

Independence and Constitution of Virginia.

THE PUBLICATION OF JAMES MADISON'S MONTPELIER

PEOPLE

WE
THE

SPRING 2026



James Madison's
MONTPELIER



Journal of the
Virginia Con-
-vention in 1776
August 10. A
situation of the
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* Bureau of the State

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shall be called the GENERAL
ASSEMBLY of VIRGINIA.

* An alteration in the hand writing of M. erases
of the House and inserts after "Committee," appointed for that
purpose; and adds, at the end, after "members" of the House,
making the whole read - laid before the Committee ap-
-pointed for that purpose, which they have ordered

agreed to by the Convention.

A. DECLARATION of RIGHTS, made

A DECLARATION of RIGHTS
made by the good people of Vir-
people of Virginia, assembled in
free Convention; which rights do pertain

by the representatives of the good people of Vir-
ginia, assembled in full and free Conven-
tion; which rights do pertain to them,
and their posterity as the

MONTPELIER IN 1776:
A LOOK BACK P.8

MADISON'S 275TH
BIRTHDAY P.4

WHY MONTPELIER'S WORK MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

As our nation approaches the 250th anniversary of American independence, we find ourselves at a moment that calls for reflection and responsibility. Milestones like this are not only about commemoration; they invite us to consider what we have inherited and what we choose to carry forward.

At Montpelier, that question carries particular meaning. This is the home of James Madison, the “Father of the Constitution,” whose ideas about representative government, liberty, and the rule of law continue to shape the American experiment. As we look toward 2026 and beyond, Montpelier is embracing America’s 250th as an opportunity to deepen public understanding of the Constitution and its enduring relevance.

Madison believed a successful republic depended on an informed and engaged citizenry. He understood the Constitution was not self-executing; it required interpretation, debate, and stewardship across generations. That conviction remains at the heart of Montpelier’s mission today.

Across the site, our exhibitions, programs, and educational initiatives explore the Constitution’s origins and its ongoing impact on civic life. Visitors step into Madison’s study, encounter the stories of the enslaved community who lived and labored here, and engage with history that reveals both the promise and the contradictions of the American story. At Montpelier, the Constitution is not presented as a static document, but as a living framework that continues to shape our national life.

Montpelier is strengthening its role as a place for civic dialogue, scholarship, and lifelong learning. Through exhibitions, lectures, teacher institutes, and community conversations, we are expanding opportunities for people to explore the ideas that define our democracy.

We look forward to welcoming you to Montpelier as we mark this historic milestone together. Your engagement and support help ensure that this extraordinary place continues to inspire reflection, learning, and civic responsibility for the next 250 years.

Sincerely,



Krista Costello
Acting President and CEO
The Montpelier Foundation

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MADISON'S 275TH BIRTHDAY

In March 1831, as James Madison's 80th birthday approached, his cousin James Taylor wrote:

"I think about this time you have arrived at your four score years. I congratulate you that from appearances when I had the pleasure of seeing you, your strength of body & mind, you may live Many years to enjoy life, be a comfort to your family & friends, and a light to the rising generations."

As Taylor hoped, Madison was able to "enjoy life" for another five years as "a comfort to [his] family and friends." As we celebrate his 275th birthday this year, we can confidently say that Madison still remains as "a light to the rising generations."

In 1832, the National Republican Convention in Virginia thanked Madison "for his many distinguished and patriotic services to his country, regarding him as they do, as one of the Fathers of our Constitution, as the faithful and able expounder of that instrument and as the able and consistent advocate of Civil Liberty."

From the teachers and law enforcement officers who participate in seminars at the Robert H. Smith Center for the Constitution, to the visitors and students who tour the House, to the hikers who enjoy the Landmark Forest – no one leaves Montpelier without a greater appreciation for Madison's vision of constitutional self-government, his thirst for knowledge, or even his concern for the environment. With the help of our donors and members, The Montpelier Foundation plans to keep Madison's light shining for the next 275 years!

