

## Leonard Harbaugh (1749 – 12 Sep 1822)

---

**Harbaugh.** Yesterday at his residence on the Capitol Hill, Mr. Leonard Harbaugh, an old and respectable inhabitant of this city.

*The Evening Star, September 22, 1855*

### The District in the Olden Time



The following letter, exhumed from the musty records, will be interesting to our readers. While perusing it, we would suggest that they institute a comparison with what was then predicted and what has since been accomplished. As for the elegance and strength of the Federal bridge, however, they will readily form their own conclusions.

"Georgetown, (Md.) August 8, 1792

On Saturday, the 4th instant, the corner stone of the western abutment of the Federal bridge (being the second corner-stone of the same) was laid in due form by Uriah Forrest, Mayor of this town, in presence of the Aldermen, the Recorder, and Common Council, attended by a numerous concourse of respectable citizens of the place, who assembled on the occasion. After the ceremony was over the company returned to Mr. Suter's Fountain Inn, where a handsome entertainment was given by the Mayor

to the workmen and others concerned in erecting the bridge.

A correspondent observes that it must afford general satisfaction to every well-wisher of the prosperity of Washington to be assured that the public works now being carried on in this place are conducted with spirit and enterprise, and at the same time with that due regard to economy which is so absolutely necessary in all extensive public undertakings when a country is but in its infancy. The Federal bridge, which will exceed, when finished, for elegance and strength, anything of the kind heretofore attempted in this country, will be completed in a few weeks, and it is confidently expected that, against the day in October next which is advertised for the sale of lots in the city, the Superintendent of the President's house will have all matters in readiness for the laying of the corner-stone of the same, (the third in the Federal city,) which will afford the gentlemen concerned in the superintendence of the Federal buildings and those who are proprietors of land in the city an opportunity of displaying their taste in the brilliancy of a third procession, and of exhibiting their liberality in an entertainment suitable to the occasion, which may be a further inducement to purchasers, and thereby benefit themselves as well as contribute to the honor and future prosperity of the city of Washington."

*Bryan, Wilhelmus Bogart, A History of the National Capital, Vol I, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1914,*

*p.189-190:* In the spring of 1792 the commissioners made a contract with Leonard Harbaugh of Baltimore for the erection of a stone bridge across Rock Creek on a line with K Street. This was in furtherance of L'Enfant's scheme of providing an outlet for the post road through the city. ... Harbaugh's plan of building arches was defective and the bridge fell down. [Footnote: The bridge consisted of three arches of stone, and before the evil days came upon it was regarded as an important public enterprise. The corner-stone of the eastern abutment was laid on the national anniversary in the presence of the commissioners and citizens. There was a procession and "a discourse suitable to the occasion," and toasts were drunk (Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser, July 10, 1792). A month later the corner-stone of the western abutment was laid with similar formality.]

*p. 243:* The loss to the city by the failure of the Harbaugh bridge was secured as far as was possible by getting from the luckless experimenter, for it appears the bridge was after a plan of his own invention, a mortgage on his property in this city.

*P. 314:* The commissioners felt justified in beginning the erection of one of the proposed executive buildings. The treasury was the one selected, and by the middle of November 1798, "the foundation of that building, which was one hundred and forty-seven feet long and fifty-seven feet six inches wide is dug out." ... A contract was made with Leonard Harbaugh to erect the building for the sum of \$39,511, and to have it completed by the first of July, 1800.

At the time, Mr. Hadfield finished the plans for the treasury office, it was intended to erect a similar structure for the use of the other executive departments west of the president's house. However, that part of the plan was not carried out, until the following year, the contract being awarded, July 29, 1799, to Leonard Harbaugh.

*P. 360 -- (1800)* The contract for building the bridge was awarded to Leonard Harbaugh, whose device for arches brought the first bridge on the line of K Street down in ruins a few years earlier, but in this instance the recognized rules for bridge building were evidently observed, as the structure stood.

### **??? Capital Studies, Competition 1792**

*p. 79:* Leonard Harbaugh. Much is known of the life of Leonard Harbaugh (Plate 66), but little about his design for the Capitol. The fact that Harbaugh entered the competition is borne out by the Commissioners' correspondence of August 29, 1792. They were considering a revised design by Hallet, perhaps combined with the best elements from the designs of Blodget, Turner, as well as Harbaugh-- whose design had "claimed approving notice." From a Jacob Small letter of March 9, 1793, one learns of the rumor that Harbaugh's design for the "federal hall" had been chosen. As a result, Small requested the return of his rejected drawings.

Harbaugh was born in 1749 of German parents at Kreuz Creek, York County, Pennsylvania. This Moravian settlement is now a part of Frederick County, Maryland. Harbaugh married in 1754 and fathered fourteen children. Many of his descendants still live in Pennsylvania and Maryland.

Nothing is known of Harbaugh's education or career until he moved to Baltimore in 1775. The Baltimore newspapers of the period often refer to Leonard Harbaugh as a master builder and inventory of machines for cutting and threshing grain and for clearing docks. Harbaugh is credited with the building of Baltimore's first apartment house, as well as a number of individual houses. Perhaps the most significant and best documented structure of Harbaugh's Baltimore career is the stone arch designed and engineered to be placed under the existing two-story brick Court House to make way for Calvert Street (Plate 67).

