



Haverford Township Historical Society



MILESTONES ON ROADS IN HAVERFORD TOWNSHIP

By Richard D. Kerr

BACKGROUND

As with covered bridges, old milestones attract the interest and affection of people. We have a social “soft spot” for these physical, public artifacts of the past. Milestones stood as silent sentinels along the sides of early American roads, and their silence continues today in the form of a general lack of documented information about their own history.

Historians generally have divided milestones in our region of the country into three phases. The earliest of these is **early colonial milestones**, believed to date back to the early 1700s. These were believed to be installed by individuals along the road in question, in a common effort. As with most milestones, they do not date as far back as the establishment of the road itself, and there is no assurance that a known milestone was the first (or only) one at its location. Along the five-mile Old Providence Road (which itself dates back to 1684), there were four colonial stones, differing in appearance and other clues, between the Chester Court House and the Providence Friends Meeting House. There are none from this early phase known in Haverford Township.

The second phase is of the so-called **insurance company milestones**, dating back as far as 1764. It is believed that these were established by two early insurance companies. One was the Philadelphia Contributionship, the oldest fire insurance company in the United States, established in 1752. Its well-known symbol was the square made by four hands, each clasping the wrist of another. Benjamin Franklin has generally been historically associated with this company. It had a procedure that fined directors of the company who were absent from meetings, and its records show that fine funds were used to make and place milestones on the road from Philadelphia northward to the Trenton Ferry, and also on the road south to Newcastle. A few of these are known to have survived into the 1900s.

The second insurance company was the Mutual Assurance Company, also in Philadelphia and dating back to 1784. There is one old reference crediting it with the making and placement of milestones on early roads, but whether it was really responsible for any milestones has been questioned by some researchers. The stones themselves are granite and are carved with the “coat of arms” of William Penn’s family, a shield shape with a horizontal band running across it, containing three round balls in a row. These milestones are known to have existed on the Chester Pike, the old Haverford Road, the Darby and Radnor road (later known as Coopertown Road and presently as Darby Road / Lansdowne Avenue), and the old Gulph Road. Of these, the Haverford and the Darby-Radnor roads pass through Haverford Township.

The third and last phase of historic milestones dates from 1794 on. These are known as **turnpike milestones**. Clearly, if someone was given approval by authorities to build and operate a toll road, and to charge travelers for the use of the road according to the distance traveled, both the authorities and the public wanted some physical, verifiable indication of distance. These milestones served a very real

and practical purpose. Early turnpikes in Delaware County, radiating from Philadelphia, included the Lancaster Turnpike (the first turnpike in the country – see separate article), the West Chester Turnpike, the Baltimore Turnpike, and the Chester Turnpike. Of these, the Lancaster and the West Chester “pikes” pass through Haverford Township.

In summary, five old roads, known to have had milestones, run through Haverford Township. Six milestones are known to have existed within the township on these roads. Only one of these is known to have survived the many road projects and widenings to still exist today; however, over time two additional milestones from the area surrounding the township have found refuge within it.

INSURANCE COMPANY MILESTONES IN HAVERFORD

The **Old Haverford Road** went generally westward from the location of the ferry, and later the early bridge, that crossed the Schuylkill River from the vicinity of the then western end of Market Street in Philadelphia. The “zero point” for the milestone measurement on this road was at Second and Market streets in old Philadelphia, the location of the courthouse at that time. The milestones were placed on the “north” or right-hand side of the road in the direction leaving Philadelphia. They had the Penn shield chiseled on the back, and a simple number in a dressed rectangle on the front, facing the road from the side. Milestones 1 through 7 were within the limits of Philadelphia County, with 7 being just on the Philadelphia side of the present intersection of Haverford Avenue/Road and City Avenue. Milestone 8 was in the segment of Haverford Road between present-day Powder Mill Lane and Brinton Park Drive in Lower Merion Township, Milestone 9 at the northeast corner where Eagle Road/Wynnewood Avenue crosses, and Milepost 10 on the western edge of the Haverford College campus.

Haverford Township milestones 9 and 10 have gone missing over the years, with Milestone 10, the last still in place, said to have been lost or stolen through the carelessness of a contractor when Haverford Road was widened in 1968. Nonetheless, two Old Haverford Road milestones exist today in Haverford Township. When Haverford Avenue was being widened in Philadelphia, prior to 1917, Milestone 5 was saved from destruction by the Ashhurst family, who lived at the Grange Estate and apparently had that “soft spot” for milestones. They hauled it by horse and cart from Hobart Street and Haverford Avenue to the Grange and replanted it there. Decades later, Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin R. Hoffman, then the owners of the Grange Estate and having a “soft spot” for milestones, similarly rescued Milestone 7 at City Avenue. It was about to be buried under Haverford Avenue as that road was being widened. They thereby doubled the Grange “collection.” The Hoffmans later donated both milestones to the Haverford Township Historical Society. Today Milestone 7 is at Nitre Hall, but Milestone 5 was returned to the Grange and re-set in 1977, on long-term loan from the Society to the Friends of the Grange. (It was years after the donation of the milestones by the Hoffmans to the Historical Society that the Grange was bought and preserved by Haverford Township, and its Friends group was formed.)

