

APPROVAL SHEET

Title of Thesis: Buried Memories: The Evolving Commemoration of Black and White Burial Grounds at Mount Vernon and Monticello

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## ABSTRACT

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COMMEMORATION OF BLACK AND  
WHITE BURIAL GROUNDS AT MOUNT  
VERNON AND MONTICELLO

Molly Ricks, MA, 2017

Directed By: Dr. Anne Sarah Rubin, Department of History

I explore how the commemoration of both black and white burial sites changed over time at George Washington's Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, first during the various iterations of these plantations' uses as working farms, and then as historic sites. Tracing how these sacred grounds have been commemorated reveals the changing power relationships of the races at the historic sites over time. The two current owners of Mount Vernon and Monticello have buried twentieth century black history on top of eighteenth and nineteenth century black history. I attempt to unearth a new story of commemoration, black activism and historic preservation at Mount Vernon and Monticello.

BURIED MEMORIES: THE EVOLVING COMMEMORATION OF BLACK AND  
WHITE BURIAL GROUNDS AT MOUNT VERNON AND MONTICELLO

By

Molly Rebecca Ricks

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1841, Edmund Parker arrived at Mount Vernon as an enslaved field hand. He was fourteen years old. Thirty-three years later and a decade after Emancipation, Parker again worked at the plantation, now a free man. On the eve of the Civil War, the Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA) bought the land on which George Washington's mansion and tomb sat. The site became a national shrine devoted to honoring the life and work of Washington. The MVLA hired local blacks to work on the property.<sup>1</sup> In 1874, Parker, clad in the Mount Vernon uniform, started guarding Washington's tomb from opportunistic tourists attempting to steal precious relics.<sup>2</sup>

As a formerly enslaved person, Parker had the potential to be subversive, to stain the narrative of democracy and freedom at Mount Vernon with his very presence. Yet he could also be powerfully persuasive in the other direction. As visitors gazed into the tomb, Parker related pleasant anecdotes about his tenure at Mount Vernon. In fact, Parker avoided any discussion of the brutality of life as an enslaved person. Moreover, he did not remind white visitors of Washington's role as an enslaver.<sup>3</sup> Instead, Parker's public position made slavery a palatable truth at the shrine of freedom. He acted as "a kind of emotional and political salve," as Micki McElya describes.<sup>4</sup> His presence at such a sacred site dulled the sharp contradictions between the Founding Fathers' principles and actions. Parker's faithful watch soothed any complicated paradoxes visitors may have attempted to reconcile.

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<sup>1</sup> Scott Casper, *Sarah Johnson's Mount Vernon: The Forgotten History of an American Shrine* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 77.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 186, 194.

<sup>4</sup> Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 130.

The audience easily digested Parker's stories. The "faithful servant" at Washington's grave was so successful that H.H. Dodge, the male superintendent of Mount Vernon, deliberately sought out former enslaved persons, and later their descendants, to fill the guard position. The tradition continued until 1965. Yet Parker's presence and words raise questions about the stories told at Mount Vernon. Who is shaping the narrative at Mount Vernon and what were Parker's choices? Why would he want to tell his stories at George Washington's tomb?

If Mount Vernon was a theater, the tomb was the stage and the guards became the actors.<sup>5</sup> Their uniforms were a costume. While all of the pageantry occurred at the stage of Washington's tomb, visitors stood only 100 feet away from the old cemetery of Mount Vernon's enslaved community. Out of the spotlight, the eighteenth-century site of Parker's own forbears lay disguised by the vines and underbrush of neglect. Their script urged silence. This deep disconnect between the two sacred burial sites—one center-stage and the other off in the shadows—would continue until the 1980s.

The story of the guards of George Washington's tomb encapsulates many of the issues I address in this project. By looking at not only Mount Vernon, but also Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, I explore how the commemoration of both black and white burial sites changed over time during the various iterations of these plantations' uses first as working farms, and then as historic sites. The commemorations of black and white burial grounds at Mount Vernon and Monticello have evolved over time in order to fit the attitudes of the era. Tracking the specific changes reveals evolving American understandings of race and democracy at what are arguably the preeminent shrines to the Republic.

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<sup>5</sup> Casper, 186, 198. Scott Casper devotes a whole chapter to Parker's "performances."

The Virginia plantations of Mount Vernon and Monticello have unique significance. Washington and Jefferson have long been venerated as the two of the most essential founding fathers. Washington was the hero of the War for Independence and our first President. Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence and served as the first Secretary of State and third President. Since the deaths of their patriarchs, these historic plantations have become wildly popular sites. Mount Vernon now welcomes one million visitors each year.<sup>6</sup> Over 500,000 people visit Monticello annually. The public recognizes their names—they are the only two presidents' houses mentioned in the acclaimed 2016 musical *Hamilton*.

The two former presidents are buried at the plantations making the sites national sacred space. They are temples to the United States located in the Virginia countryside.<sup>7</sup> Edmund Morgan describes, "...Virginia furnished the country's most eloquent spokesmen for freedom and equality...They were all slaveholders."<sup>8</sup> Washington and Jefferson owned tremendous amounts of land maintained by enslaved human beings. These black communities of Mount Vernon and Monticello also buried their loved ones on the grounds of the estates.

Burial grounds provide an ideal site for exploring the difficulties of interpreting race at popular public history sites. Sacred spaces lend a permanency and sobriety to the historical narrative, including a religious component. Cemeteries can rarely be moved, but they can be easily ignored, allowed to grow over, or written out

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<sup>6</sup> "History of the Estate," *Mount Vernon Ladies Association*, 2016, <http://www.mountvernon.org/about/>.

<sup>7</sup> For more on sacred spaces: Paul A. Shackel, ed., *Myth, Memory and the Making of the American Landscape* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 6.

of the narrative of a place. They can be uplifted as sacred spaces of American history or denigrated as unwanted blemishes on an otherwise “heroic” landscape. Still, their permanent foundations provide clues for scholars. Both the unknowing passiveness of white organizations and their deliberate decisions to ignore or commemorate black cemeteries while enshrining white enslavers provide an excellent opportunity to examine how race is interpreted at historic sites.

Despite several difficulties, in recent years, public historians of Mount Vernon have attempted to commemorate both the white and black cemeteries. Monticello lags behind. Descendants of Thomas and Martha Wayles Jefferson still bury family members in the family plot on the property. They do not, however, recognize the descendants of Jefferson and Sally Hemings. The cemeteries remain segregated in 2017. Monticello historians have made progress since the Jim Crow era to identify and research the black burial ground in the parking lot of their visitor center. Edward Linenthal stated, “Sometimes the very lack of memorial attention to marking certain acts of racist violence on the landscape calls attention to such places for that very reason: previously ignored sites become significant because they have been ignored.”<sup>9</sup> White public historians, and the predominantly white organizations that own the respective properties, control the commemorations, if any, of black and white burial grounds at Mount Vernon and Monticello.

Little scholarly work pinpoints the significance of black and white sacred spaces at the prominent plantations. Several recent and localized anthropological studies of antebellum and postbellum white and black graveyards provide much

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<sup>9</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, “Epilogue: Reflections,” in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton et al. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 221.

necessary information for historians of cemeteries. Lynn Rainville has written the most relevant and comprehensive study. In *Hidden History: African American Cemeteries in Central Virginia*, she provides excellent research on the formation of vernacular antebellum black cemeteries, including how to locate, document and preserve lost burial grounds.<sup>10</sup>

Although there have been few surveys of the burial grounds at prominent plantations, several comparative studies of plantations and their representations of slavery provide a framework for such inquiries. In their comprehensive 2002 study, sociologists Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small examined the representation of slavery at 122 museum-plantations in three southern states. The need for such inquiry reveals the fractured nature of collective memory in America. The scholars identified four levels of representation: “symbolic annihilation and erasure, trivialization and deflection, segregation and marginalization of knowledge, and relative incorporation.”<sup>11</sup> Other studies have compared the representations of slavery at prominent plantations, yet they do not mention the burial grounds.<sup>12</sup> One can apply

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<sup>10</sup> Lynn Rainville, *Hidden History: African American Cemeteries in Central Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014). She has written extensively on the topic: Lynn Rainville, “Home at Last: Mortuary Commemoration in Virginian Slave Cemeteries,” *Markers* 26 (2009): 54-83; Lynn Rainville, “Protecting Our Shared Heritage in African-American Cemeteries,” *Journal of Field Archaeology* 34, No. 2 (2009): 196-206.

For an excellent study of Jamaican enslaved burial practices: Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

The classic graveyard preservation manual is by Lynette Strangstad, *A Graveyard Preservation Primer* (New York: Altamira Press, 2013). Her scientific approach provides a wonderful complement to the historical research of Scott Casper and others.

Additionally, several studies of black graveyards in New England and South Carolina have emerged. “Grave Matters: The Preservation of African-American Cemeteries,” (Columbia, SC: The Chicora Foundation, Inc., 1996); Glenn A. Knoblock, *African American Historic Burial Grounds and Gravesites of New England* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>12</sup> See: Leslie Brett Kirchler, “Reinterpreting a “Silent” History: Slave Sites at Four Virginia Plantations,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2005); Amanda G. Seymour, “Pride and

Eichstedt and Small's criteria to the treatment of burial grounds to understand the sacred grounds' changing commemorations.

No study compares the relationship between black and white cemeteries across multiple properties. This is partially due to the lack of material about cemeteries of the enslaved. Only in the past few years have archaeological studies provided historians with substantial evidence. Since the intensive and detailed work of Michael Blakey at the African Burial Ground in Lower Manhattan revealed so much about colonial servitude, the significance of cemeteries of the enslaved has become a staple in the historiography of slavery.<sup>13</sup> There have been separate archaeological studies of the Mount Vernon and Monticello black cemeteries, but no comparisons.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the excavations at Mount Vernon's black cemetery are still occurring.

To date, no comprehensive national study of African American cemeteries exists.<sup>15</sup> Local studies of African American gravesites combined with recent archeological projects of black gravesites at Mount Vernon and Monticello provide the material for a new and worthwhile historical comparison between white and black

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Prejudice: The Historic Interpretation of Slavery at the Homes of Five Founding Fathers," (MA Thesis, The George Washington University, 2013); Keely Aurelia McGill, "The Presentation of Slavery at Mount Vernon: Power, Privilege, and Historical Truth," (MA Thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 2005).

There have also been several dissertations on the archaeology of slavery at select sites: Anna Gruber, "The Archaeology of Mr. Jefferson's Slaves," (MA Thesis, University of Delaware, 1990); Douglas Walker Sanford, "The Archaeology of Plantation Slavery at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello: Context and Process in an American Slave Society," (PhD Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Mark E. Mack and Michael L. Blakey, "The New York African Burial Ground Project: Past Biases, Current Dilemmas, and Future Research Opportunities," *Historical Archaeology* 38, No. 1 (2004).

<sup>14</sup> Sara Bon-Harper, Fraser Neiman and Derek Wheeler, "Monticello's Park Cemetery," *Monticello Department of Archaeology Technical Report Series 5* (2003) and Joseph Downer, "Hallowed Ground, Sacred Space: The Slave Cemetery at George Washington's Mount Vernon and the Cultural Landscapes of the Enslaved," (MA Thesis, The George Washington University, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Sandra A. Arnold is the Founder and Project Director of the National Burial Database of Enslaved Americans. Her groundbreaking work will compile a comprehensive list of burials and will be extremely useful for future projects. <http://www.memorializeamericanslavery.com/about/>

burial grounds over several decades. My intervention in the literature occurs at the intersection of studies on commemoration of sacred space, the Founding Fathers and slavery. I will follow in the footsteps of historians of memory, such as David Blight, who recognize the complexities of memory and race in America.<sup>16</sup> Edward Linenthal's studies of memorials and grief help explain the difficulties of commemorating traumatic events like slavery.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Paul Shackel argues, "The perception is that American history is linear and straightforward. This uncomplicated story only occurs when we leave 'others' out of the picture."<sup>18</sup> This thesis attempts to re-incorporate "others" into two plantation landscapes.

There has been much discussion about slavery at these plantations in both popular and scholarly literature since the 1970s. Of course the celebratory stories of the nation's creators still line the bookshelves. Yet, recent critical treatments of their enslavement of humans are also available. Henry Wiencek, author of *An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves and the Creation of America* and *Master of the Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves*, provides scathing and controversial in-

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<sup>16</sup> The preeminent historian of U.S. collective memory, David Blight, defines collective memory as "the ways in which groups, peoples, or nations construct versions of the past and employ them for self-understanding and to win power in an ever-changing present." Collective memory, therefore, is a public construction of history, a way to create identity. "Historians and Memory: David Blight," *Common-Place* 2 No. 3, April 2002, <http://www.common-place-archives.org/vol-02/no-03/author/>. More by Blight: David W. Blight, "If You Don't Tell It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought to Be," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton et al. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006); David Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).

Power relationships, Geoffrey Cubitt posits, influence how collective memory reinterprets the past. Cubitt explains it is "complex political interactions, in which different interests vie for ascendancy, influence and survival – and in which some interests will be more successful at asserting themselves than others." Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 224.

<sup>17</sup> Ed Linenthal and Julie Rose, "Public History and the Challenges of Commemoration," *History News* 66, No. 2 (2011): 12-16. For more see Edward T. Linenthal and David Chidester, ed., *American Sacred Space*, (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Paul A. Shackel, "Introduction: The Making of the American Landscape," in *Myth, Memory and the Making of the American Landscape*, ed. Paul A. Shackel (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001), 4.

depth analyses of the politicians' policies towards their enslaved populations.<sup>19</sup>

Annette Gordon-Reed, in her lengthy Pulitzer-prize winning monograph, published a more complex study of Jefferson's character and his interactions with the enslaved Hemings family.<sup>20</sup> She focuses most of her attention on the large Hemings family. Most popular histories, however, tend to study the actions and decisions of the enslavers. Further, they are not representative of the majority of the enslaved population, but instead focus on those with the unique experiences of prized enslaved housemaids such as Sally Hemings.

In stark contrast to his peers, Scott Casper's 2008 study of Mount Vernon, *Sarah Johnson's Mount Vernon: The Forgotten History of an American Shrine*, refreshingly focuses on the evolution of the plantation after the death of the American icon. His work traces the lives of the African Americans who lived at Mount Vernon before and after Emancipation. Further, he delves into the relationship between the enslaved population's burial site and that of Washington.<sup>21</sup>

In the first chapter, I examine the plantations, powered by enslaved labor, in the eighteenth century. Conscious of their place in history, the Founding Fathers paid close attention to the organization of their plantation landscapes. They realized their

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<sup>19</sup> Henry Wiencek, *An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003); Henry Wiencek, *Master of the Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012). For more on George Washington's manumission of slaves in his will: Dennis Pogue, "George Washington Slave Master," *American History* 38, No. 6 (2004).

<sup>20</sup> Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008); For another well-researched study, sponsored by the Monticello Foundation: Lucia Stanton, *"Those Who Labor for My Happiness: Slavery at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello"* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2012). Stanton goes beyond Monticello to trace the descendants of the enslaved community.

For more on the paradoxes of the Founding Fathers and slavery: Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> For more on American culture and death: Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

property was an extension of themselves, or a self-portrait as Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter S. Onuf describe Monticello.<sup>22</sup> The Founders' self-image certainly affected their decisions arguably making them nascent public historians. With this in mind, I examine how the Founders plotted sacred spaces on their land. Both commented on the placement of white burials, including their own, but rarely mentioned black cemeteries. Using the landmark conclusions of Eugene Genovese, I scour the eighteenth-century sacred landscapes and archival documents for impacts of paternalism.<sup>23</sup>

I use the written records of the enslavers to elucidate their intentions about the burials on their land. Yet, I also read the sources against the grain to locate Trouillot's silences in order to see how the enslaved communities spoke through the enslavers' records.<sup>24</sup> The significance attributed to the graveyards by plantation heads reveals the intentions of those in power to create a celebratory American heritage.<sup>25</sup> It was, in the Foucauldian sense, a "regime of truth."<sup>26</sup> I also track how the burial grounds are

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<sup>22</sup> Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter S. Onuf, *Most Blessed of the Patriarchs: Thomas Jefferson and the Empire of Imagination* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 238.

<sup>23</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976).

<sup>24</sup> Trouillot identifies "moments," or intersections of humans and the production of history, in which silencing occurs. He explains, "To put it differently, any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly." He also makes clear the distinction between "historicity 1 and historicity 2 (between what happened and that which is said to have happened). I will examine how the decisions of public historians towards burial grounds affected their creations of Trouillot's "historicity 2." Many actions "silenced," as Trouillot identified it, the history of the enslaved communities. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26-27, 106.

<sup>25</sup> In *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, David Lowenthal argues, "Heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes." Much like collective memory, heritage also manipulates history to suit its needs. Historians strive for objectivity, while those who create heritage pointedly use the "past for the sake of the present." In this sense, heritage creates "tunnel vision." David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1998), 168, 79; Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), 16.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 73.

depicted on maps over time. Because of their intention to be seen, maps can be examined as visual displays of power.

Also in my first chapter, I examine the history of black and white burial grounds beyond the lifespan of the two influential enslavers to trace how their commemorations evolved. After the deaths of Jefferson and Washington, both Mount Vernon and Monticello changed hands numerous times. New populations of people lived and died at the estates. The subsequent private owners altered the landscape.<sup>27</sup> For example, one owner of Monticello, Uriah Levy, buried his mother near the mansion in 1839. Along with the new additions to the landscape, I examine if the owners acknowledged or commemorated existing cemeteries on the property. It is fruitful to see how private owners, who were often enslavers, interacted with the landscape because public historians later inherited these revised estates.

The graves of Washington and Jefferson had long been pilgrimage sites when private owners acquired the plantations. The graves and monuments to relatives flanked the presidents' resting spots. These areas became physical records of family ties and focal points of heritage celebration. Rituals, like relic-taking and coin-tossing, developed over time as acts of homage and revealed tourists' wishes to literally covet a piece of the revered past. These actions etched away at the infrastructure of the sacred spaces. Conversely, black burial grounds, ignored and uncared for, received little attention from the plantation owners or visitors. Instead of human destruction, natural forces slowly destroyed markers and grave offerings over time.

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<sup>27</sup> "The duPonts," *James Madison's Montpelier*, Research and Collections, <https://www.montpelier.org/research-and-collections/people/duponts>.

My second chapter focuses on the era when the sites transferred into the hands of philanthropic organizations and opened to the public. In 1858, the Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA) acquired Mount Vernon. The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation (TJMF) bought Monticello in 1923. I observe how these organizations re-packaged the landscape for the segregated viewing public, with a special focus on the cemeteries. White owners reconciled the presence of a black cemetery with the glorification of the Founding Fathers in several ways. At Mount Vernon, the 1929 “faithful servant” memorial at the black cemetery showed how the MVLA attempted to interpret slavery.<sup>28</sup> For much of the twentieth century, the superintendent of Mount Vernon strategically placed certain uniformed black characters on the landscape (remember Edmund Parker in front of Washington’s tomb) to act out the heritage play. It was a mechanism for controlling the American story—one that can be seen at many public history sites.

Conversely, at Monticello, the all-white Jefferson descendant organization, the Monticello Graveyard Association (later the Monticello Association), became the literal gatekeepers of Jefferson’s grave. Commemoration of white graves became exclusively a white privilege. Post-Emancipation, white supremacy and the Lost Cause narrative thrived, which skewed historical interpretation at both sites. Whether by providing black actors with a pre-approved script or simply leaving black employees out of the process entirely, the MVLA and the TJMF eliminated black agency to obscure the incongruous and “unthinkable” history of slavery.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Casper, 218.

<sup>29</sup> Trouillot, 78. Trouillot addresses the “unthinkable” history of the Haitian Revolution. He also elaborates on the incompatibility of the Enlightenment’s definition of “man” and slavery.

Influenced by Stephanie H. Camp's brilliant analysis of enslaved women's resistance, I also examine the spatial history of the cemeteries over time. In Camp's terms, enslaved people created "rival geographies" to gain power outside of the "boundaries of power" the enslavers drew in an attempt to curb unauthorized black movement.<sup>30</sup> After Emancipation, black burial grounds continued to be cherished by local black communities. African American cemeteries at the two plantations held the dual roles. For the black employees in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these plots were rival spaces of cultural expression. Black employees and descendants sometimes secretly worshipped at these sites. They passed down oral history about the hallowed grounds. For the white owners of the sacred spaces, the cemeteries were controlled places void of commemoration until white approval. The landowners did not value the black burial grounds as historical assets. This not only blocked black people from connecting to the landscape and their identities, it denied all visitors a complete historical landscape. I examine how placement of black and white cemeteries mirrored place in society. During the Jim Crow era, the separate burial grounds at these prominent historic sites mirrored societal segregation.<sup>31</sup> Overall, the decisions of the whites *and* blacks mapped out power on the landscape over time.

For this Jim Crow-era discussion, I use the archives of the various owners of the sites, primarily private families and philanthropic organizations. This material is located at the on-site research libraries of the historic plantations.

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<sup>30</sup> Camp makes the distinction that "place" refers to both literal and metaphorical meanings. Stephanie H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, 2004), 6-7, 16.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

My third chapter examines how, in the post-Civil Rights era, black activists and descendants of enslaved people advocated for commemorations of black burial grounds and for inclusion into the American heritage story. At Mount Vernon, the Fairfax, Virginia, NAACP used local legal channels to call attention to and remedy the MVLA's negligence of the black burial ground. At Monticello, bolstered by DNA results, descendants of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings attempted to join the Monticello Association. They published their arguments for inclusion in the national press. Black activists used a variety of channels to challenge the accepted norms of historic preservation at Mount Vernon and Monticello. Commemoration of black burial grounds became their platform for change. The politics of such memorials were complex and contested.

This chapter addresses the two-fold revisions to the landscapes by the MVLA and the TJMF. The organizations had to address the original landscape created by the previous private owners and then the changes made to the landscape by early public historians. The black burial grounds needed to be researched, excavated and commemorated. Each site approached this task differently. Mount Vernon created a large new memorial, while Monticello cordoned off the burial site and erected an informational sign. Both sites eventually recognized the black burial grounds as historic assets because of the work of black activists.

For this chapter, I utilize several secondary sources focusing on the issue of interpreting slavery at public history sites. In 1997, Richard Handler and Eric Gable's *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* addressed the changing historical interpretation at one of the preeminent public

history sites in the country. They discussed the waxing and waning acknowledgements of slavery and racial tensions.<sup>32</sup> In 2008, James Oliver Horton and Lois Horton edited a compendium of essays on American history, race and memory titled *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*.<sup>33</sup> Ira Berlin, David Blight and Edward T. Linenthal are among the contributors to the book, which has become a mainstay in the historiography.

At Monticello, I interviewed descendants of both the enslaved community and the enslavers. Descendants of Thomas Jefferson, whom I met at the white burial ground at Monticello, excitedly recounted their family history by ushering me to each of their forefathers' ornate gravestones. Descendants of enslaved people have no such privilege. A comparison of white and black burial grounds provides concrete evidence of how slavery irrevocably severed black family structures and monetarily protected white ones. Only with the recent advent of DNA tests have descendants of enslaved people been able to recover a semblance of their family origins and identity.

Tracing how these sacred grounds have been commemorated reveals the changing power relationships of the races at the historic sites over time. It also reveals current attitudes. The stories of the commemoration of black burial grounds and the exclusion of Hemings descendants by the MA continue to be buried by the MVLA and the TJMF, which changed its name to the Thomas Jefferson Foundation (TJF) in 2000. In essence, the two current owners of Mount Vernon and Monticello have buried twentieth century black history on top of eighteenth and nineteenth century

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> James Oliver Horton and Lois Horton, ed., *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

black history. In the proceeding chapters, I attempt to unearth a new story of commemoration, black activism and historic preservation at Mount Vernon and Monticello.

