. With characteristic promptness, Washington proceeded to carry out his instructions set forth by appropriate legislation.

"On January 22, 1791, President Washington appointed three commissioners—Daniel Carroll and Thomas Johnson of Maryland, and David Stuart of Virginia."¹ These men were all personal friends whom he greatly trusted. Washington later confessed that he had only limited acquaintance with the right men for commissioners

who were free enough from local prejudices to qualify them for the task and still be familiar with the area.

Daniel Carroll was an aristocrat in feeling but an autocrat in his heart. The name of Carroll had long stood for power and wealth in the Middle Colonies. He was appointed a delegate to the Constitutional Convention and worked hard for a strong centralized government. He served as a commissioner until he resigned in 1795 because of poor health.

However, the remaining two were more co-operative. David Stuart was a physician in nearby Alexandria who had married the widow of John Parke Custis. Thomas Johnson was a highly respected lawyer from Maryland. The latter was without a doubt the more distinguished of the three commissioners. He was brigadier-general of the Maryland militia and was the first governor of Maryland. He had served in the Continental Congress and later was appointed Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court. Washington wanted Johnson to be Secretary of State after Jefferson resigned, but Johnson refused because of poor health.

On the 24th of January, 1791, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson sent letters to each of the appointed commissioners requesting their acceptance. The letter read as follows:

"The President of the United States, desirous
of availing himself of your assistance in preparing the Federal seat on the Potomac, has appointed you as one of the three commissioners directed by law for that purpose..."

They all accepted, although Daniel Carroll was a little reluctant, but he finally accepted after a personal request by President Washington.

The authority of the commissioners was rather general since most of the power was vested in the hands of President Washington. However, the commissioners had one definite limitation made by law that the sites for the public buildings should be upon the eastern side or Maryland side of the Potomac River. Washington insisted upon this law which became effective on March 3, 1791. He felt that if the buildings would be built on the western or Virginia side of the Potomac, the value of his property would increase. This fact could have been reality, except that his wish was granted and the buildings were placed on the Maryland side of the Potomac River.

On February 2, 1791, President Washington appointed Andrew Ellicott from Pennsylvania to work with the commissioners to set the permanent boundary of the federal district. Jefferson sent a letter to Ellicott stating:

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"You are desired to proceed by the first stage to the federal territory on the Potomac, for the purpose of making a survey of it. You will herewith receive a draft on the Mayor of Georgetown to cover your expenses."

However, to Ellicott's embarrassment and the Mayor's amusement, the latter knew nothing about such a transaction. Nevertheless, the signature of Thomas Jefferson was enough so that Ellicott received all that he requested.

Andrew Ellicott, who was a major in the American Revolution, was an American engineering officer of much distinction and experience. In 1784, he had laid out the boundary line between Virginia (now the state of West Virginia) and Pennsylvania, and the following year he located the western line of Pennsylvania. His successful career as a surveyor and his personal friendship towards General Washington led to his appointment as surveyor of the federal district.

Ellicott had begun his job immediately and on March 3, 1791, by his suggestion, Washington asked for and received an amendment taking in some land southeast of the Anacostia and all of Alexandria south to Hunting Creek. Ellicott worked long hours in an effort to get the boundary laid as soon as possible. He cleared timber from a line forty feet around the tract. In this space at mile intervals, he placed concrete posts standing two feet high saying:

3Ibid, p. 41.
"Jurisdiction of the United States." The cornerstone for the Federal District was laid by President Washington with commissioners in appropriate ceremonies at Hunters Point, just south of Alexandria on April 15, 1791.

To design the capital city, George Washington chose Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant, "the artist of the American Revolution." He had come to America with Lafayette to help the colonies fight for their independence. However, the sources disagree as to whether L'Enfant came before, with, or after Lafayette. "Major L'Enfant was 'artist extraordinary' to the Army, drawing likenesses (including one of Washington at Valley Forge), decorating ballrooms, and building banquet halls."

Arriving in 1777, he entered the Continental Army at his own expense. "In February, 1778, he was made a captain of engineers and as such proved his valor in battles about Charleston, where he was wounded and was included in the capitulation and exchanged." He became a major in the year 1783.

After the peace had been signed with England, he

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4Padover, op. cit., p. 5.


returned to France to visit his father. Then he returned to America where he spent the rest of his life. His first job was to remodel the New York City Hall for the reception of the First Congress of the United States; "a building of such beauty never before having been seen by the assembled representatives of the people." Thomas Page says:

"He had the soul of a gambler, and was one of the most capable, egotistical, and gifted men of his time." 8

His artistic ability was recognized in various ways. As a personal favor for LaFayette he drew a portrait of Washington. He designed a pavilion for the celebration at Philadelphia, July 15, 1782, of the birth of the French Dauphin, and he was responsible for designing the insignia and diploma of the Society of the Cincinnati. The reredos of St. Paul's Church in New York City was his undertaking.

L'Enfant became acquainted with General Washington and when L'Enfant realized that a great nation was being born, he begged for a share in the undertaking. "It was his dream, he said, to design a capital worthy of a new nation." His offer to help in planning the national capital was enthusiastically accepted by President Washington.

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7 Ibid, p. 24.
8 Page, op. cit., p. 50.
and in March of 1791, Major L'Enfant commenced work in laying out the city. The stage was now set for a new city to emerge from the swamps of the Potomac.
CHAPTER III

PROBLEMS DEVELOP

The supervisory personnel of the district were faced with difficult problems of building a capital city on land with very little solid foundation. "Washington was a gloomy spot of appalling mud and dense thickets." Late in the summer insects and malaria were very common in the district. However, this problem was solved by careful planning, and every possible precaution was taken to prevent sickness and disease. The city was evacuated at times during the hot summer months to eliminate the chance of becoming exposed to the insects and other carriers of disease. Nevertheless, the city was progressing on schedule.

Fortunately, for the country, the men who were to have most to do with planning the national capital were men with large ideas. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison saw the future of this country with eyes in which it loomed large. These men were especially interested in architecture which was

1 Early, op. cit., p. 9
2 Page, op. cit., p. 49.
considered essential in the education of a Virginia gentleman. They decided to lay out the city on a large plan with a view of future greatness to the capital of a great nation. Washington believed that within a century, should the country keep united, it would produce a city, though not as large as London, yet, with a magnitude inferior to few others in Europe.

The first big problem which confronted Washington and the commissioners was to bring into harmony the rival landowners who were extremely interested in acquiring financial rewards anyway they could. There was considerable chaos in the months between the passage of the Residence Bill in July of 1790 and the selection of the Potomac site in January of 1791. Jealousies and tempers grew to a high pitch between all landowners for approximately twenty miles along the Potomac River. None of the landowners had any success in convincing George Washington where the proper site should be located. He and Thomas Jefferson finally made the decision in January of 1791, and this reduced the tension to a smaller group.

The area between Rock Creek and the Eastern Branch was divided into farms and plantations and owned by nineteen proprietors. Several towns were already

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3Frary, op. cit., p. 17

4Page, op. cit., p. 49 (Page used several of George Washington's letters).
located in the district although Georgetown wasn't included. It was already too big and the land around the town was extremely expensive. There were, however, several places that had been laid out as towns. There were Carrollsburgh, Hamburgh, and Alexandria, of which the latter had the larger population.

"When Washington arrived in the future National Capital he found the great task before him." He called the landowners together and showed them where they all could receive profit if they cooperated instead of competing against each other and causing rivalries and jealousies. Out of the nineteen landowners Washington found himself face to face with one man, David Burnes, with whom neither prestige nor reason prevailed in the least.

David Burnes owned most of the land between the President's House and the Capitol Building. Money wasn't the reason for his refusal to submit his claim, but, rather, his unorthodox pattern of not going along with the crowd and not wanting his peaceful and modest home to be turned into a thriving metropolis. The following conversation shows the trouble that President Washington had with Burnes.

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6 Early, op. cit., p. 10.
"Nae on ye life, mon," said the tight little Scot.

