

ABSTRACT

One for the Books: A Case Study of the Interpretation of Personal Libraries in Historic House Museums

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Libraries in historic house museums often suffer identity confusion due to the varying interpretational methods of libraries and museums. Eighteenth century prodigy house museums in particular include large libraries that, although they reveal a great deal about their owners' character and life, are passed over in museum interpretation. This is due to the fact that books are not consistently recognized as objects of material culture among museum professionals. Eighteenth century print culture, however, suggests that books from this time period should be considered authentic signposts for both public and private behavior. Whether or not a historic house museum chooses to acknowledge these signposts is determined by each institution's respective mission, audience, and resources.

One for the Books: A Case Study of the Interpretation
of Personal Libraries in Historic House Museums

by

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A Thesis

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first draft of this, literally. And Mama, you'll never know how much it meant that you came to Virginia with me. You are my pink post.

DEDICATION

To Ten. Remember Huntington? This started there.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Project Summary

Meaning and progress are both contextually derived. Any topic, event or material object that one party considers valuable, beautiful or rendered useless receives that differentiation only when it is compared to topics, events or objects that preceded it. As a result, abstract ideas like value and meaning change not only from one person to another but also over time. Separating two persons' ideas of value by hundreds of years exponentially increases the variables of difference. Indeed, comparing the definition and development of such abstract ideas is exhausting without trying to unite them in a single, holistic experience. Yet historic house museums strive to bridge the gap between historic value and meaning-making for every visitor that enters their historic spaces. As an abstract concept, the meaning attached to spaces and objects is the most attainable in the context of the historic house. When visitors enter a historic house museum, they gain not only physical proximity, but also emotional, mental, and ontological nearness to the owner by experiencing the space and objects as they did: holistically.

This thesis seeks to explore the meaning and interpretation of personal libraries in three prominent historic house museums: Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, James Madison's Montpelier, and George Washington's Mount Vernon. As Founding Fathers, these three men contributed a wealth of knowledge and powerful charisma to the creation of the United States. Their scholarship, valor and wisdom have been written and rewritten by historians, politicians and orators since they first entered Virginia political society.

Over the last fifty years, there has been a distinct scholastic trend to explore the contents of these three founder's libraries in order to better understand the roots of their genius and how they achieved the levels of historic prestige in which we hold them today. This thesis will examine how that scholarship is or is not coming to light through the interpretation of the libraries at Monticello, Montpelier, and Mount Vernon.

Based on my experience with community and university libraries, research for this thesis began with the hypothesis that libraries in historic houses suffer from identity confusion. It seemed counter-missional for a library, whose stereotypical purpose is an information repository, to be located in a historic house museum, where objects of material culture are viewed and treated as the information themselves. I began with the question 'do personal libraries in historic houses consider themselves first a library or a museum?' In addition, I hoped to explore whether, as a result of that question, they viewed Jefferson, Madison, and Washington's books as primarily intellectual resources, whose value is found in the words on their pages, or as objects of material culture that can, in themselves, tell a story.

Two scholarly publications resolved my earliest questions about the role of library interpretation in these historic houses. Kathryn L. Brogdon's thesis, entitled "The Library-Museum: An Inquiry into the Nature of a Hybridized Cultural Institution" confirmed for me that library-museums do often "suffer identity confusion and suppressed potential."¹ In order to solve this role confusion, Brogdon suggests that library-museums' self-identity is often based "on their original purpose or in keeping

¹ Kathryn L. Brogdon, "The Library-Museum: An Inquiry into the Nature of a Hybridized Cultural Institution" (Thesis, Baylor University Press, 2002), 1.

with professional organizations they look to for leadership.”² In other words, library-museums often solve their identity crisis by consulting historic precedent or a third party affiliated with their institution. Personally, I found this approach disturbing, both from a logistical and academically professional standpoint. Historic precedent, while helpful, can only be consulted insofar as it aids an institutions’ future goals, otherwise the institution will remain anchored to old teaching methods amidst a new generation of learners. Similarly, third party consultations are distinctly removed from the story told by the collection in its own words.

In Alberto Manguel’s *The Library at Night*, I found a unique perspective of libraries as living, non-static spaces and it became one of the primary lenses through which I explored the Jefferson, Madison, and Washington libraries. While Brogdon proposes an impersonal and disconnected answer to library-museum identity confusion, Manguel suggests that the solution is evident in an examination of the very spaces, pages, and character of the library and its owner. This internally-focused approach to library-museums seemed to me not only more academically responsible but more engaging for visitors. As a result, I concluded that in the case of the historic house museum, the nature of interpretation must be linked first and foremost to the nature and character of their human subject, namely Jefferson, Madison, and Washington, rather than to past methods or the foundations that own and operate them. Consequentially, I decided to forego a study of library interpretational methods and instead began a careful study of these three men’s libraries individually, including their architectural design, scope, contents, and purpose. I felt I could gain a far better understanding of their interpretation potential by trying to get inside the minds of their creators.

² Brogdon, 17.

In order to best understand these historic houses' current interpretational methods, I also examined how each has been interpreted over time before my visit. One of the difficulties of analyzing and comparing interpretational methods at historic house museums is that they evolve in a manner different from other museums. Historical scholarship can have drastic repercussions for historic house museums, not only in how they are presented physically to visitors, but in the intentions and purposes behind their interpretational methods. As a result, during my preliminary research, I had to consider historiographical variations among my sources for each of the three houses and their respective owners. During an interview at Montpelier, the Coordinator of the Interpretive Team Sterling Howell pointed out that when analyzing historic houses, museum professionals have to consider several sides of each stage of development. This includes historiography trends, significant events or current scholarship that may have affected interpretational decisions made at each of those stages. As Patricia West maintains, "historic house museums are products as well as purveyors of history".³

Mount Vernon provides a very tangible and observable example of these stages. After it was acquired by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (MVLA), interpretational methods treated the space more as a shrine to Washington than a historic house. Over the years, those interpretational methods have drastically changed; the house was restored in 2008 and its current interpretation, which favors modern definitions of 'historic house' over that of a 'shrine', is extensively supplemented by a nearby Education Center and Museum. Significant for this study is that each stage of Mount Vernon's development

³ Patricia West, introduction to *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), xii.

had its own purpose, interpretational method, and critics.⁴ In order to fairly and accurately assess interpretational methods at Mount Vernon as well as Monticello and Montpelier, I had to consider how their methods have been affected by past and recent scholarship and arrived at their current stage.

While preliminary research suggested that all three houses lacked the desire to incorporate scholarship regarding the Founders' libraries into their interpretational practices, visits to each house and interviews with their staff revealed, in some cases, an entirely different attitude. Admittedly, as the first house I visited, Monticello set the bar rather high for my trip, but also helped me reshape some of my research questions and consider the effect of institutional resources and mission statements on day-to-day interpretation. By the end of the trip, I was able to begin drawing legitimate comparisons between the three houses as well as between the information found in my preliminary research and the information I gained through my visits. As a result, the bulk of my thesis took on a much more museum-related focus than a library-related focus.

Given that this thesis focuses on one room in three geographically-specific historic house museums, my study includes two chapters that place both the houses and their libraries in their historic context. Chapter Two places the historic houses against the backdrop of eighteenth century Virginia prodigy houses and Chapter Three places their libraries in the wider context of eighteenth century Virginia print culture. Naturally, once historic context is established, Chapters Four, Five, and Six include case studies of each of the three historic houses in the order in which I visited them. Chapter Seven includes my analysis of the three historic houses and their libraries as well as my conclusion

⁴ In *Domesticating History*, West expands on the theory that the MVLAs' antebellum preservation efforts were motivated not only by primarily feminine patriotism, but also by a strong desire to preserve the Union.

regarding their interpretation. Since the interpretation is analyzed in light of the houses' historic context, my conclusion is based on a combination of background research, observation, and personal interviews with staff members at the historic houses. Interviews were completed with three library staff members and one curatorial staff member at Monticello during my visit from August 6-7, 2015. Another interview was completed with an additional Monticello curatorial staff member at the Brazos Forum at Baylor University on October 29, 2015. Interviews with two Montpelier curatorial staff members and one interpretative staff member were completed during my visit on August 10, 2015. Follow-up interviews were conducted with both curatorial staff members by email through October 2015. An interview with a Mount Vernon curatorial staff member was completed during my visit on August 13, 2015 and ongoing interviews with two library staff members were conducted by email from July-November 2015. These interviews focused on interpretational goals and methods for the houses and libraries, varying opinions regarding the value and use of the libraries and a general survey of to what extent, if any, staff members viewed books as objects of material culture. Placing these findings against the backdrop of my historic context research allowed me to construct an assessment of each houses' library interpretation that was both founded on established history scholarship and supplemented by each houses' current individual needs and resources.

Slavery Disclaimer

Although the paradoxical issue of slavery was ever-present in my research, it had no affect on my analysis of the houses' interpretational methods and is therefore absent from this thesis. It became clear very early in my research that the political, intellectual,

and social success of many of the Founding Fathers, indeed the very resources that allowed them to study and promote ideas of liberty and justice, were built on the backs of slaves. However, if researchers seek to study the role of slavery in building these prodigy houses, they will not find it here because such information lies outside the scope of this research project. What researchers will discover is a brief history of the print culture and architectural context in which these libraries were built, accumulated, and used in order to explore the interpretation of books as objects of material culture.

CHAPTER TWO

Historic Houses

Introduction

Providing the public with the opportunity to see authentic objects of material culture is a key component of museum interpretation, but historic house museums take that opportunity to the next level. Historic house museums offer their visitors the unique opportunity to encounter historic objects in their original place, their natural habitat so to speak. At the Lincoln Home National Historic Site, not only are visitors able to see Abraham Lincoln's real hat, but they are able to see it hanging on his hall stand in the front hall of his house on his property in downtown Springfield, Illinois. In addition, arranging objects in their natural setting within the spaces of a historic house appeals to each visitor's respective idea of 'home'; it creates a space that engages emotion and fosters questions about social behavior and private activity.

Historic house museums are also uniquely situated to present an additional category of material culture that museums for the most part do not, namely historic architecture and landscapes. Similar to the way gift-wrapping can be just as carefully planned, designed, and executed as the purchase of the gift inside, the architecture of a historic house reflects how past generations chose to keep their personal objects both on display and hidden from guests. In the 1920s, a surge in comparative graphic literature allowed history and architecture scholars to not only place historic houses within their contextual landscape, but to begin making concrete connections and comparisons among various historic communities and specific structures. Over the years, this genre of

comparative literature has laid the foundations for an ongoing discussion between academic historians, architectural historians, and scholars of print culture to create a web of connections among members of the Virginia gentry, local and foreign architects, and the architectural libraries of each. Unfortunately, while this scholarship seems to have established certain connections between different historic structures, those structure's respective incorporation of decorative arts, and their compliance with historic architectural trends, it has not gone so far as to allocate particular conversation or page space toward some of their less popular spaces, namely libraries.

As this chapter will show, eighteenth century Virginia gentry houses reflect a rising trend in room specialization. As a result, much research has been completed and several books published on relative scale and dimension, decoration, and development among the Virginia gentry's specialized public spaces, such as parlors, dining rooms, bedrooms, and occasionally front halls. However, less public rooms, like kitchens and libraries, have not received as much attention. The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) provides extensive photographic and documented materials on its various subjects, but naturally, their records for the historic interiors of colonial houses are almost completely lacking in the way of libraries and personal studies. This could be the result of a limited amount of film allocated for each house, placing certain rooms on a higher priority than others and any number of additional factors. However, the comparative literature mentioned above confirms that libraries have, among museum professionals at least, been viewed as privately in the twentieth century as they were in the eighteenth. While a notable lack of resources concerning these private spaces makes it difficult to study them to the same extent as public spaces, what can be achieved here is a brief,

general, comparative study of eighteenth century Virginia architecture to show how private libraries and studies developed as specialized spaces among the gentry.

Once complete, this comparative study will provide a helpful backdrop against which museum professionals can explore the current interpretation of the personal libraries at Monticello, Montpelier, and Mount Vernon. Most importantly, it will reveal the significance of these three historic houses and their respective libraries against that of other historic houses in colonial Virginia. Placing these houses, their libraries, and their books in this grand narrative will be doubly beneficial for this study; it will provide a strong basis for their architectural significance in general and support the hypothesis that their respective owners' knowledge and character are largely book-based. Both of these factors will provide sufficient motive for historians and museum professionals alike to reexamine how books and library spaces in particular can be more effectively interpreted for visitors.

Virginia Houses

In her book entitled *Prodigy Houses of Virginia: Architecture and the Native Elite*, Barbara Burlison Mooney explores colonial architecture through the lens of slavery and social relationships. The term 'prodigy house' was first used by Sir John Summerson to refer to imposing Elizabethan country houses, and Mooney was the first to apply it to houses of a later era and, specifically, to colonial Virginia. Since Mooney's research offers such an excellent comparison of colonial Virginian architecture constructed under similar circumstances as Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Montpelier, her terminology serves as a useful categorical term and will be used throughout this case study. Although her researched unearthed little information pertaining to libraries, she does present

significant evidence for an architectural language spoken by the social elite with similar resources, education, and taste. The Virginia gentry, she claims, is marked by the distinction that “their money was new, their ascent was rapid and their authority extraordinary”¹. Besides money, a classical education was foundational for distinction as a member of the gentry; in *The Chesapeake House*, Carl R. Lounsbury identifies the study of English, French, and Italian architecture as “simply one part of the curriculum of a gentleman’s classical education.”² From this demographic, Mooney identifies several Virginia prodigy houses of which Carter’s Grove (1750), Gunston Hall (1752), and Mount Airy (1760) are most relevant for this study. To gain a better understanding of large library collections among the Virginia gentry, it will also be helpful to examine the Byrd library at Westover. While all of these historic houses were constructed nearly a half-century before Jefferson, Madison, and Washington complete their libraries, they provide an accurate backdrop against which we can observe the evolution of colonial architecture and how it was used by members of the Virginia gentry. Mooney successfully compares her prodigy houses to the broader colonial and European architectural contexts in which they are built, claiming this comparison “situates their design more precisely [and] accurately identifies the cultural sphere in which Virginia’s gentry operated.”³ She maintains that British architecture books offered aesthetic and

¹ Barbara Burlison Mooney, *Prodigy Houses of Virginia: Architecture and the Native Elite* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 10.

² Later chapters will show how George Washington used his library to make up for his lack of formal education, using both his library and his house as a way to supplement and retain his gentry status. Lounsbury, 81.

³ Marshall B. Davidson, *The American Heritage History of Notable American Houses* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc., 1971), 11.

social ideals for Virginia mansions and that their architects addressed issues such as privacy and room specialization out of a broader architectural system.⁴

The beginning of architecture in colonial Virginia is, realistically and understandably, an extension of rural British architecture. Most early settlers in Virginia came from villages and rural areas of England that still “lingered in the fading glow of the Middle Ages.”⁵ According to Marshall B. Davidson, their first homes reflected a persistent, albeit rudimentary and unchanging, medieval tradition “that centered about a principal room, or hall and its large fireplace.”⁶ The first framed houses in the English colonies were built in Virginia after the arrival of Sir Thomas Dale in his company in August 1611. This is not to say, however, that all Virginia houses looked the same; colonial settlers arrived from all over England and the vast differences in climate, geography and resources demanded adaptation of both material and style. Davidson maintains that each colony, particularly Virginia, “imparted its own accent to the common language” found in architecture books.⁷ In many Virginia homes, this “grammar of construction finishes” as Edward Chappell describes it in *The Chesapeake House*, can be parsed out for researchers from the arrangement of walls and passages down to the furniture, paintings, ceiling cornices, and door hinges.

⁴ Throughout the remainder of this thesis, the term ‘prodigy houses’, will refer to the aforementioned historic houses constructed by the Virginia gentry within the parameters that Mooney presents. To label them as ‘mansions’ tends to emphasize their size, but in this case, it is not their size but rather the conditions of their construction that make them significant. As a result, I will retain Mooney’s term. Later, the term ‘prodigy libraries’ will also be used to refer to the libraries contained in these particular prodigy houses.

⁵ Davidson, 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Davidson, 75.

For the Virginia planters who ultimately established the gentry, architectural endeavors were primarily drawn from the Georgian style. With origins in ancient classicism as reinvented during the Renaissance, Georgian style architecture presented formal architectural rules of proportion and symmetry known as Orders that had been filtered through several generations of European architects. Its earliest roots appeared in the Roman architect Vitruvius's *De architectura* and were adapted by Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio. His *Quattro Libri dell' Architettura* was first published in Italy in 1570 and presented strict architectural orders, a survey of public and private buildings, and a very careful study of Roman architecture. Palladio's *Four Books on Architecture* were among the most popular purchased by early Virginia architects; a pocket vision of *Book I* was published in 1663 and went through twelve editions by 1733.⁸ According to Davidson, "it was the realization of the designs in books more or less firmly rooted in Palladian principles that constituted what we call Georgian architecture."⁹ Palladio's Orders were also the primary inspiration for English architects Inigo Jones and John Webb. Jones and Webb's academic forms first appeared in a few provincial English houses from 1615-1640, "characterized by simple rectangular masses with double files of rooms, level cornice lines, hip-roofs, and uniform ranges of classic windows."¹⁰ According to architectural historian Fiske Kimball, Lord Burlington took a "fresh initiative of international importance" when his rendition of a projecting portico at Chiswick House outdid both Palladio and Jones "in purism and classical ardor" with his

⁸ Davidson, 89.

⁹ Davidson, 89.

¹⁰ Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1922), 54.

projecting portico.¹¹ It was not the first projecting portico in England, but Wilbury House in Wiltshire and several others adopted the practice soon after. From there, the Orders were diffused to minor buildings and finally vernacular structures during the reigns of Queen Anne and the Georges, when it finally achieved its title ‘Georgian’.¹²

Coincidentally, Vitruvius, Palladio, and Jones’s work all passed from one generation of architects to the next through books. Naturally, it spread to America the same way it spread to England from Europe; through the progressively more universal access to architecture books by intelligent workmen. In other words, the story of European architecture, like that of its American grandchild, namely the Virginian prodigy house, is a story of the accumulation of books.

Before we explore the significance of architecture books in the development of Virginia prodigy houses, we must pay homage to a more direct means by which European architectural designs made their way across the Atlantic. Both Mooney and French point out that personal visits by the gentry and the immigration of European architects to the American colonies were popular means of cultural communication.¹³ It is important to remember, however, that of the three houses explored in this study, Monticello is the only one whose owner visited Europe; neither Washington nor Madison ever travelled abroad. As a result, historians find in their libraries even stronger evidence for the influence of books and regular correspondence on their architectural preferences. Mooney expands on these figures in her own study, claiming that “of the seventeen

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Leigh French Jr, introduction to *Colonial Interiors: The Colonial and Early Federal Periods* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1923), iii.

individuals for whom the historic record is somewhat complete, two, William Randolph III and Thomas Jefferson, went to Europe after construction of their mansions. A significant number of patrons in the study group, 14, spent time in England, Scotland, or Ireland before they built their Virginia dwelling.”¹⁴

Jefferson’s tenure in France revealed numerous possibilities for Monticello II, the most obvious being the addition of the mezzanine, the dome, and the overall expansion of the house. While Monticello I had fourteen rooms, the existing structure has a total of forty-three; thirty-three in the house, four in the pavilions, and six underneath the south terrace. He incorporated the French *chambre a l’alcove* at his house in New York as well as at Monticello and Poplar Forest. At Monticello, he also built the earliest French elliptical salon in Virginia. Scholars have debated the significance and inspiration for this dome; while, the English version with an octagonal salon appeared in Morris’s *Architecture Improved* (1755) and *Select Architecture* (1759), Kimball claimed that it “owed its introduction in America to Jefferson.”¹⁵ In addition, the half-dome itself is very similar to the one at Chiswick by Lord Burlington, a known English Palladian.

Jefferson also advocated the construction of single-story houses to reflect the Roman style of single stories. Kimball suggests that this was ultimately a Palladian design, but Jefferson brought it back “from the Paris of 1785, when the Hotel de Thelusson and the Hotel de Salm were building.”¹⁶ Not only did he reconstruct the upper story of Monticello, he also eliminated second stories in his designs for Edgehill (1798),

¹⁴ Mooney, 198.

¹⁵ Kimball, 162.

¹⁶ Kimball, 190.

Amphill (1815), and at Poplar Forest¹⁷. Finally, Jefferson’s adaptations of the French rotunda were some of his most powerful adaptations. In a letter to Madame de Tesse, Jefferson wrote “While in Paris, I was violently smitten with the Hôtel de Salm, and used to go to the Thuilleries almost daily, to look at it.”¹⁸ Later, Jefferson incorporated the Hotel de Salm’s Palladian Villa Rotunda, as well as Lord Burlington’s rotunda at Chiswick¹⁹ and plate 15 of Palladio’s *Book II* (see fig. 2.1), into his 1792 competitive design for the President’s House (see fig. 2.2).²⁰

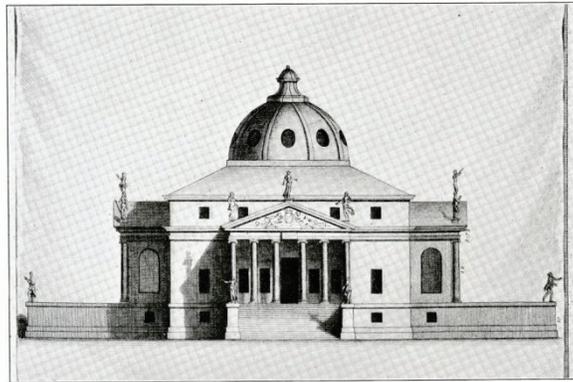


Figure 132. Elevation of the Villa Rotonda for Almerico
From Palladio, Book II, plate 15

Figure 2.1. Elevation of the Villa Rotonda for Almerico. Image from Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic*, 1922.

Books That Build Mansions

It is currently accepted among the academic community that a study of historic architecture in Colonial America, particularly in Virginia, cannot ignore the significance

¹⁷ Kimball, 190.

¹⁸ Thomas Jefferson, 20 March 1787 in *Thomas Jefferson: Jefferson Abroad*, (New York: Modern Library, 199), v.

¹⁹ The design for this rotunda also appeared in *The Designs of Inigo Jones... With Some Additional Designs* (1727).

²⁰ Kimball, 194.



Figure 2.2. Jefferson's drawing of the Presidential House. Image from Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic*, 1922.

of architecture books that rose in popularity among the gentry. Early twentieth century historians were the first to address the use of architecture books in the Virginia architecture, but in the 1970s, advocates of the vernacular architecture movement claimed that very few architecture books made it to America and that such an elitist perspective left out major contributions by local builders and their customs. In *American Architects and Their Books to 1848*, Kenneth Hafertepe and James F. O'Gorman re-address this issue and try to meld both vernacular and high-style perspectives. While it can be difficult to trace the wave patterns of architecture across the Virginia and greater American landscape, examining Virginia prodigy houses through the lens of period architecture books and pattern books can provide a reasonable standard for comparison.

Hafertepe and Gorman summarize the beginning of colonial architecture by saying that, "Architectural ideas fly on literary wings...books and, to a somewhat lesser extent, drawings [are the] primary vehicles of communication among architects as well as

between architects and their public.”²¹ They also suggest that due in part to the literary roots of these ideas in books and libraries, the “transition from colonial building practices to architectural professionalism was not a neatly chronological one.”²² As previously stated, style developments moved across Virginia in waves, yet a simple glance at the façades of these houses shows their respective commitment to the Orders of symmetry, proportion, and scale, in both their structural exterior (see fig. 2.3), floor plans (see fig. 2.4), and room use (see fig. 2.5). Connections between architectural books and the final product should not be overestimated nor is an extensive architectural study necessary for this thesis. However, for a general survey of colonial architecture to better understand the placement of these houses in the Virginia landscape, the similarities offer physical evidence of a meaningful conversation and active community among colonial architects and their patrons during this time period.

Bennie Brown’s essay in *American Architects and Their Books to 1848* offers a thorough analysis of the ownership of architecture books in Colonial Virginia. Although his research largely excludes Monticello and Mount Vernon, Brown utilizes extensive documentary resources, including “estate inventories and catalogues, correspondence and business ledgers, advertisements in newspapers and almanacs, and those original volumes that have survived in various collections” to determine what books certain populations owned in particular areas.²³ Popular eighteenth century titles included William

²¹ Kenneth Hafertepe and James F. O’Gorman, “Introduction: Architects and Books” in *American Architects and Their Books to 1848*, ed. Kenneth Hafertepe and James F. O’Gorman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), xv.

²² Hafertepe and O’Gorman, xvi.

²³ Bennie Brown, “The Ownership of Architecture Books in Colonial Virginia” in *American Architects and Their Books to 1848*, ed. Kenneth Hafertepe and James F. O’Gorman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 17.

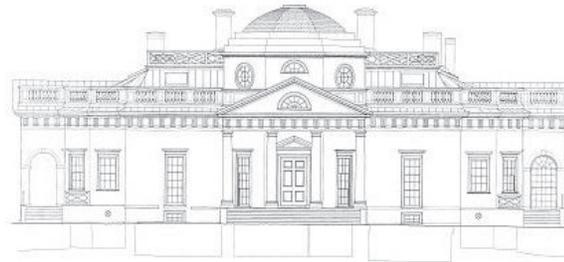
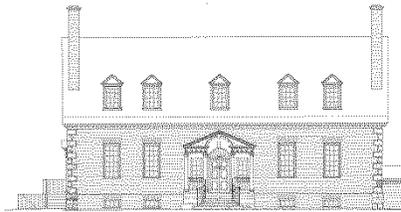
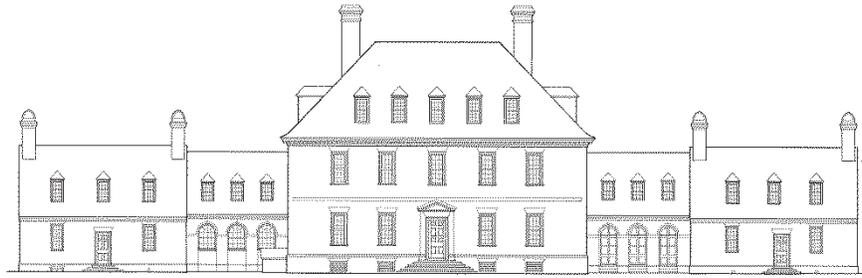


Figure 2.3 From top to bottom, Carter's Grove, Gunston Hall, and Monticello. Courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey.

Leybourn's *Platform for Purchases, Guide for Builders* (1668), James Gibbs's *Book of Architecture* (1728), Thomas Chippendale's *Gentelman and Cabinet-Maker's Director* (1754), and Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1715-25) which was owned in a three volume set by Martha Custis Washington's son, John Parke Custis.²⁴ The *Virginia Gazette* also advertized popular editions of Palladio's *Four Books of Architecture* (1738),

²⁴ Brown, 19.

William Salmon's *Palladio Londinensis* (1734) and *Harmonic Architecture* (1741), and Abraham Swan's *Designs in Carpentry* (1759).²⁵ By 1770, the Library Company of Philadelphia had acquired a number of British architecture books, including the first volume of Stuart and Revett's *Antiquities of Athens* (1762), of Major's *Ruins of Paestum* (1768) and of Wood's *Palmyra and Balbec*.²⁶ Brown's research also reveals that early architecture books in the American colonies included local adaptations of popular European works.²⁷ By the early nineteenth century however, the establishment of the Architectural Library of Boston provided sufficient evidence that American architects had developed a professional self-consciousness, one that understood the concept of designated spaces and architectural stratification.²⁸ Beyond the libraries of the Virginia gentry, Brown's essay addresses another Virginia architecture library in his article that is not nearly as extensive as the Byrd, Jefferson or Washington collections, but every bit as helpful for this study. William Bernard Sears worked as a joiner-carver under William Buckland during the construction of Gunston Hall for George Mason IV. Buckland "came to America as an indentured servant to supervise the completion of George

²⁵ Brown, 20.