## Chapter 2: “Chuse Out A Burying Place”

At Mount Vernon and Monticello, eighteenth-century white landowners controlled the sacred spaces. Yet black workers often crossed the color line to participate in the commemoration of the Founding Fathers. Enslaved workers built and protected Washington’s tomb. At Monticello, bondsmen cleared land for the family cemetery and dug Jefferson’s grave. Pilgrims flocked to the sites often mutilating the tomb of Washington and the obelisk of Jefferson.

The entombment of Washington and the burial of Jefferson created new shrines to the American republic and, therefore, new contested ground. The creation of the Monticello Association and the need for a tomb-keeper at Mount Vernon reveal the popularity of the sites and the crucial role of these places in the cult of American heritage. Conversely, the burial grounds of the enslaved communities lay ignored and untouched, except when pilgrims incidentally happened upon a black burial ceremony or a headstone. Black workers quietly commemorated their own burial grounds with little oversight while white owners loudly protected their ancestors’ resting spots, perpetually imbued with sacred meaning.

### **MOUNT VERNON**

#### **The Secular Religion of Washington**

As stated previously, Edmund Parker guarded the New Tomb of Washington. However, the original tomb of Washington was not always located next to the African

American burial ground.<sup>34</sup> Four days after his death on December 14, 1799, the first president's body was placed in a family vault on a bluff overlooking the Potomac River.<sup>35</sup> In 1745, his half-brother and previous owner of Mount Vernon, Lawrence Washington, built the tomb at Mount Vernon for his three infant children.<sup>36</sup> About two hundred yards south of the mansion, it was composed of "rough sandstone" and brick, with a wooden door.<sup>37</sup> Lawrence died in 1752 and was buried in the tomb according to his wishes.<sup>38</sup> At five feet tall and twelve feet deep, the unassuming vault housed several Washington family members by the time of the General's death.<sup>39</sup> Yet in his will, Washington stipulated that he did not want to be buried in this tomb:

The family Vault at Mount Vernon requiring repairs, and being improperly situated besides, I desire that a new one of Brick, and upon a larger Scale, may be built at the foot of what is commonly called the Vineyard Inclosure, on the ground which is marked out. In which my remains, with those of my deceased relatives (now in the old Vault) and such others of my family as may chuse to be entombed there, may be deposited.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Dr. Judith Burton remembers her family discussing potential enslaved persons' graves around the Old Tomb. This would not be uncommon, as many enslavers considered their enslaved community a part of the family in a paternalistic sense. Still, there is little evidence so far to suggest black burials around the old tomb. Joseph Downer, "Hallowed Ground, Sacred Space: The Slave Cemetery at George Washington's Mount Vernon and the Cultural Landscapes of the Enslaved," (MA Thesis, The George Washington University, 2015), 53.

<sup>35</sup> [Burials at Mount Vernon], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>36</sup> [Report on the Old Tomb, May 8, 1939], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, Old], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>37</sup> [An Article Describing a Visit to Mount Vernon from the Herald, Nov. 1844], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, Old], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>38</sup> [The Tombs-Burials], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>39</sup> [An Account of a Visit to Mount Vernon, 1826], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, Old], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>40</sup> "George Washington's 1799 Will and Testament," Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, <http://www.mountvernon.org/the-estate-gardens/the-tombs/george-washingtons-1799-will/>.

With no new tomb in sight at the time of his death, the family placed him in a lead casket, which was secured within a mahogany coffin, and placed the president in the small tomb.<sup>41</sup> Weeks after his death, a proposal to inter Washington in the Capitol building emerged. This stalled potential plans to build a new tomb. In 1800, Martha Washington gave permission for the transfer of her husband's remains to a crypt below the Capitol Rotunda. She died before construction began and joined her husband in the old family vault at Mount Vernon.

Devoted followers flocked to Washington's final resting place. It quickly became one of the first quintessentially American tourist destinations.<sup>42</sup> Despite the private ownership of the plantation, the shrine embodied the democratic ideals of the first president.<sup>43</sup> Many reports of the site invoked the imagery of Mecca or Jesus Christ.<sup>44</sup> A pilgrimage to the tomb was integral to "the secular religion of Washington."<sup>45</sup> The faults of Washington melted away as his "republican virtues" grew exponentially.<sup>46</sup> Whoever owned and commemorated Washington's tomb had the responsibility of guarding the memory of the so-called father of democracy.

Visitors to Mount Vernon corroborated Washington's reports of the vault's dilapidated state and simple construction. In 1812, E. May Eaves criticized the maintenance of the vault. Eaves complained:

... The place where the remains of the General are deposited is a disgrace to the country. Its appearance is

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<sup>41</sup> Walter L. Jones, "The Translation of Washington, n.d.," *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>42</sup> Lydia Mattice Brandt, *First in the Homes of His Countrymen: George Washington's Mount Vernon in the American Imagination* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 2016), 9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>45</sup> Steven Conn, "Saving the Homestead of the Nation: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association and the Preservation of Mount Vernon," *Nineteenth Century Studies* 11 (1997): 88.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

no better than a common bake oven. It is a low damp little place crammed with coffins, some of which are mouldering to ashes and the bones strewn on the pavement...<sup>47</sup>

A nearby natural spring caused humidity, landslides and flooding.<sup>48</sup> Laborers often repaired the site. In 1813, one visitor criticized the arrangement of the old vault because Washington's remains could not be distinguished from those of other family members.<sup>49</sup> In 1823, Prussian visitor Louise Ralisky recounted, "the grave especial is in the most inexcusable manner. It is an old ice vault with a broken down door, in which the coffin lay on a common rough table."<sup>50</sup> Tree roots, according to one account, had infiltrated the tomb sending it into disrepair.<sup>51</sup> By 1831, the old tomb sheltered twenty bodies, including those of Martha Washington and Bushrod Washington, who inherited Mount Vernon.<sup>52</sup> Published drawings and prints of the tomb, including Lafayette's 1824 visit, conveyed the decrepit state to those who could not visit in person.<sup>53</sup> A few accounts appreciated the simplicity of the site, claiming it invoked the egalitarian attitude of the Founding Father.<sup>54</sup> The majority of visitor accounts, however, criticized the location, size and state of the vault as unfit for such an illustrious man.

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<sup>47</sup> [Letter by E. May Eaves, December 17, 1812], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, Old], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>48</sup> [Tomb, Old: Notes from Minutes of Council and Supt.'s Reports], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, Old], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>49</sup> Brandt, 36.

<sup>50</sup> [Journal of Louise Ralisky, December 20, 1823], The Tomb Black Book, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>51</sup> [Excerpt from Baker's "Washington after the Revolution"], The Tomb Black Book, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>52</sup> [Burials at Mount Vernon], The Tomb Black Book, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>53</sup> Brandt, 36.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Beyond natural destruction, relic-snatching helped ruin both the interior and exterior of the old tomb. One visitor remembered that during Bushrod Washington's ownership of Mount Vernon, tourists could enter the tomb and touch the coffins. Many tore off pieces of the velvet covering on Washington's coffin for souvenirs.<sup>55</sup> In 1820, one tourist commented that the vault was "overgrown with cedars, from which every visitor, by a simultaneous movement, plucked a sprig."<sup>56</sup> Bushrod Washington padlocked the door in the 1810s to deter further damage.<sup>57</sup> It is unclear why during his twenty-seven year ownership of Mount Vernon Bushrod never built a new tomb for his progenitor.<sup>58</sup> Into the early twentieth century the MVLA struggled with protecting the tomb from the elements.<sup>59</sup> Black laborers often performed the mitigation construction, including adding fences and bricks.<sup>60</sup>

In 1830, one particularly egregious relic theft induced the construction of the new tomb. Varied, and sometimes conflicting, information about the crime surfaced. N.P. Willis reported that a "sacrilegious ruffian" broke into the tomb.<sup>61</sup> In 1979, Mount Vernon archivist John Rhodehamel stated that locals found the robber in a "cheap rooming house in Alexandria, with the skull beside him." The skull found its way back to the vault. Yet Rhodehamel continued, "I do want to emphasize, however, that

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<sup>55</sup> [The Tomb, 1806], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>56</sup> [J. Elliot Letter, May 6, 1820], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, Old], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>57</sup> Casper, 12.

<sup>58</sup> [Walter L. Jones, *The Translation of Washington*, n.d.], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>59</sup> [Tomb, Old: Notes from Minutes of Council and Supt.'s Reports], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, Old], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>60</sup> [Old Tomb], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, Old], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>61</sup> [Early Description of the Tomb, N.P. Willis, "American Scenery," 1840], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

there is actually no reliable information.”<sup>62</sup> Shortly after the burglary, it was later determined the bones did not belong to George Washington, but a relative by marriage.<sup>63</sup> Another source labeled the robber a drunken “disgruntled employee.”<sup>64</sup> Harrison Howell Dodge, who became superintendent in 1885, heard the culprit was a gardener, but did not know his name or “nationality,” although he believed the accused to be white.<sup>65</sup> Archivist Rhodehamel also debunked rumors of Confederate soldiers attempting to steal Washington’s body, a rumor propagated by Northern newspapers in 1861.<sup>66</sup> After the burglary, the owner of Mount Vernon, John Augustine Washington II, started the process of erecting a new tomb.

### **The New Tomb and the Black Burial Ground**

George Washington designated the exact location of the New Tomb, as it is commonly called, in his will. Five hundred feet from the old vault, it faced the black burial ground, but there is no evidence Washington picked the location because of that proximity. The executors of George Washington’s will, primarily Major Lawrence Lewis, paid for the New Tomb, which was completed in March 1831.<sup>67</sup> Workers then moved the Washington family remains from the old tomb to the new one. The dampness of the old vault had caused many coffins to decompose. Most

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<sup>62</sup> [John Rhodehamel to Frederick Drimmer Letter, February 20, 1979], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia

<sup>63</sup> [Attempt to Steal the Body of Lincoln], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>64</sup> [American Stone Shadows], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>65</sup> [H.H. Dodge to W.H. McLaughlin Letter, January 7, 1905], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia; Dodge, 184.

<sup>66</sup> [John Rhodehamel to Frederick Drimmer Letter, February 20, 1979].

<sup>67</sup> [Memo from MVLA Library to Randal Cornell Teague, n.d.], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia; [H.H. Dodge to W.H. McLaughlin Letter, January 7, 1905].

bones were comingled and therefore were buried together in two boxes.<sup>68</sup> There was no official ceremony.<sup>69</sup> In 1908, Richard B. Washington, son of John Augustine II, recalled the presence of Lawrence Lewis among other family members, and “the laborers,” during the move.<sup>70</sup> Richard was nine-years-old at the time.

The transfer of the bodies from the old tomb to the New Tomb generated many myths. There is significant debate as to whether Washington’s coffin was opened and his face looked upon. In 1839, Jane Washington, the wife of John Augustine Washington II, stated she was not present for the transfer, but heard that Major Lewis and his son Lorenzo did look at the sheet that shrouded the General.<sup>71</sup> Superintendent Dodge wrote in 1898 that an apprentice bricklayer named William Burgess viewed the body.<sup>72</sup> Yet Richard B. Washington stated that no one looked in the coffin during the transfer.<sup>73</sup> Other rumors include Henry Clay as an onlooker, as well as an anonymous newspaper boy.<sup>74</sup>

In 1837, Lawrence Lewis asked West Ford, a formerly enslaved Mount Vernon worker, to examine the coffin and the New Tomb. Ford and another laborer, George Duffey, went to the tomb. According to Duffey, Ford could not open the door of the vault. Duffey assisted. Once inside, they noticed substantial leaks causing

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<sup>68</sup> [H.H. Dodge to W. Lanier Washington Letter, March 8, 1921], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>69</sup> [Memo from MVLA Library to Randal Cornell Teague, n.d.].

<sup>70</sup> [Richard S. Washington to Lawrence Washington Letter, December 1, 1908], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, New], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>71</sup> [Jane C. Washington to Major William Popham Letter, May 24, 1839], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>72</sup> [H.H. Dodge to I.B. Cox Letter, Dec. 12, 1898], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>73</sup> [Richard S. Washington to Lawrence Washington Letter, December 1, 1908].

<sup>74</sup> [Charles Wall to J. Herbert Foley Letter, February 7, 1964], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

Washington's coffin to rot.<sup>75</sup> Lewis decided to place Washington's coffin in a protective marble sarcophagus designed by William Strickland. Laborers from Alexandria and "some of the domestics" of Mount Vernon prepared the foundation where the sarcophagus would be placed.<sup>76</sup> According to one source, before laborers cemented the stone coffin shut, John Struthers, a Scottish marble cutter, looked at the remains.<sup>77</sup> He described the eye sockets as "large and deep...of unusual size."<sup>78</sup>

There is no record that anyone else viewed the remains of the first president. Still, rumors of relic stealing have persisted.<sup>79</sup> In 1953, W.J. Cartledge, Jr. wrote Charles C. Wall, superintendent after Dodge, about his great grandfather, Joseph Cartledge, who worked for Mr. Struthers. Not only did Joseph see the General's body, he also took a lock of hair, or so W. J. Cartledge claimed.<sup>80</sup> Richard B. Washington dismissed any rumors of preserved hair as "utterly without warrant."<sup>81</sup>

In another case, James Currie claimed that George Washington Parke Custis allowed Mr. Struthers to take a piece of the old mahogany coffin. Mr. Struthers gave James Currie a portion of the wood, which Currie then made into a ring. On July 12, 1861, Currie sent the ring to President Abraham Lincoln stating, "In view of the difficulties and dangers that surround you in this the day of our Country's trials, I would hope sincerely [sic], that the same overruling guidance and wisdom which was

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<sup>75</sup> [George Duffey to Lawrence Lewis Letter, April 1, 1837], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, New], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>76</sup> [Walter L. Jones, *The Translation of Washington*, n.d.].

<sup>77</sup> [Jane C. Washington to Major William Popham Letter, May 24, 1839].

<sup>78</sup> [Disinterment of the remains of Washington], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>79</sup> [J.A.S. Young to Olivia M. Coffin, December 23, 1911], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia; [Walter L. Jones, *The Translation of Washington*, n.d.].

<sup>80</sup> [W.J. Cartledge, Jr. to Charles Wall, June 13, 1953], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>81</sup> [Richard S. Washington to Lawrence Washington Letter, December 1, 1908].

with our Immortal Washington may be vouch-safed to you...”<sup>82</sup> Washington’s qualities as founding father evidently seeped from his body into his coffin. The phenomenon of relics emphasizes the cult of Washington, the Christ-like first president.

A more substantial move of Washington’s body had yet to be resolved. On February 13, 1832, Congress revived the effort to move the first president’s body to a vault in the bottom of the Capitol building in tandem with the hundredth anniversary of Washington’s birth.<sup>83</sup> One week later, the General Assembly of Virginia urged John Augustine Washington not to allow such actions. Not only had Washington documented his wishes in his will, but also Virginians wanted the body to stay in the state. John Augustine Washington agreed with his state government. The General’s body was to stay at Mount Vernon.<sup>84</sup>

With the construction of the New Tomb came the first documentary evidence of the black burial ground. While paying her respects at the New Tomb in 1833, Caroline Moore described, “Near his tomb, you see the burying place of his slaves, contain 150 graves.”<sup>85</sup> In 1846, one visitor to the New Tomb noticed some black people in the woods just beyond it. They were burying a “favorite servant, an aged colored woman...”<sup>86</sup> The account continued, “There were many graves in the grove, and one of the servants pointed out that of Washington’s favorite servant, who was

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<sup>82</sup> [James Currie to The President of these United States Letter, July 12, 1861], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>83</sup> [Walter L. Jones, *The Translation of Washington*, n.d.].

<sup>84</sup> [Washington’s Tomb in the United States Capitol], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Downer, 49; Caroline Moore, “A Glorious Remembrance,” *Experiencing Mount Vernon: Eyewitness Accounts, 1784-1865*, ed. Jean B. Lee (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2006), 139.

<sup>86</sup> “Visit to Mount Vernon,” *Western Literary Messenger*, February-August 1846, 201.

with him in his campaigns...”<sup>87</sup> Presumably the grave of William Lee, Washington’s enslaved steward during the Revolutionary War, the location of such a favored enslaved worker reveals that this graveyard may have been used by those who worked directly for the Washington family.<sup>88</sup> The visitor noted that the mound of the grave had flattened. An 1849 article described the location of the New Tomb as “obscure” revealing that before the construction of the new shrine, this area received little visitor traffic.<sup>89</sup>

In 1855, Currier and Ives published the only known map depicting the black burial ground. It shows twelve burials just south of the New Tomb arranged in two neat rows. The key labels this area, “Negro Burying Ground.”<sup>90</sup> In 1860, J.A. Wineberger described the New Tomb as “surrounded by a deep wooded dell containing thick shrubbery and many venerable, stately oaks.”<sup>91</sup> This dell sheltered the black burial ground. With few permanent markers, observers could not accurately estimate the number of burials, but their descriptions do help elucidate the breadth of the burial ground. The only reason white visitors commented on the African American burial ground was because of its proximity to the New Tomb. The movement of George Washington’s body closer to the black burial ground brought the latter into the public consciousness.

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<sup>87</sup> “Visit to Mount Vernon,” *Western Literary Messenger*, February-August 1846, 201.

<sup>88</sup> In 1967, construction of the Wessynton sub-development a ½ mile north of MVL property destroyed another burial ground of the Mount Vernon enslaved community. George Washington owned this land. For more, see: *Slaves and Slave Quarter Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia; Downer, 54-66.

<sup>89</sup> [An Article Describing a Visit to Mount Vernon, 13 April 1849], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, New], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>90</sup> Nathaniel Currier and James Merritt Ives, *Plan of Mount Vernon: The Home of Washington* [map], (New York: Currier and Ives, 1855).

<sup>91</sup> J.A. Wineberger, *The Home of Washington at Mount Vernon* (Washington, DC: Thomas McGill, 1860), 41.

By the late 1830s, the New Tomb needed repairs. As the nation fractured into political camps on the issue of slavery, more Americans sought out the Founding Father's tomb as it represented the long gone days of American unity against foreign oppressors.<sup>92</sup> Relic hunters continued to grab at any piece of the venerable past. Lawrence Lewis tasked his own enslaved people to help the masons with repairs and additions.<sup>93</sup> An 1835 editorial in the *Alexandria Gazette* reported that "eleven Negroes, some of whom were freedmen, and claiming to have been former servants of General Washington," helped level land for a new "brick Gothic Revival enclosure" at the New Tomb.<sup>94</sup> An iron railing enclosed the sarcophagi of George and Martha Washington. In the 1840s, John Augustine Washington III authorized a series of monuments, iron railings and walkways to be erected around the space.<sup>95</sup> In 1843, Mary Eliza Angela Lewis Conrad, the grandniece of Washington, and her child, were buried on a plot of land twelve feet to the southeast of the vault. One visitor in 1846 described the New Tomb as "very plain, though neat."<sup>96</sup> In an effort to deter the destruction of the New Tomb, the MVLA may have encouraged the selling of canes and other souvenirs at the site.<sup>97</sup>

In 1846, Jane Washington and John Augustine Washington considered selling part of the plantation, including the New Tomb, to the state or federal government.

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<sup>92</sup> Casper, 33.

<sup>93</sup> [1839 Work on the New Tomb], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>94</sup> [1835 Work on the New Tomb], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.; Brandt, 36.

<sup>95</sup> [Extracts from the Diaries of John Augustine Washington], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>96</sup> "Visit to Mount Vernon," *Western Literary Messenger*, February-August 1846, 201.

<sup>97</sup> Theodor Horydczak, "Drawing of Washington's tomb at Mount Vernon," Library of Congress, ca. 1920-ca. 1950, <https://www.loc.gov/item/thc1995013236/PP/>.

Nothing materialized.<sup>98</sup> Other proposals, such as transforming the plantation into a burial ground for American heroes, also floundered.<sup>99</sup> In 1855, Jane Washington was the last person to be buried in the tomb. Edmund Parker helped inter her body.<sup>100</sup> The Washington family locked the vault and, according to folklore, threw the keys into the Potomac River.<sup>101</sup>

### **The Ownership and Protection of Mount Vernon's Sacred Spaces**

The New Tomb only housed white bodies, but it was black people that protected it. In 1832, a reporter from the *New York Mirror* viewed the tomb “under the guidance of the old negro.”<sup>102</sup> N.P. Willis recounted, “I followed the decrepid [sic] old family servant, who had served Washington forty years, to his master’s tomb.”<sup>103</sup> One visitor reported in 1840, “A middle-aged mulatto, the steward of Mount Vernon,” held the keys to the New Tomb.<sup>104</sup> This man was most likely West Ford, a free black man who had previously been enslaved at Bushrod Washington’s Mount Vernon. It is generally believed that a Washington, but most likely not the first president, fathered Ford. This may account for why he was manumitted by the terms of Hannah Bushrod’s will around 1806 (Hannah was George Washington’s sister-in-law). As a free man, Ford started a farm near Mount Vernon which would later

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<sup>98</sup> Casper, 67.

<sup>99</sup> Brandt, 37.

<sup>100</sup> “Daughters of the Revolution,” *The Nashville American*, 28 February 1897.

<sup>101</sup> [American Stone Shadows], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>102</sup> [An Article in the *New York Mirror*], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, Old], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>103</sup> [No title], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, Old], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>104</sup> [“Tomb of Washington,” by William Strickland, c. 1840-50], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

become the black hamlet of Gum Springs. Ford returned to Mount Vernon to work for Bushrod and John Augustine II.<sup>105</sup> In an 1840 letter to George C. Washington, Jane Washington relayed that “West Ford prepared a Coffin for the remainder of such your nearest relatives.”<sup>106</sup> Some historians, like Philander D. Chase, editor of the Papers of George Washington at the University of Virginia, claimed Ford, a light-skinned black person, resembled Bushrod.<sup>107</sup> Ford participated in the burial processes of the Washington family and then protected their sacred vault.<sup>108</sup> He led visitors to the tomb, possessed the keys and periodically cleaned the area.<sup>109</sup> In 1863, he died at age 79. *The Baltimore Sun* listed his death, citing that Ford lived at Mount Vernon “the greater portion of his life.”<sup>110</sup> He was most likely the last person to be buried in the black burial ground.<sup>111</sup> Judith Burton, a descendant of Ford, cites family lore. She states that when West died, his body was temporarily placed in the old tomb.<sup>112</sup> Beyond oral history, there is no evidence or explanation of such an event, but the transfer of Ford, a black Washington, from the old family vault to the black burial ground conveys a powerful message about family and race in the mid-nineteenth century. Despite shared blood, appearance informed family ties during life and death.

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<sup>105</sup> Casper, 25.

<sup>106</sup> [Jane C. Washington to George C. Washington Letter, 23 May 1840], *The Tomb Black Book*, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>107</sup> Nicolas Wade, “Descendants of Slave's Son Contend That His Father Was George Washington,” *The New York Times*, 7 July 1999.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Casper, 58.

<sup>110</sup> “Dead,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 August 1863, p. 4.

<sup>111</sup> Downer, 5.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Chelsea Elise Hansen, “I Cannot Tell Your Lie: Alternate and Dominant Narratives of Slavery at Mount Vernon, Virginia,” (Honors Thesis, Macalester College, 2013), 67.

