Old Stones Mark D.C. Boundaries

By Sara E. Hunsinger
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Behind a century-old, decayed, lighthouse at Jones Point, Alexandria, a decaying, moss-covered stone rests in a niche in the sea wall. On the few letters are barely discernible. What they spelled clearly when the stone was placed there on April 15, 1701, was "Jurisdiction of the United States" on one side and "Virginia" on the other, for the line divided the District of Columbia and the state. Authorized by Congress at George Washington's request, 40 such sandstone markers were placed at one-mile intervals around the 10-mile square that comprised the capital in 1701 and 1792. Today, with one stone missing, 39 of them still mark the dividing line between the city and Maryland. The land on the southern side of the river was ceded back to Virginia in 1846. And now it constitutes all of Arlington County and most of Alexandria.

The first of the stones was set in place at Jones Point, the southern corner of the old city. By local dignitaries and residents, a parade and affectionate greetings from Maj. Andrew Elliott, who surveyed the capital's boundaries and whose town, Elliott's City, may be a symbol of the other 38 stones. They had been erected by the Lighthouse Board, from and below Alexandria, and then dragged by horses or mules through the woods.

Illustrated on the back of many of the other stones, the Jones Point marker was covered by a seawall built in 1891 to protect the light from a new bridge from a gully. In 1912, Fred L. Woodward, the brother of the department's chief, purchased the U.S. Corps of Engineers to carve the niche in the wall so the historic stone would be visible. Woodward also restored the Daughter of the American Revolution in the stone, and the DAR has acted as their custodian ever since, helped by the National Capital Planning Commission.

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26 Stones Carved in 1791
Mark District's Boundaries

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An American Civil Engineer is working to preserve the stones and the District of Columbia's Bicentennial Office is involved in a project to refurbish one of these stones. "Benjamin\nBanneker, a free black man, who assisted Eliott's survey in 1791.

Nine of these stones are now on private lawns, and one thing, Martin J. Roddy, director of special projects for the National Capital Planning Commission, would like resolved is exactly who owns the stones.

"Most of the stones are privately owned, but the property on which they are located is owned by the District of Columbia. The stones are historically significant, and the DAR is interested in preserving them," Roddy said.

A voluminous report on the history and condition of each stone, prepared by the commission, suggests the stones were used in the original survey of the District of Columbia. The DAR is working with the National Park Service and the District to preserve the stones.

One of the property owners with a marker in her front yard is Adeline Giovannetti of 4316 Southern Ave., N.W. She would like to sell her home, that is, history-conscious buyer. The stone, which is an iron picket fence, has been in place for years. Mrs. Giovannetti says she likes having the marker in her lawn, although she is a little uncertain if the DAR would sell it to her.

"We're interested in preserving the stones," Roddy said. "Many of the stones are hard to find, and in woods or partly buried, although some people have found them. The commission's report mentions two, "Marie Backer", who sold the entire 40 miles in three summers around 1897."

"The sweater," she continued, "went to "Sawyer" who took a trip on a train in 1846 to do it. She staffed the DAR all last year, and an Alexandria man, Kenneth D. Lawrence, was credited with completing the trip in 1899."

The stone, one mile northeast of the District, called the Forney Stone, has been moved to a higher ground.

"One mile northwest of the District, near the corner of Wilkes and G. Payne Streets, is a stone that I've been trying to move for years," Roddy said. "It's been knocked over many times, and it takes $400 to restore it."

She said she didn't know whether the DAR would donate the money.

"The stone that is in the best condition, she said, is at 601 Elmwood Ave. in the
neatly trimmed front yard of the Henry B. Gibbin, Co. The wholesale drug company has erected a plaque nearby which tells the stone's history."

The DAR has been trying to find a home for the stones, but Roddy said they are looking to sell them to interested parties.

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