

**Major Andrew Ellicott, Esq. –
Colonial American Astronomical Surveyor, Patriot, Cartographer,
Legislator, Scientific Instrument Maker, Boundary Commissioner &
Professor of Mathematics**

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Key words: Andrew Ellicott, Survey, Treaty, Boundary, Washington D.C., West Point.

ABSTRACT

Major Andrew Ellicott, Esq. was perhaps the foremost astronomical surveyor during the terms of Presidents George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Silvio Bedini, Esq. describes Ellicott:

“No other American man of science in his time could number as many achievements, or as important ones. Furthermore, he was truly a scientist by dictionary definition, for he was professionally trained in the sciences, and earned more than half his income from pursuit of them, a unique distinction for that period.” (Bedini, 1975)

He existed amongst the scientific elite of the new republic. Benjamin Franklin, David Rittenhouse, Dr. James Madison, Robert Patterson, Thomas Hutchens, Isaac Briggs, Benjamin Banneker, Dr. John Ewing & William Dunbar were some of his friends and colleagues. In 1788, Benjamin Franklin penned a reference for his young friend that stated:

“I do hereby certify whom it may concern, that I have long known Mr. Andrew Ellicott as a Man of Science; and while I was in the Executive Council have had frequent Occasions, in the Course of Public Business, of being acquainted with his Abilities in Geographical Operations of the most important kind, which were performed by him with the greatest Scientific Accuracy. Given at Philadelphia this 10th Day of August, 1789. B. Franklin, late President of the State of Pennsylvania.” (Mathews, 1908)

Perhaps the climax of Ellicott’s career was the extraordinary expedition to survey and mark the 1st U.S. Southern boundary. President Washington appointed Ellicott as the Astronomical Commissioner to survey this Spanish-U.S. territorial boundary as defined in the 1795 Treaty of San Lorenzo el Real. The treaty had settled a 12 year long boundary dispute between Spain and the U.S. concerning jurisdiction over the Southeastern Indian Nations.

Ellicott’s early career served as a prelude to the Spanish border expedition honing his skills and knowledge in the completion of numerous state & federal boundary commissions. This paper examines Ellicott’s life and career using the Southern boundary expedition as a focal

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point to link his formative years to later surveys and his tenure as Professor of Mathematics at West Point.

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