

Our Town:

D. C. Boundary Stones Historian's Nightmare

By Christine Sadler

Another of those things that surprise the newcomer to the District of Columbia is that the District has more trouble keeping its boundary line straightened out than any lady ever had trying to keep her waistline whittled down.

Congress made the District 10 miles square and ordered 40 sandstone markers placed around the boundary to prove it. But keeping the markers in their places and commanding the proper respect for them—that has been the problem.

Just now word is getting around that one of them is for sale at a second-hand store in Fourteenth street. Whether this is true or not, the Na-

tional Capitol Parks office this week is starting Ronald Lee, its historian, around the District to take a "look-see."

It's a 100-Mile Trip

Lee will be gone for a week and will have to travel 100 miles to make the 40-mile trip. Although he will start out by auto, he will do much walking and will take to a boat two or three times in the investigation. In his notebook he will jot down information on the weed cutting and fence mending that need to be done, and list the stones that may have been moved.

No one will await his return more eagerly than local chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Beginning in 1915, the D. A. R.'s worked to preserve the markers and to see that fences were erected around them.

Since that date, all 40 of the stones have been located and fences put around all except three. Those three are in the part of Virginia that used to be the District and include the west cornerstone just beyond West Falls Church.

"We have been hoping the Virginia chapters would see that these fences were placed," Mrs. T. J. Holzbert, State historian for the D. A. R. in the District, said yesterday. "There are District chapters who would have liked to do the work, but we have run into difficulty. Two of the stones are on farms and at one place we have been refused entry. We also have the feeling that stone has been moved from its first position into its present barn-yard site."

Boys Know Them Well

Mrs. Grant Chase, who has written the history of the boundary stones for the D. A. R., yesterday said the chapters had exciting days when they were out looking for the markers.

"We found that young boys in the neighborhood could take us to the old stones more often than anyone else. The east cornerstone at Chesapeake Junction was the most difficult to find. One woman said if it were in her neighborhood she would know about it, but we uncovered it about 100 feet from her home," Mrs. Chase said.

Stone number one was placed at Jones Point, below Alexandria. It is still there, back of the old lighthouse, but rarely visited. The fence around it also incloses a Government signal corps reservation, and vines growing over it have made the task of finding it a needle-and-haystack problem.

The west corner stone is near West Falls Church and is unprotected by a fence. This worries Mrs. Holzbert considerably, and her worry is intensified by the fact that a large tree keeps growing around it. Since all the Virginia markers were placed in 1791, the tree has had a chance to become rather larger.

Best preserved of the markers, as far as the lettering on them is concerned, is the one near the Delacarla Reservoir on this side of the Potomac, Mrs. Chase declared.

Markers Mistreated

"But the one on Western avenue at Forty-first street is enough to hurt you," she said. "It is down in a hole due to street changes. You'd think the real estate men would be proud of the markers and want to keep them exactly as they were, but that had not always been true. We have had to look out for them almost every time a border subdivision was cut out."

Of the 100 square miles embraced in the original District of Columbia, the 36 acres that had been given by Virginia were ceded back to that State in 1846—leaving 14 of the markers on "foreign soil," which is sometimes confusing to persons who take the wording literally and think they're in the District although they really are in Falls Church.

The Virginia stones were worn

and broken considerably in the Civil War and the one in Alexandria, below the George Washington Masonic Memorial, is a substitute, Mrs. Chase said. "It's the only one," she said, "that does not date to 1791 or 1792. The original disappeared. We don't know where."

Marking of the original Federal District was carried out by Andrew Ellicott, who received his commission from George Washington. Stone number one was placed at Jones Point on April 15, 1791—and hence April 15 is our birthday.

Wine and Sentiment

According to old newspaper clippings, from which Mrs. Chase gathered some of her material, placing of the first stone was quite an event. Alexandria and District officials gathered for a glass of wine to the sentiment: "May the stone which we are about to place in the ground remain an immovable monument of the wisdom and unanimity of North America." They planted the marker in accordance with the impressive rites of Masonry, "after which a deposit of corn, wine, and oil was made upon it."

"May jealousy, that green-eyed monster," Dr. E. C. Dick proclaimed, "be buried deep under the work we have this day completed, never to rise again within the Federal District."

On January 1, 1793, Maj. Ellicott reported completion of his task, declaring, "It is with great pleasure that I report that the lines are now opened and cleared 40 feet wide, 20 feet on each side of the line." What Maj. Ellicott must be thinking about the way trees and bushes and streets are crowding on his stones today!



While this may not be a familiar scene to most Washingtonians, it is right down where the District of Columbia started—and where it still would start if Virginia had not taken back the land she ceded for the Capital City

Behind this old deserted lighthouse on Jones Point—where historic Hunting Creek meets the Potomac and the wind blows a continual gale—is District boundary stone No. 1. It was placed there on April 15, 1791, and marked the south corner of the 10-mile square set aside for Federal area. A close-up of the corner stone is shown in the circle.