

4-486

**Creating the Federal City, 1774–1800:
Potomac Fever**

Kenneth R. Bowling

Octagon Museum
Kym S. Rice, Guest Exhibition Curator

July 11–September 25, 1988

The American Institute of Architects Press
Washington, D.C., 1988

Kenneth R. Bowling, a native of Baltimore, Maryland, received his Ph.D. in American history from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1968. He is an authority on American politics in the years immediately following the War of Independence and serves as co-editor of the multivolume *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress*, a project based at George Washington University.

The American Institute of Architects Press
1735 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006

© 1988 by the American Institute of Architects. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States.

ISBN 1-55835-011-X

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Bowling, Kenneth R.

Creating the federal city, 1774-1800: Potomac fever /
Kenneth R. Bowling.

p. cm.

Bibliography: p.

1. United States Capitol (Washington, D.C.)—History.
2. United States—Capital and capitol—History—18th century.
3. Washington (D.C.)—Politics and government— To 1878. I. Title.

F204.C2B66 1988

975.3'01—dc19

88-16810

CIP

Cover: "View of the Capitol" by William Birch. Watercolor, 1800. Collection of the Library of Congress.

Contents

Illustrations	vi
Foreword	1
Introduction	3
I. Exclusive Jurisdiction: The Idea of an American Capital	7
II. Hudson, Delaware, and Susquehanna River Competitors	23
III. George Washington and Potomac Fever	39
IV. Congress Debates the Issue, 1783–90	61
V. Implementation of the Residence Act, 1790–1800	79
Select Bibliography	111

This publication and exhibition were made possible by grants from the AIA College of Fellows, the D.C. Community Humanities Council, and the Kiplinger Foundation.

Illustrations

View of the Capitol, by William Birch	cover
Plan and Perspective View of a House . . . belonging to Edwd. Langley, by Nicholas King	frontispiece
George Town and Federal City, by T. Cartwright after George Beck	2
East Elevation of the United States Capitol, by William Thornton	8
Portrait of George Washington, by unknown	10
The State House in Philadelphia, by James Trenchard after Charles Willson Peale	13
Portrait of Alexander Hamilton, by James Sharples	13
Nassau-Hall, by Henry Dawkins	18
Portrait of James Madison, by unknown	18
Map of Virginia, by Bishop James Madison	24
Georgetown College, by Augustus Köllner	27
House Intended for the President . . . in Philadelphia, by William and Thomas Birch	29
Stephens's Plan of the City of Philadelphia, by Theodore Leonhardt & Son after Thomas Stephens	31
Ferry Scene on the Susquehanna, by Pavel Petrovich Svinin	33
Lancaster County Courthouse, by Benjamin Henry Latrobe	33
Portrait of Thomas Hartley, attributed to Edward Green Malbone	35
View at Havre de Grace, by Benjamin Henry Latrobe	36
Plan of the Town of Baltimore, by A. P. Folie after James Poupard	38
East Branch of the Potomac River, by Augustus Köllner	40
Falls of the Potomac, by William Russell Birch	43
Duddington Plan of Washington, by Nicholas King	46
Portrait of Thomas Jefferson, by Michel Sokolnicki after Thaddeus Kosciusko	46
Description of plan of Washington, by George Walker	52
View of Georgetown, by George Isham Parkyns	54
Washington, by George Isham Parkyns	57
Permanent Residence of Congress, by David Stuart	58
Portrait of Elbridge Gerry, by James Barton Longacre after John Vanderlyn	62
The State House at Annapolis, by James Trenchard	64
View of New York City from Long Island, attributed to John Montresor	66
Portrait of Robert Morris, by Robert Edge Pine	70
Portrait of Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek, by John Wollaston	74
Congress Embarked Onboard the Ship Constitution, by unknown	77

Terms of sale of lots in Washington	81
Portrait of Thomas Corcoran, by Charles Peale Polk	84
Portrait of Hannah Lemmon Corcoran, by Charles Peale Polk	86
View of the Federal Edifice in New York, by unknown	89
Plan of the City of Washington, by James Thackara and John Vallance after Andrew Ellicott after Pierre-Charles L'Enfant	92
Map of Notley Young's property, by Nicholas King	92
Federal District boundary stone	94
Portrait of Dr. William Thornton, by Charles Balthazar Julien F�vret de Saint-M�min	97
West Elevation of the Capitol, by Stephen Hallet	99
View of Washington, by Nicholas King	99
The Six Buildings, by unknown	101
View of the Capitol from My Shop, by Benjamin Henry Latrobe	101
Portrait of the Washington Family, by Edward Savage	103
Map, territory of Columbia, by Andrew Ellicott	105
Plan of the White House Grounds, by unknown	107

