

## Formation and Naming of Mason County, West Virginia

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### Petitioning for a new county 1798-1803

Attempts to form a new county from part of Kanawha County began in 1798 with a petition submitted to the Virginia General Assembly by inhabitants of Kanawha County wishing to make access to the seat of county government more convenient. This petition was judged reasonable by the Committee for Propositions and Grievances but was rejected and withdrawn.

In 1799 another petition was presented to the Virginia General Assembly asking for a division of Kanawha County along the same boundaries as the 1798 petition. This petition was rejected and reported to the Assembly.

In 1800, once again, inhabitants of Kanawha County petitioned for division of Kanawha County to form a new county. The boundaries of the proposed county were slightly modified from the boundaries proposed in 1799. The petition was determined to be reasonable by the Committee for Propositions and Grievances but was rejected and withdrawn.

The persistent inhabitants of Kanawha County presented a petition (undated) for division of Kanawha County to a session of the Virginia General Assembly which began December 6, 1802. The area contained within the boundaries of the proposed county was reduced from the three earlier petitions. The date of submission is unclear, but was after Wood County was formed December 21, 1798, from Harrison County because the north boundary description for the proposed new county was the Wood County line rather than the Harrison County line used in the earlier petitions of 1798, 1799, and 1800. The petition asked that Point Pleasant be the seat of government for the new county. This petition was determined to be reasonable by the Committee for Propositions and Grievances and reported to the General Assembly but was rejected by the Senate on third reading January 25, 1803.

Undaunted by four unsuccessful attempts to form a new county, the inhabitants of Kanawha County petitioned the Virginia General Assembly in 1803 for a division of Kanawha County to form a new county with the seat of government to be Point Pleasant. The proposed boundaries were again reduced. The Committee for Propositions and Grievances found the petition to be reasonable on December 12, 1803, and reported it to the full General Assembly, which passed legislation creating the new county on January 2, 1804. The legislation stated "... : *beginning at the mouth of the Little Guyandott river, running from thence to the north-west corner of a survey of one thousand four hundred and thirty-seven and half acres made for Thomas Lewis in Teaze's valley near the house of Joshua Morris, from thence to the mouth of Little Hurricane creek, thence crossing the Kanawha river and taking a dividing ridge between Eighteen mile and Pocatallico creeks to the end thereof, thence pursuing a north-east direction till it intersects the Wood county line to the Ohio, thence down the Ohio to the beginning, **from and after the first day of May next, form one distinct county, and be called and known by the name of Mason county.***" The legislation did not state for whom the county was named.

The legislative journals for the 1803-1804 session (not available online) probably used the same boilerplate wording for the third reading of legislation forming new counties as seen in the 1795 House Journal regarding the formation of Hardy County by dividing Hampshire County:

*SATURDAY, December 3, 1785.*

*An engrossed bill, for dividing the county of Hampshire;" was read the third time, and the blanks therein filled up.*

*Resolved, That the bill do pass; and that the title be, "an act, for dividing the county of Hampshire."*

*Ordered, That Mr. Carter Henry Harrison do carry the bill to the Senate, and desire their concurrence.*

Of the "blanks therein filled up" was the name of the new county, as in the excerpt from the October 10, 1785, Hardy County statute:

*...to the dividing line between the counties of Shenandoah and Hampshire; and that all that part of the said county lying south of the said line shall be called and known by the name of Hardy;....*

## Naming of Counties by the Virginia General Assembly

Hugh Blair Grigsby (1806-1881), noted Virginia historian, describes the Virginia General Assembly's customary naming practice for counties formed during and after the Revolutionary War in his posthumously published article, "The History of the Virginia Federal Convention of 1788", Grigsby, 1890 (24-25). (*The History of the Virginia Federal Convention of 1788: With Some Account of Eminent Virginians of that Era who Were Members of the Body*, Hugh B. Grigsby (2, 24-25), published in Collections of the Virginia Historical Society, New Series Volume IX, 1890.) Relevant passages from the article:

