



# THE FOUNDING OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

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On June 19, 1783, the Continental Congress was meeting in Philadelphia. The war was over. The treasury was empty. The thirteen colonial states were "free," but it was unclear how they would unify.

Then shocking news arrived. Armed soldiers were marching towards Philadelphia to demand overdue pay.

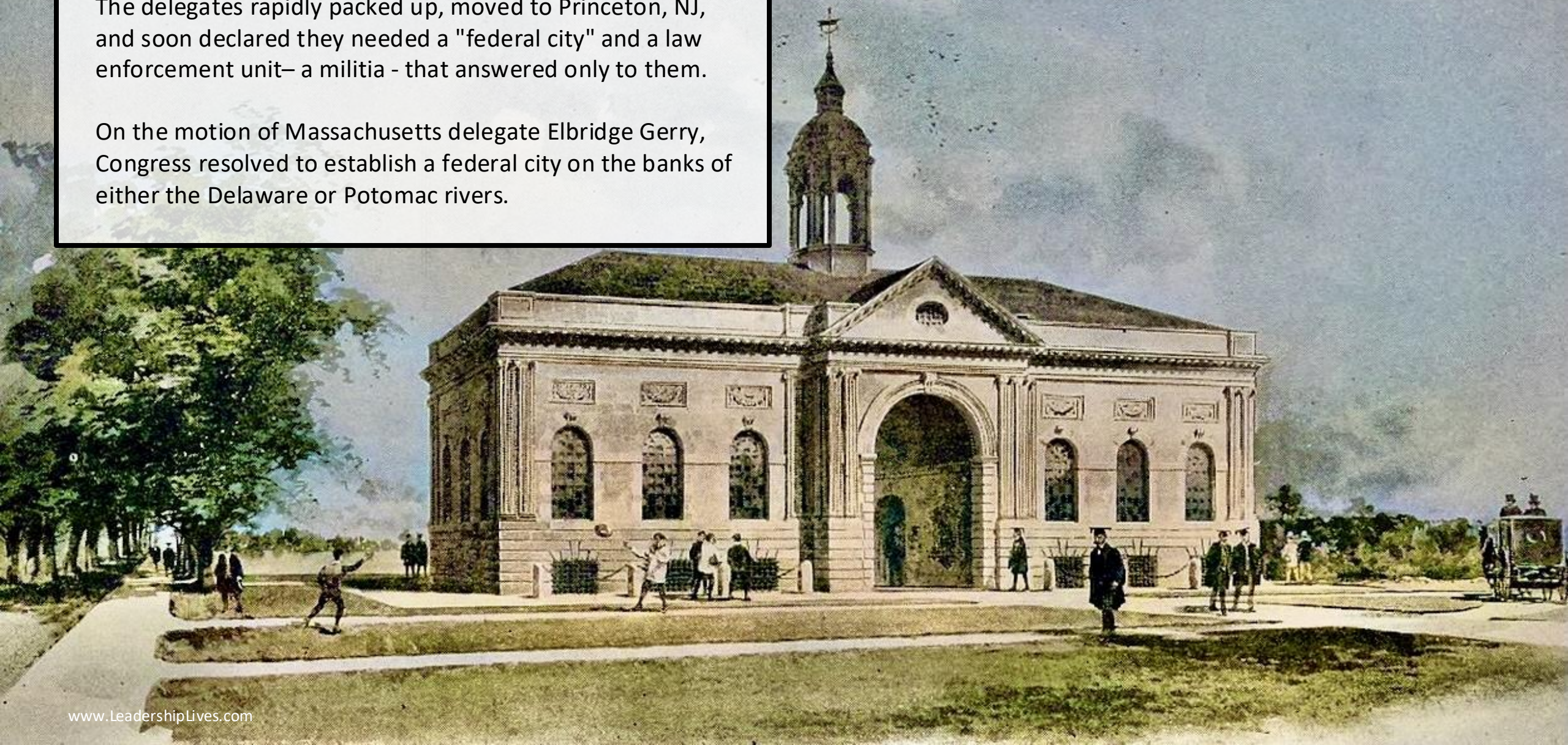
Congress requested protection from Pennsylvania officials. The request was denied. The soldiers arrived, surrounded Independence Hall, and held the delegates hostage at gunpoint.