Foreword

The American Architectural Foundation, the publicly oriented arm of The American Institute of Architects, is pleased to make our contribution, *Creating the Federal City*, to the bicentennial celebration of Washington, D.C. This excellent study, the first in a series of five exhibitions, encompasses the creation of the entire city. The impetus for this work, however, originates from a desire to better understand The Octagon, a structure rich in history and unique in its relationship to the early federal city. Through an appreciation of Washington's late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century geography, topography, and development, we will be able to fully appreciate the national treasure this house is.

We particularly appreciate our sponsors who gave generous support to the project. The D.C. Community Humanities Council, the Kiplinger Foundation, and the AIA College of Fellows provided major grants. Their enthusiasm for the project has encouraged us and has made this exhibition and book possible. The Octagon Society, chaired by Winthrop W. Faulkner, FAIA, provided additional financial assistance.

Many people have given generously of their time and expertise in the research and preparation of *Creating the Federal City*. We thank Nancy Davis, Director of the Octagon, who has been the driving force behind the exhibition. We also wish to express special appreciation to guest exhibition curator Kym Rice and guest research associate Ellen Kirven Donald.

The project owes a great deal to others who have given so much of their talent and devotion. We wish to gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Sherry Birk, Barbara Carson, Paula Dravec, Anthony Dyson, Edward Kelsey, Sherri Lee, Marilyn Montgomery, Betty Musselman, Ann Parenteau, Judith Schultz, and Pamela Scott. Thanks go to the members of the Octagon Committee, chaired by Maureen Quimby. Also, Janet Rumbarger deserves recognition for her editorial assistance, interest, and valuable suggestions.

We are an organization blessed with imaginative people furthering our mission to serve the public. We are grateful to our Board of Trustees under the leadership of Ted P. Pappas, FAIA, and Benjamin E. Brewer Jr., FAIA. Also, the Chairman of the Board of Regents, Thomas J. Eyerman, FAIA, RIBA, provided advice, counsel, and encouragement.

Finally, we thank our colleagues, friends, and, above all, our museum patrons who generously give of their time to participate, read, and give us suggestions for future programs and exhibitions.

James Perry Cramer
President, American Architectural Foundation

Introduction

The Octagon Research Series: Studies in the History of the Early Federal City

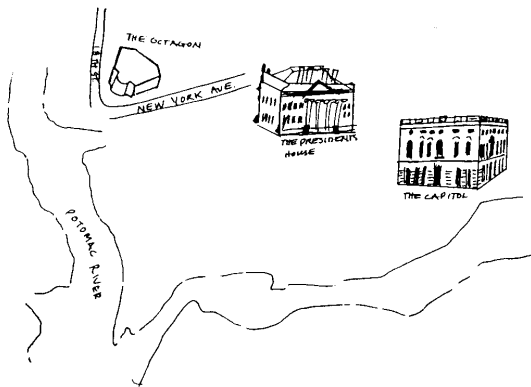
The Octagon Research Series focuses both on the larger realm of the early federal city and the precise history of the creation of one of its most renowned residences. The Octagon, one of the last surviving buildings of the early city, is a rich resource for such study. Concealed in its history lie questions and possibly many answers regarding the life of the early Republic. The house, as a material artifact, waits to be well scrutinized by architectural historians and scholars of material culture.

Three years were spent in fund-raising to support this research. We are grateful to the following sponsors for realizing the potential of this project and for providing their much-appreciated financial backing: AIA College of Fellows, a member of the Octagon Committee, and the Eva Gebhard-Gourgaud Foundation. With their support, sufficient research was completed to reveal that great treasures were at hand.

