CHAPTER I

THE FOUNDING OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL

IN LATE May 1800, when the sloops carrying government records and the personal belongings of federal officials docked at Lear's wharf on the Potomac near the mouth of Rock Creek, the new national capital bore little resemblance to a city. A half-mile below the landing a sluggish little stream, Tiber or Goose Creek, worked its way to the river through tidal flats. Above the marshy estuary rose the painted sandstone Executive Mansion, flanked on one side by the brick building designed for the Treasury, on the other by the partly built headquarters for the State and War Departments. A mile farther east one wing of the white freestone Capitol occupied a commanding position on Jenkins Hill, blocking off from view the houses on the wooded plateau beyond. Nearby, dwellings ready to turn into boarding houses for congressmen dotted the ridge along New Jersey Avenue, while on North Capitol Street stood the two houses General Washington had put up to encourage other investors. Between the Capitol and the President's "Palace" stretched Pennsylvania Avenue, planned as the federal city's main thoroughfare, its course marked by a tangle of elder bushes, swamp grasses, and tree stumps.[1]

Downstream from the tidal swamps bluffs edged the river nearly to Greenleaf's Point, where the "Eastern Branch" flowed into the Potomac. About the point, today the site of Fort McNair and the National War College, were substantial brick

[1] Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners for the District of Columbia, 24 Sep 1798, IV, 215-16, Record Group 42, National Archives (hereafter cited as Comrs' Prcdgs); George Washington to Dr. William Thornton, 6 Oct 1799, *The Writings of George Washington*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, XXXVII, 388; "Washington in 1800," *The Correspondence and Miscellanies of the Hon. John Cotton Smith*, pp. 204-209; John Ball Osborne, "The Removal of the Government to Washington," Columbia Historical Society *Records*, III, 158 (hereafter cited as CHS *Rec*).

houses, some of them occupied, more of them awaiting tenants. The speculators who had attempted to exploit this river-front area had also erected two rows of houses west of the President's House on Pennsylvania Avenue, the "Six Buildings" begun by James Greenleaf at 22nd Street, and at 19th Street the better-known "Seven Buildings," financed by Robert Morris, which would serve for a time as offices for the Department of State.

Other houses conforming to the federal commissioners' exacting specifications lay scattered over the four-mile expanse from the site of the Navy Yard on the Eastern Branch to Washington City's northwestern boundary at Rock Creek. Here and there clustered small frame houses which the commissioners in charge of building had reluctantly permitted because "mechanics" obviously could not afford to build or occupy three-story brick edifices and the city would have to accommodate some of the "lower orders." All told, Washington contained only 109 habitable brick houses and 263 wooden. But in midsummer the beauty of the natural setting impressed newcomers. The "romantic" scenery of river banks shaded by "tall and umbrageous forest trees" compensated somewhat for the "unformed" streets, the roofless houses, the distance from one group of buildings to the next, and the clutter of stone, lumber, and debris about the unfinished government buildings. Not until the November winds stripped the trees bare would the rawness and untidiness of the new capital afflict men fresh from the elegance and comforts of Philadelphia.[2]

In 1790 tobacco and cornfields, orchards and woods had covered most of the area. A few houses had been built in Carrollsburgh on the Eastern Branch, where in 1770 Charles Carroll, Jr., of Duddington had attempted to found a trading

[2] Allen C. Clark, *Greenleaf and Law in the Federal City*, pp. 123-43; William B. Webb, *The Laws of the Corporation of the City of Washington*, pp. 55-62; "Diary of Mrs. William Thornton, 1800-1863," CHS *Rec*, x, 88-226 (transcript of the entries for 1800, hereafter cited as Thornton Diary); *American State Papers, Miscellaneous*, I, 254-56 (hereafter cited as *ASP, Misc*); Margaret Bayard Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society*, ed. Gaillard Hunt, p. 10 (hereafter cited as M. B. Smith, *First Forty Years*).

village. Twenty years later the plantation of the Carrolls of Duddington still extended northward to include Jenkins Hill with its fine old trees which Daniel Carroll cut to sell for timber and fire wood. A few dwellings stood also in Hamburg, a tiny settlement located to the east of Rock Creek near the Potomac, where Jacob Funk of Frederick, Maryland, had similarly tried to develop a town. Along Goose Creek had stretched David Burnes' fields; his story-and-a-half farmhouse nestled against the slope near the stream's mouth. A man named Pope had owned that land in the seventeenth century and, having called his plantation "Rome," had christened the brook "Tiber," but later generations who hunted the wild geese and ducks along its estuary had rechristened it Goose Creek, and that name endured locally until after 1800. While the Executive Mansion was rising on the high land above his house, Burnes had continued to plant his corn in the fields bordering the stream until, in 1796, the commissioners had cut a swath through to form Pennsylvania Avenue. A cherry orchard occupied most of the present-day Lafayette Square.[8]

