

# Gunston Grapevine

Sept. 2016



**W**HEN I WAS GROWING UP in Philadelphia, the City initiated a summer program for youth connecting area students with cultural projects in and around the City.

Called the Phil-A-Kid program, options included experiences at the art museum, symphony, ballet, and at area museums and historic sites. After careful consideration, I selected an archaeology program at historic Fort Mifflin.

A National Historic Landmark, Fort Mifflin is located in the Delaware River just south of Center City Philadelphia in proximity to the airport. Originally built by the British, the Fort was occupied by the Continental Army in 1775. In the fall of 1777, for over six weeks the 400 Continental soldiers—cold, starving, and ill—serving in the garrison withstood the largest bombardment of the Revolutionary War and successfully prevented the British Navy from reaching Philadelphia and resupplying the Army. This valiant effort allowed Washington and his army to safely reach Valley Forge. On November 15, 1777, having exhausted all their ammunition, the Continental Army evacuated the fort and joined their comrades in Delaware.

My job that summer, as a young aspiring archaeologist, was to participate in an excavation designed to find evidence of this tremendous bombardment for the purpose of better telling the story of how only a few hundred young men survived such an onslaught. It was hot and the bugs, being on a marshy, low lying island in the middle of the river, rivaled even the largest and meanest biting flies and mosquitos we have ever encountered at Gunston Hall. The noise of airplanes overhead and the shipping on the river sometimes made a sense

of historic authenticity difficult. The digging was hard, and we found lots of actual trash.

But, it was awesome!

I even still remember the first time I encountered something mysterious in the ground, something other than a Pepsi bottle or piece of plastic. As I worked on a sloped embankment, trowel and brush in hand, I distinctly remember hearing the clink of something metal and brushing away the dirt to reveal a fragment of something round. It was big, about the size of a softball, and the exterior was a dark shade of black and somewhat pocked to the touch. I immediately and enthusiastically called over the actual archaeologist who very thoughtfully coached me through the process of extracting the object. Once the object was removed, he explained that this fragment was that of a projectile from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, manufactured by the British, and typical of the munitions employed by the British Navy.

Wow, what a find!

The rest of that day, night and into the summer I pondered that fragment, the people who fired it, and the people whom it was meant to subdue. This curiosity led me in many directions and prompted me to read, visit other associated sites in and around Philadelphia, and think further about the people and stories of the American Revolution. This sense of curiosity, exploration, discovery, and awe at what our history—our past—reveals remain with me today and in many ways is what continues to motivate my work as a museum professional.

Since that time as a young boy in Philadelphia I have been blessed to work at other sites featuring archaeological programs.

*(Continued on page 3)*

### **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.

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In these various capacities I have been witness to prehistoric shell middens, 16<sup>th</sup> century shipwrecks, Minié balls and muskets, and remnants of the Industrial Revolution. Each of these discoveries prompted the same emotional and intellectual stimulation as that first very personal discovery of my own on Fort Mifflin. And, my friends, this is the power of archaeology and of place.

At Gunston Hall, our archaeological team led by Dave Shonyo and assisted by a dedicated group of talented volunteers are uncovering new and exciting things about this place on a daily basis. It is exciting, invigorating, and awe inspiring to witness this work and even more so to contemplate the results of the work, all of which allows us to learn much more about the people and stories associated with Gunston Hall.

On your next visit, I encourage you to visit Dave and his team. In addition to being exceptional archaeologists, they are masterful educators. Bear witness to their work and even more importantly, allow yourself to be consumed with the power of what their efforts are teaching us, allow yourself to be inspired by the quest for more knowledge, and allow yourself to be humbled by the reality of how much we do know and how much there is still to learn. This is why we exist as an organization, to engage hearts, minds, and spirits in a quest for knowledge. This is also why I love archaeology and why, in part, I love Gunston Hall.

Looking forward to seeing you this fall and it is a great day at Gunston Hall!

Scott Muir Stroh III  
Executive Director  
August 9, 2016

## WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG

### WHEN DID YOU TOUCH HISTORY OR LET HISTORY TOUCH YOU?

“I fell in love with history on my first visit to Colonial Williamsburg when I was ten years old. Talking with interpreters and seeing all of the historic homes showed me that history is very much alive and new discoveries are always being made!” *Janie Stallings, Guest Services Representative*

“Imagining myself an intrepid knight in European castles.”  
*Lacey Villiva, Education Manager*

“I was in a fife and drum corps called the Mount Vernon Guard. When I was 10, I marched through Alexandria in my first George Washington Birthday Celebration parade. It was cold and rainy, but this was George Washington’s (and my) hometown! I also discovered a tricorn hat makes a very serviceable rain gutter.” *Frank Barker, Education Coordinator*

