

# Gunston Grapevine

Winter 2014

The Snow is now as deep here, as it was in the hard Winter of 1740; indeed I think deeper than I ever saw it, except in the Winter of 1773. It will occasion, I expect, great Losses in the Stocks of Cattle, in this part of the Country.  
George Mason, January 23, 1792



## 'ELOQUENTLY, PASSIONATELY, AND COMPELLINGLY' ADVOCATE FOR GUNSTON HALL

THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA'S legislative body, the General Assembly, is the oldest continuous law-making entity in North America.

Established July 30, 1619, at Jamestown, the original assembly included the Virginia Governor's Council and the House of Burgesses. The Assembly moved from Jamestown to Williamsburg in 1699, which is where George Mason IV assumed his seat in the House of Burgesses following his election in 1758. The legislative body was re-named the General Assembly following the ratification of the Virginia State Constitution, which of course was written by our own George Mason, in 1776. The seat of Virginia government ultimately moved to Richmond in 1780 during the administration of Governor Thomas Jefferson.

Upon taking his seat in the House of Burgesses, Mason joined established leaders already serving in the House such as Edmund Pendleton and George Wythe, as well as a fellow freshman delegate from Westmoreland County, Richard Henry Lee. Mason allied himself with the Northern Neck faction in the House, led by the Lee family, as opposed to the James and York River faction dominated by Speaker John Robinson and Attorney General Peyton Randolph.

By all accounts Mason left only a minor mark during his first term, serving on several ad hoc committees related to military preparedness (the French and Indian War still raged), and also on the Committee of Privileges and Elections, and the Committee of Propositions and Grievances.

Dominant issues of the day included the War, but also the Two Penny Act, defended by Patrick Henry in what became known as the Parson's Cause and which rocketed the young lawyer from Hanover County to prominence. Mason was absent from subsequent sessions from 1759-1761 and chose not to run for re-election in 1761.

Today the General Assembly, composed of forty Senators and 100 Delegates, continues to meet in Richmond where they are currently in session. Issues driving much of the debate within the General Assembly in 2014 include budget negotiations, ethics, health care, education, the environment, and voting rights. Amazingly, regardless of the issues under consideration, the legislative process in Virginia remains largely un-

changed from the time of Mason's service in the House of Burgesses and certainly from the time of Virginia's Constitution.

This sense of history and tradition is palpable when you visit the State Capitol in Richmond, designed by Jefferson, and in particular the old Hall of the House of Delegates. In this space, located at the north end of the Capitol, the House voted to ratify the U.S. Bill of Rights in 1791, Aaron Burr was acquitted of treason in a trial presided over by Chief Justice of the United States John Marshall, and the Virginia Secession Convention met during part of its first session in 1861.

This magnificent space also boasts a number of busts of prominent Virginians, including George Mason, whose bust is located to the left of the Speaker's Chair and silver mace as you enter the room.

Over the past month, I traveled to Richmond several times as part of our advocacy efforts in support of capital funding for Gunston Hall. The Capital Budget currently includes approximately \$2 million for the purpose of renovating the Ann Mason Visitor Center and adjacent buildings at Gunston Hall; funds which are critically important and necessary for the enhancement of both this physical space and our ability to offer compelling educational programs and exhibits within these associated buildings. My trips to Richmond include visiting with members of the General Assembly, committee staff, and colleagues in other agencies.

My trips also always include at least a quick walk to the Capitol. In doing so I walk by the statue of Mason on the grounds outside the Capitol, but my goal is the Old Hall of the House of Delegates. Upon arriving in this space, I immediately approach the bust of George Mason and am instantly re-connected with Gunston Hall and our cause. Much as Mason longed for Gunston Hall while away, I too miss being "home." Importantly, however, just as Mason eloquently, passionately, and compellingly advocated so strongly for what he believed to be important, so must we.

Accordingly, I encourage you all to consider reaching out to Virginia's elected officials and advocating for our beloved Gunston Hall. Trust me, it is fun and it is truly something you all are al-

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ready doing as you promote Gunston Hall to friends, families and neighbors. We have just created an advocacy handbook for those of you seeking additional guidance and just let me know if you would like a copy. And, if you find yourself in Richmond, say hello to George for me.

Thank you and it is a great day at Gunston Hall!

