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ALLSTON BRIGHTON

Work begins to fix, free 283-year-old stone mile marker in Allston

Posted by Matt Rocheleau December 6, 2012 05:23 PM

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(Matt Rocheleau for Boston.com)

A photo taken Thursday, Dec. 6, of the milestone on Harvard Avenue as crews began work to permanently fix and free the historic sidewalk rock. The rock was wrapped and covered to protect it while crews worked around it.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Allston's most-legendary member of the rock genre is finally getting the respect it deserves after years of being snubbed, including a recent wave of public abuse.

Repairs began this week to the 283-year-old stone mile marker on a Harvard Avenue sidewalk.

About a year-and-a-half ago, a truck backed into and [severed](#) the historic boulder, which had been long-neglected by many passersby. The rock got a [temporary fix](#), but remained cracked. It sat caged in by steel police barriers for the past 17 months.

During that imprisonment, the stone was mocked and marred with graffiti and gum, and suffocated by weeds and garbage.

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Fliers hung in the area demanded that someone “free the rock.” But, those turned out to be yet another cruel joke at the stone’s expense.

Last month, thousands of area residents, public officials and even professional football players publicly humiliated the rock with no roll when they gave royal treatment to the rockers of Aerosmith as the group played a show outside their former home in a neighborhood nicknamed “Rock City.”

But, apparently, not all rock types receive equal treatment in this part of town that’s one letter ‘e’ away from being ‘All-stone.’

The sound of cheering crowds during the band’s concert echoed a few blocks away to where the Colonial-era stone sat alone and ignored despite having seven times as much history in Allston as the musical group.

It was rock bottom.

But, this week, the stone received a lift.

Literally, workers lifted it up using a pulley system and repositioned the mile marker about two feet further into the sidewalk, away from the street, to give it some additional breathing room from the busy roadway.

The gum and graffiti have been washed off. The broken stone will be nursed back to health by Watertown-based sculpture and monument conservator, Daedalus, Inc., which plans to apply a specially-matching mortar to stitch up and seal the rock’s laceration.

And, the rock will be given full-time protection. Two bollards are scheduled to be set in place on either side of the stone after a new concrete sidewalk slab is poured around the marker.

“It will be better protected this time,” Derek Nickerson, a foreman with South Easton-based Folan Waterproofing & Construction Co., said Thursday shortly after he and his colleague Miguel Relvinha dug up the sidewalk to move the rock that they estimated weighs about 1,500 pounds.

The rock’s resurrection is scheduled to be completed, weather permitting, by early next week, workers said.

The \$15,581 project is funded by the state's transportation department, which oversees that stone and others like it, according to Michael Verseckes, a spokesman for the department.

He said that because of the stone's historic nature, plans to repair it had to go through multiple layers of review, which accounted for most of the delay in fixing and freeing the mile marker.

"We're hoping that this will last 283 more years," Verseckes said. "I think folks will be happy that this is being done and that it will help draw attention to the fact that these mile markers exist."

"We're lucky to have the ones that remain and we're happy to protect them," he added.

The stone – which reads "Boston 6 miles" – is known as "Marker #6." It is one of four remaining in Boston and one of 47 known statewide out of at least 99 that once existed.

The markers are part of a group of stones installed along a mail delivery system connecting the Hub and New York City.

The rocks, installed along the Upper Boston Post Road, which is now Route 20, became a standardized means of measuring distance between Springfield and Boston in 1767, when the Bay State was still an English colony. But some, like the Harvard Avenue milestone, were installed before then.

Each stone had a mileage figure carved into it to mark its distance from a stone near City Hall in downtown Boston. Over time, some of the rocks are believed to have been lost or moved because of factors including damage and development.

The stone on Harvard Avenue "disappeared and was believed to be lost, but it was eventually found and reset," according to a copy of a historic survey report from 1941 that Charlie Vasiliades of the Brighton-Allston Historical Society e-mailed to Boston.com.

Carved into the stone is "1729," the year it was installed. Below that marking, the initials "PD" are engraved. The letters stand for Judge Paul Dudley, who

became Chief Justice of the Province of Massachusetts Bay in 1745. He installed some other mile markers around Boston.

Benjamin Franklin also planted some of the mile markers in Massachusetts.

All of the boulders, which vary in dimension and weight, were listed as a group in the National Register of Historic Places in the early 1970s after a law was passed the decade prior directing the state to restore and maintain the heavy, informative rocks.

Stones are known to have been located in: Cambridge, Watertown, Waltham, Weston, Wayland, Sudbury, Marlborough, Northborough, Shrewsbury, Worcester, Leicester, Spencer, East Brookfield, Brookfield, West Brookfield, Warren, Palmer, and Wilbraham.

The stones range in height from one to five feet; in width from 18 inches to three feet; and in depth from four inches to more than one foot.

E-mail Matt Rocheleau at mjrochele@gmail.com.

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(Matt Rocheleau for Boston.com)

A photo of the milestone days after it was severed on July 28, 2011, when a truck backed into it.

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