“My love of history came from both classroom and summer experiences. Each summer my parents would take my brother and me to a historic site which included places in New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the South making what I learned in the classroom all the more meaningful.” *Michael Spironello, Guest Services Representative*

“We moved in to our new house in 1953. The land used to belong to a farmer. This was in England. My parents gave me a patch of garden to plant flowers and veggies in. I was three at that time. While digging in my garden, I dug up a silver boot, a silver cat, and a small silver Bible. I thought the fairies had left them for me! My mother said that Grandma had some charms just like them. She had found them in the Christmas pudding. The Victorians used to add them and sixpence to plum pudding for good luck. My mother put brandy in her Christmas pudding; she said less chance of needing a dentist!!!” *Lesley Rakowski, Archaeology Volunteer*

“At the age of 10 my parents took us to Gettysburg and while we traveled slowly across the battlefield listening to the cassette tape tour, I saw hoop-skirted women in the distance. I wanted make-believe to be real and finally found my outlet in clothing and material culture studies. By 12, I was an apprentice at Claude Moore Colonial Farm.” *Samantha Dorsey, Curator of Collections*

“My first love of archaeology came at our ranch in central Texas where I searched creek beds for Indian arrowheads as a teenager. Other folks found stone hide scrapers, stone hand axes, and a spear point. An intriguing lost culture.”  
*Jerry Foster, Archaeology Volunteer*



*Summer Saturdays:*  
**A Cure for the  
 Summertime  
 Blues**

Lacey Villiva  
 Education Manager

**T**HIS SUMMER we launched a new series of programs, Summer Saturdays.

Every Saturday in June, July, and August, we offered a different experience for visitors. Our visitors were thrilled with their newfound ability to explore Gunston Hall in a variety of ways. These casual programs offered them a chance to ask new and different questions, play with 18<sup>th</sup> century games, and have fun. Our volunteers and staff enjoyed the chance to show off their skills and knowledge. This program really filled Gunston Hall with a summer of fun!

The first Saturday of every month, visitors had the chance to meet Dave Shonyo, our archaeologist. On a 45-minute tour of the grounds, he helped visitors explore the ways in which archaeology has shaped the way that we talk about life at Gunston Hall for George Mason.

Several times over the course of the summer, guests met a variety of our historic characters, from George Mason himself to almost forgotten neighbors such as Ann and Martin Cockburn from nearby Springfield plantation. Each occasion sparked a different conversation about the Virginia Declaration of Rights, George Mason's life, and Gunston Hall.

Once a month, visitors have also had occasion to help make some cooling treats. From ice cream to shrub, participants got involved in the making and basked in the pleasure of sampling the product of their

*Curator Sam Dorsey helps two young visitors search for elusive pocket monsters in the Kitchen Yard on a Summer Saturday in August.*

labor.

On a few weekends, we encouraged visitors to explore how news was shared during George Mason's lifetime. We started with word-of-mouth, moved on to learning how to write, and rounded out the experience with creating a newsworthy headline for the *Virginia Gazette*. At the end of the session, all newsies produced their very own copy of an 18<sup>th</sup> century newspaper.

In partnership with Mason Neck State Park, which was originally part of the Gunston Hall tract, we were pleased to offer our visitors a way to engage with the natural history of the property. Each weekend, a ranger from the park engaged visitors with a nature hike, or an activity focused on the animals on the Neck.

Throughout the summer, a cadre of volunteers also taught visitors how to play 18<sup>th</sup> century games, write with a quill pen, explore our herb garden, and even hunt for Pokémon on our grounds.



*Above, archaeologist Dave Shonyo shows visitors the most recent finds in the dig near the director's home.*

*Refreshing syllabubs were created in the hearth kitchen, much as they would have been in the 18th century.*

