

JOHN MASON OF ANALOSTAN ISLAND

By

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Few people who live or work in the multistoried Rosslyn of today realize that its antecedents as a community date back to 1798 and an attempt to found a town there called South Haven. In 1798, John Mason, the son of George Mason of Gunston Hall, petitioned the Virginia Assembly for authority to found such a town on land he owned along the Virginia shore of the Potomac, opposite Georgetown in what is now Arlington. The Assembly passed the necessary legislation, but the plan was never carried out, and development of Rosslyn did not begin until well after the Civil War. The reasons for the failure of Mason's project are not apparent, and he is scarcely remembered in modern Rosslyn. He did, nevertheless, play a prominent role in the business and social affairs of both Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., for almost sixty years from the early 1790s until his death in 1849.

John Mason was the fourth of five sons and the seventh child of George and Ann Eilbeck Mason. He was born at his maternal grandmother's house in Charles County, Maryland, on April 4, 1766. He spent his childhood at Gunston Hall enjoying all the comforts associated with a large and prosperous plantation. The only trauma in his early life was the death of his mother when he was only six years old. He described this event in remarkable detail in an unfinished recollection of his early life written in his old age.¹

A man of considerable means, George Mason employed private tutors for the education of his sons. School was held in a small outbuilding near the main house and was attended by the five Mason sons as well as the sons of nearby neighbors. In 1781, for reasons unknown, the tutor left and, because of the disruption caused by the Revolution, young John was not sent away to school. He remained at Gunston Hall and it seems safe to assume that he was tutored by his father. Finally, in the spring of 1783, John Mason did go off to an academy in Stafford County kept by the Reverend Robert Buchan. He continued his studies there until the winter of 1784-85 when he journeyed to the residence of a Mr. Hunter, "a Scotchman" residing in Calvert County, Maryland, near Prince Frederick, to study mathematics. He returned briefly to read "history and natural and moral philosophy" with Mr. Buchan in 1786, and then later the same year, his formal education complete, he went to the counting house of Alexandria merchant William Hartshorne to learn the mercantile trade.

¹ All information concerning John Mason's childhood and education is from the unfinished recollection, "A Short Narrative of the Life of John Mason, Son of Colo. George Mason of Gunston Hall," Mason Papers, Library of Congress (microfilm copy in the Gunston Hall Library).

John Mason was particularly close to his father and accompanied him to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in May 1787. He remained with his father for the duration of the convention and did not return to the counting house until September. One can only speculate on the excitement and the learning experience young John enjoyed during those four fateful months.

After two years of training with Mr. Hartshorne, John Mason entered into partnership with James and Joseph Fenwick of Maryland in 1788 to establish the trading firm of Fenwick, Mason & Company in Bordeaux, France. The firm sold tobacco shipments received from Virginia and Maryland planters and bought and shipped to those planters goods they needed from Europe. Each of the three young men contributed £1,000 for the capital of the business. James Fenwick remained in America to handle affairs there while his brother Joseph and John Mason managed the business in Bordeaux.²

George Mason was in Richmond attending the Virginia Constitutional Convention when John sailed for France in June 1788. He wrote his son with great fatherly concern, advising:

avoid being drawn into any dangerous Connection with french or other foreign Merchants, it may contract your Business at first, but it will rise upon Safe & solid Foundations. Some Patience & Firmness will be necessary in such a Situation & Mr. Jo. Fenwick & you are both Young men, & consequently can't yet know much of Mankind. I entreat you to let no flattering Prospects whatever induce you to a Departure from this plan; for in my Opinion, almost inevitable Ruin wou'd be the Consequence. . . . Live in a frugal Style, without parade or Ostentation, avoid all unnecessary Expence, & do as much of your Business your selves, as you can; when it exceeds this Compass, look narrowly into the Conduct of those you employ. Attend with Diligence & strict Integrity to the Interest of your Correspondents and enter into no Engagements which you have not the almost certain Means of performing. With an Observance of these Maxims you will deserve to be rich; and you will be rich; and in the Progress, you will possess Safety & Ease, unmingled with Fear or Danger.³

John Mason carried on an active and, for those times, a frequent correspondence with his father. He provided an account of his business activities as well as a first hand description of the rising revolution in France. George Mason, for his part, related the events at Gunston Hall and, from time to time, sent requests for various items including fruit trees—pears and plums “of the best kind,” grape vines, six cases of wine, and “a piece of silk for your sister Betsy.” George Mason frequently sent his son advice on various matters, even a detailed remedy for a stomach ailment.⁴

² Helen H. Miller, *George Mason, Gentleman Revolutionary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 310.

³ Ltr, George Mason to John Mason, June 12, 1788, in Robert A. Rutland (ed.), *The Papers of George Mason* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), III, p. 1072 (hereafter cited as *Papers*).

⁴ See the exchange of letters during the period June 1788 to April 1791 reproduced in *Papers*, III, pp. 1072-1227.

