

Stoned Out of My Mind:

A Guide to and Personal Reflections of the Boundary Stones for the District of Columbia

By

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("There's a hole in the fence, dear Matthew..."). How many times have I been to this location, approaching it from all directions, snooping around with a disposable camera in one hand and a street map in the other? Never had I noticed this opening, but there it was, luring me to my final destination. All of the other monuments had been accounted for, missing or viewed with my own eyes and photographed. This was the last one.

The dingily carpeted trail leading to a small dwelling could have been made of roses – for those who crave discovery I was on the brink of something regal, something old. "I'm looking for a boundary stone – it should be in a wrought-iron fence," I nearly pleaded, as an old man pointed down across a small pond toward another fence bordering D.C and Maryland. A few shots, a "thanks" and I was done.

It is interesting to note the variety of the modern-day surroundings of the stones. From affluence to poverty-stricken, peaceful woods to the brash Potomac riverbed, the stones are everywhere and they are nowhere. Rarely on street maps, older than the man who aided my quest, new to the kids for whom he was cooking lunch, new on the minds of preservationists and historians, older than Washington D.C., they are the 37 boundary stones that currently outline the original Federal City.

The first stone, in Jones Point Park in Alexandria, Va., received a spot on a local news channel when, in January 2001, the first phase of the widening of the

Woodrow Wilson Bridge commenced. The Southern Cornerstone and the D.C.'s most famous lighthouse became endangered by nearby construction. As the local news broadcast mentioned the stone, thousands, myself included, caught a glimpse of the first "building block" of what we now know as the District of Columbia.

Their History

One who is familiar to the D.C. metro area will often see a license plate marked "D.C. Bicentennial – 1791-1991", and while the first stone was set at Jones Point on a rainy April 15th 1791, Congress passed the Residence Act on July 15, 1790. By this time, Virginia had ceded 33 of the 100 square miles of its land the Act allocated to the new Federal City. America's permanent seat of government was to be between the Potomac's Eastern Branch (present-day Anacostia River) and the Chonnogocheque River, near Williamsport, Md. (1). On Jan. 24, 1791, President Washington announced the designation of the city to encompass a diamond at the confluence of the Potomac and its eastern branch (2). It was to include the port towns of Georgetown and Alexandria and large parcels of Maryland's then 95 year-old Prince George's County and neighboring Montgomery County.

Surveyor Andrew Ellicott and astronomer/mathematician Benjamin Banneker were hired to conduct the survey. Ellicott was considered among the most celebrated surveyors of his time. Banneker is touted as the first African-American scientist of note, inventing, among many other things, America's first almanac. In February 1791, a vistro was cleared for the half-ton stones to be laid. In 1791 and 1792, 40 stones were placed - 4 large cornerstones and 36 smaller milestones. On the side facing the Federal City was inscribed "JURISDICTION OF THE UNITED STATES". The other sides of the stone included its border state (Maryland or Virginia), the year it was placed and its compass reading, respectively. The limestone used for the monoliths was mined near Aquia Creek in Stafford County, Virginia, "from the same quarry that later produced the building blocks for the Capitol and the White House" (6).

Finding Them

So accurate was Banneker, using celestial coordinates to pinpoint their exact locations, any modern map (I chose ADC, based out of Alexandria, Va.), easily

outlines Maryland and Virginia's borders with the jurisdiction. Though today we consider the Potomac River to be Virginia's border with D.C., it once spread into present-day Arlington and Alexandria, as one can see by looking at their western-most boundaries. Given my amateurish geographical skills, well before I knew I could locate them on a United States Geological Survey (USGS) topographical (topo) map, I simply started with the cornerstones. I had already seen the south stone at Jones Point. I eyed a map of Arlington for the western stone and went hunting. It was pretty easy to find; soon thereafter (about 10 seconds) I was "stoned." I obtained information from the D.C. chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), thereby learning that there were 40 stones in all. "On April 7, 1915, the DAR Committee on Preservation of Historic Spots and Records (for the District of Columbia) selected the reclaiming of the boundary stones as their project for the year."⁽³⁾ Along with a map marking the stones were brief descriptions of their locations. Many of the wrought-iron fences erected by the DAR exist today. The fences are a lasting tribute to this organization, seeking to preserve the capital city's first monuments.

Continuing my search, I uncovered a web site listing the stones on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) which provided more accurate descriptions, down to footage from landmarks and compass readings, of where some of the harder-to-find stones along the D.C. – Maryland border were located.⁽⁴⁾ It is comforting to know that, as of Nov. 8th, 1996, 23 stones along the this border are listed on the NRHP.

This doesn't mean, however, that all are protected, as is the case for the three stones not along the border today. Also, all do not appear to be original. The following are stone-by-stone accounts of their current surroundings and conditions, starting from the southern stone and proceeding, as Banneker and Ellicott did, clockwise.

Southern Cornerstone

Probably the most visited and famous of all the stones, the first of the 40 sits on the Potomac riverbed just south of the Jones Point Lighthouse, the southernmost point of old town Alexandria. Built in 1856 by Charles Church, used as target practice by the Army Signal Corps during WWII, moved once, set on fire by vandals, almost sold to real estate developers, and finally established as a National Park the early 1960's, the lighthouse is another testimonial to the will of

everyday people to randomly destroy and instinctively preserve history (5). Parking is available on Jones Point Road, and one must walk through modern history, the reconstruction of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, to get to the park. Opens fields, dogs running, wooded enclaves and water views blanket this picturesque 50-acre historical estate. The stone can be seen through a small hole in the cement on the southern side of the lighthouse. By climbing the rocks, one can view it from the riverside, and view the first monument in what was to become one of the most powerful cities in the world. It has held together, but the markings have weathered off. Of good note: the Woodrow Wilson bridge reconstruction is well north of the lighthouse. Endangerment does not appear to be an issue.

