

Proctor's Washington and Environs; Written for the Sunday Star, 1928-1949, 1949,  
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## LAYING OF THE FIRST CORNER STONE AT JONES POINT

The exercises connected with the laying of the first corner stone of the District of Columbia, at Jones Point, Alexandria, were conducted on Friday, the 15th day of April, 1791, under the auspices of Lodge No. 22, F.A. & A. M. of Alexandria, chartered under the grand jurisdiction of Virginia, April 28, 1788, and of which Gen. Washington became the first worshipful master, and the President of the United States on April 30, 1789--just two days short of a calendar year from the first date. This lodge is now known as Alexandria-Washington Lodge, No. 22, and thousands of tourists annually visit its lodge-room to see the Masonic relics connected with the life of the first President.

Dr. Elish Cullen Dick, who was worshipful master of the lodge, and who officiated as such at the cornerstone laying, was a close friend of President Washington, attending him in his last illness, making arrangements for his funeral and even finally performing the interesting ceremonies of the Masonic order at his funeral.

Accompanying Dr. Dick to Jones Point, upon this memorable occasion, were, in addition to the officers of the lodge, the mayor and common council of Alexandria and a large number of "citizens and strangers."

Arriving at the point, Rev. James Muir, D.D., chaplain of the lodge, delivered an address. A thoughtful writer who happened to be present contributed to a Philadelphia paper the following interesting, though brief account of the event:

"Alexandria, April 21, 1791.

"On Friday, the 15th instant, the Hon. Daniel Carroll and Hon. David Steuart arrived in this town to superintend the fixing of the first corner stone of the Federal District.

"The mayor and commonalty, together with the members of the different lodges of the town at three o'clock waited on the commissioners at Mr. Wise's, where they dined, and, after drinking a glass of wine to the following sentiment, viz:

"May the stone which we are about to place in the ground remain an immovable monument of the wisdom and unanimity of North America,' the company proceeded to Jones Point in the following order:

"First. The town sergeant.

"Second. Hon. Daniel Carroll and the mayor.

"Third. Mr. Elliott and the recorder.



"Fourth. Such of the common council and aldermen as were not Freemasons.

"Fifth. Strangers.

"Sixth. The master of Lodge No. 22, with Dr. David Steuart on his right and the Rev. James Muir on his left, followed by the rest of the fraternity in their usual form of procession.

"Lastly. The citizens, two by two.

"When Mr. Elliott had ascertained the precise point from which the first line of the District was to proceed, the master of the lodge and Dr. Steuart, assisted by others of their brethren, placed the stone. After which a deposit of corn, wine and oil was placed upon it and the following observations were made by the Rev. James Muir:

"Of America it may be said, as of Judea of old, that it is a good land and large--a land of brooks, of waters, of fountains, and depths that spring out of the valleys and hills--a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates--a land of oil, olives, and honey--a land wherein we eat bread without scarceness, and have lack of nothing--a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayst dig brass--a land which the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it; from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.

"May Americans be grateful and virtuous and they shall insure the indulgence of Providence; may they be unanimous and just, and they shall rise to greatness; may true patriotism actuate every heart; may it be the devout and universal wish; peace be within thy walls, O America, and prosperity within thy palaces. Amiable it is for brethren to dwell together in unity; it is more fragrant than the perfumes on Aaron's garment; it is more refreshing than the dew on Hermon's hill.

"May this stone long commemorate the goodness of God in those uncommon events which have given America a name among nations. Under this stone may jealousy and selfishness be forever buried. From this stone may a superstructure arise, whose glory, whose magnificence, whose stability, unequalled hitherto, shall astonish the world and invite even the savage of the wilderness to take shelter under its roof."

"The company partook of some refreshments and then returned to the place from whence they came, where a number of toasts were drunk; and the following was delivered by the master of the lodge (Dr. Dick), and was received with every token of approbation:

"Brethren and gentlemen: May jealousy, that "green-eyed monster," be buried deep under the work which we have this day completed, never to rise again within the Federal District."

In addition to the lodge officers mentioned, the following persons are included among the names of those also present:

"John Allison, Joseph Greenway, Benjamin A. Hamp, Michael Madden, Col. Dennis Ramsay, Col. Charles Simms, Thomas West, Jesse Taylor, jr.; John Harper, Peter Waggoner, James Taylor, Capt. John Hawkins, Jonathan Swift, Robert McCrea, William Hodgson, John Dunlap, William Herbert, Robert Sanford, William Hunter, sr.; Edward Harper, William Hunter, jr.; Charles Turner and Michael Gretter."

