

# SURVEYS OF DISTRICT

## Mr. Marcus Baker Talks of the Old Landmarks.

### TRACT NOT ON EXACT SQUARE

Measuring on First Survey Not Accurately Done—Some of the Old Boundary Stones—No Map of the Ground Before Seat of Government Was Established—The Work of Maj. L'Enfant.

Mr. Marcus Baker, of the Geological Survey, enjoys the distinction of being the best posted man on the old landmarks, corner-stones, and surveys of Washington in the District. For some years past he has been giving this matter special attention, and to a Post reporter, who called on him recently, he gave much of genuine interest concerning the laying out of the Capital.

"The choice of a site for the National Capital," he said, "was made in 1790. Congress, in session July 16, 1790, in Philadelphia, passed an act authorizing the selection, and under this authority President Washington directed a survey to be made of the District. Being himself a surveyor, President Washington was well qualified to draw up instructions to the surveyors. It is interesting to quote his language:

"Now, therefore, for the purpose of amending and completing the location of the whole of said territory of ten miles square, in conformity with the said amendatory act of Congress, I do hereby declare and make known that the whole of said territory shall be located and included within the four lines following—that is to say:

"Beginning at Jones Point, being the upper cape of Hunting Creek, in Virginia, and at an angle in the outset of 45 degrees west of the north and running in a direct line ten miles for the first line; then beginning again at the same Jones Point and running another direct line at a right angle with the first, across the Potomac ten miles, for a second line; thence from the termination of said first and second lines, running two other lines of ten miles each, the one crossing the Eastern Branch aforesaid and the other the Potomac and meeting each other in a point."

"About ten years ago the Coast Survey executed a triangulation to determine the correctness of this original survey, and discovered that the District is not an exact square. In fact, its distortion is quite pronounced, its northern point being something over 5 minutes west of a line running due north from its southern point. In all probability the measuring of the first survey was done with chains in the somewhat loose and inaccurate manner practiced by our forefathers, who had more land than they knew what to do with. In those days a few hundred acres, more or less, made very little difference.

#### The Second Survey.

"A second, or locating, survey was made of the District, beginning April 15, 1791, at which time there was laid, with solemn and elaborate Masonic ceremonial the corner-stone of the District of Columbia at Jones Point, near Alexandria, Va., in the presence of a large gathering of citizens from Philadelphia, Georgetown, and Alexandria. President Washington and the Commissioners—Thomas Johnson, Daniel Carroll, and Dr. David Stuart—officiated. The surveyors were Andrew Ellicott and Maj. Peter Charles L'Enfant. This stone, still standing, though hidden from view, forms a part of the foundation wall of the lighthouse at Jones Point. It is under the gateway in front of the south door of the lighthouse.

"In 1792 the line was cleared of timber to the width of twenty feet on each side, and in this forty-foot lane through the woods stone mileposts were erected. These posts are two feet high and one foot square. They are marked on the District side, 'Jurisdiction of the United States,' followed by an inscription showing the distances from that corner of the District from which they are numbered, such as 'Miles 3,' 'Miles 5,' &c.; on the opposite side, 'Maryland' (or 'Virginia'); on the third side, the year '1791' or '1792,' and on the fourth side, the variation of the compass. The stones are numbered from one to nine on each line, from south to west, west to north, &c.

"These monuments are of Aquia Creek sandstone and were sawed out. Through abuse and exposure to the weather the inscriptions are becoming obscured, a few being already totally lost. I personally visited and inspected those of the boundary monuments of the original District of Columbia set in 1790 and 1791, on the north side of the Potomac, recently, and found that out of the milestones five were erect and in fair condition, three erect and in very good condition, two erect and in excellent condition, two leaning, though in fair condition, one in the woods, erect, though badly seamed, one erect and in poor condition, one in bad condition, one in very bad condition, with the inscription wholly illegible, another buried almost out of sight, and another partly buried in a swamp.

#### Washington Before 1790.

"One often hears the inquiry as to 'how the site of Washington looked before 1790,' but this is something no one can answer, for no contemporary map, so far as I know, exists to answer this question. Scattered bits of information here and there, diligently and patiently collected by Dr. J. M. Toner, have enabled a map to be made which in part answers the question. Twenty years ago Messrs. Faetz and Pratt, authors and publishers of a real estate directory of Washington, published a book entitled 'Washington in Embryo,' in which they include a map compiled from the rare historical researches of Dr. Toner.