# Oysters in the mix

## *On the tables and in the walls*

Jerry Foster  
Archaeological Volunteer

### COMESTABLE

**O**YSTERS HAVE BEEN, for generations, utilized for food in the lower-Potomac region.

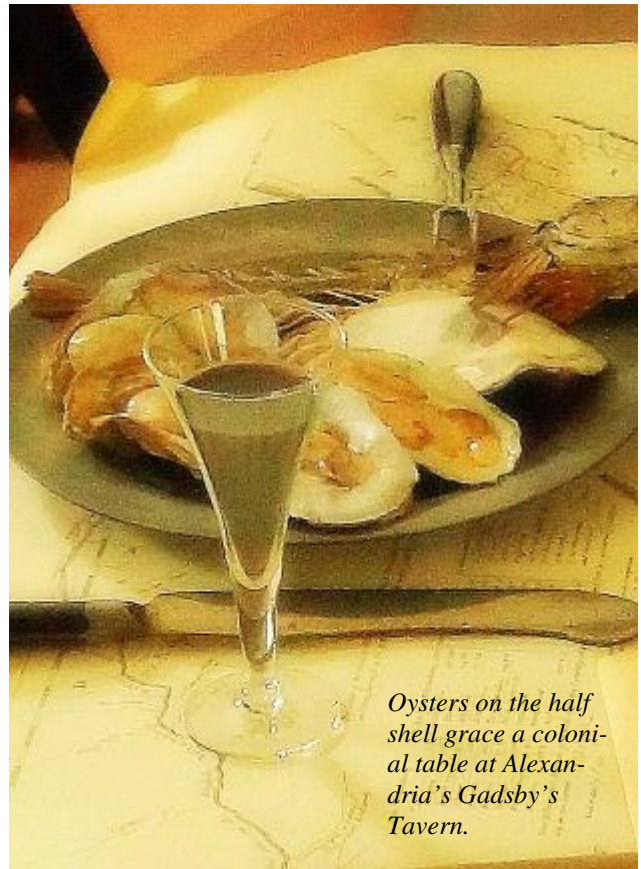
Indians harvested them for consumption; colonists in Jamestown ate them – especially during the Starving Time; they appeared on the dinner table at George Mason’s Gunston Hall, based on their frequency in kitchen trash pits. Furthermore, George Washington is documented, along with his wife and stepchildren, as eating them at Christina’s Tavern in Williamsburg on December 2, 1769.<sup>2</sup>

The Potomac River is saline enough to support their growth upriver only as far as the former site of Hooe’s Ferry Plantation (Dahlgren, Virginia) – quite a distance downriver from Gunston Hall.<sup>3</sup> The literature is sparse concerning what must have been a rather thriving band of oystermen supplying live oysters for food as well as large quantities of shells for plantation lime production to settlements upriver.

And, the archaeology department is finding, basically, two types of shells in the trash pits – those with a relatively smooth surface and those with perforations. The latter are from even farther downriver than the Hooe family plantation as the parasite that bores the holes survives only in very saline water.

Did the level of salinity and, therefore taste of the oyster, affect the buying habits of the 18th-century consumer?

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*Oysters on the half shell grace a colonial table at Alexandria’s Gadsby’s Tavern.*

*The American oyster, *C. virginica*, ranges along the east coast of North America from the Gulf of St. Lawrence south to Vera Cruz. Over most of this range *C. virginica* is exceedingly abundant in shallow water where conditions are favorable for survival and growth.<sup>1</sup>*



*Smooth-shelled oyster recovered by archaeologists at Gunston Hall. The type of oyster probably lived in fresher water than oysters with parasite holes. Photo by Archaeologist Dave Shonyo.*

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When you eat an oyster, you eat the water in which the oyster grew. Oysters are evaluated by epicures the way wines are assessed by oenophiles; the aquaculture equivalent to "terroir" for vineyards is "merroir" for oysters. ...The flavor of an oyster has everything to do with its geography - flavors differ regionally and even from bay to bay and creek to creek. The taste of the sea, and thus an oyster, depends on everything from salinity and water temperature, to the algae they eat, the minerals in the water, the way they're cultivated, and the time of year they spawn. All of these factors affect taste, plumpness, texture, and sustainability.<sup>4</sup>

*This oyster shell, also uncovered at Gunston Hall, shows the parasite holes that indicate this oyster lived further downriver where the water has a higher salinity. Photo by Archaeologist Dave Shonyo.*



Were oystermen, as entrepreneurs, bringing them upriver, perhaps to George Mason's wharf on the Potomac located, now, on the adjacent, privately-owned Overlook property? As George Washington's diary entry Sunday, January 6, 1760, indicates dock-side delivery could have its pitfalls: "... the oyster man still continuing his disorderly behavior at my landing I was obliged in the most preemptory manner to order him and his compy away which he did not incline to obey until next morning"

Frederick Tilp, in his book *This Was Potomac River*, speculates "...about 1760, instead of each man providing his own food, he began to turn to specialists for various necessary items, thus establishing a new business on the river – that of professional oystermen. Within twenty years oysters became such a favorite that many inns and taverns began to specialize in serving them."<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps George Mason and George Washington developed a taste for the briner oysters during their stays at colonial Williamsburg as high-salinity, perforated shells are found in the Gunston Hall kitchen trash pits – both from the main house and from what appear to be the house slave quarters .