Harbaugh's design for a bridge to span Rock Creek in the Federal City was accepted by the Commissioners prior to the Capitol competition. He moved to Washington in 1792 to fulfill his obligations as contractor for the bridge. Harbaugh's plan (Plate 68) called for a single forty-two foot wide arch of masonry with a sixty foot span. Designed to be the first permanent bridge over Rock Creek,

it was scheduled for completion by August 1792, but the cornerstone was not laid until July 4. A revised design had to be made, as the single arch was considered unfeasible. Harbaugh made a revision but, apparently, the ultimate cost far exceeded his original estimates. According to the 1795 records of the Commissioners, the main arch had to be removed and replaced by a drawbridge. Harbaugh refunded a portion of the expended funds for the unsuccessful project.

His failure with the bridge did not destroy his reputation as a builder. In 1798, he was appointed by the Commissioners to construct the Treasury Building. His success in this endeavor won him the construction contract for the War Office in 1799. In 1800, Harbaugh's design for a wooden bridge to span Rock Creek at M Street was also accepted.

Other projects in which Harbaugh was involved include construction of the three locks at Great Falls on the Potomac, in order to make the river navigable for long boats, and oversight of the building of the "Jug Bridge" in Frederick, Maryland in 1808-09. The "Jug Bridge," so named because of the ten ton ornamental "demijohn" at one end, in which Harbaugh sealed a bottle of whiskey, was not one of his major successes. "Harbaugh stayed around Frederick for exactly three days after the job was done. Then one of the arches began to sag a bit, and Harbaugh--as legend goes--left town quietly and in a considerable hurry." Documentation of Leonard Harbaugh's building career ends here. He died in 1822 and is buried in Washington's Congressional Cemetery.

*Coopridge, Cora Bell Harbaugh, Harbaugh History Book, 1940. pp. 259-260*

**1394. Leonard Harbaugh**, 2315, Washington D.C.

B-May 10, 1749. D-Sept. 11, 1822: Leonard Harbaugh moved from York, Pa., sometime between 1775 and 1780, and resided in Baltimore, Md., up to 1781, when he moved to Washington, D.C. During the time he was in Baltimore, he constantly engaged in building of every kind--churches, taverns, dwellings, warehouses, and bridges. He is credited by descendants with the building of the first apartment house in Baltimore.

In the spring of 1782, the Commissioners of the City of Washington gave a contract to Leonard Harbaugh for the erection of a stone bridge over Rock Creek on a line with K Street. The bridge was a three-arched structure, and was defective, so fell down, hence a public loss. Another structure was built over Rock Creek about 1800 of wood, which was only temporary. The Commissioners of Washington and the Corporation of Georgetown cooperated in the construction of another stone structure at K Street according to the rules. This structure stood and Leonard was the builder of the first arched bridge in America to stand.

The contract for the building of the Treasury Building was let to Leonard Harbaugh in Nov. 1798 for the sum of \$39,511 to have it completed by the first of July, 1800. For a more detailed account of his work in Washington, see *The History of the National Capital*, by W.B. Bryan, p. 189 ff.

He owned a hundred lots in Washington ranging in price from \$300 to \$800. This was a large accumulation of property, since wages were around \$2.50 per day at that time. He had lost most of this property by 1802, probably in his efforts to make good the loss to the government of some of the bridges. It seems from many records, that he was the business partner of George Washington, at least their names appear on several papers, as reported by Mrs. Marion Dwight Harbaugh, who has done considerable research upon this.

In a letter written by his son, Benjamin, Feb. 4, 1853, we find that Leonard occasionally preached and exhorted in religious assemblies in the church under the charge of Rev. Otterbein. In consequence of some misunderstandings, occasioned by a heavy draft on his time and means, he withdrew himself from the church and congregation.

M-Rebecca Rineback, B-Aug. 31, 1754. D-Feb. 13, 1801 (According to a letter written by one of her sons, she was buried in Baltimore. However, in Congressional Cemetery, Washington there is a marker showing Leonard and his wife in the same grave and Rebecca and David in another grave.

He was born in Hellam Twpt., County, Pa. The first two children were born in York County, the 3rd to 10th in Baltimore, and the others in Washington. This fairly well fixes the time they lived in those places. His bible is in possession of James Edward Harbaugh, and in this we find the statement-- (Thirteen boys and each one had a sister.)

William	Apr. 12, 1773-	Never married
Leonard	Feb. 6, 1775-May 13, 1812	See 1395
Thomas	Mar. 5, 1777-Jan. 10, 1857	See 2127
Joseph	Feb. 8, 1779-Aug. 12, 1864	See 1279
Samuel	Mar. 3, 1781-	See 2008
George	Mar. 25, 1783-died as infant	
Jessie	Feb. 5, 1785-Sep. 17, 1810	
David	May 2, 1787-Jan. 24, 1844	Never Married
Charles	Aug. 31, 1789-July 2, 1813	Died single in Army
Daniel	Feb. 20, 1791-Sept. 1791	
Benjamin	Apr. 10, 1794-	See 162
Frederick	Apr. 1, 1796-Apr. 18, 1796	
John	Jul. 20, 1797-July 20, 1797	
Rebecca	Sep. 15, 1798-Dec. 14, 1818	Never married.