## MONTICELLO

### Jefferson's Plans

On July 4, 1826, Thomas Jefferson died at Monticello. Following his wishes, his daughters buried him near his wife in the family graveyard, just three hundred fifty yards south of the iconic mansion. Wormley Hughes, the enslaved nephew of Sally Hemings, the mother of six of Jefferson's children, dug Jefferson's grave.<sup>113</sup> According to Jefferson's grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, the author of the Declaration of Independence "desired that his interment should be private, without parade...His body was borne privately from his dwelling, by his family and servants."<sup>114</sup> On July 6, about thirty-five relatives and enslaved people attended the funeral at the Jefferson family cemetery.<sup>115</sup>

The Monticello enslaved community, more than one hundred people, mourned Jefferson's death because it signaled the dissolution of their families through sale. When Jefferson died, he was at least \$100,000 in debt.<sup>116</sup> Monticello was physically deteriorating.<sup>117</sup> The enslaved community knew about such issues.<sup>118</sup> On January 15, 1827, Jefferson's daughter and heir, Martha Randolph, hosted an auction of one hundred and thirty enslaved people on the mansion lawn to pay her late father's

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<sup>113</sup> Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello*, 652.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Jefferson Randolph, "Account of Thomas Jefferson's Death," 1 January 1856 to 31 December 1858, *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/1896>.

<sup>115</sup> Andrew K. Smith, "Account of Thomas Jefferson's Funeral," 6 July 1826, *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/38>.

<sup>116</sup> Marc Leepson, *Saving Monticello: The Levy Family's Epic Quest to Rescue the House that Jefferson Built* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2003), 3.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Gordon-Reed, 635.

debts.<sup>119</sup> Jefferson's accounts would eventually be settled, but the black families of Monticello would never again be fully re-united. Only an ignored black burial ground at the bottom of the mountain secretly honored the story of the enslaved community.

Unlike Washington, who inherited a landscaped plantation and a family tomb, Thomas Jefferson designed and created the mansion and grounds of Monticello, including the family graveyard. He had a passion for nature, English landscaping, and Greek revival architecture.<sup>120</sup> In 1771, Jefferson described:

...choose out for a Burying place some unfrequented vale in the park...let it be among the antient and venerable oaks; intersperse some gloomy evergreens. The area circular, abt. 60 f. diameter, encircled with an untrimmed hedge of cedar, or of stone wall with a holly hedge on it in the form below. In the center of it erect a small Gothic temple of antique appearance. Appropriate one half to the use of my own family, the other of strangers, servants etc. erect pedestals with urns, etc. and proper inscriptions. The passage between the walls, 4 f. wide. on the grave of a favorite and faithful servant might be a pyramid erected of rough rock-stone; the pedestal made plain to receive an inscription.<sup>121</sup>

Jefferson designed an integrated and idyllic burying ground for family members and cherished enslaved people. He even wished to mark graves of bondsmen with a pyramid and inscription. Typically enslaved people decorated their own loved ones' burials with temporary markers. That Jefferson desired to include enslaved people in his graveyard reveals his paternalism. Micki McElya describes:

Accounts of enslaved people's fidelity constituted the ultimate expression of southern paternalism, which held that the relationship of the master to the slave was removed from market forces and economic exigency and functioned more like a familial relationship between

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<sup>119</sup> Thomas Jefferson Randolph, "Newspaper Advertisement for Poplar Forest and Monticello Estate Sales," 3 November 1826 to 6 January 1827, *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/2027>.

<sup>120</sup> Thomas Jefferson, in Edwin Morris Betts, ed., *Thomas Jefferson's Garden Book*, (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1944), 25; Frederick Doveton Nichols and Ralph E. Griswold, *Thomas Jefferson, Landscape Architect* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 90.

<sup>121</sup> Jefferson, in Betts, ed., 25.

father and child based on a set of mutual obligations and responsibilities as well as affection.<sup>122</sup>

Jefferson attempted to control the enslaved community in both this world and the afterlife, in the present and the future. Additionally, his plans to include some enslaved people within his family graveyard could be because some bondsmen were actually his family. McElya succinctly states, “Furthermore, identifying some slaves as being like family members denied the fact that many indeed were the biological children of owners and overseers.”<sup>123</sup> The family graveyard could be for Jefferson’s black *and* white progeny.

Yet just three years later, the plans changed. On May 22, 1773, Jefferson recorded in his Garden Book that “2. Hands grubbed the Grave yard 80.f.sq.”<sup>124</sup> Two enslaved workers cleared and leveled a plot of land just three hundred fifty yards south of the mansion. In favor of time, Jefferson forwent the ornate architectural features of his 1771 plan. His brother-in-law and “dearest friend,” Dabney Carr had died on May 16.<sup>125</sup> As young men, they had promised to bury the first deceased under a particular oak tree at Monticello.<sup>126</sup> Jefferson reinterred Carr’s body, first buried on a nearby plantation, to honor his pact.<sup>127</sup> He could still build a more ornate graveyard elsewhere on his property, but another untimely death permanently ended planning in this direction.

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<sup>122</sup> McElya, 66.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>124</sup> Jefferson, “May 22, 1773,” in Betts, ed., 40.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Stone, 16 March 1782, *Founders Online*, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-06-02-0159>.

<sup>126</sup> Jefferson, in Betts, ed., 41; For Carr’s epithet, see Thomas Jefferson, “Notes for Epitaph and Grave of Dabney Carr,” after 16 May 1773, *Founders Online*, <https://founders.archives.gov/?q=graveyard&s=1111311111&r=4>

<sup>127</sup> Jefferson, “Notes for Epitaph and Grave of Dabney Carr.”

On September 6, 1782, Jefferson's wife Martha Wayles Jefferson died during childbirth. The politician elected to bury her in the same plot as Carr. Martha's headstone bore a quote from the *Iliad*.<sup>128</sup> The inscription read, "Nay if even in the house of Hades the dead forget their dead, yet will I even there be mindful of my dear comrade."<sup>129</sup> Below Homer's prose, Jefferson added a few of his own words. He wrote:

To the memory of  
Martha Jefferson  
Daughter of John Wayles;  
Born October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1748, O.S.  
Intermarried with  
Thomas Jefferson  
January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1772;  
Torn from him by death  
September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1782:  
This monument of his love is inscribed.<sup>130</sup>

With these affectionate words, Jefferson created a permanent family burying ground. In 1808, the "Master of the Mountain" directed his overseer to plant weeping willow trees around the edge of the cemetery.<sup>131</sup> The next year, Jefferson gave author Margaret Bayard Smith a tour of the grounds. She recorded, "As we passed the graveyard, which is about halfway down the mountain, in a sequestered spot, he told me he there meant to place a small gothic building..."<sup>132</sup> Jefferson planned no other family burying ground. This was to be his eternal resting spot as well.

By the end of his life, Jefferson had overseen the burials of twelve people, including his sister, Martha Jefferson, his mother, Jane Randolph Jefferson and his

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<sup>128</sup> Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Ties That Bound: Founding First Ladies and Slaves* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 167.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Jefferson, in Betts, ed., 44.

<sup>132</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, "The Haven of Domestic Life," 1809, in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Visitors to Monticello* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 51.

two infant daughters (both named Lucy).<sup>133</sup> In an undated document, Jefferson described his own tombstone. He wished to have placed on top his grave:

a plain die or cube of 3.f. without any mouldings, surmounted by an obelisk of 6.f. height, each of a simple stone. on the faces of the obelisk the following inscription and not a word more  
‘Here was buried  
Thomas Jefferson  
Author of the Declaration of American Independence  
Of the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom  
& Father of the University of Virginia’  
because by these, as testimonials that I have lived, I wish most to be remembered.<sup>134</sup>

Jefferson wished to control historical memory about him. He could carve in stone a short biography. A dirt-filled double-brick wall enclosed the graveyard in which Jefferson ordered a red-berried pyracanthus hedge be planted.<sup>135</sup> The Founding Father died on July 4, 1826, exactly fifty years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

When Philadelphia lawyer Henry Gilpin visited Monticello in 1827, he remarked, “the grave of Mr. Jefferson is on one side marked by the freshness of the earth & an oak tree hanging over it... There is no monument, but a plain obelisk of which he left the design to be placed on his grave.”<sup>136</sup> Gilpin may have observed a temporary marker.<sup>137</sup> The actual obelisk, which was not erected until 1833, towered

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<sup>133</sup> Joy R. Boissevain, Robert T. Coolidge, George H. Esser Jr., Nancy Morgan, William M. Randolph, “Final Report of the Membership Advisory Committee of the Monticello Association,” *The Monticello Association*, 9 February 2002, 20.

<sup>134</sup> Thomas Jefferson, “Design for Tombstone and Inscription,” Undated, *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/2026>.

<sup>135</sup> John H. Works, Jr., “History of the Monticello Association,” 1989, Box 11-15-B, p. 4, Custodian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>136</sup> Henry D. Gilpin, “Prospects Most Magnificent,” 1827, in Peterson, ed., 112.

<sup>137</sup> “The Monticello Graveyard’s Original Obelisk and Plaque at the University of Missouri,” Box 16-B, Folder: Graveyard-Monuments, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

nine feet high and sat in between the flat tombstones of Jefferson's close family members.<sup>138</sup> Thomas Jefferson Randolph purchased his grandfather's memorial. He recalled:

It is true I have at considerable expence, placed a monument over the grave of Mr Jefferson, ascertained by some written memoranda left by himself as being what he himself wished, likewise tablets with inscriptions over his wife and daughters which have been desecrated and destroyed.<sup>139</sup>

Gilpin also described the surrounding graves, which were unnoticeable "except by a board stuck in at the head with the initials painted or cut in."<sup>140</sup> Family members often returned to place permanent markers on their deceased relatives' graves. Peter Carr, Jefferson's nephew, wrote in his 1815 will, "My brothers and myself have long intended to place a tomb stone, over the ashes of our revered parents: it is my desire that so soon as this can be done."<sup>141</sup> As money and time allowed, the Jefferson family memorialized their loved ones.

After Jefferson's death, his lingering debts forced his daughter, Martha Randolph, to sell the plantation, its valuable furnishings and the enslaved community.<sup>142</sup> In 1831, the dilapidated mansion and grounds finally changed hands. Twenty-four-year-old James T. Barclay, a local druggist, bought the 522-acre estate for \$7,000.<sup>143</sup> Martha Randolph stated, "Monticello is at last sold and bitter as the pang was it is over...the graveyard is retained, and now constitutes all that remains to

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<sup>138</sup> "Monticello Association History, 1826-The Civil War," 2016, *The Monticello Association*, visited June 5, 2017, <http://www.monticello-assoc.org/1826-to-civil-war.html>.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas Jefferson Randolph to Charles Wirtenbaker, 1 January 1856 to 31 December 1860, *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/1958>.

<sup>140</sup> Gilpin, in Peterson, ed., 112.

<sup>141</sup> Peter Carr, "Will of Peter Carr," 14 January 1815, *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/14>.

<sup>142</sup> Leepson, 3.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 25.

the family of My dear father & Mother's once great possessions.”<sup>144</sup> At the end of the deed, Martha's son, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, handwrote, “the parties reserve to themselves the family graveyard with free access to the same.”<sup>145</sup> In an afterthought, the graveyard became the only land still maintained by the Jefferson family. As relatives interred their deceased, they created a growing record of family genealogy.

Before the Barclays moved onto the property, Cornelia Jefferson Randolph, Jefferson's granddaughter, wrote to her sister lamenting the family's loss of Monticello. She also mentioned that she had witnessed John Hemings, an enslaved joiner formerly owned by Thomas Jefferson, carving a headstone for his wife, Priscilla Hemings, who died one year earlier.<sup>146</sup> One hundred and forty years later, Resident Director of Monticello James A. Bear found it “suspended” in the crook of a tree near the Director's house.<sup>147</sup> In 2001, William Kelso, the head archaeologist during Bear's tenure at Monticello, remembered the discovery story of Hemings' headstone “because it didn't seem rational.”<sup>148</sup>

Randolph Crawford, a long time African American Monticello employee, may have remembered Priscilla's grave. In 2000, he described:

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<sup>144</sup> Martha Jefferson Randolph To Ellen W. Randolph Coolidge, 15 August 1831, *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/1225>.

<sup>145</sup> Thomas Jefferson Randolph, Martha Jefferson Randolph & James T. Barclay, “Deed for Sale of Monticello,” 1 November 1831, *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/2256>.

<sup>146</sup> Cornelia J. Randolph to Virginia J. Randolph Trist, 22 August 1831, *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/2273>.

<sup>147</sup> Burial Site II-III, 4 September 2001, Series 37, African American Burial Ground, Folder 7: Burial Ground Committee, Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello; Lucia Stanton Interview of James A. Bear at Monticello, 7 August 2000 (Transcript of Video), Series 37, Box 1 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 7: Burial Ground Committee, Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>148</sup> Lucia Stanton Interview of Interview with Bill Kelso, 13 September 2001, Series 37, Box 1 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 7: Burial Ground Committee, Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

I don't recall whether it was an indention [sic], but there was a tombstone. I don't want this to sound funny, and written on it was 'Sally Hemings.' And Mr. Bear got, removed that stone and it was in his office. I always wondered whatever happened to it...<sup>149</sup>

According to Crawford, a tulip poplar towered over the grave. His description echoed Bear's story of Priscilla's headstone. The interviewers asked if he had confused Sally and Priscilla Hemings. He responded, "We could of got..."<sup>150</sup> The interview changed direction and Crawford provided no more information on the tombstones. No other evidence of Sally's gravestone has surfaced. The location of Priscilla's grave is still unknown. Her tombstone now resides in the museum at the Monticello visitor center.

### **1836: The Year of New Monticello Owners**

Both the graveyard and the plantation changed owners in 1836. After only five years, on April 1, Barclay sold Monticello to Uriah Levy, a Jewish officer in the United States Navy.<sup>151</sup> Martha Randolph died on October 10 and the family plot transferred to her son, Thomas Jefferson Randolph. Both Levy and Randolph would greatly change Monticello's sacred landscape.

Unexpected pilgrims to Jefferson's grave may have impelled Barclay to sell. In 1831, Martha Jefferson claimed, "the evil of visitor[s] has increased to such a degree as to be a tremendous draw back upon it as a residence."<sup>152</sup> Barclay could not defend the property from deterioration caused by relic-takers and the ordinary wear of

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<sup>149</sup> Lucia Stanton and Dianne Swann-Wright Interview with Randolph Crawford, 26 March 2001, Series 37, African American Burial Ground, Folder 7: Burial Ground Committee, Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>150</sup> Lucia Stanton and Dianne Swann-Wright Interview with Randolph Crawford, 26 March 2001.

<sup>151</sup> Melvin I. Urofsky, *The Levy Family and Monticello, 1834-1923: Saving Thomas Jefferson's House* (Charlottesville: The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2001), 45; Boissevain et al., 2.

<sup>152</sup> Martha Jefferson Randolph To Ellen W. Randolph Coolidge, 15 August 1831, *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/1225>.

tourists. In 1832, William Barry, the postmaster general of the United States, visited the site. He concluded, “the late residence of Mr. Jefferson has lost all its interest, save what exists in memory, and that is the sacred deposit of his remains.”<sup>153</sup>

Jefferson himself foresaw destruction to his grave and purposefully designed his obelisk to be cut from “coarse stone of which my columns are made, that no one might be tempted hereafter to destroy it for the value of the materials.”<sup>154</sup> In the final years of his life, he could have heard about the pillaging of Washington’s tomb.

In the 1840s, new railroad lines connected east coast cities to Charlottesville and delivered more tourists to the doorsteps of Monticello. Stephen Higginson Tyng, a notable reverend and critic of Jefferson, visited the Monticello graveyard in 1840.

He observed that, “everything is ruin around. The brick wall is torn down to its foundations, the tombstone itself has been broken and marred in every line and corner, I suppose by devotees who would carry away a memento of his name.”<sup>155</sup> In

1853, Benson Lossing, reporter and engraver for *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, complained that the obelisk had been “shamefully mutilated by thieving visitors.”<sup>156</sup>

In a letter from the early 1850s, Thomas Jefferson Randolph also bemoaned the relic-takers. He constantly struggled to preserve the tombstone of his grandfather.

Trespassers broke locks and took sledgehammers to the markers. Randolph continued:

Individuals to gratify a desire to possess fragments of these memorials of the dead have disregarded the private rights and the most hallowed

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<sup>153</sup> Urofsky, 43 (originally: William Taylor Barry To Susan Barry Taylor, 16 August 1832, William Taylor Barry Papers, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia).

<sup>154</sup> Thomas Jefferson, “Design for Tombstone and Inscription,” Undated, *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/2026>.

<sup>155</sup> Stephen Higginson Tyng, “Monument of an Unbeliever,” 1840, in Peterson, ed., 128.

<sup>156</sup> Benson J. Lossing, “The Empty Offerings of Laudable Curiosity,” 1853, in Peterson, ed., 138.

and cherished of the private feelings of Mr. Jefferson's family residing in the immediate vicinity and witnessing outrages which they cannot prevent. What would be the feelings of these individuals were they called on to witness almost daily the mutilation by stranger hands of memorials placed by their affections over the graves of loved and honored parents? Have they a right to suppose that our feelings are less sensitive than theirs?<sup>157</sup>

Randolph harbored private concerns about a memorial many others considered public property for the taking. He differentiated between private property and public memory. Randolph had even considered encasing the obelisk within "a cairn of loose stones" to block thievery.<sup>158</sup> In 1837, the descendants replaced the crumbling double-wall with a nine-foot tall brick wall to deter vandalism.<sup>159</sup>

Uriah Levy's career as a commander in the United States Navy often took him away from Monticello. In 1839, while stationed in the Gulf of Mexico, Levy's mother, Rachel, died at the estate.<sup>160</sup> She was buried in the ruins of the old stone house on Mulberry Row, a lane of structures and shops near the mansion where enslaved people lived and worked. When Uriah returned to Monticello, he learned of his mother's death.<sup>161</sup> In 1859, Uriah's brother and Rachel's son, Jonas Levy, erected a tombstone in her honor.<sup>162</sup> Eventually, the gravesite would be overrun with weeds only to be restored after the lobbying by Jewish philanthropists and scholars in the 1970s.

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<sup>157</sup> Thomas Jefferson Randolph to Charles Wirtenbaker, 1 January 1856 to 31 December 1860.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Works, Jr., "History of the Monticello Association," 7.

<sup>160</sup> Leepson, 70.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> William L. Beiswanger, "A Short History of the Levy Grave Site," 14 May 1984, Monticello Association & Levy Family, Folder 8: Preliminary Discussions on Levy Gravesite, Refurbishment & Ceremony: Oct. 1974-Feb. 1985, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

At the beginning of the Civil War, Levy received orders to head the Court Martial Board of the Navy in Washington DC.<sup>163</sup> In October 1861, the Confederate government began planning the seizure of Monticello. The Confederate Alien Enemies Act legalized the action because a Northerner, and a federal military officer, owned the Virginia plantation. Levy was an “alien enemy.”<sup>164</sup> Yet, Levy died of pneumonia in 1862. His executor, George Carr, attempted to prohibit the Confederate government’s acquisition of the estate through a lawsuit. The Richmond court heard the case in September 1864 and ruled in favor of a Confederate seizure.<sup>165</sup>

Southern soldiers visited Jefferson’s tombstone and continued the ritualistic pilfering of the gravesite. According to *The Charleston Mercury*, the Jefferson graveyard was in shambles. The tombstones had blackened and the iron gate perpetually stayed open to thieves.<sup>166</sup> Many reported the defacement of the mansion and the graveyard, including Sarah Strickler, who visited Monticello towards the end of the war.<sup>167</sup> She herself took a piece of Jefferson’s obelisk.<sup>168</sup>

Monticello changed hands multiple times during and after the war. On November 17, 1864, a large crowd gathered at the historic estate for its public auction hosted by the Confederate government. Jonas Levy attended the event to make a specific request. After the deputy marshal explicitly expressed that a one-acre plot, the Jefferson family burial ground, was excluded from the sale, Jonas asked that the

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<sup>163</sup> Leepson, 85.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>165</sup> James A. Bear, Jr., “Monticello and the Civil War,” The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, <https://www.monticello.org/site/house-and-gardens/monticello-and-civil-war>

<sup>166</sup> “Monticello Association History, 1826-The Civil War,” 2016, *The Monticello Association*, visited June 5, 2017, <http://www.monticello-assoc.org/1826-to-civil-war.html>.

<sup>167</sup> Leepson, 89.

<sup>168</sup> Urofsky, 123.

future purchaser also take care of his mother's grave on Mulberry Row.<sup>169</sup> The graves of past white Monticello residents received significant attention at the sale, while presumably no one said anything about the black residents' burial sites. Col. Benjamin Franklin Ficklin bought the estate for \$80,500.<sup>170</sup> The Confederate government received the profits.<sup>171</sup>

The Ficklins enjoyed the property until the Confederate defeat in 1865. The dissolution of the Confederate government voided the 1864 sale of Monticello. In his will, Levy had left Monticello to the federal government to be used as a school for "children of all denominations, Hebrew and Christian."<sup>172</sup> Levy's many heirs, including his wife, his siblings and their children, challenged the will's validity. After years of court cases, Jonas Levy took charge of the estate in 1868, with plans to sell it and split the profits among the heirs.<sup>173</sup> Jonas remained concerned about his mother's grave. In December 1868, he stated, "When the sale is made, a specific clause must be made in relation to the reservation of the piece of ground where my mother is buried for my family, as it cannot be disturbed under any consideration whatever."<sup>174</sup> With his mother forever buried at Monticello, Jonas was loath to sell the property. Still, he felt it was the only remedy to years of legal entanglements.<sup>175</sup>

Jonas's son, Jefferson Levy, a three-time United States Congressman, followed in his father's footsteps and, in 1873, set out to purchase Monticello from

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<sup>169</sup> "The Sale of Monticello," *The North Carolina Standard*, December 6, 1864.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> Leepson, 89.

<sup>172</sup> "The Will of Com. Uriah P. Levy," *The Richmond Dispatch*, September 2, 1862.

<sup>173</sup> Leepson, 99.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

his fellow heirs.<sup>176</sup> By 1877, Jefferson Levy claimed, “I own about one half of Monticello.”<sup>177</sup> He bought the other half at auction on March 12, 1879 for \$10,050.<sup>178</sup> Levy was a devout Jefferson admirer. Every 4<sup>th</sup> of July, he sponsored fireworks in celebration of the third president’s legacy.<sup>179</sup> After he owned the whole estate, Levy began an expensive and much needed restoration of the mansion and grounds.<sup>180</sup>

Through visitor reports and newspaper articles, news of the dilapidated condition of Jefferson’s grave had traveled the nation. Like Washington’s tomb at Mount Vernon, patriotic politicians expressed interest in the rehabilitation of the sacred site. In 1878, Congressman Samuel S. Cox of New York proposed a resolution to buy and restore Jefferson’s grave. Congress appropriated \$5,000 for the cause “without a dissenting voice.”<sup>181</sup> Cox assumed Levy owned the graveyard and would readily sell “two rods square” of land surrounding Jefferson’s grave to the federal government.<sup>182</sup> Instead, the graveyard belonged to the many heirs, including minors, of Thomas Jefferson Randolph, who had died in 1875. Levy could not sell land and the descendants did not organize to quitclaim the site.<sup>183</sup> The resolution dissolved.<sup>184</sup>

Four years later, Representative George Washington Geddes of Ohio proposed another resolution for an appropriation of \$10,000.<sup>185</sup> In response, Sarah Randolph,

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<sup>176</sup> Leepson, 108; “Monticello Association History, 1826-The Civil War,” 2016, *The Monticello Association*, visited June 5, 2017, <http://www.monticello-assoc.org/1826-to-civil-war.html>.

