

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC Benjamin Banneker:  
SW-9 Intermediate Boundary Stone (milestone) of the District of Columbia  
AND/OR COMMON  
Intermediate Stone of the District of Columbia

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER  
18th and Van Buren Streets  
CITY, TOWN  
Arlington  
STATE  
Virginia  
VICINITY OF  
\_\_\_\_\_  
CODE  
51  
COUNTY  
Arlington  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
10  
CODE  
013

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME  
Arlington County Board  
STREET & NUMBER  
Court House, 1400 N Court House Road  
CITY, TOWN  
Arlington  
VICINITY OF  
\_\_\_\_\_  
STATE  
Virginia

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
National Archives of the United States  
STREET & NUMBER  
Seventh and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
CITY, TOWN  
Washington  
STATE  
D.C.

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE  
None Known  
DATE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_FEDERAL \_\_\_\_STATE \_\_\_\_COUNTY \_\_\_\_LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS  
CITY, TOWN  
\_\_\_\_\_  
STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The SW-9 Intermediate Boundary Stone of the District of Columbia falls on land owned by Arlington County Board in the suburbs known as Falls Church Park at 18th Street and Van Buren Drive, Arlington, Virginia. It is surrounded by an iron fence painted dark green approximately four and one-half feet in height. The stone stands approximately 15 inches above the ground and is made of sandstone one foot square. The top of the marker is worn and missing a bronze plaque that was added by the Daughters of the American Revolution in the early 1900's (the plaque is now in the office of the Arlington County Survey and will be replaced shortly). The inscriptions on the four sides of the stone are as follows: on the west side facing Van Buren Drive "Jurisdiction of the" is all that can be read since the stone is sinking in the ground; on the north side facing a set of trees and 18th Street the date "1791" is seen; on the east side facing the interior of the park meadow area is the state name "Virginia"; on the south side the "variance" can not be read due to the closeness of a tree shadowing the stone facing the park area stream and the continuation of the park. The SW-9 Intermediate Boundary Stone lies directly on the line separating Arlington County from the City of Falls Church.

The original forty (40) boundary stones are out of alignment now, but were placed outlining the original boundary of the District of Columbia beginning at Jones' Point running due northwest ten miles, thence to the north corner at right angles ten miles, thence to the east corner ten miles; thence back to its point of origin ten miles; except as to a few places where the miles terminated on a declivity or in the water. In such cases the stones were placed on the nearest firm ground and the true distance in miles and poles was marked on them. Each stone between the four corner stones was suppose to measure one mile. On the sides facing the territory was inscribed "Jurisdiction of the United States," on the opposite side the name of the state, Virginia or Maryland, on the third side the inscription of the year was placed, and on the fourth side the position of the magnetic variance.

Each boundary stone bore the word "miles" or "mile," and they were numbered progressively from one to ten miles on each surveyed line. An additional number was placed on the last five stones on the northeast apparently marking the number of miles on Maryland territory.

The original intermediate boundary stones of the District of Columbia were all of fine sandstone, one foot square and two feet in height, independent of the rough part which was embedded in the ground and which was also two feet. The top was bevelled for four inches, thus forming the frustum of a four-sided pyramid. The stones originally appeared to have been carefully and accurately sawed and not cut with a chisel.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES **Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806)** BUILDER/ARCHITECT **Not Known**  
**Boundary Stones (1792-present)**

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Benjamin Banneker was perhaps the most famous black man in colonial America. He was a farmer, a mathematician, an inventor, an astronomer, a writer, a surveyor, a scientist, and a humanitarian. As a scientist and inventor he constructed a wooden clock with moving parts which operated for more than half a century. His astronomical calculations led to his writing one of the first series of almanacs printed in the United States. He was one of the first black men to participate in public service to the new nation as a scientific assistant under the leadership of Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant in surveying the city of Washington. He was respected as a scientist by other men of science in both the colonies and in Europe. Banneker was also a humanitarian who objected to the injustices of slavery, opposed capital punishment, and subscribed to the creation of a Bureau of Peace.

## BIOGRAPHY

Benjamin Banneker was born in 1731 and spent almost his entire life in Baltimore County, Maryland where his ancestors had settled during the seventeenth century. His grandfather was an African prince named Bannke or Bannaka who married his mistress, a former indentured servant Englishwoman named Molly Welsh. Banneker's formal education was limited to what his maternal grandmother could teach him and the instruction he received at a Quaker school. In spite of differing accounts of the circumstances of Banneker's early education, most witnesses concur that he attended school until he acquired a knowledge of reading and writing, and an advanced understanding of mathematics.

Banneker's native intelligence was perhaps his greatest endowment since he was essentially a self-taught man. His ability to educate himself, in part, rested on his extraordinary retentive memory as well as his acute powers of observation. He was a keen observer of everything that transpired around him.

Banneker's ability as a mathematician enabled him to construct what is believed to have been the first working wooden clock in America in 1753. He had observed only two time-pieces in his life, a sundial and a pocket watch, and recreated on a larger scale a clock made almost entirely of wood that struck the hour.



