

Burke CONNECTION

Burke Historical Society President Suzi Fowler Neal wears a 1780s period dress for the lecture on George Mason.

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Finding the Forgotten Founding Father

Burke Historical Society hosts lecture by George Mason historian.

BY VICTORIA ROSS
THE CONNECTION

Say the name George Mason and most people think of the university that bears his name. Google “George Mason,” and biographical information about Virginia’s notable statesman does not appear until the fifth entry.

The historic snub is something Tom Moncure, senior counsel for George Mason University, would like to remedy.

“It’s the worst bit of history. Credit should be given to George Mason as much as James Madison as the father of the Constitution,” Moncure said, during a lecture at the Silas Burke House on Sunday, March 17.

Hosted by the Burke Historical Society, Moncure spoke before an audience of about 60 people, many of who were curious about George Mason the man, not the university.

“I enjoy history, but I really did not know that much about George Mason,” said Teresa Croxton of Fairfax. “I thought the lecture was wonderful.”

Moncure said that Mason, born in Fairfax



Thomas Moncure, general counsel for George Mason University, talks with guests Teresa Croxton and author Ruth Rose.

County on Dec. 11, 1725, read avidly as a child, and it was his reading in history that convinced him the liberty of people, and a “declaration of rights,” had to be an essential part of any government’s formation.

During the lecture, Moncure emphasized Mason’s superior intellect, strength of char-

acter and indispensable role in forming the fledgling government of the United States

But George Washington, who chaired the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia’s State House in 1787, did try to dispense with Mason, according to Moncure.

“They sent him an invitation fully antici-

“Credit should be given to George Mason as much as James Madison as the father of the Constitution.”

— Tom Moncure

pating he would not go. He was in his 60s, and he had not traveled outside of Virginia and Maryland. However, Mason was so concerned that we would replace the tyranny of King George III with the tyranny of Philadelphia that he attended,” Moncure said.

Political shenanigans, back-room politicking and oversized egos were as prevalent during the debate to frame the Constitution as any current political convention, Moncure said. As one of Virginia’s delegates, Mason relentlessly spoke out in favor of the rights of individuals and the states as opposed to the federal government. Mason’s Anti-Federalist position eventually fractured the friendship of Washington and Mason.

The Federalists, as Madison, Hamilton and Washington were called, defeated Mason, and Mason retired to his home, Gunston Hall in Lorton, for the final time

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Herrity: Lyme Disease Epidemic ‘Largely Ignored’

Governor’s Task Force on Lyme disease hears stories of loss, pain and frustration.

BY VICTORIA ROSS
THE CONNECTION

Tricia Platas, a Springfield mother of four, sat in front of Gov. Bob McDonnell’s Lyme Disease Task Force on Tuesday, March 24, clenched her hands together, and testified about losing her 9-year-old daughter, Amber Marie, to Lyme disease.

“It was a few months after her ninth birthday when we really knew something was wrong,” Platas said. “She woke up one morning in so much pain that she could not walk to the bathroom. This was a little girl who loved to laugh, loved to sing and dance, Amber was the light of our lives.”

Platas cried when she told the panel and 120 attendees how desperate she was to make the many doctors she saw with Amber to take her daughter’s “mysterious” illness seriously. In her frantic search for a cure, she took Amber to a doctor who strapped the little girl to a bed, and waved foul-smelling oils in her face. “Amber was screaming. I just can’t believe anyone would do that,” she said.

“I wanted them to treat my little girl right, so I wouldn’t always ask the right questions, or demand answers. I feel terrible about that,” she said. “You have to push for answers.”

Amber Marie Platas died on April 22, 2002, at Children’s National Medical Center.

Platas was one of 25 area patients and caregivers who testified about their experiences with Lyme disease at Immanuel Bible Church in Springfield. They shared stories of pain, fear and fatigue with the eight-member panel of health department officials and legislators’ representatives. It was the fifth public testimony hearing about the spread of Lyme disease in the Commonwealth.

Led by Michael Farris, chancellor of Patrick Henry College in Purcellville, the task force will propose recommendations to the governor after its final hearing April 25. Farris’ wife and seven of his 10 children have been diagnosed with Lyme disease. The task force is comprised of physicians, wildlife officials, veterinarians and other experts.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 900 new cases of Lyme disease were reported in Virginia in 2009, a number the CDC acknowledges could be ten times higher due to under-reporting and inaccurate diagnostic tests. In Fairfax County, 250 cases were reported last year, according to the Fairfax County Health Department.

