



St. Andrew's Society of Washington, DC

The 18th Century Scottish Origins of Washington, DC: Early Scots in Georgetown and Washington City – Implications for Our Society

- 1. The first land grant in what is now Georgetown was made in 1703, on behalf of Queen Anne, by Charles Culvert, "Absolute Lord and Proprietor of the Province of Maryland", to a Scottish immigrant, Colonel Ninian Beall.***
 - The core of this land grant, originally called "the Rock of Dumbarton", survives today as the Dumbarton Oaks Estate, located at Wisconsin Avenue and "R" Street, NW in Upper Georgetown.
 - Ninian Beall was born in Largs, Fifeshire, in 1625. He fought for King Charles II against Cromwell and the English at the Battle of Dunbar in 1650, was captured, sold into indentured servitude, and transported first to Barbados, then to Maryland. After completing his term of indenture, he received a grant of 50 acres from the Maryland Assembly for bringing out other Scottish immigrants to settle here.
 - An experienced soldier, Col. Beall rose to the rank of Commander of the Maryland Provincial Militia. He died in 1717, bequeathing all his Maryland property, including the Rock of Dumbarton Estate in what is now Georgetown, to his 12 children—six sons and six daughters.
 - Thus was founded an early Scottish-American dynasty (whose descendants are still with us today), which was to shape much of the 18th century history of the Province (later State of Maryland), the Port of Georgetown, and Washington City.
- 2. Alexandria was settled by Scottish merchants in 1749 as a tobacco port town, originally called "Belle Haven" (its first buildings located where the Belle Haven Country Club now stands, on the banks of the Potomac between Old Town Alexandria and Mount Vernon). But Alexandria's longtime commercial rival (for the past 260 years called "Georgetown"), was located directly across the Potomac River from Alexandria and was likewise settled by Scottish merchants, and at almost exactly the same time--in 1745 —also as a tobacco port town.***
- 3. Scots so predominated there in the mid-18th century that Georgetown's original name was "New Scotland."*** Large Scottish merchant houses based in Glasgow dominated the tobacco trade on the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers and along the Chesapeake from the early 1740s through to the time of the American Revolution, 35 years later. These truly "international" firms employed "factors" (agents) in both Alexandria and Georgetown as

well as elsewhere (like Bladensburg, MD) and sent apprentices from Scotland to work for them in these locations—both as free laborers and as indentured servants.

4. *The most prominent Scottish merchants doing business in Georgetown during the colonial period was the firm of John Glassford & Company—Glasgow's largest tobacco merchant house.* Though Glassford himself never travelled to America, he, his sons and their partners controlled a major portion of the Chesapeake tobacco trade. Through his local **factors**—invariably other prominent Scotsmen who had already settled in Virginia and Maryland (including Robert Fergusson at Georgetown), Glassford & Co. established a system of tobacco warehouses as well as branch stores along both sides of the Potomac—selling hardware, spirits, sugar, salt, and slaves to local settlers and buying tobacco directly from the local farmers.
5. *A group of prominent Scottish merchants and landowners, all residents of what would later be called Georgetown, governed the town (under a formal and exclusive delegation of power from the Maryland Assembly) from the middle of the 18th century until well after the American Revolution. These Scottish dynasties—the Bealls, **Gordons**, Peters, Magruders, **Dunlops**, Davidsons, **Bowies**, and others, put a clearly Scottish stamp on Georgetown during the first 50+ years of its existence.*
 - Large parcels of land in what was to become Georgetown were already owned in 1751 by a dozen or more of these wealthy Scottish merchants—land extending from east to west, the length of what is now "M" Street, NW, down the entire length of the Georgetown waterfront, and north up the nearby hill, on both sides of what is now Wisconsin Avenue, NW as far north as the Dumbarton Oaks Estate on what is now "R" Street, NW.
 - Many of the mansion houses built by this and the next generation of local Scottish merchants still stand today in Georgetown residential neighborhoods—including, among others, Dumbarton Oaks (originally called simply, "The Oaks"), Dumbarton House, **Evermay**, Halcyon House, Pretty Prospect, Tudor Place, etc.
6. In 1751, the Maryland Provincial Assembly appointed eight (8) Commissioners to formally lay out a town (which subsequently was named "George Towne", now Georgetown) and once laid out, to govern it. *Of the eight (8) original Commissioners of George Towne, at least six (6) were Scots (George **Beall**, Josiah **Beall**, Cpt. Henry Wright Crabb, George Gordon, and James Perrie).*
 - From 1754 until 1785, 11 Successor Commissioners were appointed from time to time by the Maryland Assembly to fill vacancies in the ranks of the original eight. Of these additional 11, at least seven (7) were Scots (Robert Peter, John Murdoch, Thomas **Beall**, Benjamin Stoddert, Samuel Davidson, John Peter, and Adam Steuart).
 - The Commissioners of George Towne employed a Clerk and Surveyor to assist them in their oversight responsibilities. Of the five successive Clerks of George Towne

between 1751 and 1782, the first three were Scots (Alexander **Beall** (1751-57), Josiah **Beall** (1757-74), and Robert Ferguson (1774)).