Washington's thin lips tightened. He was a great aristocrat and, in the tradition of the times, was enraged by resistance from common folks. "Had not the Federal city been laid out here, you would have died a poor farmer, Mr. Burnes," he said.

"Aye, mon," retorted Davy, "and had ye na married the Widow Custis, ya would a been a land surveyor today, and a dam poor one a that."

Washington, after trying to settle the dispute without force, informed him that unless he accepted the terms offered, he would have his lands condemned. When Burnes heard this, he replied, "Who are you, to charge me with extortion? You would never have been heard of but for old Mrs. Custis' lands and Niggers."\(^7\)

Public opinion finally compelled David Burnes to yield, and on March 30, 1791, the nineteen proprietors signed an agreement at Suter's Tavern in Georgetown. They agreed to give land, free of cost, for the laying out of streets, parks and other public improvements; they also agreed to sell such land as was needed for Government building and public improvements at twenty-five pounds an acre. The rest of the land was to be laid out in building lots and apportioned equally between the Federal Government and the original landowners. \(^7\)Page, op. cit., p. 46.
has included in his book a copy of the original agreement.

"We, the subscribers, in consideration of the great benefits we expect to derive from having the Federal City laid upon our lands, do hereby agree and bind ourselves, heirs, executors and administrators, to convey, in Trust, to the President of the United States, or Commissioners, or such person or persons as he shall appoint, by good and sufficient deeds, in Fee simple, the whole of our respective Lands which he may think proper to include within the lines of the Federal City, for the purpose and on the following conditions:

The President shall have the sole power of directing the Federal City to be laid off in what manner he pleases. He may retain any number of Squares he may think proper for public improvements, or other public Uses, and the lots only which shall be laid off shall be a joint property between the Trustees on behalf of the public, and each present proprietor, and the same shall be fairly and equally divided between the public and individuals, as soon as may be, after the City shall be laid off.

For the streets the proprietors shall receive no compensation; but for the squares or Lands in any form, which shall be taken for public buildings, or any kind of public improvements, or uses, the proprietors, whose lands shall be so taken, shall receive at the rate of twenty-five pounds per acre, to be paid by the public.

The whole wood on the Lands shall be the property of the proprietors.

Nothing herein contained shall affect the Lots which any of the parties to this Agreement may hold in the Towns of Carrollsburgh and Hamilton.

In witness whereof we have hereunto set our hands and Seals, this thirtieth day of March, 1791."

In his diary, George Washington said concerning this agreement between the landowners:

Page, op. cit., p. 49.
"The parties to whom I have addressed myself today, being taken the matter into consideration, saw the propriety of my observations; and that whilst they were contending for the shadow they might loose substance; and therefore mutually agree and entered into articles to surrender for public purposes one half of the land." 9

The land which was being considered for the city proper consisted of about six thousand acres. There were thirty-six hundred acres taken for the streets and about five hundred and forty were bought by the United States for public buildings and grounds. The lots totaled over twenty thousand, of which the United States took half and returned the rest to the property owners. The United States sold its share, and the proceeds went to buying the land for the public buildings and grounds.

With the land in their possession, Washington and his staff began to construct the capital city which was to be ready for the Government by November of 1800. Everybody who was connected with the new capital city worked very hard to fulfill the deadline for completion. All they needed was a little time and patience on the part of the citizens of the new nation.

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CHAPTER IV

INITIAL PLANS APPROVED

The new capital was planned under the direct and minute supervision of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. The political differences between George Washington and Thomas Jefferson multiplied as the years went on. But to the establishment of the capital city below the falls of the Potomac, they were in perfect agreement.¹ There is no doubt that the creative and propelling force was Washington himself while the intellect and directing power was Jefferson. "These two combined to produce the breadth and greatness of the plan."² Their ideas were carried out successfully by the commissioners, engineers, and architects.

The overall magnificence and grandeur was the work of L'Enfant, whose job it was to prepare plans for the city. He had a great imagination which in a few months got him into serious trouble with everybody that he was working with.

²Page, op. cit., p. 53.
He sent a letter to Thomas Jefferson requesting plans of foreign cities which he thought would help in drawing adequate and modern plans for the capital city. The letter dated April 4, 1791, reads as follows:

"I would be very much obliged to you if you could procure for me whatever may fall within your reach of any of the different grand city now existing such as for example as London--Madrid--Amsterdam--Naples--Venice--Genoa--Florence--together with particular maps of any sea ports or dock yards and arsenals as you may know to be the most compleat in their improvement..."

Jefferson did supply L'Enfant with considerable material concerning European cities, but the Frenchman followed his individual bent and developed the plan largely in conformity with the grandiose scheme of Versailles, in which regularly laid out streets are intersected by radiating avenues.

"On August 6, 1791, L'Enfant sent a sketch to President Washington with a note, 'the plan altered agreeable to your suggestion.' He included vistas and axes, sites for monuments and museums, parks and pleasure gardens, and canals and fountains. Many of his plans were too modern and elaborate for a nation which was somewhat in financial chaos. His plan was generally accepted

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3 Padover, op. cit., p. 57.
4 Frary, op. cit., p. 6.
although there were a few corrections made by Washington and Jefferson.

L'Enfant was an engineer of tremendous foresight, and there is little doubt that his genius for city planning was far ahead of his time. The L'Enfant plan was the first and most comprehensive plan ever designed for any city. The new capital was designed for a city of eight hundred thousand people. The avenues were to be one hundred and sixty feet in width. "There were two great focal points—the Capitol and the White House—each with its intersecting avenues that add beauty and charm to the city and at the same time make distant parts of the new city easy of access." It was L'Enfant's intention to render impossible in Washington such barricading of streets as had spelled ruin in Paris. From the Capitol principal avenues radiated like spokes of a wheel, commanding all approaches as to a fortress. At strategic points along the avenues are circles, originally planned as fortification points.  

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7Ibid., p. 25.
8Hazelton, op. cit., p. 10.
"There were to be gardens and fountains (enormous fountains!), but nothing was to interfere with the view, for L'Enfant was in love with the proud vistas and magnificent distances.\(^{10}\)

In 1930, William Partridge, consulting architect of the National Park and Planning Commission gave intensive study to the L'Enfant plan. He concludes:

L'Enfant created his own plan which was original and unique. No mention can be found of Versailles or London which was formerly conceived. His design was made to model the existing topography of the district. He used only the maps that Jefferson leaned him for a means of comparison or aiding in the betterment of his plan. The merits of the plan of L'Enfant have been duly acknowledged by all.\(^{11}\)

On September 8, 1791, Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State, and James Madison, in conference with the commissioners of the district decided on the following proposal:\(^{12}\)

"To name the streets of the Federal city alphabetically one way and numerically the other from the Capitol and that the name of the City and Territory shall be the City of Washington and the Territory of Columbia."

The city was also divided up into four sections--northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest. The Capitol served as the center and North and South Capitol Street divided north and south. L'Enfant incorporated this simple system

\(^{10}\)Early, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 11.


One fallacy that has been widely repeated and almost established as fact concerns the laying out of the city. It claims that the names of the southern states were given to those avenues which were at that time conceived to be the most promising and prominent while the names of the northern states were given to avenues which at the time were supposed to be quite secondary. However, a glimpse of the map will readily prove that this fallacy had no foundation. It is apparent that the best one was given to Pennsylvania, which connects the Capitol with the White House and was to extend west to Georgetown and to the Eastern Branch on the east. The rest, which were named after the twelve remaining original states with Rhode Island being named last because it was the last state to ratify the Constitution, were equally divided among several vantage points in the new capital city.

In June of 1791, George Washington, Major L'Enfant, and the commissioners rode over the land to choose the location of the President's Mansion and the

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14 Page, op. cit., p. 69.
Capitol Building. Washington described this incident in his diary:

"...I went out with Major L'Enfant and Mr. Ellicott to take a more perfect view of the ground, in order to decide finally on the spots on which to build the public buildings." \(^\text{15}\)

The site that they chose for the Capitol Building is exactly where it stands today—a hill, called Jenkin's Hill, rising eighty-eight feet above the Potomac River. "In referring to Jenkin's Hill, the young Frenchman spoke of it as 'a pedestal waiting for a monument.' \(^\text{16}\)

There is no doubt that it has served a useful purpose, for the Capitol Building now resting on the top of the hill is a fitting monument for the oldest Republic in the world.

