

# The ALEXANDRIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2009

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## JUNE MEETING

**DATE:** Wednesday, June 24, 2009

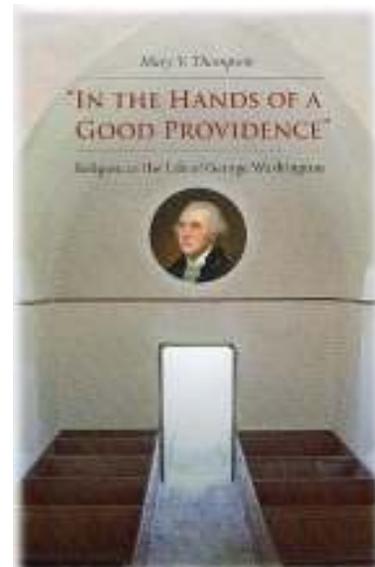
**PLACE:** The Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia

**TIME:** 7:30 PM

**SPEAKER:** Mary V. Thompson, 2009 Alexandria History Award Recipient

## **“In the Hands of a Good Providence:” Religion in the Life of George Washington**

Mary V. Thompson, the research historian at Mount Vernon and recipient of the 2009 Alexandria History Award, will discuss her new book *“In the Hands of a Good Providence:” Religion in the Life of George Washington*. George Washington’s religious practices and beliefs have been very controversial subjects in the past, and this book no doubt will become the definitive authority on those subjects. *“In the Hands of a Good Providence”* moves beyond modern arguments regarding whether The Father of Our Country was an evangelical Christian or a Deist. Thompson concludes that Washington was a devout Anglican of a Latitudinarian bent. She focuses on the important place religion occupied in his life, as well as his support for religious freedom in the early development of our country. Regardless of his personal preference for a specific denomination, Washington believed that religion was an important aspect of a strong and successful nation. He often expressed an opinion that a nation needed a set of shared values, and that religion encouraged a sense of morality, civility, and concern for fellow citizens. Much of his religious philosophy was formed in Alexandria. Ms. Thompson will tell how she wrote the book and focus on some Alexandria residents featured in the book. *(Continued on Page 2)*



**About our June 24 Speaker.** (Continued from Page 1) Mary V. Thompson received the 2009 Alexandria History Award for her book, *"In the Hands of a Good Providence": Religion in the Life of George Washington*. She has worked at Mount Vernon for over 28 years, serving for the past ten years as Mount Vernon's Research Historian, where she is



Mary Thompson holds the Alexandria City Council proclamation naming her the recipient of the 2009 Alexandria History Award. From left is Ms. Thompson, Senator Patsy Ticer, and Doug Thurman, Chair of the Awards Committee.

responsible for, among other things, research supporting all the programs in all the departments at Mount Vernon, editing internal and external publications, and helping to develop permanent and temporary exhibits and interpretive materials. Her primary focus is on everyday life on the estate, including domestic routines, food, religious practices, slavery, and the slave community. She has written and lectured extensively on subjects as varied as Martha Washington's life during the American Revolution; work, family life, private enterprise, and resistance among the slaves at Mount Vernon; the diet of both enslaved and free at Mount Vernon; religious practices of the Washingtons and in the slave quarters; and the

smallpox epidemic. She curated the travelling exhibition, "Treasures from Mount Vernon: George Washington Revealed," which toured the U.S. between 1998 and 2000.

Ms. Thompson has also frequently contributed articles to Alexandria history publications such as the *Alexandria Chronicle* and *Historic Alexandria Quarterly* and been a speaker at various Alexandria history events, including the 1999 symposium on "George Washington and Alexandria, Virginia: 'Ties that Bind.'" She is well known for her willingness to share her vast knowledge of Alexandria's most famous son, George Washington, with local Alexandria authors as well as nationally known ones ranging from Joseph Ellis to Cokie Roberts.

She has a B.A. in History, with a minor in Folklore, from Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama; and an M.A. in History from the University of Virginia.

