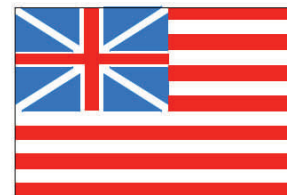




The Rappahannock Gazette



Newsletter of the Rappahannock Colonial Heritage Society, Inc.

The purpose of the Rappahannock Colonial Heritage Society is to bring together persons interested in preserving and perpetuating the heritage and culture of the colonial era in and around the Rappahannock River Valley of Virginia; to conduct historical research of persons, places and events relating to the Rappahannock River Valley in Colonial times, and to organize activities related to the Colonial era in an effort to educate the public about the ways of life of our forbears in this area.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Aug. 20 - Community Welcome Fair, UMW: 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
EC: Elaine Sturgeon, 540/785-2168.

Aug. 23 - Sewing Circle - English Gown: 1:00-6:00 p.m., St. George's Church. EC: Catherine Taylor, 540/775-0852.

Sep. 1 - Business Meeting: 7:30 p.m., St. George's Church, room 300. Chair: Sharon Brunacci, 540/659-2080.

Sep. 19 - Our Living Legacies: Mary Washington House. 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. EC: Lyn Padgett, 540/841-7275.

Sep. 26 - Fredericksburg Welsh Festival. 3:30-4:30 p.m. EC: Trip Wiggins, 540/371-3906.

Due to liability concerns of the corporation, **your membership must be current** in order to participate in RCHS events.

ENGLISH COUNTRY DANCE CLASSES

Aug. 28 - Open
Sep. 4 - Demo
Sep. 11 - Open
Sep. 25 - Demo

TRIAL RCHS BUSINESS MEETING FORMAT

At the July 7 Business Meeting the motion was made and accepted by membership vote to change the format of the monthly RCHS Business Meeting on a trial basis. The format changes include: deleting the Committee Reports from the business meeting and instead including the reports of the committees in the monthly newsletter, decreasing the time allotted for the discussion of business to 45 minutes, and including a 45-minute training/information session presented by Society volunteers. The trial period begins with the September 1, 2009, meeting and extends through the end of the calendar year; to include the October and November meetings. There are no monthly meetings scheduled for August and December.

I have volunteered to present the 45-minute session for the September 1st meeting and have entitled my presentation; "All the world's a stage....' You're Always On!" This will be an interactive presentation; no

sitting and taking notes. Trip Wiggins has volunteered to lead the October session (topic to be determined) and we are seeking a session leader for November. If you have a topic that you are interested in sharing for the good of our Society or have any questions, please contact me at 540/841-7275. This is a wonderful opportunity for knowledge sharing within the Society. Our imagination is the only limit to the range of topics appropriate for this venue with the guiding principal being information that will assist us all in better portraying and conveying information about life in 18th century Virginia. If this trial is successful it may lead to bringing in presenters from outside our Society and other exciting opportunities for learning.

Your Servant,
Lyn Padgett

O F F I C E R ' S C O R N E R

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The next RCHS Business Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 1st, at 7:30 p.m. in St. George's room 300.

TREASURER'S REPORT

May Beginning Balance: \$8,158.09
 May Ending Balance: \$8,536.97
 June Ending Balance: \$8,536.97
 July Ending Balance: \$8,840.32

E N G L I S H C O U N T R Y D A N C E C L A S S E S

English Country Dance classes are held on the second and fourth Fridays of each month in the Family Room of St. George's Episcopal Church. Classes begin at 7:00 p.m. and are open to the public (\$2 per class). Rehearsals for the Dance Demonstration Team are on the first Friday of each month. Dance Mistress: Elaine Sturgeon, 540/785-2168 or miselaineus@yahoo.com.