<sup>177</sup> Leepson, 109.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>181</sup> “Jefferson’s Tomb,” *The Chicago Tribune*, April 14, 1878.

<sup>182</sup> “Quit Claim Deed To the Grave of Thomas Jefferson,” 28 November 1878, Box 4, Folder 3.3: Quit Claim Deed, Family Rights, Fence Movement, UVA’s Responsibility for Graveyard, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>183</sup> Boissevain et al., 2.

<sup>184</sup> Urofsky, 155.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*; “Monticello,” *The Washington Herald*, April 30, 1882.

Jefferson's great-granddaughter, wrote a letter to Representative Vannoy Manning of Mississippi. She explained that the clause in the Monticello deed ensured the Jefferson descendants' ownership of the 100-square-foot burial ground—the only part of Jefferson's estate remaining within the family. She also acknowledged the need for a new tombstone, stating, "The zeal or vulgar mania of tourists for relics has long ago battered that monument, a simple granite obelisk, into a shapeless mass."<sup>186</sup> She showed an appreciation for the "enlightened patriotism" of the congressional committee, but asked that the government make an "unconditional donation" in honor of Jefferson. She requested the resolution not necessitate a transfer of ownership.<sup>187</sup>

Congress approved the compromise. In April 1883, it erected a new obelisk, which still stands today, of the "most durable stone known in that section of the country." It weighed nine tons and reached eighteen feet high.<sup>188</sup> At the same time, the Jefferson family replaced the brick fence with a sturdy iron one.<sup>189</sup> The descendants gave the original obelisk, whittled down to a column, to the University of Missouri, the first state university established within the boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase.<sup>190</sup>

After government involvement abated, the descendants still owned the graveyard. Levy acknowledged the family's attachment to the family plot and allowed for visitation with notification. Still, some Jefferson kin did not want to be forced to alert Levy when they entered his property. They wanted uncensored access. At the turn of

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<sup>186</sup> "The Grave of Thomas Jefferson—An Interesting Letter from His Great-Granddaughter—A Little Graveyard all that Remains of Jefferson's Estate," *The Washington Herald*, April 30, 1882.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> "Untitled," *The Lexington Intelligencer*, April 12, 1883.

<sup>189</sup> Works, Jr., "History of the Monticello Association," 7.

<sup>190</sup> "Monticello Association History, 1826-The Civil War," 2016, *The Monticello Association*, visited June 5, 2017, <http://www.monticello-assoc.org/1826-to-civil-war.html>.

the century, one source claimed that a Jefferson descendant “tipped a black woman at the gate ten cents so she would not ring a bell and alert Levy that they were en route to the final resting place of their distinguished ancestor.”<sup>191</sup> The descendants constantly asserted their independence from the owners of Monticello. Unexpected outside pressures would force the family to consolidate its power.

### **The Need for a Family Organization**

In 1911, public support for the federal acquisition of the whole estate of Monticello gained momentum. Maud Littleton, the Texas-born wife of a prominent lawyer and politician, began the movement after a disappointing visit to the plantation in 1909.<sup>192</sup> In particular, she erroneously critiqued Levy for the dilapidated state of the graveyard. She published her scalding reports in newspapers and pamphlets, the most notable of which was “One Wish.”<sup>193</sup> In April 1912, Littleton’s appeal reached the ears of congressmen. Two months later, Senate Resolution 92 proposed the federal purchase of Monticello.<sup>194</sup> On July 15, 1912, the *Washington Post* published a letter by Cornelia Jefferson Taylor, Jefferson’s great-granddaughter, refuting Littleton’s claims of a crumbling family cemetery. Taylor countered:

The tomb is not ‘shamefully neglected’ as Mrs. Littleton asserts. With its surroundings, it is watched over, cared for, and constantly visited by those to whom it is sacred as the resting place not only of a great man, but of a long list of loved ones of whom he was the ancestor.<sup>195</sup>

A corrected Littleton turned her fury towards Jefferson Levy and his private ownership of Monticello.

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<sup>191</sup> Leepson, 253.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>195</sup> Cornelia Jefferson Taylor, “Care for Sage’s Tomb,” *The Washington Post*, July 15, 1912.

The threats of Maud Littleton's campaign coupled with the difficulties of graveyard maintenance pushed Jefferson descendants to organize into a formal association. By 1912, descendent Colonel Jefferson Randolph Kean recognized that the care of the cemetery could not rest solely on local family.<sup>196</sup> Further, it had recently become "of public interest and concern." He suggested the family form "an organization for the care and preservation of the cemetery."<sup>197</sup> The group would also strive "to protect and perpetuate the reputation and fame of Thomas Jefferson."<sup>198</sup> Finally, the third purpose, added years later, would be "to encourage association and friendship among Mr. Jefferson's descendants."<sup>199</sup> On April 14, 1913, one day after Jefferson's birthday, several descendants met to establish the Monticello Graveyard Association (MGA). At this first meeting, they elected officers to an Executive Committee and created a constitution.<sup>200</sup> Membership, which cost one dollar, was open to "any lineal descendant of Thomas Jefferson."<sup>201</sup>

Members of the MGA publicized the new group by sending out informational postcards to descendants. The card stated, "The Monticello Graveyard Association has been organized by the Descendants of Thomas Jefferson who are willing to do their part of the filial and patriotic duty of caring properly for his grave."<sup>202</sup> By the

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<sup>196</sup> "Monticello Association History, 1900-Present," 2016, *The Monticello Association*, visited June 5, 2017, <http://www.monticello-assoc.org/1900-to-present.html>.

<sup>197</sup> Jefferson Randolph Kean Proposal, 1912, Box 4, Folder 7: Formation of the Monticello Graveyard Association, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Nat Abeles to MA Members, 29 March 2003, Box 16, Folder: Annual Meeting 2003, Historian's Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>200</sup> Boissevain et al., 3.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> MGA Informational Postcard, Box 3, Folder: Meredith to Sort, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

fall of 1913, the MGA printed its own stationery with a letterhead listing the three reigning members of the Executive Committee—the president, the vice-president, and the secretary. Members carefully saved their records. They took many notes. Kean was the first president. Members elected Cornelia Taylor, who had publically refuted Littleton one year earlier, as vice-president.

Improvements to the cemetery occurred immediately. In September 1913, the Executive Committee focused on the repair of monuments.<sup>203</sup> By February 14, 1914, the growing Association had already spent \$500 restoring the site.<sup>204</sup> The MGA also received an annual donation from the University of Virginia, “the child of Thomas Jefferson,” to care for the property.<sup>205</sup> In October, Cornelia Taylor sent Jefferson Randolph Kean an update. The condition of the burial ground was “really very gratifying.”<sup>206</sup> She explained that an “auto-mobile party” arrived at the site while she was taking stock of the improvements. “One of the party,” she stated, “remarked on the well kept appearance of the place, and said, ‘I suppose Mr. Levy keeps it up.’ My answer, naturally, was –‘He has no more to do with it than you have. It is cared for by Mr. Jefferson’s descendants.’”<sup>207</sup> Cornelia’s lineage and ownership of the cemetery

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<sup>203</sup> Virginius Randolph Shackelford to Randolph Jefferson Kean, 2 September 1913, Box 1, Folder 1: Organization of the Monticello Graveyard Association and Genealogy, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>204</sup> Cornelia Jefferson Taylor to Jefferson Randolph Kean, 5 February 1914, Box 1, Folder 1: Organization of the Monticello Graveyard Association and Genealogy, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>205</sup> Memorandum for Mr. Robert H. Kean, 8 March 1928, Box 4, Folder 3.3: Quit Claim Deed, Family Rights, Fence Movement, UVA’s Responsibility for Graveyard, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>206</sup> Cornelia Jefferson Taylor to Jefferson Randolph Kean, 5 February 1914.

<sup>207</sup> Cornelia Jefferson Taylor to Jefferson Randolph Kean, 31 October 1914, Box 1, Folder 1: Organization of the Monticello Graveyard Association and Genealogy, Papers of Jefferson Randolph

imbued her with pride. Her defensiveness with the visitors became the general attitude of the Monticello Graveyard Association.

Years of criticism and encroachment by outsiders like Maud Littleton threatened the MGA's control of the graveyard. Many Americans viewed it as a public site of remembrance despite its private ownership. Littleton argued that, since it was a sacred place, it should be open to all Americans.<sup>208</sup> As a Founding Father and author of arguably the most sacred American text, Jefferson occupied a crucial part of American historical memory. Many claimed his tomb as a shrine to American democracy created for American tourists. The MGA treated it like any other family plot—off limits and personal. The issue of private spaces and public perception would dog the MGA until the twenty-first century.

On April 9, 1914, Littleton contacted Jefferson Randolph Kean to report that Levy had finally agreed to sell the estate for \$500,000. Levy and a friend, she described, "...were a sorry sight. Their argument was pathetic." She then mentioned her recent visit to the graveyard. She reported, "I noticed some improvement in the care of the cemetery, but was shocked to find that all the beautiful old evergreen trees had been cut down."<sup>209</sup> Unlike in previous years, Littleton faced an organized group of eighty-nine people.<sup>210</sup>

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Kean, *The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present*, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>208</sup> Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 100.

<sup>209</sup> Maud Littleton to Jefferson Randolph Kean, 9 April 1914, Box 4, Folder 3.3: Quit Claim Deed, Family Rights, Fence Movement, UVA's Responsibility for Graveyard, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, *The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present*, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>210</sup> Jefferson Randolph Kean to Virginius Randolph Shackelford, 17 May 1915, Box 3, Folder 2: Miscellaneous Genealogy, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, *The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present*, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

In 1922, the organization changed its name to “The Monticello Association” (MA). That same year, members voted to restrict burials directly surrounding the Jefferson obelisk.<sup>211</sup> Every spring, the Association gathered for its annual meeting, held for many years in the mansion itself.<sup>212</sup> It was a time to honor Jefferson by visiting the graveyard and attending to organizational matters. The Association took itself seriously. The united front of the descendants would become vital when Monticello again changed hands.

## **Conclusion**

After the deaths of Washington and Jefferson, the owners of Mount Vernon and Monticello revised the landscapes to reflect their new purposes as shrines to the former presidents. In doing so, the resting places of the forefathers became wildly popular. Improving transportation technology aided the pilgrimages of visitors to the sites. Members of the MA recognized the need for pooled resources if it was to solidify its control over Jefferson’s grave. After years of individual ownership of the plantations, two organizations, the Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA) and the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation (TJMF) would adopt the MA’s example in an effort to perpetually preserve white sacred spaces.

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<sup>211</sup> Boissevain et al., 4.

<sup>212</sup> Works, Jr., “History of the Monticello Association,” 27.

### Chapter 3: White Shrines, Black Workers

As MVLA tomb guard, Edmund Parker stood with his back to the Washington vault and faced the African American burial ground. One day in the late 1880s, he approached the Mount Vernon Superintendent Harrison Howell Dodge about the “moanin’ noises” of the black spirits at the burial ground. The two employees, one black and one white, ventured into the sacred woods to examine the eerie sounds, which turned out to be trees rubbing against one another. According to Dodge, Parker was terrified. The superintendent recounted, “he trembled on the edge of the awesome field, frozen with the conviction that unseen hands would gather him alive and convey him under the sod to his fathers.”<sup>213</sup> Taken literally “unseen hands” could refer to the hands of ghosts. Going beyond Dodge’s intended meaning, “unseen hands” also alludes to a silenced history.

At both Mount Vernon and Monticello, undetectable under the forest floor lay the bodies of hundreds of black workers, or hands, who labored in bondage for the families of Washington and Jefferson in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>214</sup> While protecting Washington’s sacred remains, Parker and the guards after him continually unearthed the memory of the Mount Vernon enslaved community by talking about their burial ground. Similarly, black workers at Monticello continued to visit the burial ground down the hill from the mansion.

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<sup>213</sup> Harrison Howell Dodge, *Mount Vernon: Its Owner and Its Story* (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott Company, 1932), 93. For more on black spirits: Elliot J. Gorn, “Black Spirits: The Ghostlore of Afro-American Slaves,” *American Quarterly* 36, No. 4 (1984): 549-565.

<sup>214</sup> For this interpretation of “hands,” I would like to acknowledge Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

Conversely, during the formative years of the MVLA and the TJMF, the white resting places of both Founding Fathers received limitless attention. These sites continued to endure the perpetual siege of “unseen hands” grabbing for a piece of the founding father’s legacy. MVLA and TJMF archives overflow with historical documentation of Washington’s tomb and Jefferson’s grave while basic facts about the African American burial ground, like the number of burials within it, remain unknown.

After the two plantations transferred into the ownership of the MVLA and the TJMF, white grip over historical memory determined the commemoration of black hallowed ground. The MVLA endorsed a white supremacist heritage story by instituting the tradition of black tomb guards to protect Washington’s tomb and remind visitors of the antebellum subservient black worker.

The Association etched this stereotype into a 1929 memorial honoring the “faithful slaves” at the Mount Vernon black burial ground. The TJMF, alternatively, did not address the black burial ground on the estate at all. These burials represented an undesirable history compared to the one interpreted at the top of the mountain. Finally, the MA vehemently dismissed all rumors of a sexual encounter between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings. Black people could not participate in a commemoration of Jefferson until the twenty-first century.

## **MOUNT VERNON**

### **The Ladies Arrive**

In an 1853 letter, Louisa Bird Cunningham, a Southern plantation mistress, described the dilapidated state of the Mount Vernon mansion to her daughter, Ann Pamela Cunningham. That year, the younger Cunningham started an energetic campaign to buy and preserve the home of George Washington.<sup>215</sup> After several years of fundraising and negotiating, in 1858 the Mount Vernon Ladies Association of the Union (MVLA) bought the estate from John Augustine Washington III.<sup>216</sup> John Augustine Washington made an agreement with the MVLA to preserve the “burial rights” of the deceased Washington relatives, but also stipulated that no one else would be buried at Mount Vernon.<sup>217</sup> Cunningham became the first regent of the MVLA. During the Civil War, Cunningham and her assistant, Sarah Tracy, worked diligently to protect Mount Vernon. They declared it neutral territory. Both Union and Confederate soldiers, guns left at the gates, ventured onto the property to visit the tomb of George Washington.<sup>218</sup> Along with his comrades, Joshua Chamberlain, who would later lead the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine in a valiant effort at Gettysburg, carved his name into a brick on the New Tomb.

Emerging unscathed out of the Civil War, the MVLA advertised the plantation as an idyllic shrine to George Washington. It became a major tourist attraction during Reconstruction, as northern travelers sought refuge from industrialization and racial anxieties. Southern plantations like Mount Vernon gave tourists temporary retreats

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<sup>215</sup> Casper, 69.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>217</sup> [Mount Vernon—Tomb], Morley Jeffers Williams, [Series I: Structures, Tomb, New], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>218</sup> [Walter L. Jones, *The Translation of Washington*, n.d.].

into antebellum comfort.<sup>219</sup> Mount Vernon was a landscaped sanctuary void of modern tensions. Improving transportation made the site more accessible.<sup>220</sup>

As more people visited, vandalism at the New Tomb increased. Pilgrims attempted to pocket pieces of ivy growing up walls of the mausoleum. Others stole gravel pebbles, which the MVLA replenished every so often.<sup>221</sup> The Association began to officially employ guards to protect the infrastructure of the site and remind visitors to be respectful. West Ford, among his other duties, told stories about life at Mount Vernon. In 1860, in his book about Mount Vernon, J.A. Wineberger declared that the New Tomb “has a thousand tongues, speaking silently to the heart.”<sup>222</sup> Yet, it was black people who spoke, loudly at times, for George Washington at his tomb.

In 1874, Ann Pamela Cunningham resigned as Regent, though not before warning, “The mansion and grounds around it should be religiously guarded from change—should be kept as Washington left them.”<sup>223</sup> The MVLA may have taken her statement literally because, in 1874, Edmund Parker started as official “guide,” which included guarding the tomb.<sup>224</sup> Further, the MVLA may have wanted heightened security during the centennial of the American Revolution. In 1885, Harrison Howell Dodge became superintendent. Recalling Parker’s position years later, Dodge explained, “. . .it seems incongruous that it should have become a custom that a member of that race is made custodian of a *tomb* [italics by Dodge].”<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Rebecca Cawood McIntyre, *Souvenirs of the Old South: Northern Tourism and Southern Mythology* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 7.

<sup>220</sup> Brandt, 26.

<sup>221</sup> Casper, 160.

<sup>222</sup> Wineberger, 51.

<sup>223</sup> Conn, 88.

<sup>224</sup> Casper, 143.

<sup>225</sup> Dodge, 94.

Yet Dodge kept Parker on because he recognized Parker's role at the tomb. Parker's old black visage subserviently and faithfully guarding his former enslaver transported white tourists back to the antebellum period when slavery elevated white status. Parker echoed the traits of Uncle Remus, created by Joel Chandler Harris in the 1880s.<sup>226</sup> According to one newspaper account, he spoke in the accent of the "Virginia darky."<sup>227</sup> Parker's role was not unique to Mount Vernon. Rebecca Cawood McIntyre describes how Southern tourist sites transformed blacks into "picturesque 'others,' curiosities that amused and entertained."<sup>228</sup> Parker's pleasant memories imprinted on the visitor and dulled Mount Vernon's sharp foundation of forced servitude. McIntyre argues that the presence of a stereotyped black figure on the landscape acted as a "visual marker of southern identity," like Spanish moss or the white columned mansion.<sup>229</sup> These, "romanticized visions," Lydia Brandt concurs, "promoted the idea that slavery had been both benevolent and necessary."<sup>230</sup> Parker's presence made room for visitors to honor George Washington without questioning their heritage myth. Dodge relied on this mold so much that in his autobiography he altered Parker's own biography. Although Parker arrived at Mount Vernon in 1841, the superintendent claimed he was born there.<sup>231</sup> The better the connection to Washington, the more potent the stage character. By the end of his tenure as guard, Parker earned \$20 a month.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Casper, 193.

<sup>227</sup> "Guards the Great Dead," *The Burlington Republican*, Burlington, Kansas, 21 December 1894.

<sup>228</sup> McIntyre, 103.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Brandt, 93.

<sup>231</sup> Dodge, 92; Casper, 185.

<sup>232</sup> [Regular Employees, 1885], Superintendent Files, [Harrison H. Dodge, Annual Report Entries Filed by Subject-E], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

Parker encountered many famous figures at his post. American politicians and foreign dignitaries flocked to the site. Military leaders also worshiped General Washington. One newspaper reported that Parker witnessed visits from “Sherman, Sheridan, Logan, Butler Banks and Burnside, of the Union Army and Lee, Joe Johnston, Gordon, and Buckner of the Confederate cause.”<sup>233</sup> Generals from both sides of the Civil War could worship Washington because Parker’s presence purposefully presented a “softened picture of slavery” and quelled any sectional divide at Mount Vernon after the Civil War.<sup>234</sup>

With the opening of the Washington, Mount Vernon, and Alexandria Electric Railway in September 1892, attendance at Washington’s home surged. From May 1891 to April 1892, 35,130 people toured Mount Vernon. From May 1892 to April 1893, 67,231 visitors made the trip.<sup>235</sup> Where the ferry trip cost one dollar and required a day of travel, the railway was faster and cost only 25 cents. The railway ran more frequently and accommodated more people on each trip. Out of all of the laborers at Mount Vernon, only two black people interacted with this public. Parker was one of them. The MVLVA controlled the heritage story of Mount Vernon by staging Parker at the most sacred location on the landscape.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> “Personal,” *The National Tribune*, Washington, D.C., Dec. 13, 1894; Casper, 185.

<sup>234</sup> Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 77.

<sup>235</sup> Thomas Adams, “Purser’s Financial Report,” Minutes of the Council of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union Held at Mount Vernon, Virginia, June Second to Ninth, Eighteen Ninety-Two (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union, 1892), 61; Thomas Adams, “Annual Statement of the Mount Vernon and Marshall Hall Steamboat Co. for the Year Ending April 30, 1893,” Minutes of the Council of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union Held at Mount Vernon, Virginia, May Twenty-Fifth to June Third, Eighteen Ninety-Three (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union, 1893), 68.

<sup>236</sup> Casper, 193.

When Parker died on December 30, 1898 from cancer, his death received national attention.<sup>237</sup> One newspaper stated he might be buried “inside the grounds of Mount Vernon.”<sup>238</sup> Another inaccurately reported that the MVLA wanted to bury Parker in front of Washington’s tomb.<sup>239</sup> This integration of burials at Mount Vernon has never occurred (beyond West Ford’s debated genes). Instead, Parker’s family buried him in Columbian Harmony Cemetery, a black burial ground in Washington D.C.<sup>240</sup> The MVLA paid for his funeral.<sup>241</sup> Even beyond Mount Vernon, white hands reached into black burial grounds.

### **The Tradition of Guarding Washington’s Tomb**

In searching for Parker’s replacement, Dodge tried to select someone who had “proper speaking powers as well as the desirable lineage,” i.e. someone descended from George Washington’s enslaved community.<sup>242</sup> Parker’s son, Esau, applied for the position, but Dodge believed he was too young.<sup>243</sup> In early 1899, Thomas Bushrod, sexton of Pohick Church, where George Washington once worshiped, succeeded Parker as guard of the tomb.<sup>244</sup> Dodge referred to him as “Uncle Tom,” signaling the superintendent’s attitude of superiority toward Bushrod.<sup>245</sup> His white hair added to his “authenticity.”<sup>246</sup> His visibility, as Ywone Edwards-Ingram

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<sup>237</sup> Casper, 197.

<sup>238</sup> “Miscellaneous,” *The Great Bend Weekly Tribune*, Great Bend, Kansas, 6 January 1899.

<sup>239</sup> “Washington’s Tomb Has a New Guardian,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 27 March 1899.

<sup>240</sup> Casper, 197.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>242</sup> Dodge, 92.

<sup>243</sup> Casper, 198.

<sup>244</sup> “Personal,” *The New York Tribune*, 25 February 1899.

<sup>245</sup> Dodge, 94.

<sup>246</sup> Yvonne Edwards-Ingram, “Before 1979: African American Coachmen, Visibility, and Representation at Colonial Williamsburg,” *The Public Historian* 36, No. 1 (2014), 26.

describers of black workers at Colonial Williamsburg prior to 1979, served a purpose.<sup>247</sup> According to one article, Bushrod talked “in that soft droning plantation voice which no white tongue can imitate.”<sup>248</sup> Bushrod played a role and the brick walkway in front of the New Tomb was his stage. One 1900 photograph catches Bushrod, hat in hand, posing in front of the tomb and looking out into the distance, or potentially looking back in time.<sup>249</sup> Since Dodge hired the guards because of their old age, they did not last long in the position. In 1902, Alfred Jasper, who Dodge claimed descended from a “servant of Washington,” replaced Bushrod, only to leave two years later.<sup>250</sup>

Edon Hammond, a Methodist preacher, became the next guard. Dodge praised Hammond’s lectures, which “enthralled his attentive audience.”<sup>251</sup> Between 1904 and 1906, Hammond published a pamphlet of his speech with Washington’s portrait on the front and his own proud portrait on the back. The project showcased his writing, celebrated his intelligence and gave him historical authority. Dodge and the MVLVA did not sanction such actions. The MVLVA may have thought Hammond had transgressed the boundaries of his position, and potentially his race. Dodge, a self-proclaimed Washington historian, may have felt Hammond encroached on his own aspirations. Dodge stated, “His publication was never circulated.”<sup>252</sup> Hammond soon

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<sup>247</sup> Edwards-Ingram, 11.

<sup>248</sup> “Washington’s Tomb Has a New Guardian,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 27 March 1899.