On the heights of the Potomac upstream from Washington stood the city of Georgetown. Laid out in 1751 and incorporated in 1789, the little river port had flourished for some years as a shipping center for Maryland and Virginia tobacco. After 1793 she had suffered reverses as the small crops grown on depleted soil, the uncertain markets of war-ridden Europe and, hearsay reported, the diversion of local capital to speculation in Washington real estate combined to cut her tobacco exports by three-fourths. At the opening of the nineteenth century she still served as an outlet for the produce of the Maryland farms in her immediate vicinity, and her population together with that of the adjoining countryside outside her limits exceeded by some 1,900 the 3,000 inhabitants of Washington. Fine-looking brick

[8] George Watterston, *A New Guide to Washington*, 1842, Preface; Commissioners to David Burnes, 19 Feb 1796, Letters sent by the Board of Commissioners for the District of Columbia, RG 42, NA (hereafter cited as Comrs' Ltrs Sent); *Daily Patriot*, 8 Dec 1870.

houses stood in pleasant gardens running from Bridge Street to the river or along four or five other wide streets; the humble dwellings of working people occupied the land about the wharves and the warehouses. Suter's Tavern and the newer Union Tavern offered visitors comfortable accommodation. A handsome Presbyterian church and Trinity Catholic Church contributed to the settled atmosphere of the community, while Georgetown Seminary, founded eleven years before by Bishop John Carroll to train men for the Roman Catholic priesthood, lent the village special distinction. Congressmen seeking agreeable living quarters would be tempted to choose Georgetown, despite the inconvenience of the three miles of travel over rutted roads to reach the Capitol.[4]

Alexandria, five miles down the Potomac at the southern tip of the "ten-mile square," was still more firmly established and sophisticated. Beautiful houses built before the Revolution for the Scottish tobacco factors and the wheat merchants who had developed this chief seaport on the Potomac had made her, in the judgment of that observant Frenchman, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, "beyond all comparison the handsomest town in Virginia."[5] By building a network of roads into the lower Shenandoah Valley in the 1760's and 1770's, Alexandrians had captured the lion's share of the export trade in Virginia wheat and flour. Although she was accessible to the new capital only by sailing vessel or by coach and ferry over the river, her 5,000 residents, like citizens of Georgetown and Washington City, saw in the transfer of the federal government to the Potomac the dawning of a bright new future. Later events would lead them to ask themselves why they had so con-

[4] Benjamin Stoddert to John Templeman, n.d., Benjamin Stoddert Mss, Library of Congress (unless otherwise noted, all nonofficial manuscripts cited are in the Library of Congress Manuscript Division); Avery O. Craven, *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860*, in *University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences*, XIII (Mar 1925), pp. 76-77.

[5] Craven, *Soil Exhaustion*, p. 77; Fairfax Harrison, *Land-Marks of Old Prince William*, II, 407-11; Francois-Alexandre-Frédéric La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Voyage dans les Etats-Unis d'Amérique*, VI, 167-68.

fidently expected prosperity to follow immediately, but in 1800 they believed that a mighty commercial expansion would rapidly occur at "the permanent seat of empire."[6]

Indeed Americans generally had assumed that wherever Congress chose to locate the federal city, there a great commercial center would arise. That conviction explains more fully than any consideration of prestige or legislators' convenience why sectional controversy had run so strong during the congressional debates on the "residence" bill. Expectations of long-term economic benefits as well as the immediate revenues the presence of Congress would bring to a community—$100,000 annually, a well-informed New Yorker estimated[7]—had led a half-dozen towns and states, months before the debates opened, to offer Congress land for a permanent meeting place and jurisdictional rights over it. During the nearly seven years of intermittent discussion between October 1783 and July 1790, representatives had agreed on the overriding importance of a central location for the seat of government. But whereas some men defined *central* as geographically half-way between southern Georgia and northern New Hampshire, to others the term meant center of population, a point considerably north of Virginia, even were slaves counted. Apparently no speaker mentioned the drawbacks of a capital in slave-holding territory. Southerners were persuaded, Thomas Jefferson perhaps as completely as anyone, that a capital below the Mason-Dixon line would attract "foreigners, manufacturers and settlers" to Virginia and Maryland and thus shift southward the center of both population and power.[8] The Potomac River Valley, moreover,

[6] House of Representatives Report 59, 11C, 2S, *Papers of the First Fourteen Congresses*; Isaac Weld, *Travels Through the States of North America . . . during the Years of 1795, 1796 and 1797*, I, 90; *Alexandria Advertiser*, 8 Dec 1800; *Second Census of the United States*, 1800.