Classes:
 Aug. 28 - Open
 Sep. 4 - Demo
 Sep. 11 - Open
 Sep. 25 - Demo



Costume by: ©Thomson 1788 of Paris's Robert Aron

R C H S C O M M I T T E E N O T E S

EVENTS COMMITTEE

Thursday, August 20

UMW Community Welcome

Fair:

The University of Mary Washington Community Welcome Fair, an opportunity to greet the freshman class and let them know about our Society and activities, is Thursday, August 20th from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The day will entail setting up a tent, table and chairs at Ball Circle on the UMW Campus, talking with the students about RCHS activities, handing out brochures, and then taking down the tent.

If you are able to volunteer for

this activity, please call Event Coordinator Elaine Sturgeon at 540/785-2168.



Tuesday, September 1
Events Committee Meeting:

The next RCHS Events Committee meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 1st at 6:00 p.m. in St. George's room 300. For more info, please call Lyn Padgett at 540/841-7275.

**SEWING COMMITTEE**

Sunday, August 23

Sewing Circle - English Gown:

We will continue working on English gowns starting at 1:00 p.m. in the Family Room of St. George's Church. We will be cutting out the gown and constructing the bodice of the gown. YOU will NEED to have your STAYS for fitting the bodice of the gown.

Remember to bring everything you will need, including your sewing machine, pattern, fabric and accessories. If you have questions before the event, contact Event Coordinator Catherine Taylor at 540/775-0852.

JAMES MERCER, ESQ.

By Trip Wiggins

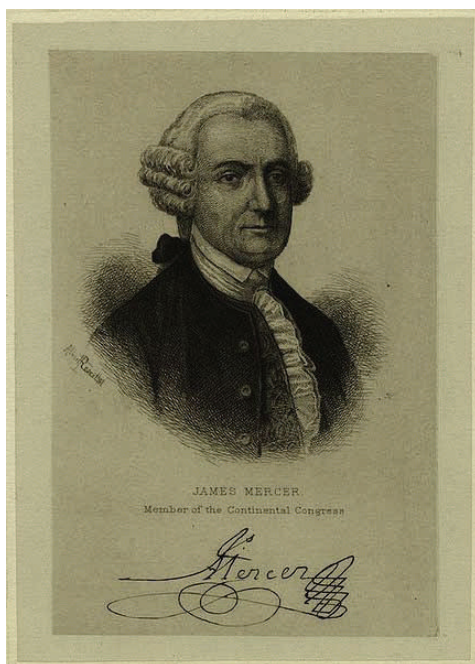
When you mention “Mercer” in Fredericksburg, the first name that comes to mind is that of Dr. Hugh Mercer, the Scottish immigrant, physician and Revolutionary War hero. But this time we are going to look at the other Mercer of our town—James Mercer.

I hear you saying, “James? Who’s he?” A good question. Let’s explore his interesting life. Oh, and while James was a patient and probably friend of Dr. Mercer, the two were not related.

Just northeast of Fredericksburg, in Stafford County, was where John Mercer built his home, *Marlborough*, on the banks of the Potomac. John (1715-1768) emigrated from Dublin, Ireland, when he was a youth and became a wealthy and powerful attorney in Virginia. He wrote several books on the law in Virginia, served as probate attorney for many people in the region, including Augustine Washington (George’s father), and was a co-founder of the Ohio Company (a land speculating company). He married well, Catherine Mason, sister of George Mason III, with whom he had 10 children: George, John Fenton, James, Sarah and Mary and five who died before their 16th birthday.

When George Mason III and his wife died, John became guardian for their son, George Mason IV, the future “Bill of Rights” statesman. George IV and James grew up together and it was John Mercer who introduced both to the law—from which neither wandered.

Following Catherine’s death in 1750, Mercer wasted no time in finding a mother for his children and married Ann Roy, daughter of Dr. Mungo Roy, of Caroline County. (Caroline County was more the center of commerce at this time; Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania still being considered “back water” areas.) Ann gave George nine more children, of which Grace Fenton, John Francis, Maria, Robert and possibly Elinor & Anna (?) attained their majority. While several children had notable careers, we’ll explore that of James and touch on the others at the end.



Originally father didn’t think James was suited for academia or the law but rather architecture so he arranged for James to be apprenticed to a master builder in Williamsburg. Following strong objections from James’ brothers, he was instead sent to William & Mary where he studied law.