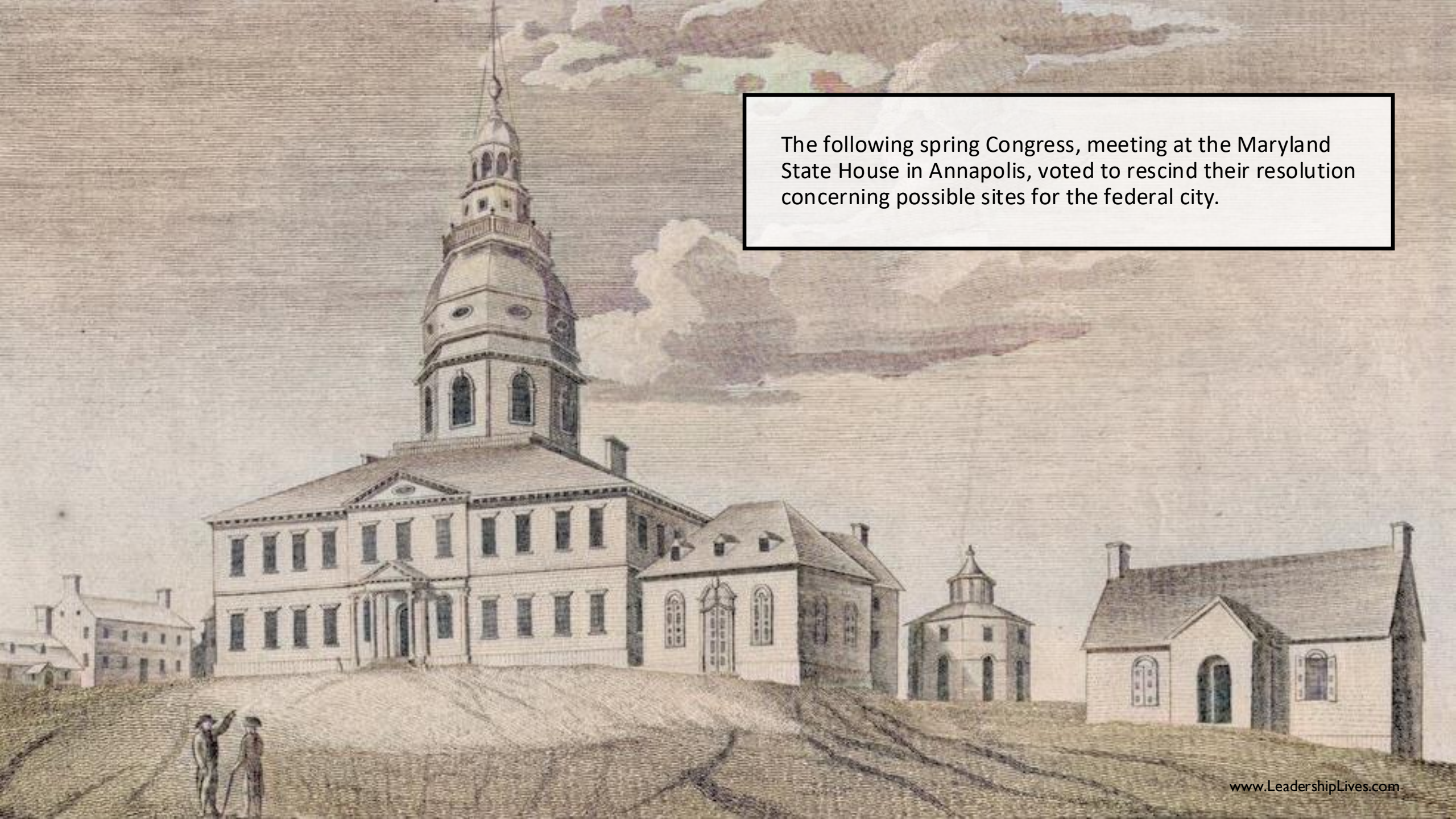


Independence Hall, 1778.

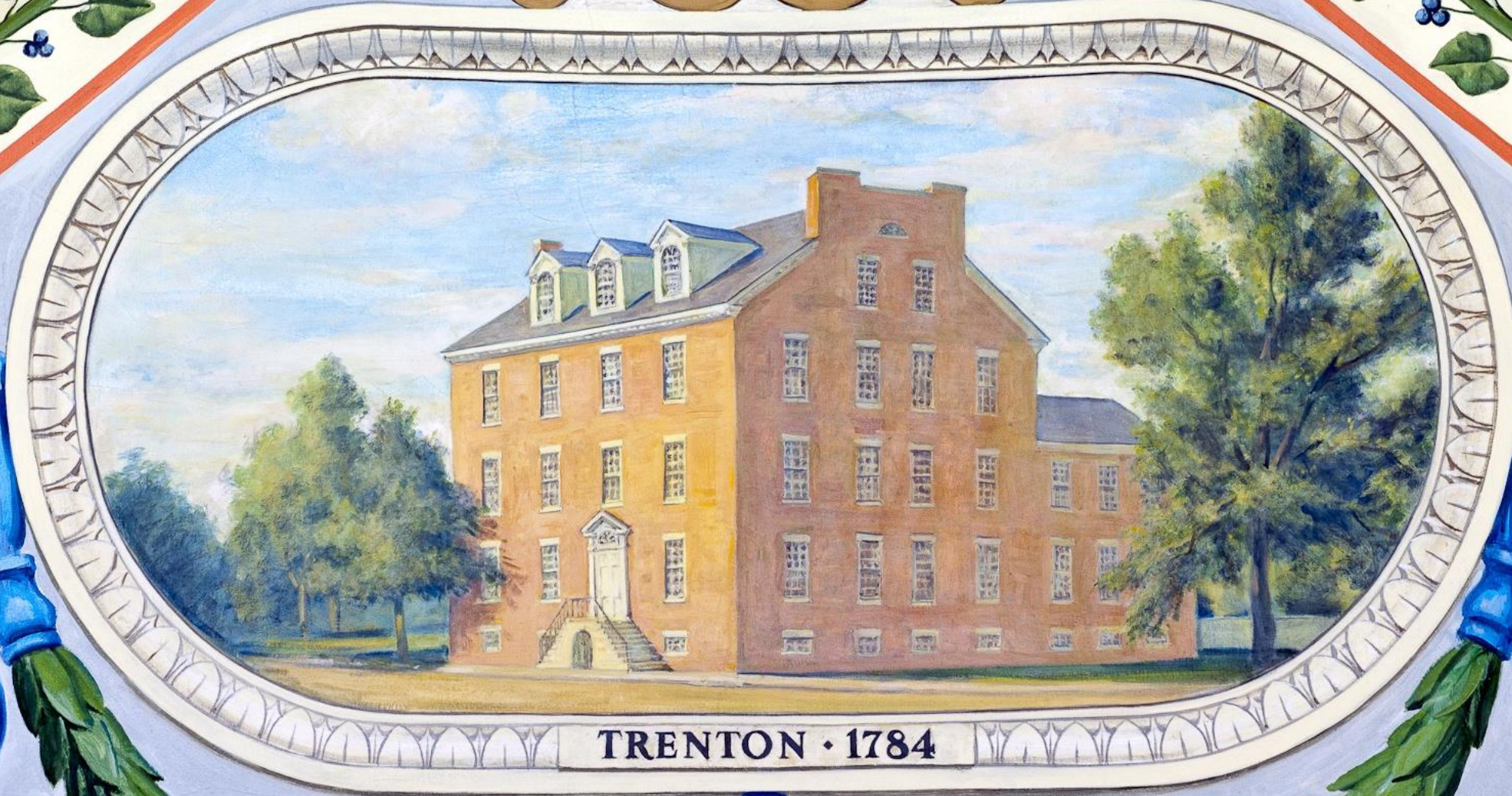
The delegates rapidly packed up, moved to Princeton, NJ, and soon declared they needed a "federal city" and a law enforcement unit— a militia - that answered only to them.

