

CHAPTER FIVE

The Asphalt Tycoon

"Having given thirty years to the paving of city streets—during which time the Author has been identified with the laying of more pavements, or the furnishing of material therefor, than any other person in the history of the world, he ventures to submit his views on the building of country roads for the considerate judgment of all who are now trying to solve this important problem in engineering."

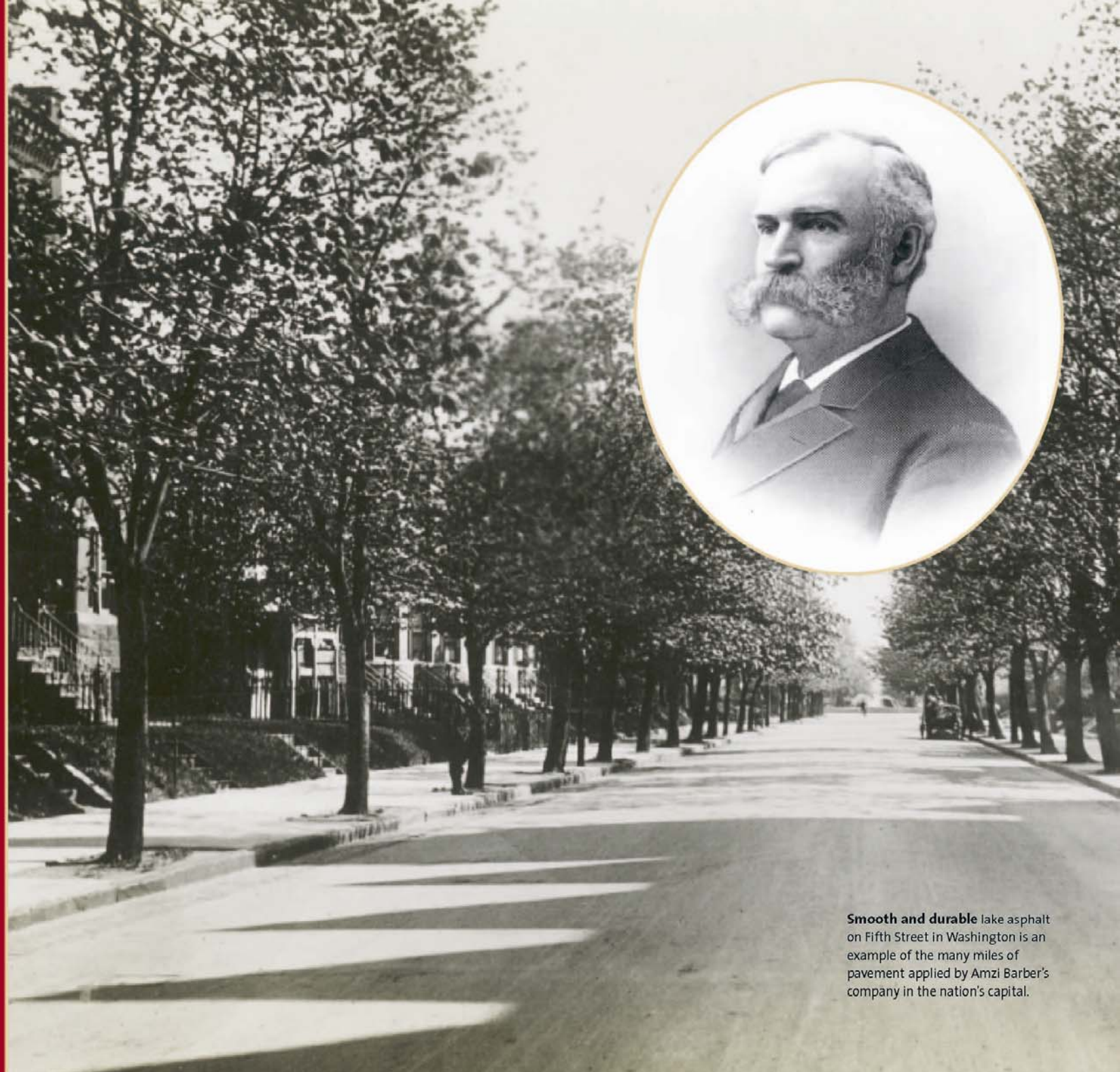
—Amzi Lorenzo Barber

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WHEN AMZI LORENZO BARBER graduated from Ohio's Oberlin College in 1867, he contemplated following his father into the ministry. Instead, he took a professorship of philosophy and a seat on the board of trustees at the newly formed Howard University in Washington, D.C. Founded for newly freed slaves and blacks who had been born free, Howard was one of the first true opportunities for African Americans to get a college education.

In 1873, after leaving Howard University, Barber purchased 40 acres of the university's grounds and, along with his brother-in-law, created a subdivision of 41 homes. The land was later turned over to the city of Washington and became a center of African American intellectual and cultural life.

Barber's foray into real estate and his experience as an entrepreneur led to his visionary insight into the potential of asphalt and the improvements it could generate in American cities. At the turn of the 20th century, *The New York Times* reported, "It was the inquiry conducted by the United



Smooth and durable lake asphalt on Fifth Street in Washington is an example of the many miles of pavement applied by Amzi Barber's company in the nation's capital.