

III. George Washington and Potomac Fever

By a twist of geopolitical fate, Maryland, whose residents had been the first to discuss an exclusive jurisdiction for Congress and the first to raise the issue of a permanent U.S. capital, found itself in 1790 providing the two major contenders: Baltimore and somewhere on the Potomac River. Maryland's December 1788 act offering to grant Congress jurisdiction over an area ten miles square had carefully not favored either location. But those who advocated a Potomac capital had the advantage, owing to the efforts of an aggressive local development corporation known as the Potomac Navigation Company. The company not only provided data and publicists but also members who served in politically important positions. Marylanders Michael Jenifer Stone, Charles Carroll, and Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek and Virginians Richard Henry Lee and Alexander White were elected to the First Congress. Most important, the company's guiding influence and first president was George Washington.

Potomac Fever, a delusion-inducing obsession with the grandeur and commercial future of the Potomac River, infected these men and the corporation they founded. It passed from generation to generation along with the property if not the genes of such families as the Washingtons and Lees of Virginia and the Johnsons and Carrolls of Maryland, whose landholdings on the Potomac and the Ohio to the west numbered in the hundreds of thousands of acres. One did not have to reside on the shores of the Potomac to succumb to the Fever. In 1784 an English traveler described the river as "certainly the most noble, excellent, and beautiful river I ever saw, indeed it can be excelled by no other river in the universe. . . . Every advantage, every elegance, every charm, that bountiful nature can bestow, is heaped with liberality and even profusion on the delightful banks of this most noble and superlatively grand river."

Potomac Fever culminated in the person of George Washington, who early in his youth fell victim to it. That the U.S. capital sits on the Potomac River just above Mount Vernon is due in large part to his influence. Washington's acute appreciation of the interrelationship between economic and political power, his deep concern for his personal fortune and place in history, his sense of

geographical place, and his Potomac Fever decisively influenced the location of the U.S. capital.

Washington, however, was legendary for his discretion—what John Adams once referred to as Washington's gift of silence—and therefore his exact role before July 1790 in bringing the capital to the Potomac is unclear. Washington himself wrote that he always made it a "maxim rather to let my designs appear from my works rather than by my expressions." He once confessed to General Henry Lee, a fellow promoter of the Potomac River, that he always took pains to avoid the imputation of having interfered in an issue from improper or selfish motives, "for I hold it necessary that one should not only be conscious of the purest intentions; but that one should also have it in his power to demonstrate the disinterestedness of his words and actions at all times, and upon all occasions."

Known to unrecorded generations of the Algonquin people as "Petomek," the river's name has been translated variously as "trading place," "a place to which something is brought," and "a place to which tribute is brought." One hundred and fifty miles upriver from the Chesapeake, at the deepest penetration of tide-water on the North American continent, the sedentary Anacostians had built their wigwams among cornfields and gardens of squash, beans, and potatoes for at least half a millennium. There, at the juncture of the Anacostia and Potomac rivers, beginning early in the 1660s, wealthy Britons patented speculative land grants with such colorful names as Rome, New Troy, Scotland Yard, Widow's Mite, and Cuckold's Delight.

Settlement of the Virginia bank of the Potomac followed the same pattern as in Maryland: fur trade with resident and nomadic natives, large unsettled land grants, land sales and re-grants of expired patents, the first tenants, the gradual disappearance of the native population, and, finally, the arrival of planter families. By 1700, a few frontiersmen living below the Arlington Hills could look across the river at the hearth smoke of their Maryland counterparts on Rock Creek.

In 1711 Thomas Lee became resident agent for the more than five million acres in northern Virginia owned by the Fairfax family. While thus employed, young Lee succumbed to Potomac Fever. He envisioned the river's ten-mile drop onto the coastal plain as a future emporium of commercial and political energy linking the Atlantic and the westward flowing waters of the Ohio. There,

he reportedly predicted, would rise a great Virginia commercial city, the capital of a nation independent from Great Britain. Moved by his dream, he purchased 20,000 acres of land stretching from Little Falls to above Great Falls.

By 1747, Lee was president of the Virginia Council and one of the most powerful men in the colony. In that year he, George Mason, Lawrence Washington, and other Virginia Potomac promoters formed the Ohio Company to establish a Potomac link to the western fur trade. The company soon blazed a path through the mountains from the Potomac to the Monongahela. When Lee died three years later, leadership of company affairs passed to Lawrence Washington. After 1750 Potomac Fever was spread primarily by the Washingtons.

Lawrence Washington lived on a Fairfax County plantation above the Potomac, which he had named after Edward Vernon, a British admiral under whom he had served. Mount Vernon consisted of half the original patent of 5,000 acres between Dogue and Little Hunting creeks granted to his great-grandfather and a partner eighty years earlier. Like Thomas Lee, he understood Virginia's need for a commercial city; unlike Lee, he dreamed of locating that city on tidewater. To become reality, his dream required finding a means to avoid the time and expense of transferring goods from the West at the falls of the Potomac. If the means could be found, he wanted the city to rise at the mile-wide, eighteen-foot-deep tidewater harbor at the mouth of Great Hunting Creek, ten miles upriver from Mount Vernon. The Virginia Assembly had established a tobacco warehouse at the site in 1732. Belhaven, the settlement that grew around the warehouse, attracted Scottish merchants who recognized the location as providing easy access to the infant agricultural wealth of northern Virginia.

