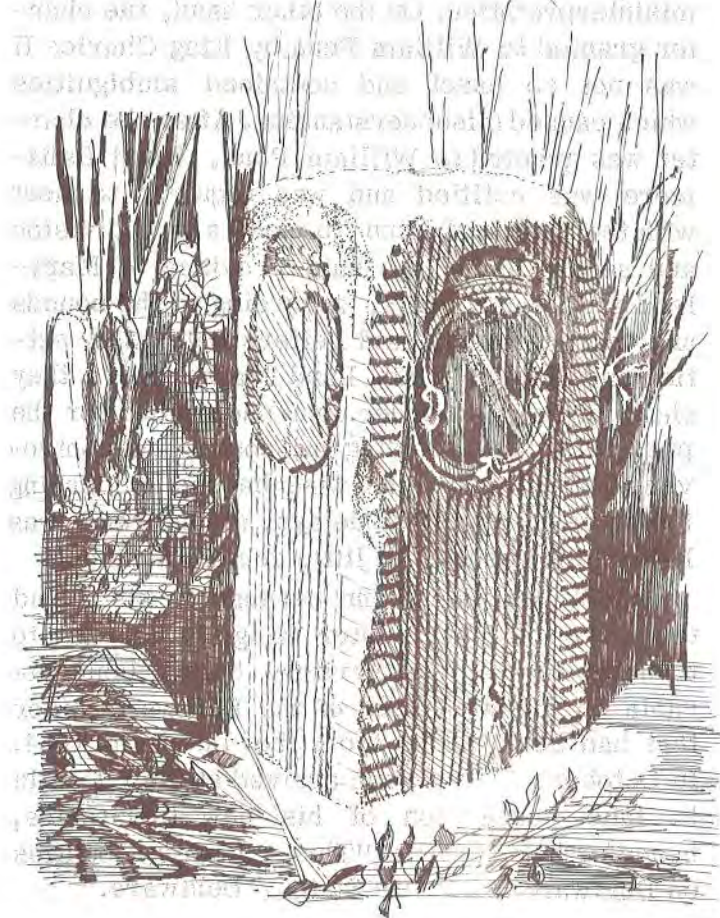


The
Mason-Dixon
Boundary
and its

Markers





The Mason-Dixon Boundary Line which achieved fame during the years immediately preceding the Civil War is the one which marks the southern boundary of Pennsylvania. This boundary was popularly accepted as the dividing line between the free states and the slave states. The whole line was run to separate the lands of the Lords Baltimore and those of the Penn family, a matter of dispute for almost a century before.

History of the Boundary Line



Lord Baltimore's charter, granted by King Charles I, clearly defined the limits of his territory, but the imperfect knowledge of the geography of the area and the uncertainty of terms used, caused misinterpretation. On the other hand, the charter granted to William Penn by King Charles II was not so exact and contained ambiguities which caused misunderstanding. After the charter was granted to William Penn, Lord Baltimore was notified and was required to meet with the agents of Penn "to make a true division and separation of the said province of Maryland and Pennsylvania, according to the bounds and degrees of our said Letters Patents by setting and fixing certain Land Marks where they shall appear to border upon such other for the preventing and avoiding all doubts and controversies that may otherwise happen concerning the same . . .". After delays, a conference was held which resulted in little accomplishment.

In 1682 William Penn persuaded his friend the Duke of York, later King James II, to transfer to him the territory below Pennsylvania on the west side of the Delaware River that had been taken from the Dutch in 1664. In October, 1682, Penn arrived at New Castle to take possession of his new territories, henceforth known as "Three Lower Counties on Delaware", now the State of Delaware.

This transfer of title contributed to the controversy. The question was referred to the Board of Trade and Plantations by the King. On November 7, 1685, this committee recommended to the King that, on the basis of Lord Baltimore's patent being for "hitherto uncultivated" lands, the tract be equally divided by a line from the latitude of "Cape Henlopen" to the fortieth degree of north latitude. On November 13, 1685, the King ordered that the division be made. The boundary line finally fixed by Mason and Dixon was largely determined by this decision.

