



History and Heritage at James Madison's Montpelier: Significance and Privileged Narratives at Historic Sites

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ABSTRACT

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Thomas Hardej Master's of Historic
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In 2003, the Montpelier Foundation began a massive restoration of the Montpelier mansion, the lifelong home of James Madison, founding father, fourth president, and architect of the Constitution. But there had also been eight subsequent owners in the 150 years that had passed, including members of the duPont family, who had made extensive changes to the house and landscape. The restoration removed all the non-Madison fabric from the house, but left the landscape as it was.

This study examines the reasons why restoration was ultimately chosen over the preservation of the site at Montpelier. I explore the questions of why the Madison narrative was selected as most important and why the stories of our presidents are privileged over all others? After examining the vast duPont landscape, I create a walking tour to interpret the duPont narrative. The project concludes with recommendations for how Montpelier's story can be more inclusive of the site's multiple narratives, and how these ideas can be used more broadly for interpretation at other historic sites.

HISTORY AND HERITAGE AT JAMES MADISON'S MONTPELIER:
SIGNIFICANCE AND PRIVILEGED NARRATIVES AT HISTORIC SITES

By

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As you drive up the path to Montpelier, you immediately see the house on the hill, a red brick mansion with a large white portico and columns, and two wings on either side. It looks regal, classic, and historic. This was James Madison's lifelong home, and it's easy to imagine that this was what he saw as he rode his carriage home from Washington, his wife Dolley at his side, to retire after spending eight years in Washington as our fourth president.

Of course, things are not exactly as they were in 1817. Along the path to his left and right, Madison would have seen enslaved people laboring in tobacco fields. Today, in their place there is a racetrack and a steeplechase course installed by the home's last private owner, Marion duPont Scott. Closer to the house, just beyond Mr. Madison's temple, where we are told he contemplated the great issues of liberty and state, and partially obscured by the shade of a large tree, are three gravestones. These mark the graves of Mrs. Scott's prize-winning thoroughbred horses—two of them, Battleship and Annapolis, were sired by the great racehorse Man O'War. Mrs. Scott, who was an avid equestrian, added over 100 outbuildings to the property in the 20th century, including barns, stables, and homes for workers. Most of these structures still remain on the 2,700 acres of Montpelier.

When she died, Mrs. Scott wished that the house be donated to the National Trust for Historic Preservation (National Trust), and in her will she requested that the house be restored "in such a manner as to conform as nearly as possible with the architectural pattern which existed when said property was owned and occupied by



Figure 1.1. James Madison’s Montpelier in November 2011 (photo by author).

President Madison.” Mrs. Scott makes it very clear in her will that she wished the house to be opened to the public as a “historic shrine” dedicated to the memory of James Madison.¹

Mrs. Scott’s father, William duPont, Sr. purchased the property in 1901, and made extensive changes to the mansion. The family members were direct descendants of DuPont chemical company founder, Eleuthère Irénée du Pont, and thus were among the wealthiest families in the world at the time.² The 21-room home doubled in size, as duPont added new wings and transformed the layout into a 55-room country manor. Previous owners had stuccoed over the brick façade of the house, and the duPonts painted it a peach color. Thus, when the National Trust

¹ Marion duPont Scott, will. Box 45, Page 41, Orange County Courthouse, Orange, VA, 2.

² Different sects of the du Pont family spell their name differently. The Montpelier duPonts spelled it without a space.

purchased the property from Mrs. Scott's heirs, it didn't quite look as it did during the Madison years. In fact, for many years, the National Trust did not know what to do with the property, which contained extensive duPont fabric overlaid on the original Madison dwelling. Interpreted as the Madison-duPont house, the tour told the James Madison story, while showing off the duPont architecture and furnishings. At that time, there simply wasn't enough information or money to do it any other way.

In her will, Mrs. Scott used the word "restore," but the extent to which she understood the meaning of that word is unclear. A full restoration at Montpelier essentially means the demolition of a large chunk of her lifelong family home. I don't mean to cast doubt on Mrs. Scott's words, but is that really what she wanted? Ultimately, Montpelier Foundation and members of her family interpreted her words very literally and used that as their justification for what would follow.

The Montpelier Foundation was authorized by the National Trust in 2000 to become co-stewards of the property, handling the day-to-day operations, interpretation, and fundraising.³ The estate of Paul Mellon was approached about funding the restoration project and agreed to pledge more than \$20 million towards the project, and so in 2003, the Foundation began a massive restoration of the Montpelier mansion. The effort took five years to complete, effectively removing all non-Madison fabric, returning the house to its appearance during Madison's post-presidential retirement years. Following one of the most extensive architectural research and documentation projects in history, the new additions were demolished, the original room configuration was determined, and the peach stucco was removed

³ According to former Vice-President of Historic Sites, Jim Vaughan, it is common among the 28 National Trust Historic Sites. They are almost all run by co-stewardship agreements.

to reveal the red brick that visitors see today.⁴ The extensive duPont landscape was spared, in that the equestrian activities were still producing income, but it is not interpreted as a part of the new Montpelier. Now known as “James Madison’s Montpelier,” there is little doubt that the site was to be celebrated as Madison’s home alone.

In advance of the restoration, a debate raged as to what to do with the house. Historic preservation scholar W. Brown Morton was a fierce opponent of the plan, claiming that any restoration would be nothing more than an “elegant fake.”⁵ But the Montpelier Foundation believed that not only was it Mrs. Scott’s wish to see the house restored, but it also provided an easier path towards its mission of educating the public about James Madison and the Constitution.

The restored house now looks approximately as it did when inhabited by the Madison family, but the rest of the 2,700 acres are filled with 20th-century duPont structures that create a confusing viewshed and a schizophrenic landscape. When I began this project, I was critical of the site for just this reason. The Montpelier Foundation wants to tell an authentic story of the property, but authenticity comes from a layered and complex history of the entire site and its many incarnations. It’s easy to dismiss the duPont family as less significant to the site than the Madisons. This branch of the duPonts were not involved with the family business in Delaware, and in fact, Mrs. Scott was a socialite who turned her equestrian hobby into a hunt race tradition at the site. One has to ask, is the duPont story as important as, say,

⁴ The duPont house was documented both by the architectural team and by the Historic American Building Survey (HABS). The Appendix to this project includes some of their work.

⁵ Kennicott, Philip. “Madison’s Makeover.” *The Washington Post*, Aug. 13, 2006.

creating the Constitution? No, of course not, but that does not mean the impact that she and her father left upon the site is insignificant either.

At this point it is not possible to continue the debate of whether or not the restoration *should* happen. It already has happened. But the questions it raises are still relevant to the field of historic preservation, so they are worth examining. These are questions of significance and interpretation at historic sites, preservation versus restoration, and the worship of our founding fathers at so-called “shrines.” There were many philosophical and practical concerns that went into the decision to restore the mansion. My initial misgivings have been tempered by a close look at the process and result, acknowledging that perhaps the answer cannot be viewed in such black and white terms. There are pros and cons to both sides of the debate, and neither is wholly right or wrong. Thus, I will attempt to unpack the different arguments in a way that is useful to the field.

First and foremost, this paper is a cultural landscape study in that I examine the landscape of Montpelier as it is today, studying its history, significance, and interpretation as a modern historic site. To read the landscape, I use cultural landscape methodologies. Geographer, Richard H. Schein writes that:

interpreting a cultural landscape is a geographically specific exercise that requires interrogating the role of the landscape in social and cultural reproduction, as well as understanding the landscape within wider social and cultural contexts.⁶

National Park Service *Preservation Brief 36* offers specific guidelines for reading a landscape. Using supporting documents and historic research,

⁶ Schein, Richard H. “The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 87, No. 4, Dec. 1987, 660.

individual features can be understood in a systematic fashion that show the continuum that exist...By classifying these features and relationships, the landscape can be understood as an artifact, possessing evidence of evolving natural systems and human interventions over time.⁷

One way to better understand the Montpelier landscape is to imagine it as a “stage” with the people of the past as the “actors” and the historical objects and artifacts as props. Ann Denkler explores Luray, Virginia, in this way, using the work of Rhys Isaac to help frame her discussion.⁸ “Landscapes,” she writes, “are seen, and, more importantly, are conceptualized differently from person to person to explore the multiplicity of meanings and symbolism.”⁹ In Luray, as in many historic sites, there is a dominant narrative—that of the white, male, founding fathers and war heroes. But there is also an invisible landscape consisting of the African-Americans who co-existed, and whose stories were not being told, and who were clearly the “other.”

In discussing a colonial-era Virginia plantation like Montpelier it would be irresponsible to avoid the topic of slavery and the narratives of the enslaved people on the property. Montpelier was a working plantation, and the Madisons owned slaves who worked at the site. Surprisingly enough—and this surprise comes from the juxtaposition of the other nearby presidential homes, George Washington’s Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello, where slavery is interpreted in a

⁷ Birnbaum, ASLA, Charles A. “Protecting Cultural Landscapes Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes.” *Preservation Brief 36*, National Park Service, 1994.

⁸ Isaac, Rhys. *The Transformation of Virginia: 1740-1790*. New York: WW Norton & Co., 1982.

⁹ Denkler, Ann. *Sustaining Identity, Recapturing Heritage*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007, 3.



Figure 1.2. Reconstructed frames of slave quarters at Montpelier, as of early 2012 (photo by author).

narrower, more problematic way—James Madison’s Montpelier takes seriously its obligation to tell this part of the story. Exhaustive research and archaeology continues at the site to improve the Madison narrative, and this includes the reconstruction of slave buildings near the main house. The narrative of Montpelier’s enslaved population is very visible on the site as a part of the dominant James Madison story. On the house tours, docents are very honest about the role of enslaved people at the house and have even gone so far as to report that the Madisons were not particularly nice to their slaves, which is a rare thing to hear at any historic plantation tour.

Even so, it does seem strange to be painting the duPont family, one of the richest in America’s history, as the “others” of the Montpelier story, but it is their narrative that has become nearly invisible at James Madison’s Montpelier. Thus, the site must be more inclusive of the duPont owners to tell the complete story.

Although I refer to the duPont landscape as invisible, that may not be the most precise way to frame things. The buildings are still there, but their story remains largely absent from the principal narrative of the site. Utilizing the stage metaphor, I believe there is a better way to look at the Montpelier landscape. In plays there are two types of characters: those that know each other and those that do not.

Dramaturgy seeks to cast the people who act on the landscape as the “actors,” but I’d like to focus on the architecture rather than the people. The Madison fabric becomes one actor and the duPont another. These are two characters that certainly do not know each other, but on the stage of the Montpelier landscape they have been forced to interact. The story here is not being written by some omniscient narrator. The story is being controlled by the Montpelier Foundation, which has given the Madison actor the lead, and then silenced the duPont character. Director Constantin Stanislavski famously said: “there are no small parts, only small actors,” but at Montpelier, the Madison actor (only two buildings in size) is dwarfed by the duPont (more than 100 buildings). The interaction is totally one-sided, but the Montpelier set includes both characters on stage together. Perhaps a shift in lighting is necessary so that the duPont character is not simply waiting in the dark for her big break. If the spotlights could illuminate both characters, a richer theatrical experience could be gained.

While I may have taken the metaphor a bit too far, I think it is useful to imagine the two different characters interacting with each other, rather than simply coexisting. It was easier for the actors to “communicate” with one another before the restoration, when they were more fully intertwined. And so I want to imagine the site

as it could have been as a preserved historic site, and how it could be now as a restored historic site.

The question of whether to preserve a historic site's story over time, or to restore it to a specific time period, is one of the fundamental philosophical questions in the interpretation of historic properties. The case study of James Madison's Montpelier illuminates the problematic restoration, resulting in a schizophrenic landscape. The main house at Montpelier is interpreted to the Madison family period but the rest of the landscape, largely untouched and largely of duPont fabric, remains uninterpreted. Effectively, these numerous and very visible structures across the landscape are rendered invisible.

The precedent set by groups like The Mount Vernon Ladies Association and the Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello has always been to restore. These groups would argue that to learn from them, the houses of presidents should be as the presidents knew them. In contrast, however, the building fabrics of Mount Vernon and Monticello were much more intact than at Montpelier, so restoration was an easier path to pursue. The restorations at these sites did not involve the wholesale destruction seen at Montpelier.

As defined by the National Park Service, restoration "depicts a property at a particular period of time in its history, while removing evidence of other periods." In contrast, preservation is focused on the "retention of a property's form as it has evolved over time."¹⁰

¹⁰ National Park Service. "Four Approaches to the Treatment of Historic Properties." <<http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments.htm>>

These treatments represent the two philosophical approaches in historic preservation: scrape vs. anti-scrape. The “scrape” approach favors restoration to a specific time in history, and the “anti-scrape” camp prefers preservation, or “the attitude that historic buildings should be left alone.”¹¹ John Ruskin was surely in the anti-scrape camp, but he also understood the urge to memorialize great men. “It is in becoming memorial or monumental that a true perfection is attained by civil and domestic buildings.”¹² Yet he did not see the need to restore a building to a certain time. Ruskin vehemently argued that buildings should be allowed to stay as they are. “Take proper care of your monuments, and you will not have to restore them... Watch an old building with anxious care; guard it as best you may, and at *any* cost from every influence of dilapidation.”¹³ Drawing on Ruskin’s ideas, the *Secretary of Interior’s Standards* state that:

Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure, or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.¹⁴

On the flip side of this argument, the consummate proponent of scrape was Eugene Viollet-Le-Duc, who was interested in the restoration of castles and churches in Europe during the 19th century. Restoration, he said, was to “reinstat[e] [a building] in a condition of completeness that could never have existed at any given time.”¹⁵ He

¹¹ Ferro, Maximilian. “Scrape vs. Antiscrape: A Modern American Perspective.” *Bulletin of the Association for Preservation Technology*, Vol 17, No. 3/4, Principles in Practice, 1985, 22.

¹² Ruskin, John. Excerpt from “The Lamp of Memory.” In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. London: Routledge, 1907 (original 1849), 170.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹⁴ From the *Secretary of Interior’s Standards*.