²⁶ Jefferson had secured many of the same works between 1785 and 1795. Kimball, 152.

²⁷ Brown presents *Joachym Scughim of Architecture* as a prime example; its contents are actually Vincenzo Scamozzi's *Mirror of Architecture* (1669) as translated by William Fisher from the abridged Dutch edition of Joachim Schuym. Similarly, the earliest English translation of Palladio, compiled by Godfrey Richards in 1663 is listed as the only book Richard Brown of Lancaster County owned in 1717. Brown, 18.

²⁸ Martha J. McNamara, "Defining the Profession: Books, Libraries, and Architects" in *American Architects and Their Books to 1848*, ed. Kenneth Hafertepe and James F. O'Gorman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 71.

Mason's house...between 1755 and 1759."²⁹ He also had an architectural library that included titles by Langley, Salmon, Morris, and Swan.³⁰

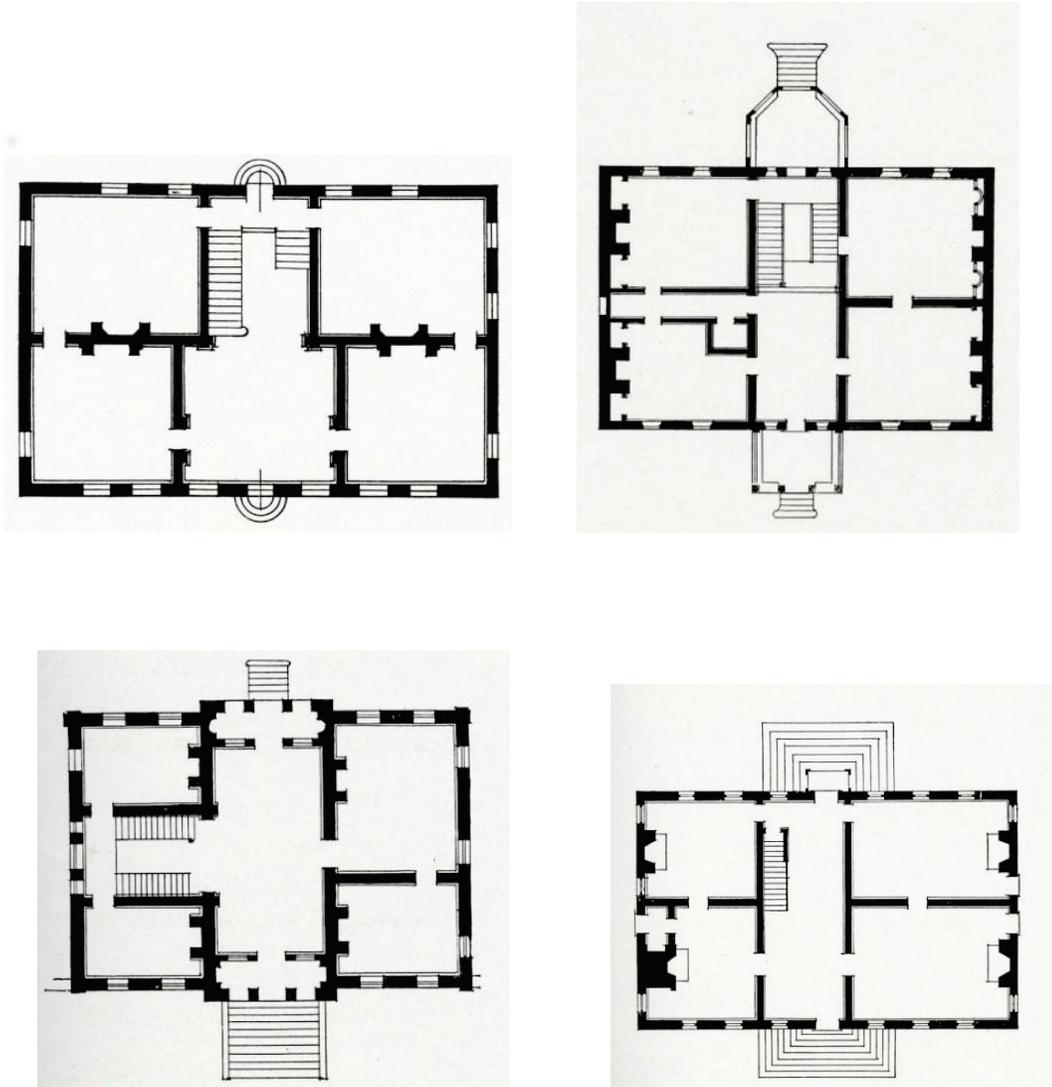


Figure 2.4 Above left, Carter's Grove; right, Gunston Hall; below left, Mount Airy; below right, Westover. Images from Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic*, 1922.

²⁹ Brown, 26.

³⁰ Lounsbury, 81.

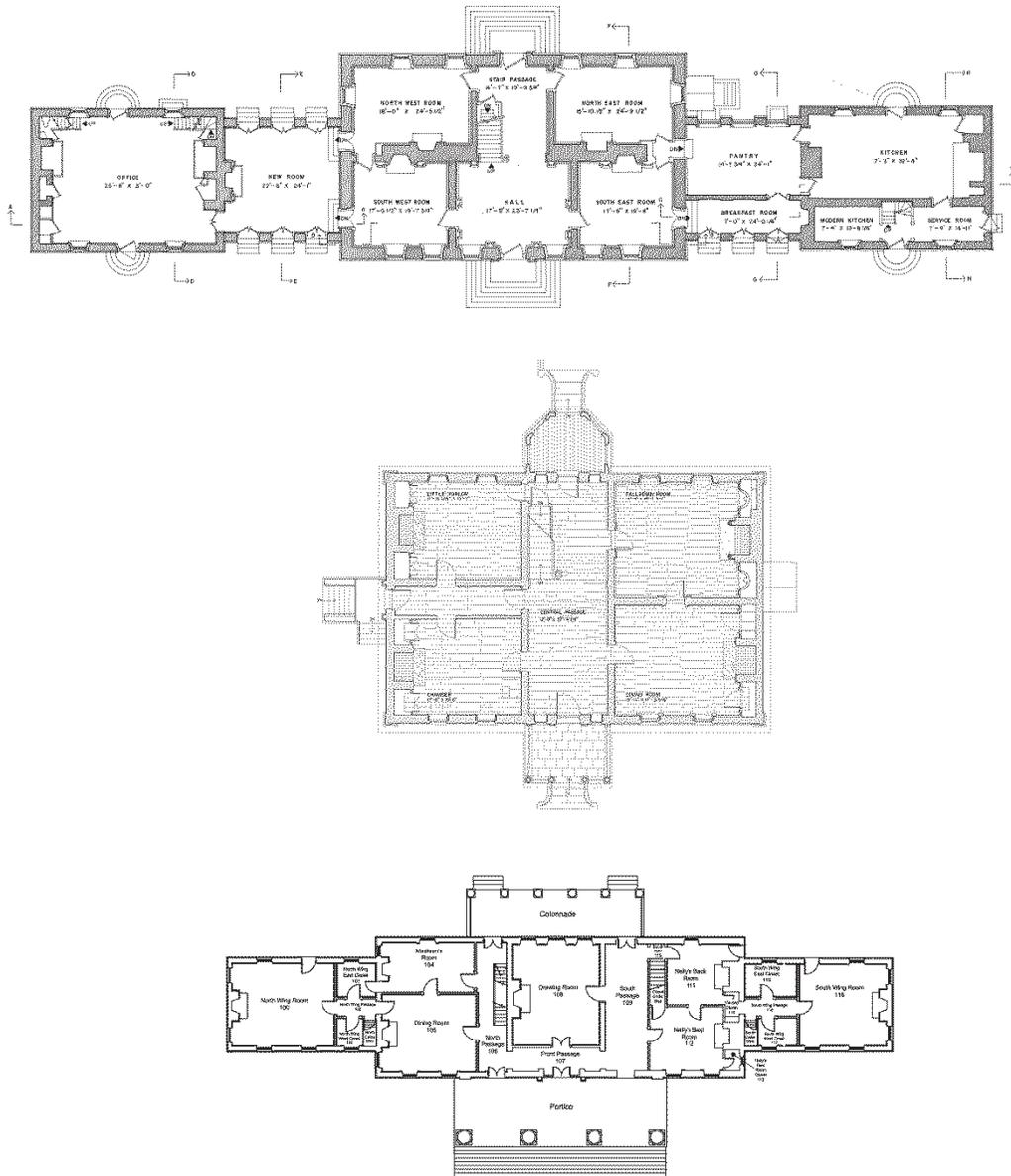


Figure 2.5 *From top to bottom*, Carter's Grove, Gunston Hall, Montpelier floor plans. Courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey and the Montpelier Foundation.

Brown suggests that Buckland would have naturally given Sears access to Swan's *British Architect*. Consequently, there can be no doubt that both Sears and Buckland were familiar with the Swan chimney piece George Washington especially selected for his

dining room at Mount Vernon in 1775. In August 1777, Washington wrote to his kinsman Lund Washington, “I wish you would quicken Lamphere and Sears about the Dining Room Chimney Piece (to be executed as mentioned in one of my last Letters) as I could wish to have that end of the House completely finished when I return.”³¹ While this letter affirms Washington’s specific attention regarding the choice of the Swan chimney piece as well as his desire that Sears be involved in the installation, it is also evidence of the architectural community among Virginia gentry whose language was found in the pages of architecture books. According to Carl Lounsbury’s essay in *The Chesapeake House*, it was not uncommon for building contracts to “single out specific features to copy [from architecture books or local trends] without describing them, fully confident that all parties would understand the standard form or manner of execution.”³² Interestingly, although this language was spoken by the gentry and their architects, it was understood by everyone who witnessed the final product. Lounsbury suggests that if uneducated visitors or immigrants did not have the resources or training to understand architectural technicalities, they “certainly understood from what they saw the symbolic significance of an arcade, cupola, or compass-headed window.”³³

For the purpose of this thesis, a few specific examples will demonstrate some of the parallels found between period architecture books and Virginia prodigy houses. Some of these examples are line-by-line replications while others may incorporate several ideas into one final product. For example, Mooney points out that architectural historians can

³¹ George Washington to Lund Washington, 20 August 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington*, ed. William W. Abbott and Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983-), rev. ser., I:335.

³² Lounsbury, 69.

³³ Lounsbury, 80.

identify “no less than six separate publications by Abraham Swan, Thomas Chippendale, Batty Langley and Robert Morris [in] the interior ornamentation of George Mason IV’s Gunston Hall.”³⁴ Again, the connection between British architecture books and the Virginia gentry’s final product should not be overestimated, but comparisons like these assist in creating an architectural backdrop against which individual houses can be explored while at the same time confirming the relevance of architecture books to the design and construction process.

One of the most basic indicators of the architectural hierarchy found in Virginia prodigy houses are the materials used in their construction. The traditional hierarchy of materials regarded wood as the lowest material, followed by brick, then stone as the most privileged.³⁵ According to architectural historian Camille Wells’ research of advertisements in the *Virginia Gazette*, 90% of houses in eighteenth century Virginia were made of wood.³⁶ Interestingly, Virginia prodigy houses, if not made with more privileged materials, were designed to look as if they were. Washington had Mount Vernon’s wooden exterior walls beveled and painted with a sand mixture to imitate ashlar stone. Similarly, Monticello is made of brick but Jefferson covered the new north entrance with incised plaster so that it would also look like stone.³⁷ This hierarchy of materials was reinforced by the Orders and their “ornamental vocabulary of classical

³⁴ Mooney, 216.

³⁵ Mooney, 30.

³⁶ Camille Wells, “The Planter’s Prospect: Houses, Outbuildings, and Rural Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 28, no. 1 (1993): 9.

³⁷ Mooney, 33.

architecture.”³⁸ While the Orders were strongly referenced in architecture books, they were also circulated through popular publications. The three porticoes outlined by Tuscan columns at St Philip’s in Charleston, South Carolina were featured in a 1753 issue of *Gentleman’s Magazine*, a popular periodical among the Virginia gentry; it appears twice in Washington’s probate inventory.³⁹ Fiske Kimball first began connecting Jefferson’s architectural designs to his architectural library in the 1910s and made one of the earliest connections between his design for Monticello I (see fig. 2.6) and plate 64 in Palladio’s *Book II* (see fig. 2.7).⁴⁰

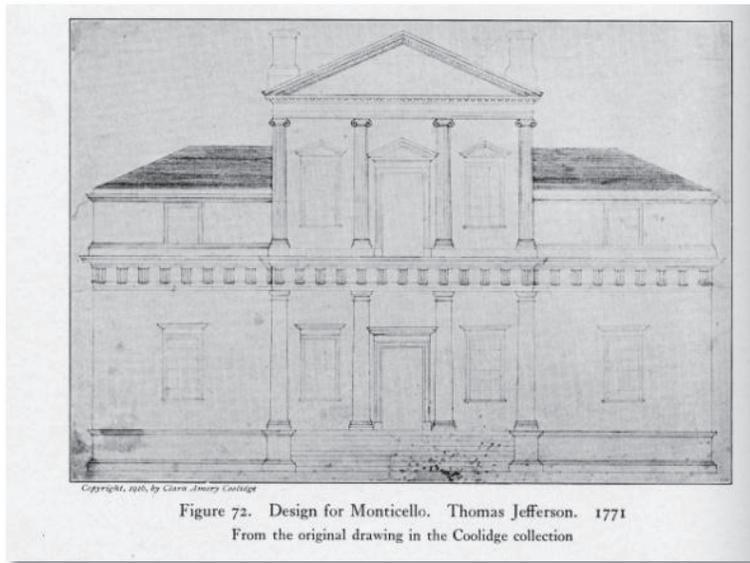


Figure 2.6. Jefferson’s design for Monticello I. Image from Image from Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic*, 1922.

In addition to structural influence, more specific evidence of the gentry’s use of architecture books can be found in decorative preferences. For example, Jeremiah Lee’s

³⁸ Mooney, 39.

³⁹ Mooney, 39.

⁴⁰ Kimball, 100.

‘mahogany room’ at Marblehead includes a mantelpiece taken line-for-line from plate 51 in Abraham Swan’s *British Architect* (see fig. 2.8). Similarly, elements of Swan’s plate

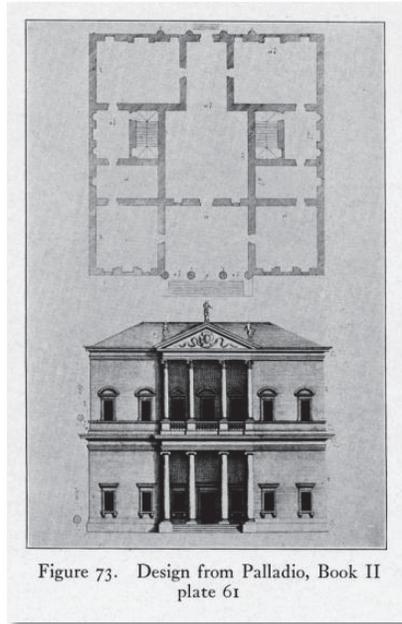


Figure 2.7. Design from Palladio, Book II, Plate 64. Image from Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic*, 1922.

50 appear in both the Mount Vernon dining room and the Brice House in Annapolis.⁴¹

Window designs are another decorative component of Virginia prodigy houses that can be directly linked to known architecture books. Several architectural historians have made the connection between the Venetian window in the Mount Vernon banquet hall (see fig. 2.9) and a design in Batty Langley’s *The City and County Builder’s and Workman’s Treasure of Designs* (1750) (see fig. 2.10).⁴²

To summarize the significance of architecture books in Virginia, Brown’s article suggests the existence of two parallel streams. The first can be summarized as the

⁴¹ Kimball, 125.

⁴² Mooney, 215.

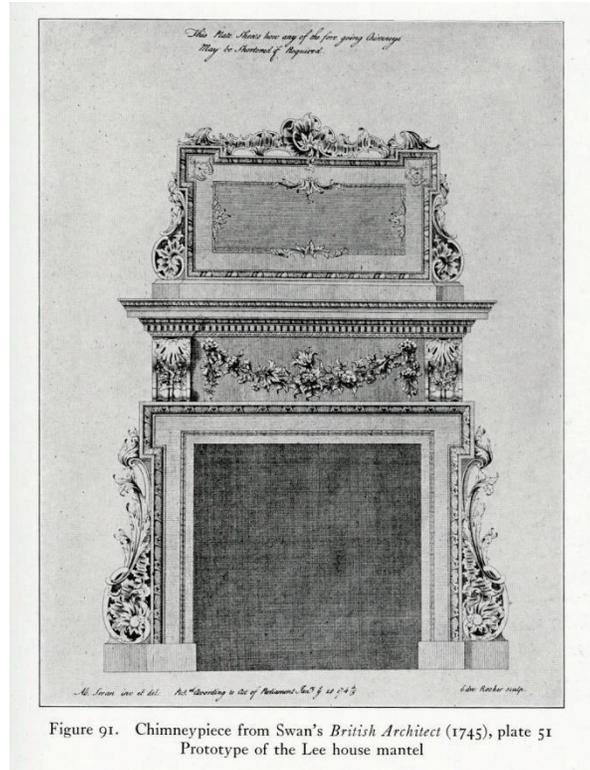


Figure 2.8. Chimney piece from Swan's *British Architect*, plate 58. Image from Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic*, 1922.

development of the architecture book in England in the seventeenth century and its relationship to the explosion of English architecture in the eighteenth century. The second stream is the “development of Virginia society as it progressed from unstable frontier in the seventeenth century to established colony in the eighteenth.”⁴³ Both streams involve the mutually inclusive relationship between the accumulation of books and cultural refinement. In other words, historic houses in colonial Virginia, particularly Monticello, Montpelier, and Mount Vernon, rest on the creative interplay between the growing popularity of the architecture book in England and the evolving social awareness of the Virginia gentry. All three houses embody specific moments in the synchronized development of these two moving parts. Rather than imagine them as parallel streams,

⁴³ Brown, 29.



Figure 2.9. Exterior of New Room window at Mount Vernon. Photo taken by Casey Schumacher.

one might imagine them as points of meeting between two dancers. In this case, these three houses show the moments where the two dancers are joined together in harmony, though constantly in motion.

Virginia Libraries

Now that an architectural backdrop has been created for our Virginia prodigy houses, our study can begin to focus on the particular rooms and spaces of study, namely personal libraries. The significance of the book market in colonial America, both in Virginia and beyond, has been explored by historians and scholars of print culture for decades. Franklin's Library Company of Philadelphia (1731), the Redwood Library and Athenæum in Newport (1747), the highly exclusive Library Society of Charleston (1748), and eventually the Library of Congress (1800) all confirm the eighteenth century's dual recognition of the importance of books and the desire to circulate them among the American public, albeit a limited public in some cases. The priority of freedom of the

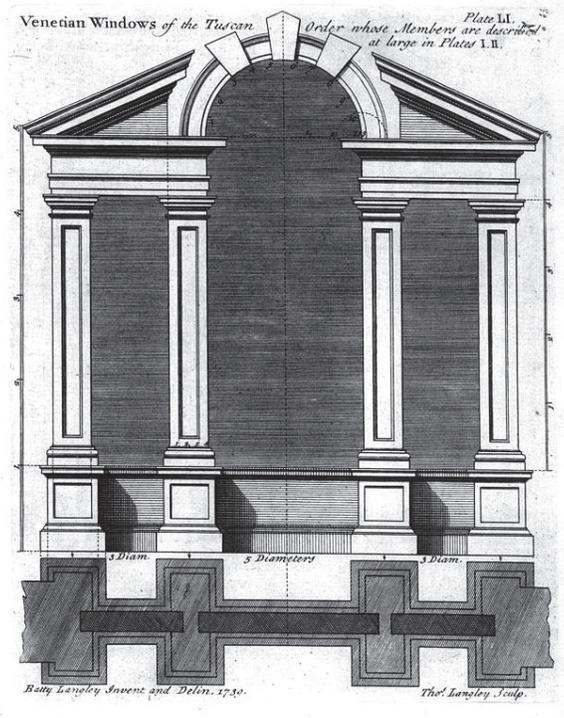


Figure 2.10. Design for a window by Batty Langley.⁴⁴

press in the earliest versions of the Constitution is yet another testament to the acknowledged power of the written word. For this study in particular, the most important fact is that substantially fewer lending libraries appeared in Virginia during this period, leaving the gentry to their own devices for collection and circulation. Due in part to the gentry's frequent visits to northern cities and the expansion of the book trade by this time, the owners of private libraries in Virginia prodigy houses managed to obtain many of the same titles as their northern counterparts. As a result, it is no surprise that as far as size and content, their private libraries were very similar to northern private libraries.⁴⁵ This is

⁴⁴ Batty Langley, *The city and country builder's and workman's treasury of designs, or, The art of drawing and working the ornamental parts of architecture* (1756), pp. Plate XXXIX.-Plate LIII

⁴⁵ According to Jackson Turner Main's *Social Structure of Revolutionary America*, out of 500 post-Revolution inventories in Suffolk County, NY, 322 or 64.4% contained books. Comparatively, a study of 455 Maryland estates between 1760 and 1776 showed that 63% included books. About 1 out of 6 of

not to say that private libraries in Virginia had large or extensive collections; after all, certainly not all private libraries in New York or Philadelphia had large collections. Rather, the general statement can be made that there were both small and large library collections in all of the colonies, each with respectively similar titles, but lending libraries were the keepers of knowledge in the north while in Virginia, the more wealthy, educated gentry held that honor. The three libraries at Monticello, Montpelier, and Mount Vernon demonstrate the continuation of this tradition. Moreover, their existence as both specialized and private rooms offers additional evidence of their importance to their owners.

Prior to the eighteenth century, most Virginians did not have large library collections, much less special space dedicated to them in their homes. In the 1930s, George K. Smart conducted a survey of the size and content of one hundred private libraries in Virginia based on inventories, the *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine*, and supplementary lists from the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*. The study focused on materials from 1650-1787 and examined not only the libraries of the gentry, but also those of farmers, lawyers, music teachers, and men from a variety of other demographics. Only twenty-nine of the one hundred libraries were completely unitemized; over half were partially itemized and about a third included

these men had only a Bible, but on the other hand 22 inventories listed 10 or more volumes. (Joseph T. Wheeler, "Books Owned in Colonial Maryland," *Md. Hist. Mg.*, xxxv (1940), 338.) In Virginia, exactly the same proportion of the inventories examined contained books, the slightly smaller number of book owners in the Piedmont being compensated for by a larger proportion in the eastern counties" (Jackson Turner Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 254). From these numbers alone, it cannot be assumed that most Virginians were as well-read as most New Yorkers, but the statistics do indicate that Virginians had access to just as many of the same kind of books as New Yorkers even if that access was achieved by entirely different means.

complete catalogues.⁴⁶ This information alone shows a distinct measure of interest in the collection, retention, and cataloging of books. While Smart's study reveals extremely detailed patterns in the topics of private libraries, his assessment regarding their size is more important here. From the libraries surveyed, the average number of titles was 106, but Smart is quick to point out that this number is very deceiving; a select few libraries with extremely large collections⁴⁷ hide the fact that "even comparatively well-to-do Virginians, planters or otherwise, [had] only a dozen or so titles in their inventories."⁴⁸ Incidentally, the only book all one hundred libraries had in common was a Bible; Smart claims "it is the only book everyone owned, and not uncommonly the only one."⁴⁹ His final conclusions reveal that most Virginia libraries, gentry or otherwise, were surprisingly small in quantity and naturally, required little or no designated space to keep them. This places the libraries of Jefferson, Madison, and Washington above and beyond those of typical Virginians not only in their size and scope, but in their location in specialized rooms.

In addition to being specialized rooms, Virginia gentry libraries were distinctly private spaces, hence their aforementioned seclusion from both probate inventories and the probing eyes of visitors. In *The Refinement of America*, Richard Bushman explains the vital role of courtesy and etiquette books in informing the Virginia gentry of the proper execution of refined behavior, yet he points out that "life in the courtesy books

⁴⁶ George K. Smart, "Private Libraries in Colonial Virginia," in *American Literature*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Mar., 1938), pp. 24-52 (Duke University Press: 1938), 27.

⁴⁷ Arthur Spicer of Richmond had 49 titles in 1600. Edmund Berkely had 102 titles in 1718. William Fleming of Montgomery had 209 titles and Daniel McCarty of Westmoreland had 109 titles. Smart, 33.

⁴⁸ Smart, 33.

⁴⁹ Smart, 44.

was confined almost entirely to the times and places of formal entertainment.”⁵⁰ Public and private spaces in Virginia homes were marked not only by the structure of the house, but by the decorative materials, furniture, and domestic goods designated to each space for particular use in that space. In some cases, obvious architectural barriers formed cognitive and social barriers; such as in Secretary Thomas Nelson’s House in Yorktown where two staircases seem to block access to the study from the ‘Best Parlor’, ‘Drawing Room’, ‘Hall’ and ‘Common Parlor’.⁵¹ Mark Wenger describes how, in a more subtle manner, the presence and absence of particular luxuries separated public spaces from private ones. In his essay *Town House & Country House*, he describes the vestry of St. Mark’s Parish in Culpeper County, Virginia, where surbase-height wainscoting was used in public spaces like the hall, dining room, and passage while private spaces like the chamber and study “were to have chair boards and bases only.”⁵² Public-private space distinctions like these were occasionally subtle, but often intended to be recognized by guests. In *The Chesapeake House*, Cary Carson maintains that these social signposts served to “partition the gentry house into specialized activity areas – public entertaining rooms designed for company, private apartments for family and intimates or special friends, and workrooms for the help.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 46.

⁵¹ Lounsbury, 66.

⁵² Mark R. Wenger, “Town House & Country House: Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,” in *The Chesapeake House: Architectural Investigation by Colonial Williamsburg*, ed. Cary Carson and Carl R. Lounsbury. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 137.

⁵³ Cary Carson, “Architecture as Social History,” in *The Chesapeake House: Architectural Investigation by Colonial Williamsburg*, ed. Cary Carson and Carl R. Lounsbury. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 23.

A final characteristic of these prodigy libraries was that, despite their owners' desires for seclusion, they were located on the ground floor rather than the second. Granted, the law library of the Todd House (1775) in Philadelphia included 350 volumes and was kept in a front room on the first floor.⁵⁴ However, by comparison, the Bishop White House library (1786) was located in a back chamber connected to a second floor bedroom. The popular John Sartain painting of the Bishop White study, showing books filling the presses, stacked on chairs, and piled on additional shelving above the doorway, is a common reference point for large libraries kept in small, overstuffed rooms. Similarly, it is generally believed that the James Logan Stenton library (1727), one of the finest in colonial America and a major contributor to the Library Company of Philadelphia, was kept on the second floor.⁵⁵ While these locations can be chalked up to a simple matter of personal preference or easy access, the differences are worth mentioning for this study.

The Byrd library at Westover provides an excellent and specific comparison for both the contents and layout of a large Virginia gentry library. Its scope and size were unparalleled in colonial America; Franklin and Jefferson's collections were comparable in size but as later collections, they were likely inspired by their predecessor at Westover. Collected over three generations and containing more architectural titles than any other pre-Revolution library, the Byrd collection numbered 2,345 titles after the death of

⁵⁴ Roger W. Moss, *Historic houses of Philadelphia : a tour of the region's museum homes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 43.

⁵⁵ Moss, 144.

