



Montpelier is being restored to the original 22-room 1820s Madison-era mansion.

Turn in at the new entrance to Montpelier and park at the new Visitor's Center-

**Stop #6-Montpelier-**

There is much significant history here, and it doesn't always involve the obvious... that this was the home of the Fourth President of the United States and the Father of the U.S. Constitution, James Madison. We will try to tell you a little bit about some of these stories, but we don't have room for all. By all means, go into the visitors center (open daily 9:30-5:30), watch the film presentation and tour the mansion and grounds. And then consider the following:

**James Madison was NOT born here-** The reason for that is, in those days, a woman usually gave birth to her first child in familiar surroundings, namely her home place. Nellie Conway Madison gave birth to James Junior at Port Conway among family, friends and familiar servants. Then when she and the infant were well enough to travel, she came here. It's as if you said, "I was born and raised in Orange County." Well, actually you weren't. You were probably born in a hospital either in Culpeper, Fredericksburg or Charlottesville, and then raised in Orange County.



The Montpelier races have been held the first Saturday in November since 1934.

And so, James Madison is born in the "hospital," his mother's ancestral home in Prince George County, on March 16, 1751. He spends his entire life here...with some notable exceptions...and dies in this same house on June 28, 1836, only seven years after his mother died at the age of 97! Besides his more obvious accomplishments, James Madison is regarded by his close friend Thomas Jefferson as "the best farmer in the world." That might be a bit of a stretch.

**From slavery to Jim Crow-**The Madison family had already been here for two generations. His grandfather, Ambrose, had married Frances Taylor, one of Colonel James Taylor II's daughters (remember him from Part I?) Ambrose built a house named Mt. Pleasant near where James and Dolley Madison are buried today. Within two months, Ambrose is dead. Pompey, a slave borrowed or rented from another plantation, is tried, convicted and executed for poisoning Ambrose to death. Two others, Turk and Dido are implicated. Yet Frances Taylor Madison, the widow, puts them back to work because their names show up in future records.

In those days, a plantation was divided into sections, known as "quarters," and it was not uncommon for a slave to be an overseer of a quarter. Sawney was such a slave. Tobacco merchants on the docks at Fredericksburg would look for Sawney's mark on the hogsheads of tobacco. They knew those containers contained prime leaf. Up in a patch of woods between the flat track and the new visitor's center is the slave cemetery. Unmarked graves can be seen after a snowfall by the slight depressions in the ground. And household slave quarters have been discovered south of the mansion.

During the winter of 1863-64, Confederates camped across Rt. 20 from here. When the war was over, freed slaves George and Polly Gilmore rented 16 acres and built a cabin, using an abandoned chimney from one of those Confederate encampments. At age 90, George bought the 16 acres, and today his modest cabin survives as the only restored freedman's home open to the public in the United States. Today, a direct descendant, Rebecca Gilmore Coleman, born and raised right here in Orange County, is president of the Orange County African-American Historical Society.

Now, go back across Route 20 to the old railroad station. Reportedly, there in the back, is a sign that says "Colored." You have just traveled a remarkable one mile journey from slavery to freedman to Jim Crow.

**The duPonts-** It is interesting to note that the duPont-Madison connection goes back to the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with France during the Revolution. But it is William duPont who actually buys the 2,750-acre estate and home in 1900 and erects a village there complete with its own electrical power plant, forge, wheelwright shop, etc. duPont leaves a life estate

to his daughter, internationally known horsewoman, Marion. Marion starts the tradition, in 1934, of the Montpelier Races, opening the estate to the public on the first Saturday of November...a tradition that endures to this day.

Following Marion's death in 1983, the National Trust for Historic Preservation acquired title to Montpelier. Currently, Montpelier is undergoing a massive \$23 million project to recover the 22-room 1820s Madison home from the 55-room duPont mansion. Right here in Orange County.

Time to load up and head for Orange for the final portion of our tour.

No story of the county is complete without mention of the wreck at the Fat Nancy Trestle. Fat Nancy is the only



The wreck at the Fat Nancy Trestle, July 12, 1888.

name we have. She may have been a laundress who lived nearby. Apparently she waved to trains, and she was, uh, quite large.

