

Center For Mason Legacies: The Research Partnership between the University Libraries and College of Humanities and Social Sciences

2020-2021 Academic Year Report



Center for Mason Legacies

The Center for Mason Legacies participated in the town of Vienna's Liberty Amendments month keynote event which focused on the thirteenth amendment. This event included President Gregory Washington's first public speech in the community since arriving at George Mason University. The panel participants explored the paradox of George Mason's ideas on universal liberties with his practice of enslaving men, women, and children.

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Mission and Vision

"Uncovering hidden histories"

The Center for Mason Legacies (CML) is an interdisciplinary and collaborative research center with the mission of preserving and examining the legacy of George Mason IV (1725-1792), his ancestors and heirs, and the people he enslaved.

CML coordinates and sponsors far-reaching studies of our university namesake, a renowned father of democratic rights – and, problematically, a Virginia slaveholder – with special attention to his enduring impact on American politics, Northern Virginia development, and higher education.



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History

The Center for Mason Legacies was formally established by the partnership between the Dean of the University Libraries and the Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at George Mason University in 2020. Though the center is completing its first year as an established, chartered research center at the university, adjacent work to the center's mission has been ongoing since 2017, when students and faculty set out to discover the worlds of enslaved African Americans on Mason's Gunston Hall plantation.

This initial inquiry - The Enslaved Children of George Mason project – resulted in creating an online exhibit on the Omeka platform, initializing discussions about the impact of slavery on higher education institutions, seeing the work of the project expand, and recognizing the enslaved individuals of Gunston Hall with a memorial on the Fairfax campus of George Mason University.

The work did not end there but led to continuing research, with students participating in classes, independent studies, transcription projects, and internships while faculty members laid the groundwork for a formal center, designed new courses, presented at conferences, and provided consultation on the university's Enslaved Peoples of George Mason memorial project.

The Center's First Year

2 graduate research assistants producing major achievements.

1 graduate intern

1 undergraduate research assistant

1 website created

2 social media accounts

3 digital projects

5 courses taught (2 History 300, 2 History 499, 1 Hist 615/688)

Scholarship and Presentations

1 article submitted and has been sent out for review by the editors of a major journal in the field of US History. We expect feedback in September 2021.

3 interviews/media appearances

[Prince William County Public Library: "A Complicated Legacy the Enslaved Children of George Mason."](#)

[WJLA Statue Removal and EPGM](#)

"The Paradox of George Mason, Constitutionalist and Slaveholder" keynote address by [Dr. Gregory Washington](#), President, George Mason University followed by a panel discussion with



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[Dr. George Oberle](#) History and Director, Center for Mason Legacies at GMU, [the Honorable Kenneth R. Plum](#), Member, Virginia House of Delegates, 36th District, and [Councilmember Chuck Anderson](#). The event will be held at 5 p.m. June 24 at the [Vienna Community Center](#) and live streamed on [Facebook](#) and [Youtube](#) @TownofViennaVA

June 15 Wendi Manual-Scott's keynote for the Virginia Department of Education "Freedom Dreaming: Race, Place, and Black Geographic Storytelling" explored how Black people have resisted oppressive structures and ideologies by engaging in liberatory counternarratives and Black geographic narratives centering freedom and agency. The following week on June 20 and 21, Manuel-Scott gave two talks to Fairfax County teachers entitled "The Unlearning & Unknowing of US History" and "Teacher Agency and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy."

Service to The University

Contributing to the university, the community, and to historical and archival scholarship
Director and associate directors service on ARIE Task Force. Wendi Manuel Scott is Co-Chair of the entire Task Force. Benedict Carton served on the research subcommittee and George Oberle served on the Community engagement subcommittee.

Unveiling of the Enslaved People of George Mason Memorial and Ribbon Cutting ceremony

Benedict Carton and George Oberle have been consulted by Paul Alvin's Unite about the 50th Anniversary Planning

Director and associate director appointed to new strategic/assessment naming Committee for the university

New and Ongoing Research

Enslaved People of George Mason Memorial: CML remains the lead scholars for this project, and we are busy producing language for signs, a short film about the memorial, and other support materials for various parts of the university including, Admissions, University Development, the Communications office, Alumni, and undergraduate education, and OLLI.