We do not have any known surviving oyster recipes belonging to Ann Eilbeck Mason or Sarah Brent Mason, George Mason's first and second wives. However, close neighbor Martha Washington did have a family compilation of recipes handed down to her, and the editor of *Martha Washington's Booke of Cookery*, Karen Hess, after careful review of this material, has concluded that most of the recipes required pickled oysters.

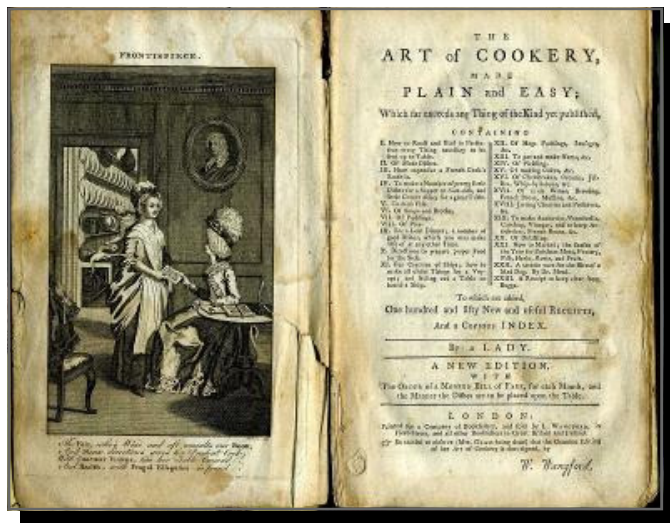
However, there is one recipe for fresh oysters:

*"To Make Capon Sauce: [N.B. y = th in archaic orthographic usage.]*

*Take oysters with their liquor, & ale [all?], & set ym on ye fire. yn put into ym a little clarret, & some whole ma[ce], & shread in a little ounio[n], a little leamon pill, & a little salt. when it [is] stewd a little while, thicken it wth a little grated bread, & put in a piece of fresh butte[r] but let it not boyle after."<sup>6</sup>*

Martha Washington also possessed a British cookbook, and as this book was very popular in the colonies, Ann Mason and Sarah Brent Mason also likely owned a

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copy. *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy*, by Hannah Glasse – which had various recipes utilizing oysters. One of which involved pickling:

*Take 200 oysters, the newest and best you can get, be careful to save the liquor in some pan as you open them, cut off the black verge, saving the rest, put them into their own liquor; then put all the liquor and oysters into a kettle, boil them about half an hour on a very gentle fire, do them very slowly, skimming them as the scum rises, then take them off the fire, take out the oysters, strain the liquor through a fine cloth; then put in the oysters again; then take out a pint of the liquor whilst it is hot, put thereto three quarters of an ounce of mace, and half an ounce of cloves. Just give it one boil, then put it to the oysters, and stir up the spices well among them, then put in about a spoonful of salt, three quarters of a pint of the best white-wine vinegar, and a quarter of an ounce of whole pepper; then let them stand until they are cold; then put the oysters, as many as you well can, into the barrel; put in as much liquor as the barrel will hold, letting them settle a while, and they will soon be fit to eat. Or you may put them in stone-jars, cover them close with a bladder and leather, and be sure they are quite cold before you cover them up.<sup>7</sup>*

*Hannah Glasse's The Art of Cooking Made Plain and Easy, first published in 1747, became a best seller on both sides of the Atlantic for over a century.*

*By Scan: Contributor. Original: W.Wangford c.1777 - Scan by this contributor from c.1770 original in own possession, Public Domain, from Wikipedia*

As this cookbook seems to have been common in plantation households according to Mary Thompson, Research Historian at Mount Vernon, it's very likely Gunston Hall's kitchen also prepared pickled oysters using this, or a similar, recipe. Pickling may have not only been a preservative but, considering the blander oysters more accessible to Gunston Hall and Mount Vernon at their upriver locations, it may have offset the blandness; pickling may also have extended the duration of oysters on the menu when deliveries by oystermen were not regular.

George Mason's wives probably would have read out the recipe to a slave cook and brought out the more precious spices from the left-side closet in the master bedroom. This closet, according to son John's recollections "... held the smaller or more precious stores for the table and would have, I suppose [been] called an upper pantry."<sup>8</sup>

### BIVALVE BONUS

In addition to oysters functioning as comestibles, their shell's calcium carbonate has a further, somewhat unusual, role in neutralizing the acidity of the soil found in kitchen trash pits thereby preserving some organic matter that would, otherwise, have been lost: a lagniappe.