"This map shows the drainage, farm outlines, &c., of the tract on which Ellicott laid out a great city in 1791. Within this tract existed one real and two paper towns. Georgetown was the real town, and had been in existence some thirty-five or forty years, while Carrollsburg, and Hamburg existed on paper only. Carrollsburg was a tract of 160 acres on the northern bank of the Anacosta, just east of the Arsenal grounds. Before its subdivision into 263 town lots it was known as Duddington Manor. Hamburg is or was the name of a town laid off in town lots by its owner, Jacob Funk, and occupied the site of the old Naval Observatory. It was sometimes called Funkstown, after its owner.

"Maj. L'Enfant, a French engineer, was engaged, under Washington's direction, in planning the future Capital, and the map he prepared (the first map of Washington) is now in the custody of the Commissioner of Public Buildings and Grounds, in the War Department. Having become much faded and worn with use, it was a few years ago sent to the Coast Survey Office, where it was very carefully traced and a photolithographic copy of it prepared.

"Near the intersection of North Capitol and R streets is, or until recently was, a monument, which I have not seen, said to be some fifteen feet high, on land owned by a Mr. Beall. I have been unable to secure definite information as to the purpose of this monument or its use. It seems probable that it was a monument erected by Mr. Ellicott as an azimuth mark, and its recent destruction is, therefore, regrettable.

#### First Accurate Map.

"Albert Boschke was a German employed in the Coast Survey before the war. He conceived the idea of making a very accurate map of Washington and of the District, with the hope of selling it to the government. This, he proceeded to do, organizing a corps of surveyors that he maintained at his own expense. Two maps resulted from his work, one a

map of the entire District, the other a map of the city. They were engraved upon copper by Mr. David McClelland, and were just about to be published—indeed, a few copies or proofs had been struck—when, the war breaking out, the government seized the map and plates. It appears that at the outbreak of the war the United States had no topographic map of the District.

"Boschke had sold his interest in the map to McClelland, now seventy years old and living in Le Droit Park, who offered to sell the maps and plates to the government for \$20,000. Secretary Stanton, not understanding the labor and expense of a topographic map, thought that \$500 was a large sum. This resulted in a disagreement, but after some negotiations McClelland offered to transfer the maps and plates to the government for \$4,000 on condition that the plate and copyright were returned to him at the close of the war.

"While these negotiations were pending a squad of soldiers appeared at McClelland's house one day, seized the material that had cost him so much labor and money, and conveyed it to the War Department. Subsequently, at the close of the war, the government paid Mr. McClelland \$8,500 for the maps and plates seized during the struggle between the States.

"Old residents of Washington know the term Meridian Hill. A hundred years ago it was the custom of various nations to reckon longitude from their own capitals—a bad custom not yet quite dead. Our grandsires, proposing to follow this practice, gave early attention to establishing a first meridian. Joined to it was the idea of a national observatory and American ephemeris, to the end that the young republic might in these respects, as well as in all others, be quite free from dependence on foreign nations.

#### The First Meridian.

"The complete story of this first meridian seems to be still unwritten. On L'Enfant's map of the Federal City the letter B appears on the site of the emancipation statue in Lincoln Park, about a mile east of the Capitol. A marginal note indicates the plan proposed for this place, to-wit:

"An historic column; also intended for a mile or itinerary column, from whose station all distances of places through the continent are to be calculated."

"This appears to indicate that L'Enfant planned to have the primary meridian of the United States pass through a point exactly one mile east of the Capitol. Subsequently, Jefferson planned to have the first meridian pass through the White House, about one and one-half miles west of the Capitol, whereas the meridian afterward adopted by Congress was that of the Capitol itself. A word now about the old stone on Meridian Hill. It will be remembered that Admiral Porter had a mansion on the old Peter place, at the head of Sixteenth street. Its main entrance was due north of the main entrance to the White House.

"Exactly in line between these doorways, on the lawn south of the house, stood a low sandstone block, on which was placed a brass sun-dial. This stone was carved in cylindrical form on its northern side. This stone, so the story goes, was removed when Sixteenth street hill was cut down some twenty years ago, and is now doing duty as a carriage step at the corner of Fourteenth and R streets. On talking with the owner of the place at the corner of Fourteenth and R streets, however, he denied vigorously that this was the meridian stone. He described the meridian stone as similar to the Capital, or 'Jefferson' stone, and Mr. King, Jefferson's surveyor, who set the two stones in 1804, also describes them as similar.

"I infer, therefore, that two stones at the head of Sixteenth street have been called meridian stone. The original one, still extant, is said to be now serving as a hitching post in front of the Reform School. The carriage step at Fourteenth and R streets is probably a later stone set up as a base or support for a sundial, and came to be known as the meridian stone, to the exclusion of the original three-stone obelisk."