CML is collaborating with the Master Plan group with a “History Trail” component for the campus with John Forgy.

[Mason Family Papers Project](#)

This project is the flagship project for our work. *The Papers of George Mason* project compiled and edited by Robert Rutland which was completed in 1970 produced a three-volume set in a letter press edition which remains important for the study of George Mason and his plantation at Gunston Hall. This impressive work remains the first stop for all researchers exploring questions related to George Mason IV, his family, his extensive landed properties, and the enslaved people who made his life possible. Still, this collection is very limited. It is unclear what happened to papers that were in the possession of the Mason family at the time of George Mason IV's death however it is possible to reconstruct some of those papers and by including documents from his ancestors and descendants we can better understand the legacy of George Mason and his family on the region and country. Furthermore, Rutland may not have considered the experiences of enslaved persons of Gunston Hall when compiling the records of our university namesake. As a result, significant pools of sources in court houses and other repositories have yet to be discovered. A scholar need only thumb through the index of the three-volume collection to note the absence of enslaved people. The Mason Family Papers will help rectify this by finding sources in the courthouses which were ignored by Rutland and by



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connecting the Mason with the legacy of his family and documenting the experiences of his family in early Virginia. This will help scholars utilize a diverse set of sources and demonstrate the importance of using family history as a significant method to perform this work. Anthony (Tony) Guidone, doctoral candidate and leader on this project produced an excellent Omeka exhibit titled "[Who Was Richard Chichester Mason](#)" to demonstrate how this project can produce important findings.

Mason Family Account Book - In 2012, the University Libraries acquired a [Mason family manuscript account book](#) documenting the business, family, and personal accounts of Stevens Thomson Mason (1760-1803) and his son, Armistead Thomson Mason (1787-1819). Included in the accounting are extensive records for the operation of the family plantation, Raspberry Plain Farm, near Leesburg (Loudoun County), with many entries related to those enslaved by the family. Stevens Thomson Mason was the nephew of George Mason IV. Following acquisition of the account book, the Libraries created a [digitized copy](#). This rich resource remained largely untapped until professors George Oberle and Cynthia Kierner, with the assistance of graduate research assistant Anne Dobberteen, co-taught a documentary editing course in Spring 2020 using the Mason family account book. Through this course, students began transcribing entries from the account book and conducting related research. This transcription and research project is ongoing and will lead to a valuable, public online research tool. The course was offered again in Spring 2021 and will be offered in the next academic year as well.

Racial Reckoning - [Racial Reckoning](#) is a response to the mass protests following the police-involved killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Rayshard Brooks during the spring and summer of 2020. These events are part of a long history of racism in the United States. The end of the Civil War and American slavery did not bring equality for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Today, unarmed BIPOC encounter individual, institutional, and systemic racism in their everyday lives, and compared to white people, are disproportionately likely to be stopped, falsely arrested, and killed by the police. With the *Racial Reckoning* site, we seek to collect, preserve, and present the stories from the broader George Mason community. These narratives will highlight the personal memories and digitally-born materials generated or inspired by protest actions against racism and white supremacy. Since COVID-19 dispersed the community, documenting this moment means capturing experiences on- or off-campus, in another city, state, or country.

Black Lives Next Door - In Summer 2021 term, the Center for Mason Legacies began "Black Lives Next Door," an interdisciplinary project and collaboration between faculty and students to explore the environs surrounding the early years of George Mason College and its transition to George Mason University. [LaNitra Berger](#) (senior director of fellowships in the Office of Undergraduate Education, instructor, and affiliated faculty of CML), [Benedict Carton](#) (associate



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professor of History and associate director of CML), and [George Oberle](#) (History Librarian, assistant professor, and director of CML) are leading the summer team of six undergraduate students and two graduate research assistants. We expect to disseminate preliminary findings in Fall 2021. We envision this to be a signature research project which will emphasize public history methods and community partnerships.