[From page 2 footnote](#): *A discourse delivered before the Virginia Historical Society; in the Hall of the House of Delegates at Richmond, on the evening of February 23, 1858, and subsequently enlarged to the present History*  
[From page 24-25](#): ***Since the organization of the State Government In 1776 - a period of twelve years - no less than twenty-eight counties had been formed; and the naming of the new counties offered a graceful opportunity of honoring individual worth.<sup>29</sup> Posterity beholds in those names no uninstrutive memorial of the estimation in which the originals were held by their contemporaries. Indeed, from such materials, one skilled in the anatomy of history, might, in the absence of other sources of intelligence, reconstruct no inaccurate record of that age. Not one of those names had hitherto received any such expression of the public regard; for, up to this period, the name of no Virginian had been given to a county; and in the number and character of the new names, it is plainly seen that some remarkable public epoch had occurred. The history of Henry, Washington, Jefferson, Harrison, Campbell, Nelson, Randolph, Hardy, Russell, Woodford, Mercer, Madison, and Pendleton, is the history of their times. The names of Montgomery, Franklin, Lincoln, and Greene, show that in the great event which had transpired, and which had called forth so many of our own citizens, we had received the succor of our sister States; while the name of Fayette evokes the name of that chivalrous youth who, turning his back on the endearments of domestic life and the fascinations of the gayest metropolis in Europe, hastened to share with our fathers the toils and dangers of war, who attained to the rank of Major General in the armies of the United States, and held high command in our midst, and who won on the field of York his greenest laurel; and the name of Bourbon renews the recollection of that beneficent but unfortunate prince, without whose assistance the war of the Revolution might have lasted thirty years, and whose fleets and armies aided in gaining, in our behalf, and within the limits of this Commonwealth, one of the most glorious of those innumerable battles in which the banner of St. Louis had, during many centuries, been borne in triumph.***

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<sup>29</sup>*The names of the counties laid off in the interval between July, 1776. and June, 1788, were: Fluvanna, Rockingham, Rockbridge, Greenbrier, Henry, Kentucky, Washington, Montgomery, Ohio, Yohoganey, Monongalia, Powhatan, Illinois, Jefferson, Fayette, Lincoln, Harrison, Greensville, Campbell, Nelson, Franklin, Randolph, Hardy, Bourbon, Russell, Mercer, Madison, and Pendleton. The reader may wish to know on which of the patriots of the Revolution the honor of having a county called by his name was conferred. Patrick Henry received that honor. He was the first Governor of the State, and the old Colonial rule of naming a county after the existing Governor was applied with peculiar propriety in his case. But, at the same session, the county of Fincastle was divided into Kentucky, Washington, and Montgomery, and the name of Fincastle dropped, as was also, at the same session, the name of Dunmore, and Shenandoah substituted in its stead. At the session of the Assembly immediately after the adjournment of the present Convention, a county was called after George Mason and another after the gallant Woodford. Mason and Woodford counties were in the district of Kentucky, and were lost to us when the district became a State. So that at this time we have no county named after the author of the Declaration of Rights, and the General who gained the first victory of the Revolution. **The present Mason county was laid off in 1804-the year after the death of Stevens Thomson Mason, a distinguished patriot, long a member of both Houses of Assembly and of the Senate of the United States; and, I have understood, was called in honor of his name.***

### Which Mason?

Following the tradition of naming newly formed counties described by Grigsby, one should look at the people of note and events occurring in proximity to the formation of a county. A good example is the formation of Mason County, Kentucky in November of 1788 for which the legislative records are all available online.

[Mason Co Ky bill introduced](#) (House 10/25/1788, bottom of page)

[House Journal 3rd reading - blanks filled up 11/3/1788](#) (fourth bill under November 3, 1788)

[Mason County Kentucky- May 5, 1788 Senate Journal](#)

[Mason County KY House Journal](#) (passed House with Senate amendment November 5, 1788)

[Mason County KY statute](#) (November 5, 1788)

When the General Assembly passed legislation dividing Bourbon County to form Mason County (KY) in 1788, George Mason very well-known because of his well-publicized ([Mason's Objections to the Constitution-pamphlet addressed to citizens of Virginia](#)), reprinted from [Ford's Pamphlets on the Constitution](#) efforts related to the Bill of Rights during the Virginia Federal Convention of 1788. The U. S. Constitution was ratified by the Virginia Convention on June 26, 1788, with a resolution attached asking Congress to later amend the Constitution with a Bill of Rights. The resolution was a concession to get some votes for ratification from the "anti-federalists" led by George Mason and Patrick Henry. George Mason died October 7, 1792. Relying on the legislative records alone, gives no clue as to whether Mason County, now Kentucky, was named for a person named Mason, a generic stone mason, or as a reference to the Order of Masons. Therefore, a person must have some historical knowledge of the circumstances of the time when the county was created to ascertain for whom a county was named, as Mr. Grigsby describes in his text above.