Following graduation in the mid 1750s he, like his two brothers, served in the Virginia Regiment under Lt. Col. George Washington during the French and Indian War (where his brother John Fenton was killed). Late in the war he was given command of Fort Loudon in today’s Winchester, VA.

Following the war James came to Fredericksburg and purchased several lots in the “new section” of town. The lots would be known as “Mercer’s Park” and in the 60s he built his cottage home at the north-west corner of Charles and Fauquier streets calling it “St. James’ House” in honor of his father’s boyhood neighborhood in Dublin on St. James’ Street. How much the lots and house were financed by father John remains unknown, but perhaps father was trying to get young James started in his law practice in the young bustling town of Fredericksburg.

During this time also two families became inextricably intertwined—the Mercers and the Dicks. Charles Dick (see article in the December 2008 and January 2009 issues of *The Rappahannock Gazette*) was a successful merchant in the region, starting in Caroline County and moving about 1750 to Fredericksburg. He was an old friend of John Mercer. In fact they were also brothers-in-law as both married daughters of Dr. Mungo Roy in 1750; John to Ann and Charles to Mary.

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In 1762 James ran for a vacant seat in the House of Burgesses, not from either Stafford or Spotsylvania but rather the new county of Hampshire (now in West Virginia). It was part of the land his father gave him and he owned more than enough to count as a “landowner” so could run for election even though he didn’t live there. He and his family had connections with friends in Hampshire and won the seat.

An interesting exchange occurred in 1765 following the arrival from England of George Mercer, James’ older brother, as the new tax official in the colony. Due to the outcry over the Stamp Act, the new tax collector was not welcome and he eventually left for England for good. That said, his family, even if they didn’t agree with brother’s politics, would stick up for him. One such occurrence was documented by a proud father John to his son, now back in England, “Your bro. [James] without receiving any damage broke the doctor’s head, and closed his eyes in such a manner as obliged him to keep to his house for several days.” The “doctor” was Dr. Arthur Lee, a staunch opponent of the Stamp Act and George Mercer. What is so interesting is that in his youth John was a bit of a loose cannon, having been disbarred on occasion for all sorts of activities, but James was always the epitome of a gentleman. It’s no wonder that John was happy to see James perform in such a manner!

In 1768 John died as many Virginia Gentlemen did—land rich but money poor. He left his own children and was the guardian for

his widowed sister-in-law, Eleanor (Roy) Hill, and her three children as well as an unmarried sister-in-law, Beatrix Roy. He also left an estate deep in debt but one of the largest personal libraries in the colonies—over 1,500 volumes. While George, as oldest son, was the heir, he was living now in England so the estate issues fell to James to handle.

About 1771 James started wooing Charles Dick’s eldest daughter, Eleanor or “Nellie” (born 1757). They were married in June 1772 by Rev. Marye in Fredericksburg and took up housekeeping at the St. James cottage. There is some conjecture that since the Dicks and Mercers were now responsible for their extended Roy families, perhaps this wedding was arranged to bring the next generation of Mercers and Dicks together. We’ll never know, but at 15, his new wife was a bit younger than most.

We know that by 1771 James was doing well financially as attested by a pass for his coach and servants: A 1771 slave pass from James Mercer for two slaves, “Negro Bobb, coachman & Negro George, postillion,” to travel from Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Williamsburg “with a coach and six horses.” The pass was signed by James Mercer’s steward, Thomas Oliver, and indicates in the pass that the slaves be afforded hospitality at inns along the way, as was the usual custom. The reverse contains account of expenses signed by Jonathan Martin. Less than 1% of Virginians owned a coach. Yes, he was doing well.

He was also a large slaveholder, as were most of the plantation owners. In 1771 Mercer owned 103 slaves distributed on four

plantations under the management of Thomas Oliver. Of these there were 54 slaves on *Marlborough*, 19 on *Acquia*, 12 on *Belviderra* and nine on *Accokeek*, besides nine hired for work elsewhere. Of the 94 not hired out, 64 were field workers. Nearly all the rest, comprising the house servants, the young children, the invalids and the superannuated, were lodged on *Marlborough*.

