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REPORT ON THE CITY OF WASHINGTON.

Commissioners Office,
28th Jan. 1801.

SIR,

We do ourselves the honor to present to you a state of the business under our care and of the public property belonging to the federal seat, with an estimate of its value, founded not on mere supposition, but on the former sales.

This report would have been made at an earlier day, had it not been delayed by the unfortunate death of Mr. Scott.

We have the honor to be, with sentiments of the highest respect,

SIR,

Your most obedient servants,
WILLIAM THORNTON,
ALEX. WHITE,
W. CRANCH.

President of the United States.

[*Representation of the Commissioners of the city of Washington, to the President of the United States.*]

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

The commissioners appointed by virtue of the act of Congress, entitled, "An act for establishing the temporary and permanent seat of the government of the United States,"

Respectfully represent,

THAT the business committed to their charge having so far proceeded as to enable the government to remove to its permanent seat, they have judged it expedient to lay before the President such a statement as will enable him to determine on the measures proper to be pursued in future.

By the act of Congress above mentioned, the commissioners appointed in the manner thereby prescribed, or any two of them, were authorized to purchase or accept such quantity of land on the eastern side of the river Potomac within the limits of the said act mentioned, as the President should deem proper for the use of the United States; and according to such plans as the President should approve, prior to the 4th Monday in December, 1800, provide suitable buildings for the accommodation of Congress, and of the President, and of the public offices of the government of the United States. That the President in compliance with the act above mentioned, and so far as to amend the same, passed at Philadelphia, on the 3d of March, 1791, did, by his proclamation dated 30th of the ensuing month, locate a district within the limits prescribed by the above mentioned acts, and which has now become the permanent seat of the government of the United States. That the President, in pursuance of the above recited acts, appointed, and by supplying vacancies which have happened by resignation and death, has kept in appointment three commissioners, for the purpose in the said acts described. That the proprietors of the lands on which the city of Washington is laid out, by their several deeds dated on or about the month of June, 1791, conveyed the said lands to Thomas Beall, of George, and John M. Gantt, and the survivor of them, and the heirs of such survivor, in trust to be laid out in a Federal city, with such streets, squares, parcels and lots as the President of the United States for the time being should approve, and that the said Thomas Beall, of George, and John M. Gantt or the survivor of them, or the heirs of such survivor, should convey to the commissioners for the time being and their successors, for the use of the United States, for ever, all the streets, and such of the said squares, parcels and lots, as the President should deem proper for the use of the United States, for ever; and that as to the residue of the lots into which the said lands should be laid off, that a fair and equal division should be made of them in the manner in the said deeds of trust specified, and that the part assigned to the public should be held at such times and in such manner, and on such terms and conditions as the President of the United States for the time being should direct; and that the fiduciaries or the survivors of them, or the heirs of such survivors, should on the order of the President, convey all the said lots, so sold and ordered to be conveyed, to the respective purchasers in fee simple, according to the terms and conditions of such purchases, and the produce of the sales of the said lots when sold as aforesaid, should in the first place be applied to the payment in money to the original proprietors for all the parts of their lands which should be laid off in lots, squares or parcels, and appropriated to the use of the United States, at the rate of £. 25 per acre, not accounting streets any part thereof; and the surplus whether in money or securities of any kind should be paid, assigned, transferred, and delivered over to the President for the time being, as a grant of money to be applied to the purposes mentioned in the aforesaid act. In which deed of trust, it is further provided, that the said trustees should at any time at the request of the President of the United States, convey all, or any of the said lands, which shall not then have been conveyed in execution of the trust aforesaid, to such person or persons as he shall appoint in fee simple, subject to the trusts then remaining to be executed, and to the end that the same may be perfected, the whole of the said property being thus placed at the disposal of the President, he pursued those measures which appeared most conducive to the great objects committed to his charge. He directed public sales of the property, and authorized by advertising under his own hand, dated 20th September, 1792, the commissioners, or any two of them to sell, or agree for the sale of any lot or lots in the said city, at private sale, for such price, and on such terms as they should think proper. (B.) But no sales took place deserving attention until the 2d and 3d December, 1793, when a sale was made with Robert Morris and James Greenleaf, for the sale of six the ninth lots, averaging five thousand two hundred and twenty-five feet each, at the rate of £90 18 4 per lot, payable in four equal annual instalments, without interest, commencing the first of May, 1794, and with condition of building twenty brick houses, twenty-two frame houses, and twenty-two twelve hundred feet each, and under further condition that they should not sell any lots previous to the first of January, 1796, but on condition of erecting on every third lot, one brick house within two years from the time of sale. (C.) This contract was afterwards modified by an agreement of the 24th of April, 1794, by which the payment of 80,000 dollars, and the erecting the fifty houses within time should refer on the joint bond of the said Morris and Greenleaf, and of John Nicholson; and that one thousand lots should be reserved to the said Morris and Greenleaf. (D.) which was accordingly done. It is proper to observe, that on the day on which the first mentioned contract was executed, the assembly of Maryland passed an act, entitled, "Whereas doubts have arisen, the said city, by the said commissioners, or any two of them, under terms or conditions of payment being made thereof, in any day or days after such contract entered into, if any time of the said lots, money or interest shall not be paid for the space of thirty days after the time ought to be paid, the said commissioners, or any two of them, may sell the said lots or parcels, vendue, in the city of Washington, at any time after sixty days notice of such sale, in some of the public newspapers of George-Town and Baltimore, and retain in their hands sufficient of the money produced by such new sale, to satisfy all principal and interest due on the first contract, together with the expences of advertisement and sale, and the original purchaser or his assignee shall be entitled to receive from the fair commissioners, at their treasury, on demand, the balance of the money which may have been actually received by them, or under their order, shall be forfeited and assigned to all claim, legal and equitable, of the first purchaser, his heirs and assigns."

