

## V. Implementation of the Residence Act, 1790–1800

Once George Washington signed the residence bill in July 1790, he had complete authority over and responsibility for its execution. Congress no longer had any involvement unless the president chose to consult it; it had relinquished its oversight role by not requiring senatorial consent of the individuals appointed as commissioners for the federal city and by not appropriating money for its construction. From 1791 until his death in 1799, Washington worked unceasingly to guarantee that the federal government would be seated on his beloved Potomac at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He believed that this location would strengthen the Union and his reputation in its history, as well as the Potomac's role in the political economy of the emerging American Empire.

Washington involved himself in the choice of a specific site on the Potomac, the purchase of land for the federal city within the federal district, the plan and activities of Pierre L'Enfant, the details of construction and financing, and the neutralization of political opposition. His concern over the physical development of the city itself led him to intervene in details as important as the design of the Capitol and as mundane as the nature of street railings. Contemporaries recognized the development of the capital as Washington's hobbyhorse, the favorite object of his heart and the one that more than anything else had his attention. His preeminent biographer, Douglas S. Freeman, concluded that had the District of Columbia been Washington's only responsibility, "he scarcely could have found the future seat of government more time consuming."

In the early phases of implementation, Washington worked closely with Secretary of State Jefferson and Representative James Madison. By 1790, both advisers knew exactly where Washington planned to locate the federal district, and both agreed that the residence act could be interpreted to allow him to select that location without relying on the commissioners. Until he suddenly recognized his indiscretion at the end of July, Jefferson had told his correspondents that the capital would be at Georgetown. Madison recommended, and Jefferson concurred, that the president at first announce the location of only part of the ten miles square so

that such places as it may not have been prudent to accept initially might be included later. Alexandria—Washington's hometown, which lay below the southern limit of the district as specified by the residence act—was the place Madison meant. In exchange for Alexandria's vote for assumption, Madison had promised the town's congressman that it would be included in the federal district.

Acting at Washington's direction, Jefferson and Madison toured the area between the Anacostia and Little Falls in September 1790 with a group of landowners. Jefferson stressed to them not to lose the opportunity at hand, for Congress would never give the Potomac a second chance. He explained the dangers of relying on public bodies for funds and proposed that they make a generous offer of land. Jefferson and Madison next sounded out the independent and outspoken George Mason, who owned 2,000 critically situated acres on the Virginia side of the Potomac from a point opposite Georgetown up to Little Falls.

Despite Jefferson's efforts, the Maryland landowners did not join in a common offer to the federal government because of the rivalry between the proprietors of land south and east of Tiber Creek (the Anacostia, or Carrollsburg, interest) and those north and west of it (the Georgetown interest). In mid-October several Georgetown area landowners submitted an agreement to Washington offering their lands for the federal city on whatever terms he deemed reasonable and just. With the agreement came an argument for Georgetown's merits over any other site in the vicinity: placing the federal buildings adjacent to the healthier and more defensible port of Georgetown would act to guarantee the arrival of Congress in 1800 because investors would prefer to buy lots contiguous to an already thriving town. The best way to appease the Anacostia proprietors, they argued, was to expand the federal city in their direction from Georgetown.

The timely document arrived just as Washington set out on a trip up the Potomac for the ostensible purpose of selecting a site for the federal district. Discretion required the trip and, he hoped, it would also keep the Georgetown proprietors from excessively inflating their land values. Washington spent a day touring the area between the Anacostia and Little Falls and requested a plat of landownership. When he headed upriver, Georgetown residents exuded confidence that the federal city would rise in their environs, and land prices rose accordingly.

Washington devoted little attention to the other potential sites, and his unannounced twelve-day journey caught advocates of up-river locations completely unprepared. Prominent residents suggested Senator Charles Carroll's 10,000-acre estate on the Monacacy; the Shepherdstown, Virginia–Sharpsburg, Maryland, area; and Williamsport, at the mouth of the Conococheague.

Success for the Potomac capital, wherever it was to be, required funds additional to the promised \$192,000 from Virginia and Maryland. The United States considered various means of financing the purchase of land and construction of buildings for its capital. In 1783 Congress had been content to rely on commitments from states that made offers; a year later it had appropriated \$100,000. In 1789 it considered borrowing that sum, but concluded instead that the money should be provided by the states in which the capital was fixed. The method attempted, after the decision to locate the capital on the Potomac, was proposed by George Walker, the Georgetown merchant and publicist. He suggested in 1789 that the federal government purchase the land from the proprietors, develop a city plan, divide the land unnecessary for public purposes into numbered lots, engrave the plan with them, and then sell them. Walker believed his plan would eventually raise about \$10.5 million, thereby allowing the government rapidly to construct a great city without taxing the people. The sale of lots, however, failed to raise much money, and it became necessary to borrow. Once committed to borrowing money, the federal government assumed the full cost of the development of its capital.

