

Weems' ordination noted

Mason Locke Weems, a noted resident of Dumfries during the late 1700s and early 1800s, was one of two Americans who were the first to be ordained to the Anglican (Episcopal) priesthood after the revolution. The other was Mr. Weems' cousin, Edward Gant.

Historic Dumfries, Virginia, Inc. and All Saints' Episcopal Church will commemorate that ordination with a special service Sunday at 4 p.m. at the church. All Saints' is located on Saratoga Lane, off Silverdale Road, in Dale City.

The Rev. Robert W. Prichard, Ph.D., a professor of church history at the Virginia Theological Seminary and columnist on church history for *The Virginia Churchman*, will speak at the service. Area residents may remember the Rev. Prichard for his service as interim vicar at St. Martin's in Triangle in 1979 and 1980. The service is open to the public.

Persons attending will be invited by the vicar of All Saints', the Rev. John A. M. Guernsey, to visit the Ewell cemetery, adjoining the church property where Parson Weems was reinterred following his death and burial at Beaufort, S.C., in 1825.

Bel Air, where Parson Weems was married to Frances Ewell in 1795, and which he owned at the time of his death, will be open for showing. The Episcopal Church Women will have a reception on the grounds of Bel Air.

Mrs. Weems, who died in 1843, is also buried in an unmarked grave at the cemetery.

The significance of the ordination in 1784 is marked by the fact



Mason Locke Weems

that Mr. Weems, through much expenditure of effort from 1782, when he first went to England to seek ordination, to August 1784, is cred-

ited with securing the passage by Parliament of an act permitting bishops of the Church of England to ordain Americans without the requirement that all candidates for ordination swear allegiance to the British Crown.

The act was passed on August 13, 1784. Messrs. Weems and Gant presented themselves immediately thereafter to the Bishop of Chester, acting for the Bishop of London, who ordained them as deacons on Sept. 5, 1784, and then to the Archbishop of Canterbury for the crowning achievement of ordination as priests on Sept. 12, 1784.

Parson Weems promptly returned to his home state of Maryland to become rector at All Hallows Church in Charles County

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REFERENCE



VIRGINIANA FILE OCT 24 1984

*P.W.C. - Biography
reaches Mason Locke*

Bel Air Plantation

Prince William Public Library
Manassas, Va.

DN 8/7/84

Julia's Sch...
 Aerobic ar...
 is now open for...
 re-dance

medly about five
 phans straggling
 a rock n' roll band's
 stars as the band
 Also starring are Mack-
 Valerie Stevenson, Il de-
 der. She Wrote stars Angela

8 POTOMAC NEWS SCENE, Woodbridge, Va., Friday, Sept. 7, 1984

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and later, the rector at Saint Mar-
 garet's in Westminster.
 He found that support of the An-
 glican Church was not sufficient to
 maintain a pastorate following the
 disarray of the Revolution. There-
 fore, he began publishing and ped-
 dling books for supplemental

income.
 This activity, along with other
 actions on which he departed from
 the acceptable practices of the
 Maryland church, led to his dis-
 qualification for service in the
 Maryland clergy. He then went
 into book-selling and publishing as
 his main income source.
 In addition to writing and pub-
 lishing the first biography of

George Washington (reprinted in
 more than 80 editions), he pro-
 ceeded to prepare and publish al-
 manacs, other biographies of noted
 Americans — Francis Marion,
 Benjamin Franklin and William
 Penn — and sermons and tracts.
 He undertook to act as the field
 agent of Matthew Carey, a leading
 publisher in Philadelphia, who pro-
 vided a wide range of books — the
 Bible in a handsome edition, works
 of great philosophers, sermons by
 noted religious persons, novels,
 spelling books and other education-
 al and literary works.

He ranged up and down the East
 Coast from New York to Georgia,
 appearing on court days at court-
 houses and at market places
 throughout this large area. His ar-
 rival in a community was always
 welcome because he brought the
 world of the printed word to the
 culture-starved citizens. He also
 combined his business acumen
 with good conversation, entertain-
 ing exhibitions with his ever-pre-
 sent fiddle, and even a sermon or
 two when requested.
 The last 30 years of his life he
 was based in Dumfries from which

he regularly departed on his long
 journeys by stagecoach or, later, in
 his own covered cart.

During this 30-year period he
 served as a supply preacher in va-
 rious churches in Northern Virgin-
 ia. His most noted preaching was
 done at Pohick Church. John Da-
 vis, an Englishman living briefly in
 Occoquan, gave the following de-
 scription of such occasions:

"About eight miles from the Oc-
 coquan mills is a house of worship
 called Powheek Church, a name it
 derives from a Run that flows near
 its walls. Hither I rode on Sundays
 and joined the congregation of Par-
 son Weems, a minister of the Epis-
 copal persuasion, who was
 cheerful in his men that he might
 win men to religion.

"A Virginia church-yard on a
 Sunday, resembles rather a race-
 ground than a sepulchral-ground...
 the rattling of carriage wheels, the
 cracking of whips, and the vocifer-
 ousness of the gentlemen to the ne-
 groes who accompanied them. But
 the discourse of Parson Weems
 calmed every perturbation; for he
 preached the great doctrines of sal-
 vation, as one who had experienced

their power... Of the congregation
 of Powheek Church, about one half
 was composed of white people and
 the other of negroes... After
 church, I asked Parson Weems his
 opinion of the piety of the blacks.

"Sir," said he, "no people in this
 country prize the Sabbath more se-
 riously than the trampled-upon ne-
 groes. They are swift to hear; they
 seem to hear as for their lives.
 They are wakeful, serious, rever-
 ent, and attentive in God's house.
 Oh! it is sweet preaching when peo-
 ple are desirous of hearing!"

(from John Davis, *Travels in
 America, 1798-1802*). The Rev.
 Parson Weems, described Parson Weems's
 style of preaching as "one by no
 means discreditible to Mr.
 Weems" even though he did not
 adopt the more common serious
 demeanor of early 18th century
 preachers.

Mr. Weems was a moralist, in-
 terested in the private lives and
 standards of deportment of his
 heroes rather than in their public
 achievements. By stressing these
 elements he hoped to offer pre-
 cepts and examples of personal de-

portment to America's youth.
 He succeeded, perhaps beyond
 fondest dreams, in best de-
 strated by the famous story
 George Washington and the cherry
 tree, which is known to every
 American and celebrated annu-
 als as our most enduring national
 end.

The Weems House, part of
 Weems-Botts Museum in Dumfries,
 is the only tangible rem-
 of Mr. Weems's life in Dumfries.
 The museum is open to the pub-
 lic from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily, 7
 day through Saturday, and is su-
 ated by Historic Dumfries
 Merchant Park on Duke Street