Exploration of the extended Mason family – Faculty and graduate research assistants are embarked in an ongoing exploration of the Mason family (Mason Family Papers) and a search for relevant primary resources. Gaining access to the original pages of a handwritten account book of John Mercer (George Mason IV's uncle and mentor), which reveals evidence of his investment in human trafficking and identifies the slaveholders with whom Mercer transacted deals, led George Oberle and Benedict Carton to write this [article](#) and share their findings with the ARIE Task Force and the university community. As a result, Oberle and Carton have been named to a new committee to examine the naming and vetting of names to university spaces which would be led by CML.

Land Acknowledgment Project – This acknowledgement statement is in draft form and was developed by Associate Director Gabrielle Tayac and the team. Professor Tayac is continuing this work conducting formal research and outreach to the tribes in the region. This work is part of the CML project since the Mason family engaged in violent and systematic assaults on the indigenous peoples in this area. This acknowledgement research is critical to the university and is a high priority for our scholarship. CML developed this statement based on requests from members of the university community.

Presentations and Research Dissemination

Website

- George Oberle and Jessica Clark met with CHSS web team to discuss website creation, layout, and training. George and Jessica co-manage the legacies.gmu.edu site and populate the majority of the content. In addition to [news announcements](#), created a [“Notes from the Field”](#) segment to highlight current research.

Social Media

- Instagram account @masonlegacies created in support of CML.
- Twitter account @racereckoning created in support of Racial Reckoning project.

Presentations

- Prince William County Library



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- Panel: "Collecting and Contextualizing the Current Moment of Racial Reckoning" - Laura Brannan, Janine Hubai, Anne Dobberteen, Dr. George D. Oberle, and Alyssa Toby Fahringer
- Keynote for the Virginia Department of Education "Freedom Dreaming: Race, Place, and Black Geographic Storytelling"
- Two talks to Fairfax County teachers entitled "The Unlearning & Unknowing of US History" and "Teacher Agency and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy."
- Vienna City Council-Panel Participant on George Mason as part of Vienna's Celebration of the Liberty Amendments.
- Invited to speak to OLLI-Fall 2021
- Invited to Speak to Sons of the American Revolution-Fall 2021
- Panel Presentation by George Oberle, Alyssa Fahringer, Anne Dobberteen, Tony Guidone for the [2021 Conference on Community Writing](#)

Grants and Fundraising

- Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) - George Oberle and Jessica Clark met with a program officer and co-wrote a grant application for the IMLS National Leadership Grant program. While this application was unsuccessful, we gained valuable and positive feedback from the reviewers to incorporate and strengthen in future applications.
- Virginia Humanities - George Oberle joined fellow CHSS faculty for an exploratory meeting with the Virginia Humanities, and CML is considering future projects and potential applications for support.
- Summer Team Impact Grant – LaNitra Berger, Benedict Carton, and George Oberle applied and were granted a Summer Team Impact Grant for Summer 2021, for the "Black Lives Next Door" project.
- Private Philanthropy – CML has partnered with Kathleen Kehoe, Director of Development for the Libraries, and Kevin Stoy, Associate Director of Development for CHSS, for fundraising ideas and outreach, to host prospective donor visits, share language and updates, and participate in the university's annual Giving Day. Giving options are available on both the Libraries and CML websites.

Exploring Community Partnerships

- Gunston Hall
- Fairfax County Public School System



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- Vienna City Council
- Thomas Balch Library
- OLLI
- 250th American Revolution Celebration partnership with Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian and Gunston Hall.
- NAACP Fairfax Chapter Partnership on exploring redlining and inequities in real estate

The Year Ahead

- Invited to present at Conference on Community Writing
- Strengthening partnerships and forming new ones with local history and community groups
- Seeking major grant funding
- Hosting events-We are particularly interested in inviting a major speaker. Perhaps this can be done in partnership with the Humanities Center and/or local history organizations
- Planning library/archival research workshop
- Develop a new course(s) that focuses on local history
- Memorial dedication & related memory project
- Black Lived Next Door and beyond
- Implementing communications plan (including regular e-newsletters, creating listserv, etc.)
- Solidifying Faculty Advisory Board
- Laying groundwork for developing an Advisory Board

Our Team

- George D. Oberle III
- Benedict Carton
- Wendi Manuel-Scott
- Gabrielle Tayac
- Jessica Clark
- Anthony Guidone (GRA)
- Anne Dobberteen (GRA)
- Rejina Tabay (OSCAR Fellow-Undergraduate)