¹⁵ *Architectural Theory of Viollet-le-Duc* Thomas Hearn, ed. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990, 269.

saw this as an act of modernity to make buildings more appealing for visitors. Preservation scholar W. Brown Morton counters that “reproductions or reconstructions of historic buildings soon cease to fool the eye and are quickly recognized as products of their own time.”¹⁶ But that is just what Viollet-Le-Duc hoped to achieve. He saw restoration as creating something both historic and modern, an amalgam better suited to the present. It is about improvement for Viollet-Le-Duc, who wrote that:

In restorations...it is that every portion removed should be replaced with better materials, and in a stronger and more perfect way...The restored edifice should have a renewed ease of existence, longer than that which has already elapsed.¹⁷

This is precisely the idea at a site like Montpelier. The house was not just restored to better tell the James Madison story today, but instead it was restored in order to maintain that narrative for the foreseeable future. Montpelier has a “renewed ease of existence” as Le-Duc says. The narrative is simpler now, but is that really what we want from our historic sites? The simplest possible interpretation?

This debate between scrape and anti-scrape boils down to the concept of significance. Should a property, like the home of a president, be seen as significant just for a specific period of time? Or is significance derived from a building’s history over time and through different kinds of uses. Alois Riegel argued for a more value-based sense of significance applied to monuments, considering the historical, art, and use values of properties, which thus seems to be an argument for preservation—for

¹⁶ Morton, III, W. Brown. “The Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Historic Preservation Projects: Ethics in Action.” *Ethics in Preservation: Lectures Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for Preservation Education*, NCPE, 1995, 21-22.

¹⁷ Viollet-Le-Duc, 275.

honoring the long historical view, and the many meanings of a property.¹⁸

Preservation scholar Randall Mason offers a similar view, wherein a values-centered preservation can offer a better way of analyzing a historic site. It creates, he says, a framework “for dealing holistically with particular sites and addressing both the contemporary and historic values of a place.”¹⁹ Montpelier has value that is derived from its entire existence, and so the period of significance for the house cannot be restricted to simply the period of the Madisons. The Madisons, the duPonts, and the owners in between have all added value to this property, and for Montpelier to truly have contemporary value as a historic site, it needs to include each of these periods in its interpretation.

Much has been written about the decision to restore Montpelier and its pros and cons, but less has been written about the consequences of the restoration on the larger landscape. The purpose of this project is to talk about James Madison’s Montpelier as it is today, and to suggest a better way of dealing with the different characters on its stage.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the significance of the property, spotlighting the Madison, duPont, and National Trust (both pre- and post-restoration) periods of ownership. I will explore the reasons why Madison is so valuable as a narrative from philosophical, economic, and educational perspectives, and examine the idea of the privileged narrative. Why are the homes of presidents created as “shrines,” and how does this play into a so-called civil religion?

¹⁸ Riegl, Alois. “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origins.” (trans. Diane Ghirardo and Kurt Forster) *Oppositions* 25, 1982, 21-50.

¹⁹ Mason, Randall. “Theoretical and Practical Arguments for Values-Centered Preservation.” *CRM* Volume 3, Number 2, Summer 2006, 21.

In Chapter 3, I look at the schizophrenic landscape at James Madison's Montpelier and offer one potential solution: a walking tour of selected sites around the property that interprets and reinterprets the story of the entire estate. The restoration of Montpelier has already happened and it cannot be reversed, but that does not mean that the interpretation cannot tell a more complete story, and is the definitive answer on whether to preserve or restore.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I offer some concluding thoughts and some recommendations on how to weave this all together into a more complete narrative and interpretation at the site.

Chapter 2: Significance at Montpelier

“Significance” in historic preservation is a loaded term. Significance as defined by the National Register of Historic Places, attempts to categorize properties based upon their contributions to American history, the important people who once live there, architectural style, or because of the information value of the site. In its National Register nomination, Montpelier’s significance derives from the property’s association with James Madison and his family and with the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Prior to the restoration of the main house, the duPont mansion was extensively documented in advance of the demolition of the duPont fabric. Ironically, the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) concludes the significance section by noting that:

The house is primarily significant for its association with James Madison, but the duPont habitation was also significant as an example of the Country Place Movement in Virginia and for the duPont’s impact on the horse industry in Virginia.²⁰

A hierarchy of significance was created with Madison’s tenure at the top, and the duPonts’ lower down the list and expendable.

In this section, I discuss significance in terms of the cultural landscape of Montpelier, focusing on the three main periods of ownership: Madison, duPont, and National Trust (pre- and post-restoration).²¹ At the post-restoration Montpelier, the

²⁰ Mason, Anne. *Historic American Building Survey, Addendum to Montpelier*. National Park Service: 2009.

²¹ I argue that the interpretation at Montpelier should not be fixed on one period of time, and instead it should find a way to incorporate the complex history of the site over time. But in doing so I have instead zeroed in on two periods of occupation of the property. The owners that came in between the Madison and duPont families made contributions to the house and the property. Many of the outbuildings that I am including in the “duPont landscape,” do have history that pre-dates the 20th century, but it is their later use by the duPonts, particularly by

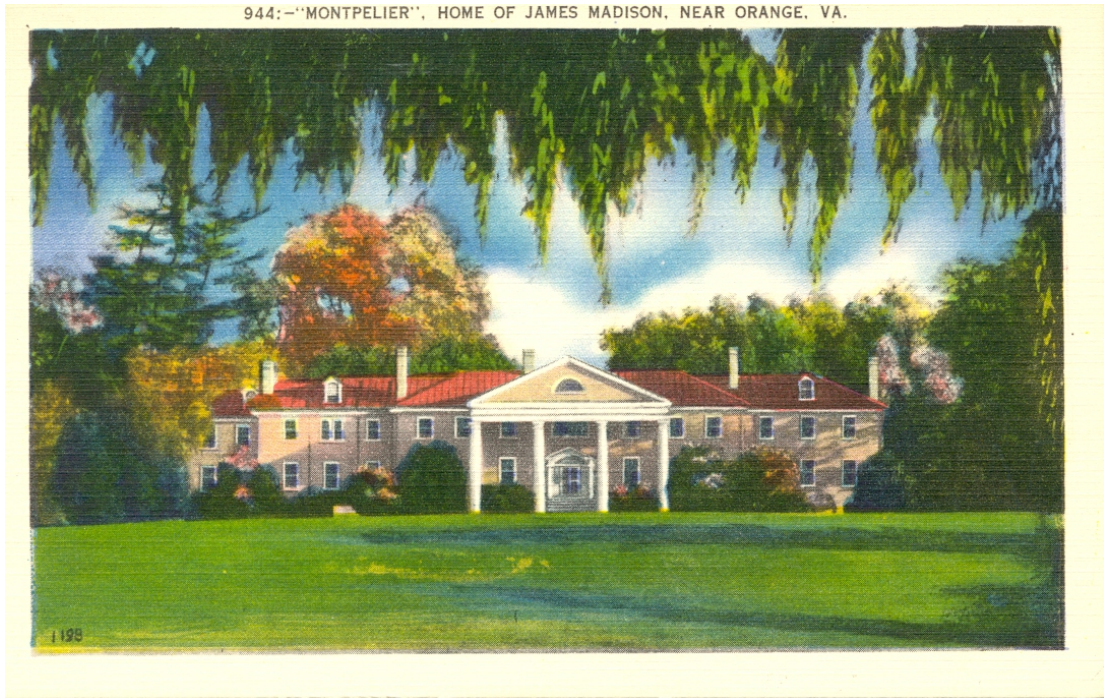


Figure 2.1. Montpelier in the 1930s (postcard from the author's collection).

Madison narrative is at the center of the overall interpretation, and I explore the reasons behind this centrality. The answer is not just that James Madison is the *most* significant resident. I discuss the idea of the civil religion that we use to worship at the shrines of our founding fathers and presidents, and examine the debate between history and heritage at the site.

Marion duPont Scott for her horses, that places them within that narrative and not the earlier one. Each of the six owners that came in between is also significant to the site, and so I will reference them briefly. However, each stayed for much shorter periods of time than either the Madison or duPont families, and because of time and page limits, I will not be going into their stories in much detail. The HABS report, Historic Structures Report, and Matthew Hyland's work on the site provide a great resource for delving deeper into the other Montpelier owners.



Figure 2.2. James and Dolley Madison as portrayed by Gilbert Stuart, c. 1804.

The Madisons at Montpelier

When James Madison was born in 1751, his family had owned the tract of land on which Montpelier was built for nearly 30 years. It was his grandfather, Ambrose, one of the wealthiest men in Virginia at the time, who purchased the land, had it cleared, and built the first building on the property, then known as Mount Pleasant. It was not until James was a young boy that his father, James Madison, Sr., had built what we know today as Montpelier. James Madison, Jr., spent nearly his entire life living in this house.²²

Montpelier, the largest brick structure in the county at the time, was a two-story, five-bay, Georgian-style mansion, thought to be completed around 1765. This

²² Since the Madison story is covered so well elsewhere, I am only briefly explaining their time at the Mansion and the building campaigns. The information in this section comes from various sources including *James Madison's Montpelier Home of the Founding Father* and tours of the house. Richard Brookhiser's recent biography, *James Madison*, is a good starting off point for anyone looking to learn more about our fourth president's life.

is the core of the building still standing today. James Madison, Jr. inherited the property upon his father's death in 1801. He had begun a major renovation to the house a few years prior, when he brought his new bride Dolley to the family seat. In 1797, having retired from the House of Representatives, he was planning on living a quiet life with his wife and her son from a previous marriage.

Madison's mother, Nelly, also lived with the couple, and the renovations essentially converted the house into a duplex, giving both Nelly and Dolley their own households on separate sides of the front hall. The new Montpelier had eight bays and Madison added the large Tuscan portico that we know today to the front of the house. He considered his good friend Thomas Jefferson to be one of the greatest architects of the time, and so borrowed on his design for Montpelier, and even used the same workmen.

The Madison's quiet time in Virginia was short lived, as Jefferson appointed Madison as his secretary of state, a position he would hold for eight years. Then in 1808, Madison was elected president for the first of two terms. It was during his first term that the final Madison-era building campaign at Montpelier began, adding two large one-story wings onto the sides of the house with terraces on each roof.

This renovation, finished around 1810, completed the house for Madison. This is the house he occupied upon his return from Washington, and this is the house where he died in 1836. Dolley lived in the house for another eight years following his death, before selling the property and most of their possessions in 1844. This is also, more or less, the house that visitors see when they visit the property today. The

restoration focused on this time period, creating the house in Madison's post-presidency years—the period with the most remaining Madison fabric.

Figure 2.3. William duPont, Sr. (date unknown) and Marion duPont (1920) (photos from Strine).

The duPonts at Montpelier

In 1844, Dolley Madison sold Montpelier to Henry W. Moncure, and the property then changed hands six more times before William duPont became its owner in 1901 (Table 1). Over the course of the 57 post-Madison, pre-duPont years, the different inhabitants continued to adapt the house. Benjamin Thornton (no relation to US Capitol architect, William Thornton), who owned the house from 1848 until 1854, added gray stucco to the brick façade of the house, and removed some of the front stairs, extending the columns to the ground. The house began to reflect the Greek Revival style, more than Madison's classical look. Evidence shows that by the turn

of the 20th century there was almost no trace of the Madison outbuildings, including the former slave quarters.

Table 2.1. Montpelier’s owners and their years of occupation from 1723 to 1983.

Montpelier's Owners	Column1
The Madison Family	1723-1844
Henry R. Moncure	1844-1848
Benjamin Thornton	1848-1854
William H. Macfarland	1854-1855
Alfred V. Scott	1855-1857
Thomas J. Carson & Frank Carson	1857-1881
Louis F. Detrick & William L. Bradley	1881-1900
Charles King Lennig	1900
The duPont Family	1901-1983

William duPont, Sr. was the grandson of Eleuthère Irénée du Pont. Descended from from French nobility, E.I. du Pont came to America to flee the French Revolution, and ended up founding E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company (known today as DuPont) in 1802. Originally a gun powder producer, the company supplied the US with the black powder it used in the War of 1812, during President Madison’s first term. Over the following 200 years it would become one of the largest corporations in America.

At the turn of the 20th century, William duPont, Sr., his wife Annie, and his two young children, Marion and William, Jr., were living in England. Marion duPont Scott describes how her father came to own Montpelier:

Willie [her brother] and I were said to be delicate. The doctor in London had said that we ought to be in some higher place. The climate up on the Delaware River would have been too damp for

us...He looked around Orange and Lapidian, all around, and one day the man driving him said, "We can cut through the back of Montpelier," while taking him from one place to another. They cut through...My father liked it, right off. When he went back to Delaware he sent a representative from Wilmington to negotiate...and he got the place.²³

The representative she spoke of was Charles Lening who secured the property in late 1900. By the following year, duPont owned the house and before the family could move in, began a series of expansions. An announcement of the move and the renovations even made the papers:

The famous old colonial mansion, Montpelier, once the home of President Madison, has changed hands once more, this time being purchased by Mr. William Dupont...The whole place is to be entirely renovated and extensive improvements made, with due care, however, to the preservation of all that is historic and quaint about the style of architecture...all of the improvements will be strictly in harmony with the old-fashioned architecture which has made the manor house of the South far famed for 200 years for elegance, comfort, picturesqueness and beauty.²⁴

Under duPont's direction, the two terraced Madison-era wings were given a second story, and another wing was added to the rear of the building, doubling the number of rooms in the house. To the landscape, the duPonts added exotic trees, ornamental shrubs, and boxwoods. A train depot was constructed on the property, already near to the rail lines, to make William duPont's frequent business trips to Delaware more convenient. While not involved with the DuPont Company in Wilmington, he spent most weeks in Delaware working for the Delaware Trust Bank; he travelled back to Montpelier on the weekends.

²³ Strine, Gerald. *Montpelier: The Recollections of Marion duPont Scott*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976, 35.

²⁴ "The Madison's Home, Famous Colonial Mansion Again Changes Hand, Dupont of Delaware Owner," Orange County Historical Society vertical files.

Figure 2.4. Marion duPont Scott on horseback (from Montpelier.org).

Upon her father's death in 1928, Marion duPont (who later married and divorced actor Randolph Scott) took control of the property. The actual mansion remained largely unchanged during Mrs. Scott's tenure. The main exception was her "Red Room."

One of her major remodeling projects within the house was the renovation (ca. 1929-1937) of her mother's old "Empire" drawing room into her own Art Deco "Red Room," a room dedicated to Mrs. Scott's beloved horses and favorite equestrian sports....The concepts for the "Red Room" were Mrs. Scott's, with design assistance from her longtime friend, the gentleman jockey, horse trainer and sculptor Carroll Bassett."²⁵

²⁵ Miller, Ann L. *Historic Structures Report: Montpelier, Orange County, Virginia: Phase II (Revised): Documentary Evidence Regarding the Montpelier House 1723-1983*. HABS Report, July 2002, 148.

