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Marshall Hall Part II—The Estate

By Don Schatz

Ed. Note: Part I of this article appeared in the October 2000 issue of this publication. Part I provided background information regarding the beginning period of colonization in Maryland and highlighted the Marshall family tree from 1640 to 1867. Part II will trace the land purchases that made up the estate known as Marshall Hall.

William Marshall arrived in Maryland in 1640 as an indentured servant. During the 33 years that he lived in the Colony, he accumulated 1,870 acres of land. None of these properties, however, were located in the area that became Marshall Hall. When William Marshall died in 1673, his son, William Marshall II inherited all the land previously owned by his father. The acreage that William II inherited was less than the 1,870 acres accumulated by his father, as his father had sold some of the acreage before he died. William II died in 1698 at the young age of 28. His children inherited his land holdings at his death which consisted of 710 acres. His will divided the land so that each of the three younger children, including Thomas Marshall, received 100 acres, while the eldest son, William III, inherited 410 acres after his mother's dower rights expired.

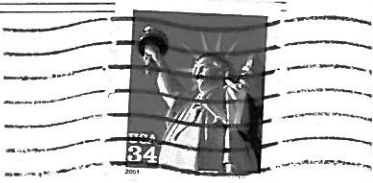
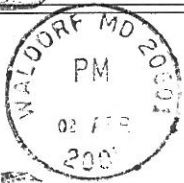
Thomas's 100 acre parcel was located in the lower part of Charles County on the Wicomico River and was cultivated to produce prime tobacco. By the time Thomas came of age in 1715 this farm in the lower part of Charles County after 65 years of cultivation was far from the new frontier. Late in the eighteenth century, when land was evaluated by the tax assessor, the soil was still judged to be "black and good." This record noted that the parcel was located on a marsh, that 40 acres were arable, 10 acres were woodland and that 50 acres were "other," probably wetlands. Thomas being an ambitious man moved north along the banks of the Potomac into lands earlier reserved for the Piscataway Indians. He made this move in the mid 1720s. Claims originally made in this area many years earlier by such men as Randall Hanson and Randall Brandt were now being developed. Those first on the scene in this new wave of speculation, such as James Stoddert, could claim huge tracts; Marshall came too late for this. What he found were pieces that others had missed.

Today it seems improbable that areas could be found unclaimed between boundaries surveyed for others. This was not uncommon in colonial tidewater where the combination of frontier conditions, poorly trained surveyors, and slow development of instruments and methods appropriate for measuring vast forested tracts produced woefully inaccurate surveys in the seventeenth century. When the metes and bounds were remeasured by eighteenth century surveyors and the acreage recalculated, any errors discovered might reveal overlapping boundaries or vacant unclaimed land. If the owner was unaware of the excess or did not want it, surveyors frequently filed claims for such land.

This is why Thomas Marshall's association with the family of surveyor James Stoddert is of particular interest. One result of the effort to re-establish the early boundary lines was the discovery that some land thought to be contiguous was in fact separated by vacant land. In such a case, a third party could patent the vacant land. This is how Thomas Marshall acquired the first part of the land on the Potomac bank which became known as Marshall Hall. Thomas patented the land in 1728 calling the tract "mistake" apparently because of the earlier mistakes of others.

There is no doubt that Thomas Marshall's marriage was instrumental in his claim to another tract called Marshall's Adventure. This was 140 acres of land, 70 acres of which were vacant areas located between a parcel patented earlier by James Stoddert and a tract known as "Brent's Land." The remaining 70 acres of Marshall's Adventure were to be taken from a piece of land patented by Stoddert during his lifetime. Thomas Marshall's son, Thomas Hanson Marshall, patented a nine-and-three-quarter acre tract appropriately called the addition to Mistake in 1768 after discovering that the family mansion and the family cemetery were in fact not included in the original sliver of land comprising the original Mistake.

When Thomas Marshall patented Mistake in 1728, he laid the basis for development of the estate that would eventually be called Marshall Hall. This land, which formed the nucleus of the Marshall Hall estate, was not patented for more than 40 years after its initial purchase.



The reason for the delay was the confusion over land ownership and property boundaries that existed in the area. A certain amount of confusion is normal in a frontier period, but the land south of Piscataway Creek was additionally complicated by the establishment of the Piscataway Indian Reservation in 1669 which restricted English patents and gave the Indians some claims. Thomas also purchased 360 acres along the Potomac which was named "Charley" and abutted the land known as "Mistake" that Thomas already owned. Thomas's son eventually acquired title to these 360 acres as well as the nine-and-three-quarter acre site adjacent to "Mistake."

