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Catherine's Ring

The Story of a Sea Captain and the Daughter of a Philadelphia Potter in Alexandria, Virginia

by Richard H. Klingenmaier

On Tuesday evening, October 29, 1799, Sea Captain John McKnight and Miss Catherine Piercy were wed in the Presbyterian Meeting House on Fairfax Street in Alexandria, Virginia, the Reverend Mr. Swann officiating. John was 30 years old; Catherine was 16. The *Alexandria Gazette* for November 2, 1799 reported the wedding as follows: "Married – On Tuesday evening, by the Rev. Mr. Swann, Capt. John McKnight to Miss Kitty Piercy, a young lady possessed of every accomplishment capable of rendering the marriage state truly happy." Thus began the union between an Alexandria sea captain and the accomplished daughter of a Philadelphia potter that was to last for 34 years, result in the births of twelve children, and forever provide a direct and very personal link to The Father of Our Country – George Washington.

*"Washington Is No More!!!"**

The citizens of Alexandria awoke on Sunday morning, December 15, 1799, to learn that George Washington -- neighbor, military hero, and first President of the United States had died the evening before at his nearby estate Mount Vernon. On Monday, December 16, the members of the Alexandria Masonic Lodge met in a special funeral Lodge to arrange the traditional Masonic burial ceremony for the first Worshipful Master

*A phrase that appeared in a local newspaper in Elizabeth-town, N.J., December 24, 1799. The announcement was based on a dispatch dated Alexandria, December 16th.

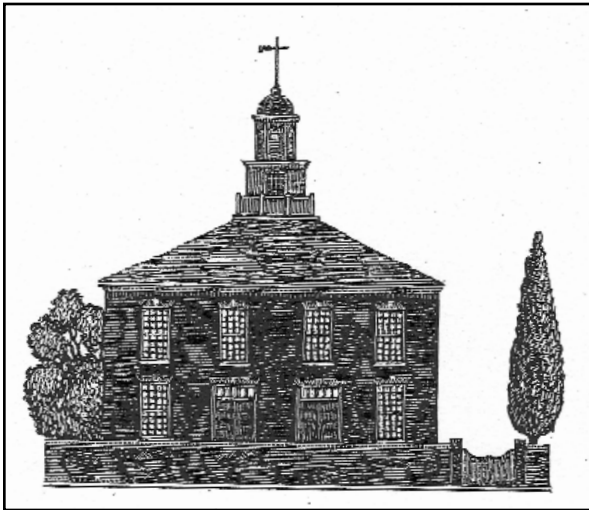
of Lodge 22.¹ Among the thirty-eight members in attendance was Sea Captain John McKnight.²

Early in the morning of Wednesday, December 18, 1799, the Masonic fraternity, under escort by several local military units and citizens of Alexandria, started for Mount Vernon, where they arrived about one o'clock in the afternoon. It was a cold winter day with snow on the ground, and the nine-mile trip took several hours, particularly for those participants without carriage or horse. By three o'clock, the funeral procession was formed and moved solemnly to the place of burial. A schooner anchored in Potomac River fired its cannon in final salute. At the family vault, Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick, Worshipful Master, performed the Masonic funeral service, and the Reverend James Muir assisted with the prayers and Bible readings. The Reverend Thomas Davis read the Episcopal Prayer Book's funeral service. Finally, Dr. Dick deposited in the coffin Washington's Masonic apron -- the badge of a Mason. It was followed by a sprig of evergreen representing the acacia plant, a Masonic symbol of immortality and rebirth.³ Washington's remains were then carried into the vault by the pall bearers. Following a final military salute by the artillery and infantry, the funeral party returned to the mansion house for light refreshments, and then very sadly went on their way -- few, no doubt, fully comprehending the historic significance of what they had witnessed.

Unlike later Presidents of the United States, George Washington's burial ceremony was not a national affair.

Word of his passing did not reach the Congress of the United States or President Adams in Philadelphia until the day of his funeral.⁴ His burial was indeed a very local affair, attended principally by people who probably knew Washington personally, if not intimately. Martha Washington chose to remain inside the family home during the burial service. Captain John McKnight and his young wife Catherine were among the official Masonic Lodge mourners in attendance.⁵ Catherine's uncle, Major Henry Piercy, commander of a voluntary infantry unit called The Independent Blues of Alexandria, led his unit in the burial procession.

