

CRANDAL MACKEY, CRUSADING COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY

By

Jack Hamilton Foster

"One of the biggest events that ever happened in Arlington was the election of Crandal Mackey as Commonwealth's Attorney in 1903,"¹ said the late Senator Frank L. Ball, who himself played a significant role in Arlington County history.

To understand the importance of this election, it is necessary to look at the Alexandria County of the 1890's and the first few years of the Twentieth Century, which bears absolutely no resemblance to the Arlington County of today. The population of the County in 1900 was 6,400. Most of the land was in small farms. The principal industry seemed to be brickmaking, there being several brick kilns and brick yards located near the river in the southern part of the county, near Alexander's Island.

Aside from the farms, railroad yards, and the brick works, the race tracks and gambling halls were the principal places of employment. In the 1890's Alexandria County in a small way was similar to Las Vegas of today - - gambling halls, saloons, and other establishments of ill-repute flourished. There were two race tracks providing thoroughbred racing throughout most of the year; one was on Alexander's Island and the other, the St. Asaph's track, was located in what is now the City of Alexandria, between Mount Vernon Avenue and Route 1.

Election of 1903

In a speech to the Arlington Historical Society on May 8, 1964 Senator Ball told about the campaign for Commonwealth's Attorney in 1903.² A group of concerned citizens who desired to clean up the county met to pick a candidate for Commonwealth's Attorney. After much deliberation over which of three leading candidates to choose, the "convention" finally settled on Crandal Mackey.

Captain Mackey ran as the anti-gambling candidate whose chief opposition came from one Dick Johnson who was backed by the gamblers. Mr. Mackey won by the slim margin of two votes and his election was contested through the courts to no avail.

Early Years

The father of Crandal Mackey, Thomas Jefferson Mackey, was a lawyer and a Captain of Engineers in the Confederate Army. After the war, Captain Mackey took his family to Shreveport, Louisiana where Crandal Mackey was born on December 15, 1865. Later the family settled in Chester, South Carolina where Thomas Mackey served as Judge of the Circuit Court.

Crandal spent his youth in South Carolina where he occasionally worked in the cotton fields when not attending school. He received his early education at



Crandal Mackey, 1905

South Carolina Military Institute. When he was eighteen years old the family moved to Washington, D. C. where Judge Mackey practiced law.

Crandal Mackey attended Randolph Macon College where football and boxing were among his school activities. He later enrolled in Georgetown University where he earned his law degree.

On June 21, 1898, young Mackey was appointed a Captain of Infantry Volunteers, Spanish American War. After the war he returned to the practice of law in Washington, D. C.

The Famous Raid

Mr. Mackey's election campaign was based on closing the gambling dens and unlicensed saloons and he didn't take long to begin working toward this goal. After taking office in January, 1904 he requested the law enforcement officers to take the necessary action to shut down gambling. The Sheriff requested more time but after a delay of four months, Mackey decided more direct action was needed.³

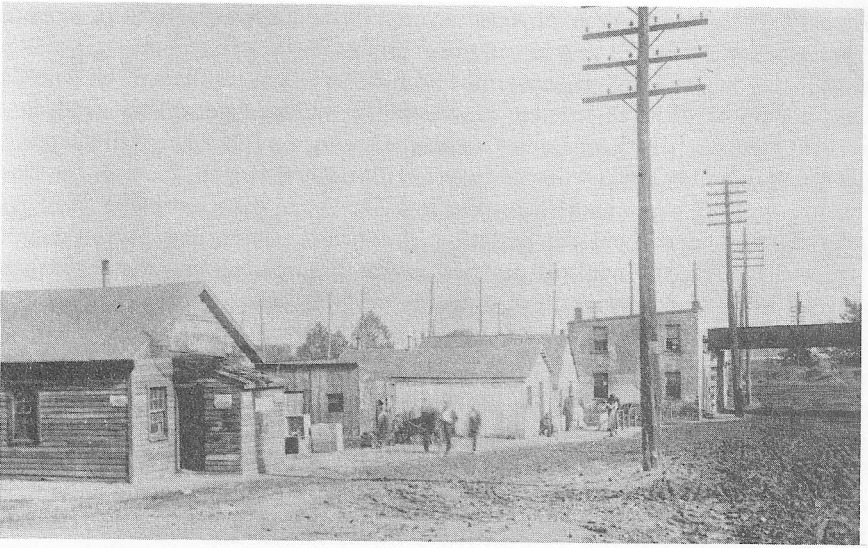
In late May, the Commonwealth's Attorney obtained warrants from Magistrate Hagan, and secret plans were formulated for a raid. Constable Marcey was selected to lead the raid, and a posse was organized which included some of the County's leading citizens. Care was taken in the selection of the raiding party to prevent the gamblers from receiving tips in time to get their paraphernalia out of their houses. Shortly before four o'clock in the afternoon the party met in the city of Washington and made final arrangements for the trip.