The first West Virginia county I have found with its eponym written into the statute for creation of the county was [Mercer County in 1837](#) (Hugh Mercer). There are six West Virginia counties created by the Virginia General Assembly which have their eponym specified in the statute; Mercer, [Marion](#), [Wayne](#), [Barbour](#), [Boone](#) and [Raleigh](#). [Lincoln County](#), created in 1867 by the West Virginia Legislature, also has its eponym written into the statute. The remaining forty-eight West Virginia counties have no definitive legislative record of their eponyms. Analysis of the circumstantial record and events at the time of formation for each of the forty-eight counties is necessary to determine their correct eponyms, as recommended by Grigsby.

Examination of the historical circumstances during the 1803-1804 session of the Virginia General Assembly, when the petition of the inhabitants of Kanawha County was under consideration, yields the eponym for Mason County (now West Virginia).

Stevens Thomson Mason, United States Senator from Virginia, died in office May 10, 1803. On June 4, 1803, John Taylor (John Taylor of Caroline) was appointed by Virginia Governor, John Page, to temporarily fill Senator Mason's Senate seat until the Virginia General Assembly convened December 5, 1803 to elect someone to fill the Senate vacancy, as required by the U. S. Constitution (*...if Vacancies happen by Resignation, or otherwise, during the Recess of the Legislature of any State, the Executive thereof may make temporary Appointments until the next Meeting of the Legislature, which shall then fill such Vacancies*).

On December 7, 1803, Abraham B. Venable was elected by the Assembly to fill the vacancy created by Senator Mason's death. The petition to divide Kanawha County was reported out of the Committee for Propositions and Grievances December 12, 1803, just five days after the election of Sen. Stevens Thomson Mason's successor on December 7, 1803. The legislation forming Mason County passed on January 2, 1804. Holding to the political logic of the time, Senator Stevens Thomson Mason is the eponym for the new county.

There is absolutely no circumstantial evidence to support George Mason, who died in 1792, as the eponym for Mason County, WV.

### Tracing the Historical Error

The naming confusion begins in 1845 when a book written by Henry Howe of Connecticut was published. Mr. Howe erroneously cites George Mason as the eponym for Mason County (1804). Mr. Howe's error was compounded when Virgil A. Lewis' *The History of West Virginia in Two Parts* was published in 1889. Mr. Lewis used Mr. Howe's erroneous eponym for Mason County. Henry Howe visited Mason County in 1844 to collect information for his 1845 book, *Historical Collections of Virginia*, as noted by Virgil Lewis in his 1909 book, *History of the Battle of Point Pleasant*. Mr. Howe's reliance on exciting personal accounts of history and his lack of residential connection to Virginia may have induced his eponym error. It is very likely that residents of the western part of Virginia had little news or information about the events related to State and Federal legislative activities in 1803-1804. Western Virginians probably knew of George Mason due to his well-publicized activities related to the U. S. Constitution in the late 1780's, but had little, if any, knowledge of Stevens Thomson Mason as their U. S. Senator, since U. S. Senators were elected by the

General Assembly and not by direct popular vote. A combination of Mr. Howe's commercial rather than academic pursuit of history with the local perceptions of State/Federal Government activities led to his citation of George Mason as the eponym for Mason County. Since Virginia legislative records in the early 1800's did not state for whom new counties were named, a person would have to have some knowledge of Virginia politics, events and legislative process at the time of the formation of a county to discern for whom a new county was named.

In 1890, "The History of the Virginia Federal Convention of 1788", Grigsby, 1890 ([24](#)), was published, citing Stevens Thomson Mason as the Mason County eponym. This was in contradiction to Howe 1845, and Lewis 1889, references to George Mason. [Hugh Blair Grigsby](#) was president of the Virginia Historical Society from 1870 to 1881.

