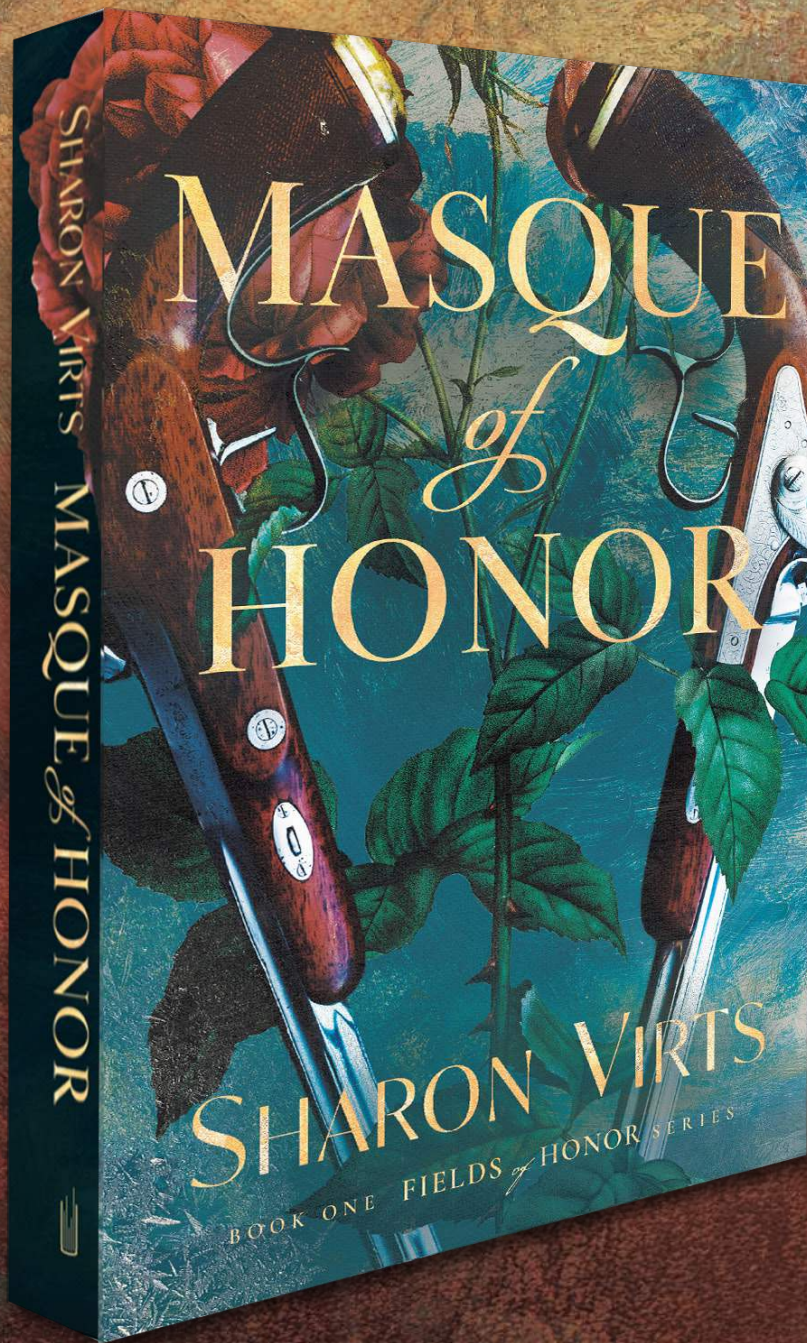


BOOK CLUB GUIDE



2026 Edition

Dear Reader,

My inspiration to write *Masque of Honor* began with the purchase of Selma, a dilapidated historic manor house that had sat abandoned for decades just north of the town of Leesburg, Virginia. As my husband and I embarked on the restoration of the property, I was intrigued by the history of the home and the stories of the people who lived there before. I found myself most fascinated by the legend of the man who originally built Selma, General Armistead Thomson Mason. I delved into research to learn all I could about his life and the infamous duel he fought with his brother-in-law and second cousin, John "Jack" McCarty.

When I began this project, I was confident that Armistead was my protagonist. Many accounts tell the tragic tale as a shining hero being felled by a rogue scoundrel. But as I read more into the original documents and memoirs, I realized a different story was emerging – so I redirected my efforts and began to learn as much as I could about Jack McCarty.