William Byrd II⁵⁶ and 4,000 volumes when it sold in Philadelphia in 1781.⁵⁷ It included all the expected English architecture titles of a gentleman's library, as well as a few French ones; Sebastien Le Clerc's *Traite d'architecture* (1714), Andre Felibien's *Principes de l'architecture* (1676), and Gabrielle Perrelle's *Vues de plus beaux endroit de Versailles*.⁵⁸ There were also several Italian texts by Pietro Ferrerio, Filippo de Rossi, Alessandr Donati, and Justus Lipsius as well as two pattern books by William Halfpenny.⁵⁹ In addition to the architecture books, the Byrd library included volumes on history, travel, drama, medicine, divinity, music, philosophy, agriculture, gardening, etiquette, art, as well as an extensive collection of law books and English histories.⁶⁰ William Byrd II is credited with acquiring most of the titles in the collection, several of which came from his home in London. According to entries in his famous diary, he read three or four times daily, usually beginning the day with the Bible in Hebrew and some Greek.⁶¹

During the summer and fall of 1709, Byrd began designing and building his special library space. Interestingly, the Westover mansion is believed to be based on

⁵⁶ Kevin J. Hayes, introduction to *The Library of William Byrd of Westover* (Madison: Madison House Publishers, Inc., 1997), ix.

⁵⁷ Brown, 22. The sale of this library was comparatively well documented and curators at Montpelier have used it as a significant resource in recreating James Madison's library.

⁵⁸ Brown, 23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ John T. Kneebone, "Recovering William Byrd's Library: The First Virginia Library History Award," *Virginia Libraries*, Vol 46, No 2 (April/May/June 2000), https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/VALib/v46_n2/kneebone.html.

⁶¹ Hayes, 35.

Drayton Court, the Northamptonshire seat of the Earl of Peterborough⁶², where the library collection was housed in a long gallery on the second floor of the north-east wing. Similar to Drayton Court, Byrd's library also constituted one spacious gallery that eventually housed twenty-three walnut bookcases holding up to seven shelves each.⁶³ However, Byrd's library was built as a separate structure from his house, indeed it was completed before the actual mansion was begun, specifically to house his book collection. Upon its completion, the library-gallery was large enough to keep his American library, which at the time required "five or six days working both morning and afternoon to move all the books."⁶⁴ The London collection would not arrive until 1729. Unlike Monticello, Montpelier, and Mount Vernon however, Byrd's library-gallery was a much-used public space. He often entertained guests there and even described it as "very long-ten couples might dance in it very well...there is a fine spinet & harpsichord."⁶⁵ For the most part, the library-gallery was sparsely furnished, though it did include a couch and a trunk for keeping correspondence. Portraits of friends and family as well as many gilt vellum books lined the library walls, both of which were used as conversation points for his many visitors.⁶⁶

In addition to the unique use of space, Byrd's collection was arranged in such a manner that was well ahead of its time. While his earliest reorganizing and cataloging attempts occurred in waves and with only some accuracy, Byrd's arrangement represents

⁶² John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 4.

⁶³ Hayes, 37.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Hayes, 38.

one of the few examples of a library classification system before the mid-eighteenth century. In his text, *The Library of William Byrd of Westover*, Kevin Hayes explains that books were arranged by format and size with folio books grouped together on folio-sized shelves.⁶⁷ Cases were organized topically for the most part, one exception being Case Nine, which contained nearly the complete works of Robert Boyle.⁶⁸ Interestingly, Samuel Lee's New England library would later utilize similar topical classifications, as did Jefferson's second and third libraries at Monticello. Once Byrd's London collection arrived, he rearranged it and integrated it into his American collection.⁶⁹

For Byrd, the library reflected "home and permanence" and also re-created "the intellectual world he had known in England," yet Hayes maintains that the isolation bothered Byrd.⁷⁰ Considering its use as both a place of study and entertainment, it is apparent that the idea of a specialized, private space like Jefferson's Sanctum Sanctorum was not conducive to Byrd's more active lifestyle. William Stith's tribute to Byrd after his death in 1744 also reflects Byrd's willingness to open his library for use and visitors, claiming "that well bred Gentleman and Scholar...threw open his Library (the best and most copious Collection of Books in our Part of America) and was himself ever studious and sallicitous, to search out and give me, whatever might be useful to my Undertaking."⁷¹ In summary, it appears that although William Byrd II constructed his library within the early parameters of Virginia prodigy libraries, he adapted it to his own

⁶⁷ Hayes, 74.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Hayes, 67.

⁷⁰ Hayes, 68.

⁷¹ Hayes, 90.

personal needs, namely leisure, entertainment, and the circulation of his books among friends.

While it does provide a quasi-predecessor to the libraries at Monticello, Montpelier, and Mount Vernon, the library at Westover may be the exception that proves the rule; not all Virginia prodigy houses incorporated such specialized room use.

Although most architectural historians recognize Mount Airy (1758) as a model of English architecture in Virginia, so much so that it appears on nearly every art and architectural history syllabus in America, its lack of a designated library space stands in direct contrast to Westover and the three prodigy houses this thesis seeks to explore. Kimball describes Mount Airy as “perhaps the most ambitious house in the colony [with] coursed ashlar of somewhat varying height, with the central pavilion and trim of lighter stone in regular courses.”⁷² Mooney in turn describes its “tidy correspondence” to several Gibb’s drawings, particularly plate 58 in *A Book of Architecture, Containing Designs of Buildings and Ornaments* (1728), but claims that its “affinity to this famous Anglo-Palladian book...makes it atypical” because no other composition has such a strong connection to Gibbs’s book plates.⁷³ Mooney’s assertion is absolutely correct and vital for this study; for all its architectural attributes, Mount Airy’s conformity to English architectural trends makes it a less-specialized structure; the same is true at Carter’s. Granted, Mount Vernon does exhibit a strong commitment to British architecture books, as is evident in the Swan mantelpieces and the Langley Venetian window. However, Washington seems to use these pattern book designs for an altogether different purpose than mere conformity. A Polish traveler to Mount Vernon wrote, “The General has never

⁷² Kimball, 65.

⁷³ Mooney, 213.

left America...but when one sees his house and his home and his garden it seems as if he had copied the best samples of the grand old homesteads of England.”⁷⁴ For Washington in particular, the house’s exterior adhered to many of the rules of Georgian style while the interior reflected the social and personal needs of an active member of the Virginia gentry. In other words, Washington utilized decorative trends from architecture and pattern books insofar as they provided a stylish location to receive all of his and Martha’s guests, a major expectation of maintaining one’s place among the Virginia gentry. After all, the esteem of gentility can only be achieved in communion with other people; genteel conversation, decoration, and education are useless if no one is present to acknowledge and approve of them. Monticello and Montpelier also made use of several of the orders, but their interiors make deeply personal statements about their owners. Jefferson’s Monticello was a physical rendition of his life-long essay on architecture and included special spaces for his favorite guests and his large family. Similarly, although the façade in particular is textbook Georgian, Madison’s Montpelier was centered on an extreme attention to dual-family spaces as well as the need for quiet, personal spaces for studying and writing. For all three of these men, the need for additional “spaces where the life of the courtesy-book world could be carried forward” was taken into careful consideration, but they also felt the real need for privacy.⁷⁵ Consequently, it is no surprise that Washington, Jefferson, and Madison all made additions to their houses within twenty-five years of each other that included designated space for a private library as well as additional public and entertaining spaces. What these three prodigy houses reveal is physical evidence for the intentional adaptation of architecture book designs to fit their

⁷⁴ Davidson, 132.

⁷⁵ Bushman, 46.

individual needs as both as members of the Virginia gentry and as men who desired solitude to read, write, and think.

CHAPTER THREE

Eighteenth Century Print Culture and Twenty-first Century Material Culture

Print Culture

An important distinction Mooney makes in her text is that the authority and social refinement associated with prodigy houses was “only meaningful when it stood within a larger built environment.”¹ While her purpose in making this claim is to show how prodigy houses stood out within their less-refined plantation context, the same claim can be made for libraries within those houses as well as the books within those libraries. Once placed within the wider context of print culture and the transatlantic book trade, book collections and individual titles are better equipped to reveal the depth of their significance to their owners. Ultimately, understanding books against this historic landscape and exploring their meaning will provide a strong case for interpreting them as objects of material culture.

Architecture books represent only a small portion of the vast world of the eighteenth century book trade. Table 1 shows the ratio of various subjects among the one hundred private Virginia libraries in Smart’s study. By comparison, table 2 shows the ratio of subjects represented in Washington and Jefferson’s libraries. Finally, table 3 shows the results of Jackson Turner Main’s 1960s study, which examined over 1,800 inventories in Massachusetts, Virginia, and South Carolina to determine what percentage of members in various occupational groups owned books by the end of the eighteenth century. These tables provide statistical evidence of the ownership of books among

¹ Mooney, 11.

particular demographic groups as well as the popularity of various subjects among those groups.

Table 1. Genres represented in one hundred eighteenth century Virginia libraries.

Subject	Percent
Philosophy and Law	23%
Science and Practical Arts	11%
Classics and Languages	26%
History, Biography and Travel	15%
Religion	12%
English Literature	13%
TOTAL	100%

Table 2. Subject content of the libraries belonging to George Washington (GW) and Thomas Jefferson (TJ), courtesy of Endrina Tay, August 2015.

Subject	GW's 1799 Library	TJ's 1815 Library (1770-1815)	TJ's Retirement Library (1815-1826)
History & Biography	7%	20%	28%
Politics, Economics & Law	33%	21%	14%
Religion & Philosophy	14%	13%	17%
Travel Accounts, Geographies & Atlases	4%	8%	5%
Agriculture	14%	2%	3%
Science, Industry & Natural History	5%	9.6%	8.9%
Fine Arts & Architecture	?	2%	1%
Popular Fiction, Plays & Poetry	9%	11%	13%
Military & Naval Affairs	9%	0.4%	0.1%
General Reference	5%	13%	10%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

In the earliest stages of the American Revolution, the book market, like most markets, was primarily an international one. By the eighteenth century, Europe had solved the major problem of crossing, mapping and making money off of its resources out that in 1771, “British North America ranked as the leading export market for London

across the Atlantic. In *A History of the Book in America Volume 2*, Robert Gross points publishers, absorbing more English books than all of Europe did.”² The half century

Table 3. Results from Jackson Turner Main’s study.³

Group	Percentage Owning Books
Lawyers	100%
Ministers	94%
Doctors	94%
Esquires	85%
Gentlemen	80%
Merchants	70%
Farmers	68%
Artisans	58%
Shopkeepers	51%
Innkeepers	50%
Ships’ captains	50%

after the Revolutionary War saw an explosion of American printing in books, almanacs, and especially newspapers. The sudden shift away from European printing caused such a deep-rooted print patriotism that the Congress of 1814 was extremely hesitant to purchase Jefferson’s European bibliophile collection to replace their Library of Congress after its destruction in a fire. The House vote barely passed, 81-71 “and it remained adamant against subsequent bids to enhance those holdings.”⁴ In order to understand Jefferson, Madison, and Washington’s libraries, however, we must examine exactly what the 1814 Congress was hoping to avoid: European bibliography and the dangers associated with pre-Revolutionary print culture. As with Georgian architecture, extensive research has already been written on the history of the book and a lengthy history is not necessary

² Robert A. Gross, “Introduction: An Extensive Republic” in *A History of the Book in America Volume 2: An Extensive Republic, Print, Culture and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 13.

³ Jackson Turner Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 257.

⁴ Gross, 32.

here. However, understanding the significance of the book in eighteenth century England and France in particular will clarify the significance of the book in eighteenth century Virginia. In the words of historian Russell L. Martin III “Anglo-American book culture needs to be placed in a larger European context as well, for book history in early America was an international and polyglot phenomenon.”⁵ Many other historians have examined the history of the book in other publications, but for the purpose of our study, a brief history is necessary to fully understand the unique position of libraries of the Virginia gentry in the development of the trans-Atlantic book trade.

To examine the origin of the trans-Atlantic book trade is to observe the emergent strain between liberty and order. In mid- to late eighteenth-century Europe, the war between feudalism and privilege came to a head on the printed page at the hands of the European Republic of Letters. The founding principles for this school of scholarship first appeared in the writings of Aristotle, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Erasmus before coming to full blossom in the seventeenth century. From this school, historians trace the beginning of the development of western society. Naturally, the Republic of Letters gave way to an “explosive growth in scholarly publications.”⁶ The first Dutch book auctions were held in Leyden in the early 1600s and spread to Britain by the 1670s.⁷ While most of this chapter will address the book market in France, it is important to note that the French book market did not take off until the eighteenth century. The seventeenth century book trade, however, belonged to Holland and the Netherlands. Even at its literary height,

⁵ Russell L. Martin III, “North America and Transatlantic Book Culture to 1800,” in *A Companion to The History of the Book*, ed. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 260.

⁶ Rietje van Vliet, “Print and Public in Europe 1600-1800,” in *A Companion to The History of the Book*, ed. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 252.

⁷ Svend Dahl, *History of the Book, Second English Edition* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1968), 167.

France produced a rich harvest of literature, but that wealth was "...largely disseminated through books reprinted in Holland."⁸ Journals were dispersed among non-scholarly audiences, women and children became their own established reading groups and novels gained significant popularity, all by the end of the seventeenth century. By then, the American Colonies had presses in Cambridge, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Although they published mostly British government documents and sermons, America was also ripe for inclusion in the exploding book market. For the French, British, and American reader at the dawn of 1800, "there was so much knowledge available that books were needed in which that knowledge was systematically organized."⁹

Elegant book-binding had also began in Holland in the seventeenth century, planting the first seeds of a dual decorative-literary hierarchy for book collectors. Faint traces of baroque ornaments, dotted stamps, marbled endpapers, leather, and silk provided a standard against which the value of different publications, and by extension the social status of their owners, could be measured.¹⁰ As a result, eighteenth century French bibliophiles embraced the luxury aspect of book collecting, formally inaugurating the use of books as indicators of social status.¹¹ "The more the power of the French royal house increased, the greater and more luxurious was the book display at court."¹² In England as well, French fashions began to invade the book market. Englishmen under George I begin collecting and building public libraries, particularly the National Library

⁸ Dahl, 168.

⁹ Vliet, 253.

¹⁰ Dahl, 171.

¹¹ Dahl, 168.

¹² *Ibid.*

of Britain. In 1753, Parliament purchased Sir Hans Sloane's collection of books and manuscripts for the creation of the British Museum and established a Department of Printed Books in same year. Under George II, the library of the royal house was given to the British Museum "...and along with it the right to receive deposit copies of all books issued in England."¹³

For the purpose of this study, it is vital to point out that although book collecting was competitive by the reign of Louis XIV, French courtiers invested minimal interest in the literature itself and collected it in order to accumulate the popularity it provided. By the time of Louis XV and Louis XVI, this competition had begun to spread outward into the general public, but that public was actually reading what they were collecting. At this point, the French monarchy recognized the potential danger of educating their wider public and began to crumble under the weight of books they had on their own shelves. Two consequences, intentional and otherwise, arose from this literary development that are key for this particular study. The first is that the French court introduced book ownership as a status symbol. This was already an accepted practice in Europe, but its adoption in the French court reached its climax just in time for the Virginia gentry to begin thinking about book collecting and expanding their homes to include private libraries. The second consequence here is that the term 'public' becomes much more loosely defined and social boundaries become blurred very quickly.

According to historian Martyn Lyons, "The eighteenth century was the French century," but publishing there remained a dangerous scheme.¹⁴ According to historian Rietje van Vliet, censorship was everywhere, but it was still much less severe in Holland

¹³ Dahl, 193.

¹⁴ Martyn Lyons, *Books: A Living History* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011), 95.

and the Netherlands than it was in France “...where between 1659-1789 a total of 942 people connected to the book trade ended up in the Bastille.”¹⁵ Voltaire was sent to the Bastille prison in 1711 and 1726. The Paris Parlement also ordered the arrest of Jean-Jacques Rousseau after he published *Emile* in 1762. French royal censors had to approve everything a publisher put to the press. In 1700, that amounted to some 400 manuscripts a year. In 1750 it was about 500 and by 1780 it was 1,000.¹⁶ French writers were able to publish their work outside the French border, but it was difficult to get the final product back into France. As a result, their work was taken on by publishers in Switzerland, England, the Netherlands, even Russia, where Empress Catherine II paid 60,000 livres for Diderot’s library so he could continue his work on an *Encyclopedie*.¹⁷ Again, once they were published, returning the works to France proved difficult. According to Lyons, “an elaborate clandestine network ensured that contraband books and pornography travelled from Swiss publishing centres to reach readers in France.”¹⁸ Manuscripts fresh off the press travelled by mule cart over the Jura mountains where a merchant near the border could bribe customs agents into smuggling them over. Naturally, prices for smuggled books went up considerably, but as far as the French reading public was concerned, the price was absolutely worth it. As a result, the Age of Reason exponentially expanded book production and circulation, firmly establishing a large urban reading public by the time Jefferson arrived in Paris. By the time he left, literacy rates were inconsistent, yet

¹⁵ Vliet, 255.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Lyons, 102.

¹⁸ Lyons, 10.

the expanded at an almost uncontrollable rate.¹⁹ In 1680, only 29% of the French male population could read and write.²⁰ By 1780 that percentage had increased to 47% and by 1789 it had reached 90%²¹.By then, almost all white men in New England could read, but their literacy was born out of a largely religious context. At that time, 60% of English men and 40% of English women could read.²² Eastern Europe would retain far lower literacy rates until communist regimes took up the education mantel in the twentieth century.²³ Regardless of location in the book trade, literacy remained a globally-recognized ingredient of social status and urbanization in a world where books danced across borders and through loopholes of censorship.

Robert Darnton's *Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* discusses at length the circulation of censored works, particularly foreign commentary on the French political situation like the *Gazette de Leyde* in Holland, the *Courier du Bas-Rhin* in Germany, and Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet's *Annales civiles, politiques, et litt'eraires* in Brussels through the Swiss publishing house known as the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel (STN).²⁴ The STN worked around the police informers that carefully monitored taverns and public places for "...loose talk about current events."²⁵ According to Darnton's research, the STN generally represented the illegal trade of

¹⁹ Lyons, 96.

²⁰ Vliet, 251.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Lyons, 96.

²³ Lyons, 97.

²⁴ James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 66.

²⁵ Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (London: Fontana Press, 1996), 242.

enlightened literature in France; various components of its 457 titles made up 59% of customs confiscations, 60% of titles removed by police raids and 67% of the titles associated with clandestine catalogues.²⁶ The most popular forbidden titles circulated by the STN included Raynal's *Histoire philosophique*, Voltaire's *La Pucelle d'Orleans*, several pornographic classics, as well as many previously-unknown texts by Mercier, Linguet, Raynal, Helvetius, and Rousseau. The content of these books was mostly political, but philosophical literature broadly encompassed "theoretical treatises and general works, which criticized all sorts of abuses without being predominantly religious or political or pornographic in nature."²⁷ Similar to the journals and pamphlets, philosophical books moved quickly from topic to topic, condemned specific institutions, and held everything to a standard of reason.²⁸ Such a careful system of mercantile supply must first be triggered by a vigorous demand. Darnton asserts that "readers' reactions, though varied, tended to be strong"; such a distinct and careful system would not have been utilized without significant demand from the public sphere.²⁹

Darnton closes his study of forbidden literature by addressing the question 'do books cause revolutions?' He responds that eighteenth century readers read for different purposes; "...to be in fashion, to be informed, to be aroused for movement."³⁰ The rise of the public sphere as a distinct space for serious discussion and the mingling of private affairs with public institutions is evident in the evolution of European printing and

²⁶ Darnton.

²⁷ Darnton, 73.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Darnton, 217.

³⁰ Darnton, 224.

publication, particularly in France. “When the revolutionary crowd eventually stormed the Bastille on 14 July 1789, they found stacks of banned books ready for pulping.”³¹ Law, sex, moral values, and private life were all exposed to the public use of reason through novels, journals, pamphlets, newspapers, and reviews, distributed to the intellectually hungry through bookstalls, libraries, reading rooms, and lending shops not to be silenced by even the strictest censorship systems.³² This intentional blurring of the lines that separated the public and private spheres of enlightened Europe, partnered with the massive expansion of enlightened literature, marked the end of the Old Regime. “It had lost the final round in the long struggle to control public opinion. It had lost its legitimacy.”³³

Without a doubt the most influential publication to come out of France in the eighteenth century, and the one that Jefferson spent plenty of money sending back to the colonies, was Denis Diderot and Jean d’Alembert’s *Encyclopedie*. First released in 1751, the first edition included seventeen folio volumes, including eleven volumes of engravings, containing articles written by over one hundred and fifty members of the French literati. Rousseau contributed four hundred articles, Voltaire at least forty and Diderot himself wrote over five thousand. Far more than a compilation of information, the *Encyclopedie* “...was a manifesto for the rational thinking and social criticism of the

³¹ Lyons, 102.

³² In *The Library at Night*, Alberto Manguel also discusses various titles that have been banned over the years that are no considered popular, even classical works. Specific authors and volumes he mentions include Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black*, seventeenth cent Japanese classic *Comrade Loves of the Samurai*, and *Don Quixote* in Chile. *The Wizard of Oz*, banned among stricter religious circles for pagan beliefs and *The Catcher in the Rye* for its dangerous role models are among his list of once-banned American titles. For additional lists, Manguel directs his readers to the Catholic Church’s *Index of Forbidden Books*, published in Madrid in 1612.

³³ Darnton, 246.

Age of Enlightenment. It aided to disseminate up-to-date knowledge of scientific inventions and the practical arts, making new ideas and procedures accessible to any educated reader.”³⁴ Criticizing Biblical history, political institutions and “the parasitical position of the aristocracy”, the *Encyclopedie* threatened to cripple the French monarch’s power over his subjects in the same way Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* fired the first colonial shot into the heart of George III. ³⁵After the publication of the second volume in 1752, the French monarchy banned the *Encyclopedie*, but Diderot and d’Alembert continued to collect articles with the financial and political backing of such prominent figures as Catherine II of Russia and Madame de Pompadour. In total, all the eighteenth century editions together sold about twenty five thousand copies. While the explosive circulation of books in eighteenth century Virginia verifies their presence in Virginia prodigy houses, mere ownership of books does not disclose their purpose or function. A careful study of their use must also be included here if museum professionals are to make the connection from a particular title’s ownership to its meaning.

American history scholars have known for decades that the political, social, economic, and even religious foundations of the American Constitution are book-based. Forrest McDonald’s essay, *A Founding Father’s Library* describes the significance of the trans-Atlantic book trade in providing men like Jefferson, Madison, and Washington as well as Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and hundreds of others with the resources they needed to create the government of the United States. In addition to providing a firm foundation for government, the explosion of European print culture in the eighteenth century coincides with a drastic increase in social refinement among the Virginia gentry.

³⁴ Lyons, 107.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

For men like Jefferson, Madison, and Washington, one's house, clothes, posture and even their handwriting were, in the words of Richard Bushman, "perpetually on display...Everyone and virtually everything could be brought to judgment before the bar of refinement and beauty."³⁶ Libraries, books, and bookcases were no exception to this rule. In the words of Bushman, the gentry believed that literature, both fiction and nonfiction, was the purest source of refined behavior. "To own books implied sensibility, taste, even polish."³⁷ As a result, several portrait painters, including Charles Willson Peale, began depicting their patrons holding books, reading books, or standing near tables covered with books. Bushman even goes so far as to claim that in the eighteenth century in particular, "No single item was more essential to a respectable household than a collection of books, and no activity more effectual for refinement and personal improvement than reading."³⁸ In this way, personal libraries of this sort are a manifestation of the fact that the act of refining is refinement itself; in addition to the product, the act of educating oneself about refinement is the achievement of the standard.

Similar to Bushman, Rhys Isaac observes that history is the story of people doing things and the translation of the things they do is more than just words; it includes "gesture, demeanor, dress, architecture, and all the codes by which those who share it convey significance to each other."³⁹ As we have seen, conveying significance is a very familiar concept for members of the Virginia gentry; their houses, clothes, manners and yes, even their libraries become part of a life-sized theater intended to convey

³⁶ Bushman, xiv.

³⁷ Bushman, 283.

³⁸ Bushman, 282.

³⁹ Rhys Isaac, "Ethnographic Method in History: An Action Approach," in *Material Life in America 1600-1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 40.

significance and status. As a result, not just the gentry's specialized library rooms, but the particular titles visible to guests became two-fold indicators of status by their use on one hand and by their display on the other. In her Introduction to *A History of the Book in America, Volume 2*, Mary Kelley describes the significance of Polly Wamer's 16th birthday gift from her parents in 1765. The daughter of a prominent New Hampshire merchant and ship owner, Polly received a 155-volume library containing every subject that "other members of the provincial gentry were importing from Great Britain" as well as specially-crafted bookcases for storing it.⁴⁰ These included histories and some novels as well as courtesy and etiquette books, continuing the tradition of a right society, known as polite society, in which standards were successfully met by employing the right behavior. Although the contents of her library, as a northern ladies' library, include titles very different from those of Virginia planters, the significance of receiving such an exact collection upon her coming-of-age shows that Polly's reputation, like those of Virginia planters, rested on not only owning particular volumes, but knowing their contents, discussing them in genteel conversation,⁴¹ and displaying them where they could be seen by guests. Although libraries tended to be more private spaces, a Virginia planter's library could greatly contribute to his social status depending on the number of volumes, the variety of titles, the cost, and detail of the bindings and the amount of square feet it occupied in his house. In *The Chesapeake House*, Wenger claims that through the

⁴⁰ Polly's library included a 12-volume edition of Charles Rollin's *Ancient History*, a 3-volume edition of Lady Mary Wortley's *Montagu's Letters*, a four-volume edition of Joseph Addison's *Works*, a three-volume edition of Charles Rollin's *Belles Lettres*, three volumes of the *Ladies Library*, a total of 14 volumes of the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*, Isaac Watts's *Improvement of the Mind* which ironically included a chapter on the importance of books and reading, as well as William Darrell's *A Word to the Ladies*. Kelley, 53.

⁴¹ Her editions of the *Gentleman's and Lady's Key to Polite Literature*, the *Beauties of Shakespeare*, the *Essay on the Genius and Writing of Pope*, and the *Preceptor* were intended for particular use in conversation. Kelley, 53.

expansion of Mount Vernon and its library, “Washington was just one of many affluent Virginians rebuilding a house to achieve new levels of refinement in private as well as public living.”⁴² As previously mentioned, both Jefferson and Washington’s houses show the mutual expansion of the public and private aspects of their home at the same time; they both added private library space to the southern wings of their respective houses at the same time they added space for public entertaining and/or guest chambers to the north wings.⁴³ The common denominator here is expansion; every added room, whether it be public, private or locked, was larger than the original rooms. Most importantly, even if only a select number of guests were admitted to Washington’s study, they only needed to know that it existed in order for it to achieve its intended impression. Acquiring respectable titles or having certain volumes expensively bound displayed one’s affluence just as effectively as an imported chair, china cabinet, or teapot. Polly’s books lining her secretary bookcase shelves had calfskin binding, gold trim and the name *Miss Warner* stamped on the board of each volume. Simply owning them boosted her social status almost as much as knowing and practicing the codes of conduct and demeanor they contained.

Material Culture

Broadly speaking, to study material culture is to study objects, so the natural next question for museum professionals is ‘What qualifies as an object?’. Although museum professionals appear to have solidified an understanding of what is meant by ‘object’, preliminary research for this thesis revealed that books are rarely identified as objects of

⁴² Wenger, 150.

⁴³ Madison, by comparison, added private spaces to both wings of Montpelier; one for his mother and one for his library.

material culture by museum professionals. Indeed, they do not appear on the List of Artifacts in Ivor Noel Hume's *Guide to Artifacts in Colonial America* (1969), neither do they appear in Susan Stein's object catalogue for Monticello, *The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello* (1993). It would appear that for the most part, books are still finding their place in the material culture community and, by extension, museum interpretation. In some cases, interpretation that favors books as intellectual or academic resources, such as one might find in a library, seems more appropriate. In such a case, the value of a book is determined by the information contained within its pages rather than by its physical object biography. As a result, understanding books as objects of material culture requires a shift in how museum professionals define 'object', how they examine books, or most likely a bit of both. In the words of Michelle Stefano, "The term [material culture] is vague. What it means can be subject to unlimited interpretation, depending on the interpreter."⁴⁴ Similarly, the term 'object' can vary from one professional to another.