In 1892, Kate Mason Rowland in [The Life of George Mason, 1725-1792](#), 1892 v1:[180-181](#), while discussing the non-importation/non-exportation league, related the eponym of Mason County (Stevens Thomson Mason) to her great, great granduncle, George Mason with, *The battle of Point Pleasant was fought on the 10th of October, 1774, in which General Andrew Lewis contended against the "Northern Confederacy of Indians," led by "Cornstalk," the Shawnese chief. The Indians, it was believed, were instigated to enmity against the colonists by Lord Dunmore, who failed to come to Lewis' assistance, and this battle has been known in Virginia as the first one of the Revolution. It is interesting to trace here an association with George Mason's family, through his brother Thomson's eldest son. On the site of the battle-field has grown up the village of Point Pleasant, the capital of Mason County, now in West Virginia, the county being named after Stevens Thomson Mason, in 1804.*

When Virgil A. Lewis' textbook, [History and Government of West Virginia, was published in 1896](#); paraphrasing Hugh Grigsby's wording, *MASON, formed in 1804, from Kanawha, and named from Stevens Thompson Mason, a distinguished patriot, long a member of the General Assembly of Virginia, and United States Senator from 1794 to 1803*, to state Mason County was named for Stevens 'Thompson' Mason. Lewis corrected his erroneous 1889 [History of West Virginia in Two Parts](#) declaration that Mason County was named for George Mason. Most history texts and West Virginia government publications after 1896 used Lewis' wording from his 1896 book when attributing an eponym for Mason County. Virgil A. Lewis was a Mason County resident and West Virginia's first Historian and Archivist from 1905 to 1912.

In 1904, [Hand-Book of West Virginia: Its History, Natural Resources, Industrial Enterprises, And Institutions ....](#) [Charleston, W. Va.] was written by Virgil Lewis, prepared and published under the direction of the West Virginia Commission of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in which Mason County's eponym is Stevens Thompson Mason.

Stevens Thomson Mason as Mason County eponym continued with the [1907 Manual of the State of West Virginia for the Years of 1907-1908](#) and [1916 West Virginia Legislative Hand Book and Manual and Official Register](#) (Blue Book). The 1907 Manual and 1916-1920 Blue Book descriptions for Mason County state Mason County was named for Stevens 'Thompson' Mason, using Virgil Lewis' 1896 wording.

In the [1921 Blue Book](#), the Mason County description was shortened, omitting the county eponym. This volume of the Blue Book contained about half the number of pages of the 1920 Blue Book. The shortened description continued until 1927, when the Mason County description was expanded to include Lewis' 1889 wording listing George Mason as the eponym. This change could be related to the fires that destroyed the West Virginia Capitol in 1921 and 1927 (most likely), Clifford Myers being West Virginia State Historian (he was from Mason County), the Mason County Clerk (John Aten) submitting new county information based on Lewis' 1889 book to the WV Senate Clerk for inclusion in the 1927 Blue Book, or a change in editor of the Blue Book. It is possible the convergence of the above circumstances caused the eponym error in the 1927 Blue Book.

### **The Correct Eponym for Mason County, West Virginia – Stevens Thomson Mason**

After reviewing the available historical resources, considering the circumstances of the formation of Mason County and events surrounding the change in Mason County eponym in the West Virginia Legislative Handbook and Manual and Official Register (West Virginia Blue Book) from Stevens Thomson Mason to George Mason in 1927, there is no doubt that Stevens Thomson Mason is the correct eponym for Mason County, West Virginia.

**1845 [Howe](#)** (1816-1893)

The first reference found of an eponym for Mason County WV (1804) is in Henry Howe's [Historical collections of Virginia: containing a collection of the most interesting facts, traditions, biographical sketches, anecdotes, &c., relating to its history and antiquities, together with geographical and statistical descriptions to which is appended an historical and descriptive sketch of the District of Columbia](#), published in 1845, 1846, 1852. Mr. Howe's work is largely anecdotal and states on [page 360](#), "Mason was formed in 1804 from Kanawha, and named from the celebrated statesman George Mason." On pages [260-261](#) Mr. Howe described George Mason, "Gunston Hall, which was the seat of the celebrated GEORGE MASON, stands on an elevated and commanding site overlooking the Potomac. Mr. Jefferson said that he was "of the first order of wisdom, among those who acted on the theatre of the revolution, of expansive mind, profound judgment, cogent in argument, learned in the lore of our former constitution, and earnest for the republican change on democratic principles. His eloquence was neither flowing nor smooth; but his language was strong, his manner most impressive, and strengthened by a dash of biting criticism when provocation made it seasonable." Mr. Mason was the framer of the constitution of Virginia, and a member of the convention which formed the federal constitution, but he did not sign that instrument. In conjunction with Patrick Henry, he opposed its adoption in the Virginia convention, believing that it would tend to the conversion of the government into a monarchy. He also opposed the slave trade with great zeal. He died at his seat in the autumn of 1792, aged 67 years."

