



In 1807, President Thomas Jefferson adopted Ferdinand Hassler's strategy to organize a Survey of the Coast of the young Nation. The Survey started as an exercise but soon became an institution, the oldest scientific agency in the government. Two hundred years later, this organization is still vibrant and serving our Nation as the Office of Coast Survey of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Coast Survey pioneered the geodetic and physical sciences applied to government service, and its methods for precise instrumental observation coupled with rigorous mathematical analysis became the standard against which all other scientific agencies measured themselves.

The primary objective of the Coast Survey was, and remains, to create the finest nautical charts and other navigational aids to guide people and vessels through the Nation's waterways. Nautical charts of the Potomac River have been continuously in print for the last 145 years. At the time of the 1884 edition (image on left) Coast Survey mapping was based on precise visual observation and lead-line soundings to measure the river's depths. In 2007, NOAA charts the river and its environment with ships positioned by satellites, using underwater sonar systems and powerful computers. Much has changed, but not the commitment to engage the best science in service and stewardship to the Nation. 200 years later, Jefferson's vision still steers NOAA's course.