

HIST-397/615/688

Mason Legacies:

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

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*Please feel free to contact us at any time via Slack or regular Mason email.*

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](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.

**Class format and structure:** Our class meets most weeks, remotely via Zoom, on Wednesday at 4:30. To access our virtual classroom, go to the class Blackboard site and click on "Zoom Link for Class Meetings," which you will find on the green margin on the left side of the course homepage, which will take you to the list of Zoom meetings. Simply click the button for the appropriate date to join the meeting.

Because this class is in part a collaborative workshop/seminar, we will likely do some of our work via Slack. Slack works best--i.e., fastest--as an app on your phone or tablet, but you can also access it through their website on your laptop. You can use this tool to collaborate with each other, to address the group generally, and to consult with your instructors as needed outside of class time. To join the group, use this link: [https://masonfamilyac-a9b2741.slack.com/signup#](https://masonfamilyac-a9b2741.slack.com/signup#/)/ and for a great introduction to Slack, by our colleague Abby Mullen, go to: [https://drive.google.com/open?id=1OamaBqHmWnh\\_90F-zY9tZgEn6zT7drQv](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1OamaBqHmWnh_90F-zY9tZgEn6zT7drQv)

**Rules/suggestions for online learning:** This course meets synchronously—in other words, on a specific day and time—and the objective is to come as close to an in-person seminar as possible. That goal should be attainable in part because our group is relatively small. These simple protocols should further enhance the quality of our weekly discussions:

- All participants should try to remember to mute their audio unless they are speaking. Background noise from multiple sources can be extremely distracting.
- Please consider using live video during our seminar. Ideally, we should all get to know each other, which would be very difficult if we cannot see each other. If you are in a weird place, if your house is a mess, or if you just want some privacy, Zoom allows you to insert a generic or custom virtual background. Go to

<https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/virtual-backgrounds/> for some university-provided options.

- To avoid confusion and to make sure that everyone has a chance to participate in class, we will use the hand-raising function during class discussions.

**Required texts:** Students should purchase Michael E. Stevens and Steven B. Burg, *Editing Historical Documents: A Handbook of Practice*, which is available from the university bookstore and from Amazon and other online sellers. The premier guide to documentary editing, this book will be used less as a basis for class discussion than as a reference work over the course of the semester.

Other required readings, which provide historical context to inform both your written work and our class discussions, consist of articles and book chapters, which are accessible remotely through the Fenwick Library catalog unless otherwise noted. These remaining readings are either posted on the course Blackboard site in the "Course Content" area or are accessible via hyperlinks embedded in the course syllabus, below.

**Grades for this course will be determined as follows:**

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|--|-----|
| • Short essay (due 2/17)                                       | 10% |
| • Draft of first biographical entry (due 3/10)                 | 5%  |
| • Revision of first biographical entry (due 3/24)              | 5%  |
| • Second biographical entry (due 3/24)                         | 10% |
| • Third biographical entry (due 4/7)                           | 10% |
| • Additional biographical entries (due 5/5; 3 @ 10% each)      | 30% |
| • Annotations and glossary (due 5/5)                           | 10% |
| • Attendance/participation (including in-class work and Slack) | 20% |

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

**Course Schedule:**

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

- Read: Stevens and Burg, *Editing Historical Documents*, chap. 1
- Read these two brief pieces from Smithsonian: <https://amhistory.si.edu/american-enterprise/merchant-ledger/> and <https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/decoding-colonial-ledger>

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

- Jackson Turner Main, "The One Hundred," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 11 (1954): 354-84.
- E. Lee Shepard, "Lawyers Look at Themselves: Professional Consciousness at the Virginia Bar, 1770-1850," *American Journal of Legal History*, 25 (1981): 1-23.
- Laura Sandy, *The Overseers of Early American Slavery: Supervisors, Enslaved Labourers, and the Plantation Enterprise*, chap. 2 (ebook).

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

### **Wednesday 10 February: Foundational Reading II (The Masons' Northern Virginia)**

- Peter R. Henriques, "An Uneven Friendship: The Relationship Between George Washington and George Mason," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 97 (1989): 185-204.
- Kathy O. McGill, "'A Meteor and a Generous Mind': The Revolutionary Political Thought of Thomson Mason," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 125 (2017): 98-137.
- 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 (Blackboard).
- 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.

**\*\*Guests: Laura Christensen (Curator of Manuscripts and Archives) and Norah Schneider (Library Genealogy Associate), [Thomas Balch Library](#)**

### **Wednesday 17 February: Foundational Reading III (Money and Accounting)**

- 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>.
- 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 (Blackboard).
- John J. McCusker, "How Much is that in Real Money?" *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings* 101 (1992), at [www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44517778.pdf](http://www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44517778.pdf).