After exhaustive review and careful examination of each man and their family and friends, I found a narrative that explained the events leading up to their fateful meeting on the dueling grounds at Bladensburg on that snowy morning in February 1819. I discovered that while Jack did indeed provoke the General, it was Armistead who was the aggressor and simply could not let the matter rest. And as I dug deeper, I discovered the importance of the women in their lives. Sally McCarty, Lucinda Lee, Polly Mason, and Emily Mason McCarty in particular, played significant roles in thwarting the fight, but ultimately could not prevent it.

My portrayal of Armistead Mason and Jack McCarty, while not intended to be a nonfiction account of their lives nor a specific chronicle of their controversy, captures the essence of who they were and how each struggled in a world where life was fragile – and honor was everything.

My purpose as an author is to write page-turning stories that my readers want never to end. To do so, I create a blend of fact and fiction that entertains while at the same time, stays true to the essence of the story.

My hope is that Jack and Armistead touch you and the members of your book club as they have touched me and that their story—the meaning of honor and the power of forgiveness—resonate and remain with you a long, long time.

Best,



BEHIND THE MASQUE

The early 19th century in the United States was a time of political deference. Deference was the practice of showing respect for individuals who had distinguished themselves through military accomplishments, educational attainment, business success, or family pedigree. Deference shown to members of what many Americans in the early republic agreed was a natural aristocracy dovetailed with republicanism and its emphasis on virtue and honor.

From 1800 through the mid-1820s, all American presidents were wealthy, slave-holding members of the Virginia aristocracy and all Democratic Republicans. The more conservative Federalists believed American deference was less aristocratically-based than that of Britain; their Democratic Republican political opponents vehemently disagreed.



JACK McCARTY

In 1816, the country was still healing from the War of 1812, and American citizens and the economy were suffering. Adding to the heated political climate, the year would be known as the

“Year Without a Summer” due to devastating winter weather caused by a catastrophic volcanic eruption the year before. Many lost their financial stability with the loss of crops, and disrupted business. And it was in this climate that a tone-deaf Congress passed the Compensation Act – basically giving themselves a raise while the country was struggling. Adding to this, the Treaty of Ghent had failed to resolve lingering trade issues between the fledgling nation and Great Britain, resulting in the passage of a controversial tariff on goods imported from Britain.

Virginia, like most states, had imposed property qualifications for voting as a means to keep democratic tendencies Federalists

considered “mob-rule” in check. However, ordinary men from the middle and lower classes increasingly questioned the idea that property ownership was the only indication of virtue. They argued for universal manhood suffrage, or voting rights for



ARMISTEAD MASON

all white male adults. The Republicans began to focus more energy on crafting platforms and messages that would attract this new electorate while the Federalists lost favor.

Armistead Mason and Jack McCarty were both members of the Virginia aristocracy and both active in politics. Like his father, Armistead was more liberal in his persuasion. He was a supporter of his father’s life-long friend, Thomas Jefferson, and a leader in the Democratic Republican party. Jack, an ardent Federalist, was conservative by nature, and held the centrist philosophy of his father’s cousin, George Washington. When Armistead proposed a controversial militia bill supporting the rights of contentious objectors, tensions between them grew. At the loss of his election bid for a seat in Congress, Armistead accused the Federalists of election fraud which further strained the relationship between him and his cousin and sparked the controversy that led them to the dueling field.

By the time of their dispute, Virginia had passed the Anti-dueling Statute whereby death by duel became illegal in the commonwealth. In fact, the punishment under this statute for killing someone in a duel was death. The Act declared that dueling was no longer a gentlemanly way to solve a disagreement. As of 1810, it was murder. For this reason, Armistead and Jack retired to Maryland to settle their differences.

DRINKING & DINING

MINT JULEP

We wouldn't be true to the Southern charm of Jack McCarty if we did not suggest that you enjoy a Mint Julep during your book club meeting. Sit back and think of his lazy days on the veranda of the Barry House in Lexington, Kentucky.



- 4 to 5 mint sprigs (leaves only)
- 2 sugar cubes (or 1/2 oz simple syrup)
- 2 1/2 ounces bourbon whiskey
- Garnish: mint sprig

Place the mint leaves and sugar or simple syrup into a Julep cup, Collins glass, or double old-fashioned glass. Muddle well to dissolve the sugar and release the oil and aroma of the mint. Add the bourbon. Fill the glass with crushed ice and stir well until the glass becomes frosty. Garnish with a mint sprig. Serve with a straw and enjoy.

