

THE DIG

"A fantastically important area."

—Archaeology Field Director, Mark Trickett

The story of Montpelier is also being told from what is coming out of the ground. In 2002, a remarkable find...an 1837 insurance policy... yielded a map showing the distance and direction of outbuildings from the manor home. Montpelier's Director of Education, Beth Taylor, remembers the phone call...remembers that her pulse quickened as the caller casually described the document. "It was like a treasure map," she exclaims excitedly. "If I dig here, I should find the smoke house." She traces her finger down the dotted line. "The fit was perfect to inches."

What they found was the Montpelier household slave quarters, now known as the South Yard, and at this very moment, staff archaeologists and students from James Madison University are carefully excavating 4' X 4' squares of this slave village. It's hot, dusty, and sometimes tedious work...a nail here, a pottery shard there, and lots of red dirt in between. But director of archaeology Matt Reeves says "no matter how small the find, these fragments of history are pieced together to tell the story of the real people who lived and worked at Montpelier."

Like good detectives, they've even sifted through the trash! Outside what has been determined to be the cur-



Photo courtesy of the Montpelier Foundation
Archaeologist Megan Veness exposes the cobbles road in front of Madison's home.



Archaeologists Mark Trickett (left) and Brian Schneider (right) removed cement from the cellar in Dolley Madison's kitchen one five-foot square at a time, revealing the herring-bone pattern of the original Madison brick kitchen floor.

Photo courtesy of the Montpelier Foundation

tilage (surrounding yard) of the manor house, archaeologists have found the Madison's trash midden. Basically a garbage dump, it was located intentionally downwind and downstream of the house. Here, they've found broken champagne bottles, oyster shells, and animal bones that tell volumes about the Madisons, their diet, and their way of living. It is here that they found a piece of a broken dinner plate bearing a pattern that perfectly matches an intact Nast plate given recently to Montpelier by Johnny Scott and currently on display in the Grills Gallery in the Visitor's Center.

They've also found the road that ran in front of the house. A landscaping book of that era showed it was common practice to locate the front gate the same distance from the front door as the length of the house. Montpelier, back then and today, from wing to wing, is/was 90 feet long. And, sure enough, exactly ninety feet out from the front door, they found evidence of gate posts and the half moon of cobblestones where the carriages would pull off of the road to discharge their passengers. A heavy duty picket fence, called a paling fence, paralleled the road.

Matt Reeves' department has been called to do many things: mitigation archaeology before they dug the underground vault that houses all the 21st century stuff which protects the house from excessive heat, cold, dryness, humidity, and the most dreaded threat of all...fire. Near the portico, it was the archaeologists who found the original shutter dogs, those metal feet that keep window shutters pressed back to the wall. Now, the modern day blacksmiths have something authentic to copy.



Photo by Phil Audibert
Archaeologist Brian Schneider screens dirt from the South Yard slave quarters, looking for artifacts.

Archaeological surveys have been going on at Montpelier since the National Trust took possession of the house in 1985. And it's not just the Madisons and their slaves; it's also Native American sites, a Civil War encampment that hosted 2,500 Confederate soldiers during the winter of 1863-64, and the Gilmore Farm, a freedman's home that has yielded fascinating tidbits about life after Emancipation. They will be busy for decades to come.

But this summer, the focus is on the incredible find in the South Yard, the one where the treasure map said, "dig here."



Montpelier Stories

Part I: The Redo, The Document, The Dig

Before, during and after. Top photo, this 2002 pre-restoration photograph of Montpelier shows the massive additions made by William duPont after he purchased the property in 1901. Middle photo, while the house was being restored it was covered in scaffolding and plastic. Bottom photo, in April 2006 Montpelier's exterior restoration was largely completed, with the mansion once again appearing as it did in James and Dolley Madison's day.

All photos courtesy of the Montpelier Foundation.

We have an historical treasure here in Orange County that many of us have taken for granted. It is called Montpelier. This treasure has been buried...for at least a century and a half. But over the past four years or so, with the help of "maps," it has been unearthed again.

On September 17th of this year, Constitution Day, the lid to this coffer will be flung open for all to see. In this and the next *Insider*, we will preview the riches to be found in this remarkable treasure chest. Part I talks about a house, a dig and a document. Part II talks about the people: James, Dolley and the slaves.

THE REDO

"The most important restoration of our generation."

—Montpelier Foundation President, Michael Quinn

With those words, Michael Quinn told a group of visiting journalists a few weeks ago that Montpelier has many stories to tell, but right now, the most compelling of them all is the big redo.

