

MARCH MUSINGS

SHARON VIRTS



The House That Changed Everything

Celebrating 10 Years of Selma

On March 16, my husband and I will celebrate the tenth anniversary of a decision that changed everything in our lives. That was the day we purchased historic Selma.

At the time, Selma was not the elegant Southern property many of you have visited or seen in photos. It stood abandoned, weathered by time, its once-grand presence fading into ruin. Most people saw a lost cause. I saw a story waiting to be told.

Ironically, Selma found me first.

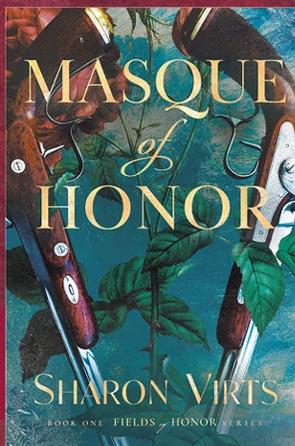
An old college friend had posted a photograph on Facebook of a crumbling mansion sitting alone on a hill. The house looked haunted by time—windows broken, paint long gone, the bones of a once-beautiful estate barely holding on. The caption simply asked if anyone knew what house this was. Even though I had grown up only a few miles away, I didn't recognize it at first. All I knew was that I had to save it.

Within days I was telling my husband about the house and confidently assuring him that the restoration would be simple. “All it needs,” I told him cheerfully, “is a little wire brush and some paint.” Ten years later, we still laugh about that.

The house, of course, needed far more than paint. It needed vision, stubborn determination, and more than a little faith that the stories embedded in its walls were worth preserving. And what stories they were.

Selma’s past stretches back more than two centuries, touching moments that shaped American history. One of its earliest residents, **Armistead Mason**, returned to Selma after the **Battle of Craney Island during the War of 1812**. The events that happened on the banks of Hoffer's Creek near the mouth of the Nansemond River near Norfolk serve as part of the backstory in both *Masque of Honor* and *Bargains of Fate* (releasing **June 23, 2026**).

Later generations lived through the upheaval of the Civil War, when Union General Wesley Merritt’s troops swept through the region in late November 1864. Family legend tells of Selma’s loyal butler who, when he heard the Yankees...[<READ MORE>](#)



PRE-ORDER NOW

Available March 24th, 2026

BOOK 1

The *FIELDS of HONOR* Series

On March 24th, *Masque of Honor* is released again in softcover. This new version of the original book is a bit shorter where I tightened some of the chapters. You'll find an added chapter in the new release as well as a different epilogue, this one from Jack's perspective years later as he reflects on the duel and what comes next. Inspired by true events, *Masque of Honor* explores what happens when pride hardens, words become weapons, and a single public challenge sets fate in motion.

To thank readers who pre-order, I've created a special set of pre-order gifts, available for a limited time:

- A signed bookplate.
- A beautiful bookmark inspired by the novel.
- An exclusive extended video tour, where I share the real history and backstory behind *Masque of Honor*.
- An invitation-only virtual book talk with me, where you can ask anything about the characters, plot, research, the sky's the limit!

To receive the bonuses:

[Pre-Order Masque of Honor Here](#)

[Register Your Pre-Order Here](#)

And check out this new book trailer!

[Masque of Honor Book Trailer](#)



Selma Through the Lens of History

Moments when the story of one house intersected with the wider world

For more than two centuries, Selma has quietly stood through wars, epidemics, agricultural revolutions, and sweeping changes in American life. The lives of the families who called Selma home often unfolded alongside major events shaping the nation. Here are a few moments when Selma's story intersected with history.



1812–1813 War of 1812 Reaches the Chesapeake

During the War of 1812, the Chesapeake Bay region was a major battleground between American and British forces. One of Selma's early residents, **Armistead Mason**, returned home after the **Battle of Craney Island in 1813**, where American defenders successfully repelled a British attack on Norfolk and Portsmouth. The war ended two years later, but the young United States was still defining itself—just as the families at Selma were establishing their roots in Virginia.