WASSAIL PUNCH

As Sally McCarty enjoyed a hot cup of Wassail during those winter evening parties at Belmont Manor, enjoy a cup of your own at your next club meeting with this simple recipe that is sure to keep you warm.



- 1 cup sugar
- 4 cinnamon sticks
- 3 lemon slices
- 2 cups pineapple juice
- 2 cups orange juice
- 6 cups dry red wine
- 1/2 cup lemon juice
- 1 cup dry sherry
- 2 lemons, sliced

Boil the sugar, cinnamon sticks, and 3 lemon slices in 1/2 cup of water for 5 minutes and strain. Discard the cinnamon sticks and lemon slices. Heat but do not boil the remaining ingredients. Combine with the syrup, garnish with the lemon slices, and serve hot.

THE LADY'S ASSISTANT

BY CHARLOTTE MASON | PUBLISHED IN 1775

A few original recipes from 18th-century English cooking and historical foodways.

TARTLETS

Have very small and shallow tin pans; butter them, and lay a bit of puff-pastry, marking it nearly round the edges, and leaving a hole in the middle, bake them; when they are cool, fill them with custard, or put into each half an apricot, raspberry-jam, or any preserved fruit, a little preserved apple, or marmalade; pour it over custard with very little sugar in it.

ICING FOR TARTS

Beat the white of an egg; rub it on the tarts with a feather, and sift double-refined sugar.

OYSTERS

Wash them in their own liquor, strain them; put them into a sauce-pan with some white pepper pounded, a little beaten mace, a little cream, a piece of butter mixed with flour; stir this until it boils; throw in the oysters, simmer them until enough; add salt, if wanted: toasted sippets round the dish.

ICING FOR TARTS

Stew them as above, fill little Dutch loaves with them.

DRINKING & DINING

Prior to the nineteenth century, appetizers were typically available throughout a meal. Then, the succession of courses we know today became common practice. At this time, appetizers change radically, becoming an ever more refined aspect of the meal and becoming a separate course altogether. This, too, is the time when the term "appetizer" enters common usage.

Here are some of my favorites from the 19th Century that most certainly were served at the dinings of Belmont and Raspberry Plain.

CHICKEN LIVER PATÉ

2 celery ribs with leaves
A few whole black peppercorns
1 teaspoon sea salt
1 lb. chicken livers (organic, pasture-raised)
½ lb. (2 sticks) unsalted butter
(fresh spring butter if you can get your hands on it)
⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper
(more or less to your liking)
2 teaspoon dry mustard
½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
2 pieces of cooked bacon
1 small yellow onion, coarsely chopped
1-2 garlic cloves
¼ cup Apple Jack Liquor
½ cup dried currants

Add celery, peppercorns and chicken livers to saucepan. Cover with about an inch of water and add salt and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 10-12 minutes; livers should still be slightly pink inside.

Drain; discard celery and peppercorns, and place livers in the bowl of a food processor. Add remaining ingredients and process until well blended and very smooth. It will be a little soupy. Taste and adjust seasoning. Add more Apple Jack and salt to taste.

Transfer into a 3-4 cup crock or terrine or to several small crocks. Smooth the top, cover, and refrigerate for a few hours.

Makes about 3 cups of pâté.

FRIED GREEN TOMATOES WITH SHRIMP REMOULADE

1 cup buttermilk
1 egg
A few dashes of hot sauce
Vegetable oil, enough to add about an inch in the bottom of your frying pan (coconut oil works well)
12 slices of green tomato, approximately ½-inch thick (3-4 tomatoes should do it)
1 cup cornstarch
1 cup cornmeal, lightly seasoned with Tony Chachere's Creole Seasoning (or salt, black pepper and a dash of cayenne)
One pound small to medium shrimp, cooked, peeled and chilled (see below)
1 cup chilled remoulade sauce (see below)
Mixed greens

In a medium bowl, whisk together buttermilk, egg and hot sauce.

Heat oil in a large frying pan over moderate heat.

Lightly salt and pepper each tomato slice.

Dip each tomato slice first in cornstarch, then in the egg mixture, then coat with cornmeal. Be sure to coat both sides with all three dips. Place tomato slices in the pan with heated oil in a single layer.

Do not crowd. Cook over moderate heat until golden brown on bottom. Turn and brown on other side. (Total cooking time is 3 to 4 minutes.) Exterior should be golden brown.

Place cooked tomatoes on a plate lined with paper towels.

Toss cooked shrimp with the remoulade.

