

ALEXANDER R. SHEPHERD

WASHINGTON'S CORIOLANUS

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OCTOBER 6, 2015

Matthew B. Gilmore

Guest Speaker presentation for Cindy Gueli's "Scandalous Washington: Uncovering DC history", Fall 2015, The Washington Center

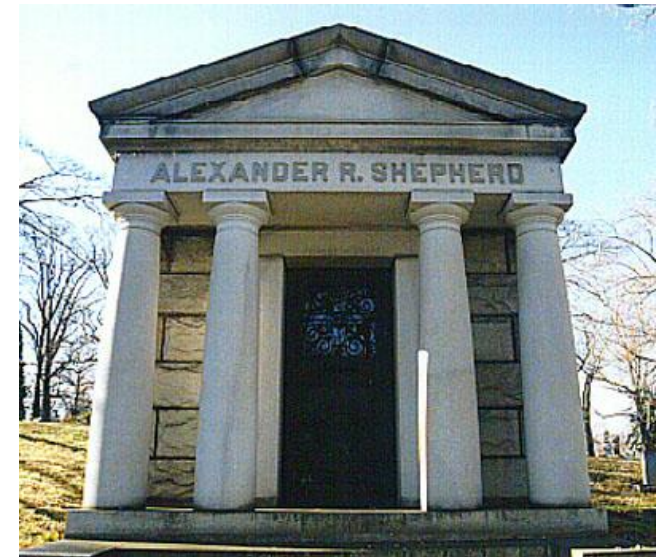


Last week!

Governor Shepherd's
portrait reinstalled
September 2015

ALEXANDER R. SHEPHERD AND THE CREATION OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

- Background on DC at the time
- Who was Shepherd?
- What did he accomplish?
- Why was it controversial?
- His rehabilitation over 100 years – a “necessary man”?
 - Shepherd sites:
 - Statue in front of District Building (1909 – 1979, 2005 --
 - Portrait inside District Building (2015)
 - Rock Creek Cemetery



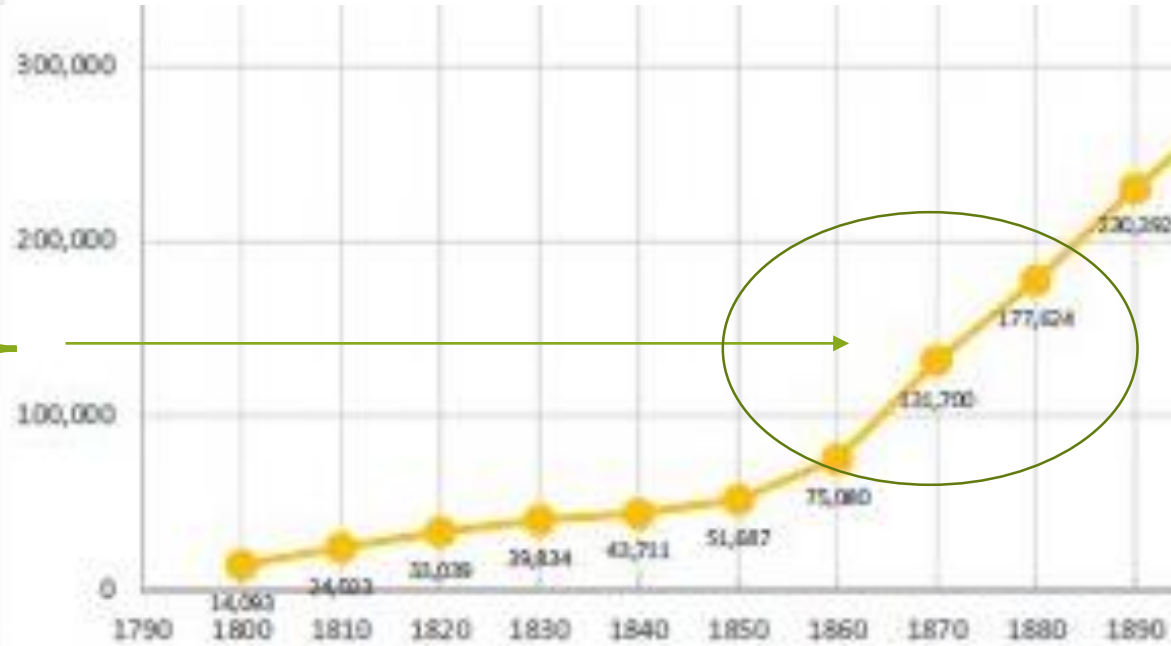
WASHINGTON, DC—TELL US MORE

- Three **jurisdictions**:
 - City of Washington
 - City of Georgetown
 - County of Washington

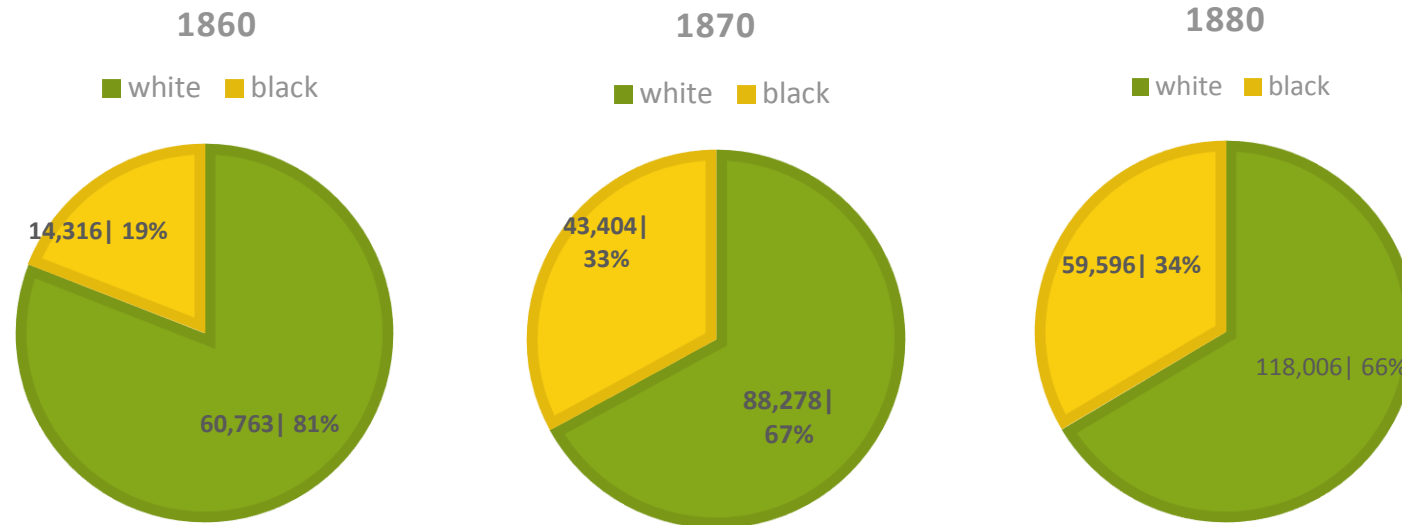
- Post Civil War
 - Population explosion
 - Worn-out infrastructure due to Civil War—roads, etc.
 - Focus of national attention—federal government -- “should I stay or should I go?”
 - Focus of national attention – black suffrage
 - Expansion beyond city boundaries begun -- Uniontown, Mount Pleasant

