

RECORD OF THE PRESENT CONDITION AND LOCATION

OF THE MILE-STONES

by

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REPORT ON THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE
BOUNDARY STONES OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

About a year ago, on one of my sightseeing trips around the city of Washington, I ran across a neat iron fence surrounding an old sandstone monument. A metal plate on this fence informed me that this was one of the original boundary stones of the District of Columbia, and that this stone was protected by a chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. American History was always one of my favorite subjects while I was in school, and I resolved that some day I would investigate the story behind this stone. Quite some time passed, however, before this intention of mine was carried. The matter had almost slipped my mind when, this last spring, I encountered another of these historic old markers in Alexandria. It was then that I decided to investigate further.

It appeared that little information on the subject was available in the general run of textbooks. Even my own set of the Encyclopaedia Britannica seemed of little help. But then I called upon the services of the Britannica Library Research Service and was richly rewarded. They referred me to several articles on file at the Library of Congress and at my first opportunity, I made the trip into town and read them. All of the articles that I read were in the Records of the Columbia Historical Society, one by Marcus Baker and three by Frederick E. Woodward. Mr. Baker's article was rather brief and described a trip he made over the District boundary lines from 1894 to 1897. Mr. Woodward's articles were very complete, however, and included pictures of the boundary stones as they appeared in 1906, 1907 and 1913.

I could hardly hope to improve on either of the above authors' most interesting articles, and will not attempt to do so. Therefore, for the history behind the placement of these boundary stones, I will refer you to the above mentioned articles. However, the last of these articles was written over 35 years ago, and the pictures of the stones taken at the same time. Perhaps I might be able to give you a fair idea of how these same stones look today, with both a word description and also a set of photographs taken this past summer. But that is getting ahead of my story just a little bit.

After I had read Mr. Woodward's excellent articles, I decided to make the trip over the forty mile perimeter of the old District boundary line at my earliest convenience. Since I have no automobile, and since many of the locations of the stones were described rather vaguely, it took the better part of my summer week-ends to find the entire forty markers. But find them I did, and what an interesting project it was! I made no attempt to find the stones in the order in which they were placed. To start off with, I picked the stones which were in the most accessible areas and which I thought would be easiest to find. But this was not always the case.

To illustrate this last statement, I'll mention that the twentieth stone that I found was within a hundred yards of the house in which I have lived for nearly a year. I had passed within two yards of the stone on numerous occasions, but it was so completely covered with vines and underbrush that I had never seen even the iron fence which surrounded the stone. Unfortunately, this was not the exception, as many of the fences were in a similar condition. In fact, in eight cases, there was either no fence at all, or the existing fence was so damaged as to offer but little protection to the stones. In one case, the fence was in good condition, but nearly buried under a slide of dirt. In another, the stone was not even on dry land but covered completely by the waters of the Potomac River! Many of the fences were badly in need of paint, and I decided to take action on this matter. I wrote a letter to the Daughters

of the American Revolution headquarters at 1720 D Street and this letter was forwarded to the State Regent, Mrs. David Wells. Mrs. Wells in turn referred the letter to the State Historian, Mrs. George D. Nolan, who contacted me almost immediately. She asked me if I would be willing to make a report of my findings and this I offered to do. At the same time, I volunteered to furnish a set of the photographs I had taken on my trip.

These photographs are included with this report. Unfortunately, my photographic work is far from professional, and the prints vary considerably in their contrast. But I offer the excuse that these photographs were taken under greatly varied conditions of exposure, and weeks apart. Perhaps they will suffice until better ones can be taken by someone more qualified. I endeavored to photograph each stone at close range, a few feet away, and also at a distance of about five paces back. This will help show you not only the condition of the stone itself, but also the fence and the immediate vicinity surrounding the fence.

I might add at this time that all but a relatively few of the stones may be visited with great ease by means of an automobile. By far the largest number of these stones are located within sight of the boundary avenues of the District, namely, Western Avenue, Eastern Avenue, Southern Avenue, and King Street in Alexandria. Unfortunately, King Street does not run as true as the other three, and considerably more effort is required to find the stones and fences on this side. Likewise, a few of the other stones on the Maryland side of the river are equally hard to find where the above named avenues are not cut all the way through. But I believe that only a few of the stones might require a guide to aid in the search for them.

