

with the ostensible purpose of attacking Commodore Barney's flotilla which had taken refuge at the head of the river. The real purpose, however, as subsequent developments showed, was to attack Washington.

On ascending the river as far as possible British forces to the number of 6,000 were debarked and started toward the American capital. The only part of the American army available for the defense of the city numbered between 3,000 and 4,000 men, with 17 pieces of artillery. These offered some resistance to the British advance but being for the most part raw, undisciplined soldiers they were incapable of doing very efficient fighting and retreated before the seasoned "red coats," leaving the field clear to the capital. At last the British marched triumphantly into Washington and began to put into execution the threat of the British officer to the effect that the "Yankee capital grounds" would be converted into a cow pasture.

After the capitulation of the city the British soldiers began to set fire to it, burning the capital and the various public buildings, including the president's house which was then called the "president's palace." According to accounts that have come down from that time Dolly Madison, the president's wife, stopped long enough to cut a portrait of George Washington from its frame and carry it off to safety, leaving the "palace" with the president's dinner steaming on the table to the mercies of the invaders.

Rushing into the building the British troopers applied to its draperies flaming brands which they had seized from a burning saloon. All of the furniture and inside furnishings were broken up to feed the flames which destroyed everything on the inside and scorched the outside considerably. When the structure was repaired later the marks of the fire on the outside were obliterated by the use of white paint. In this way the celebrated building came to be called the "White House."

An Englishman who was present describes the scene in the following manner: "The blazing houses, ships, and stores, the report of exploding magazines and the crash of falling roofs was one of the finest sights to be conceived. The sky was brilliantly illuminated by the conflagration. The scene was as striking and sublime as the burning of St. Sebastian's. Toward morning a violent storm of rain, accompanied by thunder and lightning, came on, whose flashes seemed to vie in brilliancy with the flames which burst from the roofs of burning houses, while the thunder drowned the noise of falling walls and was only interrupted by the occasional roar of cannon and of large depots of gunpowder as they exploded, one by one."

As Washington was the capital of the American republic the British felt greatly elated over its capture while the Americans felt the deepest chagrin and indignation. In fact the burning of the city was regarded