**Fall Lecture Series to Be Announced.** At press time, negotiations had not been completed with speakers for the Alexandria Historical Society Fall lecture series. Information about the Fall lectures will be posted shortly on our website, [www.alexandriahistorical.org](http://www.alexandriahistorical.org). In the meantime, please mark your calendars to reserve **September 23** and **October 28** for some outstanding history lectures.

**Auditors Needed.** If you would be willing to assist with the annual audit of the Alexandria Historical Society's financial records this summer, please telephone President Audrey Davis at (703) 838-4356, Ext. 11.

**Help Plan Alexandria's Commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Civil War.**

On behalf of the Historic Alexandria Resources Commission, the Office of Historic Alexandria and the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association will co-sponsor a Civil War Sesquicentennial community planning meeting on Saturday, June 6, from 9 AM to noon. The meeting will be held at the George Washington Masonic National Memorial, 101 Callahan Drive, Alexandria; and free parking is available. This meeting is open to all, and public participation is most welcome.

The purpose of the meeting will be to gather public input and refine ideas for Alexandria's commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. As part of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission, a local committee is to be formed as part of a statewide effort to develop a greater understanding of the cause, impact and aftermath of the war, based on the theme "Understanding Our Past, Embracing Our Future." Activities associated with this initiative are planned to take place from 2011 to 2015.

As part of the June 6 program, representatives from each of Alexandria's history museums will give short presentations on plans, ideas, or suggestions for participation in the upcoming anniversary remembrance. Following the presentations, those attending will break into small groups to gather and refine recommendations on how Alexandria should best proceed with this commemorative effort.

Alexandria's Civil War heritage is very unique because it reflects the history of the Union, the Confederacy and African Americans. The overwhelming majority of Alexandrians were loyal to the South, with one of its most prominent citizens, General Robert E. Lee, commanding the Confederacy's Army of Northern Virginia, and hundreds of men from Alexandria serving with the Confederate Army.

The June 6 program will assist in developing a plan that reflects these and other themes of Alexandria's Civil War heritage.

**The Friends of Local History** invite you to attend the organization's annual meeting at 7:00 PM on Wednesday, June 10 at the Alexandria Public Library Local History unit at the Kate Waller Barrett Branch Library, 717 Queen Street in Alexandria. This year is the 150th anniversary of Northern Virginia's first Reform congregation, Congregation Beth El. Come learn about its evolution from the 1859 Old Town synagogue, its social and cultural contributions to Alexandria's history, and its growing archives collection. Also, Rose Dawson, Director of the Alexandria Library System, will bring you up to date on library activities and the current financial situation.

**Local History Library Hours Being Cut.** City budget cuts for the coming fiscal year, beginning July 1, 2009, will seriously impact the invaluable work carried on at the Local History unit of the Alexandria Public Library. The branch is being cut back to two staff people. It will only be open three days a week and one Saturday per month.

**History Award Renamed.** At the May 15 retirement party for Mike Miller, Alexandria Historical Society President Audrey Davis announced that the Board of Directors had voted to change the name of the Alexandria History Award to the "T. Michael Miller Alexandria History Award" in recognition of the significant work Miller has done in researching and preserving Alexandria's history.

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The AHS Newsletter is published by the Alexandria Historical Society, Inc., and mailed free to members. To join the Society, submit your check made payable to "Alexandria Historical Society," together with your name, address, and telephone numbers, to the Alexandria Historical Society, 201 South Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314. Annual dues are: \$10.00, Student; \$20.00, Single; \$30.00, Couple; \$50.00, Sustaining; and \$100.00, Patron. The membership year is July to June. Dues are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

*The purpose of the Society shall be to promote an active interest in American history and particularly in the history of Alexandria and of Virginia.  
The Society is organized exclusively for educational purposes.*

**VISIT OUR WEB SITE:  
[www.alexandriahistorical.org](http://www.alexandriahistorical.org)**