Back in 1855 the Government deemed it advisable to erect at Jones Point at the mouth of Great Hunting Creek, on the west bank of the Potomac, a lighthouse, for the protection of navigation and in doing so found it necessary to inclose the District's corner stone in the seawall surrounding the structure placed there 64 years before, and in this way it was obscured from view for many years. About 20 years ago it was located and enough of the wall removed so that it might be visible at all times, and a few years subsequent to this it was protected with an iron grating placed there by local members of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

To ever so many Washingtonians of "mature" age, Jones Point Lighthouse means much. For, in their childhood excursion days, when gliding down the Potomac on the "fast and commodious Steamer Mary Washington," they always had to pass this venerable landmark. Indeed, if they only went as far as Fort Foote, which was almost opposite Alexandria, they still came in full view of the lighthouse.

If, however, the boat went as far down the river as Glymont or perhaps to Lower Cedar Point, how glad we tired tots were when we could see in the distance, upon returning home late at night, the light from Jones Point! Then we knew we were nearing Alexandria, and that the boat would soon be at the Washington wharf, where we would all run pell-mell for the long line of bobtail street cars held there for our especial benefit,



for the purpose of conveying us to our respective sections of the city, which we generally reached without mishap, unless the car happened to jump the track, which was not an unusual thing then for a Washington bobtail car to do.

After the corner stone was laid 40 other stones were placed in position along the boundary lines of the District at approximately one mile apart, and a 40-foot lane was cleared of tree obstructions on all four sides of the surveyed territory--20 feet inside and 20 feet outside the line. As all the stones on the Virginia line were dated "1791" it is evident that they were placed during that year, and as the Maryland stones are reported to bear date of the following year, the conclusion is reached that they were not placed in position until 1792. When the condition of land, at the point where the particular stone should be placed, was not suitable for the purpose, perhaps being marshy or even--as it happened in one or two cases--covered with water, the stone was either placed forward or backward and the difference noted.

Around 1906 Fred E. Woodward, brother to the late S. W. Woodward, did considerable voluntary work measuring the corner stones of the District and checking up on the data regarding these old relics. It was the writer's pleasure a day or two ago to renew his acquaintance with Mr. Woodward at his home in Takoma Park, and, incidentally, to talk over the discrepancies that gentleman found when he "re-surveyed" the boundary lines of the District, and it also seems to be about this time that he read a paper on the subject before the Columbia Historical Society. Since what he then said was so very interesting, no doubt The Star's readers would like to know just what inaccuracies he found. Here is Mr. Woodward's own statement:

"It will surprise many to know that the District of Columbia, the seat of the National Government, often called the 'Ten Miles Square,' is not at present, and was not, even at the outset, exactly 10 miles square. Accurate measurements made by the United States Coast Survey, fixing definitely the position of the original boundary stones, show that while the District was approximately a rectangle whose four sides were 10 miles in length, it was not exactly so, as each line is somewhat more than 10 miles long. To be exact, the northwestern and southeastern lines exceed 10 statute miles by 63 feet and 70.5 feet respectively; and the northeastern and southwestern lines also exceed 10 statute miles by 263.1 feet and 230.6 feet, respectively.

"These irregularities throw the north corner of the District 116.2 feet to the west of the meridian of the south or original stone, and also throw the west corner 138.6 feet farther to the north than the east corner. A closer examination shows that the distances between the successive stones vary considerably from exact miles, and in no single instance can a milestone be found placed at exactly a distance of one mile from its neighbor. The nearest approach to an exact mile is between Nos. 1 and 2 on the southwest line, near Benning, and between Nos. 7 and 8 on the northwest line, near Chevy Chase Circle, each of which measures 5,279 feet, or one foot short of a mile.

"These errors in measurement amount to as much as 40 feet over a mile in one instance and to 138 feet short in another of the various intervals, and these discrepancies apply to those spaces which are supposed to be exact miles and not to certain spaces which were intended to be either more or less than a mile, and are so marked.

"It is still further discovered that many of the stones are out of alignment and that the original lines limiting the territory are not at the proper angles. For instance, the southeastern line, which was intended to bear north 45 degrees east, or true northeast, is actually north 45 degrees 1 minute 45.6 seconds, or nearly two minutes out of the way, while the southwestern line, which was intended to bear 45 degrees west, or true northwest, is actually north 44 degrees 59 minutes 24.6 seconds west, or nearly one-half minute out of the way."