For reasons beyond my comprehension, the *Alexandria Gazette* of May 31 devoted little space to what was a newsworthy event. The *Gazette* had only this paragraph buried in one of the inside pages.

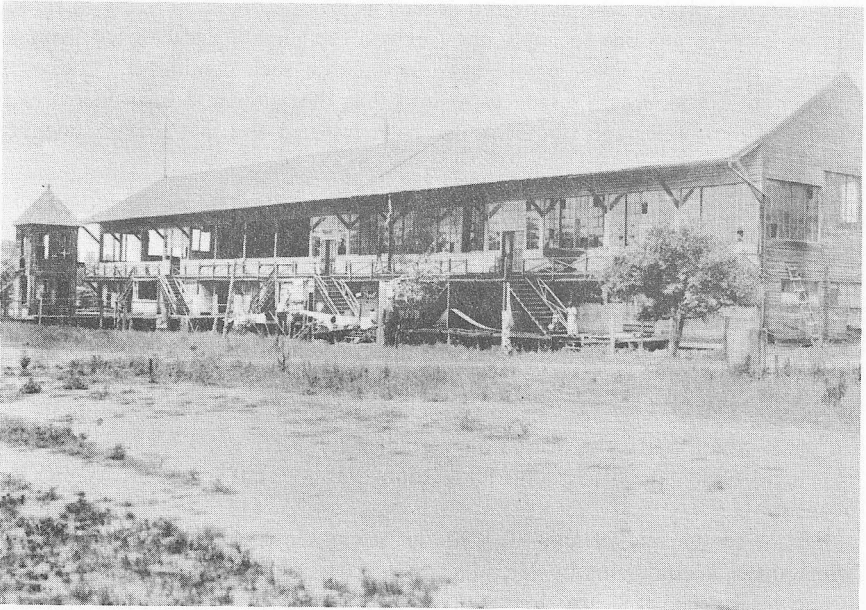
"Jackson City, DelRay and Rosslyn were visited by law officers with posses yesterday and several alleged gambling resorts raided and paraphernalia destroyed. The raid was under the leadership of Constable Marcey with warrants from Justice Hogan, who had issued them on information furnished to Commonwealth's Attorney Crandall Mackey. A full set of what is alleged to be a burglar's outfit was discovered in a house in Jackson City. No arrests were made."

On the other hand, the *Washington Evening Star* of May 31 had almost a whole column citing details of the raid. Here are some excerpts from this column.

"Commonwealth's Attorney Crandall Mackey and a number of law-abiding citizens of Alexandria County, Va. late yesterday afternoon visited several places in the county where gambling is alleged to have flourished and made a demonstration which is intended to give the lawbreakers an idea of what they may expect if they persist in operating Mr. Mackey is being backed by the better people of the county, it is said, and yesterday when he called for volunteers the responses were numerous The 'raiders' were anxious to put the pool room at St. Asaph's out of business first and then visit the smaller establishments. It was soon learned, however, that the pool room was not in operation, which was disappointing. Then the party decided to visit Jackson City where it was presumed, gambling was going on. The raiders found that a high board fence had been built about the building in which all kinds of games were in the habit of being con-



A row of gambling houses and taverns, Jackson City



The grandstand at St. Asaph's race track

ducted. The gate had been left open because no raid was expected and no trouble was experienced in effecting an entrance.”

According to the Star none of the proprietors was in the place at Jackson City, but a number of gamblers were in, engaged in various games. They suddenly recalled “that they had engagements elsewhere and were in a hurry to keep them. It did not bother them whether they left through the open doors or the closed windows. They all wanted to get out in a hurry, and once outside most of them started north over the Long Bridge When the posse had driven the crowd from the place, the work of destruction was commenced and in a few minutes several hundred dollars worth of property had been destroyed Others in the raiding party visited the room in which liquid refreshments were dispensed Glassware was smashed and the contents of the bottles, demijohns and decanters was allowed to flow, giving the room the appearance of having passed through a Potomac flood.”

“Rosslyn was next visited and the raiding party called at the resort known as ‘Heath’s’ a short distance above the village. . . . At each place visited by the raiding party the raiders took paraphernalia enough to use as evidence in the event it is decided to prosecute the proprietors of the places.

