

BOUNDARY STONES

Official Limits of District Have Been Subject for Scientific Surveys Since Original Ceremony.

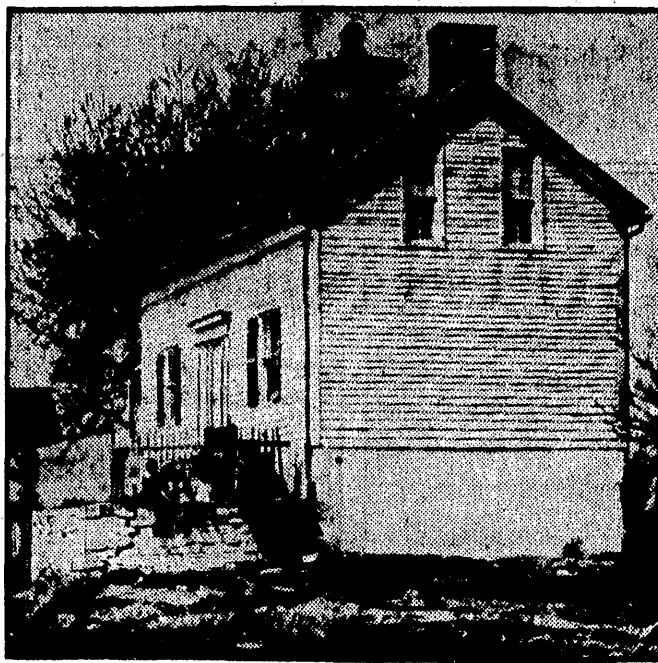
By John Clagett Proctor.

NOW THAT Spring has put in its actual appearance and the weather is gradually getting warmer, one thing the writer has to suggest to those who are able to tramp through the woods is to find out and locate the corner stones, and the intervening stones, surrounding the District of Columbia, and just imagine, while you are doing it, how much trouble it must have been to those who erected them back in 1791 and 1792, when much of this part of Maryland and Virginia was about as it was when the Indians used it as their hunting grounds. Indeed, Maj. Andrew Ellicott, who surveyed the Ten Miles Square, in writing of this territory in 1791, made this interesting statement: "There is not one house that has any floor except the earth, and, what is more strange, it is in the neighborhood of Alexandria and Georgetown."

of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates—a land of oil, olive, and honey—a land wherein we eat bread without scarceness, and have lack of nothing—a land whose hills thou mayest dig brass—a land which the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.

"May Americans be grateful and virtuous, and they shall insure the indulgence of Providence; may they be unanimous and just, and they shall rise to greatness; may true patriotism actuate every heart, may it be the devout and universal wish; peace be within their walls, O America, and prosperity within thy palaces. Amiable it is for brethren to dwell together in unity; it is more fragrant than the perfumes on Aaron's garment; it is more refreshing than the dew on Hermon's hill.

"May this stone long commemorate the goodness of God in those uncommon events which have given America a name among nations. Under this stone may jealousy and selfishness be forever buried. From this stone may a superstructure arise, whose glory, whose magnificence, whose stability, unequalled hitherto, shall astonish the world and invite even the savage of the wilderness to take shelter under its roof."



Jones Point Lighthouse, in the wall of which is the first District of Columbia corner stone, laid April 15, 1791.



North corner stone of the District, on the East-West Highway about 1 mile west of Silver Spring.



East corner stone of the District, with Fred E. Woodward standing nearby.

For many years, only a few of the 40 stones surrounding the District, as originally planned, were identified, and it was not until 1897 that Marcus Baker, a well-known scientist, made an investigation of the stones still standing and prepared a paper on the subject for the Columbia Historical Society. Subsequently, Fred E. Woodward, another member of this society, added much information and material on this interesting topic, until today the subject has been pretty thoroughly covered and all the stones accounted for.

THE laying of the first corner stone of the District of Columbia, at Jones Point, a short distance below Alexandria, Va., on April 15, 1791, was an event of much consequence at the time, and shortly after the Society of Natives of the District of Columbia was formed, March 27, 1920, it decided to adopt the date of the laying of the initial corner stone as District day, and it further decided to celebrate this date with a banquet, a custom which has continued since with few exceptions.

President Washington was very anxious to include Alexandria, Va., in the area to be taken for the Nation's Capital, and since the act of July 16, 1790, did not permit this, an amendatory act was passed March 3, 1791, which resulted in the first corner stone being laid at Jones Point, and thus not only was outstanding local history made, but national history of prime importance created as well, and few today would gainsay the fact that had the Capital been placed elsewhere it is quite probable it would never have become the beautiful metropolis Washington is today.