After several unsuccessful petitions from Lawrence Washington and other prominent Fairfax County residents, the legislature chartered Belhaven as the sixty-acre town of Alexandria in 1749. Alexandria grew rapidly, becoming by the 1760s the preeminent Potomac River port. It imported wares and building materials from England and rum and molasses from Barbados and exported wheat.

Lawrence Washington did not survive to witness the rise of Alexandria. His death in 1752, the year the town became the Fairfax County seat, pulled twenty-year-old George Washington

from the shadow of primogeniture. George inherited Mount Vernon, as well as a commitment to the Ohio Company, Alexandria, and bypassing the falls of the Potomac. Thomas Lee's and Lawrence Washington's vision matured during the half-century of George Washington's stewardship; by the time of his death in 1799, Washington left a Potomac River on the verge of political—and anticipated commercial—emporium.

George Washington's belief in the potential of linking the Potomac to the Ohio River caused him to invest heavily in land along the route. By the 1780s, he had acquired at Mount Vernon the alienated half of the original 5,000-acre grant and had added to it another 3,500 acres. He loved Mount Vernon and believed that its ten miles of river frontage, combined with its backwaters, marshes, wooded hills, and elevation above the Potomac, made it the most pleasantly situated estate in the United States. The five autonomous farms, along with the mansion house, the home manufactures (including a grist mill), the meticulous landscaping, and the deer yard, supported by the largest group of slaves in Fairfax County, enhanced the natural grandeur. The many visitors who came to Mount Vernon considered it and its Potomac vista delightful. But Washington refused to limit his hunger for land to the expansion and cultivation of his estate. Through inheritances, military bounties, and his own funds and those of his wife, the wealthy widow Martha Dandridge Custis, Washington garnered another 60,000-plus acres, over two-thirds of which was virgin bottomland along the Potomac-Ohio river system.

To increase the value of his holdings and further his vision of the Potomac as the best access to the West, Washington early became the prime advocate of opening the Potomac to navigation by clearing its channel of rocks and building a system of bypasses around the major falls. At age twenty-two, he had canoed the river from near the site of present-day Cumberland, Maryland, to Great Falls and reported the Potomac to be the most convenient and least expensive route to the West, notwithstanding a scarcity of water during much of the year, a drawback he quickly and conveniently repressed.

Washington soon found an influential ally in the person of Thomas Johnson of Frederick County, Maryland. The two men corresponded about the project during the 1760s; in 1770 Washington assured Johnson that no person had more ardor for the opening of the Potomac than he himself and expressed fears that

if the Potomac were not soon developed, other rivers would become the channel of conveyance for the extensive and valuable trade of a rising empire. In 1772 the Virginia legislature adopted a Potomac navigation bill drafted by a committee on which Washington served. This led one Potomac promoter to proclaim that the river would soon become the route for all the commerce between Great Falls and a point 300 miles up the Missouri River.

Navigational improvements on the Potomac required the cooperation of Maryland, which claimed jurisdiction over the Potomac up to the Virginia shoreline. Its legislature repeatedly refused to join Virginia in the effort despite Johnson's influence. Maryland's opposition to the plan was led by Baltimore merchants and their political spokesmen from the upper Chesapeake Bay, who worried that the opening of the Potomac would destroy any chance of Baltimore becoming the eastern terminus of western commerce and render Maryland an appendage of Virginia. Even if the profits of western trade could be diverted from Alexandria to Georgetown, they remained opposed.

Georgetown at Rock Creek on the Potomac, seven miles above Alexandria and three miles below Little Falls, stood out as a potential commercial rival for both Alexandria and Baltimore. Maryland had authorized a road to the creek in 1720, a tobacco warehouse in 1745, and finally a sixty-acre town in 1751. Georgetown also served as the major ferry crossing on the Potomac. Like Alexandria, Georgetown had attracted Scottish merchants who envisioned a great future in its location at the head of Potomac navigation, but unlike Alexandria, its shallow port suffered from shifting sandbars, flooding, and ice floes. Nevertheless, its promoters predicted for it the same glorious future that Virginians envisioned for Alexandria. In 1768 Jacob Funk platted Hamburg (Funkstown) just southeast of Georgetown at the mouth of the creek known variously as Tiber, Goose, or Duck. Two years later Daniel Carroll of Duddington laid out Carrollsburg on the north bank of the Anacostia, near its mouth. Both towns were speculative ventures in an area widely thought destined for commercial emporium.