On December 29, as the full realization of Washington's death began to take hold in the seaport community, John and Catherine attended one of four special memorial services for Washington held at the Presbyterian Meeting House on Fairfax Street. Poor weather and a muddy road forced a last-minute change in the venue for this service. As the *Columbia Mirror & Alexandria Gazette* reported on December 28, "Walking being bad to the Episcopal Church (Christ Church – "the Church in the Woods") the funeral service for George Washington will be preached at the Presbyterian Meeting House tomorrow at 11 o'clock."



The Old Presbyterian Meeting House

When Washington died, the bell of the Meeting House, the only church bell in Alexandria at the time, tolled for four days and nights,⁶ an action repeated in many small towns and villages. Grieving Americans organized and participated in over four hundred special funeral services and processions during the weeks to come.⁷

On January 6, 1800, President John Adams declared, by Presidential Proclamation, the twenty second of February 1800 as the National Day of Mourning.⁸ In Alexandria, a special committee was appointed to plan the local events for this special day. On February 1st, the

Committee reported in the local newspaper that "...a memorial procession would form in King Street precisely at 11 o'clock, from which place they will march in order to the Presbyterian Meeting House..." There an Oration would be delivered by Dr. Elisha C. Dick, followed by "religious solemnities."⁹ All colors on ships in the port would be lowered to half mast, and all business in the city suspended, and shops closed. Thus George Washington's home town prepared to bid a final farewell to their "First and most beloved of Citizens."¹⁰

"Washington In Glory/America In Tears"*

George Washington was a national hero who embodied the promise of the new republic. As Thomas Jefferson was to write several years later, "It may be said that never did nature and fortune combine more perfectly to make a man great, and to place him in the same constellation with whatever worthies have merited from man an everlasting remembrance."¹¹

Washington's unexpected death resulted in the first national display of mourning in the United States. It was expressed through the sharing of mourning memorabilia. It was traditional for very special mourning jewelry to be given to family members and close personal friends of the deceased. Often this occurred at the specific direction of the deceased's will. In the case of Washington's death, samples of his hair were provided to special admirers by Martha Washington herself. These hair samples were subsequently encased in some form of memorial jewelry to be protected as family heirlooms for future generations to revere.

In January 1800, Eliza Wadsworth, the twenty year old daughter of Congressman Peleg Wadsworth of Maine, asked her father to obtain, if possible, a lock of General Washington's hair as a keepsake. Congressman Wadsworth, residing in Philadelphia at the time, wrote directly to Mrs. Washington making the request on behalf of his daughter. Moved by Eliza's request, Martha Washington provided the young woman with a lock of her husband's hair. That lock of hair, encased in a gold locket by Eliza's nephew, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, is now in the safe keeping of the Maine Historical Society, along with related correspondence between Eliza and her Papa. On a sad note, Eliza died of consumption two years later, age 22.¹²

In his will, George Washington specified that five gold rings, valued at \$100 each were to be given to "...my sisters-in-law Hannah Washington & Mildred Washington and to my friends Eleanor Stuart, Hanna

*This phrase is part of the black transfer print decoration on a cream ware ceramic jug made for the American market, probably in Liverpool, England, c.1800.

Washington of Fairfax and Elizabeth Washington of Hayfield...". While all five of these gold rings still exist, none can be attributed to a specific owner.¹³ "Washington" memorial rings were either inscribed "George Washington OB: 14 Dec. 1799. AE.68," or simply "George Washington." In one instance, a ring was inscribed "George and Martha Washington". They usually contained either a miniature portrait of the former General or plaited hair beneath a clear crystal. It is rare for any attribution of ownership to appear on these rings, and consequently, their provenance is not fully known. A rare exception is Catherine's ring.