As the writer has previously stated, President Washington had a way of moving fast when the occasion warranted it and he was not taking any chances of having his plans upset after having once decided upon the particular location of the seat of Government. So, in about two weeks from the time the agreement had been reached with the landowners, the ceremonies connected with the placing of the initial stone occurred.

Indeed, apparently, in so big a hurry were the commissioners appointed by him, in placing the four boundary lines of the District, that a temporary stone was used upon the occasion of laying the stone at Jones Point, and it was not until June three years later, that it was replaced with the permanent stone as we see it today.

THE exercises connected with the laying of this corner stone were conducted under the auspices of Lodge No. 22, F. A. and A. M., of Alexandria, chartered under the grand jurisdiction of Virginia, April 28, 1788, and of which Gen. Washington became the first worshipful master, and the President of the United States on April 30, 1789—just two days short of a calendar year from the first date. This lodge is now known as Alexandria-Washington Lodge, No. 22, and thousands of tourists annually visit its lodge room to see the Masonic relics connected with the life of the first President.

Dr. Elijah Cullen Dick, who was worshipful master of the lodge, and who officiated as such at the corner-stone laying, was a close friend of President Washington, attending him in his last illness, making arrangements for his funeral, and even finally performing the interesting ceremonies of the Masonic order at his funeral. Accompanying Dr. Dick to Jones Point, upon this memorable occasion, were, in addition to the officers of the lodge, the mayor and Common Council of Alexandria and a large number of "citizens and strangers."

ARRIVING at the point, Rev. James Muir, D. D., chaplain of the lodge, delivered an address, and a thoughtful writer, who happened to be present, contributed to a Philadelphia paper the following interesting, though brief account of the event as he saw it.

"Alexandria, April 21, 1791.

"On Friday, the 18th instant, the Hon. Daniel Carroll and Hon. David Stuart arrived in this town to superintend the fixing of the first corner stone of the Federal District.

"The mayor and commonalty, together with the members of the different lodges of the town, at 3 o'clock waited on the commissioners at Mr. Wise's, where they dined, and, after drinking a glass of wine to the following sentiment, viz:

"May the stones which we are about to place in the ground remain an immovable monument of the wisdom and unanimity of North America," the company proceeded to Jones Point in the following order:

"First. The town sergeant.

"Second. Hon. Daniel Carroll and the mayor.

"Third. Mr. Ellicott and the recorder.

"Fourth. Such of the Common Council and aldermen as were not Freemasons.

"Fifth. Strangers.

"Sixth. The master of Lodge No. 22, with Dr. David Stuart on his right and the Rev. James Muir on his left, followed by the rest of the fraternity, in their usual form of procession.

"Lastly. The citizens, two by two.

"When Mr. Ellicott had ascertained the precise point from which the first line of the District was to proceed, the master of the lodge and Dr. Stuart, assisted by others of their brethren, placed the stone, after which a deposit of corn, wine and oil was placed upon it and the following observations were made by the Rev. James Muir:

"Of America it may be said, as of Judea of old, that it is a good land and large—a land of brooks, of waters, of fountains, and depths that spring out of the valleys and hills—a land

the west of the meridian of the south or original stone and also throw the west corner 138.6 feet farther to the north than the east corner. A closer examination shows that the distances between the successive stones vary considerably from exact miles, and in no single instance can a milestone be found placed at exactly a distance of 1 mile from its neighbor. The nearest approach to an exact mile is between Nos. 1 and 2 on the south-west line, near Benning, and between Nos. 7 and 8 on the northwest line, near Chevy Chase Circle, each of which measures 5,279 feet, or 1 foot short of a mile.

"These errors in measurement amount to as much as 40 feet over a mile in one instance, and to 138 feet short in another of the various intervals, and these discrepancies apply to those spaces which are supposed to be exact miles and not to certain spaces which were intended to be either more or less than a mile and are so marked."

IN SURVEYING the four lines of the District of Columbia, and in laying off the streets of the city, Ellicott was materially assisted by Benjamin Bannaker, a free colored man, of partly white extraction, whose knowledge of the exact sciences was sufficiently remarkable to attract the attention of both Washington and Jefferson. He was a marvel in mathematics, and was recognized for his work by the French Academy of Sciences. Apparently he was of the type of Frederick Douglass, for he is described as being noble and imposing in appearance.

"His broadcloth coat," we are told, "though of ancient cut, was of good material and adorned with antique metal buttons. Later in life he is described as having a venerable face and an abundance of white hair, which caused him to become an object of much interest."

The Bannaker Public School in this city, for colored children, is named for this celebrated protégé of Maj. Ellicott.

