

## MONTHLY MUSINGS

# SHARON VIRTIS

### **A Cosmic Visitor**

For the past several weeks, I have been fascinated by the nighttime sky. With July's new moon, the NEOWISE comet did not disappoint. I have witnessed only two other comets in my life. In 1986, Haley's comet welcomed my first born son. Hale-Bopp marked another set of unforgettable memories in 1997. NEOWISE hails another comet-worthy memory ... the publishing of my debut novel!



There have been many great comets that have crowned the skies above us. In July 44BC, a comet appeared over ancient Rome. Dubbed Caesar's comet, it was thought to be the soul of Julius Caesar, a sign from the gods announcing his deification. Until about the sixteenth century, comets were considered bad omens of deaths or coming catastrophes.

A poem from the 15th century provides an impressive description of the nature of comets: "They bring fever, illness, pestilence and death, difficult times, shortages and times of great famine." In 1680, Edmond Halley, a friend of Isaac Newton,

observed a large comet and explained that the comet probably had a “sharply curved” trajectory. With this finding, Edmond Halley concluded that the comet traveled on an elongated ellipse and should return in 76 years. Unfortunately Halley did not live to see his triumph of celestial mechanics when, as he predicted, Halley's comet returned in 1758.

There have been other notable comets in history. In the winter of 1743-44, a comet as bright as Venus with six tails appeared in the sky. The Great Comet of 1811, often referred to as Napoleon's comet, was visible in the nighttime sky for nearly nine months. The comet was believed to have portended Napoleon's invasion of Russia and the War of 1812.

In 1910, a comet appeared in the southern hemisphere and was so bright that it could be seen by the naked eye throughout the day. Named the Daylight Comet, it gradually became visible in the northern hemisphere in the evenings and was often confused with Halley's comet that arrived later that year.

These "broom-stars" have graced our skies for millennia, bringing with them wonder and amazement to dazzle our imaginations. I hope that you have a chance to see this latest cosmic visitor before it disappears into memory.



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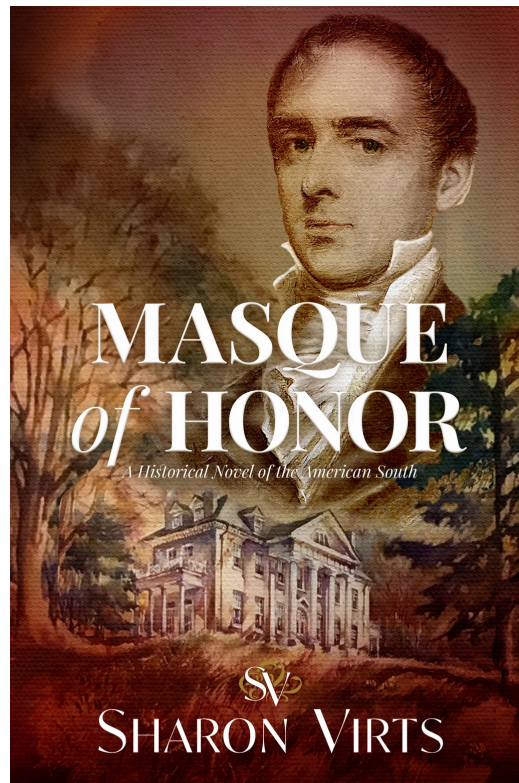
## **MASQUE OF HONOR**

### **Update: Cover Reveal**

I am thrilled with the design of this breathtaking cover for my debut novel MASQUE OF HONOR. From the portraitist rendering of Armistead Mason (those dark eyes!) and the haunting watercolor of Selma to the rich palette, custom fonts and artful

layout of the design, this cover really captures the essence of the story and speaks to my heart.

Masque of Honor is available for [preorder now](#) and will be released worldwide on February 9, 2021.



### **This Month in History: Burr vs. Hamilton**

On July 11, 1804, former Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton faced off against Vice President Aaron Burr in the most infamous duel in American history.

While Hamilton missed his mark, Burr's shot was more accurate, striking Hamilton in the stomach. Hamilton died the next day. The duel culminated a simmering conflict between the two men rooted in the controversy surrounding Thomas

Jefferson's election as President. Can you imagine if our politicians resolved their differences in similar fashion today?

[Learn more](#) about the dispute between Hamilton and Burr and the political fallout resulting from Hamilton's death.

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### **Sharon's Cooking Series:**

July is for PEACHES! And Chef Thomas Harvey of [Tuscarora Mill](#) has graced our kitchen at Selma with some fabulous recipes to share.

