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EDITOR’S NOTE

Articles of historic interest on Southern Maryland are requested for possible publication in future issues of *The Record*. Please send your typewritten manuscripts to: Publications, *The Record*, P.O. Box 2806, La Plata, Maryland 20646.



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Wayne Winkler, President Donald T. Schatz, Editor

The President’s Message

A year has passed since the Tornado of April 28, 2002 and the County is coming back strong. New buildings are up all over La Plata, trees are being planted and new businesses are starting in the County. Our home, the train station, has a new roof, the caboose is getting new windows and more fresh paint, and we are now open for the summer. The train station hours are Saturday, Sunday and Monday from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm. We still need pictures of sites in the County that reflect the past. If you have any, then please call me so I can get the committee to consider them for framing.

Last month, Kitty Newcomb passed away. Kitty came to be known as the La Plata Historian and published many papers on the history of La Plata as well as Christ Church in La Plata. She was a wonderful lady and will be missed by all who knew her.
The Town of La Plata wants to make a park at the Train Station and has money to finance this project. If you have any idea as to what you think the park should look like then please let me know and I will pass the information on.



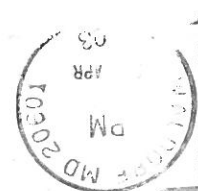
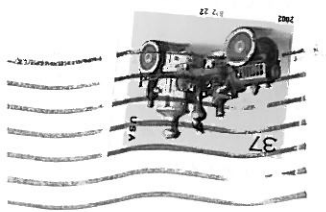
Editor’s Notes

THE MAY MEETING
Please note the timeliness of the May 17th meeting topic, “Slots in Southern Maryland.” Our speaker will be Thomas “Mac” Middleton, State Senator, from Charles County.

THE LIFE OF GEORGE MASON IV
The article in this issue on George Mason IV is an excellent review of the life of a man who was one of our founding fathers and was also a

resident of Charles County. As the editor and on behalf of all of our members, I thank Elmer S. Biles for putting this article together for us.

The Editor



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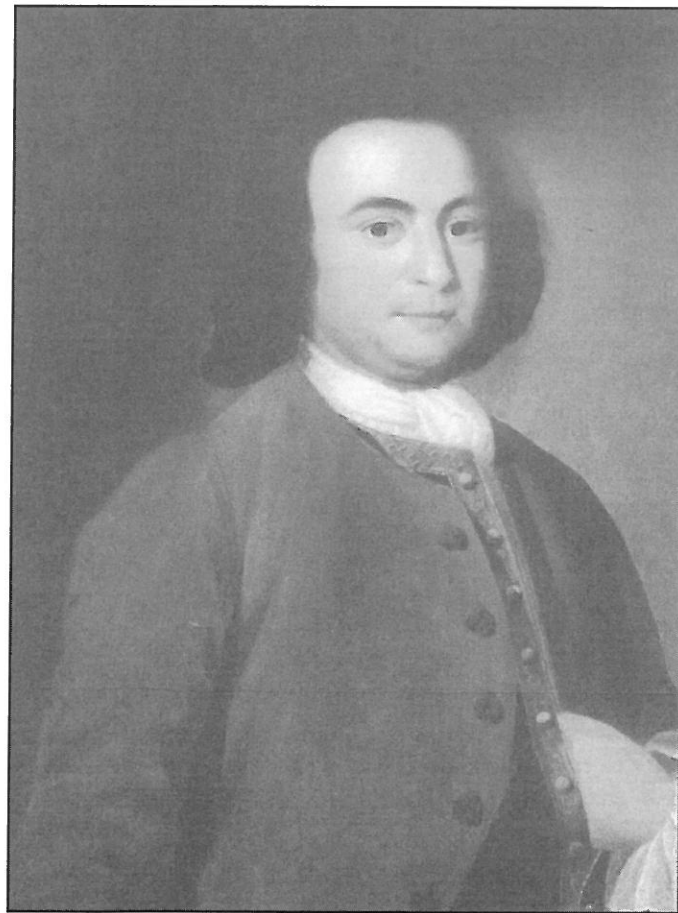
George Mason IV

A Brief Review of His Life

From his boyhood years in Charles County to Elder Statesman and Founding Father

Elmer S. Biles

A memorial to George Mason IV, elder statesman and founding father, was dedicated in Washington, D.C. on Tuesday, April 9, 2002. The bronze, larger-than-life likeness of Mason, lounging on a stone bench with some of his writings inscribed on either side, is located near the memorial to his close friend Thomas Jefferson.



