

THE KEYSTONE MARKER TRUST

Re-Inventing the Perfectly Pennsylvania Keystone Marker

The Emblem of a New Commitment to Citizenship

Revised March 2012

A GOOD SIGN FOR THE FUTURE

The Keystone Marker, with its ornate pole and brilliant blue and gold keystone, once made a monumental statement about many of our Pennsylvania places. Where they survive, they define and reflect a character that is purely local, but perfectly Pennsylvania. They were guardians of the gateways to nearly all Pennsylvania communities.

The Keystone Marker Trust is dedicated to preserving, interpreting, and re-creating these proud symbols of our past as a way of orienting our Commonwealth—literally and philosophically—toward a better future. Core elements in establishing pride-of-place, the markers are under-utilized tools in engaging young people with what it means to be a Pennsylvanian. Adopting a marker is a very visible, low-cost, high-return means for schools, historical societies, and local governments to teach not only local and state history, but also larger concepts of responsibility, volunteerism, and stewardship and to highlight the good works they are doing in their town. By re-affirming the identity of "home," the markers encourage young people to appreciate our special places and prepare them to re-invest in them in the multiple senses of that word later in life.

Installed by one of the nation's first highway departments and PennDOT's predecessor, the Pennsylvania Department of Highways, the Keystone Markers date from the time of the First World War. The last of them was installed just before the Second World War. They were used as the principle highway signage in Pennsylvania, serving a seemingly limitless number of uses as directional signs, speed limit signs, caution signs, etc., and, as most of us know them, as monumental markers for cities, towns, and borough lines, creeks, trails, and points of interest. Of the tens of thousands once common across Pennsylvania, only about 500 remain.



TOWN MARKERS. Markers such as these, with a front-mount sign and pole, were used to denote the entrances to all Pennsylvania towns, cities, villages, etc. Scroll down on this page to learn how to "read" a town marker. This marker shape was also used for a host of other purposes, as shown in the drawings below, including speed limits, directions, danger zones, school zones, etc.



STREAM MARKERS. Keystone Markers were used to denote stream and river crossings and could once be found at every such crossing along state roads. Most stream and river markers were of the top-mount, two-sided variety as shown here at Welsh Run, though some used the front-mount sign and pole common to the Town Markers. (Photo: Fred Yenerall)



TRAIL and HISTORIC ATTRACTION MARKERS. Keystone Markers were used to indicate trails and other points of interest. Trail markers, as shown here, generally used the front-mount pole and the keystone variant sign shape. (Photo: Cheri Campbell). Some points of attraction markers also used the town or stream type of markers.



BOROUGH AND COUNTY MARKERS. Keystone Markers were used to indicate jurisdictional boundaries, such as borough lines. These markers generally used the front-mount pole and the keystone variant sign shape, as shown here.

Recent treatments of the markers make a less enthusiastic representation at best and, at worst, smack of a sad disinvestment in place. Many markers have been lost; many others are abandoned. Others have had their historic poles discarded or have been moved. New replacements for these markers have, by and large, been unavailable or wholly lacking of the character of the originals. To curb these unfortunate trends, the Keystone Marker Trust was established to raise funds and awareness to:

1. To replicate, restore, or re-install markers in partnership with municipalities, organizations, and individuals. Most towns had at least four historically; rivers, borough lines, creeks, trails, and distances also used keystone marker
2. Work with PennDOT to establish a uniform set of principles about what markers can be grandfathered in to current safety standards as well as guidelines for marker care.
3. Create an Adopt-a-Marker Educational tool kit to enable schools to build local and state history programs around markers
4. Create an interactive on-line database of all current and historic Keystone Markers
5. Create a revolving loan/small grants o assist municipalities and interested organizations in replicating and restoring their markers
6. Work with Waymarking groups to integrate markers into their activities, enabling geo-coordinates to be correlated to markers.
7. Work with municipalities, historical societies, civic improvement groups, and historic preservation groups to utilize www.keystonemarkerttrust.org as a way to highlight their special places and their preservation, community development, educational, or volunteerism initiatives and achievements.

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