It appears to me that with the Sesquicentennial of the District only a few short months away, it would be very desirable to give a little attention to these historic markers. A majority of the fences could be put into first class shape with nothing more than a coat of paint, and a little trimming of the weeds and vines which have sprung up near them. I might warn you that there is a considerable amount of poison ivy growing on the fences, a weed to which I was fortunately immune. Some of the fences have fair sized trees within them, and I fear that these may threaten the stones if they become much large.

There might be some expense to rebuilding the missing fences, but surely some agency should care enough for their preservation to advance the money needed. Even the Virginia stones which no longer mark the boundaries of the present District of Columbia serve a real purpose in that they now mark the line between Arlington and Fairfax Counties. A number of the existing fences also lack the small metal plates which identify the markers as original Federal boundary stones.

But aside from these suggestions, that is about all that I have to report on the matter. On the pages to follow, you will find a report of each individual stone, and I sincerely hope that this information will be of use to you.

South Corner. - Located on Jones Point in Alexandria, Virginia. The front of the stone can be seen only by approaching the location by boat on the river. It stands underneath the front steps of the old, abandoned lighthouse which now stands on a military reservation. It can also be viewed from the top, inside the fence, through a small hole directly over the center of the stone. The stone is well protected but in very poor condition. I could make out no lettering at all on either of the visible sides. There is nothing on the fence at any place to indicate that this is the cornerstone of the old Federal District.

Southwest 1. - This stone is located at the corner of Wilkes and Payne Streets in Alexandria, Virginia. It stood originally about 100 yards south of the house at 1200 Wilkes Street but was dug up from that location over forty years ago. The stone is in good condition but has a crack running vertically. The fence is severely damaged and offers no protection. The plate on the fence reads, "Protected by Mr. Vernon Chapter, D. A. R."

Southwest 2. - This stone is located a few yards north of King Street on Russell Road, practically in the shadow of the Masonic Memorial. I am inclined to think this stone is a "fake", however, for these reasons: It is not a foot square as are all the other stones; the top part of the stone is rough, where it should be smooth; there is no trace of lettering anywhere on the stone; and the stone is nearly half a mile from its proper location. Neither Mr. Woodward nor Mr. Baker found any trace of this stone on their trips and I wonder where this one came from. The plate on the fence names the Mt. Vernon Chapter, D. A. R., as its protector. Perhaps they can shed a little light upon this doubtful subject.

Southwest 3. - East of Chinquapin Village on the south side of King Street, directly opposite 3019 King Street. This stone was so covered with vines, weeds, and trees that I searched for it for parts of three different days before finding it. The stone is in rather poor condition, being quite badly battered and the inscriptions quite hard to read. The fence is badly in need of paint, and the trees growing up around the stone should be cut down before they damage the stone further. Protected by American Liberty Chapter, D.A.R.

Southwest 4 - This stone is located on the shoulder of the Alexandria-Leesburg turnpike on the north side of the road, a short distance north of Wakefield Street. It is in extremely poor condition, being broken off even with the ground. It should be replaced with a duplicate of the original. The fence is completely overgrown with vines which should be cut away to expose the stone. The plate names the Continental Chapter, D. A. R., as its protector.

Southwest 5. - This stone is nearly a twin to number four, being also broken off nearly even with the ground. This stone is located about 100 yards northeast of the Leesburg Pike at a point where a small creek crosses the road, between 25th Street and Walter Reed Drive. The fence has been torn down and rearranged in the form of a triangle. It needs painting, and also a plate to identify the stone which it surrounds. Actually, fence and stone should be replaced, in my opinion.

Southwest 6. - This stone is located on the rim of a large gravel pit about 200 yards southeast of the Columbia Pike. The stone is in very poor condition and appears to have suffered very recent damage. A huge crack running vertically up the stone threatens to split the stone in two at any time. There is no fence about the stone whatsoever, although the corner poles of a former fence lie nearby on the ground.