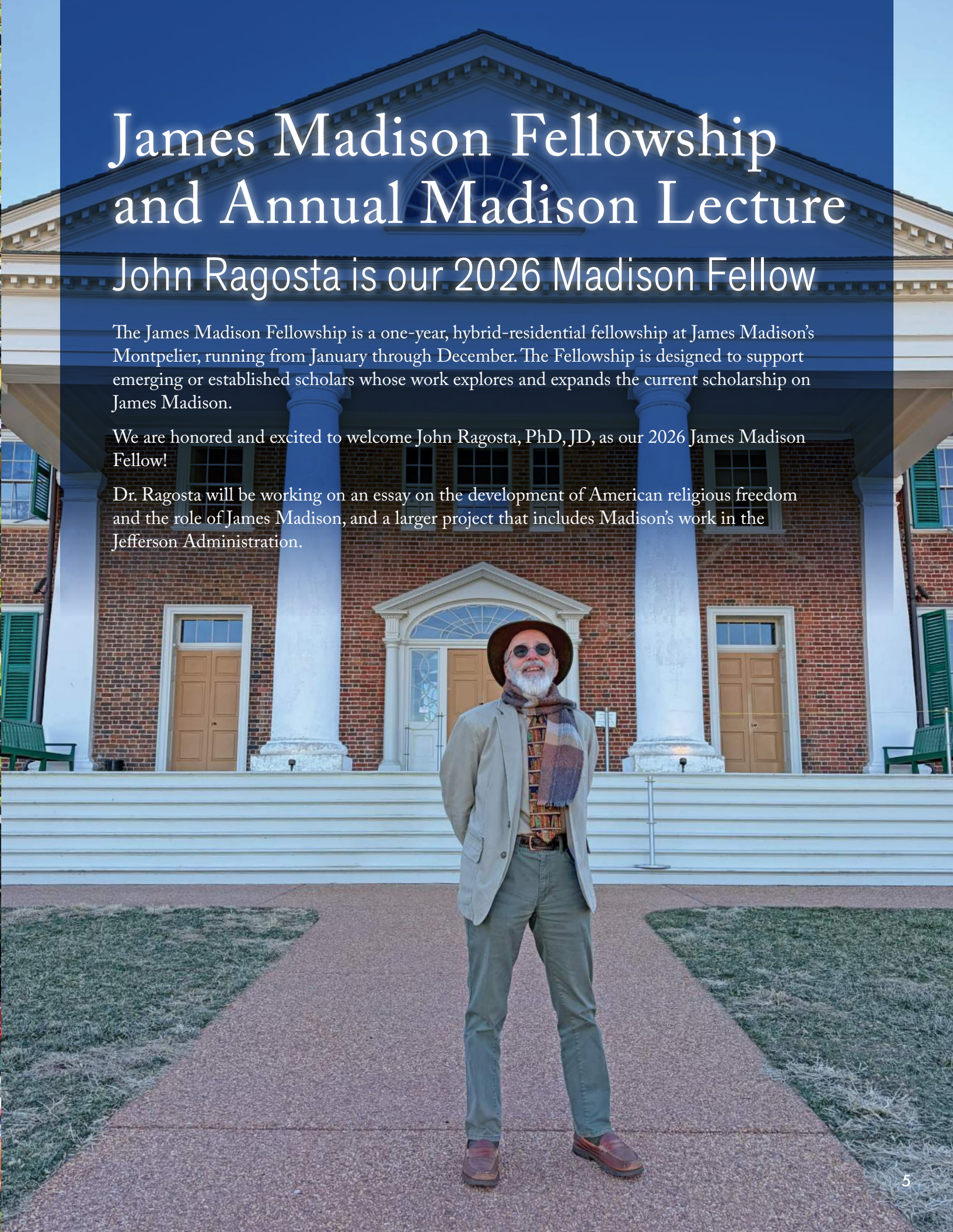
James Madison Fellowship and Annual Madison Lecture

John Ragosta is our 2026 Madison Fellow

The James Madison Fellowship is a one-year, hybrid-residential fellowship at James Madison's Montpelier, running from January through December. The Fellowship is designed to support emerging or established scholars whose work explores and expands the current scholarship on James Madison.

We are honored and excited to welcome John Ragosta, PhD, JD, as our 2026 James Madison Fellow!

