

A Guide to the Chichester Collection, ca. 1809, 1840

Chichester Collection ca. 1809, 1840

ca. 1809, 1840

A Collection in the Thomas Balch Library M 038

Thomas Balch Library

2006

Author: Matthew Exline

History

Processed by: Matthew Exline

Title Statement

A Guide to the Chichester Collection, ca. 1809, 1840

Subtitle: Chichester Collection

Collection: M 038

Author: Matthew Exline

Publication Statement

Date: © 2006 By Thomas Balch Library. All rights reserved.

Publisher: Thomas Balch Library

[Conditions of Use](#)

Profile Description

Creation: Machine-readable finding aid derived from MS Word, created by Beth Schuster, 10 April 2008

Language Usage: Description is in English

Revision Description

2013-11-21 Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

Descriptive Summary

Collection number

M 038

Language

English

Abstract

This collection consists of three items: two academic certificates of merit, and *The Parent's Assistant; Or, Stories for Children*, vol. 3, by Maria Edgeworth (Georgetown, DC: Joseph Milligan, 1809).

Creator

George M. Chichester, Sarah E. Chichester

Extent

3 items

Repository

Thomas Balch Library

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection open to research.

Use Restrictions

No physical characteristics affect the use of this material

Acquisition Information

Certificates: James Pierpoint, Leesburg, VA. Book: purchased from Bookworm and Silverfish Publishing, Wytheville, VA, with funds donated in memory of Warren Weitman, a longtime Thomas Balch Library volunteer.

Processing Information

Processed by Matthew Exline, 1 Apr 2008

This is an "artificial" collection of two academic merit certificates and a book. The book and certificates have no direct connection with one another besides having belonged to a member of the Chichester family. Thomas Balch Library's copy of Margaret Mercer's *Ethics*, above, also belonged to Sarah E. Chichester Edwards (it was presented to her by Margaret Mercer in 1841).

Preferred Citation

Chichester Collection (M 038), Thomas Balch Library, Collection #M 038, Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, Virginia.

Accruals

2005.0208; 2008.0021

Alternative Form Available

None

Adjunct Descriptive Data

Related Material

Mercer, Margaret. Popular Lectures on Ethics, or Moral Obligation: For the Use of Schools. Petersburg, Virginia: Edmund & Julian C. Ruffin, 1841. VREF 170.44 MER, Virginiana Rare Books.

Bibliography

"Belmont Chapel," <http://www.ashburnweb.com/history/chapel.htm>, accessed 25 Mar, 2008.

Chichester Collection (M 038), Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, Va.

di Zerega, Philip van Uytendaele. "History of Secondary Education in Loudoun County, Virginia." Master's Thesis. Charlottesville, Virginia: University Archives, University of Virginia, 1948. Microfilm.

Family Bible, Sarah E. Chichister (Mrs. Thomas W. Edwards). 78-80 in "Family Bible Records," vol. 5, Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, Va.

Washingtonian

"Genealogy of George Mason of Gunston Hal, 1725-1792....," Family File #277, Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, Va.

Kelly, Francis King. "The Gifted One: A Brief Biography of Margaret Mercer." Unpublished MS, Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, Va.

Confederate Engineer: Training and Campaigning with John Morris Wampler.

Popular Lectures on Ethics, or Moral Obligation: For the Use of Schools.

Memoir of Miss Margaret Mercer.

Old Virginia Days and Ways: Reminiscences of Mrs. Sally McCarty Pleasants.

From Frontier to Suburbia.

Other Finding Aid

None

Technical Requirements

None

Historical Information

This collection consists of a book belonging to George M. Chichester and two certificates of academic merit awarded to his daughter, Sarah E. Chichester while she was at Belmont Academy in Loudoun County. George M. Chichester (2 Mar 1793-12 Dec 1835) was the grandnephew (on his mother's side) of George Mason of Gunston Hall (11 Dec 1725-7 Oct 1792), the author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights. He married Sarah C. "Sally" Elliott (3 July 1801-20 Mar 1820) on 14 Apr 1818, and they had two daughters, Ann Rebecca Chichester (died in infancy) and Sarah E. Chichester (2 Mar 1820-25 June 1878). The name S. C. Elliot (George's wife's maiden name) is written on the title page and on the inside of front and back covers, in addition to George Chichester's official bookplate. George's wife Sarah died a few days after their daughter Sarah was born. On 23 Dec 1824, George married Mary Bowie (c. 1 July 1802-31 July 1872), of Georgetown, D.C. They had two sons. Little is known about George M. Chichester personally. Tax and probate records show he was a successful farmer who, around the time of his death, owned three different farms, a well-furnished house in Leesburg, about 20 slaves, 40 horses, and a carriage. Although he was a slaveholder, in Dec 1831, after Nat Turner's rebellion, he was a member of a committee appointed to petition Loudoun delegates in the General Assembly to introduce a bill to abolish slavery in Virginia.

George's daughter, Sarah E. Chichester, attended Belmont Academy for at least a year. Belmont Academy was a private boarding school for girls operated by Miss Margaret Mercer. While there she received the two academic awards in this collection: an "Honorary Card" given "in testimony of her progress in her studies generally," and a "Certificate of Merit: Fourth Degree" testifying that she had "obtained the highest approbation of her teachers" in Latin, French, Geometry, Chemistry, Geography, Arithmetic, Botany, and Music. A note attached to the Certificate of Merit (presumably Mercer's version of a report card) records that she performed excellently in French, Chemistry, Arithmetic, Geometry, Latin, Botany, Music, and Scripture, and her conduct was exemplary. Sarah married Thomas W. Edwards (3 Jan 1817-18 Feb 1891) on 2 Nov 1843.