[7] *Annals of the Congress of the United States*, 4C, 1S, pp. 825-40 (hereafter cited as *Annals*); Ezra L. Hommedieu to Governor Clinton of New York, 15 Aug 1783, quoted in Wilhelmus B. Bryan, *History of the National Capital*, I, 4, 11 (hereafter cited as Bryan, *Capital*).

[8] Jefferson to the Governor of Virginia, 11 Nov 1783, and Notes on the Permanent Seat of Congress, [13 Apr 1784], quoted in *Thomas Jefferson*

gave the South one natural advantage: a link between the eastern seaboard and the trans-Alleghany West by river and the shortest traversable route over the mountains. Aware that the Ohio country, if left without commercial ties with the East, might align itself with the Spanish or French settlements of the interior, George Washington and several associates in 1784 organized the Potomac Company to improve navigation of the river westward.[9]

In the end neither geography nor demography so much as political bargaining fixed the location of the capital. As the controversy dragged on into 1790, Jefferson, Secretary of State in Washington's first administration, and Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of the Treasury, arranged a compromise. Over Jefferson's supper table in New York, the two cabinet members and congressmen Richard Bland Lee and Alexander White of Virginia agreed that, in return for Hamilton's aligning northern support for a southern capital, the Virginians would vote for federal assumption of the state debts incurred during the Revolution. Congress, in accepting the plan, specified Philadelphia as the seat of government for ten years while the federal city was building. Thus supporters of a strong national fiscal policy gained a vital concession and the proponents of a capital on the Potomac at once won special recognition for their section and, as they believed, a significant boost for the South's flagging commerce.[10]

Throughout the long and frequently acrimonious disagreements over where to locate the capital, few men had challenged the principle of congressional control of a federal district. The

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and the National Capital, ed. Saul K. Padover, pp. 1-4, 6-9 (hereafter cited as Padover, *Jefferson*); *The State Records of North Carolina*, ed. Walter Clark, XVI, 908-10.

[9] Weld, *Travels*, I, 71-80; Walter S. Sanderlin, *The Great National Project: A History of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal*, in *The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, LXIV, No. 1, pp. 18, 28-44 (hereafter cited as Sanderlin, *National Project*).

[10] Note on the Residence Bill [ca. May 1790], in Padover, *Jefferson*, pp. 11-12. For more detailed discussion, see John B. McMaster, *A History of the People of the United States*, I, 555-62, and Bryan, *Capital*, I, 1, 27-35.

consensus outside and in Congress had already settled that basic problem. From first to last, every gift of land tendered to Congress, whether from the town of Kingston, New York, Nottingham, New Jersey, or the state governments of New York, Maryland, New Jersey, Virginia, or Pennsylvania, had included offers of complete jurisdiction free from state interference.[11] In the light of the jealousies with which the sovereign states composing the Confederation had guarded their prerogatives, the willingness of each contender for the capital to relinquish authority over a piece of its own territory may seem strange at first glance. Cession of lands in the West was a different matter, for they were remote, part of an unsettled wilderness; the capital would be the very center of American political and commercial activity. But compelling reasons for state self-denial were several. The very jealousies between the states made each loath to see a rival in a position to dominate the general government. At the same time any method of strengthening the Union without injuring any of its thirteen members had obvious merit. A fixed meeting place for Congress should provide the stability that peripatetic sessions had denied it. "Muteability of place," a delegate to the Constitutional Convention observed in 1787, "had dishonored the Federal Government."[12] Yet to place a permanent capital within the jurisdiction of one state was to imperil the influence of every other. The surest way of avoiding that risk was to vest in Congress rights of "exclusive legislation" over the capital and a small area about it. The debates on the residence bill had proceeded upon that premise.[13]

While the competitive bids for the capital were rolling in, an

[11] Papers of the Continental Congress, Item 20, Reports of Committees on "State Papers," 4 Jun 1783, I, 389, and Item 46, Proposals to Congress relative to locating the seat of government, *passim*, and especially 7 Mar 1783, pp. 9-10, and 16 Jun 1783, p. 43, RG 11, NA (hereafter cited as Papers Cont Cong).

[12] Quoted in Bryan, *Capital*, I, 12.