7. *The survey of the town that would come to be called "George Town" (later Georgetown) was completed in 1752. Portions of George **Beall's** land and George Gordon's adjacent land were found "most convenient" for the laying out of the new town. (Each gentleman was offered two lots plus the cost of condemnation, by right of eminent domain).*
 - *The town was NOT named for the Sovereign of Great Britain, but rather for George **Beall** and George Gordon, the two Scotsmen from whose land tracts the town was created.*
 - *Meetings of the Commissioners of George Towne were held at least once annually (in private houses) every year from 1751 **til** 1789, when at last George Towne was incorporated. It was not chartered as a "burgh city" and was not to have elected aldermen or mayors. Instead, the Maryland colonial Assembly reserved the power to appoint its governing board—the so-called "Commissioners of Georgetown"—and each of them to life terms. (Georgetown did not acquire the right to elected self-government until after the Revolution.)*
8. *The first Mayor of the newly incorporated Georgetown in 1790 was Robert Peter, a second generation Scot and a major Georgetown landowner and **merchant**. His family, builders and original owners of Tudor place, married in with the Custis family, relations of President George Washington, and continued to live at Tudor Place in Georgetown **til** the 1960s.*
9. *The first Postmaster of the newly incorporated Georgetown in 1790 was William Magruder, also a second generation Scot and also a major landowner and merchant.*
 - Magruder's Grocers, still in operation in Georgetown, is owned by one of his direct descendants.
 - These Magruder's were **MacGregors**; a number of them were founding members of the American Clan Gregor Society in the United States (1908).
 - Confederate General James Longstreet was a **Magruder** on his mother's side.
10. *In 1780, a small congregation of mainly Scots Presbyterians who had met informally in private houses since 1760 founded a church in Georgetown, under the leadership of Rev. Stephen Bloomer Balch, a pupil of Scots-born John Witherspoon, a signer of the Declaration of independence. Subsequently called Georgetown Presbyterian Church, it exists to this day **and** is the oldest continuously operating Christian congregation in Washington, DC.*
 - *Many of the Scots-born founders of Georgetown are buried in its kirkyard. (Though the church has moved locations since its founding, these graves were relocated with it.)*

- *Its Pastor, from the time of his arrival from Scotland in 1980 til his retirement in 2002, was Rev. Campbell **Gillon**. During these years, Rev. **Gillon** was also Chaplain of the St. Andrew's Society of Washington, DC. (He still lives part-time in the Greater Washington area and is now Chaplain emeritus of our Society.)*

11. When the US Constitution was ratified in 1790, Article I, Section 8, Paragraph 17 created a federal enclave, the District of Columbia, from land donated by both Maryland and Virginia. *Both the existing port city of Alexandria and the existing port city of Georgetown were assimilated from that year onward into the newly created District of Columbia.*

12. *Along with this creation by Congress of the District of Columbia, Washington City began to be constructed in 1791 on land partially purchased from gentleman farmer David Burnes, grandson of a Scottish immigrant of the same name (b. 1695.), who at his death in 1760 owned 700 acres of prime bottom land in rural Maryland near Tiber Creek and the Potomac—land that was later to become prime real estate in Washington, DC.*

13. *It was the landholdings of David Burnes II, grandson of the Scottish immigrant of the same name, on which much of **Official** Washington was to be built. He was the "obstinate Mr. Burnes" who for a long period refused to sell his extensive land holdings to President George Washington for the erection of the Federal City and the laying out of Pennsylvania Avenue.*

- *On that **land**, for which Burnes reluctantly accepted \$1 million from the new United States Government, now sits the south side of the US Capitol Building, the entire Washington Mall, most of the President's House (the White House), all of the Treasury Department, all of the Ellipse behind the White House, and all of Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol to the White House.*
- *Burnes died in 1799 and was survived by a daughter, Marcia, a very wealthy heiress who in 1802 married Senator John Van Ness of New York—the **first** Mayor of Washington City (1830-34). They built a large mansion directly across from the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue, on a small parcel of land still left to them after the Federal City was laid out.*

14. *Another famous Scot of importance in early Washington, DC was David Stuart (b. 1753, d. circa 1814). Born in Scotland, Stuart studied medicine and languages at the University of St. Andrews. Emigrating to America, he established a practice in Alexandria, and in 1783 became a relative of George Washington's when he married Eleanor Calvert Custis, widow of Washington's stepson, John Parker Custis. (A number of letters from Washington to Stuart exist, concerning family matters and Virginia politics.)*

- *Stuart served as a representative to the Virginia House of Delegates and also to the Virginia Convention of 1788 that ratified the U. S. Constitution.*

- In 1790 Stuart was appointed by President Washington as one of the three Commissioners of the Federal City to oversee the siting and planning of the new capital—which was called by the Commissioners "Washington City." He served on the Commission until at least 1793.

