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## Kentucky's Southern Border with Tennessee

I am sure most of us remember our American Literature Class in High School when we read William Byrd's account of "The Dividing Line" and the survey through the Dismal Swamp. For one, I did not like this then but now find myself interested in it, as it is the forerunner of the survey of the Walker Line.

The dividing line between Virginia and North Carolina, which is the basis of the Southern Boundary of Kentucky, was first conceived in the mind of Charles II of England and his Council. Therefore its' history begins in 1665 as an imaginative line before settlers opened up exploration of the unknown western country. This line was set at 36 30' North running from the Atlantic Coast westward to the South Seas.

In the days when the European monarchs rewarded their favorites with grants of immense tracts of land in the New World, they did their surveying at the Council-table and used oceans and parallels of latitude for boundary lines. Through successive Kings some of the grants were enlarged until they overlapped. Thus Charles II on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1665 named a line destined to become famous in our history as the line of 36 degrees by 30'. A party of commissioners, of whom one was William Byrd of Westover, a Virginia landmark on the north shore of the James River. Byrd was one of the Virginia Commissioners entrusted to form a boundary line between the Commonwealth and North Carolina. North Carolina was also represented by a team of commissioners for the survey. They set out from a point on the Atlantic coast at Currituck Inlet some 20 miles south of Norfolk, Virginia on March 6<sup>th</sup> 1728. In the party were seventeen made up of ax men, chain bearers, two surveyors, and a chaplain, as well as servants. The chaplain was to take care of the spiritual needs of the survey party as well as the needs of the frontiersmen that they

encountered on the way. They performed marriages and baptism for the settlers that were living in the area which was surveyed. They chopped their way through cane brake, and waded swamps and cleared room for the establishment of this line. The principal marking being chop marks on the trees. The group was stopped after 78 miles were traveled because of the presence of rattlesnakes. They waited until September before they continued the march westward. They continued until October 26<sup>th</sup> when bad weather stopped them at Peters Creek some 241 miles from the coast. This line was accepted by both states as the true boundary. It was 20 years later that surveyors from both states continued the line 88 miles to steep Rock Creek which is 20 miles from Abington, Virginia.

In the later party was Peter Jefferson, the father of Thomas Jefferson. Peter was a good friend of Dr Thomas Walker of Castle Hill, and Peter Jefferson, who had the utmost confidence in Walker made him guardian over his teenage son, Thomas. It would be Dr Walker that would make the line marked between Kentucky and Tennessee famous.

It was enlightening to the Virginia group of surveyors for they were astonished in the fact that border line residents preferred to be in North Carolina than Virginia. Virginians were assessed a tax for they had to pay a levy to the state for the support of the Church. This tax for the benefit of the Anglican Church, caused many hard feelings among the people. The Baptist were tortured and in many cases jailed for expressing their religion.

It was not until 1779, some thirty years later that survey parties from both Virginia and North Carolina ventured forth westward. Dr. Thomas Walker and Daniel Smith from



Virginia and Richard Henderson and William B. Smith from North Carolina headed up this group. This group was to set a line and survey it to the Tennessee River.

The friction caused by land disputes was moderated in most instances by the fact that there was an enormous amount of land and secondly by the fact that there was a liberal spirit and fraternal feeling among the colonist that was generated by the camaraderie in Revolutionary War. . Thus in May 1776, Virginia framed a bill of rights, and enacted a constitution which declared: "The territory contained within the charters erecting the colonies of Maryland, Pennsylvania, North and South Carolina is hereby ceded and confirmed to those States forever." Thus with the fight for the newly acquired freedom and the thought of building up a Federal Republic,

