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A Community of Households: Early 19th-Century Enslaved Landscapes at James Madison's Montpelier

By Matthew Reeves*

Introduction

Over the next three years, the Montpelier Foundation¹ will conduct archaeological investigations of various households that were part of the early 19th-century (1810s to 1830s) enslaved community at Montpelier.² Three different living areas for the enslaved community have been identified in Montpelier's 1,250-acre historic core that in the early-19th century was called the Home Quarter:³

1. The South Yard -- the quarters for house slaves who resided within the formal grounds of the mansion
2. The Stable quarter -- a set of quarters associated with the operations of the mansion household which appear to have included those enslaved individuals working as gardeners, craftspeople, or in the stables; and
3. The Field quarter -- the quarters for field slaves located in the heart of the working complex for the Home Quarter (Figure 1).

The relationship between the location of these sites and the assumed work role of household occupants is consistent with numerous studies that have shown a slave's "occupation" typically determined his or her place of residence (Genovese 1976; Pogue 2002; Reeves 2003). The

1. James Madison's Montpelier is a property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP). The Montpelier Foundation is a private non-profit 501(c)(3) set up in 2000 through a co-stewardship agreement with the NTHP to manage the financial and physical operations of the property.

2. This project is being funded in part by a Collaborative Research Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (RZ-51141-10).

3. During the early 19th-century, there were at least four Quarters (or divisions) making up the plantation lands of the Madison family. The quarter known historically as the "Home Quarter" consisted of 1,250 acres of the original land patent that surrounded the Madison's main dwelling, Montpelier, and is the subject of this study. For this article, when discussing the working division of land, the Quarter will be capitalized, but for areas of residence, such as Field quarter, quarter will be lowercase.

spatially distinct location of these three quarters allows us to make the comparative contrast between these households in terms of the style of housing, yard organization, and material goods.

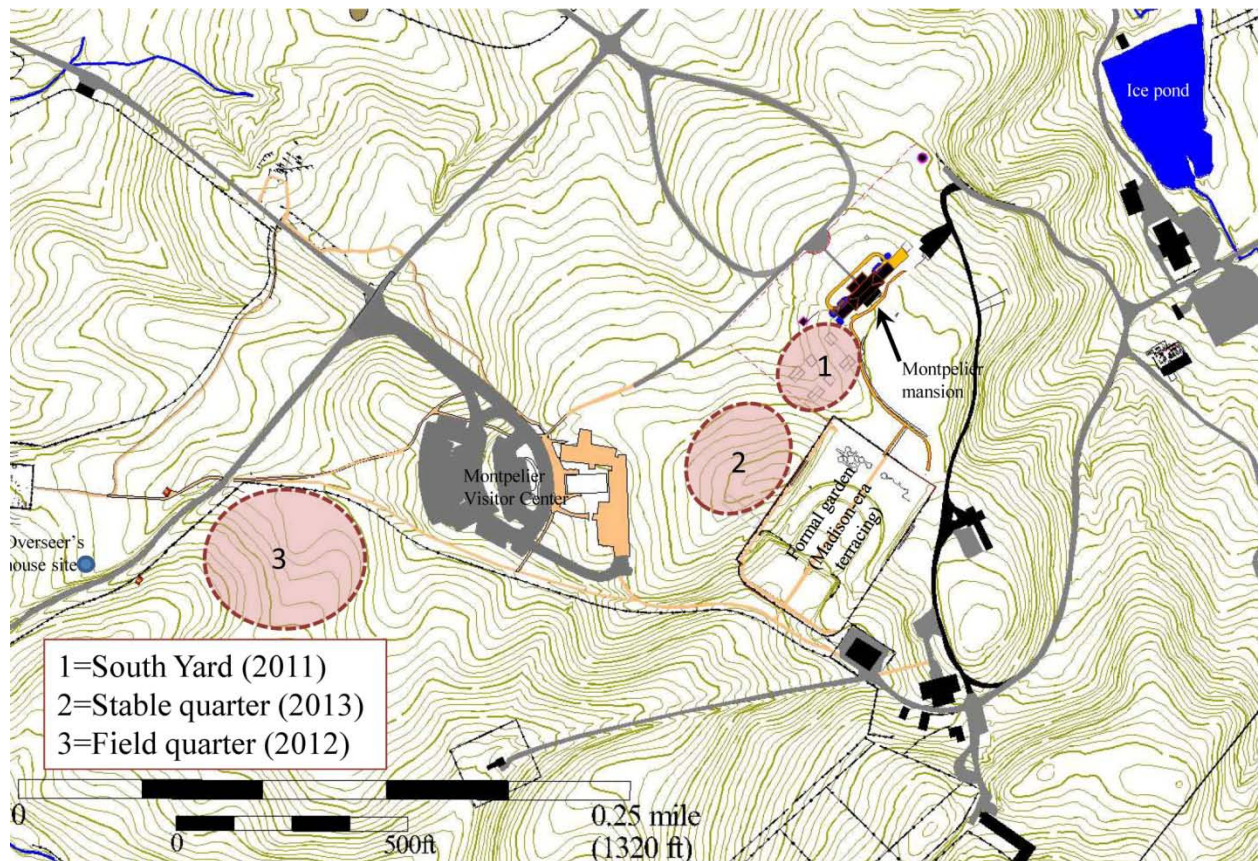


Figure 1. Three loci of excavations proposed for this study overlay on the current landscape setting (all images by author).

