

Harry Charles "Chas" Langelan (June 12, 1947–November 19, 2019)

A Tribute by David Lee Ingram

As I was preparing this tribute for Chas, WMS past president Dennis Gurtz reminded me of a couple of stories about Chas related to the Washington Map Society (WMS). The day of the WMS 2012 Annual Dinner Chas had gathered a couple of us to present a day long program at the Library of Congress and from there we went to Dennis's home for the dinner. After we were greeted by Dennis and his wife, we were told to make ourselves at home while we whiled away some time prior to the rest of the guests arriving. Dennis noted that the caterers were quite surprised when Chas did just that. He headed for the fridge, grabbed a couple of beers for us, and we headed out back to the covered patio by the barn to sit back and relax. Chas was not bashful. And if he could do something without bothering others, he would just get the job done.

And did Chas love his stones—boundary stones that is. On a couple of different occasions, it is said he spent more time with stones than he did with his wife. The first was when he was working on planning a meeting for Surveyors Historical Society (SHS) and the Maryland Society of Surveyors (MSS). Through a great deal of effort a broken base of a Mason—Dixon Line marker was found and for several months (years) he hauled that piece of stone all over the mid-Atlantic region promoting the coming meeting and eventually this piece of stone was placed to mark Charles Mason's grave. On another occasion he was hauling around one of the DC boundary stones including a stop at Dennis's home while returning a map that he had scanned for one of his numerous articles and presentations. After getting a picture with Dennis, the stone ultimately ended up at the DC Surveyor's office.

After being a devoted husband and father, Chas's real passion and career was that of being a Land Surveyor. His career spanned over 43 years when he retired from A. Morton Thomas (AMT) in 2008 where he had risen through the ranks to become a vice-president of the company. His career as a surveyor spanned the technology revolution for surveyors that I am all too familiar with, but his even starts a little earlier than mine. While my cartographic experience started with ink on mylar, he recounted his early days of drafting using ink on starched linen where there was no room for mistakes because it was nearly impossible to correct an error. This was meticulous work. However, what may have been his



Chas (left) with DC Boundary Stone.

proudest moment with AMT was when they opened an office in the District, which he had long championed.

Chas was the consummate professional and was a licensed surveyor in Maryland and the District. In fact, because survey licensure came only in recent years to the District, Chas had the honor of being the first Licensed Land Surveyor in the District. He was always willing to

share knowledge with and help other surveyors so that the profession was made better. He held many positions in several societies and had been named Surveyor of the Year by the MSS and received the first DC Association Lifetime Achievement Award.

Chas was also a presenter and writer and labored long and hard to get the details right to make informative presentations for many of the groups where he was a member. Many will remember his interesting presentations to the WMS with his unique style, but I remember a more humorous style to his writing. There came a time when I went to DC to make a presentation to the WMS about the Fairfax Line and at that time Chas was editor of *The Maryland Surveyor*, the journal/newsletter of the MSS. He wrote an article for the Maryland Society about my presentation since I was also a member of the MSS and headlined the article "Mr. Ingram goes to Washington". He did have a way with words.

The day after Chas's passing, I received an email from a mutual friend with a tribute that I want to share and conclude with. It reads as follows:

"So what does one now say? I for one, I wish I knew him better and longer. Yet for the past decade, to me, he was a smart, funny, and dedicated man—who knew and loved to talk about surveying. And he played the finest role of "Andrew Ellicott", which I gladly heard a half-dozen times. And I remembered so many of his surveying stories in Washington D.C., e.g, getting stuck in quicksand (of all places); or helping to survey one of the old National Guard forts in D.C.; or at the National Arboretum where he surveyed e.g., the columns that originally supported the old East Portico of the US Capitol (since 1828)."

But it was the 17th national SHS Rendezvous at Philadelphia in 2013, which in a large part was due to Chas (and our Todd Babcock, and Jim Shomper), which stands out to me as it made history. For example, a new Pennsylvania 'blue & gold' historical marker was unveiled at South Street, near the 1760s 'official' Southernmost Point of Philadelphia, where Mason & Dixon actually began their survey. And he & they also marked the real spot—out at Stargazer's Stone in rural Chester County—of Mason & Dixon's 1764 Astronomical Observatory (as I remember talking with Chas on how he got that marker, and with him and Ed Danson "Weighting The World", on the Stargazer's Stone being a "backsight"). And in a ceremony that gathered international publicity, as it honored the memory of Charles Mason who previously was in an unmarked grave at Christ Church Cemetery, but now lies buried in a marked cenotaph two blocks from Independence Hall, with an authentic 1766 Mason-Dixon Stone which once stood to mark the famous Line. It was Chas who got that



Chas in reenactor's uniform.

Stone years ago, knowing someday it would be put to good use, and it was.

And I remember him hobbling on his wounded leg in his reenactor's uniform (see photo) during that rendezvous trying to make sure things were going just right. And indeed, that rendezvous featured events of such significance as it added some needed pieces to our American history. And to me, another part of that history happens when we have dedicated men, such as the late Chas.

As was written in that Rendezvous' 2013 pamphlet—"William Faulkner got it right when he said, 'The past is never dead, it isn't even really past.' That's particularly true for surveyors." And Chas in many ways is with us and will be remembered for a long time!"

He is survived by his wife, Terry, and 3 sons—Ryan, Kellen and Brady.

Chas was our friend!

—WMS member **David Lee Ingram** is a retired licensed land surveyor who now dabbles in the repair and restoration of antique surveying instruments and continues to study the history of surveying. David spoke before the WMS in October 2000 on "Survey and Resurvey of the Fairfax Line"; a summary of that presentation appeared in *The Portolan's* issue 49 (Winter 2000–2001). Chas Langelan served over twelve years on the WMS Board of Directors and organized numerous Society social and professional events, plus presented to the Society and wrote two excellent journal articles (issues 96 and 104). 🌐