

## DISTRICT NOT PLUMB

### Pictures and Data Show that Boundary Is Untrue.

#### TIME DESTROYING MILESTONES

"A Ramble Along the Boundaries of the District with a Camera," the Subject of an Interesting Lecture by Fred E. Woodward, Interests Historians and Antiquaries in a Neglected Subject.

An interesting lecture was delivered recently before the Columbia Historical Society by Mr. Fred E. Woodward, manager of the book department of Woodward & Lothrop, entitled "A Ramble Along the Boundaries of the District With a Camera."

The lecture was illustrated with screen pictures of each one of the twenty-six original milestones, showing them as they exist to-day, as well as of many of the surrounding objects of interest.

The lines of the District, as originally laid out, were ten miles on a side, and as the stones were placed at intervals of one mile, there were forty in all. In 1846 that part of the District west of the Potomac River was retroceded to Virginia, including fourteen of the boundary stones, leaving twenty-six stones as the present boundary between the District and Maryland.

Mr. Woodward's address, in part, was as follows:

#### District Not Ten Miles Square.

It will surprise many to know that the District of Columbia, the seat of the national government, often called the "Ten Miles Square," is not at present, and was not even at the outset, exactly ten miles square. Accurate measurements made by the United States Coast Survey, fixing definitely the position of the original boundary stones, show that while the District was approximately a rectangle, whose four sides were exactly ten miles in length, it was not so, as each line is more than ten miles long. To be exact, the northwestern and southeastern lines exceed ten statute miles by 63 feet and 70.5 feet, respectively; and the northwestern and southwestern lines also exceed ten statute miles 263.1 feet and 230.6 feet, respectively.

These irregularities throw the north corner of the District 116.2 feet to the west of the meridian of the south or original stone, and also throw the west corner 138.6 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 instance can a milestone be found placed at exactly a distance of one mile from its neighbor. The nearest approach to an exact mile is between Nos. 1 and 2 on the southwest 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 one foot short of a mile. These errors in measurement amount to as much as forty feet over a mile in one instance, and to 138 feet short in another of the various intervals, and these discrepancies apply solely 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.

#### Stones Are Out of Line.

It is still further discovered that many of the stones are out of proper alignment and that the original lines limiting the territory are not at the proper angles. For instance, the southeastern line, which was intended to bear north 45 degrees east, or true northeast, is actually north 45 degrees, 1 minute, 45.6 seconds east, or nearly two minutes out of the way, while the southwestern line, which was intended to bear 45 degrees west, or true northwest, is actually north 44 degrees, 59 minutes, 24.6 seconds west, or nearly half a minute out of the way.

The District of Columbia was established by an act of Congress dated July 16, 1790. It was first called the Territory of Columbia, although a reporter in Alexandria, Va., in sending a report of the laying of the original corner-stone, April 13, 1791, made use of the words "United Columbia." An early use of the words "District of Columbia" appears on the records of the Maryland House of Delegates, December 14, 1796, when a loan was authorized to the "City of Washington, in the District of Columbia." No mention of any of these titles, however, appears on any of the boundary stones, the Federal territory being marked in every instance by the words, "Jurisdiction of the United States."

The corner or initial stone of the District was placed at Jones Point, on Hunting Creek, below Alexandria, Va., April 15, 1791, by the Masonic lodge of Alexandria, assisted by Dr. Stuart, of Alexandria, one of the Commissioners, who was a Mason, and from this point a line was run due northwest ten miles to a point not far from the present village of Falls Church, Va., and another line due northeast ten miles to a point near the present station of the Chesapeake Beach Railroad, near Benning, D. C. From each of these points a line was run at right angles ten miles in length, the two meeting at a point near the village of Woodside, Md., one mile north of Silver Spring.

