

MASON AND DIXON'S LINE.

Mr. President and Ladies and Gentlemen of the Lancaster County Historical Society: During the discussion of the excellent paper on the several attempts to divide Lancaster county, prepared by our ambulant historical encyclopaedic President, and read by our enthusiastic Corresponding Secretary, second only to our President in historic lore, at our last meeting, the subject of Mason and Dixon's Line was introduced, and although Lancaster county only borders on this celebrated boundary line for about five miles, limited to the southern confine of Fulton township, yet I thought the subject of sufficient importance to present this synopsis of the history of this much-talked about, yet poorly understood, geographical conventional line, bounding and separating the State of Pennsylvania on the south, and the States of Delaware, Maryland and West Virginia on the north.

I have accepted the definition of Mason and Dixon's line as defined by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: Beginning at Cape Henlopen, on Fenwick's Island, and extending westward to the middle of the peninsula between Delaware Bay on the east and Chesapeake Bay on the west, thence northward eighty-six miles to the tangent point on the famed Newcastle circle, thence due north, twice bisecting the circle to the parallel of 39 degrees, 43 minutes and 26.3 seconds north latitude. The Cape Henlopen of 1767 was fifteen miles farther south than the present Cape Henlopen, which at the above date was known as Cape Cornelius.

Mason and Dixon's line was the line for years dividing the Free and the Slave States, excepting a small portion of Delaware and Virginia. The territory adjacent to Delaware Bay and claimed by the colonies of Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland, was for many years a subject of controversy. The history of the disputations on this question of proprietorship would require a 500-page octavo volume at least, perhaps a quarto, to present the contentions arising from the overlapping of the several English land grants, and in my attempt to elucidate the subject I feel that I am in the condition of the witness before a legal tribunal who preferred to affirm, rather than swear, in the matter at issue, as he was not quite certain of the facts.

The southeastern boundary of Pennsylvania possesses some characteristics not found in any of her sister State lines. The semi-circle of twelve English statute miles radius, Newcastle being the centre of the chord of the arc, which forms the boundary between the northwestern territory of Delaware and the southeastern limit of Pennsylvania, stands without a parallel in the geographical boundaries of the forty-five States of our Union.

In 1602 Charles I. granted a patent to the Baron of Baltimore, an Irish Catholic, which may account for many of the troubles afterward arising, the object being to procure an asylum for the persecuted of that faith. The patent covered all of the territory of the States of Maryland and Delaware as they are bounded at the present time and a portion of Pennsylvania, extending to the 40th degree north latitude, but was restricted to unsettled and uncultivated lands.

The Dutch had settled at the mouth of Lewes creek in 1631, for a short

time, but were driven off by the Swedes. In 1634, when Lord Baltimore took possession of his grant, he made no effort to claim the Delaware peninsula, and the Swedes settled thereon in 1635. In 1655 the Dutch returned, drove out the Swedes, and dated their settlement back to 1631. In 1664 James, Duke of York, afterward King James II., received a patent from his brother, Charles II., extending eastward and northward from the east side of Delaware Bay, including New Jersey and part of New York, and James, by conquest, captured the west side of Delaware Bay. In 1673 the Dutch recaptured this territory, but gave it up to James. In 1681 William Penn received his patent from Charles II., covering the territory bounded on the south by Maryland, on the east by the Delaware river, extending north as far as plantable, and westward limited as Maryland. The grant was five degrees of longitude and three degrees of latitude, reserving to the Duke of York, his brother, all the territory lying within twelve miles of Newcastle, which town the Duke of York had founded, thus forming a circular boundary between the colonies of Pennsylvania and Delaware.

Penn, desiring communication with the Atlantic Ocean, purchased from the Duke of York, in 1682, the territory embraced in the counties of Newcastle, Kent and Sussex, now forming the State of Delaware, the circular boundary of Newcastle remaining as the county geographical line. Lord Baltimore, great-grandson of the original Lord Baltimore, protested against this encroachment upon his patent, but as the Duke of York had become King of England, succeeding to the throne of Charles II., his inherited pugnacity oozed out and he agreed that the peninsula between the Delaware and

Chesapeake Bays should be equally divided between Penn and himself, the eastern half to Penn and the western half to himself, the division line to extend south as far as the latitude of Cape Henlopen and north to the 40th degree of latitude.

When Penn's commissioners discovered that the 40th degree of latitude would include the proposed site of the city of Philadelphia, Penn's sons in 1732 compromised with Lord Baltimore, and they mutually agreed that the twelve-mile circle from Newcastle should remain, and that the peninsula as before agreed upon should be equally divided from the latitude of Cape Henlopen to the latitude of fifteen miles south of the proposed site of Philadelphia's southern boundary, and that this parallel of latitude be continued west, forming the dividing line between Pennsylvania and Maryland. It was also agreed that the line from the Cape Henlopen latitude, dividing the peninsula between the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays, should extend in a northerly direction until it reached the periphery of the Newcastle circle, forming a tangent to the circle, and from the tangent point should extend due north along a meridian line until the latitude of fifteen miles south of Philadelphia was reached, the southwestern angle of which lines should constitute the northeastern corner of Maryland.