Interpreting objects inherently requires applying a sense of purpose and meaning to them. For most museum professionals, including Ian Hodder in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, an object's meaning is found in its use. As a result, the broadest categories of object identification are use-based. In his essay for *Material Life in America 1600-1860*, Jules David Prown claims that object value can be useful, aesthetic, spiritual or, as in the case of gentry refinement, a device to express attitudes toward other human beings or toward the world. Further, he claims that each of these sources of value can be either inherent or attached to the object and sometimes, value is so culturally fundamental

⁴⁴ Michelle L. Stefano, Peter Davis and Gerard Corsane, "Touching the Intangible: An Introduction," in *Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*, ed. Michelle L. Stefano, Peter Davis and Gerard Corsane (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2012), 1.

it is never articulated, only assumed⁴⁵. Adding to the confusion is the classification of value for books and if they are indeed to be identified as objects. Is their value in their use, aesthetic appeal, spiritual awareness, or the status that owning them portrays? Later in his essay, Prown identifies the following categories of objects: Art, Diversions, Adornment, Modifications of Landscape, Applied Arts or Devices. Unfortunately, our research of Virginia prodigy houses and libraries has shown that at any given time, prodigy library books could have fallen into most of these categories. Prown himself places books in the category of Devices, admitting that Devices tends to serve as a miscellaneous category for ‘problem’ items such as toys and prepared meals. This categorical discretion kills library interpretation in historic house museums. Situated as they are in Prown’s model, books pass almost instantly from being miscellaneous objects to misunderstood objects.

Robert Blair St. George claims in *Material Life in America* that material culture reveals “a history more about daily routine than about exceptional deeds.”⁴⁶ This observation supports Prown’s assertion regarding assumed object value. Naturally, objects that are used in a daily routine, particularly tools of communication, food service or dressing, have a profound assumed value that is sometimes unnoticed until the objects are lost or unavailable. It is very possible that many books in Virginia prodigy libraries may suffer from this assumed value, which explains why they have not been traditionally identified as objects. A lingering question throughout this study is that although much research has been completed and published on our Founding Father’s libraries as well as

⁴⁵ Jules Prown, “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method” in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (New York: Routledge, 1994), 20.

⁴⁶ Robert Blair St. George, “Introduction,” in *Material Life in America 1600-1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 3.

on the history of the book in America, why does museum-oriented literature seem to avoid treating books as objects? We have seen in the section on Virginia print culture that prodigy libraries in particular offer a wealth of information about their owners. Why is that information not making its way into everyday interpretational practice?

One of the difficulties of incorporating print culture into interpretation can be the dizzying attempt to create object biographies. Similar to other objects of material culture, the circulation, purchase, and exchange of books can be traced by examining financial ledgers, correspondence, and the greater archival record. Annotations or signatures on the titles pages provide other clues to identifying volumes that are but one of many that were printed. A more extreme example is Jefferson's removing large portions of scripture from his Bible.

Particularly at Montpelier, the document record has provided a great deal of metadata to curators trying to find Madison's library collection. Another source of object biography and meaning can be found in the object itself; for books, biographical clues lie in the method, detail, and location of their binding. For example, in an article published by *William and Mary Quarterly* in 2011, Francois Furstenberg explored Washington's position on trans-Atlantic slavery through a close examination of his bound collection of abolitionist pamphlets. Washington's inventory indicates that he owned at least seventeen works on slavery, all but one of them abolitionist. In his article, Furstenberg focuses on a particular volume entitled *Tracts on Slavery*, which includes six works that Washington had bound in an elegant calfskin with the title gilded in gold foil along the spine and signed in his own hand. Furstenberg goes on to explain that such artifacts can be considered as "both objects and intellectual productions... [combining] material and

conceptual approaches to the interpretation of textual evidence.”⁴⁷ In this particular case, the binding, order of appearance, and occasional margination in this volume all reveal significant information about their place in Washington’s collection, their use, and most importantly, their meaning for him. If the owner’s object meaning is already apparent in the object itself, this makes the interpreters job rather simple. In other words, if Washington believed this volume was of particular import, so should the keepers and interpreters of his collection.

Opposition or Confirmation?

The following chapters on Monticello, Montpelier, and Mount Vernon will bring to light these institutions’ respective answers to this question, but beyond their circumstantial reasoning, there remains a basic collections principle that can explain why books are not traditionally interpreted as individual objects. Simply put, if too much emphasis is placed on individual titles in a prodigy library, there is a danger of missing the forest for the trees or rather, the library for the books. Private libraries, like collections of similar china plates or Chippendale chairs, allow curators to explore collecting methods and arrangement for a group of objects in one place. Since libraries, similar to art galleries, are rooms specifically designated to house a collection, whether for practical use or aesthetic display, they contain a distinct, often intentional environment. If too much emphasis is placed on specific volumes, that environment becomes stagnant, empty and most tragically, forgotten.

⁴⁷ François Furstenberg. 2011. “Atlantic Slavery, Atlantic Freedom: George Washington, Slavery, and Transatlantic Abolitionist Networks”. *The William and Mary Quarterly* 68 (2). Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture: 247–86. doi:10.5309/willmaryquar.68.2.0247., 249.

In his book *The Library at Night*, Alberto Manguel discusses several different lenses through which observers can interpret personal libraries which, when partnered with Susan Pearce's essay in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, can give us a starting point for exploring libraries and books as spaces and objects of material culture.⁴⁸ In his book, Manguel explores fifteen characteristics of both ancient and modern libraries, including the library as myth, order, space, power, shadow, shape, chance, workshop, mind, island, survival, oblivion, imagination, identity, and home. Each characteristic is explored in a different chapter and all of them refer to library collections as whole entities, focusing on the environment they create for those who enter its sacred space, which Manguel describes as "pleasantly mad places."⁴⁹ The creation of library environments are fluid for Manguel and the potential for their expansion and change is limitless. He describes the range of library environments from the intentional and static to the evolved, inadvertent, and secret. Throughout his text, Manguel makes it very clear that he views libraries as living spaces; he would absolutely echo Carlos Maria Dominguez's sentiment that "To build up a library is to create a life. It's never just a random collection of books."⁵⁰ As a result, he stands in direct opposition to Columbia University's librarian Patricia Battin. Battin, a strong advocate for the microfilming of books, claims that "the value of the proximity of the book to the user has never been

⁴⁸ While Manguel is an internationally recognized anthologist, novelist and editor, he is neither a historian nor a museum professional. As a result, he presents a uniquely artistic and passionate view of libraries that is not often found in academic writing. However, his research is undeniably thorough and his view of the library as a possible connection between the owner and the visitor qualifies his study for inclusion in this thesis. Historic houses and the collections they contain both seek to connect their visitors with the character and person of its historic owner. Manguel adds an emotional depth to that encounter that Pearce seems to glimpse in her essay, but I believe both of them present unique perspectives on material culture that most museum professionals do not often explore.

⁴⁹ Alberto Manguel, *The Library at Night*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 4.

⁵⁰ Carlos Maria Dominguez, *The House of Paper* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005), 35.

satisfactorily established.”⁵¹ Naturally, many research-focused librarians maintain this view; if the value of a book is limited to the information it contains, there is no need to preserve the book itself, only the words on its pages. Manguel believes this mindset has caused the demise of the ancient library; it is now “considered less a living entity than an inconvenient storage room.”⁵² For him, the library does not just contain the experience of reading, it is the experience itself.

In a rare moment of unity between libraries and material culturalists, Manguel’s romanticized view of library spaces and collections falls in with Susan Pearce’s idea of collections, particularly those containing souvenirs and fetish objects. Pearce maintains that object collections can form a very intentional cluster of souvenirs, fetish objects or what Pearce describes as systematic collections in which objects gain significance by their affiliation with the other objects in the collection. For Pearce, souvenir collections in particular represent the subordination of the object to a romantic vision of the owner and fetish collections represent the subordination of the owner to a romantic vision of the objects.⁵³ Not only would Manguel agree with Pearce that books can fill the roles of both souvenir and fetish objects at any given time, he would also agree that their romantic affiliations, whether directed at the books themselves or at the owner, confirm their position as dynamic, living collections. Curators and interpreters alike must remember the value, character, and experience of library collections as whole entities when displaying and presenting them for visitors.

⁵¹ Manguel, 75.

⁵² Manguel, 224.

⁵³ Susan M. Pearce, “Objects as Meaning; or Narrating the Past” in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (New York: Routledge, 1994), 22.

Up to this point, this thesis has made a strong case for the recognition of eighteenth century personal libraries and book collections as objects of material culture, despite preliminary research indicating the contrary among museum professionals. We have seen that the expansion and careful decoration of parlors, dining rooms, and front halls displayed an intended level of refinement to the visitors of Virginia prodigy houses. The preceding chapter has shown that both the structural and literary expansion of one's library could achieve the same effect and the following chapters will explore how curators at Monticello, Montpelier, and Mount Vernon have chosen to incorporate this information into their every-day interpretational practices. Although preliminary research indicated that books and libraries have been left out of conversations about historic houses and material culture, visits to each of these houses revealed that, for the most part, historic house museum staff maintain an educated appreciation for personal libraries and a desire to interpret them as thoroughly and effectively as their institutional missions allowed.

CHAPTER FOUR

Monticello

Introduction

We have seen in the previous chapters that it is appropriate to recognize the products of eighteenth century print culture as both tools for learning and as displayed items with powerful social significance. As in any library, the contents of Jefferson, Madison, and Washington's libraries found value in their use, but we have also seen that their value extended to their display and circulation. This opens up the possibility of examining their books not only as objects of material culture, but as decorative arts as well. Of course, when examining the different methods of interpretation among these three libraries, it is vital to remember their existence as collections, not just individual volumes that happen to be in close proximity with one another. Similarly, we have seen that the location and use of library spaces varied from the extremely decorated and welcoming to the extremely private and practical. Elements such as the library's location within the house, including the second-floor precedent set by many keepers of large libraries in the north, as well as the books' location within the library and additional furnishings all have something to teach museum professionals and visitors about the habits and character of the owner. The contents of Jefferson, Madison, and Washington's libraries seem to reflect highly efficient, practical spaces with very little in the way of decoration or visitor hospitality. These elements and similarities, considered all together within their historic context, are the foundation for the following case study of

interpretational methods at all three libraries. My case study begins with Thomas Jefferson's Monticello.

First conceived when Jefferson was only a teenager and constructed over several years as his essay in architecture, Monticello represents a political, social, and architectural epicenter in the Colonial period, albeit decidedly in the south. Compared to his peers, Jefferson was a jack of all trades and a master of several. "To the end of his life, his opinions on many subjects varied as his experience ripened."¹ Jefferson's travel did not, thankfully, negate his desire for books but rather fed the flames of his burning desire for continuous education and research. "He learned many languages, built one of the great eighteenth century libraries and was warmly claimed by the French intellectuals as a fellow *philosophe*."² He has been called a philosopher, scientist, designer, architect, linguist, educator, farmer, horticulturist, man of letters, and bibliophile, classicist, lawyer, musician, indefatigable letter-writer, diplomat, and philosophical statesman. The variety and depth of these areas of expertise does not pronounce Jefferson in history nearly as much as how often they seemed to oppose one another. He was a rare breed of Virginian nationalist, a slave-owner obsessed with freedom, an aristocratic democrat, a practical idealist, and a pacific imperialist.³ Even to researchers, the man is exhausting. The collection of books and personal papers which contribute to, summarize, and detail Jefferson's character are virtually endless and it has taken collections managers and interns several years to work through his notes, publications, and correspondence. If one

¹ Beth L. Cheuk, ed., *Thomas Jefferson's Monticello* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), xvii.

² Cheuk, xviii.

³ Cheuk, xix.

were to try to summarize Jefferson's way-of-being, they may say he was an intensely thoughtful and rigorous learner who wrote everything down but found his deepest pleasure in the simple pleasures of his plantation life. If any single room in Monticello summarizes this attitude and makes it tangible to visitors, it is Jefferson's personal library.

Jefferson in France

In order to understand Jefferson's library as Manguel suggests, that is as a holistic space of history, being, and projecting, I must address Jefferson's experience in France. "It can be argued that we perceive the world in one of two ways," Manguel suggests, "as a foreign land or as home – and that our libraries reflect both these opposing views."⁴ His assessment summarizes Jefferson's experience. An avid reader and devoted student from an early age, even Jefferson would agree that the most important stage of his intellectual life began with his career in France. Jefferson arrived in Paris as the new nation's minister to France in August 1784. The Declaration of Independence was written and signed, the war won, the Constitution still in various stages and scraps of paper scattered across James Madison's desk at Montpelier. Jefferson lived in Paris for five years and it changed him forever. When he arrived, he joined John Adams and Benjamin Franklin in the effort to negotiate as many "treaties of amity and commerce as they could."⁵ The three of them made quite a trio in France and although the French loved Benjamin Franklin, Jefferson was considered the most honored. Adams was known to have been exceedingly jealous of Franklin's early success and popularity in Paris as the symbol of

⁴ Manguel, 309.

⁵ Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and the Rights of Man* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951), 3.

America in French court. For the French, Franklin had “not only drawn lightning from the skies...he had also wrested the scepter from the tyrant’s hand.”⁶ Jefferson, however, did not appear overly concerned about replacing Franklin as the ambassador to France. At any rate, he did his part in showing his French counterparts the more sophisticated capabilities of the Virginia gentry; he put aside Franklin’s beaver cap for the civilized attire and manners of French society, built a gorgeous French apartment, and did his best to blend in. According to Monticello’s Assistant Curator Emilie Johnson, “Jefferson had to work very hard to project a persona of stability and gentility when he was in France. Franklin used [European] stereotypes...to his advantage, but that [was] not Jefferson’s style. He was buttoned up with a white wig, playing courtier...because he [needed] to be able to sit at the same table with all these European countries and speak with them one to one.”⁷ Similar to the gentry in England and Virginia, the French court had its own language of gentility that Jefferson mastered more so than any previous American diplomat. As a result, his success in France was much more social and material than political. As Johnson put it, “He skated through politically. He definitely did some excellent American public relations, but for the most part, he had a great time, bought a lot of things and made some great friends.”⁸

Consequently, the social and literary culture Jefferson encountered in France was of far greater significance than what he was able to accomplish diplomatically. Although Jefferson’s arrival in France was complicated by illness, his entrance into French society began with Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette and the royal family during his first ceremonies

⁶ Malone, 34.

⁷ Emilie Johnson, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 7, 2015, transcript.

⁸ *Ibid.*

at Versailles as Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States to the Court of His Most Christian Majesty.⁹ His connections at the French court no doubt brought him into the more intimate circles of the *philosophes* and literati whose names we most often associate with the French Revolution. Unfortunately for Jefferson, he was unable to meet Rousseau, for the man had died six years before Jefferson arrived in Paris.¹⁰ In addition, Diderot died only a week before his arrival; a meeting between these two men would no doubt have been an exciting occasion, considering Diderot's contribution to the French reading public and Jefferson's large investment in sending several copies of Diderot's *Encyclopedie* back to Virginia. In any event, he certainly met plenty of the *philosophes* including the Marquis de Condorcet, Lafayette and La Rochefoucauld.¹¹ These friends "constituted for him the triumvirate of liberal aristocrats throughout his stay in France."¹² No doubt Jefferson also established connections with some of the foreign publishers smuggling pamphlets and essays back into France from Holland and the Netherlands. Many of these foreign contacts welcomed Jefferson and carried on extensive correspondence with him after his retirement from France. As Malone puts it, "the French were glad to get Jefferson if they could not keep Franklin."¹³

A key component of Jefferson's time in France was negotiating trade agreements. It cannot be forgotten that in addition to being a plantation owner, statesman, architect

⁹ Malone, 14.

¹⁰ Malone, 14.

¹¹ Furstenberg's article elaborates on both Washington and Jefferson's French connections, providing an example of the vast foreign culture of letters in which Virginia gentrymen were obliged to participate in this period.

¹² Malone, 15.

¹³ Malone, 35.

and man of letters, Jefferson's political career was largely based upon financing a new nation. Very early in his career, Jefferson immediately realized the potential problems of Americans doing 75% of their trade with England. As a recently politically independent nation, America was still very financially dependent on the mother country. Jefferson recognized that England had the readiest credit but as a Virginian he was also aware that their market was not as dependable. To paraphrase one of his letters to Madison, Jefferson insisted that America take hold of financial opportunities with France and never let go. At one point, he declared that the French "...love us more than they love themselves."¹⁴ In light of the previous chapter on print culture in pre-revolution France, Jefferson's connections with French political society and, by extension, the French book market, were at the epicenter of his own personal library at Monticello.

Acquiring and maintaining beneficial trade agreements with France was not the only French advantage Jefferson acquired for his home country. Europe was changing very quickly and Jefferson certainly made his own dent in the French foreign book trade for all the volumes he sent back to his American counterparts to keep them up to speed. The bulk of his cargo included Diderot's *Encyclopedie Methodique* and his primary recipient was none other than James Madison. The *Encyclopedie* subscription lists were still open when Jefferson arrived in France, and "about 2/5 of the projected sixty volumes were ready."¹⁵ While Madison was not the only benefactor of Jefferson's spending, he received nearly two hundred books from Jefferson on almost every topic they had previously discussed in their correspondence. Before his friend departed for the best book market either of them had ever seen, Madison had "pored over the catalogue of

¹⁴ Malone, 46.

¹⁵ Malone, 86.

Jefferson's own library, which included items wanted but not yet bought, and they had undoubtedly talked enthusiastically about future acquisitions."¹⁶ Madison also hinted in his letters to Jefferson that he was glad to receive anything "old and curious or new and useful."¹⁷ Interestingly, though both men left their plantations hopelessly in debt upon their deaths, Jefferson seems to have been in Madison's debt fairly early in their friendship and their correspondence indicates that Madison was willing to have the books he received taken out of Jefferson's debt¹⁸. For two men so eager to learn and anxious for their new nation's stability, it seems perfectly fitting that the author of the Declaration of Independence should repay his debts to the future author of the Constitution by supplying him with all the necessary literature for securing their common objective. Theirs was absolutely a team effort.

The power-duo of Jefferson and Madison is essential in understanding these key years of development in American history. Jefferson was in France while Madison was drafting the Constitution and yet through the systematic and continually more specialized Atlantic book trade, Jefferson was able to contribute to American political discourse. Madison received large doses of natural science, Pascal, Voltaire and Diderot to add to his already expansive collection of literature on Ancient Rome. Both were in a position to witness "history in the making at a time when supremely important history was being made."¹⁹ A few Revolution-era historians argue that the Revolution would not have been won without the assistance of the French Navy, however, examining Jefferson and

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Madison to TJ, Apr. 27, 1785 (Hunt, II, 133).

¹⁸ Malone, 86.

¹⁹ Malone, 180.

Madison's personal library in the context of the Atlantic book trade will show that the French contribution to American independence truly tips the scale in their long-term favor with their books. In 1789, of course the French Revolution coincides with the completion of the Constitution; two major movements of liberty, both primarily book-based. We cannot ignore this relationship between Jefferson and Madison, mirrored in the culminating events of 1789. We cannot fully appreciate one without recognizing the contribution of the other and we cannot explore the personal libraries of Jefferson and Madison without acknowledging the central role of the French book market in their success.

Although Jefferson and Madison both likely realized the significance of the pot of gold they had accessed in the French book market, Jefferson did not realize how immediately his nation would require his aid until he returned from Paris. When he landed at Norfolk on November 23rd, 1789, he had no idea that he had missed Washington's October letter notifying him that he had been appointed Secretary of State. According to Malone, Jefferson "thought of his international experience as no mere preparation for a particular sort of statecraft. Since it was a part of life he valued it for its own sake, and its significance extended far beyond technical diplomacy. He was more than a technician, more than a statesman as we ordinarily use the term. He was an omnivorous and highly sensitized mind and he had lived in a cockpit of ideas and world seat of culture."²⁰ Having just returned from "a continent in the first throes of revolution", Jefferson had all the information he needed to ensure the survival of the country of his

²⁰ Malone, 247.

birth.²¹ Once his political career was over, all of that heart, ambition, and undying commitment to the cause of freedom refused to die; his library is chock-full of the evidence.

Building Monticello

Jefferson's father died when he was only a teenager and as the oldest son, the estate passed to him. He was already conceiving ideas for Monticello by the time he was twenty and by age twenty-five, he had begun drawing out the first few pages of his *Essay on Architecture*. While this particular thesis is not focused on Jefferson's architectural talent, one cannot discuss any part of Monticello without addressing its architectural genius. After all, as the home of the father of national architecture, one simply cannot escape it; each room was designed with great care and, no doubt, for a great purpose. However, I only mention the architecture of Monticello here insofar as it reflects the extreme importance Jefferson placed on his library and the variety of ways he incorporated it into his everyday work. Quite literally, it was nearest and dearest to his heart most of the time and he made many architectural exceptions to keep it so.

Jefferson began collecting books as early as 1772 and his first purchase was James Gibbs's *Book of Architecture*.²² Gibbs was "...the first British architect to publish a book devoted entirely to his own designs [independent of the orders]."²³ His architecture collection also included other proponents of the orders, including five editions of Palladio's *Quattro Libri*, two of which were in French. As an innovator and

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Susan R. Stein, *The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1993), 12.

²³ Eileen Harris, *British Architectural Books and Writers 1556-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

master of merging ideas with imagination, Jefferson spent most of his life redesigning Monticello based on the variety of architecture books he had in his library as well as the various buildings he saw in France. The first drawings for Monticello, incidentally, were very similar to designs found in his architecture books; the front is almost an exact replica of Palladio's Villa Pisani, which appeared in Leoni's edition of the *Quattro Libri* (see fig. 4.1).²⁴The final design for Monticello I also incorporated aspects of Gibbs's *Rules for drawing the several Parts of Architecture*.²⁵ Conveniently, about the time Jefferson completed Monticello I, his political career took him to France, where he encountered persistent inspiration to continue modifying his designs.

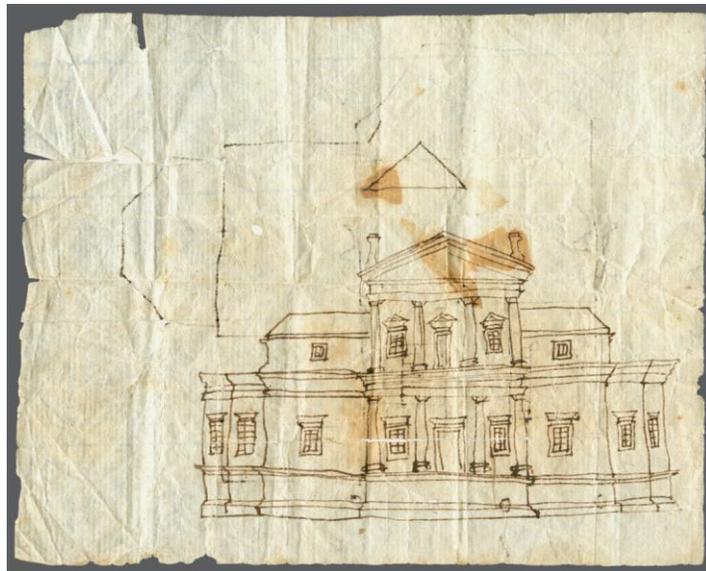


Figure 4.1. Thomas Jefferson's early rendering of Monticello I. Courtesy of Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello.

Jefferson's desire to continuously remodel and finish Monticello is indicative of and reflected in his desire to accumulate a library that would, in a sense, both build the

²⁴ William Howard Adams, *Jefferson's Monticello* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1983), 47, 49, 55.

²⁵ Stein, 14.

house and fill it with evidence of his life, career and character. His education at William and Mary from 1760-1762 immensely aided his book collecting and reading, a process he kept strict record of and noted his favorite passages in his Literary Commonplace Book.²⁶ From his voluminous notes, researchers have discovered several new details about his reading list. For example, they know he was reading Lord Bolingbroke's *Philosophical Works* as well as some eighteenth century poetry while he was studying law with George Wythe.²⁷ Much to Jefferson's dismay, a fire at his childhood home, Shadwell house, in 1770 destroyed all of his books, but we know from his notes that he had acquired 1,256 volumes by August 1773. This literary recovery repeated itself throughout Jefferson's life and he made a point to record the details of each new change and transition. His library was certainly given a massive influx upon his arrival in Paris. In a letter to Samuel H. Smith, Jefferson writes,

While residing in Paris, I devoted every afternoon I was disengaged, for a summer or two, in examining all the principal bookstores, turning over every book with my own hand, and putting by everything which related to America, and indeed whatever was rare and valuable in every science. Besides this, I had standing orders during the whole time I was in Europe, on it's principal bookmarts, particularly Amsterdam, Frankfort, Madrid and London, for which works relating to America as could not be found in Paris.²⁸

In Paris, Jefferson acquired over 2,000 volumes, raising the catalog count of his library to 5,000 volumes by the time he returned in 1789. Naturally, his political career continued to supplement his library until he sold it to the Library of Congress in 1814 for the much-debated sum of \$23,950.²⁹ As noted above, there was extensive disagreement

²⁶ Stein, 99.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ TJ to Samuel H. Smith, 1814, cited in Wilson, "Jefferson's Library," 165.

²⁹ Stein, 99.

about Jefferson's giving the books to Congress at all; the House vote to receive them barely passed 81-71 with extreme hesitation about ever adding to it. One notable dissenter, Federalist Cyrus King said that Jefferson's books "...would help disseminated his 'infidel philosophy' and were 'good, bad and indifferent, old, new and worthless, in languages which many cannot read, and most ought not.'"³⁰ In response, Jefferson maintained that his library did not contain "any branch of science which Congress would wish to exclude from their collection: there is, in fact, no subject to which a Member of Congress may not have occasion to refer."³¹ Thus, Jefferson's third and final library, which is currently on display in Monticello, includes his retirement library, accumulated from 1815 until his death in 1826. "I cannot live without books," he wrote to John Adams in the summer of 1815, "but fewer will suffice where amusement, and not use, is the only future subject."³² And yet, even this 'smaller' library of Jefferson's proved to be one of the largest and most extensive in Virginia at this time. By the time of his death in March 1826, it had reached about 1,000 volumes. The most major subjects included History, Religion, Politics, and Popular Fiction, including poetry and plays.

For the sake of this thesis, our architectural examination of the library will focus on the current space that is open for visitors, namely the final product of the remodel that began in 1796 and was finally completed in 1809. This final remodel of the house, known as Monticello II, reflected much of Jefferson's experience in France and conveyed his

³⁰ Wilson, "Jefferson's Library", 167 – Stein

³¹ Manguel, 73.

³² TJ to John Adams, 10 June 1815, Cappon, 443.

endless desire to invent and remodel.³³ In Monticello II, Jefferson's private apartment included four semi-distinct spaces: a Bedroom, Cabinet, Book Room, and Greenhouse on the southeast side of the house. The Bedroom and Cabinet had been included in the designs for Monticello I, but were modified during the 1796 remodel in addition to adding the Book Room. Adding the Book Room to his private chamber was a major personal decision for Jefferson. "Its incorporation into the apartment marked a significant change from the earlier version of Monticello, where the library above the parlor was probably the second most impressive architectural space in the house. Its elimination when Jefferson decided to spread out all his principal rooms on the ground floor shows how far he had come to value convenience over ceremony and architectural display."³⁴ The L-shaped space is very open and well-lit, thanks in part to a skylight over the bedroom and several windows from the greenhouse facing the vegetable garden outside. "Besides conventional doorways features such as a bed in an alcove open on both sides, and arches...are employed as transitions from one space to another."³⁵

The alcove and skylight are certainly not the only visible evidence of French influence in Jefferson's library. High ceilings, due to the removal of the second floor, were one of the more major changes Jefferson made upon his return from France, where everything had been isolated to a single level with 16-18 foot ceilings in principal entertaining rooms and 8-10 foot ceilings in small private staircases and back bedrooms. Consequently, Jefferson's study-bedroom ceiling is nearly 19 feet high and flooded with

³³ According to Monticello's assistant curator Melanie Lower, interpreters have to be careful about emphasizing Jefferson's status as an inventor. She classifies Jefferson as more of a "tinker-er", pointing out that he did not "invent a whole lot but he loves modifying things...he gets credit for a lot more than he actually invented." Melanie Lower, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 6, 2015, transcript.

