

BOUNDARY MILE STONES

by

Mr. Fred E. Woodward

BOUNDARY MILESTONE

An address delivered by Mr. Fred E. Woodward, October 14, 1916 at an assemblage gathered at Milestone No. 8, South-east.

The American Indians wrote no books and left no monuments. Following them came our fore-fathers, who were both writers and builders, and the land is deluged by books and marked by monuments.

Massachusetts points with pride to Plymouth Rock, Virginia to Jamestown, Maryland to St. Mary's, each with feelings of reverence for these venerable marks of an earlier civilization. The District of Columbia, approximately ten miles square, was donated by the Virginia and Maryland, and has only a brief century and a quarter to tell; yet in all the world not one person is now alive who was living when this stone was placed, 125 years ago. George Washington who of all his contemporaries realized the greatness of the nation they were founding, had just been elected its first President. Benjamin Franklin died but one year before. Lord Byron and Napoleon were alive, with Waterloo 25 years in the unknown future.

Stage-coaches were the ordinary means of communication, through almost primeval forests. Gas was unheard of, one had yet to see a railroad train or a steam engine. Photography was in the very dim future and 54 years were to pass before the first telegraphic message was to be sent over a wire.

The area of the United States was 900,000 square miles - about one-fourth its present size and the population was 5,000,000 or one-twentieth its present number. There are more people in the State of Illinois and more in the great city of New York today, than in the whole United States of that day.

In this twentieth century we find life very strenuous, with telephones in every house; with our movies, aeroplanes, submarines, electric appliances, wonderful newspapers, public schools and sky scrapers. Corn fields have given way to beautifully paved streets, automobile horns have supplanted cow-bells and the name and face of Edison and Ford, like the face of Lydia Pinkham, are known in the islands of the sea and to the ends of the earth.

THE DISTRICT LINE

Briefly described, the line of the original District of Columbia is as follows; beneath the southern sea-wall of the miniature Light-House on Jones Point, below Alexandria, Virginia, encased in a concrete cage, which was constructed in 1913 by Col. W. C. Langfitt of the United States Engineers, may be seen the initial or southern corner stone of this District. On April 15, 1791, just 125 years ago, the Master of Alexandria Lodge No. 22 of Masons, poured corn, wine and oil upon this carefully-oriented stone and pronounced it good.

Standing at this stone, facing North-West as nearly as their instruments of survey allowed, the lines of the District were extended up the long ascent of Shutters Hill, following closely the Leesburg Turnpike, through Glen Carlyn and over Upton Hill to West Falls Church, a distance of ten miles to the West corner.

Turning now at a right angle, the line extends North-East through woods and fields, across the Old Dominion Railroad, across the Potomac River above Chain Bridge, through Tenallytown, Chevy Chase Circle, Pinehurst, Rock Creek Park, to the North Corner at Woodside, Maryland, another 10 miles.

Turning at a right angle again to the right, the line passes through the grounds of Hon. Blair Lee, through Takoma Park, the Reform School, Kenilworth and Burrville, to the low ground near the Station of the Chesapeake Beach Railroad, to the East Corner, another ten miles.

Again turning at right angles, the line extends along the high ground of the Bowen road, down the valley of the Oxon Run, the high plateau of the Wheeler road, to Blue Plains and finally on across the Potomac River to the point of beginning, Jones Point Light House.

At the end of every mile there was erected a stone 12 inches square and about two feet above ground; and a broad path, 40 feet wide or 20 feet on each side, was cut through the woods largely along the entire line. Our brief time does not permit me to describe the condition of these stones, but generally speaking they are not well preserved, suffering not only from the hands of Time, but also from careless marauders and vandals. Time, with an artist's pencil, paints the beautiful color of antiquity on these stones.

HISTORIC NOTES

In 1846, during the administration of President Polk, the 36 square miles in Virginia were retroceded to the State of Virginia, with scarcely a dissenting vote. The 14 stones on the Virginia side of the Potomac are no longer boundary marks of the District of Columbia, but now define only the division line between Alexandria and Fairfax Counties.

If I were to call this a sermon, I would take my text from the Book of Joshua, Chapter 4, verses 6 and 7:

"When your children ask their Fathers in time to come, 'What mean ye by these stones?' Ye shall say,

"These stones shall be a memorial unto the children of Israel forever!"
That's a good text!

Memorial stones are as old as the human race. They served various purposes, recording facts and dates and marking boundaries. All peoples in all lands have made use of them and will continue to do so. In ancient Babylonia, tablets or stones of burnt clay are being unearthed, containing records of 4000 and 5000 years ago and they are being deciphered. These milestones are 125 years old only; yet how eloquently they speak of the days gone by. I once stood upon Plymouth Rock, where the Pilgrim Fathers landed; that was 296 years ago; and two years ago I saw in Westminster Abbey the famous Coronation Stone upon which all English Kings have been crowned, said to date back to the fifth century before Christ. But here is one of the Babylonian tablets of stone that can still be read, a record in memory of a king called Singashied, who lived 22000 years before Christ, or about 4116 years ago. Now we can begin to understand what it means, to become a memorial forever.