On the motion of Massachusetts delegate Elbridge Gerry, Congress resolved to establish a federal city on the banks of either the Delaware or Potomac rivers.



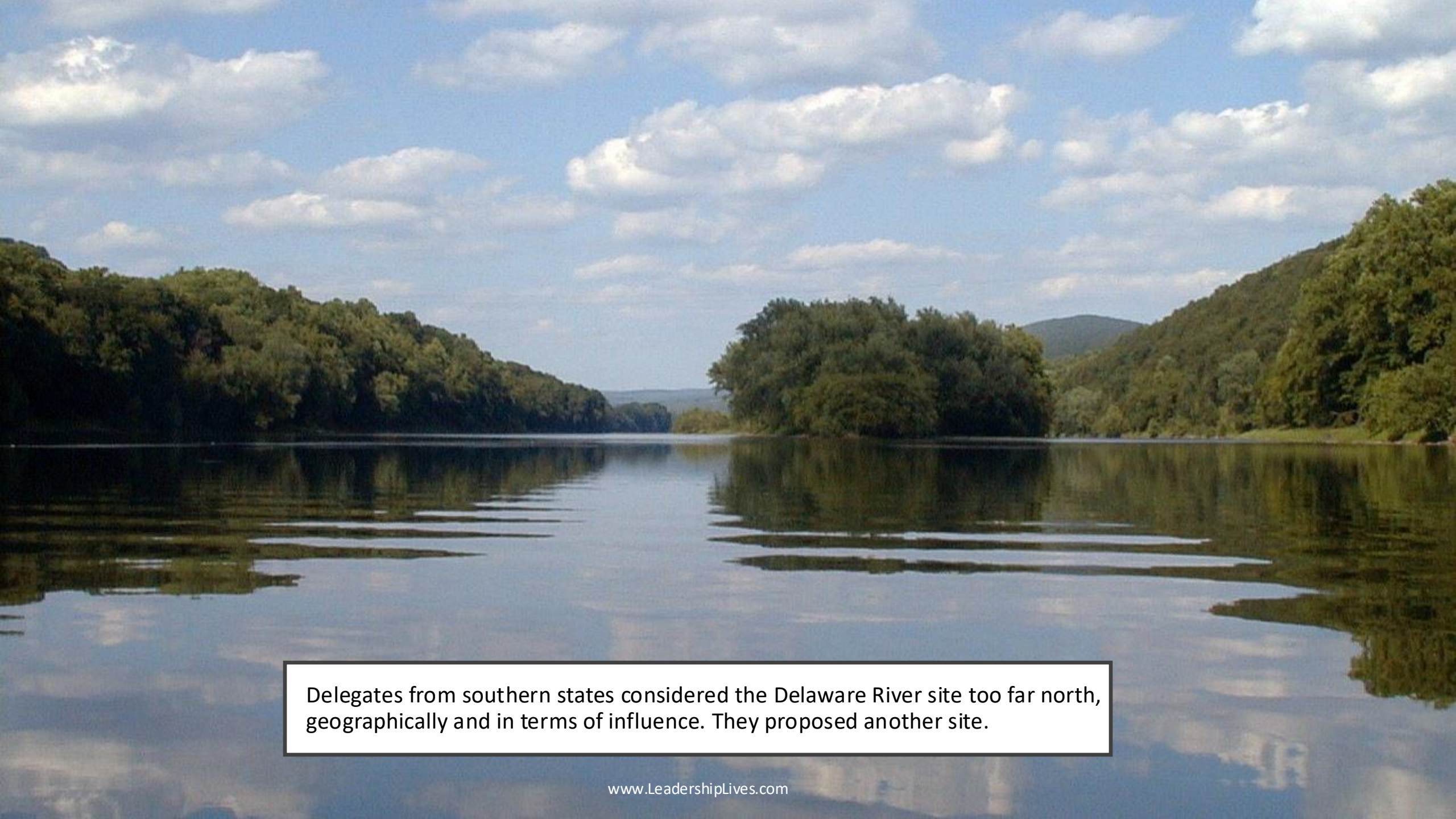


The following spring Congress, meeting at the Maryland State House in Annapolis, voted to rescind their resolution concerning possible sites for the federal city.