This month he has prepared three fabulous dishes including:

- French Toast with Peach and Prosecco Syrup
- Puff Pastry and Prosciutto Wrapped Asparagus Balsamic Zabaglione.
- Marinated Flank Steak with Charred Bourbon Peach and Bacon Relish

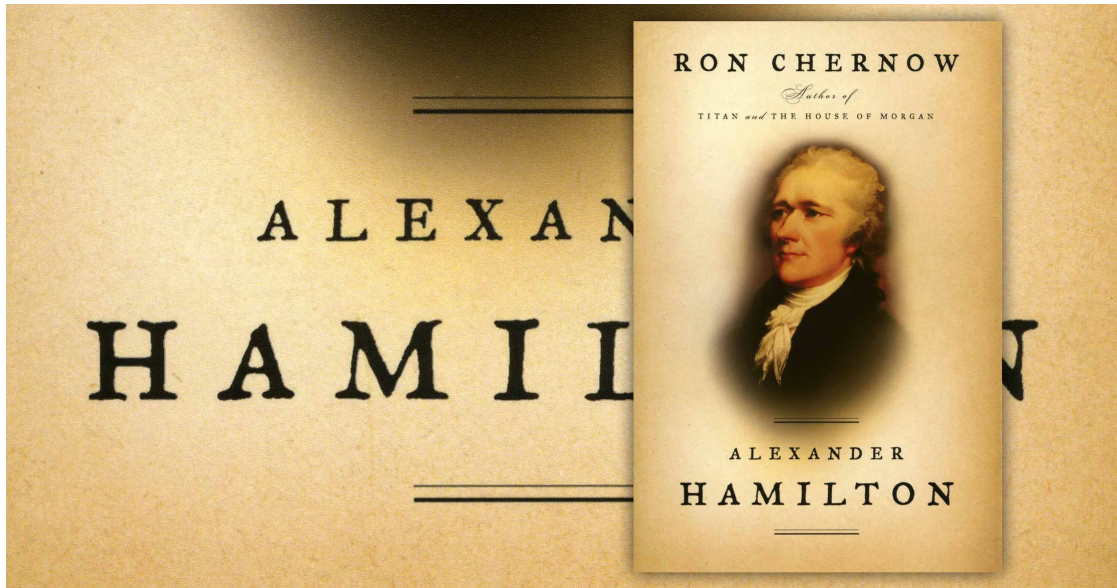
Download the [recipe cards](#) and watch step-by-step video instructions as Thomas cooks these peachy delights.

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“Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?”

– T.S. Eliot

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## **Ron Chernow**

Before working on *Alexander Hamilton*, Ron Chernow had previously written multiple books on the topics of business and finance. In 1999, Chernow shifted his emphasis away from business moguls to start a biography on a new topic, American politics. He later cited his change in focus "as a way to broaden my scope, and to stay fresh." Chernow called Hamilton his "exit strategy" when he began the writing process in 1998.

In writing *Alexander Hamilton*, Chernow researched his way through more than 22,000 pages of Hamilton's papers. He described Hamilton's extensive writing, calling him "the human word machine" and that Hamilton "must have produced the maximum number of words that a human being can scratch out in 49 years".

Over the course of the project, Chernow also took the time to dive deeper into Hamilton's history. He held the dueling pistols used in the famous Burr–Hamilton

duel, visited the jail cell on Saint Croix where Hamilton's mother was imprisoned, went to the Island of Bequia where Hamilton's father disappeared to after abandoning his illegitimate son, and had a lock of Alexander's hair genetically tested for his racial makeup.

Chernow explained Hamilton in his book by stating, "If Washington was the father of the country and Madison the father of the Constitution, then Alexander Hamilton was surely the father of the American government."

Inspiring one of the most successful musicals on Broadway, *Alexander Hamilton* indeed memorializes the legacy of one of the greatest men in American history.

" Those who stand for nothing, fall for anything."  
— Alexander Hamilton

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## Summer Getaway

I have spent all of July at our beach house on Bald Head Island, NC. While not a vacation per se, it is a wonderful break from normal routines and a chance to get some writing done! Whatever your vacation plans this summer, enjoy time away from *your* routine. And stay safe!





## #ReadWithSharon: The Last Train to Key West

Be part of the CLUB! Join me via ZOOM on **Tuesday July 28 at 5pm** for our discussion of *The Last Train to Key West*. [Email me](#) for an invitation to the meeting. Chanel Cleeton has some snack and cocktail suggestions for our book club, [download the book club kit here](#). Video will air on July 31.

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**Don't forget to check my [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) page for details on our August reading selection.**

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