To the surprise of many, Washington did not announce the location of the federal district when he addressed Congress in December 1790. Early in January he was still studying the best way to run the boundary lines so that the maximum amount of land could be included around Alexandria, allowing the town to grow westward as well as northward within the federal district. Finally, on 24 January he issued a proclamation announcing the chosen site. Washington not only included Alexandria—four miles south of the lower limit specified in the 1790 residence act—but also named a point within the town as the starting place for the survey of the district's boundaries. The ten miles square was oriented so that a corner of it pointed due north; its center was the site of the present-day Pan American Building. This orientation allowed for

the inclusion of more land in Virginia. The proclamation stated that only the area above the Anacostia in Maryland and above a line that ran southwest from it to about the mouth of Four Mile Run in Virginia be accepted for the district. In a letter to Congress, Washington recommended that it pass a supplemental residence act to enable him to complete the full ten miles square to his liking, by taking in Alexandria and land south of the Anacostia.

Washington's actions not only courted renewed sectional tensions and a confrontation with Congress but also attacks upon himself. He took these risks, nevertheless, because he was wedded to the location. He had faith in the commitment of Congress to the Compromise of 1790, and he considered his reputation with Americans too secure for them to accuse him of local bias or private interest. That the president had selected the southern limit specified by their act did not surprise congressmen, despite the clear implication of the Virginia act of cession and the southern call during the residence debate of 1789 for a westerly, upriver site. Instead, the stunned congressmen complained of Washington's proposal to include land in both Maryland and Virginia south of the limit established by Congress. One congressman exaggerated only slightly when he observed that Mount Vernon bordered Alexandria. He, of course, did not know that Washington owned almost 1,200 acres along Four Mile Run within the proposed district or that George Washington Park Custis, Martha Washington's grandson and the president's ward, owned the 950-acre plantation that would become Arlington Cemetery.

Washington's decision, however, was not motivated by purely personal gain, and to attribute the choice only to a desire to raise the value of Mount Vernon and other family lands belittles his vision. To be sure, he clearly expected an immediate rise in the value of his land as a result of the location, for one of his most conspicuous traits was an open concern for his own economic interest. During the 1790s he referred in personal business transactions to the increase in the value of Mount Vernon that followed from the location of the federal district nearby, and raised his tenant rents accordingly. That he did not site the capital primarily for personal gain, as some have alleged, is suggested by the fate of Abingdon, a 950-acre river plantation adjacent to present-day National Airport. In 1789 Washington secured an act from

the Virginia legislature allowing him to alter the will of Martha's son, Jack Custis, in order to return the plantation to its previous owner. The land had been a heavy burden on the Custis estate, but worth retaining if holdings within the federal district had been Washington's aim. He had more important reasons for his choice than to line his or his family's pockets.

What motivated this man so attuned to politics, public opinion, and his own reputation in history to select the site he chose and to risk putting the issue before Congress again? The site was the midpoint between Maine and Georgia, and he considered it the best spot for the survival of the Union to which so much of his life and reputation had been devoted. Potomac Fever and his commitment to the economic growth of Alexandria, however, outdistanced other factors in importance. To David Stuart, Washington stressed the intimate political and economic connection between the federal district and the navigation of the Potomac. No exertions, he concluded, should be omitted to accomplish the latter, for, in proportion as it advanced, the former benefited.

Besides the few congressmen who privately criticized Washington's motives in 1791, Americans showed little reaction to the location. Marylanders and Virginians residing on the Potomac expected it to boost the Potomac Company and to open new fields for commercial and land investment. The Potomac would soon echo with the din of industry, agriculture, and commerce, predicted a Georgetown merchant, who sought to buy land near Tiber Creek where he assumed Washington would situate the public buildings. At Alexandria, people believed their fortunes insured forever.