**1878 [Atkinson](#)** (1845-1925)

George Wesley Atkinson wrote [History of Kanawha County: From Its Organization In 1789 Until the Present Time; Embracing Accounts of Early Settlements, And Thrilling Adventures With the Indians. Also, Biographical Sketches of a Large Number of the Early Settlers of the Great Kanawha Valley. Illustrated by Numerous Engravings](#), which was published in 1878. Mr. Atkinson was Governor of West Virginia from 1897 to 1901. His work appears to emulate Henry Howe 1845 as evidenced by the title. His Mason County naming attribution appears to a paraphrasal of Howe 1845 when, on [page 17](#) he says, "[Mason County] Was the first territory that was taken from Kanawha. It became evident that Kanawhaians could very well get along with a less number of square miles of land than they possessed, so a proposition was agreed to, allowing the Legislature to establish a new county from the north-western portion of Kanawha county, to be called the county of Mason, in honor of the distinguished Virginia statesman, Hon. George Mason. Accordingly, in 1804, an act was passed to that effect, and Mason took her place in the roll of Virginia counties, ..."

**1889 [Lewis](#)** (1848-1912)

Next, a county naming reference was found on [page 616](#) in noted West Virginia historian Virgil A. Lewis' 1889 [History of West Virginia in Two Parts](#) which says, "The county was formed from Kanawha by an Act of the General Assembly passed January 2, 1804, and was named in honor of the celebrated George Mason, one of the prominent actors on the theatre of the Revolution. He was born in 1725, and early in life won the esteem of his fellow-citizens, who paid him homage because of his expansive mind, profound judgment, cogency in argument and learning in constitutional law. He was the deviser of the Constitution of Virginia, and a member of the Convention which framed the Federal Constitution, but he did not sign that instrument. In connection with Patrick Henry he opposed its ratification by the Virginia Convention, believing that it would be the conversion of the Government into a monarchy. He died at 'Gunstan Hall', his country seat, in 1792." Mr. Lewis appears to have used Henry Howe as a source.

**1890 [Grigsby](#)** (1806-1881)

In 1890, The Virginia Historical Society published [Collections of the Virginia Historical Society, New Series Volume IX](#), which contained a biographical tribute to Hugh Blair Grigsby, President of The Virginia Historical Society from 1870 until his death in 1881, and Mr. Grigsby's "*The History of the Virginia Federal Convention of 1788*". In footnote 29 on [page 24](#), Mr. Grigsby states, "The present Mason county was laid off in 1804 – the year after the death of Stevens Thomson Mason, a distinguished patriot, long a member of both Houses of Assembly and of the Senate of the United States; and, I have understood, was called in honor of his name."

(From footnote 2 on [page 2](#) describing his undertaking of writing a history of the Virginia Federal Convention of 1788 at the request of the Historical Society of Virginia: "*A discourse delivered before the Virginia Historical Society; in the Hall of the House of Delegates at Richmond, on the evening of February 23, 1858, and subsequently enlarged to the present History.*")

**1892 Rowland** (1840-1916)

The Life of George Mason 1725-1792 (two volumes), 1892, by Kate Mason Rowland, in volume 1 on page [181](#) states, "(...) the village of Point Pleasant, the capital of Mason County, now in West Virginia, the county being named after Stevens Thomson Mason, in 1804." Ms. Rowland was related to both George Mason and Stevens Thomson Mason. Ms. Rowland was also a member of the Virginia Historical Society.

