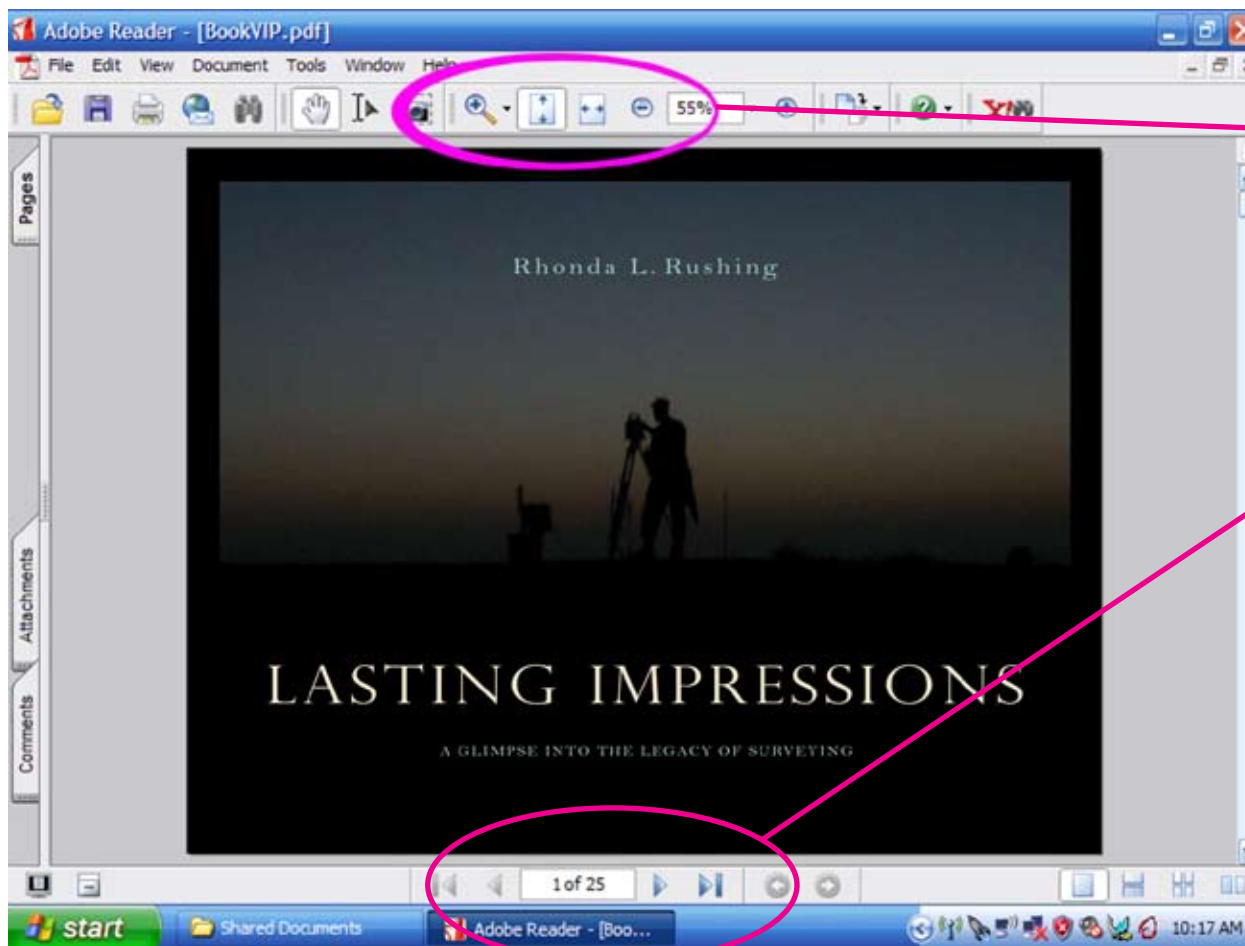


LASTING IMPRESSIONS

A SAMPLE OF THE JEFFERSON PIER STONE



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THE JEFFERSON PIER STONE

Draw a line due South from the White House's front door, and another due West from the center of the U.S. Capitol. Pierre Charles L'Enfant based his plan of Washington D.C. on this right angle and intended that the Southwest vertex be marked by a monument to George Washington. But in the 1790s the area was very close to the Potomac River, too close for a large monument, so in 1793 Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State, surveyed and located the vertex and set a simple wooden post. In 1804, when Jefferson was President, the post was replaced by a stone marker known as the Jefferson Pier. The 1804 stone served as a benchmark and reference point during construction of the Washington Monument. Various markers came and went in that location. The two-foot square, two-foot high stone marker seen today was set in 1889.

The monument is known as a *pier* because it was once routinely used as an anchor by barges on the Washington City Canal. The name seems a little strange today, since the entire Mall area was filled with sediment in the late 1800s and the canal system is long gone. But the pier was also a symbolic anchor: it marks the south end of a line that extends due north through the Meridian Stone in the center of the Ellipse in President's Park; the Zero Milestone, just north of the Ellipse and intended as the symbolic origin of all the nation's roads; the White House; the centerline of 16th Avenue; and ending at a point on Meridian Hill which was formerly marked by a small obelisk. This well-marked line is known as the "White House Meridian" and was once the prime meridian of the United States, the official starting point of lines of longitude. Jefferson, seeking scientific as well as political independence from Great Britain, did not want to rely on the meridian passing through the Royal Greenwich Observatory in Greenwich, England. However, along with the rest of the world, the United States officially adopted the Greenwich Meridian in 1912.

While it was once in contention as the starting point for all the world's longitudes, today the relatively plain marker does little more than puzzle tourists. It is still, however, an excellent place to check the accuracy of one's compass – the White House should be due North.

THANK YOU!

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