Dr. Ragosta will be working on an essay on the development of American religious freedom and the role of James Madison, and a larger project that includes Madison's work in the Jefferson Administration.



History in the Making at Revolution Era site

AT JAMES MADISON'S MONTPELIER



If you visit Montpelier this summer, expect to see history in the making. Archaeologists are excavating a blacksmith complex that helped gain our independence.

What is the relationship between blacksmithing and the American Revolution?

Many early American colonists came seeking freedom and new opportunities. But they quickly realized that England had other plans: the colonies were expected to supply raw materials and buy finished goods made in Britain. As frustration grew, colonists began pushing back against these limits. One way they did so was by building their own local industries, taking early steps toward the economic independence that would later fuel the push for revolution.

An example of this American industry is seen at Montpelier. The development of a blacksmith complex during the 1760s allowed for the production of iron instruments, tools, and weapons. Surviving documentation suggests that this was no ordinary blacksmith shop. Built through the business acumen of James Madison, Sr. and the expertise of Moses and the other enslaved blacksmiths, the shop ultimately grew to have multiple forges and over 300 customers, including the Continental Army.

The ability to produce finished goods and repair essential items allowed a financial independence from Great Britain. This political moment could be seen as one of the first “Made in America” campaigns, a fascinating link between industry, financial independence, and national identity. The profits made from this enterprise enabled James Madison, Jr., to dedicate himself to public service. It is easy to visualize a young James Madison penning some of the first drafts of our nation’s founding documents while listening to the ringing of the blacksmith hammer outside the window of his study.

Now, the remnants of this blacksmithing complex are hidden from view beneath the surface. This year, the archaeology team will be excavating the site in an effort to learn more about the important roles that the Madisons and the enslaved craftsmen played in the forging of our nation.

Join us on a public archaeology program, work alongside professional archaeologists, try your hand at blacksmithing, share in the process of discovery, and become part of the story of the 250th anniversary of our nation’s founding.