We are lucky at Gunston Hall to have found vegetable seeds – perhaps fresh from the eighteenth-century dinner table – in trash pits. We know, thanks to the identification by the National Seed Herbarium, what those seeds were: beets and cruciferous vegetables (probably cauliflower).

Additionally, an unusual tropical flowering plant seed native to the Caribbean was found in one of the trash pits – *Cleome spinosa* Jacquin – simple forerunner of today's "Spider Flower."

Based on Gunston Hall's archaeology department's discovery proving a 1770-1780's context for this flowering plant, Wesley Green, Head Gardener at Colonial Williamsburg, replaced it in the gardens there.

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*Cleome spinosa* jacquin, commonly known as the spider flower. Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution



### OYSTER SHELS AS LIME INGREDIENT

Oysters were also utilized as an ingredient in making plaster as well as mortar. Flecks of oyster shell are found in Gunston Hall's interior wall plaster; it is not clear whether oyster shell or limestone was used to prepare the mortar for Gunston's brickwork.

To make lime using oyster shells, you prepare a lime rick. The intense heat from burning these shells creates quicklime.

*A lime rick is a circular platform of firewood topped with a large mound of oyster shells and burned in order to make lime. The Colonial Williamsburg brick makers built this one at the brickyard to produce lime for the Coffeehouse reconstruction project. Photo & caption courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*



This, in turn, is mixed with water in a process known as "slaking."

This somewhat liquid material is then used, after screening for large bits of shell, in varying portions, as an ingredient in mortar as well as plaster.



*Trades workers in the brickyard in Williamsburg mix water with the quicklime in the process of turning oyster shells into mortar. Photo courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*

George Mason did become personally involved in overseeing the making of mortar and plaster used in Gunston Hall's construction. Wording in the passage below may indicate – by extrapolation – that oyster shells were used for lime in "outside-work" as well as "inside-work."

"When I built my house [Gunston Hall] I was at [some?] pains to measure all the Lime & Sand as my Mortar was made up, & always had two Beds, one for outside-Work 2/3 ds. Lime & 1/3 d. Sand, the other equal parts of Lime & Sand for Inside-work – it is easily measured in any old Tub or Barrel, & there is no other way to be sure of having your mortar good without Waste, & the different parts of yr. Building equally strong." (Letter to Alexander Henderson – July

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18, 1763. George Mason Papers, Vol. 1, p. 56, editor Robert Rutland.)

Many thanks to Mary Thomson, Research Historian, Mount Vernon; to Elaine McHale, Reference Librarian, Fairfax County Library; and to the staff at Colonial Williamsburg Foundation – Allison Heinbaugh and Marianne Martin of the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library and Melissa Blank of Historic Foodways. Also thanks to Claudia Wendling and Dave Shonyo of the Gunston Hall archaeology department for reading the text and making helpful suggestions. Finally, to a great editor, Frank Barker. JF

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- <sup>2</sup> [Dec. 1769] Founders Online, National Archives. Source: The Diaries of George Washington, Vol. 2, 14 January 1766 – 31 December 1770. Editor Donald Jackson. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976, pp. 199-204.

<sup>3</sup> *A Water-Quality Study of the Tidal Potomac River and Estuary – An Overview*, Edited by Edwar Callender, et al., U.S. Geological Survey Water Supply Paper 2233. U.S. GPO: 1984.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.virginiaplaces.org/natural/oystersalt.html>

<sup>5</sup> *This Was Potomac River*, Frederick Tilp. Bladensburg, MD: Tilp, 1978, pp. 35-36.

<sup>6</sup> *Martha Washington's Booke of Cookery*, edited by Karen Hess. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981, pp. 59-60.

<sup>7</sup> *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy*, Hannah Glasse. (multiple editions after first edition of 1747.)

<sup>8</sup> *The Recollections of John Mason – George Mason's Son Remembers his Father and Life at Gunston Hall*, edited by Terry K. Dunn. (Board of Regents of Gunston Hall, Mason Neck, Virginia.) 2012, p. 64.



#### FAREWELL TO AN OLD FRIEND

The elderly cedar tree that lived across the lane from the kitchen yard is no more.

In August and early September, an arborist and a tree service worked tirelessly taking down dangerous trees and limbs, and this venerable cedar, probably a century old, had to come down. It seems that while the tree was tall and stately, its inner structure was rotten and it was time for it to go.

Strangely, the tree had a large mound of stones built up around it. It is not known at this writing what will be come of the stump and its cache of stones.



