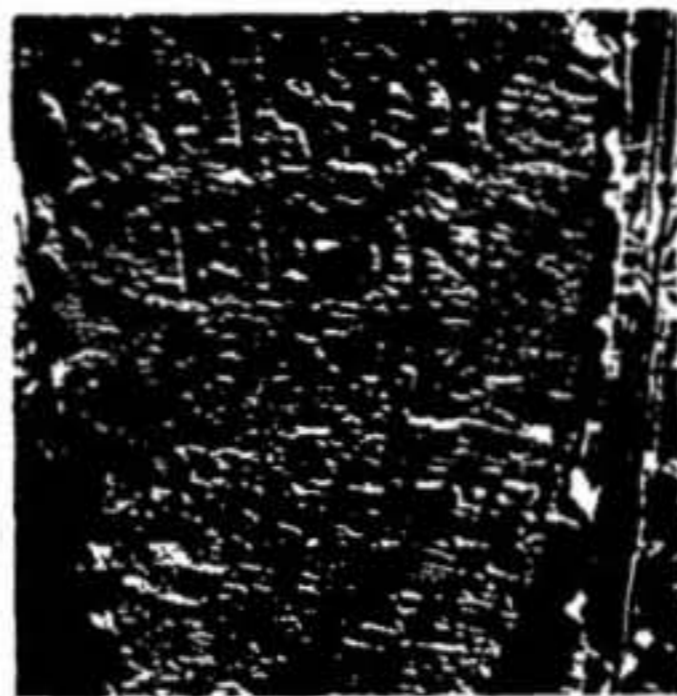


# BOUNDARY STONES



*You can make a game of searching along Washington's frontier for 40 markers 172 years old*

By EDWIN DARBY NYE

ANYONE with the slightest respect for history can have an exciting treasure hunt on a spare afternoon with a good map and a car. A camera is a must too, for your friends probably won't believe your tale. The treasures are the original boundary stones of the District of Columbia.

The first official Federal activity in Washington, D. C., was the placing of 40 boundary stones, one mile apart, marking off the perimeter of the "10 mile square" which was to become the Capital of the United States. These stones were set in place in 1791-92, and of the original 40, 36 are still to be found, most of them nearly intact.

In a sprawling, bustling capital like Washington, it is strange to find these stones located in dense woods, backyards and on main thoroughfares. Washingtonians are proud of their city, but for the most part are unaware of the location of these markers.

The fascination of these venerable old stones led the author down an extremely absorbing trail.

Most schoolboys know that George Washington was accorded the honor of selecting the site for the Capital City and that he chose the banks of the Potomac because it was the midpoint of the United States as it then existed and because he liked the area. The first thing Washington did, having been a surveyor in his youth, was hire two surveyors to set off the 10-mile square and place stones around its boundaries.

The surveyors selected for the job were Andrew Ellicott, son of the founder of Ellicott City near Baltimore, and Benjamin Banneker, the son of a slave.

Andrew Ellicott was not as enchanted with this location as President Washington. In a letter to his wife, dated June 26, 1791, he wrote:

*"The country through which we are now cutting one of the ten-mile lines is very poor; I think for near seven miles on it 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 George-Town,—we find but little fruit, except Huckel Berries, and live in our camp, as retired as we used to do on Lake Erie. Labouring Hands in this country can scarcely be had at any rate; my estimate was twenty; but I have to wade slowly through with six—this scarcity of hands will lengthen out the time much beyond what I had intended.*

*"As the President is so much attached to this country, I would not be willing that he should know my real sentiments about it.*

*"This country, intended for the Permanent Residence of Congress, bears no more proportion to the country about Philadelphia and German-Town, for either wealth or fertility, than a crane does to a stall-fed ox."*

Ellicott and Banneker worked closely with Major Pierre l'Enfant, the volatile French architect who was given the job of mapping out the plan of the "Federal City."

As the famous l'Enfant Plan was nearing completion, land speculators and other influential people began to ask just where certain of the more important buildings were to be located. L'Enfant refused to reveal this information, not wanting his work to bring anyone a fast profit. When he was ordered by the special Commissioners of the city to make his plan known to certain people, l'Enfant rolled up all his work sheets and took them



*The historic markers of the original boundaries of the Nation's Capital are almost all protected by iron grilles. Earlier, many stones were damaged and a few were even taken away.*



back to France and would not even accept compensation for all the work he had done.

The layout of the city proceeded, however, thanks to Benjamin Banneker. A map of the city today (that part south of Florida Avenue) is to all intents and purposes identical to the l'Enfant plan, which was subsequently returned to us and is now in the Library of Congress.