Population explosion

Year	Population
1800	14,093
1810	24,023
1820	33,039
1830	39,834
1840	43,711
1850	51,687
1860	75,080
1870	131,700
1880	177,624
1890	230,392
1900	278,718
1910	331,069
1920	437,571
1930	486,869
1940	663,091
1950	802,178
1960	763,956
1970	756,510
1980	638,333
1990	606,900
2000	572,059
2010	601,723



POPULATION DYNAMICS



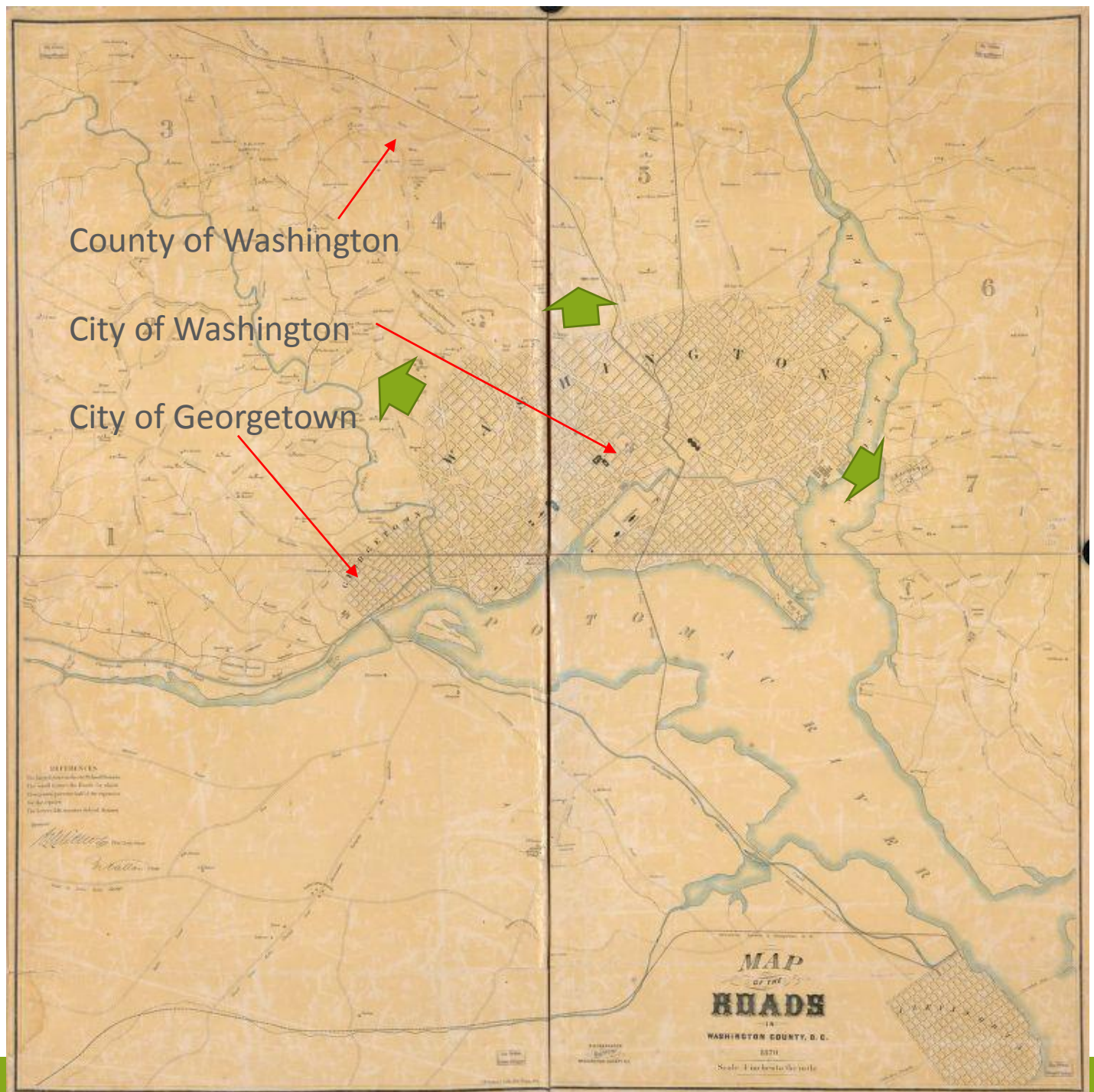
Change in racial composition—dramatic but slowing

POPULATION FRACTURED

- “Citizens” – Old guard, long-time residents, “cave-dwellers”
 - Southern secessionist sympathies
 - Democrats
- Newcomers
 - Northerners, abolitionists
 - Radical Republicans – black suffrage
- And others in-between—many shades of opinion on all issues—education, suffrage, improvements
- Question—nation’s capital – outsized for the city expected to support it
- Nation’s stage—in the eye of the national public