<sup>249</sup> Detroit Publishing Co., Publisher. “Tomb of Washington, Mt. Vernon, Va,” Library of Congress, ca. 1900, <https://www.loc.gov/item/det1994014342/PP/>.

<sup>250</sup> [Employees, 1901-2], Superintendent Files, [Harrison H. Dodge, Annual Report Entries Filed by Subject-E], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>251</sup> Dodge, 95.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

resigned from hurt feelings or old age.<sup>253</sup> Thomas Braxton and Isaac Carter filled the position, but lasted only a few years each. At the end of 1912, T.S. Wright served as interim tomb guard.<sup>254</sup>

In 1913, Charles Simms became the new guard of the tomb, now veiled in ivy and wisteria.<sup>255</sup> Dodge hired Simms even though he was from Leesburg, Virginia and not of the “right” lineage. Still, one visitor received the impression that Simms was a direct descendant of a Mount Vernon enslaved person. She believed Simms was “a living link between the fevered present and the storied past.”<sup>256</sup> By looking the part, Simms became a part of the heritage story at Mount Vernon. Yet, his position also necessitated asking pilgrims to be respectful while at the tomb, which some whites did not appreciate. On one occasion, Dodge remembered a man snapped that he “didn’t allow a nigger to attempt to teach him good manners.”<sup>257</sup> Amidst Jim Crow’s stark racial limitations, Simms had a remarkable position that turned race relations on its head. Rarely did a black person have the authority to order around a white person. Simms stood between white visitors and Washington’s sarcophagus. While tourists clamored to see past the iron gate, going so far as to climb on the fences enclosing the exterior obelisks, Simms stood right up front.<sup>258</sup> His MVLA badge, mimicking those

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<sup>253</sup> Casper, 205.

<sup>254</sup> [Regular Employees 1912], Superintendent Files, [Harrison H. Dodge, Annual Report Entries Filed by Subject-E], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>255</sup> Harris & Ewing, “David Lloyd George at George Washington’s Tomb, Mount Vernon, Virginia,” Library of Congress, 1923, <https://www.loc.gov/item/hec2013013522/>.

<sup>256</sup> Dodge, 90.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 97

<sup>258</sup> Harris & Ewing, “British Commission to U.S. Balfour, etc. at Mount Vernon,” Library of Congress, 1917, <https://www.loc.gov/item/hec2008005914/>.

of law enforcement, glared in the sunlight.<sup>259</sup> In front of George Washington's tomb, race relations were restored to antebellum attitudes. Certain, white-approved black people could operate in positions of limited power. When Simms died in 1924, George Ford became tomb guard. With the lineal connections to Mount Vernon and white hair, Ford easily fit Dodge's guard prescription.<sup>260</sup>

During Ford's tenure as guard, the MVLA decided to commemorate the black burial ground. The only other mention in official MVLA documents of the black cemetery was in Dodge's 1902 report at the annual meeting. He reported that burial ground "opposite the Tomb—has been cleared of its leaves and debris and sown with a mixture of seeds..."<sup>261</sup> In 1927, the Tomb Committee reported:

The graveyard which was used by General Washington for his slaves is unmarked. In the course of time it is possible all traces of the graves will disappear. It is recommended that a simple marker, suitably inscribed, be place on this consecrated ground.<sup>262</sup>

Annie Burr Jennings, Vice Regent for Connecticut, offered to finance a "permanent" marker.<sup>263</sup> The J.F. Manning Co. of Washington D.C. charged \$135.00 to make the monument.<sup>264</sup> Dodge claimed he could not find any "account of interments of Mount

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<sup>259</sup> Harris & Ewing, "Tomb of George Washington, Mount Vernon, Virginia," Library of Congress, 1923, <https://www.loc.gov/item/hec2013013498/>.

<sup>260</sup> Harris & Ewing, "Scouts at Tomb of George Washington, Mount Vernon, Virginia," Library of Congress, 1931, <https://www.loc.gov/item/hec2013006310/>.

<sup>261</sup> [Grounds 1902-3], Superintendent Files, [Harrison H. Dodge, Annual Report Entries Filed by Subject-G], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>262</sup> MVLA Minutes of Council, 1927, 75.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> H.H. Dodge, "Superintendent's Report," Minutes of the Council of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union Held at Mount Vernon, Virginia, May Ninth to Sixteenth, Nineteen Twenty-Nine (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, 1929), 46; [Ellen McCallister Clark to Dr. William E. Carr Letter, November 6, 1986], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial, Correspondence, Dedication Ceremony, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

Vernon servants,” but reported that he had supervised the placement of the Georgia marble tablet on March 28, 1929.<sup>265</sup>

The “appropriate” inscription, according the MVLA, read “In memory of the many faithful colored servants of the Washington family buried at Mount Vernon from 1760 to 1860. Their unidentified graves surround this spot.”<sup>266</sup> This “faithful servant” trope diminished the reality of forced servitude and distorted history. In the United States, and especially in Washington, DC, a trend to commemorate “faithful servants” had begun in the early twentieth century. The 1912 election of Woodrow Wilson, a Southern Democrat, contributed to what Micki McElya called “the southernization of Washington.”<sup>267</sup> Three years later, Wilson hosted a screening of D.W. Griffith’s white supremacist film in the White House. Beginning around 1915, the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to Northern cities increased the population of black Americans in the nation’s capital. Wilson intensified segregation laws in the federal government and the capital. He severely constricted black freedom. In 1919, after a black man had been accused of attacking a white woman, race riots enveloped the city. White mobs attacked black individuals. It lasted four days.<sup>268</sup>

Racial tensions in the capital ran high. In 1923, in an attempt to influence perceptions of the races, i.e. bolster white supremacy, the United States Senate

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<sup>265</sup> H.H. Dodge, “Superintendent’s Report,” 1929, 46; [Ellen McCallister Clark to Dr. William E. Carr Letter, November 6, 1986].

<sup>266</sup> [Report of Tomb Committee], Minutes of the Council of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union Held at Mount Vernon, Virginia, May Ninth to Sixteenth, Nineteen Twenty-Nine (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, 1929), 62.

<sup>267</sup> McElya, 1273 (Kindle Edition).

<sup>268</sup> “Race Riot in Washington, DC,” The Gilder Lehrman Center Institute of American History, visited 12 July 2017, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/jim-crow-and-great-migration/timeline-terms/race-riot-washington-dc>.

approved the United Daughters of the Confederacy's (UDC) proposal of a "faithful slave" memorial in the District.<sup>269</sup> Micki McElya described the invocation of "mammies" and "Uncle Toms" specifically for a white audience. She stated:

...many white Americans have wished to live in a world in which African Americans are not angry over past and present injustices, a world in which white people were and are not complicit, in which the injustices themselves-of slavery, Jim Crow, and ongoing structural racism-seem not to exist at all.<sup>270</sup>

The MVLAs, just like the UDC, invoked the "faithful slave" stereotype at the black burial ground. It was a purposeful commemoration to erase white culpability. The sacred space and the new marker became collectively known as the Slave Memorial.

In the early twentieth century, the black cemetery had several features that are no longer visible today. As they installed the 1929 memorial, several workers remembered seeing "mounds of dirt and rough stones that might be marker [sic] for slaves graves." One worker, Artie Petit, recalled that George Ford repeatedly told Dodge that his parents were buried near the new memorial.<sup>271</sup> According to Petit, Ford also said there used to be a rail fence around the site, but Dodge removed it. At the establishment of the memorial, an "informal" path led to the site.<sup>272</sup>

George Ford served as guardian of the tomb until 1935 when his son-in-law, William Holland took over.<sup>273</sup> Holland started working at Mount Vernon in 1905 as a

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<sup>269</sup> McElya, 1193, 1429 (Kindle).

<sup>270</sup> McElya, 44.

<sup>271</sup> [Slaves Burying Ground], Slaves and Slave Quarter Black Book, Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>272</sup> [John A.C. Keith to Senator Joseph V. Gartlan, Jr. Letter, February 9, 1982], Regent's Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (2 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>273</sup> H.H. Dodge, "Superintendent's Report," Minutes of the Council of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union Held at Mount Vernon, Virginia, May Fourteenth to Twenty-Second, Nineteen Thirty-Six (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, 1936), 20.

waiter in the restaurant. He said it was “a privilege” to guard the first president’s tomb. Continuing the work of Simms, he asked visitors to be respectful and had disruptive children leave the area. He also designed a booth to take shelter in during inclement weather. In any climate, he could perform his duties.<sup>274</sup> Poignantly, the Holland family claims lineal descent from an enslaved Mount Vernon worker. According to Edna Greene Medford, concrete evidence substantiating this connection does not exist, but family history suggests it. The Holland family had long been associated with the Gum Springs neighborhood founded by West Ford.<sup>275</sup> Either way, Will Holland’s family claim matches the real or fabricated family histories of the previous tomb guards. Just like his predecessors, Holland wore the Mount Vernon uniform and performed his duties solemnly. He stood among world politicians and famous leaders such as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.<sup>276</sup>

More than ever, the MVLA needed a tomb guard. The new scenic George Washington Parkway made car travel to Mount Vernon easy. In 1936, Mount Vernon hosted 530,000 paying visitors—a new record.<sup>277</sup> The MVLA also decided to open the site on Sundays.<sup>278</sup> The grounds experienced more wear. When Holland retired in 1965, the tradition of the tomb guard stopped.<sup>279</sup> Lacking concrete evidence explaining the termination of the position, it could be argued that, given the racial

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<sup>274</sup> “Negro Guards Famous Vault,” *Ebony*, October 1955.

<sup>275</sup> Edna Greene Medford, “Beyond Mount Vernon: George Washington’s Emancipated Laborers and Their Descendants,” in *Slavery at the Home of Mount Vernon*, edited by Philip J. Schwarz (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, 2001), 151.

<sup>276</sup> Harris & Ewing, “Washington’s Birthday, Washington, D.C. February 22. President Roosevelt,” Library of Congress, 1937, <https://www.loc.gov/item/hec2013015634/>.

<sup>277</sup> Brandt, 129.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>279</sup> Casper, 220; “Negro Guards Famous Vault,” *Ebony*, October 1955.

tensions of the mid-1960s Civil Rights Movement, the MVLA did not want to seem political in any way.

While performing their duties at Washington's tomb, black workers, free and enslaved, kept the memory of the black burial ground alive. In 1838, one anonymous visitor mentioned how "a very aged negro, and quite gray" showed him the black burial ground.<sup>280</sup> Edmund Parker reminded Dodge of the spirits at the black burial site. George Ford insisted on telling Dodge of his parents' burial spot in the cemetery. These guards faced the graveyard literally and figuratively.

## **MONTICELLO**

### **A New Owner**

Not until 1923 did a private organization, the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association (TJMF), buy Monticello from Jefferson Levy.<sup>281</sup> Incorporated in 1923, the TJMF was a cadre of northern male Democrats who wished to memorialize Jeffersonian principles.<sup>282</sup> The same year, the Foundation and Levy signed a contract to transfer the land. The TJMF immediately supplied Levy with \$10,000. It would spend the next year raising the additional funds to complete the transaction.

Meanwhile, the MA needed more land. In 1922, member Hollins N. Randolph stated, "I have noticed for several years that the present space in the graveyard was considerably crowded."<sup>283</sup> He suggested petitioning Levy, before the final transfer of

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<sup>280</sup> Downer, 49.

<sup>281</sup> Leepson, 216.

<sup>282</sup> West, 111.

<sup>283</sup> Hollins N. Randolph to Cornelia J. Taylor, 30 May 1922, Box 3, Folder 8: Miscellaneous Letters and Other Papers, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

property, for more ground. Others felt the MA could not afford to buy land, but suggested extending ownership of the family plot to Levy.<sup>284</sup> Hollins Randolph, and many of his relatives, vehemently objected to the transfer of ownership outside of the family. They did not want to share their sacred ground with the Levy family.<sup>285</sup> Randolph recognized that the MA would suffer if contentious issues like graveyard control split the family into factions.<sup>286</sup> The goals of the Association would be unattainable if individuals could not agree. Eighty years later, the Association would see the results of Randolph's concerns.

Fortunately for the MA, these matters did not devolve into family disputes. In March 1923, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, a member of the Association and a Charlottesville attorney, reached a "gentleman's agreement" with Levy.<sup>287</sup> Levy gave the Association an additional one-half acre of land to "for burial purposes only for the descendants of Thomas Jefferson."<sup>288</sup> The TJMF most likely supported the deal because it recognized the MA's permanence. The graveyard could not be relocated. Good relations, therefore, were essential. Also, the MA was not receiving the land for free. In 1924, the MA presented the TJMF with a \$1,541.50 donation. Association members also played an instrumental role in refurbishing the mansion with their

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<sup>284</sup> Hollins N. Randolph to Randolph Jefferson Kean, 14 June 1922, Box 3, Folder 8: Miscellaneous Letters and Other Papers, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>285</sup> Hollins N. Randolph to Cornelia J. Taylor, 28 November 1922, Box 3, Folder 8: Miscellaneous Letters and Other Papers, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>286</sup> Hollins N. Randolph to Randolph Jefferson Kean, 14 June 1922.

<sup>287</sup> Thomas Jefferson Randolph to Jefferson Randolph Kean, 17 March 1923, Box 3, Folder 8: Miscellaneous Letters and Other Papers, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>288</sup> Leepson, 228; Indenture Between Jefferson M. Levy and the Monticello Association and the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 30 June 1923, Box 3, Folder 14: Graveyard Addition and Expansion, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

donated Jefferson-owned items.<sup>289</sup> In 1925, the MA began plans to enclose the newly acquired land with the old section of the graveyard.<sup>290</sup> It would be completed in 1927.<sup>291</sup>

Immediately aware that the TJMF now owned all of the land surrounding the Jefferson graveyard, descendants discussed how to approach relations with the Foundation.<sup>292</sup> With regard to the recent transaction, Thomas Jefferson Randolph claimed, “They [the Foundation] have acted in the most friendly and handsomest manner throughout, and are anxious to cooperate with us in every way in preserving Jefferson’s tomb.”<sup>293</sup> The TJMF included the MA in its planning process. On December 5, 1923, Thomas Jefferson Randolph met with members of the Foundation to discuss the opening of the site to tourists. As a fledgling public history site, the TJMF would institute a fifty-cent admission fee for maintenance costs.<sup>294</sup> More railroad lines connecting Charlottesville to urban centers on the East Coast, like Washington, DC and Richmond, would cause tourism to swell at Monticello.<sup>295</sup> In 1924 alone, around 312,000 people toured the site.<sup>296</sup> Further, the long-time black employees of Monticello would become guides.<sup>297</sup> The Association pledged to

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<sup>289</sup> Works, Jr., “History of the Monticello Association,” 27.

<sup>290</sup> Thomas Jefferson Randolph to Cornelia Jefferson Taylor, 4 December 1925, Box 3, Folder 8: Miscellaneous Letters and Other Papers, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>291</sup> Hollins N. Randolph to Harold Jefferson Coolidge, 19 January 1927, Box 3, Folder 8: Miscellaneous Letters and Other Papers, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>292</sup> Archibald Coolidge to Jefferson Randolph Kean, 2 July 1923, Box 3, Folder 8: Miscellaneous Letters and Other Papers, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>293</sup> Thomas Jefferson Randolph to Cornelia Jefferson Taylor, 4 December 1925.

<sup>294</sup> Leepson, 232.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>296</sup> “Monticello Passes 25 Million Plateau,” *Monticello Newsletter* 15, No. 2 (2004): 1, <https://www.monticello.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/2004wvisitors.pdf>.

<sup>297</sup> Leepson, 232.

continue its upkeep of the cemetery. It created the position of custodian to care for the cemetery. The two Jefferson related organizations, the Foundation and the Association, could cooperate because of their mutual desire to preserve the legacy of the “sage of Monticello.”

The issue of space within the burial ground continued to haunt the MA, even after the additional half-acre. Several members proposed permanently barring burials. In 1926, Hollins N. Randolph wrote to Jefferson Randolph Anderson, “Neither do I agree with you that it would be legally possible, under the laws of Virginia...that any descendants could be prohibited or prevented from the right of sepulcher in the cemetery.”<sup>298</sup> Other members wished to curb controversy, like Harold Jefferson Coolidge, who stated in 1927, “[I] shall very much regret it if my various cousins cannot see their way to settling it without public discussion.”<sup>299</sup> Coolidge unwittingly foreshadowed the future tensions of the MA that played out in the press. In 1927, the MA was able to enlarge the graveyard 64 feet longer and did not restrict descendent burials.<sup>300</sup>

Between Dabney Carr’s burial in 1773 and the formation of the MA in 1913, 61 people were buried in the graveyard. Several were non-descendants, mostly spouses and in-laws.<sup>301</sup> Mary Stewart, the wife of a blacksmith who worked at Monticello, was buried in the family graveyard. Maria Mazzei, the wife of a

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<sup>298</sup> Hollins N. Randolph to Jefferson Randolph Anderson, 28 December 1926, Box 3, Folder 8: Miscellaneous Letters and Other Papers, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>299</sup> Harold Jefferson Coolidge to Jefferson Randolph Kean and Jefferson Randolph Anderson, 4 January 1927, Box 3, Folder 8: Miscellaneous Letters and Other Papers, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>300</sup> Works, Jr., “History of the Monticello Association,” 15.

<sup>301</sup> Boissevain et al., 2.

Florentine merchant and good friend of Jefferson, Philip Mazzei, was interred in the family plot in 1788.<sup>302</sup> Jefferson sold part of the Monticello estate to Philip Mazzei earlier that year which potentially explains why Jefferson allowed Maria's burial in the Monticello graveyard.<sup>303</sup> In 1952, MA membership voted to allow the burial of spouses, which had always been tradition, but not acknowledged in the by-laws.<sup>304</sup> Also in the 1950s, the Association built stairs leading from the fence to the road. A growing membership ensured more money for improvements.<sup>305</sup> In 1956, the MA bought insurance for the Jefferson graveyard to compensate for future damage. One year later the Association agreed to publish its first fifty years of annual reports.<sup>306</sup>

From 1913 to 2000, the MA oversaw the interment of 137 bodies.<sup>307</sup> On Jefferson's birthday in 1973, the Association hosted the first public celebration in the graveyard.<sup>308</sup> By 1976, the MA allowed adopted children and stepchildren to become members.<sup>309</sup> Over time, their membership policy relaxed. Two years later, the custodian first reported coins on Jefferson's grave—a new ritual to replace relic taking.<sup>310</sup> Those who maintained the graveyard described the painstaking process of collecting the coins, often nickels with Jefferson's profile engraved on one side.

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<sup>302</sup> Robert H. Kean, *History of the Graveyard at Monticello* (Charlottesville: The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 1972), 5.

<sup>303</sup> Rebecca Bowman, "Mazzei Phillip," The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 1997, visited 12 July 2017, <https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/mazzei-philip>.

<sup>304</sup> Boissevain et al., 4.

<sup>305</sup> "Monticello Association History, 1900-Present," 2016, *The Monticello Association*, visited June 5, 2017, <http://www.monticello-assoc.org/1900-to-present.html>.

<sup>306</sup> Works, Jr., "History of the Monticello Association," 20.

<sup>307</sup> Boissevain et al., 2.

<sup>308</sup> Works, Jr., "History of the Monticello Association," 28.

<sup>309</sup> "The Monticello Association, Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting," 1 May 1976, Box 11-15-B, p. 20, Custodian's Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>310</sup> Works, Jr., "History of the Monticello Association," 11.

By the 1990's, the Monticello Association had flourished into a large family society—one that the TJMF greatly respected. In the 1970s, a series of increases to membership dues reflected not only the state of the economy, but also the increasing maintenance needs of an eighteenth cemetery. In 1988, each adult member paid \$10 in dues.<sup>311</sup> The TJMF president, Daniel P. Jordan, a history professor, fostered strong ties with MA members.<sup>312</sup> He made sure they did not have to pay to enter the property.<sup>313</sup> In return, the MA granted him honorary membership.<sup>314</sup>

### **“Rumors of Liaison”**

The MA had long heard whispers of sexual encounters between Jefferson and Sally Hemings. In his “History of the Monticello Association,” written in 1989, MA member John H. Works, Jr., recalled:

In 1974, Harold Jefferson Coolidge explained to the membership the reasons for his release to the public of a letter from Eleanora (Ellen) Wayles Coolidge to her husband Joseph Coolidge in 1858, during a visit to her brother Thomas Jefferson Randolph. The letter analyzed the allegations concerning certain children purported to belong to Sally Hemings at Monticello.<sup>315</sup>

In 1974, the MA felt the need to address Fawn Brodie's recent biography, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History*. The University of California professor argued that Jefferson indeed fathered children with Sally Hemings. According to Works, the rumor “was first publically proclaimed by a vengeful journalist, James Thomson

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<sup>311</sup> Works, Jr., “History of the Monticello Association,” 19.

<sup>312</sup> Leepson, 252.

<sup>313</sup> Dan Jordan to Family Member, 27 October 1987, Box 11-15-B, Custodian's Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia

<sup>314</sup> Margaret Shaw to Daniel Jordan, 17 August 1997, Box 17-A, Folder: 1997, Historian's Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>315</sup> Works, Jr., “History of the Monticello Association,” 26.

Callender, in 1802.”<sup>316</sup> In 1873, Madison Hemings, Sally Hemings’ son, told a reporter that his father was Thomas Jefferson.<sup>317</sup> Since the nineteenth century, the progeny of Sally Hemings received oral history about Jefferson blood-ties.

The MA glided through the twentieth century with few problems. By the 1990s, membership numbered nearly three hundred.<sup>318</sup> However, after the new scholarship developed in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, incorrect representations of slavery surfaced and raised questions of correction and inclusion. Historians, such as Barbara Jeanne Fields, Leon Litwack, Eric Foner, Gary B. Nash and James Oliver Horton, effectively combatted the absence of slavery in historiography. New social history moved from a celebratory story to a critical one. Revisionist historians re-examined the lives of the Founding Fathers. More accurate depictions of Virginia enslavers moved the spotlight away from victorious tales to the more shadowy details of their lives. These new interpretations clashed with the heritage cult propagated by the MA.

In the early 1990s, members of the Association discovered that a new Hollywood movie about the rumored sexual relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings had begun production. The movie, *Jefferson in Paris*, starring Nick Nolte, glamorized sexual encounters between Jefferson and Hemings. On November 30, 1994, MA member Margaret Shaw wrote to the Executive Committee, “On the rumors of liaison between Jefferson & Hemings: This is a matter for historians, not our Association. Our purpose is to preserve and care for the Monticello

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<sup>316</sup> Works, Jr., “History of the Monticello Association,” 26.

<sup>317</sup> “Hemings, Madison,” *Getting Word: African American Families of Monticello*, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, <https://www.monticello.org/getting-word/families/hemings-madison>; Madison Hemings, “Life Among the Lowly, Number 1,” *Pike County Republican*, March 13, 1873.

<sup>318</sup> “Jefferson Relatives Seek Monticello Burial,” *USA Today*, 22 October 1998.

graveyard.” She added in a postscript, “I think we are better off being as lowkey as possible and seemed the consensus of the group.”<sup>319</sup> The MA continued to monitor developments, but refrained from any advertisement of its opinions.

Most MA members agreed with Works that Jefferson could neither voluntarily have sex with an enslaved woman nor commit rape. The majority of members could not fathom an alternative to the ingrained Jefferson story promulgated by schools and museums. Works summarized, “it was virtually unthinkable in a man of Jefferson’s moral standards and habitual conduct.”<sup>320</sup> To Works, MA member Lucian Truscott later pressed, “...which was the more profound moral question—to own slaves, or to have sex with one. He told me he couldn’t answer the question, but of course, he had answered it all too well.”<sup>321</sup> Truscott uncovered Work Jr.’s racism within his double standards.