According to Quinn, Montpelier is one of the last homes of a founding father to be restored. And there's a reason for that; it was a private residence until 1984. It was not until 2001, with the creation of the Montpelier Foundation, that some crucial questions were asked: Can you do away with the non-Madison portions of this house? Can you find the original 1820s James and Dolley Madison retirement home within these walls?

A feasibility study generating 2,300 pages and the careful opening of some 300 holes into the walls, floors and ceilings answered this question with a resounding "yes."

The restoration story reads like a foren-

sics thriller. The main sleuths, architectural historian Mark Wenger, director of restoration John Jeanes, and archaeological director Matthew Reeves, sifted through the evidence like detectives; cross referencing, documenting, preserving everything. "We didn't throw anything away," says Jeanes.

Good thing too because others not as careful, might have tossed that small treasure of information found in a wall...a mouse nest! It yielded a torn newspaper clipping which dated the find, a piece of red damask material, which tells them how the furniture in the drawing room was upholstered, and a scrap of paper with the clearly legible word "mother" written in Madison's distinctive hand. A mouse nest!

They looked at bills for materials. They read letters from James Madison to Thomas Jefferson who had lent his friend two builders. They listened to eyewitness accounts by visitors of the time. They compared watercolors, lithographs and drawings. They matched up nail holes and pock marks in the plaster and grooves in the brick. They looked at old



Photo by Phil Audibert
Director of Restoration at Montpelier John Jeanes.

paint through a microscope. From the only five 1880s-era interior photographs known to exist they discovered the room where Madison died. It had a door just to the left of the fireplace that no one knew about. In a photograph they could see a reflection of

a door in a mantel piece mirror, literally looking back into history. It told them which way it opened. They found 38 of the original 51 Madison era doors. It seems William duPont who purchased Montpelier in 1901, was, in Michael Quinn's words, "one of the nation's first recyclers;" he used sheathing from the basement to panel his bowling alley. Outlined on these planks can be seen the "ghosts" of the tread and rise of the cellar stair. They determined the shape of a cornice from the profile it left on a brick wall.

Down in the basement, when they removed the duPont-era cement floor they found perfect impressions of herringbone brick in the red clay. Dolley's kitchen floor!

And so, armed with this information, they carefully tore out the duPont additions from around the original house and started to rebuild the Madison home.

This was no easy task. The second stories on the wings had to be removed, along with all other duPont era additions. Stucco had to be chipped off the brick walls. Off came the tin roof. Columns had to be shortened and the ground level brought up to meet the portico.

A giant vault was dug outside to house utilities, heating, ventilation, airconditioning. Ducts and wiring had to be hidden in chases and chimneys. In places the house had settled

as much as 3-3/4 inches. It had to be jacked up. All in all, the 36,000 square-foot, 55-room duPont mansion was "deconstructed" to the 10,600 square foot 27-room Georgian and Greek Revival home that James and Dolley enjoyed when they finally came home for good in 1817.

"This is based on hard information," says Mark Wenger, sounding like a police investigator. They assembled a team of craftsmen and restoration experts, 40 of them in all, to make this happen. Asked if they were ever stumped about what should go where, Wenger says, "We really had pretty good evidence for just about everything."

And so, master mason and stone carver Ray Cannetti was able to carve the drawing room fireplace surround detail from sandstone from the exact same quarry it came from in England;

he just did it 200 years later. And historic builder Peter Post was able to craft a fantail hip teardrop shingle from an original found discarded in the attic space. He just used cypress instead of pine because it lasts longer. And restoration carpenter Keith Forrey could make some of the 25 to 35 decisions needed to restore each door with a remarkable degree of accuracy. And millwork superintendent Blaise Gaston could lovingly check a Madison-era window into a "hospital ward," where it would be carefully repaired and rebuilt. And Mac Ward and Bill Bichell could precisely fit new sections of mor-



Photo by Phil Audibert
Historic builder, Peter Post with a sample of the cypress shingles that now cover Montpelier's roof.



Photo by Phil Audibert
Master mason and stone carver, Ray Cannetti hand carved the fireplace surround in the Madison drawing room from sandstone quarried in England.

tise and tenon floor joists in with original ones. And Jim Price and Wayne Mays could order up replacement brick and carve it to fit. And Michael Price could fire limestone to make calcium oxide, which when mixed with water actually boils into putty, which when mixed with sand and horsehair becomes plaster.