George Mason IV
(1725 – 1792)

The Mason family came from England in the 17th century and settled in Northern Neck Virginia. In 1727 George Mason III relocated his wife and two year old son to western Charles County from Virginia.

He purchased land in Does Neck (later named Stump Neck), on Chicamuxen Creek, which is today part of the Navy Base at Indian Head. In addition, he acquired land in Christina Temple Manor, adjoining land we now know as the home of General Smallwood, as well as land along Mattawoman Creek. We do not know why he relocated here, except for the possible safety of his family. During this period there was unrest in the Northern Neck owing to restrictions being placed on former prisoners who constituted part of the settlers in the area. There were incidents of house burnings and the rape of women. Mason established himself as a planter in Charles County and rented out his land to tenant farmers in exchange for a percent of their tobacco crop. Young George Mason IV grew up here. This is where he would learn the tobacco trade and observe slavery on a day-to-day basis. He would fish in the creek and learn to ride and hunt. These would be experiences that would help shape his attitudes as an adult. This is the George Mason who would later become famous for authoring the Virginia Bill of Rights.

In less than a decade tragedy was to strike the Mason family. In 1735 George Mason III drowned while crossing the river from Virginia to his home at Stump Neck. His widow decided to move back to their home in Virginia at Chopawamsic along with her two sons and daughter. Ann Thomson Mason would never remarry but would become active in the management of the family farms both in Virginia and Maryland.

Prior to Mason the III's death he had entered into an agreement with the vestry of Durham Parish for building a new brick church. Upon his death his wife contracted with a John Hobson to complete the structure.

At the death of his father young George Mason was only ten. George would be the shared ward of both his mother and uncle, John Mercer of Marlborough, Virginia. His uncle would tutor him



Memorial to George Mason
Washington, D.C. (Dedicated April 9, 2002)

Mason's Bill of Rights. It would take another 75 years and much blood shed, however, to finally abolish slavery.

We look back on the legacy of Mason. He was a visionary. He saw the need to look to the west for expansion. In 1778, he supported the expedition of George Rogers Clark. Clark would be successful in obtaining the Northwest Territory from the British for the fledgling nation.

Mason's primary achievement was authoring the Virginia Bill of Rights. He was also successful in the elimination of state funding for the church. He strongly supported the separation of church and state. He was a strong family man and recognized his duty in the raising of his children. He was an elder statesman whose advise, council and friendship were sought by such leaders as James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and George Washington to name just a few. He was truly one of the founding fathers of this country.

George Mason died October 7, 1792 with his children and grandchildren at his bedside. His good friend Thomas Jefferson had visited with him just a few days earlier. He was buried next to his beloved wife Ann at Gunston Hall, the young woman he married 42 years earlier in Charles County.

We can be proud that Charles County, Maryland along with Virginia can claim a share of the legacy left by George Mason.

Post Note: George Mason in his will left the following charge to his sons: *"I recommend it to my sons, from my own experience in Life, to prefer the*

happiness of independence & a private Station to the troubles and Vexations of Public Business; but if either their own inclination or the Necessity of the times shou'd engage them in Public Affairs, I charge them, on a Fathers Blessing, never to let the motives of private Interest or ambition to induce them to betray, nor the terror of Poverty and disgrace, or the fear of danger or of death deter them from Asserting the liberty of their Country, and endeavoring to transmit to their posterity those Sacred rights to which themselves were born."

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the crown that heightened the tensions within the colonies. The Boston Tea Party was one of the outward expressions of resentment to the growing taxation on the colonies and frustration for their concerns not being heard.

In 1775 when Washington is named Commander in Chief of the Continental Army the Virginia legislature asked Mason to take Washington’s seat in that body. This is one of the few times he accepted a political position.



Araby (Mattawoman)

Later that same year (1775), Mason’s mother-in-law, Sarah Eilbeck, would be diagnosed with breast cancer. Mason paid frequent visits to her during her illness. She suffered much and passed away five years later in 1780. She was buried next to her husband at the family cemetery at Mt. Eilbeck, which her husband called his “Pomoukey Hundred,” and which was also known as Wheelers Purchase. Today we know it as Montrose Farm.

In early 1776 Mason was elected as a Virginia delegate and immediately found he had been appointed to a committee to draft the Declaration of Rights and a constitution for Virginia. He wrote the document himself with the help of the young James Madison (age 22).

In June of the same year, Richard Henry Lee is sent by the Virginia delegation to Philadelphia where he introduces a motion declaring the colonies independent. Lee, the natural choice to draft such a declaration, had to ask for leave to return to Virginia because of his wife’s illness. Jefferson then takes over writing the Declaration. He was only 33 at the time.