FRACTURED JURISDICTION

- Development pressure



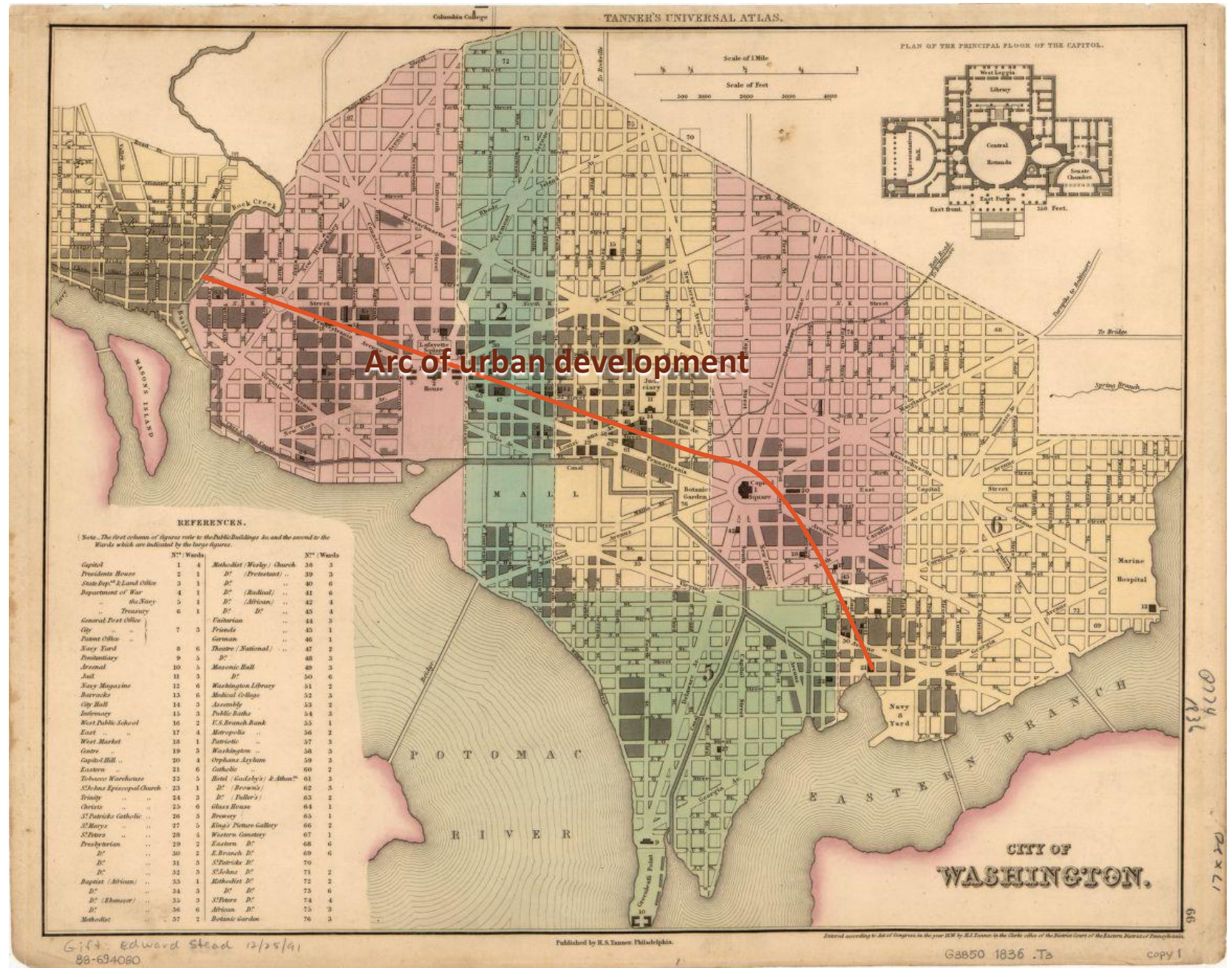
UNIONTOWN

- As an example of urbanization
- Now Historic Anacostia



THE CAPITAL

- The actuality of Washington and the idealized/planned vision (shown on maps) always produced a startling contrast.
- Development followed Pennsylvania Avenue arcing from Georgetown to the Navy Yard—much remained undeveloped



NEW GOVERNMENT 1871

- Those three **jurisdictions**:
 - City of Washington
 - City of Georgetown
 - County of Washington

Now MERGED  Territory of Columbia

One Governor [appointed by President] (Cooke) +

Legislature – 2 houses

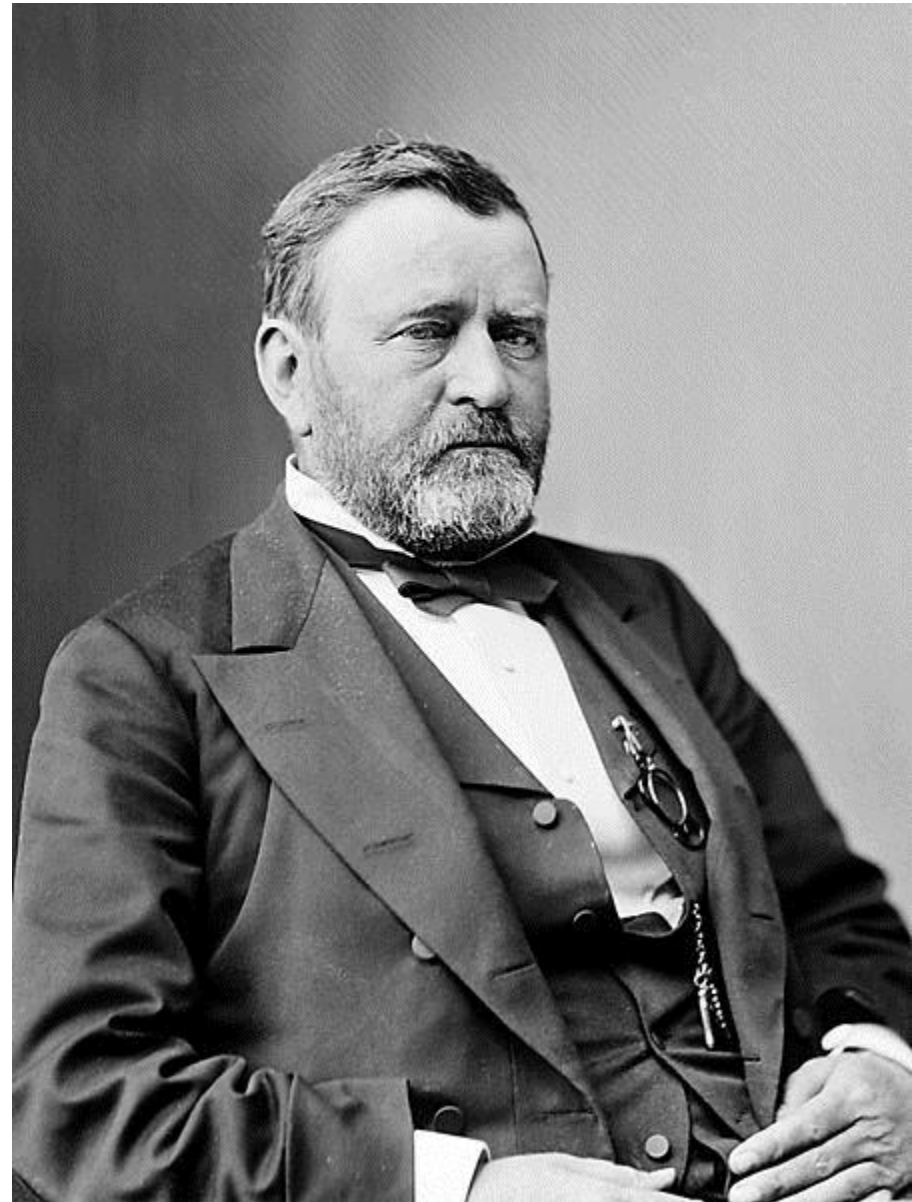
Board of Public Works (manage infrastructure)

