Daniel Boone Trail Marker

The Daniel Boone Trail marker is a stone and bronze arrowhead monument on the median of Commonwealth Avenue at the intersection of Beacon Street and Hammond Streets near Boston College. According to Fred C. Alexander (Newton Historical Society, 1965) the monument was installed by the City of Newton's Street Commissioner, Charles Mahoney, and a Mr. Dempsey accepted it for Mayor Sinclair Weeks. Paid for by the Kiwanis Club, the monument was erected and thereafter dedicated on October 21, 1934 "in the bicentennial year of Boone's birth." Kiwanis Club subscriptions followed a persuasive talk by Mr. J. Hampton Rich himself as the "Manager" of the Daniel Boone Trail Association, though it would be later discovered that Rich absconded with the Association's funds [see below for a biography of Rich]. The Boston Public Library had its name removed from the marker to dissociate from the fraud, though most names of subscribers still remain on it.

J. Hampton Rich

The force behind the Boone Trail Markers was Joseph Hampton Rich (1874-1949), a graduate of Wake Forest University in the class of 1898. He had several careers: public school teacher; representing the Institute of Heraldry of Washington, DC; preaching in churches (he attended seminary in Kentucky); and operating the Piedmont Print Company in Winston-Salem, NC. As a newspaper owner from Mocksville, NC, he erected 358 stone monuments across America from 1913 to 1938, according to Everett Gary Marshall, his biographer. He ended his career as Clerk Librarian of the North Carolina State Senate.

The biography states, “A visionary man, Rich founded and managed The Boone Trail Highway and Memorial Association, which was organized in 1913 in North Wilkesboro, NC, to help improve road conditions and memorialize Daniel Boone's trail blazing efforts. For 25 years, "Major" J. Hampton Rich traveled far and wide, stirring the imaginations of civic leaders and school children, raising funds, placing metal tablets on arrowhead shaped monuments, leading the ceremonies and issuing press releases.”

He chose to celebrate Daniel Boone's trail because of its contribution to the settlement of mid-America and because he was captivated by "the pioneer spirit" of that era. Rich united history with the need for highway enhancements from the North Carolina to Tennessee, West Virginia and Kentucky and as far as the West Coast where he erected more than 100 monuments.

Although many of the tablets are associated with locations visited by Boone, many were simply placed wherever Rich could collect the necessary donations to erect a monument. He established the Boone Trail Highway Association to further his project. From the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s, the Association published a newsletter which detailed the efforts to install new monuments.

Supposedly, the tablets were (at least partially) constructed from metal salvaged from the battleship USS Maine (ACR-1), which was sunk during Spanish-American War in 1898. Typically, the tablets were located near schools, government buildings or along old highway routes. Over the years many of the markers have been lost to highway construction and general urban sprawl.

In the late-1990s, a group of descendants of Daniel Boone established the Boone Trail Highway & Memorial Re-Association with the intent of locating the markers which remained.