They started the plaster work almost exactly a year ago. Almost 90 tons of it dry-mixed with 56 pounds of horsehair. It weighed twice that when it was pressed wet into the crannies between and behind the lathing...three coats in places. It will take another year or more to dry and cure.

Asked if they ever had a conflict between their commitment to authenticity versus the convenience of modern day technology, John Jeanes responds that inside the mansion they kept true right down to the hand-ground paints. However, "on the exterior we took a little bit different approach." He points to gutters and 21st century protective paint that would never have been there originally. He explains the thinking. "Let's build a maintenance endowment right now. Let's buy the very best materials we can, let's do it as well as we can and lets make sure we have a maintenance program that maintains this in such a way that we don't have to get back at it again."

Allison Deeds is the acting curator of this museum that is Montpelier. Her job, to track down original furniture and decorations, has been made maddeningly difficult by the fact that Dolley Madison's alcoholic/gambler son started selling the contents of Montpelier right out the door after James' death in

1836. Eventually, Dolley, facing poverty, had to sell the mansion and everything in it. There's a record of 700-800 books of Madison's 4,000-volume library being auctioned off on the Orange County Courthouse steps in 1854.

Although she has a complete inventory of what was in the original drawing room, documentation for artwork "is incredibly slim," says a disappointed Allison. Only one list of oil paintings exists and it is so vague, describing some paintings as "a landscape," and "a still life," that it is not much help. "A lot of the documentary evidence is no longer extant or we haven't found it yet," she shrugs.

So, don't expect furnished rooms by September 17th. Remember, the plaster has to dry and cure. They won't turn on this new HVAC system till

summer, and it too has to acclimate. Ideally a constant temperature within a few degrees of 70 and a constant humidity within a few points of 50 percent are ideal.

"The goal is to put furnishings back in the house; we just don't know, working with the environmental system how long that will take," hedges Allison. She says they would consider furnishing the house with reproductions; "if we knew what to reproduce...We're trying to, in say, three or four years probably, attempt to have the drawing room and the dining room furnished, completely. I don't know if that's doable because of funding."

It seems the \$24 million slated for the redo, \$18 million of it from the Mellon Foundation, does not include furnishings. They have to raise that separately.

There have been some significant ribbon cuttings lately at Montpelier, beginning with the new bridge and then the new Visitor's Center, where the duPont story is now told. CBS's Sunday Morning segment featured Montpelier this past March. Dolley's 240th birthday was celebrated just last week. Visitation is up, more than 50 percent for the first four months of this year over last year.

And on September 17th, which aptly enough is Constitution Day, there will be another ribbon cutting. The master of ceremonies will be none other than Jim Lehrer of PBS. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts will speak. Laura Bush has the date penciled in on her calendar. Elementary schools from miles around will be emptied so the kids can once again form a living flag on the lawn at Montpelier.

But the pomp and ceremony will honor more than just this painstaking process of bringing Montpelier back; it's about bringing the man back. In Michael Quinn's words, "Our aim is to restore James Madison to the American people."

THE DOCUMENT

"His driving ambition throughout his life is create a union."

