

Dedicating The District In 1791

By JESSE MERRITT

THE simple ceremony attending the laying of the cornerstone of the District of Columbia on April 15, 1791—just 150 years ago—affords an interesting glimpse at life and personalities in Alexandria, Va., during the days immediately following the Revolution when the town's first citizen, George Washington, had emerged from that struggle as a world hero.

The stone was laid with much less fanfare than usually accompanies similar but less important events today. And the records indicate it was done in the leisurely eighteenth century mode, beginning with a dinner at Mr. Wise's Tavern, which concluded with this toast: "May the stone we are about to place in the ground forever remain an immovable monument of the wisdom and unanimity of North America."

Two By Two

After this the guests proceeded to Jones Point, near Alexandria, for the ceremony, walking two by two led by the Town Sergeant. Immediately behind the sergeant walked Daniel Carroll, Maryland's commissioner at the ceremony, who was accompanied by the Mayor of Alexandria. Then came Major Andrew Ellicott, the surveyor who aided Major Pierre L'Enfant in laying out the District.

Following them were members of the common council, aldermen, visitors from out of town and the master of the Alexandria Masonic Lodge. Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick, accompanied by Dr. David Stuart, Virginia's commissioner, whose wife was a daughter of Benedict Calvert and the widow of John Parke Custis. After them came members of the lodge and members of such old Alexandria families as the Greenways, Ramsays, Harpers, Wests, Taylors, Hawkines and the Waggoners.

A Simple Act

When they all arrived at the spot which Major Ellicott had chosen as the starting point for the District, which is almost a perfect square of ten miles, Dr. Dick, assisted by Dr. Stuart, placed the stone. It was done as simply as that; and it was from this stone that the boundaries of the District were determined by Major Ellicott's surveyors.

Those participating in this historic event were friends and neighbors of Washington, and he had undoubtedly asked many of them for advice regarding the location of the District. For it was in Alexandria that Washington had his office and the volunteer fire company in which he was so interested. And it was there, too, that he attended church and became a member of the Masonic Lodge.

A Versatile Doctor

Among his close friends in Alexandria was Dr. Dick, a versatile, energetic and genial man, whose letters are full of wisdom and humor. He attended the first President during his last illness, having been called in by Dr. Craik, and he had charge of the last rites at Washington's tomb. He studied medicine under Dr. Benjamin Rush, surgeon general of the Continental Army during the Revolution, and it would seem that he was a physician of considerable ability, since the New York Academy of Medicine has a record of his medical research. The Friends Historical Society at Swarthmore College has an autographed medical book from his library, and Dr. Dick's letters and other papers are now in the Library of Congress and in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

A portrait in oils of Dr. Dick now hangs in the girls' reading room of Washington College, at Chestertown,



DR. ELISHA CULLEN DICK

a gift of Mrs. Frank Madison Dick, wife of one of Dr. Dick's descendants, and a friend of the college. Washington was a member of the board of Washington College.

Memories Of Physician

Alexandria teems with memories of Dr. Dick and there is a portrait of him in the Washington-Alexandria Masonic lodge. And in Mount Vernon there is a portrait of Washington painted by this versatile doctor. In fact, his fondness for Washington is one of the outstanding characteristics associated with the memory of Dr. Dick.

That Doctor Dick was also genial and something of a bon vivant is indicated by the poem hanging in the old Stabler Pharmacy in Alexandria, which has now been restored. The poem is an invitation to dinner and shows the doctor is a little lame in his ability to rhyme. Here's the poem:

*If you can eat a good fat duck,
Come up with us and take pot luck.
Of white-backs we have got a pair,
So plump, so round, so fat, so fair.
A London alderman would fight
Through pies and tarts to get one bite.
Moreover, we have beef and port,
That you may use your knife and fork.
Come up precisely at two o'clock,
The door shall open at your knock.
The day 'tho wet, the streete 'tho
muddy,
To keep out the cold we'll have some
toddy.
And if perchance you should get sick,
You'll have at hand*

Yours E. C. Dick.