

II. Resort Villa on the Sligo

By Kit Watts

Though he didn't know it, Judson S. Washburn had already begun answering that question. That very summer he had held evangelistic meetings in Washington, D.C. On a stifling summer day, it is reported, he and his family sought refuge from the city's notorious heat and humidity by making their way to a resort village on the banks of beautiful Sligo Creek.

While listening to the tumbling stream and looking into the waving trees above, Washburn is said to have hit upon the idea this was the place—the place for an Adventist School.²

That may well have been the way it was.

For when the General Conference session met March 27 to April 13, 1903, in Oakland, California, Washburn was in action.

As the ashes of the two great Michigan fires settled, there began gradually to seep in to the Adventist consciousness an awareness of what Ellen White had been saying for years: the spiritual vitality of the denomination was on the decline as institution after institution was headquartered in Battle Creek and the sense of mission and outreach atrophied.

By General Conference time the brethren had been convinced that relocation of the administrative office and the Review should at least be looked into.

Washburn had a pocketful of reasons why they should relocate in Washington. He got his little congregation behind him, passed and printed up a resolution and circulated it at the Oakland convention. It invited the General Conference, Review, and any other institutions to come to the nation's capital. He besieged Ellen White and her son, Willie (James had died in 1881), with letter arguing every possible advantage of the location.

Willie answered the first appeal by saying "After reading your letter, Mother said that your suggestions were worthy of consideration, but that we ought not to think of locating in the city".³

Undaunted, Washburn replied that Washington really wasn't a business city at all, just a country town, wonderfully clear and free, but that the institutions could be in one of the suburbs.⁴

A council to tie up loose ends followed the General Conferences session and it is said that Washburn bombarded it with telegrams every day.⁵ Finally a full-blown locating committee was set up, headed by A.G. Daniells, the denomination's president.

The committee first consulted Mrs. White to see what suggestions she might have on selecting a place. She thought New York, Washington, D.C., or other large Eastern cities should be looked at.⁶

By the end of May 1903 she wrote the committee a letter, discouraging settlement in New York City. "Any place within 30 miles of that city would be too near," she said. But she urged that the advantages of Washington be closely investigated. The site itself should be chosen carefully. It ought to be in a rural setting with enough land for a small sanitarium and agricultural school, and it should have a good climate conducive to health.⁷

A few days later she sent another letter to the now travel-weary committee. She recalled saying twenty years earlier that memorials to God should be established in Washington, D.C. She emphasized, "If there is one place above another where a sanitarium should be established, and where gospel work should be done, it is Washington." There would also be great value, she said, in establishing the Review where Adventist books would bear the imprint of Washington, D.C.⁸

In late July the committee assembled in Washington. Heading the local delegation to assist it was Judson Washburn.

By train and streetcar the group combed Washington, D.C. Reporting a few days later for the August 20, 1903, Review, Daniells said the locating committee had agreed "without a dissenting vote" that Takoma Park was the place.

With the decision made, Daniells moved with dispatch. Though he met residual opposition by brethren who had houses and lands in Battle Creek, he got headquarters packed

and shipped within days. Furniture and files arrived at temporary quarters at 222 North Capitol Street on August 10, 1903,⁹ less than a month after the city had been picked.

Footnotes:

2. "This is the Place," Ralph Krum, Sligonian, March 31, 1954.
3. Letter Book 21, William C. White, letter 173, White Estate.
4. "History of Seventh-day Adventists in Washington, D.C." unpublished manuscript, Ron Graybill.
5. "This is the Place," Ralph Krum, Sligonian, March 31, 1954.
6. "The Removal to Washington," A. G. Daniells, Review & Herald, August 11, 1903, p.6.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid, August 20, 1903, p. 4.
9. "History of Seventh-day Adventists in Washington, D.C." unpublished manuscript, Ron Graybill.