Occasionally, George Mason sent John various things from Virginia. Once, he shipped him three live opossums, which he thought might interest the French; another time a mocking bird; and on yet another occasion a half a dozen Virginia hams "packed up in a Box of salt." The irregularity in the sailing of ships between Virginia and Bordeaux at times thwarted the senior Mason's plans to send other items. On July 26, 1790, he wrote John that "a Pot of baked White Fish and a Pot of soured Fish Roes we put up for you in the spring," had spoiled before they could be sent and "three red Birds" he had hoped to send had "lately died."⁵

Upon arrival in France, John Mason had hoped to obtain the appointment as U.S. consul in Bordeaux and wrote his father about this matter. But his partner, Joseph Fenwick, also wanted the position and had already written to George Mason about it prior to John's arrival in Bordeaux. George Mason replied to John that he felt it would be proper to make application for Mr. Fenwick in preference to his son since Fenwick was older and had more experience, and would probably remain in France longer. Moreover, the wise father wanted "above all" to avoid giving the smallest cause "for any jealousy or misunderstanding" between the two partners. George Mason did write to the Secretary of State, his friend Thomas Jefferson, on behalf of Mr. Fenwick, who was named consul in 1790.⁶

Although George Mason did not seek the consul post for his son, he was active in promoting John's business interests. He wrote to many of his friends in the "Eastern and Southern States," recommending, with some success, Fenwick, Mason & Company. Even George Washington wrote from New York on October 12, 1789, to place an order with John Mason. Due in some part to the business from the elder Mason's friends, and in large part from the prosperity enjoyed by the port of Bordeaux in the last years of the eighteenth century, Fenwick, Mason & Company flourished.⁷

John Mason never intended to remain permanently in France, and, in June 1791, he sailed for home, bringing a cargo of brandy with him. He landed in Norfolk in August and moved on to Richmond to sell the brandy. Ever solicitous of his son's health and well being, George Mason wrote to John there urging him to take lodgings on the hill. The vale under the hill at that season, the father cautioned, was "the most sickly Hole in Virginia." Whether John heeded this advice is not apparent, but he soon

⁵ Ltrs, George Mason to John Mason, May 14, 1789 and July 26, 1790, *Papers*, III, pp. 1148-53, 1203-06.

⁶ Ltrs, George Mason to John Mason, December 18, 1788 and July 26, 1790, *Papers*, III, pp. 1135-40, 1203-06.

⁷ Ltr, George Mason to John Mason, September 2, 1788, *Papers*, III, pp. 1128-30. John C. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *The Writings of George Washington* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), xxx, p. 436n; Miller, *George Mason*, p. 311.

traveled on to Gunston Hall and was reunited with his father after an absence of more than three years.⁸

In 1792, John Mason opened an office of Fenwick, Mason & Company in Georgetown, and the business continued to prosper. Soon thereafter he owned a brick townhouse at the northeast corner of 25th and L Streets, a warehouse, and a wharf, as well as several lots in Carrollsburg in what is now Southwest Washington. He became in 1793 one of the incorporators and directors of the Bank of Columbia in Georgetown, which served as the financial agent for the commissioners of the recently formed District of Columbia. Subsequently, in 1798, John Mason was named president of the bank, succeeding Benjamin Stoddert when the latter became Secretary of the Navy.⁹

Upon George Mason's death on October 7, 1792, John Mason inherited his father's property along the Virginia shore of the Potomac across from Georgetown in what is today Arlington. As described in George Mason's will this property included "all my land between Four Mile Run and the Lower Falls of the Potowmack River in the Parish and county of Fairfax being about two thousand acres."¹⁰ George Mason also bequeathed John "my Island in the Potomack River opposite the mouth of Rock Creek . . . by the name of Barbadoes," or Analostan as it was also known.¹¹

The island until that time was undeveloped, but John Mason immediately set about building a country home there. The exact construction date of the house has not been determined, but beginning on January 16, 1793, and continuing regularly for the next several weeks, John Mason advertised for "12 to 15 stout young Negro Fellows" for a year's employment in "the

⁸ Ltrs, George Mason to John Mason, August 17, 1791 and September 4, 1791, *Papers*, III, pp. 1233-35, 1237-39.

⁹ Mary E. Curry, "Theodore Roosevelt Island: A Broken Link to Early Washington, D.C. History," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, 48 (1971-72), p. 20; James F. Duhamel, "Analostan Island," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, 35-36 (1935), p. 138; Pamela C. Copeland and Richard K. MacMaster, *The Five George Masons* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1975), p. 257.

