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The Mason-Dixon Line

Lead: The most famous boundary in United States history originated in a eighty year dispute between two colonies.

Intro.: "A Moment in Time" with Dan Roberts.

Content: One of last parts of Colonial Maryland along the Chesapeake Bay to attract settlers was northeast of present day Baltimore. The soil was there heavier and not as hospitable to the growth of tobacco as in the southern reaches of the Bay. This area was good for the cultivation

of wheat and corn and as trade with the hungry West Indies expanded, the area began to draw more development. Unfortunately, this brought Maryland into conflict with Pennsylvania. Lord Baltimore's charter promised Maryland land up to the fortieth parallel which in 1632 was the southern border of New England, but in the meantime the government in London had made other promises particularly to William Penn and by the 1730s it was obvious that these grants were in conflict with the Maryland charter. For instance the principal city of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, was significantly south of the fortieth parallel.

The Penn-Baltimore dispute involved countless court battles which were not flattering to either party, but the arrogant and deceitful manner in which the parties conducted their litigation paled in comparison to the conflict that went on within the disputed zone itself. Lord Baltimore encouraged settlers to enter this area and take residents. This meant that families holding Maryland commission were occupying land north of Pennsylvania settlements, even north of line running through Philadelphia itself. Raids and reprisals went back and forth as guerilla groups fought each other with the un-official blessing of their provincial governments. Finally, in 1750 London stepped in and appointed a commission to settle the

dispute. It took eighteen years to do its job.

In 1763 the Commission hired two London surveyor Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon to establish the boundary. It took four years to complete their survey and another two to secure royal approval. But in 1769 the border between Pennsylvania and Maryland was fixed, nearly a straight shot just north of the 39th parallel. They set milestones along the 244 mile barrier with a P on the north and an M on the south.

This boundary between two colonies became in United States history the traditional border between

North and South, between slave and free states, the Mason-Dixon Line.

**From the University of Richmond,
this is Dan Roberts.**

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