[13] E.g., *Journals of the Continental Congress*, XXIV, 381-83, XXV, 647-60, 706-14; Papers Cont Cong, Item 23, Reports of committees relating particularly to Congress . . . , 13 Aug 1788, I, 101-102, and 6 Aug 1788, I, 339-41.

episode occurred in Philadelphia that underscored the weakness of Congress and the necessity of bolstering its prestige if the Union were to be more than a meaningless name. In June 1783, Pennsylvania veterans not yet discharged from the army had prepared to march to the State House, where Congress was in session, to demand the pay long overdue them for service during the Revolution. Earlier petitions had elicited no answer from Congress, doubtless for the very good reason that with an empty federal treasury a satisfactory reply was not possible. Congress upon learning of the soldiers' impending arrival asked the Pennsylvania state council for protection. The council took no action; Philadelphians reportedly sympathized with the soldiers, who were, after all, seeking redress of real grievances by use of procedures recognized in America—free assembly, free speech, and direct appeal to elected representatives. On June 21 some 250 "mutineers" gathered about Independence Hall, only to find the doors locked against them while Congress huddled inside. Their nearest approach to violence consisted of "offensive language" and occasionally a musket pointed at the tightly shut windows. In mid-afternoon when Congress adjourned, the soldiers returned to their barracks. Congressmen thereupon scuttled out of the city to reconvene in Princeton the following week.[14] The "affront" to the dignity of Congress added ammunition for the campaigners for a federally controlled capital, but the movement to establish it had gained momentum weeks before. Only later did Congress, perhaps secretly chagrined at its own timidity, cite the humiliations it suffered from Pennsylvania as justification for an "Exempt jurisdiction."[15] And in time, after the excesses of the French Revolution had frightened moderates everywhere, the story of the mutiny in Philadelphia came to find place in school text books as the

[14] *The Writings of James Madison*, ed. Gaillard Hunt, 19, 21 Jun 1783, I, 480, 482-84.

[15] Papers Cont Cong, Item 23, 18 Sep 1783, I, 149-50; *Annals*, 6C, 2S, p. 996, 7C, 2S, pp. 50-54.

reason for founding a new capital city out of reach of mobs and powerful local interests.

In accepting the principle eventually written into the Constitution, that Congress must be supreme in the federal district, no one had equated sacrifice of state power with cancellation of political rights of citizens of the future federal territory. On the contrary, Americans of the 1780's had taken for granted that permanent residents, like citizens of any state, would "enjoy the privilege of trial by jury and of being governed by laws made by representatives of their own election."[16] Madison, to be sure, had recognized the puzzling character of the problem in a country where all political machinery operated through state organizations and only citizenship in a state enabled a man to vote in national elections. In 1783 the Virginian had noted merely that "the power of Government within the sd district [should be] concerted between Congress and the inhabitants thereof." Four years later he had gone further. In one of the *Federalist* papers, that collection of able essays urging adoption of the Constitution, he had declared the political status of citizens of a federal district amply protected, "as they will have had their voice in the election of the government which is to exercise authority over them; [and] as a municipal legislature for local purposes, derived from their own suffrages, will of course be allowed them." If the phrase "they will have had their voice" implied they could not continue to have it, few contemporaries had observed the nuance.[17]

In fact before 1800 few contemporaries apparently had thought at all about the local problem in the making. In the 1780's men concerned about building a stronger union had so firmly believed a federally controlled capital a necessary part of the plan that they had incorporated the provision into the Con-

[16] Papers Cont Cong, Item 46, Mar, May, and Jun 1783, pp. 5-10, 15, 55-57, 93.

[17] Papers Cont Cong, Item 23, 27 Dec 1783, I, 161; *The Federalist*, No. 43, p. 280 (1938 ed.).

stitution. At the state conventions called to ratify the Constitution, only in Virginia and North Carolina had delegates so much as spoken of the hazards of creating a federal district beyond the reach of state laws; and these criticisms, though pointing to possible tyrannies such as abolition of trial by jury within the district and grants of commercial monopolies to its merchants, had been in essence part of the over-all attack upon any plan for a strong central government.[18] After ratification of the Constitution and passage of the residence bill eighteen months later, the question of governing the ten-mile square on the Potomac had resolved itself for a decade. The act of July 16, 1790, had not only empowered the President to choose the exact location and to engage commissioners to take charge of planning and building the new capital but had also decreed that until Congress took up residence there and should "otherwise by law provide," Maryland law should prevail in the territory ceded by Maryland, Virginia law in the area given to the United States by the Old Dominion.[19] With that decision, Americans had thankfully dismissed the matter. As late as November 1800 local citizens therefore continued to vote in state and national elections.

President Washington, although free by the terms of the residence act to select any locality between the mouths of the Eastern Branch and the Connocheague River forty miles up the Potomac, had probably never seriously considered a site above tidewater. In an era when travel was slow and hazardous at best, a capital accessible to coastal and ocean-going vessels was virtually imperative. Twentieth-century residents of the District of Columbia, nevertheless, have wondered now and again why a trained surveyor who knew the countryside well chose a spot where tidal swamplands yearly bred fevers and oppressive damp heat would blanket the city every summer. The answer, apart from the undeniable importance of a location

[18] *Debates and Other Proceedings of the Convention of Virginia . . . , June 1788*, III, 27-31; *Proceedings and Debates of the North Carolina Convention, . . . July 1788*, pp. 229-36, 246-47, 273-74.