³⁴ Cheuk, 11.

³⁵ Cheuk, 11.

natural light from the skylight and triple-sash window while other bedrooms in the house have 10 foot ceilings and are lit by less extravagant windows. Another major contributor to the flood of natural light in Jefferson's study was the addition of a greenhouse in Monticello II. Three porches, accessible through massive door-sized windows, offered a space for Jefferson's mockingbirds as well as a transitional space from his bedroom to the gardens outside.

From Home to House

The story of Monticello's transition from the home of an American president to a historic house is unto itself a contribution to the story of American preservation methods and obstacles. As will be seen in the study of Montpelier, several Virginia planters died in extreme debt, including Jefferson. A combination of the failing tobacco industry and lack of money to be made as a statesman were among the factors that led to Monticello's \$107,000 debt when Jefferson died in 1826. In 1827, Jefferson's wife Martha and her son Thomas Jefferson Randolph were forced to hold an executor's sale that included most of the estate's slaves, farm equipment, animals, and furniture. Four years later, the house and 552 acres were purchased for \$4,500 by a local apothecary named James T. Barclay who hoped to grow silk worms on the property.³⁶ After only two years, his venture failed, and the house was purchased in 1834 by a naval officer named Uriah P. Levy.³⁷ Levy had been a long-time supporter of Jefferson's views on religious tolerance and after his death in 1862, he left the house to the government under strict conditions. After the Civil War, during which the Confederacy seized and sold the house yet again, the government

³⁶ "Monticello (House) FAQ," *Thomas Jefferson's Monticello*, accessed August 2015, <http://www.monticello.org/site/house-and-gardens/monticello-house-faq>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

refused to comply with Levy's conditions and his heirs challenged the government's ownership. In 1879, Levy's nephew, Jefferson Monroe Levy finally took possession of the house, which he sold to the newly created Thomas Jefferson Foundation in 1923.³⁸

The Foundation still owns the property today and has steadily expanded its holdings of Jefferson property in include 2,500 of the original 5,000 acres. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, the Foundation receives no federal, state or local funding to support its dual mission of educational and preservation at Monticello (see fig 4.2). The Foundation does, however, receive extensive donation-based funding that has allowed them to conduct several restoration projects on the property as well as complete the construction of the Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies in 1994. The Smith Center exists to “foster Jefferson scholarship and widely disseminate[current] findings” through the various archaeology projects, education programs, publications, and research departments.³⁹ The Center also hosts regular panel discussions, lectures, teacher workshops and other programs including long- and short-term residential fellowships for researchers and scholars.

Currently, Monticello staff work under several departments, including Archaeology, Curatorial, Gardens and Grounds, Research, Restoration, Administration, Press, and Development as well as various focus centers, such as the Center for Historic Plants, The Smith Center, the Jefferson Library, and the Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series. During my visit, I was able to meet with representatives from the

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ “Thomas Jefferson Foundation,” *Thomas Jefferson's Monticello*, accessed August 2015, <http://www.monticello.org/site/about/thomas-jefferson-foundation>.

Curatorial Department as well as staff from the Jefferson Library and the Retirement Series project. Each Department and special project contributes to the Jefferson



Figure 4.2. Monticello. The North front. Photograph by Casey Schumacher, August 2015.

Foundation’s mission to present Monticello as an autobiographical statement, maintaining that “To understand Jefferson, one must understand Monticello.”⁴⁰

Monticello is a National Historic Landmark and was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987.

The Sanctum Sanctorum

The main purpose of this thesis is to explore how the staff of these historic house museums interpret the personal libraries of their owners. In light of my preliminary research on Jefferson, it seemed logical to me that interpretation of the library at Monticello and Jefferson’s book collecting would be taken very seriously. While preliminary research did not prove very promising in this area, a visit to the house and

⁴⁰ “Mission Statement,” *Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello*, accessed August 2015, <http://www.monticello.org/site/about/mission-statement>.

interviews with the curators a dual appreciation for the library and a commitment to interpret it in the most effective way possible. Interviews were conducted at the Kenwood Jefferson Library and Monticello Collections Office with Research Librarians Jack Robertson and Anna Berkes, Assistant Collections and Exhibitions Manager Melanie Lower, and Assistant Curator Emilie Johnson.

Susan Stein's catalogue, *The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello* seems to be the authoritative text on objects in the historic house, even among Monticello staffers. As previously mentioned, the catalog includes several chapters devoted to paintings, drawings, sculpture, furniture, silver, clocks, maps, lighting, and musical instruments, but there is no chapter set aside for books. As Stein moves through the house, the Sanctum Sanctorum is discussed in light of its architectural layout and significance to Jefferson, but for a book devoted to cataloging personal objects, the lack of page-space appropriated to Jefferson's books was a surprise and a disappointment. Many of the objects mentioned in the catalog are included in the house because of information Jefferson read about in his books. What is a museum professional supposed to do with the juxtaposition of a period room that not only lacks but also dominates the object culture of the house?

Assistant Curator Emilie Johnson suggests a few possible reasons for Stein to leave books out of her text. One suggestion may be that there was simply not enough page space; at 472 pages, Stein's text is already quite lengthy and exhaustive. Another reason could be categorical focus; Stein seems to present a more art-historical perspective of the objects at Monticello which, depending on how one examines books, may not include books and publications. From this perspective, no curator or academic researcher has written the definitive book on Jefferson's library, not from the point of view of

American history, nor from decorative arts. With even so magisterial a volume as Susan Stein's *The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello* setting aside the topic of books, completing a full catalogue including books seems a daunting task.

A final, more probable reason is that so many other historians and politicians have already written about Jefferson's library. The largest and most exhaustive library in America at this time, Jefferson's library became the nucleus of the Library of Congress in 1815. Curators and librarians alike know that it was organized in three classes: History, Philosophy, and Fine arts, which reflected Francis Bacon's categories of knowledge: Memory, Reason, and Imagination. We know that as a fine art, architecture was grouped alongside painting, gardening, and music.⁴¹ Interestingly, we also know that Jefferson cataloged his Bibles under the category of Reason because he considered it a way of thinking.⁴²

Inasmuch as the literary content of Jefferson's library is left out of Stein's catalog, she does present several examples of the use of architecture books in Jefferson's designs confirm my previous discussion concerning the significance and circulation of architecture books. When Jefferson anonymously submitted an architectural design for the President's House, it is very reminiscent of both Palladian style and some of the French architecture he saw in Paris.⁴³ His design was passed over for that of James Hoban, which also included Palladian elements. A key point of interest here is that Hoban's design incorporated a very particular plate from Gibbs's *Book of Architecture* that also inspired

⁴¹ Stein, 12.

⁴² Sterling Howell, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 10, 2015, transcript.

⁴³ Stein, 54.

Jefferson's design for Monticello I.⁴⁴ As discussed in Chapter One, this confirms the circulation of architecture books, common architectural language and literary ties to England among Virginia architects. Similarly, Jefferson and Madison's numerous exchanges confirm an extremely intimate literary exchange. When Jefferson began designing the University of Virginia in 1817, his library had already been donated to the Library of Congress in 1815. As a result, he had to borrow architecture books from James Madison; very likely these were architecture books that Jefferson recommended to Madison and/or sent him from France. While Chapter One explained that historians have made these connections about the significance of architecture books, only recently have museum professionals begun incorporating that research into their day-to-day interpretational practices.

In 1999, Monticello staffers began a massive project of historical bibliographic research, the first of its kind between the Monticello, Montpelier, and Mount Vernon libraries. The dedication of the Kenwood Jefferson Library in the spring of 2002 provided not only a special location for the research, but extensive contacts and resources. By partnering with the Libraries of Early America Project, a research initiative to catalog every book owned in America before 1825, Monticello librarians and curators were able to dialogue and collaborate with the site's Education Department to improve interpretational content. Research Librarian Jack Robertson is the only current staffer who has seen this project from its founding and is very proud that curators look to the library for interpretational material. "The [tour] guide is the intermediary and they are good researchers," he says, "Our job is to help them see that Jefferson's ideas are largely

⁴⁴ Stein, 54.

book-based and make sure they bring that into their tours.”⁴⁵ As a result of this on-going project, the Monticello education department staff is both excited and passionate about incorporating the historical bibliographic research concerning Jefferson’s library into their everyday interpretation practices. The Human Resources Department holds regular orientation for their interpretive staff and over the last couple of years, the library and curatorial staff have been increasingly involved. Exciting future projects include the publication of the *Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series*, with an anticipated date of completion in 2026 that will coincide with Princeton University’s publication of Jefferson’s presidential papers.⁴⁶ At this point, everyone at Monticello seems anxious to have the papers available for research to supplement the mansion’s interpretation.

To establish for visitors a book-based interpretation of the mansion, Jefferson’s famous quote to John Adams, ‘I cannot live without books’, is often repeated and very central to tours and other visitor experiences at Monticello. The library-study-bedroom is notably identified as the Sanctum Sanctorum, a place kept locked and rarely entered. Its layout is unlike any other library space in Virginia during this time period, and therefore certainly unlike the layout of the libraries found in Montpelier or Mount Vernon. The Sanctum Sanctorum is made up of four spaces: the Book Room, Cabinet, Greenhouse,

⁴⁵ Jack Robertson, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 7, 2015, transcript.

⁴⁶ Lisa Francavilla is the Managing Editor of the *Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series*. She and her staff are currently working to publish all of Jefferson’s papers from his presidential retirement in March 1809 until his death in 1826 in both digital and letterpress form. The project encompasses about 27,000 original documents, most of which are currently housed at the Library of Congress. The Monticello curatorial staff keeps about 50 original papers at their offices and is using digital scans from the LC for this project. Their publication rate is 600 documents per volume with one volume published every year. Princeton University is currently doing a similar project with Jefferson’s presidential papers; although there are fewer years to cover, they are very dense years in Jefferson’s paper trail so they will take longer to publish. At this point, both projects are set to finish in 2026. More information on the *Retirement Series* can be found at <http://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/project-description>. Anna Berkes, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 7, 2015, transcript.

and Bedroom, which consume the entire south end of the house. Sir Augustus John Foster once said that “If the library had been thrown open to his Guests, the President’s Country House would have been as agreeable a Place to stay as any I know, but it was here he sat and wrote and he did not like of course to be disturbed by Visitors.”⁴⁷ Similarly, Mrs. Anna Thornton recorded of her 1802 visit that “the president’s bedchamber is only separated from the Library by an arch, he keeps it constantly locked, and I have been disappointed much by not being able to get in to day.”⁴⁸ While these visitor accounts do hint at extreme privacy, Monticello’s assistant curator Emilie Johnson believes these two particular quotes have been a bit overused and may give only a semi-accurate picture of who was or was not admitted to Jefferson’s library. “I think we’ve gone a little overboard in how private [these spaces] were,” she suggests.⁴⁹ While it is very likely that guests required an invitation to enter the Sanctum Sanctorum, Johnson believes that more visitors were allowed to enter than is perceived. “If you look at other visitors’ correspondence, it indicates that Jefferson let them in for a couple of hours to talk about Greek, Latin, and other subjects.”⁵⁰ In addition to outside visitors, Monticello interpreters are quick to point out that Jefferson’s love for education and his close relationship with his daughters and granddaughters would hardly have allowed the library to be so guarded. Borrowing books for the learning room next door or cleaning the alabaster hanging lamp in the Book Room were favored adventures for Jefferson’s granddaughters. “We also have to consider Jefferson’s experience with the term *private*,” Johnson suggest, speaking

⁴⁷ Cheuk, 59.

⁴⁸ Anna Thornton, *Visitors*, 34 – Stein

⁴⁹ Emilie Johnson, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 7, 2015, transcript.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

to the social developments in France that were addressed in Chapter Two. “While Jefferson is there, the definition of terms like *private* and *public* are still very unclear.”⁵¹ In summary, interpreters of Monticello’s private and public spaces, particularly the Sanctum Sanctorum, have to be carefully aware of the differences between what *private* means for visitors, what it meant for Virginians and what it meant for Jefferson.

Regardless of the library’s level privacy or privilege of access, its impressive size and scope are of no debate anywhere. In total, between his first library, the second library that eventually became the Library of Congress and his retirement library, Jefferson owned roughly 7,000 books; nearly double that of Madison and nearly ten times that of George Washington. The volumes were valuable in their binding, written in several languages, often rare, and covered all kinds of topics from art, poems, and architecture to science, botany, law, and philosophy. As mentioned above, curators and librarians at Monticello have managed to piece together Jefferson’s catalogue system, which also sets his library apart from Madison and Washington’s.

The Book Room is generally considered the heart of the library and, in fact, is more like what visitors would imagine a library to be: filled with books. What they do not often expect is to find most of them in boxes rather than book presses. In order to transport his library to Congress in 1814, Jefferson’s books were placed in book boxes made at the Monticello joinery especially for the purpose. The entire donation filled 10 wagons. Considering the dimensions of the book boxes, the vast quantity of the donation and the size of Jefferson’s study, curators and interpreters at Monticello are confident that

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

the room was “literally spilling over with books.”⁵² As with the Montpelier library, one can imagine books and papers stacked on top of tables, chairs, even in the corners of the room or the center of the room depending on how important they were to their owner.

One of Jefferson’s male slaves, Isaac, describes the crowded space this way:

Old Master had abundance of books; sometimes would have twenty of ‘em down on the floor at once – read fust one, then tother. [I] has often wondered how Old Master came to have such a mighty head; read so many of them books; and when they go to him to ax him anything, he go right straight to the book and tell you all about it.⁵³

Such a large donation of such an extensive and well-loved library would certainly have felt like a deep loss to the library’s owner. As a result, it is no surprise that once the donation was made, Jefferson simply could not stop collecting books. A probate inventory of the house was completed upon Jefferson’s death in 1826, but since the Book Room (see fig. 4.3) does not appear on that inventory, very little is known about the object content of the room and historians have very few accounts of it since it was usually locked and rarely described by visitors. Susan Stein’s catalog suggests that besides the homemade book boxes, the Book Room probably contained “a tall reading desk, an octagonal filing table, and two or more chairs.”⁵⁴ The reading desk was likely used for drawing or writing and was “one of several purchases from Virginia cabinetmakers dating from the late 1760s and early 1770s” while the octagonal filing table would have been acquired in Philadelphia or New York.⁵⁵ The filing table includes eight drawers

⁵² Stein, 100.

⁵³ James A. Bear, Jr. ed., “Memoirs of a Monticello Slave as Dictated to Charles Campbell by Isaac” in *Jefferson at Monticello* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 12.

⁵⁴ Stein, 100.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

marked with the letters of the alphabet, mostly used for storing papers and correspondence and is modeled after the English rent table.⁵⁶

The most private of the four spaces was the Cabinet (see fig. 4.4), which includes several presses, a whirligig chair, Windsor couch, sofa, and a writing table with a rotating top. Here he kept most of his small, prized inventions and here he wrote his endless correspondence, which filled five presses and spilled out all over the room. A well-lit space including three large windows and a set of French doors, all of Jefferson's most favorite authors were kept here, as well as all the necessary tools of an impassioned student. Naturally, the idea of several inkwells, papers being stuck in books which are stacked on chairs and piled in corners seems far more studious than we imagine for a retired man; I would venture to suggest that seeking solace in his Cabinet was really no retirement at all. Rather, the exhaustive inventory of mathematical instruments, mineral specimens, and writing tools, all suggest the living-working space of a life-long student. There is a polygraph patented by Charles Willson Peale and John Isaac Hawkins, all the tools for surveying, several telescopes, an astronomical clock, celestial globe, and an orrery.⁵⁷ As seen in figure 4.4, even the furniture speaks to a marriage of easy access and comfort; the sofa could be moved and fit together in all sorts of positions and the Windsor couch could be easily slid under the writing table.⁵⁸ In addition, Jefferson's

⁵⁶ Stein, 252.

⁵⁷ Stein, 107.

⁵⁸ Stein, 105.

revolving bookstand⁵⁹ has five adjustable rests for holding books at adjustable angles.⁶⁰



Figure 4.3. Jefferson's Book Room. Courtesy of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello.

Another essential component of Jefferson's Sanctum Sanctorum was the Greenhouse. While Jefferson, Madison, and Washington all had extensive gardens and, by extension, several books dedicated to their construction and care, Jefferson is alone in his inclusion of exotic plants in his library space. In retirement, Jefferson wrote Charles Willson Peale that he was "an old man but a young gardener."⁶¹ While it has been suggested that he intended to add an aviary to his greenhouse, there are no existing

⁵⁹ While Stein's catalog claims that the rotating bookstand was designed and constructed in Jefferson's own joinery, a recent discovery by Monticello's Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts Diane Ehrenpreis revealed that both the bookstand and the octagonal writing table were likely made by Thomas Burling of New York with the intent of arranging them together in the Cabinet. Atop the table, the bookstand would form a perfect cube resting in the center of a perfect octagon, thus incorporating Jefferson's appreciation for symmetry and shape in design. Diane Ehrenpreis, "Thomas Jefferson's Monticello: Recent Discoveries from the Mountaintop" (presentation, Brazos Forum, Waco, TX, October 28-29, 2015).

⁶⁰ Cheuk, 108.

⁶¹ TJ to Charles Willson Peale, 20 August 1811, *Thomas Jefferson's Garden Book*, ed. Edwin M. Betts (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1944). Stein, 461

drawings to support this. His notes, however, do indicate that he kept mockingbirds in the greenhouse, providing a tranquil, natural space, directly adjacent to his Cabinet, for him to write his correspondence and read.

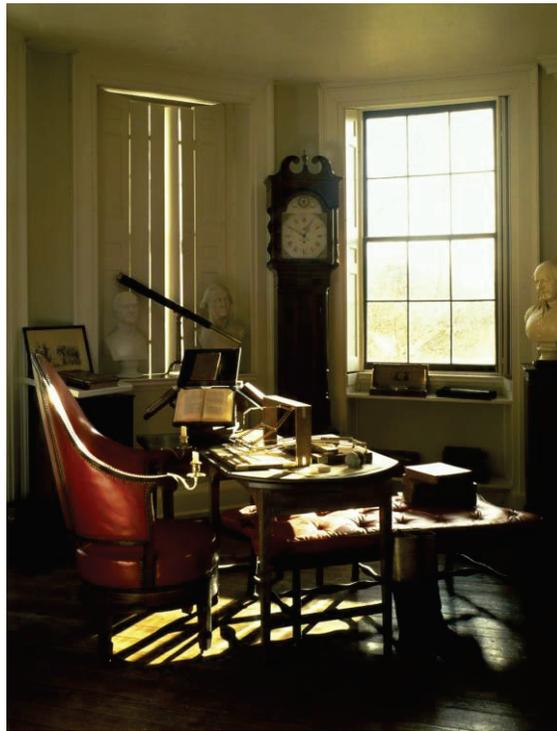


Figure 4.4. Jefferson's Cabinet. Courtesy of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello.

The fact that Jefferson's Sanctum Sanctorum includes his Bedroom (see fig. 4.5) sets it apart from Washington's library, but not so much Madison's – in the next chapter I will show that in his final years, Madison moved his bedroom to the first floor to be near his library and, like Jefferson, died surrounded by his beloved books. Jefferson's Bedroom, most often identified by the French-style alcove bed, is almost as well-lit as the cabinet by a triple-sash window and skylight, also reminiscent of French architecture during the period. While much can be said about the motifs, urns, ribbons, ceiling, and floor, for the purpose of this study I will simply restate that the higher ceilings in this

space reflect the French style as well as a few French decoration choices. Across from Jefferson's bed, resting two marble obelisks is a gorgeous clock, designed by the "expert Paris clock maker Chantrot in 1790."⁶² There is also a gilt-and-gesso-on-wood mirror, one of seven he brought back from Paris and, of course, a book press made in his joinery.⁶³



Figure 4.5. Jefferson's Bedroom. Courtesy of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello.

Current Interpretation

From the moment they arrive at the historic site, visitors to Monticello understand the significance of Jefferson's library and its importance in building Monticello. Before

⁶² Stein, 108.

⁶³ Stein, 110.

they approach the house, visitors purchase tickets at the David M. Rubenstein Visitors Center, which includes an outdoor courtyard and welcome pavilion, a gift shop, café, the Milstein Theater with a 15-minute introductory film, the Smith Education Center and finally, the Robert H. and Clarence Smith Gallery. Recently opened in 2009 and made up of four large exhibit spaces, the two-story, 5,200-square-foot gallery space offers an in-depth look at the person of Thomas Jefferson and prepares each visitor to look at the house through his eyes. The ‘Boisterous Sea of Liberty’ exhibition in the Michelle Smith Gallery includes twenty-one flat-panel LCD screens, seven of which are interactive, that offer a timeline the creation of America from the writing of Declaration of Independence and the Constitution through Thomas Jefferson’s presidency to present-day politics, all through the lens of freedom and liberty.

The Stacy Smith Liss Gallery, with quotes from Jefferson projected on the floor and walls with lasers, provides a surprisingly subtle, quiet and not-too-overwhelming transition from the high-tech Liberty exhibition into the David Bruce Smith Gallery. There, visitors enter a more traditional gallery space entitled *Making Monticello: Jefferson’s ‘Essay in Architecture’*, which is every architectural historian’s dream come true. In this gallery, visitors to the site are very carefully, tastefully, and effectively informed of the progress and regress that occurred in the construction of the building they are about pass through. Clarifying and presenting various stages of architecture can be very confusing and tedious, but this gallery achieves its mission very well. Throughout the gallery, quotes and visuals from Palladian architecture books are presented side-by-side with Jefferson’s own architectural notebooks and drawings. Entire panels are dedicated to explicating Palladio’s orders, showing direct examples in Monticello doors,

windows, and pedestals (see fig. 4.6). An original 1742 Leoni edition of *Quattro Libri* lies open in a case, showing a page of rotunda drawings. Directly beside it, a 1764 rendering of James Madison's Montpelier is compared with the first elevation of Monticello I (1775), allowing visitors to compare the classic orders and Jefferson's interpretation of them with the Georgian style so pervasive in Virginia during this time period. Tapping into Jefferson's French experience, there is a 3-sided panel entirely devoted to comparing the Monticello dome with other domes Jefferson would have seen in Paris. Speaking to the social situation of Paris, another color-coded panel differentiates between the private and public spaces of Monticello and even mentions that such social landscapes and boundaries were still being established and questioned in France (see fig. 4.7). Most importantly, inherent in every example of Monticello architecture is a source of inspiration (Palladian or otherwise) are Jefferson's personal notes; one panel on baseboards and window frames includes letters with shipment lists, actual wood pieces, and Jefferson's sketch designs. Full-scan reprints, including blank pages, of Jefferson's three building notebooks are left open for visitors to flip through, including a notebook for Monticello I (1770s), the first notebook for Monticello II (1794-1803), and the second notebook for Monticello II (1796). Each of these panels, timelines and displays are state-of-the-art, interactive and somehow manage to make every visitor feel like an architecture expert by the time they are ready to view the house (see fig. 4.8). One of the more sobering panels, and often the last one visitors see in the gallery, lists all the known builders who worked on Monticello from 1768-1826. No less than 69 workers are credited with taking part in the construction of Jefferson's masterpiece; they are all listed by occupation (brickmaker, joiner, glazer, etc) and, incidentally, are designated as 'free

white workmen’ or ‘enslaved workmen’. This panel is the first acknowledgement of slavery at Monticello and, like the rest of the gallery, it prepares visitors for what they will see when they reach the Big House.



Figure 4.6. One of several panels explaining the Palladian Orders. The panels include quotes from Palladio’s books, Jefferson’s quotes regarding Palladio and visual examples of Palladian designs at Monticello. Photograph by Casey Schumacher, August 2015.

The second floor of the Smith Gallery includes an exhibition entitled *Monticello as Experiment* and explores Jefferson’s other personal hobbies beyond architecture. The first thing visitors encounter when they enter is a panel explaining the principles of classical learning and the significance of books acquired from England and France to direct that learning. Panels include more journal entries, images, and Jefferson notes on politics, Paris, gardening, and the weather. As in the architecture gallery, full-scan reprints of his record books are available to flip through, as well as six interactive touch

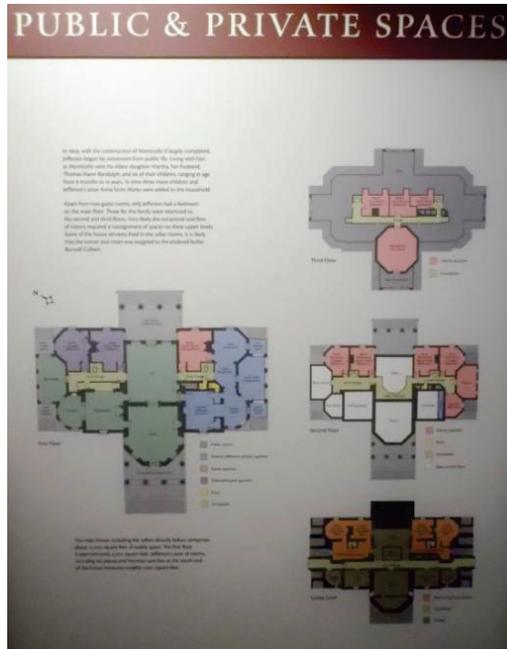


Figure 4.7. A panel showing public and private spaces in Monticello I and II. Photograph by Casey Schumacher, August 2015..

screen panels that provide more in-depth samples of his work. Once visitors have tapped into Jefferson’s genius, they can exit directly to the shuttle station that will drive them up the hill to the house.

Once they reach the grounds, visitors are free to roam the Monticello grounds, gardens, outbuildings, and slave quarters along Mulberry Row. Tours of the house are included with general admission tickets and guests can purchase behind-the-scenes tickets for a more detailed look at other rooms now shown in the regular tour. Visitors can also reserve spaces on tours of the grounds and gardens for free. Although the house tours only last about 35 minutes, they are very object-heavy and include topics like social boundaries and room use. As a result, guides seem to focus more on the individual spaces rather than the house as a whole. This method can seem segmented and compartmentalized, but after going through the Smith Galleries, visitors have a good idea

of how the house functions and the rooms work together. The guides appear to be extremely passionate about what they teach and are more than willing to answer questions. According to one of the guides, the Sanctum Sanctorum sparks the most questions from visitors and rightly so. “I would say it’s absolutely the most important room in the house.”⁶⁴



Figure 4.8. Panel showing Jefferson’s architectural notebooks. Photograph by Casey Schumacher, August 2015.

The first thing visitors notice when they enter the Sanctum Sanctorum is that it is far too neat and tidy compared to the description from the galleries. The second thing they realize, thanks to the tour guide pointing it out, is that there is no way to fix this and show the room as an appropriately messy and active space. As Assistant Curator Emilie

⁶⁴ Unknown guides, 8/7/15

Johnson puts it, “Our biggest struggle is how to show a small space overflowing with books and papers and still have enough room to bring a tour of 25 people through?”⁶⁵ There are currently about 1,000 books on display in the Book Room, all of which are similar imprints, editions, and titles as are found in Jefferson’s retirement library. For the most part, they are arranged by size. When asked about retaining the Memory, Imagination, and Reason categories that Jefferson utilized, Johnson explained that most of Jefferson’s book boxes were built with different dimensions in order to accommodate different sizes of books; there is perhaps some categorization within the boxes, but for the most part, book storage in Virginia libraries at this time period was primarily based on size.⁶⁶ While Monticello library staff have been able to pinpoint Jefferson’s cataloging methods fairly accurately, very little is known about how the Library of Congress staff chose to arrange it once it was received. George Watterson, the Congressional librarian who would have received them, apparently abandoned both the order and inventory Jefferson sent him with the books in 1815, causing Jefferson to send his nephew Nicholas Trist to the Capitol to write up another inventory, even if he could not rearrange them properly. While Jefferson’s arrangement “offered illuminating intellectual bridges between diverse fields,” Watterson saw the difficulty of explaining such an arrangement to library patrons and set about arranging them as he felt proper.