The dream of commercial emporium on the Potomac languished between 1774 and 1783, the year that Washington returned to Mount Vernon from the Revolutionary War. The development of Alexandria marked the first step taken by Virginia's Potomac promoters after the war, for the establishment

of a commercial city within the state remained a paramount economic goal of postwar Virginia. Many of its leaders had long accepted the idea of such a city as essential to economic growth and rationalized the concomitant social costs as justified by the wealth produced. Washington, Henry Lee, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison were the most prominent of many who hoped for such a city in order to protect Virginia's commerce not only from Philadelphia but also from rapacious Baltimore.

Virtually untouched by the fighting and stimulated by the war economy, Alexandria expected a commercial boom. Residents found a powerful supporter in Washington, whose adulthood had been intimately linked with the rise of his hometown. He inherited and purchased lots there, represented its citizens as a town trustee and colonial legislator, presided over the 1774 meeting that adopted the Fairfax County Resolves, and served as an officer and benefactor for various of its civic organizations. Alexandria provided Washington and other Fairfax planters access to the benefits of urban life. There he traded, voted, celebrated, and worshiped. A week after his return to Mount Vernon from the war, he rode to Alexandria to receive the salutations of its citizens. "Your residence in our neighborhood will have a happy influence . . . on the growth and prosperity of this infant town," they proclaimed on welcoming home their special patron.

In the spring of 1783, when Congress received New York's offer of Kingston for its postwar capital, Thomas Jefferson was visiting Philadelphia. There he and Congressman James Madison launched their seven-year effort to bring the U.S. capital to the Potomac River. The Virginians consulted the two Maryland delegates, Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek and Thomas Sim Lee, both of whom lived in the Potomac watershed. They agreed that their states should jointly step forward with a tract of land centered on Georgetown. This pleased Jefferson who believed that, if Virginia could not obtain a Potomac seat for the federal government, it should support a site north of the Chesapeake Bay, since a location on the bay might make Virginia dependent on Maryland.

The political conflict between Maryland's Potomac and upper Chesapeake Bay interests—which had so long blocked interstate efforts to open the Potomac to navigation—prevented Maryland from joining Virginia in a joint offer of a site. The upper bay interest believed that a federal capital on either bank of the Potomac would be dominated by Virginia and that Maryland would be-

come an economic vassal of its much larger neighbor. The conflict between the two interests influenced Maryland's position throughout the fight over the location of the capital. So strongly did the upper Chesapeake interest feel about the matter that in 1790 it secured the defeat of every incumbent member of the U.S. House of Representatives who had voted for a Potomac capital.

News of Maryland's independent offer of Annapolis reached Virginia early in June 1783. If Maryland preferred to compete, Virginia would match Annapolis. At the end of June, Virginia granted Congress use of the Capitol, the governor's palace, all other public buildings, and 300 acres adjacent to Williamsburg, plus up to \$250,000 to build thirteen hotels for the state delegations. In addition, the state promised Congress as much jurisdiction over a five-miles-square (twenty-five square miles) district as its residents would yield. The state offered similar terms if Congress preferred a residence somewhere on the Potomac. Keeping its options open, the Virginia legislature promised to cooperate with Maryland should it agree to a joint cession in the future. In such a case, Virginia would make a grant directly across the Potomac from that ceded by Maryland; but if Congress decided to place its buildings on the north bank of the river, Virginia would donate only \$100,000, expecting Maryland to supply the other \$150,000.

In addition to Virginia's need for a commercial city, Jefferson believed in the necessity of reaching across the Appalachians so that the trade of the Ohio Valley and the upper Mississippi flowed east rather than south to New Orleans. He also recognized the immense value to Virginia if the Potomac rather than the Hudson or Susquehanna became the route. Early in 1784 Jefferson served Washington a gourmet vision of Virginia's Potomac-based future, pretending ignorance of his correspondent's commitment to opening the Potomac to navigation. Jefferson counseled immediate action by Virginia but noted a powerful objection to his proposal: the familiar argument that public undertakings are carelessly managed, with much money spent to little purpose. Only Washington could overcome this. Would he be willing, alone or in conjunction with any persons he chose, to superintend such a public project? "What a monument of your retirement it would be!" Jefferson proposed, before concluding with an assurance that his own zeal for the business was public and pure be-

cause he owned not one inch of land on the Potomac, the Ohio, or their tributaries.

"My opinion coincides perfectly with yours" respecting the Potomac-Ohio route to the West "and the preference it has over all others," Washington responded. "I am made very happy to find a man of discernment and liberality (who has no particular interest in the plan) thinks as I do, who have lands in that Country the value of which would be enhanced by the adoption of such a scheme." Washington agreed that not a moment should be lost because the New Yorkers would waste no time in opening a navigation route from the Hudson to the Great Lakes once the British surrendered the forts there. Nevertheless, Washington hedged on the central question. He doubted public funding feasible in 1784 and would wait to see its terms before agreeing to superintend.

