

Capital crisis in 1793

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Capital in crisis 1793 In the summer of 1793, Philadelphia was in midst of a political crisis. Great Britain had declared war against revolutionary France, instantly polarizing American public opinion. Many favored France, whose political ideals seemed akin to our own. Other disagreed, pointing out the bloody massacres and other outrages that had recently convulsed Paris. President George Washington's own cabinet split along party lines. Secretary of State Tomas Jefferson and his Republican Party were passionately in favor of France, while Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton and many other Federalists felt Britain was a bulwark of civilization against the rising tide of revolutionary anarchy. Nominally a Federalist, Washing ton tried to govern with fairness and impartiality. It was a difficult task, and sometimes even Washington's celebrated patience showed signs of cracking under the strain. While the president grappled with partisan politics and the thorny issues of war and peace, a new threat was developing far closer to home. The spring of 1793 had been abnormally wet, but despite a bone-dry summer, stagnant pools of water remained in the streets, alleyways and open fields, breeding insects by the millions. Diarists noted the presence swarms of mosquitoes, little knowing the buzzing nuisance carried a deadly disease. These mosquitoes spread the tallow fever virus, and within weeks Philadelphia, then the Nation's capital, would suffer through the worst epidemic to plague an American city in the 18th century. Philadelphia was the largest and most cosmopolitan city in the United States, boasting a population of more than 40, 000 people. It was a city of monuments, many of them associated with the nation's beginnings. Congress met in Congress Hall, in the shadow of the Old State House, where the Declarations of

independence were signed and the Constitution was drafted. Philadelphia's streets were paved with cobblestones and laid out on a grid plan that some visitors found unsettling. Used to the medieval jumble of avenues back home, a foreign traveler considered the right Angled streets " a mathematical infringement on the rights of individual eccentricity. " The cities Architecture injected a note of egalitarianism in an otherwise class-conscious age. Most homes were built of red brick in a colonial Georgian or the newly emerging " federal" style. Bolley Payne Todd lived in a house on Walnut and Fourth streets. She was charming, vivacious and Beautiful, and her charismatic personality could not be contained by the straightjacket of Quaker Convention. Her husband John Todd was a solidly middle-class lawyer whose sturdy, three-story red Brick home was typical of the period. Like many of his neighbors, John Todd conducted business from an office on the ground floor. While Todd and his clerks scribbled away on briefs and other legal documents, Dolly holy court in the Second-floor parlor. Known as a great entertainer, she was also the conscientious mother of two young Sons.