Southwest No. 1

Given that in 1846 Virginia retroceded its 33 acres from the District of Columbia, the task of preserving the stones also became the Commonwealth's responsibility. But who cared? It wasn't part of the Federal City anymore. Ironically, all of the 14 stones in the Virginian jurisdictions of Arlington, Falls Church, Alexandria and Fairfax exist (although not all of them appear to be original) and have DAR fences surrounding them. On the northwest corner of a lot at 1220 Wilkes Street at the intersection of Payne Street, SW1, as do a lot of them, sits in the quiet serenity of suburbia. Consequently, this modest townhouse was for sale around the time of this article. My far-fetched hopes for owning a property containing one of these rare relics were quickly shattered, as my means could not compliment the \$350,000 price tag.

Southwest No.2

An imperfect mile (the milestone when measured accurately, would have been just northwest of the intersection of Upland Place and King Street), SW2 sits north of King Street on the sidewalk in front of 7 Russell Rd. From it one can view the stately George Washington Masonic National Memorial, Alexandria's train station and Old Town's main east-west artery, King Street. Given its odd shape, lack of any writings and the appearance of being made of granite, this stone is most likely not original.

Southwest No. 3

When traveling on King Street, one could easily miss the next stone, given its cozy location behind a row of hedges along the roadside. Look to the left for the First Baptist Church of Alexandria. SW3 lies toward the north end of the parking lot. This is the first stone indicating that the original southwest border is nearly parallel with, or follows King Street, asking the question – should this have been called Northern Avenue, given that Western, Eastern and Southern Avenues follow their respective borders almost entirely? In fact, the road predates the District and was called Vestal's Gap Road, a colonial highway stretching from Alexandria to the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Southwest No. 4

Another famous stone, at least to Northern Virginians, SW4 lies in Fairlington, located about 50 yards northwest of Wakefield Street on the northeast side of King Street. It is currently being looked after by the Fairlington Historical Society (FHS), though there is not much to protect; it is a stub, merely five inches above ground with no writings visible. It's location, virtually hidden by shrubs on three sides, is ideal, given King Street's high traffic volume.

Southwest No. 5

Of interesting note is the extent to which all jurisdictions involved in the boundaries maintain, quite accurately, their borders in proximity to the stones. Could Banneker and Ellicott have done better with today's surveying equipment? The blacktop of a small trail along the north side of Walter Reed Drive, about 100 feet east of its intersection with King Street, ends, of course, along the boundary, just south of SW5. Due to its awkward shape, this does not appear to me to be an original stone.

Southwest No. 6

Surviving a snowplow mishap years ago and consequently held together by cement, SW6 lies on the median strip of South Jefferson Street between Columbia and Leesburg Pikes - the first stone to border Fairfax County. Due to its well-

intentioned but less than perfect patchwork, the markings on the stone are displaced by about two inches. Personally, I feel this is the most poorly placed stone of the 37. Being hidden by a hill to its southwest and succumbed to non-stop 30 MHP+ motor vehicle commuter traffic are uninviting surroundings for any monument. Not in its original location (7), this is another ironically placed monument, destined for both exploration and destruction.

Southwest No. 7

SW7 sits on the grounds of Carlin Springs Elementary School in Arlington. Dissecting the fence towards the southwest side, in the middle of the parking lot, it is an ideally placed stone, with easy access through its surrounding suburb. Unfortunately I stepped in dog excrement right next to the stone while taking a picture. Certainly, some concerned animal owner surrounds the fence with their pets' feces to prevent wild and unruly elementary school kids from pilfering the relic.

Southwest No. 8

Its location bears to mind the fact that history is sometimes right around the corner from where most people live; from where I lived in Arlington at the time of writing this article, it took me a half a dozen turns and three minutes and there it was. Located off Wilson Boulevard, just past John Marshall Drive in a parking lot of an apartment complex, SW8 rests about 120 ft. southeast from a water tower.

Southwest No. 9

A friend of mine, who has been living in Northern Virginia much longer than I, helped me with this location ("Oh, there's a park down that way, maybe it's there," she confessed as we diverted rush hour through Falls Church.) Later that weekend, I discovered East Falls Church Park/Benjamin Banneker Park, one of only five parks (what a brilliant idea!) on which a boundary stone is located. Though only about 10 inches of it is visible, the writings on the stone are remarkably preserved. The park is accompanied by plaques honoring Banneker and the stone. Look for a phantom boundary line extending southeast of the stone, toward a small footbridge.

West Corner Boundary Marker

Two properties (as far as I could tell) occupy the 150 foot-long-or-so North Arizona Street at the westernmost point of Arlington, while Meridian Street extends the road to the north and south. One is Andrew Ellicott Park at 2824 and the other is a single-family house across the street, another of which a developer could easily squeeze into this cozy park, cutting off the stone from public view; as we will see later, that's just what happened to two mile stones. Its proximity to people (and away from traffic) makes it one of the better locations of a boundary stone I've seen. It is a testimonial to the three jurisdictions in which it borders (Falls Church, Fairfax and Arlington) that this is one of three parks dedicated to a boundary stone and the only park dedicated to a cornerstone. It is just as well that there is no house here – think of the tax nightmare! The “boundary lines” emerging from the stone offer great visual insight.