In the wee hours of the morning of July 12, 1888, train Number 52 eased out of Orange bound for Somerset, Barboursville and points beyond. On board was Cornelius Cox, the man in charge of replacing, with earth fill, the rickety 487-foot-long wooden trestle. In a scene that evokes head-shaking irony, the trestle collapsed, killing Cox and eight others, including a Confederate veteran returning from a Gettysburg reunion. A ninth body was found in the wreckage, that of a deceased infant in a coffin in the baggage car...bound somewhere for burial. The last two cars did not plunge into the abyss. And on one was none other than former Confederate General, James Longstreet, the general who was wounded at the Battle of the Wilderness and was carried back to Meadowfarm 24 years earlier...right here in Orange County.

*That concludes our self-guided tour of Orange County. Most of the facts for these two Insiders came from Orange County Historian, Frank Walker and his book, Remembering: A History of Orange County Virginia. Available for purchase at the Orange County Historical Society, it is highly recommended reading for anyone with an interest in the heritage and history of this remarkable county of ours. Frank Walker is also the founder of Tourguide Ltd., which conducts general heritage and Civil War step on tours. Call 540-672-9414 or go to the website: www.tourguideltd.com, for more information.*

# Right here in Orange County: part II



Looking from Rt. 15 towards Woodley and Kenwood Farm.

Photo by Bernice Walker

*Two weeks ago, we took you on the first half of a self-guided journey through Orange County that is based on a heritage tour given by historian, Frank Walker. In this issue of the Insider, we will pick up from where we left off in the Town of Orange. So, gather up your map from two weeks ago, and let's explore the people and events that made our county the historical treasure trove that it is.*

## "Orange County, Be it Remembered"

Those are the first words on the first page of the first General Order Book issued in Orange County. The date was January 21, 1734 (Old Style calendar). Created by an Act of Establishment, the county is named after William, Prince of the House of Orange-Nassau who married Anne, the Princess Royal and daughter of England's George the II. Apparently this lissome lass was as wide as she was tall. When asked by her father if she accepted William's proposal of marriage, she replied, "Father I shall have him were he a baboon." Lucky fella. Anyway, in 1734, Orange County was to include all the land west of here to the Mississippi, or at least all the land west of here that the crown would like to claim. That means that for a few years, Orange County included all of West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois and the southern thirds of Michigan and Wisconsin! The original courthouse was located just off Rt. 522 near True Blue. By 1749 it had moved to a site across from today's visitor's center in the Town of Orange. Two moves later in 1859, it came to its present location.

*Saddle up and head for Gordonsville on Rt.15.*



The Orange County Courthouse as it appeared in the 19th century (from a photo in the Orange County Historical Society) above, and as it appears today, below.



As you drive along Route 15, you will notice that you are paralleling the Southwest Mountains. Formed eons ago, these mountains are what's left from erosion. In other words, over millions and millions of years, the soft rock just washed away, leaving the hard rock to stand alone.

In Part I, we talked about land and how soil type played a role in the fortunes of the families who settled those lands. A splendid example of that rich soil we were talking about can be seen in the carefully cultivated test plots of the Northern Piedmont Agricultural Research facility next to the Regional Jail. Further down the road, look to your right towards Woodley and Kenwood behind it; you will see Bernice Walker's photograph (page 1) that is the dust jacket for Frank Walker's book, Remembering: A History of Orange County, Virginia.