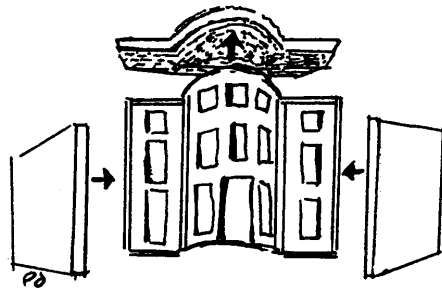
Preparations for the series included enlisting the help of Barbara Carson, who assisted in developing a comprehensive five-year research plan that is now in effect. The plan was reviewed by prominent scholars who divided the work into five topics, each of which will be addressed in an annual exhibition and catalog. By sharing the results of the research process with the public, each exhibition will broaden our understanding of the architectural, social, political, and cultural history of the early Republic.

The first exhibition, *Creating the Federal City: Potomac Fever*, funded by the AIA College of Fellows, D.C. Community Humanities Council, and the Kiplinger Foundation, provides a physical and geographical context for the Octagon. The physical evidence of the city's formation is presented in the exhibition. Such evidence was difficult to locate because portions of the eighteenth-century city are now incorporated into Maryland and Virginia; therefore, early records are scattered in all three jurisdictions. Moreover, many artifacts were lost when the city was burned during the War of 1812. The objects seen in the exhibition today, however, do represent a large portion of available material. Kym Rice, exhibition curator, masterfully met the chal-

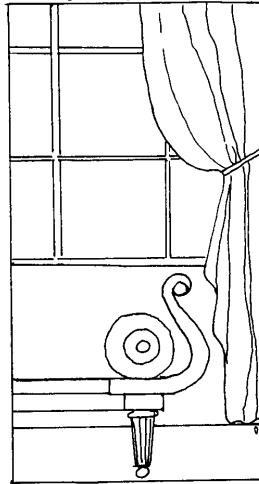
length of locating those artifacts and installing the exhibition. Kenneth Bowling's essay on the political maneuverings of the Founding Fathers complements the exhibit's display of physical evidence of the new city.



It is planned that each exhibition will develop in similar fashion. *Building the Octagon* (1989) will explore the technology of the early building trades; the relationship among craftsmen, designers, and builders; and the development of the town house form in other American cities with respect to the Octagon. These concepts will be examined through Octagon construction records found in the Tayloe papers.



We anticipate that the third exhibition, *Furnishing the Octagon* (1990), will examine surviving material evidence of the Tayloes' city household. It will investigate such issues as public versus private space as reflected in room usage, changes in the traditional gentry value systems, and consequent patterns of consumption and transmission of style.



The Cultural Environment in Early Washington (1991) will consider Tayloe's residency at the Octagon and the growing complexity of the city's economic and cultural life in the early years of the Republic.



Courtesy Division of Political History, Smithsonian Institution.

In 1992 the exhibition and catalog will focus on *Domestic Life in the Early Federal City*. Family life, work, the roles of women, slaves, and servants in the household, food preparation and preferences, and routines of daily life will be examined.



The significance of these exhibitions and catalogs lies in their cumulative effect: a complete reinterpretation of the Octagon for the public, an accurate refurnishing plan, an outreach program for local schools, and a scholarly contribution to the study of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This commitment to long-range goals and objectives will benefit every aspect of the museum—its restoration, collections, exhibitions, and public programs—and, thereby, move the Octagon into its third century with grace.

Nancy Davis
Director, The Octagon

I. Exclusive Jurisdiction: The Idea of an American Capital

The fight over the location of the United States capital caused more political turmoil than any other issue during the seven years Congress debated it. The issue threatened the very existence of the Union, as Revolutionary leaders sought to achieve a location in the best interest of themselves and their constituents. Despite their rhetoric, no one made the interest of the nation their predominant concern, for the idea of the Union was too new to outweigh loyalty to section, state, and locale. George Washington of Fairfax County, Virginia, had the interest of the Union more at heart than anyone because his place in its history, which motivated his actions throughout the Revolution, wed him to the Union's success. Nevertheless, the widely respected Washington behaved no less politically about the issue than the often vilified Robert Morris of Philadelphia. The Revolutionary generation wrote much less about the implications and role of a capital for a republican empire than they did about its location. In large part this reflects the fact that Americans understood so well the benefits connected with the location of a capital. They had fought over the sites for county seats and colonial and state capitals dozens of times before the struggle over the site of the federal capital.