Works emphasized the second purpose of the MA to protect the reputation of Jefferson. He reported:

The Association has not often sought to take public position affirming a particular view of his ‘reputation or fame...’ Most believe that his dazzling array of contributions to society will, themselves, maintain his place in history. But the silent pride that all who claim him as ancestor share brings with it an obligation to be mindful of what is being said or written about him, and to take any prudent steps as an organization that may be necessary to keep them aright.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Margaret Shaw, “Memo to Members of the Executive Committee,” 30 November 1994, Box 16-A, Folder: Executive Committee, 1994, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>320</sup> Works, Jr., “History of the Monticello Association,” 26.

<sup>321</sup> Lucian Truscott to Bob Coolidge (email), 3 July 2001, Box 1 of 2: Monticello Association & TJF, Folder 8: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 1998-2001, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>322</sup> Works, Jr., “History of the Monticello Association,” 25.

Until 1994, little documentary evidence suggests that the MA took claims about Sally Hemings seriously. After news of *Jefferson in Paris*, several family members wanted to “take prudent steps” to quell the “stories,” as Works prescribed. In 1994, Virginius R. Shackelford, Jr. admitted, “sometimes I think we should fight back, even at the risk of being classified as ‘racist.’”<sup>323</sup> “V” Shackelford, as he was known, volunteered to sully his own reputation to protect his ancestor’s unshaken morality.

### **The Monticello Association and Race**

Aged strands of racism course through the history of the predominantly male and white Monticello Association. Many of the MA subscribed to the dominant racial sentiments of the early twentieth century. In an effort to maintain white superiority after the Civil War, many whites bolstered the trope of the faithful slave and the notion that the Civil War was not fought over slavery.<sup>324</sup> The new pseudoscience of eugenics also strengthened the white supremacist argument by inaccurately proving the physical and mental inferiority of non-white races. A new movement to celebrate white heritage through genealogy and the historical profession swept the country. Militant groups, like the Ku Klux Klan, reemerged after years of inactivity. When Jefferson descendants formed the MA, racial discourse dictated that black people were in every way subordinate to whites.<sup>325</sup>

In 1915, during the initial attempts to gather information on the diaspora of Jefferson descendants, Jefferson Randolph Kean, the MA’s first president, remarked

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<sup>323</sup> Margaret Shaw to Bob Gillespie, 6 September 1994, Box 16-A, Folder: Executive Committee, 1994, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>324</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, 260.

<sup>325</sup> Novick, 75.

on the high ratio of Jefferson descendants currently abiding in New England, which “is supposed to be the favorite [sic] home of race suicide in this country”<sup>326</sup> In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt popularized the eugenicist term “race suicide.” White Americans feared that a low white birth rate would cause other, purportedly inferior, races to eventually outnumber them.<sup>327</sup> An amateur genealogist, Kean believed in this theory.

MA members littered their family histories with racial slurs. In 1925, Anna Hotchkiss Gillespie, wrote to Kean stating,

You may be interested to know that my mother, Mrs. W.E. Hotchkiss of Courtland, Alabama has an old darkey by my grandfather, Wm. S. Bankhead. Our old Ed is a descendent of Thomas Jefferson’s Caesar, who hid under the portico at Monticello with the silver during the British raid. Old Ed tells us many stories that were told to him by his mother of the slaves in Virginia, one being the story of the darkies pulling the carriage up the hill, when Mr. Jefferson returned from France.<sup>328</sup>

Gillespie’s description of her family’s pseudo-ownership of Ed, the family servant, smacks of antebellum white possession of enslaved people. Whites in Alabama attempted to preserve racial hierarchies with dehumanizing terms like “darkey.” Gillespie invoked the trope of the “faithful slave,” evidenced by the excitement of Jefferson’s return, to dull the horrors of forced servitude and hide white complicity. Gillespie’s family folklore presented Jefferson and his descendants in the best light at the expense of black people.

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<sup>326</sup> Jefferson Randolph Kean to Virginius Randolph Shackelford, 17 May 1915.

<sup>327</sup> Adam Hochman, “Race Suicide,” *Eugenics Archive*, 29 April 2014, visited 12 June 2017, <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/connections/535eedb87095aa0000000250>.

<sup>328</sup> Anna Hotchkiss Gillespie to Jefferson Randolph Kean, 7 December 1925, Box 3, Folder 7: Anna Hotchkiss Gillespie to Jefferson Randolph Kean, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

In 1928, MA member Hollins N. Randolph grasped onto a false history to celebrate his family. He believed the book, entitled *Virginia's Attitude Toward Slavery and Secession*, proved “that our people were abolitionists, although not for the reason, or of the same type, as the New England group (Garrison, Lloyd and others).”<sup>329</sup> Little evidence points to the Jefferson descendants engaging in abolitionist activities. Randolph may have tried to distance his family from the evils of slavery. Alternatively, he may have dredged the past for commonalities between Northern and Southern members of his family. White unity over past differences became a high priority in the lingering wake of Emancipation.

Hollins Randolph acknowledged the importance of commemoration as an avenue to reconciliation.<sup>330</sup> As President of the Stone Mountain Confederate Monumental Association, he directed the enormous, reverent carving of Confederate leaders on the edifice of Stone Mountain in the 1920s. In his keynote address at the 1924 Daughters of the Confederacy Annual Convention, Randolph described the human need to create burial grounds. He stated, “This feeling, which is instinctive in the human breast, has reached all the way from the humble burial mounds of savage races to such outstanding monuments as the Pyramids of Egypt.”<sup>331</sup> “Humble burial mounds of savage races” could have referred to Native American sacred grounds, or closer to Randolph’s own heritage, the burial grounds of enslaved communities, like the one eventually preserved at Monticello. It would take until the late twentieth

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<sup>329</sup> Hollins N. Randolph to Jefferson Randolph Kean, 30 July 1928, Box 3, Folder 6: Randolph Genealogy Completed by Jefferson Randolph Kean, Papers of Jefferson Randolph Kean, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>330</sup> Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, 211.

<sup>331</sup> Hollins N. Randolph, “Address Delivered at the Annual Convention United Daughters of the Confederacy,” 19 November 1924, Savannah, Georgia, <http://www.memory.loc.gov/service/gdc/scd0001/2010/20100224001ad/20100224001ad.pdf>.

century for the MVLA and the TJMF to commemorate the sites of black burials. The MA took even longer to decide if it would extend its control over the Jefferson burial ground to new family members.

## Chapter 4: Conflicts and Commemoration at Black Burial Grounds

In the late twentieth century, and after decades of institutional silence about the black burial grounds and interracial family connections at Mount Vernon and Monticello, black activists and descendants began to advocate for new interpretations at the sites. In this post-Civil Rights period, new social history began to impact how public history sites told the American story.<sup>332</sup> At long-standing historic sites, such as Colonial Williamsburg, public historians began to move away from a celebratory American story that, as Richard Handler and Eric Gable, described, “privileged national consensus and ignored social conflict, thereby cleansing American history of oppression, exploitation, injustice, and struggle.”<sup>333</sup> However, at Mount Vernon and Monticello, it was black activists and descendants who advocated for change, much like the previous generations’ willingness to change institutionalized inequalities. At Mount Vernon, publicity about the negligence of the MVLA propelled the local NAACP chapter to lever political power in the courtroom. The MVLA acted begrudgingly and exhibited continual fear of losing control over the historical narrative of Mount Vernon. The process of commemoration consistently pitted the Association against the black activists.

At Monticello, MA members experienced fear related to their personal histories—their identities. After 1998, when DNA results permanently linked the descendants of Jefferson to those of Sally Hemings, Jefferson’s enslaved maid, conflicting racial attitudes emerged within the all-white graveyard association and

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<sup>332</sup> Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 4.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

almost caused the society to implode. Two histories that for centuries had been segregated in different cemeteries could no longer be regarded in black and white terms. The Monticello burial grounds held the key to identity. Who held the key to the cemeteries?

At Monticello, trends in commemoration have mirrored white acceptance of minority groups in American society. The graveyard of Jefferson and his white descendants has consistently received attention, albeit occasional subpar maintenance. In the 1970s, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation refurbished the gravesite of Rachel Levy, the mother of the Jewish owner of Monticello, Uriah Levy. The African-American burial ground survived years of neglect only because of the watchful eyes of black Monticello employees. In 2017, no memorial exists in its honor.

At both sites, white and black groups operated with different historical perspectives. White privilege butted against black inclusion. Black burial grounds, long ignored as historical assets, became contested places of heritage in need of recognition. The persistent actions of black activists and descendants of enslaved people to receive acknowledgment of their ancestors forced the MVLA, TJMF and the MA to face black history, the cessation of control and the potential overhaul of historic interpretation at the famed historic house museums. Each group responded to these new challenges with varied levels of enthusiasm and willingness.

## **MOUNT VERNON**

### **Confrontation in the Courtroom**

From 1965 until the early 1980s, the black and white burial spaces experienced little change. Both tourists and famous politicians from near and far paid their respects at Washington's tomb while the forest slowly camouflaged the 1929 slave cemetery marker. Mary Thompson started as historian at Mount Vernon in 1980. She recalls, "I was here for three years and didn't know that there was a slave burial ground here."<sup>334</sup> Then it all changed. On February 6, 1982, Dorothy Gilliam, the first black female reporter at *The Washington Post*, published an article entitled "Remembrance" that set off a chain of events at Mount Vernon ultimately ending with a new commemoration of the African American burial ground. In the article, Gilliam lambasted the MVLA for not properly commemorating the black burial ground. She scathingly announced, "It seems not to matter that these men and women provided the free labor on which the plantation operated. This absence of proper recognition is an atrocity that adds insult to the already deep moral injury of slavery."<sup>335</sup> According to Judith Burton, a descendant of West Ford, the site "had grown up in brambles and bushes."<sup>336</sup> Further, Gilliam highlighted how the MVLA regarded the sacred ground as an afterthought. Mount Vernon archivist, John Rhodehamel, told Gilliam, "I suppose one thing you can do is mark the fact that there was something back there and mark the trail."<sup>337</sup> Mary Thompson has acknowledged the impact of Gilliam's reporting. She recalled, "It took her article to push Mount

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<sup>334</sup> Quoted in Hansen, 75.

<sup>335</sup> Dorothy Gilliam, "Remembrance," *The Washington Post*, 6 February 1982.

<sup>336</sup> Quoted in Hansen, 74.

<sup>337</sup> Gilliam, "Remembrance."

Vernon into doing what they should have been doing before.”<sup>338</sup> Even the MVLA credited Gilliam’s article as the catalyst for a new memorial. The February 6<sup>th</sup> article is the first event on an MVLA document titled “Sequence of Events Regarding Slave Burial Site, 1982.”<sup>339</sup> Yet, the article alone did not spur the MVLA to action. Another reader of the *Post* did.

Fairfax County Supervisor James Scott, incensed by Gilliam’s article, phoned Frank L. Matthews, the Fairfax NAACP chapter’s legal counsel, to inform him of an upcoming MVLA case in front of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. Two days later, on February 8, 1982, the Mount Vernon Inn, Inc., the owner of two restaurants at Mount Vernon, petitioned the Board for exemption from personal property taxes.<sup>340</sup> After John A. Castellani, Director of Mount Vernon and Executive Vice-President of Mount Vernon Inn, Inc., voiced his support of the resolution, Matthews spoke in opposition of it.<sup>341</sup> Matthews cited Gilliam’s article and criticized the MVLA’s treatment of the African American burial ground. The Association had violated the county’s human rights ordinance.<sup>342</sup> The Board passed the MVLA’s resolution with the stipulation that the Association commemorate the site in concert with Matthews. The next day, the MVLA proposed five measures to appease Matthews and the NAACP:

1. Construction will begin immediately of a formal gravel pathway to the slave graveyard.

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<sup>338</sup> Quoted in Hansen, 74.

<sup>339</sup> “Sequence of Events Regarding Slave Burial Site, 1982,” Regent’s Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (1 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>340</sup> Dorothy Gilliam, “Memorial,” *The Washington Post*, 23 February 1983.

<sup>341</sup> [John A.C. Keith to Senator Joseph V. Gartlan, Jr. Letter, February 9, 1982], Regent’s Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (2 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>342</sup> Gilliam, “Memorial.”

2. A new sign identifying the site and directing visitors to it will be placed in a more heavily travelled area.
3. The landscaping around the stone marker of the graveyard site will be improved to the extent now permitted by weather with more appropriate landscaping to be installed in Spring 1982.
4. The next printing of the Mount Vernon tourist brochure will include identification of the site.
5. Mr. Castellani has agreed to meet with Mr. Matthews at Mr. Matthew's convenience in the near future.<sup>343</sup>

On Friday, February 12, Matthews brought two residents of the Gum Springs community, William Carr, a local psychology professor, and Judith Burton to meet with Frances Guy, Regent of the MVL, and Castellani to discuss the improvements.<sup>344</sup> Internally, Castellani described this first talk as a "stormy, acrimonious meeting with threats of bad publicity and what they could force us to do."<sup>345</sup> The director later received an apology from Judith Burton about the "tone."<sup>346</sup>

The construction of the improvements began immediately. At the end of the month, Castellani informed Matthews that the improved path and new signage had been completed.<sup>347</sup> The resident director also claimed, "...we are happy to work with you and other members of the community and nation who share our interest and commitment to historical accuracy."<sup>348</sup> Matthews, Burton and Carr received a March 31 letter welcoming them as consultants to the "slave memorialization" project.<sup>349</sup> By

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<sup>343</sup> [John A.C. Keith to Senator Joseph V. Gartlan, Jr. Letter, February 9, 1982].

<sup>344</sup> [Frank Matthews to MV Board of Visitors Letter, February 16, 1982], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial, Correspondence, Dedication Ceremony, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia; Dorothy Gilliam, "Memorial," *The Washington Post*, 23 February 1983.

<sup>345</sup> "Sequence of Events Regarding Slave Burial Site, 1982."

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> [John Castellani to Frank Matthews, March 26, 1982], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial, Correspondence, Dedication Ceremony, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> [John Castellani to Frank Matthews, Judith Burton and William Carr, March 31, 1982], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial, Correspondence,

mid-March, the MVLA had formed the Slave Memorialization Committee (later it would be called the Slave Marker Dedication Committee) composed of four vice-regents, three members of the MVLA Advisory Committee (men), and two staff members, Castellani and John Rhodehamel, the Mount Vernon archivist.<sup>350</sup> Alison Burdick, vice-regent from Delaware, headed the committee.<sup>351</sup> In April 1982, the MVLA met for its annual meeting. The vice-regent from New Hampshire voiced that the 1929 memorial was “cold and somewhat forbidding.” She proposed a new inscription.<sup>352</sup>

Outwardly, the MVLA feigned a welcoming atmosphere for the consultants, yet the Association’s lack of understanding fostered an internal climate of fear. In his February report to the MVLA, Castellani described the burial ground as “a particularly important site to the black community in northern Virginia.”<sup>353</sup> The wider significance of the black burial ground at the home of the father of the nation was not mentioned. Further, on May 4, 1982, the Association discussed the “wisdom of adding a black” to the MVLA Advisory Committee.<sup>354</sup> Although this memo was not meant for public consumption, the de-humanizing language reveals certain racial attitudes harbored by vice-regents. Later, the MVLA minutes clarified, “Another difficulty would be appointing a black member simply because he is black. The

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Dedication Ceremony, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>350</sup> [Helen Sharp Anderson to Alison Burdick, March 15, 1983], Regent’s Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (1 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> “Third Day--Thursday, April 29, 1982,” Minutes of the Council of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union Held at Mount Vernon, Virginia, April Nineteen Eighty-Two (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union, 1982), 4.

<sup>353</sup> John Castellani, “February Monthly Letter,” Minutes of the Council of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union Held at Mount Vernon, Virginia, April Nineteen Eighty-Two (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union, 1982), F:4.

<sup>354</sup> “Sequence of Events Regarding Slave Burial Site, 1982.”

appearance of tokenism should be avoided.”<sup>355</sup> Appearing in any way politically incorrect was worse than actually being offensive. Facades and labels mattered. Internal memos of the MVLA never refer to Matthews’ NAACP chapter by name, but merely a “concerned group of local black citizens.”<sup>356</sup> In October 1982, Castellani reported:

I want to say that 1982 may be considered the year Mount Vernon’s ivory tower was shaken. Certainly our privacy was threatened by the challenge of a formidable community action group made up of prominent black leaders. . . I used all of our recourses to make a potentially ugly situation into an asset for this Association.<sup>357</sup>

Only one group laid a wreath at the slave burial ground in 1982—the Fairfax NAACP chapter.<sup>358</sup> The anxiety of the Association may have been partially due to the financial situation of the MVLA. Faced with declining attendance in the 1970s, the MVLA had launched a capital campaign to raise \$10 million in 1979.<sup>359</sup> Bad publicity, more specifically, accusations of racism, could hinder its success.

The MVLA performed the minimal work asked of them by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. Recalling the vice-regents, Burton remembers, “They had to have fire to their feet. . .”<sup>360</sup> They acted begrudgingly and failed to recognize their

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<sup>355</sup> [Minutes of the Interim Meeting, January 18, 1983], Regent’s Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (1 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>356</sup> Frances Guy, “Report of the Regent,” Minutes of the Council of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union Held at Mount Vernon, Virginia, April Nineteen Eighty-Two (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union, 1982), 12.

<sup>357</sup> John A. Castellani, “Report of Resident Director,” Minutes of the Council of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union Held at Mount Vernon, Virginia, April Nineteen Eighty-Two (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union, 1982), 15.

<sup>358</sup> “Floral Tributes at Slave Burial Site,” Minutes of the Council of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union Held at Mount Vernon, Virginia, April Nineteen Eighty-Two (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union, 1982), 16.

<sup>359</sup> Brandt, 193.

<sup>360</sup> Quoted in Hansen, 74.

decades-long lack of interpretation. Looking back over the year, one unnamed vice-regent stated, "...this self-appointed group forced themselves upon us...And we are not going to put any more emphasis on slaves than we did on the bicentennial or on the 250<sup>th</sup> birthday."<sup>361</sup> This author expressed her position against a potential new museum exhibit on West Ford. She cited lack of time and resources, "And there are other facets of Mount Vernon I feel would take priority...We surely do not want Judy Burton ensconced at Mount Vernon as 'visiting scholar' and boasting of her connection," she claimed.<sup>362</sup> These comments reveal the high level of anxiety and upset harbored by the vice-regents, especially because Burton argued that George Washington fathered West Ford. Mount Vernon historian Mary Thompson recalled, "I think they were annoyed that this had come up."<sup>363</sup> Instead of seeing an opportunity to diversify their historical interpretation, they perceived the commemoration of the black burial ground as a threat to their power.

Although Gilliam and Matthews forced the MVLA to face the black burial ground, white hands controlled the entire process of memorialization. In February 1982, the MVLA proclaimed that "all major decisions must be made by Council."<sup>364</sup> At the December 8, 1982 meeting of the "Slave Memorialization Project," the three consultants, Matthews, Carr, and Burton, stated "their group, having devoted considerable time and energy to this project over the past year, should have some sort

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<sup>361</sup> [Unknown to Helen Anderson Letter, January 4, 1983], Regent's Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (1 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Quoted in Hansen, 75.

<sup>364</sup> "Sequence of Events Regarding Slave Burial Site, 1982."

of official title and recognition.”<sup>365</sup> The MVLA would not give them a formal name despite fear of picket lines and demonstrators.<sup>366</sup> Instead, the Association decided to send letters to Matthews, Carr and Burton expressing their appreciation.<sup>367</sup> At this same meeting, Castellani warned that “the group was very sensitive to any suggestion of condescension or paternalism and that we should be careful to avoid this.”<sup>368</sup> Frances Guy explained that the initial relationship between the group and the MVLA was strained, but had evolved into a friendly one. She insisted it stay that way.<sup>369</sup> Overall, the MVLA viewed the group as volatile and unpredictable. The Association decided to fund the whole new memorial themselves in order to “retain control.”<sup>370</sup> In July 1982, the Slave Memorialization Committee decided to host a memorial competition, but solicited “designs only from those who are sympathetic to the aims of the group.”<sup>371</sup> The Association straddled the line between not ceding authority and remaining favorable in the public eye.

Working with Dean Harry Robinson III of Howard University, the MVLA sponsored the “Slave Burial Ground Memorial Design Competition” within the School of Architecture and Planning. The competition packet asked site plans to

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<sup>365</sup> [Minutes of the Meeting on the Slave Memorialization Project and Related Matters, December 9, 1982] Regent’s Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (1 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>366</sup> [Unknown to Helen Anderson Letter, January 4, 1983].

<sup>367</sup> [Minutes of the Interim Meeting, January 18, 1983], Regent’s Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (1 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia; [Helen Sharp Anderson to Frank Matthews Letter, January 19, 1983], Regent’s Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (1 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>368</sup> [Minutes of the Interim Meeting, January 18, 1983].

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> [Summary Minutes, Slave Burial Ground Project Meeting, July 13, 1982], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial-Committee Meetings, Minutes, Agendas, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

recognize “the strength evidenced by a people who were extrated [sic] from the homeland, survived the middle passage, held in involuntary servitude in an unfamiliar culture/land and contributed to the birth and growth of a nation...”<sup>372</sup> This description addressed the trauma of slavery and the country’s foundation of forced labor. Thirty teams of students submitted designs to commemorate the site. The committee also decided that the memorial should be “consistent” with the New Tomb. The black burial ground had to conform to established white burial structures. The Regent wanted a “simple, and meaningful, rather low key, but at the same time impressive” monument.<sup>373</sup> A jury of vice-regents and the three consultants would judge the submissions.<sup>374</sup>

One ten-person group, led by David Edge, 28, won the competition.<sup>375</sup> Chosen for its simplicity, the design featured a centralized gray broken column with a flat surface suitable for engraved text. Three terraces, representing hope, faith and love, circled the column with blocks of shrubs.<sup>376</sup> The memorial sat in a circular sunken space. One long path would end with a brick archway, in the same hue as the New

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<sup>372</sup> [Competition Program], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial-Howard University Design Competition, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>373</sup> [Minutes of Meeting on Slave Burial Ground Memorial Project, August 16, 1982], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial-Committee Meetings, Minutes, Agendas, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>374</sup> [Minutes of the Meeting Concerning the Howard School of Architecture Design Competition for Slave Burial Ground Monument, September 23, 1982], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial-Committee Meetings, Minutes, Agendas, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>375</sup> Dorothy Gilliam, “Memorial,” *The Washington Post*, February 23, 1983.

<sup>376</sup> [In Memoriam], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial, Correspondence, Dedication Ceremony, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

Tomb.<sup>377</sup> In recognition of the competition, the MVLA gave Howard University a \$2500 revolving student loan fund.<sup>378</sup>

The three consultants, Matthews, Carr, and Burton, volunteered to write the text of the column inscription. A skeptical Rhodehamel had no faith that the MVLA would approve of their work.<sup>379</sup> The consultants provided a paragraph of text.