Northwest No. 1

It is ironic that I should pick the holiday season to search for the stones. After all, who in the wealthy suburban section of northeast Fairfax county would dream of not vitally contributing to the local economy, two weeks before Christmas, on a Saturday afternoon, around two o'clock? Good for me; nobody home, nobody to care if I go trekking around their lush yards. NW1 lies next to a tool shed in the back yard of 3607 Powhatan Street, on the west side of the yard about 200 feet from the road. Auto mechanic Vernon Hall owns the property and “doesn't mind curiosity seekers, though knocking is appreciated” (6). I knocked.

Northwest No. 2

Though my research has indicated that some of the stones have been replaced, I'm not positive about which ones, and it's more pleasing to think of them all as original, surviving the changes of one of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States. At this point in my journey I could easily tell which stones look real and those that are in the best condition are usually on high ground. NW2 is one such stone, as it rests atop a hill on the north side of the back yard of 5298 Old Dominion Drive. Remember, if you pass a sign saying “Entering Fairfax

County” as I did, you’ve know you missed it – a rule to follow for many of the stones in Virginia.

Northwest No. 3

Ah, the winding streets and cul-de-sacs of post WWII housing development (“yeah, but I don’t want to SEE my neighbor”). This stone was miraculously saved, though I doubt anyone, in the 1950’s real estate market anyway, would have missed it. My condolences to the builder that created this development, hiding the stone within the fenced back yard at 4013 Tazwell Street. It’s quite protected, as long as the kids don’t have BB guns. Its condition and markings are unknown.

Northwest No. 4

Another imperfect mile - the original would have been in between the soon-to-be Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and the Potomac River - NW4 sits behind a house at 5906 Daleclaria Place, Northwest (NW) D.C. Unfortunately, it’s on gated federal property. My hopes for finding it were momentarily shattered, until I noticed a well-weathered path near the fence (strap on your walking shoes). Just to the west of the southwestern-most fence of the Daleclaria Reservoir, at the corner of Potomac Avenue and Norton Street, is a small trail. Walk north along the Crescent Trail about 400 yards, look for a sign on the bike path stating “Entering Montgomery County” and look up to the right. It sits about 100 feet from the fence and, from a distance, looks very well preserved, overlooking the tree-lined shore the “Potowmack.”

Northwest No. 5

All records indicated that this stone was in its original location. Finding this stone was the most meaningful for me, as it reminded me of days when my father and I would look for abandoned railroad tunnels for the South Pennsylvania Railroad, now part of the right of way of the Pennsylvania Turnpike. In the mid 1860s, the railroad construction was halted at 60 percent completion, leaving behind two half-completed tunnels that my father, brother, sister and I found using topo maps - my first experience in searching for old stuff in the wild, and the events that fueled my desire for this project.

On my first trip to find the stone, a stream and a black fence being my only visual guides, I hit a dead end. I followed the fence, situated adjacent the Daleclaria Parkway and opposite Warren Place, westward for about 1000 feet, ending at another fence, the concrete culvert merely 100 feet away. I chickened out, not being prepared to trespass on federal ground (NW5 is also in the Daleclaria Reservoir). On my return trip I noticed an opening on the north side of the fence, across the small creek (this seems to be a pattern). I followed it, eyed up southeast on my compass, went to the culvert and started walking “300 feet southeast of concrete culvert.” (4) Through small streams and marshy terrain, I gave up measuring (my stride being about three feet). I came to a small gully with three logs placed geometrically, thinking that this might be it. It wasn't. I starting looking and, simultaneously “woo-hoo”-ing to myself, found it about 100 feet southeast of the gully. In the middle of the woods, away from civilization and resting peacefully, it was the most preserved stone I had seen (having seen all but two at this point). No trails, parks, beer cans or other human things have intruded, just blue and white ribbons draped on each corner of the fence. It raises the question: Would the stones be better off if nobody was around them or knew about them? Maybe they'd survive another 200 years? (Note: Look for what looks like part of the original visto, extending northeast from the culvert in between 2 sets of houses).

Northwest No. 6

The second park dedicated to a mile stone, simply called “Boundary Park”, sits on the NW side of Western Avenue, across from Fesseden Street. NW6 sits west of a bus stop between Park Place and Western Avenue. From this boundary point, proceeding to the northeast, Western Avenue parallels the boundary. It is a quaint park; a well-designed homage to the stone, as the houses are about 100 feet west of the stone.

Northwest No. 7

Little did Frank Ruddy know when he bought the house at 5600 Western Avenue in Chevy Chase that he would find “strangers in his yard hovering over it, snapping pictures”(6). I gave him the courtesy of knocking on his door, to which he responded, before I could barley say why I was there, with a hand wave and a “sure”, instantly sliding back inside his house. While guarded by a spruce tree

just beside it, NW7, to my dismay, is not protected by an iron fence. Yet it remains cared for by Mr. Ruddy, whose preservation strategy when he must mow the lawn is simple: “Don’t crash into it” (6).

Northwest No. 8

NW8 appears more like an eye sore in someone’s front lawn than a historical artifact. It lacks an iron fence, and upon requesting to take a photograph of the stone, a resident at 6422 Western Avenue simply said, “Sure, go for it.” Literally just a lawn ornament now, I’m sure even a small iron fence wouldn’t kill the décor of NW8’s insignificant surroundings.