Notwithstanding the favourable prospect which this transaction for a time afforded, the scene soon changed. The purchaser not only failed to pay the instalment which became due in May, 1795, but early in that year discontinued the buildings which they had commenced under their contract, and in which very little progress has since been made. The Parties, however, did not think it prudent to offer for sale to large a portion of the public property as would be necessary to raise the sums requisite to carrying on the public buildings, believing, on grounds sufficiently solid to authorize the declaration of his opinion in a message to Congress, accompanying the memorial of the commissioners hereafter mentioned, that this property would be insufficient for the purpose, could it be reserved till after the removal of government, or till it could be sold in small parcels, to such as would purchase for their own use.—It was therefore determined to solicit the patronage of Congress, which was done in the year 1796, by a memorial from the commissioners, stating the difficulties of their situation, and suggesting the propriety of authorizing a loan, bottomed on the city property, and guaranteed by the national Congress, if property should prove deficient. Congress approved of the measure, and authorized a loan under their guarantee to the amount of 300,000 dollars.—It is needless to detail the fruitless attempts made to negotiate this loan, in which critical specie: The only loan which could be obtained was 200,000 dollars in United States six per cent. stock at par from the State of Maryland, and for which the commissioners were obliged, in addition to the guarantee of Congress, to give bonds in their individual capacities, agreeably to the resolutions of the assembly of that State, passed in the years 1796 and 1797. (E.) The monies arising from the sales of this stock, with the interest accrued thereon amounting to 200,000 dollars, and the dollars 160,873 41 cents, and the interest paid thereon up to the 30th of September last, inclusive, amounts to dollars 89,000, and that the net sum of dollars 130,873 41 cents remained applicable to the use of the public.

The extent of these loans being thus ascertained, and the purchasers of lots full in arrear, the amount of their purchases should become obvious, and the mode of their payment could not be accomplished without further aid.

