2024-2026 TALKING HEADSTONES

Dick Moody, Sacajawea Chapter, DAR, presenting "Charles Mason Narrative" Union Pioneer Calvary Cemetery. Tumwater, WA.

Charles H. Mason, Washington Territory's First Secretary of State and Four-Time Acting Governor

I'm Charles H. Mason. I was born in 1830 at Fort Washington, Maryland to Milo and Marie Mason. My father died when I was seven, and the family then moved to Providence, Rhode Island. I graduated with honors in 1850 from Brown University at Providence, and in 1851, I was recommended for admission to the state bar as an attorney.

I came to Washington Territory in 1853 to serve as the territorial secretary. I served as acting Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs when Governor Isaac Stevens was absent from the Territory.

In all, I served four stints as acting Governor:

- **March 26, 1854 – December 1, 1854**
- **May 12, 1855 – January 19, 1856, while Governor Stevens was establishing treaties with indigenous tribes in eastern Washington. I assisted Governor Stevens in the negotiations of the Medicine creek and Point No Point Treaties. I was credited during those negotiations as the Secretary of Treaty Commissions. From October 1855 to January 1856 the state was at war when hostilities erupted between settlers and First Nations peoples in Snohomish, King, Pierce, and Thurston counties.**
- **I assisted Governor Stevens in the negotiations of the Medicine creek and Point No Point Treaties. I was credited during those negotiations as the Secretary of Treaty Commissions. I was also selected to transport the treaty documents to Washington, D.C., and while there, secured $300,000 for territorial aid. That is equivalent to $11.5 million today.**
- **August 1857 – September 1857 when Governor Stevens resigned to become the Washington Territory delegate to the United States Congress. I served as acting governor until Gov. Fayette McMullen arrived in September.**

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- **August 1, 1858 – July 1, 1859, when Gov McMullen was removed from office for "incompetence." McMullen, from Virginia, was appointed by Democrat President James Buchanan. McMullen returned home and eventually became a member of the Confederate Congress. I again acted as governor until Richard D. Gholson was appointed governor by President Buchanan. Gholson took office on July 1, 1859.**

- **In total, my time as acting governor was about two-and-a-half years of my six years as Secretary of State.**

Historians assess my efforts during this time as "marked with energy, decision, and wisdom." Historians note that I called for volunteers, maintained peaceful relations with non-hostile bands, and greeted all parties with fairness.

I died in Olympia on July 29, 1859, from a brief illness.

In 1864 both Mason County and Mason Lake in that county were renamed in my honor.

Over the years, my grave marker was lost. After an extensive search in the 1990s my grave site was located. My burial location where you now stand was established from research of primary sources by the Washington State Archivist and staff.

This grave was marked in 1997 with both stone and bronze tablets you see here today.

Narrative written by Dick Moody, George Rogers Clark, SAR.