Northwest No. 9

This is one of several stones that can be approached from multiple directions. Although I tried eagerly to avoid the driveway of the house with which it bordered, I could not get a decent picture without feeling intrusive. Located 165 feet northwest of the centerline of Daniel Road, five feet southeast of the driveway at 2107 Daniel Road and 50 yards northwest of the intersection of Oregon and Western Avenues (whew!) is NW9. By climbing a good-sized hill, one can also approach it from Beach Drive at the entrance to Rock Creek Park.

North Corner Boundary Marker

Simply put, this stone is in a sad state of affairs. It is located about 150 feet west of the exit from Chevy Chase Crest Apartments along the 1880 block of East-West Highway (MD 410) in Silver Spring, sunken well below its three-foot-high intended height. An iron fence surrounds the stone, but otherwise it has gone seemingly unnoticed, except for the debris spewed from the ongoing traffic of MD 410 – about 20 feet north of the stone. The metal guardrail doesn’t protect road debris, let alone a crashing car, from meeting its fate in the ditch where the stone remains.

Northeast No. 1

A plaque exists where the stone was located up until 1952, when a dump truck carried it off, mistaking it for rubble (6). It is located on the sidewalk outside of a convenience store at 7847 Eastern Avenue in Silver Spring and is another sad reminder of how easily we overlook historical relics and how quickly we ostensibly need to get those businesses up and running.

Northeast No. 2

It is difficult to comprehend that a motor vehicle of any kind could strike a fairly sizeable object such as NW2 and the fence surrounding it. Yet in fall of 2002, that's just what happened, as a car somehow jumped the sidewalk and struck it. Luckily the ill-informed (much of the data from this source is incorrect (9)) Takoma community quickly acted and repaired the fence. It is located at the south end of a lawn at 6980 Maple Avenue in Takoma Park, Md., not a busy road by any means.

Northeast No. 3

Compared to the relative safety of the others, NE3 is in severe need of protection. The fence has been all but destroyed, probably by numerous careless drivers pulling out of the apartment complex on which it is located. It rests in between Chillum Road and Hew Hampshire Avenue, near a small tree on the northeast side of Eastern Avenue, exposed to whatever elements, natural or unnatural, may befall it. I'm not a geologist, but I'd say that even if this stone was never again touched by human hands, it wouldn't survive 50 years. It would be a disgrace to our historical future if this stone, like many others, perished with the rising tide of urban decay and neglect.

Northeast No. 4

About 100 feet northwest of the intersection of Sargent Road and Eastern Avenue is NE4. At this point in my travels, I was apprehensive about stepping on other people's property to get a close look at the stones, facing a trespassing charge, as this was located about 50 feet from a house. But then it occurred to me that (a) they have some historical significance, (b) most of them are protected by the federal government and (c) all I have to do is step over to the D.C. side of the

stone and I'm no longer in their property, therefore immune from prosecution (right?...).

Northeast No. 5

Nine stones are located on private property, giving them easy access by address and street map, and, sometimes, not so easy access if one wants to observe them closely. NE5, however, can be easily seen in the middle of the front lawn at 4609 Eastern Avenue. I was reluctant to photograph in depth, as this was early in my travels and I tried to photograph as many stones as possible. By knocking on the door for further inquiry, I would have been wasting my time, a trait I learned quickly from the busy mindset of urban life, and, in times like these, a trait I would like to discard.

Northeast No. 6

The accuracy with which Ellicott and Banneker completed this project is easily seen in the virtually unwavering (except for certain man-made obstacles) Eastern and Southern Avenues. I missed SE6 my first time around, mystified by the quaint old neighborhoods bordering historic Mount Rainier. On my second trial, while approaching from the northwest, I found it on the south corner of the lot at 3601 Eastern Avenue, about 700 feet southeast of Rhode Island Avenue.

Northeast No. 7

Not much data was available as to the exact location of NE7, and all for the better, as it gave me time to gaze at what is, in my opinion, the most beautiful cemetery in the D.C. metro area. Within Fort Lincoln Cemetery are expansive gardens, a mausoleum touted as the largest of its kind in the world, the oldest building in Maryland, a view of FedEx Field and acres of scenic landscape. Locales such as this served to heighten my enthusiasm for this project. Its location was simply "near an equipment storage facility" (7). I eyed it on the map, went snooping and found it about 30 yards southeast of the southeastern-most end of a series of above ground tombs on block 18, across from the Garden of the Crucifixion. An unmarked fence and a glorious environment surround the stone.

Northeast No. 8

On my first trip to see this stone, as I would find out later, I entered too far north and was subjected to marshy terrain. My Avia tennis shoes not being prepared for this, I tried to enter on the Maryland side my second time around, but still no luck. I peeked through the fence behind the apartments from the access road on Kenilworth Avenue. Strike three. Out of desperation, I decided to park in the city-owned housing project, blanketed with “no trespassing” signs. From the access road, going southwest on Kenilworth Avenue, I traveled north on Quarles Street. Just before 45th Street NE, I turned right, onto a back road leading to a smokestack. I saw a hole in a fence leading to a wooded area and walked east about 300 feet to another fence. The wrought iron fence is still there along with an old man living in a small hutch nearby, inexplicably cast in a role as its guardian.

Northeast No. 9

Behind a chain-linked fence at 919 Eastern Avenue, a small but brawny fence surrounds NE9. The property fence is a double entendre; while certainly protecting it from vandals and, knock on wood, a careless driver, it prevents curiosity-seekers from getting a good look at it. I think a letter asking permission to take a closer look at the stone is on its way.

