

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 Fenwick Library's Special Collections in an unedited digitized format: https://scrc.gmu.edu/finding_aids/masonaccountbook.html. This branch of the Mason family resided in Loudoun County at Raspberry Plain plantation.

The digitized account book, with the students' transcriptions and annotations, will be published as a born-digital project accessible to the public. The centerpiece of the project will be the biographical sketches of all of the people mentioned in the account book, which will offer users a cumulative portrait of a significant subset of the population of Loudoun County in the post-revolutionary era.

By reading, transcribing, and annotating the Masons' 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.

Class format and structure: Our class meets most weeks on Wednesday at 4:30. Because this class is in part a collaborative workshop/seminar, attendance is essential. We will be doing significant in-class work, though students should also anticipate conferring with both their instructors and their classmates as needed 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 share research information (including files) with each other, to collaborate on difficult transcriptions, and to consult with your instructors as needed outside of class time (though we are also available via email). To join the Slack group, use this link: <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

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 that we will consult from time to time 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. Readings that are not accessible through the library catalog are either posted on the course Blackboard site in the "Course Content" area or are available via hyperlinks embedded in the course syllabus, below.

Grades for this course will be determined as follows:

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| • Short essay (due 2/16) | 10% |
| • Draft of first biographical entry (due 2/23) | 5% |
| • Draft of second biographical entry (due 3/16) | 5% |
| • Revision of first biographical entry (3/25) | 5% |
| • Revision of second biographical entry (due 3/25) | 5% |
| • Third biographical entry (due 4/6) | 10% |
| • Transcriptions (due 4/13) | 10% |
| • Fourth and fifth biographical entries (due 5/11; 2 @ 10% each) | 20% |
| • Annotations and glossary (due 5/11) | 10% |
| • Attendance/participation (including in-class work and Slack) | 20% |

Note that more explicit directions for all written work are posted in the "Assignments" section Blackboard. Students will submit all written work on Blackboard.

Course Schedule:

Wednesday 26 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>
- Read the *Wikipedia* entry on Stevens Thomson Mason: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stevens_Thomson_Mason_\(senator\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stevens_Thomson_Mason_(senator))
 - Also See the entry in the [Biographical Directory of the United States Congress](#).
- Read the *Wikipedia* entry on Armistead Thomson Mason: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armistead_Thomson_Mason
 - Also see the entry in the [Biographical Directory of the United States Congress](#)

Wednesday 2 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 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 (Fenwick ebook).
- 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.

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

Each student will choose one of these relatively easily researchable people as the subject of their first biographical entry:

Folio 28: Miss B. Armistead
Folio 30: John T. Mason
Folio 37: Mrs. Mason
Folio 47: ABT Mason
Folio 47: John T. Mason
Folio 82: John Mason
Folio 91: John Minor
Folio 101: Mary Mason
Folio 105: Mary Elizabeth Mason
Folio 108: A. J. Mason
Folio 109: Emily Mason
Folio 110: William Mason McCarty
Folio 153: Elizabeth Armistead
Folio 170: William TT Mason

Basic genealogical information on these Mason family members is available on "The Mason Web" at http://www.gunstonhall.org/wp-content/uploads/masonweb/surname_index.htm

Wednesday 9 February: Foundational Reading II (The Masons' Northern Virginia)

- Warren R. Hofstra and Robert D. Mitchell, "Town and Country in Backcountry Virginia: Winchester and the Shenandoah Valley," *Journal of Southern History*, 59 (1993): 619-46.
- 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.

****Guest: Laura Christensen (Curator of Manuscripts and Archives), [Thomas Balch Library](#)**

Wednesday 16 February: Foundational Reading III (Money and Accounting)

- Henry K. Sharp, "Research Notes: New Discoveries in Old Sources: A Neglected Ledger Reveals the Persons and Processes of Building in Late-Colonial Virginia," *Buildings and Landscapes*, 27 (Spring 2020): 79-89.
- 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.

****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 article by John J. McCusker).

Wednesday 23 February: Transcribing and Annotating

- Read Stevens and Burg, *Editing Historical Documents*, chaps. 3-4
- Read Editorial Method and Project Style Guide, both posted in Course Content on Blackboard)
- Read four model student-written biographical entries in Course Content on Blackboard

In-class work: transcribing folio 10.

Note: As part of the transcription process, we will begin to generate our list of terms that the class will ultimately annotate or define more briefly in the project glossary. Each student should collect these terms in a single Word file to be submitted at the end of the semester.