# Attack of the Green Chairs!

Samantha Dorsey, Curator of Collections

**T**HE GREEN CHAIRS ARE MULTIPLYING! The green Windsor side chairs have all returned to the Central Passage. This type of seating furniture was very familiar to George Mason and his contemporaries.

Think of them as the “Ikea folding chairs” of the 18<sup>th</sup> century! Easily manufactured and easily repairable and replaceable, a set or two graced virtually every plantation household.

Period references place them in almost every room. We use them in the Central Passage to communicate that the hall was a reception and waiting area for visitors, servants, and enslaved people.

Not everyone, however, was invited to have a seat. The chairs, like the slaves who stood outside of the public rooms, awaiting instruction from their masters, stand at attention. For more information about the interpretation of the Central Passage, please read Chapter 3 of the Gunston Hall Room Use Survey (GHRUS) available in the research library.

The GHRUS notes that “By the end of his life, it is likely that George Mason owned two sets of [6-10] Windsors, one from the 1760s and a second from the 1770s or 1780s” (Vol. II, p. 148). The reproductions that guests sit on are modeled after late 18<sup>th</sup> century side chairs (chairs without arms) made in Philadelphia and would have been recognizably different from Windsor chairs manufactured in Virginia.

Why do we use Philadelphia-style chairs? George Mason is known to have gone shopping for other household furnishings for his son, John, during the 1787 Federal Convention in Philadelphia. It is entirely possible he purchased a new set for himself as well.

If you'd like more information about this distinctive seating form, read Chapter 8 of Nancy Goyne Evans, *American Windsor Chairs* (NK2715.E92 1996) available in our Library.

For more information about their distinctive color, check out this online article by conservator Christopher Swan, <http://antiquesandfineart.com/articles/article.cfm?request=867>



*According to an expert “The origin of the term Windsor has remained elusive.” It may refer to Windsor, England or possibly for Windsor castle. The chair and the term were introduced between 1710 and 1720.*

# Sarah Brent Mason's Pocket Watch: 'Breguet, à Paris'



*Control the moment; the hours will favor what remains*

*Claudia Wendling, and Jerry Foster,  
Archaeological Volunteers*

**W**IDOWER GEORGE MASON married Sarah Brent Mason April 11, 1780, and she became stepmother to nine children. The eldest of the nine – George Mason, Jr. – was in France attempting to recover from a rheumatic condition.

## **GEORGE MASON, JR.**

George Mason, Jr. had sailed to Europe in the spring of 1779 with letters of introduction from George Washington to the Marquis de Lafayette and Benjamin Franklin, the American ambassador to France. His father described his son's prior military service:

“My eldest Son George engaged early in the American Cause, and was chosen Ensign of the first independent Company formed in Virginia, or indeed on the Continent, it was commanded by the Present General Washington as Captain, and consisted entirely of Gentlemen. In the year 1775 he was appointed a Captain of Foot, in one of the first Minute-Regiments raised here but was soon obliged to quit the Service, by a violent Rheumatic Disorder; which has followed him ever since, and I believe will force him to try the Climate of France or Italy.”<sup>1</sup>

While in Paris, George Mason, Jr., in col-

laboration with his father, seems to have been a de facto agent for the American cause:

“George showed at least one of his father's letters to the American ambassador in Paris; Franklin thought Mason's estimate of public affairs of June 3, 1781, of sufficient importance to pass on to the French foreign minister, the Comte de Vergennes; it is now bound in Correspondence Politique, Etats-Unis, vol. 17, ff. 52-53, Quai d'Orsay, Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Paris.”<sup>2</sup>

His father's analysis of the declining American morale and defeats in Virginia and the Carolinas was included as a separate document in a personal letter to George, Jr., possibly with the intention of its being forwarded to Franklin.<sup>3</sup>

## **THE POCKET WATCH**

While in Paris, George Mason, Jr. found time to purchase a pocket watch for his new stepmother from the preeminent watchmaker to Marie-Antoinette and the aristocracy – Abraham-Louis Breguet. Unfortunately, little more is known than the approximate purchase date as the Breguet archives prior to 1787 were destroyed in a fire.

The purchase must have been in 1782 as it arrived in the little port village of Colchester,

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Virginia – near Gunston Hall – probably the first week of January 1783 as George Mason’s thank you letter to his son is dated January 8,



Watch n° 1 8/82, [August 1782], which is Breguet’s oldest known automatic watch, equipped with a “à toc” quarter repeater. Photo courtesy of Jean-Jacques Gagnebin, Customer Care Manager, Breguet

1783. In it he states she likes the watch “very well, and thanks you for your care in getting it done.”<sup>4</sup>

The Breguet watch company has informed us that pocket watches were identical for men and women at that time. An 18<sup>th</sup>-century woman wore a pocket, or a pair of pockets, as separate pouches under her outer garment.