A week after Congress convened in December 1790, southerners saw what some perceived as the first legislative threat to the Potomac location in 1800: Alexander Hamilton's plan for a national bank. They feared that the federal government and the bank would quickly become so entwined that one would hardly be able to function without the other; consequently, a national bank in Philadelphia, the financial capital of the United States, would render that city the permanent residence of Congress.

Southern paranoia intensified when a Senate committee reported the bank bill in January 1791. Under the terms of its incorporation, the bank would remain in Philadelphia after Congress left in 1800. The bill passed Congress despite

Madison's last minute contention that it violated the Constitution. The South's only hope lay in convincing the president to inaugurate his veto power. Southerners had a willing ear in Washington, whose obsession with protecting the federal city against any threat faced its first test. He turned immediately to his attorney general and secretary of state for opinions on the constitutional question. Both Virginians deemed the bank bill unconstitutional. Washington sent their opinions to Hamilton for his arguments in favor of its constitutionality.

As Washington considered use of the veto, Maryland Senator Charles Carroll gave notice that he would bring in a supplemental residence bill pursuant to the president's recommendation. Carroll's bill called for the federal district to include Alexandria and a few square miles of Maryland south of the Anacostia, but reaffirmed the 1790 provision that the federal buildings be situated on the Maryland side of the Potomac. The Senate postponed the bill for one week, specifically to the day on which Washington had either to sign or veto the bank bill. The first confrontation between a congressional majority and a president over the possibility of a veto loomed, and Congress had strengthened its position by letting Washington know that passage of a favorite piece of presidential legislation first required his signature on the bank bill. By the morning of the tenth day, "there was a general uneasiness and the president stood on the brink of a precipice from which had he fallen he would have brought down with him much of that glorious reputation he has so deservedly established." Washington, however, signed the bill.

The Senate immediately took up the order of the day—the postponed supplemental residence bill. The bill passed the next day, and the House agreed to it without comment. Congress had Washington's signature on the bank bill, and he had congressional approval for the inclusion of Alexandria within the federal district, as well as a reaffirmation of the Compromise of 1790. But in the process Washington had been subjected to greater public criticism than at any previous point in his presidency. Ultimately, the confrontation bore little fruit, for in 1846 the United States retroceded to Virginia that part of the ten miles square which lay south of the Potomac.

Washington had not waited for the supplemental act to begin development of the capital. On 22 January, two days before announcing the boundaries he had chosen for the federal district, he

named as commissioners David Stuart of Alexandria, Thomas Johnson of Frederick, and Representative Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek. Each held Potomac Company stock and, in the opinion of Jefferson, each stood ready to do Washington's bidding. The president believed he could not have found three men more committed or better disposed to accommodate the conflicting interests.

No one who had not served under Washington in the Continental army shared as much intimacy with him as Stuart, who was understood to be the president's voice on the commission. The two carried on a private correspondence about the affairs of the federal city, and through him Washington transmitted confidential information and personal opinions for the guidance of the commissioners. Thomas Johnson had long been associated with Washington in the promotion of the Potomac. Johnson had nominated him to be commander-in-chief in 1775 and had replaced him as president of the Potomac Company when he became president of the United States. Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek held a role in the political economy of Montgomery County, Maryland, similar to Washington's in Fairfax County, Virginia. A large slaveholder, Carroll lived at Joseph's Park, a 4,000-acre plantation northeast of Georgetown, and owned thousands of other acres in the county. His appointment to the commission held particular importance, for, although economically tied to Georgetown, he was related to both Notley Young and Daniel Carroll of Duddington, the largest landowners near Carrollsburg on the Anacostia.

Washington had no intention of slowing progress by waiting for the commission to meet. Early in February he dispatched Andrew Ellicott, assisted by the free black Benjamin Banneker, to Alexandria to survey the four boundary lines of the federal district as a preliminary step to a more exact survey later. More important than the survey of the district was the plan for the federal city within it. Little attention had been given during the long debate over the location of the capital to the question of a plan. In January 1789 George Walker had called for a city based on the best models of ancient and modern times, particularly Babylon and Philadelphia, and clearly separated into political and commercial sectors. To discourage speculators, Walker suggested that each purchaser erect a house built to specific standards within a certain number of years. With such a plan, the city would be able

to accommodate residents even before completion of the public buildings. The author of the March 1789 "conversation" between the Potomac and Patapsco rivers included such proposed details as the width and angle of the streets. "The genius of America will rise superior to the Gothic taste that has so long pervaded" urban design, Potomac hoped, "and will, in some measure, revive the elegance, regularity, and grandeur of the ancients."

