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owning founding fathers as tyrants. Madison knew it was wrong; he also felt powerless to do anything about it. We must not lose sight of the fact that he is still a great man, albeit one with human flaws.

Considerable credit must be given to Montpelier, which instead of sweeping the ugly specter of slavery under a rug, has revealed it as a fascinating journey from bondage to emancipation to freedman to Jim Crow to this past Constitution Day where a collateral descendant of James Madison and a direct descendant of his personal manservant read aloud the Preamble to the United States Constitution... together.

To this day, even though we are three and four generations removed from it, slavery conjures emotions ranging from sullen resentment to bleeding heart guilt. But in the words of Rebecca Gilmore Coleman, in the last *Insider*, "you have to move forward." And in order to "move forward," it is necessary to understand this complex issue. What follows here is a brief and incomplete look at the practice of slavery in Orange County. We also follow the life and times of one Montpelier slave who traveled that remarkable journey.

But first, two stories: one about moving backwards; the other about moving forwards.

About 15 years ago, my wife and I operated a bed-and-breakfast inn that specialized in weddings. A couple from Northern Virginia toured our facility with the idea they might be married here. They asked, "was this land owned by a slave owner in the past?"

I found it a puzzling question, and I answered as truthfully as I could. "Yes, I suppose it was," I responded, adding, "as far as I know, at one point or another, all the land around here was owned by slave owners."

They turned on their heels and stalked out, muttering something about how they would never be married in a slave owner's house or on his property. Never mind that the house wasn't built until 1903. Never mind that my family didn't own the land until 1957.

This couple was white.

A short time later, on Juneteenth, the daughter of a long standing Barbourville family that can trace its lineage back to the mid 19th century or earlier, was married at our facility. It was a joyous occasion with a ceremonial jumping of the broom. Do I need to tell you that this couple was black?

No. They have long since moved forward.

We will know that we too have moved forward, when we can omit the box that asks "Race?" on the job or college application form, because... it will have become irrelevant.

But the history is not.

A glimpse into slavery in Orange County

You could make an argument that the first slaves in this area were the captives of native American Indian tribes. When the first white man, Governor Alexander Spotswood settled here in 1710, he most likely had African slaves. They had been landing at Jamestown since 1619.

Spotswood also imported white indentured servants from Germany to work his iron mines at Germanna. This was common practice in those days, the difference being they could work off their indenture.

The vast majority of African Americans were not as lucky. They and their children and their children's children were doomed to bondage in perpetuity.

The first man to successfully patent land in what would become Orange County was Colonel James Taylor II. He built the county's first permanent home, Bloomsbury, in 1722, and he undoubtedly worked the surrounding fertile soil with the help of slaves. Taylor also most likely provided his son-in-law, Ambrose Madison with slaves to go along with the land he carved out for him. In fact, Ambrose Madison, grandfather to the future president, came up here in 1732 to check on the progress of a slave gang on this property which is today's Montpelier.

Ambrose was here barely two months when he was murdered. A rented slave named Pompey was tried, convicted and executed for the crime. Madison's widow, Frances Taylor Madison, chose to remain here in the middle of nowhere, despite the fact that she had three small children to rear, one of them being the president's father. She even took back the two accomplices to the crime. We know this because their names appear on future Montpelier rolls.

This is not the only example of a slave murdering a master in Orange County. Eve was burned at the stake up near the intersection of Zachary Taylor Highway (Rt. 522) and Pine Stake Road (Rt. 621) for poisoning her master in 1745. And Letty was tried and acquitted of poisoning her master and another slave in 1748. Poison was the preferred method of dispatch, most likely because it was hard to prove and slaves had no access to weapons. In fact there is documented evidence that poison "recipes" were carried here from Africa.

Were slaves lashed to the whipping post and beaten in Orange County? Probably. It really depended on their owners.

It's interesting to note that slaves and their families followed



Photo by Phil Audibert
Descendants of Paul Jennings stroll up to the mansion on the property where their ancestor was born, worked most of his life and where he witnessed President James Madison's death.

parallel lines with their owners. Montpelier's director of education, Beth Taylor says, "The connections to the white community are of course echoed in the black community. There are incredible interconnections... among the whites and the blacks, and sometimes even between the whites and blacks."