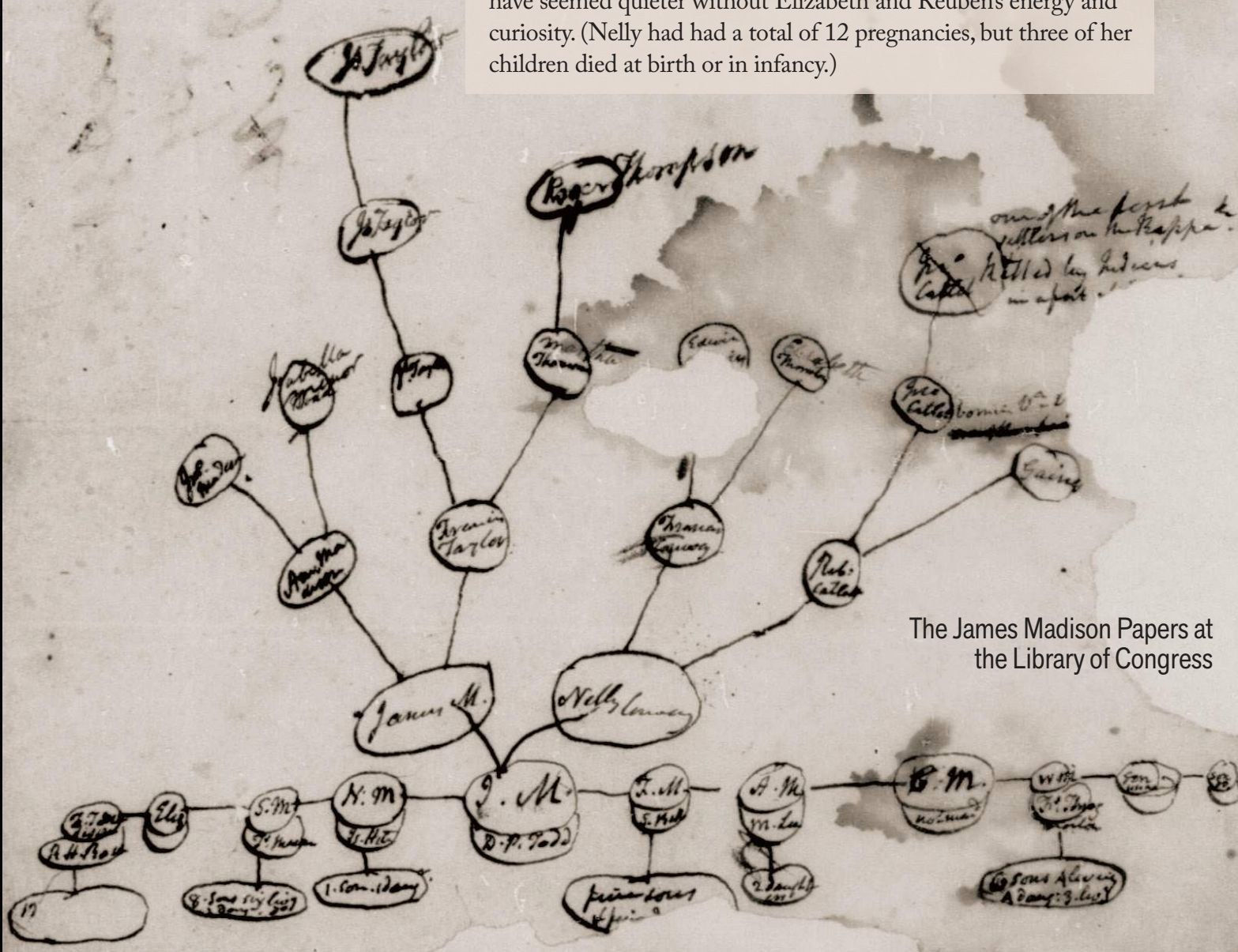
Montpelier in 1776: A Look Back



James Madison

In 1776, James Madison, Jr., fresh out of college, had not yet made his mark on the world. No one knew then that Montpelier was the home of a man who would one day become the Father of the Constitution, the Architect of the Bill of Rights, and the fourth President of the United States.

Instead, residents of the Virginia Piedmont in 1776 thought of Montpelier as the home of the locally prominent planter and businessman James Madison, Sr., his wife Nelly Conway Madison, and their large family. The Madisons' second-oldest son Francis was married, but six of the Madison sons and daughters still lived at home. James Jr. and Ambrose were adults (ages 25 and 21). Nelly, William, and Sally were teens or tweens (ages 16, 14, and 12). The Madisons' youngest child, Fanny, was 2 years old. Just a year earlier, the Madisons had tragically lost two children during a dysentery epidemic: 7-year-old Elizabeth and 4-year-old Reuben. Even with little Fanny toddling about in 1776, the house may have seemed quieter without Elizabeth and Reuben's energy and curiosity. (Nelly had had a total of 12 pregnancies, but three of her children died at birth or in infancy.)



The James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress

This sizable family lived comfortably in their new two-story brick house, built 11 years earlier. With four rooms on a floor on either side of a central passage, the large house was a visible sign of the Madisons' wealth and status in the community. James Madison Sr. served as a member of the vestry of the local Anglican parish, as a justice of the Orange County court, and as the County Lieutenant of the local militia – all of which spoke to his standing in the community.

Montpelier was not only the Madisons' home, but also a working plantation. As many as 80 enslaved people raised tobacco and wheat, spun and wove wool and linen, and tended horses, cattle, and sheep. Several enslaved blacksmiths, like Moses, worked in a shop at Montpelier that served customers throughout the wider community. Other enslaved people cooked or served food at the Madisons' table.

While the senior James Madison was well established, his son, James, was just beginning to find direction in his life. James was in poor health when he came home from College of New Jersey (now Princeton) in 1772. He was studying law on his own, although he wasn't sure he really wanted to become a lawyer.

As tensions built with Great Britain, James became enthusiastic for American independence since, as he later wrote, he was "under very early and strong impressions in favour of Liberty both civil and religious." He took up the cause of Baptist preachers who had been imprisoned in Culpeper for preaching without a license from the Church of England. He tried to join a militia company, but found he didn't have the physical stamina to participate in military drills.

"UNDER VERY EARLY AND STRONG IMPRESSIONS IN FAVOUR OF LIBERTY BOTH CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS."