¹⁰ For a more precise description of this land, see the deed when John Mason lost the land in 1833, which set the bounds as follows: "all that tract or parcel of land lying on the Potomac River in the County of Alexandria and District of Columbia inherited by the said John Mason of his father the late George Mason of Gunston, beginning for the same in the said River nearly opposite the lower end of Analostan Island (held by the said John Mason) and adjoining to the lands of the said George W. P. Custis, formerly Alexander's and running up and binding on said River to the mouth of a run called Rock Run or Little Pimmit Run & then adjoining to the lands of R. Fry formerly Lee's a little below the bridge over the said River at the Little Falls. . . ." This deed stated that the tract contained "1,822½ acres, more or less." Alexandria County Deed Book, N₂ to U₂, No. 3, pp. 477-79.

¹¹ Will of George Mason, reproduced in Kate M. Rowland, *The Life of George Mason, 1725-1792* (New York: Russel & Russel, Inc., 1964), pp. 457-72.

neighborhood of my Ferry-House" opposite Georgetown.¹² Undoubtedly these were intended as laborers for use in building the house. Mason constructed his house on the highest point of the island where it would soon command a view of the President's House, the Capitol, and the other buildings of the new capital city as they arose.¹³

John Mason's house on Analostan Island has been attributed to George Hadfield,¹⁴ the young British architect brought over from England to supervise construction of the Capitol building and who designed the District of Columbia Courthouse and, possibly, Arlington House built some years later. This hardly seems possible, however, since Hadfield did not arrive in Washington until 1795 when Mason's house probably was completed. In any event, the house was in the classical style as indicated in surviving photographs and a set of measured drawings, with arched windows and a small portico. It was one story with a full basement; the main floor included a drawing and dining rooms, three bed chambers, and a "bath" room while the kitchens and storage rooms were located in the basement. There was a large brick terrace along the south front of the house and the small entrance portico on the north front faced Georgetown. The house was approached by a long driveway. A well, an ice house, and other outbuildings were located nearby. The house stood until 1906 when it was badly damaged by fire. The fire ravaged ruins endured another thirty years until the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Association, which had purchased the island, demolished them in 1936 in order to return the island to a natural state.¹⁵

John Mason married Miss Anna Maria Murray of Annapolis, Maryland, in July 1796,¹⁶ and he and his wife took an active part in the social life of Washington for the next thirty years. They included Presidents Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe among their friends, and much of their social life centered around their house on Mason's Island as it soon became known. Stories of brilliant social events there have come down to us today. One of these recounts a lavish dinner on the island in 1798 for Louis Philippe, Duc d'Orleans and later King of France; another describes a dinner Mason gave on the island in June 1800, just after the arrival of

¹² *Columbian Mirror* and *Alexandria Gazette*, January 16, 19, and 23, 1793; February 2, 6, 9, and 16, 1793.

¹³ Curry, "Theodore Roosevelt Island," *Records* (1971-72), p. 23; David B. Warden, *Description of the District of Columbia* (Washington: 1816), p. 137.

¹⁴ See Harry F. Cunningham, Joseph A. Younger, and J. Wilmer Smith, *Measured Drawings of Georgian Architecture in the District of Columbia, 1750-1820* (Washington: Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1914), pp. 58-60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; Curry, "Theodore Roosevelt Island," *Records* (1971-72), pp. 18-26.

¹⁶ John Mason, "A Short Narrative of the Life of John Mason."

President Adams in the new capital, that included Secretary of State John Marshall and Dr. William Thornton, the architect of the Capitol.¹⁷

A description of Washington published in 1816 tells of a party given on the island on the occasion of the departure of one of the Mason sons to France. The friends of the young Mason danced on the lawn illuminated by lamps, strolled through the extensive gardens "washed by the waters of the river," and were served tea, coffee, cakes, and fruits—both fresh and preserved.¹⁸

John Mason was a dedicated gardener and he laid out extensive grounds around his island house. There were flower borders tended by an English gardener, ornamental shrubs, rare trees, and a summer house on the water's edge. But the Analostan estate was more than a retreat from the city life of Georgetown; it was a small working plantation. In addition to the ornamental gardens, there were orchards, grapevines, and a culinary garden. A variety of crops were grown, including cotton and a maize with deep purple leaves used for dye, and various fowl and sheep were raised. In several small workshops among the outbuildings, laborers and mechanics produced most of the necessities for life on the island.¹⁹

Like his neighbor George Washington Parke Custis at Arlington House, John Mason was interested in fine wool-producing sheep. He imported and bred Merino sheep on the island. He gained quite a reputation for his flock and won a number of prizes in local agricultural exhibitions. In a surviving letter of John Mason, Jr., written from the island on June 7, 1811, to his grandfather, Dr. Murray in Annapolis, he recounted that his father had sheared sheep that day and got 130 pounds of Merino wool.²⁰ All the wool, as well as the cotton, raised on the island was spun and woven into material there. In 1810, and again in 1811, Mrs. Mason won prizes at the fair of the Columbia Agricultural Society for items of apparel made from cloth produced on the island.²¹

A ferry crossed the Potomac from John Mason's Virginia land to Georgetown adjacent to Analostan Island. The ferry had been located at that site since 1748 and, when John Mason inherited the property, it yielded an annual revenue of \$700.²² This ferry was for many years the

¹⁷ Copeland and MacMaster, *The Five George Masons*, p. 258; Mollie Somerville, "General John Mason of Analostan Island," *Iron Worker* (Spring, 1962), p. 7.