East Corner Boundary Marker

For the sake of the stone, though its survival was probably not intended by the designers of this intersection; Southern Avenue, heading northeast, turns due north onto 63rd Street NE, about 500 feet before the Eastern Cornerstone, the last cornerstone to be placed by Ellicott and Banneker and the only cornerstone near a major intersection in the District. Aside from a few holes and minor scrapes, this stone is in perfect shape. Almost all of the writing exists, including the year and compass marking. It sits quietly, eerily in a small gully about 100 feet east of the intersection with a small trail beside it, weathered by foot traffic from people venturing to nearby shops at the intersection and along Martin Luther King Jr. Highway (an “extension” of Southern Avenue).

Southeast No. 1

Many reports, including the DAR's, place this stone near a small trash dump at the intersection of D and 54th Streets. In fact, it is across from the entrance to 54th Street on the east side of Southern Avenue. It lies just northeast of the northernmost fence of the endangered Capitol Heights Cemetery.

Southeast No. 2

Some reports list this stone as missing, and while the inhabitants of the dwelling at 4345 Southern Avenue may be, the stone can easily be seen in the front yard. At this point in the journey, one will notice that many stones rest atop ridges and hills and very few are located near flood areas or gullies, meeting certain ill fate through years of weathering.

Southeast No. 3

All of the stones (I guess I should have mentioned this earlier) along Western, Southern and Eastern Avenues are "outside" of the roads – meaning the side of the road opposite the District. All three roads are within D.C. This I forgot when I began looking for SE3 near the entrance to the garden apartments where it was listed as being located, and I spent a good five minutes looking for it. Across the street from 3908 Southern Ave., tucked away behind ivy, you'll find SE3.

Southeast No. 4

Nearly obliterated in an automobile accident, SE4 currently rests in the garage of Dave Doyle, a member of the Maryland Surveyors Association. A mysterious circle in the grass can be seen just southeast of the intersection of Naylor Road and Southern Avenue, most likely where it was located. I am in discussion with Mr. Doyle to view and photograph it, as he is in discussions with the powers that be to reset the stone on or near its original location.

Southeast No. 5

While photographing SE5 I was pleasantly reminded of one of the reasons why I wanted to write this article. A passerby asked "'scuse me – what is that?" I explained to him what it was, to which he replied "I've walked by here for years; never knew what it was." "By here" is about 600 feet southeast of the intersection of Mississippi and Southern Avenues – very easy to find just outside of a fenced parking lot for the Metro, D.C.'s subway system. Outside of the iron fence is a circular concrete wall – double reinforcement for the busy road just to the west. All of the boundary stones, in my opinion, deserve SE5's exceptional balance of protection and exposure to the public. One can also see it as they approach the Southern Avenue Metro Station, on the Green line, heading downtown.

Southeast No. 6

SE6 is on a quieter stretch of Southern Avenue (for a Saturday, anyway), in front Tribles, once the location for the Henry Gilpin Company (7), at 901 Southern Avenue. Its location is quite majestic; from it, one gets a great view of either side of Southern Ave.

Southeast No. 7

Well, if a car is going to hit this stone, it's also going to hit the concrete and metal bridge and fence that separates it from Oxon Run, which travels southwest just under the intersection of Indian Head Road and Southern Avenue - the busiest intersection in proximity to a boundary stone I have seen. It is located on the sidewalk south of the bridge on the east side of Indian Head Road.

Southeast No. 8

This is the only stone of the 40 not accounted for; through all my research, I have read that SE8 is not there, and nobody knows (or is saying) what happened to it. On the USGS topo map (copyrighted 2000), BS8 is there, at the southern end of one of the roads through the locked and guarded D.C. Impound Lot in D.C. Village, SW. Previously, this field of vehicles was a landfill operation. I was

denied access by management to search for the stone. The impound lot was at one point on a list of surplus properties by the city of Washington, slated to be sold and possibly turned into parkland. On a separate trip, before I knew of its exact location, I followed a path southeast of the boundary and could not find it along the fence. It's fate and final resting spot are, to my knowledge, a mystery.

Southeast No. 9

In my research I found two “yes’s” and one “no” as to whether this stone exists. It is not on the USGS map, however other sources indicate it is on Fox’s Ferry point on the riverbed of the Potomac. Off I went, parking on the southbound shoulder of I 295, walking back to Oxon Cove Bridge and started walking southwest along the river. The site would disgust many. I went a week and a half after the heavy rains of New Year’s 2002-03, leaving copious amounts of, well, you name it, along the river bank. In some places the debris was so bad got in the way of my footing, sending me slipping into nearby trees and icy waters. Adopt a shoreline, that’s what I say. My measurements aren’t exact – I walked about 1000 feet southwest along the shoreline and spotted it to my left. It rests about 120 feet from the shoreline, nestled at the foot of a small hill.

The Zero Milestone and Others

Thrown in for good measure, the Zero Milestone, though several hundred feet northeast of the true midpoint, is a modern day Washington monument of sorts. It is from here that distances to other cities in the United States are measured. It is the official center of Washington D.C. It can be easily located at the north end of the Ellipse, just north of the National Christmas Tree. I chose, for simplicity, to go on a cold and quiet weeknight, avoiding hoards of cars from the “daily grind.” It is a marble stone about four feet high with a copper compass on top. It is a great place to start sightseeing D.C.’s finest, as numerous hot spots are visible from this locale, including the Washington Monument, The White House, The Old Executive Building and The Jefferson Memorial.

