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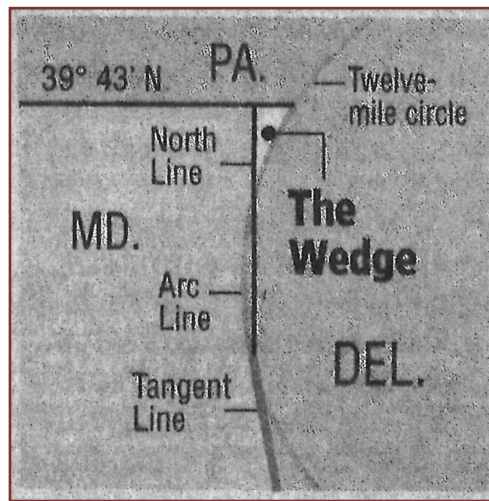
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THE WEDGE

Devotees of jigsaw puzzles often have two trepidations. They might end their work with one piece of the puzzle missing or with one piece too many. What are they to do then? When Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon boarded the Halifax Packet for Falmouth, England in September, 1768 they undoubtedly assumed that their task of puzzling out the boundary lines between the Penn and Calvert proprietorships of Pennsylvania and Maryland was complete. However, when all of the pieces of that jigsaw puzzle were assembled on the table there was one 800 acre piece left over and it became known as "the Wedge".

There are other such left over parcels scattered throughout the country. Take for example the Massachusetts "Southwick Jog". It is a 9-iron divot of land that intrudes into Connecticut from Massachusetts and is the source of a long standing boarder dispute. Or how about the "Kentucky Bend", which is a parcel of land that was literally pitched out of Kentucky into Missouri in 1812 when an earthquake, said to be ten times stronger than the one that destroyed San Francisco in 1906, rerouted the Mississippi River around it. That left the Bend on the Missouri side. Errant parcels could also change countries. Grand Island, New York was moved from Canada into New York State when a US-Canadian boundary commission decided in 1822 that the western branch of the Niagara River was its main channel. The commission determined that it was deeper and therefore should be the boundary line. So, being east of the west channel of the Niagara, Grand Island became part of New York. The Wedge can give them all a run for their money in terms of the time and amount of litigation it took to move it to the rightful place on the puzzle.



Not to scale. The News Journal © 2010

Part of the origin of the Wedge's dilemma has to do with the geometry of joining two straight lines converging at nearly a ninety degree angle to a circle. Practically speaking, this is when the north-south and the east-west lines of the Mason Dixon Line intersected with the Delaware Curve. The Wedge was left over. Starting at The Middle Point marker at the extreme southwestern end of Delaware, Mason and Dixon had surveyed the 83 mile long boundary between "the lower three counties on the Delaware" of the Penn holdings and the eastern boundaries of Maryland's six adjacent counties.

These lines, known as the "Arc and North Lines", did not meet perfectly with the Delaware curve, and the Wedge was left over. Because the Wedge was situated east of the Tangent Line, the Calvert interests conceded it to be part of Penn's holdings. This left over piece was of little concern until Delaware and Pennsylvania became separate entities after 1776. At that juncture the Wedge had to be put somewhere on the puzzle board either into the State of Delaware or the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It took 145 years and several iterations to resolve the question.

The Wedge was the closest thing to a stateless parcel for much of the time it took to resolve its status. All of this murkiness and tumult had the effect of creating a sort of no man's land giving it a kind of mystic lawless aura. It was said that bootleggers, witches, contraband runners and hooligans resided there. Duels were fought there. Promoters used it as the venue for prize fights and other elicit sporting events. Law breakers, or someone pursued by a neighboring state's authorities, could repair to the Wedge for safety claiming to be in Pennsylvania or Delaware as his fortunes warranted. He could even hop over to Maryland if needs be. Big wheels grind slowly and Delaware and Pennsylvania certainly took their time to sort out the fate of the Wedge.

The arrangement that finally stuck came out of the survey of 1892 which used the top of the spire of the court house in New Castle as the center point of the 12 mile radius to form the Delaware Curve. Delaware had heretofore exercised near continuous jurisdiction over the Wedge. The land titles of its inhabitants were located in the records of Delaware. The Wedge dwellers paid taxes and voted as Delawareans. To give them over to Pennsylvania would have caused considerable trouble.

A combination of the new radius and some of the old markers for the curve had in it the seeds of a compromise. By shortening the radius where it intersected with the Mason-Dixon Line a horn shaped parcel which had formerly been in Delaware would now be in London Britain Township Chester County,

Pennsylvania. Though it would take 25 years to accomplish, a rough trade was arranged. Any compact between states under the federal constitution must be ratified by Congress and the tradeoff establishing the new boundary line between Delaware and Pennsylvania was ratified by an act of Congress on June 30, 1921. It confirmed Delaware's title to the Wedge and Pennsylvania's to the horn shaped strip and the boundary line that we live with today.



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