From a political and economic standpoint, proximity to the seat of government meant access to federal offices and officials as well as the opportunity to take quick advantage of federal information, legislation, contracts, and jobs. Land and stock speculators considered such access of special importance. Hard money would emanate from and circulate about the capital. The construction of federal buildings offered employment and government-funded contracts for local residents. Property values in and about the site would rise. The federal government would pay for transportation improvements and the necessary military installations for defense. Profits to be realized from serving the needs of federal officeholders appeared as unlimited as the potential for government growth. Even farmers distant from proposed capital sites expected to reap benefits. If the capital became a commercial, manufacturing, and/or financial center—Amsterdam as well as Hague—it would generate vast economic growth. In 1783 congressmen estimated the annual value of the capital to a local econ-

omy at \$100,000 to \$150,000; five years later the estimate ran as high as \$250,000; and in 1789 James Madison set it at half a million. By 1790, when agreement on the location was finally reached, Thomas Jefferson put its worth at approximately a million dollars a year.

Regional supremacy within the Union and control of western resources were also at stake. The river on which the capital sat presumably would be the chosen route for penetration of the continent and the wealth that lay to the west. Throughout the latter part of the Revolution, sectional consciousness, sectional power within the Union, and the threat of dissolution of the Union influenced politics, just as they did during the nineteenth century. Such a sectionally divided society clearly understood that the power and prestige associated with the capital would provide political leverage to the section in which it was located.

Congressmen from all regions knew keenly the value of residing close enough to the seat of government to arrive early and remain throughout the session. During the 1780s the four southern states (generally considered to be Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia) remained convinced that they were a minority in the Union and that their interests were threatened by a combination of the five Middle states (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland) and the four New England states. But the South also believed that it would soon become the dominant influence in the Union. It predicted population expansion in the South and West and that new agricultural states in the West would ally themselves with the South. In the meantime southerners seldom neglected an opportunity to cite their minority status as reason for a more southern residence for Congress. The South saw the advantages of a southern exposure for providing the proper hue to government. Given the right location, southern views on any issue—including slavery—would be more readily heard than northern ones.

For those few Americans who considered the needs of the whole as well as the needs of the parts, the location of the capital had an additional role. Properly situated, it would cement the North, South, and West, thus ensuring the Union's survival and the prestige and respect Congress so desperately sought to establish for itself at home and abroad. The capital's site would reflect national pride and such American ideals as liberty, union, and republican empire. By 1789 some Americans expected their capi-

tal to become a new Rome, "the mistress of the western world, the patroness of science and of arts, the dispenser of freedom, justice and peace to unborn millions," or a new Byzantium, "the seat of science, manufactures and commerce for ages yet to come." Six years later the author of an "Essay on the City of Washington" saw the capital as the means of confirming forever a union that would one day rule all of North America. To such a capital would flock those Americans who sought to participate in, or witness, the theater of American political, economic, and cultural life and who had enough wealth to reside there. The United States capital would, he predicted, outshine Rome, London, and all the capitals of ancient and modern civilization.

Could such a capital be compatible with republicanism? Simply put, republicanism was an institutionally expressed political and social philosophy which rested on the belief that, although people were self-interested and power seeking, they were capable of self-government. People delegated sovereignty to popularly elected legislatures, supreme over executives. Representation was indirect, social distinctions but not aristocracy acceptable, and the interests of minorities protected. The goal of republicanism was to balance individual liberty with the good of the whole.

To those Americans who worried about the survival of republicanism, the dangers of a magnificent capital seemed immense, particularly if it became a commercial as well as political city. Mercy Warren of Massachusetts feared mobs, the introduction of monarchical ideas, the parade and trappings of aristocratic courts, and the arrival of European manners and the younger sons of European nobility. John Dickinson of Pennsylvania questioned the wisdom of locating the seat of government of a free people in any part of its territory that allowed black slavery. Patrick Henry of Virginia believed that the effect of proximity to the capital would be positive only if the federal government remained virtuous; if it, however, evolved into a tyranny, a citizen would be better off living on the frontier, distant from its influence. On the other hand, Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, blinded by the vision of a commercial capital situated on the Potomac, which he shared with George Washington, argued that the Republic could remain virtuous and that its capital, even were it to become a commercial center, need not suffer from the intrigue, luxury, dissipation, servility, and vices of the body so inherent to Tom Jones's cosmopolitan London.