#### Uniformity of Boundary Stones.

The boundary stones were all of fine sandstone, taken from the quarries leased by the United States government near Aquia Creek, Virginia, one foot square and two feet in height. (The north and east corner-stones are three feet high.) They are independent of the rough part which was embedded in the ground, and which was also two feet. The top was beveled for three inches, thus forming the frustrum of a four-sided pyramid. The stones appear to be carefully and accurately sawed and not cut with a chisel, many of the stones still showing the marks of the saw.

Each one bears the word "miles" or "mile," and each is numbered progressively from 1 to 10 on each line. An additional number was placed on the last five stones on the northeast line from the Potomac River, near Chain Bridge, to Woodside, Md., apparently marking the number of miles on Maryland territory.

During the spring and summer of 1905 the speaker visited and inspected all of the stones which mark the boundary line between Maryland and the District of Columbia and secured several photographs of each one. Their exact condition, with explicit directions how to reach them, has been compiled, but is too long to find a place here.

A summary shows that fourteen of the stones are in good condition. Six of the stones are in very poor state of preservation, and should be replaced in the near future by perfect stones. One is worn totally smooth, another stands in the waters of the Potomac, and two lean badly. Ten of them are more or less worn and scarred by the hand of time or battered by the hand of man, as might reasonably be expected after six score years.

Eight of the stones are in the dense woods, and at the present time quite difficult to find, though the rapid growth of building operations toward the outer limits of the District during the past two years, bids fair to soon eliminate all woods and leave only the open fields.

#### Lettering Worn from Three.

Three of the stones are practically in the roadside, one of these on the Walker road near Silver Hill, Md., being destitute of every vestige of lettering.

Eight of the stones are in cultivated fields or gardens, and four more are in the open ground or pasture land.

Three were set intentionally at intervals greater or less than one mile, and bear on the stone the exact distance marked in miles and poles.

Thus, No. 4 northwest, near the Chain Bridge, ended in the Potomac River, therefore the line was continued until firm ground was reached, and our pic-

ture shows the stone marked "Miles 4—100 poles," its true distance.

No. 6 northeast, near the Brentwood road—the end of this mile, fell in a little stream, and the line was continued onward to the further bank of the stream, and the stone is marked "Miles 6 and 10 poles."

#### Difficulties with No. 9.

No. 9 southwest line, the last stone in Maryland, the mile ended in the deep water of the Potomac River, near the point of land known as Foxs Ferry, therefore the stone was carried back to firm ground and marked "Miles 8 and 291 poles." This stone, as may be seen from our picture, is actually in the waters of the Potomac and in a very precarious condition.

One stone, No. 3, on the southwest line, standing in a garden near the Suit road, is curiously abnormal. It is three feet out of the ground, instead of two feet, as are all of the other intermediate stones. No other stone is as tall, excepting the north and east corner stones, which are each three feet tall.

The west-corner stone, near Falls Church, Va., is but two feet high, instead of three.

It bears upon its sloping surface the words, "West Corner," and is the only stone bearing a similar mark. It is seriously broken, a large piece having been split from the top and lying on the ground near by. Our picture shows it held in place by a strap for the purpose of photographing it.

In view of the diminutive size of this corner stone, and the unusual size of No. 3 southeast, it would seem that the tall stone was originally intended for this corner and that the small one placed at the west corner was intended for No. 3 southwest, but that the stonemason at Aquia Creek made a mistake in lettering, and this fact was discovered too late for correction. If this is the case, the inscription, "West Corner," may have been an afterthought.

Important as these ancient boundary stones are to the historian or antiquary, they are singularly unprotected and should at once be safeguarded against further injury or damage other than the necessary exposure to the elements. Such protection might be afforded by a small inclosure about five feet square and five feet high, suitably made of wrought iron of approved national design, to be placed around each stone. Thus shall these earlier monuments of the history of the District of Columbia be preserved for those who come after us.

At the close of the lecture a vote of thanks was adopted, as was also a resolution suggesting that a memorial be presented to Congress calling attention to the imperfect condition of several of these early monuments, asking for a restoration of them, and future protection.