Comments from within the ranks of the Association ranged, but no one voiced approval. The vice-regent for Maine, Mrs. William Loring Vaughn, suggested, “If they [the consultants] are unreasonable—resort to idea that Council must approve. Regent does not have the authority to approve, if wording is unacceptable.”<sup>380</sup> This comment underscores the MVLA’s powerful control over the memory of enslaved laborers despite the actions of descendants and black activists. Another vice-regent wanted no inscription, which would silence those who wanted to write the history. The vice-regent for Colorado, David A. Pfaelzer, suggested an engraving of George Washington’s words, in effect eulogizing the enslaver. The vice-regent for Kansas, Mrs. Carl Olander, Jr., commented, “The Citizen’s Group wording is a speech. We have bent over backwards to accommodate—call their bluff.”<sup>381</sup> The Regent wanted

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<sup>377</sup> [Meeting of Slave Memorial Dedication Committee, June 29, 1983], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial-Committee Meetings, Minutes, Agendas, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>378</sup> [John Castellani to Dean Robinson Letter, November 16, 1982], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial-Committee Meetings, Minutes, Agendas, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>379</sup> [John Rhodehamel to Alison Burdick Letter, August 10, 1983], Regent’s Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (1 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>380</sup> [Comments from Members of Interim Committee in Regard to Inscription], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial-Committee Meetings, Minutes, Agendas, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

simplicity. Paralleling centuries of white control over black actions, the MVLA condensed the paragraph to one sentence. The final inscription read:

IN MEMORY OF  
THE AFRO AMERICANS  
WHO SERVED AS SLAVES  
AT MOUNT VERNON  
THIS MONUMENT MARKING THEIR  
BURIAL GROUND  
DEDICATED  
SEPTEMBER 21, 1983  
MOUNT VERNON LADIES ASSOCIATION

On February 21, 1983, President's Day, the MVLA held the groundbreaking ceremony for the new memorial. On this holiday, Mount Vernon is traditionally free to all guests. Obviously a popular day at Mount Vernon, the groundbreaking could educate more people about the enslaved community. Yet only those already involved with the project were invited to attend. The commemoration of the Mount Vernon enslaved community competed with the celebration of Washington's birthday. Conversely, several vice-regents voiced concern that the groundbreaking would "detract from the primary mission of the Association."<sup>382</sup> Nevertheless the date remained the February holiday. Despite the groundbreaking, actual construction did not begin until July 12, 1983.<sup>383</sup> The project cost \$33,000.<sup>384</sup>

Over the course of construction, the MVLA consistently worried about the disruption of sacred graves. In September 1982, Rhodehamel contacted Ed Chatelaine, a Fairfax County historical archeologist, who stated the best way to locate

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<sup>382</sup> [Minutes of the Interim Meeting, January 18, 1983].

<sup>383</sup> "Tomb Committee Report," Minutes of the Council of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union Held at Mount Vernon, Virginia, October Nineteen Eighty-Three (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, 1983), 34.

<sup>384</sup> [John Rhodehamel to Alison Burdick Letter, August 15, 1983], Regent's Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (1 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

grave-shafts was through excavation. This, Rhodehamel insisted, “we must avoid.”<sup>385</sup> It is unclear why he was against this method given the successful excavations of black burial grounds since the early 1970s.<sup>386</sup> Another method, known as resistivity testing, which measures electrical conductivity through compacted soil, would require too much time and money.<sup>387</sup> Chatelaine also warned Rhodehamel that erosion over time could have moved the graves closer to the topsoil. The committee agreed to alter the monument plans to ensure that the footings and foundation would be as shallow as possible.<sup>388</sup> Still, construction necessitated soil removal and installation of an “underground drainage tele-system,” which included concrete pour.<sup>389</sup>

In a July 21, 1983 letter to Frances Guy, Alison Burdick, head of the committee, sent updates about the construction of the monument at “our burial ground.”<sup>390</sup> The MVLA had created an atmosphere of “white-centricity,” to use Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small’s term. Eichstedt and Small explain, “By this we mean that these sites normalize and valorize white ways of organizing the world, including the world of labor (and enslavement...[this] encoding works to sustain

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<sup>385</sup> [Memorandum for the Director from John Rhodehamel, September 27, 1982], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial, Correspondence, Dedication Ceremony, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>386</sup> Ross W. Jamieson, “Material Culture and Social Death: African-American Burial Practices,” *Historical Archaeology* 29, No. 4 (1995): 41.

<sup>387</sup> [Memorandum for the Director from John Rhodehamel, September 27, 1982], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial, Correspondence, Dedication Ceremony, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>388</sup> [Minutes of Slave Memorial Dedication Committee, April 25, 1983], Regent’s Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (1 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>389</sup> “Tomb Committee Report,” Minutes of the Council of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union Held at Mount Vernon, Virginia, October Nineteen Eighty-Three (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union, 1983), 34.

<sup>390</sup> [Alison Burdick to Frances Guy Letter, July 21, 1983], Regent’s Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (1 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

white dominance.”<sup>391</sup> Burdick’s statement embodies white-centricity. She claimed ownership of a solely black sacred space, much like an eighteenth-century plantation owner, without thought of those actually buried there. Burdick also addressed how the committee still needed a keynote speaker for the dedication ceremony. She explained:

John Hope Franklin recommended a professor at Howard who is a non-activist, non-affirmative action, and according to John R. [Rhodehamel], a ‘flaming moderate.’ Let’s hope he accepts—He will probably be very dull, but seemingly safe.<sup>392</sup>

Forfeiting the search for the best, the MVLA settled for “safe” to preserve their control. An activist or radical could attempt to wrest more power away from the Association, or at least more forcefully criticize the MVLA’s approach.

On the day of the dedication, September 21, 1983, the new Regent, Helen Sharp Anderson, spoke first at 11 am. She praised the abolitionist attitudes of Washington and did not mention his role as enslaver. Her introduction and conclusion honored the “memory of the loyal and faithful Mount Vernon slaves.”<sup>393</sup> The paternalist “faithful slave” trope of the 1929 memorial had persisted through two years of committee meetings and after recognition of Matthews, Carr, and Burton’s natural sensitivity to the racist implications. This speech had gone through multiple revisions. Other members of the Mount Vernon community helped too. One month before, the Library at Mount Vernon sent a memo to the Regent titled “Possible

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<sup>391</sup> Eichstedt and Small, 4.

<sup>392</sup> [Alison Burdick to Frances Guy Letter, July 21, 1983], Regent’s Correspondence [Mrs. John H. Guy, Slave Memorial, 1982-1983 (1 of 2)], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>393</sup> [Slave Memorial Dedication, September 21, 1983], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial, Correspondence, Dedication Ceremony, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

Washington quotes that might be suitable for the Slave Burial Ground Monument.<sup>394</sup>  
She used them all in her defense of Washington.

Reverend James E. Kearse of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Gum Springs, Virginia led the invocation. All three consultants participated in the dedication. In contrast to the Regent's soft, but defensive tone, Judith Burton read an original poem:

Here lie my ancestors: Thank God Almighty this day has finally arrived!  
Here lie my ancestors  
A people raped of a country  
A people raped of a homeland  
A people raped of a tradition  
A people raped of a heritage  
A people raped of a culture!<sup>395</sup>

The term "rape" invoked the two-fold trauma of slavery and then the lack of commemoration of that trauma for over one hundred years. Frank Matthews introduced Virginia Governor Charles Robb, who spoke briefly, and William Carr acted as Master of Ceremonies. The Howard University Choir performed multiple times during the dedication. The vice-regent for Virginia, Frances Guy (former Regent), and Dean Harry Robinson also made remarks. Major General Jerry R. Curry, Commander of the Military District of Washington, gave an address. One month earlier, the Slave Memorial Dedication Ceremony Committee had selected Curry, stating quizzically, "given the fact that no black historian was available."<sup>396</sup> Yet at the

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<sup>394</sup> [Possible Washington quotes that might be suitable for the Slave Burial Ground Monument], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial, Correspondence, Dedication Ceremony, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>395</sup> Phil McCombs, "Repaying a Debt at Mount Vernon," *The Washington Post*, 22 September 1983, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1983/09/22/repaying-a-debt-at-mount-vernion/0a2d7662-dd73-4895-a962-f1ed07615bb3/?utm\\_term=.1c5d026f2ec0](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1983/09/22/repaying-a-debt-at-mount-vernion/0a2d7662-dd73-4895-a962-f1ed07615bb3/?utm_term=.1c5d026f2ec0).

<sup>396</sup> Years later Curry would publically question Barack Obama's eligibility to become president, joining other conservatives who called for the release of his birth certificate. Chris Brown, "Daily Caller Now Publishing Anti-Islam Writer Who Pushed Obama-Is-Muslim Conspiracy," 1/26/2012 Media Matters for America, Accessed 2/21/17, <http://mediamatters.org/research/2012/01/26/daily->

dedication, Professor James Turner, the Director of Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell University, and a pioneer of the field, gave the keynote address.<sup>397</sup> A tentative schedule from August did not include Turner suggesting he was a late addition to the program.

Despite Turner's late invitation, the MVLA's inclusion of an Africana history professor marks a highpoint in the Association's flexibility. Turner invoked the power of place at Mount Vernon stating, "George Washington and George Washington's slaves lived in different places and different times . . . on the same plantation."<sup>398</sup> Now, at the same time, whites and blacks lay buried close to one another—and the public knew it.

In October 1983, the Tomb Committee of the MVLA reported that the new slave memorial, and the 1929 memorial, had become very popular sites. The Committee requested the construction of steps from the new memorial to the location of the old one. They also wished to engrave the year, 1929, on the old memorial to differentiate the two.<sup>399</sup>

In 1985, Bruce Bevan conducted a geophysical survey of the plantation, including the black burial ground. One grave lay below the pathway.<sup>400</sup> The survey identified at least 51 graves, although limited time and technology restricted the

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[caller-now-publishing-anti-islam-writer-w/186560](#); [Meeting on Slave Memorial Dedication Ceremony, August, 8, 1983], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Slave Memorial-Committee Meetings, Minutes, Agendas, 1982-1983], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>397</sup> "James Turner," Africana Studies and Research Center, Cornell University, <http://africana.cornell.edu/james-turner>.

<sup>398</sup> McCombs, "Repaying a Debt at Mount Vernon."

<sup>399</sup> "Report of the Tomb Committee," Minutes of the Council of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union Held at Mount Vernon, Virginia, October Nineteen Eighty-Three (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, 1983), 44.

<sup>400</sup> [A Geophysical Survey at Mount Vernon, 1985], Papers of the Superintendent and Resident Director [Series 2 Subject Files, Archaeology- A Geophysical Survey at Mount Vernon 1985], Archives of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Washington Library, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

boundaries of the testing area.<sup>401</sup> Bevan's report corroborated George Ford's description of a fence, which Bevan hypothesized was constructed out of chain. The survey also found pieces of iron from old flower memorial stands.<sup>402</sup> These invaluable artifacts signify the modern commemoration of the burial ground.

### **A New Interpretation**

On a rainy September day in 1990, Black Women United for Action (BWUFA), a community activist group based in northern Virginia, sponsored a wreath-laying ceremony at the African American burial ground. Four hundred people attended the event.<sup>403</sup> L. Douglas Wilder, the first black U.S. governor since Reconstruction, delivered a keynote address. He orated, "We take time to pay homage to those other forebears who toiled in . . . and emerged from . . . the shadows of yesteryear . . . palls of prejudice, hatred and discrimination, which for generations reduced freedom and equality to empty words imprisoned upon sheets of fading parchment."<sup>404</sup> The burial ground had become a place of reconciliation, of facing the ultimate paradox of George Washington. The event was so popular and emotionally charged that the BWUFA decided to sponsor, in partnership with the MVLA, an annual ceremony held every fall.<sup>405</sup>

Mount Vernon archeological excavations of the burial ground continued in 2012. Archaeologists found that the memorial intersected with numerous graves. A

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<sup>401</sup> Downer, 66.

<sup>402</sup> [A Geophysical Survey at Mount Vernon, 1985].

<sup>403</sup> "Washington's Slaves Recalled," *The Daily Press* (Newport News, VA), 24 September 1990.

<sup>404</sup> Pierre Thomas, "Forgotten Pioneers Recalled at Mount Vernon," *The Washington Post*, 23 September 1990.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

new archaeological project began in 2014. Fifty-one graves have been verified, including one grave offering, suspected to be a broken flowerpot, and one unmarked headstone (a field stone).<sup>406</sup> Although the boundary of the burial ground is still unknown, it is most likely confined to the top of ridge south of the New Tomb.<sup>407</sup> The project continues to this day and promises to uncover more. This archaeology gives to black descendants what white Washington descendants have always possessed—concrete evidence of their ancestors. Further, the continuing commemoration and archaeological investigation at the black burial ground helps all visitors better understand the past and the present. The stories of eighteenth-century whites and blacks are no longer buried.

## **MONTICELLO**

### **Burial Grounds of “Others”**

Located on an island in the Monticello visitor center parking lot, the black burial ground survived despite little active preservation by the various owners of the estate. Oral history passed down through black Monticello employees preserved the memory and location of the burial ground. Not until the late twentieth century would the Foundation publicly recognize the graveyard’s existence and fold the sacred plot into its overall interpretative plan at Monticello.

The long-time “absence” of a black burial ground at Monticello revealed the priorities of the various owners. They wished to acknowledge Jefferson’s contributions to society without highlighting his unflattering characteristics. Jefferson

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<sup>406</sup> Molly Ricks’ Interview with Joe Downer, 9 January 2017.

<sup>407</sup> Downer, 53.

owned over 400 people in his lifetime. Initially, he designed an integrated burial ground for both family and “servants.” For unknown reasons, this plan never came to fruition. Instead, two burial grounds, one white and one black, emerged on the property.

Still, Jefferson’s progeny acknowledged the burials of enslaved people like Burwell Colbert, who died in 1862. In December 1865, Sarah N. Randolph, the daughter of Thomas Jefferson Randolph, remarked, “Burwell [died] the second year of the War—we were all so sorry that we did not think at the time of having him buried at Monticello.”<sup>408</sup> Although they interred Colbert offsite, many of his relatives and fellow enslaved workers eternally rested 1500 feet south of the Jefferson family graveyard.<sup>409</sup>

The area surrounding the African American burial ground has had several uses since the eighteenth century. Jefferson named the original tract “The Park.” In 1776, he stocked it with deer. By the 1790s, the Park became more industrialized with a brickyard and stone quarry. In the early nineteenth century, Jefferson transformed it into farmland.<sup>410</sup> Much like Mount Vernon, the burial ground stood far apart from any living quarters.<sup>411</sup>

The Foundation knew about the burial ground long before it publicized the site in the early twenty-first century. Maps from the 1970s, when the TJMF expanded and paved the Shuttle Station parking lot, depicted the “old graveyard.”<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Sarah N. Randolph to Cornelia J. Randolph, 7 December 1865, *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/550>.

<sup>409</sup> Sara Bon-Harper, Fraser Neiman and Derek Wheeler, “Monticello’s Park Cemetery,” *Monticello Department of Archaeology Technical Report Series 5* (2003): 2.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Fortunately, workers paved around the site. TJMF archaeologist Fraser Neiman described, “They knew the cemetery was there when they built the parking lot. As people left the staff, it was forgotten about, except vaguely.”<sup>413</sup> In 2000, James Bear, who began at Monticello in 1955, claimed, “I have a vague recollection that there was a graveyard somewhere down here. But I don’t know that I ever ran down here and staked it out and said you can put it [the parking lot] here...”<sup>414</sup> His disinterest in the burial ground revealed the TJMF’s long lack of interest in black history and heritage. Bear intimated that it was coincidence that the burial ground survived the parking lot construction. The TJMF did not intentionally save it.<sup>415</sup>

In 1990, amid public questions about the presence of a burial ground, archaeologists conducted remote sensing of “Park Cemetery,” as they called it. The tests showed the disturbed soil of possible burial shafts. The group also mapped the area and counted twenty-four surface depressions oriented east to west.<sup>416</sup> Ten years later, the TJMF used better technology to again surface map the area in preparation for a new remote sensing campaign. This time, the archaeologists discovered twenty-nine depressions and many potential field stones used as grave markers. New ground penetrating radar technology identified new underground anomalies, but failed to conclusively confirm burial sites.<sup>417</sup>

Beginning in February 2001, the archaeology team decided to perform limited excavations to confirm the existence of burials.<sup>418</sup> The group encountered twenty

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<sup>413</sup> Henry Wienczek, *Master of the Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Girous, 2012), 153.

<sup>414</sup> Lucia Stanton Interview of James A. Bear at Monticello, 7 August 2000 (Transcript of Video).

<sup>415</sup> James A. Bear at Monticello, 7 August 2000 (Transcript of Video).

<sup>416</sup> Bon-Harper et al., 11.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

grave shafts—ten adults, eight children and two undeterminable.<sup>419</sup> Excavation proved to be the correct method for discovery because some burials did not have surface depressions.<sup>420</sup> In the surface soil, they found eighteenth- and nineteenth-century artifacts such as handmade and machine cut nails. These items suggest some human activity occurred at the site after interment. Archaeologists could not, however, definitively link these items with burials because their excavations did not reach past the surface of the shafts out of respect.<sup>421</sup> The team estimated that the cemetery held between 37 and 134 burials.<sup>422</sup>

In the 1990s, Lucia Stanton, Monticello’s senior historian, started an oral history project with her colleague, Dianne Swann-Wright, called “Getting Word.” They interviewed Monticello employees and descendants of enslaved people. In March 2001, the pair spoke with Randolph Crawford, a longtime African-American employee. He recalled asking Lillie Carr, an African-American cleaner at the site, about some “stone markers” he had observed in the parking lot. Carr responded, according to Crawford, “All of my people used to build a circle of stone, and we built a fire when someone died, and we stayed there for a right good while and we sat around and talked about the deceased.”<sup>423</sup> Carr’s testimony describes a sacred, semi-secret spot of local black devotion.

During the early construction of the parking lot in the 1970s, Crawford, and his fellow employees, protected the sacred ground. He concluded his interview by

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<sup>419</sup> Bon-Harper et al., 13.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Lucia Stanton and Dianne Swann-Wright Interview with Randolph Crawford, *Getting Word*, 26 March 2001.

stating, "...we made sure that they didn't get into where the cemetery was."<sup>424</sup> Like the black employees of Mount Vernon, the Monticello guides and workers unofficially guarded the cemetery of the enslaved community while performing their other duties at the estate. Crawford and his colleagues also actively advocated for the site. In 2000, Bear told Stanton that no one in his employment talked to him about the burial ground, but in 2001, Crawford told Stanton and Swann-Wright that he had definitely talked to James Bear about the black burial ground.<sup>425</sup> They had discussed it long before the paving ever occurred.<sup>426</sup>

In their 2003 technical report, archaeologists Sara Bon-Harper, Fraser Neiman and Derek Wheeler used their data to make two important conclusions about Park Cemetery. First, only one group of people, the enslaved community, was large enough to need at least 37 burials. Second, this graveyard could not contain all of the enslaved community's deceased. The report succinctly states, "In other words, there are almost certainly other slave cemeteries at Monticello."<sup>427</sup> The large number of burials also dated the cemetery to Jefferson's era.<sup>428</sup> At any given time, Jefferson owned at least one hundred enslaved people, more than any other owner of Monticello (Barclay and Uriah Levy were both enslavers).

The archaeologists ended their report with a brief description of a recently discovered post-bellum burial elsewhere on the estate. In fact, several other burial sites exist at Monticello. One is located near the mansion. In a 1995 memo, Stanton reported:

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<sup>424</sup> Lucia Stanton and Dianne Swann-Wright Interview with Randolph Crawford, 26 March 2001.

<sup>425</sup> Lucia Stanton of James A. Bear at Monticello, 7 August 2000 (Transcript of Video).

<sup>426</sup> Lucia Stanton and Dianne Swann-Wright Interview with Randolph Crawford, 26 March 2001.

<sup>427</sup> Bon-Harper et al., 18.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

...the grandparents and great-grandparents of two people we have interviewed were buried at Monticello (one, whose association to Monticello dated from as early as the 1850s, was according to the newspaper buried in “the colored burying grounds near the Jefferson mansion” in 1902).<sup>429</sup>

Bear found Priscilla’s headstone in a tree near the Director’s house, which is less than one thousand feet from Jefferson’s mansion.

In 1982, TJMF archaeologists partially excavated one grave near the Director’s house. They found four iron coffin handles, nails and skeletal remains, like human teeth. The nails dated the grave to between 1815 and 1830. Priscilla died around 1830. The burial, facing east to west, contained no grave artifacts, including no buttons. The team surmised it was a nude interment. They found one plaque engraved with the words “At Rest.” One archaeologist hypothesized there were other graves in the vicinity.<sup>430</sup> Both James Bear and Randolph Crawford recalled observing several depressions.<sup>431</sup> In 2001, Crawford stated, “This one, well, it’s right out from Dr. Jordan’s house now... That had a fence, a more modern-day fence around it, of woven wire. So I don’t know who was buried there.”<sup>432</sup> In the vicinity, archaeologists found one vertical stone, which could be a headstone.<sup>433</sup> Crawford suggested Sally

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<sup>429</sup> LCS Memo on “Getting Word,” Series 37, Box 1 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 7: Burial Ground Committee, Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>430</sup> “Graveyard Committee Notes,” Series 37, Box 1 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 7: Burial Ground Committee, Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>431</sup> Lucia Stanton Interview of James A. Bear at Monticello, 7 August 2000 (Transcript of Video).

<sup>432</sup> Lucia Stanton and Dianne Swann-Wright Interview with Randolph Crawford, 26 March 2001.

<sup>433</sup> Map of Gravesites, Series 37, Box 2 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 10: Site Archeology, Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

Hemings' grave might have been in another wire-enclosed area closer to the mansion. Bear identified this area as the site of two dog burials.<sup>434</sup>

Several people believed their ancestors were buried near the Director's house. After the Civil War, two black families, the Colemans and the Hendersons, lived and worked at Monticello until the late twentieth century. Willis Henderson was born at Monticello during the Levy ownership and later became a guide and housekeeper for the TJMF.<sup>435</sup> His daughter, Mary Henderson Reeves, claimed her uncle was buried near the mansion in the 1920s.<sup>436</sup> Bear had no recollection of these burials but did recall Willis. He stated, "He was a real, to go back sort of into the vernacular, he was an oldtime darkey. Black as the ace of spades, he had a wonderful face."<sup>437</sup> Willis worked at Monticello until the 1960s. In 1954, he told a newspaper that his parents, Lizzie and William Shelton, were buried on the property.<sup>438</sup> In fact, most stories of African American burial grounds at Monticello pointed to the area near the Director's mansion, not the visitor center parking lot.<sup>439</sup>

In 2001, William Kelso, head archeologist, remembered the sensitive nature of the lone excavation. He "was literally opening up a grave."<sup>440</sup> He was unsure how the Archaeology Department even found out about the site. However, in the early 1980s, Ben Carr, another African-American employee at Monticello, told Kelso that

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<sup>434</sup> "Map of Gravesites."

<sup>435</sup> "Coleman-Henderson," *Getting Word: African American Families of Monticello*, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, <https://www.monticello.org/getting-word/families/coleman-henderson>.

<sup>436</sup> Lucia Stanton Interview of James A. Bear at Monticello, 7 August 2000 (Transcript of Video).

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>438</sup> "Coleman-Henderson," *Getting Word: African American Families of Monticello*.

<sup>439</sup> Cinder Stanton, "A Quick Summary of What We've Heard About Slave Burial Grounds at Monticello," Series 37, Box 1 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 7: Burial Ground Committee, Special Projects, Papers of The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>440</sup> Lucia Stanton Interview of with Bill Kelso, 13 September 2001.

the Hendersons were buried near the Director's house.<sup>441</sup> Further, a 1954 map depicted a cemetery to the east of the Jefferson family graveyard.<sup>442</sup> After the excavation, the archaeologists filled in the grave. The Foundation publicized nothing and still does not want to bring attention to the site. Although several people have claimed that the location is unknown, a detailed map of the excavated grave can be found in the archeology archives at the Thomas Jefferson Library.<sup>443</sup> In 2017, the site remains neglected.