For instance, if a Taylor married a Madison, oftentimes, a Taylor slave would marry a Madison slave. But they couldn't live together because they were bound to separate plantations! They had to visit each other, sometimes surreptitiously. Because slaves were considered chattels, whole families and their descendants were passed down from generation to generation like heirlooms. The 1782 census of Orange County, which includes territory that is today's Greene County, listed the African-American population at 3,540 souls, an astounding 46 percent of the population. Compare that to the 14 percent counted in the last census taken nine years ago. During a recent tour of Montpelier for the descendants of Paul Jennings, communications director, Peggy Vaughn made the eye-

opening comment that during Montpelier's heyday, around the turn of the 18th and 19th century, 100 faces on this farm would be black; only five would be white.

Certainly, Montpelier wasn't the only game in town as far as slavery in Orange County is concerned, but it provides a unique insight, through documents, artifacts, and excavations, into what slave life was like. Years ago, a slave cemetery was discovered on a wooded knoll across the road from the new visitor's center. Thirty eight burial depressions have been identified. Since then, the number of slave-related excavations and discoveries has blossomed, and with them, so has our knowledge of this dark corner of our history.

Plantations such as these were divided into "quarters," each with its own overseer or foreman. The slaves who worked in a particular quarter lived in that quarter. Oftentimes, that foreman was a slave himself, such as Moses who ran a blacksmith shop with several workers under him.

Sawney was such a man, and his story is interesting because he was born the same year as the future president. He accompanied Madison to Princeton, served as foreman on a quarter named for him, and ended his days as a tottering, white-haired companion to Madison's elderly mother, "the very picture of (father) Time with his scythe," according to one visitor.

Montpelier's director of archaeology, Matt Reeves, says slave quarters have been discovered in the fields below the visitor's center. A crafts area has been identified and protected between the visitor's center and the mansion, and of course, a small village of slave duplexes and out buildings, yielding a wealth of information, has already been partially



Photo by Phil Audibert
Montpelier's Director of Education, Beth Taylor has done extensive research into the Paul Jennings story. Here she consults a Jennings family tree.

excavated in the south yard.

Matt would like to see this village eventually reconstructed, although, to do that, they will have to cut down some DuPont-era trees. But these are the original home sites of the household slaves. They were located inside a now reconstructed picket fence that separated the working side of the plantation from the formal side. These families would have been plainly visible to both visitors and the Madisons themselves...a daily reminder of this strange double standard of liberty and bondage.

Although field slaves were expected to work dawn to dusk in all weather conditions, household slaves came under a constant scrutiny that made their job not as cushy as some might think. They basically hung out in the cellar until called upstairs for duty. Visitor, Harriett Martineau writes in 1835, "During all our conversations, one or another slave was perpetually coming to Mrs. Madison for the great bunch of keys; two or three more lounged about in the room leaning against the doorposts or the corner of the sofa; and the attendance of others was no less indefatigable in my own apartment."

Ailsey Payne served as a cook. She describes, in a 1902 newspaper article, preparations made at Montpelier for a visit by the Marquis de Lafayette in 1824. "I was a house gal then, and how Miss Dolley did dress us gals for the occasion... Before the company come there was stirrin' times at Montpelier...The silver had done been shined up, the glass and china was in order, and the whole house had been gone over to make it look fine as possible."

Beth Taylor has spent years researching slave histories, in particular the story of Paul Jennings (see *The All-American Man, back page*). But when all you have is a first name, the task can be daunting. She tells a story about a slave named Billy, who accompanied Madison to the Constitutional Convention, where, Madison himself wrote, he was "tainted" by liberty. When it came time to return to Montpelier, Madison sold Billy at a discount knowing full well that Pennsylvania law eventually would free him. Billy went on to become a merchant's agent in Philadelphia. On a sea voyage to New Orleans he was washed overboard and drowned. On the passenger manifest, he was listed as Billy Gardner.

So, now we have a last name. Beth Taylor quotes a letter Madison wrote to his father. "Please let old Anthony and Betty know that their son Billy is no more." This is the second clue. "A family starts to emerge," smiles Beth. Earlier, another young slave named Anthony, "who was a chronic runaway," was sought by Madison Sr. in Philadelphia. Beth wonders if this Anthony is Billy's brother. "That's not for sure, but you would have the 'old' Anthony, the father, so

perhaps he had a son named Anthony and between that and these two, at least suspected of getting together in Philadelphia...So, these are the ways that we try to tease out relationships, and at least form hypotheses about them. And then as more information comes up, see how it holds up." She smiles. "It's a satisfying kind of work. It is a puzzle and we're making progress with it."