A deer tick takes about 36 hours to transmit Lyme disease, according to the CDC. The longer the disease goes undiagnosed and untreated, the greater the chances are for brain, heart and joint problems.

“We’re here tonight to listen to people’s stories, hear their recommendations and advocate for more public awareness and education,” Farris said.

A well-known constitutional lawyer, Farris is the founder of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSDLA) and Patrick Henry College, a Christian liberal arts college that is aimed at home-schooled students.

“Lyme disease is dramatically misdiag-

nosed, and there is too much denial by doctors that chronic Lyme does not exist,” Farris said.

Mikey Pedersen, a 14-year-old Vienna resident, told the panel that his case of Lyme disease went undiagnosed for a year despite seven doctor visits. He said doctors attributed his symptoms to growing pains. The delayed diagnosis allowed Lyme and co-in-

fections to spread throughout his body causing rashes, severe joint pain, and fatigue.

Kristina Sheridan, a Vienna mother of a teenage daughter with Lyme disease, told the panel her fam-

ily spent four years seeing 30 doctors, visiting seven hospitals and receiving more than 15 diagnoses before they found a team of doctors determined to get her daughter well.

She gave the panel a list of specific recommendations for the panel to consider, including spraying the edges of school fields and soccer fields with Permethrin, an in-

“It saddens me to see how many people are still being made sick by this horrible little bug.”

— Tricia Platas

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Lyme Disease Task Force

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sect repellent, to kill ticks as well as West Nile Virus.

"I've no doubt both my kids got bitten by ticks on soccer fields," she said. Sheridan also said parents of children diagnosed with Lyme need to understand the process for Special Education Certification for "other health issues."

"This certification provides families and the school with the flexibility needed to handle the waxing and waning symptoms, the additional days of absence," Sheridan said.

Sarah Beasley, a 29-year-old Fairfax woman, told the panel that she is living proof chronic Lyme exists. In 2000, she was a senior at James Madison University and participated in Army ROTC for fun. But then she started having serious muscle and joint pains.

"We have an epidemic that we're largely ignoring."

— Supervisor Pat Herrity (R-Springfield)

"As soon as each day was done, I'd limp to my apartment and crash into bed," she

said. "My whole life, I had been a six-hours-kind-of-sleep-girl. Suddenly, I would sleep for 13 hours and wake up feeling like I had been hit by a Mac truck." After 10 years and more than 10 different doctors, Beasley, the director of a local education association, said she is on the path to wellness.

At the end of her testimony, she dumped out a large bag of medications, herbs, supplements and vitamins. "Please understand that it takes all of these to keep me going in the way that I need to function," she said. "Without them, I will be that girl that is confined again to the downstairs couch." She added that she wants the panel to encourage research and protect doctors who actually understand "this spreading, debilitating disease."

Marjorie Veiga, a Lyme disease patient consultant and mother of a teen daughter diagnosed with Lyme disease, said the biggest myth about Lyme disease is that it is easily diagnosed and treated.

"It is difficult to diagnose due to the unreliable screening tests and due to the migrating and remitting symptoms," she said. "Also, ticks can carry multiple pathogens. If these are not diagnosed and treated, the patient may continue to be unresponsive to multiple therapies."

"These heartrending cases of misdiagnosis, financial ruin, and social isolation are difficult to hear as we travel throughout Virginia," Farris said. "But it is important to gather first-hand testimonies about the personal impact of long-term illness. One of our most important goals is to allow people to be heard."

The final Task Force hearing on the educational needs in Lyme and tick-borne disease will be Monday, April 25, at 1 p.m. in Fairfax. A location has not been announced yet.

"I was so moved by all the stories given at the meeting that night," Platas said in an interview after the three-hour hearing. "It saddens me to see how many people are still being made sick by this horrible little bug."

Supervisor Pat Herrity (R-Springfield) attended the hearing, and has listed Lyme Disease Awareness as one of his priorities.

In 2009, Herrity, along with Supervisor Michael

Fairfax County Tracks Lyme Disease Cases

For the past 10 years, reported cases of Lyme disease have been on the rise in Fairfax County. In 2009, the number spiked to 260 cases.

"Approximately 250 cases of Lyme disease were reported to the Fairfax County Health Department in 2010," said Dr. Peter Troell, medical epidemiologist with the Fairfax County Health Department (FCHD). "These reported cases represent only a portion of the cases of Lyme disease in our community and are used primarily to follow disease trends. We know that many other cases go undiagnosed and/or unreported."

