

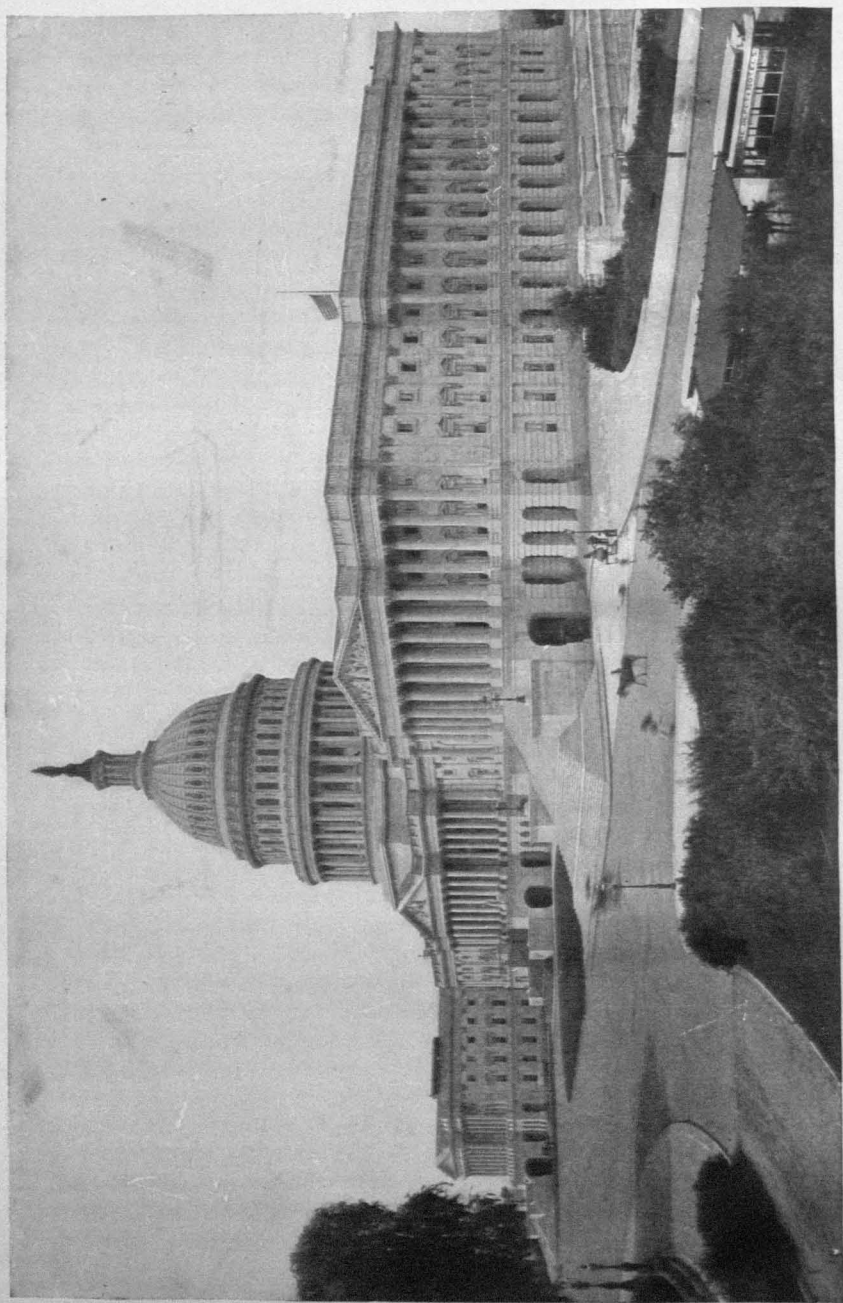
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THE NATIONAL CAPITOL
ITS ARCHITECTURE ART AND HISTORY



THE NATIONAL CAPITOL—EAST FRONT

THE NATIONAL CAPITOL

ITS ARCHITECTURE ART AND HISTORY

BY
GEORGE C. HAZELTON, JR.
AUTHOR OF "MISTRESS NELL," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



"Ah, to build, to build!
That is the noblest art of all the arts."

Longfellow's "Michael Angelo."

NEW YORK
J. F. TAYLOR & COMPANY
1914

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PREFACE

IN presenting this book to the public, it is deemed just to say that the idea of writing a history of the Capitol was first urged upon the author by Captain Howard F. Kennedy, and that, in the preparation of the work, he has collaborated by furnishing facts and data collected by him during his long association with the building, and embraced in his lecture, familiar to tourists and many others.

This production is submitted to the public with the hope that it may merit a generous welcome at their hands. If it fails to enlarge the scope of information already accumulated by other writers, or to awaken in the minds and hearts of the people greater interest and pride in their Capitol—the great forum of the law-making power of the government—such a result cannot be attributed to a want of careful research or long-continued faithful labor.

To the student and lover of architecture, it is hoped that these pages may light the way the builders took from the first foundation stone to the last and crowning piece upon the dome; to the lover of art and to the student of history, oratory and statesmanship, that they may serve as a key of intelligence by which to read the story of the nation upon the walls of her classic edifice, and to unravel its mysteries and reveal its hidden glories. But, above all, it is most desired that the volume shall present a somewhat comprehensive view of the grandeur of the National Capitol and its true character as an expression of the development of free government and the progress of American civilization.

Manuscript correspondence between the early Presidents, Commissioners, architects and contractors, in the archives of the War Department, plans in the Architect's office and files of old newspapers in the Library of Congress, have been examined by the author, and are the authority for much of the text; *Annals, Globes, Records, Secret Journals, American State Papers*, and manuscript letters also in the possession of the government and of individuals have been assiduously sought and read. An effort has been made to tell the story of the Capitol, its architecture and art, so far as possible, through the light of historical events and individual biography, as more likely to reveal correctly the human side of the great national structure; and if the author has allowed a little moss to cling to the old stones, it is because he believes that in romance and tradition much of their most delightful truth lies hidden.

G. C. H., JR.

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THE NATIONAL CAPITOL

CITY OF WASHINGTON

In fancy now, beneath the twilight gloom,
Come, let me lead thee o'er this "second Rome!"
Where tribunes rule, where dusky Davi bow,
And what was Goose-Creek once is Tiber now:—
This embryo capital, where Fancy sees
Squares in morasses, obelisks in trees;
Which second-sighted seers, e'en now, adorn
With shrines unbuilt and heroes yet unborn,
Though naught but woods and Jefferson they see,
Where streets should run and sages *ought* to be.

TOM MOORE.

IN the old days all roads led to Rome: to-day all roads lead to Washington. The eyes of the world are upon her great Capitol: the poor look to it as the bulwark of liberty and prosperity; the rich for protection of vested rights; the savage for learning and assistance; the jurist for law; the politician as the goal of his ambition; the statesman for the science of progressive government; the diplomat as the place wherein to play the game of nations; and the sovereigns of Europe in apprehension, for on its walls is written in blood: "The divine right of kings is the divine right of the people." It is the abode of the Goddess of Freedom in the New World.

No matter from which direction the pilgrim approaches the Federal City, whether by land or by water, the white dome of the National Capitol, that shrine of the world's oppressed, is almost the first sight to gladden his eye.

We have but to glance at the map of the globe, to see that Babylon, Nineveh, Tyre, Carthage, Constantinople, Venice, St. Petersburg, London, Paris, New York, Chicago and most of the other great cities of ancient and modern times have sprung up upon the low lands near the sea, or upon some of its great tributaries, where they have been nourished by commerce. Washington, too, stretches back from the banks of a great tributary, but it was not, like most of these, chance-directed in its line of growth, though the original intention of the President, the Commissioners and the engineers has in part

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miscarried. Nor was it, like others, planned by some potentate for his own delectation and power. It is the only city designed for the capital of a nation which has been projected practically in a wilderness in accordance with pre-arranged plans dictated by the will of the people themselves through their representatives.

Even before the Constitution was adopted, in 1785, a commission had been appointed by Congress with power to select upon the Delaware a site for a national capital, and to make contracts for the erection of a suitable President's house, houses for the Secretaries and a Federal House; but this commission had taken no action.

The **District of Columbia** was established under the 8th Section and 1st Article of the Constitution of the United States: "Congress shall have power to exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever, over such district (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular States, and the acceptance of Congress, become the seat of the government of the United States." In pursuance of this provision, the State of Maryland passed, December 23, 1788, "An act to cede to Congress a District of ten miles square in this State, for the Seat of the Government of the United States." The State of Virginia patriotically followed, December 3, 1789, with "An act for the cession of ten miles square, or any lesser quantity of territory within this State to the United States in Congress assembled, for the permanent seat of the General Government."

The final step was taken on the 16th of July, 1790, when President Washington, then in his first term of office, signed the Senate bill establishing the future seat of government upon the banks of the Potomac. Yet even this act left indefinite the location of the District, save that it must be between the mouths of the Eastern Branch and the Connogochegue. The President was to appoint three Commissioners, who, under his direction, were to survey, and, by proper metes and bounds, define and limit the required territory. These Commissioners, or any two of them, were given power also to purchase or accept such quantity of land as the President thought proper for the use of the United States, and were to provide "suitable buildings for the accommodation of Congress, and of the President, and for the public offices of the government" prior to the first Monday in December, 1800; but all according to such plans as the President should approve. The only substantial limitation made by the law was that the sites for the public buildings should be upon the eastern or Maryland side of the river. To defray the expenses of such purchases and buildings, the President was "authorized and requested to accept grants of money." On the above date, the seat of government and all its offices were to be removed to the new District. Meanwhile, they were to remain in New York until December, 1790, after which they were to be located in Philadelphia.