Previous surveys conducted at Montpelier identified multiple house remains for these three areas, which are all remarkably well preserved in unplowed contexts. Initial excavations have revealed large quantities of household goods -- ceramics, glass bottles, animal bone, and personal items -- and well-preserved living surfaces and features including yard surfaces covered with gravel, paths, yard hearths, and structural remains such as architectural items, chimney bases, and structure footings. The three residential quarters thus provide a remarkable opportunity to compare and contrast slave life at the plantation home of the fourth president of the United States. The deposits from all of these sites date to the late 1810s through the 1830s, and provide a discrete occupation period for study.

The Field quarter residences for field slaves at Montpelier show a marked difference from the South Yard in both built architecture and access to household goods (ceramics, glasswares, clothing items, etc). Initial excavations revealed the quarters for house slaves in the South Yard were frame structures featuring brick chimneys, glazed windows, and raised wooden floors. In contrast, the quarters for field slaves were log structures with stick and mud chimneys, no glazed windows, and dirt floors. The material possessions found in the South Yard also revealed higher access to material goods with a wider range of ceramics, glasswares, and personal items than found in the field quarters. These initial observations of material life support the stereotypical view (created by planters) that house slaves had a higher quality of life than field slaves, an assumption that historians have shown to be false (Fox-Genovese 1988; Genovese 1976; hooks 1992). What is devoid from such strictly material comparisons is the complex interplay of social relations that existed within and between households of a community and the labor role to which individuals were assigned.

The third set of quarters, the Stable quarter, bridges this “gap” by providing a context to contrast the material extremes seen in the quarters of the field and the house slaves. At this quarter, initial observations have shown that while structures were more similar to those found in the field quarters, household goods more closely aligned to those recovered in the house quarters. By contrasting many households set within a larger spatial scale, we hope to develop an understanding of the larger social institutions that had been established by Montpelier’s enslaved community -- whether these institutions be informal trading networks, the organization of established domestic work areas to support individual household needs, or the means of creating privacy within the home place from the pervasive influence and surveillance of the plantation owners. Uncovering such community activities necessitates establishing a historic context and comparative methodology that takes into account patterning within individual households and the larger plantation infrastructure.

The historic context of Montpelier makes an especially compelling case study in terms of what is known about the Madison family’s activities during their retirement years at Montpelier (1817-1836), a period that overlaps the occupation of the various quarters. Particularly interesting is how these activities impacted life in the South Yard. The South Yard complex was located within the mansion’s formal landscape or the “pleasure grounds” for the estate. Prior to retiring from the White House, the Madisons designed this area to serve as an entertaining space

that featured neo-classical landscape elements and a completely renovated home set within a picturesque landscape design. Within this formal space is the South Yard or quarters for house slaves. Letters from visitors of the time period document the use of this area and the interaction between Madison's guests and his enslaved laborers. In addition, previous archaeology carried out on the formal landscape at Montpelier has provided a key to understanding this portion of the site. As will be detailed below, this context sets the stage for comparison of the households in the South Yard with those of other parts of the plantation community and provides an interpretive focus to ferret out the many aspects of slaves' domestic lives that were both under and out of the range of direct controls by the Madison family.

Given the myriad of issues associated with making a viable study of the three segments of the enslaved community at Montpelier, it is necessary to employ a holistic methodology that considers the complex interplay between owner and individual groups of laborers, the demands of bondage placed on all enslaved people regardless of labor role, and the social dynamics of the enslaved community. Relying on the everyday material remains found at individual quarters is not enough. Rather, what is needed is a means to compare and contrast these remains in a structured manner that takes into consideration the specific historic context of the Montpelier plantation and the social dynamics inherent within a plantation community based on chattel slavery. To approach this challenge, we propose a methodology whose base unit of analysis is the household (the level provided through the archaeological record). The shift in focus to the household is one that many archaeologists of the African Diaspora have made over the past two decades -- moving away from simplistic ideas of African continuities and patterns of material culture to analyses that engage everyday-lived experiences set within a holistic contextual approach (Battle 2004; Armstrong 1990; Franklin 1997; Reeves 1997; 2010; Wilkie and Farnsworth 1999, 2005). What makes this study unique is how we approach the household -- that is, through the overarching context of community.

Our research design ascertains action at the level of the household, and considers how this action is set within a larger community framework defined by a web of social relations linking households on a myriad of inter-related levels: community, plantation, and region. Material remains (household items, differences in architectural styles, and organization of yards) within the three residential quarters will be analyzed to determine the similarities and differences that existed between households across the plantation community. Differences and similarities

between households should reflect the relationship of individual households to each other, the community to which they belong, their relationship to the plantation in general, and regional patterns of both market access and cultural traditions.⁴ Our analysis of material remains moves between the interconnected vertices of household, community, plantation, and region. Moving between these varying scales of analysis will help put into context patterns seen in the material record of individual households. Such a comparison not only allows for consideration of the impact that labor roles had on slaves' everyday lives, but also moves beyond simplistic causal relationships (such as the direct link between labor role and material lives of individual households) towards an analysis of the interplay of community life on labor structure (Reeves 1997).⁵ While the focus is on the Montpelier community, a critical part of this comparative analysis includes an understanding of the larger patterns observed by scholars of the African Diaspora -- both for the local region and the wider Atlantic World. Before detailing the community being studied, it is first necessary to delve into the theoretical underpinning for this study, so that we can introduce the actors whose lives we are trying to illuminate through this study.