They chose a smaller rise of land about one and a half miles northwest of the Capitol, as the site of the President's Mansion. In one of his letters, George Washington says that "this wide separation of Congress and the Executive Departments was intended to prevent members of Congress from too frequently visiting the various departments." \(^\text{17}\)

The two buildings were to be joined

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\(^{15}\) Fitzpatrick, op. cit., IV p. 200.


\(^{17}\) Joseph West Moore, Pictorial Washington (Providence: J. A. & R. A. Reed, Publisher, 1864), p. 28.
by a highway one hundred and sixty feet wide, which was later named Pennsylvania Avenue.

On September 9, 1791, L’Enfant received a letter from the commissioners informing the architect that they had agreed that the Federal district should be called, 'The Territory of Columbia,' and the Federal city, 'The City of Washington,' and he was directed to entitle his maps according to those specifications.18

18Craig, op. cit., p. 2.
CHAPTER V

THE ARCHITECTS AND THEIR PLANS

By March, 1792, the commissioners were authorized by President Washington to advertise for competitive designs for the Capitol Building and the President's House. A prize of five hundred dollars and a building lot were offered for the best design of each building. The job of supervising construction was also available to the winning applicant if he wanted the job and if he was capable of fulfilling it expertly.

According to the words of George Washington, the President's House was to have "the sumptuousness of a palace, the convenience of a house, and the agreeableness of a country seat." Some of his colleagues disagreed saying that the plans were too grandiose, but the basic ideas were carried out as Washington had intended.

Among the designs which were submitted for the President's House was one by an Irish-American from Charleston, South Carolina named James Hoban. His design was accepted on July 17 and along with the prize, he was also given the job of supervising construction.

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James Hoban was born in Ireland and came to America after the American Revolution. He established himself in Philadelphia, although the following advertisement which he placed in a Philadelphia paper failed to make his stay there a long one:

"Any gentleman who wishes to build in an elegant style, may hear of a person properly calculated for that purpose, who may execute the Joining and Carpenter's business in the modern taste." 2

There seemed to be no gentleman in Philadelphia who wished a building of elegant style, so he soon appeared in South Carolina, where he remained until 1792. His ability became recognized, and in 1791, he designed the state Capitol at Columbia, where it stood until it was burned in 1865.

When the competition for the public buildings was advertised, he returned to Philadelphia in 1792. After he won the contest, he remained on the job continuously until his death in 1831. He also helped supervise construction of the Capitol Building as well as other buildings in the city. He soon acquired large holdings in the city and when the new district was incorporated as a city in 1802, he was elected to the city council. He rebuilt the President's House after it was burned by the British in 1814, and he designed and erected the State and War

2 Frary, op. cit., p. 27.
offices. He was definitely a solid citizen who loved his new country.

The Dictionary of American Biography describes James Hoban as follows:

"Quiet and conciliatory, but self-respecting and capable of firmness when the occasion demanded, Hoban was the only personage connected with the Federal City who remained continuously identified with it from its inception."

His even temper and reliability kept Hoban on very friendly terms with all of the personnel with whom he worked.

The selection of the best design of the Capitol Building was proving difficult since all of the entries were rejected because they were either too elaborate or too expensive. A little later, Stephen Hallet, living in New York, sent a sketch to the commissioners which they liked immediately because it was definitely an improvement over the original entries, being simple and completely adequate for Congress.

However, before Hallet's design was completed, Dr. William Thornton, an Englishman, submitted to George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, a design which they immediately adopted. President Washington sent a communication to the commissioners requesting the adoption of

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Thornton's plan instead of Hallet's, but suggesting they do it with delicacy. "Jefferson generously approved of it as simple, noble, beautiful, excellently distributed, and moderate in size." Since Thornton had no practical knowledge of architecture, the job of constructing the Capitol Building was entrusted to Hallet. The latter was very disgruntled with George Washington because his plan wasn't accepted after he had had the promise of the commissioners that everybody would approve it. Nevertheless, he accepted the job as supervisory architect at a salary of four hundred dollars per year.

Hallet, as supervisor of construction, had an opportunity for revenge, and he searched hard for defects in Thornton's plans. He proposed several alterations which were rejected by the commissioners. This hurt his pride deeply because he was an architect of superior training and had received high honors from the schools of France. He considered Thornton as an amateur and was humiliated because Thornton was awarded the prize.

William Thornton was born on the island of Torlote in the West Indies, and after he received his medical degree at Aberdeen University in Britain, he

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4 Moore, op. cit., p. 70.

came to America and became a citizen of Delaware in 1788. Later, he moved to Philadelphia, where he won a contest for his design of the Library Company of Philadelphia, which stood until 1880.

After he had won the contest for the design of the Capitol Building, he acted as an assistant supervisor of construction, and shortly thereafter, he became one of the commissioners. He also designed several homes in the new city. He designed the Octagon for John Tayloe, and Woodlawn for Washington's adopted daughter, Eleanor Custis. In 1802, after the commission was abolished, he was put in charge of patents by Thomas Jefferson. He is credited with having saved the Patent Office from burning in 1814 by running down the hill and verbally stopping the British by humanitarian requests.

"An universal genius, Thornton was the friend of the early presidents, and the companion of the best in the land." Fast horses was his favorite pastime, and he spent many hours pursuing this interest.

The Dictionary of American Biography describes Dr. William Thornton as follows:

"He was a scholar and a gentleman—full of talent and eccentricity—a Quaker by profession, a painter, a poet, and a horse-racer—well acquainted with the mechanic arts... He was a man

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6Hazelton, op. cit., p. 21.
of infinite honour, humane and generous, yet fond of field sports--his company was a complete antidote of dullness."

The architect of the Federal City, L'Enfant, despite his great genius for city planning, had a very precariously fateful temperament. "L'Enfant was so impressed by the grandeur of the work and his own importance as the founder of the city that he quite lost his head." He was supposed to be subordinate to the commissioners although he was allowed to proceed unhampered for a while. In September, 1791, the commissioners instructed L'Enfant to number and letter the streets and then to submit a copy of his plan which was to be used in connection with the sale of the public lots. But L'Enfant refused to comply with the latter request because he felt that speculators would take advantage of the plan and would buy up large parcels of land in the promising sections. He was probably correct in this assumption because land sharks had already appeared on the scene, but he had no authority to decide upon policies.

7Johnson, ed. op. cit., p. 506.
8Passos, American Heritage, X, p. 74.
9Washington: City and Capital, p. 44.
10Page, op. cit., p. 58
11Frary, op. cit., p. 7
Daniel Carroll, whose uncle was one of the commissioners, had just started to build a fine brick house. L'Enfant told him, "You cannot build your house there. The place you have chosen is in the middle of one of my avenues leading straight to the Capitol!"  
When Daniel Carroll wouldn't listen to the Major, L'Enfant sent his men to the house and they tore it down which added impetus to the already tedious situation.

Washington was not one to put up with such insubordination, and in November, 1791, he informed L'Enfant that in the future he must look to the commissioners for direction. L'Enfant had always listened to George Washington but before long, L'Enfant was in open rebellion against everybody that he worked with. "City commissioners and others, some perhaps with personal axes to grind, soon found it increasingly difficult to work with him."  

Finally, on March 14, 1792, due to pressure by the commissioners, Thomas Jefferson informed L'Enfant that he was no longer employed as city planner of the Federal City. L'Enfant was enraged and he left his office instantly with all of his drawings and documents. Fortunately,


due to the expert efficiency of Andrew Ellicott, who re­placed Major L'Enfant as city planner, the city continued to progress.

