



### **Extended History of Collection M-042 – Harrison, Benjamin**

Benjamin Harrison (V) (1726-1801) was born on April 5, 1726 at Berkeley Plantation, the eldest son of Benjamin Harrison IV. Berkeley Plantation is still situated on the James River. Benjamin's mother, Ann Carter, was the daughter of Robert "King" Carter whose family like the Harrison's was a force in Virginia and American politics.

In 1748, at the age of 22, Benjamin married his second cousin Elizabeth Bassett, the daughter of William Bassett, from neighboring New Kent County, and a niece of George Washington's wife Martha. Benjamin attended William and Mary College where he met Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson. His classical studies education was cut short after a lightning strike killed his father and two of his sisters at Berkeley on July 12, 1745. At age 19 he returned home and took over managing Berkeley's 1,000 acre operations including ship building and horse breeding.

Eight of the Harrison's children survived to adulthood. Their most famous son was William Henry Harrison, the American general in the victory over the Indians at Tippecanoe, and who was elected President of the United States in 1840. Their great-grandson, Benjamin Harrison, a Civil War general, was also elected President, in 1888.

Harrison's public service began in the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1749 and continued there for 25 years, sometimes as Speaker. He vehemently opposed the Stamp Act and helped pen the Colony's protest. By 1772 he was urging that the importation of slaves be curbed and heavily taxed. In 1774, the Virginia patriot was elected as a delegate to the First Continental Congress and was there on opening day, September 5, 1774. He chaired the early debates on the Articles of Association and signed them on October 20, 1774. Harrison was highly regarded in Congress, and was frequently appointed Chairman of the Whole. He remained in Congress until 1778.

He was selected to read Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence to the assembled delegates on July 1, and served as Chairman of the Whole during the debate over independence on July 2.

Harrison was well known for his sense of humor. On August 2, 1776, while preparing to sign the Declaration of Independence, Harrison famously quipped to Elbridge Gerry who had taken his place at the table to sign:

*I shall have a great advantage over you, Mr. Gerry, when we are all hung for what we are now doing. From the size and weight of my body I shall die in a few minutes and be with the Angels,, but from the lightness of your body you will dance in the air an hour or two before you are dead.*



After the war, Harrison remained active in Virginia politics as a member of the House of Delegates which chose him to be its Speaker. When his second cousin, Thomas Nelson, Jr., resigned from the governorship in 1781, Harrison was elected governor of Virginia and was re-elected twice. He was instrumental in shaping the U.S. Constitution as a member of the Virginia Ratification Convention in 1788 when he argued strenuously for a Bill of Rights prior to ratification, not after. Failing that he voted in favor and helped secure Virginia's ratification in a close vote. He sat on the committee that recommended rights to be included in what became the Bill of Rights.

In 1791 Harrison returned to serve in the state legislature. Soon after his 65th birthday he suffered from a severe case of gout, and on April 24, the disease took his life. He is buried at his beloved Berkeley Plantation.

Benjamin Harrison was a very large man, standing six feet four inches tall and weighing about 250 pounds. Before suffering from gout he possessed a vigorous constitution, and in his manners was remarkably dignified. Because of his rotundity, joviality, love of good foods and wines, and fondness for luxury he acquired the nickname of the "Falstaff of Congress." His bawdy humor was said to have broken the tension in committee rooms. John Adams wrote that Harrison had "Contributed many pleasantries that steadied rough sessions." According to the testimony of a gentleman who was contemporary with him in Congress, he was characterized for great firmness, good sense, and a peculiar sagacity in difficult and critical situations. In seasons of uncommon trial and anxiety, he was always steady, cheerful and undaunted

**William Hunter Jr** (1731-1792) - It is believed that this William Hunt Jr., was born at Galston, Scotland, January 20, 1731. He emigrated to the colony of Virginia in early life, and settled in Alexandria, where he was engaged in mercantile pursuits and doing a large business with London and Liverpool. He was an influential citizen, and twice the Mayor of Alexandria (1787-1788 & 1790-1791). He was one of the founders of The Alexandria-Washington Masonic Lodge #22, with Washington as Worshipful Master, in April 1788.

One occasion of note was on March 11, 1790 when he delivered a speech for the city welcoming Thomas Jefferson on his return at the end of his tenure as US Ambassador to France. Hunter died November 19, 1792, in the 62nd year of his age, and was buried in the grave-yard attached to the First Presbyterian Church, Fairfax Street in Alexandria, where a monument was erected to his memory by the St. Andrew's Society of Alexandria. His son, General Hunter, moved to New York, City where he became an influential citizen.



**Colonel John Allison** (17xx-1803) - John Allison was a merchant in Alexandria, VA and an occasional visitor at Mount Vernon. He was a Lieutenant Colonel of the First Regiment of the Virginia State Line during the Revolution -- was an officer since January 1776, retiring in December 1782. Allison married Rebecca C. McCrea on the April 24, 1788. They had four children. Allison received 6000 acres of land for his Virginia Line service in Fleming County, Kentucky.

In 1782 certain citizens of Alexandria applied to form a new Masonic Lodge in the city. This was granted and labeled Lodge No. 39, John Allison was recorded to be the Senior Deacon and William Hunter Jr. was to be the Junior Warden of the lodge. George Washington immediately became an active member.

John Allison died June 14, 1795.