As you are no doubt aware, the independent City of Alexandria and Arlington County, Va., was until 1846 a part of the District of Columbia. Prior to the retrocession, which occurred during that year, all that part of the District lying south of the Potomac was known as Alexandria County, D.C. At that time the City of Alexandria, and the county as well, had just as much franchise as we have today. True, they had their own separate mayor, but the National Government controlled their finances and to an extent dictated just what they could do and what they could not do.

Alexandria was a port of entry prior to being merged into the District. It was a very old town, originating at Hunting Creek Warehouse, and changing its name to Bell



Haven even before becoming Alexandria.

It had enjoyed many privileges which were taken away from it when it became a part of the District. Indeed, few of the golden eggs it was promised were ever laid, and if laid, according to its belief, went to that part of the District of Columbia north of the Potomac. Burdened with a debt nearly reaching a million dollars, on the brink of bankruptcy, with its frequent appeals to Congress for relief usually falling upon deaf ears, poor Alexandria was at last forced to beg to be permitted again to become a part of Virginia, and Congress acquiesced.

In Alexandria's memorial to Congress it diplomatically set forth, as best it could under the circumstances, a very good argument in favor of again joining Virginia. However, some of the things it then said not only applied at the time to the rest of the District, but, indeed, still apply to citizens who are left behind to hold the bag and carry on. Alexandria deplored its position and did not mince words in saying so. Here are excerpts from its memorial:

"We maintain that all government (politically considered) but self-government is bad, and that without some radical change, time, instead of making a bad government better, will make it worse; that whatever power is exercised independently of the will of the people, expressed individually or through their representatives, is a despotism. When we remind the committee that we are a disfranchised people, deprived of all those political rights and privileges so dear to an American citizen, and the possession of which is so well calculated to elevate and dignify the human character; that the exclusive jurisdiction which Congress possesses over us, however wisely and moderately exercised, is a despotism, we are almost inclined to say nothing more, as we cannot doubt but that our feelings, under such circumstances, will meet with the ready sympathy of every member of Congress. Regardless of these evils, we should be willing to continue in this state of vassalage, and sacrifice ourselves for the good of our country, could we perceive any substantial benefit resulting therefrom to the rest of the Union. The citizens of Alexandria are as strongly influenced as the citizens of any of the States (we say not fellow citizens, for, in our degraded condition the term would be inapplicable) by emotions of pure and elevated patriotism.

"Can a people, among whom the march of the human mind is thus impeded in relation to the highest objects on which it can be exercised, be expected to prosper, when, too, we are surrounded by States to whose citizens every passing year brings the fruits of an improved judgment and a more intelligent understanding? By decisions of the Supreme Court, the inhabitants of this District are not constitutionally entitled to many of the civil rights of citizens of the States, as guaranteed to them, merely because their rights are secured to them as being citizens of a State; and whilst an alien, a British subject may sue in the Federal Courts of the Union, we are denied the privilege. In order to obtain this right, individual instances have occurred in which our citizens have been compelled to remove to one of the States. We are deprived of the elective franchise, a privilege so dear and sacred that we would present its deprivation in the strongest light before your honorable body. Side by side with the trial by jury and the writ of habeas corpus may be placed the rights of the ballot box. It is not unworthy of remark, that whilst the principles of free government are yearly extending with the rapid march of civilization and thrones and dynasties are yielding to their influence, here alone, in the 10 miles square, in and about the Capitol of this great country, is there no improvement, no advance in popular rights. A foreigner, on reaching some distant portion of our territory, might well expect, on approaching the seat of government, to find its inhabitants enjoying in at least an equal degree of free institutions of the country. In ascertaining our true condition, how unaccountable must it appear that we alone are denied them!"

No doubt Washington wanted Alexandria to be a part of the District of Columbia, otherwise he would not have had the corner stone placed at Jones Point, where the lines would include that city. Every one knows that President Washington was a Virginian; he was born in Virginia, lived in Virginia and died in Virginia. His love for and his loyalty to Virginia were beyond question. Why then would it not be natural for him to want included in the Federal territory at least a strip of his own native State?

The arguments advanced by Alexandria and upon which retrocession was granted are only the same arguments which have been repeatedly set forth in behalf of Washington and the rest of the District of Columbia. They call for certain relief which would and should be



granted, and, perhaps, after all, if Alexandria City and Arlington County were assured the full political rights which they now enjoy, who knows but what they would want, again, to be a part of the District of Columbia.