



**Background Information on
David M. Rubenstein's Gift to
The Montpelier Foundation
November 1, 2014**

Overview

For the last decade, The Montpelier Foundation has been restoring Montpelier, James Madison's lifelong home. Following Madison's death, the property was sold by Dolley Madison in 1844 and changed hands a number of times until it was acquired by William duPont in 1901. The architecture of the house was significantly changed during these years. In accordance with the wishes of Marion duPont Scott, her heirs transferred Montpelier to the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1984. Under The Montpelier Foundation's leadership, the home is being restored back to its 1817 appearance as Madison intended it.

The completion of the architectural restoration was celebrated on Constitution Day, September 17, 2008. This restoration has been nationally recognized as one of the most significant and authentic restorations ever achieved. With the architectural restoration complete, The Montpelier Foundation initiated an investigation to understand the appearance and use of interior rooms with the goal of authentically refurnishing the mansion. In addition the Foundation has been conducting extensive documentary and archaeological research with the goal of returning the landscape to its appearance in Madison's time, including the interpretation and reconstruction of enslaved community sites. This \$10 million gift from Mr. Rubenstein will support both of these strategic priorities.

**Mansion Interiors Restoration and Refurnishing Efforts
\$6.5 million**

Most of James and Dolley Madison's personal possessions have been dispersed widely through family descent or sale over the past century and a half. Many items are now privately owned or in the collections of other museums and historical societies.

Over the last five years, The Montpelier Foundation has conducted extensive research to relocate and acquire objects that help visitors understand the context in which the Madisons lived at Montpelier. More than \$6.5 million has been invested in this project to date, and while several rooms are now furnished, other important and prominent spaces are largely empty.

Montpelier's refurnishing priorities include the interior restoration and interpretation of the following rooms: South Passage entry hall, Mother Madison's sitting and dining rooms, upstairs bedchambers and adjacent closet/storage spaces, and the cellar kitchens and work areas.

South Passage

The South Passage, or central hall, of the original 1760s stately Georgian home, was used as an ancillary parlor and gallery space by James and Dolley Madison. Today, the architecturally restored but unfurnished South Passage is the first stop in the daily tour route. Madison visitors wrote of vivid fine art on the walls, representing a wide range of genres, and alluded to the importance of the space in daily life.



The South Passage is the first room visitors enter and is completely unfurnished today. Documentary research suggests the Madisons used this space to display their collection of fine art.

To refurnish the South Passage, the Foundation must conduct research to link disparate documents to extant works of art, contextualize use of the room (and similar rooms) in early nineteenth century history, assess the inventories of comparable households, and better understand changing uses of the room over periods of Madison family occupancy.

Mother Nelly Madison's Sitting Room and Dining

Nelly Madison, President Madison's mother, resided at Montpelier until her death in 1829. The Madisons' visitors frequently recorded their brief stops in the parlor to pay their respects to the president's mother, giving us a glimpse into the room's appearance during the height of Madison's political career.



The first section of the mansion was built in the 1760s by James Madison's parents. His mother, Nelly, lived to be 98 and continued to live at Montpelier with James and Dolley until her death.

The family's fairly unique living situation, with separate quarters but shared walls, offers Montpelier opportunities to interpret James Madison's childhood and family history in rooms occupied by his parents throughout his lifetime. These rooms are prominently located off the South Passage and are an important part of the visitor experience.

Upstairs Bedchambers and Closets/Storage Rooms

Montpelier was never a quiet home. Throughout the president's lifetime, Montpelier was almost always filled with family, friends, and visitors seeking an audience with the Father of the Constitution. Dolley Madison particularly encouraged visits from Washington and Richmond colleagues, as well as longer stays from far-flung relatives, including several nieces and nephews who spent seasons in Orange. In addition to visitors, Payne Todd, Dolley's son from her first marriage, grew up at Montpelier and stayed in the home throughout much of his life. "I am less worried with a hundred visitors here than with 25 in Washington," she wrote to her sister in 1816.



The bed shown here has Madison provenance and is available for acquisition. It is now on loan and exhibited in a largely unfurnished room. Research suggests this room was used by James and Dolley Madison, as well as by prominent visitors.

Refurnishing bedchambers and closet spaces on the second floor will allow interpretation of a busy, full home and the important people who influenced the Madisons' personal lives. Three bedroom spaces have been identified as priorities as they are located along the main visitor route and give the Foundation an opportunity to interpret the Madisons' principal bedchamber, guest bedchambers, and family bedchambers. Closets will be filled with stores of linens and clothes, and rooms refurnished with window treatments, bedding with ornamental fabric, clothing storage pieces, personal items, artwork, floor coverings, and furniture for seating.

Cellar Kitchens and Work Areas

Approximately 300 slaves labored at Montpelier as field hands, domestic servants, and skilled craftsmen during three generations of Madison family ownership. Madison struggled over how best to eradicate slavery from his plantation and from the rest of the country. Surviving letters from Madison's retirement present someone deeply conflicted about the institution of slavery.



Montpelier's cellars include two kitchens, a wine cellar, and several storage/work areas. The entire cellar area is accessible to visitors as all mechanics were buried in an underground vault located behind the mansion during the architectural restoration completed in 2008.

While Montpelier is fortunate to have a large cellar area encompassing the entire footprint of the mansion, the architecturally restored and self-guided cellar spaces contain sparse interpretation. To better use these work spaces to interpret Montpelier's enslaved community, the Foundation plans to use a variety of interactive and interpretative strategies. Interpretation in the cellar venue will shed light on the lives of individual slaves, including tracing their family stories and working lives as well as the scope of their travel and influence.