**1896 Lewis** (1848-1912) **History and Government of West Virginia**

A textbook by Virgil A. Lewis published in 1896 declares on [page 266](#), "MASON, formed in 1804, from Kanawha, and named from Stevens Thompson Mason, a distinguished patriot, long a member of the General Assembly of Virginia, and United States Senator from 1794 to 1803;". Mr. Lewis' description contains a different spelling of Thomson, which is carried to later texts by other authors. Virgil Lewis appears to have used Hugh Grigsby's 1890 eponym, Stevens Thomson Mason. Mr. Lewis was elected the Historical Society of Virginia in 1880 and likely knew its president, Mr. Grigsby, as well as Ms. Rowland. This textbook was reprinted in 1904 and 1912 with the county description section moved to the back of the book, pages 405 and 413 respectively.

**After 1900:**

Eight books after 1900 cite *Stevens "Thompson" Mason* as Mason County's eponym. The county descriptions are Virgil Lewis' 1896 account, with Thomson spelled "Thompson". Those books are:

- [Johnston, David E.](#) 1845-1917. A History of Middle New River Settlements And Contiguous Territory.
- Huntington, W. Va.: Standard Ptg. & Pub. Co., 1906. ([page 375](#))
- *The Manual of the State of West Virginia for the Years of 1907-1908* issued by C.W. Swisher, Secretary of State in 1907 [page 226](#)
- Myers, S. b. 1861. Myers' History of West Virginia. [Wheeling, W. Va.: Wheeling News Lithograph Co.], 1915. (Volume 2, [page 7](#))
- 1916-1920 West Virginia Legislative Hand Book and Manual and Official Register (Blue Book), 1916 [page 115](#)

**1904 Lewis** (1848-1912) **"Hand-Book of West Virginia"**

West Virginia: Its History, Natural Resources, Industrial Enterprises, And Institutions .... [Charleston, W. Va.]: Prepared and published under the direction of the West Virginia Commission of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, states on [page 56](#): "MASON, formed in 1804, from part of Kanawha, and named from Stevens Thompson Mason, a distinguished patriot, long a member of the Virginia Assembly, and United States Senator from 1794 to 1803;"

**1905 McCulloch** (1845-1925) ***WV Historical Magazine quarterly v5, no. 2, "Point Pleasant, 1749-1905"***

Delia A. McCulloch, WV State Historian for DAR appears to paraphrase Howe 1845/Lewis 1889. On [page 94 \(742\)](#) states, "Mason county was formed from Kanawha, Jan. 2, 1804, and named in honor of George Mason, a prominent man of the Revolution."

**1911 West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey Bulletin**

Page "It was formed from Kanawha county by an act of the General Assembly passed in 1804 and was named in honor of the celebrated George Mason, one of the prominent actors in the Revolutionary War (see Lewis' History of Mason County)."

**1913 Miller, Maxwell West Virginia and its People v1**

Thomas C. Miller (1848-1928) and Hu Maxwell (1860-1927) paraphrase Howe 1845/Lewis 1889 on [page 416](#), when they say, "Mason County-The present area of Mason county is 432 square miles. It was formed from Kanawha county, January 2, 1804, and was named in honor of George Mason, of revolutionary fame. He was one of the framers of the Virginia constitution and had to do with the making of the United States constitution. He, with Patrick Henry, opposed the ratification of the Virginia constitution, believing that it tended to monarchy."

**1915 WV Dept. of Agriculture Bulletin vol. 1, 1913-1914**

[Page 59](#)) states, "Mason lies along the Ohio river and was formed from Kanawha County in 1804. Named for Stephen Thompson Mason, a United States Senator from Virginia."

**1916 Robinson** (1876-1943)

In the "Bulletin of the Virginia State Library" v.9, Virginia Counties: Those Resulting from Virginia Legislation by Morgan P. Robinson, 1916, [page 185](#) lists George Mason as Mason County's eponym, citing Lewis' History of West Virginia in Two Parts, p. 616.

### **1921-1926 West Virginia Blue Book**

The West Virginia Blue Books, 1921-1926, contain no eponym for Mason County. [1921, page 120](#)  
“Formed in 1804 from part of Kanawha; land area 475 square miles; population 21,459 in 1920.”