A variety of individuals suggested to Washington that they or their ideas be employed in designing the city. Nevertheless, he seriously considered only civil engineer Pierre-Charles L'Enfant, who had expressed his ideas on the subject to Washington at least as early as September 1789. Washington considered L'Enfant a scientific man of taste and the best qualified person in the world likely to accept the job. L'Enfant's talents first came to Washington's attention during the Revolutionary War. A variety of artistic and architectural endeavors drew public attention to L'Enfant during the 1780s, none more prominently than Federal Hall, the first U.S. Capitol following the adoption of the Constitution. Its elegance and the speed of its renovation caused people to overlook its unexpected expense. Representative Thomas FitzSimons had recommended that L'Enfant prepare the public buildings at Philadelphia for the return of Congress in 1790. FitzSimons praised L'Enfant as a mild, unassuming person who would not expect too high a compensation and who worked well with common laborers.

L'Enfant reached the federal district early in March 1791 and, personally directed by Washington, began studying its topography and surveying the land between Tiber Creek and the Anacostia. Washington kept L'Enfant south of the Tiber in order to frighten the Georgetown landowners into selling their land at reasonable rates to secret agents the president had dispatched to Georgetown for that purpose. One writer has recently described Washington's actions as private land speculation that the president undertook for his own profit, arguing that Washington could not have been acting for the public's benefit because no funds had been appropriated. Actually, Washington could have used the funds appropriated by Maryland and Virginia had he not had to abandon the feint when the enthusiastic L'Enfant violated his instructions.

Washington then was compelled to authorize a survey north from the Tiber, to what eventually became Florida Avenue, so



that he could have a rough plat of the entire area between Georgetown and the Anacostia. Such a plat, he hoped, would allow him to play off one group of proprietors against the other. The president preferred the land along the Anacostia with its pronounced topographic features and commercial advantages. Nevertheless, he expressed reservation because he agreed with the Georgetown proprietors that a city located in the proximity of an existing population center would grow more quickly. L'Enfant helped convince Washington of the necessity of the whole area to the vision they shared.

At the end of March Washington called the rival proprietors together at Suter's Fountain Inn in Georgetown to impress upon them once again the past trials and future challenges to the Potomac capital. Their jealousies might deprive the federal government of the only means it had to raise funds for buildings. They need not be rivals, he told them, for the lands of both groups were necessary for the United States to have a capital tantamount to its status. On 30 March the proprietors reached an agreement with Washington: They would deed to the public all the land that the president wished to include within the federal city, and he would have complete control over its disposition. Once L'Enfant completed a plan for the city, the proprietors would receive \$66.67 an acre for as much land as Washington wished for public buildings and reservations, as well as half of the lots platted on their former holdings; the federal government would retain half the lots and all land designated for streets. The U.S. government thus secured over 500 acres of public reservations for \$36,099.35, as well as 10,136 lots and miles of streets at no cost to itself.

Early Washington, D.C., is popularly considered to have been a swamp. This idea apparently originated with the Irish poet Tom Moore, who described it as a place where "temples rose among primeval swamps." The dozens of observers of the young town, Europeans as well as Americans from the North, South, and Middle states, provide a more detailed description of its stunning natural setting. Almost all echoed First Lady Abigail Adams's simple assessment that it was beautiful. Water boundaries—the Potomac, the Anacostia, and Rock Creek—surrounded the amphitheatrical federal city on three sides. Cattail and reed tidal marshes, teeming with terrestrial and aquatic wildlife, lined the Anacostia and smaller inlets and creeks, but were less common on the more rapidly flowing Potomac. Along the upper Anacostia

grew extensive patches of wild rice. Oysters, a variety of fish, and wintering waterfowl provided good eating. Navigable Rock and Tiber creeks cut deeply into the city, and the former still provides residents and visitors with a sample of the area's 1790 landscape.

The federal city was platted on three river terraces, seamed with stream valleys, which rose gradually northward from tide-water at the White House grounds to an elevation of 100 feet at what became Florida Avenue, the northern boundary of the city. To the north and east stood two more eroding terraces, the highest of which had an elevation of about 400 feet. To the west across the mile-wide, eighteen-foot-deep Potomac River rose the Arlington Hills. On the northwest the Georgetown Heights dominated the horizon, while to the south rose the hills of the Anacostia River terraces. Springs were numerous, particularly in the city's eastern sector. Tobacco and grain fields, cattle pastures, and woods of maple, tulip, black cherry, and oaks, and a few roads quilted the landscape. Scattered homes and outbuildings sheltered mostly Catholic, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian small planters and farmers who had first settled the area in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. A majority of these farmers and planters owned no slaves and only a small portion owned more than ten.