What Jefferson failed to achieve by pen was accomplished by Washington's September 1784 trip to the West. He returned to Mount Vernon and urged Virginia to incorporate a private company to develop the Potomac. As a result Virginia sent Washington to Annapolis in December to convince Maryland to cooperate in forming a navigation company. His great name and influence finally overcame Maryland's twenty-five-year opposition. At Washington's urging, Virginia adopted the Maryland act verbatim. President of Congress Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Lee's son, lauded Washington for his success.

The Potomac Navigation Company chartered by Maryland and Virginia issued 500 shares of stock valued at \$220,000. Each state purchased fifty shares. Virginia bought an additional fifty shares in Washington's name as a sign of appreciation and as a means of conserving his private funds. The gesture later proved an embarrassment, but Washington did not refuse the offer, as he had all other postwar grants from public bodies. Thus, public funds purchased almost a third of the Potomac Company's stock. In March 1785 Washington played host to the Mount Vernon Conference at which commissioners from Maryland and Virginia discussed several problems related to the jurisdiction and navigation of the Potomac and Chesapeake. They adopted a mutually satisfactory compact which, among other provisions, declared the Potomac a highway for citizens of both states. In May, Potomac area residents—from Alexandria to Shepherdstown in Virginia and from Georgetown to Williamsport in Maryland—attended

the company's first meeting. Shareholders elected Washington president and Thomas Johnson to the board of directors.

Washington's zeal on behalf of the Potomac Company did not cease with its organization. Throughout 1785 he attempted to interest non-Virginians in the company. One guest at Mount Vernon could not resist recording how boring his host could become on the subject. Through Jefferson and LaFayette in France, Washington sought European capital. The return on any investment would be greater than on any speculation in the world, Washington assured LaFayette with the hyperbole characteristic of victims of Potomac Fever.

Washington also knew the political implications of opening the Potomac, asserting at one point that they outweighed the commercial. He believed that the states nearest to the center of the Union would benefit the most from a navigable Potomac because the western country and the states carved out of it would share the political interests of the seaboard states to which they were commercially tied. He understood that Virginia could thereby retain its political influence in the West and guarantee itself future political allies in Congress. Finally, he recognized that a Potomac connection to the West could influence the location of the permanent seat of the federal government.

Between 1785 and 1789, the clearing of the upper Potomac for navigation—the promised key to Alexandria's prosperity—progressed steadily, if not as rapidly as its promoters wished. Because American newspapers frequently reprinted articles from the Alexandria and Georgetown press about Potomac navigational improvements, by 1790 most articulate Americans were familiar with Washington's dream for the Potomac.

While most of the energy behind the plan to center American political and commercial emporium on the Potomac was Virginian, Marylanders with economic and geographic ties on the Potomac felt closer to the Virginians than they did to Baltimore and the upper Chesapeake interest. Just as the First Federal Congress under the Constitution convened in 1789, Baltimore's *Maryland Journal* highlighted the rival claims of Maryland's Potomac and upper Chesapeake interests in "A Conference between the Patapsco and Patowmack Rivers." Patapsco initiated the conversation by congratulating the Potomac and all other American rivers on the successful formation of a powerful, energetic American Empire and the election of George Washington to head it. "The

history of all former ages will readily show," Potomac observed, "that it has been the invariable practice of all wise founders of Empires, Kingdoms and States, from Nimrod down to the immortal Penn, to cement and support their dominions by one great Metropolis." Specifically, Potomac recommended the level plain between Rock Creek at Georgetown and the Anacostia River for a great metropolitan capital city. One could not think that Congress would prefer to sit in such an undeveloped place, protested Patapsco, when it could enjoy the accommodations offered by Baltimore. On the contrary, affirmed the Potomac, the capital of the empire must be a new city.

The specific capital site advocated by Potomac in its conversation with Patapsco had first been proposed by "A Citizen of the World" in the same newspaper on 23 January 1789. He considered the place militarily impregnable: warships required too much water to reach it, and a few forts below the Anacostia could defend it. Placing the capital there would stimulate the rise of a great commercial-political city, guarantee the completion of navigational improvements on the Potomac, facilitate intercourse between East and West, and prevent the secession of the latter from the Union.

Rarely can the identity of eighteenth-century newspaper writers using pseudonyms be discovered. Fortunately, the name of the "Citizen of the World" who first suggested the site that became Washington, D.C., is known; likely he also wrote the conversation between the two rivers. It is time he received credit for his role in the early history of the city.

George Walker of Falkirk, Scotland, came to Georgetown in 1784 as agent for Huie, Reid and Company, a subsidiary of the Port Glasgow firm of Smith, Huie, Alexander and Company. Walker actively promoted Georgetown's growth, including a scheme to improve its often unreliable harbor. Immediately after reaching agreement with the U.S. government in 1791, the original proprietors of the land that became the early federal city rewarded Walker with several lots in the city for having first publicized the site and its merits. The mayor of Georgetown also presented him with a parcel of land. Walker soon thereafter purchased a 400-acre tract known as the Hop Yard from one of the original proprietors for \$25,000. In 1793 he went to London to encourage British investment in the new city, publishing *A De-*

A DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION AND PLAN
OF THE
CITY OF WASHINGTON,
NOW BUILDING FOR
THE METROPOLIS OF AMERICA,
AND ESTABLISHED AS THE PERMANENT RESIDENCE OF CONGRESS AFTER THE YEAR 1800.