Scott Muir Stroh III  
Executive Director

GUNSTON HALL COMPLETES PURCHASE OF OBJECTS FROM  
COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION  
Mark Whatford, Deputy Director

**W**E HAVE COMPLETED THE PURCHASE of a number of objects on loan in the Mansion from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

These objects are period appropriate to the time and style of the interior.

Currently in the Little Parlor are five English splat-backed mahogany chairs c.1750. Each seat is covered in original 18<sup>th</sup> century fabric. [figure 1]

In the upstairs east side bedchamber is a Mid-Atlantic blanket chest c.1750+ of walnut and broadleaf yellow pine. [figure 2]

In the upstairs south east bedchamber are two English pierced-back walnut chairs c.1730/40. [figure 3]

Thanks to the Curatorial/Acquisitions Committee for encouraging the pursuit of these acquisitions and the generosity of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in allowing us to purchase them.



### Gunston Hall Mission

To utilize fully the physical and scholarly resources of Gunston Hall to stimulate continuing public exploration of democratic ideals as first presented by George Mason in the 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

## FURNISHINGS IN THE SCHOOL HOUSE

Lydia Blackmore, Archives/Curatorial  
Volunteer

THE SCHOOLMASTER'S DESK and wainscot chair have been removed from the school house and placed in collections storage for study and preservation.

Both objects are accessioned pieces and among the oldest in the collection at Gunston Hall.

The desk on frame is made of Virginia red walnut with turned legs and a large hinged top. It has been refinished and the ball feet have been restored, but it retains an original escutcheon and an old replaced lock.

The desk was made c. 1730 by a rural craftsman in Virginia, Maryland, or Pennsylvania. This form was common in Virginia throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The 1726 estate inventory of Thomas Sorrel of Westmoreland County, Virginia, included a **“large desk on a frame.”**

Philip Fithian, tutor to the Carter family at Nomini Hall, referred to a tall writing

desk in his diary on February 2, 1774.<sup>1</sup>

The wainscot chair is also made of walnut with a solid splat, high back, and solid wooden seat. It dates from c. 1720 and was likely made in Pennsylvania or Maryland. It has been refinished and repaired and further study will be undertaken to learn more about its origin.

The tavern table in the school house, now used as a desk for children to practice writing on slates, is also a historic piece. It was made in America in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has a maple base with turned legs, four stretchers, and a pine top. The base retains the remains of original red paint.

We will be looking for a possible replacement before moving this table into storage for preservation.

<sup>1</sup>Ronald Hurst and Jonathan Prown, *Southern Furniture 1680-1830 In the Colonial Williamsburg Collection* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1997), 424.



Above: Desk on frame, circa 1730, now in collections storage.



Right: wainscot chair, c. 1720, no longer on display in the schoolhouse.

### AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT AT GUNSTON HALL

Peter Ross, Sector Leader of the Gunston Sector of the Fort Belvoir Circle of the 114<sup>th</sup> annual Christmas Bird Count administered by the National Audubon Society, gave us the results of the annual bird count on the grounds of Gunston Hall Sunday, January 5. The two Audubon counters were on site for four hours and made the following ornithological observations.

Canada geese 78  
 Tundra swan 3  
 Bufflehead duck 2  
 Pied-billed grebe 1  
 Bald eagle 1  
 Red tailed hawk 1  
 Ring billed gull 3  
 Belted kingfisher 2  
 Red-billed woodpecker 8  
 Yellow-bellied sapsucker 1  
 Downy woodpecker 4  
 Northern flicker 3

Blue jay 15  
 American crow 15  
 Fish crow 4  
 Unidentified crows 3  
 Carolina chickadee 25  
 Tufted titmouse 20  
 White-breasted nuthatch 4  
 Carolina wren 8  
 Ruby-crowned kinglet 3  
 Golden-crowned kinglet 4  
 Eastern bluebird 12  
 Hermit thrush 1



American robin 65  
 Northern mockingbird 3  
 Cedar waxwing 12  
 Eastern starling 10  
 Yellow-rumped warbler 6  
 Chipping sparrow 1  
 Song sparrow 8  
 Swamp sparrow 2  
 White-throated sparrow 13  
 Dark-eyed junco 60  
 Northern cardinal 35  
 House finch 20  
 American goldfinch 3

*Two of the Canada geese sighted in the recent bird count at Gunston Hall. According to National Geographic, "just 50 geese can produce two and a half tons of excrement in a year." Seventy-eight were spotted here. Watch your step.*

*To find out more about Canada geese click [here](#).*

*To find out more about the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, click [here](#).*