Mansion Research Support

To maintain the same level of accuracy and authenticity achieved during the architectural restoration of the mansion, interior restoration efforts require thorough research and documentation, including analysis of physical and architectural features (such as curtain tack evidence in the window architraves), object investigation (determining when the Madisons' purported poster bed was married to its cornice), and documentary research to gather contemporary references to spaces and make sound use of comparable furnishings documentation. Together, these investigations will accelerate furnishing efforts by identifying appropriate objects for acquisition and will inform conservation and preservation of architecture and objects.

Research during this phase of restoration will build on Montpelier's recent work, now considered a model of rigorous historical research. We will rely heavily on ongoing efforts to track and annotate an ever-growing collection of some 30,000 Madison and Montpelier-related documents. Such visitor accounts, correspondence, diaries, receipts, bills of lading, plantation and household accounts, inventories and accounts for comparable households, federal treasury accounts, and extant documents written or received by James and Dolley Madison and other close family members inform our understanding of Montpelier in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Foundation is now in a phase of analysis, linking disparate documents and sources, placing objects and events in appropriate historical and social context, and situating the Madisons within their peer groups. In the coming years, the Foundation will analyze core components of the research collected in a relational database, particularly materials related to prints and engravings research, comparable households, visitation and room use, as well as changes over time. The resulting database will continue to provide the basis for all future Montpelier research projects. It also will inform the work of other departments, providing content for education and interpretive programs, publications, and scholarly research.

Reconstruction of the South Yard and Interpretation of the Enslaved Community \$3.5 million

Though the mansion restoration is returning the Madisons to Montpelier, their nineteenth century home is located in a twentieth century landscape. To contextualize many of Madison's economic, political, and private decisions and shed light on historically under-studied and misunderstood populations, we aspire to reconstruct the Montpelier plantation landscape and restore the presence of the enslaved people who made the Madisons' lives possible.



View toward the mansion of South Yard with ghosted structures. Shown here are archaeology excavations completed in 2010 which located the foundations of South Yard structures. Similar archaeological research needs to be done at the sites of the smokehouses, kitchen, and remaining duplex before reconstruction can begin.

Located adjacent to the mansion and immediately in the visitor's path is the South Yard where domestic slaves lived and worked. Reconstruction of the South Yard will include the full reconstruction of the six structures that were present during Madison's retirement years (1817-1844). These structures include three duplex slave quarters, two smokehouses, and a detached kitchen. The detached kitchen, one of the slave quarters, and the smokehouses closest to the mansion will be fully restored and furnished to provide visitors an opportunity to learn about daily life for Montpelier's enslaved residents. The other duplex will be made into a classroom space for student programs, and the third duplex will be used for exhibit space to highlight the role of the larger enslaved community at Montpelier.

Sources of Information and Authenticity

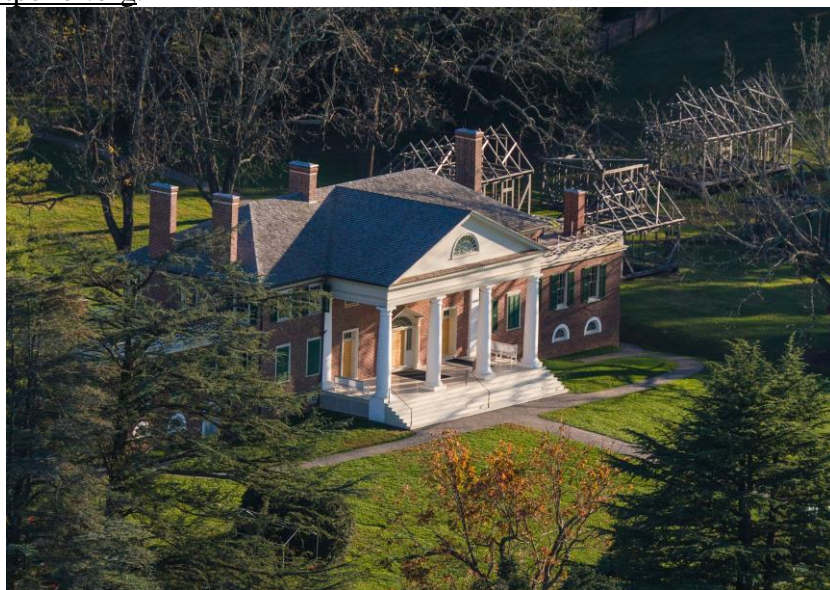
While archaeology research is guided by an 1837 insurance plat showing these structures, the most critical source of information is the surviving archaeological record. Prior years of research indicate that soon after the Madisons sold the property in 1844, the outbuildings in the South Yard were taken down and the area planted in grass. For the next 165 years, there was no disturbance of the structural and artifact deposits in this area and the footprint and evidence for building use is very well preserved. As a result, archaeological investigations provide the only source of evidence for the size, structural and architectural design, and use of these buildings. Archaeological information will be used by architectural historians to create accurate drawings for the reconstruction of these buildings.



This artistic rendering of South Yard viewed from mansion south terrace conveys how the reconstructed buildings might appear. By reconstructing these structures, visitors will be able to experience the contradictory yet intimate relationships between the Madisons and their enslaved community.

Contact Information

For more information, contact John Carfagno, Director of Communication, at 540-308-2074 or jcarfagno@montpelier.org.



10/29/14