

John Mason, Sr.

“Family Lore”

Much of the information we have about family history is “family lore”. It could be stories that are passed down from generation to generation. Or it could be the record of a birth written on a note card or in the family bible. Even information we know about living relatives is usually obtained from the people themselves or their parents, not from official records.

Sometimes, there is a person who takes a special interest in family history, who speaks to his or her relatives about the topic and writes down the results for future generations. In such a case, this might be the only systematic record of births, marriages, deaths, and stories ever recorded for the family. This is especially true for the time before formal, government documents were recorded and maintained.

One such person, who took a special interest in family history, was William Worrell Downing. He is said to have compiled family information for his own family and for that of his wife, Mary Parke Mason (the granddaughter of John Mason Sr.).

Family lore holds that John Mason, Sr. (about 1695 to after 1768) came to America with Thomas Kendall when John was a child. However, there are, seemingly, no documents that substantiate this lore. John Mason, Sr. is the grandfather of Mary Parke Mason. And I believe that this information originated with her husband, William Worrell Downing.

This information appears in at least two places: In the Cope Collection and in notes from Eleanor Ida Evans (1858-1935). The Cope Collection is a well-known collection of family history from Chester County Pennsylvania, which is housed in Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

The reference in the Cope Collection is as follows:

John Mason said to have come from England when a boy with Thomas Kendall whose daughter Ellen he married ...

(In this file, a note dated 25 Sep 1880 indicated that the information was received from William Worrall Downing Cole, which presumably means that it came originally from Mr. Cole’s namesake, William Worrall Downing.)

Eleanor Ida Evans was the three greats granddaughter of John Mason, Sr. (John, John, Isaac, Mary Ann, Lewis M. Evans). Apparently, she was interested in family history because she left notes that one of her relatives organized and transcribed. The transcription is in the possession of Steven McQuide, five greats grandson of John Mason, Sr.

The reference from Eleanor Ida Evans is as follows:

Thomas Kendall came from ... England. ... Ellen, daughter of Thomas, was born July 16, 1723. Married John Mason who came to America with her father, Thomas Kendall, and from the same town, when a boy.

Thomas Kendall (about 1680 to 1741) was the immigrant ancestor of the Kendall line, and John Mason, Sr. (about 1695 to after 1768) was the immigrant ancestor of the Mason line.

Quaker records from Settle, Yorkshire, England and Chester County, Pennsylvania establish without a doubt that Thomas Kendall moved from Settle to Chester County in 1700.

Three things are known for certain. First, John Mason *did* come to America. Second, in 1741, John Mason married Ellen Kendall (b. 1723), the daughter of Thomas Kendall. And third, John Mason and Ellen Kendall Mason had at least one child, John Mason, Jr., who was born in 1755 (and died in 1822).

Arguments in favor of the family lore being correct:

John Mason, Sr. was the grandfather of Mary Parke Mason (1799 to 1871), and John Mason, Jr. (1755 to 1822) was her father. Mary Parke Mason was the youngest of her siblings. Her brother Abiah Parke Mason (1782-1852) was the eldest. Mary was 23 years of age when her father died, and Abiah was 40. Therefore, there was ample time for John Mason, Jr. to tell his children about his father, their grandfather, John Mason, Sr.

Mary Parke Mason (1799 to 1871) married William Worrell Downing (1791-1871) in 1816. As was mentioned, William Worrell Downing was very interested in family history, and he collected records of his own and his wife's ancestors. Mary and William were married 6 years before John Mason, Jr. died. Therefore, once again, there was ample time for William Worrall Downing to engage in conversations with his father-in-law about John Mason, Sr.

The family lore regarding John Mason, Sr. was originated, very possibly by William Worrall Downing (and perhaps others). William Worrall Downing merely spoke to people and then wrote down what he understood was correct family history as it was relayed to him by those who lived it. That seems to be the best way to research and then convey the facts of history.

Later, apparently, the notes compiled by William Worrell Downing came into the possession of his descendant, William Worrell Downing Cole. Then, it appears, that the material was reviewed by Gilbert Cope (1840 to 1928). And finally, it appears that the W.W. Downing Collection (which was compiled about 1850) was incorporated into the Gilbert Cope Collection (which was compiled about 1900) through W.W. Downing Cole, who, it seems, had the collection at that time.

Arguments against the family lore being correct:

If John Mason, Sr. had been (let's say) 5 years old in 1700, then he would have been 46 in 1741 when he married Ellen Kendall (with her being only 18 years of age). And John Mason Sr. would have been 60 years old when his son (John Mason, Jr.) was born. This timing is possible, but perhaps unlikely. It would seem more likely if John Mason, Sr. had been born 20 years later. Then, he would have been about 26 when he married and 40 when his son was born. But in that case, of course, he could not have arrived in Pennsylvania in 1700 with Thomas Kendall.