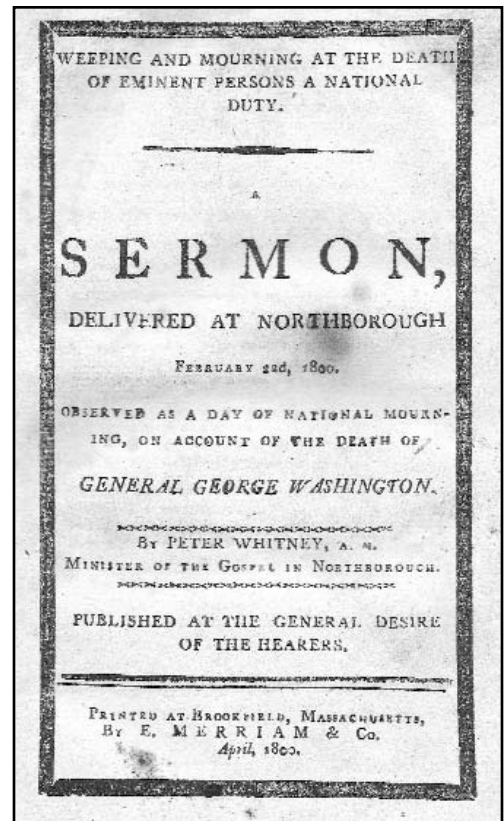
Soon after George Washington's death, perhaps on her seventeenth birthday, Catherine Piercy McKnight was given a small, pink gold hoop ring, measuring only $\frac{3}{4}$ " in diameter, with octagonal bezel containing plaited hair under a clear crystal. Engraved behind the bezel, the commemorative script read: "Gen. G. Washingtons Hair / 1799 / C.P. McKnight / Aex. Va." This special gift was most likely from her husband John, who may have acquired the hair sample from an associate in the Masonic Lodge or, perhaps, directly from Mrs. Washington.

Although not bearing a jeweler's identity mark, Catherine's ring may have been made by local silversmith Adam Lynn. Lynn opened his shop in Alexandria in 1796 and is known to have made "...new officers jewels..." for the Masonic Lodge in 1806. Most importantly, this gold memorial ring has survived and has been returned to Alexandria, Virginia – nearly two hundred and ten years after it was first presented to the young wife of Captain John McKnight.

Miss Catherine "Kitty" Piercy

Catherine Piercy was born in the Northern Liberties section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, probably at 296-298 North Front Street on January 7, 1783. She was the second youngest of eight children born to Christian and Mary (Smythe) Piercy. Christian Piercy was a potter by trade and a veteran of the Revolutionary War. Along with his two brothers Jacob and Henry, also potters, and as Captain of the Fifth Philadelphia Militia, he spent the brutally cold winter of 1777-1778 at Valley Forge. Catherine's uncle, Henry Piercy, while serving as aide-de-camp to General Washington, was wounded near Yorktown, Virginia in 1781. Henry subsequently became a member of the Society of the Cincinnati. He died in Alexandria on June 18, 1809.¹⁴

At the conclusion of the Revolutionary War in 1783, Christian Piercy returned to his family in Philadelphia and resumed his successful pottery business. By November 1792, Henry Piercy had moved from New



**A Mourning Sermon dated February 22, 1800
"The National Day of Mourning"**

Jersey to Alexandria, Virginia, where he established his own pottery business near the intersection of Washington and Duke Streets. He soon married Miss Mary Burroughs.¹⁵

During the summer of 1793, a deadly Yellow Fever epidemic devastated the City of Philadelphia. In a matter of months an estimated 5,000 people, almost ten percent of the city's population, were sick or had died of the disease.¹⁶ As one resident described the situation, "The horrors of this memorable affliction were extensive and heart rending"; "...those who were in health one day were buried the next."¹⁷ The epidemic even posed a direct threat to the new Government of the United States. President Washington was forced to temporarily move his family and his Cabinet to nearby Germantown, Pennsylvania. Members of Congress also fled the city. The Piercy family was not as fortunate; Catherine's father, Christian, age 49, and his son William died of the fever. Soon afterward, Henry, by now well established in Alexandria but without children of his own, provided a home for his niece Catherine and nephew John.¹⁸ By 1798, John, age 21, having learned the potting trade as well, returned to Philadelphia to establish his own business. Catherine remained in Alexandria and resided in the Piercy residence on upper Prince Street.¹⁹ She would soon marry a dashing sea captain.

