

WASHINGTON AND ITS ENVIRONS:

A

DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL HAND-BOOK

TO THE

CAPITAL OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

The Federal Territory, or District of Columbia, is situated on the left or E. bank of the Potomac River, at the confluence of the Anacostia or Eastern Branch of that stream.

Boundaries.—The District of Columbia comprises 64 square miles. It lies entirely within the State of Maryland, and is bounded on the north by Montgomery county, on the east and south by Prince George county, and west by the Potomac River.

The *Federal territory* as originally located by President Washington, under authority of the Constitution of the United States, and national and state legislation, formed a square of 10 miles (100 sq. m.). The *bounds* were proclaimed by the President March 30, 1791. On Friday, April 15, of the same year, at 3 P. M., the municipal authorities of Alexandria, Virginia, repaired to the house in which the commissioners of Washington were residing, and after uniting with them in a glass of wine, to the sentiment "May the stone which we are about to place in the ground remain an immovable monument of the wisdom and unanimity of North America," the company proceeded to Jones' Point, or the upper cape, which projects into the Potomac River on the Virginia side or right bank, at the confluence of Hunting Creek, then 1 mile E. of S. of the Court House of Alexandria, in the following order: Town Sergeant; Daniel Carroll, Commissioner, and the Mayor of Alexandria; Andrew Ellicott, Surveyor and the Recorder; the Aldermen and Common Council, not Free Masons; strangers, Master of Lodge No. 22, F. A. M. of Alexandria, with David Stewart, Commissioner, on his right, and James Muir, Pastor of that Episcopal parish on his left, followed by the rest of the fraternity and citizens.

Ellicott, "Geographer General," then ascertained the precise location on Jones' Point, as defined by the President's proclamation, whereupon the Master of the Lodge and Dr. Stewart, aided by the craft, planted the *initial or corner stone* of the Federal Territory, in accordance with the impressive rites of Masonry. The Rev. James Muir delivered an address. After partaking of refreshments the procession returned to the city, and closed the ceremonies of the day with a banquet and appropriate toasts and speeches. From this initial stone Mr. Ellicott, during the ensuing year, laid down the lines of boundary as directed by the President's proclamation. The *first* at an angle of 45° W. of N., a distance of 10 m., into the State of Virginia; the *second* also starting at the initial point, at a right angle with the first, or N. E., across the Potomac, 10 m., into the State of Maryland, and the *remaining two lines* from the termini of the first two and at right angles with them, respectively, N. E. and N. W., until they met each other in a point. The original Territory, it will be seen, stood diagonally, each angle facing one of the cardinal points of the compass. The *N. point*, as originally laid out, is $\frac{3}{4}$ m. due W. of Silver Spring, Md.; the *E. point* $2\frac{3}{4}$ m. S. of E. of Benning's Bridge, on the Anacostia; the *S. or initial point* at the N. cape of Hunting Creek, called Jones' Point; and the *W. point* near the source of Four-mile Run, in Virginia. The *centre of the original Territory* is marked by a gray free-stone, about 100 yds. W. of the Washington Monument and on a line almost due S. from the President's House, at a distance of about $\frac{1}{2}$ m.

The lines were marked by square mile stones, with appropriate inscriptions on the side facing the territory, "JURISDICTION OF THE UNITED STATES;" facing the State, "VIRGINIA," or "MARYLAND," according to location; facing the North "1792," the year in which planted; and facing the South, the position of the Magnetic Needle. Many of these stones are doubtless still standing, but lost sight of amid the accumulations of decayed vegetation. It has been wisely suggested that the Government should *define the lines* of the Federal Territory of this now mighty Republic by tablets, columns and other marks, worthy and commemorative of its greatness. Shortly after the District was laid out this was seriously considered. It was proposed to build a great Fort at Jones' Point, on the site of the initial corner-stone of the Federal Territory, at the same time to constitute one of the defenses of the river approach to the Capital from the Sea and to be called Fort Columbia. It was actually commenced, but was soon afterwards abandoned.

In 1846 all that portion of the District, consisting of about 36 sq. m., which lay on the W. bank of the Potomac, in Virginia, was *retroceded* to that State, which reduced the area to 64 sq. m., its present extent. Since the retrocession, the short-sighted policy of that act has been demonstrated. The question of restoring the Territory to its first limits is being agitated. In the absence of absolute jurisdiction on both sides of the river, it is manifest that there must be interminable conflicts of interest and authority; the more so as the Capital increases in population, wealth and magnificence. The schemes of improvement of the Potomac in front of Washington and Georgetown also demand the possession of the Virginia shore.