This action of Congress was the culmination of a long and acrimonious debate springing from State jealousy and personal feeling, in which the interests of New York and Germantown were vigorously presented, together with locations upon the Susquehanna and the Delaware. The meager reports of the prolonged contest in the early annals of Congress are interesting and instructive, revealing, as they do, the primitive condition of the country at that time, the bitter sectionalism which prevailed, and the ignorance of the best minds regarding the topography of the States, together with their inability to anticipate the facilities for quick communication, transportation and commerce in store for the infant Republic. Madison, Ames, Sherman, Lee and others were active in debate. Mr. Burke "thought a populous city better than building a palace in the woods"; while Mr. George Thatcher, the witty and learned representative from Massachusetts, exclaimed, with some degree of impatience at the debate, that "it was not of two paper dollars' consequence to the United States whether Congress sat at New York, at Philadelphia, or on the Potomac."

Jefferson in his own records a bit of inside history regarding the final settlement of the controversy by Congress in favor of the Potomac, and only the growth of the city and its grandeur to-day compensate for the somewhat doubtful means by which, according to his record, that end was secured. To aid Alexander Hamilton in his pet hobby, a bill for the assumption by the general government of the debts contracted by the various States during the Revolution, amounting to \$20,000,000, he invited certain Congressmen to dine. The host does not record whether it was before or after the wine that the compromise was reached, but certain it is that at that feast votes for the assumption of the State debts were pledged by Representatives of the Southern States in exchange for votes from the Eastern, or creditor States, to establish the seat of government permanently upon the banks of the Potomac.

The influence of the President also had been a powerful factor in favor of the Potomac; and, though empowered with discretion to select any site within one hundred and five miles of the river's windings, beginning at Williamsport, seven miles above Hagerstown in Maryland, all must agree with Mr. Spofford, the Librarian, that "Washington, with that consummate judgment which distinguished his career, fixed upon just the one spot in the entire range of the territory prescribed by Congress which commanded the three-fold advantages of unfailing tide-water navigation, convenient access from Baltimore and the other large cities northward, and superb natural sites, alike for public buildings and for the varied wants of a populous city."

Almost immediately, the President appointed Thomas Johnson and Daniel Carroll of Maryland and David Stuart of Virginia as Commissioners; and, no doubt, gave specific directions for surveying and laying off the tract of land for the seat of government, as he was more familiar with the region than

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most of his contemporaries. The first survey above tide-water on the Potomac had been made by himself, with a party of friends, in a "piroque," or canoe, described by G. W. P. Custis as "hollowed out of a great poplar tree, hauled on a wagon to the bank of the Monocacy, and there launched."

Wise, however, as he was in the choice of the site, it is noticeable that Washington selected it as near as possible, under the act, to his own home at Mount Vernon; and in the amendment of March 3, 1791, his hand can be plainly seen. This, while it still limited the erection of the public buildings to the Maryland side of the Potomac, allowed a portion of the district to be located below the Eastern Branch and above the mouth of Hunting Creek, so as to include a convenient part of the Branch and the town of Alexandria.

The great man watched with anxiety over the founding of the Federal City, which was to bear his name, and with eagerness hastened the erection of its government buildings, as if with them to anchor public interest to the spot on which his hopes raised a city whose destiny was to be kindred to the growth and grandeur of a nation of the people. Himself a Federalist, he doubtless foresaw as well, in this one Capitol, an ultimate recognition of Federal supremacy, and, in a perfect union, respectful alike to State and nation, a government strong enough to protect itself and its every citizen.

Perhaps no greater obstacle opposed the path of President Washington than the old Scotch proprietor, David Burns, who owned a tract of six hundred and fifty acres in the heart of the proposed city. He refused to part with his plantation, which was known as the "Widow's Mite," upon any terms. To Washington's most patriotic appeals he is said to have irritably replied: "If it had not been for the Widow Custis and her niggers, you would never have been anything but a land surveyor, and a very poor surveyor at that." He was compelled, in the end, however, to yield to the public interest. On March 30, 1791, nineteen of the principal proprietors signed the agreement, which was accepted by the Commissioners on the 12th of the next month:

"To convey in trust * to the President of the United States, or Commissioners, or to such person or persons as he shall appoint, by good and sufficient deeds in fee simple, the whole of our respective lands which he may think proper to include within the lines of the federal city, for the purposes and on the conditions following: The President shall have the sole power of directing the federal city to be laid off in what manner he pleases. He may retain any number of public squares he may think proper for public improvements or other public uses; and lots only which shall be laid off shall be a joint property between the trustees on behalf of the public and each present proprietor, and the same shall be fairly and equally defined between the public and the individuals. As soon as may be the site

* The several trustees named in the deeds, dated on or about June, 1791, were "Thomas Beall, of George, and John M. Gantt, and the survivor of them, and the heirs of such survivor."

shall be laid off. For the streets the proprietors shall receive no compensation, but for the squares or lands in any form which shall be taken for public buildings or any kind of public improvements or uses the proprietors whose lands shall be taken shall receive at the rate of £25 per acre to be paid by the public."

Peter Charles L'Enfant, a civil engineer who came to this country about 1777, was employed by President Washington's direction to prepare plans for the proposed city. He had become a major in the Engineer Corps during the war for Independence, and later had followed the seat of government successively from New York to Philadelphia, and thence to Washington. L'Enfant carefully "viewed the ground on horse-back" with the President and Commissioners, and in a report handed personally to Washington in Georgetown on the 26th of March, 1791, enthusiastically indorsed, in somewhat Franco-English, the location as a site for the capital of a "mighty empire":

"After coming upon the hill from the Eastern Branch ferry the country is level and on a space of above two miles each way present a most eligible position for the first settlement of a great city and one which if not the only within the limits of the Federal Territory is at least the more advantageous in that part laying between the eastern branch and Georgetown.

"... On that part terminating in a ridge to Jenkin's Hill and running in a parallel with and at half mile off from the river Potowmack separated by a low ground intersected with three grand streams,—many of the most desirable position offer for to erect the public edifices thereon—from these height every grand building would rear with a majestick aspect over the country all round and might be advantageously seen from twenty miles off which contiguous to the first settlement of the city they would there stand to ages in a central point to it, facing on the grandest prospect of both of the branch of the Potowmack with the town of Alexandry in front seen in its fullest extant over many points of land projecting from the Mariland and Virginia shore in a maner as add much to the prospective at the end of which the cape of great hunting creek appear directly were a corner stone of the Federal district is to be placed and in the room of which a mejstick colum or a grand Pyramid being erected would produce the happyest effect and completely finished the landscape. . . .

"Then the attractive local will lay all Round and at distance not beyond those limits within the which a city the capital of an extensive empire may be delineated."

The corner-stone of the Federal District, spoken of by L'Enfant, was laid by the Commissioners with appropriate ceremonies on the 15th day of April at Hunter's Point, just south of Alexandria. In the following month, Trumbull, the artist, visited Georgetown, where he found the Frenchman busy with his plans; and together they rode over the ground on which the city has since been built. "Where the Capitol now stands was then a thick wood." Jefferson had furnished L'Enfant with maps of many foreign cities, which he had collected in travel. The engineer's mind, however, dwelt more fondly on the work of Le Nôtre in dearly beloved France, and drawing his principal

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inspiration from Versailles, a city remarkable for the regularity and beauty of its construction, for its three grand avenues of Paris, St. Cloud and Sceaux, diverging from the Place du Chateau, and for its magnificent palace and gardens designed by Louis XIV. for himself and his court, he furnished plans for the broad avenues, vistas, streets and parkings which to-day make Washington the admiration of visitors, and, in truth, "The City of Magnificent Distances."

The site selected for the Capitol, which is called "Congress house" by the French surveyor in his original map, was upon the Cern Abby Manor, owned by Daniel Carroll. This map gives the latitude of Congress House as $38^{\circ} 53' N.$, and the longitude as $0^{\circ} 0'.$ * In his observations, placed upon his manuscript map by L'Enfant himself, is the following paragraph: "In order to execute the above plan, Mr. Ellicott drew a true meridional line by celestial observations which passes through the area intended for the Congress house; this line he crossed by another due East and West, which passes through the same area. These lines were accurately measured, and made the basis on which the whole plan was executed. He ran all the lines by a Transit Instrument, and determined the acute angles by actual measurement, and left nothing to the uncertainty of the compass."

In placing the Capitol, where it now stands, on the brow of a hill which rises eighty-eight feet above the river, its projectors doubtless contemplated as the principal site for the future city the plateau to the eastward—presenting, as it did, beautiful and ample building sites, and commanding a far more extensive view than the Capitoline Hill in Rome, with which it is scarcely comparable otherwise than in name. It is recorded, however, that, even in the early days of the District of Columbia, speculators in real estate were potent, and this seems to be verified by a letter from Washington, written to the Commissioners from Philadelphia on November 17, 1792: "I agree with you in opinion that ground in such eligible places as about the Capitol and the President's house, should not be sold in squares, unless there are some great and apparent advantages to be derived from specified buildings—immediate improvements, or something which will have a tendency to promote the advancement of the city. The circumstances under which Mr. Blodget bid off the square near the Capitol, were such as occur at almost every public sale,—and, in that instance his having done so appeared very proper for the interest of the public. I agree however with you that it wou'd be best for the circumstance, not to be generally known." The value of land in the vicinity of the Capitol was so enhanced that improvements were forced, for the most part, in the opposite direction, of the north and northwest; and

* The latitude of the Capitol is $38^{\circ} 53' 20.4''$ north; the longitude $77^{\circ} 00' 35.7''$ west from Greenwich.

thus it happens that the Capitol presents the curious spectacle of having its rear façade, rather than its imposing front, toward the wealthier and more extended portion of the city.