¹⁸ Warden, *Description of the District of Columbia*, pp. 136-37.

¹⁹ Curry, "Theodore Roosevelt Island," *Records* (1971-72), p. 22; Duhamel, "Analostan Island," *Records* (1935), p. 138; Warden, *Description of the District of Columbia*, p. 141.

²⁰ Ltr, John Mason, Jr. to Dr. James Murray, June 7, 1811, Mason Papers, Library of Congress (microfilm copy at Gunston Hall Library).

²¹ Curry, "Theodore Roosevelt Island," *Records* (1971-72), pp. 20-22.

²² Warden, *Description of the District of Columbia*, p. 134; Duhamel, "Analostan Island," *Records* (1935), pp. 137, 139.

only means for crossing the river near Georgetown, but in the early 1790s, a group of Georgetown citizens, headed by Benjamin Stoddert, formed a company to build a bridge across the Potomac. Stoddert approached George Mason about this prospect in January 1792, and the elder Mason wrote to John who was in Baltimore at the time. George Mason doubted that the project would ever come to fruition, but asked John what a reasonable compensation might be for use of his land, suggesting "a certain Part (say about a fifth) of gross Tolls. . . ." ²³

In one of his last letters to John written from Gunston Hall to Georgetown on August 20, 1792, George Mason told his son of a notice in the Alexandria paper of an intended application to the Virginia Assembly at the next session for a bridge over the Potomac. Since John would inherit the property along the river, George Mason wanted him to profit from any bridge that might be built. He advised John to be prepared with a plan and a proposed site for a bridge, suggesting that John write "to Mr. Le Enfant" to procure his opinion "with his Reasons, in favour of a Bridge at the Island; not letting the George Town People know, that you make any such Application." In the end, the bridge, constructed in 1797, was located just below the Little Falls at the site of the present Chain Bridge and well above Mason's island. ²⁴

Ever since the discovery of Analoatan Island, the main channel of the Potomac had swept around the west side of the island. In 1784, a severe winter caused an ice jam at the Three Sisters, and the resulting flood when the jam broke further deepened the channel on the Virginia side of the island. By the early 1800s the merchants of Georgetown, who were in keen competition with their Alexandria counterparts, were anxious to improve the channel on their side of the island in order to allow larger vessels access to their wharves. Accordingly, in early 1805, the Georgetown Council adopted a resolution recognizing the need to improve the channel on the east side of the island and stating that the erection of "a causeway or a dam" from Mason's Island to the Virginia shore would produce the desired result. Since John Mason had already indicated a willingness for such a project, the resolution called for a committee to confer with Mason and negotiate a contract. Agreement was soon reached and construction of a causeway at public expense was authorized in 1807. The causeway gave road access to the island from the Virginia shore, and after construction was completed, the ferry apparently ran between the island end of the causeway and Georgetown. ²⁵

²³ Ltr, George Mason to John Mason, January 23, 1792, *Papers*, III, pp. 1252-53.

²⁴ Ltr, George Mason to John Mason, August 20, 1792, *Papers*, III, pp. 1271-73 and 1273n.

²⁵ Warden, *Description of the District of Columbia*, p. 135; Duhamel, "Analoatan Island," *Records* (1935), pp. 141-44.

Soon after the completion of the causeway, John Mason proposed and the Congress approved on March 3, 1809, the incorporation of the Georgetown and Alexandria Turnpike Company. As provided in the legislation, the company was to raise money, through the sale of capital stock, "for the purpose of opening, gravelling and improving a road from the west end of Mason's causeway to Alexandria." The road was subsequently built, crossing the lands of George Washington Parke Custis and connecting with the Washington and Alexandria Turnpike, which ran from the Long Bridge to Alexandria. Although originally a private toll road, Mason's turnpike eventually became a public thoroughfare and existed as a portion of Arlington Ridge Road on the east side of Arlington Cemetery until 1971 when obliterated in an expansion of the cemetery.²⁶

While John Mason was developing his estate on Analostan Island and pursuing construction of the turnpike, he maintained his interests in Georgetown. In the late 1790s the falling price of tobacco as well as the European wars had led to a decline in the business of Fenwick, Mason & Company, and the partnership was dissolved in 1800. But Mason was already launched into other ventures and activities, including shipping, flour and wheat trade, and land investment. His Georgetown properties, including his townhouse, warehouse, and wharf were assessed at \$15,000 during the years 1800-15.²⁷