Southwest 7. - This stone lies a little over a hundred yards north of 5th Road South, just before the road turns southwestward, a short distance east of the village of Glencarlyn. The stone is in very poor condition, pitted deeply and with huge sections of the top missing altogether. The tree within the fence should be cut down and the weeds cleared away. The fence has no trace of paint, nor any plate to identify the boundary stone.

Southwest 8. - I am afraid this stone has been seen for the last time. Early in the summer, it stood about 225 yards southwest of McKinley Street and Wilson Boulevard. It was far out of place as it should have been south east, instead. The stone was buried to its top in a little ditch that ran north and south. My negatives of this stone were overexposed and when I returned later in the summer to rephotograph the stone, I found a huge hole in its place. Considerable construction work is now going on in this vicinity and since the stone had no fence, it apparently has been hauled away with the dirt from the excavations.

Southwest 9. - This stone is located alongside Van Buren Street, a short distance north of Four Mile Run, in Falls Church, Virginia. It is in good condition, although it is slanting quite badly, and the inscriptions are easily read. The fence was almost completely overgrown with vines and bushes. The plate on the fence was put there by the Falls Church, Virginia Chapter.

West Corner. - This stone stands just off Meridian Avenue a short distance south of 29th Street, in Falls Church, Virginia. The stone is in rather poor condition as the edges and top are badly broken and pitted. A huge oak tree has sprung up from the base of the stone and it is a wonder that its roots have not broken the stone. The fence is in good condition, but has no plate of any kind to identify the stone which it surrounds.

Northwest 1. - This stone stands between Powhatan and Rockingham Streets at the Arlington County line. The top is badly broken and the edges are chipped considerably, but the inscription is easily read, except for the date. The fence is in good condition and is protected by the Richard Arnold Chapter, D.A.R.

Northwest 2. - This stone stands just inside the fence at the top of a deep cutting on the south side of Old Dominion Drive. The stone is in very poor condition, its edges and top being considerably shattered. The base of the stone is exposed by what appears to be fairly recent digging. The fence is missing entirely, but a cornerpost of the former fence is lying nearby. This stone should be protected from further damage as soon as possible.

Northwest 3. - This stone is located deep in the woods about 300 yards northwest of Chesterbrook Road at the County line, and took me the better part of three days to locate. I finally found it by means of a compass, starting at Chesterbrook Road and working northeast, after directions from two different persons failed to put me at the stone. It is located on an old abandoned road about fifty yards north of a small creek, and is in only fair condition. The stone is badly chipped, especially the top corners, and the letters are marred considerably. The stone is broken off below ground and is now setting in cement to hold it erect. The fence is in good condition, except for several bars which are rusted through, and appears to have been painted rather recently. There is no identification plate on this fence.

Northwest 4. - This stone is located a short distance north of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, quite near a single track railroad. The stone leans slightly but is in good condition except for being a bit chipped on its corners. The base is covered with vines and not all of the inscription can be read. The fence is in good condition, and bears a plate put there by the Columbia Chapter D. A. R.

Northwest 5. - This stone is located in rather dense woods on the Dalecarlia Reservoir grounds, a short distance north of the reservoir. It stands erect and is in good condition except for the vertical edges which are lightly

chipped. The fence is in good condition and appears to have been recently painted. The plate on the fence was donated by the John Hall Chapter, D. A. R.

Northwest 6. - This stone stands at the side of Western Avenue at the point where it is joined by Fessenden Street. It is in poor condition, the top being badly battered and the inscriptions almost illegible. The faces of the stone are pitted to quite some extent, and the stone is leaning slightly. The fence is in good condition but the paint is peeling off. This stone is protected by the Independence Bell Chapter, D. A. R.

Northwest 7. - This stone is located in a yard at 5600 Western Avenue, at a point where it is joined by 41st Street. The stone is buried even with the surface of the ground with only the tip visible. The people living on this property have torn the fence down, considering it unsightly, perhaps. They should be made to realize its importance, and perhaps even legal means taken to have it raised and protected, if possible. Mr. Baker and Mr. Woodward reported this stone in good condition at the times they visited it.