### **1927-present West Virginia Blue Book**

Beginning in 1927 and continuing to present, the [West Virginia Blue Book](#) began reporting Mason County was named for George Mason. Text from 1927 Blue Book, page 128: “(...) In selecting a name for this county, Virginia honored one of its most distinguished sons, George Mason. Mr. Mason was born in Virginia in 1725, and early in life won recognition for his native abilities. He was the author of the Constitution of Virginia and a member of the convention that framed the Federal Constitution. This latter document he opposed, believing that it tended toward monarchy and would lead the new republic into monarchism. He died at Gunston Hall, his county seat in Fairfax County, Virginia, full of years and honors.” There is no citation or reference given for the change from Stevens Thomson Mason to George Mason. The 1927 wording seems to be paraphrased from Howe 1845/Lewis 1889.

The [West Virginia Blue Book 2012](#) description for Mason County on page 629 states, “Formed in 1804 from the western portion of Kanawha County and named for George Mason, author of the Constitution of Virginia and a member of the convention that framed the Constitution of the United States.”, which appears to be a variation of Howe 1845/Lewis 1889.

### **Discussion:**

One of the first legislative items of the 1803-1804 session of the Virginia General Assembly, which began December 5, 1803, was to fill the vacancy in the U. S. Senate created by the death of [Stevens Thomson Mason](#), U. S. Senator from Virginia, who died in office on May 10, 1803. On December 7, 1803, the Assembly elected Abraham Venable to fill the vacancy created by Mason’s death, just 26 days before passing a bill creating Mason County on January 2, 1804. Common political logic dictates that the General Assembly would honor their recently deceased colleague, Stevens Thomson Mason, rather than George Mason, who had been dead for almost twelve years, and for whom the Assembly had named Mason County, Kentucky in 1788.

The three pre-1900 authors (Grigsby, Rowland and Lewis) who cite Stevens Thomson Mason as Mason County’s eponym carry considerable weight, because they were noted historians and familiar with Virginia politics. All three were members of the Virginia Historical Society. Hugh Grigsby had served in the General Assembly, Kate Mason Rowland was of the Mason family (niece of Stevens Thomson Mason’s grandson and great, great grandniece of George Mason), and Virgil Lewis was their contemporary who lived in Mason County and was West Virginia’s first State Historian. Hugh Blair Grigsby married [Mary Venable Carrington](#) (1813-1894). She was the daughter of [Clement Carrington](#) (1756-1847) who was the son of [Paul Carrington](#) (1760-1818) and sister of [Mary Scott Carrington](#) (1760-1837). Mary Scott Carrington was married to [Samuel Woodson Venable](#) (1756-1851) who was the son of [Nathaniel Venable](#) (1730-1804), a brother of [Abraham Bedford Venable](#) (1758-1811). [Abraham Bedford Venable](#) was elected by the Virginia General Assembly to fill the unexpired term of United States Senator from Virginia, Stevens Thomson Mason (1794-1803) on December 7, 1803, twenty-six days before legislation passed creating Mason County on January 2, 1804. Mr. Grigsby’s genealogical connection, by marriage, to Senator Abraham Venable would give him unique standing to make the definitive call as to naming of Mason County in 1804. It is very likely Mr. Grigsby had read [family papers](#) which justified his statement of the naming of Mason County for Stevens Thomson Mason.

Authors of works published after 1900 who say Mason County was named for George Mason may not have been aware of Grigsby 1890, Rowland 1892 or Lewis 1896, since Grigsby and Rowland mentioned Mason County’s eponym as an aside while detailing other primary topics and Lewis’ textbook may not have been viewed as a historical reference. After Lewis’ 1896 textbook, there seems to be deference in WV State publications to Virgil Lewis’ *Stevens Thompson Mason* until 1921 when [West Virginia Legislative Hand Book and Manual and Official Register](#) listed no eponym for Mason County and in 1927 cited George Mason.

Justification for [West Virginia Legislative Hand Book and Manual and Official Register](#) (Blue Book) change from *Stevens Thompson Mason* to George Mason has yet to be documented.

### **Conclusion:**

Mason County West Virginia was named for Stevens Thomson Mason.