1848 The Mexican–American War

Selma's connection to American military history continued in the next generation. Armistead Mason's son, **Stevens Mason**, served in the Mexican–American War. In **1847**, during the **Battle of Cerro Gordo**, Stevens Mason suffered a devastating wound when a cannonball took off his leg. Like many soldiers of that war, his sacrifice reflected the high human cost of America's expansion into the Southwest.





1864 Civil War Comes to Selma

During **General Philip Sheridan's Shenandoah Valley campaign**, Union cavalry under **General Wesley Merritt** swept through Loudoun County in late November 1864. Local farms were raided and barns burned as part of the Union effort to cripple the Confederacy's agricultural resources. Family tradition holds that Selma's butler buried the household silver in the woods to protect it from the approaching soldiers—but was tragically shot by Federal troops on his return to the house before he could reveal its location. The silver has never been found.

1887 A Future Governor's Family

In **1887**, Selma was the birthplace of **Ann Douglas Beverley**, who would later become the wife of **Virginia Governor and U.S. Senator Harry F. Byrd Jr.** Her birth connects the house to one of Virginia's most influential political families of the twentieth century.





1896–1902 Fire and Rebirth

Disaster struck Selma in **1896** when the original main house was destroyed by fire. But Selma's story did not end there. In **1902**, the estate was rebuilt by **Elijah B. White**, a remarkable figure in American agriculture. White had made his fortune in the Midwest as one of the **largest grain exporters in the United States during the late 19th century**, operating farms throughout the Chicago region and across the Midwest. Here he's pictured on Selma's steps with wife Lala Harrison White.

After developing tuberculosis, White returned east to Virginia, where he rebuilt Selma and transformed it into a thriving agricultural estate. White was also responsible for establishing Selma's reputation as a breeder of **prize-winning Percheron horses**, part of the powerful draft-horse industry that helped power American farming before tractors replaced horse teams in the early 20th century.





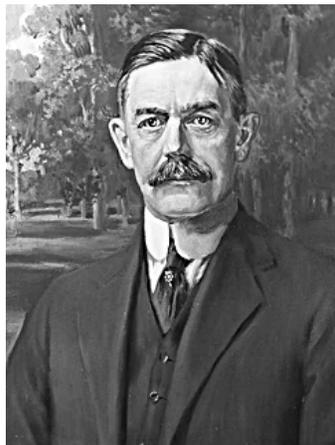
1920 The Spanish Flu Pandemic

One of Selma's saddest chapters came during the aftermath of the **Spanish influenza pandemic**, which swept the world between 1918 and 1920 and killed tens of millions of people. In 1911 Elijah White's daughter **Hazelle** married **Joel Chandler Harris, Jr., the son of the author of *Uncle Remus* stories.**

Tragically, she died from complications of the influenza pandemic in **1920**. Her death was one of countless personal tragedies felt in homes across the world during that devastating outbreak.

1926 The Passing of Elijah B. White

Elijah B. White died in **1926**, leaving behind the Selma estate he had rebuilt and restored. His legacy included both the agricultural innovations he introduced and the elegant home that still stands today.





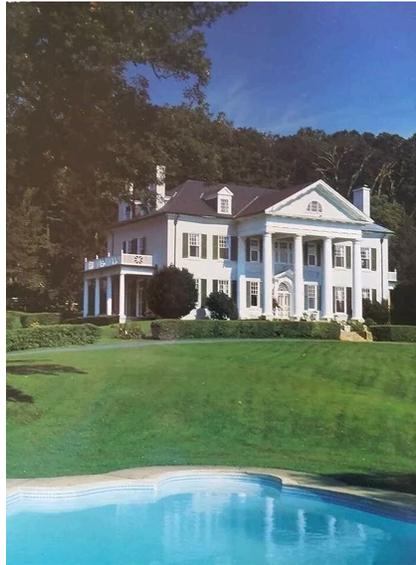
1945 The End of World War II

In the same year World War II came to an end, Selma said goodbye to one of its long-time residents. **Lala Harrison White**, who had lived at the estate for more than forty years, passed away in the house in 1945. Today, her story continues to echo through Selma's history—and even into modern historical fiction inspired by the house.

