

Act to Remove the Seat of Government to Richmond, 1779 Transcription (page 1 of 3)

CHAP. XXI.

An act for the removal of the seat of government.

I. WHEREAS great numbers of the inhabitants of this commonwealth must frequently and of necessity resort to the seat of government where general assemblies are convened, superior courts are held, and the governour and council usually transact the executive business of government; and the equal rights of all the said inhabitants require that such seat of government should be as nearly central to all as may be, having regard only to navigation, the benefits of which are necessary for promoting the growth of a town sufficient for the accommodation of those who resort thereto, and able to aid the operations of government: And it has been also found inconvenient in the course of the present war, where seats of government have been so situated as to be exposed to the insults and injuries of the publick enemy, which dangers may be avoided and equal justice done to all the citizens of this commonwealth by removing the seat of government to the town of Richmond, in the county of Henrico, which is more safe and central than any other town situated on navigable water: *Be it therefore enacted by the General Assembly*, That six whole squares of ground surrounded each of them by four streets, and containing all the ground within such streets, situate in the said town of Richmond, and on an open and airy part thereof, shall be appropriated to the use and purpose of publick buildings: On one of the said squares shall be erected, one house for the use of the general assembly, to be called the capitol, which said capitol shall contain two apartments for the use of the senate and their clerk, two others for the use of the house of delegates and their clerk, and others for the purposes of conferences, committees and a lobby, of such forms and dimensions as shall be adopted to their respective purposes: On one other of the said squares shall be erected, another building to be called the halls of justice, which shall contain two apartments for the use of the court of appeals and its clerk, two others for the use of the high court of chancery and its clerk, two others for the use of the general court and its clerk, two others for the use of the court of admiralty and its clerk, and others for the uses of grand and petty juries, of such forms and dimensions as shall be adopted to their respective purposes; and on the same square last mentioned shall be built a publick jail: One other of the said squares shall be reserved for the purpose of building thereon hereafter, a house for the several executive boards and offices to be held in: Two others with the intervening street, shall be reserved for the use of the governour of this commonwealth for the time being, and the remaining square shall be appropriated to the use of the publick market. The said houses shall be built in a handsome manner with walls of brick or stone, and porticoes where the same may be convenient or ornamental, and with pillars and pavements of stone. There shall be appointed by joint ballot of both houses of assembly, five persons to be called the directors of

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the publick buildings, who, or any three of them shall have power to make choice of such squares of ground, situate as before directed, as shall be most proper and convenient for the said publick purposes, to agree on plans for the said buildings, to employ proper workmen to erect the same, to superintend them, to procure necessary materials by themselves or by the board of trade, and to draw on the treasurer of this commonwealth, from time to time, for such sums of money as shall be wanting; the plans and estimates of which shall be submitted to the two houses of assembly whensoever called for by their joint vote, and shall be subjected to their controul. And that reasonable satisfaction may be paid and allowed for all such lots of ground as by virtue of this act may be taken and appropriated to the uses aforesaid, the clerk of the county of Henrico, is hereby empowered and required on requisition from the said directors, to issue a writ in nature of a writ of *ad quod damnum*, to be directed to the sheriff of the said county, commanding him to summon and empanel twelve able discreet freeholders of the vicinage no ways concerned in interest in the said lots of land, nor related to the owners or proprietors thereof, to meet on the said lots on a certain day to be named in the said writ, not under five nor more than ten days from the date thereof, of which notice shall be given by the sheriff to the proprietors and tenants of the said lots of land if they be to be found within the county, and if not, then to their agents therein if any they have, which freeholders, taking nothing on pain of being discharged from the inquest and immediately imprisoned by the sheriff, either of meat or drink from any person whatever from the time they came to the said place until their inquest sealed shall be charged by the said sheriff impartially, and to the best of their skill and judgment to value the said lots of ground in so many several and distinct parcels as shall be owned and held by several and distinct owners and tenants, and according to their respective interest and estates therein; and if the said valuation cannot be completed in one day, then the said sheriff shall adjourn the said jurors from day to day until the same be completed; and after such valuation made, the said sheriff shall forthwith return the same under the hands and seals of the said jurors to the clerk's office of the said county, and the right and property of the said owners and tenants in the said lots of land, shall be immediately divested and transferred to this commonwealth in the full and absolute dominion, any want of consent or disability to consent in the said owners and tenants notwithstanding. The cost of the said inquest and the several sums at which the rights of the owners and tenants are valued, shall be paid by the treasurer to the said owners, tenants, and others entitled respectively, on warrant from the auditors.

II. And whereas it may be expedient to enlarge the said town of Richmond, by laying off a number of lots to be added thereto, and it may also happen that some of the lands adjacent to the said town may be more convenient for the publick uses: Be it therefore enacted, That the said directors cause two hundred additional lots or half acres, with necessary streets to be

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laid off adjacent to such parts of the said town as to them shall seem most convenient, and they shall also be at liberty to appropriate the six squares aforesaid, or any part of them, either from among the lots now in the said town, or those to be laid off as before directed, or of the lands adjacent to the said former or latter lots, and the said six squares and two hundred lots shall thenceforth be a part of the said town. And the said directors shall return into the clerk's office of the said county of Henrico, there to be recorded a full and distinct report under their hands and seals of the lots and squares of land added by them to the said town, or appropriated to the publick uses, together with the plan thereof. The rights of the several owners and tenants of the lots of land so to be added to the town and not appropriated to the publick uses, are nevertheless saved to them.

III. But whereas from the great expence attending the just and necessary war this commonwealth is at present engaged in, the difficulties of procuring the materials for building, and the high price for labour, it will be burthensome to the inhabitants if the said publick buildings be immediately erected: Be it therefore enacted, That the directors aforesaid shall, with all convenient speed, cause to be erected or otherwise provide some proper and temporary buildings for the sitting of the general assembly, the courts of justice, and the several boards before described.

IV. And whereas the present jail of the county of Henrico, now within the said town of Richmond, if enlarged may be made sufficient for a publick jail until a more commodious one can be built; the said directors are hereby empowered to enlarge the same. Provided nevertheless, there shall not be drawn out of the publick treasury for any or all the said purposes a sum exceeding twenty thousand pounds; and the directors aforesaid are hereby prohibited from making any contracts for erecting any of the publick buildings described by this act to be built on any of the squares appropriated for publick use, fixing on the squares or laying off the additional lots until further provision shall be made for the same by the general assembly. And be it farther enacted, That from and after the last day of April which shall be in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty, the said court of appeals, high court of chancery, general court, and court of admiralty shall hold their sessions in the apartments prepared for them by the said directors; that the first meeting of the general assembly after the same day shall be in such house or houses as shall be provided by the said directors; that the clerks of the two houses of assembly and of the several courts before mentioned, shall previously cause to be removed thither at the publick expence, the records, papers, and other things belonging to their respective offices; and that the keeper of the publick jail shall in like manner cause all prisoners in his custody to be removed to the publick jail so to be built as before directed, which shall thenceforward be deemed and used as the publick jail spoken of by the laws whether heretofore or hereafter passed.

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