-James Madison, brief autobiography sent to James K. Paulding in 1832

So James involved himself in politics. He joined the Orange County Committee of Safety, which his father chaired, and which became the *de facto* local government as the institutions of the British colonial government broke down.

In the spring of 1776, young James Madison left Montpelier for Williamsburg, where he served in the Fifth Virginia Convention, the unofficial body that had taken over the role of the colonial House of Burgesses. In the Convention, Madison described himself as "being young & in the midst of distinguished and experienced members of the Convention," which made him reluctant to join in debates. Yet he cast his vote in decisions that made Virginia and the United States of America independent from Great Britain. He voted that Virginia's delegates to the Constitution should propose independence for all 13 colonies. On the topic of religious freedom, he felt strongly enough in his convictions to propose broadening the wording of the Virginia Declaration of Rights from mere "toleration" to "free exercise of religion." He also voted for a constitution for the new Commonwealth of Virginia. James Madison came home to Montpelier in early July, but would return to Williamsburg in the fall of 1776 as a member of Virginia's new House of Delegates.

The year 1776 was a pivotal year in American history, as 13 British colonies became the independent United States of America. But it was also a pivotal year for James Madison, as he found his life's purpose and committed himself to pursuing political and religious liberty. And it was a year of change for Montpelier, now the home of one of Virginia's up-and-coming statesmen.

We extend our sincere appreciation to Virginia National Bank for their trusted partnership and for sponsoring this edition of the *We the People* magazine.

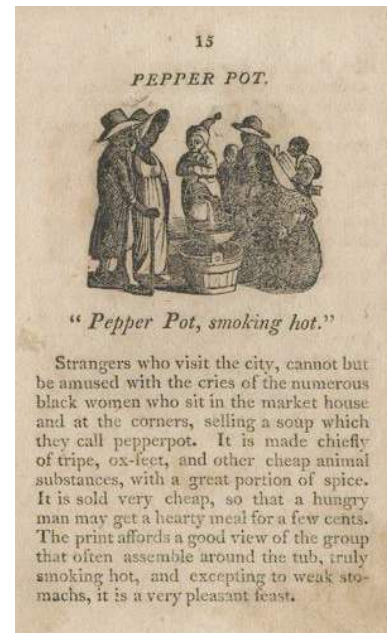
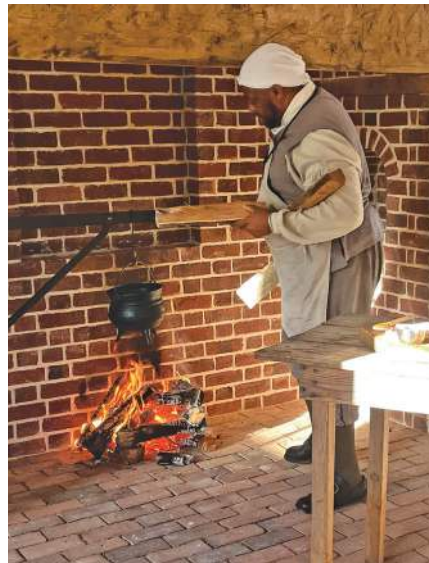


MONTPELIER ON TV!



MONTPELIER WELCOMES PBS FILM CREW

Recently Montpelier welcomed TV host and cookbook author Capri Cafaro to film a segment for PBS's *America the Bountiful*. The episode features Dontavius Williams cooking in our newly reconstructed kitchen, and discussing the vital role of enslaved cooks during the American Revolution, particularly the history of "pepper pot," the 18th-century stew that has been called "the soup that won the war." With origins in West Africa and the Caribbean, this hearty dish was cooked and eaten throughout the British colonies, and sold on Philadelphia's street corners by "pepper pot women." Made from scraps of meat, root vegetables, onions, celery, and spiced with cayenne, mace, allspice, and cloves, this stew fed a burgeoning nation. The episode will air on PBS stations this July!