While doing little to the house, Mrs. Scott added more than 100 outbuildings across the property. Many of these were barns purchased from Sears Roebuck and Co. or new houses for her staff, including the Bassett Cottage, a Hodgson Montgomery Ward house she built for her companion, jockey Carroll Basset, in 1936.²⁶ Mrs. duPont transformed the property into a thoroughbred horse farm, building a training track and a steeplechase course. In 1934, she and her brother, William duPont, Jr., started the Montpelier Steeplechase Hunt Races, which remains a popular event today, held on the first Saturday of each November.

Mrs. Scott lived on the property until her death in 1983. While she and Carroll Bassett never married, in her later years she spent most of her time in the Bassett Cottage, which she called “the little house.”²⁷ Even so, she understood herself to be the steward of Madison’s house, and wondered about its legacy. “I think it would be nicer if Montpelier were turned over to a Historic Preservation group,” she said in 1976.²⁸

Mrs. Scott did not own the house outright, and therefore, in her will, could not simply bequeath the property to the National Trust. The house was caught in an entail wherein, upon her death, without any charges of her own, ownership transferred to her brother’s children. She left the National Trust \$10 million to spend on the property, and offered suggestions to her nieces and nephews on what to do with the property. Her will states:

It is my hope that my nephews and nieces will give their share in the portion of “Montpelier”...to The National Trust for Historic Preservation, but in the event any of my nephews and nieces decline to

²⁶ Miller, 150.

²⁷ Sargent, Sarah. “A Tomboy’s Legacy.” *Virginia Living*, Oct. 16, 2009.

²⁸ Strine, 43.

do so, I request that any such nephew or niece sell his or her share in said property to The National Trust for Historic Preservation at a reasonable price....If any nephew or niece of mine fails to either give...or sell said share...then any such nephew and niece, and the descendants of any such...shall forfeit any right they may have to income and principal of the Trust established by Marion duPont Scott.²⁹

Perhaps she knew that only in offering her heirs an ultimatum would they be willing to give up their share of the property. Initially, three out of the five sold their shares to the National Trust, for more than \$1 million each. The remaining two attempted to break the will and became involved in a court battle. In 1984, they finally agreed to sell their shares to the trust for \$2 million each, and the National Trust took control of the property, but with stipulations regarding how they could present the site.³⁰ Montpelier could be a shrine to Madison, but the National Trust was no longer obligated to restore the house immediately. “Appropriate recognition” was required to be given to William duPont, Sr. within the house and in Montpelier’s literature. Additionally, Mrs. Scott’s nephew, Henry E. I. duPont, and his wife’s opinions would be considered in the management of the property.³¹

Just over \$2 million of Mrs. Scott’s initial \$10 million donation remained after the cost of the sale and the litigation, and the National Trust was faced with the question of exactly what to do with the site.

²⁹ Marion duPont Scott, will. Box 45, Page 41, Orange County Courthouse, Orange, VA, 4.

³⁰ Hunter, Marjorie. “James Madison’s Montpelier to become museum.” *New York Times News Service*, Nov. 18 1984.

³¹ Hyland, Matthew G. “Montpelier: The History of a House, 1723-1998.” PhD dissertation, The College of William and Mary, 2004, 260.

The National Trust at Montpelier

The National Trust opened Montpelier to the public on March 16, 1987, James Madison's birthday. Until 2003, when the restoration began, the site was interpreted as the Madison-duPont mansion. Two rooms on the first floor of the house (formerly Nelly Madison's domain)—Mrs. Scott's aforementioned Art Deco Room and a drawing room—were interpreted as duPont space in the main house. The rest of the space was left to be interpreted with the Madison narrative, but with most of the furnishings still missing, tours of the house passed through many empty rooms.

In 1987, Frank Sanchis, the National Trust's vice president of historic sites, declared that: "To restore buildings to a possibly inexact state is something the preservation movement has moved beyond."³² Even with Sanchis' firm pronouncement, there was the lingering idea that the house should tell solely a Madison story. The first test of Sanchis' statement came when Montpelier needed a new roof. A team of preservation experts and historians was convened to decide whether to replace the duPont roof, or to restore to the Madison period. Everyone agreed that it should be preserved as is. The 1915-era roof, not the 1817-era roof, was replaced in 1992.

Even into the late 1990s, the director of preservation at the site, Larry Dermody, spoke of the property as a book entrusted to the National Trust. He said that it was:

a book that was begun in 1723 with president Madison's grandparents,
and a book whose closing chapter ended in 1983 with the death of
Marion duPont Scott...Our philosophy is that just because certain people

³² Olmert, Michael. "Home at Last for a Nation's Hero." *Historic Preservation*, Vol. 39, No. 2, Mar.-Apr. 1987, 51.

don't like a book, or don't like a chapter in the organic history of a structure, does not mean that you tear out a chapter of the book that you don't like. We are not in the business of editorializing history.³³

The National Trust was committed to preserving the full history of the Montpelier site. During this period, the house presented a complex and layered approach to history, and was renowned as an example of a new kind of preservation that celebrated the “process” of a building through history. But the dual narrative was not attracting many visitors, and Montpelier's 2,700 acres (nearly 10 times as large as any of the National Trust's other historic sites) was costly to maintain. In 1992, for example, Montpelier only attracted about 40,000 visitors.

The National Trust was left with the difficult question of what to do with Montpelier. The organization's president at the time, J. Jackson Walter, said: “how can we find and strike a proper balance that will showcase the hunt country estate of the early 20th-century duPonts, while, at the same time, we create a national shrine for the ‘Father of the Constitution?’” Lest we forget, Walter also reminds us: “Without the connection with Madison and the Constitution, Montpelier would be just another great house in the country.”³⁴

Of course, there were advocates on both side of the restoration question. Charles Phillips was a restoration architect involved in one of the initial studies on the house. He cautioned that more evidence was needed before they could move forward, but argued for the restoration. “Our problem with keeping the duPont stuff is that it's just not very good,” he said. “The wings of the house are now two stories

³³ Nolan, Jr., James L. and Ty F. Buckman. “Restoring the Past: The Cases of Monticello and Montpelier.” *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 2, Spring 1998, 259.

³⁴ National Trust for Historic Preservation. *James Madison's Montpelier: Launching of a Landmark*. NTHP, 1998.

instead of one, which makes a big, massive block of a building, when before it had some pretensions of grace.”³⁵

Helen Marie Taylor, a preservationist from Orange County, was one of the most outspoken proponents of the restoration. She referred to the wings as “that motel addition on the back,” but lest this be seen as simply a matter of taste, she also advocated passionately for a literal reading of Mrs. Scott’s will and for honoring James Madison, whom advocates often cited as underrepresented in history compared to other presidents and founding fathers. In fact, Montpelier was the last of the founding fathers’ homes to enter into public ownership, and Madison was the only of the founding fathers whose home was not open as a museum or a shrine. Taylor said, “One cannot restore the Madison house without taking out the art deco room. Aunt Marion’s Red Room is completely incongruous. The Trust ought to get on with doing what its donor wanted it to do.”³⁶

Preservation scholar W. Brown Morton argued against the restoration and for the preservation of the site. “Historic buildings and landscapes,” he said, “have been looked upon all too often as props on the stage of history, to be manipulated into the process of restoration, to match the story wanting to be told at the moment.” Morton was a member of the Montpelier advisory panel and offered an alternative for the site. “I have a grand vision for Montpelier...it should be the most innovative and the most responsible preservation education project in the nation.”³⁷ The site, he proposed, could demonstrate its true evolution, venturing even beyond the Madison family to Native American occupation (and even dinosaurs, if fossils could be found).

³⁵ Mashburn, Rick. “Montpelier: Whose History to Preserve?” *Inform*, Nov/Dec 1990, 31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁷ Hyland, 269.

Figure 2.5. The four major building campaigns of Montpelier. The first three are computer-generated images created by the Montpelier Foundation, and the fourth is the duPont Montpelier prior to the restoration.

He was one of the early advocates of telling the complex story of everyone who lived at the site, including the Madisons and their enslaved people, the duPonts, and everyone in between.³⁸

Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village president Harold Skramstad visited the site in 1989, and although he did not favor restoration, he also had a problem with the current interpretation, which relied on the tried and true house museum model. He did not care for the tour, which spent most of the time talking about the objects and the rooms, and less about the abstract ideas that the site represented. Montpelier, he wrote, “has the potential for exposing a broad audience to historic preservation in its broadest sense.” Skramstad’s ultimate idea, in earnest, was to create Montpelier as a sort of EPCOT center for the National Trust. “We should not forget the word means Experimental, Prototype, Community of Tomorrow,” he said. “If our rhetoric as historians and preservationists has any validity we must show that the past holds *concepts* and *values* than can continue to shape the future.”³⁹

The point that both Morton and Skramstad were making was that Montpelier was a special place and it deserved special treatment. There was a real opportunity for the National Trust to do something with Montpelier that had never been done before at a historic site. Skramstad’s idea preceded Disney’s proposal to build a history-based amusement park about an hour north of Montpelier in the early 1990s. The Disney venture was cancelled amid protests from local citizens and historians and museum professionals from around the country. Scholars feared the literal

³⁸ Conroy, Sarah Booth. “The Restoration of James Madison’s Montpelier.” *CW Journal*, Spring 2005.

³⁹ Hyland, 269-275.

Disney-fication of history that would occur at the site.⁴⁰ Skramstad's idea would have likely seen that same kind of opposition, but his sentiment, to make historic sites more innovative is a welcome one. In the end, the National Trust decided to take the more traditional approach.

In 1998, the National Trust established the Montpelier Foundation to take over complete stewardship of the site, managing the day-to-day operations and handling future fundraising, and, in 2000, an official agreement was made turning over control to the Foundation. In this agreement, the Montpelier Foundation insisted upon one stipulation in particular: that they must be allowed to restore the property to the Madison period.⁴¹ The Foundation created a strategic plan, which essentially laid out the compelling financial reasons for the restoration—that the simpler narrative of James Madison and the Constitution was more likely to attract visitors to the site than the complex landscape that was being presented at that time.⁴²

The Montpelier Foundation at Montpelier

James Vaughan, who at the time had just joined the National Trust as Vice-President of Historic Sites, agreed that the Foundation could restore the site, but if, and only if, it could prove that there was enough documentary and physical evidence to complete the project as accurately as possible. Vaughan formed a Restoration Advisory Committee made up of preservation professionals from the Chesapeake area

⁴⁰ Wallace, Mike. *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996.

⁴¹ Conversation with James Vaughan, Feb. 28, 2012

⁴² *Madison, an Extraordinary Man; Montpelier, a Memorable Place: A Strategic Plan for the Next Ten Years*

to evaluate the project; this group would conduct a study and decide whether or not the project was feasible (Table 2).

Additionally, per the settlement with the family, the duPonts had to be consulted; through a separate agreement the remaining heirs signed off on the project. The duPonts were unanimous that this project go forward, and many of the more enthusiastic family members believed it was finally the embodiment of their aunt’s final wishes.⁴³

Table 2.2 Members of the Restoration Advisory Committee and their affiliations.

Restoration Advisory Committee	
Bill Beiswanger	Monticello
Barbara Campagna	Graham Gund Architect, NTHP
William Dupont	Graham Gund Architect, NTHP
Willie Graham	Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
John Larson	Old Salem
Calder Loth	VA Department of Historic Resources
Travis McDonald	Poplar Forest
Dennis Pogue	Mount Vernon
Orlando Ridout IV	MD Historical Trust

As the feasibility study began, Mark Wenger, an architectural historian at Colonial Williamsburg, and the man who would eventually become the head of the restoration team, believed that there was not enough remaining evidence of the Madison-era house to complete the restoration. Going into this process, Travis McDonald of Poplar Forest said that most if not all of the Restoration Advisory Committee members also believed that they would not find enough information to

⁴³ Conversation with Michael Quinn, Apr. 2, 2012.

complete the restoration.⁴⁴ The general feeling was that there had been too many renovations to the exterior, and the layout of the interior had been severely altered. There was no telling if the documentary and physical evidence would be able to point to the 1817 Madison house, but the Montpelier Foundation had enough at stake to pursue the idea.

The National Trust reached out to the Paul Mellon estate to help fund the project, as it was most interested in contributing to causes that had been important to Mellon. Mellon, who died in 1999, was one of the wealthiest men in the world, a great contributor to the arts, a Virginia resident, and also a breeder of thoroughbred horses. He was a longtime supporter of the National Trust, so his estate was an obvious funding source. The estate ultimately agreed to fund the initial research project to determine if the Madison house was knowable underneath all of the layers of duPont history.

In 2001, Mark Wenger and his team began an 18-month architectural and archaeological study of the property. The purpose of the study was twofold: “to characterize the house that existed during the years of James Madison’s retirement, and to assess whether the resulting information was sufficient enough to warrant Montpelier’s full restoration.”⁴⁵ The exhaustive and comprehensive study involved cutting holes in the walls to see how they were structured, removing floorboards, and chiseling through the stucco to examine the brick underneath. The team studied old documentation, including letters, drawings, architectural reports, building invoices, and inventories. Wenger characterized the house as a “reluctant witness,” as it would

⁴⁴ Conversation with Travis McDonald, Feb. 9, 2012.

⁴⁵ Wenger, Mark R. and Myron Stachiw. *James Madison’s Montpelier [1809-1836]*, demo of CD-Rom of the Architectural Investigation [2001-2002], 1.



Figure 2.6 Montpelier during the restoration (photo from Wikicommons).

provide the information only if they needed to prepared their “cross-examination well.”⁴⁶ In other words, Montpelier held all of the answers that were needed to decipher whether the original house was knowable and the restoration feasible, but they just needed to ask the right questions.

Once the team put those questions together, the answers started to flow. They discovered that the Madison house was still present beneath the duPont layers, and in fact the duPonts had been great preservationists and recyclers, reusing original doors and windows in different parts of their additions to the house. Amazingly, the brick façade was well preserved underneath the stucco. In the final analysis, the historic

⁴⁶ Conversation with Mark Wenger, Oct. 25, 2011.

records and physical evidence pointed to a fairly certain idea of what Montpelier looked like when James and Dolley Madison returned from Washington in 1817. Roughly 80 percent of the original doors still existed, along with 90 percent of the window frames and sashes, 90 percent of the brickwork, and 80 percent of the flooring. In his report on the study, Wenger wrote:

It is our judgment that the architectural, documentary, graphical, and archaeological evidence is sufficient to support a full restoration of Montpelier...Leaving aside all questions about the impact any restoration would have on the post-Madison house, we can warrant that the James Madison's Montpelier is knowable and physically recoverable.⁴⁷

This very thorough report convinced the National Trust of the project's feasibility, and the Mellon estate agreed to donate the rest of the money to restore the property (more than \$20 million). In the end, the duPonts simply could not compete with the Madisons as historic American figures that would draw visitors to the site.