## Timeline of significant events:

- 1776 – December 1, effective December 31, Kentucky County formed from Fincastle County
- 1780 – June 30, Kentucky County divided into Fayette, Jefferson, Lincoln counties
- 1787 – Constitutional Convention, George Mason was a delegate but refused to sign the final document. Mason's refusal to sign the new Constitution cost him greatly, as he lost the friendship of Washington and others over his refusal to endorse the document in its final form.
- 1788 – June 26, Virginia Federal Convention - U.S. Constitution ratified by Virginia
- 1788 – November 5, effective May 1, 1789, Mason County (KY) formed from Bourbon County
- 1791 – December 15, articles three through twelve were ratified by the required number of states and became known as the Bill of Rights
- 1792 – June 1 -- State of Kentucky formed from state of Virginia
- 1792 – October 7, George Mason died
- 1803 – May 10, U. S. Senator from Virginia/Majority Leader, Stevens Thomson Mason Died
- 1803 – Summer/Fall – Petition to create (Mason) county from Kanawha submitted to Virginia General Assembly
- 1803 – June 4, John Taylor appointed to fill U. S. Senate seat of Stevens Thomson Mason
- 1803 – December 5, Virginia General Assembly convenes
- 1803 – December 7, Virginia General Assembly elects Abraham Venable to fill Stevens Thomson Mason's unexpired U. S. Senate term
- 1804 – January 2, effective May 1, 1804, Virginia General Assembly approves creation of Mason County
- 1846 – Henry Howe, Historical Collections of Virginia; containing a collection of the most interesting facts... 360, (Mason County named for George Mason)
- 1876 – George Wesley Atkinson, History of Kanawha County: from its organization in 1789 until (...), (Mason County named for George Mason)
- 1889 – Virgil A. Lewis, History of West Virginia in Two Parts (Mason County named for George Mason)
- 1890 – Hugh Blair Grigsby, "The History of the Virginia Federal Convention of 1788", published in *Collections of the Virginia Historical Society*, set 1, n.s. 9, page 25, footnote 29 (Mason County, KY named for George Mason; Mason County, WV named for Stevens Thomson Mason)
- 1892 – Kate Mason Rowland, The Life of George Mason, 1725-1792, v1 181 (Mason County named for Stevens Thomson Mason)
- 1896 – Virgil Lewis, History and Government of West Virginia, 266, textbook (Mason County named for Stevens Thompson Mason) reprinted in 1904 and 1912
- 1905-1912 – Virgil A. Lewis (from Mason County), WV State Historian (first)
- 1906 – David E. Johnston, A History of The Middle New River Settlements and Contiguous Territory, (Mason County named for Stevens Thompson Mason, appendix B)
- 1905 – Delia A. McCulloch, *West Virginia historical magazine quarterly* v5, No. 2; "Point Pleasant, 1749-1905" (Mason County named for George Mason)
- 1907 – Manual of the State of West Virginia for the Years of 1907-1908 (Mason County named for Stephens Thompson Mason)
- 1913 – Miller, Maxwell, West Virginia and its people v1 (Mason County named for George Mason)
- 1915 – S. (Sylvester) Myers, Myers' History of West Virginia vol. 2 (Mason County named for Stevens Thompson Mason)
- 1915 – WV Department of Agriculture *Bulletin* vol.1, 1913-1914 (Mason County named for Stephen Thompson Mason)
- 1916 – Morgan P. Robinson, Virginia Counties: Those Resulting from Virginia Legislation, originally published as *Bulletin of the Virginia State Library, Vol. 9, April, May, June 1916* (Mason County named for George Mason, Cites Lewis, 616, History of W. Va. In Two Parts, 1889)
- 1916-1920 – WV Blue Book, *West Virginia Legislative Hand Book and Manual and Official Register* (Mason County named for Stevens Thompson Mason)
- 1919 – Clifford Myers (from Mason County) appointed WV State Historian
- 1921 – January 3, West Virginia Capitol destroyed by fire (Many important records were saved for posterity because the State Law Library, the State Historical Library, the Archives and the State Museum were all housed in the Capitol Annex.)
- 1921-1926 – WV Blue Book (no Mason County eponym)
- 1927 – March 2, West Virginia "Pasteboard Capitol" destroyed by fire
- 1927-Present – WV Blue Book (Mason County named for George Mason)
- 1933 – West Virginia Legislative Hand Book and Manual and Official Register officially designated as West Virginia Blue Book