Captain John McKnight

John McKnight was born in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, on July 2, 1769. He was the second of four sons born to William and Martha (Bryan) McKnight. William (1733-1812) was a veteran of the French and Indian War. He participated in the capture of Fort Duquesne in November 1758 as a Captain in the First Battalion, Pennsylvania Regiment, of General John Forbes' army.²⁰ Martha died on June 3, 1775. Probably soon afterward, William married Susanna Evans. He moved his family to Alexandria, Virginia, by late 1775. City documents show that he purchased one half acre of land there on December 19, 1774 and in March 1775 agreed to "...lay out and keep forever a street sixty-four feet wide...by the name of St. Asaph Street."²¹ His residence was on the site of present day 208 South St. Asaph Street. His original frame dwelling house was either replaced or encapsulated by his grandson and namesake, William Henry McKnight, when William Henry built the current brick structure about 1870.²²

Growing up in the seaport town of Alexandria, with in view of hundreds of tall mast sailing vessels, and very likely having contact in his father's tavern on King street with merchant seamen from around the world, must have influenced young John McKnight to seek adventure beyond Alexandria's bustling wharfs. By the age of nineteen, he had become a ship's master. During his long maritime career, he piloted the merchant ships the "Polly & Nancy," the "Maria," the "Hunter," the "President," the schooner "Brothers Return," the "Rosanna," the "Commerce," and was part owner and captain of the schooner "Adventure."

Captain McKnight's early seafaring career was far from uneventful. He experienced several hair-raising encounters with French privateers and pirates on the high seas, detainment of his ships as prizes in foreign ports, a desperate escape from a French prison, and a near catastrophic encounter with a hurricane in the mid-Atlantic. As word of these exploits became known, the thirty year old bachelor seaman was probably looked upon as a promising catch by many of the young ladies in Alexandria. His surviving portrait, painted by itinerant limner Jacob Frymire in 1800,²³ would further suggest such appeal. He, however, was to choose Catherine, the niece of a local potter.*

It was during the early years of John McKnight's maritime career that President Washington unilaterally abrogated the Treaty of Alliance between the United States and France in favor of neutrality. In retaliation, the new revolutionary government in France, at war with her European neighbors, armed eighty-seven ships from



Captain John McKnight

Santo Domingo alone and sent them to prey on American commerce. Between 1792 and 1801, more than fifteen hundred American vessels were captured by French privateers during this undeclared war.²⁴

In 1792, while homeward bound from London, Captain McKnight's ship was pursued, attacked, and captured in the English Channel by the infamous French privateer "L'Insurgente." During the course of this encounter, Captain McKnight was wounded in the leg by hostile fire. He and his crew were subsequently imprisoned in Nantes, France, for nearly two years under harsh conditions. On one occasion, he and other prisoners were marched into the prison yard where a number of prisoners were randomly executed.²⁵ Captain McKnight and several of his crew managed to escape in early 1794 by scaling the prison wall using blanket ropes, making their way to the French coast, and returning home via the West Indies.

By November 1796, John was Captain of the "Polly & Nancy," an Alexandria merchant ship. Among his papers, he carried A Suffer-to-Pass document signed by President Washington.²⁶ This paper declared the ship's neutral status in the on-going war between Britain and

*While, unfortunately, no portrait of Catherine Piercy McKnight is known to exist, she probably had few, if any, competitors for John McKnight's attention. Among a wide selection of marriage announcements in the *Alexandria Gazette* – a publication not known for its reporting of local events such as weddings – none are as glowing and complimentary of the bride as the one written about Catherine. She must have been quite attractive, as well as "accomplished."

France. On his first voyage, he was overtaken by a French privateer near the Virginia Capes and ordered to sail to a French port in the West Indies. However, in route, a British frigate interceded and forced the French ship to withdraw. Nonetheless, Captain McKnight was forced to pay a forty percent salvage charge on his cargo of salt before being released by the British captain on December 5, 1797 -- so much for neutrality in the eyes of the warring parties. The "Polly and Nancy" arrived back in Alexandria on January 26, 1798.

During a return voyage from Cadiz, Spain on July 16, 1798, the "Polly & Nancy" was again pursued and attacked by a French privateer "...mounting two swivels and carrying twenty men, who had been firing at me nearly an hour..." "It falling away calm, she boarded me..." The "Polly and Nancy" was taken as a prize to a port in the south of Spain.

