



ANDREW ELLICOTT:  
HIS LIFE AND LETTERS

CATHARINE CORTLANDT VAN MATHEWS

# His Life and Letters

BY

CATHARINE VAN CORTLANDT MATHEWS

ILLUSTRATED



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## CHAPTER IV

### THE CITY OF WASHINGTON IN THE TERRITORY OF COLUMBIA

1791-1798

THE winter months were usually to Major Ellicott an entire and an exceedingly pleasant contrast to the summer ones. He exchanged the hardships and responsibilities of the rough and uncomfortable life of the surveys in the wilderness for the ease of the pleasant home in Philadelphia, where he could enjoy his dearest possessions, the wife and the little flock of children, who were, after all, the real interest and joy of his life. In these leisure months, too, he could continue undisturbed his astronomical and scientific pursuits, attend the meetings of the Philosophical Society, and enjoy what was to him a keen delight, the society of men interested like himself in scientific research and discovery, the bright and unrestricted exchange of thought with men of equal mind.

However delightful these two or three months of home comfort and rest might be, they were always quickly succeeded by the necessity of accepting appointments for further State or Government surveys. The honesty of his purpose and the excellence of his work had attracted the favorable notice of the foremost men of his day, and

year by year the commissions he received called him to tasks of greater importance, and to fields of work that made increasing demands upon his skill and resource.

With the spring of 1791, a long talked-of undertaking of national interest had reached at last the point where an active beginning was to be immediately made. This was the surveying and laying out of a permanent seat of government for the United States. The matter of the selection of such a site had long been under discussion, and had been the subject of sharp controversy, the Northern States wishing it to be near Philadelphia, — a not unnatural desire for the Pennsylvanians to have, — and at one time Germantown had actually been selected. But the fertility of the country about Philadelphia, advanced by many members of Congress, as a reason for its becoming, if chosen, a prosperous and desirable centre, was not, in General Washington's estimation, of equal importance to future desirability, as the advantages offered by a site on the Potomac River.

Washington's views being finally accepted, he was empowered by Congress, July 16, 1790, to select a tract on the River Potomac, not to exceed ten miles square, for the permanent site of a national capital. He chose a square of land, which included the villages of Georgetown in Maryland and Alexandria in Virginia, and which is, except for the land afterwards ceded back to Virginia, the present District of Columbia. The slopes and elevations of this tract he saw, in imagination, crowned with noble buildings, and the deep waters of the Potomac suggested to him opportunities for commerce, and for quick and easy communication with other States. He chose,



*The Great Pennsylvania Magazine* The CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, OR, THE CITY OF PENNSYLVANIA IN NORTH AMERICA. Engraved by W. B. Smith, 1778.

a Church of the Holy Spirit      a Church of the Holy Spirit      a Church of the Holy Spirit      a Church of the Holy Spirit      a Church of the Holy Spirit  
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Printed by W. B. Smith, 1778.

**THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA ABOUT 1778**  
 Reproduced from a print in the library of the Pennsylvania Historical Society.

with his characteristic farsightedness, not for that year only, or the next, but for the future, and the demands of the future.

The site secured, it was necessary that the selected tract should be at once accurately surveyed, and that an architect should be engaged to lay out the proposed Capital City. For the latter work Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant, a French military engineer of ability was chosen, and subject to the suggestions or directions of the President and of Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State, he set about making the plans. Three commissioners were also chosen, and given authority over the work in hand. They were General Thomas Johnson, the Honorable Daniel Carroll of Maryland, and Dr. David Stuart of Virginia, Washington's family physician.

The survey of the ten miles square being the most immediate necessity, Major Ellicott was requested by Mr. Jefferson, at General Washington's suggestion, to go immediately to Georgetown and commence the survey. This was in February, 1791. Mr. Jefferson's letter informs Major Ellicott that he is "desired to proceed by the first stage to the Federal Territory on the Potomac for the purpose of making a survey of it." With his accustomed promptness Major Ellicott set out at once, and on February 14 he writes to Mrs. Ellicott of his arrival in Alexandria:

"MY DEAR/

I arrived at this town on tuesday last in good health;—but in consequence of bad weather could not proceed to business, (till friday last.) I have been treated with great

politeness by the Inhabitants, who are truly rejoiced at the prospect of being included in the Federal district. I shall leave this town this afternoon to begin the rough survey of the ten miles square. . . .