The two states appointed Commissioners to extend the line into what we now know as the Kentucky and Tennessee border and later as the Walker Line of 36 30'. It is ironic that we refer to the line, for the finished line was not exacting to this intent. The Commissioners were Dr. Thomas Walker and Daniel Smith from Virginia and Col Henderson and William B. Smith from North Carolina. They thus determined a point at 36 31 to the satisfaction of both and thus due west for 45 miles to Carter's Valley. Here a disagreement occurred causing a split in the parties with each running a line, the North Carolina group going two miles to the North to what is called the Henderson line. The Virginia group continued on to the Tennessee River,, but left unsurveyed a gap from Deer Fork Creek to the first or east crossing of the Cumberland River a distance of ninety –seven miles. The total distance as given in the Virginia Report of the Virginia Commissions as Walker Line is from Steep Rock Creek to Deer Fork 123 2/3

miles; an unsurveyed gap (estimated) 109 miles; from the first or east Cumberland River crossing, to second or west Cumberland crossing 131` miles; thence to Tennessee River 9- ¼ miles; making a total of 373 miles.” This added to the Fry Jefferson line, 88 miles, and Byrds line, 241 from the coast to the Tennessee River, 702 miles.

The Commissioners were not authorized to extend their line beyond the Tennessee River, but they proceeded to mark its’ termination on the Mississippi, but did not survey the distance. In consequence of the failure to make due allowance for the variation of the needle, Walker’s line deflected continuously to the north. Either from account of either an imperfection of their astronomical instruments, or from a failure to test their work by a sufficient number of astronomical observations, the Commissioners seemed not to detect, or at least did not correct this constant northward deflection. Walker’s line first touched Tennessee near latitude 36 34, and reached Tennessee River near latitude 36 40, more than 12 miles too far north in a direct line, or about seventeen miles by way of the Tennessee River.

The boundary by both states was finally settled or was it?

In 1803, Virginia was in discussion with Tennessee over the boundary...Kentucky therefore ceased on the opportunity to question its’ line with Tennessee. “Since by your own showing the confirmation of Walker’s Line by Virginia and North Carolina is invalid as to us, then we have no dividing line except the old imaginary line of 36 30. Let us move down south, and locate it.” Kentucky, realizing that they had lost 2,500 square miles of land running in a thin strip across most of the top of Tennessee protested, as the proposed line of 36 30 would devastate nine counties in Tennessee as it would mean destroying county seats and courthouses. It would throw courthouse records into chaos. It

would mean that Clarksville would be in Kentucky. To this day there are deeds in the Christian County courthouse calling for land south of the Cumberland River as being legally in the state of Kentucky. ✓

There was an area between the Rivers, that is the Cumberland and Tennessee that bulged up into Kentucky territory an area referred to locally as Pot Neck. It took years of negotiation between the two states finally, giving in to the wishes of the people living in the that area of Stewart County, TN. Most if not all of that land today is in the Land Between the Lakes area is off the tax rolls as being government land. This is a part of the National Recreation area known as Land Between the Lakes. ✓

The most talked about area was the area in Simpson County, KY. The surveyors, in an attempt to explain their efforts said that there must have been iron in the soil that deviated the needle south thus making a triangular dip southward into Tennessee. Citizens in the dip claimed to be residences in either state, as their wishes dictated. Finally it was decided that this disputed land belonged to Kentucky. One land owner, Samuel Middleton of Sumner County TN, claimed he had purchased a rectangular tract of land just inside the dip of Kentucky land in 1826 which he claimed as Tennessee land.. In 1859 Austin P. Cox and Benjamin Peebles were commissioned to run the line again, and made the decision, that the "Middleton offset" of some 680 acres should go to Tennessee. IT is not recorded why they made this decision but there were rumors of drunk surveyors and unfair pressure from land owners involved.

.There was a rumor that Middleton offered the surveyors a barrel of whiskey to yield to his wishes.

The line beginning at the Mississippi River coming east was surveyed in 1818. Kentucky sent two surveyors, Robert Alexander and Luke Munsell to mark the line from the Mississippi River to the Tennessee. They intended to set the line at 36 30 and almost did but missed it by 400 feet south. The problem, was resolved by the two states in 1820. It was agreed that the Walker line would be the true boundary between the two states. The combination of the Walker Line and the Alexander-Munsell line, both off 36 30, was agreed upon. In 1845, representatives of both states came forth to view the boundary and found that this line contained a block of ground across the Mississippi river as the river made a bend called the New Madrid bend. By following the Alexander Munsell line there would be included an area of land that is cut off from Kentucky but a part of Kentucky. One has to this day travel through Tennessee to reach this land. Tennessee wanted this land and argued for it but yielded to Kentucky because it was afraid to open up the argument again of the 2500 acres it had gained further to the east.

