

**A Brief History
of
Abiah Parke Mason**

Born 13 April 1782 in Chester County, Pennsylvania

Resided from about 1800 in Wilmington, New Castle County, Delaware

Died 20 January 1852 in Downingtown, Chester County, Pennsylvania

Buried in Wilmington & Brandywine Cemetery



Franklin Pierce Mason II

Abiah Parke Mason

Franklin P. Mason II

Abiah Parke Mason was born on 13 April 1782¹ in Chester County, Pennsylvania. He was probably born in Uwchlan Township, where his father had a farm. Abiah Parke Mason was born during the American Revolutionary War, which began in 1775 and ended in 1783.

Abiah Parke Mason was the son of John Mason II [born in 1755 in Marple, Chester County, Pennsylvania, son of John Mason I and Eleanor Kendall] and Mary Parke [born 1761 East Caln, Chester County, Pennsylvania, daughter of Abiah Parke and Ruth Jones.] His parents were married in 1781.

John II and Mary Mason had the following children, all of whom were born in Chester County, Pennsylvania:

Abiah Parke Mason, b. 13 April 1782, d. 20 Jan 1852, m. Ann Kendall

Isaac Mason, b. 06 June 1784, d. 08 Feb 1826, m. Elizabeth Weaver

Ruth Anna Mason, b. 01 Feb 1788, d. 30 June 1830, m. Samuel Kendall

Jonathan Mason, b. 02 July 1791, d. 07 Nov 1794

Benjamin Mason, b. 05 Nov 1795, d. 10 Aug 1803

Mary Parke Mason, b. 18 Feb 1799, d. 30 Nov 1871, m. William Worrall Downing

Abiah Parke Mason was a descendant of some of the first British settlers of Pennsylvania, for example, Thomas Parke (1660-1738), the founder of the Parke family in Pennsylvania, and Malachi Jones (abt. 1651-1729), the first minister of the Abington Presbyterian Church in Abington, Pennsylvania.

Abiah Parke Mason is usually listed in documents as “Parke Mason” or “Park Mason”.

Parke Mason married Ann Kendall on 30 Jun 1803 in West Chester, Pennsylvania.² They were married by John Graves, Esquire. Parke was listed as “of Chester Co.”, and Ann was listed as “of Delaware State”. At the time of their marriage, Parke was 21 years of age and Ann Kendall was 19.

Ann Kendall was born 02 May 1784³ in Wilmington, New Castle, Delaware, the daughter of John Kendall (1719-1795) and Mary Mason (1745-1820). Mary Mason was John Kendall’s second wife. She was the daughter of John Kendall’s sister, Ellen Kendall (and John Mason I). Thus, Mary Mason was John Kendall’s niece! Samuel Kendall, who married Ruth Mason, was Ann Kendall’s brother.

The Masons and Kendalls intermarried very often. Thus, Parke and Ann were first cousins from the Mason line [common ancestor John Mason I (b. England, d. after 1789, Pennsylvania)] and

¹ “Abiah Park Mason was born the 13 day of April the 7 Day of Week at 3 O clock in the morning in 1782” as written on a scrap of blue paper, perhaps by Mary D. Mason.

² *Publications of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania*, Vol. IV, No. 1, March, 1909, The Wikersham Printing Co., Lancaster, Pa, “Marriages of John Graves, Esquire, West Chester, Pa.”, page 105.

³ “Ann Kendall daughter of John Kendall by Mary his wife was born the second day of May the first day of the week at 8 O clock in the day 1784” written on the same scrap of blue paper referred to above.

first cousins once removed from the Kendall line (common ancestor Thomas Kendall [(b. abt. 1680, England, d. 1741, Pennsylvania)])

Shortly after they were married, Parke and Ann moved to Wilmington, Delaware, where they remained for the rest of their lives.

Parke and Ann Mason had the following twelve children, all of whom were all born in Wilmington.

Mary Dickenson Mason, b. 23 May 1804, d. 19 Dec 1891

Elisa Mason, b. 03 Dec 1805, d. aft 1880

Benjamin Mason, b. 07 Nov 1806, d. 01 Jul 1807

Jonathan Mason, b. 01 Jan 1808, d. 17 Apr 1817

Isaac Mason, b. 11 Apr 1809, d. 30 Sep 1864

John A. Mason, b. 31 Jan 1811, d. 06 Oct 1896

Esther Evans Mason, b. 08 Jun 1812, d. 24 Aug 1897

Tamson Mason, b. 11 Jan 1815, d. 11 Jul 1870

George Washington Mason, b. 07 Jul 1817, d. 09 May 1882

Malachi Parke Mason, b. 07 Jul 1819, d. 10 Aug 1869

Cideney Ann Mason, b. 19 Jul 1823, d. 01 Apr 1838

Catharine Jane Mason, b. 30 Jan 1826, d. 27 Dec 1841

Parke Mason was a constable for many years. The first record of this occupation was in the 1814 Wilmington City Directory, as follows:

Mason, Park, constableShipley, bet. Kent and Wood Sts.⁴

Parke Mason must have been quite well known in Wilmington in his day. The following notes appear in *History of Delaware, 1608 to 1888* by J. Thomas Scharf^{5, 6}:

1 Park Mason, a somewhat noted personage in his day, was the town bellman for half a century. He was high constable of the borough of Wilmington for a dozen or more years and was bailiff for City Council from 1832 to 1857.