I am my Dear in great hast

Your Affectionate Husband."

The same day he wrote to Mr. Jefferson giving an outline of his plan for the ten miles square. A draft of the letter has been preserved, and is as follows:

"S<sup>IR</sup>/

I arrived at this Town on Monday last but the Cloudy weather prevented any observations being made untill friday evening which was very fine.

. . . I shall submit to your consideration the following plan for the permanent location which I believe will embrace every object of Advantage which can be included within the ten miles square (Viz) — Beginning at the most

<sup>1</sup> inclination of the upper cape of Hunting Creek and running a streight line North westerly ten miles making an angle at the beginning of 45° with the Meridian for the first line. Then by a streight line into Maryland north easterly at right angles to the first, ten miles for the second line. Thence by a streight line at right angles to the second south easterly ten miles for the third line. Thence for the fourth line at right angles to the third south westerly ten miles to the beginning on the upper cape of Hunting Creek— Or the beginning may be expressed more in the spirit of the Proclamation thus "Running from the Court House in Alexandria due south

<sup>1</sup> Sic.

west and thence a due south east course till it shall strike the River Potomac." . . .

. . . You will observe by the plan which I have suggested for the Permanent Location a small deviation with respect to the courses from those mentioned in the Proclamation. the reason of which is that the courses in the Proclamation strictly adhered to would neither produce straight lines nor contain quite the ten miles square besides the almost impossibility of running such lines with tolerable exactness.

I am Sir with the greatest  
Respect and esteem your  
Hb<sup>l</sup>. Serv<sup>t</sup>.

AND<sup>w</sup>. ELLICOTT." <sup>1</sup>

Early in March, Mr. Jefferson wrote to Major L'Enfant desiring him to "proceed to Georgetown, where you will find Mr. Ellicott employed in making a survey and map of the Federal Territory," and he adds, "The special object in asking your aid is to have drawings of the particular grounds most likely to be approved for the site of the Federal Town and buildings, you will therefore be pleased to begin on the eastern branch and proceed from thence upwards, laying down the hills, valleys, morasses and waters between the Potomac, the Tyber, and the road leading from Georgetown to the eastern branch, and connecting the whole with certain fixed points on the map Mr. Ellicott is preparing." <sup>2</sup>

Major Ellicott was at this time hard at work upon the survey, assisted by Mr. Briggs, Mr. Fenwick, his

<sup>1</sup> From a draft among Major Ellicott's papers.

<sup>2</sup> Jefferson's Correspondence, vol. iii, p. 221.



brother Benjamin Ellicott and a unique character, Benjamin Banneker, the negro mathematician and astronomer.<sup>1</sup> His work left Major Ellicott little leisure for correspondence, and there are but few letters from him during the next two or three months. He writes from Georgetown, March 21st, 1791.

“MY DEAR—

I have taken a few minutes to write to you by Col. Thompson— who I expect will deliver this together with a small bundle containing a pair of Black Silk Mitts and a small smelling Bottle, which I hope you will receive as a small testimony of as pure an affection as ever had a place in a Human Breast— I have met with many difficulties for the want of my old hands— and have in consequence of a most severe attack of the *Influenza* worked for many days in extreme pain— I am now perfectly recovered and as Fat as you ever saw me—

. . . It is now late at night, and my letter carried to a great length; but when I call to mind our happy connection, the consequence of an early attachment, founded in Virtue and in Love, I know not where to conclude; so many objects pleasing to my recollection, crowd in upon me—

I am my Dear Sally

Your Affectionate

Husband.”

Benjamin Banneker, the mulatto mathematician, was born in 1761. His talents attracted much notice. Thomas Jefferson was interested in his career, and Condorcet, the Secretary of the French Academy of Science, wrote him a complimentary letter. The Maryland Historical Society has published a sketch of his life, and a public school in Washington is named for him, the “Banneker School.” He died in 1804.

"Mr. Ellicott," says a correspondent of the "Gazette of the United States," "finished the first line of this survey of the Federal Territory in Virginia and crossed, below the Little Falls, the River Patowmack on the second line." This information is headed "Alexandria, Feb. 23d." On March 26th the "Gazette" announces, "Mr. Ellicott and Major L'Enfant are now engaged in laying out the ground on the Patowmac on which the Federal buildings are to be erected."