THE CITY OF WASHINGTON, in the district of Columbia, now building for the permanent seat of the Government of the United States, stands at the junction of the rivers Potomac and the Eastern Branch, extending about four miles up each, including a tract of territory, exceeded in point of convenience, salubrity, and beauty, by none in America, if any in the world.—For, although the land is apparently level, yet, by gentle and gradual swellings, a variety of elegant prospects are produced, while there is a sufficient descent to convey off the water occasioned by rains.

Within the limits of the city are twenty-five never-failing springs of excellent water; and, by digging wells, water of the best quality is readily had; besides, the never-failing streams that now run through that territory, are also to be collected for the use of the city.

The EASTERN BRANCH is one of the largest and most commodious harbours in America, being sufficiently deep for the largest ships, for about four miles above its mouth; while the channel lies close along the edge of the city, and is abundantly capacious.

The City, being situated upon the great post road, exactly equidistant from the northern and southern extremities of the union, and nearly so from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ohio river, upon the best navigation, and in the midst of the richest commercial territory in America, commanding the most extensive internal resources, is by far the most eligible situation for the residence of Congress; and as it is now pressing forward, by the public spirited enterprise of the people of the United States, and by foreigners, it will grow up with a degree of rapidity, hitherto unparalleled in the annals of cities, and will soon become the admiration and delight of the world.

The inland navigation of the Potomac is so far advanced, that craft loaded with produce now come down that river and its several branches, from upwards of one hundred and eighty miles to the great falls, which are within fourteen miles of the New City. The canals at the great and little falls are nearly completed, and the locks in such forwardness, that, in the course of the ensuing summer, the navigation will be entirely opened between tide water and the head branches of the Potomac, which will produce a communication by water between the City of Washington, and the interior parts of Virginia and Maryland, by means of the Potomac, the Shenandoah, the South Branch, Oppeca, Cape Capon, Patuxent's Creek, Comochogon, and Monocacy, for upwards of two hundred miles, through one of the most healthy, pleasant, and fertile regions in America, producing, in vast abundance, tobacco of superior quality, hemp, Indian corn, wheat and other small grain, with fruit and vegetables peculiar to America, in vast abundance, and equal in quality to any in the United States.

The lands upon the Potomac above the City of Washington, all around it, and for fifty miles below, are high and dry, abounding with innumerable springs of excellent water, and are well covered with large timber of various kinds. A few miles below the City, upon the banks of the river, are inexhaustible mountains of excellent freestone, of the white and red Portland kinds, of which the public edifices in the city are now building. Above the City, also upon the banks of the river, are immense quantities of excellent coal, limestone, and marble, with blue slate of the best quality.

The foundation of this City, in such an eligible situation, upon such a liberal and elegant plan, will by future generations be considered as a high proof of the judgment and wisdom of the present President of the United States, while its name will keep fresh in mind, to the end of time, the many virtues and amiable qualities of that great man.

The plan of this City, agreeably to the directions of the President of the United States, was designed and drawn by the celebrated Major L'ENVOY, and is an inimitable improvement upon all other cities, combining not only convenience, regularity, elegance and grandeur, and a free circulation of air, but every thing grand and beautiful that can possibly be introduced into a city.

Two noble impressions of this plan were ordered to the public sale, one done at Philadelphia upon a small scale, and another done at Boston upon a larger scale—these did not exhibit the foundations of the harbours, and were defective with regard to the limits of the City upon the Eastern Branch.

The last and best impression of the plan is that lately published at Philadelphia upon the large scale, although it contains several mistakes in the foundations of the Eastern Branch, for, where there is thirty-five feet water, it only shows twelve and eighteen. This river has, however, been founded by authority, and is found to contain thirty and thirty-five feet to near the upper end of the city, where it is eighteen and twenty feet deep.

The City is divided into squares or grand divisions, by the streets running due North and South, and East and West, which form the ground-work of the plan. However, from the Capitol, the President's House, and some of the important areas in the City, run transverse avenues or diagonal streets, from one material object to another, which not only produce a variety of charming prospects, but remove that insidious domestic that renders some other great cities unwholesome. These great leading streets are all one hundred and fifty feet wide, including a pavement of ten feet, and a gravel walk of thirty feet planted with trees on each side, which will leave eighty feet of paved street for carriages. The rest of the streets are in general one hundred and ten feet wide, with a few only ninety feet, except North, South, and East Capitol Streets, which are one hundred and fifty feet. The diagonal streets are named after the respective States composing the Union, while those running North and South are, from the Capitol Eastward, named, EAST FIRST STREET, EAST SECOND STREET, &c. those running East and West are from the Capitol Northward named, NORTH A STREET, NORTH B STREET, &c. and those South of it are called SOUTH A STREET, SOUTH B STREET, &c.