Major L'Enfant was very grieved about his dis­missal. He was offered $2,500 dollars and a lot near the President's House, but he refused both. He spent most of the rest of his life without employment and in poverty. He lived with friends in Maryland, although he appeared almost daily in the rotunda of the Capitol. He was de­scribed as:

"A tall, gaunt figure in a blue military coat, buttoned up to the throat, wearing a black stock, but without evidence of a shirt underneath. His hair was plastered down smooth, and on his head was a tall, bell-crowned beaver hat. He usually carried under his arm a roll of papers, relating to supposed claims against the govern­ment, and in his right hand swung a large silver headed cane."14

In 1802, L'Enfant stated his claim against the government as injury to his fortune and fame as an artist. He claimed that the government owed him about one hundred thousand dollars. However, Congress awarded him only what the commissioners had offered him eight years previous which was about twenty-three hundred dollars. He again refused to accept this meager amount.

Through the good offices of Thomas Jefferson, he was offered a professorship at West Point, but he

14Frary, op. cit., p. 10.
rejected this offer also. L'Enfant died in poverty on June 14, 1815, on the estate of Dudley Digges. "His estate was appraised at forty-six dollars and he was buried in the garden in an unmarked grave."15 Eighty-four years later, his body was removed from the garden and given the belated honor of a military burial in Arlington Cemetery.16 His grave is located in front of the Lee-Custis Mansion, which overlooks the beautiful city that he helped plan.

Had L'Enfant been of moderate temperament and a little more cooperative, there could have been no end to his fame and fortune. He was definitely a hundred years ahead of his time. Natural features, which most architects would attempt to change to suit their plans, were included by L'Enfant in his plan to make the Federal City the most beautiful one in the world for centuries to come. However, L'Enfant didn't understand discipline nor expense when he incorporated his ideas for the nation's capital. "His disregard for money was epic. He was too grand to study ways and means."17

L'Enfant's plan for the new capital greatly resembles the city of today. His broad avenues, parks,

15Prary, op. cit., p. 10
16Washington: City and Capital, p. 45.
17Passos, American Heritage, X, p. 77.
circles, and vistas are part of the beauty of Washington. The Mall was conceived by him and to add to the beauty, a fitting monument to George Washington was to be part of it. His great Pennsylvania Avenue has had a few obstructions placed on its path, but for the most part, it has remained the same as L'Enfant intended. The city will always carry the mark of his originality and brilliance.
CHAPTER VI

THE BUILDING BEGINS

The choice of Andrew Ellicott to replace L'Enfant was definitely a prudent one. He was very familiar with the layout having been on the ground longer than L'Enfant. His chief work was to redraw L'Enfant's plans of the city. Ellicott worked out the details beautifully, and he finished the final map of the district in October, 1792, and George Washington immediately had it engraved.

Since the plans for the President's House were completed first, the cornerstone was laid on October 13, 1792, by James Hoban, the architect. Several sources have indicated that George Washington laid the cornerstone, but the records show that Washington and his family were in Philadelphia. The site of the President's House was a slight elevation on the banks of the Potomac River, approximately halfway between Capitol Hill and the little city of Georgetown.¹

The President's House was designed by Hoban to house the head of a nation whose population was five

million and which would some day reach the impressive figure of fifteen million. The building that Hoban constructed would not be recognized from the outside, but the interior has remained practically the same. The building was planned to be one hundred and sixty feet long and eighty feet wide with three main stories rising from the ground floor. "In his design he followed that of a palace of the Duke of Leinster, in Dublin, and the White House, as it stands today, bears a marked resemblance to its foreign prototype."² The styles of the building were definitely European in all respects.

In 1792, when the President's House was begun, it was the idea of Hoban to construct a mansion larger than Mount Vernon or Gunston Hall, which were all opulent showplaces for their day, to adequately accommodate and attract the best qualified men to the office of President of the United States. Included in Hoban's plans were a dining room seating one hundred persons, three large parlors, and more than a dozen bedrooms upstairs plus innumerable office space.

The President's House was just getting underway when the cornerstone for the Capitol Building was laid with elaborate Masonic and civic ceremonies by George Washington, who delivered an oration on September 18, 1793. He was

²Moore, op. cit., p. 138.
just returning from his trip from the South having timed his journey for the purpose of making the occasion notable. 3

The ceremony was grand and impressive, and large numbers from various parts of the country attended. On the cornerstone was placed a large silver plate, which was inscribed as follows:

"This southeast cornerstone of the Capitol of the United States of America on the City of Washington was laid on the 18th day of September, 1793, in the 13th year of American Independence, in the first year of the second term of the Presidency of George Washington, whose virtues in the civil administration of his country have been as conspicuous and beneficial as his military valor and prudence have been useful in establishing her liberties, and in the Year of Masonry 5793, by the President of the United States in concert with the Grand Lodge of Maryland, several Lodges under its jurisdiction, and Lodge No. 22, from Alexandria, Virginia." 4

After the ceremony, the people retired to an extensive booth where they enjoyed a barbecue feast. The foundation of the Capitol Building was now laid and they had seven years and three months to finish it.

The Capitol Building today one of the grandest structures in the world, covers an area of six hundred and fifty-two feet, more than three and a half acres. It has a principal story, and attic story, which rests upon a rustic basement. The basement story contains the Law

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3Page, op. cit., p. 76.

4Moore, op. cit., p. 71.
Library, document rooms, and several restaurants. The principal story is devoted to Statuary Hall, Library of Congress, and halls of the houses of Congress. The attic story is used for committee rooms. These features were designed by Thornton, although some of these offices have since been moved elsewhere.

The central part of the Capitol Building still resembles the main Thornton plan. The Capitol Building, however, does show the architectural direction and the thinking of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. "As Virginie gentlemen they were schooled in architecture and cast on the Capitol City the indelible imprint of their personalities." The presence of these two men appears in practically every plan in the Federal City, especially their adding of the finishing touches.

Soon after the cornerstone of the Capitol was completed, Heban was given the job of construction superintendent of the President's House and the Capitol. Hallet remained on the job as assistant, but he was extremely jealous of anyone who had more authority than he did. Finally, on November 15, 1794, Hallet was formally discharged.

To replace him was George Hadfield, an Englishman

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of great promise, but he lacked experience and soon found himself in the same trouble as his two predecessors. He was dismissed in 1798, but he remained in the city working on various projects. He designed the Treasury and Executive offices, and the residence of George Washington Parke Custis, which is best known as the home of Robert E. Lee.

While the President's House and the Capitol Building were progressing, two other public Buildings were being erected. They were the Treasury Building and the War Office, which were located on the central portion of the old War Department Building located near the White House. They were simply brick structures, two stories high and containing about thirty rooms each.

There were about three hundred and seventy-three houses that were started about 1795 and which were completed about 1800. Most of these houses were built by speculators who had purchased lots from the government. They built elaborate homes for themselves but less substantial homes to sell or rent. However, under building regulations and the conditions attached to the sale of lots, it was necessary for purchaser to build fairly substantial houses.

In July, 1793, King George's first envoy, Sir George Hammond, and his wife visited the site of the new Federal City. "They were enchanted by the natural beauty
of the neighborhood, but astonished at the slow progress of the surveyors and builders. Hammond doubted very much if this great project would ever be carried out since it was not improbable that a succeeding administration or Congress might oppose the removal of the capital from Philadelphia.

Public opinion was definitely against the project of establishing a new capital. The opinion was that Philadelphia was better equipped to handle the capital of a young nation than was a wilderness. Newspapers in New York, Philadelphia, and New England cracked amusing jokes at the expense of the infant city. The Capitol was called "the palace in the wilderness," and Pennsylvania Avenue "the great Serbonian Bog." Georgetown was declared as a "city of houses without streets" while Washington was classified as a "city of streets without houses." Only one favorable thing seems to have been said, and that was:

"Washington is the happiest region of flowers, and a garden here might be made to yield something for the basket of Flora for nearly three-quarters of the year." 

The building of the two public buildings caused considerable labor trouble. There were only a few good

7Moore, op. cit., p. 37.
mechanics who were capable of executing work of the quality needed to beautify the national capital. Masons and carpenters were very hard to find. A few men were sent to the North and also to Europe in an attempt to find skilled laborers to complete the delicate job. A few workers were secured, but the supervisors were able to work along at a steady pace even without very many skilled workers. There was never enough money to pay the workmen. "There were never enough workmen to do the work, and when they arrived, they found no houses to live in." 