[19] *Annals*, 1C, 2S, pp. 2234-35.

below the falls of the Potomac, is doubtless twofold. Eighteenth-century Americans looked upon the weather as an act of God and climate a capricious condition of nature which need not affect any man-made decision. In the second place, as long as trees covered the shores of rivers and streams, the area below the Little Falls of the Potomac enjoyed a kind of natural "air conditioning," and, before deforestation produced a downwash of soil and vegetation that silted up brooks and created marshes, the site of the capital was probably nearly as healthful as any farther upstream. Residents of the early nineteenth century, to be sure, suffered so regularly from "flux" during the winter and "ague" in spring and summer that they expected to run fevers while going about their daily business. But ill health pervaded most communities, and the letters and diaries of the period rarely attributed its prevalence here to Washington's climate or unwholesomeness of location.[20]

During the ten years of preparation for the transfer of the government to the banks of the Potomac, President Washington and then President Adams, the commissioners, the French engineer Pierre Charles L'Enfant, whom the President had chosen to lay out the city, Thomas Jefferson, as renowned for his architectural talents as for his knowledge of statecraft, local landowners, and an array of carpenters, bricklayers, stone cutters, and day laborers struggled with financial and physical difficulties and with each other. The President persuaded the chief property-owners to convey to the United States in trust all their land that was to be included in the city limits. According to the agreement, the government was to pay nothing for the area shown on L'Enfant's plan as set aside for public buildings, "reservations," and streets; of the land remaining, half the lots were to revert to the original proprietors, and for the other half the United States would pay £25 Maryland currency, about $67 an acre. Since the state of Maryland had already advanced $72,000 and Virginia $120,000, sale of the government lots

[20] M. B. Smith, *First Forty Years*, p. 23; Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *The Journal of Latrobe*, pp. 131-32.

supposedly would raise enough additional money to cover the costs of erecting the public buildings.

Troubles cropped up almost at once. In September 1791, after the commissioners announced that they had named the ten-mile square "District of Columbia" and the capital-to-be "City of Washington," they advertised a public auction of city lots. L'Enfant protested that it was premature, beneficial only to local speculators who would acquire choice lots at bargain prices and in the process interfere with his plan of encouraging the simultaneous development of a series of neighborhoods. In some degree events proved him right. Held in October, the sale disposed of only thirty-five lots and netted scarcely $2,000, far less than expected, since the value of the 10,000 lots of varying sizes into which L'Enfant proposed to divide the government's salable land was estimated at some $800,000. The President and the commissioners then realized that before holding a second auction they must have a plat of the city ready to enable potential purchasers to see what they were bidding for. But the gifted L'Enfant, dedicated to his vast plans and prone to revise them at frequent intervals, either could not or would not hurry the preparation of an engraved map. He was manifestly unable to comprehend the political risks of delay and the President's sense of urgency about getting money with which to start the public buildings.[21] In February 1792, when L'Enfant had still not produced the engraved map, the President assigned that task to the surveyor Andrew Ellicott of Baltimore, for, as Washington wrote from Philadelphia, "if inactivity and contractedness mark the steps of the commissioners, whilst the contrary on the part of this state [Pennsylvania] is displayed in providing commodious buildings for Congress, etc., the government will remain where it now is." Since L'Enfant indignantly refused to cooperate with Ellicott or the commissioners, the President regretfully dismissed the temperamental Frenchman.[22]

[21] Elizabeth S. Kite, *L'Enfant and Washington, 1791-1792*, pp. 51-58, 73-93.

[22] Ltrs to the Comrs, 18 Dec 1791, 17 Jan, 6 Mar 1792, to the Sec/State,

Despite wide distribution of copies of Ellicott's map, which was based upon L'Enfant's incomplete drawing, the second auction of lots, held in October 1792, again brought in very little. Consequently when efforts to obtain a loan for building the Capitol and the Executive Mansion failed, the commissioners with the President's approval accepted the proposal of James Greenleaf, a member of a prominent Massachusetts family, to buy 3,000 lots at a reduced price to be paid in seven annual installments; he was to build ten houses yearly for seven years and lend the commissioners $2,200 every month till the public buildings were finished. Robert Morris of Philadelphia, the richest man in the United States at that time, and a friend, James Nicholson, soon associated themselves with Greenleaf, and the terms of the original agreement were then broadened to permit the syndicate to acquire title to lots without paying cash for them. This transaction, together with the purchase of lots from individual proprietors, gave the syndicate control of more than a third of the land for sale in Washington and stimulated a flurry of speculation in real estate in the new capital. But the syndicate overreached itself and ended in bankruptcy in 1797, leaving behind a score of unfinished dwellings, fresh problems for the commissioners, and, worst of all, a bad name for the capital as a place of investment. That reputation would handicap the city for years to come.[23]