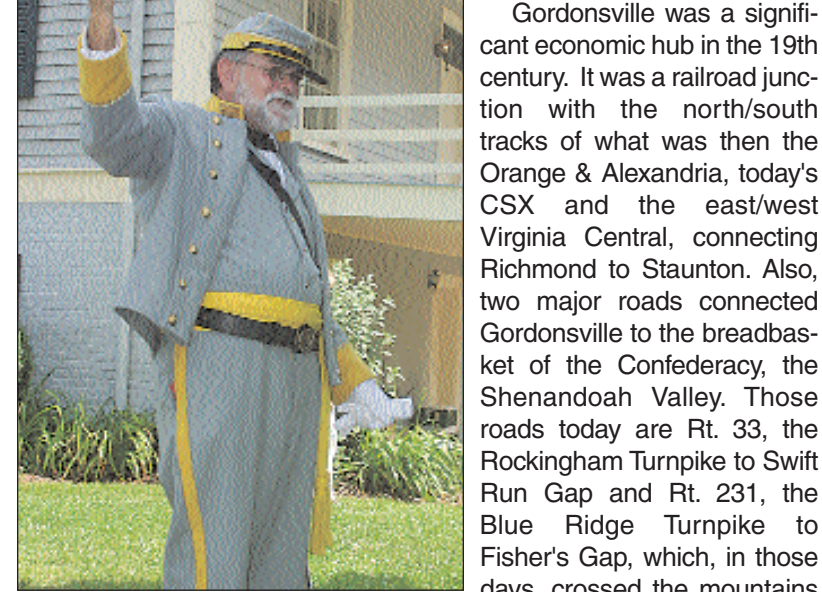
There is a reason for this: it is one of the most historic and scenic places in the county. It is part of the Madison/Chew patent that eventually included Montpelier. James Madison's brother Ambrose lived at Woodley, and "Stonewall" Jackson camped here after defeating John Pope at Cedar Mountain in August of 1862. Besides, it features some of the finest farmland in the state, and that's why this image is displayed on a Virginia license plate. Right here in Orange County.

As you go by Madison Run on your left, you will pass where Toddsberth once stood, the ill-fated home of Dolley Madison's alcoholic/gambler son Payne Todd whose debts financially ruined his mother and step father. James Madison paid off a portion of this debt, \$40,000 in the 1820s...a fortune today. Those debts eventually forced Payne's widowed mother to sell Montpelier.

At Gordonsville, find a place to park on Main Street, Gordonsville and set out on foot--

**Stop #4- Gordonsville-**

Actually Gordonsville is two towns, one that grew up around a tavern established by Nathaniel Gordon in 1794 where the circle is today and the one that grew up around the rail depot in the 1840s at the other end of town. By the 1850s they were filling in the gap, which is Main Street Gordonsville today.



Photos by Phil Audibert  
**Frank Walker, wearing a replica of his grandfather's uniform, at the Exchange Hotel in Gordonsville.**

Gordonsville was a significant economic hub in the 19th century. It was a railroad junction with the north/south tracks of what was then the Orange & Alexandria, today's CSX and the east/west Virginia Central, connecting Richmond to Staunton. Also, two major roads connected Gordonsville to the breadbasket of the Confederacy, the Shenandoah Valley. Those roads today are Rt. 33, the Rockingham Turnpike to Swift Run Gap and Rt. 231, the Blue Ridge Turnpike to Fisher's Gap, which, in those days, crossed the mountains near Syria. Long convoys of wagons plied these roads, delivering their bounty to the rail depot near where the Exchange Hotel is today. The Federals tried on several occasions to capture this town, without success. They came close...to the top of Cameron's (Bell's) Mountain, but they never took the town.

Of course, you are probably familiar with the Exchange Hotel, how, after the war, enterprising black women would greet trains with platters of fried chicken balanced on their heads to sell to rail passengers; hence the nickname "the fried chicken capital of the universe." During re-enactments here, the original recipe is still prepared and sold by locals.

Try to time your visit to Gordonsville to tour the Exchange Hotel (10-4 Mondays-Saturdays, 1-4 Sundays, 832-2944), a museum second only to the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond. The hotel, with its expansive porches and sweeping staircase down to the tracks, was pressed into service as the headquarters of a huge hospital complex during the Civil War. Some 23,000 sick and wounded went through this facility between June 1st of 1863 and May 5th 1864, which was the first day of the Battle of the Wilderness. And that's when they became really busy (Wilderness and the Bloody Angle at Spotsylvania Courthouse)... presumably too busy to keep further records.

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine the scene: a sea of tents around the hotel building as blood-spattered surgeons plied their trade. An amputation could take as little as a minute. It is scenes such as this that the expression "bite the bullet" originated, if they lacked chloroform or



**Re-enactors horrify onlookers with a mock amputation at the Exchange Hotel.**

whiskey or both. Lead minie balls with teeth marks in them have been found on the premises. Boxcars bearing more wounded awaited their turn to unload their grisly cargo. Wagons rolled down the alternately dusty or muddy streets. It was a busy time for Gordonsville.

