

The U.S. Capitol in the 1850s. Pennsylvania Avenue (rear) had been dirt, macadam, or stone at various times by then.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# Asphalting the Avenues

*I stop the noise from the street, so appalling;  
Increase the real value on roads,  
Prevent dumb brutes from slipping and falling;  
While they draw much heavier loads.*

38 **ON MARCH 4, 1829**, the newly sworn-in seventh President of the United States, having refused an inaugural parade extravaganza, rode alone on his horse down Capitol Hill. Old Hickory, nicknamed for having the toughness of the hardwood tree, moved slowly along Pennsylvania Avenue and through 16 blocks of cheering women waving symbolic hickory brooms and wearing hickory nut necklaces and men riding horses clad in hickory bark, until he arrived at his new home, the White House. It was a short but messy jaunt.

At the time of President Andrew Jackson's inauguration, America's premier boulevard was neither stately nor grand. It was as full of pigs, chickens, and grazing cows as it was of potential. Constructed in a swampy area, the "soon to be beautiful" avenue sometimes lay under several feet of water. Residents of the time said that "in rainy weather the mules and horses passing up Pennsylvania Avenue would often sink to their backs in the mud."

"I have never seen such a crowd here before. People have come five hundred miles to see General Jackson," wrote Daniel Webster of the

