

HIST-397/615/688

Mason Legacies:

Editing and Explaining a Mason Family Account Book, 1792-1820

Dr. Cynthia Kierner (ckierner@gmu.edu)

Dr. George Oberle (goberle@gmu.edu)

This course is both a contribution to the university's Mason Legacies initiative and an introduction to documentary editing. Students will transcribe and annotate sections of an account book that belonged to Stevens Thomson Mason (1760-1803), nephew of George Mason IV (the famous George), and his son Armistead Thomson Mason (1787-1819), which is currently available in an unedited digitized format: https://scrc.gmu.edu/finding_aids/masonaccountbook.html.

By reading, transcribing, and annotating the account book, students will learn about family relationships and finances, legal practice and fees, medicine, slavery, the plantation economy and local trade, and other related topics. They will also develop certain digital and editing skills. The digitized account book, with the students' transcriptions and annotations, will be published as a born-digital project accessible to the public.

Because of the workshop format of this class and of the type of work we will be doing, students must bring a laptop to each class meeting.

Required texts: Students should purchase Michael E. Stevens and Steven B. Burg, *Editing Historical Documents: A Handbook of Practice*, which is available in at the university bookstore and from Amazon and other online sellers. Other required reading consists of articles and book chapters, most of which are accessible either through the Fenwick Library catalog or as "eReserves" through the course Blackboard site. Two are accessible via hyperlinks in embedded in the syllabus, below.

Grades for this course will be determined as follows:

- | | |
|--|-----|
| • Short essay (due 2/10) | 10% |
| • Biographical entries (150-500 words; 6 @ 5% each) | 30% |
| • Annotations (due 5/4) | 30% |
| • Glossary list (due 4/27) | 10% |
| • Attendance/participation (including in-class work) | 20% |

Note that explicit directions for all written work have been posted in the "Assignments" section of the course Blackboard site.

Course Schedule:

Monday 27 January: Introduction to documentary editing, digital platforms, and the Mason account book.

- Special guests: Dr. Lisa Francavilla (*Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series*, Dr. Lynn Price (*Papers of George Washington*), Alyssa Fahringer (Fenwick Library Digital Scholarship Consultant), and Anne Dobberteen (Fenwick Library Digital Humanities GRA)
- Read: Stevens and Burg, *Editing Historical Documents*, chap. 1

Monday 3 February: Foundational Reading I (Planters, Lawyers, and Slavery)

- Jackson Turner Main, "The One Hundred," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 11 (1954): 354-84.
- E. Lee Shephard, "Lawyers Look at Themselves: Professional Consciousness at the Virginia Bar, 1770-1850," *American Journal of Legal History*, 25 (1981): 1-23.
- Hugh Grant, "Bookkeeping in the Eighteenth Century: The Grand Journal and Grand Ledger of the Hudson's Bay Company," *Archivaria* 43 (1997), at <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12179/13191>.
- John J. McCusker, "How Much is that in Real Money?" *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings* 101 (1992), at www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44517778.pdf.
- Caitlyn Rosenthal, "Slavery's Scientific Management: Accounting for Mastery," in Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds., *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*, pp. 62-86. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

****Editor's Library: Core sources and databases (in-class introduction)**

Monday 10 February: Foundational Reading II (The Masons in Northern Virginia)

- Lorri Glover, "Introduction" and "'Ourselves and Our Posterity,'" in *Founders as Fathers: The Private Lives and Politics of the American Revolutionaries*, pp. 1-5, 192-218. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Brenda E. Stevenson, "The Nature of Loudoun Slavery," in *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South*, pp. 166-205. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Thomas J. Humphrey, "Conflicting Independence: Land Tenancy and the American Revolution," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 28 (2008): 160-82.
- A. Glenn Crothers, "Agricultural Improvement and Technical Innovation in a Slave Society: The Case of Early National Northern Virginia." *Agricultural History* 75 (2001): 135-67.