As I searched for original boundary markers, I discovered that many other boundary stones dot the D.C. landscape; the Portal on 16th St. NW, the Key Bridge in Rosslyn, BS9 located near the Southern Cornerstone, BS1 located near the Northern Cornerstone and so on. A modern boundary marker, located just northwest of the Southern Cornerstone pins down Maryland’s boundary as

being 42 feet east, in the Potomac River. The marble stone at 16th Street and Eastern Avenue simply says “DC” and “MD”, facing their respective sides. These stone monuments, much less visible than the massive buildings downtown, have outlived, and most likely will outlive, any other relics of our nation’s capital.

Outro

Mine is hardly a solitary effort to educate about the markers; the DAR, the National Capital Boundary Stones Committee, the National Park Service, Maryland Surveyors Association, the Fairlington Historical Society and others have done their parts to ensure the stones’ survival. I’d like to think I’m the only one in the past six months that has seen all 38 and know of their condition. Taking several cues from Todd M. Babcock of the Mason & Dixon Line Preservation Partnership, who is currently scouting out the 230+ stones of the Mason-Dixon Line, I plan on returning to the stones to obtain accurate GPS coordinates, comparing them to those on the USGS, photographing each side and rating its condition, including any writings extant.

There are numerous individuals seeking to safeguard many historical relics and artifacts. Our reasons vary, from self-enlightenment and education, to preservation and praise of humankind’s accomplishments. Some do it to raise the value of their property, a truly modern American approach. I had considered getting this paper copyrighted and possibly published, but at what cost to people’s education and curiosity. It is a pointless venture I have recently decided to not undertake.

It seems that, as we expand as a race, we take our history for granted, until we see it as useful or belligerent, exploitative or cumbersome. Pure interest in things seems to have become history itself. Is it an irony that efforts in preserving the stones were made after the baby boom of the turn of the 20th century? Perhaps it’s because, up until that time, nobody gave them a second thought, or even knew they existed. There weren’t enough people living near the stones to mind their significance, or their inconvenience. More people were birthed, somebody was walking around one day and saw a strange rock with markings on it, and kept walking, much like the thousands of motorists that currently pass numerous boundary stones. Eventually, as more stuff was being built in the areas surrounding the stones, people took notice, probably by accident. I’m sure many

generations of curiosity seekers and historians appreciate, as do I, those who have cared enough not to destroy the stones.

We seem to stumble upon history as if it were new, when often it's been there all along, right under our noses. We create, forget, feel guilty for forgetting and take notice. For some of the stones, it is too late. I think NE1's fate is appalling. NW5's is triumphant in a way, sad in another.

However, most of them have prevailed, and I don't think it's a mystery as to why. I wonder if Ellicott and Banneker expected their work to last as long as it did. Things built long ago just seem to last longer. Most of the Mason-Dixon stones, placed in the 1670's, are still around and the many that didn't survive were destroyed by humankind, much like D.C.'s boundary stones. A 100 year-old farmhouse in La Plata, Md., which was struck by a level 4 tornado in the summer of 2002, is still around, while the other, more modern homes, got sucked up in the funnel (a fact that inspired my decision into buying an older house). I gaze in bewilderment at numerous plywood and aluminum townhouses being built by the dozens in the suburbs surrounding D.C., wondering; who would buy such a dump? Yet they are bought, sold and built within days. Wooden posts are being used to hang up plexiglass signs saying "Welcome to Washington D.C.", and while it is a welcomed addition, being that many areas of the District didn't have these signs three years ago, I think our capital is going to be around long enough for the city to invest in something more permanent. Metal guardrails, which protect motorists from crashing into ditches, crumble like paper. A van, going about 1 MHP, made a 12-inch dent in the side of my aluminum (I guess?) car. I am 26 years old, and I hate to sound like my father (love you dad!), but I guess they just don't make like they used to.

One might ask, in a city with so many monuments and history, why worry about the stones? Maybe because they are our nation's first monuments, they border numerous jurisdictions, they have survived through grassroots efforts and chance neglect, and, by viewing them, they offer many insights into where and how the D.C. metro area has progressed. They are a reminder of how great things get started and survive – in small ways.

Many states and cities have natural boundaries; bodies of water, latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates, ridges, valleys and so on. These basic surveying concepts were mostly discarded when building the Federal City. It started with a shape, size and a confluence of two rivers, and grew into what is often touted as the most powerful city in the world. Buildings get in the way, deteriorate and

are demolished, scorched or are refurbished so that very little is extant. Original crossroads for towns are easily paved over. In retrospect, it worked out well for the stones that they were so far away from the central city of Washington; they enjoyed 125 years of peace. Every city has to start somewhere, and given that Washington, D.C. was built from the ground up, one can head down to Jones Point and see exactly where D.C. started, knowing that its first monument has been virtually untouched by humankind for 212 years.

Update

As my quest for knowledge of local history continued, I came across a USGS topo map from the 1920's located in a most unlikely place – the Chesapeake Beach Railroad Museum in Chesapeake Beach, MD. As luck would have it, three stones were in fact replaced, as SW2, SW4 and SW5 were not on this map.

The Stones: By The Numbers

Original Stones: 40

Extant Stones: 38 (except NE1, SE8)

Stones Currently Outlining the Original Federal City: 37 (except NE1, SE4, SE8)

Stones located on USGS topographical map: 38 (except NE1 and SE9)

Stones Bordering Virginia: 14 (southern to western, NW1, NW2, NW3)

Stones Bordering Maryland: 23 (NW4 to SE9)

Missing Stones: 2 (NE1 & SE8) (SE4 is located in a private home)

Iron Fences: 35 (except NW7 & NW8)

Stones on Private Lots: 9 (SW1, NW1, NW2, NW3, NW7, NW8, NE5, NE6, NE9)

Parks dedicated to a Stone: 3 (western, SW9, NW6)

Stones located in a Park: 5 (southern, western, SW9, NW6, NW9)

Original height of the Cornerstones: 3 ft.