For many years, Milestone 10 of the old **Darby and Radnor Road** (later called Coopertown Road and now called Darby Road) stood just north of present-day Eagle Road. Documented as still standing as late as 1919, it was something of an enigma. For one thing, this road did not emanate from old Philadelphia. Like many early roads, it connected Quaker meeting houses, in this case the one in Darby up to the Old Haverford Meeting (just a short stretch east on present-day Eagle Road) and the Radnor Meeting (after joining into the Radnor-Chester Road, now Sproul Road). Secondly, measuring back 10 miles southward on the road does not present any obvious “zero point.” Thirdly, no other milestones were in existence or in memory along this road in the early 1900s. It also is documented as being in existence at the same time that the Old Haverford Road Milestone 10 was in place on the Haverford College campus, as well as being slightly different in appearance, so there were definitely two 10’s. One theory, put forward by F.

H. Shelton in his 1917 article, is that it was a “branch” measurement off of the Old Haverford Road, turning westward at Milestone 9 at present-day Eagle Road and running past the Old Haverford Meeting to the Darby-Radnor road. No one knows for sure, and even if the stone could talk, it has gone missing. Luckily, an “in situ” photo survives, showing a plain “10” in a recessed square on the stone’s front side, very similar to those from Old Haverford Road. The Penn family crest was noted as being on the back face.

TURNPIKE COMPANY MILESTONES IN HAVERFORD

The “zero point” for initiating the measurement and placement of milestones along the **West Chester Turnpike** was at 32nd Street and Market Street in Philadelphia, which was the “city limit” at the time when the “pike” was inaugurated. Milestones are known to have existed over 15 miles westward, past Edgmont and into Chester County, on the north side of the road. These milestones, uniformly hewn from granite, with a rounded top, bore the two-line inscription “x M / To P”, with x standing for the appropriate mile count to Philadelphia and the slash added here to denote a line break. Milestone 4 had been near the location of today’s 69th Street Terminal. In Haverford Township, Milestone 6 was near the toll house just east of present-day Darby Road, as development occurred Milestone 7 eventually found itself in front of the Odd Fellows hall adjacent to Trinity Lutheran Church in Manoa, and Milestone 8 was built into the east end of the north wall of the stone bridge that carried West Chester Pike (now Old West Chester Pike) over Darby Creek and into Marple Township.

Today, only Milestone 6 survives in the township, still along West Chester Pike, but in its third location, at least. At some point in time when roadwork was performed, it was moved from the road’s edge to safety near the front door of the Llanerch firehouse. Later, it was moved again, to the position it occupies today, in a small landscaped area near the road at the southeast corner of the Llanerch Fire Company property.

The **Lancaster Turnpike** also had milestones. Being older than the West Chester Turnpike, its “zero point” was the Market Street bridge over the Schuylkill River, as with the Old Haverford Road. This road’s milestones were of marble, with a rounded top and a three-line inscription “x M / To / P”, again with x standing for the appropriate mile count to Philadelphia and the slashes added here to denote line breaks. Because the Lancaster ‘Pike had only a short stretch through Haverford Township (the present Lancaster Avenue), the portion within Haverford had no milestones, falling between Mileposts 8 and 9. (In this stretch, Lancaster Pike crossed the earlier Old Lancaster Road. Similarly, the Haverford Township segment of the Old Lancaster Road fell between Mileposts 10 and 11 on that road.)

[This article is largely based on the following sources, in the collections of the Haverford Township Historical Society:

1. *“The Milestones of Delaware County”* by F. H. Shelton, in the *Proceedings of the Delaware County Institute of Science*, Vol. 8 No. 3, April 25, 1917, Media, Pennsylvania.
2. *“Old Milestones Around Philadelphia, Illustrated”* by Joshua L. Baily, Jr., in *Bulletin of the Friends’ Historical Society, Philadelphia*, Vol. 9 No. 2, Eleventh Month (November), 1919, published by The New Era Printing Company, Lancaster, Pa.
3. *The Hoffman Collection, at the Haverford Township Historical Society.*]

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