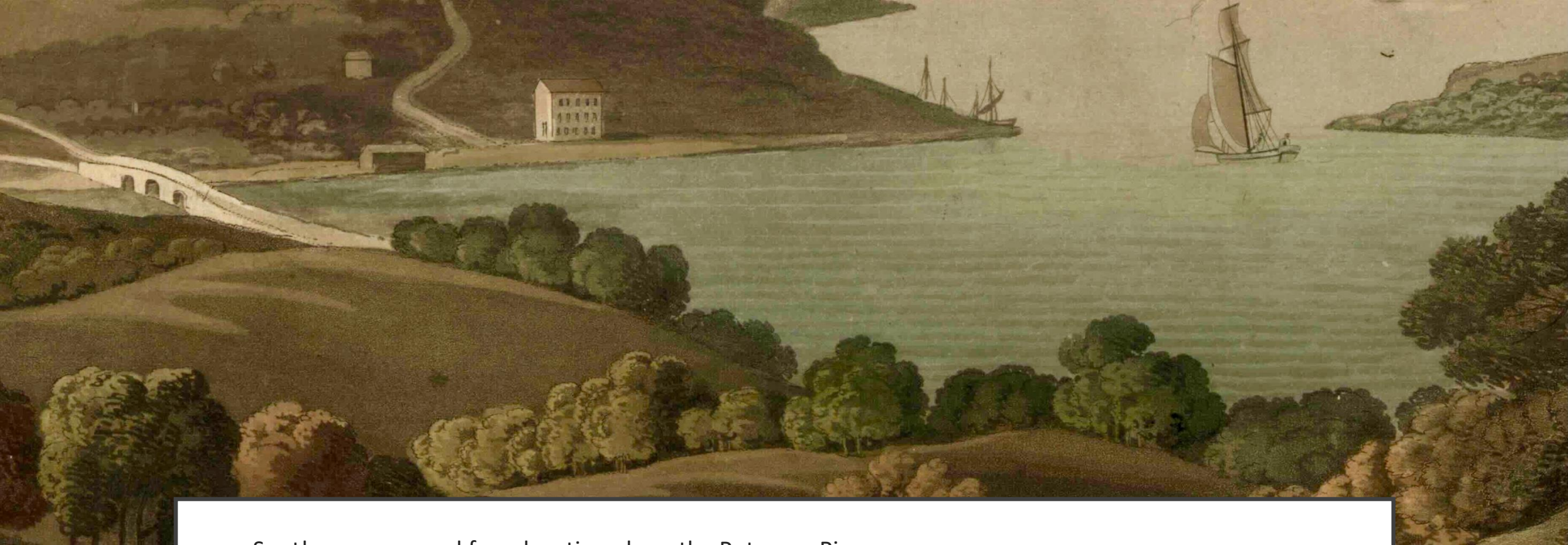


**TRENTON • 1784**

That fall, at the French Arms Tavern in Trenton, NJ, Congress appointed three commissioners to lay out a federal city along the Delaware River near Trenton.



Delegates from southern states considered the Delaware River site too far north, geographically and in terms of influence. They proposed another site.



Southerners argued for a location along the Potomac River:

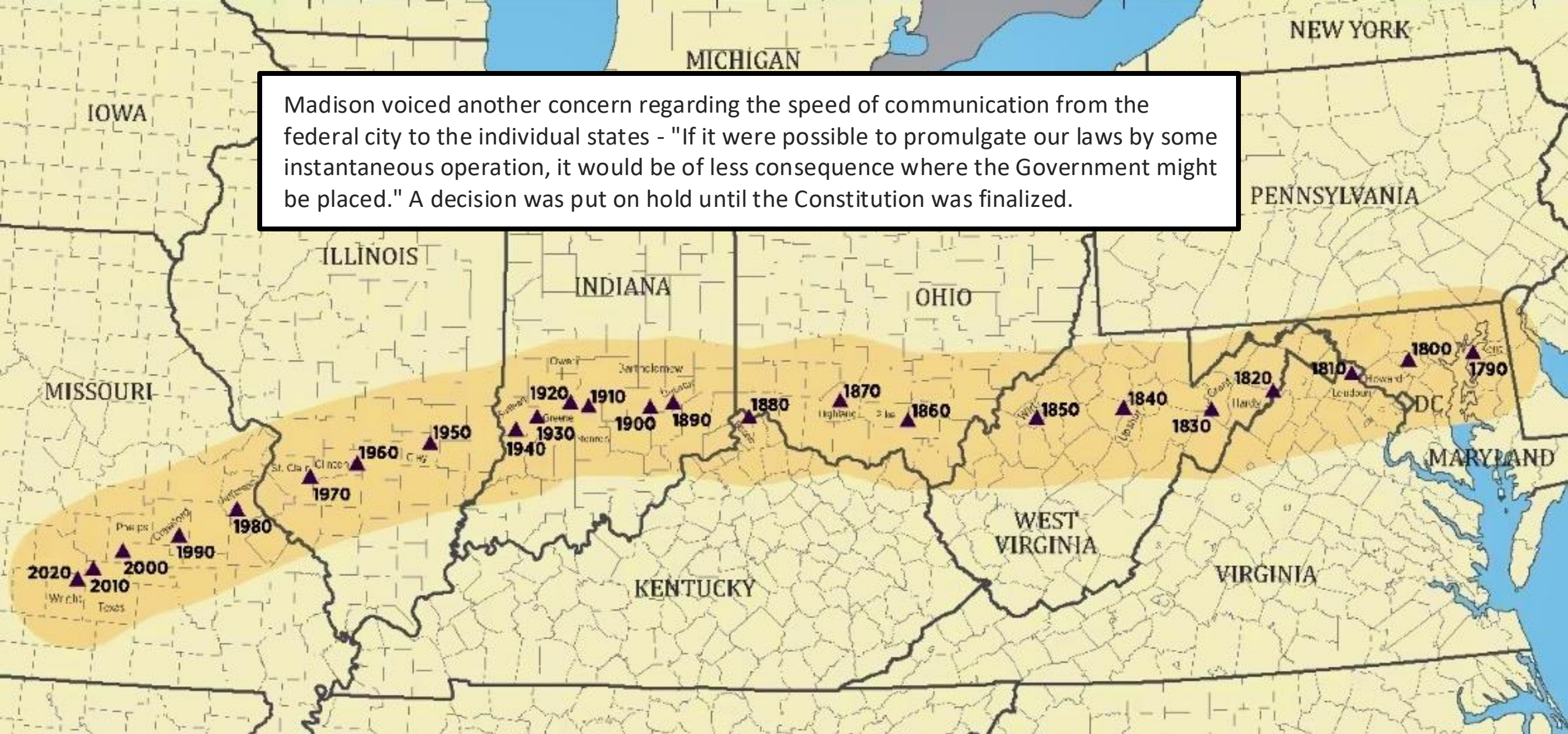
- + The area was geographically central; 500 miles south of Boston, MA; 600 miles north of Atlanta, GA.
- + It was already a population center, unlike the proposed Delaware River site.
- + The source of the Potomac was 300+ miles inland at the top of the Appalachian Mountains.
- + The long-planned Chesapeake and Ohio Canal would provide an artery across the mountains to transport inland goods to East Coast markets.



Delegate James Madison made a powerful argument for the Potomac site. Madison calculated that if the population of America doubled "in twenty-five years, we shall speedily behold an astonishing mass of people on the Western waters. ... We see the people moving from the more crowded to the less crowded parts. The swarm does not come from the southern, but from the northern and eastern hives."