Few Americans had specific notions about what cultural institutions should exist at the capital. As early as 1783, Rev. Jeremy Belknap of Boston proposed that Congress provide a room at "Columbia" to display trophies taken from the British during the War for Independence, since the sight of them would fan the flame of liberty. Various men later made proposals for a botanical garden and a scientific society at the seat of government, or an agricultural experimental farm outside of it. Charles Willson Peale of Philadelphia hoped to settle near Congress and place his museum under its patronage. The only cultural institution that found any serious support, albeit minimal, was a national university. George Washington, who encouraged the idea, believed such an institution would allow young men from the North and South to mix, thereby breaking down sectional prejudice.

Whatever institutions the capital housed, one American knew its growth would not occur quickly. Pierre-Charles L'Enfant, a French-born artist, architect, and engineer who had served in the Continental army, observed to Congress in 1784 that it would take decades, considering the financial situation, to build a town "in such a manner as to give an idea of the greatness of the empire as well as to engrave in every mind that sense of respect that is due to a place which is the seat of a supreme sovereignty." Five years later he elaborated on these thoughts to President Washington:

No Nation perhaps had ever before the opportunity offered them of deliberately deciding on the spot where their Capital City should be fixed, or of combining every necessary consideration in the choice of the situation—and although the means now within the power of the country are not such as to pursue the design to any great extent it will be obvious that the plan should be drawn on such a scale as to leave room for that aggrandizement and embellishment which the increase of the wealth of the Nation will permit it to pursue at any period however remote.

L'Enfant's long-range view of a capital of magnificent buildings and landscapes reflected America's optimistic outlook for the survival of the Union and the establishment of a republican empire, and his admirer, George Washington, became deeply wedded to his vision.

In 1774 Virginia called for an intercolonial Congress to meet "at such place annually as shall be thought most convenient." New York and Annapolis were mentioned as possible sites, but the colonies chose commodious Philadelphia, capital of centrally located Pennsylvania. Except when the British army forced a removal to Baltimore in 1776 and York, Pennsylvania, a year later (Congress spent a day at Lancaster before deciding on York), Congress

sat at Philadelphia throughout the Revolutionary War. Washington considered the most populous city in the colonies an improper place for Congress. He opposed meeting in Philadelphia because many of its inhabitants would be antagonistic to the American cause and its port would provide easy entry and cover for British spies and other troublemakers. He may have feared that Congress could not maintain secrecy and autonomy in a politically and socially alive commercial city, where influences of all sorts would affect even the most circumspect delegates. In addition, Congress, lacking jurisdiction over any part of Philadelphia, would be in effect the guest of Pennsylvania.

Despite the accommodations, urban amenities, and financial resources of Philadelphia, such concerns proved prophetic. Pennsylvania provided Congress space in the State House (known today as Independence Hall) but continued to use the largest portion of the building for itself. The two governments shared the state Capitol with little problem; however, they engaged in jurisdictional disputes over prerogatives in the capital. Congressmen interfered in state affairs, while the politically sophisticated Philadelphians involved themselves in congressional politics. In addition to rocky relations between the two governments, the cosmopolitan nature of the city caused problems. The closest that the United States came to the Paris of the French Revolution was Philadelphia in 1778–79, and the city's mobs and social protests raised questions in Congress about remaining there.

Early in December 1779 Congress resolved to leave Philadelphia in the spring. Some members talked about going to New Jersey, where Congress might purchase a few square miles of territory near Princeton. This is the earliest known mention of a district for Congress, but the degree of jurisdiction Congress would exercise, if any, was not specified. In March 1780 southern delegates, fearful of being hauled northward, failed to rescind the removal resolution but succeeded in blocking the decision on where to go. The decision to remove having been made, the impossibility of deciding where to go proved an embarrassment, and Congress referred the matter to a committee, which never reported back to it.

By June 1783, Philadelphia provided the centralists—those political leaders who advocated a strong federal government—with a sustaining environment. Financial resources, commercial information, and European news were readily available, and a

new and more conservative Pennsylvania government proved increasingly supportive. Congressmen enjoyed spacious accommodations, hearty cuisine (including Asian), elysian pleasures, and stimulating intellectual dialogue. For the decentralists—those who saw danger in increasing the power of the federal government—Philadelphia had become synonymous with grasping central government, wealth, and decadence. No one complained more vigorously than Virginia Congressman Arthur Lee, who in May 1783 insisted that Congress remove to a spot where it could act independently. Much to his delight, Congress left Philadelphia a month later.