No part of the well-drained city supported a swamp, a wetland where trees stand in water all or most of the time. Even given the loose definition of the word *swamp* in the late eighteenth century—it could mean swamp, marsh, fen, bog, brushy area, or just river bottomland—residents and visitors rarely used the word to describe any part of the federal city. Andrew Ellicott's 1793 topographic map of the District of Columbia clearly delineates marshes where they occurred; except for a few tidal marshes along the Anacostia, he shows none within the federal city.

When pressed for just how much of the nine-and-one-half square mile early federal city was a swamp, those who still believe the myth retreat to the land between the White House and the Capitol south to the Anacostia, an area roughly comparable to southwest Washington. Among the dozens of descriptions of the early federal city are two mentions of swamps in this area: one between the base of Capitol Hill and what became the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art and another at the Justice Department. These two small, low-lying areas between Tiber Creek and Pennsylvania Avenue were subject to periodic flooding, but the

most descriptive source uses "swamp" in the sense of an area overgrown with bushes, briars, and thorns, not trees in standing water.

Certainly the seemingly level plain on which southwest Washington stands was not a swamp in the eighteenth century, most of it being well-drained and not subject to frequent flooding. If it had been a swamp, or even swampy, would David Burnes have had a cornfield at the northern edge? Would Notley Young have built his plantation home at what became G and 10th Streets, S.W.? (His family's graveyard and gardens lay even closer to the river and lower than the thirty-foot elevation of the house.) Would Daniel Carroll of Duddington have platted the town of Carrollsburg there? Would the prominent Delaney, Carroll, Johnson, Tilghman, Jenifer, and Lux families of Maryland have invested there? Would the most successful of the early land speculators, Thomas Law, have chosen this part of the federal city to invest in and build? Most important, George Washington, whose eye for good land had few rivals, would never have selected swampy lowlands for the seat of an empire that he knew would perpetuate his name and reputation in history. The swamp myth simply lacks credibility whether one reads the landscape or the documents.

With the land acquired, Washington instructed L'Enfant to prepare a plan, stressing the importance of encompassing as much of the proprietors' holdings as possible. Nevertheless, Washington learned from the commissioners that problems had arisen over the agreement. Several proprietors complained that Washington had deceived them, and they refused to convey their lands. These men rightly recalled that, while the president had indicated the need for approximately 4,000 acres, L'Enfant's plan covered 6,000, and they feared that the city would be divided into so many lots that the value of each would be diminished. George Walker and other proprietors who had purchased their land after the adoption of the residence act supported the president. They did not believe he should be bound by anything he might have said, but only by the agreement itself, which clearly gave him the power to include as much land as he saw fit. They urged the commission not to concede to any demands that would mutilate the "Metropolis of America" or frustrate the president's desires. The commission wisely decided to leave the matter in Washington's hands.

Meanwhile, L'Enfant continued his work. Nature had done much for the site, he told a member of Congress as they rode about the chosen area, and with the proper design the city would become the wonder of the world. To his friend Alexander Hamilton, L'Enfant expressed equal enthusiasm. No place in America was more susceptible to grand improvement or more capable of promoting the rapid growth of a city destined to be the capital of an extensive empire. The location, he believed, would end the demarcation between North and South.

The key feature of L'Enfant's plan was a system of radial avenues imposed on a grid of streets. The numerous circles and squares that resulted provided public reservations throughout the city. The presidential mansion, with a view down the Potomac toward Alexandria, would be built near Georgetown. The Capitol, facing east toward the area of the city proposed for commercial and residential purposes rather than west to the governmental sector, would rise nearer the Anacostia on wooded Jenkins Hill. The great distance between the two buildings reflected the political necessity to provide something for both groups of proprietors. Likewise, the decision to name the great avenue that connected the two buildings after the State of Pennsylvania reflected political considerations.

Deeply impressed with the plan, Washington suggested few changes. Nevertheless, his influence was significant, since he had chosen the ground within the district upon which L'Enfant imposed his design. Had Washington dispatched L'Enfant to the heights above Georgetown, the designer could have created an Athenian capital for the United States. But the American Cincinnatus and his fellow citizens considered themselves republicans, not democrats. To them, Rome, not Athens, provided the appropriate model. Consequently, Washington had pointed L'Enfant to the generally level plain through which the Tiber flowed.