Thus, it was decided to demolish the duPont portion of the house and focus on the Madison story. No longer was the site known simply as Montpelier, now it was James Madison's Montpelier: Home of the Father of the Constitution.

⁴⁷ Wenger, 28-29.

Figure 2.7. The current map from the James Madison's Montpelier brochure (from James Madison's Montpelier).

Significance at Montpelier

It almost goes without saying why Montpelier is significant. It was the lifelong home of James Madison, a founding father, architect of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and our fourth president. Madison was a delegate to the Continental Congress, secretary of state during the Louisiana Purchase, and president during the War of 1812. At Montpelier, Madison contemplated ideas of religious freedom, the liberty of men, and the foundations of the republic. While the post-restoration interpretation at the site is dedicated to this important narrative, that's not where the larger story ends. Montpelier did not remain trapped in time upon Madison's death. Despite its current position, fixed in 1817, the home existed and evolved for another 150 years with new owners and new additions to the house and the landscape. Thus, one has to ask: why argue for the duPont inclusion in the Montpelier story? What makes the duPont narrative significant? Is there more of a reason than simply their enormous contribution to the landscape of the property and Mrs. Scott's famous horses?

The du Ponts are one of the richest families in American history. Mrs. Scott's great-grandfather, Eleuthère Irénée du Pont, founded the DuPont chemical company in 1802. Their family's significance is derived from their contribution to the economic history of the United States—the DuPont company's seal is found on everything from the development of the automobile industry, to the invention of nylon and Teflon, to creation of the chemicals crucial to the space race, and their continued contributions to science and commerce today. However, by the time Mrs. Scott took ownership of Montpelier, there were hundreds of du Ponts, and the

Montpelier duPonts were not involved in the chemical industry. Given that they were socialites and equestrians, it is easy to dismiss them as “minor duPonts,” as the restoration committee ultimately did, but I argue that their contribution to the landscape at Montpelier is significant.

The Madison family owned the property for 121 years, and lived in the Montpelier home for roughly 80 years. The duPonts lived in the house for 82 years. I am not trying to suggest that Mrs. Scott’s award winning horses are more important to American history than the Constitution, but just that the entire Montpelier history should be told. To tell an authentic story, the interpretation must be inclusive of the complete history of the site. The duPonts are significant for their contribution of the site, and while everyone will agree that the Madison story should be the primary narrative, there is also plenty to be learned from the duPont narrative, particularly on the landscape.

As preservationists move away from these ideas of significance at historic sites fixed in time, they move towards thinking more like W. Brown Morton. His idea to tell the entire story at Montpelier may have been seen as outrageous to Madison devotees, but we have to wonder why? How exactly does telling the duPont story, or any others at Montpelier, detract from the Madison narrative? Using Randall Mason’s work, we can see Montpelier as reflecting many different values, and these values work in concert with each other, and they are not mutually exclusive.⁴⁸ The issue of significance at Montpelier is very complex, and it seems that assigning all of

⁴⁸ Mason, Randall. “Theoretical and Practical Arguments for Values-Centered Preservation.” *CRM* Volume 3, Number 2, Summer 2006, 21-48.

the site's significance to the story of James Madison is the safe and easy way out for the Montpelier Foundation's interpretation of the site.

Privileged Narratives at Montpelier

“Man’s desire to be remembered is colossal.”

—President Franklin D. Roosevelt

It's actually ironic that the Montpelier Foundation has spent so much time, energy, and money to build a “shrine” to James Madison. As the father of the Constitution, he understood better than anyone the system of checks and balances and the needs for a limited federal government. I'm not sure that Madison would be surprised at the state of government today—where the executive branch now yields considerably more responsibility than it did in his day—but I do think he would be put off by the idea of his own commemoration.

A modest man, Madison would never have dreamed of memorializing himself during his own lifetime like modern presidents who curate and design their own presidential libraries and museums.⁴⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first, and his presidential library opened in 1941, four years before his death, while he was still president. It was originally modeled as a cabinet of curiosities that housed a “miscellaneous collection of mementoes and memorial traces” from his presidency. In 1955, President Harry S. Truman signed into law the Presidential Libraries Act, which encouraged presidents to donate their papers to the government at the end of

⁴⁹ Hufbauer, Benjamin. *Presidential Temples: How Memorials and Libraries Shape Public Memory*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005.



Figure 2.8. James and Dolley Madison in bronze, in the backyard of Montpelier (photo by author).

their presidencies. Each president is responsible for fundraising to build the library and museum, but then the National Archives and Records Administration is responsible for future operation and maintenance as a public archive. These facilities have grown over time, of course, as the office of US president has also grown. FDR's museum, today, is rather modest compared to the complexes that were built by Presidents Johnson, Reagan, and Clinton. The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library even includes a hangar that houses an actual Air Force One airplane that visitors can board. President Clinton referred to himself as the "curator-in-chief" of his Presidential Center.

The presidential libraries masquerade as museums, but are actually just sites of presidential worship. The way we remember our presidents, and especially our founding fathers, has become a civil religion. Montpelier has been restored not as a historic house museum, but instead as a shrine to James Madison. Mrs. Scott used the word “shrine” in her will, and the Montpelier Foundation continues to use it in their marketing materials. Are visitors meant to worship James Madison and the Constitution when they visit Montpelier?

One of the notions our founding fathers were trying to escape was the idolatry of its leaders. James Madison is clearly an icon of our American identity, but is this really the way we ought to be memorializing his contribution? The whole process has become politicized and seems to be about something more than just remembering our history. David Lowenthal argued that the “mass allegiance to icons of collective identity” comes from ideas of 19th-century nationalism.⁵⁰ This may be the case, but the idea has grown into a robust 20th-century worship of our presidents. Heritage, Lowenthal says, is a quasi-religious idea as it is. “The creed of heritage answers needs for ritual devotion.”⁵¹ Benjamin Hufbauer puts it this way:

The cult of the imperial presidency...has some parallels with the imperial cult, for the cult of presidency they promote may increasingly become an attempt to...inspire veneration of an individual idol of the civil religion, rather than the contemplation of national history.⁵²

So then what does civil religion leave us with if not an experience with history?

At historic sites, we take for granted that the stewards are presenting *history*—the history of the property and of the people who lived there, and the larger historical

⁵⁰ Lowenthal, David. *Possessed by the Past*. New York: The Free Press, 1996. 63.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵² Hufbauer, 199

context within which the site falls. Yet, often what is presented is a watered down version of history that scholars like to call heritage. Lowenthal has described the difference, noting that: “History explores and explains pasts grown ever more opaque over time; heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes.”⁵³ Michael Kammen defines heritage as “an impulse to remember what is attractive and flattering and to ignore all the rest.”⁵⁴ History, then, is a more complex idea. History tells the story over time. History is more complete and encompasses the different layers, meanings, and memories a site might contain. Heritage is what we ultimately get at James Madison’s Montpelier. The duPont chapters have been removed from the book, in order to tell a more “attractive” story.

But in order to create that story at Montpelier, the stewards had to make what David Whisnant calls a systematic cultural intervention, which is when “someone (or some institution) consciously and programmatically takes action within a culture with the intent of affecting it in some way that the intervenor thinks desirable.”⁵⁵ When Montpelier was taken over by the National Trust, when it was opened to the public, and then finally the restoration itself could all be seen as systematic cultural interventions. The decision about the ultimate interpretation at Montpelier is a definitive systematic cultural intervention and the one that leads to the problems at the site today.

Of course, there are different ways to judge Montpelier. Inside the microcosm of James Madison’s Montpelier (that is the interpreted parts of the site—the house,

⁵³ Lowenthal, xi.

⁵⁴ Kammen, Michael. *In the Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 214.

⁵⁵ Whisnant, David E. *All That Is Native & Fine*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983, 13.

the immediately adjacent grounds, including the recreated slave quarters, and the temple), actually the site does quite well. “History” as we are defining it here, may well be an impossible mark to meet, but the Montpelier Foundation comes close. They do not present James and Dolley Madison as perfect. Slavery is part of the Madison story and the site does not beat around the bush about it. On more than one tour, I have heard docents say that the Madisons were not particularly nice to their slaves.

Unfortunately, the stories of enslaved workers at southern plantations are usually the ones being left out of those narratives. Interpretation at historic sites is moving away from glorifying the stories of only the rich landowners and moving towards telling the stories of regular people and the vernacular landscape. So there is an irony here to be advocating for the duPont story. Marion duPont Scott was a member of one of the richest families in American history, and her lifestyle was hardly ordinary. But at its core, historic preservation today is about being inclusive of all stories. It happens that at Montpelier the missing story is that of wealthy heiress.

But it is when you adjust or widen the focus at Montpelier to include the duPont story that things become problematized. In the context of the entire Montpelier property, the selection of James Madison as the sole narrative is still an odd choice, given how little Madison fabric is left on the site. This is where we see the “worship” of James Madison at Montpelier. The choice to value the Madison narrative over all others is born out of modern day ideas of presidential power. It leaves out the more difficult ideas of how to explain a country house over a 200-year

period. Because of these choices, the site suffers. It could become a history site, as Morton described, but instead it is a site of heritage.

Chapter 3: Interpreting the duPont Landscape

“Our philosophy is that just because certain people don’t like a book, or don’t like a chapter in the organic history of a structure, does not mean that you tear out a chapter of the book that you don’t like. We are not in the business of editorializing history.”

—Larry Dermody, Director Preservation at Montpelier, 1998⁵⁶

This quote by Larry Dermody, the former Director of Preservation at Montpelier, provides an excellent analogy for thinking about the Montpelier space. Preservation scholar W. Brown Morton would argue that “the book” goes back even before the Madison period to the Native American occupation of the property, and even further to the dinosaurs. But since very little research has been done to travel back that far, we should call that the hypothetical preface to the book. The first chapter begins with the Madison family. But since Montpelier had eight more owners between 1844 and 1984, when the property was sold to the National Trust for Historic Preservation (National Trust) by Marion duPont Scott, it’s important to recognize that the book is not solely about the Madison family. All of the owners of the estate left their mark on the property, but the most significant changes to the house, and especially to the landscape, come in this book’s final chapters, during the duPont family period.

In her will, Mrs. Scott suggested to her heirs that the house be given to the National Trust so that it could “restore the mansion house in such a manner as to conform as nearly as possible with the architectural pattern which existed when said

⁵⁶ Nolan, Jr., James L. and Ty F. Buckman. “Restoring the Past: The Cases of Monticello and Montpelier.” *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 2, Spring 1998, 253-269.



Figure 3.1. View of Montpelier from the racetracks, with the mansion in the distance (photo by author).

property was owned and occupied by President Madison.”⁵⁷ While the exact meaning could be open for discussion, it has generally been interpreted by the National Trust, and later by the Montpelier Foundation, the day-to-day stewards of the site, to mean that Mrs. Scott wished for the house to be restored, resulting in demolition of the duPont additions.

In all, the restoration would take five years, and when finished in 2008, it was re-christened as James Madison’s Montpelier, making it clear that the duPonts were no longer a part of the interpretation of the site (aside from a small exhibit in a new Visitor Center). In a sense, the Montpelier Foundation did just what Larry Dermody

⁵⁷ Marion duPont Scott, will. Box 45, Page 41, Orange County Courthouse, Orange, VA, 2.

had promised it never would: it editorialized history and removed several chapters of the Montpelier book.

The post-restoration estate is just as problematic as before, when the Madison and duPont stories were conflated under one roof in the main house. While the house may now be interpreted as a Madison site, there are still over 100 buildings on the property that have nothing to do with that narrative. Essentially the landscape represents Mrs. Scott's life at the estate. The barns, the racetracks, and many other buildings exist around the house, but James Madison's Montpelier does not provide visitors with the tools to understand their significance.

I propose a new interpretation of the Montpelier landscape. I do not wish to diminish James Madison or his contribution to American history and the site should certainly be interpreted to tell his story, but argue that the property has more than just one story. Since the landscape has been mostly untouched by the restoration, there is room for further interpretation or re-interpretation, in the case of a few of the site. I provide a new interpretative strategy for the site to discuss the Montpelier landscape, and especially the spots associate with the duPonts, to offer greater context to the entire estate. The proposed walking tour that follows has eight stops around the Montpelier; a brief description of each for visitors is followed by background information on each of the stops from my research.



Figure 3.2. A map of the Montpelier property.

The duPont Walking Tour of the Montpelier Property

(1) Main House

(2) Visitor Center (European Drawing Room and Red Room)

(3) Annie duPont Formal Garden

(4) Barns and Stables

(5) Horse Graveyard

(6) Montpelier Hunt Races

(7) Bassett Cottage

(8) Montpelier Station Train Depot

(1) Main House

Although it no longer looks as it did when the duPonts lived there, the main house is ever an artifact of their time at Montpelier. William duPont, Sr. purchased the house in 1901 and made extensive renovations before he brought his family, wife Annie and children Marion and Willie, to live at the house. William, Sr. doubled the size of the house, adding wings to each side and reconfiguring the pattern of rooms. We know that the first floor of the house was mostly used for entertaining guests, and on the second floor were the family's private rooms. Servants quarters could be found on each floor of the house, and the servant dining area was in the basement.

When William, Sr. passed away in 1928, the entire property was left in his daughter Marion's hands. She lived at Montpelier her whole life, until her death in 1983, and made few changes to the actual house.

Of the house, Marion once said: *"It's a typical American adaptation of the Georgian style...to me, it's just home. It's a job running the place."*

Figure 3.3. Walking Tour Stop #1: The Main House: the Montpelier Hunt Races in the 1970s (photo from Strine).

Walking Tour Stop #1: Main House

In 1900, William duPont, Sr. was searching for a new home for his family. The climate in Delaware was said to be too damp for his “delicate” children, so he looked instead to Virginia.⁵⁸ He sent his representative, Charles Lennig, to scout sites, and Lennig eventually oversaw the purchase of Montpelier from Louis Detrick and William Bradley, who had owned the property since 1881.⁵⁹

At first, duPont brought in the Delaware firm of Perkins Brothers to oversee the renovations. In total it would take nearly two years, but at some point in 1901, the Perkins Brothers were replaced by George Ficklin. He remained as the building manager at the property until his death in 1917. Ficklin is said to have:

work[ed] on the main house, designed and built most of the agricultural buildings, the Montpelier general store and many of the workers' houses on the property, and renovated and enlarged the pre-duPont structures on the property to bring them into a conforming design with the new buildings.⁶⁰

During the renovations, the house doubled in size. Wings were added to both sides and the interior configuration grew to 55 rooms (with 12 bathrooms). The Madisons, of course, lived in a more *modest* 21-room mansion. duPont had been living in England with his wife Annie, two children, Marion and Willie, and tried to model the new Montpelier on the English country manors they had come to appreciate; Annie furnished the house with items brought from abroad.

