

The Mason Dixon Line: FT's Southern Border

A hundred years before Franklin Township was formed, in the mid-1700s, the boundary dispute between the Calverts of Maryland and the Penn's of Pennsylvania was playing out in this area. Some settlers claimed allegiance to the Calverts as Maryland citizens, as others with allegiance to the Penns believed they lived in Pennsylvania.



FT's Mason Dixon stone marker -- Maryland side.

To settle the dispute, the Calverts and Penns agreed to a survey with the border between the two states being the latitude line 15 miles south of the then southernmost point in Philadelphia (now 30 South Street, near 2nd Street).

James Bradley, the Crown's royal astronomer at the Greenwich Observatory, recommended Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon to complete the boundary survey. Mason was Bradley's assistant. Dixon was a skilled surveyor from Durham.

The pair arrived in Philadelphia in November 1763 with all the latest high-tech surveying equipment of the time and determined Philadelphia's southern most point to be at the 39°56' parallel. In 1764, from Stargazer's Road (near Embreeville, on

the same latitude as the southern most tip of Philadelphia) they began their survey 15 miles south and determined it to be at the 39°43' parallel. To accomplish their survey, their team cut a nine-foot swath, called a visto, across the landscape. During 1764, Mason and Dixon also surveyed the north-south and 12-mile arc boundaries between Delaware and Maryland.

In March 1765, Mason and Dixon began marking the boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania. It would start at the intersection of the 12-mile arc along the 39°43' parallel. The Arc Corner Monument stands at this location (on Hopkins Road, in Delaware). By May the team had rough surveyed the Maryland/Pennsylvania border to the Susquehanna River.



Close up of FT's Mason Dixon stone marker -- Pennsylvania side. The P is deteriorating.

One hundred stone markers carved with "M" on one side and "P" on the other side arrived from England, as were crownstone markers with Calvert and Penn coats of arms on opposite sides. In 1766, once final survey

points were made, the stone markers were placed at 1 mile intervals. The crownstones were placed every five miles.

The one stone marker in Franklin Township remains. It can most easily be accessed from the Appleton Road parking lot in Fair Hill Recreation Area, in Maryland. A stone marker remains on Elbow Lane, in neighboring London Britain Township. A crownstone is located on private property in neighboring Elk Township.

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A detailed accounting of the Mason and Dixon survey is available online at www.udel.edu/johnmack/mason_dixon. This accounting, as well as others, was used as a source for this brief explanation.

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