

# What are Those Old Stone Markers Along the Road?

Those engraved stones are roadway distance-markers, over 200 years old! They were colonial-era signs, placed to help travelers and especially mail carriers. In southeastern Pennsylvania, they measured the number of miles to the Philadelphia Court House, then at Front and High Streets.

The marker closest to Blue Bell Country Club reads, “18 M TP,” meaning, “18 Miles to Philadelphia.” The Wissahickon Valley Historical Society has identified five milestones in Whitpain Township and another six nearby.

The use of stones as mile markers dates to ancient times. The Romans were the first to use them to indicate the distance to Rome. (A Roman mile was 1,000 paces, shorter than our English mile.) In the colonies, when Ben Franklin was named Postmaster General in 1753, he supposedly set the first stones between Boston and New York, using an attachment to his wagon wheel, an odometer he had invented.

Franklin’s stones were used to set postage rates (the longer the distance, the more the postage), but they also helped all travelers figure out their location. For instance, in Whitpain during the American Revolution, the area was sparsely populated, so a house’s address was based on the nearest milestone.

One example made history: From George Washington’s 1777 headquarters in Whitpain Township at the James Morris residence (Dawesfield on Lewis Lane), he wrote “Skipack Road, 15th Milestone” as his return address!

Shown are the two milestones closest to Blue Bell Country Club. As residents drive west, away from BBCC, they can see a milestone:

1. On Morris Road, on the left, after the entrance to the Kindle Hill Farm
2. On Skipack Pike, on the left, at the Blue Bell Elementary School

To read more, see Whitpain Township’s *Whitpain...Crossroads in Time*, 1977 (available at the public library).

“Around Town” is prepared by Saint Andrews resident Carol Kalos, president of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society. Please join us. Learn more about promoting and preserving local history at [www.WValleyHS.org](http://www.WValleyHS.org).



## around town

By Carol Kalos, St. Andrews resident writer and Wissahickon Valley Historical Society President