Within a year of each other, Marion duPont’s parents both died, and in 1928, at the age of 34 she took control of Montpelier. She made few changes to the house, but remodeled her mother’s Empire Drawing Room into her Red Room (which is the

⁵⁸ Strine, 35.

⁵⁹ Miller, 9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 142.

next stop on this walking tour). She would, however, transform the landscape to suit her love of horses and the equestrian activities that would occur at Montpelier during her lifetime.

Marion referred to running Montpelier as a job in her reminiscences in 1976, but it was a job she took very seriously.⁶¹ She understood the history of Montpelier, and saw herself as a steward of that history. Like James Madison himself, she had spent almost her entire life living at Montpelier. And like Madison, she had some help in running the property.

When Madison lived at Montpelier it was a working plantation. About 100 enslaved people worked in the tobacco fields around the property and in the house. The Montpelier Foundation currently has created the frames of the slave houses closest to the house, and archaeology continues at the site to learn more about what day-to-day life was like for enslaved people at Montpelier. Likewise, the duPonts had hundreds of workers living throughout the property who tended to the gardens and the grounds, stable hands and jockeys to work with the horses, and servants who lived in the house. Records do not indicate the number of workers or their races, but we know that both white and black workers renovated the mansion, and then also tended to the grounds. However, records show that housing was segregated on the property.⁶²

Marion duPont Scott ran Montpelier for nearly 60 years and was always thoughtful of its significance to American history. In 1976 she said, “I think it would

⁶¹ Strine, 33-35.

⁶² Hyland, 236.

be nicer if Montpelier were turned over to a Historic Preservation group.”⁶³ She had no children of her own, and thus the property was to be passed to her nieces and nephews upon her death, and in her will she attempted to do just that. She left the National Trust \$10 million and strongly suggested to her heirs that they give their shares to the organization. In the end, (though not before a lawsuit in which two of the five tried to fight the terms of the will), all five of William duPont, Jr.’s children sold their shares to the National Trust, and in the terms of the settlement, the organization agreed to give appropriate consideration to the duPont family in their interpretation of the site.

It her will, Mrs. Scott said that she hoped the National Trust would “restore the mansion house in such a manner as to conform as nearly as possible with the architectural pattern which existed when said property was owned and occupied by President Madison,”⁶⁴ and this statement has been interpreted quite literally.

Although, I question whether or not Mrs. Scott really meant that she wanted most of her lifelong home to be demolished, undeniably she understood that James Madison’s legacy should live on at the property as a public shrine.

The Montpelier Foundation was created by the National Trust in 1998 and took on stewardship of the site in 2000. The Foundation saw its mission convoluted in the Madison-duPont mansion, and thus, after an intensive 18-month architectural and archaeological investigation, decided to restore the house to the Madison-era, which meant destroying much of the duPont fabric.

⁶³ Strine, 43.

⁶⁴ Scott, 2.

The Foundation reached out to the duPont family for their blessing in the project, and according to former Montpelier Foundation president, Michael Quinn, the response was unanimous.⁶⁵ The family was happy to finally see the realization of their Aunt Marion's final wishes and signed off on a new agreement with the Foundation. It states: "The Foundation has determined that education of the public about the life and legacy of James Madison can best be served by restoring the Mansion to its configuration during the last decades of James Madison's life."⁶⁶

The agreement spells out the Foundation's mission, to educate on the "life, ideals and legacy of James Madison," but it also still offers to recognize and respect "the important duPont family heritage at Montpelier" per the 1984 agreements with the duPont heirs.⁶⁷ This meant the creation of a duPont gallery in the Visitor Center, but, no other duPont interpretation would be found in the "historic core" of the property, the area surrounding the house.

At the end of the five-year restoration of the main house in 2008, a new Montpelier opened to the public. The house was rebranded as James Madison's Montpelier, making it especially clear to visitors what this site was and is all about. The interpretation of the duPont's time at Montpelier is restricted to the William duPont Gallery in the Visitor Center.

⁶⁵ Conversation with Michael Quinn Apr. 2, 2012.

⁶⁶ Montpelier Foundation. "Amendment to Agreement of Settlement with the duPont family." Dec. 1, 2002 3.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2-3.

(2) Visitor Center (European Drawing Room and Red Room)

To make room for the Visitor Center and the William duPont Gallery two former landmarks of the 20th-century landscape were destroyed: the barns where young Marion and Willie duPont kept their ponies, and the duPont family pool. The William duPont Gallery stands as a testament to the history of the duPont family at Montpelier, including the recreation of two rooms from the duPont house: the European Drawing Room and the Red Room.

The European Drawing room is not an exact recreation of a specific room, rather it is inspired by the Morning and the English Drawing rooms, formerly in the south wing of the house. Before moving to Montpelier, Annie duPont delighted in furnishing these rooms in a neoclassical style with beautiful pieces from Europe, including a large bronze Louis XVI chandelier from France, and an antique mantelpiece that dated back to 1775. The duPonts were especially interested in Napoleonic era pieces. Today the room is used for special events and lectures at Montpelier.

When the house was left in her care, Marion duPont Scott made very few changes to the actual house, but she did make one room her own. From about 1929 to 1937, she renovated the former Empire Drawing Room (which would have been just behind Nelly Madison's drawing room in today's house) to create her Red Room, or "Art Deco" room, and filled it with photos and ribbons of her prize-winning horses. It is recreated in the William duPont Gallery just as it was in the main house.

Figure 3.4. Walking Tour Stop #2: The Visitor Center. Left: Annie duPont, Right: Marion duPont Scott in her Red Room (photos from Strine).

Walking Tour Stop #2: Visitor Center (European Drawing Room and Red Room)

Annie duPont and her children moved into Montpelier in 1902, after the initial renovations were complete. In her new home, she furnished three drawing rooms. The Empire Drawing room was located within the original, refurbished Madison core of the house, while the Morning and Drawing rooms were in the new south wing added by her husband. Each room was furnished with items that Mrs. duPont brought with her from England; her taste was for neoclassical items, and especially those with Napoleonic provenance.⁶⁸

While Mrs. duPont's taste lay squarely in the 19th century, Mrs. Scott was a woman of the early 20th century, and this is clear in the way that she remodeled the Empire Drawing room into her Red room. The room is commonly referred to as the Art Deco room because of Mrs. Scott's style of decoration. From 1929 to 1937, she remodeled the room, removing the ornate wallpaper and painting the room red, adding black and white checked linoleum to the floor, and covering up elaborate plaster work with a drop ceiling that was painted silver. In this room, she kept photos, ribbons, and trophies related to her prize-winning horses, and the room itself became her trophy as the decades went on. She only entertained her closest confidants in the Red room.

Per the 1984 agreements between Mrs. Scott's heirs and the National Trust, Montpelier interpreted most of the house as James Madison's, but keep Mrs. duPont's Drawing and Morning rooms and Mrs. Scott's Red room as memorials to the duPont

⁶⁸ Miller, 145.

legacy at the site. But upon the restoration of the house, these rooms had to be removed.

In the 2002 pre-restoration amendment agreement with the duPont family, a new separate memorial to William duPont, Sr. was proposed:

A new facility named the ‘William duPont Gallery,’ honoring the life and legacy of William duPont, Senior at Montpelier, shall be established and maintained as a separate facility adjacent to Montpelier’s planned new ‘Visitor Center for James Madison’s Montpelier,’ upon the restoration of the Mansion.⁶⁹

The new facility consists of three sections. The first is an interpretive center that details the history of the duPonts at Montpelier with a timeline, photos, and some artifacts on display. The second is the European Drawing room, inspired by the Drawing and Morning rooms, to emulate the formal entertaining space in the duPont house. And the third is the recreation of Mrs. Scott’s Red room.

It should be stressed here that the Montpelier Foundation is always quick to refer to the William duPont Gallery as “separate.” Although it is technically within the same structure as the Visitor Center, it is a separate gallery with a separate name. Visitors are not to confuse it as an official part of James Madison’s Montpelier.

⁶⁹ Montpelier Foundation. “Amendment to Agreement of Settlement with the duPont family.” Dec. 1, 2002, 4.

(3) Annie duPont Formal Garden



James and Dolley Madison kept the French gardener Charles Bizet on retainer for \$700 per a year, but clearly the work he did in creating and maintaining the formal garden at Montpelier was worth it. The terraced landscape once occupied four acres and once grew vegetables, fruits, and many kinds of flowers and shrubs. After Dolley Madison sold the property in 1844, the formal garden fell into disrepair thanks to neglect.

Today the formal garden is named for Annie duPont because of her tireless work to restore it in the early 20th century. She had the previously destroyed terraces restored and added a brick wall and iron gates around the exterior. Mrs. duPont added new flowerbeds, trees, and shrubs, and her daughter Marion later added a rose garden and several topiaries.

A formal garden of this size requires constant maintenance. Bizet maintained the Madison-era formal garden and with the help of enslaved assistant gardeners, and the duPonts employed a team of gardeners for the job. In 1990, the Garden Club of Virginia began a restoration of the gardens honoring Annie's and Marion's designs, but providing Montpelier with a slightly lower-maintenance series of seasonally blooming perennials.

Figure 3.5. Walking Tour Stop #3: Annie duPont Formal Garden. The brick wall, the pathways, and the lion sculptures were all added by Annie duPont (photos by author).

Walking Tour Stop #3: Annie duPont Formal Gardens

Marion duPont Scott questioned whether the Madisons would still recognize their house (they likely would not!), but said: “The Madisons probably would recognize the Montpelier gardens today.”⁷⁰ This may or may not have been true, but the duPonts did try to create a formal garden that honored the history of the site.

When Charles Bizet designed the original formal garden it was on four terraced acres filled with James Madison’s vegetable garden, fruit trees, flowers, and shrubs. Bizet supervised the maintenance of the gardens, and upon his retirement, one of the enslaved workers took over. Dolley Madison sold the property in 1844, and during the subsequent 50 years, the owners did not maintain the garden. Thus, it was in awful shape when duPonts purchased the property in 1901.

Annie duPont described the gardens, noting that: “When the estate was bought, the garden had been destroyed, the terrace ploughed down, box bushes bare.”⁷¹ It would take her the two decades to see her vision of the formal garden realized, but Mrs. duPont oversaw the recreation of the terraces, addition of tiled paths, and installation of steps and marble urns. She wrote that it was: “Replanted with grass, flowers and shrubbery...and brick wall built, nothing of which Mr. Madison ever saw...All the planting of the trees, shrubs, and flowers were my designs.”⁷² Mrs. duPont may have had the Madison history in mind when creating the garden, but its design is more in line with the early 20th century than the early 19th century.

⁷⁰ Strine, 34.

⁷¹ From the Orange County Archives, a letter dated August 10, 1922.

⁷² Ibid.

And when it came time to restore the garden, it was the 20th-century sensibility that would remain. The formal garden at Montpelier was first introduced as part of the Garden Club of Virginia's Historic Garden Week in 1985 as one of the first events to open up the Montpelier grounds to the public.⁷³ In 1990, the Garden Club of Virginia officially took on the project of restoring the Montpelier garden to its early 20th-century glory. Since the 1920s (when Mrs. duPont was still working on her restoration), the Garden Club of Virginia has made it its mission to restore historic gardens throughout the state.

The National Trust did not have the same resources as the Madisons or the duPonts, so the Garden Club created a new formal garden that could be maintained without a large staff of gardeners. Each April, the group hosts Historic Garden Week throughout the state, and since the completion of the restoration, the Montpelier gardens have been a staple of Historic Garden Week.⁷⁴

Per the 2002 agreement between the Montpelier Foundation and Mrs. Scott's heirs, the garden was officially renamed the Annie duPont Formal Garden. But the current lack of explanation for the name at the site is problematic. The garden is one of only two spots on the map of James Madison's Montpelier that references the duPonts (the other is the William duPont Gallery in the Visitor Center). There is no placard at the garden explaining who Annie duPont is or why the garden is named for her. Thus, the formal garden needs to be reinterpreted to include Mrs. duPont and Mrs. Scott into the official narrative.

⁷³ Pettinger, Betty. "Montpelier opening gardens this year, mansion in 1987." *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Mar. 24, 1985.

⁷⁴ Garden Club of Virginia. "Restorations." <<http://www.gcvirginia.org/restorations.cfm>>

(4) Barns and Stables

When the National Trust for Historic Preservation took over the Montpelier property in 1984, there were more than 100 barns, stables, and worker houses throughout the 2,700 acres that had been used by Marion duPont Scott for her equestrian activities. (Compare that to the two structures that survived from James Madison's time—the main house and the temple.)

Though she came from one of the wealthiest families in the world, Mrs. Scott was quite frugal when it came to building new structures at Montpelier. Most of the barns, including those you can see just beyond the main house, were purchased from Sears Roebuck and Co.

But when it came to horses, Mrs. Scott spared no expense. She was known to spend upwards of \$200,000 on a single thoroughbred. Then and now, that was a lot of money!

Figure 3.6. Walking Tour Stop #4: Barns and Stables (photo from Strine).

Walking Tour Stop #4: Barns and Stables

When the National Trust took ownership of Montpelier there were over 100 outbuildings that had been used by the duPonts as barns, stables, greenhouses, worker homes, and mills.⁷⁵ A few of these structures date before than the duPonts to the Louis Detrick and William Bradley-era Montpelier (from 1881 to 1900), but they were repurposed by the duPonts for the new equestrian activities at the property in the 20th century.

Many of these buildings have not actually survived during the National Trust ownership of the site. Mrs. Scott had several greenhouses, but much like the formal gardens, they fell into disrepair due to a lack of resources in the late 1980s through the 1990s; they were torn down in the early 2000s. Other barns and stables were removed to make way for the Visitor Center and The Center for the Constitution; one barn was rehabilitated for use as an archaeology center.⁷⁶

When adding buildings at Montpelier, Mrs. Scott and her father were not necessarily disrespectful of the landscape. The view of the Blue Mountains was still visible from the front of the house, and although the duPonts added a driveway that came directly to the front of the house, the front and back lawns of the house were open, just as the Madisons had known. All of the new outbuildings were added in spaces previously used for growing tobacco, although Montpelier had not been used as a plantation in many years.

