

**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