There were several surveys to determine these lines, but none of them was satisfactory to the parties interested, one cause of dispute being as to whether the measurements should be made superficially as Maryland desired, or on horizontal lines, Pennsylvania contending for the latter mode, which was eventually adopted, using a sixteen and one-half-foot chain and plumb-line. In 1732 John Taylor

measured a line twelve miles in length from the Court House in Newcastle, and on the distal extremity of the twelve-mile line described the twelve-mile radial circle by running $33\frac{1}{2}$ perches and 1 7-40 inches, and then varying the course one-half a degree at each succeeding station. It was also determined that the latitude of Philadelphia was eighteen miles three hundred and thirteen perches north of Newcastle. In 1738 the Jersey Commissioners ran the line, but why, no one knows. In 1750 other parties surveyed the lines, but their verdict was unheeded, and well it might be, since in a short time they consumed one hog-head of port wine, eleven gallons of spirits and forty-two gallons of rum, at a cost of £27, 12s. and 6d.

In 1760 an agreement was entered into by Frederic Lord Baltimore and Penn's sons, which finally ended the controversy, so far as legal process is concerned. After employing certain parties to determine the line in question, and with whom the proprietaries became dissatisfied, they engaged Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, two eminent civil engineers of London, England, who entered upon their task in 1763.

They erected an observatory on Cedar street, now South street, the southern boundary of Philadelphia at that time, the latitude found being 39 degrees, 56 minutes and 29 seconds. From thence they ran a line westward on this parallel thirty-one miles to a point in Newlin township, Chester county, in the forks of the Brandywine, and there planted what is known as the stargazer's stone. They then ran a line due south to the latitude which was to form the dividing line between Pennsylvania and Maryland, 39 degrees, 43 minutes and 25.3 seconds, and from this point they ran a line to the Sus-

quehanna river, and verified the latitude as above.

Mason and Dixon then returned to Cape Henlopen and approved the line of their predecessors on the latitude of Cape Henlopen as far west as the middle of the peninsula where the tangent line begins and marked the point. They then proceeded to and verified the twelve-mile radius semi-circle, the Court House in Newcastle being the centre of the chord of the arc, and determined the tangent point in the circle. Then they ran the line from the marked tangent point in the circle to the marked point in the line westward on the latitude of Cape Henlopen, a distance of eighty-two miles. Then, returning to the tangent point, they ran a line due north until they intersected the parallel of latitude 39 degrees, 43 minutes and 26.3 seconds, where they planted a stone marking the northeast corner of Maryland, which, being on the bank of a small stream, was washed out by the floods and some enterprising historical relic hunter appropriated it for a chimney stone, coat of arms and all other markings included. As a date stone for the house, it was misleading. In 1849 the circle and tangent lines were resurveyed and the radial line was found to be two feet four inches too short, thereby giving a few acres of land to each of the States of Pennsylvania and Maryland which belonged to Delaware.

The due north line from the tangent point cut an arc from the circle one and one-half miles long on the base or chord, and 116 feet wide at the height of the arc. Where the due north line cut the circle is the point where the three States join each other, an important point well marked formerly, but since the Maryland circle belongs to Newcastle, and the London, Britain,

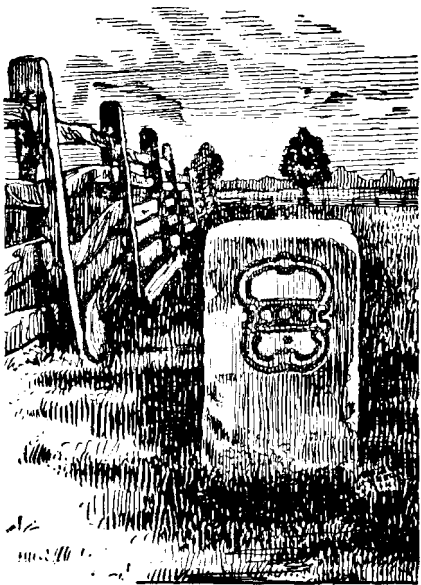
point hands her criminals and taxes over to Delaware, the former confusion has abated.