The President and Mr. Jefferson were constantly and actively interested in the plans made, suggesting and directing them in accordance with their ideas of the needs and demands of the future. On March 28, the President came on from Philadelphia to interview the Commissioners and consult with them. A dinner was given him by the Mayor and Corporation of Georgetown, "previous to which," he notes in his Diary, "I examined the surveys of Mr. Ellicott who had been sent on to lay out the district of ten miles square for the federal seat, and also the works of Major L'Enfant who has been engaged to make a draught of the gr'ds in the vicinity of Georgetown and Carrollsburgh on the Eastern Branch." March 30 he says: "This business being thus happily finished and some directions given to the Commissioners, the Surveyor and Engineer with respect to the mode of laying out the district; surveying the grounds for the City and forming them into lots, I left Georgetown, dined in Alexandria and reached Mount Vernon in the evening."

One of these suggestions of the President's was that the Executive Mansion and the Legislative Department

should have the distance of a mile between them to avoid any interference of the one with the other. As to the arrangement of the streets Mr. Jefferson was of the opinion that they could not do better than to imitate the straight streets and cross streets of Philadelphia. He placed at Major L'Enfant's disposal a collection of drawings and plans of the principal cities of Europe, which he had gathered while travelling abroad, and writes him, in a letter of April 10, 1791, that he has examined his papers, and "found the plans of Frankfort-on-the Mayne, Carlsruhe, Amsterdam, Strasburg, Paris, Orleans, Bordeaux, Lyons, Montpellier, Marseilles, Turin and Milan," which he "sends in a roll by the post." He says further, "For the Capitol I should prefer the adoption of some one of the models of antiquity which have the approbation of thousands of years and for the Presidents house I should prefer the celebrated fronts of modern dwellings which have the approbation of all good judges. Such are the Galerie du Louvre, the Gardes Meubles and the two fronts of the Hotel de Salen."<sup>1</sup>

While these wise heads were engaged over the plans of architecture and situation whose result is the beautiful and unique arrangement of parks, circles, and avenues, which has been described as "Philadelphia griddled across Versailles,"<sup>2</sup> Major Ellicott was pushing on the work of the survey through the somewhat unattractive outlying lands of the district. He writes slightly of its advantages, or the lack of them, from the "Surveyors Camp, State of Virginia," June 26, 1791.

<sup>1</sup> Jefferson's Correspondence, vol. iii, p. 236

<sup>2</sup> The City of Washington, John A. Porter, p. 543.

“MY DEAR SALLY

Since my last which was forwarded by our friend Adam Hoops<sup>1</sup> nothing material has transpired except the return of the President— . . . The Country thro’ which we are now cutting one of the ten-mile lines is very poor; I think for near seven miles on it there is not one House that has any floor except the earth; and what is more strange, it is in the neighbourhood of Alexandria, and George-Town,— we find but little Fruit, except Huckel berries, and live in our Camp, as retired as we used to do on Lake Erie— Labouring Hands in this Country can scarcely be had at any rate; my estimate was twenty; but I have to wade slowly thro’ with six, — this scarcity of hands will lengthen out the time much beyond what I intended.— As the President is so much attached to this country, I would not be willing that he should know my real sentiments about it.— But with you, (*my Dear*) whose love, and affection, I have constantly experienced, almost from my infancy, I am not afraid to make my sentiments known.—

This country intended for the Permanent Residence of Congress, bears no more proportion to the Country about Philadelphia, and German-Town, for either wealth or fertility, than a Crane does to a stall-fed Ox!— . . .

I am My Dear Sally your

Affectionate Husband.”

A letter from Georgetown, August 9, 1791, shows his good feeling towards his co-worker Major L’Enfant.

<sup>1</sup> Major Adam Hoops, a distinguished soldier and engineer. He was at one time on General Washington’s staff, and was with General Sullivan in his celebrated campaign. He was associated with all the early surveys of western and northern New York.