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8Passos, American Heritage, X, p. 77.
CHAPTER VII
SPECULATION

The commissioners now had the herculean task of selling the desirable building sites in order to pay for constructing the public buildings. Since there was no proper map of the city, because L'Enfant refused to submit his maps to the commissioners, prospective buyers couldn't identify lots which they were expected to bid for, and actual purchasers would not be able to identify lots if they did buy them. The government had five hundred and forty-one lots of what were considered desirable building sites.

The first auction sale was held in Georgetown on October 19, 1791. "The commissioners executed a number of contracts for the sale of lots in parcels on easy payments, on condition that the buyers should erect brick houses, two stories high on the property within a certain time."¹ After extensive advertisement had been made, three days had only produced the sale of twenty-two lots. "L'Enfant's apprehension that the public would rush in and purchase all the desirable lots had proven a dream."²

¹Moore, op. cit., p. 34-5.
²Page, op. cit., p. 78.
A year later in September another sale of public lots was held and this time only thirty-four lots were purchased. However, a third attempt was made to dispose of the land a year later. This effort brought only the sale of thirty lots in the Federal City.

It was now evident to everybody that public auctions were not the means by which to secure inhabitants for the new city. President Washington therefore authorized the commissioners to sell land by private sale. This method proved to give the necessary impetus toward creating new interest in the Federal City.

Within a short time the great promoters had arrived in Washington to engage in one of their speculations. "Robert Morris, James Greenleaf, Thomas Law, and John Nicolson were only a few of the promoters who invested money." However, within a year upon arrival, these speculators held a monopoly of the local realty and were asking such exorbitant prices that sales decreased slightly. Nevertheless, as Page indicates:

"Rivalry is the mother of Progress, and, as frequently in such cases, no sooner had the City of Washington been laid off and the door thrown open to investors than a gambling spirit manifested itself and speculation in its values become rife." 4

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4 Page, op. cit., p. 79.
Robert Morris, who was born in England, had millions of acres in his possession. It is said that he once offered Washington the chance to go into the North American Land Company. But George Washington remonstrated with Morris for speculating at his age. Morris replied, "I can never do things in the small; I must be either a man or a mouse."  

Morris was very active during the American Revolution and helped greatly with his financial contributions. He was in charge of the Council of Safety in the absence of Benjamin Franklin, and later, he served on the Committee of Correspondence. He first voted against the Declaration of Independence, but, in August of 1776, he signed it.

The *Dictionary of American Biography* describes Morris as:

"By sheer personal ability he won and merited the affectionate respect of the most intelligent and discriminating of the public character of his time. Certainly there was none to whom the commander-in-chief owed more. He was the most generous and lavish of hosts."

James Greenleaf was considered first and foremost in the field of speculation. He purchased three thousand lots at $66.50 each, but no money changed hands. Payments were to be spread over a period of seven years without

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5Page, *op. cit.*, p. 80

interest beginning May 1, 1794. The lots were to be sold alternately and a condition was attached that he would erect ten houses yearly, and covering a twelve hundred square foot area. The agreement also contained further conditions as to subsequent sales, mortgages, etc.

John Nicolson had been Comptroller-General of the United States at the early age of twenty-three, and at one time, he owned in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania three million, seven hundred thousand acres, one-seventh of which he held by undisputed right. He was accused in the House of Representatives of malfeasance in office, and an impeachment trial was held; but he was acquitted by the Senate.

Since Greenleaf was the first to purchase lots, he soon went into partnership with Nicolson and Morris. They launched a grand scheme to float a great loan in Holland, which was successful since they succeeded in acquiring three million pounds. They purchased fifteen hundred lots which they sold in Holland for one thousand pounds a lot, an increase of three hundred per cent. This was indeed speculation.

The vast undertakings which these three great promoters attempted met in complications. Not content with six thousand lots originally purchased, they secured over twelve hundred additional lots, besides some that Greenleaf had purchased individually. The retransfer was
very confusing and the whole business went to smash with long rows of houses half completed. After a few months of desertion, a new era had dawned.

Eventually, Morris, Greenleaf and Nicolson became absolutely bankrupt, and Morris, after having spent three years in a debtors' prison, was released to spend the rest of his life in poverty, living on a small annual pension of fifteen hundred dollars which had been allowed to his wife by his creditors. Nicolson owed nearly twelve million when the crash came. Being greedy he caused man to spell his own ruin.

President Washington did very little interfering in the private purchases by the speculators. He approved of the first sale to Greenleaf, and so he wrote to his close friend and secretary, Colonel Tobias Lear, shortly after the execution of the agreement:

"You will learn from Mr. Greenleaf that he had dipped deeply in the concerns of the Federal city. I think he has done so on very advantageous terms for himself, and I am pleased with it notwithstanding on public grounds as it may give facility to the operations at that place; at the same time it is embarking him and his friends in a measure which, although it could not well fail under any circumstances that are likely to happen, may be considerably promoted by men of Spirit with large Capitals."

However, he strongly disapproved of the second sale on such a large scale, and he expressed his thoughts on the subject to Daniel Carroll. He approved of private sales only to

7Page, op. cit., p. 86.
get the wheels in motion, and why are the speculators to pocket so much money by buying lots for eighty dollars a lot and selling them for three hundred dollars a lot. It seemed that the commissioners were not competent to make such bargains.

In the meantime, Thomas Law and William Granch arrived on the scene. The latter was a man of tremendous ability. Under John Adams he was appointed a Justice of the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia, and under Jefferson he was made Chief Justice of that court. He was also the first reporter of the Supreme Court of the United States. However, the most notable of the second group of speculators, as far as the Federal City was concerned, was Thomas Law.

Thomas Law arrived in this country in the summer of 1794 with the desire for adventure which led him to be one of the most enthusiastic promoters of the Federal City. Law was a man of high social standing in Europe and possessed good letters, which brought him in contact with the most influential people in this country. He bought on option a large number of lots from Greenleaf, but he did not come to Washington until the following winter. He became extremely engrossed over the new Federal City.

Among his earliest ventures was one in which he was eminently successful. Within eighteen months after
he had arrived in this country, he married the grand-
daughter of Martha Washington in March, 1796. However,
the marriage lasted only a year, but instead of being
depressed, he seemed to put forth more enthusiasm over
his undertakings.

The commissioners soon realized that the build-
ing fund would have to be replenished from other sources
than the sale of city lots.\textsuperscript{8} The states of Maryland and
Virginia were greatly interested in the founding of the
seat of the National Government within their borders,
and they generously voted a large sum of money as a gift
to the United States to aid in the erection of the public
edifices.\textsuperscript{9} In 1796, Virginia contributed one hundred
and twenty-five thousand dollars and Maryland gave seventy-
two thousand dollars. Shortly afterward, it was necessary
to secure more capital. The commissioners tried unsuccess-
fully to borrow money from European bankers, and Congress
was strangely dilatory in making an appropriation. In
response to the appeal of President Washington, Maryland
authorized a loan of one hundred thousand dollars.

Finally, in the fall of 1796, Congress was gen-
erous and authorized a loan of three hundred thousand dollars
and Maryland took up two-thirds of the loan. In 1797,

\textsuperscript{8}Washington: City and Capital, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{9}Moore, op. cit., p. 29.
Congress took over the other one-third. However, the state of Maryland once again lent them one half that sum although she requested private security for its repayment.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in building the capital city was the want of funds. The commissioners struggled constantly throughout the construction era to find funds so that the buildings could be completed. Their hard and patient work brought the completion of the public buildings.
CHAPTER VIII
TRANSFER OF THE GOVERNMENT

The removal of the national capital from Philadelphia to Washington was not a stupendous task. Many people thought, however, that the capital would never be moved. They felt that too much money was being wasted on a useless cause in a wilderness of insects and disease. Each political party threw irrelevant words at each other for being a part of selecting the site of the permanent national capital.