“It is stated that the residents of the county are considering the question of forming a citizens association for the purpose of effecting needed reforms and looking to the enforcement of the law against the many objectionable places in the county It is the intention of Mr. Mackey and those who participated in the raid to arrest players who are found as well as proprietors Some of those in the party were anxious to apply the torch to the gambling places, but Commonwealth’s Attorney Mackey would not countenance such conduct When the party went to St. Asaph’s they were told that the wires and instruments of the Western Union Telegraph Company had been restored and that an early opening is expected.”

Wrapping Up the Anti-Vice Crusade

One place that escaped the May, 1904, onslaught was the St. Asaph’s Pool Room. In recent years reference to a pool room in most people’s minds implies a place to play pocket billiards. However, the concept of the term eighty years ago often signified a gambling house - - a reference to betting pools. *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* presents its second definition of a pool room as “a place where betting is carried on, esp. illegally; a bookmaker’s establishment.” Not incidentally, the St. Asaph’s Pool Room was adjacent to the St. Asaph’s Race Track.

Prior to the raid of May 30, 1904 an attempt was made to close St. Asaph’s when upon a complaint by Mr. Mackey a Warrant of Arrest for J. M. Hill was issued by Justice of Peace Jonathan R. Hagan on May 5, 1904. Mr. Hill was a prominent Alexandria businessman who ran the opera house as well as St. Asaph’s and was on the Board of Directors of the Virginia Jockey Club which operated the St. Asaph’s Race Track throughout the “Gay Nineties.”

The warrant said in part that Mr. Hill “did unlawfully occupy a certain ground

and building at a place commonly known as St. Asaph's for the purpose of recording bets and wagers and the selling and making books upon the trial of speed and power of endurance of animals of the horse kind against the peace and dignity of the Commonwealth of Virginia."

On May 11, Mr. Hill petitioned the court to award a Writ of Prohibition. A long document submitted to C. E. Nicol, Judge of the Circuit Court, requested the Judge to prohibit Mr. Hagan from exercising the powers of a Justice of the Peace. I do not know the immediate result of this legal conflict but Mr. Mackey and Justice Hagan prevailed eight months later as indicated by the following paragraphs.

Eleanor Lee Templeman wrote in *Arlington Heritage* that St. Asaph's claimed that it was operating legally, but with the Grand Jury in session, Crandal Mackey "suggested that the judge adjourn temporarily with instruction to the jurymen to see their own evidence. The jurymen played the horses at St. Asaph's resulting in nineteen indictments against three proprietors and sixteen employees . . . One of the strongest opponents to the elimination of gambling was the Alexandria and Mount Vernon Railroad. Strong pressures and tempting offers were made to Colonel Mackey, without avail, to call off his crusade, for this line averaged hundreds of riders daily to St. Asaph's gambling houses."⁴

As a prelude to the closing of the St. Asaph's gambling dens, the Commonwealth's Attorney succeeded in obtaining a verdict from an Alexandria County jury on January 7, 1905 in the case of Louis Murdock who had been on trial for selling liquor at the St. Asaph's Pool Room. Mr. Murdock was fined \$2,000 and sentenced to thirty day in jail. Less than a week later, the *Washington Times* reported, "The prosecuting attorney of Alexandria County, Va. has won his fight against the gamblers . . . He was elected to office on the platform 'Put out the gamblers.' He has devoted himself to fulfilling that platform . . . the power of the law and the energy of one man have been sufficient to rout offenders with almost unlimited means and not sensitive as to the use of those means."

An editorial on May 1, 1905 in the *Washington Star* includes these sentences: "Thanks to the vigor of a new county administration, the gamblers have been forced to leave the southern side of the river . . . No longer need there be degrading conditions on the high road from the city to the national cemetery or at the very gates of the military post, both of which are of instructive interest to all visitors to this city. It will be possible for tourists to inspect both of these points without being subjected to disgusting sights or unpleasant experiences."

Mr. Mackey won his fight against the gamblers by giving them a choice between the penitentiary and vacating the district. By bringing charges that would stick he was able to get the gamblers to leave the county rather than face the charges.

Mackey Re-elected

An editorial in the *Washington Herald* in 1907 stated that Mr. Mackey's enemies were endeavoring to defeat him with a view to "lifting the lid" in Alexandria County. The newspaper supported him wholeheartedly, giving him much of the credit for the great change "in the character of the borderland south of us. It is fast becoming a region of teeming industry and peaceful homes, instead of a resort

of the rough and criminal elements. In Alexandria County are located immense railway terminals and warehouses, the important army post of Fort Myer and a number of growing industries. It is due to Mr. Mackey's energy and devotion to duty that Fort Myer is not surrounded by the low and degrading influences which characterize the environment of so many army posts, and that railway men and employees of the brickyards and other industries are not subjected to the temptations afforded by low saloons and gambling resorts."