As mentioned above, John Mason planned a town on the Potomac shore of his Virginia land opposite Georgetown, and in 1798, he obtained the necessary enacting legislation for this project from the Virginia Assembly. The statute provided for "a town by the name of South Haven" although later references called it "West Haven." Mason's plan, which was obviously designed as a money-making venture, called for a town of ninety acres, laid out in squares, lots, streets, and alleys. But despite this promising beginning, the plan was never carried out and, for reasons undetermined, South/West Haven remained a paper town.²⁸

On May 3, 1802, Congress authorized the creation of a militia for the District of Columbia similar to those of Virginia and Maryland.²⁹ The following month, President Jefferson appointed the principal officers for the new militia and named John Mason as the commander with the rank of brigadier general.³⁰ Hence Mason acquired the title of "General" by

²⁶ 2 Stat. 539 (1809); C. B. Rose, Jr., *Arlington County, Virginia: A History* (Arlington Historical Society, 1976), pp. 75-76.

²⁷ Copeland and MacMaster, *The Five George Masons*, p. 257; Somerville, "General Mason," *Iron Worker* (Spring, 1962), p. 8.

²⁸ 2 Sheperd, *Statutes at Large of Virginia 177 (1798)*. *Alexandria Times and Virginia Advertiser*, January 1, 1799, p. 3; Alexandria County Deed Book, N₂ to U₂, No. 3, pp. 120-22, 321-24, 477-79.

²⁹ 2 Stat. 195 (1802).

³⁰ *National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*, June 28, 1802.

which he was always known thereafter. Since he had no military experience prior to his appointment, he assuredly owed his selection to his political and social position.

The new District of Columbia Militia consisted of two legions, one in the city proper and one in Alexandria, which was part of the District at that time. General Mason assembled the field officers and captains of the two legions for the first time on July 26, 1802, at Analostan Island.³¹ The first formal review of the militia took place on Saturday, October 30, 1802. General Mason took the review in the presence of President Jefferson and Secretary of War Henry Dearborn. "An elegant standard," a donation from the general, was presented to the militia by Miss Murray (possibly a sister-in-law or niece of the general) and Miss Paine. A newspaper account of the ceremony reported that all of the officers and many of the men were in complete uniform and that "the appearance and conduct of the troops would have done honour to an older and more experienced corps." At the close of the review, General Mason delivered an "animated" address. He cited the Bill of Rights in declaring that "a well regulated militia is the proper and natural defense of a free government" and urged his officers to "immediate delligence in completing and having equipped and exercised their several companies. . . ." ³²

A more impressive parade by the militia occurred on July 4, 1803. Early in the morning, the legions assembled in Georgetown and "with music playing and colours flying" marched "in a solid column down Pennsylvania Avenue to the President's House. There they fired a salute and passed in review before General Mason. Subsequently, the officers marched in a body "to levee the President." After appropriate exchange of greetings and handshaking, the officers retired, reformed their companies, and paraded back to Georgetown.³³

John Mason continued in his post as Brigadier General of the District of Columbia Militia until April 1811 when he resigned, apparently because of conflict with his duties as Superintendent of the Indian Trade (see p. 31). A terse announcement in the *Washington Intelligencer* merely indicated that Colonel John P. VanNess had been appointed to the position of Commander of the Militia "vice General Mason, resigned." The possibility that Mason had not been particularly energetic in his duties with the militia seems to be indicated by the concluding statement of the newspaper announcement: "We are happy to learn there is a prospect of a re-animation of our Militia establishment; and that spirited arrangements are progressing for that purpose." ³⁴

³¹ *Ibid.*, July 23, 1802.

³² *Ibid.*, November 1, 1802 and November 3, 1802.

³³ *Ibid.*, July 8, 1803.

³⁴ *National Intelligencer*, April 16, 1811.

Another interest of Mason's was the Potowmack Canal Company. The company had been chartered jointly by Virginia and Maryland in 1784 in order to make the Potomac River navigable and to open it to trade and commerce with the western frontier. George Washington had served as the first president of the company and work on river improvements began in 1785. The plan was to remove rocks and obstructions in the river; to improve the channel; and, where necessary, to cut canals around the falls. Five short canals were called for: one on the Maryland shore around the Little Falls, a three-fourths of a mile canal with five sets of locks around the Great Falls on the Virginia side, and three more further up river. The work proved more difficult and costly than anticipated, and the enthusiasm of the stockholders waned. New issues of stock to raise additional funds were advertised, but little was taken up.³⁵

John Mason became a stockholder in the Potowmack Company soon after his arrival in Georgetown and, in August 1796, was elected a director, serving continuously, except for one two-year period, as an officer for the next thirty-two years. He helped to infuse renewed energy into the company and the work proceeded. The canal around the Great Falls opened in February 1802, and river boats could then make a continuous voyage from the western settlements of Virginia and Maryland to Georgetown, bringing furs, lumber, flour, whiskey, pig iron, and other products of the frontier. In the first year after the opening of the Great Falls Canal, some 45,000 barrels of flour passed through the canal and the company took in \$10,000 in tolls, declaring its first and only dividend of \$5.50 per share in 1802.³⁶