Board of Health

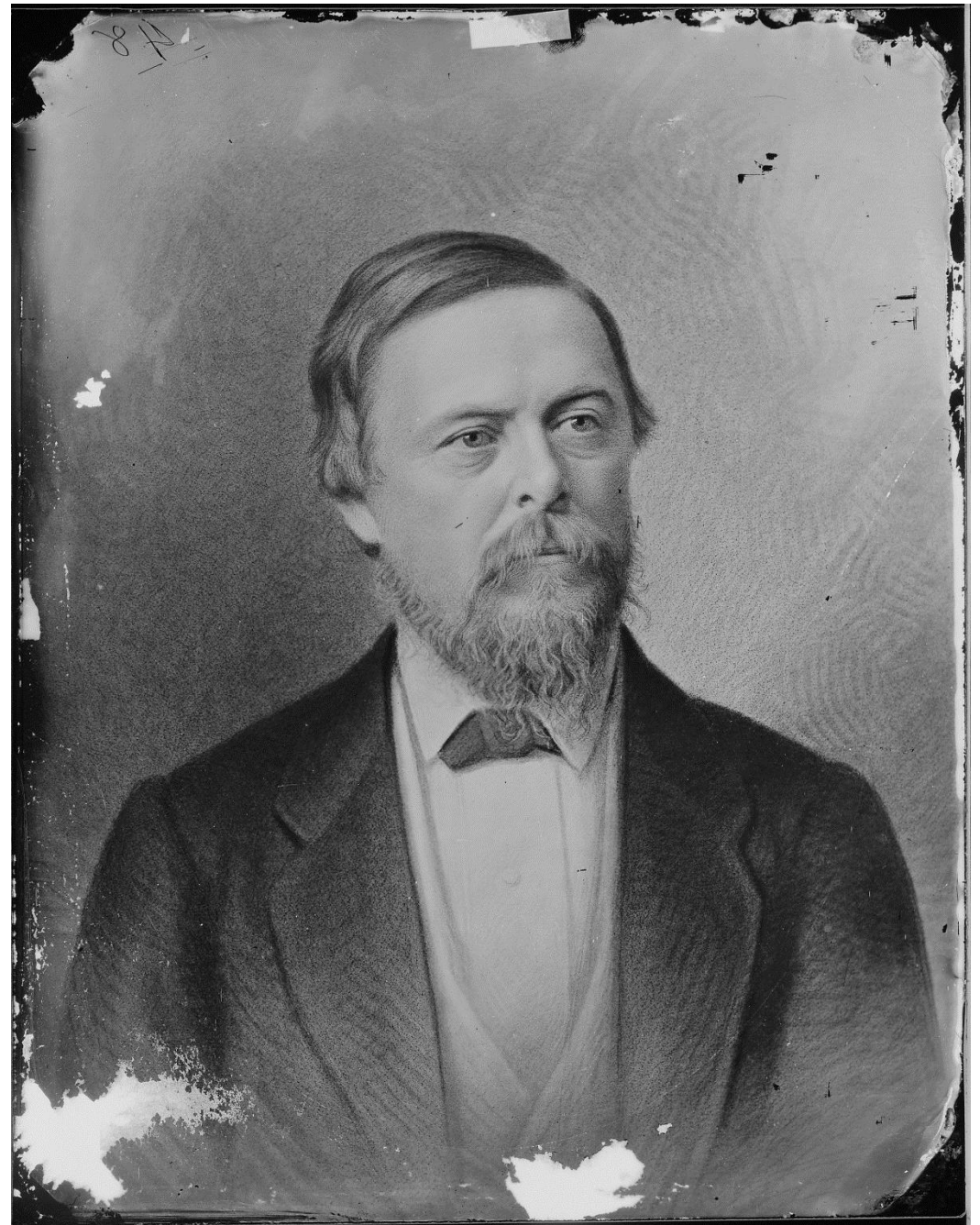
SHEPHERD

- Born in City of Washington
- Businessman—plumbing, real estate, etc.
- Politician (a little)—Republican, not Radical Republican
- Behind-the-scenes mover-and-shaker