On individual serving plates, place a handful of mixed greens. Top with two slices of fried tomato and top with shrimp remoulade.

HOSTING HIGH TEA

for Your Book Club Meeting

*"Tea service for two was always served in the parlor at Cedar Grove, rain or shine, every afternoon at four o'clock, whether Sally had guests or not. And every afternoon, the tray held not only the silver service belonging to her husband's mother, but also a crystal decanter filled with brandy, for Sally McCarty always fortified her tea with something stronger." -
Masque of Honor*

TEA HAS ALWAYS BEEN A POPULAR BEVERAGE WITH THE VIRGINIA ARISTOCRACY. TO HOST YOUR OWN HIGH TEA FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB MEETING, FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Small tables can be laid to accommodate six, or four, or even two. If one large table is used, spread with either a dinner or a tea cloth.
2. On a cold winter's afternoon, a bright open fire is one of the things to have at a truly Virginian tea party.
3. The places should be arranged with small silver for each course.
4. In the center should be a bowl of flowers and about it two candelabra or several individual candlesticks with or without candle shades .
5. In cooler months, dishes of cake, preserved or brandied fruits, etc., should be on the table. In warmer months, replace the preserves with fresh seasonal fruits.
6. Set the tea table with tea cups, milk jug, sugar basin, tea caddy, slop basin (or box), hot water kettle, and the tea pot under a cosy.
7. Serve cold beef, veal or lamb cutlets, eggs, or pickled salmon - all common at a "high tea."
8. Have the tea made in the kitchen and carefully strained; then put it in the urn and light the lamp and it will keep fresh for hours.
9. Have cream, sugar, and sliced lemons on the table, and, if you fancy a novelty, try putting two cloves in each cup and pouring the hot tea upon them, removing them before passing the cup.
10. Coffee and bouillon should be served from an urn, and the cups used for either of these, and for tea as well, should be the small flaring teacups, not after-dinner coffee cups.
11. For those that prefer their tea stronger like Sally McCarty, offer a crystal decanter filled with brandy.



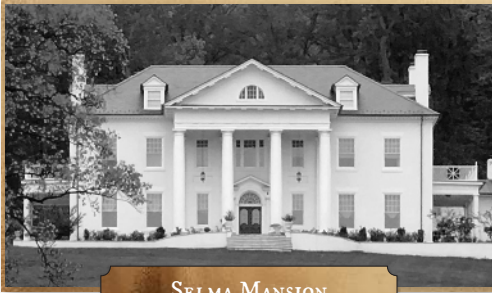
MASQUE OF HONOR

Author's Questions for Book Clubs Reading

1. What does the title "*Masque of Honor*" convey about this novel?
2. So many of the main characters lost their fathers. Discuss the impact of this early loss on the lives of Armistead, Jack and Lucinda.
3. Power and position were clear drivers of Armistead's ambition. What was important to Jack and how did his motivation and perspective put him at odds with his cousin?
4. Who bears the greater responsibility for the feud, Jack or Armistead? Why could they not let the conflict go? What was at stake?
5. What symbolism do the jackets worn by the characters represent in the book? William's coat with the McCarty family crest? The jacket of Armistead's uniform? Armistead's overcoat with the heavy skirts?
6. How would you contrast the influences that Sally and Polly had on the lives of their children? How did those influences play out on Armistead and Jack in particular?
7. What impact did Jack's trip to Natchez have on his outlook on life?
8. How important was Emily's role in Jack and Lucinda's relationship and within the family dynamic overall?
9. When Jack observes the orphans playing in New York, he asks himself two questions: "Was I ever that happy," and "Why not?" What do you think was the answer to his second question?
10. Forgiveness is an important theme in the book. What impact does the act of forgiveness have on the characters and the story?

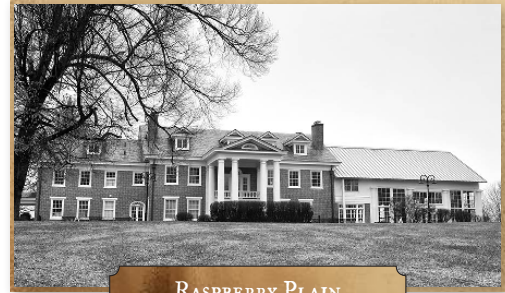
HOMES OF MASQUE

Still Standing



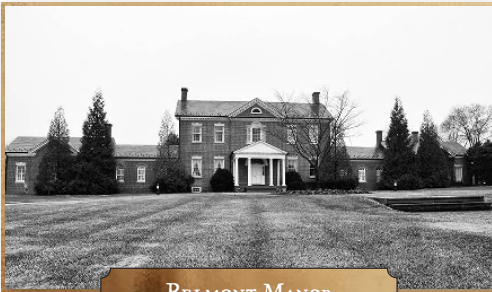
SELMA MANSION

Originally built in 1810 by Armistead Mason, the mansion burned in 1896 and was rebuilt in 1902 by E.B. White. In 2016, the property underwent a major restoration by the Author and her husband.