Northwest 8. - This stone stands less than a block southwest from Pinehurst Circle on a vacant lot. It is erect and in fair condition, the top corners being rounded a bit, but the inscriptions are easily read. The fence is in good condition and the paint peeling only slightly. The plate on this fence was placed there by the Col. John Donelson Chapter, D. A. R.

Northwest 9. - This stone stands just inside Rock Creek Park, about a hundred yards northeast of the intersection of Oregon and Western Avenues. The stone is in fair condition with the corners rounded and chipped, especially on top. The inscription on the District face of the stone is very clear cut. The fence is in good condition with the paint peeling only very slightly. This stone is protected by the Margaret Whetten Chapter, D. A. R.

North Corner. - This stone is located very close to the south side of the East-West highway, near Silver Spring. It is leaning slightly and is in fair condition, but has badly battered edges. The circular fence which surrounds the stone is overgrown with vines, is rusting, and in need of paint. The plate on this fence was supplied by the Maryland Chapter, D. A. R.

Northeast 1. - This stone is located at the edge of the sidewalk on Eastern Avenue at the point where it is joined by 12th Street. The stone is in good condition except for its vertical edges which are chipped. The inscriptions are very clear-cut and easily read. The fence is in excellent condition, and has been recently painted. It bears a plate from the Mary Washington Chapter, D.A.R.

Northeast 2. - This stone also stands alongside the sidewalk and is on Maple Avenue, a half block north of Carroll Avenue. It is in fair condition, but the face is pitted and the corners chipped lightly. The fence is in good condition but needs paint, and bears a nameplate from the Major L'Enfant Chapter D. A. R.

Northeast 3. - This stone is located just off Eastern Avenue at its intersection with New Hampshire Avenue. The stone is in fair condition but several edges are badly battered and scarred. The fence is very rusty and needs paint badly. It bears a plate furnished by the Our Flag Chapter, D. A. R.

Northeast 4. - This stone stands about forty or fifty yards northwest of where the District line crosses Sargent Road. It is in excellent condition, but it is buried a little too deep for all of the inscription to be read. The fence which surrounds the stone is in fine condition and needs paint only

slightly. This stone is protected by the Elizabeth Jackson Chapter of the D. A. R.

Northeast 5. - This stone is located in the front yard of a house at 4609 Eastern Avenue, near 22nd Street. The major part of the stone is in good condition but some of the top corners are scarred heavily. The fence has been well taken care of except that it is in need of paint. The plate on this fence names the Constitution Chapter, D. A. R., as its protector.

Northeast 6. - This stone is located at the side of Eastern Avenue at the point where it is joined by 34th Street. This stone is in very good condition considering that it has stood for over a century and a half near one of the oldest roads leading into the city of Washington. It is erect with the base of the stone set in cement to hold it in place. The inscriptions are sharp and clear and the fence is in good condition. A nameplate on this fence was furnished by the Livingston Manor Chapter of the U. A. R.

Northeast 7. - This stone is located alongside the line fence, deep in Fort Lincoln Cemetery, over half a mile from Bladensburg Road. It is also in excellent condition except for a bad seam running a foot down from the top. A metal band has been placed around the stone to keep it from splitting. The stone has sunk so that only about a foot of the stone is now out of the ground, and this hides part of the inscriptions. The fence surrounding the stone is in good condition, but bears no nameplate to identify the boundary stone.

Northeast 8. - This stone stands about 150 yards northwest from the intersection of Eastern and Kenilworth Avenues. It has no trace of protection from vandals and is severely damaged, especially on the top of the stone. The rest of the stone is in good condition, with the inscriptions very sharp and well defined. To save what little is left of the stone, a new fence should be build around it as soon as possible.

Northeast 9. - This stone is located at the side of Eastern Avenue, about 150 yards southeast of Sheriff Road. Unfortunately, the stone is now invisible, being buried under a huge slide of dirt and mud. Recent construction work on Eastern Avenue has caused much mud and silt to wash down hill and nearly cover even the fence. The area near the stone should be filled in more completely, and then the stone and the fence raised at least a yard. The fence is also overgrown with weeds but I was able to find the nameplate put there by the Molly Pitcher Chapter, D. A. R.