The squares, or divisions of the City, have their numbers inferred in the plan, and amount to eleven hundred and fifty.—The rectangular squares generally contain from three to six acres, and are divided

into lots of four front to eighty feet front, and their depth, from about one hundred and ten to three hundred feet, according to the fax of the square.

The irregular divisions produced by the diagonal streets are some of them small, but are generally in valuable situations.—Their acute points are all to be cut off at forty feet, so that no house in the City will have an acute corner.—The lots in these irregular squares will all turn at a right angle with the respective streets, although the backs of the houses upon them will not stand parallel to one another, which is a matter of no consequence.

By the rules declared and published by the President of the United States, for regulating the buildings within the City, all houses must be of stone or brick—their walls must be parallel to the streets, and either placed immediately upon them, or withdrawn therefrom at pleasure. The walls of all houses upon streets one hundred and fifty feet wide must be at least thirty feet high; but there is no obligation imposed to build or improve in any limited time.

The area for the CAPITOL (or house for the Legislative Bodies) is situated upon the most beautiful eminence in the City, about a mile from the Eastern Branch, and not much more from the Potomac, commanding a full and complete view of every part of the City, as well as a considerable extent of the country around.—The PRESIDENT'S HOUSE will stand upon a rising ground, not far from the Banks of the Potomac, possessing a delightful water prospect, together with a commanding view of the CAPITOL, and some other parts of the City.

Due south from the President's house, and due west from the Capitol, run two great pleasure parks or malls, which intersect and terminate upon the Banks of the Potomac, and are to be ornamented at the sides by a variety of elegant buildings, and houses for foreign Ministers, &c.

Intersected through the City, where the most material streets cross one another, are a variety of open Areas, formed in various regular figures, which in great cities are extremely useful and ornamental.

Fifteen of the best of these Areas are to be appropriated to the different States composing the Union; not only to bear their respective names, but as proper places for them to erect statues, obelisks, or columns, to the memory of their favourite eminent men.—Upon the small eminence, where a line due west from the Capitol, and due south from the President's house would intersect, is to be erected an equestrian statue of GENERAL WASHINGTON, now PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES.—The building where Massachusetts and Georgia streets meet, is intended for a Marine Hospital, with its garden.

The AREA at the fourth end of East Eight Street is for the GENERAL EXCHANGE, and its public walks, &c.—The broad black line, which runs along part of NORTH B STREET, and, separating, joins the Eastern Branch at two places, is a CANAL, which is to be eighty feet wide, and eight feet deep.—The AREA, where SOUTH G STREET crosses the canal, is intended to contain a CITY HALL, and a basin of water; there being now a very large spring in the middle of it.

The AREA, at the junction of the river, is for a FORT, MAGAZINES, and ARSENALS.

At the east end of EAST CAPITOL STREET is to be a BRIDGE, and the present FERRY is at the lower end of KENTUCKY STREET, where the great road now crosses the Eastern Branch.—The FERRY, which is the principal stream that passes through the City, is to be collected in a grand Reservoir before the Capitol, from whence it will be carried in pipes to different parts of the City, while its surplus will fall down in beautiful cascades, through the public gardens west of the Capitol, into the canal.—In various parts of the City places are allotted for MARKET HOUSES, CHURCHES, COLLEGES, THEATRES, &c.

The PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES, in locating the seat of the City, prevailed upon the proprietors of the soil to erect a certain portion of the lots in every situation, to be sold by his direction, and the proceeds to be solely applied to the public buildings, and other works of public utility within the City. This grant will produce about fifteen thousand lots, and will be sufficient, not only to erect the public buildings, but to dig the canal, conduct water through the City, and to pave and light the streets, which will save a heavy tax that arises in other cities, and consequently render the town considerably more valuable.

The grants of money made by Virginia and Maryland, being hitherto inefficient, few of the public lots have yet been sold; but a sale is advertised to commence on the 15th day of September next, when it is expected the demand will be considerable, as the money men in America have now turned their attention to that great national object.

When the waters of this left Washington, on the end of January last, most of the streets were run, and the squares divided into lots.—The canal was partly dug, and the greater part of the materials provided for the public buildings, which are to be entirely of freestone polished, and a great many propositions of lots were preparing to build this ensuing summer.

In consequence of the establishment of NATIONAL FAITH, ORDER, and GOOD GOVERNMENT, by the NEW CONSTITUTION, immense fortunes have been amassed in America within three years past, by the National Debt and Bank Stock appreciating to their full value, as well as by the rapid rise in the value of back lands.—The public lots in the City of Washington upon the next need no speculation in America, and there is every probability of their being run up to an enormous price, as soon as the public buildings are considerably advanced; for although lands in America, from their quantity, are less valuable than those in Britain, yet lots in cities generally sell at high.