In a letter published in the *Alexandria Times and Advertiser* and dated Algeciras, Spain, July 31, 1798, Captain McKnight related details of his capture and further described his situation: "...I have now got the French flag flying over my head." "It is almost impossible to enter the straits without being picked up by some of these pirates...nor is the least respect paid to any of the neutral flags..." "A number of Americans are here in a situation similar to my own"..."including the captain of the ship "Hunter," of Philadelphia, who has been here five or six months, and his vessel not yet cleared."

The "Polly and Nancy" was released from the Spanish port on November 4, 1798. In route home with a new cargo of salt, fruit and wine, she was severely damaged in a hurricane and dismasted on December 10th. Captain McKnight was able to safely make land in the West Indies, but with great difficulty. The severely damaged ship, however, was declared unseaworthy by port authorities in St. John, Antigua on January 10, 1799, and her cargo was sold off with the proceeds going to the ship's owner.²⁷

Captain and Mrs. John McKnight of Alexandria

How Captain John McKnight and the young Miss Catherine Piercy met is not recorded; we can only surmise. Perhaps the answer lies with Uncle Henry Piercy's membership in Alexandria Masonic Lodge #22; he was elected junior warden of the Lodge in 1793 and served as senior warden from 1797 until 1801. John McKnight was a fellow Mason.²⁸

Commercial interests may also have brought the Piercy and McKnight families together. By the late eighteenth century, Alexandria had become one of the ten busiest ports in America, with at least a thousand ships

arriving each year.²⁹ By this time, Captain McKnight was off-loading cargo from his ships for sale to local shop keepers, including, most likely, Henry Piercy.

Besides operating his pottery business on the north-east corner of Washington and Duke Streets, Henry Piercy "...was also involved in retail ventures."³⁰ An advertisement in the local newspaper on November 1, 1792, advised the public that he had "...for sale at his house, the upper end of Prince Street, a large assortment of CHINA QUEEN'S WARE and GLASS." Henry was also a business partner in a dry goods shop on King Street between Royal and Pitt streets "...opposite Mr. McKnight's Tavern..."³¹ John's father William operated this tavern from about 1775 until 1800 when John's younger brother, Charles, took over daily management and renamed the establishment the Eagle. Charles McKnight (1774-1853) also was a businessman and partner in various commission and auction houses in Alexandria.

In a small but busy seaport town like Alexandria, the Piercy and McKnight families likely established both commercial and social connections, given their related roles in the town's economy. In any event, marriage vows were exchanged within months of the Captain's return from his latest encounter with pirates off the coast of Spain.

"Going to Housekeeping"*

Captain McKnight brought his new wife to live in a frame dwelling house near the upper end of Prince Street around the corner from his boyhood home on St. Asaph Street. A deed registered with the Alexandria Hustings Court, dated May 21, 1799, records the transfer of a parcel of Lot 110 on the south side of Prince street (between Pitt and St. Asaph Streets) for the sum of 300 pounds from Charles and Lucy Cartlish to John McKnight. A Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia fire insurance policy dated August 1, 1805 shows John McKnight residing there.³² The residence consisted of two adjoining frame, dwelling houses, one with an attached kitchen and pantry, and the other with an attached wooden shed. It is interesting to note, that when this property belonged to Charles Cartlish, the eastern most structure was designated a one story shop, according to a fire insurance policy dated June 9, 1796.³³ It is not clear whether this shop was converted into a full residence when the McKnights moved there in October 1799, or whether Captain McKnight may have continued to use the space for com-

*An 18th century phrase referring to a newly married couple establishing their first home and all that it entails -- purchasing or renting a house or living space, and acquiring the initial furnishings.

mercial purposes in support of his maritime trade. It should be further noted that this structure, as shown on the 1805 policy, had an attached wooden shed, not a kitchen. This would further suggest that while described in 1805 as a dwelling house, it may not have been intended for use as a residence. Subsequent fire insurance policies confirm that John and Catherine resided at this location until 1815, either in one or both of these buildings.