Madison voiced another concern regarding the speed of communication from the federal city to the individual states - "If it were possible to promulgate our laws by some instantaneous operation, it would be of less consequence where the Government might be placed." A decision was put on hold until the Constitution was finalized.



This map, based on the U.S. 2020 Census, shows the center of the U.S. population, as Madison predicted, has continually shifted west.

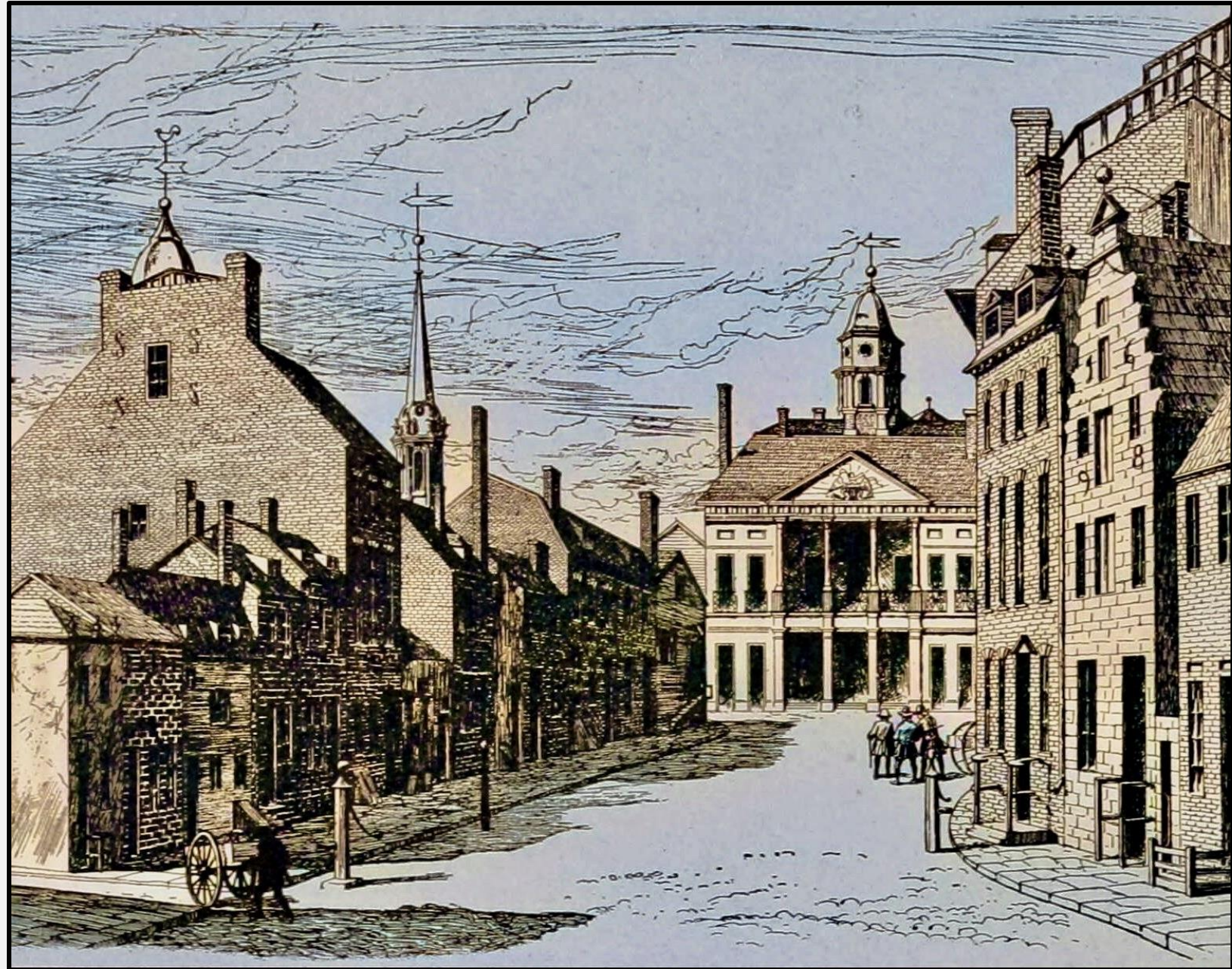
In January 1785, Congress moved to Old City Hall on Wall Street in New York City where the squabbling continued.

New York and New England delegates were happy to have the capital in New York – the administrative center of the colonies under British rule.

Pennsylvania delegates were rooting for Wright's Ferry on the Susquehanna River.

New Jersey delegates were in favor of Philadelphia.

Delegates from the Southern states refused to budge – their choice remained a site on the Potomac.



# We the People

of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common Defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

## Article 1.

Section 1. All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.

Section 2. The House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen every second Year by the People of the several States, and the Electors in each State shall have the Qualifications requisite for Electors of the most numerous Branch of the State Legislature.

No Person shall be a Representative who shall not have attained to the Age of twenty five Years, and been seven Years a Citizen of the United States, and who shall not, when elected, be an Inhabitant of that State in which he shall be chosen.

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons. The actual Enumeration shall be made within three Years after the first Meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent Term of ten Years in such Manner as they shall by Law direct. The Number of Representatives shall not exceed one for every thirty Thousand, but each State shall have at least one Representative; and until such Enumeration shall be made, the State of New Hampshire shall be entitled to chuse three, Massachusetts eight, Delaware one, Maryland three, Virginia three, New York six, New Jersey four, Pennsylvania six, and North Carolina five.