## BLUEBIRD TRAIL AT GUNSTON HALL

**T**HIS SPRING, GUNSTON HALL will be upgrading and expanding its newly reestablished bluebird trails.

The plan envisions three trails, with a total of 21 boxes, which will lead visitors around the grounds, including the beehives, graveyard, deer park, and wharf sites. The trails will give visitors an opportunity to see Gunston Hall from many new aspects and explore the **extensive grounds that were part of this thriving plantation in George Mason's day.**

They will also provide a new educational opportunity for visitors, especially school children and Scouts, who can learn about and participate in protecting and preserving **Virginia's bluebirds and our environment.**

Volunteers will help monitor the new bluebird boxes weekly during the nesting season. Volunteers will check the bluebird boxes and record information about nests, eggs, and chicks. Each volunteer generally will check the boxes once a month from April to early August. Care to volunteer? Contact Ann Elise Sauer at 703-927-5676 or [annelis-esauer@cox.net](mailto:annelis-esauer@cox.net).

There is a wealth of information about bluebirds and monitoring on the Virginia Bluebird Society website at <http://www.virginiabluebirds.org/>.

The new bluebird boxes are now on site, and they will be installed as soon as the weather permits to get ready for the nesting season.

Many thanks go to Ann Elise Sauer and Kim Thompson for leading this project, laying out the trail, arranging for boxes, and gathering donations and to Mark Whatford for his support.

Here are how the plaques for the boxes will be designated:

- **Donated by the Gunston Hall Docents' Association**
- In Appreciation of Berto Delfi-Hernandez
- Donated in Honor of James W. Whatford
- Donated by Diane Ford in Memory of Mom & Dad & Spence
- Donated by Sandy Galletta
- Donated by Mark and Kim Thompson
- Donated by Judi Cohn
- Donated by Richard and Janis Harless
- Donated by Mary Lou Argow in Honor of Nellie Grey McFarland
- Donated by Brenda Hall in Memory of Bill and Gladys Hall
- Donated by The Ruwe Family
- Donated by Carol Coose in Memory of Bill & Kay Miller
- Donated by The Nestor Family
- In Memory of Doris W. Bodager
- In Memory of Virginia Louise Reynolds
- Donated by Doug & Donna Boulter, Steve & Ellie Byers
- **Donated by the Gunston Hall Docents' Association**
- Donated by The Damerons
- Donated by Jacksons & Freys
- Donated by Bill Inglee
- Donated by Ann Elise Sauer





LIBRARY/ARCHIVES PURCHASE OF *THE ACTS OF ASSEMBLY, NOW IN FORCE, IN THE COLONY OF VIRGINIA*, PRINTED WILLIAMSBURG, VA, 1769

Mark Whatford, Deputy Director

**A** BOOK DEALER IN TEXAS recently contacted Gunston Hall regarding the 1769 edition of *The Acts of Assembly*; he was under the impression it was George Mason's copy which was not accurate.

**The book, in fact, belonged to Mason's nephew, Stevens Thomson Mason.** The story we were told was that it had been purchased at a garage sale in Texas many years ago. **Here is the book's early history.**

From the signatures, it is possible that the first owner was Ralph Hylton, Attorney at Law, who passed away in Chesterfield Co., Virginia, in May 1790. The next signature is of George Hay [1765-1830], born in Williamsburg, Virginia. The inscription **George Hay's book. Donuser** [Latin for *to give up*] **Ralph Hylton's** written on the preamble page would indicate it was given or sold to Hay by Hylton prior to 1784.

Hay read law to enter the bar, and was in private practice in Petersburg, Virginia, from 1787 to 1801, then in Richmond until 1803. He was a U.S. Attorney for the District of Virginia from 1803 to 1816. He was a member of the Virginia House of Delegates from 1816 to 1822, returning to private practice in Washington, D.C., from 1822 to 1825. He was married to Eliza Kortright Monroe, the daughter of President James Monroe. He was appointed a Judge in 1825.

From the inscription Stes Thom Mason bought July 1<sup>st</sup> 1784 of GH we can assume that Mason [1760-1803], a nephew of George Mason IV, purchased the book from George Hay or GH. Mason was a member of the Virginia State House of Delegates in 1783 and 1794, a member of the Virginia State Senate 1787-1790, and a

delegate to the Virginia Ratification Convention in 1788. In 1794, Mason was elected to the United States Senate to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of James Monroe. He was reelected in 1797 and again in 1803, serving from November 18, 1794, until his death in Philadelphia on May 10, 1803.