On September 20, 1815, a new policy signed by John McKnight identified the occupant of the Prince Street properties as Fredrick Cris, presumably a renter. Another policy dated only two weeks later, confirmed that the McKnights had moved to a two-story frame house with attached wooden kitchen on the east side of south St. Asaph Street between Prince and Duke Streets. This policy states that the residence "...is occupied by John McKnight." A postscript to the policy states: "Note. Capt. John McKnight is now at Sea."³⁴

The new McKnight dwelling house stood immediately at the south of what is now 204 south St. Asaph Street* and adjacent to the property -- now 208 South St. Asaph -- formerly occupied by his father William (died 1812). Documents show this two-story frame dwelling house was owned by John McKnight as early as August 1805 when he insured it for 350 dollars.³⁵ The insurance policy shows it was unoccupied at that time. However, by 1810, a tax assessment identifies the occupant as one Julia Carr, a renter.³⁶ This house apparently remained a rental property until John and Catherine made it their permanent home in September 1815. It was to be John and Catherine's home for the remainder of their married life together.

The private lives of Catherine and John were no doubt affected by his periodic, long absences at sea. There is no indication, however, that their marriage was anything but happy and fulfilling for both. The early years of the nineteenth century were defined by a rapidly expanding family. The care of the McKnight children, if the standards of the period can be applied, fell primarily to Catherine. The census for 1810 shows the McKnight household on Prince Street consisted of seven white occupants and two slaves.³⁷ By this date, five of their twelve children had been born, most of who were under the age of ten. At least one of the two black servants may have been a wet nurse and/or a cook, providing Catherine with at least some assistance with the children's daily care and the household chores.

The McKnight's first child, William Henry was born

*204 South St. Asaph Street was built circa 1900 on what was, in 1815, the site of a wooden stable belonging to the Bank of Alexandria property located on the southeast corner of Prince and St. Asaph Streets.

on August 24, 1800, and was baptized in the Presbyterian Church on October 5, 1800.³⁸ By November, Captain McKnight was aboard the "Rosanna" on a voyage "...to Cape Francois and other ports north side of St. Domingo." On May 7, 1802, a daughter, Martha Bryan was born, and baptized on November 16, 1802. By October 1803, John had returned from a long voyage to Petersburg, Russia, as captain of the ship "Hunter." In April 1804 he departed aboard the "Adventure" for Barbados and St. Martens. In January 1805, he again set sail in the "Adventure" for Havanna. In August 1806, a son, Charles Augustus was born, followed in about late November 1807 by daughter Margaret. In April or May 1809 and December 1810, respectively, daughters Susanna and Mary Elizabeth were born. Six more children were yet to be born to Catherine and John in the ensuing years.

The historical record is not entirely clear as to when John McKnight gave up his maritime career. The record suggests that after a number of additional voyages aboard the merchant ship "Commerce" to the Mediterranean and to ports in South America, John chose to retire to a less stressful job as Harbor Master of the Port of Alexandria. It would appear from a brief comment in a letter from Captain McKnight to his brother Charles, dated Bladensburg, Maryland, January 26, 1824, that John was already serving as Harbor Master as of that date, if not earlier. In the letter John asks his brother to tell his son John, Jr., that "...he must Collect the Harbour dues if any (ships) should arrive" in his father's absence. He was still Harbor Master when he died at age 65 on February 7, 1834.³⁹ An obituary notice in the *Alexandria Gazette* for February 8th advised: "Died, Yesterday afternoon, Captain John McKnight, in the 65th year of his age; long a respected citizen of this place, and for a number of years past Harbor Master of the Port. The friends and acquaintances of the family are requested to attend the funeral, from his late residence on St. Asaph street, at 3 o'clock This Afternoon." He was interred in the Presbyterian Cemetery in the west end of town.

At some point after her husband's passing, Catherine moved to Norristown, Pennsylvania, perhaps to be close to other members of the Piercy family; she died there on December 13, 1867. She had out-lived all but three of her children.⁴⁰ There is no record of her remarrying. Her obituary notice in the *Alexandria Gazette* for December 14, 1867 advised: "Died. In Norristown, Pa, on the 13th inst., in the 83rd year of her age, Mrs. CATHARINE P. McKNIGHT, relict of the late Captain John McKnight of Alexandria. Her funeral will take place from the Second Presbyterian Church, in this city, on Tuesday morning, 17th instant, at 11 o'clock. Friends

and acquaintances of the family are invited to attend.”