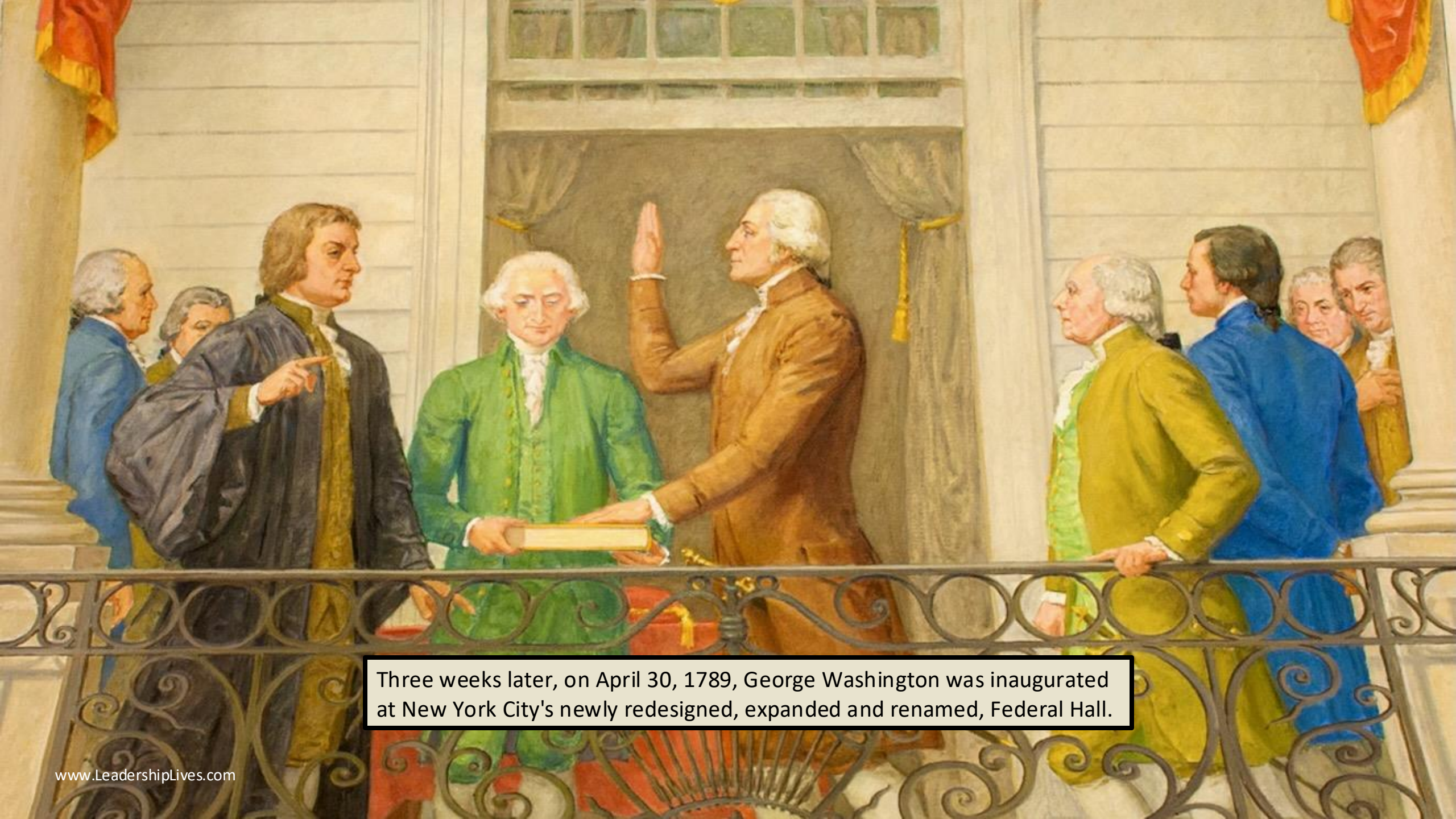
When vacancies happen in the Representation from any State, the Electors in that State shall chuse in the Manner directed by the Legislature thereof, a Person to fill such Vacancies.

Section 3. The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two Senators from each State, chosen by the Legislature thereof, for six Years, and each Senator shall have one Vote.

Immediately after they shall be assembled in Consequence of the first Election, they shall be divided as equally as may be into three Classes. The Seats of the Senators of the first Class shall be vacated at the Expiration of the first Year, of the second Class at the Expiration of the second Year, and of the third Class at the Expiration of the third Year, so that one third may be chosen every second Year; and if Vacancies happen by Resignation, or otherwise, during the Course of the Session of any State, the Executive thereof may make temporary Appointments until the next Meeting of the Legislature, which shall then fill the Vacancies.

In 1787, the United States Constitution was written in Philadelphia. Article 1, Section 8 authorized Congress to create a militia and a "District (not exceeding ten Miles square) as may, by Cession of particular States, and the Acceptance of Congress, become the Seat of the Government of the United States."

On March 4, 1789, the Constitution became the supreme law of the United States.