Publication of the plan stimulated newspaper comment and praise for the designer's genius, taste, and imagination. George Walker, promoting the site as the most beautiful, salubrious, and convenient in America if not in the world, predicted that the federal city would rise with a rapidity unparalleled in urban history. It would become the delight and admiration of the world, and future generations would consider it one of Washington's greatest accomplishments. Others had reservations. At least one writer publicly condemned the plan as overly grand. More important,

it lacked support of the commission. David Stuart, in particular, complained to Washington: Perhaps the "immense and gloomy wilderness" surrounding the presidential mansion was appropriate for despotic governments but not for the United States.

At the end of June, Washington returned to Georgetown where, with the aid of L'Enfant's plan, he allayed the proprietors' fears of financial ruin and obtained their deeds. Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and L'Enfant met in Philadelphia in August 1791 to consider the measures necessary to prepare the capital for Congress by 1800. Washington sent Jefferson and Madison to Georgetown in September to share their discussion with the commission. Although encouraged to express their own opinions freely and to reach independent conclusions, the commissioners unanimously concurred on every point that had been determined at Philadelphia. In addition, they named the city "Washington" and the district, the "District of Columbia."

With the foundation so carefully laid by his own efforts, Washington planned to turn over responsibility for the federal city to the commission. But his assessment of the politics of the issue, his obsession with the political economy of the Potomac, and his desire to remain informed kept the president busy with the affairs of the city that now bore his name. During the eight years remaining before his death, Washington not only faced but also contributed to a variety of threats to the Potomac capital.

Washington quickly realized that the real threat to the capital came from discord among its friends rather than from its enemies in New England and Pennsylvania. The Anacostia and Georgetown proprietors jealously eyed one another. The commission sparred with both groups, with its own employees, and with the land speculators who invested in city lots after 1793. Washington attended personally to most of the crises that arose among the friends of the federal city, for they delayed construction and threatened to give Congress good reason for not moving to the Potomac in 1800. As a result, he immersed himself in the details of personnel, building regulations, and financing from 1791 until his retirement in 1797.

The first personnel crisis proved the most devastating to the immediate as well as long-term development of the capital. Opposed to a sale of lots before wider dissemination of his plan, L'Enfant refused to make it available to the commission for the October 1791 sale. He believed plats of the lots for sale to be suf-

ficient, arguing that the absence of data with which to compare the lots to other points in the city would bring higher prices. Only 35 lots sold for a total of \$8,756, of which but \$2,000 was immediately due. Although the failure of the sale confirmed his opposition to its timing, L'Enfant bore the onus. Secretary of State Jefferson encouraged the president to take the opportunity to assure the commission that the planner served at its pleasure. This placed Washington in a quandary. He considered L'Enfant to be defensive about his plan, yet he recognized that the commissioners did not pay enough attention to the feelings of either L'Enfant or Ellicott. Washington, therefore, chose a middle course. He admonished L'Enfant for withholding the plan and sent word to the commission—in a private communication through David Stuart—that he deemed the assistance of L'Enfant and Ellicott as essential and that the commission should honor their feelings, or at least appear to do so. Washington promised Stuart that he would instruct L'Enfant that he served at the commission's pleasure.

L'Enfant further antagonized the commission when he took an action that threatened its chances of obtaining needed assistance from the Maryland legislature. Politically influential Daniel Carroll of Duddington had continued construction of a house in the midst of a square that L'Enfant had set aside as a focal point for the southeastern sector of the city. Fearful of the precedent and indignant over Carroll's refusal to remove the structure when asked, L'Enfant ordered the walls carefully taken down so that Carroll could use the bricks elsewhere. He left the foundation alone, for it had been dug before the land became public. L'Enfant sent the commission a written defense; its high tone grew out of both pride and an unfamiliarity with the subtleties of the English language. Subject to one master, the infuriated commissioners refused to take orders from an employee, no matter how talented. Thus, Washington had to remind L'Enfant that he was subordinate to the commission in all matters. Thereafter, however, tensions between the commission and L'Enfant seemed to diminish, and the planner restrained himself when he discovered that the newly completed house of Notley Young—another relative of commissioner Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek—sat in the middle of one of his planned streets.