By 1976, Montpelier was characterized as a horse landscape: “The house and grounds naturally reflect the dominant interest and lifestyle of the lady who has run the

⁷⁵ Different sources indicate different numbers, but there were definitely more than 100, and probably fewer than 130 outbuildings at Montpelier.

⁷⁶ Conversation with Ann Miller, Mar. 27, 2012.

estate for the last half century. Which means, in a word: horses.” The majority of the outbuildings were added by Marion duPont in the 1930s as she was creating the Montpelier Hunt Races at the site. “The barns built at Montpelier during the Thirties might surprise some visitors. Vintage Sears and Roebuck, they remain highly functional and presently house Mrs. Scott’s broodmares and yearlings.”⁷⁷

Mrs. Scott was frugal when it came to building at Montpelier. She preferred prefabricated kits that could be shipped to the property and then put together on site, which is why they mostly came from Sears Roebuck and Co. The barns were painted green, and when you visit Montpelier today they are hard to miss. There is a large barn behind the house (the site of this walking tour stop), and you can see them along the road as you enter and leave Montpelier. Although they are clearly 20th-century structures, without any kind of interpretation, they could be mistaken as Madison-era buildings. A docent on one of my tours of the house called the pre-restoration Madison-duPont Montpelier confusing to visitors, but it seems that the same problem persists today, as it is completely unclear what is going on outside of the heavily interpreted “historic core.”

⁷⁷ Strine, 43.

(5) Horse Graveyard



Not far from James Madison's temple, hidden beneath the shade of a large tree, are three graves. Marion duPont Scott loved her horses maybe even more than she loved people, so it's fitting that the three that she cared for most would be buried not far from the house. The gravestones are for Battleship, Accra, and Annapolis

In the early 1930s, Mrs. Scott purchased Battleship and Annapolis, who had been sired by the great prizewinning racehorse Man O'War. She took them then around the country to hunt races in steeplechases and they were very successful. Annapolis sired Accra, a mare, who also produced many prizewinners for Montpelier.

Mrs. Scott said of the two horses: "*Annapolis and Battleship were small, while Man O'War was big...but you ought to have seen the bone on them. Tremendous bone. They were rugged. Just a little schooling, and they both took to jumping like anything.*"

Figure 3.7. Walking Tour Stop #5: Horse Graveyard. The graves of Battleship, Accra, and Annapolis, Mrs. Scott's prized racehorses (photos by author).

Walking Tour Stop #5: Horse Graveyard

To understand Marion duPont Scott's life is to understand a life devoted to horses. From her childhood riding ponies at Montpelier to her adulthood at the Montpelier Hunt Races, horses were her singular passion. Though there were many horses at Montpelier, she was most devoted to three, Annapolis, Battleship, and Accra, and they are buried about 100 yard from the main house with gravestones markers.

Annapolis and Battleship were sired by Man O'War, a horse considered by many as the one of the greatest racehorses of all time. Man O'War's offspring were not all champion racers, but Mrs. Scott had her eyes on two. "Carroll [Bassett] and I would...drool every time Annapolis and Battleship came past in the walking ring," she said.⁷⁸ Eventually she was convinced to purchased both horses. She bought Annapolis for \$16,000, and the investment paid off almost immediately as the horse became an instant steeplechase champion.

Battleship, on the other hand, had sustained an injury and it was unclear whether or not he would ever race again. So Mrs. Scott negotiated with his owner to pay \$6,000 down, and if Battleship recovered, she would pay an additional \$6,000, for a total of \$12,000. It took some "schooling" but, Bassett, her gentleman jockey worked with Battleship and turned him into a champion. He is the only horse to ever win both the English and American Grand National Steeplechase races.⁷⁹

Both Battleship and Annapolis sired foals that also proved to be winners at the races. Battleship sired 58 foals in all, the majority starters or winners at various races;

⁷⁸ Strine, 77.

⁷⁹ James Madison's Montpelier. "Celebrating Battleship."
<<http://montpelier.org/blog/?p=4871>>

Annapolis sired 77 foals. In their lifetimes, the combined earning of the foals of both horses was nearly \$2 million for race purses, which is to say a smart return on the initial investments. Annapolis sired a filly named Accra, who raced for modest earnings but succeeded more earnestly at producing future prizewinners for the Montpelier stables.⁸⁰

The three horses' graves are a significant piece of the duPont landscape. There were hundreds of horses at the Montpelier stables, but Mrs. Scott chose to officially memorialize these three with formal gravestones. Clearly she was fondest of these three, and it would be an important addition to the property to add some sort of interpretative signage to explain their presence and meaning. Visitors can now stumble upon the graves accidentally without truly understanding their significance to the horse history of the property.

⁸⁰ Strine, 92.

(6) Montpelier Hunt Races



The Montpelier Hunt Races were established in 1934 by Marion duPont (not yet Scott) and her brother William duPont, Jr., although the actual racetracks and steeplechases were installed earlier.

Each year on the first Sunday in November, thousands of people descended on Montpelier for the races, but because of the way the property was setup it was impossible to see more than just one or two of the seven races.

During her lifetime, Marion duPont Scott opened up the grounds to the public free of charge. (Today there is an admissions charge to get into the races.) The purses won by the placing horses came from her bank account.

The Montpelier Hunt Races established the property as one of the premier sites for horse racing and steeplechases in the country, and put Orange County, Virginia on the map. The races were a community event each year to catch up with friends and neighbors. They were always integrated, and Mrs. Scott saw to it that both black and white jockeys were allowed to race.

Figure 3.8. Walking Tour Stop #6: Montpelier Hunt Races. Left: Montpelier Hunt Races sign, 2012 (photo by author); Right: Mrs. Scott looks out on her racetracks (photo from Strine).

Walking Tour Stop #6: Montpelier Hunt Races

“If one is not addicted to thoroughbred, he may consider much of Montpelier a waste of time. But if the visitor enjoys horseracing and steeplechasing, he will find Montpelier the perfect example of how a thoroughbred operation can be run today just as many were in the ‘good old days.’”⁸¹

This quote probably gets to the point about the duPont Montpelier better than any other. If you don’t care about horses, you probably won’t care about Marion duPont Scott. This is one of the reasons it became so easy for the Restoration Advisory Committee to approve of the restoration and remove the duPont chapters from the Montpelier book. Everyone can agree that James Madison contributed to US history, but only some will see the value of the duPont contribution.

The Montpelier Hunt Races have been a driving force in bringing people to the site since 1934, and the 78th Montpelier Hunt Races will be held on November 3, 2012. Although the numbers are not quite as high today, in its heyday, as many as 10,000 people would descend upon Montpelier for the event, which includes seven races on the two racetracks on the front lawn of the property. What was once a tobacco field is now a steeplechase and hunt racecourse. It may not be Churchill Downs, exactly, but the event attracts Virginia’s elite to Orange County each year.

Mrs. Scott was the grand dame of the Montpelier Hunt Races, often entering her own horses in the races. And especially later in life, when she became more and more private, it was a social coup to find yourself in her company at the races. In 1976, a reporter wrote an article about attending the yearly event with a guest list

⁸¹ Strine, 43.

including Elizabeth Taylor and her new fiancée, future Senator John Warner. But the reporter wrote that she was not as excited by the film star, as “by the mystery behind a very rich woman who lived in the large beige stucco mansion.”⁸²

While she may be a difficult figure to get a handle on, we do know that Mrs. Scott was generous to the community. Ms. Taylor’s appearance, aside, each year the Montpelier Hunt Races was a community event that was free of charge.⁸³ Mrs. Scott even put up her own money for the purses for the winning horses.

⁸² Wechsler, Pat. “Montpelier’s Queen Mother.” *Daily Progress*, 1976.

⁸³ The Montpelier Hunt Races were free to the public during Mrs. Scott’s lifetime, but today there is an entrance fee.

(7) Bassett Cottage

In the 1930s, Carroll Bassett was a “gentleman jockey” and one of the leading steeplechase riders in the country. He helped train Battleship with Marion duPont Scott and rode him to victory at the U.S. Grand National and two National Steeplechase Hunt Cups. In total he won more than 100 steeplechase races around the country. He was inducted into the National Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame in 1972.

Although they were never married, Carroll Bassett and Mrs. Scott formed a close relationship that developed into a partnership that lasted for the rest of their lives. The Bassett Cottage was named for Carroll, though Mrs. Scott liked to call it “the little house.” It was a kit house purchased from the E. F. Hodgson Company in Massachusetts, and shipped to Montpelier in 1936.

In her later years, Mrs. Scott stayed at the Cottage with Bassett. They were particularly fond of gardening and worked together on a Japanese garden at the rear of the house, which is not yet open to the public. Today the Bassett Cottage serves as the residence for the president of the Montpelier Foundation.

Figure 3.9. Walking Tour Stop #7: Bassett Cottage. Left: Back patio of the Bassett Cottage; Right: Carroll Bassett riding Battleship (photos from Strine).

Walking Tour Stop #7: Bassett Cottage

Carroll Bassett is often referred to as a gentleman jockey and an accomplished sculptor, but he is less often mentioned as Marion duPont Scott's life partner. While they never married, they were involved until his death in 1972—almost 40 years. Mrs. Scott had been married and divorced twice by 1939. Her second marriage was to famous actor Randolph Scott, so perhaps that is why her relationship with Bassett was a quieter affair.

Bassett was originally from New Jersey and is said to have come from a “good family.”⁸⁴ He attended art school in New York and was an accomplished sculptor in addition to his career as a horse trainer and jockey. Although he worked with many horses, he is best known at Montpelier for his time with Battleship and Annapolis, Mrs. Scott's prizewinning horses.

Annapolis immediately performed well at the races. Battleship, on the other hand, had suffered an injury and needed to be trained. Mrs. Scott saw something special in Battleship and worked with Carroll Bassett to school him into the accomplished jumper than he would become.

Just as with her barns, Mrs. Scott preferred cheaper, prefabricated homes that could be shipped to Montpelier and built for her workers. She ordered two from Montgomery Ward and one, the eventual Bassett Cottage, from E. F. Hodgson Co., of Massachusetts.⁸⁵ This was one important way that she differed from her father, who kept George Ficklin on staff at Montpelier to design and build new structures for the property.

⁸⁴ Sargent, Sarah. “A Tomboy's Legacy.” *Virginia Living*, Oct. 16, 2009.

⁸⁵ Miller, 150.

The modular Hodgson house was built for Bassett in 1936. It has been described as a “cozy, white, seven-room clapboard home with a porch and cedar-shingle roof.”⁸⁶ In the rear of the cottage, Bassett and Mrs. Scott, with the assistance of landscape architect Charles F. Gillette, created a Japanese-themed oriental garden. The garden sits on one half-acre and includes stone pathways, several small pools linked by a pond, sculptures, and Asian themed plants.

Today the garden is registered with the Smithsonian Archives of American Gardens, but is not usually open to the public.⁸⁷ In 2008, the garden was included in the Historic Garden Week tour put on by the Garden Club of Virginia. The Bassett Cottage is set off from the “historic core” of the house and is the private residence of the president of the Montpelier Foundation. While the interior of the house will never be on display, visitors can see the Bassett Cottage from afar. Some restoration work was done to the garden for its inclusion into Historic Garden Week. Benches were added, and stones were replaced to make the walkways safer and less precarious.⁸⁸ As of this writing, there seems to be no plan by the Montpelier Foundation to open the oriental garden to the public as a part of a greater landscape tour of Montpelier.

⁸⁶ Garden Club of Virginia, *Historic Garden Week Guide*. 2008,

⁸⁷ Smithsonian Archive of American Gardens. “Bassett House at Montpelier 2000.” <http://siris-archives.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?uri=full=3100001~!235119!0>

⁸⁸ Pitz, Marylynne. “Japanese garden was a labor of love.” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Jul. 28, 2008.

(8) Montpelier Station Train Depot



When the duPonts first purchased Montpelier in 1901, William duPont, Sr. spent most of his time in Virginia. He was not involved in the family business, E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., which would later be more simply known as the DuPont Corporation. He worked for the Delaware Trust Bank, and by the end of their first decade at Montpelier, he was making constant trips to Delaware for work, and sought a way to accommodate the trip more easily.

Around 1910, duPont, Sr. had the Montpelier Station Train Depot built as a stop on the already existing Southern Railway line. The train would only stop at Montpelier when necessary, but it quickly became an important means of transportation for workers at Montpelier and for the local community. The letters of MONTPELIER are Orange County's version of the Hollywood sign!

Due to Jim Crow laws in Virginia, the station was segregated. Today it has been restored as an exhibit devoted to that time of segregation. You can enter both the "white" and "colored" entrances to learn more about this unjust time in American history. The Montpelier Station Train Depot has the ability to teach us about the duPonts role in this period, contributing a place of segregation, but also offering a transportation depot allowing their workers access to other parts of the country. The depot closed in 1974.

Figure 3.10. Walking Tour Stop #8: Montpelier Station Train Depot (photo by author).

Walking Tour Stop #8: Montpelier Station Train Depot

When travelling to Montpelier from the north, the Montpelier Station Train Depot is one of the first things you see before arriving at the main gate of today's Montpelier. It was restored in 2009, so it looks fresh. But there is no real signage directing you to the depot, or directly connecting it to James Madison's Montpelier on the road, although the exhibit inside is curated by the stewards of Montpelier.

The train depot was built by William duPont, Sr. in 1910 for his weekly commute to Delaware. This train station shows that William duPont, Sr. had the money and influence to convince the Southern railway to add a new stop. The Montpelier duPonts often seem cut off—it was a country estate, and the rest of their family was in Delaware—and so it also shows their connection to the rest of the world. They were not just isolated rich shut-ins. They travelled to Delaware, and later, Mrs. Scott would travel with her horses to various races along the east coast and beyond. The station also served the purpose of delivering cargo to the property (like prefabricated houses for Mrs. Scott's workers, or horse feed, which they needed quite a bit of), and to provide transportation for the local community.⁸⁹

Although the station was segregated, per the Jim Crow laws of the time in Virginia, the station provided a service to the African-Americans who lived near Montpelier because it provided transportation and access to other parts of the country. That's not to make light of the segregated waiting rooms with its two doors, one for "white" and one for "colored." They were supposedly "separate but equal," but as the restoration shows today, the "colored" area was much smaller.