The Potowmack Company hoped to open trade with the frontier—trade not only with the white settlers but also with the Indians. In April 1796, the Congress enacted a statute to facilitate trade with the Indians, establishing federal trading houses on “the western and southern frontier, or in the Indian country,” to receive and dispose of goods from the Indians. These houses, under the control of the President, were designed to protect the Indians from the dishonest practices of private traders.³⁷ Subsequent legislation in 1806 extended the original act to cover the newly acquired area of the United States beyond the Mississippi and created the position of Superintendent of the Indian Trade within the War Department to administer the Indian trading houses.³⁸

³⁵ Corra Bacon-Foster, “Early Chapters in the Development of the Potomac Route to the West,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, 15 (1912), pp. 101-95; Frederick Gutheim, *The Potomac* (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1949), p. 249.

³⁶ Bacon-Foster, “Early Chapters of the Potomac Route,” *Records* (1912), pp. 101-95; Alexander C. Brown, “America’s Greatest Eighteenth Century Engineering Achievement,” *Virginia Cavalcade*, 12 (Spring, 1963), pp. 40-47.

³⁷ 1 Stat. 452 (1796).

³⁸ 2 Stat. 402 (1806).

The following year, in 1807, President Jefferson appointed John Mason as Superintendent of the Indian Trade. Upon his appointment, Mason was required to swear an oath pledging to execute faithfully the trust committed to him and to avoid any direct or indirect concern or interest in trade with the Indians. Moreover, he had to give a bond of \$20,000 and, as recompense, he received a salary of \$2,000 per year. In carrying out the responsibilities of his office, Mason maintained his headquarters in Georgetown where he also established a warehouse for the Indian trade. He held this position until 1815.³⁹

By the time of the War of 1812, John Mason had already resigned from the District of Columbia Militia, and he played no active military role in the war. He did, however, at the appointment of President Madison serve as Commissioner General of Prisoners.⁴⁰

Mason played a further role in the war as a fellow-refugee with President Madison in his flight from Washington when the British captured the city. In mid-August 1814, a British force of 4,000 men sailed up the Chesapeake Bay, landed at Benedict, Maryland, on the Patuxent, and marched on Washington. On August 22, the President with Attorney General Richard Rush, Secretary of Navy William Jones, and John Mason rode out toward Upper Marlboro to encourage the troops who were facing the approaching British. But the U.S. forces were unable to halt the advancing enemy, and on the afternoon of August 24, the British routed a defending force of local militia and regulars at Bladensburg and entered Washington. There they burned the Capitol, the President's House, and the other public buildings, forcing the President and the Government to flee.⁴¹

John Mason, together with Attorney General Rush and several servants, accompanied President Madison out of the city. They crossed the Potomac on Mason's ferry and rode on to Wren's Tavern in Falls Church. From there they went on to Salona, the home of Reverend John Moffitt, three miles above the Little Falls, where they were to rendezvous with Mrs. Madison. But all had not gone according to plan, and Mrs. Madison, unknown to the President, had stopped a mile away at Rokeby, the home of her friend Matilda Lee Love.⁴²

The President spent the night at Salona and the next morning rode back to Wren's Tavern, still accompanied by Mason and Rush, in search of his wife. Not finding her, they returned to Salona and learned that she and her party had passed by on the way to Wiley's Tavern on Difficult Run

³⁹ Virginia Mason, *The Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason* (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1906), p. 8; 2 Stat. 402 (1806).

⁴⁰ Mason, *The Life of James M. Mason*, p. 8.

⁴¹ Irving Brant, *James Madison, Commander in Chief, 1812-1836* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1961), pp. 293-304.

⁴² *Ibid.*

near Great Falls. The President and Rush overtook Mrs. Madison there. Mason was briefly detained along the way, but rejoined the presidential party later in the day at the tavern. Early on the morning of August 26, 1814, President Madison, Rush, Mason, and several others crossed the Potomac into Maryland at Conn's Ferry above Great Falls and rode to the Montgomery County Courthouse (Rockville). From there they traveled on to Brookville, the home of Henrietta Bently, where the President stayed the night. Mrs. Mason, who was seriously ill with a fever, had taken refuge at a nearby farm house with her daughters. Mason spent the night with his family and then rejoined the President the following morning for the return to the devastated capital.⁴³

Mason's property both in Georgetown and on Analostan Island came through the capture of Washington undamaged, and Mason immediately resumed his business activities. Ever alert for a profit-making opportunity, he purchased in 1815 the Columbia Foundry, one of the most important industries in the District of Columbia at that time. Located on the Georgetown shore of the Potomac near the Three Sisters, the foundry had been started in 1800 by Georgetown businessman Henry Foxall, and it was the sole supplier of government guns during the years 1800 through 1809.⁴⁴