The event that brought about the unanimous vote to leave the city where Congress had resided since 1774 begs for explanation; nothing else in the Revolutionary era more profoundly influenced the history of Washington, D.C. The circumstances under which Congress left the city explain why Congress established exclusive jurisdiction over the District of Columbia and why certain voting rights and representation have been long delayed or denied its citizens.

Not long after news of the preliminary articles of peace reached the United States and Congress had begun to demobilize its troops, Continental army soldiers with fixed bayonets surrounded the State House to demand that their financial accounts be settled. Knowing Congress to be insolvent and dependent on the states for both money and authority, and having earlier unsuccessfully appealed to it, the soldiers sought redress from the Executive Council of Pennsylvania. The angry demonstrators had carefully chosen a Saturday (21 June 1783) for their demonstration because they knew that Congress' first floor chamber would be empty during its customary weekend recess and that the council would be in session on the second floor of the State House.

As the troops assembled for their march on the State House, New York Congressman Alexander Hamilton urged Elias Boudinot of New Jersey, president of Congress, to call an emergency session on the grounds that the soldiers might rob the federally incorporated Bank of North America that night. Boudinot agreed and issued the call immediately. The two centralists feared the precedent of Continental soldiers attempting to settle their claims against Congress with a state government. If Pennsylvania agreed to the demands, other states might follow. The result would be the loss of one of the few things that, in the absence of

the British threat, held the loose union of states together: the federal debt. Centralists believed it must remain the responsibility of the federal government for the new nation to survive. Given the antimilitary bias of Americans and the historical threat posed to republics by revolutionary armies, the incident might also stimulate desperately needed public sympathy and support if Congress appeared to be the object of the soldiers' wrath. The political sparring match between Pennsylvania and the United States, which Hamilton thereby brought about, became a debate over federalism, specifically the authority and dignity due Congress by the states.

While the Pennsylvania Council deliberated its response to the armed soldiers who surrounded the State House, congressmen began arriving for the emergency session. The soldiers allowed them to enter the building, and the delegates waited impatiently for a final member (who never arrived) to make a quorum. Without a quorum, the constitutional entity known as Congress was not in session and had no authority to act, but the congressmen within the building nevertheless urged the council to call up the Philadelphia militia to drive the soldiers away. The council refused to do so because it doubted that the citizen militia would take up arms against the long-suffering men who had fought to secure America's independence, at least not until an outrage against persons or property had been committed.

In the classic American dilemma over the line between the right of protest on the one hand and law and order on the other, Pennsylvania acted to preserve the right to assembly. At the same time, it unanimously rejected the soldiers' demands and agreed to hold a conference with a committee of their officers. The armed demonstration broke up. By then the congressmen, having given their blessing to the council's solution, had safely left the building and were on their way to using the incident for their own political ends.

Boudinot called a second special session that evening. This time a quorum of seven states formed and unanimously adopted secret resolutions asserting that the authority of the United States had been grossly insulted by the soldiers who had appeared "about the place within which Congress were assembled." The resolutions demanded that Pennsylvania take measures to suppress the revolt and maintain the dignity and authority of the United States. If the state did not act adequately and promptly, Boudinot

was authorized to convene Congress at either Trenton or Princeton.

On Sunday and Monday a committee chaired by Hamilton held several meetings with the council. The council considered the promised conference with the soldiers preferable to a display of force, especially because the soldiers themselves had taken no action since their nonviolent demonstration on Saturday. Hamilton, who viewed Pennsylvania's conduct as weak and disgusting, told Boudinot that nothing could be expected from the state. Boudinot consequently adjourned Congress to Princeton with a proclamation, written by Hamilton, that placed the blame for the removal completely upon Pennsylvania.