⁸⁹ Kennicott, Philip. "Montpelier train station preserves the architecture of segregation." *Washington Post*, Feb, 28, 2010.

The depot was restored by the Montpelier Foundation in 2009, employing the same workers who had restored the main house. Inside, the building provides an opportunity to talk about this as an explicitly duPont site, since it was built in the early 20th century. But that is left almost completely out of the story. The exhibit focuses on the Jim Crow-era segregation of the station. This is, of course, an important story to tell, and the exhibit is a good one. However, this clearly lies outside of the mission of the Montpelier Foundation to education about the life and legacy of James Madison. It begs the question: why interpret the train station and not any of the other duPont era buildings?

Of course, it is a nice connection to the community. The site is a little further than walking distance from the main house, but I include it here because I think it is a good illustration of what the Montpelier Foundation can do with a 20th-century artifact. If the organization could put this kind of care into an exhibit unrelated to James Madison, it could certainly learn to interpret the rest of the 20th-century duPont landscape, even in a minimal way.

Conclusion

The walking tour is really an effort to stitch the duPont chapter back into the book. But I have also tried to weave, where I could, the duPont and the Madison stories together. Ultimately, the best narrative at Montpelier is one that can do that—tell a story of the full cultural landscape that includes the various contributions of all of the past inhabitants of the house.

At this moment in time, the Montpelier Foundation is unfortunately not open to that approach. But I have to wonder: at some point won't it have to do something with the duPont buildings in the landscape? Perhaps, as it finds more need (or more money) the buildings will come down to make way for some other ways to tell the Madison story. But I hope that's not the case. There is so much to learn from the duPonts' time at Montpelier and not just about horses.

They were a wealthy family, just as the Madisons, who navigated amid complex class relations. Drawing a comparison between the slaves of Madison's time and the workers of the duPont's time is an interesting way to show ideas of progress over time or to be critical of a lack of progress. Marion duPont Scott and James Madison were both quiet, private people, and they both spent nearly their entire lives at Montpelier. Surely there are parallels to be made.

Lastly, the duPont story does in fact intersect with the Madison story through history. As Secretary of State under President Thomas Jefferson, it was James Madison who negotiated the Louisiana Purchase with France, and specifically French diplomat Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours. His son Eleuthère Irénée du Pont would go on to found the DuPont Corporation in Wilmington, Delaware, upon fleeing

France during the French Revolution. His great-great-grandson was William duPont, Sr., so while a stretch, but a connection exists. Eleuthère Irénée du Pont's company would score its first major victory as a gun powder supplier during the War of 1812. James Madison was, of course, president and commander-in-chief at the time. Samuel Francis Du Pont was appointed a midshipman in the Navy by President Madison and would go on to serve in the Mexican-American and Civil Wars. Dupont Circle in Washington, DC, is named for him.

I use these examples to show that these two prominent families intersected unexpectedly throughout history, and thus it would require little effort to weave the duPonts back into the story of Montpelier, just as I have woven the Madisons into my duPont walking tour where appropriate. Many of the sites on the map have significance through different time periods, and it is important to recognize these multiple values.

The purpose of this project was not to try to diminish or distract from the James Madison narrative. Rather it was to add to it and make the overall story of Montpelier more meaningful. Marion duPont Scott might not have written the Constitution, but her time at Montpelier matters to the site, and her story deserves to be told alongside the other stories at Montpelier.

Chapter 4: Conclusion & Recommendations

In this paper, I have taken a closer look at James Madison's Montpelier, focusing on the impact of the recent major restoration on the current interpretation of the site. The Montpelier Foundation presents Madison for who he was, a great mind who contemplated liberty and came up with the framework for the Constitution, while at the same moment a slaveholder, and not always a particularly nice one. The stewards of the property are continuing to do archaeology at the site to better understand this dynamic, recently reconstructing the frames of slave cabins close to the house. Interestingly, reconstruction is the least desirable option at a historic site in the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards* (though still an option, nonetheless). Ironically, the Montpelier Foundation is reconstructing buildings on the site, while ignoring the more than 100 buildings already there.⁹⁰ The story of enslaved people at Montpelier is clearly significant, and it should be told. But the 20th-century duPont fabric at Montpelier is also an important part of the site history, so to leave it uninterpreted in this way does an injustice to visitors. It is probably true that most visitors come to Montpelier in order to learn about James Madison and the Constitution, but there is so much more to discover about the site.

In Chapter 1, I suggested thinking of the landscape like a stage. At Montpelier, there are two main characters, and I frame them around the Madison and duPont architecture on the property. Although the duPont character is much larger and takes up more of the stage, the Madison character is the only one with a speaking part, and the only one given the spotlight. But it's not just a matter of allowing the

⁹⁰ Of course, an argument could be made that the main house is also a reconstruction, since somewhere between 10 and 20 percent is made of new materials.



Figure 4.1. The Montpelier Mansion in early 2012 (photo by author).

character to speak, it's also about the conversation itself. The duPont and Madison characters may not have known each other, but they have a story that can be woven together. At Montpelier, the Madison character should clearly have the lead role. Montpelier is considered a historic site because of James Madison and his contribution to American history. However, but this is not a one-man show.

Interpreting the Montpelier landscape as a “Madison site” creates an atmosphere of heritage rather than history. As I explained in Chapter 2, heritage is a watered-down version of history. David Lowenthal wrote: “History explores and explains pasts grown ever more opaque over time; heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes.”⁹¹ Montpelier’s James Madison narrative is deeply infused with 19th-century ideas of American nationalism, 20th-century ideas of

⁹¹ Lowenthal, xi.

presidential power, and 21st-century politics, creating a type of civil worship at the site. To fulfill its primary educational mission, the Montpelier Foundation, argued for removing the duPont story from the map. This may have created an easier path to discussing Madison's history, but it also made Montpelier into a shrine for the civil worship of Madison. As long as the stewards of the site are only concerned with the Madison character on the Montpelier stage, then there can never be a truly authentic story being told at the site. Authenticity comes from a complex and layered narrative that tells the history of a site over time.⁹²

The walking tour presented in Chapter 3 gives voice to the duPont character on the Montpelier stage, offering a seemingly simple solution to broadening the range of the landscape interpretation. After all, visitors also come to Montpelier each November for the Hunt Races, which have a local and national significance as a fixture in the horse world for more than 75 years. I offered examples of points at which the Madison and duPont characters have been in conversation with each other as a starting point for new interpretation at the site. But the more important idea is to find a way to incorporate the entire landscape into Montpelier's narrative. The walking tour of the duPont landscape is just one possibility, offering an alternative to thinking of Montpelier as a shrine to James Madison and embracing the idea of "Great Men in History." James Madison surely was a great man in history, but historic preservationists and museum stewards should be moving away from that kind of thinking because it is exclusionary and renders the "others" invisible in the landscape.

⁹² Gable, Eric, and Richard Handler. "After Authenticity at an American Heritage Site." *American Anthropologist*. New Series, Vol. 98, No. 3, Sept. 1996, 568-578.

A better way to consider the landscape at Montpelier is to use Randall Mason's work on values-based preservation, "by which preservation practitioners can track the changing meanings of a particular place—as culture continues to shift, evolve, create, and destroy meanings."⁹³ The point is to bring traditional heritage values together with contemporary social and economic values to create a dynamic framework for interpretation at a historic site. At James Madison's Montpelier today only the heritage values are being expressed. But as I showed in Chapter 3, "heritage" is not necessarily a value because it is limiting the scope of what Montpelier can do as a historic and educational site.

When the period of significance is extended, there are so many other social values that can be found:

- The value of learning about an entire cultural landscape over time
- The comparative value of an 18th-century plantation versus a 20th-century horse farm, including the labor and output.
- Equestrian history
- Class differences
- Technology through different historic periods
- Recreational value as open space for horseback riding

My recommendation for Montpelier is to widen the focus to include more of the duPont story. As it stands, the duPonts are memorialized in the Visitor Center as a consolation from the sale of the property to the National Trust in 1984. Yet, the

⁹³ Mason, 32.

history of William duPont, Sr. and Marion duPont Scott is much more important than a mere footnote. The options available for raising the profile of the duPont story are:

- 1) Create a brochure with a walking tour to interpret and reinterpret the duPont sites at the landscape. Those that are interested will take it and explore Montpelier on their own.
- 2) Additions could be made to the current audio tour. For example, the audio stop for the Annie duPont Formal Garden could actually discuss the 20th-century significance of the garden. There could be a stop for the horse graves to explain why they are there, who these horses are, and why they are important. The audio tour already exists, so it would be a matter of adding a few extra numbers to the map.
- 3) The most desirable is to add actual signage to the landscape at these sites, so that it is clear that they are separate from the Madison story at the main house, but they are still being given their due as a part of the complete story at Montpelier.⁹⁴
- 4) Include the duPont story in the story of the house. James Madison and Marion duPont Scott are from different periods of time, but their lives were very similar. They both lived their whole lives in this house, and they were quiet, thoughtful people who managed to become leaders in their fields while at Montpelier. And not only that, James Madison *did* interact with Mrs. Scott's ancestors and in very important ways that affected American history.

The Constitution was not James Madison's only contribution to American

⁹⁴ *Preservation Brief 36* discourages signage in a landscape with so much integrity, but since there are already interpretative signs throughout the property for Madison sites, I think it would be appropriate. It does not need to be overdone.

history, and stories about the Louisiana Purchase and the War of 1812 could easily be built into the house tour.

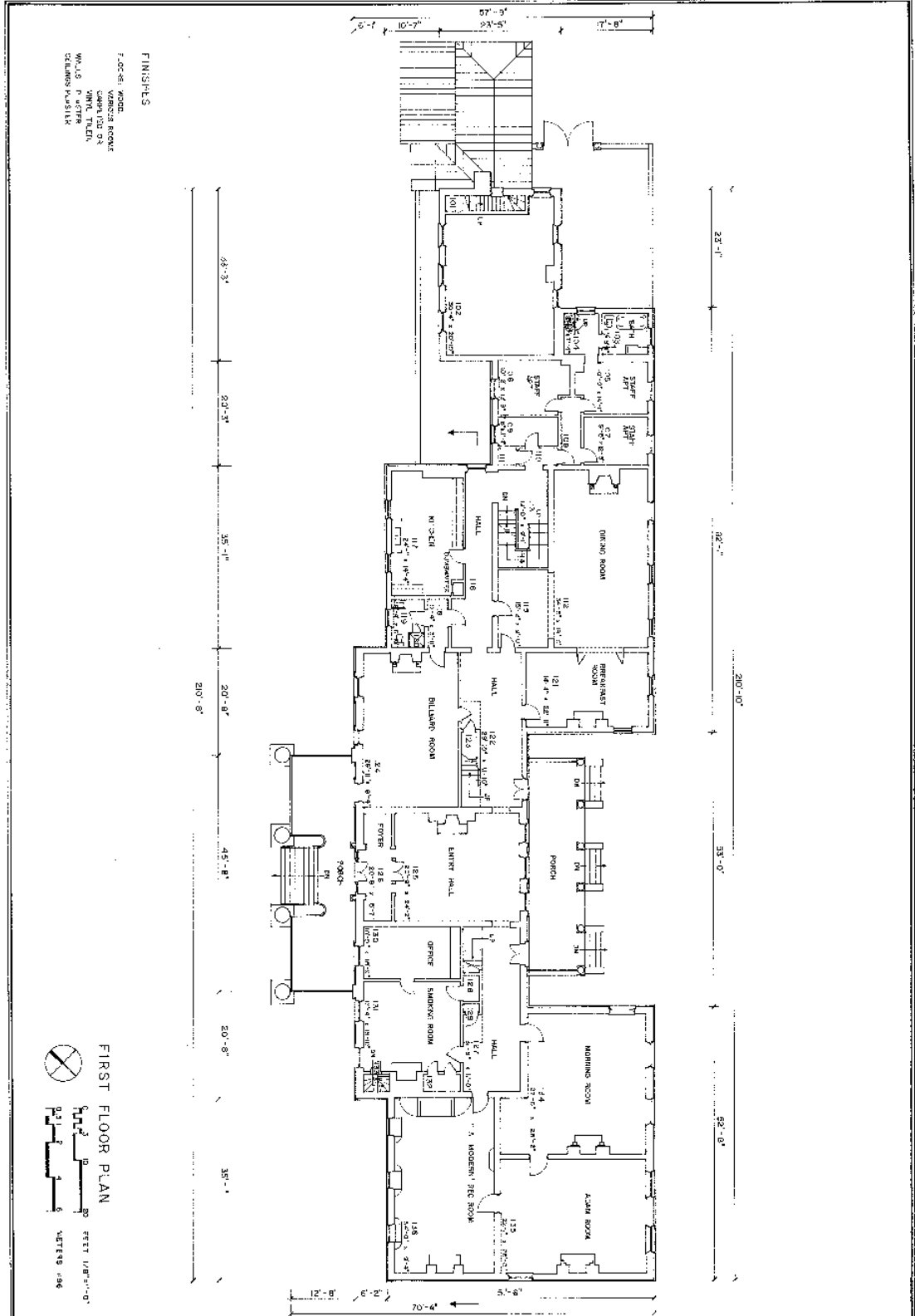
5) Montpelier could also offer special tours for people who are interested in the landscape. The gardens are always a major attraction on the Garden Club of Virginia's Historic Garden Week, so perhaps partnering with an organization like that to offer these 20th-century garden tours more often could add value to the site.

The bottom line is that Montpelier has so much potential as a historic site that is currently being wasted. Brown Morton's ideas about creating an innovative preservation museum are correct. The site could have the power to teach about preservation that, beyond the restoration of the homes of our founding fathers, protects and advocates for the recent past, embraces multiple values at a property, and understands that a true cultural landscape is a multi-vocal stage with characters that interact with each other to find greater understanding. Montpelier is so much more than just James Madison's Montpelier, and I hope some day its stewards will realize that, so it can serve as the example it is meant to be for historic homes everywhere.

Appendix

The following pages come from the Historic American Building Survey done at Montpelier to document the house extensively in advance of the restoration.⁹⁵ We can no longer visit the duPont peach stucco Montpelier, but we can imagine what life was like there by examining the floorplans and elevations of the house from their time spent living there.

⁹⁵ Mason, Anne. *Historic American Building Survey, Addendum to Montpelier*. National Park Service: 2009.



