



Boundary Stones – guardians of the Federal City

Takoma Park's history is intrinsically linked with the District of Columbia, but that begs the question of how the nation's capital city came to be located along the Potomac River in the first place.

Barely 15 years after the first Fourth of July, President George Washington's plans for creating a new capital were stalled because of a North-South split over where to locate it. Various cities from Germantown, PA, to Alexandria, VA, were vying for the honor but President Washington favored the region along the Potomac (he was also behind the C&O canal).

Enter Thomas Jefferson, who feared the stalemate would split apart the fledging union, and Alexander Hamilton, who as Secretary of the Treasury was frustrated trying to get agreement that the federal government would assume state war debts. Jefferson proposed an ingenious compromise: he would find Southern votes for the debt assumption if Hamilton would find northern votes to designate the Potomac region as the official site for the new capitol. I.

On June 1790, both measures passed Congress. Now all President Washington had to do was convince the landowners to sell their land, hire surveyors to designate the boundaries and commission a design. After months of personal dealings the owners agreed to sell.

It was left to Surveyor General Andrew Ellicott to carve out of the wilderness the agreed upon 10-mile square Federal City.

The plan was to clear 20 feet of land on each side of the boundary and place a half-ton granite marker at one-mile intervals to mark the perimeter of the District of Columbia. Ellicott enlisted the help of the most famed astronomer of the era, Benjamin Banneker, a self-taught African American, who used the stars to align the first stone (East Corner stone at Jones Point in Virginia). But after three months in tents

in the wilderness, Banneker, then aged 60, decided it was too much and retired to resume his own writings. Ellicott enlisted his brother Benjamin Ellicott to finish the job which took the rest of 1791 and all of 1792.

Beginning with the East Corner they moved clockwise through Virginia and into Maryland. The granite stone at 6980 Maple Avenue familiar to Takoma Park residents is designated NE#2. Amazingly, all but two of the 40 stones remain after more than 200 years. They represent the oldest federal monuments in the nation. Thanks to the Daughters of the American Revolution, who decided in 1915 to act as guardians of the stones, wrought iron fences were installed to protect each stone.

Given that the stones were laid out in the wilderness well before any ensuing roads were built, it is no surprise that many are a bit out of the way today.

Here's the status of the nearest stones:



North Corner

North Corner – 1880 block of East-West Highway.

The boulder marking the North Corner sits in virtual obscurity at the edge of the woods along East West Highway, just one block west of 16th Street. Only a foot of the stone is visible, across the road from the second entrance to Summit Hills Apartments.

North Portal – 15th at Colesville, Silver Spring

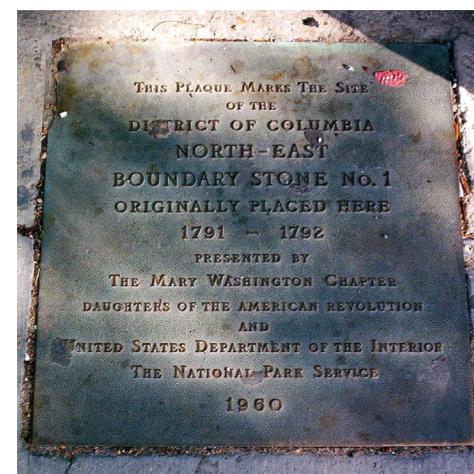
A faux boundary stone marking the "official" northern point of Silver Spring sits in the North Portal traffic circle at the intersection of 16th and Colesville Roads. Note the "MD" clearly visible. The opposite side, obscured by shrubbery, is inscribed "DC." Silver Spring and "Washington DC" signs also mark the intersection. Eastern Avenue, which traces the boundary line, begins at this spot. If it extended north two more blocks it would intersect with the true North Corner stone on East-West Highway.



North Portal

NE #1 - 7847 Eastern Avenue, Silver Spring

The original boulder at this site was dislodged during the 1952 construction of the current storefront. A bronze plaque, dated 1960, was installed in the sidewalk in front of the store currently housing Tiramisu Bakery Café.



NE #1

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**NE#2 – 6980 Maple Avenue,
Takoma Park**

If the segment of Eastern Avenue between Cedar Avenue and Carroll Avenue existed, it would intersect Maple Avenue at the spot where this stone sits. The boundary continues from this stone across the street to the cement gutter along the left side of Community Printing and across the front of Takoma Business Center before rejoining Eastern Avenue at Carroll. This diagonal line is why the high rise appears to be slanted as seen from Carroll Ave.

Parts of the original engraving are still visible:

Front: The “79” is really “1792”

left side: remnants of “Jurisdiction of the United States”

Right side: only the “yland” remains of “Maryland”

NE #2

Learn more:

For the full story of established DC, see
www.geocities.com/bobarnebeck/swamp1800.html

For more on the boundary stones, see:
www.zhurnaly.com/maps/DC_Boundary_Stones.html
www.boundarystones.org
www.dcdar.org/BoundaryStones.htm



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TPES captures time in a box

In October 2007, Takoma Park Elementary students retrieved the time capsule buried when the school was built in 1979. This spring each class contributed new items reflecting student life and current culture (think Harry Potter and Hannah Montana) for a new time capsule. The collection will be stored in a box in the media center until the year 2030.

For a sample of the items collected, go to
www.takoma.com/archives/photos/2008/07/TPES_timecapsule/index.

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