The Household as a Window into the Community

Our study centers on the excavation of house structures, yards, and "trash" areas, or what has been defined in other studies as the house-yard complex (Agorsah 1999; Armstrong 1990; Edwards 1998; Gundaker 1998; Westmacott 1992; Heath and Bennett 2000). During the research, at least two house-yards, already discovered from previous survey, from each settlement area will be examined through archaeological excavation. Through these excavations,

4. In using the term cultural traditions, I am lumping together a multitude of lifeways ranging from building traditions, yard practices, foodways, and other material aspects associated with African Americans in the Virginia Piedmont during the early 19th century.

5. For this study, the sense of community is defined along the lines of Roseberry in which members of a community are seen as group with common interests set within an economic framework of competing interests (in this case plantation slavery) (Roseberry 1966). Rather than seeing community as unified, however, this study will seek the social relations inherent among a set of households who have both competing interests and commonalities both inside and outside of their core context. As such, the concept of scales of influence come into play with each household being viewed as a separate component and whose relationship to larger organizational concepts (community, plantation, and region) can be established through material patterning.

we will expose extensive yard areas to delineate artifact scatters, evidence for yard furnishings (fences, work poles, hearths, etc.), and the visual and physical relationship of these yards to the surrounding areas through the use of plantings (potentially used for both shade and screening) and layout. The use of screenings, both built and natural, has been noted as especially important in creating privacy for enslaved inhabitants from the eyes of the white owners and management (Armstrong 1990; McKee 1992) as well as screening the work yards from the formal areas of the mansion such as the approach along the carriage road of the front lawn (Marshall 2010; Reeves 2007; Trickett 2010a). These differing functions of screening show how such landscape features were seen very differently by the owner and slave (Isaac 1982; Upton 1988; Reeves 2004) and the impact such visual proximity had on various parts of the enslaved community will be examined in this study. In addition, we will also be recovering evidence for the structures themselves in the form of chimney bases, piers, and other architectural features and objects. Finally, we will be seeking the remains of trash scatters which not only inform the edges of yards, but also provide insight into access to material goods. While the archaeology that has been carried out to date has shown that such features and deposits do survive at all three sites, the sampling has been nowhere nearly sufficient to directly address the issues being approached by this study.

Key to the analysis of these household remains is placing each set of material patterns in its historic context. The research design is intended to differentiate between actions occurring on a range of scales including how material remains were influenced by one's place in the community, regional restrictions on material goods (e.g. a particular ceramic types not being available within a market region), or individual decision-making ability set at the household level. What organizes the analysis and interpretation of archaeological data is the scale at which these actions take place:

- *Region*, or market accessibility;
- *Plantation*, or controls set by the Madison family;
- *Community*, or the loci of the slave quarters; and
- *Household*, or the specific house area being examined.

These varying scales of analysis are inspired by what William Marquardt refers to as “effective scale” in human actions (1993:107). Marquardt defined effective scale as a measure (both temporal and spatial) through which observed behavior (in this case artifact patterns) can be meaningfully understood. What Marquardt and others assert is that we are more likely to

ascertain broader social actions that influenced patterns seen in archaeological assemblages by examining these patterns through a range of spatial and temporal scales (Marquardt 1993:111; McGuire 1992; Reeves 1997 and in press; Wilke and Farnsworth 1999; Hauser 2009). In this case, the effective scale of analysis is guided by patterns seen between and within the three different loci of the enslaved community being examined in this study -- house, field, and specialized artisan. In turn, our comparisons of these three different groups of households seek differences and similarities of material remains that suggest interpretive explanation at varying levels of analysis. These varying levels include individual households (the individual), subgroup within the community (field, house, or stable), plantation (aspects unique to the Montpelier community), and finally region (such as market access or regional traditions). Each of these levels of abstraction is informed by their particular historical context to best interpret causal agency seen in the archaeological record and thus, by proxy, as occurring in everyday actions or “practice” (Beaudry 2004). By approaching patterning of material remains from these defined historic contexts, conclusions can be sought that are informed by the social actions and decisions set at each level of analysis.

In this study, we are seeking to determine how place -- both *within* the cultural landscape and *upon* the topographic landscape -- influenced architectural forms and use of yards in the quarter. In this study, place is directly related to spatial location to the formal grounds of the mansion -- some quarters were within these bounds (house slaves), others adjacent (skilled slaves), and other further away (field slaves). Examination of house style, yard activities, and trash distribution will provide insight into this scale of action.

Another level of influence was the degree of daily interaction between owner and slaves and how this influenced access to goods. What this study seeks to examine is whether closer interaction between the Madison family and their guests and other local elite allowed for enhanced marketing activities for these slaves. Comparison of household material assemblages in relationship to known goods from Madison-household deposits and between the three sets of quarters while allow for definition of exchange and relative access to goods.