The business success that followed John Mason in his younger years eluded him in later life. The first in a series of unsuccessful ventures was the purchase of part of the glebe lands in what is now Arlington. These lands had belonged to the Fairfax Parish at the time of the Revolution and were located mid-way between the two churches of the parish, the Falls Church and Christ Church in Alexandria. The Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom, passed in 1776, and subsequent events raised murky legal questions with respect to glebe lands in Virginia. Although the 1776 statute allowed the Episcopal churches to retain their glebes, a subsequent Virginia law of 1802 confiscated the glebes and empowered the overseers of the poor in each county to sell such lands for the benefit of the poor. The effect of this latter legislation on the Fairfax glebe was unclear since at the time of enactment the land in question was in the newly created District of Columbia. Meantime, the glebe house burned in 1808, and the rector lived thereafter in Alexandria. The vestry of Christ Church wanted to sell the glebe land and brought a suit in chancery in the U.S. District Court in 1811 against the overseers of the poor for Alexandria County in order to obtain a clear title. The vestry won its suit and the overseers appealed to the Supreme Court where in 1815 the lower court's decision was upheld. Thereupon the vestry advertised the glebe lands for sale, and in July 1815, John Mason and Walter Jones bought the property for \$24

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Louis F. Gorr, "The Foxall-Columbia Foundry: An Early Defense Contractor in Georgetown," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, 48 (1971-72), pp. 34-35.

an acre. Each was to take half of the property; the portion going to Jones included the ruined glebe house, which he restored for a summer home, and Mason's half joined his lands along the Potomac. Following a survey, the vestry presented a bill for 541 acres for a cost of \$14,367.34.⁴⁵

John Mason soon regretted his decision to purchase the glebe land and wanted to break the contract. He had apparently over extended himself financially and was short of funds. In any event, in 1821, he brought suit in the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia to set aside the sale and cancel the promissory notes given for the purchase with a refund of money paid. He claimed that the title to the property was defective and could not be made good by the vestry. The court dismissed the case and Mason appealed to the Supreme Court, but again the decision was against him.⁴⁶

Mason was still intent on breaking the contract, and two further suits on legal technicalities followed.⁴⁷ The final outcome, however, was not reversed, and on August 25, 1828, Mason made his final payment of \$3,750 and received title to his portion of the glebe property.⁴⁸ Later, in 1836, he sold his glebe land to John Peter VanNess⁴⁹ for \$2,500, a price considerably less than the amount he had paid for the land.⁵⁰

John Mason also remained active in the affairs of the Potowmack Company in the period after the War of 1812, but this, too, proved an unsuccessful venture. The company had never been financially viable since its establishment in 1785. Its best year occurred in 1811 when 1,300 boats carried some 16,350 tons of cargo through the company's system of canals and locks, but thereafter the tonnage fell off markedly. Mason was elected president of the company in 1817 and served in that capacity for the next eleven years, but he was unable to make the company profitable. Even though various methods, including a lottery, were resorted to in order to raise revenue, the incomes never met expenses. The problem was that the system of short canals and river improvements did not provide an effective or complete navigation system. Boats were hindered by both freshets and droughts and cargoes often failed to reach destinations or were damaged

⁴⁵ Charles O. Paulin, "Virginia's Glebe Near Washington," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 42-44 (1940-41), pp. 224-29; Alexandria County Deed Book N₂ to U₂, No. 3, pp. 329-31.

⁴⁶ Mason v. Muncaster, 2 Cranch 274 (1821); Mason v. Muncaster, 9 Wheaton 445 (1824).

⁴⁷ Muncaster v. Mason, 2 Cranch 521 (1824); Mason v. Muncaster, 3 Cranch 403 (1828).

⁴⁸ Paulin, "Virginia's Glebe Near Washington," *Records* (1940-41), pp. 231-32, 234; Alexandria County Deed Book, N₂ to U₂, No. 3, pp. 375-76.

⁴⁹ VanNess had earlier acquired the other half of the glebe from Walter Jones and, with the purchase from Mason, the old Fairfax glebe was reunited under a single owner. Alexandria County Deed Book N₂-U₂, No. 3, pp. 329-31.

