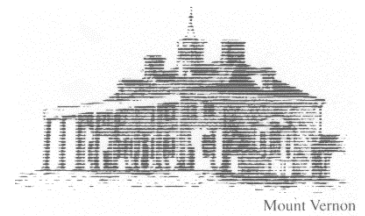




## **Dan Storck**

*Mount Vernon District Supervisor  
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors  
2511 Parkers Lane  
Mount Vernon, VA 22306*



*Telephone: (703) 780-7518 E-mail: [mtvernon@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:mtvernon@fairfaxcounty.gov)*

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### **Proclamation Recognizing the Pohick Church on its 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

**Joint with Supervisor Dan Storck and Chairman Jeff McKay**

**January 23, 2024**

When traveling north on Richmond Highway from Lorton, you can find a great deal of history tucked right next to Fort Belvoir at the edge of Mason Neck. Celebrating its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, Pohick Church has been an active spiritual home of many of our nation's founders as well as present day community members. Pohick Church played a pivotal role as the spiritual sanctuary of George Washington, who was a Truro Parish vestryman; and as Church Warden and land surveyor, he played a crucial part in the relocation, design and construction of Pohick Church on its present site in Lorton.

Rightly called "the Mother Church of Northern Virginia," Pohick was the first permanent church in the colony to be established north of the Occoquan River, sometime prior to 1724. The only artifact surviving from this period is the baptismal font, which has been identified as a large Medieval mortar, likely dating from the eleventh or twelfth centuries. The existing building was completed in 1774, just before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. Vestrymen George Washington, George Mason and George William Fairfax supervised the construction and along with other wealthy landowners of the parish purchased, and to this day still have, family pew boxes.

Listed in the National Register of Historic Places and bearing historical significance as an elegant specimen of Georgian-style architecture reflecting its colonial-era origins, Pohick Church is rich in our nation's history. During the War of 1812, oral tradition recounts that the British raided the church because of its association with George Washington. Pohick was periodically abandoned in the early 19th century and fell into disrepair. The community again banded together for the reconstruction of "General Washington's Church." Among the contributors to this renovation were President Martin Van Buren, former President John Quincy Adams, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay and Francis Scott Key.

Tragically, a mere twenty-one years after this reconstruction, the Civil War brought new devastation when occupying Union forces stripped the building's interior for

souvenirs of “Washington’s Church” and used its worship space as a stable. Soldiers scrawled their names on the inside walls, carved graffiti onto the doorposts and pockmarked the exterior with bullet holes. The outside markings can still be viewed today. Pohick then became a Union observation post, with the famous “aeronaut,” Professor Thaddeus S. C. Lowe, looking down at Confederate movements from his balloon, which soared 1,000-2,000 feet above the church courtyard.

Following the Civil war, services resumed in 1874, and a major restoration of its colonial interior began in 1890, thanks to the generous contributions of its congregation, the Mount Vernon Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, among others.

Over the years, Pohick’s unique history has drawn our nation’s leaders to visit the church for special services and commemorations. Not long after the Civil War, President Rutherford B. Hayes attended services at Pohick on Sunday, June 23, 1878, during a week when he was staying at Mount Vernon. President Warren Harding paid another such visit on May 29, 1921, the eve of Memorial Day, for the dedication of a memorial plaque honoring six local soldiers who died in combat during World War I.

Pohick Church stands as a testament to the collective endeavors of noteworthy individuals including George Washington, acknowledged as "the father of our country," George Mason, contributor to the Virginia constitution and “father of the Bill of Rights;” other local tradespeople and business owners; as well as numerous enslaved African Americans, in whose commemoration of their contributions, the church immortalized their names in bronze in 2023, serving as a lasting reminder.

With its history spanning four centuries, Pohick continues to inspire visitors from around the world, inviting all to come and explore the rich spiritual heritage that so many have experienced over the years. The church is open to visitors Monday through Saturday, 9 am to 4:30 pm, and Sundays from 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm, following the morning services. Guided tours for groups are available through advance arrangement with the church secretary and entry is free of charge.

Located next to Fort Belvoir, Pohick Church plays a significant role as a spiritual haven and welcoming community for all active military, veterans and their families.

Pohick Church holds many community events throughout the year from its Annual Fall Fair to Vacation Bible School and more. In celebration of the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Pohick Church will hold Semiquincentennial events throughout 2024. To ring in this joyous year, Pohick Church held a Bell Ringing Ceremony on Sunday, January 14 where they rang the steeple bell 250 times. Join Pohick Church

for their Jubilee Grand Celebration at Mount Vernon Estate on February 10, from 4:30 – 8:30 p.m. followed by other celebratory events throughout the year.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, without objection, I ask that a proclamation be prepared with your and my signatures to be presented to Pohick Church leadership, in the board room, on February 6, 2024, for the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its 1774 church building and for its centuries-long contributions to our community, American history and for carrying forward the spiritual legacy of its founders to current and future generations.