Although it was rather depressing to loyal Philadelphians to see the government leave, they had gained much during the capital period. The population had increased about forty per cent. But when the government moved, the last faint hope had gone. For once it settled on the Potomac, despite its inconvenience for years to come, it would never return to Philadelphia.

At the time of George Washington's death, on December 14, 1799, Congress was in session at Philadelphia, and had received President Adams' reminder that under the provisions of the Residence Bill of 1790, Congress should

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1Edward Riley, Philadelphia, the National Capital, October, 1953, p. 24.
convene in the permanent seat of government on the first Monday in December, 1800. On May 15, 1800, Congress having adjourned, Adams directed his Cabinet to arrange their departmental affairs so that the public offices may be opened in the city of Washington by the 15th of June.  This was done, and Philadelphia ceased to be the seat of the national government on June 11, 1800.

In April, 1800, Congress had appropriated nine thousand dollars for furniture for the Capitol, and a sum not exceeding ten thousand dollars for making footways. "An appropriation not exceeding five thousand dollars was made at the same time for purchase of books for Congress and for preparing a library room." This was the beginning of the Library of Congress.

Most of the personnel of the government moved to Washington, taking routes as they pleased. "The few belongings of our country, boxes of papers, books, and furniture, came in a ship up the Potomac River." Some sources describe it as a small "packet sloop." The officials numbered fifty-four persons, including President Adams, the secretaries, and various clerks, who came up

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2Washington: City and Capital, p. 47.
4Fox, op. cit., p. 21
5Hazelton, op. cit., p. 25.
the Potomac with seven large boxes and five small ones containing the archives of the government.  

It is interesting that the entire cost of moving the government officials, clerks and records from Philadelphia to Washington amounted to sixty-four dollars. Only the Treasury Department was ready for occupancy, while the other offices were scattered about in leased houses.

President Adams came by stagecoach on May 27, 1800, and made a leisurely journey to the capital by way of Lancaster and Fredericktown. He arrived on June 3rd and was met on the boundary line of the district by a large crowd of respectable citizens on horseback. He was then escorted to the Union Tavern in Georgetown.

Adams remained in Washington until the 14th of June, and by this time all of the executive offices had been moved to Washington. He quickly completed his work and returned to his home in Quincy, Massachusetts. While he was away, the departments were busy adjusting themselves to their new environment.

The Post Office Department was located near the President's House and contained the living quarters of the

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6Moore, op. cit., p. 35.
7Latimer, op. cit., p. 30.
8Page, op. cit., p. 124.
Postmaster along with the department facilities. The total rent was six hundred dollars of which he suggested that the government should pay four hundred dollars. It seemed that all of the departments were provided with adequate headquarters, but little provision had been made for comfortable accommodations for the workers.

Congress met and held its sessions in the only partially finished wing of the Capitol Building. For seven years the Representatives met in the Senators' North Building, with a three year interlude in a queer oval-shaped structure temporarily erected on the south side and descriptively known as the "oven." The members of the Legislative Branch found suitable quarters in the only good hotel in the city, which was located about forty rods from the Capitol Building. However, the families of the Congressmen found it more desirable to stay in Philadelphia, since there was only limited and suitable housing for them in the new capital.

The Capitol Building also housed the Library of Congress which was just getting started. The United States Supreme Court shared the partially finished wing of the Capitol for their chambers.

"The Congress assembled in Washington for the

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first time on November 17, 1800, having present by the
roll call forty-four Representatives and thirteen Sena-
tors in the new capital." The poor showing was due in
part to the fact that the election of 1800 had not been
decided, and the fate of Washington hung in doubt as to
whether the government should be fixed there or should
be moved elsewhere.

On November 22, 1800, President Adams addressed
both houses and congratulated them:

"In the prospect of a residence not to be
changed; although there is cause to apprehend
that accommodations are not now complete as might
be wished, yet, there is great reason to believe
that this inconvenience will cease with the present
session."

The President's House wasn't completely finished,
but John Adams didn't inform his wife, Abigail, of this
fact or that it wouldn't be a comfortable home that win-
ter when he returned to Quincy. He also kept quiet the
fact that David Burnes, the man that George Washington
had trouble persuading to sell his land, had planted his
crops almost up to the front of the President's House.
However, the building was closer to being completed than
the Capitol Building was.

Most of the members of the government lived in
nearby Georgetown, which was referred to as the emporium

10Page, op. cit., p. 131
11Latimer, op. cit., p. 38.
for the members of Congress. Here they could live as they were accustomed to in their homes in Philadelphia. There were quaint little shops and other establishments which the new capital city had not yet produced.
CHAPTER IX
WASHINGTON IN 1800

Most of the descriptions of Washington in 1800 come from the correspondence of the early inhabitants, much of it from the ladies who had accompanied their husbands from Philadelphia. They had very little to occupy themselves since there was practically no social life in Washington at this time. They were extremely disappointed when they first glimpsed the new capital, since the city of Washington was different from the elaborate surroundings in the city of Philadelphia. The population of the new capital city was approximately thirty-six hundred when the government was transferred.¹

Abigail Adams, the President's wife, was perhaps the first opponent of Washington, D. C. She first arrived in Washington on November 17, 1800, from Philadelphia. Four days later she wrote to her sister in Quincy, Massachusetts. The following lines were taken from her letter to her sister describing the new capital and surrounding territory.

"I arrived in this city on Sunday the 16th ult. Having lost my way in the woods on Saturday in going from Baltimore, we took the road to Frederick and got nine miles out of our road. You find nothing but a forest & woods on the way, for 16 and 18 miles not a village. Here and there a thatched cottage without a single pane of glass, inhabited by Blacks....We took a direction as we supposed right, but in the first turn, went wrong, and were wandering more than two hours in the woods in different paths, holding down & breaking bows of trees which we could not pass, untill we met a solitary black fellow with a horse and cart. We inquired of him our way, and he kindly offered to conduct us, which he did two miles, and then gave us such a clue as led us out to the post road and the Inn, where we got some dinner.... I arrived about one o'clock at this place known by the name of the city, and the Name is all that you can call so. As I expected to find it a new country, with Houses scattered over a space of ten miles, and trees and stumps in plenty with, a castle of a House--so I found it--The President's House is in a beautiful situation in front of which is the Potomac with a view of Alexandria. The country around is romantic but a wild, a wilderness at Present.

I have been to George Town....It is the dirtiest Hole I ever saw for a place of any trade, or respectability of inhabitants. It is only one mile from me but a quagmire after every rain....

This day the President meets the two Houses to deliver the speech. There has not been a House until yesterday. This House is twice as large as our meeting House. I believe the great Hall is as Bigg. I am sure tis twice as long. Cut your coat according to your cloth. But this House is built for ages to come....I had much rather live in the house in Philadelphia. Not one room or chamber is finished of the whole. It is habitable by fires in every part, thirteen of which we are obliged to keep daily, or sleep in wet & damp places."2

Shortly before on November 2, 1800, John Adams, writing to his wife in Quincy, said:

"Before I end my letter, I pray heaven to bestow the best of blessings on this house, and on all that shall hereafter inhabit it. May none but honest and wise men ever rule under this roof!"

However, Mrs. Adams was definitely more critical about her present situation in her correspondence than she was in public criticism. When asked how she liked the new capital, she would answer that the situation is beautiful, which was true. She realized, however, that anything in its infancy has inconveniences until conditions can be improved.

The President's House was far from finished in November of 1800. The mansion was surrounded by huts which housed the families of the carpenters. These huts had to remain because if they were torn down, the carpenters would leave.

The President's House had to be finished, and at the same time, the carpenters and their families had to have a place to live. No one could blame them, so the commissioners were obliged to let the carpenters stay in their huts. Nevertheless, strewn about the grounds were

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4Fox, op. cit., p. 27.
old buckhelms, pits for storing supplies, and stacks of rubbish.5

Abigail Adams was very optimistic about the future of Washington, but she couldn't help describing the living conditions of the President's House in her letters. She had to hang her clothes in the dining room. The principal stairs would not be completed until spring. Only six rooms were finished, but when the President's House was completed, she realized that it would be beautiful.