“ Peter Countiss high constable and Park Mason constable were appointed to preserve order in City Hall during the sittings of the Commissioners.”

⁴ Kent and Wood streets are now called 8th and 9th streets, respectively.

⁵ *History of Delaware, 1608 to 1888*, J. Thomas Scharf, L. J. Richards & Co., Philadelphia, 1888, footnote page 643 and mention on page 742.

⁶ Note that the author got his dates a bit wrong. Parke Mason died in 1852.



A town crier, or bellman, is an officer of the court, who makes public pronouncements as required by the court. (This picture is from 1909 of a town crier in Provincetown, Massachusetts.)

Parke had a wooden club that he was an expert at throwing. If a suspect began running away from him, Parke would throw the club in such a way that it would land between the legs of the fleeing person and trip him up. That club was on display for a time in the Wilmington Old Town Hall. It was given to the Delaware Historical Society by Parke's grandson, Henry Parke Mason (1852 – 1930). Unfortunately, it is no longer on display because the club was stolen.⁷

Parke and his family appear in the U.S. Census in Wilmington for 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, and 1850. In the 1850 census, he is again listed as a constable, with the value of real estate owned at \$2000, which was a considerable sum at that time. His son, Isaac, who was a bricklayer, lived two doors away with his wife Susan and their four children.

Parke's wife, Ann Kendall Mason, died on 15 Feb 1851. She is buried in Wilmington & Brandywine Cemetery in Wilmington.⁸ At the time of his wife's death, Abiah Parke Mason lived at 9th and Tatnall Streets in Wilmington, just two blocks from where he had lived in 1814.

After his wife died, Parke moved to Downingtown, Pennsylvania to live with his daughter Elisa Mason Thornbury, her husband, Evans Thornbury, and their four children.

⁷ Information from a letter written by Joseph Kendall Mason dated 16 March 1968.

⁸ Wilmington & Brandywine Cemetery was founded in 1843 by Samuel Wollaston. Ann Kendall Mason was the first member of the Mason family to be buried in the cemetery, just eight years after the cemetery was founded.

Abiah Parke Mason died on 20 Jan 1852 in Downingtown. His obituary appeared in the *Delaware State Journal*.⁹

DEAD.—Park Mason, long known to the people of Wilmington, died at the residence of his daughter, in Downingtown, Pa., on Tuesday last. Mr. Mason was at one time High Constable of this city, and was said to be a terror to all violators of law, during his incumbency. He also filled several other subordinate offices. He died at the advanced age of 70 years. His remains will be brought to this city for interment.

Abiah Parke Mason was buried on 21 Jan 1852 in Wilmington & Brandywine Cemetery, [Section V (5), Lot 13] next to his wife of nearly 50 years. Three of his sons—Isaac, Washington, and Malachi—are also buried in that burial plot.

⁹ *Delaware State Journal*, Wilmington, Delaware, Friday, 23 Jan 1852. (The previous Tuesday was 20 Jan 1852.)

Appendix: Brief History of the Wilmington City Police Department¹⁰

The Wilmington Department of Police can trace its origins to 1738, which is thirty-eight years before the United States declared its independence from Great Britain. The earliest form of policing in Wilmington was known as the watch and ward system that was common not only in the United States during this period but in Europe as well.

The town of Wilmington, as it was not yet a city, a high constable and a petite constable [...] were elected by [the] town council. The constables would patrol during the daytime hours and were responsible for keeping the peace. The night watch would patrol the streets from seven in the evening until seven in the morning with one watchman for [each] political ward. The duties of the watchmen were listed as “they shall light and trim the city lamps, as necessary, they shall arrest and detain all malefactors, rogues, vagabonds and other persons abroad with evil design – they shall bring these persons before the nearest magistrate or mayor’s court”.

In 1848 Wilmington becomes a city and is named the county seat, and with a growing population, the police force grows as well. The Wilmington police are often referred to as the “city constables” and as the city police during this time. The department was relatively small in the following decades as it is less than forty officers by 1873 however there were outcries by the newspapers of the day to increase the force.

The department during this time came under what was commonly known as the “spoils system” in government. The entire police force was appointed by the mayor and served at his pleasure, which meant that an officer could be dismissed without cause and at any time. It also meant that a new mayor could appoint a new police force while dismissing the entire existing force.

It was in 1863 that Officer John Baylis became the first police officer in Wilmington and in the State to be killed in the line of duty. Officer Baylis was arresting a subject for drunk and disorderly [conduct] [when] was he was shot and killed by the subject.

¹⁰ <http://www.fopldodge1.org/Templates/wpdhistory.htm>: “Brief History of the Wilmington City Police Department”, Tom Monahan Retiree - Wilmington Police