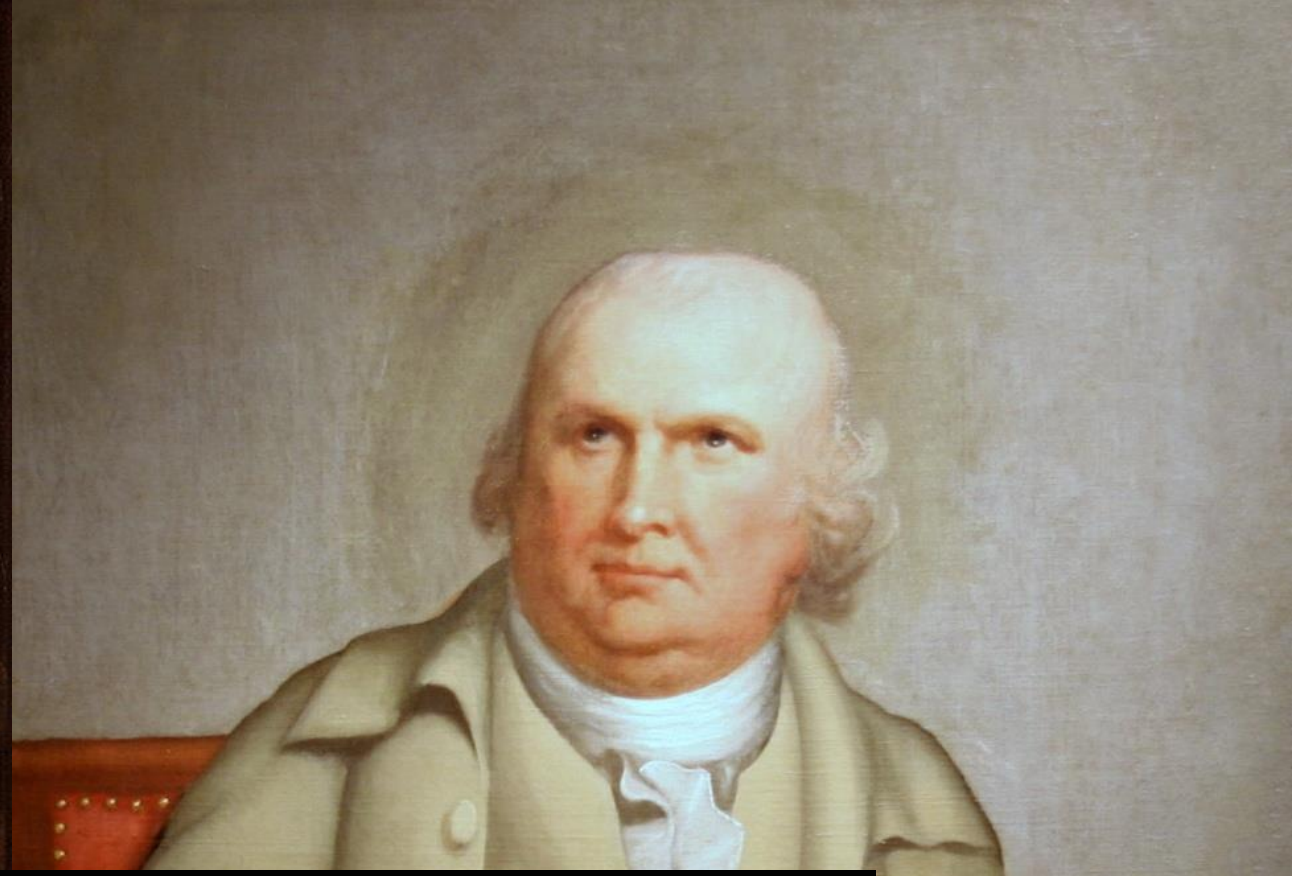
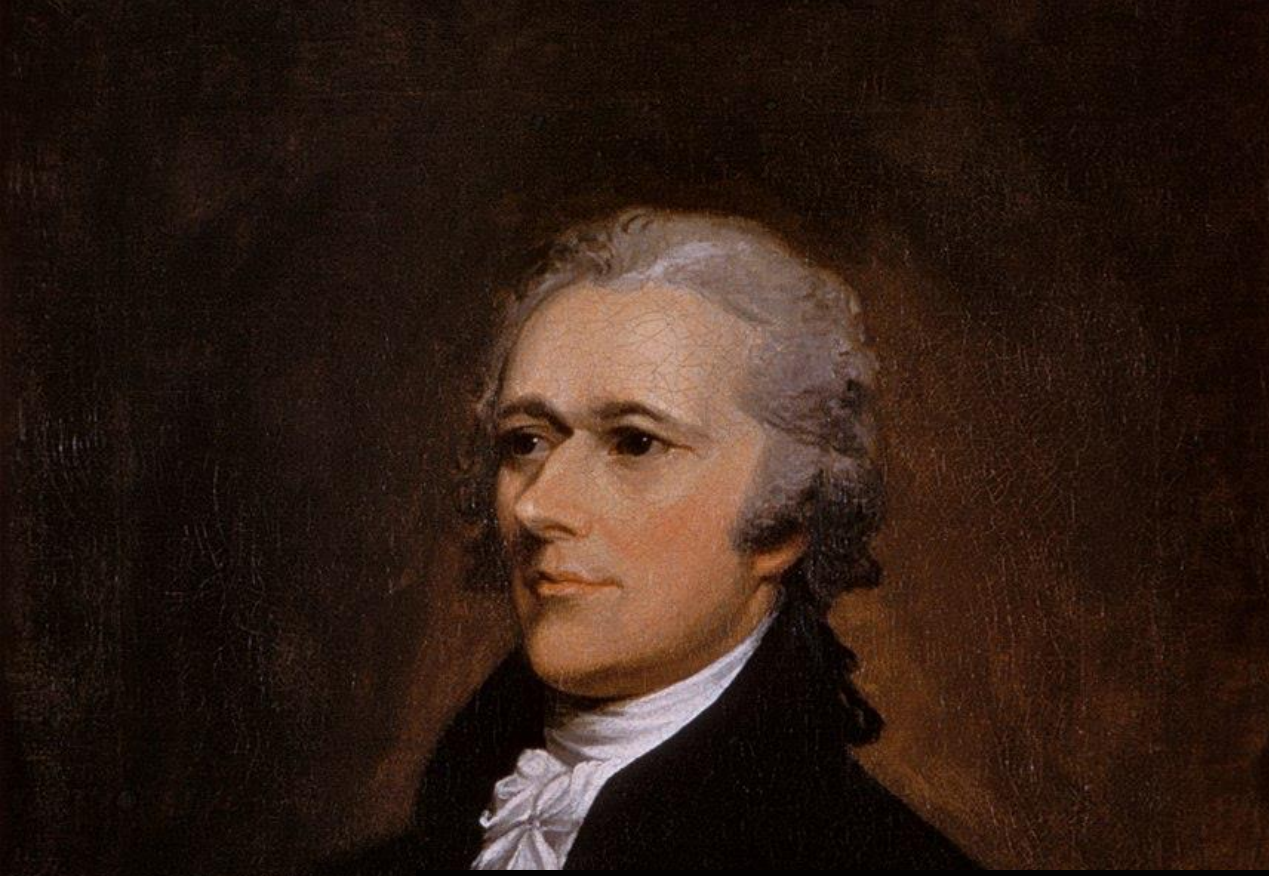
Three weeks later, on April 30, 1789, George Washington was inaugurated at New York City's newly redesigned, expanded and renamed, Federal Hall.