What everybody wants to know is how could James



Courtesy of The Montpelier Foundation
A sample of some of the artifacts discovered during archaeological digs in the south yard at Montpelier. The south yard contained a small village where household slaves lived.

Madison reconcile his dreams of equality and liberty while surrounded by people in bondage? According to a document prepared by Montpelier's Peggy Vaughan and Beth Taylor, "at the 1787 Constitutional Convention, Madison found the issue of slavery so contentious that he and others set it aside, realizing that it would derail the effort to unify the states into a single nation."

And in 1825, Madison wrote "The magnitude of this evil [slavery] among us is so deeply felt, and so universally acknowledged; that no merit could be greater than that of devising a satisfactory remedy for it." Still, this man, who was regarded as a kind master, could not bring himself to make the pen stroke that would set his people free.

Albemarle resident, Edward Coles served as Madison's private secretary for part of his presidency. Influenced by both Madison and Jefferson and their ideals regarding liberty, he freed all his slaves and challenged them to do likewise in their wills. Yet, in the fall of 1836, Coles writes his sister that Madison "has now died without freeing one slave, no not even Paul."

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From the Jennings family, courtesy of the Montpelier Foundation and Sylvia Jennings Alexander
The only photograph of Paul Jennings known to exist.



Photo by Phil Audibert
The great great-granddaughter of Paul Jennings, Sylvia Alexander attended the lecture and Jennings family reunion at Montpelier. She is the source of the only known photograph of Paul Jennings.

The photo stares back at you, the face fiercely defiant, a book clenched in his right hand, a not-so-subtle reminder that "Yes, I can read and write." He is Paul Jennings and he was born a slave on Montpelier in 1799, the great-grandson of an American Indian, and the son of an African-American mother and a white British trader.

Paul Jennings—the all-American man

Beth Taylor, who has spent the past two years researching this man's story says, "Paul's very fascinating and arresting face is a wonderful combination of his Afro, Anglo and American Indian ancestry." Paul Jennings is truly an all-American man, and his story of bondage to freedom is the all-American story.

When he was just 10 years old, he accompanied the Madisons to Washington D.C. as a footman. In a book he penned 56 years later, he described the experience of living in a yet-to-be-completed White House in our nation's fledgling capital. "The east room was not finished and Pennsylvania Avenue was not paved, but was always in an awful condition from either mud or dust. The city was a dreary place."

In 1814, it was a hot place too. The British were threatening at the outskirts, and as President Madison went to inspect fortifications, Dolley directed the packing up of valuable documents and the evacuation of the White House. Fifteen-year-old Paul was there and witnessed the rescue of the Gilbert Stuart painting of George Washington. The White House was not so lucky; it was put to the torch, which Paul witnessed from across the Potomac.

In 1817, his presidential term expired, Madison moved the household back to Montpelier. At some point, Paul married Fanny, a slave on an adjoining property,

owned by Charles P. Howard. Howard was a Quaker who had married into the same Taylor family that helped establish Ambrose Madison 90 years prior. Fanny bore Paul five children, even though Paul could only visit his wife by walking cross-country over the Southwestern Mountains from Montpelier to where Mayhurst is today in the Town of Orange.

Paul Jennings served as James Madison's personal manservant. "I was always with Mr. Madison... and shaved him every other day for six-

teen years," he writes in *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*. "For six months before his death, he was unable to walk and spent most of his time reclined on a couch...I was present when he died...he ceased breathing as quietly as the snuff of a candle goes out."

That was June 28, 1836. A year later, Dolley returned to live in Washington with a few servants, including Paul. By 1841, she had written in her will the words, "I give to my mulatto man, Paul, his freedom." By 1844, Fanny had fallen ill. Paul went home to visit her and wrote to another Montpelier slave, Sukey, still in the city, "Pore Fannee, I am looking every day to see the last of her." Fanny died in August of 1844, the same year that Dolley was forced to sell Montpelier. Strapped for cash, she rented Paul out to President James Polk.

