

A Visit to Our Capital City

By Rachel Bubb



Last year I was going through American history with my kids. We were reading about the first few Presidents and I showed short videos about some of their homes (Mount Vernon and Monticello were two of them). The videos about them on YouTube were a little disappointing. I love researching and writing so I thought I'd go ahead and write a book about some of these places. Later on I hope to do a Washington D.C. trip with my own kids (I've heard it's much better to do it as a homeschool family instead of going with a group; it's much more relaxed and not so fast paced.). If you are going on a trip to Washington D.C. I hope this helps prepare you and your family for it. You can read it either before you go or just read about the place you're going to that day in the car on the way there (or over breakfast). Remember, try to only do one or two things a day- if you do too much, it'll all be a blur and overwhelming. You want to have an enjoyable, memorable trip. Many of the museums are free. Monticello and Mt. Vernon both have entrance fees, as well as Williamsburg, Virginia (which is a town that's been rebuilt and has people re-enacting how it was like to live when our country was first founded).



A picture of the Lincoln Memorial I took in 2011.

Copyright: March 2024 by Rachel Bubb

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations.

Contact: Rachel Bubb
c/o 6443 El Camino Dr.
Redding, CA 96001

www.storiesfromchinaforkids.blogspot.com

www.inknewspaper.net

Table of Contents

Introduction

I. Homes of The Presidents: Mt. Vernon

II. Homes of The Presidents: Monticello

III. Homes of The Presidents: The White House

IV. The Smithsonian Museums

V. The Lincoln Memorial and Ford's Theater

VI. War Memorials and Other Memorials

VII. Other Buildings

VIII. Notes, Sources, and Photo Credits



Introduction

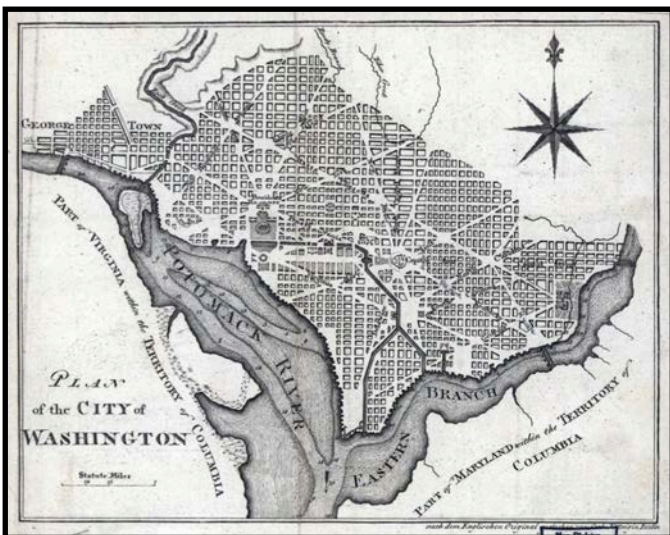
Washington D.C. hasn't always been the capital of our country. At first New York was chosen because it was a bigger city and seemed the right place. However, soon the decision was made to make a new capital somewhere else. It was first called the Federal City but was renamed Washington after George Washington died. Thomas Jefferson was one of the people who cared about developing the city in its early days. He paid for poplar trees to line the main public avenue (at the time the city was small and only had one big road) with his own money. The city only had 3,500 people and looked like a village. "Washington's skyline, if such a word can be employed, plummeted from the vaulting dome on Capitol Hill to the modest two-story structures around it. One could see unfinished buildings in every direction, some under

construction, others abandoned after funds ran out."

The original plan of the city was a diamond shape, as you can see in the design on the left. Do you think it looks like this now? It's much, much larger today. In the early days of Washington D.C. the army had a huge job of digging and reshaping part of the Potomac River as it went through the city. This means that when