ALLIES
PRESIDENT
ULYSSES S GRANT



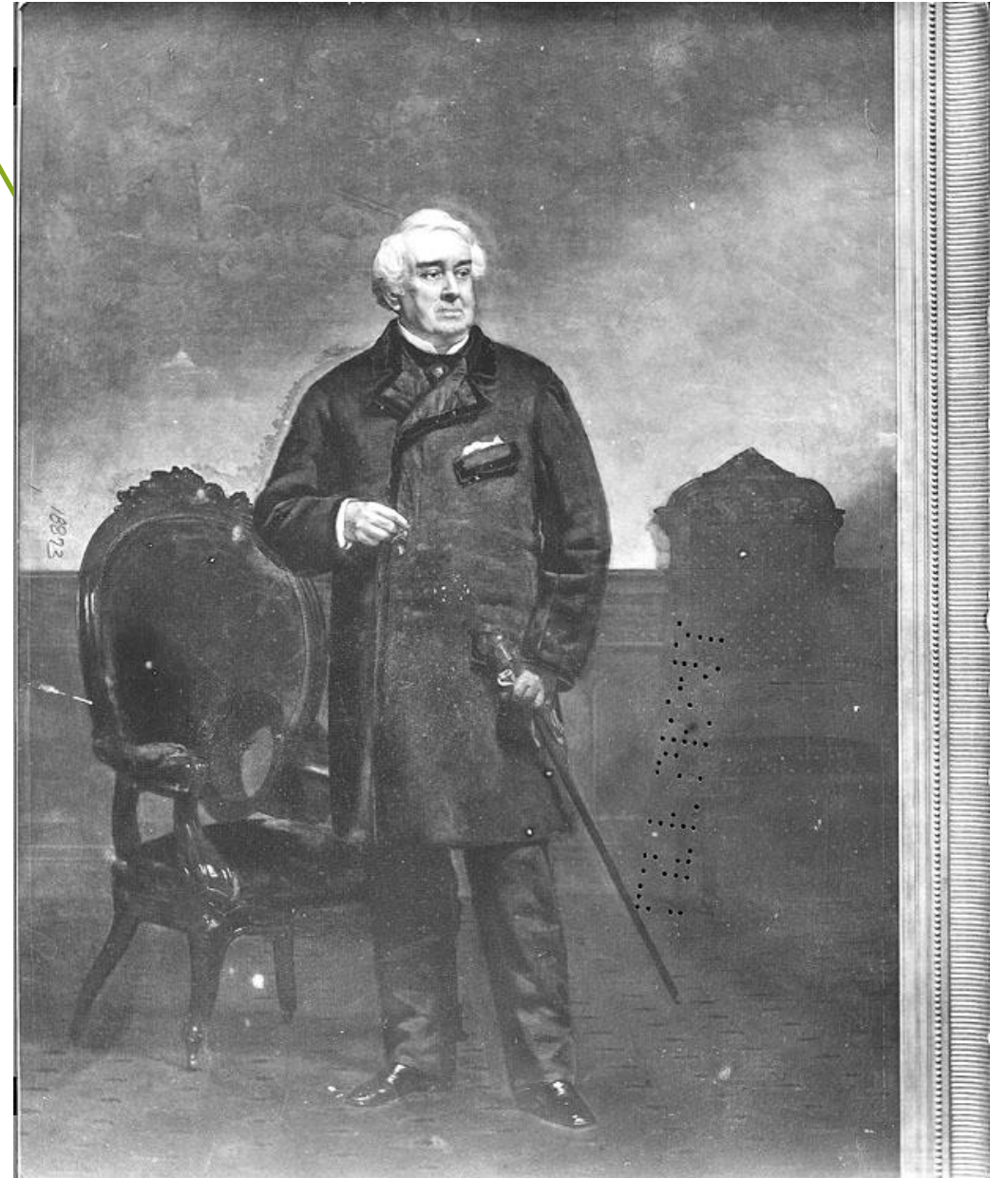
ALLIES
GOVERNOR
HENRY D COOKE



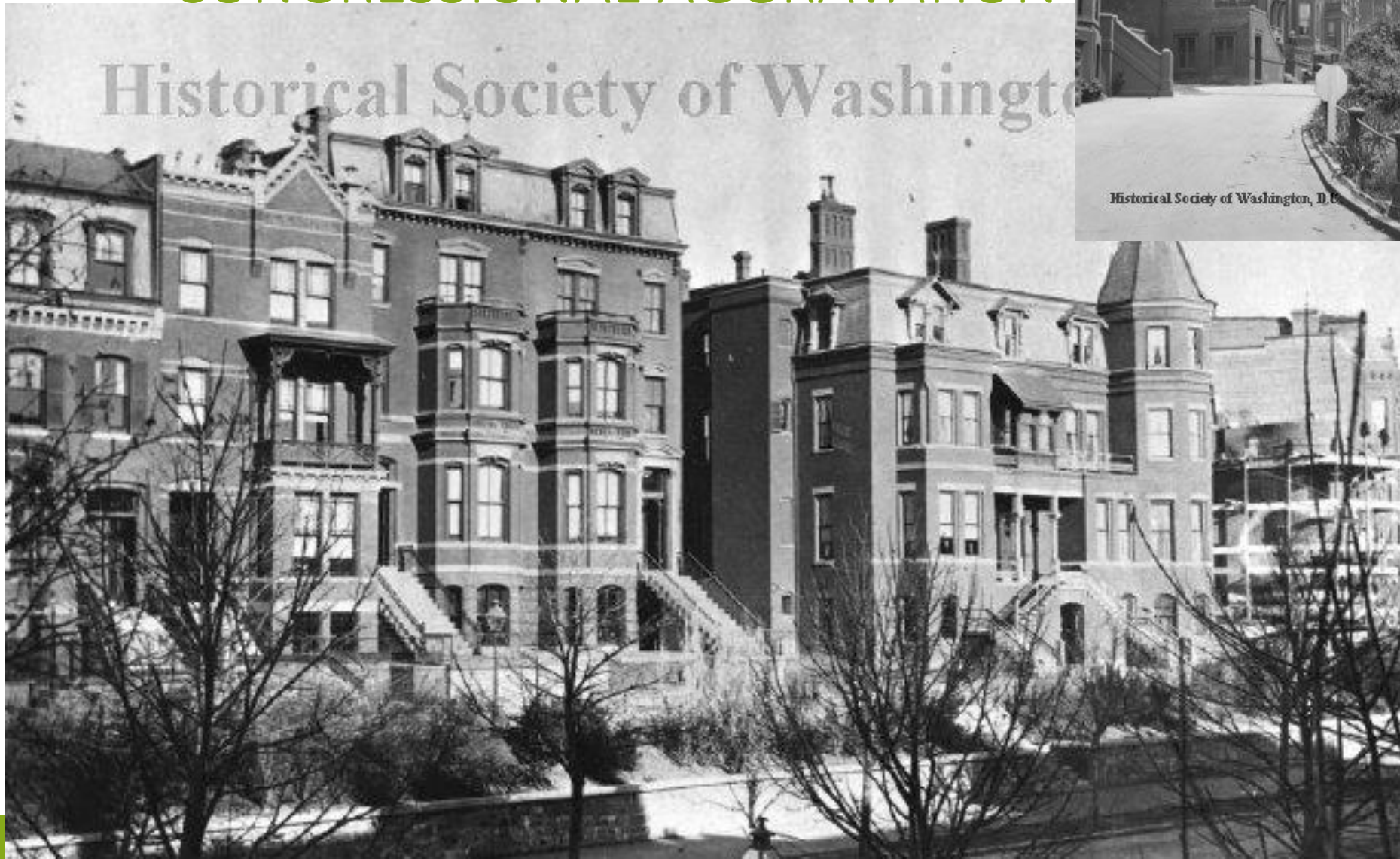
ALLIES
HENRY H. STARKWEATHER,
R-CT



ENEMIES
WILLIAM WILSON CORCORAN



ALMOST IMMEDIATE MISTAKES: CONGRESSIONAL AGGRAVATION



SENATOR T.F. BAYARD – D, DE



SEN. GEORGE F. EDMUNDS, R-VT



SENATORS BAYARD AND EDMUNDS NEAR EACH OTHER LIVED IN THE 1400 BLOCK OF MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE NW

- They came back from summer at home to find their houses 14 feet above the re-graded Massachusetts Avenue
- It's now Highland Terrace NW running along the north side of Massachusetts Avenue – still well above the avenue

OTHER EXAMPLES OF REGRADED STREETS

- left some houses inaccessible



9th & Maryland NE
Looking south



WHAT DID SHEPHERD ACCOMPLISH?

- **Not much visual documentation exists.**
- This may date from work done during the Territorial Government, next to the Winder Building at 17th and F Streets NW...if it is it's the only contemporary image



- F Street NW is being substantially lowered—about 6 feet



- 17th & F Streets today



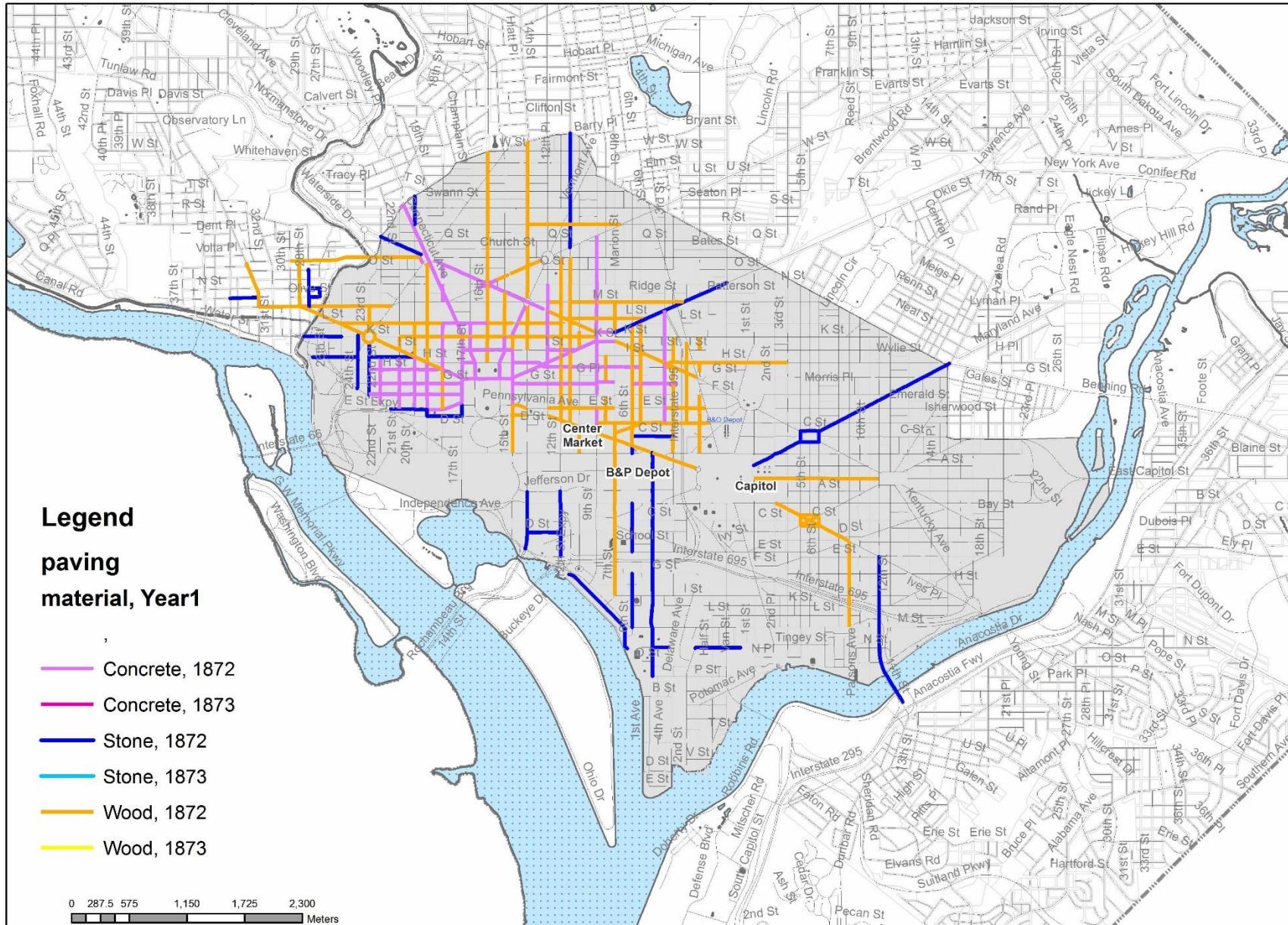
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 120 miles of sewers
- 30 miles of water mains
- 39 miles of gas lines
- 208 miles of sidewalks
- 150 miles of roads