“MY DEAREST SALLY

Next Monday two weeks at farthest I shall leave this for Philadelphia—

I am now so compleatly tired of being from home that I would willingly resign my appointments rather than suffer so much anxiety and pain— . . . I am determined though poverty should pursue me to live at home and cherish the most affectionate of wives— . . . We have a most elegant Camp and things are in fine order but where you are not there are no charms— One of our Hands was killed last week by the falling of a Tree— I expect my companion Major. L’Enfant which is pronounced in English *Loufong* will pay you a visit in my name some time next week he is a most worthy French Gentleman and though not one of the most handsome of men he is from his good breeding and native politeness a first rate favourite among the ladies—

I am my dear Sally

Your Affectionate

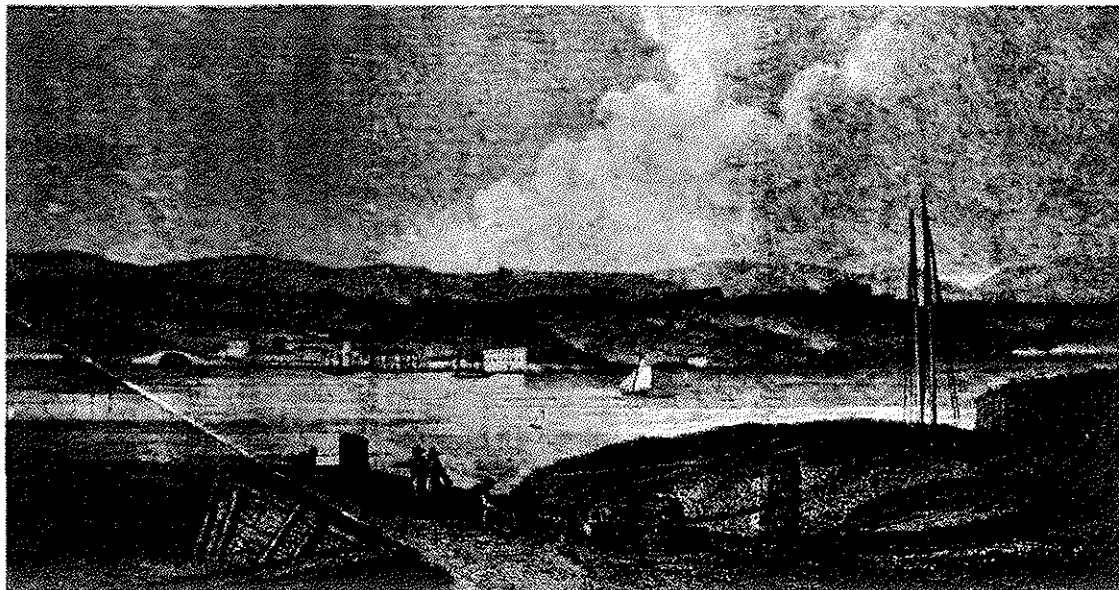
Husband.”

The 17th of October, 1791, is a memorable date, as being that of the first public sale of lots in the new City, which the Commissioners had by now decided to call the “City of Washington in the Territory of Columbia.” One of the briefest of Major Ellicott’s letters announces the fact of the sale and the consequent activity of all concerned:

“MY DEAR SALLY/

“GEO. TOWN Oct. 17th, 1791.

Lady Washington has undertaken to have this handed to you immediately on her arrival in Philadelphia— The



THE CITY OF WASHINGTON, D. C., IN 1800

Reproduced from a steel engraving by Heath, published in 1804. From an original in the Library of Congress.

most pleasing information I can give you at present is that I am in good health— but hurried off of my legs and bothered out of my senses,— This is the day of the sale of the Public lots in the new City of Washington— You may expect that I have but few leisure minutes for writing— Lady Washington will leave [this] place immediately.

I am My Dear Sally

Yours Affectionately

AND<sup>W</sup> ELLICOTT.”

Trouble had for some time been brewing between Major L'Enfant and the Commissioners over various matters, and this sale of lots brought the smouldering wrath between them to a blaze. The situation then reached a crisis which necessitated its being laid before the President, and he wrote to David Stuart, one of the Commissioners from Philadelphia, on Nov. 20, 1791, that he had “ heard, before the receipt of your letter of the 29. of october and with a degree of surprise and concern not easy to be expressed, that Major L'Enfant had refused the map of the Federal City when it was requested by the commissioners for the satisfaction of the purchasers at the sale.” He adds, “ It is much to be regretted, however common the case is, that men who possess talents which fit them for peculiar purposes should almost invariably be under the influence of an untoward disposition. . . . But I did not expect to have met with such perverseness in Major L'Enfant as his late conduct exhibited.”<sup>1</sup>