As you walk from the hotel along the now upscale Main Street consider that these buildings used to be made of wood, until they burned down in 1916... and again in 1920. By then the merchants had learned their lesson; they rebuilt in fire-retardant brick.

Further up the street past the railroad overpass in residential Gordonsville you will see a colonial blue house on your right. This is the E.J. Faulconer house, and it is the oldest standing residence in town. Take a good look at it because this is a splendid example of vernacular architecture...the architecture of the common man, in this case, master builder, Benjamin Faulconer, who built this house for his brother, the mayor.

*Time to load up in the car and head out through the circle and up the Blue Ridge Turnpike, Rt. 231 North. Please keep in mind that these houses are private residences. Unless you have been specifically invited, do not go barging in.*

You are now traveling along one of the five most scenic roads in the state. The Blue Ridge Turnpike has been nicknamed Orange's County's "Gold Coast," because you will pass by some houses and estates that, shall we say, redefine the word "grand." But first note the last house in the row on the left, that modest white cottage with the blue trim: it is the toll keeper's house.

In the 1870s, a Richmond businessman of Scottish descent, Alexander Cameron started buying up land on this mountain that is now named after him. His children inherited this land and between 1915 and 1926 they each built homes, all with Scottish names. As you travel up the road they appear in this order: Inverness on the hilltop to the left (not visible from the road), Lochiel on the right with the brick wall, Achnacarry on the right at the summit (the gatehouse is closest to the road), and Cairngorm on the left after you descend the mountain and come to the top of the next rise.

On the right is Rocklands, an 1,800-acre estate originally created in the 1850s by Richard Barton Haxall of Richmond. Further up the road on the left is Muster Meadow, so named because local troops from the Revolution through the Civil War gathered or "mustered" here. Still further up the turnpike sits Tivoli on the hilltop to the left. Built by another Richmonder at the turn of the 20th century, the National Register says this house is "possibly designed by renowned New York architect, Stanford White."

After you safely negotiate the hairpin turns where meeting a tractor trailer truck becomes an out-of-body experience, you will see Frascati on the right. Built by Jeffersonian master builder, John Perry, this was the home of Philip Pendleton Barbour, the brother of James Barbour of the Orange County village of the same name. Suffice it to say that this family covered itself in distinction; Philip Barbour was, among other things, president of the 1829 Virginia



**The 1850's toll keeper's house on the Blue Ridge Turnpike (Rt. 231) just outside Gordonsville.**

Constitutional Convention, speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. By the 1860s, however, this house was owned by Col. James Magruder. He lost a son-in-law and four sons to the Civil War, one of them at the Battle of Jack's Shop just up the road in Madison County.

**All Four Years-**It should be noted that although other communities may have experienced larger battles, none endured all four years of the conflict as Orange and Spotsylvania Counties did, making this, in Frank Walker's words, "the most heavily fought-over ground in America." Right here in Orange County.

A scant two days after First Manassas, the first major land battle of the war, wounded arrived in Orange by rail, bringing close to home the horror of the conflict. And it stayed here. Fanny Page Hume, the woman who wrote about the bloodstains on the floor of St. Thomas', entered in her diary an account of a cavalry engagement on Main Street, as it flashed by her house on Selma Road. Troops marched through Orange Courthouse on their way to the August 9th Battle of Cedar Mountain...and on their way back. Prisoners from that battle were paroled in the courthouse yard.

And of course the winter of 1863-64, Orange County played host to Robert E. Lee and two-thirds of the Army of Northern Virginia. That winter also saw the brutally cold Mine Run Campaign during Thanksgiving 1863 and the February 6, 1864 Battle of Morton's Ford. You've already heard the story of J.E.B. Stuart's hat, but he also narrowly escaped defeat and possible capture of half of his command when he was trapped by Federal troops in Madison County, September 22, 1863. He ran a gauntlet down the Blue Ridge Turnpike and escaped by the skin of his teeth as he clattered over the covered

bridge at Liberty Mills. That same bridge was burned in December of 1864 to delay Sheridan's "Christmas" raid to capture Gordonsville. Under the command of Alfred Torbert, the raid fizzled atop Cameron's (Bell's) Mountain with seven Federal cavalrymen and 258 horses dead. In that ten-day campaign, it snowed, sleeted or rained six days.