Current height of the Cornerstones: about 1-3 ft.

Original height of the Milestones: 2 ft.

Current Height of the Milestones: about 5 in. - 2 ft.

Virginian Jurisdictions: 4 (Fairfax County, Falls Church, Arlington, Alexandria)

Maryland Jurisdictions: 2 (Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties)

How to Find Them

When armed with an ADC map of Metro Washington D.C., the streets are fairly easy to find. ADC maps are available at most 7-11 stores and gas stations, cost about \$12 and are worth their weight in gold. The streets, schools, etc. can be found in the index, referencing the page and grid locations. For the harder-to-find stones, I have given more detailed directions. For those stones whose easiest access is not by way of the District, their suburban counterparts are listed. As a friend once said, it's like a scavenger hunt. Happy hunting!

Southern Cornerstone: On the S side of the Joint Point Lighthouse on Jones Point Park, Alexandria VA, through a small peephole cut through the cement. Can also be seen from rocks about 20 ft. S of lighthouse.

SW1: On the NW corner of a lot at 1220 Wilkes Street, Alex. VA.

SW2: On the sidewalk just W of 7 Russell Rd., Alex. VA.

SW3: N end of a parking lot of the First Baptist Church of Alexandria at 2932 King St., Alex., VA

SW4: Just off the sidewalk on King St., about 150 ft. NW of Wakefield St., Alex., VA.

SW5: About 100 ft. NE of the intersection of King St. and Walter Reed Dr., on The N side of Walter Reed Dr., Arl., VA.

SW6: In the median strip of S. Jefferson Street between Columbia and Leesburg Pikes, Fairfax Co./Arlington, VA.

SW7: Along the SW fence on the grounds of Carlin Springs Elementary School, Arl., VA.

SW8: About 120 ft. SE of a water tower in an apartment complex parking lot on the SE corner of John Marshall Dr. and Wilson Blvd., Falls Church, VA. When traveling E on Wilson Blvd. Immediate R past intersection.

SW9: A park along Van Buren Street, N of Columbia St., F.C., VA.

Western Cornerstone: Andrew Ellicott Park, 2848 N. Arizona Street, Arl., VA

NW1: N corner of a back yard at 3607 Powhatan St., Arl., VA, near a tool shed.

NW2: On the NE corner of 5298 Old Dominion Drive, Arl. VA.

NW3: Center of a back yard at 4013 Tazwell St., Arl. VA.

NW4: The back yard of 5609 Daleclaria Place, NW. About 900 ft. N of the SW corner fence of the Daleclaria Reservoir, about 100 E of the fence. The bike trail is located about 30 ft. W from the corner of Potomac Avenue and Norton Street, NW Washington D.C.

NW5: About 300 ft. SE of a concrete culvert, 600 feet W of the Daleclaria Parkway, NW. Just opposite of Warren Pl., NW is a black fence. Proceed

W along the fenceline, ending at another fence. There is an opening N of the stream. From here the culvert is visible. It is atop small ridge about 100 ft. SE of a small gully.

- NW6: Just W of a bus stop opposite Fesseden St., in between Park Place and Western Avenue, NW.
- NW7: Under a tree on the S corner of the front lawn of 5600 Western Ave., NW.
- NW8: Center of a front lawn at 6422 Western Ave., NW.
- NW9: 5 feet E of a driveway at 2701 Daniel Pl., 165 ft. NE from the midline of the intersection of Oregon Ave. and Daniel Pl., NW.

Northern Cornerstone: About 150 feet W of the exit from Chevy Chase Crest apartments, 20 ft. S of the 1880 block of East-West Highway (MD 410), Silver Spring, MD.

- NE1: A bronze plaque exists on the sidewalk in front of a convenience store at 7847 Eastern Ave., S.S., MD. Original stone was last seen in a dump truck in 1952, mistaken for construction rubble.
- NE2: S corner of a front lawn at 6890 Maple Ave., NE.
- NE3: About 140 feet NW of intersection of Chillum Rd. and Eastern Ave., NE.
- NE4: About 75 feet NW of the intersection of Eastern Ave. and Sargent Rd., NE.
- NE5: Center of a front lawn at 4609 Eastern Ave., NE.
- NE6: S corner of a front lawn at 3601 Eastern Ave., NE.
- NE7: About 100 ft. SE of the S corner of a series of raised monuments on the 18th block of Fort Lincoln Cemetery, Cottage City, MD. W of the Garden of the Crucifixion, along the boundary fence.
- NE8: About 500 ft. NE of intersection of Kenilworth and Eastern Aves, behind a D.C. Public Housing Project, NE. N on Quarles Rd., just before 45th St. turn right to a smokestack. Just E of parking lot, look for a hole in the black fence. Follow a trail for about 300 ft. to another fence. Near a pool of water.
- NE9: W corner of the front lawn at 919 Eastern Ave., NE.

Eastern Cornerstone: About 100 ft. E of the intersection of Eastern and Southern Aves. Approach from the NW, along Eastern Ave., as this is a one-way street.

- SE1: Opposite the end of D St., along Southern Ave., SE.
- SE2: N corner of a front lawn at 4345 Southern Ave., SE.
- SE3: Opposite 3908 Southern Ave., surrounded by ivy.
- SE4: Originally, SE of the intersection of Southern Ave. and Naylor Rd., SE.