Thus the disputed line was now finally settled.

In 1857, the two states passed laws requiring the placement of stone posts to mark the agreed upon border. The stone markers physically defined the boundary were placed in 1858-1859.

These markers were to start at the western bend of the Mississippi River and come east. It was soon discovered that by placing a marker every five miles that the first one would be in Missouri, so that one was skipped and the first marker reading ten miles was in Kentucky on the east of the bend in the Mississippi River. Most of the markers were cut by a stone mason in Bowling Green, Kentucky from a quarry there of white limestone.



There were 68 of the large stones cut to be placed every five miles of the border. On one side they read Kentucky and the south side Tennessee on the east side the date 1858-9 and on the west side the mile mark and the number of the monument. Where there were rivers and other obstacles a smaller stone was placed. Thus a controversy of 68 years was resolved,

Monuments 19, 20, 21, 22 are in the Ft Campbell reservation. 19 has not been found and should be in the impact area. A search is going to be made for it when it is clear of danger by the archeologist on post. Monument 20 being about 2 1/2 feet tall is 425 feet south of Angel Road. This road skirts the southern end of Christian County dipping into Tennessee at places. This monument was visited by the compiler of this paper as recent as November 20<sup>th</sup> and found to be in good order despite it being 144 years since being placed there in 1858-9. Beside this monument is a bench mark placed by the Geodetic Survey in 1953. On the north side is inscribed Ky, and on the south side Tenn, This marker is on the Christian County-Stewart County line. On the west face is 105 MIs, That is 105 miles from the Mississippi River. Also the number 20 which is the marker number.

Monument 21 should be near Noah's Spring on the State Line road but has not been found.

Monument 23 is in Christian County east of Ft Campbell on the Montgomery County line.

This monument has been removed and placed in a corner of a fence row about 400 feet away. The top is broken and the monument is lying on its side.

A supplement to a book, "Four Steps West" by James W. Sames III, made by a joint team of the Kentucky Association of Professional Surveyors and the Tennessee Association of Professional Surveyors, calling themselves a Joint State Line Committee have tried to find all of the monuments as well as markers along our common border. They have their report in the afore mentioned reprinted Sames book. Another effort to locate other markers is in the offing by the current members of this committee.

An evaluation of marker 20 was requested by Ft Campbell and a study was made by BHE Environmental Inc. of Cincinnati. The principal investigator for this project being Dr. Samiran Chanchani, Ph.D., Architecture Historian. It was reported that "in the opinion of Dr. Chanchani that the State marker No. 20 is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A, for its association with events leading to the establishment of the state boundary between Tennessee and Kentucky. The condition of the marker, considering that it has remained unattended for over 140 years, is fair, with the inscriptions upon it still legible. The marker has not been removed from its original site and continues to indicate the historic border of Kentucky and Tennessee. It therefore has retained its historic integrity."

There is a plan to place a replica of monument 32 at the I-65 rest stop in Simpson County. This replica will enlighten travelers of the history of the line. The monument 32 can not be found as where it should be is in a plowed field. A search for the area has revealed chips of limestone that are similar to what should be from the monument. Another of the markers in Barren County is reported headed for a museum in Glasgow.

Monument 17 is located under the waters of Lake Barkley. A group of surveyors looking for this monument encountered soldiers from Ft. Campbell on Lake Barkley, They were using hand held positioning units during exercises. Upon explaining to them the problem in locating the position of this monument, they agreed to help. They pin pointed a spot. A diver with scuba equipment dove into the 17 feet of water and searched with no luck. It is assumed that the marker had been removed before impoundment or else covered with sediment that it was not visible to the diver.

If one wants to see the marker 20 it lies south east of Lafayette, Ky. about 3 miles. One would take KY 107 south to Lafayette and turn right at the square and go one block and turn right. This street takes one onto Killebrew Road. Follow Killebrew Road into the Fort area to Angel Road. At Angel Road turn left pass Killebrew Road Extension and look for a clearing at a muddy farm road. Go up that road south, 425 feet and on the right you will see this marker. It is a good idea to wear a bright orange vest if you go for one never knows when a hunter is in the area, and wear some old shoes. They keep the road worked up to discourage four wheelers.

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