The commissioners therefore, prepared a memorial to Congress, stating the situation of the Federal lots, and the resources which remained in their hands, which memorial was transmitted by the President, to Congress, on the 23d February, 1798, which passed an act, "Authorizing the Treasurer of the United States to advance the sum of 100,000 dollars, at the times in the said act mentioned, to the commissioners, and to be repaid at the time prescribed, pursuant to the previous difficulty of collecting outstanding debts, as well from purchasers at public sales, as held by the commissioners for default of payment." This act, which was founded on the first purchases, themselves, it became evident that the several objects considered as necessary previous to the removal of government, could not be accomplished with the money at the disposal of the commissioners; application was therefore made to the assembly of Maryland, for a loan, and a resolution of that Legislature was passed, "That the Governor, in addressing the Trustee of the State, to transfer to the commissioners of the Federal buildings in the city of Washington, the sum of 30,000 dollars of the stock of the United States, bearing 6 per cent. interest, of six per cent per annum; on their giving such real and personal security, as the governor and council should approve, for the payment of the principal sum, on or before the 10 day of November, 1802, and the punctual payment of the interest quarter yearly.—Whereupon, Gustavus Scott and William Thornton, two of the commissioners, together with Uriah Forrest and James M. Lingan, entered into bond to the State of Maryland, for payment of the principal sum of 30,000 dollars and interest thereon—and the said Uriah Forrest executed a mortgage on four hundred and twenty acres of land, for the purpose, agreeably to the terms of resolution of the assembly, and the commissioners have acted, by letter dated 28th of February, 1800, and directed to the said Uriah Forrest and James M. Lingan, in answer to their letter of the same date, that all the property in the City of Washington, before that time sold or contracted for, and where the payment had not been made (except the property ceded by the act of Congress to secure the loan of 200,000 dollars) should be held as security for the payment of the said sum of 30,000 dollars. (F.)

The further sale of the state transferred the back accordingly, which has been sold at different times, including the interest received thereon, for the sum of dollars 147,737 36 cents, and interest has been paid thereon up to the 30th September last, inclusive, to the amount of dollars 2,230, leaving the net sum of dollars 40,488 96 cents to be applied to public use. The land which has been accepted, and purchased by the commissioners, for the use of the United States and which yet remains unsold (exclusive of lots forfeited for non-payment of the purchase money, and which for that cause are liable to be resold) consists of 24,655 735 square feet of ground in the city of Washington, equal to 4,682 lots of 5,268 square feet each, exclusive of those which have been navigable, which, from fronts to the extent of 2,042 feet, and are generally held by the four fronts. It is impossible to ascertain with precision the value of this property; some idea may be formed of it by taking the average price at which similar property has heretofore been sold; in this case a reference ought to be had to the different situations; 178 132 of the city lots lie north-east of Massachusetts Avenue, in which situation only 5 thousand lots (except 1800, part of Morris and Greenleaf's selection and purchase) have been sold by the commissioners; but many lots (of private property) on the same side of that avenue have been sold. We have been able to ascertain the price of 838 of these, which are on a par with the rest of the 5 lots sold by the commissioners, make an average of upwards of 105 dollars per standard lot; which rate would produce by the sale of the remaining 173 lots, the sum of 18,165 dollars. The remaining 1,504 lots are situated to the south-west of Massachusetts avenue; the average price of lots sold in that direction, since the passing of the act of the preceding law in May 1796, is 343 dollars, at which rate the above-mentioned 1,504 lots would produce dollars 515,672. The average price of lots binding on navigable waters, is 1,000 dollars per standard lot, containing 12 71 cents per foot front. The property of this description remaining to be sold at the same rate would produce dollars 25,579 dollars. It is to be observed that the profit of these lots were sold at periods remote from the time when profit could be expected to arise from them, and many of them at reduced prices in consequence of covenants which have been broken; it may be admitted that the lots heretofore sold are on an average, better than those which remain for sale, yet the change of circumstances under which future sales may be made, must more than counterbalance the difference; in addition to this property, four wharves have been built at the expence of dollars 2221 48 cents, which are in a flourishing state.

An island in Anacostick, in the state of Virginia, was purchased in the 1791, for the sum of 6,000 dollars, on account of the free stone quarries thereon, which it was proposed to use for the public buildings; Thomas Beall, and John M. Gantt for the United States. The real cause of the value of dollars 864,549 88 cents according to the best estimate we are able to form, remain at the disposal of government. (G.)

The measures to be pursued with regard to this property, it is not for us to determine; but we think it necessary to mention some matters which require attention. The debts due and shortly to become due to the city fund, and which are confidently as speed, amount to dollars 144,125 80 cents, and the debts contracted on the credit of that fund, as nearly as can be ascertained, amount to dollars 360,831 8 cents. (G.)

Although it is believed that all the debts stated to be good may ultimately