In the same letter General Washington characterizes Major Ellicott as “ a man of uncommon talents . . . and of a more placid temper.” It was well that he was

<sup>1</sup> The Writings of Washington, Ford, vol. xii, p. 87.

possessed of those desirable qualities. He was shortly called upon to exercise them both, for the troubles between L'Enfant and the Commissioners growing worse instead of better, the former was dismissed in March, and the task of completing his share of the work fell upon Major Ellicott, Mr. Jefferson writing the Commissioners to that effect on March 6, 1792, in a letter which states that "it having been found impracticable to employ Major L'Enfant about the Federal City in that degree of subordination which was lawful and proper, he has been notified that his services are at an end. . . . Ellicott is to go on and finish laying off the plan on the ground and surveying and plotting the District."<sup>1</sup>

While it is true that L'Enfant must have been hot-headed and hard to deal with, the three commissioners seem to have seen to it that the paths of those who were placed under their authority were made as thorny as possible on all occasions. Yet they were all three men of prominence, and their faults appear to have been of disposition rather than of incompetence. General Johnson, who had been Governor of his State, is described as having been "of a brusque and impetuous manner, given to strange oaths but of a kindly disposition and marked executive ability." Daniel Carroll was at this time a member of Congress, owner of a great estate, "aristocratic in feeling and somewhat dictatorial in tone." Dr. Stuart was a practising physician in Alexandria, "an elderly benevolent gentleman, fond of quoting the classics."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jefferson's Correspondence, vol. iii, p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> History of Washington, Charles Burr Todd, p. 20.



Major Ellicott soon found that to preserve peace with these gentlemen called for the fullest use of his good temper; he wrote Mrs. Ellicott on the 18th of April, 1792:

“ . . . My time here has yet passed heavily on. — I have not even been so polite as to pay one regular visit. — I shall endeavour to do my duty; but many difficulties of a serious nature have arisen between the proprietors, and commissioners, which, (require all my address to prevent the bad effects thereof and) adds much to my embarrassments.— If nothing uncommon should intervene to prevent, I shall certainly be with you some time next month. May god protect you—

I am my dearest Sally

Your Affectionate

Husband.”

He was at this time beginning the plan of the city which was to supersede L'Enfant's incomplete one. The plan which L'Enfant had made and submitted to the President had failed to meet with entire approval; it had been sent to the House of Representatives, Dec. 13, 1791, for their inspection, had been withdrawn, and given back to L'Enfant, who positively refused to permit any use to be made of it afterwards, and Major Ellicott then drew a new plan, made from his knowledge of the now unavailable plan of Major L'Enfant; from materials which he had in his own possession, and from his actual surveys of the ground. This plan was adopted and engraved; its making was of course a question of time, and it was not until 1793 that he was able to leave Washington, with the

business, so far as his personal attention was required, completed. He was hurried, throughout all this time, by the desire of the Commissioners to sell lots as fast as possible, and hurry was naturally directly opposed to his careful, painstaking methods of work. His disagreement with the Commissioners (to be referred to shortly in his correspondence) grew from their accusation that he wasted time. This view of theirs accords ill with his letter of Oct. 10, 1792:

“MY DEAR SALLY

I have been so buisy for two weeks past, that I have scarcely had time to either shave, or Comb my Head, and do not expect one minute's leisure before next Sunday—The President and his Lady were here yesterday, she Wanted to be the bearer of a Letter to you, but I had not time to write— . . . I have sent by the bearer M<sup>r</sup>. Green, (a Friend of mine) a silver Pipe as a present for Father Brown. You will observe the innitials of his name in cyphers on the Bowl.— May God bless you, and our little ones—

I am D<sup>r</sup> Sally yours

Affectionately

AND<sup>w</sup> ELLICOTT.”

The next letter, of December 14, shows that the placidity of his temper had become much disturbed.

“MY DEAR SALLY

Our work here is so far advanced, that I have some thoughts of staying about three weeks longer than I intended when I wrote to you last.— It will prevent the necessity of my returning here again to stay any con-

siderable time.— I begin to dislike the whole place, and have become too illnatured to associate with any beings except my four assistants.— I have spoke to but one female, and to her but once, for a week past— I eat alone in the Office, to which I confine myself as closely as a Bear to his den in the Winter— . . . I am my dear Sally, neither flattering you, nor myself, when I declare that in my opinion, you are the first Lady of all my acquaintance, whether considered as a Mother, wife, or an agreeable companion— and if I should ever propose staying at this place more than a month unless in your company, shew me this letter, and ask me what my feelings were when writing it—

I am my Dear Sally

Your loving Husband.”

