



Mason, Dixon, Ellicott, and Freeman

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Mason and Dixon are well-known names given to a surveyed line they established in 18th century Colonial America. This line has become a common socio-cultural divider between the northern and southern states, even though most people don't know its exact location. At the time, little could these two British experts realize either the significance of their line or how famous their names would become. Yet within a century after its creation, the boundary defined and symbolized the struggle between slave and free states, and eventually the Union and Confederate States.

The men behind the name were Mr. Charles Mason, an astronomer who once worked at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, and Mr. Jeremiah Dixon, a renowned surveyor. It all began in 1632 when King Charles I of England gave George Calvert the colony of Maryland. Fifty years later in 1682, King Charles II gave the land that would become Pennsylvania to William Penn. A decades-spanning boundary dispute arose between the Calvert and Penn families, with the ultimate result being the survey completed by Mason and Dixon during 1763-1767. Using stone markers, the surveyors created a north-south boundary between the colonies of Delaware and Maryland, continuing to mark the east-west running line between the colonies of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia (present day West Virginia). However, both men returned to England long before there was any controversy about North and South or freedom vs. slavery, much less the American Civil War of 1861-1864.

The Mason-Dixon Line is so important to some people that it has sparked debates relating to loyalty during the Civil War. Others take "facts" and use them to validate different objectives. All of the details will never be known; therefore I believe in the philosophy of journalist David Housel: When legend and fact conflict, go with the legend . . . An interesting story not known by many Alabamians is the continuing connection of Jeremiah Dixon to South Alabama. History notes that Jeremiah Dixon died in England as an unmarried man. However, a book entitled *The Dixon Legend** describes Jeremiah Dixon II who settled near and was later buried close to present-day Andalusia. This book also



The Dixon Family Cemetery near Dixie, Alabama
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mentions and shows a copy of the earliest land deed that his son, Wiley B. Dixon, recorded in 1837. This is the same old home site of the late Mr. Solon Dixon that was donated as a teaching and research center to what is now Auburn University's School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences.

Now what, you may ask, is the relationship between Mason-Dixon and Ellicott? None, except that the line connected with Ellicott is technically more important to those of us in Alabama. A long-running boundary dispute involving Spain, France, and England ultimately became an issue between Spain and the new United States of America. To settle this dispute, both countries each appointed two representatives to survey a "Line of Demarcation" between the United States' Mississippi Territory and Spanish West Florida. U.S. President George Washington commissioned Major Andrew Ellicott to lead this expedition, accompanied by Major Thomas Freeman. In 1779, after four years of arduous work in often hostile territory, the 31° North Latitude or "31st Parallel" was marked by placement of a large stone. Beginning in 1803, the Ellicott Stone became even more important as surveyors used it as the point of origin to lay out townships and ranges. The intersection of what is referred to today as the St. Stephens Base Line (defining the state boundary between Alabama and Florida) and the St. Stephens Meridian, it remains the basis for all U.S. Public Land Surveys in southern Alabama and southern Mississippi. Depending on the location, your prop-

erty boundary may be described in relation to this particular point. If you are interested, do some research and discover why the Freeman Line in central Alabama affects the size and shape of sections of land.

Both the Mason-Dixon Line and the boundary lines established by Ellicott and Freeman are significant to Alabama. In summary, you owe the geographical designation of your property to Majors Ellicott and Freeman, while you may owe your cultural/social associations to Mr. Mason and Mr. Dixon. 

* Dixon, Solon, and John Burgess. *The Dixon Legend*. Huntsville, AL: Strode Publishing, 1982.

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The Ellicott Stone is 3 feet high, 2 feet wide, and a half foot thick. It is marked "U.S. Lat. 31 1799" on its north side, and on the south side, "Dominos de S.M.C. CAROLUS IV. Lat. 31 1799" (Dominion of his majesty King Charles IV). This historic landmark, listed on the National Register Historic of Places, is protected by an enclosure on the west side of the Mobile River in north Mobile County.