It was L'Enfant's expressed intention to render impossible in Washington such barricading of streets as had proved destructive to Paris during her revolutionary uprisings. From the Capitol, principal avenues radiate like the spokes of a wheel, commanding all approaches as to a fortress. Here center also North, South, East and West Capitol Streets, the last of which, however, is merged and lost in the public grounds, known as the "Mall," which extend in that direction to the river. In a letter of September 9, 1791, to L'Enfant, the Commissioners say that they have "agreed the streets be named alphabetically one way and numerically the other, the former divided into north and south letters, the latter into east and west numbers from the Capitol." They decide further "that the federal District shall be called the 'Territory of Columbia,' and the Federal City 'The City of Washington.'"

History to-day gives to L'Enfant full credit for the genius of arrangement displayed in his original plan of the Federal City. Unfortunately, however, the qualities of his temperament made it impossible for the authorities long to brook his erratic ways, or to allow him personally to carry out his grand conception. His first material disagreement with the Commissioners arose from the lawless way in which he demolished a house that Mr. Carroll of Duddington was then constructing on the site of one of his proposed streets. The arbitrary procedure of the engineer, who evidently looked upon himself as possessed of military power and accountable to no one where his theories of art were concerned, is well revealed by a letter of December 8, 1791, from the Commissioners to Mr. Jefferson, wherein they complain that, as the house was "nearly demolished before the Chancellor's injunction arrived, Mr. Carroll did not think it worth while to have it served, trusting perhaps that our directions expressly forbidding their further proceedings in it would have been attended to. We are sorry to mention that the Major, who was absent at the time we issued them, paid no attention to them but completely demolished it on his return." The President also became out of patience with this defiance of the procedure of law: "I did not expect to meet with such perverseness in Major L'Enfant, as his late conduct exhibited."

The more immediate rupture, however, which led to the loss of his position by the engineer, was the persistent way in which he refused to surrender his plans for public inspection in order that sales of city lots might be conducted in accordance with them. His grounds, no doubt sincere, but impracticable where money had so to be secured to the Commissioners for the erection of federal buildings and the maintenance of the local government, were that purchasers "would immediately leap upon the best land in his vistas and architectural squares, and raise huddles of shanties which would permanently

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embarrass the city." On the 14th of March, 1792, the Commissioners write to L'Enfant from Georgetown: "We have been notified that we are no longer to consider you as engaged in the business of the federal City." In the same letter, they tender him five hundred guineas and a city lot for his past services, whenever he shall desire to apply for the same; but to this his pride would not stoop. He was afterwards employed for a short time at Fort Mifflin, in 1794, and in 1812 declined an appointment as Professor of Engineering at West Point. He was a member of the Society of the Cincinnati, and the designer of its badge.

"He was a favorite with Washington," writes Ben: Perley Poore, "but Jefferson disliked him on account of his connection with the Society of the Cincinnati, and availed himself of his difficulty with the Commissioners to discharge him. The Major then became an unsuccessful * petitioner before Congress for a redress of his real and fancied wrongs, and he was to be seen almost every day slowly pacing the Rotunda of the Capitol. He was a tall, thin man, who wore, towards the close of his life, a blue military coat, buttoned quite to the throat, with a tall, black stock, but no visible signs of linen. His hair was plastered with pomatum close to his head, and he wore a napless high beaver bell-crowned hat. Under his arm he generally carried a roll of papers relating to his claim upon the government, and in his right hand he swung a formidable hickory cane with a large silver head."

A life of great qualities was thus passed, for the most part, in retirement from active endeavor, because of an inability to take the American world as he found it and to deal with men as men. The proud French spirit passed away June 14, 1825. He was then residing on the Chellum Castle estate, in the vicinity of Bladensburg, where Dudley Diggs had given him a home, and where, beneath a little mound of myrtle in the garden, with no monument or inscription save an ancient cedar to mark the spot, he found a grave. The story goes that, at his death, the plan of the city of Washington was found upon his breast. Some day this man, who had not even ground he could claim for burial, will be honored with a statue in the city which owes so much to his genius.

"The enemies of the enterprise," writes Washington at the time of the Frenchman's dismissal, with apprehension for the city's welfare, "will take advantage of the retirement of L'Enfant to trumpet the whole affair as an abortion." The President's fears were not well founded, however; for, in **Andrew Ellicott**, the young surveyor from Pennsylvania who as L'Enfant's assistant had done the most of the work in the field, was found an able suc-

* We find that by act of May 1, 1810, P. C. L'Enfant received \$1,394.20 (which was the sum of \$666 $\frac{2}{3}$ with legal interest from March 1, 1792) as a compensation for his services in laying out the city of Washington.

cessor, though his relations with the Commissioners, like L'Enfant's, were anything but harmonious.

Ellicott was directed to "prepare a new plan for publication, using material gathered and information acquired while acting surveyor." The original plan by L'Enfant had been sent to the House by Washington on December 13, 1791, but afterwards withdrawn. Ellicott's plan, purporting to be the result of actual survey, contained many alterations, though its difference from the plan of the French engineer was not of such a character as to take from L'Enfant the credit of the design. It was finished in 1792, and engraved by Washington's order, in October of that year. It is said that L'Enfant, who was then in that city, when he saw that the scroll upon the "Philadelphia" map did not bear his name as its author, and that by his own hand, as shown in a former paragraph, Ellicott's name appeared upon it, left the engraver's office in disgust and would have nothing more to do with the matter. This was for a long time the only engraved map, and was followed by the Commissioners in all operations of the city, so far as practicable; "but the city not having been surveyed, and this plan being partly made from the drafts of L'Enfant, and partly from materials possessed by Ellicott," as they tell us, many spaces of ground were found to be neither in a street nor public square, and were added to the plan and divided into building lots, while "the actual survey had another apparent effect; it occasioned many squares to be laid in the water, being governed by the channel, and to insert other squares between the apparent water-squares and the river." These alterations were incorporated into a plan in the Commissioners' office, which, however, was neither engraved nor published. The consequence was that many disputes arose among the Commissioners, the original proprietors and the purchasers,—the first claiming their own plan to be correct, others L'Enfant's plan, and still others the engraved plan, which had been widely circulated throughout the United States and in Europe to entice investment. The differences led the trustees to refuse to convey the public grounds, though ordered by President Adams; and, finally, on April 8, 1802, a committee of the House recommended the printing of the Commissioners' map and the giving of lieu lands where warranted.

President Washington, in a letter to the Commissioners, dated February 20, 1797, throws some light on the history of these early maps. "That many alterations have been made from L'Enfant's plan by Major Ellicott, with the approbation of the Executive, is not denied; that some were deemed essential, is avowed; and, had it not been for the materials which he happened to possess, it is probable that no engraving from Mr. L'Enfant's draught ever would have been exhibited to the public; for, after the disagreement took place between him and the Commissioners his obstinacy threw every difficulty in the way of its accomplishment. To this summary may be added, that

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Mr. Davidson * is mistaken if he supposes that the transmission of Mr. L'Enfant's plan of the city to Congress was the completion thereof; so far from it, it will appear, by the message which accompanied the same, that it was given as matter of information only, to show what state the business was in, and the return of it requested; that neither House of Congress passed any act consequent thereupon; that it remained, as before, under the control of the Executive; that, afterwards several errors were discovered and corrected, many alterations made, and the appropriations, except as to the Capitol and President's house, struck out under that authority before it was sent to the engraver, intending that work, and the promulgation thereof, were to give the final and regulating stamp."

Ellicott's supervision, too, of the mapping and laying out of the city was brief. On the 23d of December, 1793, the Commissioners write complainingly to the President: "Major Ellicott after his absence great part of the summer and all the fall, as we hear in other service, returned to us in the winter, we do not accept his farther service. The business we believe was going on full as well without him"; and, again, on January 28, 1794: "We discharged him at our last meeting." Yet Ellicott must have been a man of talent; for in after years he achieved some distinction in the world of science, holding the professorship of Mathematics at West Point from 1812 until the time of his death, and this in spite of the fact that he and the Commissioners could not agree.

In contemplating the growth of the Federal City, it is amusing and instructive to read a letter of the Commissioners as late as the 19th of April, 1794, to Captain Ign^s Feswick, revealing, as it does, some of the difficulties in the way of building a city in the woods: "We were surprised yesterday to see the preparation for planting corn in Carrollsburgh. We cannot by silence give room to collect that, we give any consent and countenance to it. . . . We do not imagine that the oats will be productive of so great inconvenience and as to those sowed we shall say nothing of them but we flatter ourselves that on reflection you will desist from planting Carrollsburgh in corn for it is certainly improper and injurious to the interest of the public and individuals."

On July 9, 1846, Congress passed an "act to retrocede the County of Alexandria in the District of Columbia to the State of Virginia," the Legislature of that State having previously passed an act for its acceptance. Thus that portion of the land on the Virginia shore of the Potomac became again the property of that State; that which remains in the District of Columbia to-day belonged originally only to the domain of Maryland.

Such is the story, briefly told, of the laying out of the Federal District,

* The Commissioners state: "Mr. Davidson's object is to obtain additional property within the President's square."

EARLY PLANS AND ARCHITECTS

THE site for the legislative halls having been selected to the satisfaction of the President, the question of plans suitable to a building for the occupation of Congress took up the attention of the public authorities. In a letter of March 8, 1792, to David Stuart, one of the Commissioners, Washington writes :

" The doubts and opinions of others with respect to the permanent seat have occasioned no change in my sentiments on the subject. They have always been, that the plan ought to be prosecuted with all the dispatch the nature of the case will admit, and that the public buildings in size, form and elegance, should look beyond the present day. I would not have it understood from hence that I lean to extravagance. A chaste plan sufficiently capacious and convenient for a period not *too* remote, but one to which we may reasonably look forward, would meet my idea in the Capitol."