The controversy did not die, being kept alive by the settlers on the borders. Agreements, recriminations, petitions, hearings resulted, followed by a chancery suit. On May 15, 1657, Lord Hardwicke, the High Chancellor, decreed that Commissioners should be appointed within three months to lay out the lines. He further decided the question of the puzzling circle forming originally the southern boundary of Penn's province. The center of the circle was to be the center of the town of New Castle and the circle should have a radius of twelve miles. The commissioners from the two provinces meeting in New Castle on November 14, 1750, decided upon the Courthouse as the center of New Castle and the dome as the specific point.

The surveyors were sent to "Cape Henlopen" (present day Fenwick Island which is 15 miles south of the cape known today as "Henlopen") to determine the middle point of the peninsula. On June 15, 1751, they reached the east side of the Chesapeake Bay, thus completing the Transpeninsular Line, the length of which was sixty-nine miles and two hundred ninety-eight perches.

Part of the agreement of running the Transpeninsular Line was the proper marking of it. The Commissioners had instructed these surveyors to mark each mile with a post and to

set up stones every five miles "so far as twenty-five miles", a distance which was considered to be about half the breadth of the peninsula. The monuments used for marking each five mile interval were cut for the purpose from native stone. They were four and one-half inches by eight inches in cross section with a rounded top. On one side was cut the arms of Lord Baltimore and on the other side the arms of the Penns. Only five of these stones were placed at that time between the ocean and the middle point.

The death of the fifth Lord Baltimore brought about another agreement whereby the new Lord Baltimore hoped to regain part of the territory lost by his father. By this agreement of July 4, 1760, the Commissioners accepted the line run in 1751, fixed the middle point and marked it with a white oak post. When satisfied with the accuracy of their observations, the Commissioners set up a cut stone monument two feet and eight inches to the north of the post which marked the middle point. A similar stone was placed at the thirty mile point on the Transpeninsular Line, since this point had not been marked in 1751. These two stones resembled the five placed in 1751, all being engraved with the arms of the Penns facing Pennsylvania and with the arms of the Calverts facing Maryland.

Mason and Dixon Line



Two mathematicians, or surveyors, were engaged to assist in running the line. On November 15, 1760, these two men, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, arrived in Philadelphia from England. They verified the line run in 1751 and the true Middle Point. It was not until 1758 that a Double Crownstone, or corner stone, which bears on the north and east sides the coat of arms of

the Penn family and the coat of arms of the Calvert family on the south and west sides, was placed here. This is the only Mason-Dixon Double Crownstone in existence, since a similar one placed at the northeast corner of Maryland was lost prior to the re-survey of 1849.

From the Middle Point, Mason and Dixon ran the north-south line, which forms the western border of Delaware. As they surveyed, they placed markers at intervals of one mile to mark the line. These stones of limestone were made in England and shipped to the two surveyors in America as needed. These were square posts twelve inches on a side with the top shaped in the form of a low pyramid. The side facing east was marked with the letter "P" and the side facing west was marked with the letter "M". At five mile intervals a crownstone was placed, bearing the arms of the Penns on the east side and the arms of the Calverts on the west side.

Boundary Markers



Of the one hundred and two stone monuments marking the northern, southern, and western boundaries of Delaware, many of them remain in position. All of these markers show the ravages of men. In 1952, the most easterly monument on the Transpeninsular Line was re-cut by the State of Delaware to show clearly the two coats of arms. This stands in Fenwick Island adjacent to the lighthouse. In 1961, the Delaware State society Daughters of the American Revolution was instrumental in the erection of a shelter over the double crownstone at the southwest corner of Delaware to protect it from exposure to weather. The two men, Mr. George E. Wright and Mr. Harvey Ellis, who owned the land on which the markers stand gave sufficient land to make a small park. The Public Archives Commission of Delaware (now the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs) toge-

ther with the Maryland Board of Natural Resources and the State Roads Commission of Maryland cooperated in this project. This shelter was formally dedicated at a ceremony held on November 11, 1961. A bronze plaque placed on one of the brick pillars tells the story of these monuments.

An original crownstone is on exhibit in each of the historical societies of the three states, namely, the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and the Historical Society of Delaware in Wilmington. Each of these has been replaced on the boundary line by a marble replica.



The source of historical information used in preparation of this pamphlet is the booklet, The Maryland-Pennsylvania and the Maryland-Delaware Boundaries, by William H. Bayliff, Bulletin 4, Second Edition, July, 1959

Published by the Society Daughters of Colonial Wars, Inc., in the State of Delaware, in cooperation with the Delaware Division of Economic Development, Department of Community Affairs and Economic Development.

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Printed in USA