Mason and Dixon's line creates a cultural divide

By ROBIN BROWN
Bear Bureau reporter

When Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon placed stone markers along the southern and western boundaries of what would become Delaware, they had no way of knowing the impact they would have on the state or the nation.

They would come to define Delaware, even before its statehood.

LOOKING BACK

June 1899:
Tooth filled, $1.00, followed by Prescription, 40 cents.

Elisha Conover, a University of Delaware academic, formerly of Newark

And they would mark a line that created a psychological cultural divide that remains today.

Mason and Dixon's markers would divide the United States into enduring concepts of north and south with a 233-mile line that ran east to west, even though most of Delaware's portion of the boundary would run north to south, defining the state's western edge.

The surveyors were commissioned by William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, to survey the Lower Counties of Pennsylvania's western and southern boundaries, as well as the Pennsylvania-Maryland border. The pair started surveying the Lower Counties in 1763 and finished in 1768.

That explains why Mason-Dixon markers don't say Delaware. They bear a P on one side for Pennsylvania and an M for Maryland on the other. Every fifth marker was a crown stone, with coats of arms of the Penns and Maryland's Calverts.

Their famed line mainly was intended to separate Pennsylvania from economic competitor Maryland. But the surveyors also had to define Pennsylvania's three southernmost counties, which would become Delaware.

While it wasn't the noted surveyors' intent, they would put Delaware in a unique spot as the only state directly east, instead of north or south, of the Mason-Dixon Line, giving residents one more reason to say, "only in Delaware."

Eight years after Mason and Dixon finished their line, Delaware declared its independence. Later, in 1787, Delaware became "The First State," by being the first to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

The new state kept its Mason-Dixon certified state lines, which would come into play again during the Civil War.

As the war approached, the nation was a house divided, and allegiance was an especially wrenching issue in Delaware. Most states' allegiances could be identified by whether they sat north or south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Delaware was a slave-holding border state, although slaves numbered about 1,200 and freed blacks numbered about 15,000 when the war began.

Families, such as New Castle's prominent Reads, were divided. Four Reads fought for the South, five for the North.

Still, state leaders said the first state to join the union would be the last to leave. For that reason, Delaware sided with the North.

And slaves and the Underground Railroad of volunteers who helped them to freedom used the Mason-Dixon Line as their goal.

Many Delawareans became "conductors" in the Underground Railroad, a legacy that has remained a treasured part of the state's history through today.

And, perhaps unavoidably, the curious state line has bisected towns, named for both sides of the border: Delmar and Marydel.

For example, Marydel residents Karen Sanders and Jay Benton have a house in Delaware, but much of their yard is in Maryland. So the line is a living lesson for the Sanders children.

"We're all really into the history of it," Sanders said.

The News Journal/GARY EMEIGH

Karen Sanders and husband Jay Benton, with children Dustin, 13, and Stacy, 15, show off a Mason-Dixon Line marker in the yard of their Marydel home.