The traffic and varying climate conditions inherent in historic house museums begs the question of why Jefferson’s books are not stored off-site at the Jefferson Library. Indeed, their location and treatment is the primary concern of this thesis. Incidentally, the

⁶⁵ Emilie Johnson, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 7, 2015, transcript.

⁶⁶ This is also true in the Washington and Madison libraries at Mount Vernon and Montpelier.

books in the house are cataloged as objects into Profficio, Monticello's collections management system. According to Research Librarian Anna Berkes, "They are treated as objects like a pen, inkwell or a piece of art [and the non-Jefferson books] do not show up in the research library's portal."⁶⁷ Surprisingly, library staff seem somewhat divided on this issue at the three houses. Some have gone so far as to suggest that wood blocks covered in leather be used in the houses so that the books can be used for research. For Berkes, however, "It makes more sense that books are in their care than ours...the book as a Jefferson object is the most important thing to us."⁶⁸ Berkes' sentiment is widespread at Monticello, everyone seems to understand that the Jefferson Library is a place for books about Jefferson rather than books that belonged to him. "We collect everything here," Berkes explains with a knowing smile, "From the factual to the biased and factually inaccurate."⁶⁹ She says their primary patrons are Jefferson Foundation Research Fellows and they are usually looking at library materials that have been cataloged according to the Library of Congress catalog system and listed in their online catalog.

The books on display in the house were cataloged by a doctoral student in the early 2000s and, as mentioned above, most of them do not appear in the research library online catalog. Each book is assigned a tripartite number indicated the year of acquisition, acquisition group, and object number, followed by an alphabetical system to indicate different volumes. Within Profficio, the books' catalog entries are very similar to any other household object; they include scanned copies of the title page, publishing information, dimensions, and number of pages. Using Nomenclature 3.0, books are

⁶⁷ Anna Berkes, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 7, 2015, transcript.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

identified as Tools & Equipment for Communication and Written Communication. In other words, while the Library of Congress identifies these books primarily as intellectual resources, Monticello staff view them as objects and, as a result, use object identification rather than the Library of Congress numbering system. In addition, Assistant Collections and Exhibitions Manager Melanie Lower explained that Nomenclature 4.0 has allowed them to classify books across object categories, allowing them to explore the different ways books can be interpreted as material culture.

When asked about how books can be classified as objects, Assistant Curator Emilie Johnson insisted there should always be room to examine books beyond their use as intellectual or academic resources. Especially in the houses of Virginia gentry, Johnson believes that illustrated books in particular were absolutely used as “tools, art and adornment.”⁷⁰ For Jefferson, she believes these usually came in the form of his natural history books, his architectural books, and his Shakespeare. Harkening back to the refinement of the gentry, Johnson is a strong advocate for the use of Shakespeare as a social currency among Jefferson’s family and peers. “[They are all] using references to Shakespeare throughout their letters...to make a point and illustrate an idea...it’s a really pervasive language.”⁷¹ In addition, Jefferson acted out scenes from Shakespeare plays with his daughters and granddaughters, who would draw them out on paper. Johnson recently curated an exhibition on Shakespeare at Monticello and believes that there is plenty of room for more research regarding the social status affiliated with illustrated books. When asked if Jefferson ever displayed popular books without reading them for this reason, Johnson indicated that although Jefferson certainly did not have time to read

⁷⁰ Emilie Johnson, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 7, 2015, transcript.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

every book he received, he was such a practical learner that he used every book he read as a tool for education. While it was typical for Virginia gentlemen to display books in their dining rooms, correspondence reveals that Jefferson kept two hanging bookshelves in his dining room that were very atypical of the time period. Allegedly, Jefferson would wait in the dining room between the two dinner bells and read while house slaves set the table and guests began to arrive.⁷² Overall, it is apparent that although Jefferson displayed his books like other members of the Virginia gentry, he used them all for more than status symbols.

Conclusion

After visiting Monticello, I realized that there were indeed both librarians and museum professionals who felt the same way I did about personal libraries of our Founding Fathers; that they ought to be interpreted as the most important room in the house when it comes to the development and growth of their owners as founders. I felt the Monticello staff completely understood that while these men are known for creating America, visitors should leave their houses keenly aware that they were the product of their reading. Endrina Tay, Associate Foundation Librarian for Technical Services at the Jefferson Library says, “I do not think including discussions of libraries and books as objects is a new concept in the interpretation of historic house museums, least of all at Monticello.”⁷³ She cites the role of books in the Age of Enlightenment and goes on to

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Endrina Tay, email to author, November 25, 2015.

suggest that “no discussion of Thomas Jefferson nor James Madison would be complete without references to their books and reading.”⁷⁴

The biggest challenge, then, lies in the method of conveying that message. For Monticello in particular, both Lower and Johnson believe that, generally speaking, information about print culture and the historical bibliography of Jefferson’s library is not beneficial for most visitors. While it can be extremely helpful in answering visitor inquiries, guides are not encouraged to over-emphasize this area of study; there simply is not enough time or space to explain Jefferson’s 7,000 volume library in a thirty-five minute tour. Lower suggests that temporary exhibits or exhibitions such as those in the Smith Galleries are more suitable for dispersing this kind of information. Johnson’s exhibition on Shakespeare is also a fine example of providing a temporary yet successful and in-depth window into Jefferson’s library.

Visiting Monticello also confirmed that exhibits provide opportunities for a more interactive experience and a hands-on approach to books that I believe Jefferson would have approved. While visitors do not have time during house tours to pause and consider the space, character, and emotion of Jefferson’s library the way Manguel would, they have that opportunity in the Smith Galleries and during special exhibitions like the Shakespeare exhibit. This is Monticello’s unique way of portraying a living space, one that Manguel would likely approve of, but there are absolutely other methods more befitting other institutions. In Juan Fernando-Leon’s recent article entitled “The Room is Now Still,” the upstairs den of the Frances Willard House Museum in Evanston, Illinois provides an interesting case study in how to portray an active space crowded with books in the confines of a small room where groups of visitors are passing through. Similar to

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Jefferson's library, literature surrounding the library indicates that "the space was in constant flux, both in its physical configuration and intellectual activity".⁷⁵ Leon claims, similar to Manguel, Johnson and others at Monticello, that to display and think about a private study "as a static place, a place so still, is inadequate."⁷⁶ Currently, interpreters at the Frances Willard House use archival images to help visitors imagine active rooms when they were in use, rather than as single-moments frozen in time. Comparatively, the Smith Galleries allow visitors to be active themselves and, in a way, both physically handle and mentally process the information as Jefferson did. Both the Frances Willard House and Monticello present mono-moments in their period rooms, but they also both provide alternate interpretational methods that bring the room's purpose to life for visitors. As far as library interpretation goes, my visit and interviews revealed that Monticello is not only deeply invested in research regarding Jefferson's library, they consider using that research in day-to-day interpretation an extremely high priority.

⁷⁵ Juan-Fernando Leon, "The Room is Now So Still", *Public History Commons Blog*, October 8, 2015, <http://publichistorycommons.org/the-room-is-now-so-still/>

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER FIVE

Montpelier

Introduction

One of the key differences between Jefferson and Madison was the former's extensive foreign experience, while the latter was content to read any and all books he could get his hands on at home. As stated in the previous chapter, Madison received over 200 books from Jefferson during the latter's stint in Paris, allowing him to experience Europe's intellectual wealth through books. While Jefferson's libraries covered a wide range of subjects, including a few philosophic titles, Madison's research was primarily based in history, philosophy, and religion. In fact, Edward Burns refers to Madison not only as the Father, but also the Philosopher of the Constitution. He claims that "If Plato had lived in America about 1800, he might have chosen Madison as one example of the philosopher-kings who should rule the Republic. And the choice would not have been so inappropriate."¹ Burns goes on to suggest that Jefferson, not a European, was Madison's primary influence in his research; although they did not have as much in common as some historians believe, their fifty-year correspondence shows careful discussion of history, science, agriculture, religion, philosophy and, thankfully for my study, books and architecture. Madison's genius is certainly influenced by Jefferson's influence, but in examining his library, museum professionals have to adopt a different perspective regarding its content and context. Madison did far more book-research in preparing for

¹ Edward McNall Burns, *James Madison: Philosopher of the Constitution* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968), 26.

the Philadelphia Convention than any other statesman, including Jefferson who was in France at the time. More than any other member of the Virginia gentry, Madison was an original thinker, most notably in his concept of federalism, which placed him on an intellectual pedestal above and beyond his contemporaries, including Jefferson. In short, to enter the Madison library at Montpelier is to enter the work-space of a political and philosophical genius.

Building Montpelier

Madison's father first constructed Montpelier in the 1760s and moved his family there from his father's house, Mount Pleasant. The oldest of twelve brothers and sisters, Madison assisted with the family move to the textbook Georgian-style house, at the time the largest brick dwelling in Orange County, Virginia. The future president himself used the French spelling of the name 'Montpellier' suggesting a connection with the town in southern France known for its ancient university, but there is no documented evidence clarifying the origin of the name.² Throughout his political career and travels, Madison expressed a constant longing to return to his beloved home, describing his retirement there as a "return to books and farm, to tranquility and independence."³ With the exception of his political career in Philadelphia and Washington, Madison grew up, lived, retired and died at Montpelier. Similar to Monticello and its other prodigy house counterparts, Montpelier expanded over time with Madison adding additional wings in 1797 and 1809. Following his marriage to Dolley Payne Todd, a young widow seventeen

² Evelyn Bence, ed., *James Madison's Montpelier: Home of the Father of the Constitution* (Montpelier Foundation, 2008), 42.

³ Ralph Ketcham, *The Madisons at Montpelier* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 1.

years his junior, Madison added a two-story, 2,000 square foot addition to the north side of the mansion and added a four column portico in front. While several architectural historians have suggested that adding the portico was a design suggestion from Jefferson, Montpelier curators have found no evidence in Madison and Jefferson's correspondence to confirm this hypothesis.⁴ "They definitely discussed architecture and occasionally shared builders," said Assistant Collections Curator, Grant Quertermous, "but there is no definite moment where Jefferson explicitly tells Madison he should add a portico."⁵ This is not to say that Jefferson did not offer his advice, however. During the remodeling process, Madison sent a drawing of Montpelier to Jefferson for his input, but long after the rest of the project was complete, the portico columns were still unfinished. In response, Jefferson wrote to Madison that "Common [interior] plaster would not do," and that they should instead be made of "brick covered with stucco."⁶ By the time Madison got around to finishing the columns in 1807, Jefferson's master builder at Monticello James Dinsmore was already drawing up a new renovation plan to begin at Montpelier in 1809.

Before we address the 1809 expansion, we must examine Madison's second-story library in the early version of the house. The large central room overlooked the portico towards the stunning scenery of the Blue Ridge; many researchers think that this room housed Madison's 4,000 volume library. At this stage of the house's construction, there was only one door in or out of this private library and it locked from the inside, confirming the elements of privacy and specialized room use discussed in Chapter One.

⁴ Ketcham, 4.

⁵ Grant Quertermous, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 10, 2015, transcript.

⁶ Bence, 45.

In this space, Madison conducted his Constitutional research, “meticulously and exhaustively [studying] past democracies and why they had failed.”⁷ From his early education under various tutors, his close relations with Pennsylvania Quakers and his career at the College of New Jersey under Scottish Presbyterian minister Dr. John Witherspoon, Madison had amassed a library much more narrow in subject, but almost as large as Jefferson’s. His intense research of Greek and Roman history and philosophy, as well as his careful study of several languages, gave him a strong foundation in classicism that not only made him an intellectual equal to Jefferson, but gave him significant analytical authority over past government systems. Although no probate inventory exists for Montpelier, correspondence indicates his library was highly focused on history, philosophy, and religion. In 1823, Jefferson asked Madison for a list of recommended religious titles for the library at the University of Virginia; the list that Madison produced for him was so thorough and scholarly, many historians believe it could have been the work of a theologian rather than a statesman⁸. The writings of Aristotle, Plato, Aquinas, Calvin, Luther, Locke, Milton, and Hume were key components of both his early education and his studies with Dr. Witherspoon. Jefferson contributed additional writings from Rousseau, Montesquieu, Diderot, and major French and European newspapers and pamphlets. Fully aware of the failure of the Articles of Confederation, Madison pored over these resources to find a solution. As he read, he continually asked, “How could the interests of individuals, states, and the national authority be balanced? What was the real

⁷ Bence, 1.

⁸ Grant Quertermous, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 10, 2015, transcript.

purpose of government?”⁹ By the time he arrived at the Philadelphia Convention, nobody was more prepared than he to propose an entirely new form of government that would ultimately lead to the writing of a new Constitution. In addition to creating the Constitution, however, this second floor library saw the building of Madison the man as well. Manguel’s *The Library at Night* speaks heavily to the construction and use of a library in molding the character of those who use it. “Every librarian is, up to a certain point, an architect” Manguel observes, quoting Michel Melot, director of the Centre Pompidou Library in Paris. “He builds up his collection as an ensemble through which the reader must find a path, discover his own self, and live.”¹⁰ In summary, not only is the second floor library the birthplace of the Constitution, it is the origin of Madison himself.

Work on expanding Montpelier a second time began in 1809 at the start of Madison’s first term as president. He hired three master craftsmen who had worked for Jefferson at Monticello, including Dinsmore, to add single-story wings to both the north and south sides of the house. The southern expansion became a private suite for his mother, who still lived there, and the northern expansion was meant to house a first-floor library. In his later years, Madison’s bedroom was moved to a small room adjoining the library in order to be closer to his books. As a result, the second-floor library space was converted into a stack area to store his books and papers while the New Library on the first floor was used more as a working study.

Drawing on the concept of architectural refinement discussed in Chapter One, Madison’s decision to move the library to the first floor during the 1809 remodel is very noteworthy for this study; not only does it provide evidence of a shared construction

⁹ Bence, 13.

¹⁰ Manguel, 133.

network among the Virginia gentry, it also confirms the trend to create designated, private library space. Interestingly, Madison began renovating Montpelier, the same year Monticello II was completed and about the same time Jefferson and Madison's good friend, James Monroe began constructing his home, now known as Ashlawn-Highland. It is certain these three men, all American presidents, shared both advice and workmen. In October 1798, a letter from Jefferson to Madison requested that Mr. Richardson, a plasterer and mason, be delayed in coming to Monticello for at least another week because Jefferson was not ready for him to begin work yet.¹¹ Also, Madison recommended his carpenter and roofer Reuben Chewning to Monroe with the proviso that Chewning would finish his work at Montpelier before moving on to Ashlawn.¹² Considering how close these three houses are situated, all of these connections could be chocked up to proximity. However, considering the political climate of America in the new century, Jefferson's enthusiasm upon returning from Paris and the extensive, often coded correspondence between these three men, one cannot help imagine the richness of their exchanging ideas on how they planned to expand their libraries and make room for more books.¹³

Madison decision to move the library to the first floor raises the issue of whether it was used as a public or private space. Since Monticello II only has one floor, it is not reasonable to suggest that it represents a trend for first-floor libraries. At Montpelier, however, where the library is deliberately moved from the second to the first floor, Madison's decision does provide an opportunity to discuss the idea of libraries as public

¹¹ Bence, 45.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Malone, 17.

spaces rather than private ones. Unfortunately, that discussion does not go as far as students of public interior spaces would like. Correspondence and curatorial research seems to indicate that Madison's first-floor library was almost, but not quite as private as Jefferson's. Interpretational staff at Montpelier hint that like Jefferson, Madison too had several scientific specimens in his library that he enjoyed showing off to visitors. However, accounts from dinner guests note that Madison both entered and exited the adjoining Dining Room from the New Library, indicating its more private use as Madison's sitting room.¹⁴ For all intents and purposes, the primary reason for moving the library to the first floor was due to early indications of Madison's declining health, not to make it a public space like other first-story rooms. Madison had been a smaller, sickly man since his childhood and in his later years likely chose to be closer to his books without having to conquer the staircase. When he died at age 85 on June 28th, 1836, the last of the Founding Fathers, he was "surrounded by the books and papers that meant so much to him in life."¹⁵

A final component of Madison's library deserves some reference before we move on to an analysis of current interpretational methods at Montpelier: Madison's Temple (see fig 5.1). Though not included in most reference material regarding the day-to-day functions of the Big House, documentation from Dolley's niece, Mary Cutts, explains that the small temple located north of the house was "...intended, but never used, for [Madison's] study."¹⁶ Constructed in 1811, the simple, eight-column temple with a wood-shingle dome roof was designed by William Thornton, architect of the Capitol. It is very

¹⁴ Bence, 102.

¹⁵ Bence, 1.

¹⁶ Bence, 107.

similar to Jefferson's 1804 drawings for a 'monopteron' temple that may have been intended for Monticello, but was never built. Aside from the main house, the Temple is the only original and intact Madison-era building on the property.¹⁷



Figure 5.1. Madison's Temple. Photograph by Casey Schumacher, August 2015.

The Temple is important for this thesis for two reasons. First, its construction reflects Madison's love for both classicism and nature; two concepts also strongly incorporated into most of Jefferson's architectural designs, particularly the greenhouse attached to his library. The Temple's distance from the house made it less likely that Madison would have been disturbed. Solitude, architectural beauty and proximity to nature are major themes found in both Madison and Jefferson's reading spaces. In *The Library at Night*, Manguel devotes much poetic commentary to the interplay between libraries and the elements of nature, including plants, light, and soundscapes. Were he to visit Madison's Temple, Manguel would no doubt find endless inspiration in the

¹⁷ Bence, 109.

concurrence of nature with the themes of architecture and solitude, particularly for his vision of the library as space, island, and imagination.

From Home to House

Similar to Monticello, the Montpelier estate was in extreme debt when its owner died and it changed hands multiple times before it arrived at its current ownership. After Madison's passing, Dolley and her son John Payne Todd sold Montpelier to a Virginia merchant named Henry Wood Moncure. Four years later, he sold the house, land, and some of the remaining Madison furnishings to Benjamin Thornton of Gomersall, Leeds, England.¹⁸ Two of Thornton's daughters were born at Montpelier and their descendants have contributed a great deal of Madison-era items to the Montpelier collection. The Thorntons made extensive structural changes to the house, including covering the exterior bricks with a gray stucco to resemble granite, removing the steps and extending the portico columns to the ground, removing the terraces over the wings and installing a new tin roof.¹⁹ The house and grounds were sold once again in January 1854 to a Richmond banker named William H. Macfarland; at the time the *Fredericksburg News* expressed its hope that "a suitable monument may now be erected over the remains of Virginia's eminent statesman [now that the] estate has fallen into the hands of a Virginian."²⁰ Unfortunately, Macfarland sold the property after living there only a year to Colonel Alfred V. Scott, who in turn sold it to a Baltimore banker named Thomas Carson in 1857. Carson erected the stone monument that currently mark Madison's gravesite and saw that

¹⁸ Bence, 49.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Bence, 50.

Dolley's remains were brought to the site from the Congressional Cemetery in Washington.²¹

Like many homes in Virginia, the Civil War marked a significant era of change for Montpelier and its owners. Carson's brother Frank took up residence at Montpelier during the war and Confederate troops camped on the property for eight months during the winter of 1863-1864.²² After Frank Carson died in 1881, the house underwent another series of extreme redecoration under the ownership of guano-fertilizer businessmen Louis F. Detrick of Baltimore and William L. Bradley of Boston. According to the archival record, "most of the Madison-era outbuildings near the house had been cleared by 1900."²³ The last major change of ownership occurred in November 1900 when William DuPont's secretary and agent purchased the property, turning it over to William in January 1901. The wealthy family raised their children and several prize-winning race horses at Montpelier; several of them, including the most famous Battleship, are buried near Madison's Temple with tombstone gravemarkers.²⁴ When they first arrived, the DuPonts doubled the size of the house, "adding floors...and buildings additions behind the home" (see fig. 5.2).²⁵ William's wife Annie decorated their new home with "chandeliers, mirrors, sofas, and tables she had selected from exclusive antique shops" in England.²⁶ William and Annie's daughter Marion took ownership of Montpelier after her

²¹ Bence, 50.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Bence, 52.

²⁴ Bence, 56.

²⁵ Bence, 54.

²⁶ Bence, 55.

father's death in 1928 and made it her permanent home. She "transformed the property into a world-class thoroughbred racing stable."²⁷ She also constructed a steeplechase course, several barns, and a training track that are still visible from Montpelier's portico; the steeplechase course is still the only track in America to retain live brush jumps.²⁸ Although she updated and redecorated the house several times during her life, Marion declared in her will that the mansion should be restored "in such a manner as to conform as nearly as possible with the architectural pattern which existed when... owned and occupied by President Madison."²⁹ After her death, her descendents transferred ownership of Montpelier to the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1984. The mansion was opened to the public in 1987 and in 2000, the Trust transferred it to the Montpelier Foundation "through a long-term lease and other agreements."³⁰ Today, the Montpelier Foundation maintains the 2,650 acre estate as a private non-profit; their primary mission is to present James Madison's lasting legacy as the Father of the Constitution and Architect of the Bill of Rights. The Foundation completed a five-year restoration project in 2008 (see fig. 5.3) and have been aggressively expanding their collection and interpretation ever since.

Current Interpretation

Currently, visitors to Montpelier are encouraged to consider Madison's library as the most important room in the house even before their tour begins. Tickets for tours and access to the grounds can be purchased in the Visitor's Center, which includes a small

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Bence, 56.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Bence, 57.

gallery of Madison artifacts mostly belonging to Dolley, a gift shop, café, a larger gallery dedicated to the DuPont family who owned the house during the twentieth century and a theater with a short orientation film. Two major themes drive the orientation film:



Figure 5.2. DuPont additions to Montpelier. Courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey.

Dolley’s contribution to Madison’s career and the importance of his library in creating the Constitution. There are four tours available to visitors; a General Tour included in admission and three themed in-depth tours for only a few dollars more that discuss ‘Slavery at Montpelier’, ‘Dolley and Women at Montpelier’, and ‘Madison and the Constitution’. Even on the general tour, references are made to Madison’s library in every room in the house; by the time visitors reach the second-floor library, the last room on the tour, they are meant to feel as though they are entering hallowed ground. On the Constitution tour, guides refer to the second-floor library as “the most important room in the house and arguably the most important room in America.”³¹ Once visitors exit back door of the house, they can explore the Mansion Cellars, the Temple, the Formal Garden, and the Archaeology Lab where a team of archaeologists have been busily unearthing the

³¹ Interview with a tour guide, August 9, 2015.

South Yard Slave Quarters. Visitors are invited to speak with the archaeologists and observe their work. According to senior archaeologists on staff during my visit, the goal is to excavate the entire south yard within the next few months so that construction can begin on real buildings and interpretive spaces for the Slave Quarters.



Figure 5.3. Montpelier's exterior after 2008 restoration. Photograph by Casey Schumacher, August 2015.

One of the biggest surprises for Montpelier visitors is that there are currently very few artifacts on display in the house. The first-floor New Library contains two book presses, three tables, a desk, a side table, and a few chairs (see fig 5.4). As far as books go, one of the book presses has a few books on one of the shelves while the other is completely empty, there are a couple of books on the mantel, two on a chair, and none on any of the three tables. In the adjoining bedroom where Madison died, there are some books on the mantel and a small stack on the desk beside a copy of *The Spectator*. The second-floor Old Library is interpreted as a combination of the working library of 1786 and the stacks area of 1809 (see fig. 5.5). It includes six book presses mostly full of books (see fig. 5.6) while some of the books are stacked on the floor and on a desk. There are

also several papers stacked around the room and filling a pigeon-holed letterpress in the corner.³² To represent the working study space, there are a couple of fossils, a bobcat skull, and a pantograph³³ sitting on the desk facing the window that overlooks the Blue Ridge. For educational purposes, a modern book shelf with modern publications of historic titles stands in the center of the Old Library so that regular tours and school groups can handle and flip through some of the titles Madison would have kept on his shelves.³⁴ Overall though, both libraries and the house in general appear to be fairly empty of original objects. Thankfully, the curatorial staff addresses one of the major reasons for the lack of objects during tours and in the orientation film.

In 2008, Phase I of a two-part research project was completed when the Montpelier Foundation successfully restored the Madison-era building from the twentieth-century DuPont Mansion. In the orientation film, visitors can see a time-lapse video of the extensive reconstruction involved in removing large portions of the DuPont mansion in order to reveal the core of Montpelier. Visitors are also informed that Phase II is currently underway and will include acquiring Madison objects and placing them in house. This phase has been very difficult but as research continues, the interpretation of James Madison's Montpelier is improving exponentially.

³² Quertermous told me later that they know Madison used a pigeon-holed letterpress because of an account given by one of his former slaves.

³³ A pantograph is an instrument used to copy a drawing on a different scale with a system of hinged and jointed rods.

³⁴ Manager of Interpretive Content Sterling Howell is currently experimenting with how this modern collection can be used during house tours. Currently, it serves as a point of reference for school groups and an education tool that promotes student interaction. However, Howell indicated that he was open to the idea of incorporating them into regular tours if interpreters can find a way to make the books add depth and meaning to the space. This is one way interpreters can convey an accurate sense of activity in the library rather than presenting it as a still, quiet space.



Figure 5.4. New Library. Courtesy of Montpelier Foundation.

Another major reason for a lack of objects, particularly books in the library, lies in the single most important difference between the Jefferson and Madison estates: the lack of a probate inventory for Montpelier. While probate inventories exist for Monticello, in addition to several catalog lists Jefferson compiled of his library, no such records exist to reveal the contents of Montpelier or Madison's library. As Quertermous points out, this means that the curators have significantly more unanswered questions about room use and objects. For the library in particular, they lack a list of titles as well as an arrangement while Jefferson's library has both.

According to Quertermous, although most of Madison's books and many of his papers are lost, it was never his intention for them to be so difficult to find. Before his death, Madison spent considerable time compiling his papers and preparing them for publication.³⁵ During his political career as well as his retirement, he rewrote and edited

³⁵ Curators at Montpelier have been able to differentiate ink types in Madison's papers and identify original wording from his later edits. Grant Quertermous, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 10, 2015, transcript.

most of his correspondence with the intention of selling them after his death as a means of financial support for Dolley.³⁶ Similar to Jefferson, Madison died in massive debt. He did, however, leave sizeable financial gift in his will for the University of Virginia that was paid shortly after his death. Unfortunately for the staff, he had also willed the University up to 300 titles of their choice from his library. This donation took twenty



Figure 5.5. Old Library. Courtesy of Montpelier Foundation.

years to complete due to the life choices of Madison's step-son, John Payne Todd who was an avid gambler and alcoholic. After his step-father's passing, Todd produced a document claiming that Dolley had transferred ownership of everything to him and as a

³⁶ Montpelier Assistant Curator of Collections Grant Quertermous points out that Founding Fathers like Jefferson and Madison were well aware of the historic and intrinsic value of their papers even as they were writing them. Knowing their correspondence would go on to be part of the public record and enter the hallowed halls of early American history, their most political correspondence often included references to 'a formal letter at present with a personal to follow' (Grant interview). Both men were under intense pressure to publish their papers, but Madison was adamant about publishing them post-humously. The final product, if it had been kept intact would no doubt have been a major contribution to relieving some of the debt Montpelier had accumulated.

result, began selling furniture and books to pay his debts.³⁷ Todd allegedly tore the title pages out of Madison's books and even went so far as to cut away portions of letters that



Figure 5.6. Old Library bookshelves. Courtesy of Montpelier Foundation.

bore his signature in order to sell them as autographs to travelers along the road .³⁸ Finally, in 1837, the University of Virginia Board of Visitors sent a letter to Dolley inquiring after the books. She responded that she had returned to Montpelier long enough to sell everything and they were currently completing an inventory of the library. Unfortunately, that inventory has never been found. After UVA chose the books for their collection, the remaining titles were sold on the front steps of the Orange County

³⁷ Grant Quertermous, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 10, 2015, transcript.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Courthouse in 1850³⁹. As if the titles were not dispersed enough, an 1895 fire in the UVA rotunda destroyed the entire early Madison library.