The following interesting advertisement, which appeared in the principal newspapers of the country during the same month, shows that the Commissioners had more land than money with which to reward intellectual excellence.

" WASHINGTON IN THE TERRITORY OF COLUMBIA "

" A premium of a lot in this city to be designated by impartial judges, and five hundred dollars, or a medal of that value at the option of the party, will be given by the Commissioners of the Federal Buildings to the person who before the 15th of July, 1792, shall produce to them the most approved plan for a Capitol to be erected in this city ; and two hundred and fifty dollars, or a medal, to the plan deemed next in merit to the one they shall adopt. The building to be of brick, and to contain the following apartments to wit : a conference-room and a room for the Representatives, sufficient to accommodate three hundred persons each ; a lobby or ante-room to the latter ; a Senate room of twelve hundred square feet area ; an ante-chamber ; twelve rooms of six hundred square feet each for Committee rooms and clerks' offices. It will be a recommendation of any plan if the central part of it may be detached and erected for the present with the appearance of a complete whole, and be capable of admitting the additional parts in future, if they shall be wanted. Drawings will be expected of the ground plots, elevations of each front, and sections through the building in such directions as may be necessary to explain the internal structure ; and an estimate of the cubic feet of brick work composing the whole mass of the walls."

• Of the sixteen plans which, in answer to this advertisement, are said to have been submitted by architects, draftsmen and others* throughout the

* See Washington's letter, Appendix, p. 249.

country, many persons, including Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State, favored those of **Stephen Hallet**, a French architect, who had established himself in Philadelphia just prior to the Revolution. Hallet visited the city of Washington by invitation in the summer of 1792, in order to examine the site chosen for the Capitol and better to perfect his designs. These would undoubtedly have been accepted, had not **William Thornton**,* an English physician by education, but an amateur draftsman by taste, and the designer of the Philadelphia Library, then brought to the President's attention through Trumbull, the artist, a different conception of a building designed for the meetings of Congress. Washington,† at the sight of Thornton's drawings, became enthusiastic over "the grandeur, simplicity, and beauty of the exterior; the propriety with which the apartments are distributed, and economy in the whole mass of the structure."

As Hallet, however, had been encouraged regarding his designs and had made alterations in them to meet the approbation of the President and others, some courtesy was due to him. For the sake of conciliation, the President, with considerations of justice towards both, shrewdly suggested that Thornton's plans be adopted, but that, as he was not a professional architect, Hallet be engaged, in order that, under the direction of a trained architect, they might the better be executed. The Commissioners, too, evidently felt kindly toward Hallet at this period; for in a communication to Jefferson of February 7, 1793, they say: "We feel sensibly for poor Hallet, and shall do everything in our power to soothe him. We hope he may be usefully employed notwithstanding." On the 13th of the following month, in a letter to Hallet himself, they thus endeavored to compensate him for his disappointment:

"The plan you first offered for a Capitol appeared to us to have a great share of merit, none met with our entire approbation. Yours approaching the nearest to the leading ideas of the President and Commissioners. . . . Our opinion has preferred Doctor Thornton's and we expect the President will confirm our choice. Neither the Doctor or yourself can command the prize under the strict terms of our advertisement, but the public has been benefitted by the emulation excited and the end having been answered we shall give the reward of 500 dollars and a lot to Dr. Thornton. You certainly rank next and because your application has been exited by particular request, we have resolved to place you on the same footing as near as may be, that is to allow compensation for everything to this time, 100 £ being the value of a Lot and 500 Dollars."

The Commissioners notified Thornton of his triumph by letter of April 5, 1793, written from Georgetown: "The President has given formal approbation of your plans." Four days later they write to the Executive: "Doctor Thornton throws out an idea that the Capitol might be thrown back to the

* See letter to Thornton. Appendix, p. 250.

† See letters, Appendix, pp. 250, 251.

desirable spot and the center ornamented with a figure of Columbus. The idea seems not to be disapproved by Mr. Blodget, and Ellicott thinks there's room enough. It does not seem to us that there's any striking impropriety and wish that you could consider it on the spot where you could have the most perfect idea of it."

Hallet at once raised objections to the practical application of Thornton's plans; and in the following July, the President held a conference in Philadelphia, at which were present the author of the contested design, Hallet, Hoban and a "judicious undertaker [builder] chosen by Doctor Thornton as a competent judge of the objections made to his plan of a Capitol for the City of Washington." At this meeting, the plans were carefully examined, and the objections fully discussed. Certain changes were suggested by Hallet, wherein, says Washington, "he has preserved the most valuable ideas of the original, and rendered them susceptible of execution; so that it is considered as Dr. Thornton's plan, rendered into practical form." The President further informs us that "Col. Williams, an undertaker also produced by Doctor Thornton," after viewing the plans and objections, thought, on the whole, the reformed plan the best. Later, on the 25th, the Executive writes to the Commissioners as follows:

"... After a candid discussion, it was found that the objections stated, were considered as valid by both the persons chosen by Doctor Thornton as practical Architects and competent judges of things of this kind. . . . The plan produced by Mr. Hallet altho' preserving the original plan of Doctor Thornton, and such as might, upon the whole, be considered as his plan, was free from those objections, and was pronounced by the gentleman on the part of Doctor Thornton, as the one which they, as practical Architects would chuse to execute. Besides which, you will see, that, in the opinion of those gentlemen, the plan executed according to Mr. Hallet's ideas would not cost more than one half of what it would if executed according to Doctor Thornton's.

"After these opinions, there could remain no hesitation how to decide; and Mr. Hoban was accordingly informed that the foundation would be begun upon the plan exhibited by Mr. Hallet, leaving the recess in the east front open for further consideration. . . .

"It seems to be the wish that the portico of the east front, which, was in Doctor Thornton's original plan, should be preserved in this of Mr. Hallet's. The recess which Mr. Hallet proposes in that front, strikes every one who has viewed the plan, unpleasantly, as the space between the two wings or projections, is too contracted to give it the noble appearance of the buildings of which it is an imitation; and it has been intimated that the reason of his proposing the recess instead of a portico, is to make it in one essential feature different from Doctor Thornton's plan. But whether the portico or the recess should be finally concluded upon will make no difference in the commencement of the foundations of the building, except in that particular part—and Mr. Hallet is directed to make such sketches of the Portico, before the work will be affected by it, as will show the advantage or disadvantage thereof. The ostensible objection of Mr. Hallet to the adoption of Doctor Thornton's east front is principally the depreciation of light and air, in a degree, to the apartments designed for the Senate and Representatives."

Thornton's original plans have been lost; but from the data at hand, it would seem that he conceived in the central building a grand vestibule, with a portico on the east, and another large circular room on the western front. The latter chamber, for conference, was to be lighted by small elevated windows and have for its western entrance a single door-way, opening upon a semi-circular portico, whence a broad expanse of steps ran to the ground.

Hallet proposed a square center in place of the vestibule, having an open court on the ground floor containing a turn for carriages. The only dome rose above a circular conference room on the west. The external appearance of the walls, too, was much altered; and the columns on both the east and the west were extended to the full height of the structure. The pleasing effect of the present basement-exterior with the graceful pilasters above was entirely destroyed.

In a report to Congress in 1804, Latrobe, then architect of the Capitol, criticises the work of Thornton on the ground that he furnished simply a picture and not a plan. In a letter to Congress* answering this report, Thornton himself furnishes an insight into the relation between his own plans and those of Hallet: "Mr. Hallet changed and diminished the Senate room, which is now too small. He laid square the foundation at the centre building, excluding the dome; and when General Washington saw the extent of the alterations proposed, he expressed his disapprobation in a style of such warmth as his dignity and self command seldom permitted. . . . Mr. Hallet was desirous not merely of altering what might be approved, but even what was most approved. He made some judicious alterations, but in other instances he did injury."

It was quite impossible for amicable relations long to continue between Thornton and Hallet† under these circumstances. Hallet was, no doubt, a skillful architect; and his ideas for reducing the cost of the building one-half by judicious changes, mainly in size, had met the encouragement of all, and had led to certain modifications in the designs looking toward the accomplishment of that end. But he was not content. His spirit throughout shows that he was jealous of Thornton's success and constantly attempted to supplant the latter's work by alterations of his plans and by changes in the execution.