"Abigail Adams knew that all pioneers suffer discomfort and hardships, and she was the pioneer mother of the White House."6 She began immediately to make the mansion a home and a place in which to receive the nation's guests. By January, 1801, Mrs. Adams had the President's House in good running order.

The best description of the city, as it appeared at the time the government took possession, is found in a letter written by the Honorable John Cotton Smith, then a member of Congress from Connecticut. He said:

"Our approach to the city was accompanied with sensation not easily described. One wing of the Capitol had been erected, which, with the President's house, a mile distant from it, both constructed with white sandstone, were shining objects in dismal contrast with the scene around them...."
Pennsylvania Avenue, leading, as laid down on paper, from the Capitol to the Presidential mansion, was nearly the whole distance a deep morass covered with elder brushes.... The desolate aspect of the place was not augmented by a number of unfinished edifices at Greenleaf's Point.... There appeared to be but two really comfortable habitations in all respects, within the bounds of the city, one of which belonged to Dudley Carroll and the other to Notley Young. The roads in every direction were muddy and unimproved. A sidewalk was attempted in one instance by a covering formed of the chips hewed for the Capitol. It extended but a little way and was of little value; for in dry weather the sharp fragments cut our shoes, and in wet weather covered them with white mortar. In short, it was a new settlement."

The desolate appearance of the place is reflected without reserve in a letter from Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury, who wrote soon after his arrival on the scene:

"There are few houses in any one place, and most of them small, miserable huts, which present an awful contrast to the public buildings.... You may look in almost any direction, over an extent of ground nearly as large as the city of New York, without seeing a fence or any object except brick kilns and temporary huts for laborers."

Of course, his wife was hardly enthusiastic over this letter and she showed no great desire to take up residence in the new capital by the Potomac. He also included in his letter to his wife:

"There is one good tavern about forty rods from the Capitol.... I do not perceive how the

7Moore, op. cit., p. 36.
8Prary, op. cit., p. 57.
members of Congress can possibly secure lodgings unless they will consent to live like Scholars in a college or Monks in a monastery, crowded ten or twenty in one house, and utterly secluded from Society. The only resource for such as wish to live comfortably will be found in Georgetown, three miles distant, over as bad a Road in winter as the clay roads near Hartford.”

Gouverneur Morris wrote facetiously:

"We want nothing here but houses, cellars, kitchens, well-informed men, amiable women, and other trifles of this kind to make our city perfect. In short, it is the very best city in the world for a future residence."

Strangers began to poke fun at the capital. A French woman who came visiting said that Washington was 'a city of streets without houses.' She should have known that a dazzling capital city could not suddenly appear unless by magic.

Except for the two public buildings, the Capitol and the President's House, the city was a wilderness of swamp, pasture, and scrubland, dotted with small dwellings, shanties, and one tavern for government officials. There were three thousand inhabitants in the entire District, one hundred and nine brick houses, and two hundred and sixty-three frame ones, including the shanties.

It was a dreary and miserable landscape for those who had known the comforts and elegancies of New York.

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9Frary, op. cit., p. 57.

10Frary, op. cit., p. 57.

and Philadelphia. To those who came from abroad as diplomats or representatives to the new republic it must have seemed a place of savage exile.12

Americans as well as foreigners poked fun at the new capital. It was called the City of Magnificent Distances, the City of Miserable Morasses, and the Great Serbian Bog, where swarms of mosquitoes spread malaria. Much of it was under water after heavy rains, and it was not unusual to see men navigating in boats around the city.

Such was the capital city in which President John Adams, Secretary of State John Marshall, Secretary of the Treasury Oliver Wolcott, Jr., Secretary of War Samuel Dexter, Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddart, and other officials of the government took up their residence in the fall of 1800, twenty-four years after the Declaration of Independence was signed. A lot of work had been accomplished in a short period of time.

\[12\text{Ibid.}\]
CHAPTER X

THE CAPITAL IN JEFFERSON'S ADMINISTRATION

The election of Thomas Jefferson by the House of Representatives in 1801 caused the first great conflict in the new capital city. The social life as well as the political scene was changed drastically because of the change of parties. Even though the Federalists lost the election, they, nevertheless, had the opportunity of choosing between Aaron Burr and Thomas Jefferson. They disliked both men, and although the better man was chosen, it caused disension in the Federalist party, and, of course, between Hamilton and Burr.

There are many conflicting stories concerning the inauguration of Thomas Jefferson, the first President to be installed in the new capital city. That John Adams was embittered over the fact that he wasn't re-elected there is no doubt. He also had lost a son only a few weeks before the election of 1800. He worked on at the President's House far into the last night of his term, and then drove out of Washington at dawn to avoid attending Jefferson's inauguration.1 Adams did, however, communicate with

Jefferson before he left office.

"In order to save you Trouble and Expense of purchasing Horses and Carriages, which will not be necessary, I have to inform you that I shall leave in the stables of the United States seven horses and two Carriages with Horse and Property of the United States. They may not be suitable for you; but they will certainly save you a considerable Expense."  

Thomas Jefferson, before he moved into the President's House, lived at the Conrad boarding house, which was located about two hundred yards from the Capitol on New Jersey Avenue. Here he had a private drawing room, but aside from that, he lived on an equal basis with his fellow boarders.

On the day of his first inauguration, Thomas Jefferson walked the short distance from his boarding place to the two-winged and ugly uncompleted Capitol (the dome was not completed then) to be inaugurated as President of the United States. Then he returned to the boarding house where he remained for two weeks before he moved into the President's House.

A place for religious worship was not overlooked in the new city. There was in the first years of Jefferson's administration only one place for public worship, which was located at the bottom of Capitol Hill, near the

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present Peace Memorial. It was a very small frame build-
ing which had belonged to Daniel Carroll and had been used
as a tobacco warehouse.\footnote{Page, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 177.} It was here that President Jeffer-
son attended church on the Sabbath.

Soon there was a Roman Catholic Church on F Street,
which was also very small and crude. By 1837, there were
twenty-three churches of brick or stone. It appeared that
even though Sunday was a universal day for visits and enter-
tainment, church attendance was very good.

During the administrations of Jefferson, the city
improved considerably.\footnote{Gaemmerer, \textit{A Manual on the Origin and Develop-
ment of Washington}, p. 46.} He secured money from Congress for
public buildings. He planted poplar trees on Pennsylvania
Avenue, attempting to make the main avenue in the city more
than the swamp that appeared there when he first arrived.
He definitely used his artistic skill and taste for the im-
provement of the new capital city.

The President's House remained unfinished through
most of Jefferson's tenure as president. When it was com-
pleted, it was estimated that the original structure cost
about four hundred thousand dollars.\footnote{Report on the Commission on the Renovation of
the Executive Mansion, Edwin Bateman Morris (Com.), p. 29.} There were still no
bells, front stairs, or permanent doorsteps. Far corners
of the President's House were still cold and remained in this state until 1853. Andrew Jackson once remarked that "Hell itself couldn't beat that corner."\(^7\)

Jefferson at this point took upon himself to make a few necessary improvements in the President's House. He planted native trees on the grounds and took great pride in the appearance of the house itself. He brought from his beloved Monticello furniture, draperies, linens, silver, and then purchased enough furniture to complete twenty-three rooms.\(^8\) No wonder Thomas Jefferson was heavily in debt later in his life.

In 1803, President Jefferson appointed Benjamin Latrobe as architect of the Capitol, which was far from being completed or comfortable. Under Latrobe, construction of the Capitol Building soon began to take the form which had been planned by Thornton. Of course, Latrobe added a few slight changes to the Thornton plan, but basically, the Capitol generally resembled the plan of the first architect of the Capitol. Latrobe criticized the work of Thornton on the ground that he furnished simply a picture and not a plan for the building of the Capitol Building.\(^9\) This was true because Thornton's original plans

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\(^7\) Morris, op. cit., p. 29.


\(^9\) Hazelton, op. cit., p. 17
were locking in certain technical details with some unworkable features and insufficient specifications.  