Currently in a private home, pending resetting near its intended location.
 A circle of dead grass can be seen near its original location, possibly where the stone was placed.

- SE5: Opposite the NE end of Valley Terrace, along Southern Ave.,
 Next to a parking lot for the Southern Ave. Metro stop, SE.
- SE6: About 20 ft. W of the entrance to the Tribles Co., 901 Southern Ave., SE.
- SE7: About 25 ft. E of the intersection of Indian Head Hwy. and Southern Ave.,
 SE. Just SE of the bridge going over Oxon Run on Indian Head Hwy.
- SE8: Unaccounted for. USGS location places it in the SE corner of the D.C.
 Village Impound Lot, SW.
- SE9: About 1000 ft. SW of the S end of Oxon Cove Bridge along Interstate 295,
 about 120 ft. E of the Potomac river bed.

Zero Milestone: N end of the Ellipse, 1600 E St. NW D.C.

USGS Positions (DD.DDDD & D/M/S)

These measurements were taken from their placement on topographical maps from the USGS (8). To the best of my knowledge, they are true with their actual locations. Since at this point I don't own a GPS receiver, these figures will have to suffice. By lining up certain stones with identical latitude or longitude, one can gain further appreciation for Banneker's accuracy.

Stone Number	Latitude (N)	Longitude (W)
*****	dd.dddd <> dd mm ss	dd.dddd <> dd mm ss
Southern Cornerstone	38.7901* <> 38° 47' 24"	-77.0404* <> -77° 03' 16"
SW1	38.8009* <> 38° 48' 04"	-77.0545* <> -77° 02' 26"
SW2	38.8074* <> 38° 48' 26"	-77.0628* <> -77° 03' 46"
SW3	38.8205* <> 38° 49' 14"	-77.0794* <> -77° 04' 46"
SW4	38.8311* <> 38° 49' 52"	-77.0933* <> -77° 05' 36"
SW5	38.8416* <> 38° 50' 30"	-77.1065* <> -77° 06' 23"
SW6	38.8513* <> 38° 51' 05"	-77.1190* <> -77° 07' 08"
SW7	38.8621* <> 38° 51' 44"	-77.1329* <> -77° 07' 58"
SW8	38.8723* <> 38° 52' 20"	-77.1461* <> -77° 08' 46"
SW9	38.8827* <> 38° 52' 58"	-77.1591* <> -77° 09' 33"
Western Cornerstone	38.8930* <> 38° 53' 35"	-77.1725* <> -77° 10' 21"
NW1	38.9034* <> 38° 54' 12"	-77.1593* <> -77° 09' 33"
NW2	38.9136* <> 38° 54' 49"	-77.1462* <> -77° 08' 46"

NW3	38.9245* <> 38° 55' 28"	-77.1324* <> -77° 07' 57"
NW4	38.9374* <> 38° 56' 15"	-77.1157* <> -77° 06' 57"
NW5	38.9444* <> 38° 56' 40"	-77.1067* <> -77° 06' 24"
NW6	38.9547* <> 38° 57' 17"	-77.0937* <> -77° 05' 37"
NW7	38.9650* <> 38° 57' 54"	-77.0805* <> -77° 04' 50"
NW8	38.9751* <> 38° 58' 31"	-77.0675* <> -77° 04' 03"
NW9	38.9855* <> 38° 59' 07"	-77.0543* <> -77° 03' 15"
Northern Cornerstone	38.9957* <> 38° 59' 45"	-77.0412* <> -77° 02' 28"
NE1**	38.9856* <> 38° 58' 08"	-77.0281* <> -77° 01' 42"
NE2	38.9751* <> 38° 58' 30"	-77.0147* <> -77° 00' 53"
NE3	38.9650* <> 38° 57' 54"	-77.0017* <> -77° 00' 06"
NE4	38.9544* <> 38° 57' 16"	-76.9881* <> -76° 59' 17"
NE5	38.9441* <> 38° 56' 39"	-76.9750* <> -76° 58' 30"
NE6	38.9334* <> 38° 56' 01"	-76.9613* <> -76° 57' 41"
NE7	38.9236* <> 38° 55' 25"	-76.9487* <> -76° 56' 55"
NE8	38.9127* <> 38° 54' 46"	-76.9348* <> -76° 56' 05"
NE9	38.9015* <> 38° 54' 05"	-76.9206* <> -76° 55' 14"
Eastern Cornerstone	38.8926* <> 38° 53' 34"	-76.9093* <> -76° 54' 33"
SE1	38.8823* <> 38° 52' 57"	-76.9224* <> -76° 55' 21"
SE2	38.8720* <> 38° 52' 19"	-76.9356* <> -76° 56' 08"
SE3	38.8618* <> 38° 51' 43"	-76.9487* <> -76° 56' 55"
SE4*	38.8514* <> 38° 51' 05"	-76.9620* <> -76° 57' 44"
SE5	38.8414* <> 38° 50' 29"	-76.9748* <> -76° 58' 30"
SE6	38.8312* <> 38° 49' 52"	-76.9880* <> -76° 59' 17"
SE7	38.8209* <> 38° 49' 15"	-77.0013* <> -77° 00' 05"
SE8*	38.8106* <> 38° 48' 38"	-77.0146* <> -77° 00' 53"
SE9**	38.8032* <> 38° 48' 11"	-77.0242* <> -77° 01' 27"
Zero Milestone	38.8950* <> 38° 53' 42"	-77.0367* <> -77° 02' 12"

*currently not on the boundary, but marked on USGS map

**approximate, not labeled on USGS map

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