On September 12, 1794, the President appointed Thornton one of the Commissioners in charge of the District and Federal buildings, and this was doubtless that he might personally see his plans carried out. "When General Washington," he says, "honored me with the appointment of commissioner he requested that I should restore the building to a correspondence with the original plan." In this capacity Thornton had a supervisory control of the Capitol until 1802, when the office was abolished. In June, prior to his

* See Appendix, p. 252

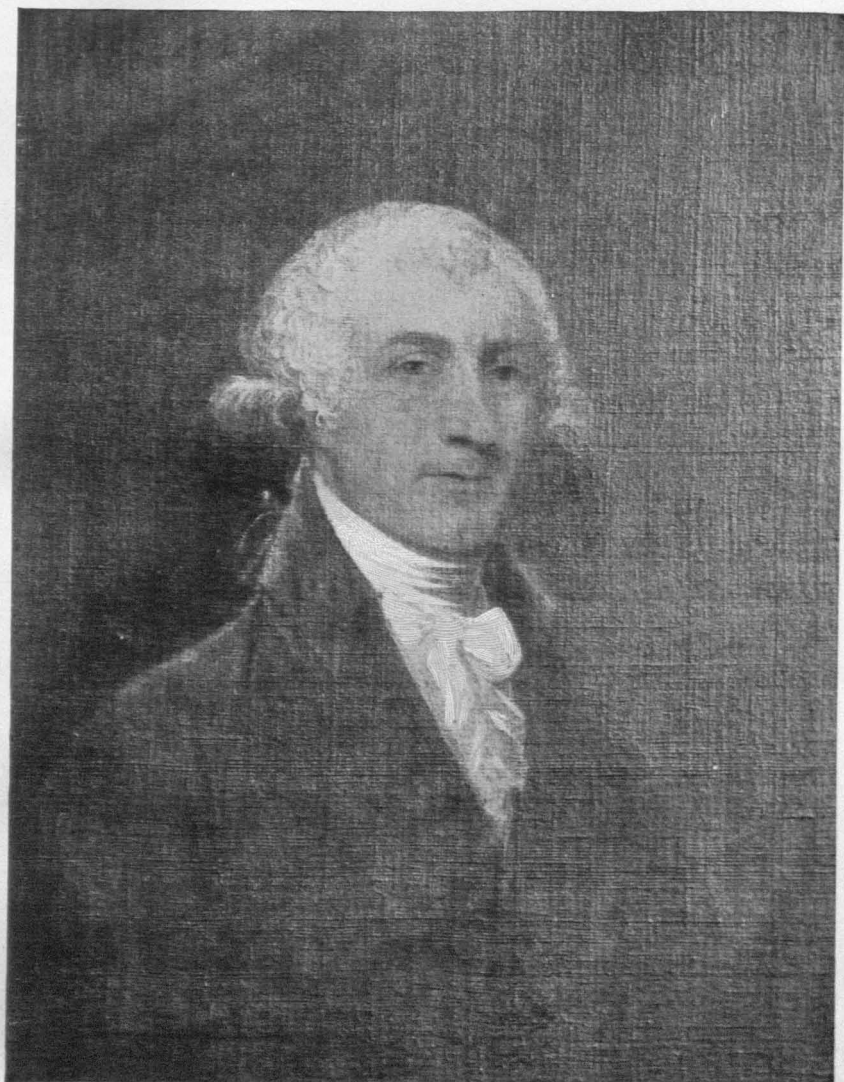
† See Commissioners' letter, Appendix, p. 251.

appointment, Hallet was finally discharged, after holding his office two years. Trumbull was then in London, and upon the receipt of a letter from the Commissioners, followed by a consultation with West, the artist, and Wyatt, the principal architect in London, contracted with **George Hadfield**, a fellow-student at the Royal Academy and the winner of all its academic prizes, to proceed immediately to America and superintend the work at the Capitol. Hadfield was appointed October 15, 1795. On March 11th of the next year, Mr. Jeremiah Smith, in a communication to the House of Representatives, reported: "The foundation of the Capitol is laid; the foundation wall under ground and above is of different thicknesses, and is computed to average fourteen feet high and nine feet thick. The freestone work is commenced on the north wing; it is of different heights, but may average three feet and a half; the interior walls are carried up the same height."

Hadfield, like Hallet, was not content with the supervision of the work for which he had been employed, and soon attempted to engraft his own plans into the construction. The President, however, had already had too much difficulty with the quibbles of architects to listen placidly * to the new designs. When Hadfield found he could not control the matter, he gave notice to the Commissioners that, at the expiration of his contract, which would be in three months, he would quit the public employment. But, to his astonishment, finding a ready acquiescence on the part of the authorities, and being offered his passage money to England at once, "he seems to have considered the subject better," write the Commissioners, "and . . . applied to withdraw his notice, promising every attention to carrying on the Capitol as approved of by the President." The Commissioners permitted him to continue upon the work until the expiration of his contract.

Hadfield was, no doubt, a man of some theoretical attainments, as the Commissioners write, March 29, 1797, that he "has drawn the plan of all the public offices to be erected in the City of Washington, and which have met with the approbation of the President and the several Departments for which they are intended." His limitations are well summed up in their letter of the 25th of June, 1798, to the Secretary of State: "We believe Mr. Hadfield to be a young man of taste but we have found him extremely deficient in practical knowledge as an architect . . . under Mr. Hadfield's directions it never could have been completed in an effectual manner. We therefore gave Mr. Hoban (who has heretofore superintended the President's house) the immediate superintendence of the Capitol." Trumbull, however, is true to his protégé: "His services were soon dispensed with, not because his knowledge was not eminent, but because his integrity compelled him to say, that parts of the original plan *could not be executed*. Poor Hatfield languished

* See Washington's letter, Appendix, p. 251.



DR. WILLIAM THORNTON

many years in obscurity at Washington, where however, towards the close of his life, he had the opportunity of erecting a noble monument to himself in the city hall, a beautiful building, in which is no waste of space or materials."

James Hoban, who had settled in Charleston, S. C., prior to the Revolution, was a native of Ireland. He came to Washington in July, 1792, and on the 18th was employed at a salary of three hundred guineas a year. He seems to have been a reliable and good man and to have enjoyed the respect and friendship of Thornton and others with whom he was associated. Hoban planned, built, and rebuilt the White House; and, indeed, was engaged upon the public buildings for more than twenty-five years, though his supervision of the construction at the Capitol, whenever the Commissioners found it necessary to utilize him there and possible to relieve him from other work, ended in 1802. It fell to his lot to protect the public interest by carefully rebuilding the foundation walls of Congress House, which the contractors had fraudulently constructed by loosely dumping in place broken stone and mortar from wheelbarrows. This early piece of knavery gave rise to the expression, "The Continental Trowel."

Thus, strange to say, the designs of the original building, and the model in accordance with which the classic Capitol has grown to completion, were not conceived by a professional architect. Neither Hallet, Hadfield nor Hoban designed any portion of the present structure. Thornton, however, was no ordinary man. He was poet, artist, scholar, inventor. He was the Father of the Patent Office, having held the position of clerk in charge of the patents, at \$1,400 per year, under an appointment from Jefferson; and was virtually its first commissioner, for later his office became known as Superintendent of Patents, and his salary raised to \$2,000 a year. In 1810 he moved the models, patents and records of the Patent Office into Blodgett's Hotel, where Congress afterwards met for a short period.

An universal genius, Thornton was the friend of the early Presidents, and the companion of the best in the land. He had a love for fast horses, and owned several, which did not lessen his attractiveness in the estimation of many of the distinguished wits and beaux of his day. He drew plans for a number of the finest old places in Washington (among them the "haunted" Octagon or Tayloe house), many of which still stand as monuments to his genius. He was born on the island of Tortola, in the West Indies, was educated in medicine in England and Paris, and traveled extensively in accomplishing himself. He came to America, and was married in Philadelphia in 1790. Three years later he moved to Washington, where he lived highly respected until his death, March 28, 1828.

ORIGINAL CORNER-STONE

THE 18th of September, 1793, should be ever memorable in American history. On that eventful day, George Washington, surrounded by those he loved, descended into the cavazion at the southeast corner of the proposed north or Senate wing, and firmly set with Masonic rites the corner-stone of the National Capitol. The day was beautiful. The sight of the little group of patriots gathered about that spot, offering prayers for the prosperity of the people and for the kindred growth of the Capitol and the nation, and all filled with reverence and love for the tall, majestic, soldier-President, now silver-crowned by years, who had guided many of those present and the brothers and fathers of others, gone forever, through the dark days of the Revolution, must have been one of tender impressiveness then, as it is in reflective glimpses now. The Masonic apron worn by the President was the handiwork of Madame de Lafayette, the wife of that beloved French general whose heroism had helped to make possible this peaceful and propitious scene.

The following account of the ceremonies on this august occasion is taken from the columns of the *Columbian Centinel*, published in Boston, October 5, 1793, and is, no doubt, a fairly accurate description, as it was written presumably by an eye-witness.

BY THURSDAY NIGHT'S MAILS,

MARYLAND.

GEORGETOWN, *Sept. 21.*

On Wednesday last one of the grandest Masonic processions took place, which, perhaps, ever was exhibited on the like important occasion.