"Pepper Pot Woman," illustration in *Cries of Philadelphia* (1810), Johnson & Warner from Historical Society of Pennsylvania in The Library Company of Philadelphia



GIFT SHOP 250 CORNER

The Montpelier Museum Shop's online store is your gateway to exclusive Montpelier memorabilia and limited-edition 250th anniversary merchandise celebrating James Madison, his legacy, and the nation's revolutionary spirit. From commemorative mugs and shirts to bourbon glasses, coasters, ornaments, and other keepsakes, the shop

offers unique gifts and collectibles that echo Montpelier's rich history. Every purchase supports the preservation of James and Dolley Madison's historic estate and the educational mission of the museum. Whether you're a history buff or looking for meaningful gifts, explore the curated collection and bring a piece of Montpelier home with you.

MONTPELIER M&MS!

We're excited to introduce Montpelier's custom M&Ms! Available now at our gift shop and online - scan QR code for our online shop.

A fun new way to share our brand, delight your guests, and add a memorable touch to events and gatherings. History never tasted so good.





In the Salon of Madame Geoffrin in 1755
by Anicet Charles Gabriel Lemonnier
1812, oil on canvas

ANNOUNCING SALON 1776

A socially engaging educational experience at Montpelier

In 18th-century Paris, the salon was where ideas came alive over candlelight and conversation. Hosted in elegant private homes, these semi-private gatherings drew an eclectic mix of philosophers, writers, aristocrats, diplomats, and curious social climbers, all eager to discuss history, politics, philosophy, art, and the latest news. In the spirit of these salons, Montpelier launched *Salon 1776*, a series that features a short lecture on a topic related to Montpelier and the founding era, followed by a cocktail reception. Held in the Grand Salon in the David M. Rubenstein Visitor Center, these gatherings provide an atmosphere of socially engaging education for the public in a welcoming, intimate environment.

Salon 1776 talks will be held on Saturdays, 4-6pm. Tickets include the lecture, light refreshments and a cash bar.

UPCOMING SALONS

July 11th **“As American as Apple Pie: Food and Feasting in 18th-century Virginia”** with Kelley Fanto Deetz, PhD, RPA

September 12th **“Madison’s Temple and Ideas of Liberty”** with Chris Pasch, MA, RPA

October 10th **“Strength, Status, & Sport: Equestrian Lives and Labor at Montpelier”** with Liz McCague, MA, ABD

November 14 **“Witch Marks and Conjuring in 18th and 19th century Virginia”** with Kelley Fanto Deetz, PhD, RPA



Please join us!

Scan QR code to register.

MONTPELIER LAUNCHES CONSTITUTIONAL COCOA

Initiative Exploring Dolley Madison’s Diplomatic Table, funded by a Forrest E. Mars, Jr. Chocolate History Grant.

We’re proud to announce a \$10,000 Forrest E. Mars, Jr. Chocolate History Grant supporting *Constitutional Cocoa*, an innovative initiative examining Dolley Madison’s diplomatic entertaining and the enslaved cooks whose culinary labor helped shape early American political culture. Centered on cocoa as both beverage and dessert at the White House and Montpelier, the project combines original archival research with dynamic public programming.

Constitutional Cocoa will be woven into house tours, K–12 education, the *Consider the Constitution* podcast, *Salon 1776*, and signature events such as We the Kids Day and Constitution Day, thereby permanently enriching Montpelier’s interpretive narrative as the nation approaches the 250th anniversary.

Stay tuned for more, and thank you to Mars for making this work possible!

Scan QR code for more information.



STAFF SPOTLIGHT

James Madison was known for his quiet genius and ability to achieve great things for the common good, all without seeking the spotlight. Two centuries later, this same leadership style guides the stewardship of his lifelong Montpelier home thanks to **Krista L. Costello**, Montpelier's Acting President and CEO. For more than two decades, Krista has been a steady and powerful presence at James Madison's Montpelier, creating meaningful change while keeping the community of supporters at the heart of her/our work.

Krista's journey at Montpelier began in 2005, when she joined the Development team. She quickly became known for building strong connections with members and donors. Guided by a deep commitment to Montpelier's mission, she took on more and more responsibility. Krista has since served in several leadership roles, including Director of Annual Giving and Advancement Services, and most recently, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer.

Krista's commitment goes beyond professional responsibility as she treats Montpelier supporters like family, bringing a personal touch to every interaction. She knows the people who care about Montpelier by name, listens to their hopes for the organization, and works tirelessly to ensure their voices are heard.