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The invention of the clock led Banneker to investigate the classical works in the field of astronomy. After many months of study and endless labor, he compiled an almanac for the year 1792. The publication of this almanac brought him to the attention of such learned men as James McHenry, a Maryland senator; Marquis de Condorcet, secretary of the Academy of Science in Paris; and Major Andrew Ellicott, an astute astronomer. Although Banneker's almanac for 1792 was not published until 1793, his publications continued for the next six years and included twenty-eight editions. However, Banneker's fame did not rest solely upon the compilation of his almanacs.

In 1789 President George Washington, authorized by Congress, gave personal orders that forty stones be erected to form the boundary of the intended capitol of the nation. He appointed Major Andrew Ellicott in 1791 to survey the site chosen for the new Federal City. George Ellicott, Benjamin Banneker's long-time friend, was asked to serve as the major's scientific assistant but he declined the position to enthusiastically recommend Banneker. The major accepted the recommendation already aware of Banneker's qualifications from the ephemeris that Banneker had calculated for his intended 1792 almanac; and Thomas Jefferson, Secretary of State, also knowing Banneker's qualifications, approved the appointment.

It was the responsibility of the surveying team to locate the site of the capitol, president's house, city parks, streets and all other public buildings. It was not until the surveying of the future capitol was well in progress and all calculations completed that Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant was appointed by Thomas Jefferson to prepare the drawings for the specific site. Shortly thereafter, Major L'Enfant resigned his position before the planned design was completed. It was only through the efforts of Major Andrew Ellicott and Benjamin Banneker that the Federal City was completed.

Prior to coming to Washington Banneker had sent a copy of his first ephemeris to Thomas Jefferson in 1791. He prefaced the copy with a letter which has since become famous. In this letter Banneker asked that Jefferson reconcile the language he used in his 1788 Notes on the State of Virginia in which Jefferson made open remarks demeaning the mental capabilities of blacks. Banneker also requested that Jefferson use his influence to find ways to end the unnecessary prejudicial attitude inflicted against the black race.

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Jefferson wrote a polite reply to Banneker and sent Banneker's ephemeris and almanac on to the Marquis de Condorcet. In Jefferson's letter to the Marquis he gave Banneker guarded praise but indicated that he had yet to be convinced of the intelligence of blacks.

Ironically, Banneker's arrival in the city of Washington with Major Ellicott in early 1792 had not gone unnoticed. In the Georgetown Weekly Ledger an article was placed, which was reprinted throughout the country in different newspapers, stating that Banneker was "an Ethiopian" who was the living rebuttal of Thomas Jefferson's opinion that blacks were "void of mental endowments."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, when Benjamin Banneker had completed his assignment for the new government he was even more determined to have his 1792 almanac printed and prefaced by the letter he had sent to Thomas Jefferson in 1791.

Benjamin Banneker further displayed his humanitarian and intellectual interests when he included a proposal for a Bureau of Peace in his 1793 almanac. He incorporated a paper written by Benjamin Rush entitled "A Plan of a Peace-Office for the United States." The inclusion of this plan is sufficient proof that Banneker supported ideas which might improve the welfare of mankind. Also contained in the almanac were his suggestions for the formation of a Department of the Interior and a League of Nations.

Banneker's life seems to have been relatively unaffected by his fame. After the publication of his first almanac and his service in the Federal City, he resumed his quiet life in Ellicott City, Maryland. In his later years, science remained foremost in his mind. Entries in his diary revealed that although he continued to compile almanacs, he also exhibited increasing interest in natural history. Banneker noticed a distinct and recurring pattern in the behavior of locust. His conclusion was that locust swarmed in seven-teen years cycles. His notes on the locusts suggest that he applied his keen sense of observation to yet another branch of science and provided additional information for the use of farmers and scientists.

In October of 1806, Benjamin Banneker died. During his funeral his home burned to the ground destroying all manuscripts and pertinent records of Banneker's complete life including the wooden clock he had made and which had continued to function since 1753.

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Banneker probably received more fame than any other black man living in the United States during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He was viewed as an example of the ability of the black race during a time when Americans sought proof of the black man's capabilities. Banneker's genius and contributions to science provide evidence of the Afro-American's contributing force to the nation during its infancy.

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PAGE Five (reference notes)

1. Georgetown Weekly Ledger, March 1791, as cited in John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, Alfred A. Knoph, New York (1965) (2nd ed.), p. 156.

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\_\_\_\_\_. The Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser. 28 November, 1806.

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Latrobe, John H. "A Memoir of Benjamin Banneker." The National Era. November 28, 1871.

Letter of James McHenry to Messrs. Goddard and Angel, Containing particulars respecting Benjamin Banneker, a free negro. The American Museum or Universal Magazine. Philadelphia: From the Press of M. Carey no. 118 Market Street, MDCCXCII.

Settle, William B. "The Real Benjamin Banneker." The Negro History Bulletin. XVI. January - April, 1953.

\_\_\_\_\_. "A Sketch of the Life of Benjamin Banneker from Notes Taken in 1836." Historical Society of Maryland, 1854.