Having every opportunity to be thoroughly acquainted with the subject, the preceding concise account of the progress of that grand and novel undertaking is respectfully offered to the public, by

London, 104 Strand, Bridge-Street, Black-friars,
March 12, 1793.
GEORGE WALKER.
Rap. Lituan. Colonus et Imperator.

"A Description of the Situation and Plan of the City of Washington . . ." by George Walker. Broadside, London, 1793. Collection of the Library of Congress.

Intended to encourage British investors, Walker's broadside is an example of the promotional literature written to advance the development of the city.

scription of the Situation and Plan of the City of Washington, a pamphlet based in part on "A Citizen of the World."

An active participant in disputes among the proprietors, the federal city commissioners, and city planner Pierre L'Enfant, Walker returned to Scotland shortly after the federal government moved to the Potomac in 1800. His dream of making a fortune in the federal city had failed, largely because the commissioners concentrated investment west of the Capitol. Walker's holdings, including the Hop Yard, lay east of the Capitol in an area of the city that he and L'Enfant believed should be the residential and commercial sector as opposed to the government sector.

Some members of the First Federal Congress privately discussed the location suggested by Walker, but few distinguished between it and adjoining Georgetown, west of Rock Creek. That town had flourished during the 1780s and verged on becoming the largest tobacco market in Maryland. The years 1788 and 1789 witnessed the laying of the cornerstone of Georgetown University and the town's incorporation. Residents petitioned Congress in September 1789 and June 1790 to select it as the national capital, but neither document survives.

Both *Maryland Journal* articles took sides in a division of opinion among promoters of a Potomac capital: should it be on tide-water or at some point above Great Falls? The first person to publicly advocate an upriver Potomac capital was General Otho Holland Williams of Baltimore, a proprietor of Williamsport, Maryland, a town platted in 1787 at the mouth of Conococheague Creek where his family had long owned an important Potomac ferry. In September 1788 he privately argued that Congress should not lay the foundation of its empire at a defenseless place. Even if all the seaports were perfect Gibaltars, fairness to the West argued against fixing the capital on one corner of the continent. Congress should place it at the mouth of the Conococheague.

Conococheague Creek, although it lay west "a long way indeed," as its Algonquin name translated, had good reason to assert its claim. It coursed through the twenty-mile-wide fertile Great Valley and had long functioned as a major transportation route. The Ohio Company of Virginia early established a storehouse there. During the 1760s thousands of emigrants from Pennsylvania ferried across the Potomac at the Conococheague on the Great Philadelphia Wagon Road. In the 1790 residence debate, Senator

Pierce Butler of South Carolina described the site as a rich, level, and highly cultivated area that tied the coastal states to Fort Pitt and the western country. Locating the capital there meant that it could include land in Virginia and Pennsylvania as well as Maryland. The Senate inserted it as the upper limit on the Potomac for the federal city in the 1790 residence act, despite ridicule of the name and the location.

Whether above tidewater or not, Virginians as well as Marylanders divided over the precise location. William Grayson had argued to the Virginia Ratification Convention that the Federal Convention had erred by not constitutionally establishing the capital near Alexandria, the center of the Union. Virginia convention delegates privately discussed Richmond, Williamsburg, and Norfolk as potential sites, but the only politically viable one remained some point on the Potomac, preferably the area near its falls.

Motivated by James Madison's fear, after the 1788 decision to convene the First Federal Congress at New York, that a location on the Susquehanna was the best that Virginia could expect, Virginians had begun to advocate an upriver capital near Pennsylvania to attract its ten votes in the House of Representatives. Shepherdstown, Virginia, which lay at the edge of the Great Valley midway between Williamsport and Harpers Ferry, Virginia, received some support. In 1789, the Virginia congressmen informed their colleagues from other states that they were willing to place the capital as far up the Potomac as the Conococheague and implied they favored an upriver location. Nevertheless, they and the Maryland congressmen who advocated the Potomac took care not to publicly name either an upriver or a tidewater site.

The most significant and far-reaching efforts of the Potomac interest followed the September 1789 residence debate in Congress. In October the quixotic John O'Connor published a pamphlet in which he implored Congress to center the great city on the Potomac. A graduate of the University of Dublin, O'Connor briefly edited a Philadelphia newspaper after the war and then moved on to Norfolk and Georgetown. His pamphlet, entitled *Political Opinions Particularly Respecting the Seat of the Federal Empire*, contained more hyperbole than anything written to support any location during the entire seven-year debate. He named the Thames, the Seine, and the Rhone as rivulets compared with the Shenandoah, only one of many rivers that flowed into the Po-

tomac. The commerce of the vast and luxuriant Potomac watershed would clothe and cherish the sufferers of the Siberian wilds as well as the pampered English aristocracy. Providence had sent a wise Father to be the Potomac's advocate, and that Father, the chosen secondary cause of every blessing to the human race, had become the first president of the United States. As if describing Potomac Fever, O'Connor identified one of his sources as "a man of veracity, and as well acquainted with the navigation of the Patowmack, as if, probably, he claimed this knowledge a species of inheritance; though the doctrine of innate ideas, and the lineal transmission of good and bad qualities, has been so long exploded."