This leaves Montpelier curators in a very awkward and empty position when it comes to library interpretation. Beginning in 2007, a research project was launched to conduct a massive search for Madison objects and books. For objects and general information about the house, exceptional progress has been made by examining the papers of Margaret Bayard Smith, an author who wrote detailed accounts of her visits to Montpelier and Monticello in 1809. According to Montpelier curators, the book hunt is going very well. As a starting point, Quertermous and his colleagues consulted an 1801 inventory conducted of the estate of Madison's father, revealing most of the typical titles found in a Virginia planter's reference library during this time period: medical books, treatises on farming, animal husbandry, and some religious works. Today, titles that appear on the 1801 inventory are displayed together in a separate book press in the Old Library. For books Madison likely purchased himself, records from the sale of the libraries of Lord Dunmore and William Byrd III have exposed several books that are stamped with the Dunmore or Byrd bookplates, but included Madison's signature on the title page. Other helpful sources include Madison and his peers' correspondence for references to books and for thanks for books they sent one another, a common practice among Virginia gentry and eighteenth-century statesmen. The most helpful and strong indicator that a book belonged to Madison is its inclusion in Jefferson's account books, where Jefferson kept careful notes, down to the dimension and publishing information, about what books he gave to Madison. A 1790 inventory of Madison's Philadelphia book collection indicates which books were gifts from Jefferson; when compared to the

³⁹ The Montpelier curatorial staff has the broadside for this sale in their collection.

Jefferson account book, curators are able to determine what books Madison would have had at Montpelier before and after his career in Washington. From these sources, Montpelier curators have accumulated a list of about 1,400 titles that were in Madison's personal library. Although this seems only a fraction of the supposed 4,000-volume collection, it is worth noting that many titles in this era included multiple volumes. This can also complicate research because "you could easily have one title that is twenty volumes, or you could also have twenty different volumes that are twenty different titles."⁴⁰

During a lunch interview with Quertermous and Manager of Interpretive Content Sterling Howell, it becomes apparent that, as at Monticello, recreating an appropriately messy work space is difficult when circulating tours of 15-20 people through the house. "Especially with school groups," Quertermous comments, "when elementary school students are sitting down on the floor...if we interpret it the way [Madison descendents] describe, there's barely enough room for anybody to pass through...it's almost claustrophobic."⁴¹ According to Quertermous's calculations, visitors should imagine Madison's second-story library even more overflowing with books, maps, and papers than Jefferson's. There are less books, but the space is also a lot smaller. He explains that "a good practice is to think about 10 books per linear foot" and points out that Madison's collection would require 400 feet of shelf space in a room with 6 book presses, the largest of which has 3-foot shelves.⁴² "This is a problem," he concludes with a laugh and recalls

⁴⁰ Grant Quertermous, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 10, 2015, transcript.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

the painting of the library in the Bishop White House with books lined up above the door. “It was probably even more packed than that,” Howell points out.⁴³

As Manager of Interpretive Content at Montpelier, Howell has been trying to emphasize Madison’s library in house tour content since he took the position in 2011. “I don’t view it as a library at all, in the typical library sense. I see it more as a retirement-era storage room or a repository.”⁴⁴ With a background in Criminology and Sociology, Howell offers a unique perspective to Montpelier interpretation and favors a holistic approach to the house that will help visitors see the Madisons’ experience more as a story than a single moment in time. Although there is no formal interpretive plan, his own personal goal is for visitors “...to be thinking about the same thing as Madison in the same space he was thinking about it” and “to be inspired there.”⁴⁵ One way that he believes that such thoughts surface during the tours is each guides’ unique take on the Madisons’ story. Tour guides at Montpelier are not given a script to memorize; Howell gives them a few themes and bullet points they have to address, but for the most part, each guide does their own research on Madison. This allows them to be inspired by history so they can, in turn, share that with their tours. “As long as they are factually correct and find their way to the end” where Madison’s most significant achievement is the Constitution, they are free to share what they find in inspirational from their own research.⁴⁶

⁴³ Sterling Howell, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 10, 2015, transcript.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

While the Montpelier curatorial staff has fewer objects and records to work with than the staff at Monticello, they are very aware of how they can go about acquiring objects and how they plan to use them. Once the house was restored in 2008, visitors were given a survey after viewing the orientation film (the same one visitors view today) to gather data regarding what they would expect to see in the house once it was completely furnished. The results were almost exclusively in favor of a furnished space full of books.⁴⁷ According to Quertermous, the continued search for objects and books to fill both libraries has been going beautifully.⁴⁸ Similar to Monticello, books are catalogued as objects into PastPerfect, their collections management system. Treated as objects for furnishing a space, they are given them same kind of attention and care as a “candlestick or a desk.”⁴⁹ In addition to PastPerfect, curators use a custom-built research database developed on a FilemakerPro platform especially for the furnishing and research project begun in 2007. According to Quertermous, PastPerfect and the research database serve two different purposes, the former for collections management and the later for provenance research, and the two must be able to communicate.⁵⁰ Ideally, every Madison provenance object in PastPerfect can be linked to a source object, letter or article that provides clues about its place in history and in the house. For example, when curators pull up Madison’s copy of *Leviathan* in PastPerfect, they can also pull up every source record that mentions Madison owning that copy of *Leviathan* in the research database. Using their own developed keyword nomenclature, curators are able to connect all of

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Grant Quertermous, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 10, 2015, transcript.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

their object records, including books, with source records that prove their Madison provenance. This process also includes acknowledging all of the papers that would have been kept in the Old Library, which accounts for the letterbox and significant amount of papers stacked on shelves and the desk. After Madison's death, Todd mentions in his correspondence that Madison had a thirty-six year run of the serial publication *The National Intelligencer*, which was published by Samuel Harrison Smith, whose wife was none other than Margaret Bayard Smith.

When asked about interpreting books as objects of intellectual use, status symbols or both, Quertermous and Howell gave mixed responses. Quertermous was confident that Madison, like Jefferson, used each book he owned, but was also quick to point out that the cost, time, and method involved in creating a fully-leather bound book in this period was comparable to what an art historian might find in a Virginia gentleman's painting. In Quertermous's own words, "as someone who researches Madison objects, I consider the provenance of a book he owned equal with that of a drawing."⁵¹ Howell seemed more open to classifying books as aesthetic objects indicative of social status, particularly in the New Library, but he also agrees with Quertermous that Madison made good use of each book he read.

Conclusion

Montpelier's library interpretation offered an interesting comparison to Monticello; both institutions seem to be pursuing the same interpretational goal of a book-based understanding of the house and the man as well as providing a space for visitor inspiration, but their research is conducted in very different ways. Simply put,

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Montpelier began their intense study of Madison's library much more recently with significantly less resources than Monticello. The Jefferson Library has been a key player in Monticello's library research, but the Robert H. Smith Center for the Constitution at Montpelier has been completely uninvolved with the Montpelier research. According to Howell, the mansion's connection to the Constitution Center is virtually nonexistent while the Jefferson Library staff is in constant communication with its interpretational staff. Since the Constitution Center is so focused on current constitutional scholarship, their only involvement with the house is occasional tours for teachers and educators attending some of the centers educational workshops. The disconnection speaks to the amount of research Montpelier curators and interpreters do on their own. As mentioned above, Howell's tour guides do their own research about Madison's library and Quertermous is responsible for acquiring and studying the archival record in search of Madison objects. By comparison, both of these areas of research are conducted by Jefferson Library staff.

Another helpful comparison that Montpelier provided was that of a historic house museum in its very early stages both in collections and interpretation development. Montpelier opened much more recently than Monticello and has fewer objects and financial resources. As a result, Montpelier has been forced to rely on tour guides to provide much of the historical context that visitors gain at Monticello simply by being surrounded with Jefferson objects. Again, this speaks to the success of the Montpelier interpretational staff; they present an engaging and successfully educational perspective of interpretation without many objects to interpret. Howell believes much of that success comes from institutional honesty. The simple answer to the dilemma of not objects "is to

be up front with visitors about what you do and do not have.”⁵² Considering the research they are doing and how long they have been doing it, the Montpelier curatorial and interpretational staff are doing a phenomenal job of presenting for visitors the life, home, and character of James Madison in a way that pays more than adequate tribute to his personal library.

⁵² Sterling Howell, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 10, 2015, transcript.

CHAPTER SIX

Mount Vernon

Introduction

While examining Mount Vernon contributes a great deal to our study of Virginia prodigy houses, it also presents an opportunity to address the origin of historic preservation in America. The long history and efforts of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (MVLA) place the home of our first president at the top of every reading list regarding historic houses and preservation. In fact, it is no understatement to say that the MVLA is the reason this thesis is being written; without their pioneering effort to make a temporary structure last in perpetuity, there would likely be significantly less interest in the houses and by extension, the libraries of our Founding Fathers. Washington saw with his own eyes the beginnings of an American nation and his house saw the beginning of American preservation. Yet for all the magic in the hallowed halls around it, the library at Mount Vernon currently receives distinctly less-than-adequate attention in both its interpretation and furnishings. Granted, Washington never achieved Madison's scholarship, nor was he ever the traveler that Jefferson was. However, it seems reasonable that if historians and interpreters at Mount Vernon hope to fully convey the depth of his character and the holistic majesty of his house, they should give due diligence to the means by which he achieved both, namely his library. In an article for the 2008 Annual Report of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Curator of Fine and Decorative Arts Emily Shapiro suggests that "more than any other space in the Mansion,

the study represents the real George Washington – the man behind the public façade.”¹ Consequently, the library at Mount Vernon sheds a unique and important light on the character of its owner that visitors are likely to miss if the space is not effectively interpreted.

Gentleman Farmer

In order to compare Washington’s library with Jefferson and Madison’s, we must first establish what these three men had in common and what they did not have in common prior to accumulating their libraries. Although Washington was several years their senior, all three men were born into a generation of Virginia statesmen that seemed destined for political success. However, while Jefferson and Madison both rose to the level of statesmen fairly early in their lives, Washington was first and foremost a farmer, then a soldier, then a president. He was born into the Virginia gentry, and consequently he did own slaves. Both of his half brothers travelled to England for their education, though George himself did not. These beginnings laid the necessary foundation for a sophisticated education and promising career. However, as Frances Laverne Carroll and Mary Meacham point out, Washington was not as high up in Virginia society as some historians imagine; he still required “luck, good investments and a good marriage to have the wealth to move into the very highest class.”² Washington’s father died when he was eleven, which both solidified the need and expectation of an advantageous marriage while removing all hope for either an English education or the opportunity to attend

¹ Emily D. Shapiro, “A Man of Method and Labor” in *The Annual Report of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union 2008* (Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2008), 33.

² Frances Laverne Carroll and Mary Meacham, *The Library at Mount Vernon* (Pittsburgh: Beta Phi Mu, 1977), 9.

William and Mary College. This lack of a gentleman's education set Washington apart from other Virginia statesman in a way that did not go unrecognized upon his election to the presidency. John Adams once claimed, "That Washington was not a scholar is certain. That he was too illiterate, unlearned, unread for his station is equally past dispute."³

If nothing else is clear from Washington's library and related correspondence, it is that he truly felt this lack of a formal education, was openly embarrassed by it and spent most of his life trying to make up for it. As a result, he turned to books to fill this intellectual gap. In 1771, he ordered a bookplate with the Washington coat-of-arms that was made to strike from four to five hundred books (see fig. 6.1). Since his library was nowhere near that size in 1771, this proves that Washington had high hopes for the expansion of his library. Especially after the Revolution, Washington took up a crusade of book collecting and serious study in order to maintain his place among Virginia's leading class. Although he never did make it across the Atlantic, he did try to learn French, albeit unsuccessfully. In June 1783, he ordered a French-English dictionary from New York and the next February ordered another dictionary and French grammar book from Philadelphia.⁴ Even during his presidential career, Washington regularly frequented local libraries. Among his correspondence are several letters of thanks to Franklin's Library Company in Philadelphia, located in Carpenter's Hall, for the use of their collection. In addition, at the completion of his second term, Washington received from the Company a special bound catalogue of their collection.⁵ When he did occasionally

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Longmore, 216.

⁵ Carroll, 112.

return to Mount Vernon during the presidency, he was most often found in his study. Like Jefferson and Madison, Washington's favorite room in his house was his library.



Figure 6.1. *Left*, genuine Washington bookplate; *right*, counterfeit Washington bookplate. Images of at least one counterfeit of Washington's bookplate still exist. In 1863, over 200 books bearing the counterfeit bookplate were offered for sale. Luckily, the counterfeit was detected before the sale, but books bearing the counterfeit plate are still in circulation. Courtesy of The Fred W. Smith Library for the Study of George Washington.

Unlike Jefferson and Madison, however, Washington was not a speculative thinker nor does his library and papers reflect a desire to formulate new ideas and philosophies. Rather, Washington's gift was living out what he read. "His genius manifested itself not in profoundly examining the beliefs of his generation, but in embodying them."⁶ Even today, historians and Mount Vernon interpreters will identify Washington not as a man of letters, but as a man of action. This is a probable explanation for Jefferson and Madison's strong admiration toward him. He certainly did not read all the books they read, but he did give their generation an ideal level of integrity and leadership to aspire to. One practice all three men did share, however, was the Virginia

⁶ Longmore, 226.

gentry's reading language; that is, incorporating their extensive reading into their everyday conversation and correspondence. Careful to thoroughly research topics that interested him, Washington often quoted books and pamphlets in his letters and continued purchasing books right up to his death. According to historian Benson J. Lossing, his library contained largely practical titles that "seemed to have been purchased for use as a mechanic would purchase his tools."⁷ Useful texts on building, farming, crop rotation, shrubs, husbandry, cattle, and horsemanship made up a large portion of his collection. His favorite subject was husbandry, reflected in two of his most-referenced titles, *The Compleat Horseman or, Perfect Farrier* and Gibson's *Disease of Horses*, which he acquired in 1759.⁸

Washington's library also included plenty of titles that we might consider 'self-help' books today. The most famous of this is Washington's own transcription of *Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour In Company and Conversation*, drawn primarily from his 1668 edition of Francis Hawkin's English translation of *Youth's Behavior, or Decency in Conversation Amongst Men*. "He also had hundreds of pamphlets, many of them political and from 200 to 400 folio volumes of his own documents."⁹ Washington was not in the habit of marginating or underlining, but in light of recent scholarship, including Francois Furstenberg's article in *William and Mary Quarterly*, Mount Vernon curators have recently begun to examine his library more closely.

⁷ Carroll, 89.

⁸ Hale's *Husbandry* is currently displayed in Mount Vernon on a parlor table where traditionally the family Bible would have been kept. As he aged, Washington did not buy books or pamphlets on religion and he rarely mentioned Scripture in his correspondence. In fact, the 1783 inventory has no Bible listed. The 1802 inventory mentions three, but one is in Latin and probably belonged to his step-son John while the other two appear to be gifts from the early 1790s⁸.

⁹ Carroll, 86.

Similar to Jefferson, the source and content of Washington's library is relatively well documented. According to historian Paul Longmore, much of Washington's political perspective was achieved through reading books and pamphlets on history and politics. He cites one estimate that "about one quarter of the volumes in his library fell into those categories."¹⁰ A more recent study in 2014 indicates that as much as one third of his library addressed politics, law, history, and economics.¹¹ Many of these particular texts were likely brought to Mount Vernon from the library of Martha's first husband, Daniel Parke Custis. Among his correspondence, Washington references reading *The Spectator*, an English history and *The Guardian* as early as his teenage years. Custis's library added *The Tatler*, *The Free Thinker*, John Trenchard and William Gordon's *The Independent Whig* and *Cato's Letters*, Bolingbroke's *Remarks on the History of England* and his *Dissertation Upon Parties*. From these few titles alone, historians can begin to grasp Washington's early appreciation for and thorough knowledge of English constitutional and political development from 1640 to the 1730s.¹²

In September 1782, Lund Washington completed an inventory of the library that had previously belonged to Martha and Daniel Parke Custis's son, John Parke Custis. Over the years, Washington had taken John's education very seriously, did his best to provide the boy with several books and occasionally noted John's name in the front cover instead of his own. Although it is unknown exactly how many of these ultimately contributed to Washington's library, the inventory included 327 titles. Ten months later,

¹⁰ Longmore, 119.

¹¹ Emily Johnson, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 7, 2015, transcript.

¹² Wendell Garrett, *George Washington's Mount Vernon* (New York: Monacelli Press, Inc, 1998), 119.

Lund made another inventory of the library at Mount Vernon, which included about sixty entries including a notation for “several titles...not worth mentioning.”¹³ At this time, aged 51 and having completed construction on his library only eight years before, Washington approved this inventory. Considering the large amount of books that would be purchased between 1783 and Washington’s death in 1799, it is no wonder that Washington installed a wall of built-in bookshelves in 1786. Considering his English taste, it is also no surprise that he “applied a wood-grain finish that resembled light English walnut to all the woodwork in the room” in order to match the bookshelves.¹⁴

Following Washington’s death, many of his books were sold or given away. Washington’s nephew, Bushrod Washington did the first posthumous inventory, but also ended up giving away many of the books after Martha died in 1802. That inventory listed 884 titles in the library excluding pamphlets, but there is no way to know how much the library had diminished since 1799.¹⁵ Table 4 below shows one inventory of the various subjects found in the Mount Vernon library. Several titles were purchased for the Athenaeum in Boston, others ended up in the Harkness Collection in the New York Public Library and the Huntington Collection, now the Huntington Library in California. A few letters to George Corbin Washington indicate the Library of Congress expected to receive a fair share, but Corbin responded that he had sold most of the remaining titles for \$3,000 to Henry Stevens, a bookseller who ultimately took them back to the British Museum.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Appleton P.C. Griffin’s annotated catalog of Washington’s

¹³ Carroll, 107.

¹⁴ Garrett, 53.

¹⁵ Carroll, 123.

¹⁶ Carroll, 124.

library for the Boston Athenaeum is still the “most comprehensive authority on the titles in Washington’s library, their provenance, physical description, and documentary references to their acquisition.”¹⁷ Currently, the Washington Library at Mount Vernon houses sixty-two original Washington titles in one hundred and three volumes; the majority of the remaining collection is at the Boston Athenaeum.¹⁸ The early dispersal of Washington’s library made it particularly difficult for previous scholars to assess its contents, but as more volumes are discovered, researchers can reexamine Washington as a reader and intellectual.

Table 4. Excerpt from Washington’s Inventory¹⁹

Inventory				Not in
Literature	64 items	137 volumes	1 missing	8 additional
Periodicals	36	87	1	5
Religious works	35	53		10
Geography and Travels	28	62		6
History	50	106	17 pamphlets	3
Politics, Political, Economy	68	88	1 pamphlet	3
Law	17	28		4
Legislation	26	80		1
Military works	40	42		6
Agriculture	56	97		1
Science	22	35		1
Miscellaneous	21	25		4
Misc. Pamphlets	45	53		
Maps, charts and prints	53			
Total		893 volumes		52 additional

Building Mount Vernon

Washington first began drawing up plans for his library in 1773 and construction began in 1774. During this final renovation of Mount Vernon, Washington added the

¹⁷ Michele Lee, “Epilogue: Rereading George Washington,” in *Take Note! George Washington the Reader*, ed. Amanda C. Isaac (George Washington’s Mount Vernon, 2013), 133.

¹⁸ Michele Lee, email message to author, October 8, 2015.

¹⁹ Eugene E. Prussing, *The estate of George Washington, deceased* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1927), 141.

well-known two-story piazza facing the river, but more importantly, he expanded the north and south ends of the house, allowing space for a new entertaining room and a private library. Scholars who have examined Washington's correspondence are still unsure of when he began dedicating space in Mount Vernon to his library, but they are confident that a reasonable collection existed prior to the 1774 remodel. A letter to his brother in 1755 references Washington's desire to return home from the French and Indian War in order to get back to his 'little library' at Mount Vernon. Considering that the library addition was not added for another twenty years, one can imagine Washington keeping a small library in one of the house's four original rooms before his marriage to Martha.

While the architectural refinement affiliated with Monticello and Montpelier had become more vernacular by the time Jefferson and Madison expanded their libraries, Washington was expanding his house at the height of a much more exclusive breed of gentility. As mentioned in Chapter One, Washington joined the ranks of Virginia gentrymen in relying heavily on "several architectural pattern books for the embellishment of the Mansion."²⁰ Interestingly, the exact replication of pattern books is more evident in the architecture of Mount Vernon than both Monticello and Montpelier. Also, the privacy of Washington's library is much more intense than Madison's and even Jefferson's. Washington's friend Samuel Powel observed that privacy in the study was absolutely requisite because of the "perpetual & elegant Hospitality exercised here."²¹ As far as privacy goes, if we can imagine Jefferson's Sanctum Sanctorum as an established place of privacy and Madison's library as one of moderate privacy, interpreters would do

²⁰ Garrett, 50.

²¹ Garrett, 51.

well to think of Washington's study as a place of extreme privacy. Interestingly, while Jefferson and Madison's libraries are described as a place only open by invitation, Martha's grandson, George Washington Parke Custis described his grandfather's study as "a place that none entered without orders."²²

While the majority of Mount Vernon fits the historic standard for a Virginia gentleman farmer's mansion, the library is a space of its own spatial and architectural confusion. To say the least, its location and lack of decoration make it a very odd, albeit intentional space, within the larger scheme of the house. In keeping with typical Georgian style, the rest of the house is very symmetrical with prominent public rooms on the first floor accessed from the central passage. In addition, the New Room and Parlor provide an interior reflection of the exterior grandeur, incorporating windows, ceilings, and doorways that strongly reflect English and Italian prototypes. By comparison, the library was located a good distance from the main hall, beyond the dining room and guest bedroom, creating a private, quiet space away from noise and movement. Its entryways, accessible only through internal passages, lack the drama and flair of the rest of the house, a design choice which Carroll attributes to its being "an addition to an existing structure."²³ This is very important for this study because it confirms two of the major themes of specialized room use and public and private spaces discussed in Chapter One. First, a guest bedroom, rather than the library, is given priority access to the hall. Receiving guests was a major expectation of maintaining one's place among the Virginia gentry and the Washingtons took great pride in receiving each guest with style. Second, placing so many physical and, by extension, cognitive boundaries between guests and the

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Carroll, 33.

library speaks to the consistent theme of privacy in the three libraries at Monticello, Montpelier and Mount Vernon. Also, the proximity of Washington's bedroom to the study mirrors Jefferson and Madison's designs. Placing the library as Washington did "achieved the best physical representation and the truest emphasis on its primary purpose", particularly seclusion.²⁴

What makes Washington's study even more private and personal is that it is situated in such a way as to be most convenient to the owner, yet uncomfortable for visitors. While Georgian style dictated that a "door should open on the most magnificent and extensive prospect of a room", usually the fireplace, the main entrance to Washington's study from the bedroom staircase opens parallel to the fireplace.²⁵ In addition, the large bookshelves that would normally balance the fireplace are adjacent to it rather than opposite. The result is an awkward and off-balanced space that is extremely uncomfortable for guests. Even the furnishings seem out of sorts. The doorways are very plain, the molding unattractive, and an orphan fire screen is listed for the study fireplace even though all the other fire screens in the house are listed as pairs.²⁶ The study's inventory includes typical library furnishings including a tambour desk, revolving chair, and a terrestrial globe, but it also lists such personal objects as surveying compasses and chains, several pistols and swords, a pocket telescope, a walking staff, whip stock, and a boot jack.²⁷ Fortunately, probate inventories can also reveal a great deal about a space by what is not listed. For Washington's study, expected objects that are missing include a

²⁴ Carroll, 26.

²⁵ Carroll, 33.

²⁶ Carroll, 37.

²⁷ Carroll, 40.

sofa and library table, likely because there is not enough room for them, but more importantly, there are not more than three side chairs listed. Carroll suggests that even if Washington's secretaries and farm managers were permitted into the study, they very likely did not sit while there and that rare guests had to wait until a servant could bring more chairs."²⁸

Likely the most surprising object in Washington's study, finalizing its use as a primarily private space, was the dressing table and copper washbasin. Although it was a distinctly English practice to keep a dressing table in one's study, even this particular object adds an element of the awkward. The table included in the inventory for the room measures 29 inches high, 38 inches wide and 25 inches deep, making it uncomfortable for a user of Washington's height regardless of whether he is sitting or standing.²⁹ One element of the space is certainly attractive however, and that is the breathtaking view of the Potomac landscape through the study's large south windows. All of its architectural and decorative flaws considered, it makes sense for Washington to have been unconcerned about the formality of the layout and decoration in his study because it was an extremely private space.³⁰ In essence, the furnishings and layout of the room reflect the attitude of both Washington the man and Washington the reader, giving minimal attention to comfort and providing maximum space for practicality and usefulness.

A word really ought to be said for the evidence of a form-follows-function mentality in Washington's bookshelves. Eighteenth century bookshelves ranged from stacks of rugged book boxes, as at Monticello, to specially-designed book presses with

²⁸ Carroll, 54.

²⁹ Carroll, 51.

³⁰ Jefferson, on the other hand, lost sleep over the crown molding in his Sanctum Sanctorum.

glass panels, as at Poplar Forest or Gunston Hall. The prestige associated with more elaborate bookshelves was enhanced by their being built against a wall that could provide the necessary bracing. According to Carroll, even if they were not original to the room, bookshelves “should look built-in, and they should blend with the architectural style of the room.”³¹ Since Washington’s bookshelves were a later addition, adding them to the library forced him to “lose a foot of space... in order to accomplish a surface flush with the wall of the room.”³² This represents another way in which Washington seemed content with awkward spatial issues in his study. Additional liberties were taken in the use of the actual shelves. In most Georgian libraries, top shelves housed sculpture, pieces of art or specimens of natural science because, although it was little more than five feet from the floor, titles imprinted on book spines could not be read from such a height. However, Washington’s six-foot frame allowed him to store books on all of the shelves and “use the bottom shelf of the cupboard below the press as a step.”³³ In summary, while the rest of the house fit the standards of Georgian style and English decoration, Washington’s study, down to the practicality of his collection and the convenience of his washbasin and bookshelves, was a space that reflected a side of Washington’s character that most people never saw in the New Room or Parlor. Herein lies the upmost significance of its proper interpretation for visitors. If they miss the obscure, subtle realities of this space, they miss out on the most noteworthy and influential elements of Washington’s character.

³¹ Carroll, 45.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Carroll, 47.

From Home to House

As mentioned above, to examine Mount Vernon is to witness the beginning of historic preservation in America. The story of the conversion of Mount Vernon into a historic house museum is in itself a case study in early organized preservation efforts. After Martha Washington's death, the mansion and its 4,000 acres was passed to George's nephew, Bushrod Washington. Upon his death in 1829, he bequeathed the mansion and 1,200 acres to his nephew, John Augustine Washington, whose son, John Augustine III, was the last Washington owner of the estate. In the years preceding the Civil War, John Augustine made several efforts to persuade the federal government or the Commonwealth of Virginia to preserve the estate for visitors, but with little response. In 1854, however, moved by a despairing letter from her mother describing the extreme disrepair of the mansion, Ann Pamela Cunningham established the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (MVLVA) in order to save the mansion. Under the leadership of appointed state regents, Cunningham called on ladies of the Union and Confederacy to raise funds for the restoration of Mount Vernon as a shrine to our nation's first president. Patricia West explains in *Domesticating History* that the push for 'shrine preservation' arose out of "of a burgeoning aesthetic moralism" that viewed early American homes as holy places of character-molding for our founding fathers.³⁴ Interestingly, this idea of character-building is very central to this thesis, which focuses on personal libraries as primary sources of influence for our founding fathers; the MVLVA may have actually been on to something. This "intrepid group of American patriots" eventually purchased the

³⁴ Patricia West, introduction to *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 2.

mansion and 200 acres from John Augustine and took over its operation in 1860.³⁵ The MVLA continues to operate the Mount Vernon complex and works closely with the National Park Service (NPS) to preserve Washington's view of the Potomac. The NPS has purchased over 4,650 acres across the Potomac to preserve the view from Mount Vernon and continues to work with the MVLA in maintaining excellence in Mount Vernon's preservation and accessibility.