Belmont Academy was not an average finishing school, nor was Margaret Mercer (1 July 1791-17 Sep 1846), its proprietress, an average schoolmarm. She was well known in Maryland and Northern Virginia as a philanthropist and educator. She was the daughter of John Francis Mercer (c. 1757-1821), who fought in the Revolutionary War, was a delegate to the Maryland Federal Constitutional Convention, served in the Maryland State Legislature, represented Maryland for one term in the newly-established Federal House of Representatives, and served two terms as Governor. He provided Margaret with an excellent education, which she supplemented by wide reading and practice, teaching herself botany, painting, and the rudiments of medicine, among other things. She was a faithful Episcopalian, and as she grew older her religious fervor combined with her naturally compassionate personality to make her a dedicated philanthropist, teacher, and evangelist. Although she inherited a number of slaves from her father, she was, along with her good friend Francis Scott Key, a leader in the Liberian colonization movement. She once wrote, "Do not for a moment doubt that slavery is in *my mind a direct violation of Christianity...*" (Morris, 131) and put this sentiment into action by manumitting her slaves and sending as many as were willing to the newly established colony in Liberia. As the editor of her memoirs wrote, this sacrifice, combined with her other philanthropic endeavors, reduced her life from one of "*affluence* to absolute dependence on her own exertions for maintenance." (Morris, 120) Combining her need for livelihood with her desire to teach and nurture young girls in academics and the Bible, she started a boarding school for girls at Cedar Park. In 1836 she purchased Belmont, a large but dilapidated plantation house, after the death of its owner Ludwell Lee (13 Oct 1760-23 Mar 1836). The mansion was five miles southeast of Leesburg in a neighborhood of poor farms. Here she continued to operate her school until her death, probably of tuberculosis, in 1846.

Margaret Mercer used a rigorous liberal arts curriculum, including extensive training in the Bible and systematic theology. The entire neighborhood had a standing invitation to Sunday School and church service at Belmont, and despite the initial indifference and even hostility of the neighbors, she eventually succeeded in building a small church, Belmont Chapel, near the school. She wrote her own textbook, *Popular Lectures on Ethics, or Moral Obligation*, published in 1841, which she used to teach ethics. In the Preface she argued

that not only was it a teacher's duty to use morals to educate children "to usefulness and happiness" (xi), and that such morals could only be based on the Bible. In the Appendix she gave her recommended reading list, which included Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Josephus, Livy, Tacitus, Sillman's *Elements of Chemistry*, Herschel's *Treatise on Astronomy*, and Lyell's *Principles of Geology*. Although "Miss Mercer," as everyone called her, did her best to protect Belmont from worldly influences, it was certainly no convent. A student at Belmont later recalled that the girls danced and played shuttlecock on rainy days, and that although table manners and moderation were strictly enforced, the girls would steal bread and butter from the dinner table and, after the house was dark, would eat them with "sero" syrup, which two girls from New Orleans had received from home. Mercer charged a baseline tuition plus board of \$125 per five month session, with extra charges for French, drawing, music, chemistry, and philosophy. She would not, however, turn away those unable to pay, so the wealthy students in effect subsidized the poor. Despite ups and downs caused by the Panic of 1837 and lingering economic depression, Mercer kept her Academy operating (although at one point her operating capital consisted of two cents) until her death in 1846. After her death, a friend continued to operate the school at Belmont until 1856, when it moved to Dodona Manner in Leesburg, where it continued until 1876. Belmont Chapel was in use until 1951, after which it fell into ruin and was burned by vandals in 1963.

Scope and Content

This collection consists of three items: two academic certificates of merit, and *The Parent's Assistant; Or, Stories for Children*, vol. 3, by Maria Edgeworth (Georgetown, DC: Joseph Milligan, 1809). The two certificates of merit are each printed on silk handkerchiefs, hemmed with lace. The main text of the certificate is neatly printed on the silk, with the blanks filled in by hand. A card bearing the signatures of the teachers is attached to the bottom of each certificate with a ribbon. Both certificates are matted and framed (the work was done by Mickelson's in Washington, DC, c. 1950s). Attached to the back of the frame of the "Certificate of Merit: Fourth Degree" is Sarah Chichester's year-end "report card," including the "Record of her Examinations," the "Record of her Classes for the year" and an overall assessment of her conduct, with Margaret Mercer's signature at the bottom. The book has a simple bookplate inside the front cover, without any device or image, which says "George M. Chichester, Loudoun County, Va." The name "S. C. Elliott" (George Chichester's first wife's maiden name) is written on the title page and the inside of the front and back covers. The book was purchased by the library to go with the certificates.

Contents List

Box 1

Folder 1: Framed "Certificate of Merit: Fourth Degree" and "Honorary Card" from Belmont Academy.

Bound Volume: Maria Edgeworth, *The Parent's Assistant; Or, Stories for Children*, vol. 3 (Georgetown, DC: Joseph Milligan, 1809).