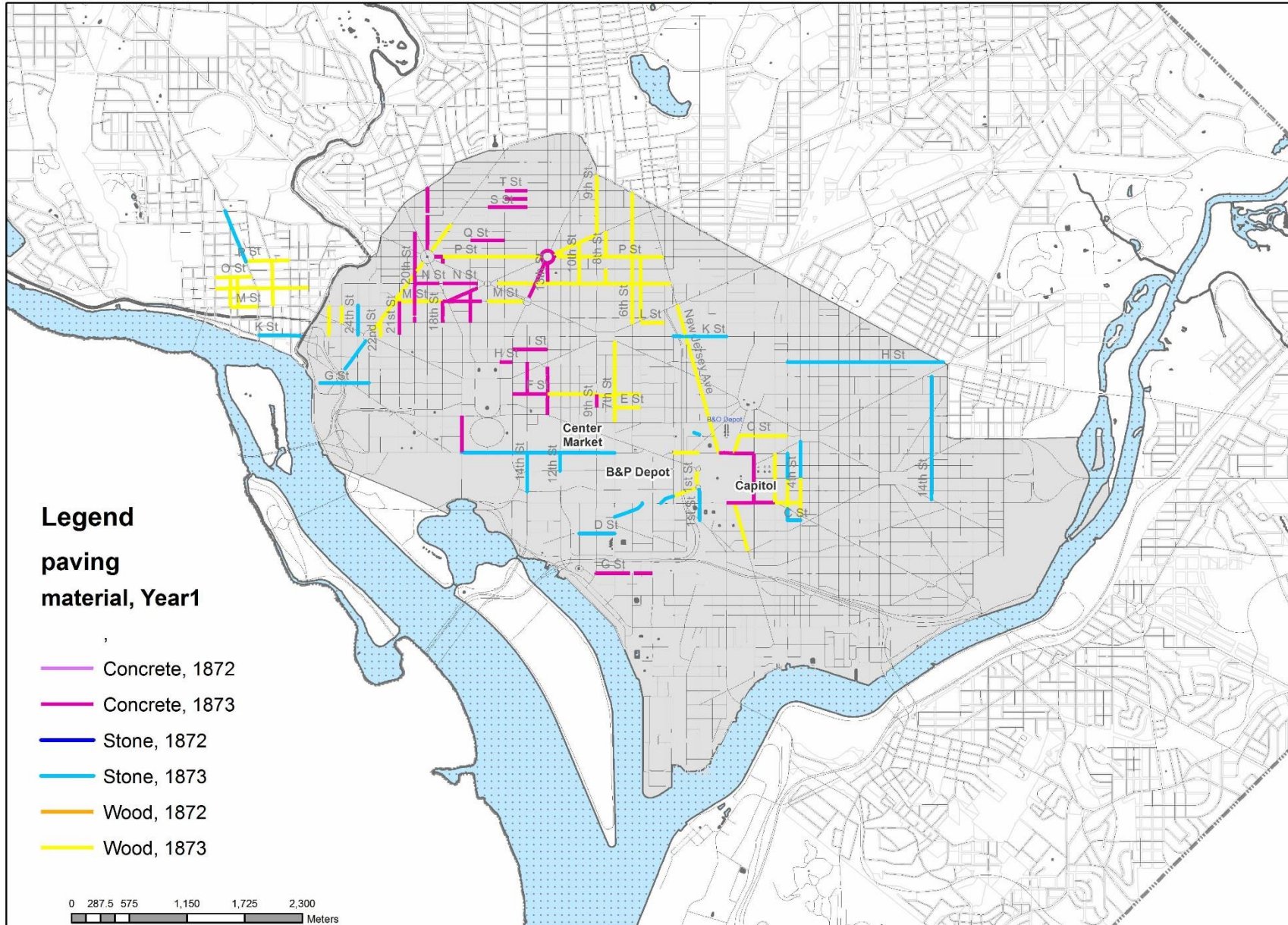
NEW WASHINGTON!

These figures have not been disputed; the quality of the work has been criticized but not the amount

