

Washington, District of Columbia.

The District of Columbia had a peculiar origin, and its constitution and history account for many of the peculiarities of the present capital city. The first Congress of the United States had the task of establishing a federal capital, under a plan for taking in some small tract of land and exercising exclusive jurisdiction over it. In 1790 a bill was passed, after many postponements and much hot discussion, accepting from the States of Maryland and Virginia a tract ten miles square on the Potomac, to be called the District of Columbia; but, in 1846, Virginia's portion—some thirty-six square miles south of the river—was ceded back to her. Three commissioners were appointed by the President (Washington) to purchase the land from its owners, and to provide suitable buildings for the Government. Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant, a French engineer, who had fought in the Revolution, was appointed to lay out the city, but proved so irconcilable to discipline that it became necessary to dismiss him, though his plan was essentially followed by Ellicott, his assistant, who succeeded him.

The avenues were named after the States, and in a certain order. By reason of its midway and influential position, that had already given it the excellent sobriquet "Keystone State," Pennsylvania was entitled to the name of the great central avenue. The avenues south of this received the names of the Southern States; the avenues which crossed Pennsylvania were named after the Middle States, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey and New York; while the New England States were left to designate the avenues then regarded as remote possibilities among the swamps and hills of the northwest. The curious way in which the capital has developed along the lines of the last-named group is

typical of the growth and change in the balance of the whole country since L'Enfant's day.

The rectilinear streets run exactly north and south and east and west. The streets running east and west are known by the letters of the alphabet, so we have North A and South A, North B and South B, and so on. At right angles to the alphabetical streets are the streets bearing numbers, and beginning their house enumeration at a line running due north and south through the Capitol. This divides the city into four quarters, Northwest, Northeast, Southeast and Southwest, each with its own set of numbers for the houses, arranged upon the decimal system—that is, one hundred numbers for each block. This is repeated in a direction away from each of the Capitol streets; all addresses, therefore, should bear the added designation of the quarter by its initials—N.W., N.E., S.E., or S.W.

In 1800 the seat of government was established in Washington city, which was first so called, it is said, by the commissioners in 1791. The general himself, who was its most active promoter, always spoke of it as the Federal City. The town was all in the woods and had only 3,000 inhabitants, most living in the northwestern quarter or on Capitol Hill. Nevertheless it grew until 1814, when, after a weak resistance at Bladensburg, it was captured by the British, who set fire to the public buildings and some private residences, intending to destroy the town altogether. A hurricane of wind and rain came that night to complete the destruction in some respects, but this extinguished the conflagration. Next day the British left a panic of causeless fear, excepting a large contingent of deserters, who took this opportunity to stay behind and "grow up with the country." The

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