Early in 1792, L'Enfant went to Philadelphia to supervise the plan's engraving. He submitted to the president an expensive, de-

tailed proposal for the year's work, thus clearly indicating his refusal to act under the commission's supervision. Washington ignored the proposal and pressed L'Enfant to complete the engraving. Moreover, Stuart told Washington privately that the commissioners had agreed to resign rather than to be subjected any longer to L'Enfant's evident caprice. The president must either make the planner their servant or render him independent. George Walker's attempt at mediation failed. Washington took personal offense at L'Enfant's behavior and fired him. To prevent the incident from becoming an issue between the political factions forming in his cabinet, the president had Alexander Hamilton draft the letter dismissing his friend and had Jefferson sign and send it. L'Enfant lived out his life in poverty, a guest of the Digges family estate directly across the Potomac from Mount Vernon. Only in the twentieth century did the U.S. capital begin to recover from his loss.

With L'Enfant gone, Washington instructed Ellicott to complete the engraving, authorizing him to make certain changes under Jefferson's guidance. It has been argued that replacing an artist with an engineer fundamentally modified the basic nature of the design and, by extension, the City of Washington: The "neatened, straightened, and engineeringly corrected" plan carved into the top of L'Enfant's tomb and reconstructed at Western Square in the middle of Pennsylvania Avenue is Ellicott's, and not the asymmetrical and more human-scale design of L'Enfant.

The choice of commission members was vital to the early development of the federal city. Consequently, Washington devoted considerable effort to appointing committed replacements as the original appointees retired. Thomas Johnson's seat went to Gustavus Scott, a Maryland Potomac Company stockholder who had served on the Maryland legislative committee that had met with Washington in 1784 and drafted the bill to charter the company. William Thornton, the man whose design for the Capitol had so captivated Washington, accepted Stuart's seat. Daniel Carroll's seat went to Alexander White, a Potomac Company investor whose vote, like that of the man he replaced, had been essential to the Compromise of 1790.

Other personnel problems at the federal city required less of Washington's time; nevertheless, they proved worrisome. Shortly after assuming L'Enfant's duties, Andrew Ellicott fought with

the commission, and the scenario of the previous year repeated itself: The proprietors generally backed Ellicott, and Washington, while publicly supporting the commissioners, privately urged them to compromise. After Ellicott resigned, the commission appointed Samuel Blodget of Massachusetts as superintendent to expedite construction. Blodget, a man consumed by the idea of a Potomac capital and the establishment of a national university there, survived only a short time in the job. Several years after his dismissal, he published a defense in which he claimed to have heard Washington advocate the Potomac site for the capital when, as commander-in-chief of the Continental army, Washington encamped outside of Boston in 1775. L'Enfant, Ellicott, and Blodget were not the only men to leave the employ of the federal government after disputes with the commission. So, too, did architect Stephen Hallet, who worked on the Capitol.

One final major problem that Washington faced was funding. The promoters of the capital had long expected the federal city's land to be their major source of money. The 1792 auction raised little more than the 1791 disaster, and Washington gave his blessing to a land speculation scheme to provide funds, speed construction, and further tie New England to the site. James Greenleaf of Massachusetts agreed to purchase 3,000 lots from the public at \$66.50 each, to build 70 houses before 1800, and to lend the commissioners \$2,200 a month until completion of the public buildings. He formed a consortium with Robert Morris and John Nicholson of Pennsylvania and sold 500 lots to Thomas Law at four times what he had paid the commission for them a year earlier.

Furious, Washington privately censured the commission for not locating such buyers itself. Greenleaf got into a dispute with the commission and withdrew from the consortium. By 1795 Morris and Nicholson owed the federal government thousands of dollars, and the president personally asked his friend Morris to pay up. The partners, however, went to jail for bankruptcy, leaving unfinished houses in the federal city and tarnishing its name as a place for investment. Law, on the other hand, proved to be a successful developer.

When the sale of lots failed to provide the money necessary to carry on the public works, and foreign loans proved unattainable, Washington reluctantly realized that he would have to turn to legislative bodies. Virginia showed no interest, and Maryland re-



fused to lend any money without guarantees. In January 1796 Washington turned to Congress for permission to use the public lots for that purpose. Congress took the opportunity to launch a full-scale investigation into what Washington termed all the faux pas that had been committed. After another sectional compromise related to the controversial Jay Treaty, Congress passed a bill to guarantee the Maryland loan with the federal city lots. Once again the Compromise of 1790 had been reaffirmed. Beginning with a direct appeal from Washington, Maryland lent the commission \$250,000 between 1797 and 1799.