Writing assignment due: Draft of one biographical entry (your choice) due by 11:00 p.m.

Wednesday 2 March: Introduction to Data Entry and to Writing a Biographical Entry

- Read the Guide to Data Entry in Course Content on Blackboard

In-class: Practicing data entry (using our transcription from folio 10) and discussing what constitutes a good biographical entry.

Each student will choose one of the following very short accounts to transcribe and enter into the database, as well as an account holder to be the (more challenging) subject of their second biographical entry:

Folio 52:

Benjamin Mead
William Mitchell
William B. Page
Robert D. Fowke
James Ewell

Folio 53:

Stephen C. Roszel
Elizabeth Holtzton
Mrs. Fouch
George Emrey
William Wright

Folio 54:

M. Sullivan
Mrs. Holtzclaw
David Barnes

Please add to your running list of possible glossary and annotation entries as you do your transcriptions.

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

Wednesday 9 March: Digital History and the Archives: [The George Washington Financial Papers Project](#), [Founders Online](#), and more.

- Read Jordan E. Taylor, "Newspaper-Brokered Slave Trade Advertisements in North America, 1704-1807," *Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation* 2, no. 2 (2021): <https://jsdp.enslaved.org/fullDataArticle/volume2-issue2-newspaper-brokered-slave-trade-advertisements> (including StoryMap linked to note 3).
- Find an open-access project that involves the digitization of manuscripts or other archival resources and come to class prepared to discuss it. The project you choose should be one that you would trust as a research source (and therefore it will likely have a .edu, .gov., or .org URL).

****Guest: Alyssa Fahringer, Fenwick Library Digital Scholarship Consultant**

Each student will choose one of the following people as the subject of their third biographical entry:

Folio 27: Col. B. Ball
 Folio 34: Benjamin Shreeve
 Folio 34: Robert Hereford
 Folio 42: William West
 Folio 50: Thomas Harrison
 Folio 57: Thomas Taylor (executors)
 Folio 58: Mrs. Chichester
 Folio 70: Stephen Donaldson
 Folio 92: H. Bedinger
 Folio 100: George Rust
 Folio 100: Dr. Claggett
 Folio 181: John Shaw
 Folio 126: Everit Oxley
 Folio 183: George M. Chichester

Please add to your running list of possible annotation and glossary entries as you do your transcriptions.

Wednesday 16 March: No Class—Spring Break.

***Writing assignment due:* Draft of second biographical entry due by 11:00 p.m.**

Wednesday 23 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*, 3rd ser., 62 (2005): 213-42.

Friday 25 March: *Writing assignment due:* Revised versions of two biographical entries due by 11:00 p.m.

Wednesday 30 March: Transcribing and Annotating the Big Project. The account of the estate of Hugh Douglas fills nearly twenty-one folios in the Mason Family Account Book. Each student will be assigned one of those folios to transcribe and to enter into the project database. Work on the transcriptions and data entry will begin in class; transcriptions must

be completed (and submitted on Blackboard) and entered into the database by Wednesday 13 April at 11:00 p.m. As you transcribe, as always, please add to your running list of possible annotation and glossary entries.

To prepare for this class, please read the biographical entry for Hugh Douglas in Course Content on Blackboard.

Wednesday 6 April: Transcription and Annotation—No class meeting. Use this week to complete your transcriptions and also to choose the subjects for your fourth and fifth biographical entries (see below).

Please add to your running list of annotation and possible glossary entries as you do your transcriptions.

Writing assignment due: Third biographical entry due by 11:00 p.m.

****Choose two people whose names appear in your section of the Hugh Douglas account as the subjects of your fourth and fifth biographical entries. Inform Dr. Kierner of your choices via email by 11:00 p.m.**

Wednesday 13 April: Checking in session. Come to class prepared to share your transcription and your research tips and problems. In class, we will try to make sense of the Douglas estate and the networks of people who were involved in its settlement.

Writing assignment due: Transcriptions due as Word files (on Blackboard) and in database by 11:00 p.m.

****Friday 15 April: Each student's cumulative annotation/glossary list is due on Blackboard by 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 20 April: Annotation or Glossary? In-class 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 collated list of prospective glossary entries and prepared to compose definitions for them. The class will divide into groups to do this work collaboratively.

Wednesday 27 April: Research and writing week—No class meeting.

Wednesday 4 May: Final Work and Class Post Mortem. Students should come to class prepared to share drafts of at least some of their final two biographical entries for collaborative peer review.

Wednesday 11 May (exam period): Final written work due.

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