Since Banneker played such an important part in the building of the city of Washington, let's have a look at his background. He was born a free Negro on a tobacco farm near Elkridge, Md. His maternal grandmother came to the colonies from England as an indentured servant girl before 1700. She brought her Bible with her and taught little Ben how to read. After serving her indenture she became a tobacco farmer at Elkridge.

Banneker eventually became a great student of mathematics, astronomy and the natural sciences.

When the Ellicott family moved into the area from Pennsylvania, built their mill and established Ellicott City, the world opened up for Banneker. The Ellicotts appreciated his capabilities and lent him many books on varied subjects.

When Ellicott secured the job of Surveyor of the District of Columbia, he was quick to take Banneker with him. He was 20 and Banneker 60 at the time.

Partly because of his modesty and partly because he was a Negro, Banneker's place in history does not loom as large as it might. His contribution to the establishment of Washington, D. C., is his greatest monument, for when l'Enfant left America in a huff, taking his precious plan with him, Banneker reproduced it out of his head in minute detail.

**T**he results of the painstaking work of these two men can be observed today by a process of exploration nearly as painstaking as their own. Ellicott and Banneker had a wilderness of trees and brush to fight through; latter-day investigators must scramble through a wilderness of traffic and housing subdivisions.

For those willing to accept the modest challenge of locating the boundary stones where and how they now exist, the author offers a guide based on his own experience.

The first marker, the South Stone, has had a long and arduous life. It is located in front of the Jones Point Lighthouse due south of Alexandria, as George Washington wanted Alexandria and Georgetown included in the ten mile square. This stone has suffered from having had a lighthouse built over it. It has had to withstand wear from the ice and tides of the Potomac because its base is now below high water. At one time it was completely covered by a small porch leading from the door of the lighthouse.

A visit to this stone, which can be accomplished only at low tide, stirs in one a sense of guilt because of the neglect of this historically important landmark.

The West Stone can be found in Falls Church, 10 miles northwest of Jones Point. During the last 171 years a giant oak tree has taken over the self-appointed task of protecting it—a very impressive sight as the folds of the trunk nearly encircle this patient soldier. To help the tree protect the stone the Daughters of the American Revolution have had

iron fencing built around it. At one time all of the stones were similarly protected by the DAR, an organization that has done great work to protect the stones; for without these iron grilles, souvenir hunters would have made off with the stones long ago.

The North Stone is a few feet from the south side of East-West highway about a tenth of a mile west of Sixteenth street. You can ask 50 Washingtonians where the north corner of the city is and it is likely that none of them can tell you. How strange that, while every day over 10,000 people drive within a few feet of this historic spot, few realize what it represents. The North Stone is the only one with a vertical inscription. Carved on the District side of each stone are the words "Jurisdiction of the United States" (for many years they were known as "jurisdiction stones"). On the other side is "Maryland" or "Virginia" as the case may be.

The East Stone is in Seat Pleasant about 100 feet west of the old Chesapeake Junction, which old timers may recall is where you transferred from the street car to the trains for a sooty ride to Chesapeake Beach. East Capitol street misses this point by several hundred yards. It is not known whether East Capitol street was intended to run directly to this corner, or whether Sixteenth street, leading north from the White House, should have passed through the North corner. If so, the 1791 survey was inaccurate compared to present-day standards.

Between the four corner stones 36 additional stones were placed approximately one mile apart. All but four of these may be found standing today.

Arlington County was originally a part of the 10-mile square that comprised the District of Columbia, but the land south of the Potomac later was ceded back to Virginia. At the time, it was deemed too far away from the city and too difficult to police. As a result, the original boundary stones now denote the boundary between Arlington and Fairfax Counties, and a number remain in Alexandria.

Moving clockwise from the South corner marker:

At the corner of Wilkes and Payne streets in Alexandria you can have a glimpse of Southwest stone No. 1 SW., which stands proud and erect at that intersection, with an iron grille around it.

In deep shade on Russell road stands SW 2, a foot taller than all the other intermediate stones. The corner stones are 12 inches higher than the others with the exception of the West stones. It appears that in some way SW 2 was interchanged with the West Stone. It is possible that the stone cutter made the mistake by selecting the wrong stone on a misty morning after a gay time the night before.

In addition to its duties as a boundary marker, SW 3 also helps delineate parking spaces on a church parking lot.

SW 4 and SW 5 have had to be relocated from their original positions due to the widening of highways. Unfortunately in the final grading these two stones were nearly covered. They should be raised.