He receives a copy of Mason’s Bill of Rights, which has been approved by the Virginia assembly. He would use this document in the drafting of the declaration. The words of George Mason as woven by Thomas Jefferson into the Declaration of Independence include the phrase: “We hold these Truths to be self-evident that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

Shortly after the widow Eilbeck’s death in 1780 George Mason married Sarah Brent. This was a marriage for companionship and was not the love affair of the type he had with Ann. Upon his grandmother’s death William Mason, son of George Mason, inherits all the land of the Eilbecks in Charles County. He lives at Mattawoman which he now calls Mason’s Inheritance and expands the plantation to more than 1800 acres by 1800. A plat of the tract shows it included Nelson Point on the tidal Mattawoman and the area where Lackey High School is now located. Mason Springs is named for William Mason. The Mason family owned land in Charles County for more than 125 years.

Things were very unstable in the colonies immediately following the Philadelphia signing of the Declaration of Independence. The revolutionary army was a bunch of rag tail volunteers many of whom Washington could not depend upon. Things were at their lowest at Valley Forge. If it had not been for the French intervention in tying-up the British in open conflict it is doubtful the young nation would have survived. Yorktown came none too soon. A few years later Mason would take the journey to Philadelphia to take part in the writing of the constitution. Although the document was written primarily by this good friend James Madison it was not possible for Mason to get the consent of the delegates to include a Bill of Rights as a preamble to the Constitution. He was further disappointed when the delegates would not approve wording in the Constitution that would abolish slavery. When mason refused to sign the Constitution many felt that he had betrayed them, since they had looked to him a a guiding hand in many of the deliberations. Mason went home extremely disappointed. He was to be vindicated, however, for during the very first congress legislation was approved and amendments to the constitution ratified that would include most of the items in

and for a period of time he was sent back to Maryland where he received tutoring from a Mr. Williams at the residence of a Mrs. Simpson here in Charles County. Although he received no formal education as such, the tutoring would more than equip him for adult life. When he became of age in 1746 he was given responsibility for the management of some 20,000 acres of his families land including some 1,600 acres in Charles County.

At an early age Mason determined that slavery was immoral and should be abolished. This was a view that was shared by others as well. Those who wished to abolish slavery, however, could not agree on how it should be done. Mason felt that before any release of slaves there should be a program to education them to read and write, so that they could more quickly be assimilated into society.

In April of 1750 George Mason IV married Ann Eilbeck at Mattawoman (known today as Araby). Ann was only 16. Since their family plantations in Charles County were nearby, George Mason was in close contact with William Eilbeck, a wealthy tobacco merchant, in the sale of his tobacco and buying supplies. Although some speculate that they lived at Mattawoman for the first years of their marriage it is more likely that they relocated to a site near where George planned to build their permanent home – Gunston Hall. Mason named his home for the home of his Charles County relatives, the Fowkes’ “Gunston Hall” home on Nanjemoy Creek.

For George Mason the early years of his marriage were consumed with the building of Gunston Hall and the development of the lands and gardens around the house. His close friend and business associate in the Ohio Company of Virginia, Nathaniel Chapman lived on the Potomac, and opposite Gunston Hall on land we know today as Chapmans Landing or Chapman Forest. The two would frequently exchange visits with each other and their wives were close as well. The Mason’s visited Ann’s family at Mattawoman frequently. On one such visit Ann was pregnant and gave birth to their son John at Mattawoman. On the south side of Indian Head Highway, on the tract recently acquired by the state, one can still see the sunken road over which the carriages traveled between Mt. Aventine and Mattawoman (Araby) and on to Port Tobacco.

Ann and George were blessed with a large family and enjoyed many happy days at Gunston Hall. When

Ann was 39 she gave birth prematurely to twins. The twins died and Ann would never recover. Their good friend and physician Dr. Craik from Charles County visited her frequently. Ann’s passing was a painful experience for her husband since the love between them was so real. He grieved for a long period and did



*Ann Eilbeck Mason
(1734 – 1773)*

not marry again for some seven years. One can grasp the true closeness of their relationship by reading the epitaph he had inscribed on her grave and by the verses he wrote about his affection for her. Nine of their twelve children would live to maturity. Ann is buried in the garden next to the house.

Following Ann’s death in 1773 Mason withdrew from public life. Within a year, however, Washington invited Mason to Mt. Vernon to help draft the Fairfax Resolves which expressed Virginias support in addressing the problems being experienced by the Massachusetts Colony. There were many actions by