The remains of John and Catherine McKnight lie in the 1809 Presbyterian Cemetery, Section 41, Lot 20, in Alexandria, Virginia.

An Epilogue

The McKnight and Piercy families played important roles in the early commercial and social history of Alexandria, Virginia. Members of both families also served in the defense of their country -- William McKnight during the French and Indian War, and all three Piercy brothers during the American Revolutionary War. John McKnight's younger brother Charles led the Independent Blues in August 1814 during the Battle of the White House -- an attempt to impede the withdrawal of the British Naval flotilla on the Potomac River following the plundering of Alexandria during the War of 1812. Charles also served important roles in the Alexandria community, first as commander of the Friendship Fire Company in 1824, and from 1837 until his death on March 11, 1853, as justice of the peace. He never married.⁴¹

During the American Civil War, McKnight family members in Alexandria sympathized with the Southern cause. Two of Catherine McKnight's grandsons, William Presley and Charles Henry, served in the Confederate Army, both having participated in the withdrawal of Confederate forces from the city as Federal troops entered on May 24, 1861.⁴²

William Presley McKnight served as a Lieutenant in the Seventeenth Virginia Regiment. He was wounded at Antietam, Maryland, in 1862. Following the end of hostilities, William Presley returned home and became the business manager of the *Alexandria Gazette*, serving in that capacity for nearly forty years. He died in 1927, aged 89. Charles, too, survived the war, but lost his right arm. He died in Alexandria, Virginia in 1916 after a successful railroad career.⁴³



Catherine's Ring

The documented history of Catherine McKnight's gold memorial ring is fairly limited to the commemorative inscription it bears -- "Gen. G. Washingtons Hair /1799/ C.P. McKnight /Aex. Va." We can only surmise additional details of its long history. In all probability, the ring remained in Catherine's possession as a revered memento of the early events of her married life. At her death in 1867, the ring most likely was passed to a female descendent in either the McKnight or Piercy families, and presumably, remained in that family until sometime in the twentieth century or later.

What we do know for sure, is that several years ago Catherine's ring appeared in an auction in New York State where it was purchased by a private collector who recognized its historical significance. As part of a subsequent estate settlement in early 2009, the ring was acquired in Massachusetts by the current owners and brought back to Alexandria.

Historically significant, Catherine McKnight's gold memorial ring remains a tangible, historic link to our first President, as well as to the events surrounding his death and burial at Mount Vernon, to our country's first National Day of Mourning, and to the two families that played important roles in Alexandria's early history. It is therefore quite fitting that Catherine's ring has been returned to the scene of those momentous events of so long ago.

The Author

Richard Klingenmaier received his M.A. in International Relations from Northeastern Illinois University and has served abroad in the Foreign Service with the U.S. Department of State. He is a life-long student of American history, with special interests in the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and 18th and early 19th century social history and customs. He and his wife Trish reside in Alexandria's historic district where he serves on the Board of Directors of the Alexandria Association.

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A publication of monographs about historical Alexandria, Virginia.

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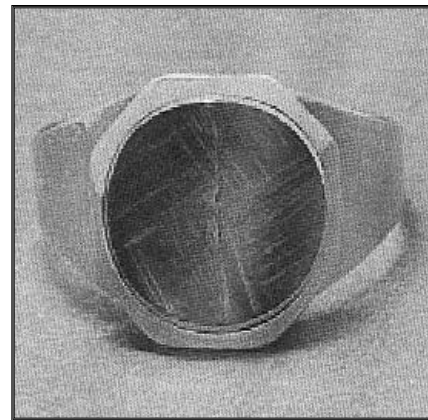
The mission of the Alexandria Historical Society is to promote an active interest in American history and particularly in the history of Alexandria and Virginia. For information about activities of the Historical Society and for past issues of *The Alexandria Chronicle*

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The next issue of the *Chronicle*, in spring 2010, tells the story of the West Family in the founding and development of Alexandria
by James D. Bish

In this issue of the *The Alexandria Chronicle*



Catherine's Ring

The ring, shown above, looking down on its crystal bezel, was perhaps a special gift from a sea captain to his young wife on her seventeenth birthday. It recently returned to Alexandria, Virginia, after nearly two hundred and ten years!

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