1970 The End of One Era — and the Beginning of Another

Another chapter closed in **1970** when **Elizabeth White**, known locally as "*Miss Elizabeth*," died in the house after living there her entire life. With her passing, one of the final direct connections to Selma's early twentieth-century owners came to an end.





Later that same year, **Ben and Ruth Epperson** purchased the property at auction and moved into the historic house with their **three daughters**. Recognizing the beauty and romance of the property, **Ruth Epperson launched a wedding business at Selma**. In nearly **three decades**, more than **3,000 weddings** were held on the property, making Selma a place where thousands of couples began their own family histories. It was the Eppersons who installed the swimming pool so often depicted in photos of the property. The Eppersons owned Selma until **1999** when it was sold to a foreign investor and ultimately abandoned.

2016 Selma's Modern Rebirth

After decades of decline, Selma entered a new chapter when it was purchased and restored beginning in **2016**. What once stood abandoned has since been brought back to life—preserving the stories of the generations who lived there. And as history has often shown, Selma's story is far from finished.



Between the Lines

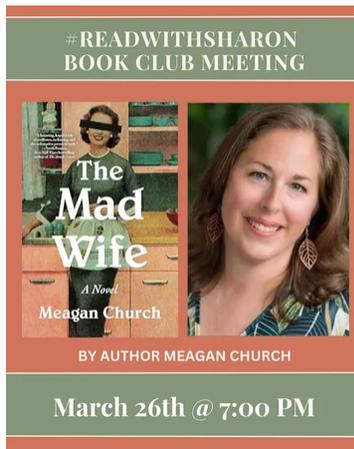
Check out my March segment of [Between the Lines](#) on Midday Maryland, WMAR where Elsa and I discuss how a house inspired my journey in writing historical fiction. You can learn more about the Selma renovation at our [Selma Mansion Rebirth website](#).



#ReadWithSharon

Historical Fiction Book Club

On Thursday, March 26 at 7pm eastern, we will discuss, *The Mad Wife* with author **Meagan Church**. Lucy “Lulu” Mayfield is a young mother trying to survive the rigid expectations of 1950s domestic life. Set in an immaculate Ohio neighborhood where smiles are mandatory and suffering is quietly medicated, the novel follows Lulu as she juggles marriage, motherhood, grief, and a growing fear that her mind is slipping. Join me with author Meagan Church as we discuss this powerful story!



You can also sign up to win a free copy of **The Mad Wife** and a signed copy of **Masque of Honor**. Winner will be announced on March 20!

Enter to Win!

The #ReadWithSharon book club only reads current release historical fiction, and I do my best to pre-read every selection before making the pick. Most months, the author joins us via zoom and you are able to ask questions during the discussion. Meetings are the fourth Thursday of the month at 7pm EST. You can sign up for free [HERE](#)



Last month, I asked you to share how you maintain connection with loved ones when today's world slows or shuts down. **Rita Seymour** (from Canada) sent me her thoughts in this heart-felt response:

My Mom and I would drive to where my Aunt way living at the time and sit for hours, and I do mean hours, and talk and laugh sharing pots of tea. No drinks other than the tea and it was the greatest time spent. Oh, the laughs we had. Thank you for bringing that happy thought back to me. Now I drive to my kids' house and spend many hours there at the table laughing and again sharing that tea pot. Sometimes there is a

stronger drink involved. And we have had so many pains in the stomach laughs! Well worth the 45 min drive.

This month's question to ponder: *Selma's walls have witnessed wars, pandemics, and generations of change. If the house YOU grew up in could talk, what historical moment would it remember?*

Click here to send me your thoughts.
I'll share them in next month's newsletter.



Enjoy the longer (and hopefully warmer) days as winter winds down!



WWW.SHARONVIRTS.COM



Sharon Virts, Selma Mansion, Leesburg, VA 20176, United States, www.sharonvirts.com

[Unsubscribe](#) [Manage preferences](#)