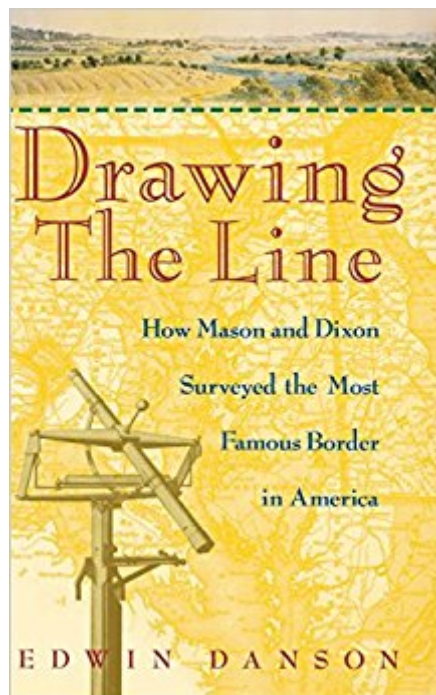




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Drawing The Line : How Mason And Dixon Surveyed The Most Famous Border In America



Synopsis

THE FIRST POPULAR HISTORY OF THE MAKING OF THE MASON-DIXON LINE The Mason-Dixon line-surely the most famous surveyors' line ever drawn-represents one of the greatest and most difficult scientific achievements of its time. But behind this significant triumph is a thrilling story, one that has thus far eluded both historians and surveyors. In this engrossing narrative, professional surveyor Edwin Danson takes us on a fascinating journey with Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, two gifted and exuberant English surveyors, through the fields and forests of eighteenth-century America. Vividly describing life in the backwoods and the hardships and dangers of frontier surveying, *Drawing the Line* discloses for the first time in 250 years many hitherto unknown surveying methods, revealing how Mason and Dixon succeeded where the best American surveyors of the period failed. In accessible, ordinary language, Danson masterfully throws the first clear light on the surveying of the Mason-Dixon line. Set in the social and historical context of pre-Revolutionary America, this book is a spellbinding account of one of the great and historic achievements of its time. **Advance Praise for *Drawing the Line*** "Drawing the Line combines a fast-moving story, a human drama, and a clear account of surveying in the era of George Washington. An intriguing interaction of politics and science."-CHARLES ROYSTER, Boyd Professor of History, Louisiana State University, and Winner of the Bancroft Prize in History

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Customer Reviews

Hailed as one of the "greatest scientific achievements of its time," and destined to designate the

boundary between free states and slave states, the Mason-Dixon Line remains an extraordinary feat in the annals of the science of surveying. Commissioned to establish a borderline between Maryland and Pennsylvania in 1763, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, two young British astronomers, toiled for more than four years in order to settle a century-old boundary dispute between the Calverts of Maryland and the Penns of Pennsylvania. Employing revolutionary survey techniques and laboring under often extreme conditions that included harsh weather, mountainous terrain, and Indian warfare, they ventured 325 miles into the American wilderness, accomplishing their task at great risk to their personal safety. A spirited, painstakingly researched account of the first comprehensive geodetic survey ever completed. Margaret FlanaganCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

"...thoroughly researched... a good story shines through..."(Sunday Times - Book of the Week, 18th March 2001)

When Isaac Newton wrote that he was "standing on the shoulders of giants" about 100 years before Mason and Dixon made their line, he remarked about a technological revolution that not many authors can conventionally delve into with an interesting and well-paced narrative. Any reader of Danson's work should be struck with the innovation of the surveyors and also the context of mathematical and scientific endeavor prevalent at the time. These are all giants on whose shoulders we stand, without even realizing it, when we access Google Maps, our GPS, or hundreds (thousands?) of other devices of modern convenience. Unfortunately, the majority of our common core objectives steer as far away from innovation and the recognition of these intellectual giants as possible, as if all of our tech today comes from coincidence, magic, or people's ability to just get along. Most notable in the achievement of Mason and Dixon is the astronomy of Mason. As a "competent" mathematician (p 55), he worked with the tools of John Bird and made just as many revisions of measure as he made original measures. These 300 year old people practiced measuring the zenith distance of a star, using softwood levels, and calculating "seven-figure logarithmic tables" (70). Add to this the scale of the work, not just the precision. And for anybody looking to read about colonial times from a less technical perspective, Danson covers the highly relevant topic of Pontiac's rebellion and the Paxton boys that made venturing too far west a matter of being spied by warring tribe members with hatchets of their own at the ready. The humor of the book comes from the legendary rivalry between Lord Baltimore, I believe the 5th, and the Penns arguing like next-door neighbors over where a stone can be staked. I live on the south of this line. If

possible soon, I would rather move to the north. William Styron wrote in "Sophie's Choice" that the South, when his character made it down to Washington DC, is where people hear your last name and ask if you are related to other people nearby who share that name. There's that distinction, plus much more.

Most people have probably heard of the Mason-Dixon line, though they may not be aware of where or exactly what it is. I grew up less than three miles from the famous line that separates Maryland from Pennsylvania, and was aware that there were stone monuments spaced every mile along the boarder - but I had no idea of the origins of this line. Danson weaves the historical backdrop that necessitated the survey and follows Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, two British astronomers, as they traveled to the colonies with their telescopes, quadrants, and mathematical expertise. A surveying job such as this required exquisite accuracy in the determination of latitude and longitude - a job for skilled astronomers in their day. For the more technically inclined, appendices are provided that go deeper into the methods surveyors use to shoot the lines. Given the amount of astronomy involved in such a surveying job, I wish the author would have provided more detail about the instruments Dixon and Mason used to accomplish their task. I'm sure it was not Danson's intention to cover this sort of technical instrumentation in detail, but in my (biased) opinion, it would have enhanced the story. Still an excellent book and one any person interested in the history of science should read.

Longitude, latitude, English Kings, Protestants versus Catholics, 200 Years of World History, and finally the contribution that Mason and Dixon made in drawing an accurate boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania.. This book has it all and doesn't mind discussing it all. Abolition, slavery, freemen are all a part of the dialog. Plenty of maps and sketches and for the reader who enjoys metes and bounds and boundary lines, this will be a real enjoyable and revealing journey. Read it today, but remember I warned you, it's not for the faint of art. This book is well researched and when all is said and done, you will be far more informed and educated in "Whatever." I actually enjoyed reading this book. But be made aware I warned you.

History and making State boundaries ...priceless... relaxing...

I applaud the author's intent to bring this episode in engineering and science history to the limelight, but more information about geometric and astronomical concepts are required if this book is to be

fully understood by even those in scientific and technical fields. But, having said that, there is far more good about this book than any failings in the details. Land surveying is much more than just geometry. As shown, there is a great deal of interpreting land descriptions (this hasn't changed at all since then!), heeding political sensitivities, and lots of very hard work. I recommend this book to anybody studying land surveying, cartography, geography (physical or social), or civil engineering. This book is mainly concerned with HOW boundaries are established. To understand about WHY boundaries are established in a particular location, see Andro Linklater's **The Fabric of America** More on the fundamentals of applied astronomy would be helpful. The illustration depicting the length of a degree of latitude appears to be geometrically incorrect and very confusing (see my explanation in the discussion area below). A reader should consider reading some generalized geodesy references along this book. A publication titled: "NOAA Reprint of Basic Geodesy" is very helpful.

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