But the Ten Miles Square was not to last for always. Indeed, Alexandria did not feel it was being given a square deal by the United States Government—just as the people of Washington have always felt, and still feel—and as early as 1824 the residents of our neighboring city decided to test out the voice of its people, in order to petition Congress for the privilege of returning to the sovereignty of Virginia, but the vote at this time was 288 for the proposition and 404 against.

Two decades later the matter again came up with the result that 763 voted for returning to Virginia against 222 who preferred to remain a part of the Federal Territory, and, accordingly, after Congress had legislated on the matter, President Polk, by proclamation of September 7, 1846, announced that the portion of the District derived from the State of Virginia was receded. And, naturally, all the boundary stones on the southwest side of the District, together with several on the northwest side, have since then been within the Old Dominion State, and this includes the west corner stone, which is just about 1 mile northwest of

the town of Falls Church. Thirty years ago, according to Mr. Woodward, this stone was standing at the edge of a little grove of trees, and was somewhat crowded by a large oak tree that seriously endangered it.

The corner stone at the east point of the District is said to stand on level marsh ground, owned, in 1906, by J. W. Lee, a colored man, and is about 500 feet south of the Chesapeake Beach Junction.

The corner stone at the northern point of the District stands on ground once a part of the estate of P. Fenwick and later the property of the heirs of D. Clagett. This stone has been surrounded with an iron railing fence, provided by the local body of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and is only one of a number similarly cared for by this organization. It stands in a ravine close by the East-West Highway, and probably less than half a mile from the circle at the District line and Sixteenth street, going northwest.

IT WAS from the initial stone at Jones Point that a meridian line was drawn across the Jefferson stone, thence through the White House, north along the center of Sixteenth street, over Peter's Hill, later called Meridian Hill, to the intersection of the diagonal lines where was the north stone before referred to as being on the East-West Highway.

Regarding the Jefferson stone, the Capitol stone and the Meridian stone—all but the latter being placed within the old city limits—there has been much controversy, but after having read the several discussions, the writer is inclined to agree with James A. Wineberger, whose account of these stones—evidently prepared with much care and pains—appeared in *The Star*



Northeast corner stone No. 6, near Brentwood road.

east point of the District, about 3 miles east of Benning bridge.

AT THE crossing of these lines near the Washington obelisk was located in 1792 the stone which designates the center of the 10 miles square, called the Jefferson or center stone. "It has been used as the basis for the bench mark calculations for the city grades, and the original measurement for the Washington obelisk was taken from it. It was situated about 150 yards northwest from the obelisk, on the banks of old Tiber creek. It had a blue rock foundation, which was about 6 feet high on the creek side, and covered by a hewn sandstone cap about 4 feet square and 4 inches thick. On the south side the shore earth covered it partly. This cap stone and part of the foundation were removed in 1872 by order of Gen. Babcock, the commissioner of public buildings and grounds, through a mistake in its identity. What remains of the original masonry was covered by earth several feet deep when the roadway was made. It is on the east side of the road line between the lakes and the intersection of Virginia avenue. Its longitude is 79 degrees 17 minutes 16 seconds." In this connection it may be stated

that there is another stone (we will call it the Capitol stone, now standing about 85 yards westerly from the obelisk.

"It is a rough-hewn freestone, now somewhat mutilated, and projects above the surrounding earth about 3 feet, being 1 foot in diameter on the earth line and 8 inches across at the top. Since it was located the surrounding earth has been excavated (except that portion immediately around it) to a depth of about 4 feet. The distance between this stone and the center stone corresponds with half the length of the old part of the Capitol Building (whereof its name) and there can be no doubt but that it was placed to represent a point due west of the south end of the old Capitol Building. This fact has been entirely unknown among the many authors of handbooks of Washington city. Gen. Babcock seems also to have been ignorant of the character of this stone, when, as commissioner of public buildings and grounds, he took this stone to be on a line with the President's House."

THE reference to the old standpipe that once stood in the center of Sixteenth street at about where it intersects with Kalorama road will

bring back fond recollections to many an old-timer who in his boyhood days delighted in throwing stones against its iron sides in order to hear the clamorous noise it made, and when this pastime became monotonous, threw the stones in the air so that they would fall within the cylindrical structure.

This standpipe served to supply Potomac water to Capitol Hill and other high points of Washington. It was on the beaten path to Rock Creek, where the boys went to swim in the Summer, and became quite a landmark before it was removed many years ago. It was built by Gray & Noyes, whose iron foundry was on Maine avenue, near Third street southwest.

Not far to the south of this was the log cabin of Joaquin Miller, poet of the Sierras, which was early removed, and is now located in Rock Creek Park. At this time, instead of embassies and fine homes, Meridian Hill was occupied—with one or two exceptions—by a few shacks and small dwellings, and the vacant ground, of which there was considerable, furnished pasture for cows owned by the people of Cow Town and other outlying places.