Badly mutilated SW 6 sneers at its replacement standing close by. A baseball diamond was recently laid out in front of SW 6. It can now view the games from a vantage point directly behind the fence at centerfield.

Continued

## WHERE TO FIND THEM

SOUTH STONE	Front door of Jones Point Lighthouse
SW 1	Wilkes and Payne streets, Alexandria
SW 2	Russell road and King street, Alexandria
SW 3	Church parking lot, 2932 King street, Alexandria
SW 4	King street, near South Wakefield, Alexandria
SW 5	Walter Reed drive, near King street, Alexandria
SW 6	Fifth street west of Carlyn Spring road, Alexandria
SW 7	On hill south of Arlington boulevard, east of Seven Corners
SW 8	Under the water tower on Wilson boulevard at McKinley street
SW 9	North Eighteenth and North Van Buren streets, Falls Church
WEST STONE	Near Twenty-ninth and North Arizona streets, Falls Church
NW 1	Behind 3607 North Powhatan street, Arlington
NW 2	Behind 5298 Old Dominion drive, Arlington
NW 3	Behind 4013 North Tazewell street, Arlington
NW 4	East side of Georgetown spur of B. & O. Railroad, behind Dalecarlia Filtration Plant
NW 5	Dalecarlia Reservoir
NW 6	Western avenue and Fessenden street
NW 7	Missing. Originally at Western avenue and Cedar parkway
NW 8	Front yard of 6422 Western avenue at Pinehurst Circle
NW 9	50 yards into Rock Creek Park from end of Western avenue
NORTH STONE	South side of East-West highway, 1/10th mile west of Sixteenth street
NE 1	Missing. Originally at Georgia and Alaska avenues
NE 2	West side of Maple street, near Carroll avenue, Takoma Park
NE 3	Eastern avenue at New Hampshire
NE 4	Eastern avenue at Sargent road
NE 5	4609 Eastern avenue
NE 6	3601 Eastern avenue
NE 7	By fence between Fort Lincoln Cemetery and National Training School for Boys
NE 8	North of Quarles street, 200 yards west of Kenilworth avenue
NE 9	919 Eastern avenue
EAST STONE	Eastern and Southern avenues
SE 1	East end of C street
SE 2	4345 Southern avenue
SE 3	3908 Southern avenue
SE 4	Naylor road and Southern avenue
SE 5	Behind Camp Simms
SE 6	901 Southern avenue, Oxon Hill
SE 7	Indian Head road at Southern avenue
SE 8	In field south of D. C. Village
SE 9	Missing. Originally at Fox Ferry Point



# BOUNDARY STONES

*Continued*

In July, 1962, SW 7 was well fenced in and high on a hill. It came as a surprise to find it gone two months after I found it. The hill where it stood has been excavated to build an apartment house. Where SW 7 has been relocated is still a mystery.

Although in an ignoble location in the alley behind an apartment house and beside a water tower, SW 8 can boast of being on the highest point of the entire 40-mile belt.

With excavation going on all around it, one feared for a while for the life of SW 9, one mile from the West Corner. It wound up happily on the edge of a park. It is a perfect situation for one of the stones except for the fact that it may be in the way of one of the possible entrances to super highway Route 66.

The first four stones along the Northwest quadrant are in wooded areas behind houses. I was impressed with the pride these lucky residents have in "their" stones, and the graciousness with which they led me through their property to photograph the markers. Some of them have decorated the area around the stones with flowers or have grown flowering vines on the iron grilles. Although NW 1 seems badly scarred from age, it does not look to me like an original stone. It stands much too high out of the ground. When Arlington was part of the District many of these markers were moved back and forth to make legal the

operations of certain taverns as the Washington laws and Virginia laws differed then as now.

From my first search for NW 2 all I brought back was a bad case of poison ivy. On my next attempt I knocked on the door of a house near where I thought the stone should be. I was welcomed and taken through the patio and so to the stone.

NW 3 now finds itself a few feet from a kitchen door. The line passes through the neighboring house, requiring a portion of the taxes to be paid to Fairfax and the balance to Arlington County. It is badly scarred, but it has a commemorative plaque at its base.

For some reason, after crossing the river the surveyors began to use additional numbering on the stones on the Maryland side. NW 4 is numbered "Miles 4" on one side and "Maryland 1" on the other.

Hiking around inside the Dalecarlia Reservation is frowned upon and permission must be obtained to enter and find NW 5. On instructions from his superior the guard will unlock the gate and let you in but he will wonder about you.