Great Boundary Dispute

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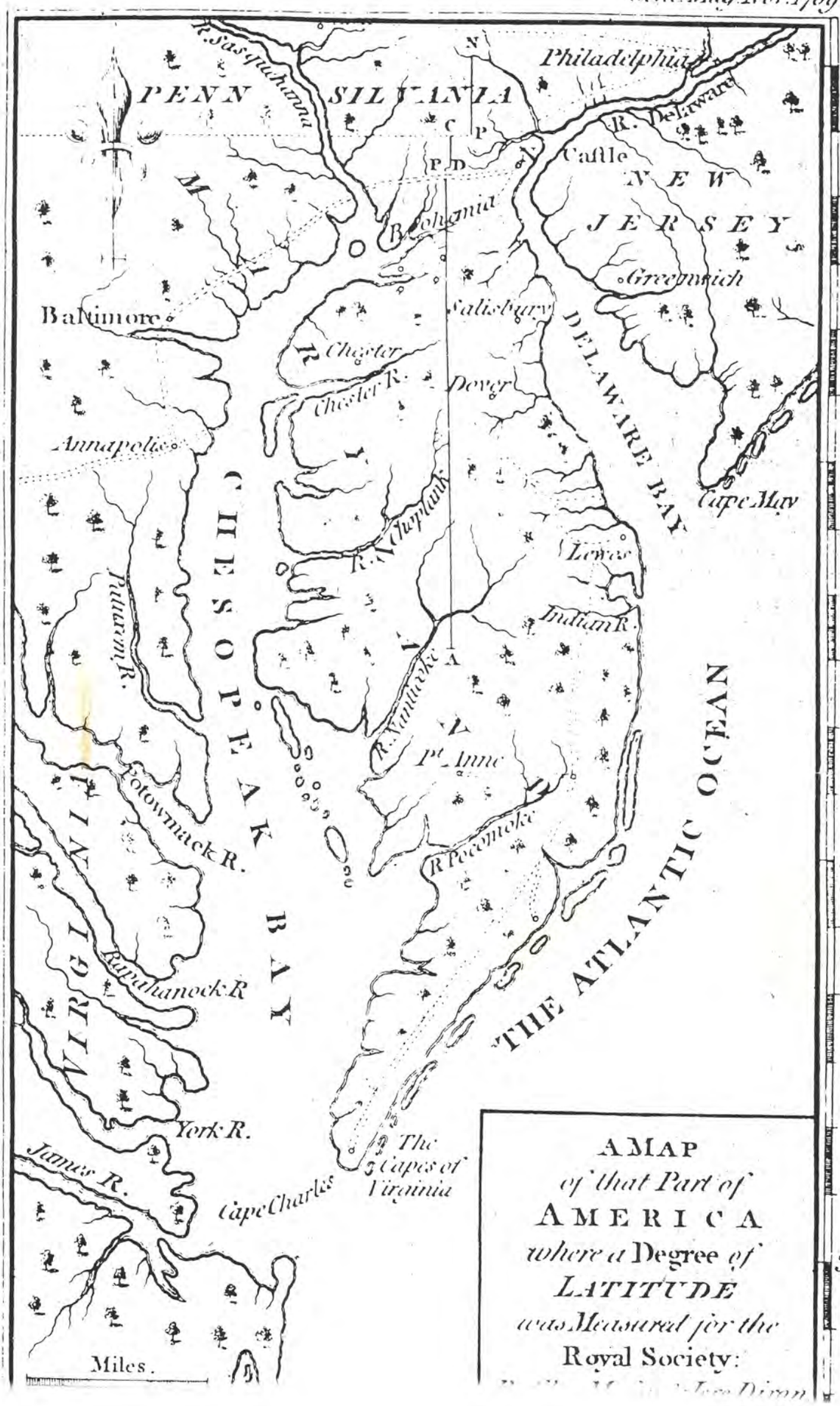
Gent. Mag. Nov. 1769



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THE HISTORY OF SUSSEX COUNTY by Dick Carter for a special supplement to the Delmarva News and the Delmarva Press SEE whole newspaper file in apple box

COPY.

Mr. James F. Mullen
Service Manager, Stine Laboratory
E.I. duPont de Nemours & Company
Newark Delaware.

Dear Mr. Mullen:

Confirming conversation with you last week I am giving below a brief resume' of the history of that section of the boundary line between Delaware and Maryland, from the Tangent Stones at or near Iron Hill Station Pennsylvania R.R. and the Prismatic Stone, 166 yards south of the Baltimore and Ohio R.R. about 2 miles west of Newark, together with a description of the stones in this section.

This part of the boundary which was surveyed bt Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon in 1765 passe through the Stine and Haskell Laboratory Properties is included in what Mason and Dixon designated as the North Line, applied to that section of the boundary which runs, with one minor exception noted later, from the Tangent Point to the Northeast Corner of Maryland, a distance of a little over five miles, in a due north direction.

In accordance with Agreement made July 4 1760, between Frederick the sixth Lord Baron of Baltimore, Proprietor of Maryland and Thomas and Richard Penn, surviving sons of William Penn, Proprietors of Pennsylvania, a line was to be run from the Middle Point of the Peninsula, now the Southwest Corner of Delaware, in a northerly direction to make a tangent with a 12 mile radius circle around New Castle. In order to make this tangent the line was run with a northwesterly bearing of 3 degrees, 32 minutes.