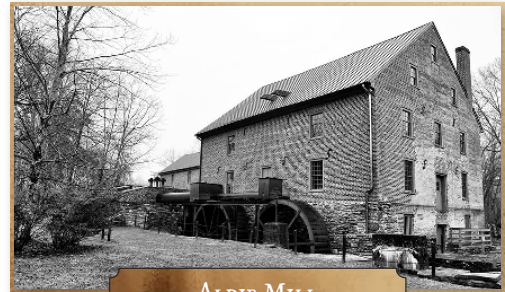
RASPBERRY PLAIN

In 1771, Thomson Mason, brother of George Mason IV, built the manor house of Raspberry Plain on the site of the current building. The mansion was added to throughout the nineteenth century and rebuilt in 1910. It currently serves as an event venue.



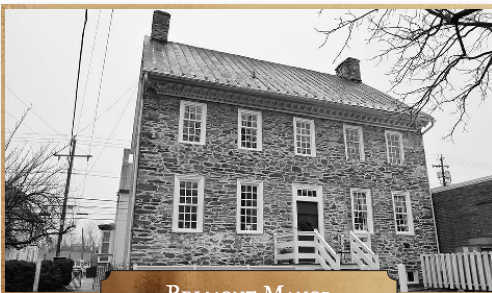
BELMONT MANOR

Today's Manor house is the original 1810 structure that was built with bricks imported from London by Ludwell Lee, son of Richard Henry Lee. In the early twentieth century, it was home to the McLean family and also the Hope Diamond. It was restored in 1995 and currently serves as the clubhouse to the Belmont Country Club community.



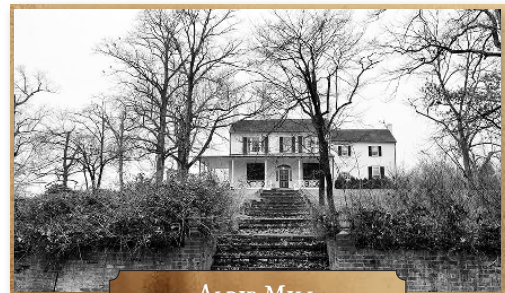
ALDIE MILL

Built between 1807 and 1809 by Charles Fenton Mercer, the Aldie Gristmill was once the largest factory of its kind in Loudoun County. The mill's tandem metal waterwheels remain fully operational.



BELMONT MANOR

Osbourne's Tavern currently serves as a law office in downtown Leesburg.

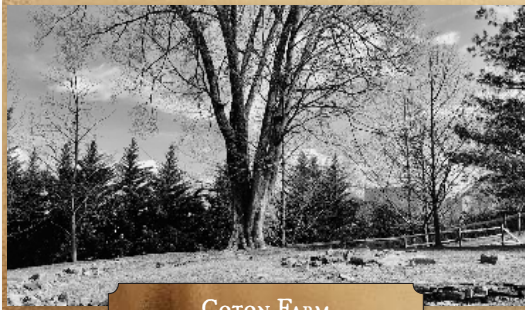


ALDIE MILL

Also known as Aldie Manor, the Mercer house was built by Charles Fenton Mercer and named for Aldie Castle in Scotland, the ancestral home of the Mercer family. The house is currently a private residence.