Benjamin Latrobe was well versed in many areas due to his unquenchable passion for knowledge. He was also blessed with a great memory and possessed tremendous skill with a pencil and brush. He solved many construction problems for his colleagues who sought his advice.

Latrobe was born in England, although his name is of French origin. He attended the University of Leipsic, traveled through most of Europe, and served a brief period in the Prussian Army. Latrobe worked for several of the leading architects of Europe.

In 1796, he was offered the Office as Surveyor of the English Crown, but he sold his property and crossed the Atlantic with his family. They arrived in Norfolk, Virginia, and with his letters of introduction, he was admitted into the best of societies. He soon came into contact with Jefferson, and finally the latter offered him the job of supervising the best building project in the new land.

Latrobe had, however, considerable difficulty with Thornton and other members of the supervisory staff. In the first place, Thornton was always embittered at anyone

11Frary, op. cit., p. 61.
who attempted to alter his plans in the slightest detail. When President Jefferson appointed Latrobe, the latter was instructed to complete the already started South wing of the Capitol according to the plans of Thornton. When Latrobe approached the President with a few alterations, Jefferson directed him to confer on the changes with Thornton, who was then one of the three commissioners. From their meeting, Latrobe and Thornton became bitter enemies, each of whom tried his best to remove the other from his present office.

Latrobe, along with having difficulties with the contractors and other supervisory personnel, had a fairly substantial private practice which took him away from the Capitol on several occasions. For this he was severely criticized. He was definitely shrewd enough to ward off all of his foes, and in October, 1807, the House of Representatives met for the first time in the South Wing of the Capitol Building. Latrobe had done a good job in the six years since the time that Thomas Jefferson had appointed him. He continued as Supervisor of the Capitol into Madison's second administration.

The receptions of President Jefferson were considerably different than those of the drawing rooms of the Washingtons and Adamses. He threw open the President's

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12Pray, op. cit., p. 77.
House to the public. Some of these affairs caused definite complications, but his state dinners were delightfully planned. "No one knew better than he the social proprieties, and few men of his time cared so much for beauty."14

Since Thomas Jefferson was a widower, he had at times great difficulty in obtaining a hostess for his social functions. He had two married daughters who helped him on occasion. But Dolly Madison, wife of Jefferson's Secretary of State, served as official hostess for most of Jefferson's parties. He often called on her for assistance in his social duties. On one occasion, she received a note saying, "Thomas Jefferson begs Mrs. Madison to take care of female friends expected."15 She was delighted with this arrangement and when Jefferson's two daughters came to Washington, she introduced them into Washington society and helped them choose the proper clothes for official occasions. Actually, she served the longest social reign in the President's House because for sixteen years she was the official hostess for President Jefferson and her husband, James Madison, who succeeded him as President for eight years.

Washington was in Jefferson's administration very

13Latimer, op. cit., p. 40.
14Latimer, op. cit., p. 40.
15McConnell, op. cit., p. 12.
crude, but was definitely beginning to mold a gay and desirable social life. The nearby city of Georgetown added its unique charm to the new inhabitants. By the time Jefferson's second term had ended and Dolly Madison had officially taken over, the social life changed from one of formality to great excitement and gaiety.

On February 27, 1801, the District received its first legislation. It was far from being a complete act for local government, which they still don't have, but it did provide for a United States attorney for the District, a circuit court, the office of District Marshal and the office of the Register of Deeds.16

A year later the inhabitants had their second legislative act, which consisted of a mayor, who was appointed by the President, and a city council, elected annually by the people. The city was divided into five distinct districts: (1) the corporation of Washington, (2) the corporation of Georgetown, (3) the county of Washington, (4) the corporation of Alexandria, and (5) the county of Alexandria. However, the mayor of Georgetown and Alexandria were elected by the people.

16"Story of Its Development, 1774-1878," Congressional Digest, op. cit., p. 293
CHAPTER XI
CONCLUSION

By the end of Jefferson's second administration in 1809, the city was beginning to take the form of a typical American city. People were coming to the capital city to live and establish their businesses or work for the government. They could see that the new city had a tremendous potential of becoming one of the great intellectual and social centers in the United States.

The city was planned with great foresight by the original planners of the city. L'Enfant, the first city architect, laid out the city on a large scale that would accommodate a population of eight hundred thousand people, which according to the 1960 census, is practically the exact number of people now living in the District of Columbia. The city of Washington in 1960 greatly resembles the basic plan of L'Enfant, which he drew over one hundred and sixty years ago.

However, living in the city in 1809 was not easy. Every aspect of Washington showed several unfinished touches. The streets were laid out as planned, but the center of each street was rough and in some places was under water.
most of the time. The houses were fairly numerous, but they were built in a hurry without regard to beauty and endurance. The city was dirty and in some seasons you needed a rowboat more than you needed a pair of shoes.

Construction of the Federal City was started in 1792. This gave the supervisory staff, according to the Residence Bill of 1790, only eight years to make the new permanent capital ready for occupancy by the Federal Government. Obviously, the time limit was too short to make the capital complete and as convenient and accommodating as everyone expected. Near the buildings could be found assorted building materials that had been left. The appearance of the city was very bad due to a lack of neatness on the part of the workers.

Perhaps the biggest handicap during the first two decades of Washington was the lack of business establishments in which to buy food, clothing, personal services and other items. So consequently, the people had to shop in nearby Georgetown. However, according to the early descriptions of it, the stores left a lot to be desired.

The public buildings, especially the Capitol Building and the President's House, were still unfinished when Thomas Jefferson left office. The south wing had just been completed, but the roof still needed some work done to it. The President's House wasn't finished until
a year after President Madison took office. All of the effort to get them finished as soon as possible went to waste since the British burned both buildings in 1814.

Washington was truly a new city built by new personalities on the American scene. Most of the architects, L'Enfant, Thornton, Hoban, Hallet, Hadfield and Latrobe, were men of foreign birth. They had come to America to seek personal freedom and to take part in building a new nation. Although some of these men didn't last long on the job, they still, however, worked diligently at their occupation. Their efforts will always be enjoyed by posterity.

The location of the National Capital along the banks of the Potomac is appropriate for its purpose since the Indian word for Potomac means "the meeting places of the tribes." Now there are fifty tribes that discuss their problems on an equal basis beside the famous Potomac River.
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One of the best books on the period, although there is very little reference to the history of the national capital.


A general history. The early history of the national capital and the commissioners were discussed in the first four chapters.


This was the first book by him about the national capital. This one included more pictures and less research.


A guide book for a sightseer interested in unusual things to see or places to eat. There were several descriptions about the national capital which shed some light on my thesis.


This volume covered the period from 1789-1799. It was very helpful although there were some of the months missing during the critical stages of the building of the city.


Deals with the history of the period from 1799-1830. An excellent interpretation of the period
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More of a story-book than a scholarly manuscript. However, a few parts of the book were helpful especially describing the President's House as the first inhabitants saw it.

Frary, I. T. They Built The Capitol. Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1940.

An excellent research concerning the building of the Capitol Building with an extremely helpful introduction to the history of the District. The first six chapters were very valuable for primary source material.


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A social history of the city of Washington. Chapters 2 and 3 were very beneficial.


A comprehensive study of the history of the White House which in parts is very dull and poorly written. The account involving Hoban was most useful.


A very descriptive and flowery story of the interesting sites in the city. Some descriptions were useful.


A historical sketch of the nation's capital with brief descriptions of the public buildings and historic spots. Pages 104-126 were of interest as to the transfer of the government.
These letters were extremely helpful in understanding her feelings about the new capital. Excellent source material.

An excellent political history of the capital with a lot of interesting stories and source material. The first 100 pages were very enjoyable and helpful to read.

This book deals with social aspects of the national capital. Very patriotic interpretation.

Deals with the correspondence between Jefferson and the leading personalities of his time. Contains many letters dealing with the national capital and the commissioners.

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A lot of source material although there were many pictures. L'Enfant's plan was explained very thoroughly with maps.

A well written book on Jefferson and contains a few references about Jefferson and the national capital, especially his years as president in the new capital city.

A detailed account of Jefferson's life with very little reference to the building of the national capital.
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