And so the war didn't just come and go with the Battle of the Wilderness; it was right here in Orange County all along.

**Somerset-** Continuing north on the Blue Ridge Turnpike we come to Somerset. In 1880, the Washington City, Virginia Midland & Great Southern Railroad came overland to Orange. It is significant that this line bypassed Gordonsville entirely. All of a sudden, Somerset, Orange and Barboursville were the new belles on the block. Right at the site of the annual Somerset Steam and Gas Pasture Party, speculators laid out, on paper anyway, city blocks and streets.

*Cross the tracks and turn left onto Rt. 655.*

About a half mile up the road on the right is the brick factory. It is

closed now, but during its heyday, this plant was known to produce the best natural color brick in the world. The Olympic village in Atlanta was built of this brick.

*At the stop sign, turn left onto Rt. 20 south and go towards Barboursville.*

**Freedman's villages-** On your way to Barboursville, you'll be able to just make out the old #7 school, choked by overgrowth on the right. Prior to integration, this is where the African-American community in this part of the county received its education. And further up Rt. 20 you'll come to Tibbstown, one of 15 Freedman's villages known to exist in the county. Others similar communities such as Cattail, Possum Hollow, and Freetown have been abandoned and swallowed up by nature. Freetown, not far from the old Jackson Store at Lahore, was the ancestral home of the Chester Lewis family. His grandchildren went on to many significant accomplishments. Edna Lewis is widely credited for kindling the rebirth of southern cuisine with her seminal cookbook, The Taste of Country Cooking.

*At the stop sign turn left on Rt. 33 East, then turn right on Rt. 20 south, then left again on Rt. 678. Follow the signs for Barboursville Vineyards and the Ruins. Park in the space provided at the Ruins and walk up the path.*

**Stop # 5-Barboursville-**

As you come up through the towering ancient boxwoods and onto the grassy knoll you will encounter the ruins of a Jeffersonian architectural gem. Many area buildings can claim they were designed by, pick one: Jefferson's (a) master builder, (b) brick mason, (c) carpenter, (d) student. However, only three residences other than his own (Monticello and Poplar Forest near Lynchburg) can claim to be designed by the man himself. One of these three is looming in front of you, right here in Orange County. Typical Jeffersonian touches include earth ramps that lead to front and rear porches, a two story hexagonal reception hall that connects to a remarkable two-story octagonal drawing room. Built of brick in the Flemish bond style on all four sides, this house reflects the prosperity of its owner, Governor James Barbour. When the house was completed in 1822, it was valued at \$20,000 for tax purposes. The next most valuable estate in Orange County was Montpelier, at half that.

This was a remarkable family. If you think Philip Pendleton Barbour at Frascati covered himself with distinction, consider this: James Barbour was, among other things, Governor of Virginia, a U.S. Senator, secretary of war and ambassador to the Court of St. James!

The house, by the way, burned Christmas day 1884. Villagers had to run into the basement and alert the feasting Barbour that the roof had caught fire. Apocryphal cocktail party stories that a vengeful child set the house on fire, or that the live-candle Christmas tree fell over, or that fireworks landing on the roof caused the blaze (more likely) cannot be substantiated. Either way, it was never rebuilt.

**Barboursville Plantation, designed by Jefferson and destroyed by fire in 1884.** (Monticello and Poplar Forest near Lynchburg) can claim to be designed by the man himself. One of these three is looming in front of you, right here in Orange County. Typical Jeffersonian touches include earth ramps that lead to front and rear porches, a two story hexagonal reception hall that connects to a remarkable two-story octagonal drawing room. Built of brick in the Flemish bond style on all four sides, this house reflects the prosperity of its owner, Governor James Barbour. When the house was completed in 1822, it was valued at \$20,000 for tax purposes. The next most valuable estate in Orange County was Montpelier, at half that.