On Jan. 1st he sigued a certificate that —

“ . . . These lines [the District boundaries] are opened, and cleared forty feet wide, that is, twenty feet on each side of the lines limiting the Territory: And in order to perpetuate the work, I have set up squared mile stones, marked progressively with the number of miles from the beginning on Jones’s Point, to the west corner, . . . thence to the place of beginning on Jones’s point; except in a few cases where the miles terminated on declivities, or in waters: . . . On the sides of the stones facing the Territory is inscribed, ‘ Jurisdiction of the United States,’ On the opposite sides of those placed in the commonwealth of Virginia, is inscribed ‘ Virginia,’ And on those in the State of Maryland, is inscribed ‘ Maryland.’ On the third and fourth sides, or faces, is inscribed the Year, in which the stone was set up, and the variation of the Magnetic

Needle at that place. In addition to the foregoing works I have completed a Map of the four lines with an half mile on each side, including the said District, or Territory, with a survey of the different waters.

Witness my hand this first day of January, 1793.

AND<sup>w</sup> ELLICOTT."

Of the boundary stones set to mark the limits of the city itself, two at least are still standing, the "North Meridian Stone" on North Capitol Street, and the fourth stone, set by Major Ellicott at 15th and C streets, N. E. Both stones have been passed as boundaries long since. The city has extended at least a mile beyond the North Meridian Stone, and it was in fact entirely lost to sight until 1903, when the Engineer Corps of the District of Columbia, after much troublesome search, located it. It was almost entirely buried beneath dirt and rubbish and was considerably below the established grade of the street. Its preservation was accomplished by levelling off the top and placing thereon a copper slab whose inscription records the fact that it marks the original north boundary of the City of Washington. The location of the stone is thus known and marked, although the stone itself is beneath the surface and out of sight.

The stone at 15th and C streets, which had at one time been moved, was found in 1895 and re-set in its old place. It is also inscribed, and, like the North Meridian Stone, stands as a fitting memorial of the original limitations of the city.<sup>1</sup>

On January 9, 1793, Major Ellicott wrote to Mr. Jefferson:

<sup>1</sup> Records on file in the War Department, Washington.

" SIR

From a conversation which I had with you some time ago I remember you was desirous of discovering the Indian name of the Eastern Branch of the Potomak- By some old surveys it appears to be Annakostia-

The reasons of my Disagreement with the Commissioners and ultimate determination to quit the business of the City of Washington on the first day of May next shall be published immediately after that date- And I have no doubt but that from a clear investigation of facts my conduct and exertions will be approved by the candid and deserving.

I am Sir

with much Esteem

Your real Friend

AND<sup>W</sup> ELLICOTT." <sup>1</sup>

It is evident he felt keenly that he was meeting with injustice; and that his friends also felt that any criticism of his method of work or of his industry was unfair, is evidenced by the following "certificate" from Mr. Briggs:

"CITY OF WASHINGTON, January 12<sup>th</sup> 1793.

" . . . Nothing . . . but extreme indisposition- and not always even that- has ever appeared to me to divert his attention from his business, or to abate his anxious endeavors to promote the general interest of the City of Washington, with the approbation, if possible, of both commissioners and proprietors.

I shall produce one instance, out of many, of his extreme attention to his duty: when we were running the boundary lines of the Territory of Columbia, being obliged to

<sup>1</sup> From a draft among Major Ellicott's papers.

transact . . . the general business of his office in George Town on saturday evenings and sundays, he used actually to arrive at our camp on the lines, at no less distance than seven miles from that town, on monday morning before it was light enough to see distinctly without a candle;- It was also his usual custom to breakfast by candle-light in the morning; the labors of the day commenced before sun rise, and he did not retire from them but with retiring day-light- frequently not even for dinner- In short, I do not believe it possible for a man, aiming solely at the augmentation of his private fortune, or the attainment of his reigning wish, to be more indefatigable in the pursuit, or constant in his exertions, than Major Ellicott always appeared to me to be in the faithful execution of the public business committed to his charge.