Correctly sensing that he might go on the block himself, Jennings may have started to pay Dolley for his freedom because he was sold at the relatively cheap price of \$200 to insurance agent Pollard Webb, who then "flipped" him to Daniel Webster who immediately freed him, after working out an arrangement where he could pay off the debt through service. While under Webster's employ, Jennings would take care packages to an impoverished Dolley. He even slipped her some cash.

In 1848, Jennings participated in an attempt by 77 slaves to escape

to the north on board the schooner *Pearl*. The attempt failed due to a lack of wind and an informant. But because the white captain refused to give up any names, Jennings escaped prosecution and jail time.

It was while he was working for Webster, on a rail journey to Massachusetts, that he married Desdemona Brooks. And by 1851, Jennings landed a job with the pension office in Washington, partly on the strength of a glowing recommendation from Webster. In 1854, he bought a house on L Street and 18th, and by 1857 had sent for his four surviving (and now free) children to come live with him and Desdemona.

In 1862, Jennings made the acquaintance of John Brooks Russell at the Pension Office. Russell, fascinated by Jennings' story, helped him write the now famous *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*, "almost in his own language." It appeared first in an historical magazine and then as a 21-page booklet.

During the Civil War, all three of Jennings' sons joined the Union cause. Franklin Jennings served with the 5th Massachusetts Colored Cavalry, and according to Beth Taylor, was wounded as he rode in the first unit to enter Richmond after it was burned. In 1870, the now twice-widowed Paul Jennings married a third time at the ripe old age of 71. He died peacefully four years later. Montpelier memoirist, Mary Cutts, described him as "enamoured with freedom."

His direct descendants, 30 of whom gathered at Montpelier recently for the first time since the late 1950s, still have the family's two cavalry swords from the Civil War. Paul Jennings' great, great-granddaughter, Sylvia Jennings Alexander, at age 94, keeps them and the lone photograph of her forebear, this slave turned freedman, this all-American man, in a safe place.

(Many thanks to the sources for this Insider: Beth Taylor, Peggy Vaughn, Matt Reeves, The Montpelier Foundation, and the author of Remembering: A History of Orange County, Virginia, Frank Walker)

You have to move forward

Slavery is our greatest national shame. To buy and kidnap human beings from their homeland, ship them to our shores in crowded fetid cargo holds, auction them off like cattle, flog them like beasts of burden, separate them from their parents, mates and children, and set them to hard labor with no compensation is...abhorrent.

There is no justification for slavery, but there is an explanation. Free labor is cheaper than paying workers a wage. That does not mean, by the way, that it is more efficient. The South painfully learned that necessary lesson from the North 144 years ago.

Slavery is also as old as Methuselah himself. People have been pressed into bondage from ancient Egypt, through Rome, the Middle Ages, right up to the cotton fields of the mid 19th century America. In some remote parts of Africa and Asia it still exists.

Again, there is no justification for slavery, but in 18th century Orange County, there is an explanation for it. It was a commonly accepted practice and an economic necessity, primarily in the non-industrial agricultural south, although there are isolated examples of slavery in New England, and more than a few northern pockets were generously lined by the slave trade. Then as now, as long as there's a buck to be made, anything can be justified.

The irony, of course, is that in Orange County, James Madison, the architect of the Constitution and Bill of Rights was a slave owner. In fact you can make the argument that without slaves he would not have had the economic freedom to devote himself to the lofty ideals of democracy, freedom and individual rights. In 21st century America, it is too easy to dismiss Madison and other slave



Photo by Phil Audibert

Montpelier Director of Archaeology, Matt Reeves, points out south yard slave quarters to descendants of Madison era slave, Paul Jennings. About 30 of Jennings' descendants attended a recent lecture and reunion.



Photo by Phil Audibert

Descendants of the Paul Jennings family visit the slave cemetery, where 38 burial depressions have been documented at Montpelier. Two such depressions can be seen in the foreground.

Considerable credit must be given to Montpelier, which instead of sweeping the ugly specter of slavery under a rug, has revealed it as a fascinating journey from bondage to emancipation to freedman to Jim Crow to this past Constitution Day where a collateral descendant of James Madison and a direct descendant of his personal manservant read aloud the Preamble to the United States Constitution... together.