In addition to the parcels making up Marshall Hall, Thomas Marshall also acquired 480 acres in Fairfax County, Virginia in 1739. It should be noted that Marshall's Virginia land bounded Mount Vernon on the west and was sought by George Washington as early as 1760 when he was beginning to expand his Potomac River property. An exchange was worked out but was never completed. In 1779, the midst of the Revolutionary War, Lund Washington purchased the 480.5 acres from Thomas Hanson Marshall for George Washington. This property is across the Potomac immediately opposite Marshall Hall. In 1759, at the time of his death, Thomas Marshall listed 1,305 acres in his will although it is known that this figure did not include other sites he purchased the extent of which is unknown. Beginning with small tracts such as Mistake and Marshall's Adventure, Thomas gradually extended his acreage through both survey and purchase. When the land was patented, it was in Prince George's County, but in 1748 an adjustment of the county lines was made and the properties were shifted into Charles County. When Thomas purchased the 480 acres in Virginia from William Spencer, this tract on the Dogue Creek included the ferry landing on the western river shore, though that strip of six acres was sold to Thomas Posey in 1757.

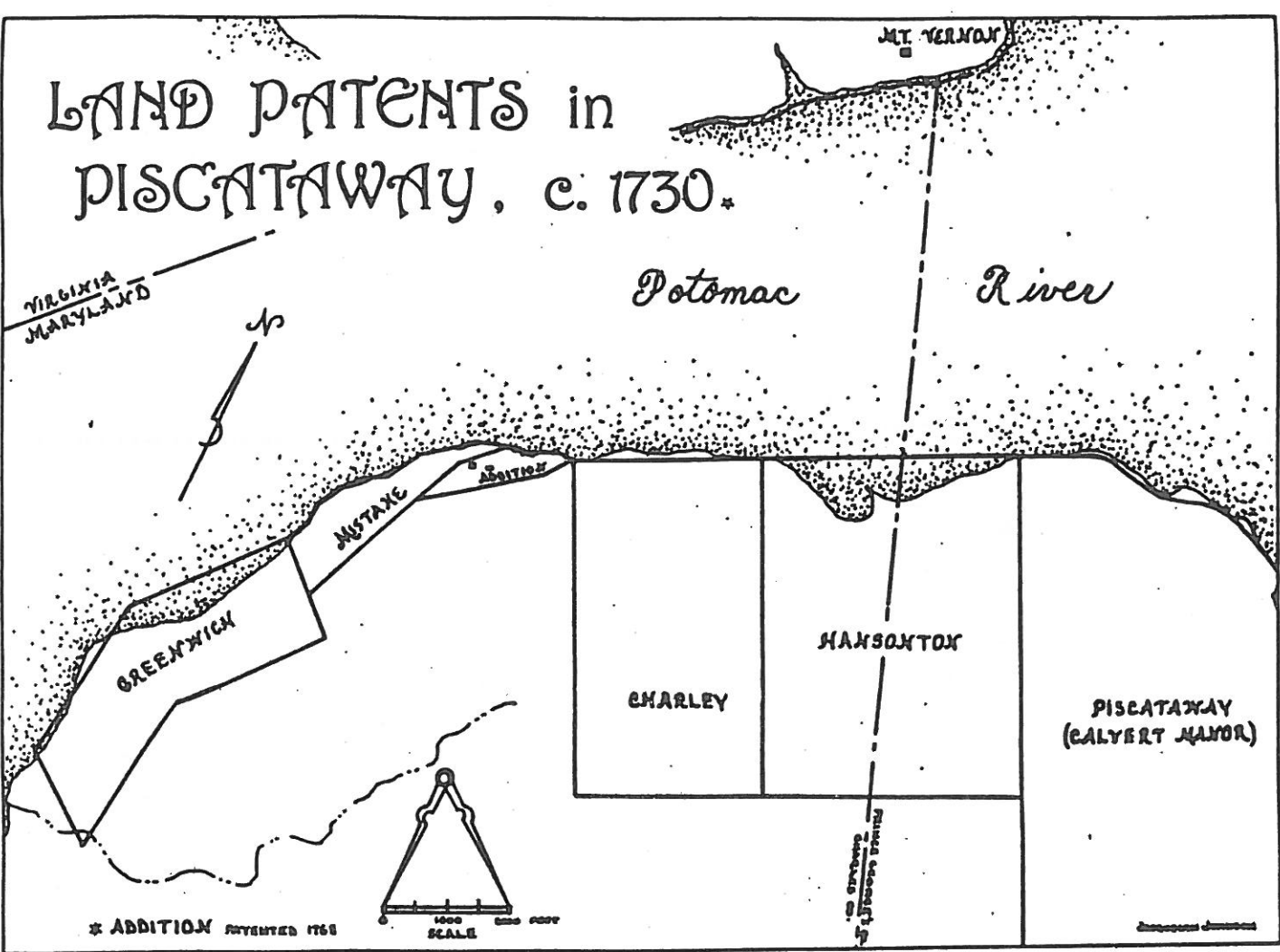
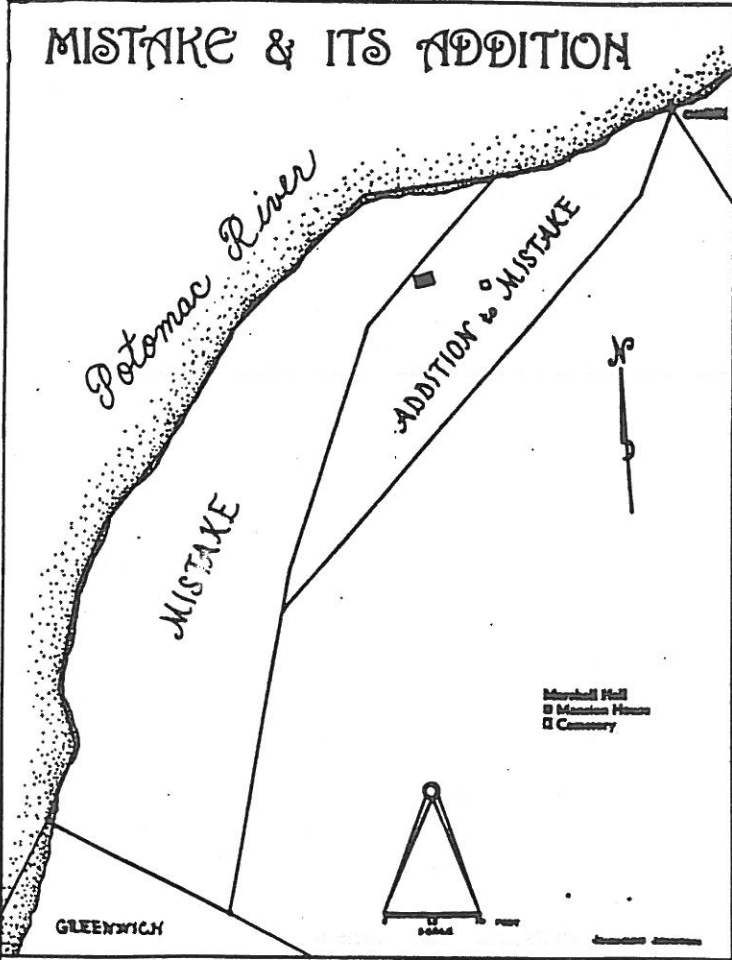
Thomas Marshall's son, Thomas Hanson Marshall, inherited his estate. In 1783, a tax assessment listed the holdings making up the mansion farm with the brick dwelling as follows:

- | | | |
|----------------------|---|-------------|
| Part of Mistake | - | 84 acres |
| Part of Mistake | - | 66 acres |
| Mistake's addition | - | 9 3/4 acres |
| Marshall's Adventure | - | 141 acres |
- The rest of the property in the county, separate from the mansion tract was:
- | | | |
|------------------|---|-----------|
| Monument | - | 11 acres |
| Charley | - | 130 acres |
| Carrick | - | 128 acres |
| Pasture enlarged | - | 272 acres |
| Pasture | - | 118 acres |

- | | | |
|---------------|---|--------------------|
| Marshall | - | 100 acres |
| Laurel Branch | - | 150 acres |
| Improvements | - | one small dwelling |

After Thomas Hanson Marshall's will, presented to the court in 1801, there are no further testaments or inventories of the direct heirs of Marshall Hall. No will exists for Dr. Thomas Hanson Marshall who died in 1829; his son, Thomas Hanson Marshall IV, is known to have died intestate in 1843. Proceedings were initiated in 1846 by the widow of Thomas Hanson Marshall IV to clarify the titles in preparation for sale of parts of the properties.

Four lots were created with Thomas Marshall V acquiring 377.25 acres called Lot No. 1 which was the mansion tract. In 1850, Lot No. 1 was sold to William Page. This was the first time someone other than a Marshall owned the mansion house since it was built in the mid 1720s. In 1851 the property was sold to John Augustine Washington of Mount Vernon; he was the last Washington to own and live at Mount Vernon. Washington sold the property to Seton W. Norris in 1859; he sold it to Henrietta Lyles Marshall in 1867, second wife of Thomas Marshall V. Thomas and Henrietta were the last Marshall family members to live on the property.



There was a chain of title changes from 1867 through 1975. For many decades within this time span the property was operated as an amusement park. Many Southern Maryland residents partook of the events and festivities in the park over these years and many fond memories remain today. On June 16, 1975 the manor house, the burial ground and an unspecified amount of land were sold to the United States Government for \$3.6 million. On Oct. 16, 1981, the manor house, believed to be 256 years old and the oldest in Maryland, burned down. the remaining ruins can still be viewed today.

Editor's Note: For those who are interested in finding out more on this historical property, the College of Southern Maryland's Southern Maryland Studies Center (in main campus library) should be visited. Therein are over 125 pictures, drawings, legal items and memorabilia.

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