Current Interpretation

When visitors arrive at Mount Vernon, they are met with more options for tours, activities and things to do than at Monticello and Montpelier combined. In addition to touring the Mansion and Grounds, visitors can take a sightseeing cruise along the Potomac, take a shuttle to the Distillery for beverages and tours or visit the Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center, which houses more than seven hundred original objects and includes twenty-five theaters and galleries conveying the Life and Legacy of George Washington. At first, the separation of elements between the house, museum, and education center is confusing and overwhelming. Not only are visitors uncertain about what to do first, but once they decide, the spaces seem so separate from one another, they may as well be separate sites rather than one.

The Mansion is currently interpreted to look the way it did immediately after Washington's death in 1799. On the day I visited, restoration work was being done on the west façade, which meant all the windows were boarded up, creating a very dark, almost ghostly interior (see fig. 6.2). Visitors are walked from room to room, meeting a different guide in each room. This makes sense for traffic flow because visitors are almost

³⁵ "Mount Vernon Ladies Association," George Washington's Mount Vernon, accessed October 2015, <http://www.mountvernon.org/about/mount-vernon-ladies-association/>.

constantly moving through one room into the next. Mount Vernon receives, on average, one million visitors every year so there is rarely enough time to gather an entire tour group into a single room, much less coordinate stop-and-go interpretation in each one. Interestingly, the study seems the most quickly moved-through room on the tour, even though 50% of tour guides questioned believed that it is the most important room in the house. The guide in the room admits that on the rare occasion he has time to address specific objects for visitors, he usually points out the fan chair in the center of the room, the swivel chair, and the washbowl. Currently, there are even fewer books in this space than in the Madison library: a few are stacked on two desks, one left open on a writing desk, the shelves of which are empty. Figure 6.3 shows a somewhat recent photo of the study, including the writing desk which is shown full of books, but was almost completely empty when I saw it in August 2015. Similarly, figure 6.4 depicts the bookshelves that make up the west wall of the study, which during my visit were largely empty except for a couple of books. According to Assistant Curator Adam Erby, all of the books in the house are “generic eighteenth century bindings”; all of the original Washington-provenance books at Mount Vernon are kept in a vault in the Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington across the street from the Mount Vernon complex.³⁶

The galleries in the Education Center are the loudest of any museum I have visited, and the noise is not from an abundance of visitors. Every few panels are devoted to a time period, theme or significant event in Washington’s life and each one has a blaring soundscape. On a slow day, visitors can hear ballroom music, dramatic readings of the Constitution, canons from two different wars, and the sound of young George

³⁶ Adam Erby, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 13, 2015, transcript.



Figure 6.2. Photograph by Casey Schumacher, August 2015.

chopping down the mythical cherry tree all at once. Aside from the overwhelming sound effects, however, the galleries in the Education Center are state of the art. There are minimal objects on display, but the images, panels, dioramas, and label-type are all vibrant and engaging. Several digital screens show actors in period costumes sharing first-hand accounts, making the experience all the more relatable for visitors. Several different theaters allow families and school groups to branch off from the galleries to learn about specific themes such as George and Martha's love story, Washington and religion, and spies in the Revolutionary War. A significant amount of floor-space is dedicated to Washington's political career, incorporating both the signing of the Declaration of Independence, his two-time unanimous election to the presidency, and the adoption of the Constitution. Unfortunately, Washington's political career is not portrayed as tastefully or effectively as his childhood and military career; modern political cartoonists were employed to create retro cartoons to depict Washington's

cabinet relations and re-election and modern TV screen show more references to Washington in twentieth and twenty-first century political issues rather than explore his own administration. The last panel visitors see in the Education Center is the only space without an overwhelming soundscape. A large map of the United States shows the location of every institution, building, street, city, state, and monument named after George Washington. Visitors can use interactive screens near the map to answer Washington trivia, which seems like an excellent way to ‘test’ visitors’ retention of the galleries, but the trivia is related to the streets, cities, and monuments named after Washington rather than his life.



Figure 6.3. The writing desk in the right of this photograph was empty during my visit, showing the mass removal of volumes from the mansion in the last two years. Photograph taken August 2013, courtesy of The Fred W. Smith Library for the Study of George Washington.

After visiting the Education Center, the Museum offers a quiet escape to a treasure trove of Washington-provenance items. Visitors pass through two sets of glass doors to enter the Museum, creating both a physical and cognitive barrier between the Education Center and the artifacts. The galleries include mostly jewelry, clothing, art, and



Figure 6.4. After Washington's study was refurbished in 2008, many subtle changes were made and objects added and removed. For example, *the* sawfish rostrum standing on the desk under the portrait of Lawrence Washington was eventually moved to the Museum and displayed with the globe and other items from the study. Notice that the rostrum, shown here in 2009, does not appear in the Fig 4 image dated August 2013. Photograph taken June 2009, courtesy of The Fred W. Smith Library for the Study of George Washington.

dishes, all of which are polished and displayed under jewelry-style lights that make the entire space seem to shimmer. According to Erby, most of the objects in the Museum were kept by the Washingtons at the national capitol, not at Mount Vernon. Items in the Museum that were kept at Mount Vernon, such as Washington's swords and fine China, were often tucked away in closets or kept on the third floor where visitors cannot see them, "so [curators] put them in the Museum [where] more people get to see them."³⁷

The Museum also offers a space for items that cannot be preserved under the Mansion's current environmental conditions. "We can do props in the Mansion" Erby says, in order to save the original items and display them in a bigger space like the Museum.³⁸ In a quiet corner of the Museum, a few of Washington's books and papers are on display in the Gilder Lehrman Gallery entitled 'Washington and the World of Ideas,' but the

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

majority of the original papers on display are in a temporary exhibition about the Gardens and Grounds of Mount Vernon. In that particular area, there are more books and documents on display than in any other area in the complex combined. To wrap up the Museum space, Erby explains that they also interpret Washington's Life and Legacy by displaying items like "paintings of George Washington that [he] never owned."³⁹

The Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington, quietly hidden across the street from the Mount Vernon complex, was dedicated in September 2013. The 45,000 square-foot presidential library includes a state-of-the-art reading room, but is only open to researchers who make an appointment for specific Washington-related research. An exhibition entitled *Take Note! Washington the Reader* coincided with the grand opening of the Library and allowed visitors to view over 86 original Washington books and papers from September 2013-January 2014. The exhibition was exceptionally curated and included such titles Washington's copy of *A View of the Conduct of the Executive* by James Monroe as well as Washington's English translation of *Don Quixote*, which he purchased in 1787 in Philadelphia. The exhibition's catalog, written by Associate Curator Amanda Isaac, explores the stages of Washington's library using inventories completed in 1759, 1764, 1783, and the probate listing of 1799. She acknowledges that many scholars focus on texts that supplement Washington's career as a soldier, farmer, and statesman, which makes sense considering the high percentage of texts related to these topics in his library. However, she also suggests that Washington "sought more than purely practical lessons from his readings, and derived moral and

³⁹ *Ibid.*

social enrichment from them as well.”⁴⁰ To support this claim, she points out that at the time of his death, “religious and philosophical texts accounted for 14% of his collection”⁴¹, including copies of Sir Matthew Hale’s *Contemplations Moral and Divine* (1685), Thomas Comber’s *Short Discourses on the Common Prayer* (1712), and Offspring Blackhall’s *The Sufficiency of a Standing Revelation in General* (1717). This quantity is exactly equal to the amount of agricultural texts in Washington’s library and double that of his histories. Interestingly, Washington devotes a higher percentage of his collection to religion and philosophy than Jefferson in his second library. The unique makeup of topics among these libraries are, according to Manguel, key factors that differentiate their character and taste. “What makes a library a reflection of its owner” he claims, “is not merely the choice of the titles themselves, but the mesh of associations implied in the choice.”⁴²

To close the *Take Note!* catalog, Special Collections Librarian Michele Lee explains Mount Vernon’s desire to create a database incorporating “not just the numerous lists of books associated with Washington’s library, but also...information drawn from the account books, the correspondence, and those few books that have eluded any documentation but bear his signature or bookplate, or list him as a subscriber.”⁴³ As of 2013, the database had accumulated just under 1,300 titles, which Lee hopes will allow researchers, interpreters, and visitors to examine Washington’s library through a different

⁴⁰ Amanda Isaac, *Take Note! George Washington the Reader*, (George Washington’s Mount Vernon, 2013), 41.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Manguel, 194.

⁴³ Michele Lee, “Epilogue: Rereading George Washington,” in *Take Note! George Washington the Reader*, ed. Amanda C. Isaac (George Washington’s Mount Vernon, 2013), 142.

lens, “to closely examine not just what was on the shelves of his study, but how he may have utilized these books.”⁴⁴ She goes on to quote Furstenberg’s observation that the bibliographic shift in Washington scholarship will reveal “Washington not as a man of action but as a thinker and participant in some of the most urgent transatlantic debates of the era.”⁴⁵ While this methodology sounds very similar to the bibliographic history research at Montpelier and Monticello, it does not appear that, beyond the *Take Note!* exhibition, bibliographic research on Washington’s books will find its way into Mount Vernon interpretational practice.

When asked why Washington’s library is not as deeply ingrained in the interpretation of the Mansion as at Monticello and Montpelier, Erby responded that the library-heavy approach is not the traditional way of looking at Washington. “The difference between Washington and [men like Jefferson and Madison] is that Washington doesn’t have the classical education [they do]...he wants to be considered first and foremost a farmer.”⁴⁶ As a result, interpretation at the Mount Vernon complex focuses on his military success, agricultural background and his presidency. Erby believes *Take Note!* “certainly challenged that [idea]” and showed visitors a side of Washington they would not normally see.⁴⁷ Now that the exhibition has passed, however, there is no connection between the Library and the Mansion, save the fact that some curatorial offices, including Erby’s, are located in the Library. “[In the house], we don’t talk about the [research] library...it’s intended for researchers and scholarly pursuits, it’s not

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Michele Lee, “Epilogue: Rereading George Washington,” in *Take Note! George Washington the Reader*, ed. Amanda C. Isaac (George Washington’s Mount Vernon, 2013), 133.

⁴⁶ Adam Erby, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 13, 2015, transcript.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

intended to be part of the tour...and it's not at all possible for visitors to make the connection."⁴⁸

In regards to furnishing the library, Erby readily agrees that the study ought to be more full of books than it currently is. After all, with shelf space for about 300 books and an inventory of at least 800, Washington's library seems about as packed as Madison's. According to Carroll, "Washington may have used the cupboards by the fireplace, the floor, the closet, or double-shelving."⁴⁹ Currently, Erby and other Mount Vernon curators are, like the Montpelier staff, looking for books to fill the shelves in the study. "We recently took a big step and put out a call to the public for books," he says with a nervous laugh, "We're looking for donations of eighteenth century, non-rare books in good condition. We could get some amazing donations or we could get some really terrible trash."⁵⁰ In addition, Erby suggested that interpretation of Washington's study should be, if anything, more about correspondence, pamphlets, and newspapers than about books. According to Erby, "Washington is always very careful with the way he deals with his papers [and] is very meticulous about keeping those papers" once they are compiled and bound because, like Jefferson and Madison, he knew they would be valuable later.⁵¹ The spirit of Furstenberg's article supports this idea that much of Washington's character can be gleaned from his papers and pamphlets, not just his purchased books.

As stated above, the Washington Library keeps sixty-two titles of original Washington books in 103 volumes in their vault. Not even Erby has keys to this space.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Carroll, 122.

⁵⁰ Adam Erby, interview by Casey Schumacher, August 13, 2015, transcript.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

There are three sections in the vault, each deeper than the next and behind an additional set of locked doors. The first contains the rare book reading room and houses eighteenth century texts from the surrounding area, a few items from the Bushrod Washington library, and first-edition Washington biographies. The second section of the vault contains original documents related to Mount Vernon and correspondence belonging to Washington and his descendents. The third section of the vault contains a circular room that houses the sixty-two original Washington books from the study in Mount Vernon. All of the books are accessioned into the Library's Special Collection catalog and they do not appear anywhere in the Mount Vernon catalog system.

Conclusion

While analysis of library interpretation at Monticello and Montpelier was, for the most part, confined to the Mansion structures, Mount Vernon forced me to address the entire complex. This added a few new angles and complication to my study because there is currently minimal flow or dialogue between the Education Center, Museum, and Mansion and at this point, there is very little that can be done about it. Since the complex combines three major interpretational spaces that usually exist in isolation, there is confusion about what visitors can expect from each space. Generally speaking, visitors expect historic house museums to display objects rather than house them in a separate museum. Similarly, education centers are often exclusively interactive and do not usually include object-heavy exhibits with similar content.⁵² Granted, keeping Washington

⁵² A comparison may be made here between the Mount Vernon Education Center and the Discovery Rooms at the Mayborn Museum Complex located on the campus of Baylor University in Waco, Texas. While the Mayborn complex includes both historic, object-heavy exhibit space and interactive Discovery Rooms, their content and, by extension, their interpretation are completely different. In other words, though both are meant to educate their respective audiences, objects viewed in the exhibits and

objects in the Museum allows for better preservation, but it leaves the house feeling decidedly empty. Similarly, visitors learn so much about Washington's childhood, military career, presidential election, and retirement in the Education Center that little is left to be learned during house tours. Regardless of which order visitors experience these three buildings, there is a distinct lack of cohesion which makes the Education Center overwhelming, the Museum seem uncomfortably quiet, and the Mansion feel like an empty shell. All that said, it can never be forgotten that interpretive spaces must accommodate their audience and that Mount Vernon's annual audience surpasses the hundred thousands. Not only is it logistically, mechanically, and spatially inefficient to incorporate all of the content from the Education Center and into Museum into one space inside the Mansion, it would also be harmful to the preservation of the objects.

Even recognizing the inherent differences among historic houses, museums, and education centers does not excuse Mount Vernon's lack of interpretation in the library. While there is plenty of rigor in the search for books to fill the library space, there are not currently any ongoing efforts to incorporate the richness of the *Take Note!* exhibition into the day-to-day interpretation of the Mansion, Museum or Education Center. While visitors do see some of Washington's personal papers in the Museum, there is still a great disconnect between the Museum and the Mansion which is made doubly inadequate by the fact that the actual books are located off-site and not mentioned in house tours. As a

objects handled in the Discovery Rooms are of a completely different nature, are presented in intentionally dissimilar spaces and achieve two separate missions. By contrast, Mount Vernon's interactive Education Center and object-heavy Museum both attempt to educate visitors about the life and legacy of George Washington through two different modes of communication. While this does allow different kinds of learners to recognize a common general theme, discerning the primary intended message among the different modes of communication can be confusing for visitors.

result, the secretive nature of the Smith National Library does no favors for this particular study.

Although the historic and enriching value of Washington's library seems obvious to me, Mount Vernon staff are still weighing it against the logistical difficulties and questionable necessity of its thorough interpretation. On one hand, Erby agrees that Washington's status as a meticulous reader is important for scholars and he is confident that researchers of print culture can find answers to "good questions" about how Washington bound, arranged, and wrote about his books. On the other, he seems adamant that the pursuit of these interests should remain isolated to the reading room of the Smith Library.⁵³ To be sure, his argument stems from a very legitimate concern. For men like Jefferson and Madison, Erby claims, connecting their library content with interpretation is simplified by the fact that Madison and Jefferson's libraries have natural, identifiable connections to the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. This provides visitors with hard evidence for the significance of their books. "For Washington, it's not always so easy," he says, "Washington is very much a man of action and his education feeds into that."⁵⁴ Erby's argument is valid; the extensive research conducted on Washington's library make it clear that he was no Madison and certainly no Jefferson. As a result, museum professionals should be wary of jumping to conclusions when interpreting his library. However, both the *Take Note!* exhibition and recent scholarship are continually revealing that Washington did keep a well-rounded library, he did use it and, most importantly, its role in building his character, life, and legacy was undeniably profound. In the *Take Note!* catalog, Isaac described the significant role of Washington's

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

library in making him a “lifelong learner, inquisitive, and informed...the ideal American citizen that the founding fathers envisioned for the new republic.”⁵⁵ This observation is absolutely a step in the right direction, but if interpreters at Mount Vernon believe there is any truth to it, they must find a more effective way to give credit where credit is due.

⁵⁵ Amanda Isaac, *Take Note! George Washington the Reader*, (George Washington’s Mount Vernon, 2013), 5.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

Institutional Differences

Conducting a comparative study of three historic houses that appear so similar in content, yet are so different in their mission and interpretational scope proved difficult. At the beginning of this project, I hypothesized that the personal-relational connection, physical proximity, and historic significance among Washington, Jefferson, and Madison would incline them toward a similar interpretational method for their respective libraries. Upon closer examination, however, this was not and in fact cannot be the case. Indeed, these three libraries' major thematic and missional differences must overshadow all the evidence of their similarities. Each historic house museum is different and museum professionals should not expect the contents, order, and interpretation of any one library to mimic the goals and mission of another. During my visits and interviews, I concluded that Monticello and Montpelier had very similar missions and, by extension, interpretational goals for their libraries while Mount Vernon's mission and interpretational goals were completely different in both content and scope. As a result, my final conclusion must isolate my analysis of Mount Vernon from my analysis of Monticello and Montpelier, using its interpretation as a foil for, rather than opposing representation of, what I might consider 'proper' library interpretation.

The staffs at Monticello and Montpelier have been conducting in-depth research regarding their owners' bibliographic history for nearly a decade and they consider its ongoing progress a top priority for interpretation and development. Anna Berkes, Jack

Robertson, Melanie Lower, and Emilie Johnson all agree that the contents, use, and dispersal of Jefferson's library are key components of Monticello's interpretation and that ongoing research will reveal even more innovative ways to incorporate Jefferson's books into the day-to-day visitor experience at Monticello. Meg Kennedy, Grant Quertermous, and Sterling Howell are confident that similar research will bring similar results at Montpelier. One point of comparison is that while the Monticello staff has gone so far as to incorporate the Jefferson Library's research on an administrative level through staff training collaborations and their Human Resources Department, Montpelier's interpretive staff does their own research on Madison. However, Montpelier's mission to present Madison primarily as the Father of the Constitution allows it to match Monticello in terms of interpretational emphasis, effort, and effectiveness.

Naturally, the common interests and missions of these two institutions lend themselves to similar visitor experiences. Both Monticello and Montpelier use their extensive research to present thorough, effective, and engaging experiences in their libraries. At this point, the size and scope of Jefferson's collection is indeed more suited to an off-site research library than Madison's, but as the Montpelier staff continues their research, there is definitely room for discussion of whether their growing collection would be best suited in Madison's Old Library or in a separate presidential research library similar to the ones at Monticello and Mount Vernon. If Montpelier is able to acquire enough materials to justify a research library, their interpretational staff would do well to use Monticello's staff structure as a model for connecting their interpretation with both the library and the curatorial staff. On the other hand, Montpelier is achieving such wonderfully emotional and engaging interpretation in Madison's library that Monticello

staffers might look to their interpretational method as a model as well. For now, both historic houses should continue utilizing their libraries as a way to effectively engage and connect their visitors to the minds and characters of Jefferson and Madison.

By comparison to Monticello and Montpelier's research, Mount Vernon has only very recently taken its first in-depth look at Washington's library and while the research is ongoing, expectations for new interpretational material seem far lower than at Monticello or Montpelier. The dedication of the Washington Library in 2013 is somewhat late in the game compared to Monticello early research efforts beginning in 1999. Also, research at the Washington Library has been very focused on Washington's papers more so than his books. Granted, his papers have sparked rich, new discussions about Washington's designs for his house and garden. However, there has been no effort to interpret his books beyond the *Take Note!* exhibit in neither the Washington Library, the Museum, the Historic House nor the Education Center. Further it appears that any enthusiasm and efforts to incorporate ongoing bibliographic research into Mount Vernon's day-to-day interpretation is completely lacking. My interviews alone revealed a sharp contrast between Mount Vernon and the other two houses; Monticello and Montpelier staffers were visibly excited to continue their research while the Mount Vernon staff I interviewed seemed skeptical and uninterested. Overall, Mount Vernon seemed missionally unconcerned and literally unattached to Washington's library. Unfortunately, this creates a significant interpretational gap between what we know to be true of Washington's library and what visitors are actually learning about it.

All this considered, the order and interpretation of Washington's library appear to fall far short of the unworldly devotion to scholarship and academe one might find at

Monticello or Montpelier, but the expectation that all three houses will utilize the same mission and interpretational method is practically unrealistic and historically irresponsible. Montpelier's interpretation emphasizes Madison's history and philosophy research to fulfill their mission of presenting him as the Father of the Constitution. Comparatively, Monticello's interpretation covers a wider variety of genres to show the vast scope and depth of Jefferson's education, hobbies, and interests. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Mount Vernon's mission to portray Washington as a man of action does not demand a book-based interpretation like Monticello or Montpelier's. Since their goal is to emphasize Washington's Life, Leadership and Legacy, their non-interest in any of the interpretational options I have discussed is fairly legitimate. As a result, comparing these three historic houses provides not only a case study in different interpretational methods but also the opportunity to explore how those methods are directly affected by the institution's mission. In this case, the trickle-down from board-level mission statements to every-day interpretation causes some extreme differences in the visitor experience at three historic houses that may, at first glance, appear very similar in scope and content.

In addition to missional differences, these institutions' resources drastically affected their interpretational methods regarding personal libraries. These resources include financial support, available space and, particularly for the libraries, objects to display. There is no doubt that at this point, both Mount Vernon and Monticello have more books to display than Montpelier, but space and financial resources are key components as well. As mentioned in the Monticello chapter, the Frances Willard House Museum uses freestanding visual aids to portray an active space. Comparatively,

Montpelier is looking for books to fill the space and experimenting with the use of modern volumes during their house tours while the Monticello staff uses large, new interactive exhibits in the Smith Galleries. These interpretational differences reflect each institutions' respective differences in resources and development. The Frances Willard House Museum does not have the financial or spatial resources for exhibitions such as Monticello's Shakespeare exhibit, but the Smith Galleries provide Emilie Johnson with both the space and the funding for such an event. By comparison, Mount Vernon seems to have both the space and the objects to make their *Take Note!* exhibit a more permanent one, space, and resources that the Montpelier staff would not doubt love to have at their disposal, yet they choose not to pursue that route.¹

In summary, while each of these libraries may seem to historians the most important space and message that visitors should encounter during their visits, historic house museums by nature must consider other factors and points of view. Regardless of how history scholars choose to remember these men, museum professionals must consider their resources, mission, and audience when it comes to interpretational methods. If those methods leave historians unsatisfied, they must remember the fundamental differences between historic scholarship and museum education. The latter by nature is much more dynamic, interdisciplinary and, most importantly, must fulfill the demands of a much broader public.

¹ There is certainly room to discuss the lack of cohesion between the Mount Vernon Museum, Education Center and Mansion, but that discussion is best left to another thesis. This one focuses on the books.

Interpretational Trends

One of the joys of discussing the idea of books as material culture with Montpelier and Monticello staff is observing how excited they are to include these developing themes in their interpretation. A looming question, however rests over the whole business: *Why have we not done this before?* Dr. Richard Guy Wilson of the University of Virginia agrees that historians have been confirming the importance of Founding Fathers' libraries for decades, but when asked how often that research comes through in interpretation and visitor experience, his gloomy response was, "Not much."² He admits that history scholars in particular have a common desire to find the sources of ideas more so than the average museum visitor, but that understanding the significance of the library in building both the house and the man are key to fully appreciating what it is they came to see. "If we're going to try to understand these men, we need to try to understand where they got all of their ideas. It is not one genius building this country. Jefferson did not wake up one day and know everything; it was generations of other geniuses who built on one another's ideas that he was reading that made him the man he was."³ Even after conducting interviews at all three houses, the jury is still out on whether or not this enthusiasm regarding Jefferson's library is a new concept in interpretation or whether it will continue to gain momentum. All three houses recognize that historians have been writing about the Founding Father's libraries for decades, and while I am very pleased that this aspect has found its way into interpretation, one cannot help but ask, *what's taken so long?*

² Richard Guy Wilson, interview by Casey Schumacher, October 28, 2015, transcript.

³ *Ibid.*

While historians recognize the value of the Founder's libraries, others have attributed the emphasis on their books to the recent push by conservative voters to idolize the Constitution and how it was first inspired and written. Now more than ever, thanks to the digitization and dispersal of more documents from this period, Americans are asking questions that require a legitimate museum staff response. This begs the question of purpose; is the new book-based interpretation a response to visitor inquiry or the current political climate? The visitor survey at Montpelier seems to indicate that interest in the libraries of Founding Fathers is not entirely new and arises largely from visitor interest. Unfortunately, the role of America's current political climate in its Founders' historic house interpretation is still a new discussion with minimal scholarly research. While in some ways it does lie beyond the scope of this thesis, future historians, and museum professionals may be able to shed more light on this trend as it develops, if it develops at all.

Final Thoughts

I believe that Monticello and Montpelier's ongoing research and interpretational development are both setting the bar for library interpretation that future historic houses, particularly Virginia prodigy houses, should absolutely consider. Not only is their research ongoing and implemented into their day-to-day interpretation, their staff seeks to use their library spaces to inspire visitors the way Jefferson and Madison were inspired there. Interpreting the libraries as they do brings visitors mentally and emotionally close to their Founding Fathers in a way that visitors to Mount Vernon do not experience. This act of inspiring and learning also creates a unique connection between visitors and researchers, a connection that is greatly damaged at Mount Vernon by the separation of

facilities throughout the complex. At the 2015 Brazos Forum in Waco, Texas, Diane Ehrenpreis explained Monticello's incorporation of developmental text panels to keep visitors in the loop about current research and discoveries. She said, "We are constantly discovering new things and we want our visitors to come along with us on that journey."⁴ Unfortunately, with the closing of the *Take Note!* exhibit, visitors to Mount Vernon have lost not only the opportunity to see a foundational attribute of Washington's character, they are missing out on the connection between the history they see in the complex and how that history is continually rediscovered. In a personal interview, Ehrenpreis described mulling over research she has conducted for several years at Monticello before making new connections and discoveries⁵. These kinds of behind-the-scenes developments can be very exciting for visitors and while this thesis has shown the importance of libraries in creating the men we recognize as Founding Fathers, disregarding them or failing to give them their due diligence also removes the opportunity for museum professionals to let history continue to create and inspire. As Howell observed at Montpelier, Madison is inspired in his library and the best way to connect visitors to his character is to allow them the space and opportunity to be inspired as well, to mull over his books as Ehrenpreis might suggest. This emotional and mental alignment should be what museum professionals strive for when they have the opportunity to present history in the natural habitat of the historic house museum. Not all historic houses have a library as historically or personally foundational for the owner, nor do they all have the book-based mission and resources to make it an

⁴ Diane Ehrenpreis, "Thomas Jefferson's Monticello: Recent Discoveries from the Mountaintop" (presentation, Brazos Forum, Waco, TX, October 28-29, 2015).

⁵ Diane Ehrenpreis, interview by Casey Schumacher, October 29, 2015, transcript.

interpretational priority. Placing the structure, contents, and use of eighteenth century Virginia prodigy libraries in their proper context reveals an extremely emotional, enlightened, and deeply profound space that both readers like Alberto Manguel and historians like myself will argue demand to be felt.

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