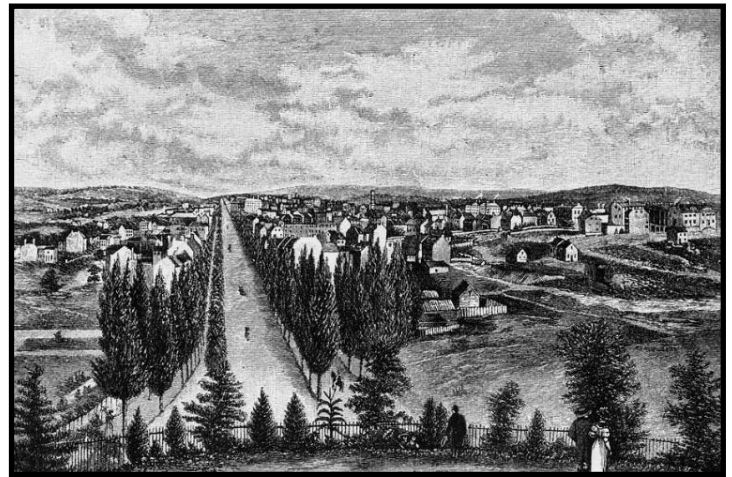
they built the Lincoln Memorial, one of the biggest challenges they had was the swampy land (which was caused by them draining some of the water from the river).

In 1819 an English merchant mentioned how Washington D.C. was largely unfinished. "Washington may be



said to be rather the site of a city that is to be than an actual city. It is laid out on an extensive scale, but the streets are for the most part unbuilt, or checkered with houses of the shabbiest description. Still, however, it has some magnificent features, while the romantic scenery which surrounds it, and which is visible from almost every part of it, redeems much of the deformity of its scattered and uncomfortable aspect.”

Another person said that “Those who, in visiting Washington, expect to find a city, will be somewhat surprised when they first enter its precincts, and look round in vain for the appearance of a house.” A few years later someone commented that, “Here and there ranges of buildings are starting up, but by far the greater number of the houses are detached from one another. The streets, where streets there are, have been made so unusually wide, that the connection is quite loose; and the whole (city)...looks as if some giant had scattered a box of his child’s toys at random on the ground.”



Washington D.C. in 1800

One of the most difficult times for the city was the War of 1812. The British came through the city and started burning the main government buildings, including the White House and the Capitol Building. They seemed to spare many of the (few) homes in the city. Can you imagine our country’s capital city burning like that? Afterward they had a decision: rebuild the city or make a different city the capital city entirely? They decided to keep the capital city where yet was and do the arduous, long task of rebuilding. 1812 was around



A painting of the city in 1833 by George Cooke

the time that Jane Austen was writing her books. Neo-classical architecture was really popular at the time, which you can see today in the many historical buildings built from this time. Also, the clothes people wore were like those you'd expect to see in a Jane Austen movie. There's a famous painting of Dolly Madison (the First Lady at the time of the War of 1812) wearing a dress that looks like it's from Jane Austen's time. Speaking of which, one of the best places to see the change of fashions from the big dresses of America's Independence to the smaller dresses of Jane Austen's time to the big hoop dresses in the late 1800s and then the slim Roaring Twenties



Washington D.C. in 1853

dresses is the Smithsonian Museums (the First Ladies' exhibit). It wasn't until after the Civil War that the city started to finally grow and fill in. It was looking more and more like a city. Today the city is huge, but it's very spread out. You don't see many tall buildings and the tallest building in the area is the Washington Memorial.

I. Homes of the Presidents: Mt. Vernon

Often you can tell something about a person by visiting their home, and the American Presidents are the same. Two of the most famous homes of the Presidents are Mt. Vernon and Monticello. We'll first start talking about Mt. Vernon. When you think of "Mount" Vernon, don't think of the mountains of the

Rocky Mountains. The "Mount" isn't that big.



A painting of Mt. Vernon from around 1792

Mt. Vernon was named by George Washington's older brother, Lawrence. Lawrence worked for a time in the navy and spent some time on a ship run by Admiral Vernon in the West Indies. It's this Admiral Vernon that the home was named after. At the time, Mt. Vernon was a plantation, a big farm.

Around the time George Washington got married, he had the big house that's become "Mt. Vernon" made for him and his bride, Martha. They chose the top of the hill for their home so they could look out over the Potomac River.

George Washington loved walking around on the plantation, tinkering in his garden, and adding on to his farm. When his brother died, he gave George all of Mt. Vernon and made him caretaker of his niece. However, his niece died not long after that, so by the age of 21, George owned all of Mt. Vernon and was quite a wealthy man. After the war of Independence was over, he returned to Mt. Vernon to retire but then was elected as the first President of the United States. He reluctantly moved to New York (which was the first capital of the United States) for a time and then returned back to Mt. Vernon afterward. He was most happy when he was home. One time he said, "I'd rather be at home with