In 1772 he welcomed a new neighbor on Charles Street when George Washington moved his mother, Mary, into the house at 1201. James would become her attorney.

As his law practice grew, so did his family. The first to arrive was John Fenton Mercer in 1773 followed by Mary Eleanor Dick Mercer in 1775, Lucinda in 1776 and finally Charles Fenton Mercer in 1778. Throughout this period the family, and probably his law office, operated out of St. James’ House—a cottage of two rooms and a hallway downstairs and two small rooms upstairs. It got quite crowded, I’m sure!

James had become a well-known citizen of the community and was now a close friend of the Fielding Lewis household as evidenced in James and Nellie being named godparents for Fielding’s eleventh son, Howell in Dec. 1771. Since the Dicks were close with the Lewises, it’s only natural that James, as Nellie’s beau and new husband would join the fold.

Next time: War! A Continental Congress delegate and a judgeship. Join us.

R C H S O N L O C A T I O N



All photographs by Naomi McPherson.



In spite of the heat, Society members spent a sunny Sunday afternoon together under large shade trees on the lawn of Spotsylvania Court House for the **Spotsylvania Stars & Stripes Spectacular**.

After setting up the tent and accessories, they engaged the public in popular 18th century games and conversation about life in Colonial Virginia. They played musical instruments and danced. They demonstrated handicrafts and how to keep cool.

Clockwise from top left: Sandra Piercey, Michael McPherson and Greg Brunacci with visitors under the tent; Tina Buchanan; Lyn Padgett, Bettie Brezee, Linda Pool, Elaine Sturgeon and Elizabeth McDowell dance; Lyn Padgett, Sharon Brunacci and Jo Buchanan chat.

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Photograph by Naomi McPherson.

The following Saturday, Society members assembled at the annual **Port Royal Fourth of July** celebration where they heard a reading of the Declaration of Independence and watched the local militia march. Left to right: Greg Brunacci, Trip Wiggins, Bob Serafini, Sandra Piercey, Bettie Brezee and Elaine Sturgeon perform the English country dance “Prince William” for the crowd.

At the request of Bettie Brezee, Society members entertained the residents of **Lakewood Manor Retirement Community** in Richmond with a dance demonstration and period-appropriate accessories exhibit. Earlier in the day they surprised the staff and other visitors by touring the Valentine History Center in period attire. Left to right: Display table featuring handiwork; John Jacobsen, Lyn Padgett, Naomi McPherson, Sandra Piercey, Bettie Brezee, Linda Pool and Elaine Sturgeon pose on stage.



Photograph by Naomi McPherson.



EVENTS OF INTEREST IN THE AREA

The following were gathered from various sources and are subject to change.

Jul. 10-Nov. 9 – Historic Costume at Scotchtown, 1760-1830. More than two dozen historic garments and accessories will be on display. Exhibit included with admission to the house. Call 804/227-3500 for info. \$

Aug. 22 – 4H Heritage Club Event, Geo. Washington Birthplace National Monument. 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. 4H leaders and members will interpret colonial crafts like blacksmithing, spinning and cooking. See www.nps.gov/gewa for info. \$

Aug. 29 – Tobacco Harvest, Claude Moore Colonial Farm: McLean. 1:00-4:00 p.m. The tobacco crop, used to pay the rent and to purchase goods not produced on the farm, is ready to be harvested. Go to www.1771.org for more information. \$

Sep. 12 – Textiles: Fibers to Frocks at Scotchtown. 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Costumed interpreters will be demonstrating traditional methods of turning raw materials into cloth used to make clothing. Call 804/227-3500 for info. \$

Sep. 12 – Colonial Candle-Making: National Colonial Farm. Accokeek, MD. 1:30-3:30 p.m. You will learn about wicks, waxes, uses of candles in the 1700s and safety instruction at this hands-on workshop. Visit www.accokeek.org for information. \$

Sep. 13 – Constitution Commemoration, Geo. Washington Birthplace National

Monument. 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. As the presiding officer of the Constitutional Convention, George Washington played a crucial role in determining the shape of our government. A lecture by a noted scholar will be presented at 2:00 p.m. (free with admission). See www.nps.gov/gewa for info. \$

Sep. 17 – Constitution Day: Montpelier. 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Enjoy free admission to Montpelier. Go to www.montpelier.org or call 540/672-2728 for information.