From the beginning, moreover, the commissioners found that competent workmen were hard to recruit, possibly because slave labor kept wage rates in the South lower than in northern cities; in 1798 ninety slaves made up most of the work force engaged in building the Capitol. Feuds developed between the architects and the superintendents of building. Since the surveyors' plats, L'Enfant's drawing, and the physical features of the

26 Feb, 4 Mar 1792, to Pierre Charles L'Enfant, 28 Feb 1792, and to David Stuart, 8 Mar 1792, *Writings of Washington*, XXXI, 445-48, 461-62, 486-89, 495, 497-98, 504-508; "L'Enfant's Reports to President Washington bearing dates of March 26, June 22, and August 19, 1791," CHS *Rec*, II, 45, 53.

[23] Ltr to Daniel Carroll, 7 Jan 1795, *Writings of Washington*, XXXIV, 79-81; Clark, *Greenleaf and Law*, pp. 151-77.

terrain were frequently not in agreement, long-drawn-out quarrels arose between public officials and landowners. The chief proprietors of the land near the "Congress house" charged the commissioners with bad faith in placing the executive offices adjacent to the "President's Palace" and thereby encouraging the westward growth of the city at the expense of the area about the Capitol. Later stories of uncertain origin accused Daniel Carroll and his neighbors of holding their lots for such exorbitant prices that the buying public was driven to purchase the cheaper land along the swampy stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue and near Georgetown. For the prospective householder the advantages of proximity to the well-established community of Georgetown were undeniable, and Carroll in an effort to counterbalance this factor made extremely generous price concessions for his lots. But unhappily for historical justice, the tale of the greedy proprietors hoist on their own petard has stuck and is still the popularly accepted explanation of why the city spread westward instead of developing on the Hill as L'Enfant had supposedly intended.

In actuality nothing indicates that L'Enfant envisaged the Hill as the principal residential section of the city. Just as the deep water running close inshore along the Eastern Branch made its banks the logical place for the Navy Yard and merchants' wharves and warehouses, so the executive department buildings would be most conveniently placed within easy reach of the Executive Mansion on the city's north-south axis well to the west of the Capitol. And departmental officers and clerks, as more permanent residents than members of Congress, would be a larger factor in determining where people would live. Certainly no record suggests that the commissioners betrayed the proprietors of the eastern section by arbitrarily introducing significant changes in L'Enfant's plan. The controversies and recriminations merely complicated a difficult task. In fact, the commissioners encountered obstacles to progress at every turn.[24]

[24] Kite, *L'Enfant*, pp. 53-57; Padover, *Jefferson*, pp. 63-126, 150, 163-64, 178-87, 200-201, 322-34; Comrs' Ltrs Sent, 22 Nov 1798, v, 177-78;

Yet in June 1800 the new national capital, however unfinished, was at last a reality.

The arrival of executive officers and the public archives that month occasioned little excitement; the great moment would not come until Congress convened in November. Residents nevertheless welcomed the first official newcomers. On June 3, Georgetown sent a delegation of citizens on horseback to greet President Adams at the District line and to escort him to the city's Union Tavern, where a company of marines fired a salute in his honor. The next day the President drove on into Washington to inspect the Executive Mansion and the Treasury and on June 5th to attend a reception arranged by citizens at the Capitol. Following a call upon the recently widowed Mrs. Washington at Mt. Vernon and then a large banquet in Alexandria, the President departed for Massachusetts after spending only ten days in the District of Columbia. By then departmental heads or responsible subordinates had opened their offices for business in new, if too frequently cramped, quarters. Though the advent of 131 federal employees failed to bring the long-awaited prosperity, their presence dispelled citizens' uneasiness lest Congress postpone its first session in Washington.[25]

Meanwhile the commissioners hurried on with their preparations. They had obtained another $50,000, loaned by Maryland, but as the sale of lots in the city had virtually stopped in 1797,

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Annals, 7C, 2S, pp. 1304-26; B. Henry Latrobe to Chairman House Committee, 28 Feb 1804, quoted in *Documentary History of the Construction and Development of the U.S. Capitol Building and Grounds*, H Rpt 646, 58C, 2S, pp. 107-108, Ser 4585 (hereafter cited as *History of the Capitol*); J. Dudley Morgan, et al., "Why the City Went Westward," CHS *Rec*, VII, 107-45.