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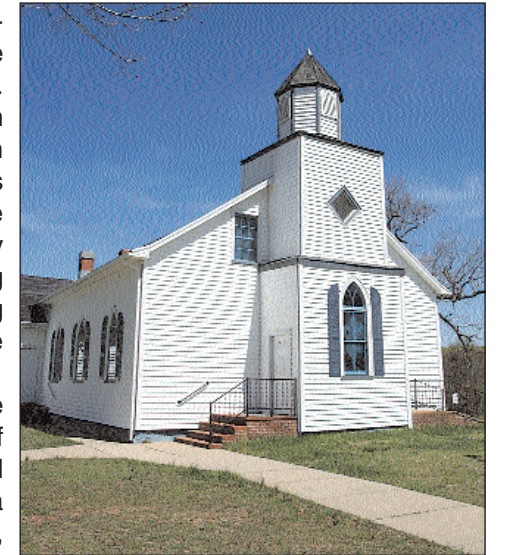
Today, the ruins and the 830-acre surrounding plantation are owned by the Gianni Zonin family of Italy. Established as a vineyard in 1976 with only five-and-a-half acres, Barboursville now has 150 acres under cultivation, producing 30,000 cases of wine per year. Recently, Barboursville's \$40-a-bottle Octagon won a gold medal at the prestigious Critic's Challenge in California. Another winery just down the road, Horton Vineyards, is also garnering awards and buzz for its hybrid and rare grape variety wines. Both wineries are open for tastings and tours.

*Saddle up and head towards Orange on Rt. 20.*

**Blue Run Baptist Church-** After you pass the road that we came out of coming to Barboursville, you will go down a small hill. Up on a knoll to the left, before you cross the stream is the oldest standing-in-the-same-place church in Orange County. Blue Run Baptist Church was built in 1769. Elijah Craig answered the call as its first pastor. By the way, he later moved to Kentucky where he is credited, among other things, for inventing bourbon whiskey. In fact, one brand is named after him. Remember in Part I, we talked of the Church of England and how you could be a Baptist or a Presbyterian if you wished, but by law everyone had to attend the Anglican church. Well, here come the Separatist Baptists; they're beyond the regular dissenters. They have gravitated to Orange County partly because they know they have friends here in the Madisons.

Another interesting fact: Blue Run Baptist Church was integrated up through the Civil War! In 1859 the congregation consisted of 160 blacks and 40 whites. The church was sold to the black congregation, and "white" Blue Run Baptist Church moved up the road to Old Somerset. Both churches are going strong to this day. Now here's a family story: at Somerset Plantation up on top of the hill to your right, 16-year-old Nannie Goss herded the servants, the family silverware and even her pony into the basement as Federals established a camp below the house. Because her mother was ill abed with a newborn infant, Nannie took it upon herself to march down the hill and demand from the Union regimental commander that a guard be posted at her family home to prevent looting. The astonished commander acquiesced. Nannie went on to marry Captain Robert Stringfellow Walker of Mosby's Rangers. Together with his sister they founded Woodberry Forest School. Their grandson is none other than Orange County historian, Frank Walker, who is essentially the source of this two-part series: "Right Here in Orange County!"

As you approach the intersection of Rts. 20 and 231, consider that in December of 1864, a skirmish was going on right here between Sheridan's cavalry troopers and Confederate defenders of this, the westernmost end, of the Rapidan line. A cannon ball crashed into the walls of the pale blue Somerset Christian Church on the right. Cross Blue Run and at the top of the rise sits Mt. Athos, home of Walter George Newman. A notorious big spender, Newman reportedly would ride to Orange in a coach and four. As he approached town, he had his coachmen blow a fanfare on their coaching horns. He would make his grand entrance down Main Street tossing silver dollars to the gathering crowd..."the south end of a northbound horse," snorts Frank Walker.



**Blue Run Baptist Church, the oldest standing church in Orange**



**Barboursville Plantation, designed by Jefferson and destroyed by fire in 1884.**



**Fannie Page Hume whose Civil War era diary provided a unique insight into life in the Town of Orange.**