

The First Washington Monument *Erected in Memory of George Washington*

WASHINGTON MONUMENT STATE PARK, BOONSBORO, MARYLAND



Photography provided by: **Town of Boonsboro**

Washington County in Western Maryland is the first county in the nation to bear the name of Washington and also the first county to erect a monument in George Washington's memory. Located atop South Mountain, in what is now Washington Monument State Park, the structure is a rugged stone tower that was initially erected by the citizens of Boonsboro, MD, in 1827.

The well-known Washington Monument in Washington, DC, was not completed until 1885.

On July 4, 1827, most of the 500 townsfolk of Boonsboro assembled in the public square behind the Stars and Stripes and a fife and drum corps, and marched two miles to the mountain site to begin construction. The mountain top



Left: Original postcard showing the Washington Monument before the Civilian Conservation Corps restoration.

Below: Marble plaque on the monument with the inscription "Erected in Memory of WASHINGTON, July 4th, 1827, by the citizens of Boonsboro."

had been chosen because of the abundance of native rock in that area. Since water was not available nearby for mortar, huge stones were carefully selected and accurately cut and laid to form the dry circular structure. The construction of the monument was facilitated by the skill of a number of stonemasons from that area.

A dedication service was held at noon, after which a cold meal was served, and work was resumed until 4 pm. Then the Declaration of Independence was read to the assembly and three Revolutionary War veterans mounted the tower and fired a three-round salute. At this time, the monument stood 15 feet high on a base of 54 feet in circumference. Plans were made to finish it to a height of 30 feet "after the busy season" (accomplished in the fall of that year). Inside steps led to an observation platform surrounded by a coping. On the side toward Boonsboro was placed a marble plaque inscribed with: "Erected in Memory of Washington, July 4, 1827, by the citizens of Boonsboro."

Fifty years after construction, the structure had fallen into a state of decay. It was rebuilt and restored to its original form by the Town of Boonsboro, under the sponsorship of the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows in 1882 and



dedicated before a crowd of 3,000 people. A decade later, however, the tower again fell into ruin when a crack in the wall was not repaired.

The Washington County Historical Society purchased the site in 1920 and deeded it to the State of Maryland in 1934, for use as a state park.

The tower was rebuilt to its present form by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Workers set in place the original cornerstone and a reproduction of the dedication plaque. A third dedication ceremony of the restored monument was held on July 4, 1936, with great fanfare.

During the Civil War, on September 14, 1862, as Confederate General Robert E. Lee and his staff entered



Boonsboro during the Battle of South Mountain, Lt. Col. E.P. Alexander observed “a small party of people on what seemed to be some sort of tower on the mountain top.” Thinking they were Union signalers, Alexander led a squad of eight men to investigate, but found them to be only some local citizens trying to get a better view of the combat. Union signalmen did use the monument afterward, however, and during the Battle of Antietam three days later.

A critical turning point in the American Civil War, South Mountain State Battlefield seeks to preserve the first major battle to take place in Maryland. Only here does the Appalachian National Scenic Trail intersect a major Civil War battlefield.

Today, Boonsboro is proud to be the first Appalachian Trail Community in Maryland taking steps to ensure the ongoing protection of their natural, cultural, and recreational resources. Nestled at the foot of South Mountain, between Hagerstown and Frederick, Boonsboro was founded in

An ideal site for spotting migratory birds, as well as spectacular views, can be seen from the top of Washington Monument. The park also offers access to the Appalachian Trail, picnicking facilities, and a museum with exhibits on the natural and cultural history of the area.

PHOTO COURTESY MARYLAND OFFICE OF TOURISM

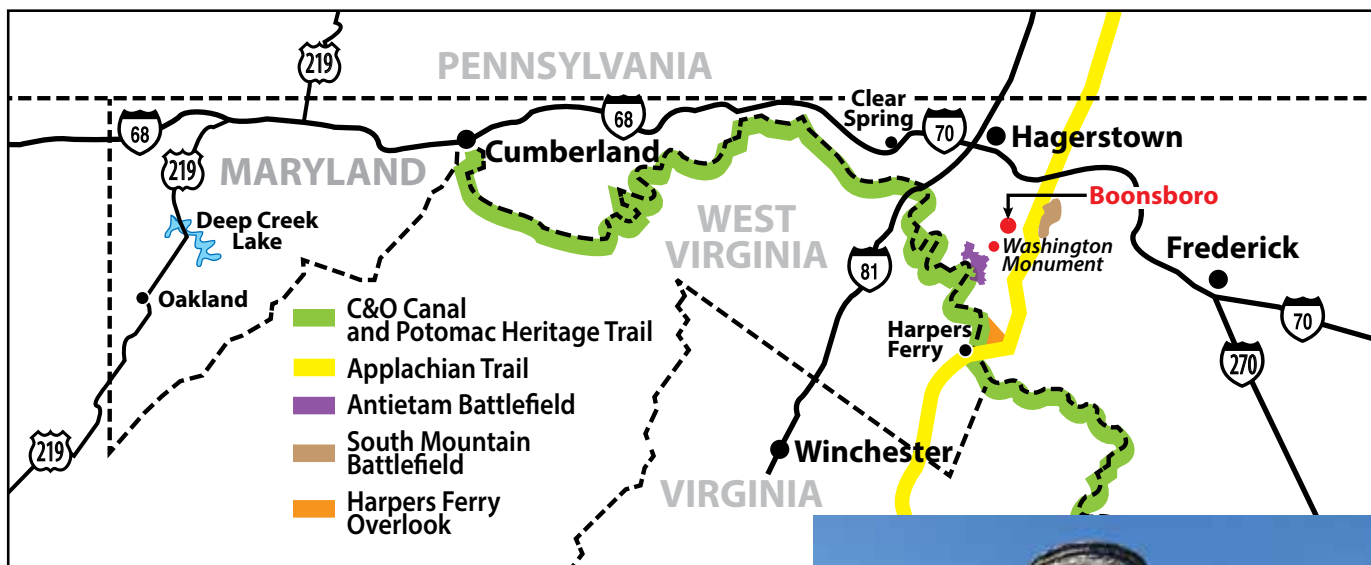
1792 by George and William Boone (cousins of Daniel Boone). It is a welcome respite for hikers and perfectly

placed to start your exploration of colonial and Civil War heritage sites, including the Historical National Road Scenic Byway, South Mountain State Battlefield, and Washington Monument State Park. Antietam National Battlefield and the C&O Canal National Historical Park are just minutes away, and Harpers Ferry National Historical Park is not much farther.

Washington Monument State Park, with the first monument to honor our nation's

first president, offers views east and west. It makes an ideal site for spotting migratory birds such as hawks, eagles and falcons, especially in mid-September. The park, managed





by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, can be reached off Interstate 70 eastbound via Exit 35. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. The Park is also home to the main office for South Mountain State Battlefield and museum. The main parking area, picnic pavilion and museum are accessible to the mobility impaired. Hours are 8 a.m. to sunset (April to October) and 10 a.m. to sunset (November to March).



PHOTO COURTESY MARYLAND OFFICE OF TOURISM

A promotional banner for Hagerstown-Washington County, MD. The left side features a photograph of a cannon at the Antietam Battlefield. The right side is a blue background with the Maryland "YOU'RE WELCOME" logo, the text "History - It's in Our Nature", "YOU'RE WELCOME in Hagerstown-Washington County, MD", the website "visithagerstown.com", and the "Visit HAGERSTOWN & Washington County" logo with "Convention and Visitors Bureau" below it.