15. ***Yet another very famous Scottish-American Georgetown resident was Colonel Benjamin Stoddert***—like David Steuart, one of the three Commissioners appointed by President Washington to plan the location of the Capitol Building and other key Federal Government buildings. But Stoddert's reputation far exceeded that of his two colleagues on the Commission: The grandson of an early Scottish immigrant to Maryland, Benjamin Stoddert (b. 1751) was a major figure in the early years of the Republic. Starting life as a merchant in his father's firm in nearby Bladensburg, MD, he saw action as a cavalry officer during the American Revolution. After being seriously wounded in the field, Stoddert was appointed Secretary to the Continental Board of War. A staunch Federalist and close friend of General (later President) George Washington, after the war Stoddert was appointed by Washington as one of the three Commissioners to site and plan the key federal buildings in the new Nation's Capital. It was Stoddert who conceived the name for the new capital city: "Washington City." In 1783, Stoddert established a tobacco export business in Georgetown, together with business partners Uriah Forrest and John Murdoch; it was an extremely successful venture and made him a wealthy man. In 1798, then President John Adams appointed Stoddert to be the first Secretary of the Navy; he held that post until **1801**—during which time he built up the Navy and oversaw action against France in the Caribbean. A wealthy man, Stoddert lived and entertained in Georgetown, where he built Halcyon House (at 34th & Prospects Streets, NW), still standing. (The gardens at Halcyon House were designed by Pierre L'Enfant, the main architect of the new federal city.) Stoddert's tobacco business, like most commercial activity in the Port of Georgetown, suffered a severe decline because of the War of 1812 and the consequent British Embargo on American exports. Stoddert died in 1813 and is buried in nearby Seat Pleasant, MD.

16. ***Yet another famous Scottish-American of early Georgetown was Colonel Washington Bowie, 6.1776 to Allen Bowie, a major property-owner in Frederick County, MD and himself the grandson of Scottish immigrant John Bowie, who arrived in Maryland in 1706.*** (The Bowies were a leading family in colonial Maryland and afterwards; Ogden Bowie was Governor of Maryland in the late 1800s and the town of Bowie (in Prince George's County, the third largest town in Maryland) was named after him.) Washington Bowie was the godson of President George Washington, who was present at his christening. The famous frontiersman Colonel James ("Jim") Bowie, who died at the Alamo, was a distant cousin. By 1810, Washington Bowie had grown up to be a prosperous tobacco merchant in Georgetown, a colonel in the Maryland Militia, and one of the wealthiest men in the newly built Washington City. He was also one of the founding vestrymen of St. John's Episcopal Church, built in 1797 in Georgetown and in continuous operation (at its original "O" Street, NW location) to this day.

17. ***From 1790 until its retrocession to Virginia in 1846, the City of Alexandria (plus what was formerly called Alexandria County, now Arlington County, VA) were part of the District of Columbia.*** This was a key period of half a century, during the formative years of our National Government.

18. According to surviving newspaper local accounts, ***the St. Andrew's Society of Alexandria was founded in 1787.***

- Its first President was Robert Hunter, a Scottish merchant who was later Mayor of Alexandria and a confidant of President George Washington. (He is buried in the graveyard of the Old Presbyterian Meeting House in Old Town, Alexandria.)
- The last mention of a meeting of the old St. Andrew's Society of Alexandria occurred in 1851.

During 56 of the 64 years of its recorded existence (1787-1851), the St. Andrew's Society of Alexandria operated in a town which was part of the District of Columbia. This clearly qualifies it to be called the "predecessor society" of our current St. Andrew's Society of Washington, DC.

19. ***A new St. Andrew's Society of Washington, DC was founded in 1855 in the District of Columbia*** by Scottish immigrant William Robertson Smith (b. 1828), and five other Scottish-Americans.

- Smith served for decades as President of the Society. For 60 years he also served as the well-known Superintendent of the Botanic Gardens, located at the foot of Capitol Hill, which is where the Society always met (In his offices).
- Smith was a vocal opponent of the Civil War in the years leading up to it and from his writings appears to have been a Southern sympathizer, though not a secessionist. After the war, he fervently opposed placing the monument to General Ulysses Grant on land that was previously part of his Gardens. In the end he lost, which deeply embittered him toward the Congress, his employer.