[25] Osborne, "Removal of the Government," and Hugh T. Taggart, "The Presidential Journey, in 1800, from the old to the new seat of government," CHS *Rec*, III, 147-51, 187-201; Thornton Diary, 7 Jan, 5-12 Jun 1800, CHS *Rec*, X, 92, 151-54; "Extracts from the Report of the Committee" [to investigate federal expenditures], 29 Apr 1802, CHS *Rec*, IX, 226-41; Oliver Wolcott to his wife, 4 Jul 1800, quoted in George Gibbs, *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams, edited from the Papers of Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury*, II, 276-78 (hereafter cited as Gibbs, *Memoirs*).

they were still short of money. Consequently in August 1800 they cut the price of lots nearly in half, keeping only to the stipulation that purchasers must build on at least part of their property. That scheme worked. Dr. William Thornton, chief architect of the Capitol, prophesied a city of 160,000 in a very few years. During the summer communication improved. Stage coach lines increased the number of runs to the "Federal City," and by November a traveller from Philadelphia might make the journey in thirty-three hours, though it generally took more. The theatre that opened in August closed in September after performances Mrs. Thornton considered "intolerably stupid," but already there was talk of another season. To provide some of the other amenities such as existed in Philadelphia, the half-dozen members of the Marine Corps band inaugurated weekly outdoor concerts, and during the early autumn subscribers organized two dancing "assemblies," gathering at Stelle's Tavern at five in the afternoon and ending at nine.[26]

Still more important for the city, that fall the *National Intelligencer* and its weekly version, the *Universal Gazette*, began publication in Washington, while the *Washington Federalist*, the *Museum* and the *Cabinet* appeared in Georgetown, and, across the river, was the *Alexandria Advertiser*. The Georgetown papers were short-lived, but the *Alexandria Advertiser*, renamed the *Gazette*, has had a continuous existence to this day, and the *Intelligencer*, though published in a city that would soon earn the name "graveyard of newspapers," lasted till 1869.[27] The *Intelligencer* initially owed its vigor to its owner, printer, and editor, Samuel Harrison Smith, friend of Jefferson and formerly secretary of the American Philosophical Society. As vehicles of local advertising, purveyors of national news, and organs of political opinion, the papers contributed to

[26] Comrs' Ltrs Sent, 13 May 1800, 27 Aug 1800; Comrs' Prcdgs, 20 Aug, 14 Nov 1800; Thornton Diary, 13 Aug 1800, CHS *Rec*, x, 178; *Centinel of Liberty*, 6 May, 6 Jun, 11 Jul 1800; *National Intelligencer*, 26 Nov 1800; *Washington Federalist*, 21 Nov 1800, 28 Apr 1802; Gibbs, *Memoirs*, II, 378; *ASP*, *Misc*, I, 254-55.

[27] Clarence S. Brigham, *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820*, I, 87-108.

Washington a more nearly urban air than the years of planning and building had contrived. And because Samuel Harrison Smith and his charming wife, Margaret Bayard, were delighted with the young city, the columns of the *Intelligencer* and the exchange of ideas in Mrs. Smith's hospitable drawing room helped temper harsh judgments upon the new capital. Within a year after saying of Washington "there is no industry, society or business," Oliver Wolcott, in July 1800 still Secretary of the Treasury, might have conceded that the city had something to offer besides empty space.[28]

Progress notwithstanding, Washington City in November 1800 was still a small, isolated community. Of the 501 "heads of households" enumerated in the census return, nineteen were the "original proprietors" who had signed the agreement with President Washington in June 1791, and a score or more were smaller landowners who had accepted similar terms somewhat later. Most of the rest were newcomers. Land speculation had attracted some of them. Thomas Law was probably the most notable of that group. Brother of a British peer and himself a wealthy man when he emigrated in 1795, he was one of the few large-scale investors in Washington real estate to make his home here after the failure of the Greenleaf and Morris syndicate had caused a sharp drop in local property values. His marriage to Mrs. Washington's granddaughter, Eliza Custis, doubtless strengthened his ties to the new capital. Although the sugar refinery he financed near Greenleaf's Point in 1797 closed down before 1801, Law ranked as Washington's pioneer manufacturer. Professional men formed a third category of the city's residents. William Cranch, a nephew of Abigail Adams, at first came as business agent for Robert Morris and James Nicholson but stayed on to serve as a federal commissioner and later as a judge of the circuit court. Several other lawyers, three or four physicians, and a half-dozen pastors lengthened the list of specially trained men. Opportunity to work on government building projects had brought still others—

[28] Gibbs, *Memoirs*, II, 377.

Dr. William Thornton, remembered for his design of the Capitol, the Octagon House and other architectural triumphs; his rivals, English-born George Hadfield, the Irishman James Hoban, designer of the Executive Mansion; and several less talented rivals.