Where are the hands that wielded the chisel and cut into this stone the words, "Jurisdiction of the United States?" Gone and forgotten, unwept, un-honored and unsung. Not so, however, the memory, precious and fragrant, of the names of Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison. Not so, the minds of those great men who fashioned in thought this greatest of nations, long before it had being.

COME AND VIEW WHAT THESE MEN SAW

These milestones all came from a quarry near Acquia Creek, Virginia and were set in place in 1791 and 1792. The work was officially completed January 1, 1793.

It might be interesting to know who were the men actually engaged in the survey. They were Major L'Enfant, Andrew Ellicott, Count de Graff, Isaac Roberdeau, William King, Nicholas King and Benjamin Bannerker, a free negro distinguished as a mathematician, assistant to Ellicott.

What did they see as this path 40 feet wide was carved out of the land? Almost a wilderness, in which primitive forests and purling brooks were interspersed with waving fields of corn, purple tasseled tobacco, apple orchards and red clay banks. Houses were few and far between; slaves toiled in the fields; vessels from every port in the world brought their wares to Alexandria and Georgetown, both of which were cities of importance even then.

Although an impression prevails that General Washington was present at the laying of the first stone, such is not the case; as it is certain that he was in Petersburg, Virginia on the 15th of April, 1791. His agreement with the land owners was signed in Georgetown on March 30th, 1791; and he says that he "was vexed by importunities of anxious residents or grasping speculators."

Ten years ago I visited each stone and secured photographs of them as they then appeared. A history of this pilgrimage was embodied in three separate reports, read before the Columbia Historical Society 1906, 1907 and 1913. In each of which an urgent appeal was made for some action to be taken, to preserve and protect these our earliest land marks.

The first response to these appeals came from a Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, before whom I had the pleasure of speaking, in one of the halls of the Public Library a few years ago, when a suggestion was made by some of the Daughters present, that the preservation and protection of the boundary mile-stone was a legitimate work and might well be undertaken by the D.A.R. of the District of Columbia.

Some months later, one of the State Committees of the Daughters took the matter seriously in hand and entered fully into the task of protecting these monuments by inclosing them in an iron fence. The fruits of that labor are before you today in this somewhat ornamental inclosure, which it is hoped will prove a perfect protection for all time for these sentinels of our District.

THE PERSEVERING WORKERS

I trust that no words of apology are needed, if I digress long enough to refer to the wonderfully successful labors of this State Committee on the "Preservation of Historic Spots and Records," whose perseverance and wisely directed efforts have brought this work of preserving and protecting the milestones to such a successful issue. I know for a fact, that many of these enthusiastic women have worked early and late, in season and out of season, in behalf of this large project; have traveled hundreds of miles, made speeches, talked, lectured and explained the plan to others; have held numberless committee meetings, discovered stones in their wildest hiding places, inspected and accepted iron-work; invaded offices of all sorts of Government officials, searched records and collected money. All honor to the patriotic "Daughters" of the District of Columbia!

HOW IT WAS DONE

Arrangements were made with a responsible iron-worker for a suitable iron fence about 3 feet by 3 feet in size and 5 feet high, with the corner posts set in cement stone, at a price of 18 dollars each; and as soon as the civic authorities had given a tacit consent and the committee on Beautiful Washington interposing no objection, the various chapters of the D. A. R. were asked to become responsible for payment for one \$18.00 fence each, with the expectation that this particular chapter should in a sense adopt this particular stone and in future care for the same.

This met with an immediate response and today the eye rests upon a substantial iron fence around each and every one, save one, of the 26 Maryland stones, a record of which they may well be proud. In the State of Virginia, similar action has been taken and several fences have already been put in place about the stone.

Assuming that the D. A. R. stands for loyalty, Patriotism and service, who can say, in these perilous times when nearly all the civilized nations of the world are at war, who can say when and where, there may not be a call for display of heroism and sacrifice on the part of American women as well as men, in defense of those great principles of human freedom, equality and progress, to which this great nation, with its varied interests but united people, is dedicated?

So today may the united bands of the D. A. R. plighting fealty about this stone, move grandly forward to renewed activity of patriotic endeavor, in virtuous and constant labor, being assured that a large measure of success will ultimately crown their efforts. These stones may be said to voice the appeal of humanity, from the rule of kings to the rule of the people.

If this be our motto "In God is our trust," so shall these mile-stones become "memorials unto the inhabitants of the land," in the name and for the sake of themselves, their homes and their country, forever.