The good news, Troell said, is that Fairfax County employs a more comprehensive approach than many other areas in the nation, where the focus is solely on how to avoid ticks.

The county's approach includes: tracking human cases, tick surveillance, outreach to health care providers to promote early diagnosis and treatment, deer management and public education.

In May 2010, Fairfax County Chairwoman Sharon Bulova (D-At-large) and Supervisor Linda Q. Smyth (D-Providence) hosted a town hall meeting at the Fairfax County Government Center, featuring county staff and two of the two of the nation's leading experts on Lyme disease.

"Lyme disease is on the rise in Virginia and the United States, according to the CDC," said Bulova. "As people spend more time outdoors because of the warm weather, we want them to know how to protect themselves from the ticks that transmit Lyme disease."

— VICTORIA ROSS

Frey (R-Sully), conducted a town hall symposium on Lyme disease at Centreville High School. He said he became concerned about the prevalence of the disease after hearing from many of his constituents afflicted with the disease.

"We have an epidemic that we're largely ignoring," he said, adding that he hopes the panel considers that one of their recommendations should be to pass legislation similar to that enacted in Connecticut, where doctors are allowed to prescribe extended doses of antibiotics without fear of malpractice lawsuits.

According to "The Connecticut Post," passage of the bill in May 2009, which allows physicians to diagnose chronic Lyme disease, and treat it with long-term antibiotics was one of the "cornerstone moments of Lyme disease politics over the last decade."

Similar bills have been introduced in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New York and Maryland that would compel insurance companies to pay for antibiotic treatment for chronic Lyme disease CLD.

"For Swine Flu, we went on full red-alert, but more people are afflicted with Lyme disease, and it's time we take it seriously," Herrity said.

Those who did not attend the hearings, but want to share how they've been affected by the disease may e-mail Farris at lyme@phc.edu.



PHOTO BY VICTORIA ROSS/THE CONNECTION

Thomas Moncure, general counsel for George Mason University, gives a lecture on "George Mason, the Statesman" to the Burke Historical Society.

Local History Lecture

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in 1787.

Moncure said Mason's hand was clearly the guiding force behind the Bill of Rights, introduced by Madison.

"When George Mason died in 1792, his death went almost unnoticed," Moncure said, but he died knowing that his greatest concern was satisfied."

Moncure said it's difficult to find biographies of this lesser-known revolutionary figure, but he recommends "George Mason: Forgotten Founder" by Jeff Broadwater. In the book, Broadwater quotes Mason's comments after the adoption of The Bill of Rights: "I have received much satisfaction from amendments to the federal Constitution that have lately passed ... with two or three further amendments ... I could cheerfully put my hand and heart to the new government."

Ruth Rose of Arlington, who attended the lecture, said she always enjoys Moncure's lectures. "He puts you right into the history," she said. The Arlington resident wrote the book, "Memories of Beautiful Burke," which the Burke Historic Society sponsored.

Moncure, who was appointed University Counsel for GMU in 2006, was elected Clerk of Court for Stafford County, where he grew up, and served as a member of the Virginia House of Delegates. He also has 26 years of service in the U.S. Army Reserves and the Virginia National Army Guard.

For more information on GMU's Speakers Program — "Connecting the University with the Community" — visit <http://communityrelations.gmu.edu/speakersbureau>.

Preserving the History of Burke

The Burke Historical Society (BHS) was first established in 1978 as an advocate for preserving Burke's heritage. The society procures and maintains the community's historical markers, collects community artifacts for display and sponsored the book "Memories of Beautiful Burke," co-authored by Nan Netherton and Ruth Rose. The historical society also inspired artist Barbara Thelin Preston to paint and donate a painting depicting Old Burke, which the society framed and donated to the Burke post office. The society also hosted an annual Burke Historical Days event promoting an appreciation for history.

"The society was inactive for several years, but since last summer, we have been active again in revitalizing the Burke Historical Society's original efforts to preserve history," said Suzi Fowler Neal, president of BHS. Karla Pringle, membership chair, said the group is comprised of local historians and "historians-at heart."

Meetings and forums take place the last Sunday of the month at 4 p.m. at the Silas Burke House, 9595 Burke Lake Road. For more information about BHS, contact Karla Pringle at pringlekl@cox.net or go to the website at www.burkehistoricalsociety.com.