From the Tangent Point, Mason and Dixon were instructed to run a due north line until it intersected a west line running on a parallel of latitude 15 miles south of Philadelphia. It was specified, however, that if this north line cut the New Castle Circle, then the arc of this circle between the Tangent Point and the point of such intersection was to form the boundary, and the area in the segment thus formed, was to belong to New Castle County. This explains the exception noted above.

Actually the due north line did cut the circle and the arc from the Tangent Point to the Prismatic Stone, the point of intersection anf formerly the corner of the three states of Del, Md, and Pa. is about 1½ miles long and the area of the segment roughly 13 acres. This circular boundary is not generally known, and is not shown except on large scale maps.

This arc is the section of boundary which runs through the Stine and Haskell Laboratory Properties, assuming that they do not extend farther north than the B&O.R.R.

Now I will take up the Stones in the Line. Although the Tangent and the First Arc Stone are not on Dupont property, I think it would be of interest to describe all the stones from the Tangent Point to the Prismatic Stone. There are nine of these, eight of which are still standing. These

are as follows:

TANGENT POINT; There are two stones at this point. The first, of a dark granite bearing the bearing the Coat of Arms of Lord Baltimore on the west side and that of William Pennon the east(both now illegible) is about 24" high and rounded on top. This wasplaced by Mason and Dixon in 1765.

A new stome of better granite was placed by the Graham Resurvey in 1849. It stands 30" high,12x18"; marked with the word Tangent and letters M and D. It is in excellent condition.

ARC STONE No. 1. This stone is of the same dark and inferior granite It stands on the south side of Route 2,right next to the boundary line sign. It is badly worn and weathered,and is reported to have been moved from the middle of the road. Placed in 1765.

ARC STONE No.2. This is the first one on Dupont property,about 60 feet north east of woods bordering branch of Persimmon Run. This stone was placed by Mason and Dixon in 1765. It is of the same dark inferior granite as the preceding one,rounded on top with no markings visible. It is broken off about 6 inches above ground and top is leaning against base.

ARC STONE No.3. This stone was set up in 1849 by the Graham Survey, to mark the meridian point of the small arc. It is of the same granite as the newer Tangent Stone,30" high,12x18",rounded on the west side to indicate the circle; marked M amd D. In excellent condition. It is about 40 feet north and east of Arc Stone No. 2.

MILESTONE No. 83. This stone placed by Mason and Dixon in 1766 marks the 83rd mile from the Middle Point. It is one of the original stones Oolite,a durable type of limestone,brought over from England,and the same as all the other stones in the lines surveyed by Mason and Dixon with the exception of the Arc Stones of native granite noted above.. This Stone is 12x12", 24" high with low pyramidal top. Lettered M and P and in good condition. This marker is also designated as Arc Stone No. 4. It is 1271 feet north of Arc Stone No. 3.

ARC STONE No.5. This stone is one of the original dark granite markers placed on this site by Mason and Dixon in 1765. It is about 20" high,rounded on top,leaning slightly but firm. No markings. This stone,as you know,is now covered with earth from an excavation. It is my understanding that that the earth will be removed as soon as the ground is drier. The location should not be difficult to find as it is 728.68 feet north of the preceding stone.

INTERSECTION STONES (Prismatic Stone) This is the point of intersection of the Arc and the North Line and is about 1865 feet north of Arc Stone No. 5. At this point there is now standing the triangular Or PRISMATIC Stone erected by a joint Commission of Delaware,Maryland and Pennsylvania in 1849. It is a granite shaft 4 feet high,with the letters D,M and P on the three sides. It also bears the the date and the names of the Commissioners.

Lying at the base of the Prismatic Stone is the original

INTERSECTION Stone placed there by Mason and Dixon in 1765. It is of the same dark inferior granite as the other original Arc Stones. It is badly weathered and chipped with any markings obliterated.

Tis completes the Line as it passes through or touches upon Stine and Haskell Laboratory properties. I hope the information will be of interest and value for your files and Records. I am alsp hopeful that greater knowledge of the history and traditions of the Mason-Dixon Lines may lead to the better care and preservation of the Markers along this Historic Boundary.

Signed
W.T.Mahoney.

"POST MARK'D WEST" Site of.