Examining these material correlates through contrasting scales of action allow the confluence of labor hierarchy, place within the spatial proxemics of the plantation landscape, relationship with the owner, and interaction between slave households to be meshed together. In addition, bringing multiple households into the comparison allows tighter patterning to be drawn

from these comparative levels of analysis. By bringing such analytical units together within a contextually cohesive methodology, we can begin to reconstruct the rich fabric of social relations, class distinctions, and social action that was present in this community known otherwise only through a sparse set of documentary records.⁶ One might argue that to study a community such as Montpelier where there are almost no specific records of household structure, slave's roles within the plantation, and demographic data would make such an analysis much weaker than for a better documented slave community. However, when one considers that most plantations in the American South share the same lack of documentation found at Montpelier, it becomes even more important to develop methodologies and case studies to overcome such obstacles. It is our contention that by developing a broad understanding of the plantation context (through the excavated archaeological remains and available historic documents) that a rich understanding of the community and their actions is attainable.

Households under Study

Making comparisons within any plantation community is a complex undertaking. We are enhancing this comparative study by involving three different groups within the enslaved community: the house slaves, field slaves, and slaves with specialized (skilled) occupations. What connects all of these households and defines them in terms of their role as laborers is the owner household -- in this case the Madison family. In any household analysis involving enslaved communities, the dominance of the owner in terms of prerogative, agenda, and motivating experience, must always be kept in the forefront as this defined the experience of slaves in any given historical context (Berlin and Morgan 1993:1). In this regard, looking towards the Madisons' home, lifestyle, attitudes towards slavery, and political views -- all of which have been extensively examined by historians for decades -- will provide an axis by which the enslaved community can be interpreted (Ketchum 1990, 2009; McCoy 1980; Meyers 1981; Slaughter 1970). In addition, excavations and landscape studies conducted over the past eight

6. Much of the documentation of the plantation from the retirement years at Montpelier (1817-1836) was destroyed in the 1850s when, following the sale of the property, the papers were transferred to Madison's step-son, John Payne Todd. John Payne Todd was notorious for his numerous scandals and gambling debts that brought the Montpelier estate into considerable debt. When Madison family members discovered the cache of Montpelier papers at Todd's home following his death in 1852, the decision was made to save a few scraps and relegate the rest to the flames. *Fredericksburg News* 1855; President Madison's Notes on Dr. Franklin (also including description of destruction of Madison family papers), 22 November. Fredericksburg, Virginia, copy on file, Montpelier Archives, Montpelier Station, VA.

years at Montpelier (Reeves 2007; Brown 2006) have enabled an accurate reconstruction for the appearance of the Madisons' mansion grounds (aka pleasure grounds). Understanding this overarching context has proven to be critical in conceptualizing the experience of enslaved families at Montpelier, not only for the slaves living within the pleasure grounds but, in a comparative context, for the rest of the enslaved community as well. For this reason, we start with the landscape context of the enslaved households associated with Montpelier's main house.

Prior to his retirement from the presidency in 1817, Madison arranged to have the grounds around the home radically altered from his parents' Georgian style to a more Picturesque landscape. This new landscape featured a neoclassical layout and landscape elements, serpentine paths, plantings with directed views, and formal gates marking the arrival into the mansion grounds (Reeves 2007). The boundaries of these formal grounds were demarcated in a distinctive manner through the use of fences, roads, ha-has,⁷ and plantings. These borders formed the perimeter of the mansion curtilage, the immediate grounds surrounding the house that define the formal landscape (Lounsbury 1999), which at Montpelier encompassed a five-acre area of land that was part of the intimate space for the Madisons' entertaining activities. Within the boundaries of the curtilage are the following elements: a formal terraced garden; a temple set at the end of a pine tree allée; a massive, level, two-acre green on the rear lawn which served for garden fetes; and an elaborate picket fence within which was set a distinctive gate leading to the front portico of the house (Brown 2006; Reeves 2007) (Figure 2). The garden landscape was meant to be incorporated into the architectural spaces of the house as views of significance. For example, the drawing room with its three triple-hung windows coupled with multiple terraces –provided Madison's guests visual access to key elements of the built landscape. Our understanding of this landscape is enhanced by accounts from visitors to Mr. and Mrs. Madison from the late 1810s to 1830s -- the very mention of such views serves to reinforce the importance of these landscape schemes in the minds of the Madisons and their contemporaries. These letters and diaries recall the entertainment provided by the Madisons and the distinctive style of the Madison household both in terms of interior furnishings and garden design (Miller 2002; Reeves 2007). Within the formal confines of these grounds, the enslaved community held a distinctive role and place.

7. Ha-has are a form of "sunken fence" whereby a wall and ditch are used to keep animals out of the formal pleasure grounds for an estate. Such a landscape device allowed unbroken views between the formal grounds and the surrounding landscape (Lounsbury 1999).