The unanimity with which Congress acted arose from the uniqueness of the circumstance. Decentralists such as Arthur Lee saw their opportunity to escape from a city they had long considered an unfit seat. They succeeded at last because of the centralists' desire to assert the dignity and authority of Congress at a moment when the very existence of meaningful union stood at stake. Most centralists nevertheless intended to return to their stronghold once order had been restored. By 30 June, when Congress achieved a quorum, the mutiny had long since subsided. The soldiers had returned to their officers, not a shot had been fired, not a person injured, not a piece of property destroyed. But much to the chagrin of the centralists, decentralists controlled enough state delegations to prevent Congress from returning to Philadelphia. The centralists' attempt to use the soldiers' demonstration as a means of enhancing federal authority had backfired—but only for the moment.

The demonstration dramatically called attention to a critical political issue of the American Revolution—the balance of power between the states and the central government—and brought forward the question of the proper jurisdiction of Congress over the place where it would meet. Those who sought a federal government supreme over the states seized on the soldiers' demonstration as the reason why Congress must exercise exclusive jurisdiction at its capital, a novel American concept molded by Congress' tenure at Philadelphia and a deliberate misinterpretation of the events that caused Congress to leave in June 1783. Most public comment, often referring to the demonstration, supported granting Congress "supreme local jurisdiction in the spot" where it sat.

Soon after reaching Princeton, Congress appointed a committee to recommend the degree of jurisdiction it should have over its seat. The issue involved two questions: What should be the line between the authority of Congress and that of a locality or state over the seat of federal government; and what should be the relationship between the federal government and the residents of its seat? With no precedent to follow, Congress had only its experience at Philadelphia for guidance. The matter proved puzzling even to Congressman James Madison who sought advice from fellow Virginians. His request prompted Thomas Jefferson to draft a series of proposed congressional resolutions that rejected both federal ownership of the land and the idea of an exclusive jurisdiction for Congress on the grounds that both meant unnecessary and time-consuming problems.

Emboldened by the escalating offers of jurisdiction from several states and by the public discussion of the issue in the aftermath of the Philadelphia demonstration, the centralist-dominated jurisdiction committee reported in September 1783 that Congress should have exclusive jurisdiction over a district not more than six miles square (thirty-six square miles) nor less than three miles square (nine square miles). The report mentioned nothing of the rights of the inhabitants of such a district, but Madison expected them to join with Congress in administering the powers that the federal government would exercise over them. Congressman Lee argued that they should be governed by their own elected representatives. Decentralists considered exclusive jurisdiction dangerous, and in light of their growing political strength, the committee report never came up for debate.

In May 1787 the Federal Convention to revise the Articles of Confederation, which centralists had sought since even before the Articles was ratified in 1781, convened at Philadelphia. Several members of the 1783 congressional committee on jurisdiction attended and heard Madison offer the proposition that would become paragraph 17, section 8, Article I, of the U.S. Constitution: Congress had "exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever, over such district (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular states, and the acceptances of Congress, become the seat of government of the United States." "Exclusive legislation" was perhaps a less threatening phrase than "exclusive jurisdiction," but the two differed little if at all in meaning. Decentralists George Mason of Virginia and Elbridge

Gerry of Massachusetts questioned the breadth of jurisdiction but lacked the support to prevent adoption of Madison's proposition.

One Antifederalist, Samuel Osgood, claimed to have spent many a sleepless night trying to discover the most obnoxious part of the proposed Constitution, and he finally fixed on Congress' exclusive legislation over its capital. Beginning in the press in November 1787 and climaxing at the Virginia Ratification Convention in June 1788, Antifederalist leaders publicly attacked what they saw as the inexorable result of a yet-to-be-located district under the exclusive jurisdiction of Congress and distant from the eyes of the people.

Antifederalists envisioned a city—before 1787 Americans had referred to their future federal seat as a town—larger and potentially more corrupt than Philadelphia, or even London. One hundred square miles was an enormous area to an agrarian people whose largest city, thirty-six-square-mile Philadelphia, had a settled area of less than two square miles, and whose second largest city, New York, lay a mile south of Greenwich Village. Antifederalists projected the federal city's population at perhaps two or even four million people, directly attendant on the federal government as employees and lobbyists or their family members. They would be subject to a legislature that had absolute authority over them but in which they would have no representation.