FINISHES

- FACED: WOOD
- VARIABLES ROOMS
- CARPETS OR
- WALLS: PLASTER
- COLUMNS: PULVER

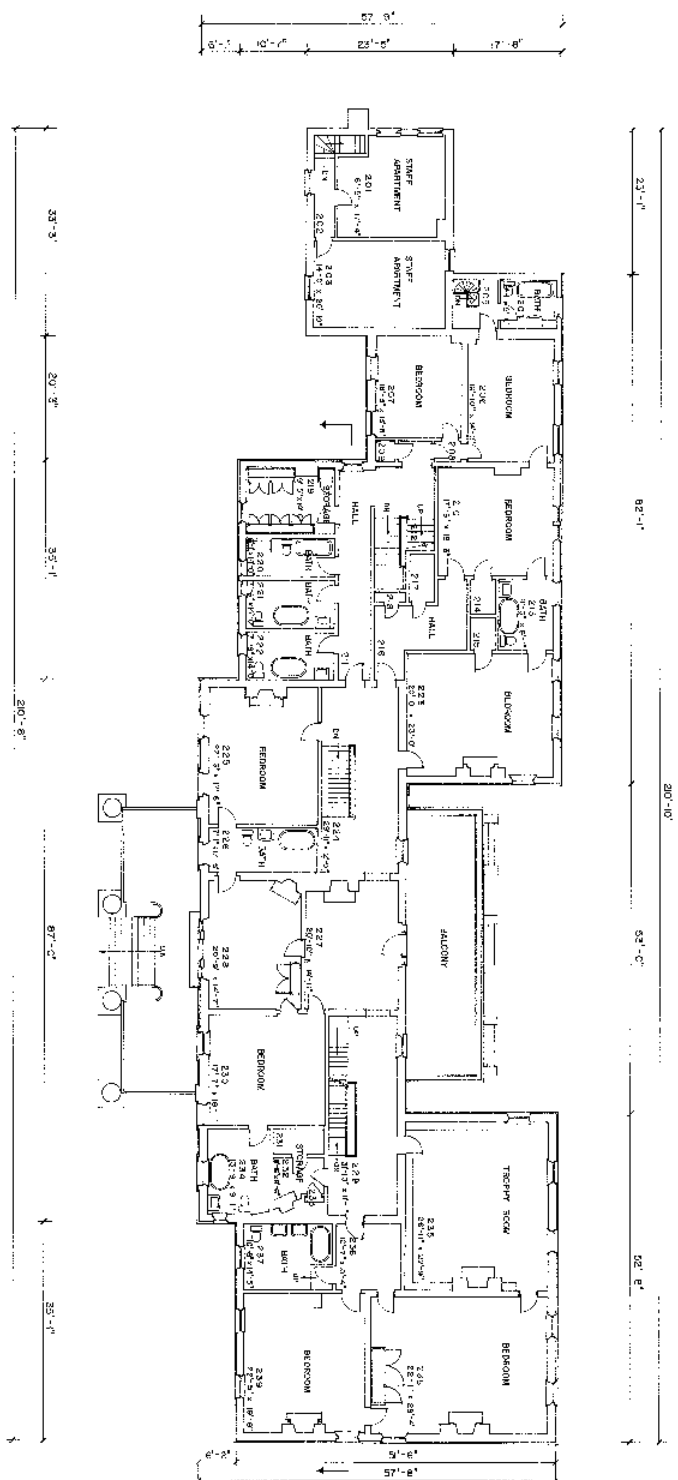
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

FEET 1/8" = 1'-0"

 METERS 1/8" = 0.86

MONTEPELIER STATION VIGNETTE ORANGE COUNTY	VIRGINIA	LIBRARY OF AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY MAY 3 1963
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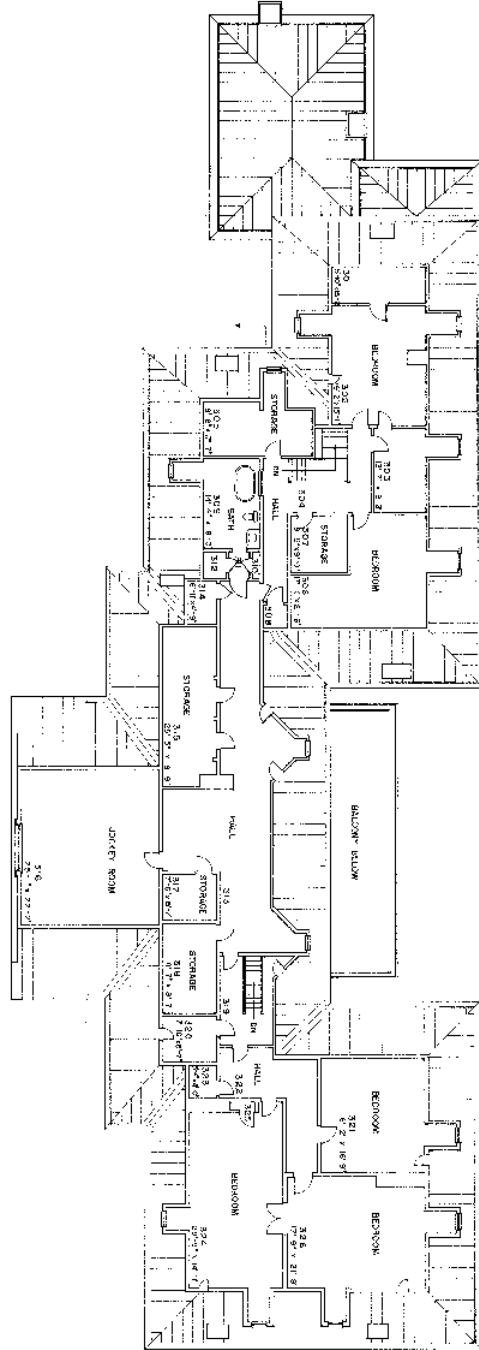
FINISHES
 F-256: WOOD
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 CARPETED OR
 VINYL TILED
 WALLS: PLASTER
 CEILINGS: PLASTER



SECOND FLOOR PLAN
 1" = 20' FEET (1/8" = 1' 0")
 1" = 4 METERS (1/32" = 1 METER)

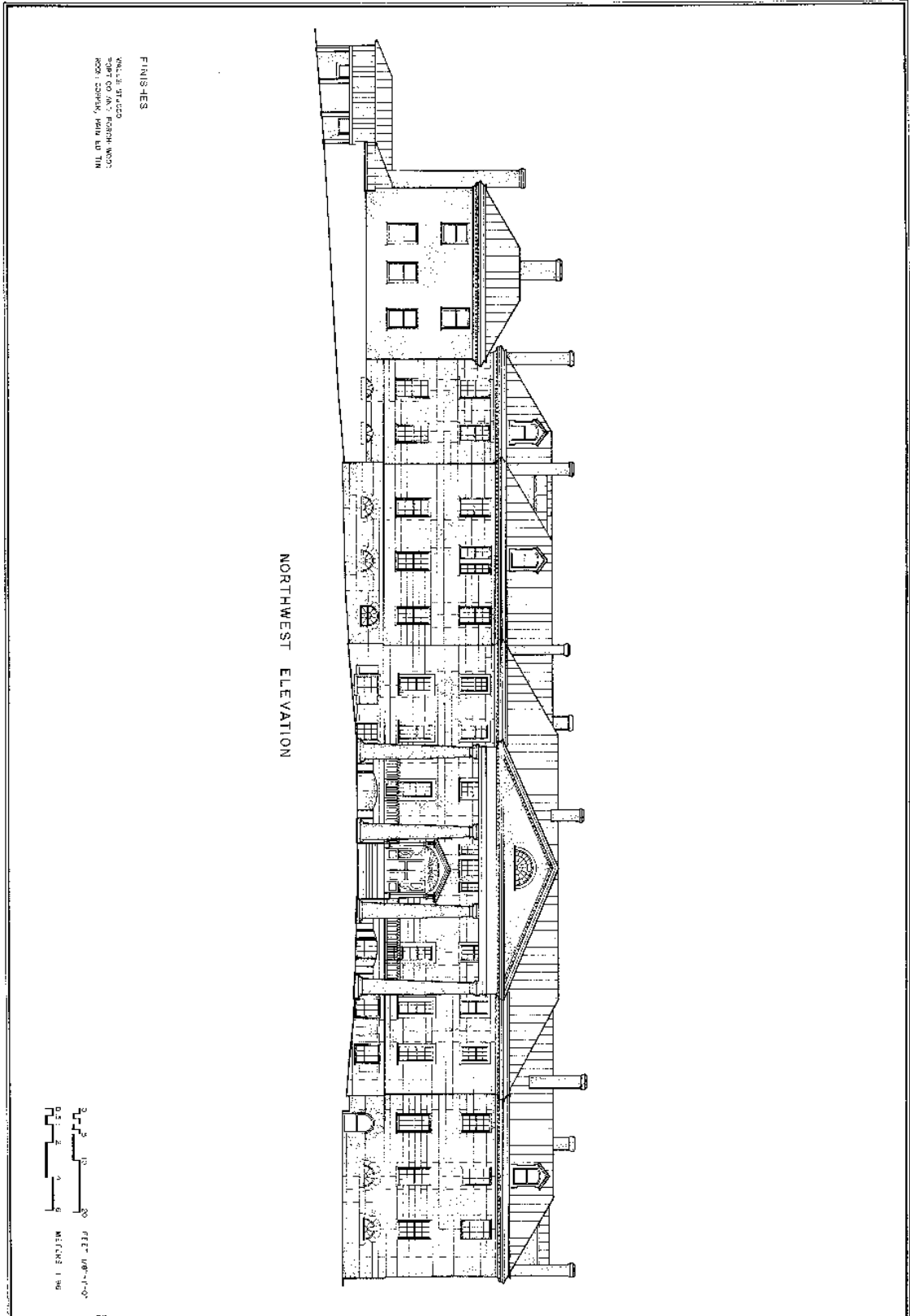
DANIEL WENTZ ARCHITECT 1000 N. MARKET STREET, SUITE 100 CHARLOTTE, NC 28202 TEL: 704.375.1234 FAX: 704.375.1235	MONTPELIER 233-GE COUNTY 233-GE COUNTY 233-GE COUNTY	VA-24 HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY VOLUME 4 OF 6 SHEETS
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FINISHES
 FLOORS: WOOD
 WALLS: PLASTER
 CEILING: PLASTER



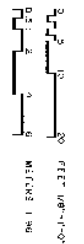
THIRD FLOOR PLAN
 4.21' 0" x 4.21' 0" VERTS 1:98

<p>DESIGNED BY: DANIEL WENZ</p> <p>DATE: APRIL 2004</p> <p>PROJECT: MONTPELIER STATION VICINITY</p>	<p>MONTPELIER CRANFORD COUNTY</p>	<p>SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"</p> <p>DATE: 04/01/04</p>	<p>PROJECT NO: VA-D-14</p> <p>ISSUED BY: HSB/DOWNS AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY</p>
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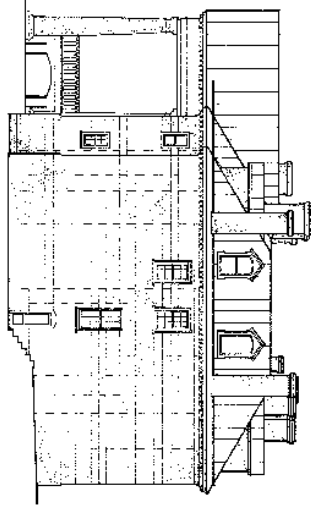
FINISHES
 WALLS: STUCCO
 ROOF: CEDAR
 TRIM: PINE

NORTHWEST ELEVATION

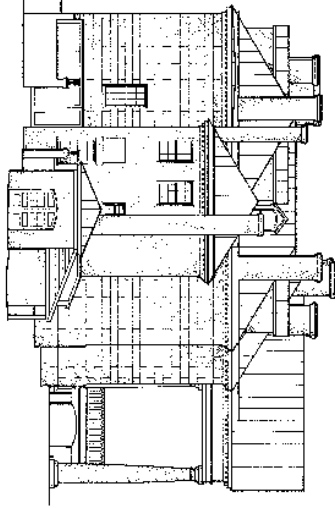


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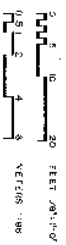
DANIEL WENTZ ARCHITECT 100 STATE STREET MONTPELIER, VERMONT 05602	MONTPELIER STATION VICINITY MONTPELIER CHAMBER COUNTY VERMONT	HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY 1987-88 VA 1214
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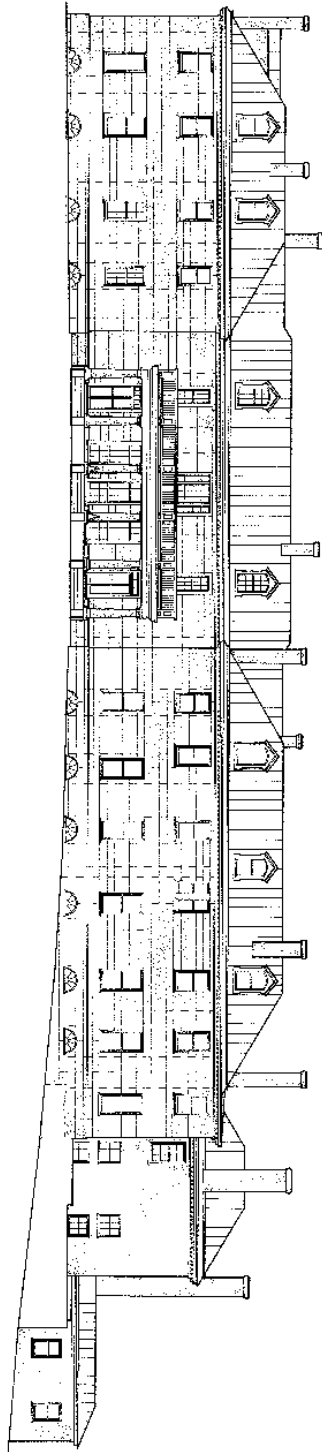
SOUTHWEST ELEVATION



NORTHEAST ELEVATION



SOUTHEAST ELEVATION



<p>ARCHITECT: DANIEL GRENZ ARCHITECTURAL FIRM: DANIEL GRENZ ARCHITECTS, P.C. 100 STATE STREET, SUITE 200, MONTPELIER, VT 05602</p>	<p>LOCATION: MONTPELIER STATION, VERMONT PROJECT: MONTPELIER STATION, VERMONT DATE: 2011</p>	<p>CLIENT: VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION PROJECT NO.: 11-001</p>	<p>SCALE: AS SHOWN</p>
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