Distant from the federal city and obsessed with dreams for its success, Washington's decisions had not always been wise. Nevertheless, by the time he retired to Mount Vernon in March 1797, the only opposition to a removal to the Potomac in 1800 centered at Philadelphia. Its residents attacked the federal city as a forest with no access to commercial information and contrasted Philadelphia's civic improvements to the City of Washington, whose growth arose from speculation rather than from any qualities of site. Some Philadelphians still asserted that the northern states would refuse to go to the Potomac and that, if the South insisted, the Union would be severed. In reporting such opinion, an English visitor concluded that the transfer would occur on schedule not only because a large majority of Americans favored it, but also because a refusal would destroy the harmony of the Union, if not the Union itself.

Friends and neighbors at Alexandria joined to welcome Washington into retirement, and he vowed his support for the town's prosperity. To keep this vow and to satisfy his own dreams, Washington violated his commitment to keep out of federal city concerns. Just as his very existence overshadowed President John Adams's efforts in military and foreign policy, it similarly operated in the affairs of the federal city. Adams declined to participate in routine decision making for the federal city and even refused Washington's suggestion that he make a symbolic visit to the city. He yielded, however, when the former president strongly dissented from Adams's proposal to place the executive offices near the Capitol instead of the presidential mansion, as originally planned. Washington maintained correspondence with the commission and individual commissioners, and relied on commissioner Thornton to oversee the construction of Washington's houses in the federal city.

Washington's commitment to a Potomac location for the seat of the American Empire is nowhere better captured than in Edward Savage's 1796 painting, "The Washington Family." Savage portrays George and Martha Washington, Martha's grandchildren, and George's devoted body slave, William Lee, before a vista of the Potomac. On a table lies the plan of the federal city. Washington's left hand is on the plan, his right on the shoulder of George Washington Parke Custis. In turn, the boy, representing the future of the United States, rests his right hand on a partially covered globe.

The year 1800, at the close of which the federal government would move to the Potomac, was a presidential election. The deeply split Federalist party had reason to fear Jefferson and the Democratic-Republican party. The Federalists' best hope, argued Gouverneur Morris, lay in Washington once again coming out of retirement to accept the presidency. Consider, he urged Washington, that the proximity of the capital to Mount Vernon would allow for relaxation there. And, Morris added, guaranteeing the removal of the federal government to the Potomac might require his acceptance. The proprietor of Mount Vernon did not receive the letter: Washington will live, a eulogist proclaimed, "cherished in the remembrance of all faithful Americans while their empire shall continue."

Over half a million dollars had been spent on construction of the capital between 1791 and 1800. The population and the number of houses had grown dramatically. An imposing home for the president and the first portion of a magnificent Capitol rose dramatically above the landscape. Nevertheless, the city's development did not suggest grandeur. Broad, sometimes muddy streets passed between tree stumps to connect the widely scattered buildings in the huge, empty city. Here and there decaying houses left unfinished by Morris and Nicholson added to the lonely vista. The Capitol and presidential mansion, although habitable, remained unfinished. Despite a newspaper, taverns, a theater, and such other evidences of urban life as outdoor concerts by the Marine band, the cultural deprivation of the federal city in comparison with Philadelphia struck observers. Abigail Adams concluded that New Englanders would have done it better.

President John Adams had no love for the Potomac. But if anyone hoped in 1800 that he would seize upon lingering opposition to the residence act at Philadelphia to keep the federal government

there, they misjudged the man. Adams had worked closely with the Virginians to start the Revolution three decades earlier. He understood the necessity of a removal to the Potomac for the preservation of the Union, and he respected George Washington's belief that a Potomac capital would bind North to South and East to West. The commission informed President Adams in the fall of 1799 that the capital was ready, and, when the Sixth Congress met in December, Adams called its attention to the impending transfer of the government. In April 1800 Congress passed a removal act—the funds for which had been appropriated in 1790—and in May it ordered its next meeting to be at Washington in November. Nothing perhaps better symbolizes the peaceful turnover of political power in the United States from the Federalists to the Democratic-Republicans than the move from urbane Philadelphia to rustic Washington, D.C. Even more important as an image, the move reflected an optimistic society willing to reaffirm a political act of faith in the future it had made ten years earlier.