Top: Krista greeting guests at the 2025 Dolley Madison Legacy Luncheon.

Bottom: Jennifer Sohn, Krista Costello, and Katie Crawford-Lackey

Though she has long thrived behind the scenes, Krista stepped into the role of Acting President and CEO in the fall of 2024 to meet the needs of the organization. For Krista, Montpelier is more than a workplace; it is a legacy. Her long career is a testament to her commitment and care in stewarding the legacy of James and Dolley Madison and the enslaved community.



ARE YOU
LOOKING FOR
A SPEAKER
FOR 2026?
Montpelier
Speaker Bureau
We bring history to you!

The Montpelier Speaker Bureau connects audiences with scholars, historians, and museum professionals who bring the ideas, debates, and legacies of James Madison and the early American republic into contemporary conversation. Through engaging lectures, panel discussions, and facilitated dialogues, the Speaker Bureau supports civic education, inclusive history, and thoughtful public discourse on James and Dolley Madison, the enslaved community, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, archaeology, and democratic governance.

If you are interested in booking one of our speakers visit <https://www.montpelier.org/learn/montpelier-speakers-bureau/>



ENDURING LEADERSHIP: Honoring William H. Lewis and Joe Grills

From its earliest days, The Montpelier Foundation has benefited from visionary leaders who believed deeply in the power of history to inform civic life. Two such leaders—William H. Lewis, Founding Chair of the Board, and Joe Grills, longtime Board member and subsequent Chair—have played pivotal roles in shaping Montpelier’s modern identity and future.

As Founding Chair, Bill Lewis helped guide Montpelier through its formative years as an independent organization. His leadership was instrumental in establishing a strong governance structure and a clear sense of purpose, grounded in Montpelier’s responsibility to James Madison’s legacy and to the nation. Bill brought steadiness, strategic insight, and an unwavering belief in Montpelier as a place where history, scholarship, and public dialogue must intersect. His advocacy helped lay the foundation for Montpelier’s growth as a nationally respected historic site and civic institution.

Joe Grills built upon that foundation with equal commitment and care. After years of dedicated service on the Board, Joe stepped into the role of Chair during a period of continued expansion and increasing complexity.



Joe and Marge Grills

Known for his thoughtful leadership and collaborative approach, Joe helped guide Montpelier through important moments of change, always keeping the institution’s mission and people at the center of decision-making. His tenure reflected a deep respect for Montpelier’s staff, partners, and supporters, and a belief in the importance of listening, learning, and long-term stewardship.

Both Bill and Joe have been more than Board leaders; they have been enduring champions of Montpelier’s mission. Their generosity, advocacy, and belief in the institution have left a lasting imprint. Montpelier is stronger today because of their leadership, and we are deeply grateful for the legacy they continue to build.



Peyton and Bill Lewis

REPORT OF GIFTS

The Montpelier Foundation gratefully recognizes those who generously made gifts or pledges between January 1, 2025, and December 31, 2025. Thank you!

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Visionaries of Montpelier \$100,000 and Above

- The African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund of the National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Mr. and Mrs. William H. Lewis
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On May 20, 2025, we welcomed supporters to our annual Luncheon, featuring the program “Dolley Madison: The Unifier.” Guests enjoyed an engaging and thought-provoking discussion with Nancy Kegan Smith and Diana B. Carlin, who explored Dolley Madison’s remarkable ability to bridge divides and shape the early republic.

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The Madison Pillars Society recognizes the generous individuals who have made provision for James Madison’s Montpelier in their estate plans. Planned gifts to the Foundation include bequests, charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts, retirement plans and life insurance, among other options.

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Gifts naming Montpelier as the recipient of a bequest will allow you to realize a larger charitable objective than might otherwise be possible. You can designate your gift to a specific cause, or make an unrestricted gift to be used where it is most needed.

If you have included The Montpelier Foundation in your estate plans, please let us know so we can properly recognize and thank you for your generosity.

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Where's Your Madison?

Do you live near a “Madison”? Maybe it's Madison Square Gardens, Madison Lane, Madison Park, or Madison High School? Madison’s name is all over the world! We invite you to share your Madison with us!