With very little industry in the County, this was not a stronghold of labor unions, but nevertheless, *The Trade Unionist*, a Washington publication, editorialized that Mr. Mackey has always been a consistent friend of organized labor. It supported him for re-election because of his "splendid record, especially in putting a quietus on gambling."

Crandal Mackey was re-elected to the position of Commonwealth's Attorney in 1907 and 1911. In 1915 he chose not to run and he was succeeded by Frank L. Ball.

Later Career

After three terms as Commonwealth's Attorney, Crandal Mackey had just turned fifty years of age. His prominent place in Arlington County history is the result of his dynamic career as Commonwealth's Attorney but he continued to have an active interest in the county's affairs for many years after leaving office.

One of Mr. Mackey's many interests was writing, editing, and publishing. There is a "A History of Alexandria County" written by Crandal Mackey as a member of a committee appointed by the Board of Supervisors. It is undated but seems to have been written in 1906 or 1907. For many years he was the editor and publisher of a local weekly newspaper, the *Chronicle*. In this capacity he lost one contest, as he was one of the leaders in the opposition to the adoption of the County Manager form of government in 1930.⁵ After he discontinued working as an editor of the *Chronicle* he continued to serve as a regular editorial writer for that paper.

Mr. Mackey was a candidate for Congress in 1930 but was defeated in the Democratic Primary by Howard Smith who represented this district for many years. He campaigned on a "states rights" platform, seeking to get the United States government "out of Virginia in prohibition, and as much as possible in everything else and let Virginia run her own affairs as intended by our forefathers."

Captain Mackey was a director of the Arlington National Bank in Rosslyn and was one of the organizers of the old Arlington Trust Company. In his later years he was a member of the Board of Trustees of George Washington University and a director of the National Mortgage and Investment Company. He practiced law in Arlington and Washington for many years and was a popular lecturer in the area. He remained active until he broke his hip in an automobile accident on Lee Highway in 1951. Thereafter his activities were confined to his home.

Family

Mr. Mackey had five sons and two daughters, none of whom are still living.

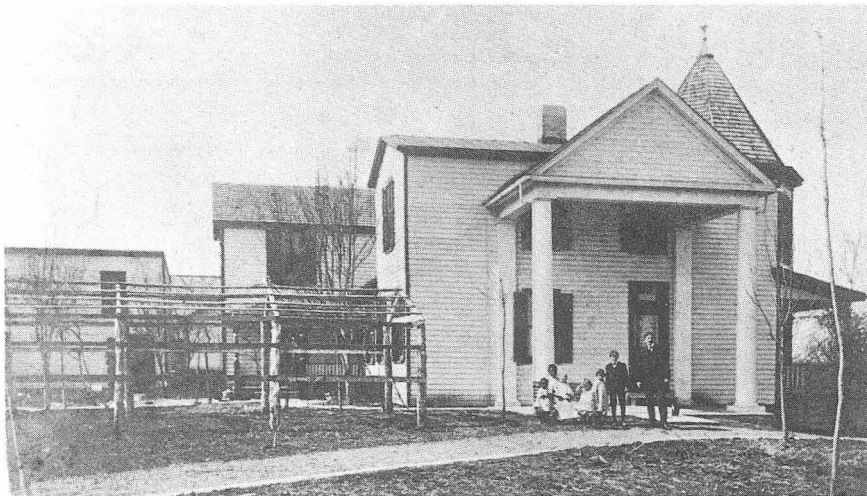


Crandal Mackey - approximate age, 62

There were fifteen grandchildren, thirteen of whom are still living, three of them in Northern Virginia.

For many years Mr. Mackey lived on a hill above Rosslyn which later became known as Mackey's Hill. His address was 1711 North 22nd Street., which is now a vacant lot. During his later years he lived with his son Argyle at 3707 North Woodstock Street, Arlington. He died at that residence on March 31, 1957 at the age of ninety-one.

Arlington County will always owe a debt of gratitude to Crandal Mackey for his great contribution to the welfare of this community.



The Mackey home at 1711 N. 22nd St. - now a vacant lot

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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FOOTNOTES

¹ Frank L. Ball, "The Arlington I Have Known", *Arlington Historical Magazine* (1964), p. 3-16.

² Ball, *op. cit.*

³ Eleanor Lee Templeman, *Arlington Heritage*. The author, 1959, p. 76.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Robert Nelson Anderson, "Arlington Adopts the County Manager Form of Government," *Arlington Historical Magazine* (1958), p. 52-57.