Like George Walker, O'Connor named the flats between Georgetown and the Anacostia as the best site for the seat of federal government. The climate was temperate and the place defensible enough to "shelter the Archives of the United States from the Invasion and Cannons of the Universe." The Potomac below Georgetown, he claimed, could harbor 10,000 ships the size of Noah's Ark, and the Anacostia alone had room for all the ships on the Thames. A multitude of landscapes stimulated one's senses at Georgetown, and the hills above the Anacostia provided ample space for the mansions of ambassadors. If Congress chose this site—a center without parallel on the terraqueous globe—Americans would within a decade see a city more superb and powerful than London. It would be regarded with rapture by the children of future ages as the only imperial city ever founded on the principles of liberty and reason. The rarity of the pamphlet—the earliest extant non-newspaper imprint from Georgetown—suggests that its embarrassing rhetoric led Potomac promoters to suppress it.

In December 1789 the Potomac interest launched its campaign to bring Congress to the Potomac. As part of its strategy, several leading citizens of Georgetown and Alexandria, most with ties to the Potomac Navigation Company, agreed to appeal to New Englanders in an effort to prove why they would benefit economically from a Potomac location. Dr. David Stuart, second husband of Martha Washington's widowed daughter-in-law, crafted the final version with some realism, for, as he confessed to George Washington, he expected that the sagacious New Englanders would laugh at the "flaming" account. The broadside, signed by prominent residents from Alexandria and Georgetown, George

Walker included, was mailed to the selectmen and other influential citizens of several New England towns at the end of the year. The means employed—direct communication between Virginia and New England—followed pre-Revolutionary War precedent.

Stuart began by informing the New Englanders that the citizens of Georgetown and Alexandria believed that, next to the ratification of the Constitution, the location of the capital carried greater importance for the present and future welfare of the country than any other issue. He dismissed arguments for placing it at either the center of population or wealth, since these fluctuated like the winds, and insisted that location at the center of territory paid greater attention to posterity and perpetual union. The Potomac acted to preserve the connection with the West better than any other river. This consideration required the utmost attention of the Atlantic states, for a separation would create connections highly dangerous to them. Stuart further described the navigation, extent, and products of the Potomac, quoting Jefferson on the relationship between the Potomac and the western waters to demonstrate why the route with its mere seventeen-mile portage constituted a better link to the West than the Hudson.

The broadside noted the defensibility of the Potomac, the healthiness of its residents, the fertility of its soil, the salubrity of its climate, and the availability and abundance of its fish, building materials, and coal. A special appeal to New England's economic interest concluded the missive. Georgetown and Alexandria merchants lacked capital and owned few ships. This, Stuart suggested, provided an opportunity for New England investment that could not be expected if the capital were located on the Susquehanna or the Delaware, where Baltimore and Philadelphia would engross the whole commerce to themselves. Finally, Stuart noted that New England's agricultural and manufactured goods would be in much greater demand on the Potomac than elsewhere.

On 22 January 1790, an article entitled "The Federal City Ought to be on the Patowmack" appeared in the *Maryland Journal*. Its author called the upcoming decision on the location of the capital the most important before the Union. The decision would determine whether the Union of North, South, and West would survive or dissolve into the horrors of civil commotion. Providence, the article proclaimed, had designated for the capital a site on the Potomac between Georgetown and Alexandria, the north-

south center of the Union. Quoting at length from Stuart's broadside, the author also directed special arguments to New Englanders. They would dominate the trade of the Potomac when the capital on its banks became the largest commercial city in America. Finally, the Potomac offered New England the closest connection to its settlements on the Ohio River.

Virginians like Stuart were wise to expect a less than enthusiastic reaction from New Englanders. As John Adams complained many years later, Virginia geese are all swans; the hyperbolic Philadelphians and New Yorkers were modest in comparison with old dominionism. New England's only public response to the Potomac interest's efforts came in the form of newspaper articles. One condemned those Virginians who threatened to leave the Union if Congress did not situate on the Potomac. Nevertheless, the Potomac interest, led by George Washington, had been effective at putting its claims for the Potomac before the American people.

When Thomas Jefferson returned to Virginia early in December 1789 after five years in France, he likely recalled his own efforts on behalf of a Potomac capital in 1783: The Virginia legislature had just offered Congress jurisdiction over any ten miles square in the state. The politically strategic bill implied that the best site for the capital lay high on the Potomac above tidewater where Pennsylvania as well as Maryland and Virginia could share in the location. In addition, Virginia proposed to Maryland that it unite with Virginia in a joint offer of jurisdiction and money. Should Congress accept a cession on the Potomac from either or both states, Virginia would give Congress \$120,000 to erect public buildings if Maryland would provide \$72,000 for the same purpose. Despite objection from the upper Chesapeake interest, Maryland appropriated the money at the end of 1789.