

YOU LIVE IN MEXICO!

by Mary K. Manzoli

Next time you write home, tell the folks you live in Mexico -- the name of our neighborhood long before it became Foggy Bottom. Robert Peter, who came to Georgetown in 1752, prospered as a merchant and invested in much land here. His lands east of Rock Creek, bordered on the south and east by the River and the Hamburg settlement; and reaching north to about the present O Street were called Mexico. The Peter plantation thus encompassed all Foggy Bottom plus considerable stretches north of Pennsylvania Avenue. One can only conjecture why Mr. Peter called his lands Mexico, a name that must have been highly exotic in 1752. Perhaps the mighty Scottish merchant had made a killing with free-booting that involved Spanish crown galleons headed for Mexico. Rich Mexican trade was a favorite prey of American merchant ships such as those plying the ocean from the Georgetown port in those days.

The original Peter house on the plantation Mexico was in the middle of the block bounded by Eye and K Streets, and by 26th and 27th Streets. Later in the 18th Century the Peter family built the houses in the 2600 block of K Street which, as we mentioned in an earlier article in the NEWS, were among the most distinguished in early Washington.

Mexico disappeared as a plantation when, in 1791,

Robert Peter, as well as other Washington proprietors, were persuaded by George Washington to divide their lands into lots for the Federal City. But relatively little of the Peter lands was taken up for prompt development, and most of our part of town remained "commons" land until Civil War days. In or near our neighborhood, nonetheless, were some notable structures. Just northwest of Washington Circle Isaac Pollock built a group of houses in 1798 which gave the name of "Round Tops" to the Circle area. Long since demolished, the houses were perfectly square, with the roofs capped with octagonal cupolas. At 2107 Pennsylvania Avenue stood historically important Six Buildings, first location in Washington of the Navy Department. From September 1800 to May 1801 the State Department was also located in one of these houses. Among the famous residents of the Six Buildings were James Madison and Sam Houston.

At 1901 to 1913 Pennsylvania Avenue, until just a few years ago, stood the famous Seven Buildings. Dating from around 1800, these row houses were occupied by many notables, including Martin Van Buren. General McClellan had headquarters there in 1861.

Another fine old residence that vanished just within the recent past was the Lenthall House, located at 612-14 Nineteenth Street, which was built about 1800 by John Lenthall, an architect who worked with Benjamin Latrobe on the construction of the Capitol.