

GMAIC Celebrates the 800th Birthday of the Magna Carta

At its February 18, 2015 meeting, the George Mason American Inn of Court celebrated the 800th birthday of the Magna Carta by staging a mock trial in which King John of England squared off against the rebel baroness Williama d'Aubigny, Lord of Belvoir Castle, over the question of whether the Magna Carta was the product of duress and, therefore, invalid.

Atchuthan Sriskandarajah acted as the host for the evening, and began by giving the membership an introduction to the Magna Carta and the enduring importance of the groundbreaking document. Thereafter, the mock trial began, with The Hon. Lawrence Hagel presiding in the role of Pope Innocent III. James Davis, in the role of King John, was represented by Dan Monahan and Lorrie



The Cast of the Magna Carta Program



Host Atchuthan Sriskandarajah

Sinclair, who argued that the King was coerced into signing the Magna Carta because he feared for his life, and that the document was therefore not the product of the King's free will. Sheila Barnett assumed the part of Baroness d'Aubigny. She was represented by Emily Canis and Brian Goodman, who took the contrary position that the King simply made a free and rational decision to sign the Magna Carta and continue his reign in England rather than, for instance, refusing to sign and taking up exile in France.

After the arguments had concluded, the membership was given the opportunity to vote on the question of whether the Magna Carta was truly the product of duress. The vote was close – so close, in fact, that a recount had to be conducted. At the end of the day, the membership's vote mirrored Pope Innocent's historical determination that the Magna Carta had been the product of duress, and was therefore invalid.

The mock trial underscored how groundbreaking and controversial the Magna Carta was at the time it was drafted, and the players ably presented the issues on both sides.



Entrance of the Hon. Lawrence Hagel as Pope Innocent III

The program was a great success, and the Inn is grateful to the Magna Carta team for the thorough and entertaining nature of their presentation.



King John (far left), Baroness d'Aubigny (far right), and their Counsel.