—Montpelier Foundation President, Michael Quinn

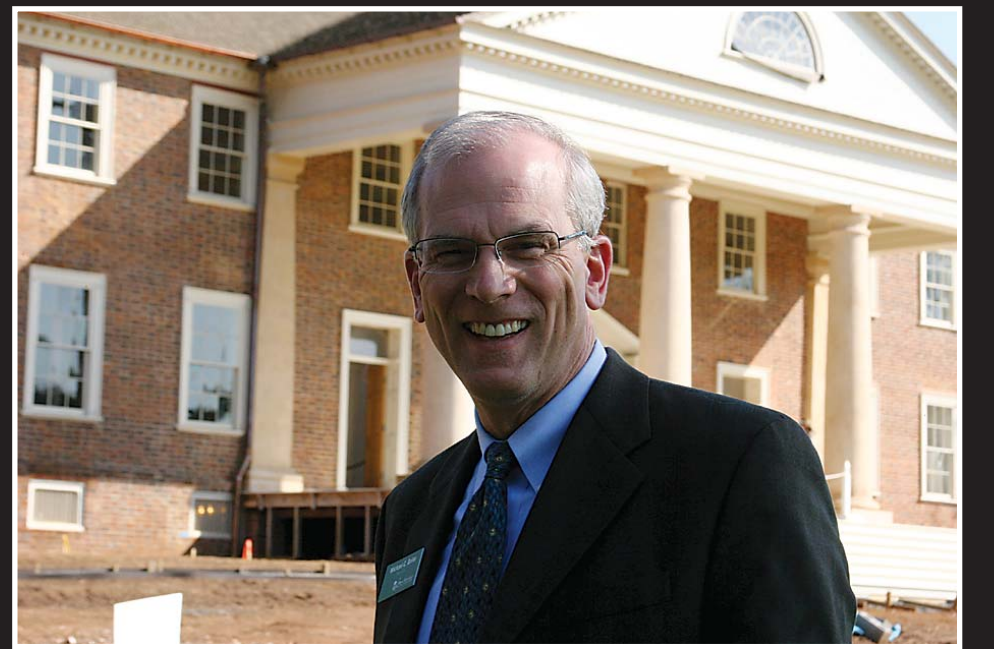


Photo by Phil Audibert
Montpelier Foundation President, Michael Quinn.

James Madison never signed the Declaration of Independence. He wasn't even there. But he is generally regarded as the father and architect of the two documents that hold this country together, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

When he presented the Virginia Plan to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia he came armed with a magnificent education and the intellect to use it. Schooled early in the principles of the Scottish Enlightenment by first a Presbyterian minister in Tidewater and later John Witherspoon at Princeton, he grew up with the dichotomy that there is "a spark of divinity in every man," and that "all men are knaves...He realized both statements are true," says Michael Quinn.

And so James Madison came home to Montpelier after the Revolution to study the idea of self-governance. Quinn says the country was in serious trouble. "Every state had no reason but to their own way. It was verging on anarchy...the country was literally coming apart."

Madison's solution: a strong central government, "to create a state so large that no single interest group could become a dominant majority, at least not for very long... 'Save the union' was his creed as a way to achieve individual liberty."

When it came time for the Constitutional Convention, it was Madison who had done his homework. "He brought about the convention, he set the agenda for the convention, he set the guiding principles for the convention for the new form of government, and all of that was adopted." After the Constitutional Convention, he argued effectively for the document's approval, particularly in *The Federalist Papers* numbers 10 and 51, which Quinn says are "regarded as the most profound statements

of American political theory." He also demonstrated flexibility when he listened to the detractors of a strong central government, men who feared it would become tyrannical. In response he drafted the *Bill of Rights*. "Religious freedom, religious liberty, freedom of conscience, separation of church and state are the real hallmarks of his political career," points out Quinn.

Here it is more than 200 years later and that same document is still being studied, analyzed, and discussed. At Montpelier, it is being done in a converted stable just down the hill from Mr. Madison's study.

Sean O'Brien is the executive director of the Center for the Constitution. Started in 2003 as a visionary parallel project to the restoration of the mansion, this think tank will have, by the end of this year, sent almost 1,900 government and history teachers home with a renewed sense of what it means to be an American.

Every fall and every spring, the center offers four weekend seminars to these teachers, seminars in citizenship, the founding, the Constitution, and the *Bill of Rights*. They arrive on Friday evening and come out changed people by noon the following Monday. Everything but their transportation to and from Montpelier is paid for...lodging in the surrounding Constitutional Village, meals, everything. A \$5 million endowment, totally separate from the restoration project, plus significant grants from local benefactors such as board chairman Robert Smith and others, have made all this possible.

"The Center for the Constitution is

designed to serve current and future stewards of the Constitution," says O'Brien. "So working with teachers, they are current stewards of the Constitution because they are teaching the next generation. The students are the future stewards of the Constitution." Just recently, two Prospect Heights Middle School teachers completed one of the seminars.

Phrases like "life changing," abound in testimonials from program graduates. Next O'Brien has set his sights on law enforcement officials, members of the media, politicians, members of Congress, judicial and military staff. This summer "non-stop, back-to-back programs," are scheduled.

"You can't stay at Mt. Vernon," he points out. "You can't stay at Monticello. You can't stay anywhere except at Montpelier. So this is the only place where you can come and study the legacy of that person and stay here." He smiles and adds softly, "and then at 5:30 when all the tourists leave the property, you're still here...It's really fun on a beautiful night to walk up and see the teachers standing on the portico of the house thinking about what they've been studying for the past two days."

O'Brien tells a story. A constitutional expert at the center was asked if Madison were alive today, who would he be? And the answer was Cal Ripken, Jr., the long-time steady-eddy shortstop for the Baltimore Orioles. Cal Ripken???

"He was always there. He always did his homework, so he was always prepared; and he always gave 100 percent."