

Deaths in Loudoun County

When **George Mason** met his accidental death he left no will. Under the Colonial law of primogeniture, his extensive holdings of land therefore went to his eldest son. According to the family historian, his younger children were left penniless. His widow thereupon bent all her energies to create an estate for each of them. Saving what she could, through every available economy and acting under the advice of her late husband's friends, she acquired "ten thousand acres of what was then called 'wild lands' in Loudoun County, for which she paid only a few shillings per acre." She,[76] during her lifetime, divided these lands between her two younger children "for the reason assigned by her that she did not wish her children to grow up with any sense of inequality among them in regard to fortune. The investment turned out a most fortunate one, and she thereby unwittingly made her younger children wealthier than their elder brother."

Mrs. Ann Thomson Mason. It is thus so many of the beautiful modern estates between Leesburg and the Limestone Branch trace their title back to the Mason family. Mrs. Ann Thomson Mason died on the 13th November, 1762, "leaving a reputation among her connections and neighbours for great prudence and business capacity, united to the charms of an amiable, womanly, character." Her Rector, friend and relative, the Rev. John Moncure, described her as "a good woman, a great woman, and a lovely woman."

Though she planted the Mason line in Loudoun, she herself does not appear ever to have lived in that rough and for those days remote frontier country. The actual seating of her line on her large purchase was left to her son Thomson who, after going to England to acquire his training in law and being admitted to the Middle Temple on the 14th August, 1751, as its records show, returned to Virginia, practiced law at Dumfries, became, perhaps, the most eminent lawyer of his time at the Virginia Bar and vigourously aided the American Revolution. He either had improved and extended the first Raspberry Plain home or, as Lancaster says, built a new one for he deeded the existing structure with the supporting land to his son Stevens Thomson Mason, confirming the grant in his will, together with the plate and furniture then in the dwelling; which indicates a more impressive home than the first building.

Thomson Mason died at Raspberry Plain on the 26th February, 1785, and was there buried; but the first mansion and burial place were not where the imposing modern house of the same name now stands but rather much to the north, near the fine spring and branch for a long time included in the present Selma lands, for the latter[77] estate was, of course, at that time and long afterward but another part of the extensive Mason holdings. It is of interest to note that this original Raspberry Plain holding was never acquired by Francis Aubrey nor was it part of Mrs. Ann Thomson Mason's purchase. On the contrary, it comprised a small grant, stated to be 322 acres, made by the Proprietor to one Joseph Dixon, a blacksmith, by patent dated the 2nd July, 1731.[54] Dixon, in turn, sold it to Aeneas Campbell by deed dated the 15th July, 1754, for

a consideration nominally stated as "five shillings"—the old-time equivalent of our "One Dollar and other good and valuable considerations"—and Campbell was living there when commissioned the first sheriff of Loudoun in 1757. In the deed to him the plantation is described as being "On the branches of Limestone run called and known by the name of raspberry plain" and the grant goes on to give the exact location by metes and bounds. It apparently had been more carefully surveyed and found to have more area than first believed, for it is further described as containing "393 acres as appears by a survey thereof" and the grant specifically includes "all houses, buildings, orchards, ways, waters, water-courses," etc. Therefore Dixon may be credited with having built the first Raspberry Plain house, a matter long in doubt locally.[55] The estate was subsequently sold by Campbell and Lydia his wife to Thomson Mason, by deed dated the 15th day of May, 1760, for 500 pounds current money of Virginia.

William Douglas of Leesburg

Around 1750 there came from Scotland to this same country, north of the present Leesburg, that William Douglass who is to be so frequently mentioned by Nicholas Cresswell in his journal at the time of the Revolution. Colonel Douglass, as he afterward became, was the son of Hugh Douglass of Garalland in Ayshire who, in turn, was sixth in descent from the Earl of Douglas and also a descendant of the Campbell Barons of Loudoun, thus making the Douglass family of Loudoun County kinsfolk to the Earl of Loudoun for whom the county was to be named. Our William Douglass owned the estates of Garalland and Montessor in Loudoun, served as one of[78] her justices (1770) and as sheriff in 1782. He died in the latter year, leaving a will which was probated on the 24th September 1782.

Charles Fenton Mercer of Loudoun County

In this second quarter of the nineteenth century, to which we have now come, the name of Charles Fenton Mercer, soldier, statesman and philanthropist, is writ large in Loudoun's records. Already we have read of him in his country home and of his founding the town of Aldie in 1810; but the brief reference there made[194] is wholly inadequate to the man and his accomplishments. Born in Fredericksburg on the 6th June, 1778, he was the son of James Mercer and grandson of that John Mercer of Marlboro whom we have already met.[148] His father, after a distinguished career, left at his death an estate so much involved that the son had some difficulty in securing his education. He, however, was able to graduate at Princeton in 1797 and the next year, at the time of friction with France, was given a commission by Washington as a captain of cavalry. When the danger of war passed, he studied law and, admitted to the Bar, practiced his profession with great success. He served as brigadier general in command of the defense of Norfolk in the War of 1812, removed to Loudoun, was a member of the Virginia Legislature from 1810 to 1817 and, as a Federalist, was elected a member of Congress, in 1816, over General A. T. Mason, the election being so close, however, that it had to

be decided by the House of Representatives. In Congress he served until 1840, a longer continuous service "than that of any of his contemporaries." Always deeply interested in the project of the Chesapeake and Potomac Canal, he introduced the first successful bill for its construction and it was in tribute to him that those interested in the plan met in Leesburg on the 25th August, 1823. When the canal company was organized taking over, in effect, much of the plant of General Washington's cherished project the Potomac Company, Mercer became its first president and continued in that position during the period of Federal encouragement. Then came the Jackson administration and its opposition and, as a final blow, the organization of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company. The day of the canals gave place to that of the railroads; but that section of the canal in Maryland, across the river from Loudoun, was completed and placed in successful operation, affording to her people better and cheaper transportation to Washington and Alexandria for their products than they before had known.

Mercer was an ardent protectionist, intensely opposed to slavery and an advocate of the settlement of freed slaves in Liberia. He died near Alexandria on the 4th May, 1858, and was buried in the Leesburg Cemetery. On his headstone it is justly reaffirmed that he was "A Patriot, Statesman, Philanthropist and Christian." Mercer's day well may be cited as the most active and, perhaps, the most ambitiously progressive in business affairs in the county's history. Space precludes enumeration and extensive description of all the enterprises then undertaken but passing mention may be made of a few. The improvement of transportation was a dominant motive. Canals, railroads, turnpikes all were instruments to that end. An early railroad was projected by the men of Waterford and incorporated in 1831 as the Loudoun Railroad Company to run from the mouth of Ketocin Creek on the Potomac "passing Ketocin mountain to the waters of Goose creek so as to intercept the Ashby's Gap turnpike road"; a curious and impractical route it may seem to us in the light of present conditions and that it was just as well that the project died in birth. In 1832 another railroad but sponsored in Leesburg, to be known as the Leesburg Railroad and to run from that town to the Potomac, also came to naught. At length in 1849 the Alexandria, Loudoun and Hampshire Railroad was incorporated and built, and under various names has been since continuously operated, thus giving the county its only railroad communication within its boundaries.

Source: Legends of Loudoun: An Account of the history and homes of a border county of Virginia's Norterh Neck by Harrison Williams