Such conduct in a public servant, although the rigid moralist may call it no more than duty, is certainly meritorious, and demands the esteem and approbation of every unprejudiced mind.

T: BRIGGS."

His own opinion of his detractors Major Ellicott expresses roundly in his next letter to his wife:

"MY DEAR SALLY

"GEO. TOWN JAN<sup>y</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> 1793.

Owing to my disagreement with the commissioners, and one, or two, other causes, I was prevented from dining with you, on the first of this month- My disagreement with the commissioners, has gone to such a length, that I have given them notice, that I shall leave the work on the first day of May next- I have received treatment from them, that

would justify me in any measure whatever— . . . Neither credit, nor reputation, will ever be the lot of a single person, who enters into their service. . . . I dislike the place, and every day adds to my disgust.— Where you are, there is all my happiness, and if I can manage matters in such a manner, as to be able to support you, as you deserve, without leaving you again, you may rest assured, that my arms shall enfold you every night, and as far as my conversation can add to your amusement, it shall the remainder of our lives be daily dedicated to your service.— . . . .

Your loving and affectionate

Husband.”

But the high estimation in which he was held by the President, by Mr. Jefferson, and by all who could appreciate his entire honesty of purpose, turned the scales so completely in his favor that his next letter records his triumph, and his pleasure in that triumph:

“MY DEAR SALLY/

“GEO. TOWN April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1793.

I have just taken a few minutes to acquaint you that I am in good health, and have been so ever since I left your Arms— The singular situation into which I was thrown immediately on my arrival at this place, and the doubtful issue, prevented my writing until a final determination, which was had yesterday. My victory was complete; and all my men reinstated in the City, after a suspension of one month.— As my reputation depended on this determination, I neglected nothing in my power to defeat the commissioners; but had to contend very un-

equally owing to all my papers being seized by their order the day after I returned from Philadelphia. — And this day they were all restored to me again!!! this victory has cost me at least £75. The defeat of the commissioners has given great pleasure to the inhabitants of this place, and when I went into the City yesterday after the determination, the joy of every person concerned in the business was evident, and it was with difficulty that they were prevented from huzzaing.— Briggs behaved like a true friend, and a man of sense and prudence. . . .

I am my Dearest Sally

Your Affectionate

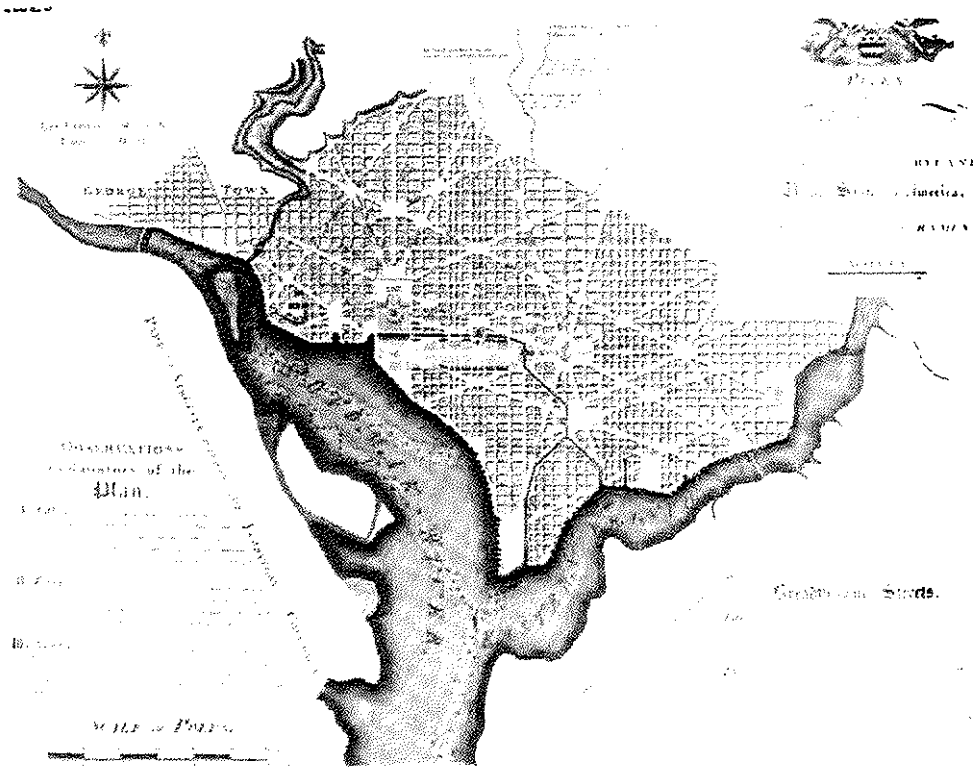
Husband.