The distance from where the three States touch each other to the northeast corner of Maryland is three and one-half miles, and from said corner along Pennsylvania's southern boundary is three-fourths of a mile, an arc of the circle forming the eastern boundary, and containing about 800 acres, divided into three or four farms and comprising in its limits the village of Mechanicsville. The Presbyterians, true to their pioneering and colonizing instinct, have established a church within the borders of said triangle, known as the "Head of Christina." In 1765 Mason and Dixon proceeded to the point on the Susquehanna where they had stopped the previous year, surveying the western line, crossed the river, marking a rock in the river bed, and continued the line ninety-five miles to the Kittatinny Mountains, and then returned to civilization to pass the winter.

In the spring of 1766 the surveyors again resumed the work and extended the line to a distance of 230 miles from the northeast corner of Maryland, lacking thirty-six miles of the whole five degrees of west longitude, the length of the Pennsylvania and Maryland boundary lines. At this point the Indians became troublesome and threatening, and in obedience to their orders the surveyors returned to Philadelphia. Subsequently, by others, the line was extended to the southwest corner of Pennsylvania.

The western limit of Mason and Dixon's line is a mooted question. Certainly the authorities only gave the right to survey a line between Pennsylvania and Maryland, and the continuation of the southern boundary line of Pennsylvania should not re-

ceive the name of Mason and Dixon's line, the Encyclopaedia Britannica to the contrary notwithstanding. By agreement of the proprietaries the line was to be marked by stones brought

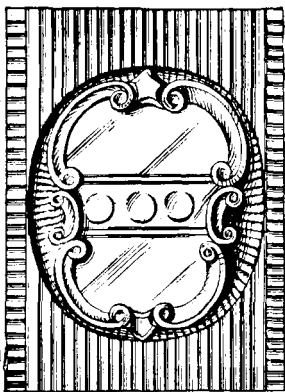


MASON & DIXON'S BOUNDARY LINE STONE.

from England, oolite fish eggs limestone. This marking was done as the survey progressed. Every five miles a large stone was set up or planted, on the respective sides of which were graven the arms of the proprietors. Every mile between the larger stones smaller ones were set, with the letters P and M on the respective sides. In running these lines a vista was cut through the forest (some authorities say twenty feet wide, others claim the opening was eight yards wide), and the

stones marking the line were set in the centre of the roadway. The planting of the stones was continued 132 miles from the northwest corner of Maryland, but, owing to the difficulty in transporting the stones, the rest of the distance to the summit of the Allegheny Mountains was marked by piles of stones six to eight feet high. Beyond the mountains wooden posts were used to mark the line of separation of the colonies of Pennsylvania and Maryland.

At the time of the revolution of 1688, which deposed King James and placed Protestant William and Mary on the

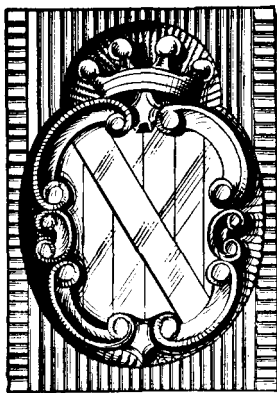


PENN ARMS ON NORTHERN SIDE.

throne, Lord Baltimore had failed to proclaim William and Mary, and the disaffected Protestants of Maryland, encouraged by those of like faith in Pennsylvania, revolted, and the feudal lord was deposed, ending the reign of the Lords Baltimore until 1714, when Frederic Lord Baltimore, who was a Protestant, was recognized as the proprietor, and the colony remained under

the Baltimores until 1776. The Church of England was established in Maryland by the King and Queen, but after his restoration Lord Baltimore granted the most liberal religious concessions of any of the colonies after years of internecine religious strife. When William and Mary ascended the throne William Penn, in consequence of his friendship for James, was denounced as a Catholic, and the Province of Pennsylvania, with the three Lower Counties, was turned over to the Governor of New York.

During the time of Penn's deposition, which continued until 1694, other emigrants than Friends or Quakers were settling in Pennsylvania. Although not wanted, yet they came, not a few of whom were rebellious Scotch-Irish



**CALVERT ARMS ON SOUTHERN
SIDE.**

Presbyterians. Dissatisfaction reigned everywhere. The Quakers and Presbyterians were uncongenial. The old English fostered fight between the Protestants along the southern border of Pennsylvania and the Catholics in

the northern territory of Maryland who were constantly in not very peaceful environments, but the settling of the boundary line between the colonies removed one cause of contention, but the early inculcated sectarian hatred would occasionally crop out, with bad results.

The government of Pennsylvania being in the hands of the Quakers, little protection was vouchsafed to the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians along the frontier from the Indians, and these frontier men were often induced by provocation unendurable to retaliate, as did the Paxton Boys in 1763.