East Corner. - This stone is located a short distance east of the intersection of Eastern and Southern Avenues in a small swamp. The stone is in good condition with deep lettering that is easily read. This stone still shows the saw marks from when the stone was cut a century and a half ago. The circular fence around the stone is in good condition, but urgently needs a coat of paint. The chapter marker on this fence was placed here by the District of Columbia, Chapter, D. A. R.

Southeast 1. - This stone stands between D Street and Drake Place at the District line. The stone is in fair condition, leaning slightly, and somewhat chipped and shattered on the edges. The fence is in good condition with the paint peeling only slightly. This stone is protected by the Sarah Franklin Chapter, D. A. R.

Southeast 2. - This stone stands in the front yard of a house at 4345 Southern Avenue, about 70 yards southwest of Ridge Road. The stone is in very good condition and has been well cared for. The fence surrounding the stone has been very recently painted with bright aluminum paint and is very attractive. The plate on this fence is sponsored by the Marcia Burns Chapter of the D. A. R.

Southeast 3. - This stone is located on Southern Avenue at Suitland Terrace. The stone is larger than the other intermediate stones, and is in poor condition. The face of the stone is quite rough and the letters are not easily made out. The fence is in good condition but completely covered with vines. The plate on this fence is from the Ruth Brewster Chapter, D. A. R.

Southeast 4. - This stone is located at Southern Avenue and Naylor Road, on the south side of the road. It is in very poor condition, and has no trace of lettering present upon any of its faces. The top is well rounded and does not even resemble the other stones. The fence is damaged slightly, overgrown with vines, and needs paint. This stone was formerly protected by the John Lindsey Chapter of the D. A. R. but now has a new plate naming the American Eagle Chapter.

Southeast 5. - This stone is located about 200 yards south of where Oxon Run crosses Southern Avenue. It is in fair condition but has a large piece chipped from one of the upper corners. The fence is in good condition but needs paint. This stone is protected by the Louisa Adams Chapter, D. A. R.

Southeast 6. - This stone is in almost perfect condition, and is the best specimen of the entire forty. It is a shame that this stone may eventually look like its neighbors as exposure to the elements dulls its trim lines. It would be wonderful if this particular stone could be replaced with a duplicate, and the original sent for safekeeping to some museum such as the Smithsonian. The fence is in good condition but needs paint. This stone is protected by the Martha Washington Chapter of the D. A. R.

Southeast 7. - This stone is located on Southern Avenue at the point where it is crossed by South Capitol Street, on the east bank of a small stream emptying into Oxon Run. The stone is in good condition except of the Maryland side, and for the top corners which are rounded. The fence is slightly caved in on one side, and bears a plate by the Lucy Holcomb Chapter of the D.A.R.

Southeast 8. - This stone is located on the edge of a swampy thicket near the mouth of Oxon Run, and about a quarter-mile south of the Blue Plains Home. It is in good condition, but sunken into the ground so that only a foot remains above the surface. The fence is in good condition but the paint is peeling. The name plate on this fence is from the Monticello Chapter, D. A. R.

Southeast 9. - This stone is located in the waters of the Potomac River at Fox Ferry Point. It is lying on its side about six feet from shore and is completely covered by the river at high tide. It is very hard to reach this stone by any other means than a boat, as the land approach is through quite swampy ground. The stone is in fair condition considering its location, but the waters of the river are starting to dull the lines of the lettering. It would take considerable effort to move the stone back on dry land as it must weigh at least 800 pounds. My feeble efforts failed to move the stone the slightest fraction of an inch. This stone should be removed from the river at the earliest possible moment, and then moved back far enough so that the river will not soon undermine it again. This might have to be some distance as the river bank is quite level here.

But this completes the list of the forty boundary stones. I had a most enjoyable trip looking each one of them up, and wish to thank the D. A. R. for the wonderful work of erecting fences about the greater share of the stones. Had these fences not been placed around the stones, I fear few of them would be recognizable today. Perhaps with a little more care in the years to come, these stones will last another 150 years. Let us hope so anyway.

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