About ten o'clock, Lodge No. 9, were visited by that congregation, so grateful to the craft, Lodge, No. 22, of Virginia, with all their officers and regalia, and directly afterwards appeared on the southern banks of the grand river Potowmack, one of the finest companies of volunteer artillery that hath been lately seen, parading to receive the President of the United States, who shortly came in sight with his suite—to whom the artillery paid their military honors, and his Excellency and suite crossed the Potowmack, and was received in Maryland by the officers and brethren of No. 22, Virginia, and No. 9, Maryland; whom the President headed, and preceded by a band of music, the rear brought up by the Alexandria volunteer artillery, with grand solemnity of march, proceeded to the President's square, in the city of Washington, where they were met and saluted by No. 15, of the city of Washington, in all their elegant regalia, headed by brother Joseph Clark, Rt. W.G. M.P.T. and conducted to a large Lodge prepared for the purpose of their reception. After a short space of time, by the vigilance of brother C. Worthy Stephenson, grand

marshal, P. T. the brotherhood and other bodies were disposed in a second order of procession, which took place amidst a brilliant crowd of spectators of both sexes, according to the following arrangements, viz:

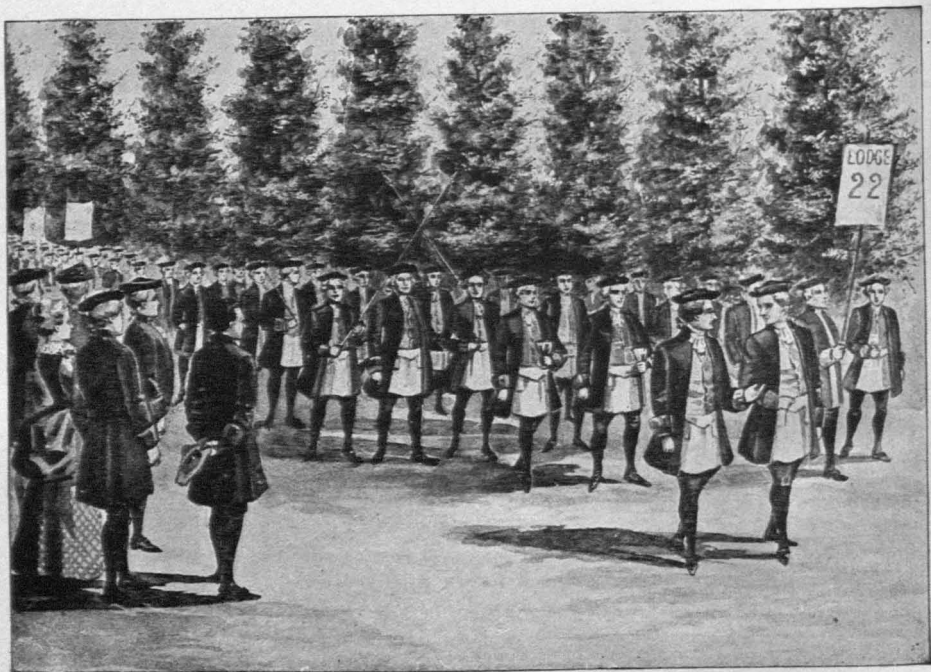
The Surveying department of the city of Washington,
 Mayor and Corporation of Georgetown,
 Virginia artillery,
 Commissioners of the City of Washington, and their attendants,
 Stone cutters,
 Mechanics,
 Two Sword Bearers,
 Masons of the Fifth degree,
 Bibles, etc., on Grand Cushions,
 Deacons with Staffs of Office,
 Stewards with Wands,
 Masons of the Third Degree,
 Wardens with Truncheons,
 Secretaries with Tools of Office,
 Pay-Masters with their Regalia,
 Treasurers with their Jewels,
 Band of Music,
 Lodge No. 22, of Virginia, disposed in their own order,
 Corn, Wine, and Oil,
 Grand Master, Pro Tem.,
 Brother George Washington, W. M.,
 No. 22, Virginia,
 Grand sword-bearer,

The procession marched two a-breast, in the greatest solemn dignity, with music playing, drums beating, colours flying, and spectators rejoicing; from the President's square to the capitol, in the city of Washington: where the grand marshal ordered a halt, and directed each file in the procession to incline two steps, one to the right, and one to the left, and face each other, which formed an hollow oblong square; through which the grand sword bearer led the van; followed by the grand master P. T. on the left—the President of the United States in the center, and the Worshipful master of No. 22, Virginia, on the right—all the other orders, that composed the procession advanced, in the reverse of their order of march from the President's square to the South East corner of the capitol: And the artillery filed off to a destined ground to display their manœuvres and discharge their cannon: The President of the United States, the Grand Master, P. T. and Worshipful M. of No 22, taking their stand to East of an huge stone; and all the craft, forming a circle Westward, stood a short time in silent awful order:

The Artillery discharged a volley.

The Grand Master delivered the Commissioners, a large silver plate with an inscription thereon, which the Commissioners ordered to be read, and was as follows:—

This southeast corner stone of the Capitol of the United States of America, in the City of Washington was laid on the 18th., day of September, 1793, in the eighteenth year of American Independence, in the first year of the second term of the Presidency of George Washington, whose virtues in the civil administration of his country have been as conspicuous and beneficial as his military valor and prudence have been useful in establishing her liberties and in the year of Masonry 5793, by the President of the United States, in concert



MASONIC PROCESSION, SEPTEMBER 18, 1793

with the Grand Lodge of Maryland, several lodges under its jurisdiction, and Lodge No. 22, from Alexandria, Va.; Thomas F. Johnson, David Steuart, and Daniel Carrol, Commissioners; Joseph Clark, Right Worshipful Grand Master, pro tempore; James Hoban and Stephen Hallette, architects; Collin Williamson, master mason.

The artillery discharged a volley.

The plate was then delivered to the President, who, attended by the grand master P.T.—and three most worshipful masters descended into the cavasson trench, and deposed the plate, and laid on it the cornerstone of the Capitol of the United States of America—on which was deposed corn, wine, and oil; when the whole congregation joined in awful prayer, which was succeeded by Masonic chaunting honours and a volley from the artillery.

The President of the United States and his attendant brethren ascended from the cavasson to the East of the corner stone, and there the grand master P.T. elevated on a triple rostrum, delivered an animated and ingenious Oration.*

The whole company retired to an extensive booth, where an ox of 500 lbs. was barbecued, of which the company generally partook, with every abundance of other recreation. The festival concluded with fifteen successive volleys from the artillery, whose military discipline and manœuvres, merit every commendation.

* This oration, pronounced by Brother Joseph Clarke, Rt. Worshipful Grand-Master P.T., may be found in the *Columbian Centinel* of Wednesday, October 9, 1793.

OLD CAPITOL

In the month of October, 1800, a small "packet sloop," laden with all the records, archives and furniture which the infant Republic possessed, sailed from Philadelphia, where Congress then sat, up the Potomac to the new seat of government.

Oliver Wolcott, in a letter to his wife of the 4th of July, writes that there was at that time, "one good Tavern about forty rods from the Capitol, and several other houses . . . building; but I do not perceive how the members of Congress can possibly secure lodgings unless they will consent to live like Scholars in a college or Monks in a monastery, crowded ten or twenty in one house, and utterly secluded from Society. The only resource for such as wish to live Comfortably will be found in Georgetown, three miles distant, over as bad a Road in winter as the clay grounds near Hartford." Yet a belle of the times describes the former place as "a town of houses without streets, as Washington is a town of streets without houses."

The Commissioners report that on May 15, 1800, by accurate report, there were 109 houses of brick and 263 of wood. On November 15, 1801, to these had been added 84 of brick and 151 of wood, while 79 of brick and 35 of wood were building. Between 1796 and January, 1801, the Commissioners sold lots southwest of Massachusetts Avenue at an average price of \$343; and northeast, they and the proprietors sold them at an average price of \$105. Lots "binding on" navigable waters sold at an average price of \$12.71 the "foot front."

This primitive condition of the city in which Congress was to take up its permanent residence furnished abundant food for wits and raconteurs. John Cotton Smith, a Representative from Connecticut, said that, "Instead of recognizing the avenues and streets, portrayed on the plan of the city, not one was visible, unless we accept a road, with two buildings on each side of it, called New Jersey Avenue. Pennsylvania Avenue, leading, as laid down on paper, from the Capitol to the Presidential Mansion, was, nearly the whole distance, a deep morass covered with alder bushes, which were cut through the width of the intended avenue during the ensuing winter." He described the city generally as "covered with scrub oak bushes on the higher grounds, and on the marshy soil either with trees or some sort of shrubbery."

Mrs. John Adams, writing to her daughter, says: "Woods are all you see from Baltimore until you reach the City, which is only so in name—here and

there a small cot without a window appearing in the Forest, through which you travel miles without seeing a human being." Only a month later, Gouverneur Morris writes: "We want nothing here but houses, cellars, kitchens, well-informed men, amiable women and other trifles of this kind to make our city perfect. . . . In short, it is the very best city in the world for a future residence."

Congress met for the first time in the City of Washington on November 17, 1800. Not, however, until the 21st was President Adams notified that the Senate at last had a quorum; and on the next day at twelve o'clock, according to his own arrangement, he came into the Senate Chamber, where the Representatives had already taken the seats assigned them for the ceremony, and addressed Congress, congratulating them "on the prospect of a residence not to be changed. Although there is cause to apprehend that accommodations are not now so complete as might be wished, yet there is great reason to believe that this inconvenience will cease with the present session."

Both branches were then sitting in the old north wing, as that was all that was then completed, and truly their conveniences do not seem to have been of the best; for, four days after convening, Thomas Claxton was directed to erect a shelter over the fire-wood required by the two Houses so as to protect it from the weather. For the furnishing of the apartments themselves, the offices and the committee rooms, as well as for the expenses of the removal of the books, records and papers of Congress from Philadelphia, only \$9,000 had been appropriated, to be expended under the supervision of the Secretaries of the four Executive Departments. These Secretaries at the same time were to see that the Commissioners prepared *footways* in suitable places and directions for the "greater facility of communication between the various Departments and offices of the Government."