P. S. Yours by the President came to hand — I think my victory in some measure was owing to him.”

As to how far the city plan was L'Enfant's or how far Major Ellicott's, there can be no definite statement made. The completed plan, from which the engravings were made, was drawn by Major Ellicott, “partly from L'Enfant's draughts, partly from his own materials.” The fact that L'Enfant's plans were used whenever practicable, and as far as practicable, has never been denied.

At the last, it must be said that they were both men of unusual talent (working for many months together), and that a city of unusual beauty and nobility of design is the product of their work, a work directed largely by the wise and far-sighted President. A fair-minded statement, and perhaps as brief and exact a one as could be made of the relative part played by each toward the accom-





1845  
 Savannah, Ga.  
 1845



ATLANTA  
 City of Georgia  
 SAVANNAH

GEORGIA TOWN  
 SAVANNAH

DISTRICTS  
 of the  
 City

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 3rd District  
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Savannah Streets

SCALE OF FEET

plishment of the plan of the city, is found in a letter from three later commissioners to Mr. Dennis, chairman of a committee of Congress, headed "At the Commissioners Office, March 23, 1802."

". . . Major L'Enfant's plan of the city," it states, "was sent to the House of Representatives on the 13. December 1791, by President Washington for the information of the House, and afterwards withdrawn. Many alterations were made therefrom by Major Ellicott with the approbation of the President and under his authority. All the appropriations (except as to the Capitol and the President's house) were struck out and the plan, thus altered, sent to the engraver. These changes from L'Enfant's plan took place in the year 1792, and the public plan appears to have been engraved in October of that year. . . . This plan being made partly from L'Enfant's draughts and partly from material possessed by Ellicott."<sup>1</sup>

And in the report communicated to the House of Representatives by Mr. Dennis, April 8, 1802, he says:

"Your committee finds that the plan of the City was originally designed by Mr. L'Enfant, but that it was in many respects rejected by the President of the United States and a plan was drawn up by Mr. Ellicott, purporting to have been made by actual survey, which recognized the alterations made therein and which was engraved and published by the order of General Washington in the year 1792.

"This plan was circulated by the Government through-

<sup>1</sup> American State Papers, vol. xx, p. 333.

out the United States and sent to the public agents in Europe, by authority of the Government, as the plan of the city, and is the only one which has ever been engraved and published.”<sup>1</sup>

This would seem to be final, but the last word on the subject may be left to General Washington himself, who wrote with his own hand:

“ . . . 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 L’Enfant’s draughts 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.

Mr. Davidson is mistaken if he supposes that the transmission of L’Enfant’s plan to Congress was the completion thereof, so far from it, it was only given as a matter of information to show what state the business was in.”<sup>2</sup>

It is not necessary to seek to detract in any way from the originality and acknowledged brilliance of Major L’Enfant’s plan, in order to prove of what paramount importance Major Ellicott’s completion of it was toward the accomplishment of the plans as a whole. General Washington’s words may fitly be taken as the final ones, and his statement that but for Major Ellicott no permanent plans would ever have resulted is surely the most

<sup>1</sup> American State Papers, p. 330.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. xx, p. 334.

fitting and lasting tribute to the importance of the services which Major Ellicott rendered in the making of the City of Washington, a city which fully realized all the expectations and hopes concerning it, and which has even more of beauty than it had in the visions of its founders.

What Major Ellicott accomplished on these Washington surveys and plans has been held by some students of his life to have been his most important public work. This view is somewhat difficult to take, when his further surveys, and his negotiations with the Indian tribes, and with the representatives of a foreign country are taken into consideration. That it stands high on the list of his services to his country is undeniable, and the appreciation of its permanent value will ever increase, and not diminish, so long as the words of General Washington are remembered, — that without Major Ellicott the plans of Washington in the beauty and freshness of their first conception would have been lost to us forever.