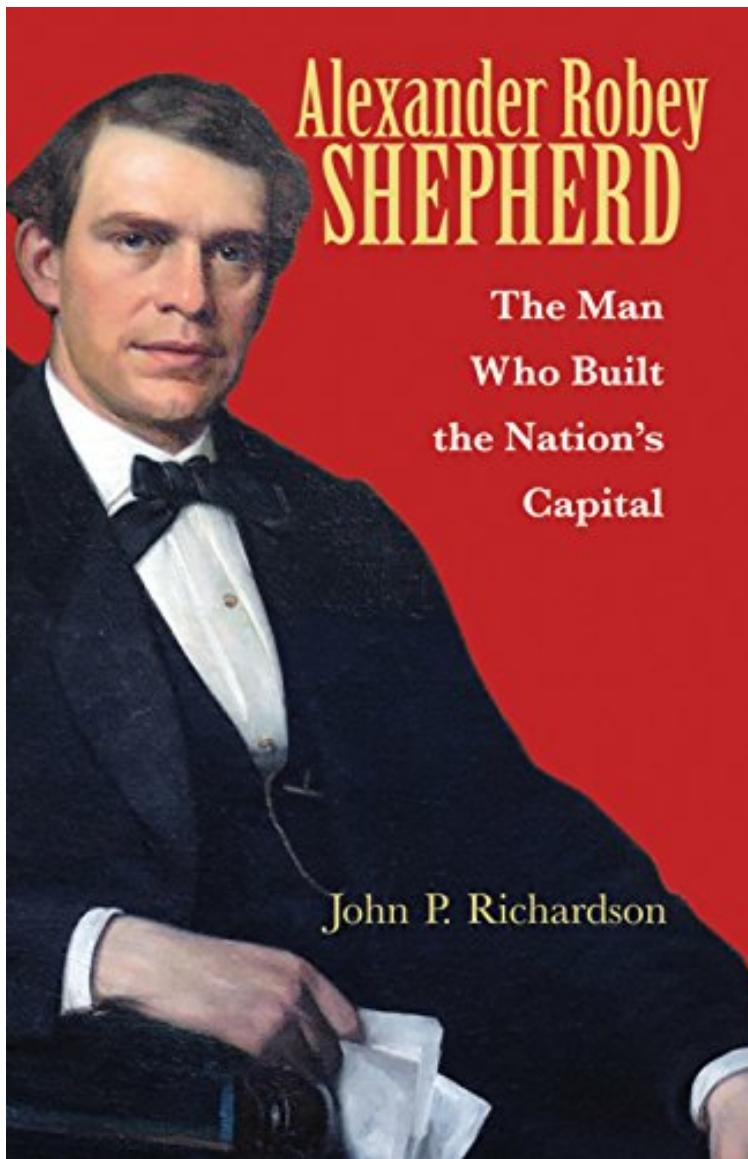


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Alexander Robey Shepherd: The Man Who Built the Nation's Capital

John P. Richardson

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John P. Richardson : Alexander Robey Shepherd: The Man Who Built the Nation's Capital before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Alexander Robey Shepherd: The Man Who Built the Nation's Capital:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Definitive Biography of the Man Responsible for the Building D.C.'s Post-Civil War InfrastructureBy JDMOne might expect this impeccably researched and elegantly written

biography of Alexander Robey Shepherd to have been perhaps the work of a scholar holding an endowed chair at an Ivy League university. Wrong. This book is the culmination of a decades-long endeavor by a retired intelligence officer with the U.S. government who is also an exceptional historian. John Richardson mined numerous archives, libraries, and conducted interviews with surviving distant relatives of "Boss Shepherd." Richardson even traveled to a remote and potentially dangerous part of rural Mexico to see first hand the remote mining town where Shepherd spent the last years of his life trying to rehabilitate his reputation. The intriguing Shepherd was a difficult target - his deeds on one hand were a matter of public record as an official in Washington responsible for "modernizing" the capital, but his motivations and intent were not always clear in the dawning era of the Gilded Age. Richardson carefully examines Shepherd's life, accomplishments, and the whiff of corruption and scandal that surrounded him in Washington. The fascinating account of Shepherd and his family's years in exile in Mexico is illuminating and suggests that perhaps Shepherd has been judged too harshly in the past. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Teddy Roosevelt like character. By Steve Learned. Anyone who is interested in Washington, D.C., history will enjoy this book, a scholarly yet thoroughly readable biography of Alexander Shepherd. Shepherd typifies the can-do attitude of Nineteenth Century public-spirited men, who were often devoted family men as well. Reading this book made me think of Teddy Roosevelt. Roosevelt would have admired Shepherd's tenacity and vision of Washington, and he would have surely understood Shepherd's silver mining venture in Mexico and the work and dedication he applied to it. As Richardson points out, in Washington it was man against man. In Mexico, it was man against nature. A great story, wonderfully researched and written by first time author John Richardson. Steve Learned. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars. By Jonathan L. Sperling. Fantastic piece of history reflecting extensive research. Must reading for anyone interested in the history of the nation's capital.

With Alexander Robey Shepherd, John P. Richardson gives us the first full-length biography of his subject, who as Washington, D.C.'s, public works czar (1871–1874) built the infrastructure of the nation's capital in a few frenetic years after the Civil War. The story of Shepherd is also the story of his hometown after that cataclysm, which left the city with churned-up streets, stripped of its trees, and exhausted. An intrepid businessman, Shepherd became president of Washington's lower house of delegates at twenty-seven. Garrulous and politically astute, he used every lever to persuade Congress to realize Peter L'Enfant's vision for the capital. His tenure produced paved and graded streets, sewer systems, trees, and gaslights, and transformed the fetid Washington Canal into one of the city's most stately avenues. After bankrupting the city, a chastened Shepherd left in 1880 to develop silver mines in western Mexico, where he lived out his remaining twenty-two years. In Washington, Shepherd worked at the confluence of race, party, region, and urban development, in a microcosm of the United States. Determined to succeed at all costs, he helped force Congress to accept its responsibility for maintenance of its stepchild, the nation's capital city.

"Shepherd's story, told [here] with skill and confidence, is at once the story of a great American character, with all his great achievements—bold, visionary, pragmatic, entrepreneurial; and notable flaws.... It's also the story of a great and complex American city's recovery from the Civil War, growth in the industrial age, and implementation of one of the world's greatest urban plans. In short, it's how Washington became a city." —From the foreword by Tony Williams, mayor of Washington, D.C., 1999–2007