HOMES OF MASQUE

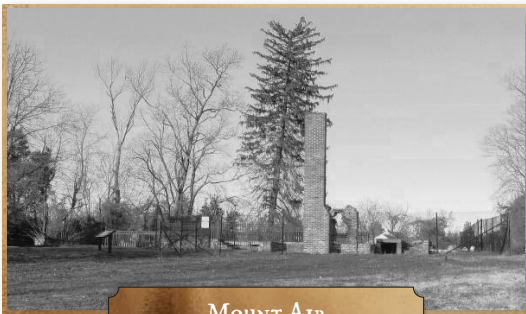
Lost to the Past



COTON FARM

Thomas Lee of Stratford Hall was granted over 11,000 acres by the British government. On 800 acres where the Potomac River meets the Goose Creek, is the site that would become Coton Farm. In 1796, his grandson, Thomas Ludwell Lee Jr., set out to improve the property by enlarging the manor house and mill and building a distillery and meat house. At his death, the property passed to his wife, Fannie Carter Lee who raised the couple's eight daughters on the farm and managed the

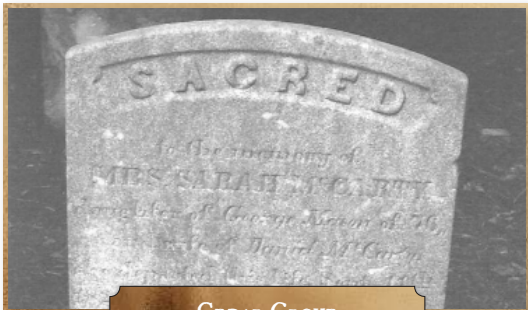
family business. Following her death, the manor house burned and was rebuilt several times over the next century. In the 1930s it was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Warner Snider who lived there for over thirty years. Today, only the stone foundation, kitchen, and domestic slaves' quarters remain. It is now part of the Lansdowne community and sits near the resort's golf club.



MOUNT AIR

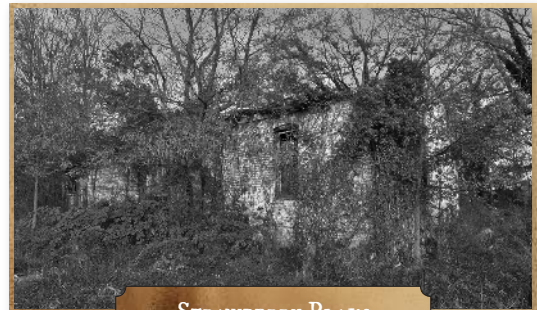
Built in 1727 by Major Dennis McCarty, Mount Air was initially situated on over 522 acres on the Northern Neck near Mount Vernon. More acreage was acquired and the original house enlarged and rebuilt in 1806. In 1856, it was partially destroyed by fire and rebuilt on the same foundations where over the years it was remodeled several times. In 1992, shortly after the death of owner Elizabeth Shirley Enochs, the house was destroyed by fire again.

This time, the house was completely destroyed with the exception of the brick foundation walls, chimney, fireplaces, and several portions of the columns. Although the manor house was never rebuilt, several of the outbuildings remain. The property was sold for development into a single-family residential community.



CEDAR GROVE

Originally built in 1745 as a tenant property of Mount Air, a larger dwelling was constructed in 1758 by Daniel McCarty. In 1848, William McCarty sold the property to Jonathan Roberts, a Quaker from New Jersey. Located on the Pohick Bay at the confluence of Accotink and Pohick creeks, Cedar Grove is now within the boundaries of the US Army's Ft. Belvoir. All that remains today is the McCarty family cemetery.



STRAWBERRY PLAIN

In 1754, Aenas Campbell, Loudoun County's first sheriff, purchased the property and built the mansion and the first jail on what later became part of the Raspberry Plain property.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Sharon Virts is a bestselling author known for richly layered historical fiction that blends meticulous research with psychological suspense and immersive storytelling. A Virginia native, Sharon grew up captivated by tales of the past—stories of forgotten lives, buried truths, and long-hidden mysteries. That early fascination sparked a lifelong curiosity—about the people, events, and places history has overlooked that—that now fuels her writing.

Her bestselling novels *Veil of Doubt*, and *The Grays of Truth*—and the *Field of Honor* series featuring *Masque of Honor* and *Bargains of Fate*—weave historical accuracy with cinematic narrative and atmospheric tension, crafting stories that linger long after the final page. *Veil of Doubt* was named a finalist for Best Historical Fiction by both the American Book Fest's 2024 Best Book Awards and the IAN Book of the Year Awards. *The Grays of Truth* won the 2025 International Book Award for Best Historical Fiction.

Sharon's contribution to the arts, preservation, and community service have earned her recognition as one of *Washington Life Magazine's* Philanthropic 50 in 2020 and a 2024 Loudoun History Award honoree.

Sharon lives with her husband, Scott Miller, at Selma Mansion in Virginia, a historic estate they rescued from demolition and lovingly restored. There, surrounded by stories of the past, she continues to write the ones still waiting to be told.

SHARON VIRTS