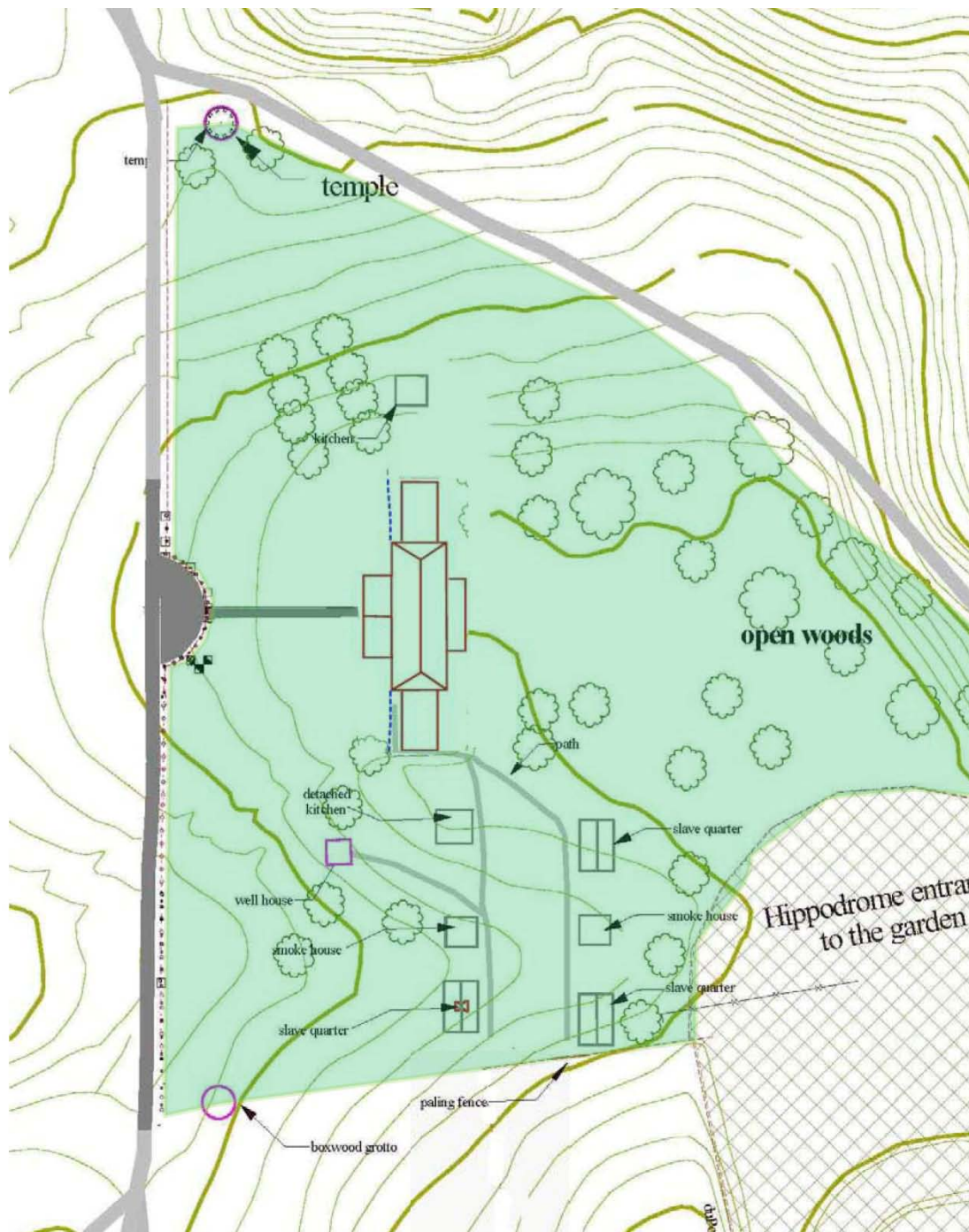


Figure 2. Early 19th century appearance of mansion grounds. The area shown in light green is the formal boundary of the mansion grounds (curtilage) as defined from archaeological features and period descriptions. The area of the South Yard is the collection of structures in the lower portion of the green area.

The Madisons' house slaves resided in a set of quarters located within the defined formal yard for the mansion. While having quarters set adjacent to the main house is not unusual for the time period, what is unique is that available documentary and archaeological evidence suggests

these quarters were incorporated into the overall landscape design for the intimate space of the formal rear lawn. In other words, these quarters were not only in direct sight from the mansion, but were also meant to be part of the overall pleasure grounds attached to the mansion. Our first evidence for the early 19th-century quarters for house slaves was found through excavations that were carried out in the early 1990s. These excavations uncovered the remains of a brick chimney base with a double-sided hearth suggestive of a duplex as well as prodigious quantities of window glass, door hardware, and other items suggesting a more refined house structure. About 10 years later, our understanding of how this structure related to the rest of the landscape was revamped through the discovery of an 1837 insurance map that showed the full extent of outbuildings in the South Yard (Marshall 2009). This insurance map shows three duplexes (one of which matches the exact location of the chimney base discovered in 1992), two smokehouses, the stable, and a detached kitchen. In 2008, we carried out test excavations along the eastern line of structures and found incredibly well preserved remains of another chimney base for a domestic quarter (this time stone), yard surfaces, fence lines, and large quantities of artifacts that verified the existence of the structures shown in the 1837 insurance plan and the excellent preservation present across this domestic complex (Figure 3).