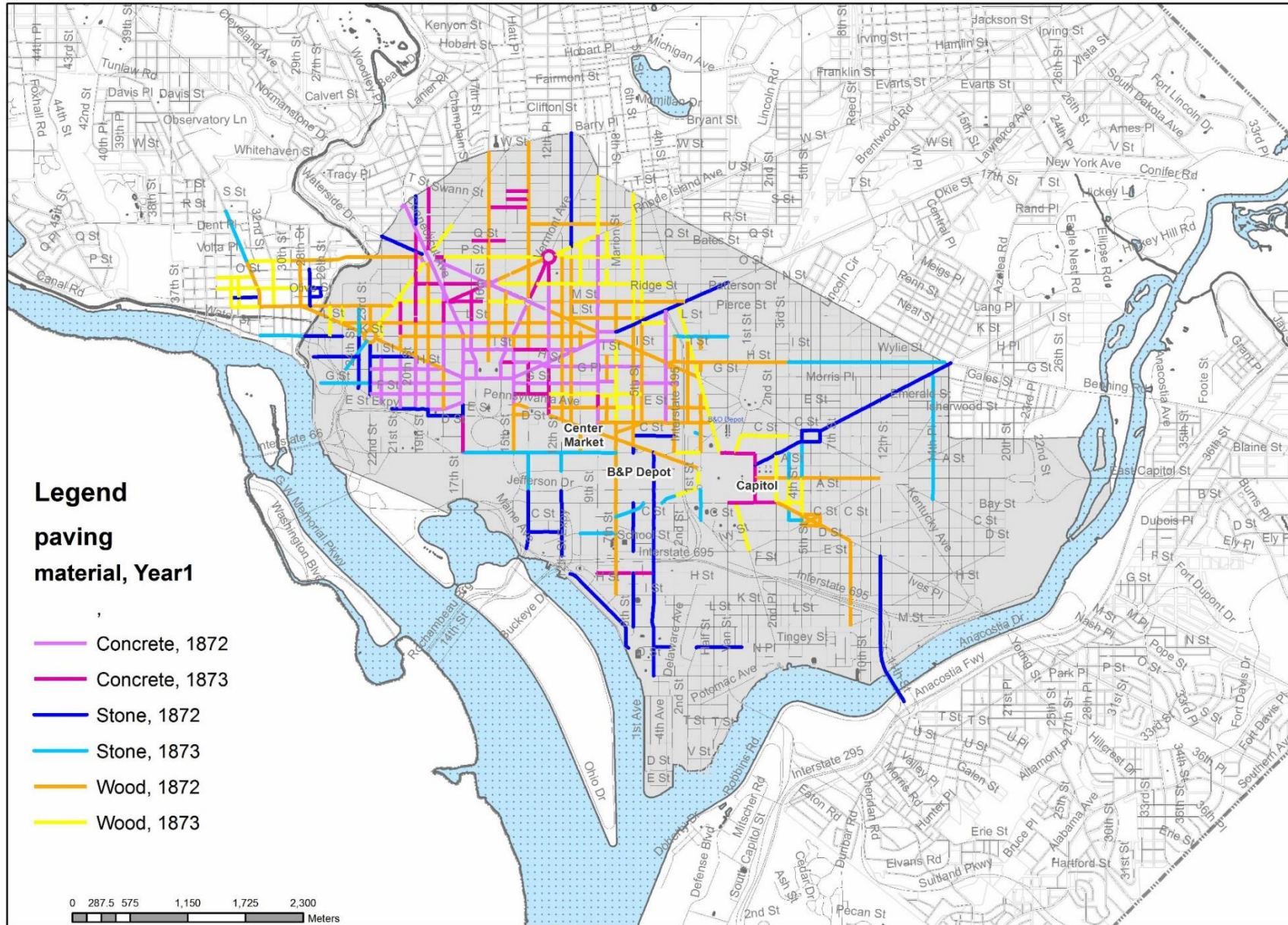
Street Paving 1872



Street Paving 1873

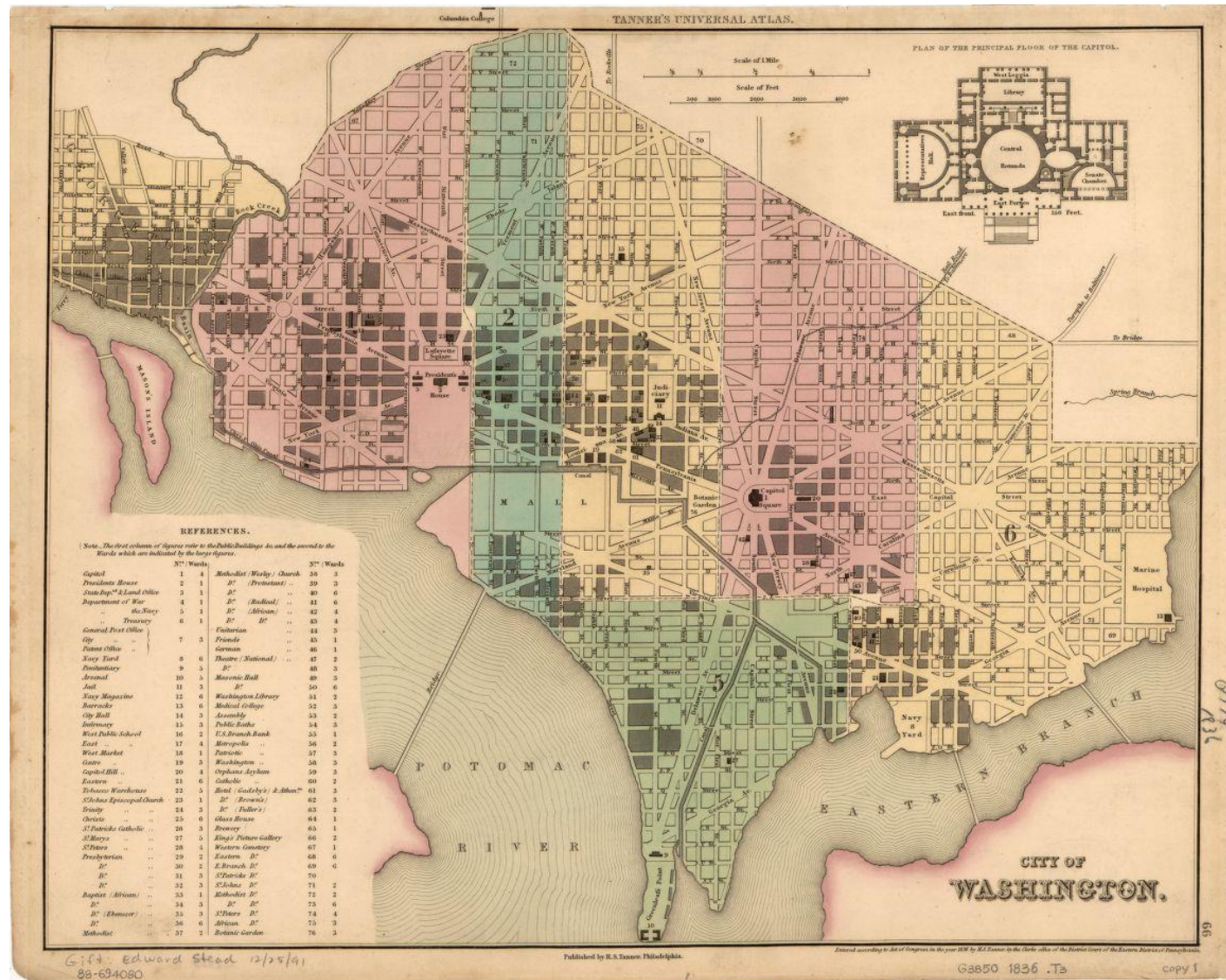


Street Paving 1872-1873



COMPARE MAPS

- Shepherd paved the most developed areas first, then moved further out



Gift: Edward Stead 12/25/91
88-634080

Published by R.S. TANNER Philadelphia

Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1836 by R.S. TANNER in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania

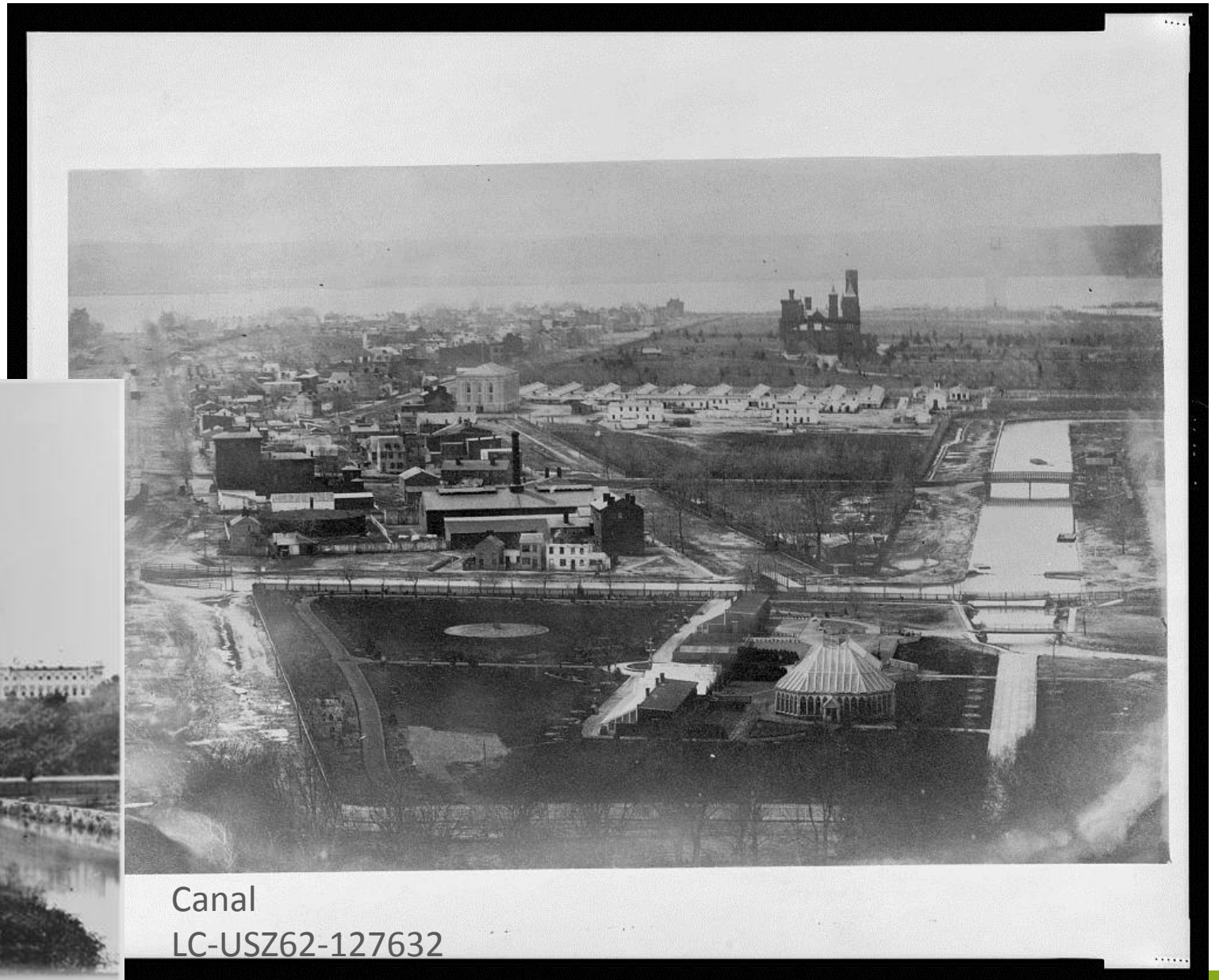
Ga850 1836 .T3

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17 x 20
17 x 20
99

WASHINGTON CANAL

Covered over--unilaterally



Canal
LC-USZ62-127632

WHAT HAPPENED (SCANDALOUS)

- Budget overspent
- Proposed plan not followed
- Contracting issues
- Management issues
- Technological issues – materials for paving—wood turned out not to be a durable choice
- Lack of communication – advisors to the Board of Public Works not consulted
- Lack of transparency
- Economic unrest – Panic of 1873
- Appearances of corruption

CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT

- 1872 investigation -- exoneration
- 1874 investigation -- by a hostile Congress

ISSUES

- Shepherd was friend of Grant – attacking Shepherd was a way to undermine Grant tight election fight between “Tweed-buster” Samuel J. Tilden and Republican Rutherford Hayes—even after Shepherd had been out of office for over a year

- 1874 elections brought in a hostile Congress

- 1876 Democratic Campaign book has Shepherd as (p. 179):

THE TWEED RING OUTDONE.

- Virtually every recounting of the issues draws from this account – consciously or unconsciously
- Folks are literally “following the textbook”

Campaign Text Book

WHY THE PEOPLE WANT A CHANGE.

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY REVIEWED.

Its Sins of Commission and Omission.

A SUMMARY OF THE LEADING EVENTS IN OUR HISTORY UNDER
REPUBLICAN ADMINISTRATION.

NEW YORK :

ISSUES

- Shepherd's hubris and inability to bend to political reality

His nature is too noble for the world: He would not flatter Neptune for his trident, Or Jove for his power to thunder. Menenius describing Coriolanus--Coriolanus III, 1

Even L'Enfant appreciated the need to politick and engage and interest as many as possible



To change a Wilderness into a City, to erect and beautify Buildings &ca. to that degree of perfection, necessary to receive the Seat of Government of so extensive an Empire, in the short period of time that remains to effect these objects is an undertaking vast as it is Novel, and reflecting that all this is to be done under the many disadvantages of opposing interests which must long continue to foment Contention among the various Branches of the Union—the only expedient is to conciliate, and interest the Minds of all Ranks of People of the propriety of the Pursuit by engaging the national Fame in its Success, evincing in its progress that utility and Splendor, capable of rendering the Establishment unrivalled in greatness by all those now existing, by holding out forcible inducements to all Ranks of People.

Pierre Charles L'Enfant to Thomas Jefferson,
February 26, 1792

ISSUES

- Shepherd's inner personality and motives are utterly obscure; nothing insightful or self-reflective exists
- No real management infrastructure—government not yet professionalized
- Congressional oversight/micromanagement
- Team backstabbing – Adolph Cluss
- No-win situation
 - Cost of improvements were assessed against the adjacent property owner—even with a comprehensive plan—Surprise! Here's your bill...
 - This militated toward improving developed areas or areas nearby, so the cost could be recouped
 - It also meant disrupting those areas digging up the street

RESULT

- Territorial government abolished for temporary 3-commissioner form – including the Army Corps of Engineers to oversee infrastructure improvements
 - (a precursor of Galveston/Des Moines model –Progressive-era anti-Bossism trend)
 - 50/50 payment plan for improvements (gradually eroded away)
- Made permanent in 1878 (Organic Act)
- Home rule gradually returns
 - 1968 Board of Education
 - 1974 Home Rule Act
- Still massive tension between city *qua* city and national capital/Federal institution

SHEPHERD'S REHABILITATION

- New commission government continued his work
- His work was soon appreciated as necessary (if slipshod/not durable in some cases)
- The result of this engaged Congress in District affairs as never before to build the Capital city (50/50 split)
- Congressmen thought the investigations vindicated him
 - Grant tried to appoint him as one of the new Commissioners in 1874!
- Bankruptcy and move to Mexico in 1880 – not a success
- Returned once but died in Mexico in 1902

STATUE RESTORED

On Saturday, January 29, 2005 -- three days before Shepherd's 140th birthday -- the Dunbar sculpture of Governor Shepherd was removed from the District's Department of Transportation facility on Shepherd Parkway, SW and transported back to a place of prominence in downtown D.C.

With the support of City Council-members Jim Graham and Jack Evans, Council Secretary Phyllis Jones, DDOT Director Dan Tangherlini and through the generosity of the Gilford Corporation, Miller & Long Concrete Construction, Hutchison International (United Rigging) and the Associated Builders & Contractors, the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants of D.C. has finally realized its long-fought effort to have the Governor Shepherd statue returned to the area from which it was removed in 1979 during the reconstruction of Pennsylvania Avenue and Freedom Plaza. Today, rather than staring out over the city's impound lot, the Governor casts his gaze across the avenue near the very location where the statue was originally dedicated on May 3, 1909. AOI Historian Nelson Rimensnyder has never missed an opportunity for over a decade to champion the statue's return. Our hats are off to Nelson and everyone who helped make this happen.

“BOSS” – WHY DOES IT PERSIST?

- Catchy
- Good story
- Myth/legend
- Competition with New York
- Historians like it

- Was he? I'd argue no—not the motivation or means

RESOURCES

- <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28441/pages/35141/alexander-robey-shepherd-1835-1902>
- *Alexander Robey Shepherd: The Man Who Built the Nation's Capital* – John P. Richardson (forthcoming)
- *Washington during the Civil War and Reconstruction: Race and Radicalism* – Robert Harrison
- *The Nation and its City: politics, “corruption,” and progress in Washington, D.C., 1861-1902* – Alan Lessoff