Analostan Island Once Mystery Tract
Occupied by Family From Abroad, Which Kept Apart From People, and Became Subject of Much Speculation—Dramatic Event Accompanied by Tragic Incident, but Followed by Settling of Old-World Quarrel—Story of the Masons of Gunston.

Gen. John Mason (1768-1849), son of George Mason of Gunston Hall.

Anna Maria (Murray) Mason, wife of Gen. John Mason.

BY JOHN CLAGG PROCTOR.

LYING close to the Virginia shore, but in the waters of the District of Columbia, is Analostan Island, a tract of two or three acres, unknown to the people nowadays, but which in past years—and, especially in the early days of Washington—was one of the most attractive and beautiful spots in the Federal territory. Indeed, Analostan or Mason's Island—by both of which names it is equally well known—existed as a well known estate years before the City of Washington was laid out, being the property of George Mason of Gunston Hall. Though apparently merged with the Virginia side of the Potomac, yet it is easily discerned as one passes across the Key Bridge, from which it is not far distant to the northward. It may be said, therefore, that it has almost a certain elevation of more than 50 feet.

George Mason of Gunston Hall was the fourth of that name in a direct line in this country. The first George was born in England and died in Virginia in 1648. George of Gunston inherited considerable land from his father, as the latter had also inherited from his forebears. Consequently, the fourth George, when he had arrived at the age of 31, found himself one of the wealthiest men in Virginia, his estates even extending into Maryland, which in 1670 was purchased by his son in law, Strathmore, of whom the Masons of Gunston Hall are descendants.

Just how the fourth George Mason became possessed of Analostan Island, the writer is unable to say, for the authorities seem to differ as to the dates and method of obtaining title, but he is felt to be by purchase and not by seizure.

Kate Mason Rowland, in her work entitled "The Life of George Mason," has this to say on the subject:

"In 1748, a ferry was established from the plantation of George Mason, opposite to Rock Creek, over to the opposite side of the Potomac, which was a tract patented by George Mason's father, and was a short distance above 'Arlington.' Soon after, in 1751, a ferry had been established across the Potomac on the land of Francis Asbury, and it was now removed to George Mason's place, about half a mile higher up the river.

"About this time it may have been that George Mason obtained by patent from Lord Baltimore the island opposite to Rock Creek, called Analostan or Mason's Island. Though it was called at one time Analostan, it was in the time of Mason's will, Barbados. The island and ferry.

"In the present deed of George Mason's son.

"And for more than a century the ferry continued to exist, to be replaced at times by a toll bridge. Finally, in April, 1858, a free bridge was inaugurated at this point, and for the first time in a century and a half the traveler could cross the Potomac at Rock Creek without paying toll or fee."

"From this it would seem that George Mason of Gunston inherited Analostan Island from the estate of the father, who died in 1718, and, as a matter of fact, as the writer has obtained it, the deed made direct to him."

In 1857, Hugh Taggart, one of the foremost barristers and the late father of the late Mrs. L. Taggart—who was started to the City Council, wrote a paper for the Royal Society on 'An Old Georgetown,' in which he said, in speaking of Analostan Island: 'It passed into the possession of George Mason by a deed from Prince George of Denmark dated August 28, 1771, hence the name Mason's Island. Those who recall Mr. Taggart and his ability as a lawyer and historian, especially on matters relating to Georgetown, will appreciate the weight of his statement and will conclude that the island did not come into George Mason's possession until the year 1771. Indeed, Mr. Taggart's whole statement is so interesting that the writer feels it will bear quoting as follows: 'I have in my possession a map showing the Potomac River and its tributary courses, prepared by Mr. Willard, a member of the board, though it bears no date, there is reason to believe that it was drawn prior to the island was in possession of the island in the first half of the eighteenth century.'"

"Two islands appear on this map in Tucker's book, Washington's Land, just above its confluence with the Potomac. They are called the 'Analogos Islands;' one of these we have no difficulty in recognizing as the present Analostan or Mason's Island, and the other as the island which formerly existed at the end of Long Bridge, called at one time 'Holmes Island' and later 'Alexander's Island.'"

"This in connection I may add that several years ago I saw in the clerk's office of Fairfax County Court a plat which it is probable had been prepared prior to the Revolutionary War with the object of enlightening the court as to the pretensions of the parties to an important suit, and which showed a profile of the river on the Virginia side from a point below the Point Mills Run as far up as the present Patent Bridge. Upon the map the two islands are delineated. The lower one bears the name of Holmes Island and the one above it, viz., Analostan or Masons Island, bears the name of my Lord Baltimore's owner under the patent for Maryland of the land on this side of the Potomac. On the map of the Potomac, the name under the patent for the land on the other side, might be made the subject of a curious historical controversy involving the ancient, long continued and but recently acted dispute between Maryland and Virginia as to the boundary line between them on the Potomac."

"The records of the Virginia land office show that as early as the year 1689 the island was in sale. As known. October 25 of that year a patent was issued to Capt. P. L. M. 8. and a tract of 560 acres described as lying in the Bay from the Potomac River and as having for its beginning a red oak standing by a small branch or run newly opposite an island commonly called and known by the name of My Lord's Island."

"A NAVALISLAND obtained still another name, viz., Barbados, and the island is named from the date, timbers, etc. obtained by the Maryland colonists, which for a while seems to have been a foundation in fact, and so, in looking up the history of Analostan Island, we find it, too, has a lesser legend well worth repeating, which naturally has its bearing at a time many years before it was owned by the Mason family. It will be here given as it appeared in print 30 years ago."

"Towards the close of the last century there appeared 'An Island called Analostan,' from Liverpool, an English gentleman, acquainted by his wife and two daughters. He was unknown here, and from his written matter it was evident he did not care about forming new acquaintances. Arrivals from abroad were not so frequent then, nor, and people of an inquisitive nature were considerably disappointed in not being able to turn something on."

"In a few years, there were his name and residence on every street of the city, and at the houses of the magnates and family. London, England—but that was not sufficient; they wanted to know all about him, and how to get this information was the subject of many conversations."

"About a month after his arrival he purchased the property now known as Analostan Island, and during the six months that followed he raised the name of 'Morgan' from a small name. The name was shortly afterwards changed to Morgan's Island for the arrival of which building commenced at once. Morgan was put to work clearing the wild growth of timber, laying out walks and drives, digging a well and garden, building an ice house, a lodging for bees, and such other improvements as the owner desired."

"'The latter part of November Mr. Straubinger and family took possession of their beautiful home. The dwelling—a two-story frame—was situated in the center of the island, facing Georgetown. It contained 14 large rooms, with a wide veranda on front and back, ornamented with furniture and works of art imported from Paris and London. Several omissions were indicated about the premises; a large barn, unlike anything else in the neighborhood of the city, stood a few hundred yards in the rear of the mansion, and a walk, leading from the dwelling, at the water's edge, was a fine line in nature."

"Of course, this sudden and seemingly