Combining archaeological evidence of the quarters in the South Yard with documentary accounts provided us with an interesting perspective on this space. What the insurance map suggested was that these quarters were valuable enough to be insured as property along with the house. The presence of brick chimneys with raised hearths suggested these structures had raised wooden floors, the window glass suggested sash windows, and the door hardware suggested a defined trimwork and finishing for the structures. Testing of yard areas suggests that trash deposition was kept confined to areas out of sight from the main house. Taken in tandem, what these finds suggest is these quarters were meant to be seen from the house. Views from the mansion's south terrace balcony and rear lawn support this as one looks directly into the heart of the living complex (Figure 4). That these quarters were meant to be part of the formal space is also supported by visitors' accounts wherein Madison's guests recall visiting the quarters following breakfast and bringing leftovers as gifts to present to the elderly slaves in this space (Miller 2002:72). The direct interaction of Madison's guests with these quarters as part of the pleasure grounds must have placed the households residing in this portion of the Montpelier

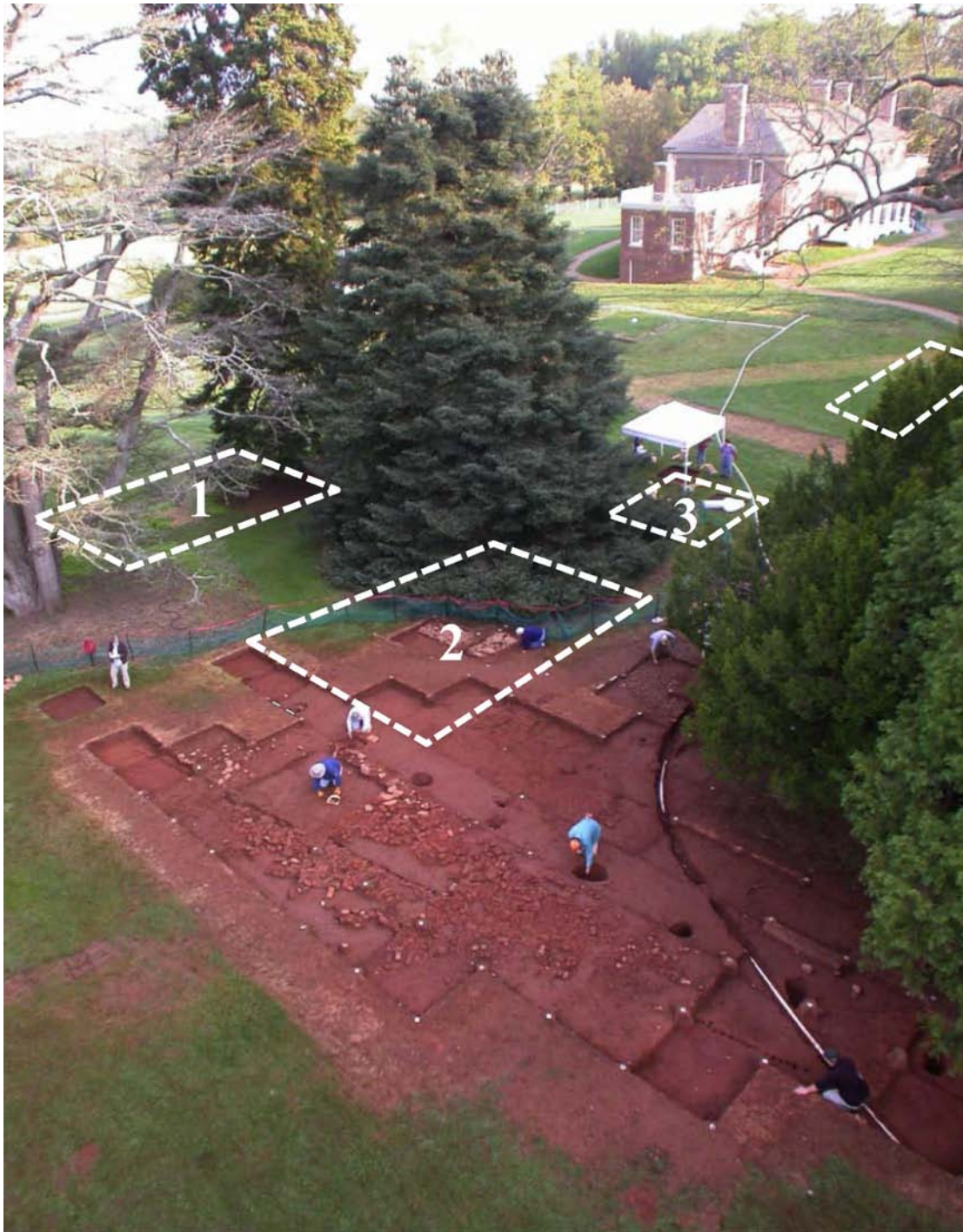


Figure 3. 2008 excavations in the South Yard showing exposed chimney base, fenceline and yard surface for the Northeast duplex (#2). White rectangles represent quarters with the area surrounding and between 1 & 2 being the focus of the proposed study during the 2011 field season.



Figure 4. 3-D digital rendering of view into South Yard from the south terrace of the mansion (photo inset to right shows the corresponding modern view from the terrace). From this view, it is obvious that Madison’s guests would have direct visual access into the houseyards of quarters for the mansion. Image courtesy of University of Virginia’s Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities.

community in a vulnerable position with actions being monitored and under close scrutiny on a daily basis.