“The pockets were not sewn into their garments, as with men’s clothing, but rather tied around the waist (often in pairs), on long strings. Slits in the sides of their gowns and petticoats gave them access to the pockets underneath.”<sup>5</sup>

Watches might also be worn on a

*Lady’s pocket, c. 1730-1780. United States – linen, wool. Board of Regents, Gunston Hall, G132.*



chain or ribbon tied to the waistband of their skirts.

We know more about the watch from an advertisement Sarah Brent Mason placed in the *Alexandria Advertiser*, September 1, 1801:

*Twenty Dollars Reward*

LOST in the town of Alexandria, on the 21<sup>st</sup>. August, a large, flat, Gold French WATCH; a single case, which opens by a spring in the shank of the watch; the maker’s name *Breguet, à Paris*; the motto around the dial plate is in Latin, ‘*Rege momenta reste horae favebunt.*’ It had no chrystal, and it was in carrying it to a watch-maker’s for one, it was lost. --- Whoever has found it, and will deliver it to Mr. Andrew Jamieson, shall receive the above reward and no questions asked.

SARAH. B. MASON

An assistant professor of classics, who wishes to remain anonymous, translated the Latin *Rege momenta reste horae favebunt* as “Control the moment; the hours will favor what remains.” The source of the inscription is not clear. Did George Mason, Jr. have that done in Paris on his own initiative; did he do it at the request of his stepmother or father; or was it done upon its arrival in Virginia?

We know that Sarah Brent Mason, in her will, left a gold watch to her sister, Jean Graham. Was the lost Breguet found and passed down in the sister’s family? Its present location, and even whether it has survived, is unknown.

**ABRAHAM-LOUIS BREGUET**

In 1775, Abraham-Louis Breguet established his watch making business at 39 Quai de l’ Horloge on the Ile de la Cité in Paris. It was at that shop George Mason, Jr. would have purchased the watch. Eventually, revolution would come to France with the fall of the Bas-

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tille in 1789. With it the aristocratic customers would have rapidly declined. Breguet's life was in danger by 1793, and he fled to his native Switzerland eventually returning, years later, to Paris.

The revolution must have taken a toll on his workshop with less and less demand for luxury goods, and it is at this time one of his workmen who may have actually worked on Sarah's pocket watch, Humber Droz, would emigrate from Paris and settle in Philadelphia. Early in his stay there, July 29 1791, he wrote a letter to President Washington offering his services as a watchmaker:

I would not think that I am making use as I must of my talents if I did not offer them especially to the man whom all the world considers as the most deserving of the thirteen United States. If he honors me with his trust, then I swear on my word as a Swiss that he shall not be deceived. For eight years I have involved myself in nothing but bringing harmony to the most complicated works: watches with inertia blocks, minute repeaters, equation of time watches having all sorts of calendars, detached escapements, etc. which are made at Mr. Breguet's, the finest artist in Paris and, I believe, the entire world.

So that if one wants to make the sacrifice of paying me for my work, I can take the very worst watch and I will make it a good one, giving my guarantee for 10 years; and if one can prove after a year that it has not worked well, without it having been dropped or involved in any other accidents, I will return all money received for it.<sup>6</sup>

Droz's opinion of Breguet as "the finest artist in Paris and, I believe, the entire world" would be a shared belief:

"Among his clients Breguet could number most of the crowned heads of the world including those

of England, Russia, Spain, Tuscany, Holland, Naples, Bavaria and Wespalia. The heads of numerous aristocratic families were frequent purchasers. Before the Revolution, Marie Antoinette chose his watches as presents for her favourites. The Duke of Wellington and Napoleon carried none other than Breguet's watches.

Fashionable writers of the day, including Alexandre Dumas, Balzac, Kuprin and Pushkin all mention Breguet in their writings. Even the magnificent Phileas Fogg relied upon a Breguet watch to assist in navigating him on his epic journey around the world."<sup>7</sup>

With many thanks to Jean-Jacques Gagnebin, Customer Care Manager, Breguet for background information regarding the watch and for the photograph of a 1782 example; to Elizabeth Nuxoll, Editor John Jay Papers, Columbia University for calling our attention to the Droz letter; to the European Division, Library of Congress for its assistance with reference and difficult passages of the translation of the Droz letter; to Samantha Dorsey, Gunston Hall's curator, for the photograph of a lady's pocket; and to Frank Barker, editor of the Grapevine.