That fall, both Houses of Congress voted to establish the federal city in Germantown, PA – north of Philadelphia - but before the decision could go into effect, conniving House delegates added a minor amendment and the Senate adjourned before taking it up. When Congress reconvened in the spring, enthusiasm for the Germantown site had faded.

Delegates from Virginia sprang into action and offered 10 square miles of land and \$120,000 to construct federal buildings.

Maryland made a similar offer.





While Congress debated possible locations for the federal city, Alexander Hamilton was near despair over establishing a Bank of the United States to fund the fledgling country's debts.

In February 1790, Hamilton confided in Robert Morris, financier of the Revolution and Senator from Pennsylvania, that he needed one vote in the Senate and five in the House.

The impasses on both matters seemed unbreakable. Then a miracle happened.

Perhaps by chance, perhaps by design,  
Alexander Hamilton met Thomas Jefferson  
in front of George Washington's residence.

For 30 minutes, they walked up and down  
Broadway and hashed out a compromise.

Jefferson would wrangle the necessary  
votes for Hamilton's "Funding Bill."

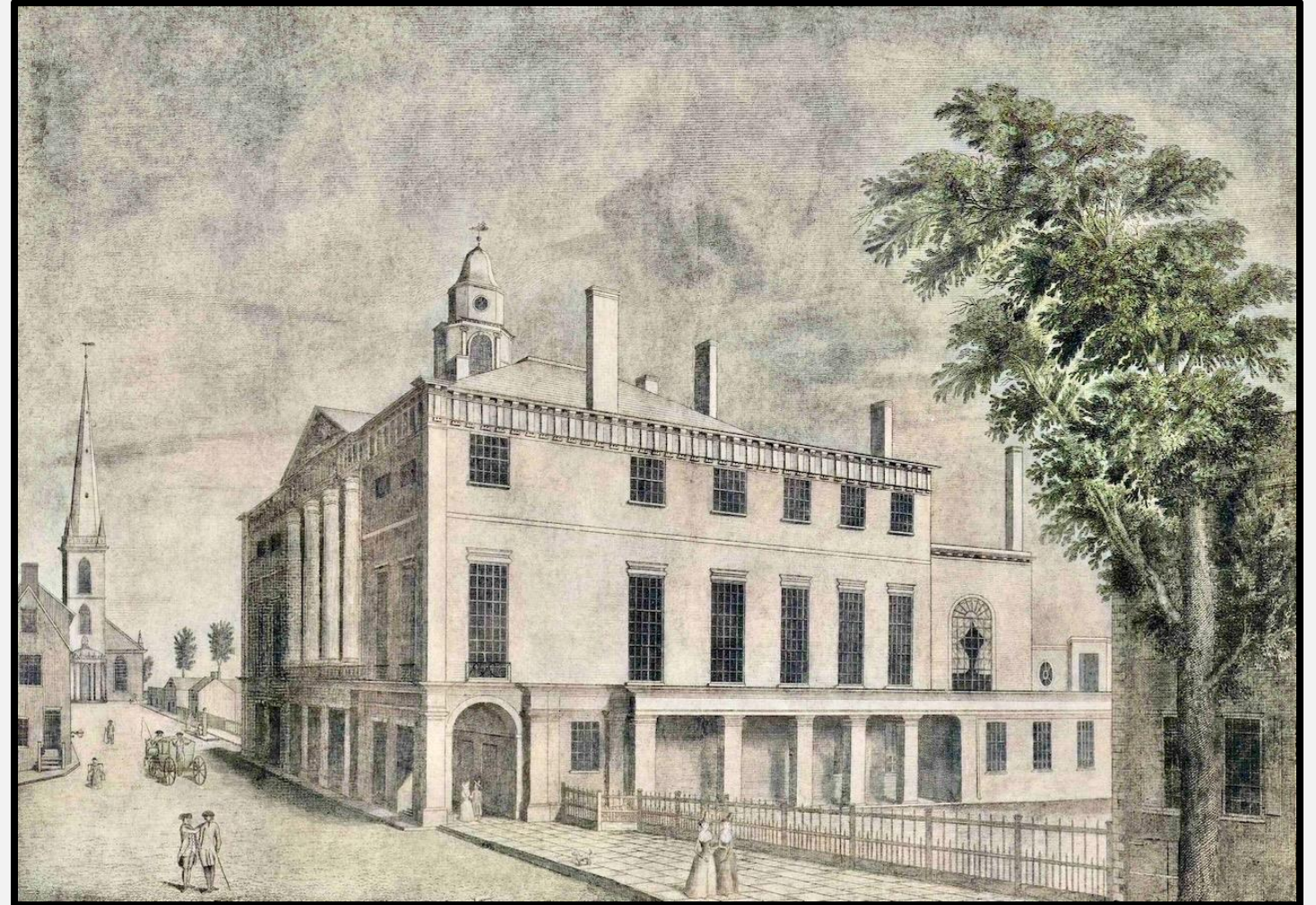
In return, Hamilton would provide the  
votes needed to establish the federal city  
on the Potomac River.




When the votes were cast, Pennsylvania's ballots were the deciding factor.

In return for supporting the Potomac site, Philadelphia would serve as the nation's temporary Capital for 10 years.

The final votes in favor of the Potomac site were 32 to 29 in the House and 14 to 12 in the Senate.





A detailed landscape painting of a river valley. In the foreground, a large, leafy tree frames the left side, and a smaller tree stands on the right. A dirt path winds through the valley, with a person on horseback and a person on foot with a dog. In the middle ground, a town with red-roofed buildings is situated on a hillside overlooking a wide river. Several sailing ships are on the water. In the background, rolling hills and mountains are visible under a cloudy sky.

Six months later, work began on transforming the wilderness on the Potomac into America's Capital.

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