Smith was a close friend of Andrew Carnegie and a Mason. At his death he donated his extensive collection of first edition works of Robert Burns to the Scottish Rite Masonic Temple on 16th Street in Washington, DC—where it resides to this day.

20. ***In their day, both of these societies operated exclusively within the District of Columbia.***

- There is no record of ANY overlap in time between the old St. Andrew's Society of Alexandria and the new St. Andrew's Society of Washington, DC. In fact there is a four-year gap between the last recorded meeting of the former and the first-recorded meeting of the latter. But

- We know the names of the six founding members of the new DC Society in 1855, though we do not know the names of any of the last-remaining members of the older Society in 1851. Could there have been overlap?
- It has been asserted by some that none of the founding members of the new Society belonged to the older Society, but apart from the President, William Robertson Smith, who was a recent immigrant from Scotland, this has not been proven. And absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

21. ***Yet another “re-foundation” of our Society occurred in 1908***, when FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME the St. Andrew's Society of Washington, DC was incorporated.

- All the "modern" features and practices of our Society—such as our Code of Bylaws, the annual election of our officers, etc.—date back only to this 1908 re-founding.
- As a matter of corporate law, all corporations are "persons," and their legal life span is "in perpetuity" from the date of their incorporation onward, unless later formally dissolved. That means that all corporations have a birth day.
- By law, the official birthday of our Society is May 18, 1908 (the date of its incorporation), at Noon—NOT 1855, as is asserted by some.
- Though the five Society incorporators in 1908 included William Robertson Smith (then an elderly man), the others (William Fraser Small, William Ramsay, John McGregor, J.H. Small, Jr., and Archibald McLechlen) were different persons from those who with Smith founded the 1855 Society.

22. ***Unlike its one-time commercial rival Alexandria, Georgetown remains a part of the District of Columbia to this day (1790–2011)***. It lost its status as a separate town within DC in 1871 and was administratively merged with Washington City into what, after that date, came to be called "Washington, DC."

23. ***Whether there ever existed a St. Andrew's Society of Old George Towne, as existed right across the river in neighboring Olde Towne Alexandria, is a matter that requires original research. But with some diligent effort, the answer to this question can probably be arrived at.***

- Many primary source documents relating to the Scottish origins of Georgetown and Washington City still exist in public archives in Georgetown and elsewhere in Washington, DC (at the newly restored and reopened Georgetown Library, at the Washington Historical Society, at the Library of Congress, at the Georgetown Presbyterian Church, etc.) and should be reviewed by members of our Society to answer this question about whether an early St. Andrew's Society ever existed in Georgetown in the 18th century.
- Given the clear Scottish origins of the town (originally called "New Scotland"), its complete economic and political domination for the first 50+ years of its existence

by a wealthy group of first and second generation Scottish merchants and landowners, and the fact that Scots tended to establish St. Andrew's society wherever they settled in significant numbers, the existence of an early (18th century) St. Andrew's Society in Georgetown is extremely likely.

- As Scottish immigrants tended to establish such societies wherever they settled, is it unlikely that so many Scots gathered in Georgetown for so many generations failed to follow this pattern, too? No, it is not likely.
- If so, it would have been the FIRST St. Andrew's Society of Washington, DC.
- To date, it appears that this research has NEVER been attempted by anyone on behalf of our Society—despite the existence of many books about the Scottish origins of Georgetown and of Washington City, and the relatively easy access to many primary source records right here in our Nation's Capital. Why not? Regardless, it is high time for our Society to undertake this research challenge!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arnbeck, Robert, *Through a fiery Trial: Building Washington, 1790-1800* (Chapter 1, "The General and His Plan")(Madison Books, 1991).

Ecker, Grace Dunlop, A *Portrait of Old Georgetown* (Dietz Press, Richmond, VA, 1951).

Georgetown Presbyterian Church, "A Brief History of the Presbyterian Congregation in Georgetown" (2005). Manuscript available through the Church's **Website** and also online at <http://www.gtownpres.org/history.asp>.

Green, Constance MLaughlin, *Village and Capital, 1800 – 1879* (Princeton University Press, 1962).

Hackett, John F, Harry G. Reiss, and Mary A. Lacy (eds.), John *Glassford & Company – A Register of its Records in the Library of Congress* (Manuscript Division, LOC, Washington, DC, 2000).

MacMaster, Richard K, "Georgetown and the Tobacco Trade, 1751 – 1783", in *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, DC*, Vol. 37/38, (1966/ 1968), at pp. 1-33 (Historical Society of Washington, DC, 2010).

Magruder, Caleb Clarke, "Colonel Ninian Beall", in *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, DC*, Vol. 37/38, (1937), at pp. 17-29 (Historical Society of Washington, DC, 2009).