**\*\*Guest: Alison Herring, independent scholar and accountant**

***Writing assignment due:*** Based on the past three 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).

**First editing assignment (for transcriptions and for first and second biographical entries):** Sign up in class for one of the following folios: 39, 40, 42, 43 & 46, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50.

### **Wednesday 24 February: Transcribing and Annotating**

- Read Stevens and Burg, *Editing Historical Documents*, chaps. 3-4
- Read Editorial Method and Style Guide (both posted on Blackboard)

Each student will come to class having prepared a rough transcription of a pre-assigned set of pages (i.e., one recto and verso pair) in the account book. In class, students will

collaborate to finalize their transcriptions and then to begin researching the people listed on their pages to prepare to write their first entries. By the end of the class, students will choose two of the account holders from their assigned pages to be the subjects of their first and second biographical entries.

From now until the end of the semester, please keep a running list of possible annotation and glossary entries as you do your transcriptions. We will be merging these lists and completing all of the glossary and annotation entries at the end of the semester.

**Wednesday 3 March: Introduction to Data Entry and to Writing a Biographical Entry**

- Read model student-written biographical entries in "Course Content" on Blackboard

In-class: practicing data entry and discussion of what constitutes a good biographical entry.

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

**\*\*Guest: Anne Dobberteen, Fenwick Library Digital Humanities GRA**

**Wednesday 10 March: Digital History and the Archives: [The George Washington Financial Papers Project](#), [Founders Online](#), and more.**

- Please find a project that involves the digitization of manuscripts or other archival resources and come to class prepared to discuss it.

**\*\*Guests: Alyssa Fahringer, Fenwick Library Digital Scholarship Consultant; Dr. Christopher Hamner, Editor-in-Chief, *Papers of the War Department, 1784-1800***

**\*\*Draft of one biographical entry due by 11:00 p.m.**

New assignment (third biographical entry, due on Wednesday 7 April): Each student will commit to writing about one of the following people who appeared in previously transcribed folios (as noted here):

Joseph Langley Jr. (folio 10)  
Mrs. Saintclair (folio 13)  
E. Roper (folio 13)  
David Simons (folio 13)  
Joseph Langley (folio 13)  
Joseph Smith (folio 14)  
Bob (folio 14)  
Milley (folio 14)  
Cudjo (folio 14)  
Betty (folio 31)  
Fanny (folio 31)  
Col. Powell (folio 31)  
Philips (folio 31)  
A. Sanders (folio 33)  
George Maul (folio 33)  
William H. Harding (folio 35)

John J. Maunds (folio 35)

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

**Wednesday 17 March: No Class—Research, writing, and transcription on your own.**

**Wednesday 24 March: Checking in session.** Share something about your research experiences and also about the people who are the subjects of your first two biographical entries. What was interesting? What was exciting? What was frustrating?

- Read Stevens and Burg, *Editing Historical Documents*, chap. 6
- Read Susan Kern, "The Material World of the Jeffersons at Shadwell," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 62 (2005): 213-42
- Read Kirsten E. Wood, "Broken Reeds and Competent Farmers: Slaveholding Widows in the Southeastern United States, 1783-1861," *Journal of Women's History*, 13 (2001): 34-57

**\*\*Revised first biographical entry and second biographical entry by 11:00 p.m.**

**Wednesday 31 March: Transcribing and Annotating the Big Project.** Come to class prepared to work on your transcriptions, annotations, and remaining biographical entries. [Big Project assignment TBD]

Each assigned section should need at least three biographical entries, and possibly some annotation. (If there are not enough people mentioned on your page, we will supply names from elsewhere in the account book.)

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

**Wednesday 7 April: Transcription and Annotation—No class meeting.** Use this week to complete your transcriptions and to begin the research component of your assigned folio.

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

**\*\*Third biographical entry due by 11:00 p.m.**

**Wednesday 14 April: The Big Project (continued).** Come to class prepared to share your transcription and your research tips and problems.

**\*\*Each student's cumulative annotation/glossary list is due on Blackboard by Friday 16 April at 5:00 p.m. Your instructors will alphabetize and collate the list—and divide the merged lists into sections, which will be circulated before next class meeting.**

**Wednesday 21 April: Annotation or Glossary?** Discussion of annotations and when to use them. Review the Style Guide and come to class with questions/examples from the list you have been compiling over the entire semester.

Students should come to class having read the pre-circulated list of prospective glossary entries and prepared to compose definitions for them. The class will divide into break-out groups to do this work collaboratively.

**Wednesday 28 April: Final Work and Class Post Mortem.**

Students should also come to class prepared to share drafts of at least some of their final three biographical entries for collaborative peer review.

**Wednesday 5 May (exam period): Final work due.**

- **Completion of glossary (if necessary).**
- **Annotations due.**
- **Fourth, fifth, and sixth biographical entries due.**