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#### Works Cited

- <sup>1</sup> Robert A. Rutland, Editor, *The Papers of George Mason* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), Volume I, Page 434.
- <sup>2</sup> Helen Hill Miller, *George Mason, Gentleman Revolutionary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), page 209.
- <sup>3</sup> Robert A. Rutland, op. cit., Volume II, Pages 692-695.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid, Volume II, Page 760.
- <sup>5</sup> Hillary Murtha, Ph.D. and M.A. in History, University of Delaware. *The Meaning of Things* (Blog). "Some 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Women's Pockets: Objects of Female Empowerment." October 22, 2012.
- <sup>6</sup> Theodore J. Crackel, Editor, *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Totunda, 2008)
- <sup>7</sup> George Daniels, *The Art of Breguet* (New York: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1975), page 8.

THINGS YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED IF YOU WEREN'T AT  
**GUNSTON HALL** THIS SUMMER



**The Annual Soaking of Scouts.** Cub Scouts spending a week at a camporee at Gunston Hall are cooled off by a fire truck from Gunston Station 20.



**Docents Doing Windows.** And ceilings and closets and floors and hearths. A cleaning committee of docents including Nancy Sage on window and Carol Coose on ceiling scrubbed and swept the school house to get it ready for school year 2016-17.



**Women's Equality Day Lecture.** The Turning Point Suffragist Memorial Association and Gunston Hall sponsored a program about suffragist martyr Inez Milholland Boissevain as well as how the Constitution and Bill of Rights affected women during the Suffragist Movement and today. George Mason (Don McAndrews) and Edith Mayo, Curator Emeritus in Political and Women's History at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, were keynote speakers



**Educators Getting Educated.** The Just for Educators program in August brought in educators from as far away as China, Boston, and Fairfax County to discuss methods of teaching George Mason and American rights in the classroom. Rebecca Martin, Director of Education and Guest Experiences, center, shares ideas with Katherine Rehm from West Springfield High School and Meaghan Gasiorowski from Loch Lomond Elementary.

## THIS FALL AT GUNSTON HALL

**Saturday, Sept. 10, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.**

Naturalization Ceremony. Welcome people from all over the globe as they are sworn in as American citizens at this historic location. Admission until 1 p.m. is complimentary.

**Monday, Sept. 12, 10 a.m.**

Monthly Docent Meeting in the Ann Mason Room.

**Saturday, Sept. 24, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.**

Archaeology Day. Become an archeologist for the day as you screen for artifacts, piece together objects, and learn about recent discoveries from the Gunston Hall archaeology team. Attend a talk on the region's native inhabitants; learn about archaeology careers. Included with regular admission.

**Monday, Oct. 3, 10 a.m.**

Monthly Docent Meeting in the Ann Mason Room.

**Thursday, Oct. 6-Sunday, Oct. 9**

Board of Regents of Gunston Hall, Inc. annual meeting

**Saturday and Sunday, October 22 and 23, 10 a.m.- 4:00 p.m.**

Open Hearth Cooking Class Level I. Learn to cook using 18th-century techniques and recipes with Gunston Hall's veteran hearth cooks. Visit [www.gunstonhall.org](http://www.gunstonhall.org) for details and to register.

**Tuesday, Oct. 25, 6 p.m-8 p.m.**

Candlelight and Cocktails. Enjoy an evening at Gunston Hall during this special after-hours event. Sip on period cocktails as you learn to make 18<sup>th</sup>-century mixed drinks and snacks in the hearth kitchen. Experience the serenity of Mason Neck during an exclusive candlelight tour. Register at [www.gunstonhall.org](http://www.gunstonhall.org).

**Thursday, Nov. 3**

Symposium. Join Gunston Hall for its annual exploration of decorative arts and material culture. \$95 registration fee includes the speaking program, a guided tour, light breakfast, and box lunch. Visit [www.gunstonhall.org](http://www.gunstonhall.org). to register and for further details.

**Monday, Nov. 7, 10 a.m.**

Monthly Docent Meeting in the Ann Mason Room.

**Friday, Nov. 11**



## Grapeshots!

*Summertime Visitors to Gunston Hall. Left: Lycoris squamigera, also known as the resurrection lily, surprise lily, and naked ladies is a plant in the amaryllis family that pops up every August near the herb garden. Right: Often found fluttering around the butterfly bush near the kitchen yard is the official state butterfly of Virginia, the eastern tiger swallowtail. Judging by the blue colored patches on the after portion of the wings, this is a female of the species.*

*Below is a view that hasn't been seen in many years. The missing cedar tree (see page 9) changes the vista of the land front side of the house and kitchen yard.*