Our understanding of the living and working space for the enslaved domestics was enhanced by our excavations of the service complex in and around the mansion from 2002-2006. These excavations revealed direct evidence that the paths we had found through remote sensing in the South Yard connected not only the various structures of this space with each other, but physically connected the South Yard complex with the mansion. These paths provided slaves access into the cellars of the mansion, which in turn provided discrete access into the first floor of the house through service stairs. The flow of materials and activities into the mansion cellars was highlighted during our excavations of the cellar spaces within the mansion. From 2004-2006, we excavated the entirety of the mansion cellar floor area -- this area was a well-

preserved archaeological context due to the duPont family (who purchased the property in 1901) arranging for a concrete floor to be poured across this entire space. This concrete sealed the remains of 18th- and early 19th-century wall partitions, sub-floor pits, floor treatments, hearths, domestic deposits, and other features relating to sleeping areas, work spaces, and storage areas. These features provided rich information on the use of space within the mansion cellars (Tinkham and Reeves 2010, see webpage <http://montpelier.org/explore/archaeology/cellars.php>). The discrete nature of the work areas in the cellar, a space in which slaves could work and sometimes socialize out of sight from the Madison family and their guests, was in complete contrast with the direct views into the slave families' spaces at the South Yard service complex. However, the Madisons' expectations for the ever-present services of the enslaved domestics meant even these cellar areas were kept under strict surveillance -- a pattern seen among many Virginia great houses of the time period (Epperson 1999; Upton 1988).

The combined context of the South Yard being set within the formal grounds of the mansion and at the same time being directly tied with the service complex of cellars and spaces of the mansion make the living area for Montpelier's house slaves an incredibly volatile and complex set of spaces. The presence of the smokehouses reminds us that yard spaces of the homes would be used for daily labor such as processing food for storage, laundering, repairing items from the house -- all activities being closely scrutinized by the mistress of the house (Vlach 1987). At the same time, these spaces were seen as visual points of interest by the Madisons' guests and all activities were likely expected to conform to the surrounding ordered landscape.

One question that arises with the placement of the slave homes within the formal landscape of the mansion is whether this location was inspired by the idealized worker housing movement going on in England during this same time period. Period garden books, most especially during the picturesque movement, provide designs for idealized worker housing (Williamson 1999; Delle 1999). The layout of slave housing at Montpelier with central chimneys and dimensions of 20ft x 30ft is very reminiscent of designs by gentleman planters in England and their recommendations for influencing workers (cf. Kent 1775; Wood 1781). What makes the homes for house slaves such a fascinating comparison with their brethren in the field quarters is the disparate architectural traditions used between the two portions of Montpelier's enslaved community.

Excavations carried out in the quarters for field slaves at Montpelier have revealed a very different set of structures from those in the formal grounds at the mansion. Initial surveys at the “Field quarter” less than a quarter mile from the mansion, have shown these homes to be log structures with stick and mud chimneys (based on no appreciable brick, stone or mortar at the site and the presence of a borrow pit suggesting a source for clay daub), clay floors (based on lack of footers), unglazed windows (very little window glass present at the site), and an overall lower diversity of architectural materials present on the site (Figure 5). The placement of these quarters both adjacent to roads and in other cases at the end of ridges closely conforms with the placement of field quarters at other Virginia Piedmont plantations where surveillance was more concerned with monitoring slaves’ movements on the landscape rather than with specific activities within the quarters (Reeves 2003). Such surveillance was in complete contrast to what we saw in the South Yard where slave’s daily activities appeared to be monitored and closely