Because the Constitution had no Bill of Rights, district residents would be guaranteed none of the traditional English and American civil liberties protected by most state constitutions. Nor would residents have common law protections. Antifederalists did not believe that the absence of state taxes in the federal district would compensate for the lack of republican liberties and protections of the law. How easy it would be, they thought, for the federal government to corrupt a population so dependent upon it. Residents of the capital would compose a readily motivated mass of support for federal programs and for political pressure on Congress. On the other hand, residents annoyed at the federal government might subject Congress to mob action.

Because the Constitution only provided for extradition between states, Antifederalists saw a federal district as a sanctuary for the states' criminals, debtors, and escaped slaves. They feared that the judiciary centered at the federal city would try Americans without the benefit of juries or with juries composed of men dependent upon the federal government. All but the rich would be

denied justice there. Congress would exercise powers at its place of residence that were implicitly or explicitly denied it in the states. Moreover, Congress could possibly reroute into its coffers at the federal city all the wealth of the nation, for it would surely find the ways and means to spend as much money as could be raised by taxes.

Some Antifederalists viewed the president, with a large military establishment under his command, as the fetus of monarchy and envisioned an aristocracy rising about him. The federal city would become the cultural and social center of the United States, a “dazzling centre, the mistress of fashion.” To it would flock those who adulated wealth and power, and it would soon become the residence of the great and mighty. The “base, the idle, the avaricious and the ambitious” would turn the federal city into a “happy place, where men are to live, without labor, upon the fruit of the labors of others,” or into a “political hive, where all the drones of society are to be collected to feed on the honey of the land.” The American people would be taxed to pay for all this.

For Federalists, the issue of Congress’ exclusive jurisdiction over its residence played an important role in the constitutional revolution of 1787–90. It symbolized the kind of government they hoped to establish for the American Empire, and they employed their superior journalistic and financial resources to counter Antifederalist charges in the press and at ratification conventions. Federalists, however, recognized that empires were measured by the grandeur of their capitals, and they did not deny the Antifederalist claim that the city would become the focus of American politics, wealth, and society.

To justify the necessity of exclusive federal jurisdiction over the district, Federalists pointed to the soldiers’ demonstration at Philadelphia as evidence that Congress must be independent of any state jurisdiction in order to protect its members and its dignity from insult and violence. Madison stressed the necessity of protecting the federal government and its archives from being the creature of any state, a condition that could outrage other states and destroy the Union.

Federalists argued that the liberties of federal city residents would not be infringed. The state acts of cession would protect the liberties, common law rights, and other interests of people who thereby became residents of the district. Madison assumed that Congress would provide for a popularly elected municipal legis-

lature for the district. A newspaper commentator argued that Congress needed exclusive jurisdiction particularly because of the foreign community and other special interests that would locate at the seat of federal government. He nonetheless recognized the problem of disfranchisement and suggested an amendment to the Constitution to provide district residents congressional representation once their population reached forty or fifty thousand.

Finally, Federalists insisted that the federal district would not become a place of exclusive privilege or a refuge from justice. How absurd, argued Madison, to imagine that congressmen would provide exclusive advantages over commerce to one small area of the Union at the expense of the communities that had elected them. Edmund Pendleton of Virginia claimed that Congress would never degrade the federal government by allowing the district to become an asylum for villains or other disreputable types. On the issue of the federal district, Antifederalist James Monroe of Virginia sided with the Federalists. He predicted that Americans would be delighted to live in a city flourishing in population and wealth, and under the government of an enlightened Congress.

When they ratified the Constitution, several states proposed an amendment to limit the exclusive legislation of Congress to regulations respecting police and good government. No state recommended an amendment to give the residents of the district representation in Congress, although Alexander Hamilton moved that the New York Ratification Convention do just that. Nor did any state propose to restrict the district to three or five miles square (nine or twenty-five square miles) as some Antifederalists had suggested. A year after the ratification debate, the First Federal Congress easily defeated a proposed amendment from Antifederalists to ensure the operation of state law within the federal district.

Philadelphia held a great parade on 4 July 1788 to celebrate ratification of the Constitution by ten states. Many of the parading tradesmen carried banners and flags expressing federal sentiments in the idiom of their trade. The scene on the bricklayers' flag portrayed the federal city rising out of a forest. "Both buildings and rulers are the works of our hands," proclaimed its motto. But the flag's rendition of the federal city as a new city rising out of a forest did not then represent an American consensus.