While the Quakers and non-combatants and non-resistant Germans were in sympathy in religious intolerance of war, the Scotch-Irish and Catholics of Pennsylvania and Maryland, with others of the same sectarian proclivity in the other colonies, had one bond of union in the fact that while they loved not one another they all hated England with a bitter hatred, because of persecution through religious intolerance in the "Old Country," which hatred was in many cases the only inheritance the father gave to his children. No wonder King George called the American Revolution the Presbyterian Rebellion.

From 1780, when slavery was abolished in Pennsylvania, until the general emancipation of all slaves in the United States by proclamation of President Lincoln as a war measure, Mason and Dixon's line was the northern boundary of the slave State, Maryland, and many of the slaves escaped into Pennsylvania, and, owing to the strong abolition sentiment in Delaware, Chester and Lancaster counties, it was with difficulty and danger that the slave holders could reclaim their runaway slaves, especially when that great champion of freedom, Thaddeus Stevens, was interested in the case, and

whose monument should have a public school house on one side and a runaway slave on the other. The first battle of the slaveholders' rebellion occurred in our own county. After the enactment of the Fugitive Slave law, these runaway slaves were generally sent to Canada, by means of the underground railroad. Neither steam nor trolley cars were used on this system; the stations were a few miles apart, and the Quakers generally conducted the line without time-tables or telegraph signals, the conductors regarding the "inner light" as a law to be observed rather than the enactments of Congress. These teachings permeated the communities where disseminated, and Pennsylvania became an abolition State, the blue-stockings Presbyterians being in unison with the anti-slavery teachings.

The influence which those silent stones, marking the northern boundary of slavery, around which many a fervent prayer was offered up to the Father against the institution of slavery, exerted can never be measured. I remember of standing upon one between Greencastle and Hagerstown and making a speech to the troops as they crossed the State line. If ever I was inspired it was on that occasion.

The bitter feeling which existed between the Quakers and the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians in Pennsylvania did not prevent emigration, and, as the evicted Presbyterians of Ulster were subjects of Great Britain, they were entitled to vote early and often, and authorities give as many as 30,000 of the evicted Ulstermen as having located in Pennsylvania, although, as has been said, they were not wanted. This seems like a great number, but when we reflect that of the 3,000,000 people who inhabited the colonies at the time of

the Revolution, and that 900,000 were Scotch-Irish and their descendants, 600,000 descendants of Puritans, 400,000 German Huguenots and Dutch, all Calvinists and followers of Knox, the other 1,100,000 being Quakers, Catholics and other religious denominations, it is highly probable Pennsylvania had the above number, and it was through the flood-tide that poured into Pennsylvania in 1772 that the vote of Pennsylvania in the Convention which adopted the Declaration of Independence, which was an improved edition of the Mecklenberg Declaration, was changed in favor of that measure. The Quakers were loyal to King George, one notable exception being General Greene, who was excommunicated by the Society. The last notable fight between the Quakers and Presbyterians was when Galbraith defeated Wright for the Assembly in our own county.

DR. J. W. HOUSTON.

MASON AND DIXON LINE STONES.

At the session of 1887 of the State Legislature an Act of Assembly was passed, and subsequently approved, requiring the Commissioners of proper counties to take under their charge the care of the stones marking the Mason and Dixon boundary line. Under the provisions of the Act, Messrs. Gingrich and Hartman, Commissioners of Lancaster county, on the 13th of October, 1887, made an examination of the stones located in this county. They found the stones more or less defaced, and one of them buried beneath the soil by time and change, and yet, considering the fact that the line was completed to the Susquehanna on June 17, 1765, the wonder is that the stones were not stolen or lost sight of long

since. They found one fifth-mile stone and four one-mile stones in this county, their location being as follows:

The first stone east of the Susquehanna is found on the farm of Wm. P. Haines, known as the Frazer's Point farm, about 500 yards from the water. It was standing erect, and was the best preserved of any.

The next stone is a mile east of this, on the farm of Thomas Grubb. It was buried, and had to be excavated and re-set.

The next stone is another mile east, on the farm leased by the heirs of Isaac Tyson, of Baltimore. The stone was broken. This is a fifth-mile stone.

The next stone is on the land of John Gray, one mile east, and was in fair condition. The southern boundary of Lancaster county is the shortest of any in the State bordering on the Mason and Dixon line, it being only about five miles in length. The marking of the line a mile west of Mr. Haines' farm is located in the river, where three links of a chain are fastened in the rock on an island, near the York county side. This mark is very seldom seen, on account of the water covering the small island unless very low.

S. M. SENER.

Author: Houston, J. W.

Title: Mason and Dixon's line / by J. W. Houston, M.D.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Lancaster County (Pa.)--Boundaries.
Mason-Dixon Line.
Pennsylvania--Boundaries.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society,
1902/1903

Description: [115]-127 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 8,
no. 5

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.8

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

+++++

Institution Name

Institution Address

Institution Phone Number

Institution E-mail Address