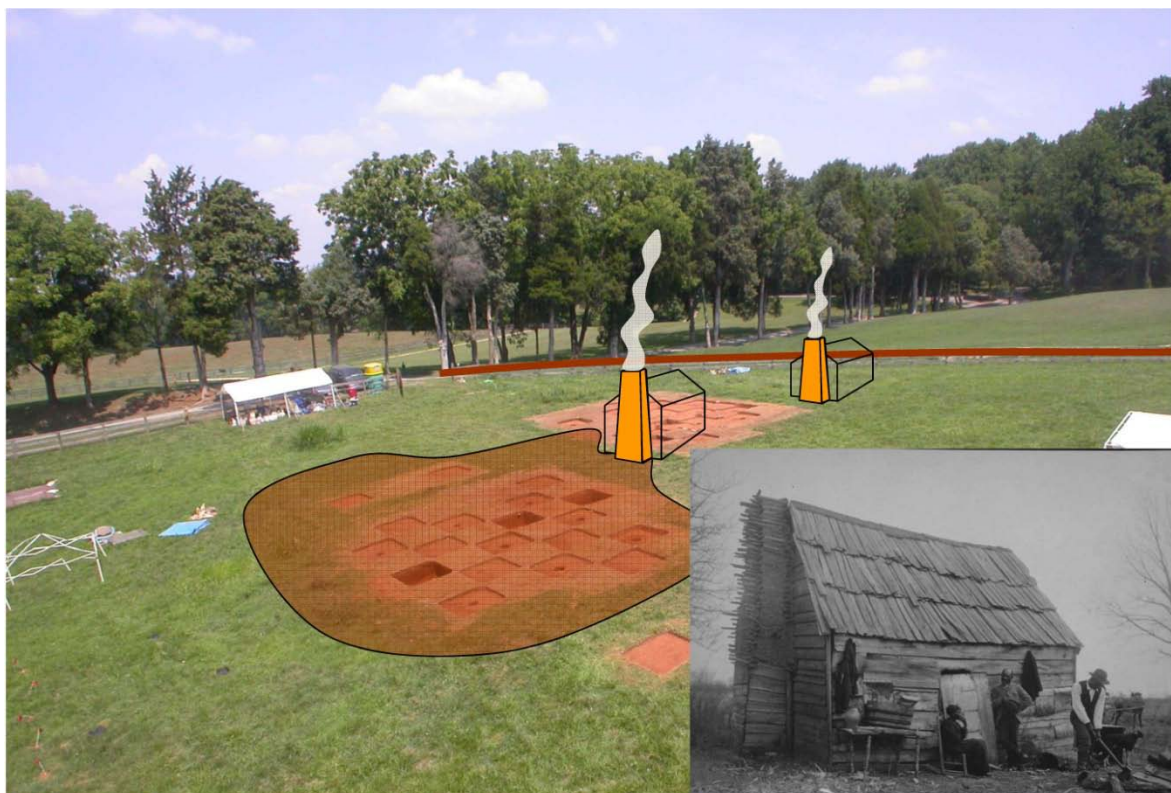


Figure 5. 2005 excavations at the Field quarter with overlay showing hypothesized layout of structures and yards. The inset 1899 Frances Benjamin Johnson photograph on the lower right depicts how we believe the structures at this site appeared (inset image courtesy of Library of Congress).

regulated. Initial sampling at the field quarters showed these households had an overall lower access to more costly decorated ceramics, furnishings, and personal items (Reeves and Barton 2007).

The third portion of the enslaved community being investigated are those structures associated with the stable and craft complex located south of the formal boundary of the mansion grounds. The location of this set of quarters in relationship to the stable (shown on the 1837 insurance plat -- see Figure 1) and formal garden suggests this household's association with either an enslaved gardener or stable worker (hence the name Stable quarter) (Figure 6). Both of these positions would involve enslaved individuals working closely with members of the Madison household -- either through work in the formal garden or with the owners' horses. In addition, archaeological surveys have located a craft complex (potentially containing carpenter shops and a carriage house) adjacent to this site which suggests the occupants might also be craftsmen as well. Artifacts recovered at one of the house sites at this quarter have revealed a combination of flower pots, tack items (bridles, horse shoe nails) and carpenter tools -- making assignment of occupation difficult, but at least related to all of the activities in this area (Trickett 2010*b*).

Excavations carried out in 2010 have shown this area to be awash with contradictions in terms of expected status. The style of the home at this site is more similar to those found among the field slaves while at the same time containing a higher quantity and diversity of household remains than even found at the quarters for house slaves (South Yard). Archaeological evidence suggests this home featured a stick-and-mud chimney, clay floor, very little window glass, and log architecture, this structure was typical of what was found in Virginia quarters during the late-18th and early-19th century.

Features at the site suggested the size and number of households present at the site. Archaeologists found two brick hearths located twenty feet from each other. Based on the position of these hearths and evidence for potential rock and brick bases for the logs, the structure appears to be 16ft by 20ft in size.⁸ While this structure might at first glance be considered a duplex, the differences in size for the hearths suggest one was a primary hearth for cooking and heat while the other was secondary for heat and limited cooking. Supporting this

8. This size (16ft x 20ft) has been noted in the architectural form of several other 18th-century sites at Montpelier (Trickett 2010a).

interpretation is the presence of a 4ft x 4.5 ft sub-floor pit directly in front of the larger hearth. Given the single sub-floor pit in this location, it further supports the presence of a single household using this space. The size of this structure combined with the higher amount of household goods suggests this household had more access to material goods, and therefore potentially more status within the community.



Figure 6. Overhead shot of excavations at Stable Quarter site, November 2010, with ash-filled borrow pits (A and B), a sub-floor pit (C), a large hearth (D), and a small hearth (E).

What this final group in the household comparison allows for is the potential for a third control variable to contradict the simplistic comparison between house and field slaves. What makes the Stable quarter so compelling is that its inhabitants potentially held roles on the estate that were somewhat transitional in relation to the roles held by field and house slaves. Such labor roles would not demand the 24-hour-a-day response to the needs of the Madison family under which house slaves were placed, but at the same time make them a “trusted” slave in terms of handling the property held near and dear to the Madison family. Contrasting the patterns seen at both field and house quarters with the Stable quarter provides an important dimension in establishing the complex interplay between labor roles and material living conditions as well as how these reflect social ties between households, the plantation, and even the region.

Concluding Observations

This project is an effort to make visible an otherwise invisible community -- the “hidden minds and lives” of Montpelier. At the same time, these efforts can help make the little-known role that Madison held as a slave owner visible -- an important and worthy goal to build a more complex and nuanced understanding of a gentleman farmer who in his public, political life established the rights of citizenship that Americans enjoy today. The contradiction, of course, being that for the descendent community born from the slaves he maintained as personal property, it took over 150 years to begin to enjoy the same rights. It was only through the constant struggle of African Americans asserting their humanity that the brutal institutions initiated by plantation slavery were overcome (Wilkins 2002). Ascertaining the forms this struggle took under plantation slavery is the goal of this community-based study. The outcome of this analysis will additionally be compared and contrasted to wide array of contexts -- both similar historic contexts of enslaved communities belonging to other Presidential planters (Kelso 1997; Galle 2004; Pogue 2002; Heath 1999; Thomas 1998) and other lesser known planter contexts both in Virginia and the wider Atlantic World (Fesler 2004; Franklin 1997; Wilkie and Farnsworth 1999; Reeves 1997; Armstrong 1990).

This winter, we are analyzing our site finds from the Stable Quarter -- in the meantime, please follow our progress on our archaeology blog (<http://montpelier.org/blog/?cat=9>) and as we complete reports, these can be found at <http://montpelier.org/library/index.php#archaeology>.

Note

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