While categories overlap, and a man like Daniel Carroll of Duddington was at once an original landed proprietor and owner of the busiest brick kilns in the city, the men intent upon exploiting the commercial possibilities of the new capital made up a rather distinct fourth group of citizens. Besides the suppliers of building materials—Robert Brent, for example, whose family owned the quarry at Acquia Creek which furnished stone for houses and federal buildings—there were merchants who hoped to establish import-export businesses. Colonel Tobias Lear, former secretary of General Washington, represented this kind of investor. Though the collapse of 1797 had injured the prospects of mercantile firms, some of the disappointed commercial adventurers remained in the city in the belief that the convening of Congress would mend their fortunes. Of all the men who anticipated a business future in the capital, the printers and the tavern and boardinghouse keepers were among the few to gauge correctly the chances of financial success. Officers attached to the Navy Yard and the Marine Corps unit, while subject to transfer, also rated as local citizens: Captain Thomas Tingey, Superintendent of the Navy Yard, in fact would be a fixture in Washington till his death in 1829. The other 300-400 householders were largely craftsmen and day laborers, some of them free Negroes.[29] "The people are poor," wrote Oliver Wolcott, adding rather disdainfully, "as far as I can judge, they live like fishes, by eating each other."[30]

In addition to the people who chose to live in the federal District in 1800, its 14,093 souls included some 3,200 chattel bondsmen, a higher proportion than any later decade would

[29] Enumerator's Return for the District of Columbia, Second Census of the U.S., 1800, pp. 117-50, Ms, N.A.; Comrs' Prcdgs, 29 Jun 1791.

[30] Osborne, "Removal of the Government," CHS *Rec*, III, 158; Gibbs, *Memoirs*, II, 377.

show. Some were field hands owned by farmers in the area outside the cities' limits. (See Table I.) Ownership of the 623 slaves in Washington City was scattered; only 7 people had as many as 10, and only the former planter Daniel Carroll of Duddington and Ann Burns had as many as 20. The local

TABLE I

POPULATION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA[a]

	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870
D.C. TOTAL	14,093	24,023	33,039	39,834	43,712	51,687	75,080	131,700
White	10,266	16,088	23,164	27,563	29,655	37,941	60,764	88,298
Free Negro	783	2,549	4,048	6,152	8,461	10,059	11,131	43,422
Slave	3,244	5,505	6,277	6,119	4,694	3,687	3,185	
WASHINGTON								
TOTAL	3,210	8,208	13,117	18,826	23,364	40,001	61,122	109,199
White	2,464	5,904	9,376	13,367	16,843	29,730	50,139	73,731
Free Negro	123	867	1,796	3,129	4,808	8,158	9,209	35,455
Black							5,831	
Mulatto							3,378	
Slave	623	1,437	1,945	2,330	1,713	2,113	1,774	
GEORGETOWN								
TOTAL	2,993	4,948	7,360	8,441	7,312	8,366	8,733	11,384
White	3,394[b]	3,235	5,099	6,122	5,124	6,080	6,798	8,113
Free Negro	277[b]	551	894	1,204	1,403	1,561	1,358	3,271
Black							562	
Mulatto							796	
Slave	1,449[b]	1,162	1,521	1,115	785	725	577	
WASHINGTON								
COUNTY[c] TOTAL	1,941	2,135	2,729	2,994	3,069	3,320	5,225	11,117
White			1,514	1,828	1,929	2,131	3,827	6,434
Free Negro			168	167	288	340	564	4,678
Black							238	
Mulatto							326	
Slave			1,047	999	812	849	834	
ALEXANDRIA								
CITY TOTAL	4,971	7,227	8,345	8,241	8,459			
White	3,727	4,903	5,742	5,609	5,758			
Free Negro	369	836	1,168	1,371	1,627			
Slave	875	1,488	1,435	1,261	1,064			

[a] Compiled from *U.S. Census*, Second Through Ninth, 1800-1870
[b] Georgetown and Washington County together
[c] Washington County encompassed all the area beyond the Eastern Branch, and all above Washington's present-day Florida Avenue and Georgetown's present-day R Street.

attitude toward slavery, a visitor later remarked, was much like that in the West Indies. No one had expressed dismay at Andrew Ellicott's employing Benjamin Banneker, a free Negro skilled in mathematics, as an assistant surveyor for the capital. But slaves, whether hired out by their masters for building operations or used as household servants, comprised the core of the labor force. The "peculiar institution" of the South was an accepted part of the social order of the new capital from its very beginning.[31]

In November 1800 this was the community which, as the "permanent seat of empire," Americans hoped would cement national unity forever.

[31] *Third Census of the United States*, 1810; David B. Warden, *A Chorographical and Statistical Description of the District of Columbia*, p. 64.