Another name written on the cover is John T. Mason, [1787-1850] likely the son of Stevens Thomson Mason. In 1812, John T. Mason left Virginia to attempt making his own fortune in Lexington, Kentucky. In 1817, President Monroe appointed him United States Marshal. Mason was appointed Secretary of Michigan Territory and superintendent of Indian affairs in 1830 by President Andrew Jackson. He held those appointments until 1831, when President Jackson sent Mason on a mission to Mexico.

In 1830, Mason became a scrip holder for the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company which comprised approximately 20 million acres. Mason was made commandant of the Nacogdoches District by the Committee of Vigilance and Safety on April 11, 1836 only to resign twelve days later. He remained in Nacogdoches for most of the duration of the Texas Revolution. Mason attended a session of Congress of the Republic of Texas in Houston, the capital of Texas. He died of cholera on May 3, 1850, at Tremont House in Galveston.

As for the notations in the book, most **refer to new acts written after 1783, '84 & '86 and could possibly be by Stevens Thomson Mason**, although they are not as cursively florid as his hand writing in his letters.

Many thanks to the support of Library & Archives Committee under Mrs. Millard for approving this purchase.

We plan on having the book, currently in poor shape, conserved by Cat Tail Run Bookbinding in Winchester, Virginia.

## PUBLIC NOTICES: UPCOMING EVENTS

### An ARCHAEOLOGY SEMINAR

The Archaeology of Slavery in the Chesapeake Region  
will be held at GUNSTON HALL

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15

9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Archaeologists will discuss recent discoveries in the Chesapeake region of sites and artifacts associated with slavery. This seminar is open to the public and professionals.

Featuring presentations by Dr. Elizabeth Crowell of the Fairfax County Park Authority, Dr. Kelley F. Deetz of Roanoke College, Garrett Fesler of Historic Alexandria Archaeology, Dr. Julia King of St. Mary's College, Dr. Mathew Laird of the James River Institute for Archaeology, David Shonyo of Gunston Hall & Stefan Wöehlke of the University of Maryland. \$50 Fee includes program, light breakfast, lunch, and Mansion tour; \$40 for Friends and Docents of Gunston, FOFA, and individuals registering before February 8.

Register by clicking [here](#).

### Liberty Lecture Series 2014

The War of 1812

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23

3 p.m.

Prizewinning author George C. Daughan, author of *1812: The Navy's War*, will tell the story of **how the U. S. Navy led the country to victory against the world's greatest imperial power.**

SUNDAY, MARCH 2

3 p.m.

Gene Allen Smith, the author of *The Slaves Gamble: Choosing Sides in the War of 1812*, tells the story of American slaves and their roles in the War of 1812. While surprising numbers did assist the Americans, the war created opportunities for slaves to find freedom among the British, the Spaniards, and the Indians.

SUNDAY, MARCH 9

3 p.m.

A veteran reporter for the Washington Post, Steve Vogel, author of *Through the Perilous Fight: Six Weeks that Saved the Nation* will discuss the story of the burning of Washington and the siege at Baltimore that helped save the nation and inspired the National Anthem.

Suggested contribution. Up to six teacher re-certification points available. Sponsored by the Kirkpatrick Family Fund.





FIRST & LAST  
 In the last event of 2013, a jolly visitor from way up north came to visit during Breakfast with St. Nick in the Ann Mason Room on Sunday, December 15.

Small children and large ate a sumptuous repast, discussed their Christmas list with Santa, and even helped write a Gunston Hall blog with their letters to Santa.

You can read that and all our blogs [here](http://gunstonhallblog.blogspot.com/)  
<http://gunstonhallblog.blogspot.com/>

*Left: St. Nick and his friend Stomper Bird regale his guests with a tale of flying and potatoes during Breakfast with St. Nick.*



And for our first event of 2014, Gunston Hall welcomed Professor Garrett Epps from the University of Baltimore Law School for an author talk on January 18.

Prof. Epps spoke about his book *American Epic: Reading the U.S. Constitution*. Epps gave an engaging lecture and fielded a number of questions on historic and current topics from the audience. According to *Publishers Weekly* review of his book, "Epps has created the ideal study guide for civics and political science classes, an intelligent and provocative tour through the fascinatingly complicated, vitally important blueprint of the United States."