Sep. 18, 19 & 20 – “Our Living Legacies.” 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Fri. & Sat.; 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Sun. The Rising Sun Tavern, Mary Washington House and Hugh Mercer Apothecary Shop will feature exhibits and demonstrations. Go to www.apva.org for more information. \$

Sep. 19 & 20 – 18th Century Craft Fair, Mount Vernon Plantation. 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Artisans demonstrate their crafts and sell their wares. Features period entertainment. Go to www.mountvernon.org for info. \$

Sep. 19 – Spinning & Dyeing Day, Claude Moore Colonial Farm: McLean. 1:00-4:00 p.m. Costumed interpreters card, spin and dye wool for knitting. Go to www.1771.org for more information. \$

Sep. 19 – Colonial Foodways: National Colonial Farm. Accokeek, MD. 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Costumed interpreters demonstrate what life was like for “middling” sort tobacco growing families in the late 1770s, preparing seasonally available foods using colonial implements and methods.

Visit www.accokeek.org for info. \$
Sep. 20-Sep. 22 – Textiles for Interiors 1730-1830 by Colonial Williamsburg. This symposium gathers leading scholars to review the design and composition of textile furnishings available between 1730 and 1830. See www.history.org/conted or call 1-800-603-0948 for info. \$

Sep. 25 – 51st Annual Alexandria Forum, Gadsby’s Tavern. 6:30-9:00 p.m. The forum will explore “Rediscovering the Federal City.” Keynote address by Sumpter Priddy and dinner at Gadsby’s Tavern. Call 703/838-4242 or visit www.gadsbystavern.org for info. \$

Sep. 26 – National Public Lands Day at Historic Jamestowne. 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Explore the first permanent English settlement in North America without paying a fee. Visit www.apva.org for more info. FREE

Sep. 27 – The Hands that Built Gunston Hall. 1:00-5:00 p.m. Dr. John Michael Vlach will talk about the building of an 18th-century plantation house and Robert M. Watson of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation will demonstrate period woodworking techniques. Visit www.gunstonhall.org for info. \$

Oct. 5 – 22nd Annual James Monroe Lecture: Great Hall, UMW Campus. 7:30 p.m. Gene Smith, professor of history at Texas Christian University, will present “The War of 1812: Slaves, Monroe, and Fighting for Freedom.” FREE



Rappahannock Colonial Heritage Society, Inc.

**P.O. Box 7823
Fredericksburg, VA 22404-7823**

**Visit our Web site:
www.rchsinc.org**

N E W S L E T T E R G U I D E L I N E S

Our time period and location is 18th century Virginia with our area of concentration being Fredericksburg and the Rappahannock River Valley. The Rappahannock River Valley covers from the ford of the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers down to the Chesapeake Bay. Our particular interests lie in the areas of Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania, Stafford, King George and Caroline Counties.

Any member may, and is encouraged to, submit articles for publication. Committee chairpersons are especially en-

couraged to write reports of past and upcoming activities. The newsletter is distributed to and read by people with varying degrees of expertise. Articles should be accurate in detail, sources/references must be given for factual information and opinions of the writer must be clearly identified as such. This newsletter will be posted online, so be very careful about listing your sources and getting permission for reprints. The editor has the final say on content, format and deadlines. Items for the newslet-

ter should be addressed to the Editor, c/o RCHS, P.O. Box 7823, Fredericksburg, VA 22404 or e-mailed to nana4979@comcast.net.

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