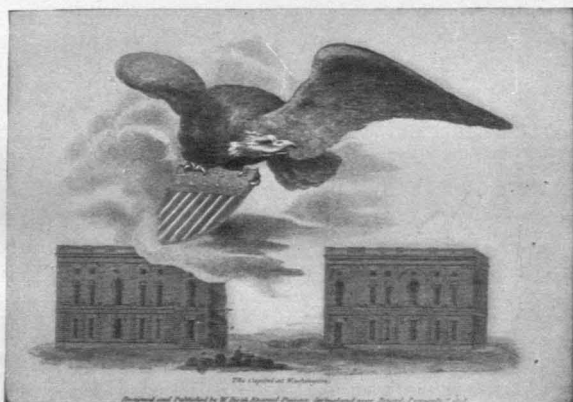
On February 11, 1801, the Speaker, attended by the House, proceeded to the Senate Chamber to witness the opening and counting of the electoral votes for President and Vice-President. It was found that **Thomas Jefferson** and Aaron Burr each had received 73 votes, John Adams 65, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney 64, and John Jay 1. The President of the Senate, therefore, announced that, according to the Constitution, it lay with the House to choose between Jefferson and Burr for President. The House then returned to their own chamber where, with closed doors, they proceeded to ballot by States. During the day Mr. Nicholson, who had been very ill, appeared and had a seat assigned him in an ante-room of the chamber in which the House assembled, whither the tellers of Maryland carried the ballot-box to enable him to vote. This was important, as his vote for Jefferson divided the State. The first ballot showed 8 States for Jefferson, 6 for Burr, and 2 divided. The thirty-sixth ballot, on the 17th, was final: 10 States for

Jefferson, 4 for Burr—Delaware and South Carolina voting by blank ballots. The *National Intelligencer* of the 16th says: "All the accounts received from individuals at a distance, as well as the feelings of citizens on the spot, concur in establishing the conviction that the present is among the most solemn eras which have existed in the annals of our country. That confidence, which has hitherto reposed in tranquil security, on the wisdom and patriotism of Congress, stands appalled at dangers which threaten the peace of society, and the existence of the Constitution. . . . The unanimous and firm decision of the people throughout the United States in favor of Mr. Jefferson will be irresistible."

The corresponding south wing* was not so far completed as to be occupied by the House of Representatives until the beginning of the extra session on October 26, 1807. At the close of the first session in Washington, however, the House

left its chamber on the west side of the north wing, where soon after the Library was placed, and on December 7, 1801, took up its quarters in "the oven," a temporary low brick structure of elliptical shape on the site† of the proposed south wing.

In 1803, **Benjamin Henry Latrobe**, an accomplished English architect, who had settled in Richmond soon after coming to America, was appointed by Jefferson to take charge of the work as surveyor at the Capitol, with full authority to construct the south wing, and to remodel the north wing if he should think advisable. Latrobe was a man of some artistic taste, as is seen from a study of his work and a perusal of the many reports he sent to Congress respecting its progress. He is said to have been presented to President Washington at Mount Vernon shortly after his arrival in the United States, in 1796, by Judge Bushrod Washington, and to have made a most favorable impression upon the Executive. Following Latrobe's appointment,



THE CAPITOL, 1807

* For plans, see Appendix, p. 255.

† See Jefferson's letter, Appendix, p. 249.

the foundations of the external walls of the south wing, he says, "were condemned and pulled down. The center building occupied by the House of Representatives remained standing,—because in the opinion of many a further appropriation appeared at least doubtful." Very little other work was done on account of the narrow space around the building, and all the workmen were discharged in December. After the House adjourned, on March 27, 1804, however, the temporary building was torn down and removed, and the south constructure commenced in earnest.

The Quasimodo of the Capitol, no doubt, chuckled gleefully at the steadfastness of the majority of the Members but three days before the adjournment. Despite the advocacy of John Randolph and the strength given to the measure by his "yea"—to say nothing of the personal discomfort of the Representatives—they then defeated by a vote of 76 to 27 a Senate amendment providing for "finishing the President's House in such manner as will accommodate both Houses of Congress; and for the purpose of renting, purchasing, or building a suitable house for the accommodation of the President."

The destruction of the "oven" necessitated another removal of the House, in the fall of 1804. They evidently again took up their old quarters in the north wing, as in the next year \$700 were appropriated "for defraying the expenses incidental to the dismantling the late Library room of Congress, and fitting it up for the accommodation of the House of Representatives, at the ensuing session." Here, Latrobe tells us, their extremely inconvenient situation during the session of 1805-06 "created a very great impatience in all the members to occupy their new Hall, at the next session." Indeed, they specially called upon the President to carry the work upon the south wing to completion by that time, but it proved to be impossible. On December 8, 1806, one of the Representatives observed that "he had kept his seat not without considerable alarm"; and it was resolved that the Speaker take steps to pull down the plastering or otherwise secure "the ceiling of the chamber in which the sessions of the House are now held." This had swagged in some places more than half an inch, and in another part of the House had actually fallen down.

In the spring of 1807, in conformity to a report of the Superintendent, a bill was prepared providing for the alteration, as well as the repair, of the east side of the north wing. It proposed to make two stories of the Senate Chamber, and to apply the upper one to the courts. The Senate was to be accommodated on the west side of the north wing, by demolishing the Library, committee rooms, etc., and making in their place one large room. When the bill came to the House, however, it was amended, Mr. J. R. Williams saying that he knew of but one reason for the proposed change: "It was to make things correspond with the parliamentary language. When a bill is sent

down from the Senate to the House of Representatives, it will, if the alteration takes place, really descend, as this House will be about fifteen feet lower than the Senate." Rather than incur a great expense for such an object, he continued, he "would rather alter the language and say, a bill is sent up to this House and down to the Senate."

At the close of the year 1806 the framing of the roof of the south wing was put on, and during the winter it was covered in. The greatest exertions were then made to finish the interior, in order to be ready for the early meeting of the House in October, 1807. Latrobe seems somewhat to have altered Thornton's plan for this chamber by substituting a hall in the form of "two semi-circles abutting on a parallelogram" for one of elliptical shape. "The seats of the members will occupy the area of the House," he reports, "and look to the south. Behind the Speaker's chair is a small chamber appropriated to his use. The House is surrounded by a plain wall seven feet high. The 24 Corinthian columns which rise upon this wall and support the dome, are 26 feet 8 inches in height, the entablature is 6 feet high, the blocking course 1 foot 6 inches, and the dome rises 12 feet 6 inches, in all 53 feet 8 inches. The area within the wall is 85 feet 6 inches wide. The space within the external walls is 110 feet by 86 feet." The Corinthian columns, probably of freestone, and their ornate capitals, were finished upon the ground. There were at this time in the service of the government, two skillful Italian sculptors, Andrei and Franzoni, who, with their pupil, Somerville, an American citizen, were employed, for the most part, upon this and the other more difficult work at the Capitol.

In 1807 Latrobe sent a letter to Congress, and the following extracts are worthy of perusal, not only for their description of the south wing, but for their picture of some of the difficulties under which the early Congresses labored:

"In the distribution of the House, it is provided that the access of those citizens who attend in the gallery, solely for the purpose of being present at the debates, is on the south front, at a distance from the eastern entrance, which leads to the apartments appropriated to legislative business. Between these parts of the buildings there is no communication whatever, excepting by a small door from the lobby, which door is only intended to admit the Doorkeeper into the gallery, in order to execute an order of the House for the exclusion of strangers.

"Thus all intrusion upon the business of the House and of its committees, may be effectually prevented by regulating admissions by the eastern entrance.

"The ground floor is entirely appropriated to the use of the committees of the House, and of the Clerk. The committee rooms ranged on the east and west fronts have an ante-chamber or waiting room, to each range, for the use of those citizens who have to attend the committees, and who, heretofore, had no accommodation but such as the lobby or the gallery of the House afforded. Such persons must of necessity enter at the eastern door.

"From this entrance also the staircases lead up to the door of the House. Within the House the lobbies are to the right and left. The position of the Doorkeeper gives him an

The National Capitol

immediate view of every one who enters, while the interior of the House cannot be seen excepting from the galleries of the lobbies. There is, therefore, no temptation to continuance in the lobby, but for the sake of hearing the debates from its galleries, in which the presence of the House will preserve order and silence.

"Within the colonnade of the House there is no room for any persons not members of the House, excepting on the seats under the northern part of the wall. Those seats were erected on the presumption that the House might appropriate the same to the use of the Senators of the United States, when attending the House, and of such other persons, distinguished by their official characters, as the House might judge proper to admit to them.

"It will be in the recollection of the members that, in the north wing of the Capitol, in which were all the committee rooms and the Clerk's office, even during the sitting of the House in the temporary building, erected on the site of the south wing, every one, without discrimination, had access to all the passages of the building. It was, indeed, impossible to distinguish those who *ought* from those who *ought not* to have entered. The consequence was, that every part was crowded by those who had and by more who had no business in the House. There are annually from four to five hundred persons whom their affairs bring to the seat of Government during the sitting of the National Legislature; for these citizens the interior of the House afforded the only shelter during the severity of the Winter. The lobby of the House was, therefore, usually filled with a part of them, to the great inconvenience of the members, and sometimes to the interruption of the legislative business. Besides *these*, idle and dissolute persons ranged the whole building; the walls were defaced by obscenity and libels; the public furniture and utensils of the House were considered as fair objects of depredation; and, were I to state the amount of some of the depredations, it would appear almost incredible. The committee rooms themselves have not been secure from the most improper intrusion; and, to particularise only one fact, much of the leakage of the roof arose from the smaller pieces of lead, called *flashings*, being stolen. . . ."

It is evident that the propensity of boys in those days was much the same as it is to-day; for the architect adds, in the same report, "some restriction might probably be laid upon the intrusion of boys of all colors beyond the outer door, by regulating the occupancy of these lobbies."

In March of the following year, Latrobe tells us, the south wing was virtually complete. The wood-work, though primed, and the walls, however, required painting; while only two of the capitals of the Corinthian columns were entirely finished, eight in a state of forwardness, and fourteen only rough-hewn. Also the moulding of the cornice, the sculpture over the entrance, two small capitals in the circular vestibule and other minor details still needed attention.

On December 11, 1809, Latrobe reports :

"When the House first occupied the south wing, the number of committees and committee rooms was only seven. The Committee of the District of Columbia has since then been created and great inconvenience has been experienced for want of a room sufficiently spacious for their increasing business. At present, their sittings are held in the small chamber fitted up for the use of the President whenever he comes to the Capitol."