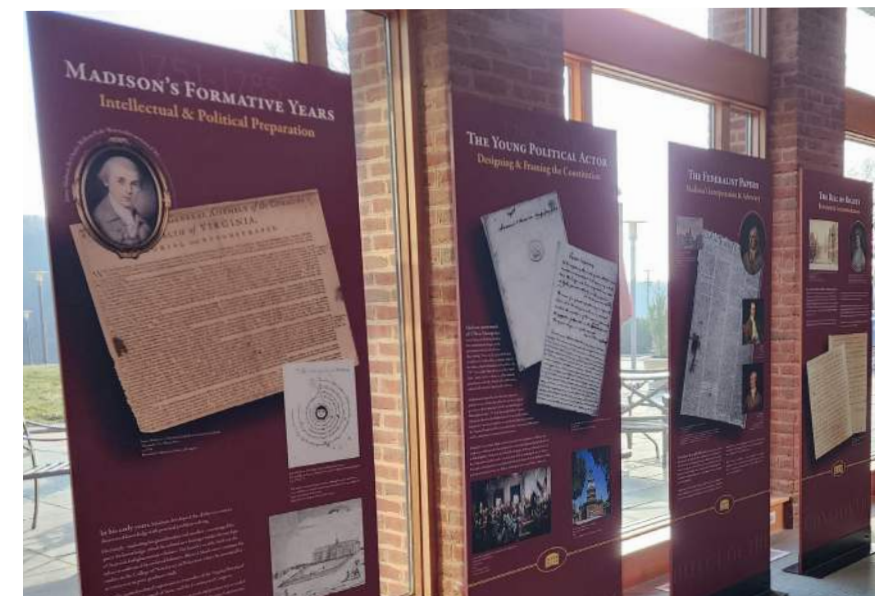
Print out Flat Madison, find your local Madison, snap a picture or make a video, and share with Montpelier, the home of the original James Madison!

#madisonmatters #madisonmadness
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NEW EXHIBIT!

Be sure to stop by the David M. Rubenstein Visitor Center to see our newly-installed exhibit “**James Madison: A Constitutional Life in Six Phases.**” Just in time to celebrate America 250, this exhibit shows how the Constitution relates to each era of Madison’s life. Six panels tell the story, from his early education, to his contributions to the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, and the Bill of Rights, and through his presidency and retirement.



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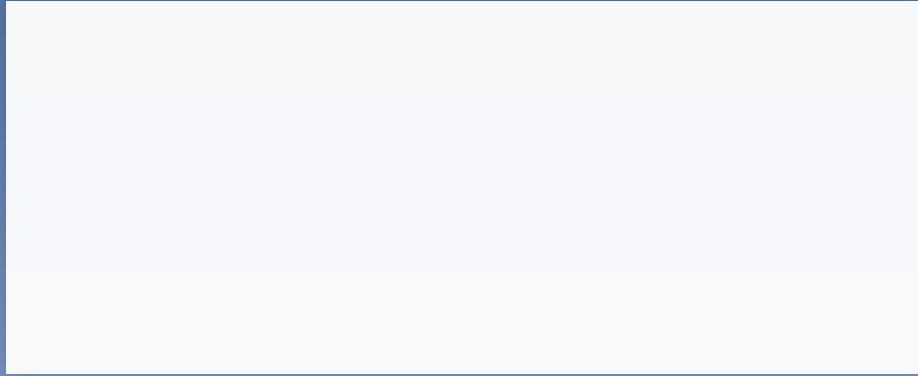
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SAVE THE DATE!

*June 6: Constitution 301 "Amendments 11-17,
...and Beyond?"*
July 3: Orange Music Festival
*July 11: Salon 1776: As American as Apple Pie:
Food and Feasting in 18th-century Virginia*
September 19: Constitution Day

*Scan QR code to get
details about upcoming
events and to register.*

We want to hear from you!



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Stand with us in preserving the home and ideas of James Madison. Your gift helps bring history to life through groundbreaking research, powerful education programs, and the continued stewardship of this national treasure.

Make your donation today and help ensure that the principles of the Constitution continue to inspire future generations.