**Special guest: Dr. Sheri Huerta, Department of History and Art History, George Mason University

Writing assignment due: Based on the past two weeks' foundational reading, write a 3-5-page essay (double-spaced) describing what you believe to be the salient features of the Masons' world in Loudoun County. Be sure that you state the thesis of your essay in the first paragraph and that you draw on all of the assigned readings (except for the articles by Hugh Grant and John J. McCusker).

Monday 17 February: Transcribing and annotating (in-class)

- Read Stevens and Burg, *Editing Historical Documents*, chaps. 3-4
- Read project statement on Editorial Method posted in "Course Resources"

Each student will work to transcribe an emptier set of pages (i.e., one recto and verso pair) in the account book. In the remaining class time, each student will research the clients listed on their pages to prepare to write their biographical entries.

Please keep a running list of possible glossary entries as you do your transcriptions.

Tuesday 25 February: Site visit to Thomas Balch Library

The [Thomas Balch Library](#) is a history and genealogy library with collections that are uniquely useful for our project. Because the Balch is not open on Monday evenings, we are meeting on Tuesday this week during our regular class time. Our special session begins at 4:30. Please be punctual. The library is located at [208 West Market Street, in Leesburg](#), and traffic will likely be heavy.

Monday 2 March: Transcribing and annotating (in-class)

- Read Stevens and Burg, *Editing Historical Documents*, chap. 5

Each student will work to transcribe an emptier set of pages (i.e., one recto and verso pair) in the account book. In the remaining class time, each student will research the clients listed on their pages to prepare to write their biographical entries.

Please keep a running list of possible glossary entries as you do your transcriptions.

*****Spring Break*****

Monday 16 March: Transcribing and annotating (in-class)

- Read Stevens and Burg, *Editing Historical Documents*, chap. 6
- **First two biographical entries due.**

Each student will work to transcribe an emptier set of pages (i.e., one recto and verso pair) in the account book. In the remaining class time, each student will research the clients listed on their pages to prepare to write their biographical entries.

Please keep a running list of possible glossary entries as you do your transcriptions.

Monday 23 March: Visit from Library of Virginia local records archivists. Greg Crawford, Local Records Program Manager, and Kathleen Jordon, Digital Initiatives & Web Presence Director.

Monday 30 March: Digital History and the Archives: [*The George Washington Financial Papers Project*](#), [*Founders Online*](#), and more.

- Assignment: find a project that involves the digitization of manuscripts or other archival resources and come to class prepared to discuss it.
- **Third biographical entry due.**

****Special guest:** Jennifer E. Sterzer, Director, Center for Digital Editing, University of Virginia, and Interim Director and Senior Editor, *Washington Papers*

Monday 6 April: Transcribing and annotating the Big Project (in-class, individual work)

- Read Stevens and Burg, *Editing Historical Documents*, chaps. 7-8
- Other topic -specific (e.g., women, inheritance, biographical) reading: TBD and possibly varying depending on the pages we assign

Each student will be assigned a single heavily written page from one of the account book's longer accounts. Transcription will begin in class. The expectation is that each of these pages will require three additional biographical entries, as well as significant annotation. (If there are not enough people to identify on your page, we will supply names from elsewhere in the account book.)

Please keep a running list of possible glossary entries as you do your transcriptions.

Monday 13 April: Transcription and annotation—No class meeting. Use this week to continue transcribing and to begin the research component of your assigned page.

Please keep a running list of possible glossary entries as you do your transcriptions

Monday 20 April: Research and annotation (in-class)

Please keep a running list of possible glossary entries as you do your transcriptions

Monday 27 April: Complete research and annotations

Please keep a running list of possible glossary entries as you do your transcriptions

- **Glossary list due on Blackboard at the end of class**

Monday 4 May: Making a Glossary.

Students should come to class with their semester-long glossary lists and be prepared to propose terms and material from their annotations as potential entries in a glossary for the account book project.

- **Annotations due.**
- **Fourth, fifth, and sixth biographical entries due.**