After the completion of the permanent quarters for the Representatives, Latrobe turned his attention to the north wing, which had been constructed previous to his appointment as architect. The main appropriations, of \$20,000 each, for this portion of the building were made March 3, 1809, and May 1, 1810. The former act contained also an appropriation of \$5,000 "for completing the staircase, and providing temporary and adequate accommodations for the Library, in the room now used for that purpose, and in the one in which the Senate now sit."

Latrobe, in the report of 1809, thus describes the progress of the work :

"The court room, the office of the Clerk of the Supreme Court, and the office and library of the judges have also been nearly completed, and may be occupied the approaching session of the court [February Term, 1810] . . . the court room and those offices on the ground story, which support the Senate chamber, and other apartments of the Senate above, were necessarily constructed out of the general fund of the north wing. . . .

"The whole east side and centre of the north wing being now permanently completed, excepting the part deficient in the Senate chamber, the iron work of the staircase, and some minor details, I again beg leave to call your attention to the west side of this wing ; it is intended to contain the library, and is in such a state of decay throughout, as to render it dangerous to postpone the work proposed. It is now the only part of the Capitol that remains to be solidly re-built.

"But independently of this consideration, the increasing extent of the library of Congress induces me to represent to you the necessity of constructing the rooms intended permanently to contain it. Should the work be commenced in the appropriate season, the books may be removed, and the library and reading rooms fitted up for use by the session after the next."

These repairs had been much needed, as is shown by Latrobe's report * of March 23, 1808 :

"The accommodation of the Senate and of the Courts is very far from being convenient for the despatch of public business . . . the present chamber of the Senate cannot be considered as altogether safe, either as to the plastering, of which the columns and entablature consist, or as to its floor and ceiling . . . rooms in the third story, which have never been finished, but which will be highly useful apartments whenever the wing shall be completed."

The same report informs us why these repairs had not been begun under the appropriation of March 3, 1807, for the general repair of the wing :

"The floors and ceilings of the Senate chamber and library being also rotten, it was judged most prudent and necessary to begin with a thorough repair of the centre from the foundation, and not to disturb these apartments, *the use of which could not be dispensed with the ensuing session* ; for, had the roof of the Senate chamber been opened, no exertions could have completed the repairs in proper time, . . .

"In the great staircase the old wooden skylight and cove was entirely taken down, and a solid brick cupola turned over this large area of forty-five by thirty-five feet, and crowned by a lantern light."

* See Jefferson's letter, Appendix, p. 252.

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The repairs in the Court room in 1809 seem to have been made during a recess of the Court and not to have interfered with its sittings. It was far otherwise with the repairs in the Senate Chamber. On Washington's Birthday, 1809, that body resolved that the surveyor of the public buildings, "with as little expense as may consist with the reasonable comfort of the members, and with the convenience of spectators," prepare "The Library Room" for its accommodation at the next session. This began, by a special act of Congress, on May 22d, but lasted until only the 28th of June, when both Houses adjourned to meet on the fourth Monday in November. On New Year's Day, 1810, the Senate returned to its chamber. Six months before, it had appropriated \$15,000 to finish and furnish its permanent abode, together with the committee rooms, lobbies and other apartments. An additional appropriation of \$1,600 had been made to defray the expense incurred in fitting up the temporary chamber, and in providing and repairing articles of furniture.

Both wings were built of freestone from quarries upon an island in Acquia Creek, in the State of Virginia, which island the government had purchased in 1791 for the sum of \$6,000. They were connected in 1811 by a wooden bridge, running north and south, 100 feet in length; and in this condition, save for certain repairs and for some sculpture in the House and finishing touches to the Senate Chamber, the Capitol remained until the fire in 1814.

The official estimates show that \$491,194.19 were the net expenditures upon the old building, out of Congressional appropriations, from 1803 to 1819. A goodly part of the cost of the old Capitol was defrayed from donations of the State of Maryland, which contributed \$72,000 to the fund for the erection of public buildings in Washington, and of the State of Virginia, which voted \$120,000 for the like good cause. In this connection it is amusing to reflect upon the candid expression of Washington in his letter of August 29, 1793, to the Commissioners of the Federal District: "Query—In what manner would it be proper to state the accounts with the States of Virginia and Maryland, they having advanced monies which have not been all expended on the objects for which they were appropriated?"

BURNING OF THE CAPITOL, 1814

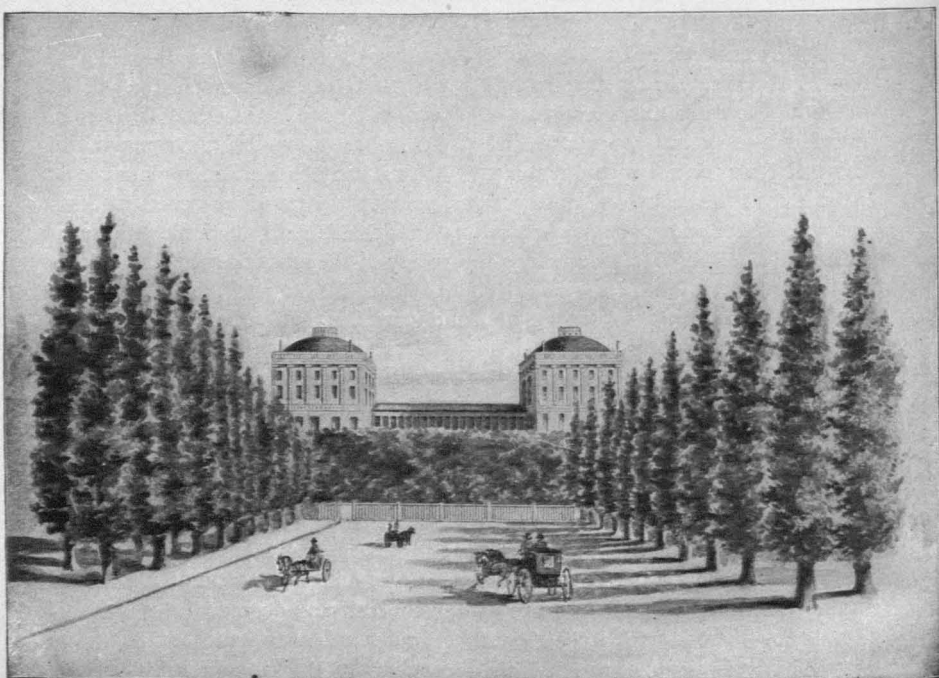
CONGRESS continued to occupy the two small wings until the ill-fated 24th day of August, 1814. Our second war with Great Britain was then at its height. Madison was President. A few days before, an English fleet, commanded by Admiral Cockburn and carrying troops under the command of General Ross, sailed up the Patuxent. The main debarkation took place at Benedict on the west bank of the river, whence the troops marched to Bladensburg, where an engagement ensued. An ignominious rout of the Americans followed, due, perhaps, as much to the policy of the generals as to the rawness of the troops.

By General Winder's orders, the Americans fell back on the Capitol and awaited the advancing enemy. "There," says Ingersoll in his *History of the Second War*, "General Armstrong suggested throwing them into the two wings of that stone, strong building. But General Winder with warmth rejected the proposal. . . . Colonel Monroe [afterwards President] coincided with General Winder's opinion. The Capitol, he feared, might prove a cul-de-sac, from which there would be no escape; the only safety was to rally on the heights beyond Georgetown. . . . Both at their first order to retreat toward the Capitol, and their last to retreat from it, and march beyond the city, insubordinate protests, oaths, tears, and bitter complaints broke forth. To preserve order in ranks so demoralized and degraded was impossible. Broken, scattered, licentious, and tumultuous, they wandered along the central, solitary avenue, which is the great entry of Washington; when arrived at Georgetown, were a mere mob, from which it was preposterous to suppose that an army could be organised to make a stand there."

This defeat of the Americans at Bladensburg, and the retreat, or rather flight, of the soldiers through the city, abandoning the government buildings to the mercy of the enemy, was the signal for a general panic. Every sort of vehicle was pressed into service to remove valuables from private homes and public offices. The President, after taking the field, found his counsel useless, and fled, as did Mrs. Madison, who stopped only to see to the removal from the White House of silver and other articles of value, including the picture of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart which, because of her womanly thoughtfulness, still adorns its walls. In this connection we quote her vivid letter to her sister, Mrs. Cutts, hastily written at the White House before the departure. If the officers and soldiers had been possessed of more of the

sense and heroism of this great woman, the city itself might have been saved.

"Twelve O'clock.—Since sunrise I have been turning my spyglass in every direction, and watching with unwearied anxiety, hoping to discover the approach of my dear husband and friends; but alas, I can descry only groups



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of military wandering in all directions, as if there were a lack of arms or of spirit to fight for their own firesides."

"Three O'clock.—Will you believe it, my sister, we have had a battle or skirmish near Bladensburg, and here I am still within sound of the cannon. Mr. Madison comes not. May God protect us! Two messengers covered with dust come to bid me fly, but here I mean to wait for him. . . . At this late hour a wagon has been procured and I have had it filled with plate and the most valuable portable articles belonging to the house. Whether it will reach its destination—the Bank of Maryland—or fall into the hands of British soldiery, events must determine. Our kind friend, Mr. Carroll, has come to

which until 1846 was ten miles square, and of the planting of the beautiful Federal City of which to-day the whole nation is proud, and which, by its artistic advancement, is rapidly commanding the admiration of the world. By the building of the capital of the States upon its banks, the Potowmak has fulfilled the Indian prophecy in its name: "The river of the meeting of the tribes."