A DAR plaque is mounted on the protective enclosure around NW 6. This particular stone is readily seen from a car driving along Western avenue just west of River road. Passersby are more apt to notice NW 6 than many of the other markers as it stands in a small park close to the street.

NW 7, which was just west of Chevy Chase Circle, has been removed, but NW 8 stands like a staunch old soldier before a Dutch

colonial house at Pinehurst Circle. The inscription is in reasonably good condition despite its lack of protection.

All of the stones were obtained from a sandstone quarry at Aquia Creek south of Quantico, Va., and still discernible on this one are saw marks. "Miles 8" at the bottom indicates this point to be eight miles from the West Corner. Another piece of information included on each stone of curious interest is the magnetic compass variation. "Var. .02 E" indicates that at the time of the survey the variation between magnetic north and true north at Pinehurst was two minutes. It suggests that Banneker, the astronomer-surveyor, was taking night-time celestial observations. But since magnetic variation constantly changes, one wonders why the 1792 variation was carved in eternal stone.

Of course Rock Creek Park has its stone, NW 9, which can be found by venturing 50 yards into the woods at the terminus of Western avenue.

Leaving the North Corner and traveling along Eastern avenue many boundary stones are readily discovered. NE 1, which should be in the vicinity of Georgia and Alaska avenues, is the only one missing in this quadrant.

NE 2 in Takoma Park is fortunate in having neighbors who are interested in maintaining the landscaping. The historical significance of these markers seems to command the respect of those fortunate enough to have them on their land.

NE 3 is one of the stones that can be readily viewed from a car.



On Eastern avenue near Sargent road stands NE 4, a large oak towering close beside it. Despite the protection furnished by this tree and iron bar enclosure, NE 4 is in bad shape. I could read none of the inscriptions.

Standing in the midst of a sweep of well-manicured lawns, NE 5 is easy to spot. It does not appear to be one of the original stones.

A "Stop Sign" in Mount Rainier commands you to halt and take a look at NE 6 beside it on the corner.

NE 7 is nearly camouflaged by the grave-stones in Fort Lincoln Cemetery. Although not the handsomest stone in the cemetery, it can claim to be the oldest.

Only the venturesome should look for NE 8. It is deep in the marshes near Kenilworth, with only a few streets and paths to lead you to it.

NE 9 is another stone that can be seen without leaving your car. It shares a lot with an old house on Eastern avenue, and it appears to have withstood time and the elements far better than the house.

SE 1 is well hidden at the end of C street. Because of undisturbed privacy, this boundary stone is in nearly perfect condition. It is little wonder because in searching for it I was plagued with a maze of dead-end streets.

Proudest of all the boundary stones should be SE 2, which enjoys a prominent spot in a well kept garden, with a patriotic flagpole beside it. Its grille gleams with bright aluminum paint. Much praise is due the family in whose front yard it stands.

SE 3 is not difficult to locate since it stands in a commanding position on high ground near where Suitland road leaves the District.

On the very edge of Naylor road, SE 4 shows the most wear of all the markers. Naylor is one of the oldest roads leading from Washington into Southern Maryland, and the number of trucks, cars, wagons and horses (including John Wilkes Booth's) which have lumbered or whizzed by SE 4 is impossible to imagine.

SE 5 is without a doubt the most difficult of the markers to locate. A search for it involves a half-mile trek through a jungle of poison ivy, fallen trees, honeysuckle, ditches and brier bushes higher than a man's head. I recommend this venture only to the stout of heart.

In the front yard of a new commercial building stands SE 6. A gas lamp post is placed nearby to carry out the old fashioned decor established so long, long ago at this spot by the boundary stone.

SE 7 is another stone that has had to be relocated due to the widening and regrading of roads. Yet still it stands on the Indian Head road at the end of the bridge over Oxon Creek quietly watching the traffic. The first 150 years of its life, it maintained a peaceful vigil, but lately it has probably been wondering how much longer it will be permitted to remain where it is.

But one mile away in Blue Plains, SE 8 stands in desolate flatlands. It is a new marker, bearing no inscription, that was placed by the DAR last year, since the original stone had disappeared.

Also probably gone is SE 9, which was reported in 1905 to be sinking into the mud off Fox Ferry Point. Finding this stone would necessitate probing the river bottom in this area. Perhaps one day some soul, more adventurous than the author, will attempt this search.\*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELWOOD BAKER



*ABOVE*—Northeast 9 boundary stone shares the 900 block of Eastern avenue with a house.

*BELOW* — Southwest 3 looks across a barren parking lot beside the First Baptist Church.