⁵⁰ Alexandria County Deed Book, V₂ to C₃, No. 4, pp. 76-77.

along the way. As early as 1816, a continuous navigable canal paralleling the river was suggested as an alternative to the Potowmack Company facilities, and the Chesapeake and Ohio Company was chartered for such a purpose in 1824. Work on the new canal began in 1826 and two years later, in 1828, the Chesapeake and Ohio Company assumed the rights and assets of the old Potowmack Company, which ceased to exist. In a final report as president, Mason stated that expenses of the company since 1785 amounted to \$650,000, while tolls from 1799 onwards had brought in only \$162,380.⁵¹

John Mason suffered his greatest business disaster of all in 1833 when he lost his beloved Analostan Island and his land along the Potomac in present-day Arlington, including the ferry rights. Eight years earlier, in 1825, he had sustained great losses in land speculation and was forced to give notes on the island and Arlington properties in order to cover his debts. In 1833, he could not meet the notes, and the Bank of the United States foreclosed.⁵² What a blow it must have been for Mason to leave his island home that he had developed over a period of forty years. For many years, local tradition attributed the Masons' departure from the island to the terrible mosquitoes of the summer season, but this story undoubtedly began as a polite fiction to ease the embarrassment of Mason's financial reverses.⁵³

During his later years, Mason continued to own and operate the Columbia Foundry, but even that was not the successful enterprise it once had been. By 1835, the foundry had begun a slow decline. The cannons produced were discovered to be weak and poorly made and there was growing demand for a national foundry. John Mason was not a founder, but rather an entrepreneur who happened to own a foundry, and he did not have a true understanding of the craft. Moreover, by this time, Mason was nearly seventy years old and had turned actual operation of the establishment over to a manager. In 1836, he offered to sell the foundry to the Federal Government, probably in an effort to raise cash, but the offer was not taken up and the foundry began to die although it continued in existence until 1854.⁵⁴

After John Mason lost Analostan Island, he moved with his wife to Clermont,⁵⁵ a farm he owned in Fairfax County situated four miles west

⁵¹ Bacon-Foster, "Early Chapters of the Potomac Route," *Records* (1912), pp. 195-276; Brown, "America's Greatest Eighteenth Century Engineering Achievement," *Virginia Cavalcade* (1963), pp. 40-47.

⁵² Alexandria County Deed Book, N₂ to U₂, No. 3, pp. 120-22, 321-24, 477-79. Gorr, "The Foxall-Columbia Foundry," *Records* (1971-72), p. 52.

⁵³ Conversation with Cornelia B. Rose, Jr., June 6, 1976.

⁵⁴ Gorr, "The Foxall-Columbia Foundry," *Records* (1971-72), pp. 48-58.

⁵⁵ See biographical sketch of Mason contained in Rutland, *Papers*, I, p. xxvi.

of Alexandria and one mile south of the Little River Turnpike. Here Mason farmed the 320 acres of the estate and continued to raise sheep as he had on the island. He also pursued his interest in gardening, and Clermont had extensive "ornamental grounds," gardens, walks, and "orchards of choice fruit."⁵⁶

Mason lived quietly during his remaining years at Clermont. He was on the vestry of Christ Church in Alexandria, the same body that he had brought suit against a few years previously to break the contract for his purchase of the glebe lands. At Christ Church, on February 10, 1835, Mason's youngest daughter, Anna Maria, married Sydney Smith Lee of the U.S. Navy and the younger brother of Robert E. Lee.⁵⁷

During the Clermont years, John Mason became interested in perpetuating the memory of his father and set about collecting George Mason's papers. In 1844, he wrote to family members requesting any documents they might have.⁵⁸ In January of that year he presented to the Virginia Assembly the "first draught" of the Bill of Rights of Virginia, which was in the form of a report by George Mason to the Virginia Convention of 1776. John Mason believed this document to be the only original draft in existence and he expressed the hope that the Assembly would preserve it.⁵⁹

John Mason died at Clermont on March 19, 1849, just two weeks before his eighty-third birthday and a service was held at Christ Church three days later.⁶⁰ The *Washington Daily Union* commented in an obituary:

Gen. Mason, through a long and active life, and in an extended sphere, attracted, as he deserved, the esteem, respect, and confidence of all who knew him. . . . He was for many years the dispenser of the most liberal hospitality to the citizens of Washington. Mason's island was the centre of attraction to every enlightened stranger. No one could ever mix in his society without admiring the man. None could see him and ever forget him.⁶¹

⁵⁶ For a description of Clermont and its location, see the sale notice of the estate which followed Mason's death in *Alexandria Gazette and Virginia Advertiser*, April 21, 1849, p. 3. All the farm equipment and animals, including the sheep, of Clermont were sold at auction after Mason's death, see notice, *Alexandria Gazette and Virginia Advertiser*, April 19, 1849, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Somerville, "General Mason," *Iron Worker* (1962), p. 10.

⁵⁸ See ltr, John Mason to Mrs. Eleanor Anne C. Mason of Gunston Hall, March 6, 1844, Mason Papers, Library of Congress (microfilm copy in Gunston Hall Library).

⁵⁹ Ltr, John Mason to the General Assembly of Virginia, January 23, 1844, reproduced in Kate M. Rowland, *The Life of George Mason*, pp. 442-43.

⁶⁰ *Alexandria Gazette and Virginia Advertiser*, March 21, 1849, p. 3.

⁶¹ *Washington Daily Union*, March 21, 1849, p. 3.