PLACED. This Post set up by Mason and Dixon, June 12 1764. to mark a point 15 miles south of the southernmost part of the city of Philadelphia.

LOCATION. Mason and Dixon's entry in their Journal of the above date locates the "Post" as fpllows:

"The Point 15 miles south of the southernmost part of the City of Philadelphia is situated in Mill Creek Hundred, in the County of New Castle in a plantation belonging to Mr. Alexander Bryan.

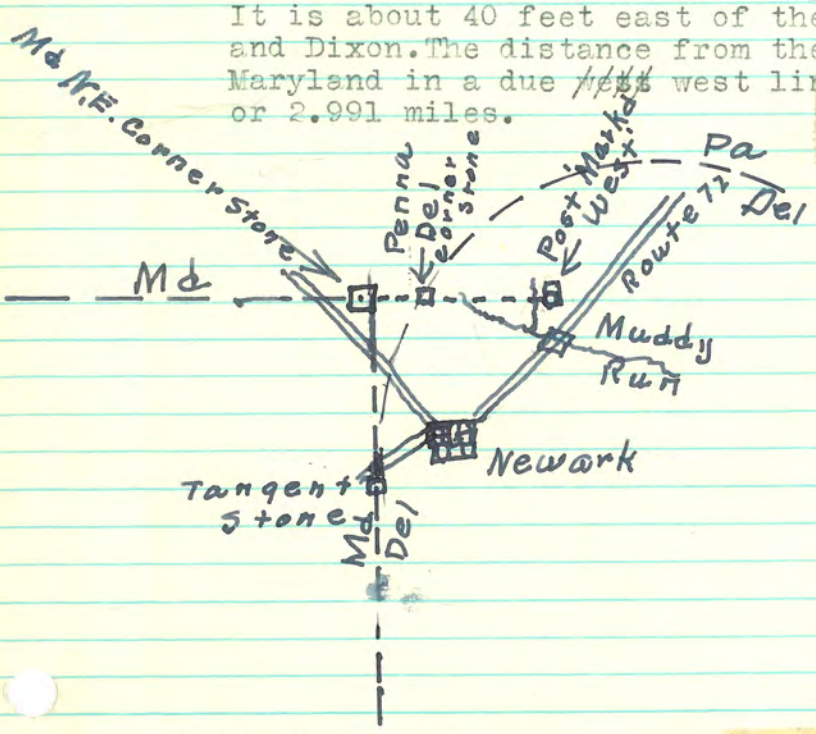
The middle of the front of Mr. Bryan's house, bears from the Point 37 52' northwesterly distant 23.38 chains(1521 feet).

It is close by the east side of a small Run, the head of which is due north, distant 5.00 chains(330 feet)

From the Point to the middle of a Rivulet called Muddy Run on a due South course is 7.15 chains(472 feet)."

ON May 7 1952 thru the cooperation of Mr. Ernest Vandemark president of the Engineering Firm of Vandemark & Lynch, and with the active services of Mr. I.M.Haitsch, their Chief of Survey, we ran out the lines and measured the above distances, with Transit and 100 foot chain. (M&D used a Gunter's chain of 66 feet) We did not quite finis on the above date, and Mr. Haitsch and I completed the lines on May 16.

We found the site of this Post to be in a lightly wooded area about 275 yards west of Del Route 72 at a point 1/8 mile north and east of bridge over Muddy Run, and nearly a mile N.W. of Milford Cross Roads. It is on property of Mr. S.Halleck duPont, who gave us every possible cooperation in locating the Post. It is about 40 feet east of the "small Run" mentioned by Mason and Dixon. The distance from the "Post" to the northeast corner of Maryland in a due ~~west~~ west line is 2 miles 79 chains and 23 links or 2.991 miles.



Post Mark'd West

REFERENCES: Mason and Dixon's Journal, Vol. VII Md. [illegible]
Dr. Thos.D.Cope's booklets on Mason and Dixon and their work and Bulletin No 4 Md. Board of Natural Resources.

Date 9-25-61
Location
Looking Towards
Contract No.
From To
Subject

Photo by
DELAWARE STATE HIGHWAY DEPT.
DOVER, DELAWARE

Neg. No. 51932-1

Contract No.

Mason Dixon stones at M s. w. corner of Delaware