The first burial ground that the TJMF commemorated was the Rachel Levy site on Mulberry Row. After the Foundation bought the property in the 1920s, Levy descendants attempted to visit her grave. The relatives asked employees for the key to the cemetery's iron fence. The Foundation initially denied the family access because "no one was buried there by that name."<sup>444</sup> In fact, the TJMF barely told the Levy story to visitors. In the 1970s, several prominent Jewish genealogists, scholars and historians, including Malcolm Stern and Saul Viener, lobbied the Foundation to erect a plaque with an appropriate description of the Levy family's contributions to the preservation of Thomas Jefferson's estate.<sup>445</sup> The president of the Foundation, James Bear, resisted any change in interpretation. In 1985, Daniel Jordan replaced Bear and

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<sup>441</sup> Stanton, "A Quick Summary of What We've Heard About Slave Burial Grounds at Monticello."

<sup>442</sup> Map of 'Monticello, 2 September 1954, Series 7, Land Records: 1923-2004, Box 1: Home Tract, Folder 5: Maps and Plats (1954-1967), Papers of The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>443</sup> "Location of Gravesite," Series 37, Box 2 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 10: Site Archeology, Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>444</sup> Leepson, 246.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 247-252.

immediately agreed with Stern's group. Jordan asked them to form an advisory committee to inform the Foundation.<sup>446</sup>

To first incorporate the Levy family story, Jordan commemorated the grave of its matriarch, Rachel Levy. He reasoned, "It's along Mulberry Row, one of the main modern pathways and one on which most of our visitors walk."<sup>447</sup> On June 7, 1985, over sixty members of the Levy family gathered at Monticello to honor their ancestors. Rachel Levy's great-great-granddaughter, Harley Lewis, unveiled the new plaque.<sup>448</sup> At Rachel Levy's gravesite, the original headstone, a new plaque and an informational wayside told their story. The Foundation told stories about white owners of Monticello after Thomas Jefferson, but not about the enslaved population that he held in bondage.

### **DNA Evidence, New Family and Exclusion**

By the end of the 1990s, advances in technology offered new insights into family genealogy. In 1998, pathologist Eugene A. Foster began a study to finally determine if a genetic link existed between Jefferson and Hemings descendants. He collected DNA samples from several male descendants of Field Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson's uncle. He also retrieved specimens from descendants of Thomas Woodson, Sally Hemings' first son, and Eston Hemings, Sally Hemings' last son.

When news of Foster's in-process DNA study reached the MA in January 1998, the Executive Committee held an emergency session. MA President Robert Gillespie reminded his cousins that the DNA results would not change the parameters

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<sup>446</sup> Urofsky, 201.

<sup>447</sup> Leepson, 253.

<sup>448</sup> Leepson, 254.

of burial in the graveyard, which was only reserved for descendants of Thomas Jefferson Randolph. Further, the term “descendant” included only legitimate lineage.<sup>449</sup> In February, another MA member, Bob Coolidge, argued in favor of expanding Gillespie’s definition of “descendant.” He claimed that the MA had always used the term in a biological sense. Blood, not marriage, defined a descendant. Coolidge also reminded his cousins that the MA had granted illegitimate children membership and burial space in the graveyard.<sup>450</sup> He claimed that the MA buried one illegitimate black descendant in the cemetery, but no other source material, including the person’s name, can be found.<sup>451</sup> Coolidge did not believe Jefferson fathered children with Hemings, but he also did not want to appear racist for such opinions. On November 5, 1998, Foster published the results of his research in an article, inflammatorily titled “Jefferson Fathered Slave’s Last Child,” in the reputable publication *Nature*. The geneticist concluded that Eston Hemings, but not Thomas Woodson, was the biological son of Thomas Jefferson.<sup>452</sup>

The news rattled through the channels of the Monticello Association. In December 1998, the Executive Committee met to decide their position. It would prove difficult. Some Jefferson descendants, like Lucian Truscott IV, readily accepted the results of the DNA study. In January 1999, Truscott would joyfully appear

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<sup>449</sup> Robert Gillespie to Cousins, 17 January 1998, Box 17, Folder: Ex Comm Minutes, Etc. 1998, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>450</sup> Bob Coolidge to Cousins, 6 February 1998, Box 17, Folder: Ex Comm Minutes, Etc. 1998, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>451</sup> Bob Coolidge to Daniel Jordan, 25 December 1998, Box 17, Folder: Ex Comm Minutes, Etc. 1998, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>452</sup> Eugene A. Foster, M. A. Jobling, P. G. Taylor, P. Donnelly, P. de Knijff, Rene Mieremet, T. Zerjal & C. Tyler-Smith, “Jefferson Fathered Slave’s Last Child,” *Nature* 396, No. 27-28 (1998), <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v396/n6706/abs/396027a0.html>.

alongside Hemings descendants on the Oprah Winfrey Show. Other MA members, like John H. Works, Jr., angrily disputed the validity of Foster's evidence. Many members became concerned about the limited space of burial plots in the graveyard. Some knowingly harbored racist attitudes. Others were blind to their own white privilege.

For many Jefferson descendants, the DNA results presented a conflict between the second and third purposes of the MA. Many members could look past Jefferson's role as enslaver, but could not reconcile the dual goals of both protecting the "fame and reputation" of Jefferson and encouraging friendship with new members of the family descended from Hemings. To extend a friendly hand to Hemings descendants would mean propagating the fact that Jefferson copulated with an enslaved woman. Accepting the Hemings families would mean dishonoring their ancestor. With this disconnect, the MA began to feel the initial fractures of its previously strong ranks.

If the Executive Committee accepted that the DNA results did not prove the Woodson family connection to Jefferson, it would also have to agree that Eston Hemings was indeed Jefferson's son. Instead, the MA refuted all DNA results. The Woodsons, therefore, could still make a case for Jefferson ties. Lucian Truscott IV invited several descendants of Thomas Woodson and Eston Hemings to the May 1999 Annual Meeting.

Colleen Moore Jones, her mother, Carolyn Proctor Stevenson Moore, and Woodson Family Association President Robert Golden represented their family at the meeting. In the *Thomas Woodson Family Newsletter*, similar to the MA periodical,

Colleen Jones described the events of the weekend to her family. She first mentioned that the MA contacted the Woodsons with little time before the event.<sup>453</sup> She surmised, “The lateness of the invitation certainly seemed to broadcast the ambivalent reception that awaited us at Monticello.”<sup>454</sup> None of the present Woodsons desired to be buried in the Jefferson graveyard. They traveled to Monticello to honor their ancestor, Sally Hemings.

On Sunday, the MA held their annual memorial service at Jefferson’s grave. The Woodson family representatives debated whether to attend. They did not want to honor an enslaver, but also felt, if they were indeed related, they should acknowledge Jefferson as an ancestor. They decided to go. Jones described, “It was a momentous occasion as Black and White gathered and walked through the small graveyard.”<sup>455</sup> William F. Dalton, a Hemings descendant, also appreciated the moment. He “left the reunion feeling uplifted.”<sup>456</sup> The graveyard reception touched many who had never before been invited to experience it.

Jones noticed the internal differences of the MA. One member told Colleen Jones that two groups had recently developed within the Association—the Easterners and the Southerners. The Easterners more readily accepted the DNA results.<sup>457</sup> Jones also recalled that MA member Thomas Jefferson Eppes feared certain personalities.

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<sup>453</sup> Colleen Moore Jones, “Report from Monticello: A Detailed Account of the Recent Monticello Association Meeting,” *The Thomas Woodson Family Newsletter*, July 1999, Box 16-B, Folder: Publications-External, 1990s, p. 3, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>455</sup> Jones, 6.

<sup>456</sup> William R. Macklin, “At Meeting of Jefferson Kin, Fight Ends First-Ever Reunion,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 May 1999.

<sup>457</sup> Jones, 5.

In particular, Lucian Truscott was “antagonistic” and the Association would “blow up” under his pressure.<sup>458</sup>

The most contentious event of the weekend was the annual business meeting on May 16. 200 people, including 35 descendants of Eston Hemings and Thomas Woodson, piled into a conference room at the Omni Hotel in Charlottesville. First, two keynote speakers lectured during the luncheon. As the second speaker, Eugene Foster discussed his DNA findings. “The Minutes of MA Annual Meeting” reported, “Both speakers were warmly received.”<sup>459</sup> MA President Robert Gillespie announced the formation of a new group, the Membership Advisory Committee (MAC), to research the Association’s membership policies. In 2000, the MAC would recommend how to proceed with revisions, if any, to the by-laws. V.R. Shackelford, Robert Coolidge, Nancy Morgan, Joy Boissevain and George Eggers formed the committee. Lucian Truscott IV wanted to elect more members to the group, but his motion failed. These five individuals would decide the fate of the Hemingses involvement in the MA.<sup>460</sup>

One MA member then mentioned Lucian’s recent comments in *The Washington Post* in which he described inherent racism within the family.<sup>461</sup> According to Colleen Jones, Truscott argued that the previous MA discussion of a separate graveyard for the Hemings descendants was “Jim Crow.”<sup>462</sup> Someone accused Truscott of disrupting the meeting. One anonymous MA member later

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<sup>458</sup> Jones, 5.

<sup>459</sup> Minutes of Monticello Association Annual Meeting, 16 May 1999, Box 16, Folder 9: 1999, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid.

<sup>461</sup> Jones, 7.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

described Lucian as “horrid...as if he had been the first white person in the world to discover ever slavery.”<sup>463</sup> Truscott’s inflammatory and very public comments infuriated his self-aware relatives who feared being labeled with prejudice.

A few days prior to the business meeting, Bob Gillespie received information on Truscott’s conversations with media outlets. Lucian allegedly told a “newsman,” that he planned to attend the Annual Meeting to “embarrass them [the Monticello Association]...to get them as much bad press as possible.” The report continued, “He called you [Bob Gillespie] the ‘Bull Connor of the Monticello Association.’”<sup>464</sup> The overtly racist Commissioner of Public Safety in Birmingham, Alabama, Eugene “Bull” Connor advocated for violence against Civil Rights workers and black citizens. Truscott’s incendiary words further fertilized the soil for family dispute during the business meeting on May 16<sup>th</sup>.

After a few heated minutes fueled by Truscott and several others, the MA then dove into a long discussion on the nature of membership. Patricia Taylor Salazar claimed that if she could, she would vote the Hemingses in immediately. Julia Jefferson Westerinen, a self-identified white descendant of Eston Hemings, then contributed that the Association had “the opportunity to assume a leadership position in the United States, to welcome a brand new family of articulate, accomplished people who give honor to the Jefferson name.”<sup>465</sup> To her, the task of admitting new members, regardless of the ancestor’s color or status, was easy. After her appeal,

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<sup>463</sup> SS—Memo, 18 May 99, Box 1 of 2: Monticello Association & TJJ, Folder 8: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 1998-2001, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>464</sup> “Memo to Robert Gillespie,” 13 May 1999, Box 16, Folder 9: 1999, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>465</sup> Minutes of Monticello Association Annual Meeting, 16 May 1999.

three Hemings descendants asked to be admitted to the Association. The MA secretary agreed to send the candidates applications that they could then submit by mail. Lucian Truscott requested that the Hemings and Woodson descendants to receive honorary membership. His motion was denied.<sup>466</sup>

Bob Coolidge reported later that Truscott “was determined to interrupt the normal business of the meeting.”<sup>467</sup> John H. Works, who opposed the extension of membership to Hemings descendants, recounted, “. . .we became victims of what can only be best described as an enormous and highly orchestrated media con job.”<sup>468</sup> The emotional and tense meeting ended abruptly with the issue tabled until the completion of the MAC Report.<sup>469</sup> Family members, black and white, legitimate and contested, exited the Omni amid throngs of reporters. With little accomplished during the meeting, the graveyard association meeting ended with brother against brother, cousin against cousin, over issues of race, slavery and belonging. A civil war had erupted.

### **The Years of Battle**

As the MAC drafted its report, the family conversation evolved into detailed arguments on the validity and integrity of genealogy, oral history, legal interpretation, and documentary record. Lucian Truscott characterized it as a “story about race,

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<sup>466</sup> Minutes of Monticello Association Annual Meeting, 16 May 1999.

<sup>467</sup> Robert Coolidge to The Editor of *the Montreal Gazette*, 19 May 1999, Box 16, Folder 9: 1999, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>468</sup> John H. Works, Jr., “DNA Testing and the Hemings,” 8 July 1999, Box 16, Folder: Ex Comm 1999, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>469</sup> “Group Snubs Slave’s Descendants,” *The Montreal Gazette*, 17 May 1999.

blood and land.”<sup>470</sup> He also correctly identified that the issue was not going to disappear.

After the meeting, Truscott and John H. Works, Jr., on opposite sides of the membership issue, began to communicate with anyone, within the Association or externally, who would listen. In December 1999, Works, Jr. wrote a long winded appeal to the MA body outlining why Hemings membership was inappropriate. Among other concerns, Works opposed another MA member’s suggestion to allow the burials of the descendants of “all black slaves that labored for Mr. Jefferson at Monticello.”<sup>471</sup> He believed any deviation from the MA constitution would overwhelm the limited number of burial spaces. Lifelong MA members could potentially lose their right to burial. Works read the MA’s founding documents strictly while Truscott took a more liberal interpretation.

In his letters to other members, Works attempted to absolve himself of any charges of racism. Yet he refused to listen to the descendants of Sally Hemings. He ignored their oral history and questioned their motives. Works queried, “Who wouldn’t like to claim Thomas Jefferson as an ancestor?”<sup>472</sup> He accused them of attention seeking. Many people, who recognized the “Master of the Mountain” as an enslaver, chose to distance themselves. In 1999, the Woodsons debated appearing at the MA memorial service in the graveyard. Overall, Works believed all supporting

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<sup>470</sup> Lucian Truscott to Bob Gillespie and James Truscott, 5 May 1999, Box 16, Folder 9: 1999, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>471</sup> Works, Jr., “DNA Testing and the Hemings.”

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

evidence was “flimsy.”<sup>473</sup> In May 2000, he founded the Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society to further investigate the paternity issue.<sup>474</sup> Lucian Truscott has surmised that Works spent \$20,000 to \$30,000 attempting to prove the DNA results wrong.<sup>475</sup>

Meanwhile, the Executive Board had started to make crucial decisions. In December 1999, the governing body denied the burial of Robert Cooley, a Woodson descendant, in the Jefferson graveyard.<sup>476</sup> At the 2001 Annual Meeting, Bob Coolidge, the MA historian at the time, proposed a constitutional amendment to create a special membership category for Hemings descendants. The MA membership voted to let the MAC decide on the issue. The MAC voted against the special category.<sup>477</sup>

The same year, John Works published a treatise on Monticello graveyards. He recognized the large enslaved workforce that lived and labored on the estate. From there his scholarship devolved into euphemisms. Reminiscent of the paternalist writings of the Founding Fathers, Works, referred to the enslaved population as the “plantation family” numerous times. He also mentioned the possibility of “the discovery of a slave graveyard.” The site, he claimed, would need a marker. He stipulated, “If away from other structures, a memorial (2) feet or so in height might

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<sup>473</sup> John H. Works, Jr., “Discussion of the Lack of Documentary Evidence of Paternity of the Hemings Family,” 2000, Box 16, Folder: Correspondence 2000, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>474</sup> Boissevain et al., 5.

<sup>475</sup> Lucian Truscott to Bob Coolidge (email), 3 July 2001, Box 1 of 2: Monticello Association & TJF, Folder 8: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 1998-2001, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>476</sup> John H. Works, Jr., “DNA Testing and the Hemings.”

<sup>477</sup> Boissevain et al., 6.

suffice.”<sup>478</sup> In his suggestions, Works, Jr. never mentioned the descendants of the enslaved community.

On February 9, 2002, the MAC published the long-awaited “Final Report of the Membership Advisory Committee to the Executive Committee of the Monticello Association.” The committee cited that lack of “definitive evidence,” i.e. written documentation, prevented the Hemings descendants from Association membership and burial in the graveyard. The MAC recommended, “no change be made at this time in the criteria for membership in the Monticello Association.”<sup>479</sup> The report also advised the Association to update their legal defenses.<sup>480</sup> The committee realized their report could embroil the MA in a potential lawsuit.

The report did not reference any oral history—not even white family stories.<sup>481</sup> MA member James J. Truscott commented, “If you don’t have a solid paper trail, you’re not in. There’s no way for descendants of slaves to have a paper trail. The only other evidence is DNA and it is not conclusive.”<sup>482</sup> James Truscott used the historic oppression of African Americans, for example laws against black literacy, to justify contemporary discrimination, i.e. exclusion from the MA. In response to his cousin, Lucian Truscott told *The Richmond Times Dispatch*, “What is enough evidence? Why don’t they have DNA tests for me or anyone in the

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<sup>478</sup> John H. Works, Jr., “Thoughts About A Monticello Grave Yard Memorial and Other Considerations,” 2 August 2001, Box 1 of 2: Monticello Association & TJF, Folder 8: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 1998-2001, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>479</sup> Boissevain et al., 7.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>481</sup> Lucian Truscott to Joy Boissevain (email), 10 May 2002, Box 1 of 2: Monticello Association & TJF, Folder 8: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 1998-2001, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>482</sup> Carlos Santos, “Jefferson’s Kin Holding Out,” 18 April 2002, *The Richmond Times Dispatch*.

association? They don't even require a birth certificate."<sup>483</sup> He later commented on his family history, "They knew. They knew a secret they never whispered to us, not even upon their deaths: we were related to the 'help.'"<sup>484</sup> Lucian especially hated that the MAC refused to consult any Hemings descendants. Whether white or black, the oral history of the Hemings-Jefferson liaison told the story many MAC members wished to ignore. And so they did.

The MAC report highlighted the unbalanced efforts of the MA. Too much time and energy had been devoted to the third purpose of the society—to foster friendship between relatives—than to its second goal to “protect and perpetuate the reputation and fame of Thomas Jefferson.”<sup>485</sup> In this vein, on February 9, 2002, the Executive Committee decided to allow Hemings descendants to attend the MA annual meeting one last time. After 2002, they would then be barred from future reunions.<sup>486</sup> The MAC report concluded, after all, that the Hemings were not convincingly related.

In the months preceding the 2002 Annual Meeting, all parties began to voice their concerns aroused by the MAC report. David Works, John Works Jr.'s brother, wanted to find another solution. He stated, “It is plain wrong to just say ‘NO’ to folks without offering a positive solution.”<sup>487</sup> In preparation for Executive Committee

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<sup>483</sup> Santos, “Jefferson’s Kin Holding Out,”

<sup>484</sup> Lucian Truscott to Mary Lee Brady (email), 1 April 2003, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>485</sup> Boissevain et al., 9.

<sup>486</sup> Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, 9-10 February 2002, Box 16, Folder: Executive Committee 2002, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>487</sup> David A. Works to Cousins, 30 March 2002, Box 1 of 2: Monticello Association & TJF, Folder 1: History of the Monticello Association, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

elections, Lucian Truscott and John Works, Jr. feverously campaigned for their candidates. In response to the MAC report, Hemings descendant, Jillian Sim, stated:

...it is abundantly clear that the Membership Advisory Committee has not now nor ever has had a real interest in acknowledging the descendants of Sally Hemings as lineal descendants of Thomas Jefferson or recommending them as members of the Monticello Association.<sup>488</sup>

At the Annual Meeting in May 2002, an armed guard checked nametags at the door.<sup>489</sup> Civil War allegory had materialized into real bullets.

Supplied with the information from the MAC report, MA members voted “overwhelmingly” to bar Hemings descendants from membership. Only six relatives—five Truscotts and Marla Stevens—voted for their inclusion.<sup>490</sup> The Hemings family was not surprised. Just days before the vote, Works had sent Lucian Truscott an offensive picture of a black man, allegedly comedian Bernie Mac, with a zipper over his mouth. Works unwittingly sent an image that encapsulated the actions of his camp. Under his lead, many MA members attempted to silence Hemings descendants by ignoring their oral history and DNA. Works’ defense of his white family history mirrored interpretation at Colonial Williamsburg before the advent of new social history in the 1970s. As Handler and Gable eloquently describe of the historic site’s administration, “Just as white masters continued to have underground sexual relations with blacks without recognizing the consequences, so, too, was the foundation’s white majority continuing to keep such stories out of the public

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<sup>488</sup> Jillian Sim, “A Response to the MAC Report,” Box 1 of 2: Monticello Association & TJF, Folder 8: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 1998-2001, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>489</sup> Lucian Truscott to Daniel Jordan (email), 24 April 2003, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>490</sup> “Jefferson Group Votes to Bar Hemings Kin,” *The Journal News*, White Plains, NY, 6 May 2002; Lucian K. Truscott IV, “The Reunion Upon the Hill,” *The New York Times*, 10 July 2003.

domain.”<sup>491</sup> Works’ obstinacy denied Hemings descendants formal acknowledgment of their true identity.

Truscott printed out the image to show the public. Many Hemings descendants spoke out. Michele Cooley-Quill stated, “I am personally offended and represent offense for all African Americans.”<sup>492</sup> In one Associated Press photo, Shay Banks-Young angrily displayed the image. Many spoke of the inherent racism of the organization. In front of the press, Works apologized to Hemings kin. He also took advantage of limelight to deny the any charges of personal prejudice.

Not all members of the MA were as offensive as Works, Jr. In a credible effort, the MAC report attempted to acknowledge the contributions of the Monticello enslaved community. Of the plantation, the MAC report stated, “...Jefferson planned and paid for it, but the work was done by many, many others. Many of the workers were slaves....”<sup>493</sup> The report then recommended the creation of another committee to start a new association open to the descendants of anyone who lived at or worked on the estate. It would be a separate, but equal organization. This potential society could operate its own burial ground at Monticello.<sup>494</sup> Hemings descendant Julia Jefferson Westerinen disapproved of a new “back-of-bus graveyard.”<sup>495</sup> She also reported that Works opposed the joined graveyard because he feared the borders might “blend (his words).”<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Handler and Gable, 86.

<sup>492</sup> “Jefferson Group Votes to Bar Hemings Kin.”

<sup>493</sup> Boissevain et al., 9.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> Julia Jefferson Westerinen to Hemings Descendants (email), 1 May 2002, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

In fact, in June 2000, the previous chair of the MAC, V.R. Shackelford, III, had suggested that the TJMF convey more land to enlarge the existing Jefferson graveyard. A new “umbrella” organization of all descendants of those who lived or worked at Monticello could use space for burials.<sup>497</sup> On January 30, 2001, Dan Jordan approved of the suggestion.<sup>498</sup> Yet, Shackelford could not get adequate support from MA members, many allegiant to John H. Works, Jr., at the 2001 Annual Meeting. Disillusioned, Shackelford resigned from the MAC.<sup>499</sup> Despite his departure, the committee included his suggestion of the new organization in its final report.

MAC efforts to appease the Hemings descendants and their allies with small olive branches only partially obscured the real issue—Hemings descendants could still not choose to be buried in the graveyard of their ancestor. In the end, the MA membership voted against the recommendation to spearhead the new organization.<sup>500</sup> Although the MA barred media from the business meeting, secret recordings conveyed the injustice felt by Hemings descendants. Mary Jefferson, a white Eston Hemings descendant, declared, “For Jefferson to have a longstanding relationship with one woman offends you because she was part black and it scares you to pieces...None of us have any interest in invading your cemetery and making any of

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<sup>497</sup> V.R. Shackelford to Daniel Jordan, 12 June 2000, Box 1 of 2: Monticello Association & TJF, Folder 8: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 1998-2001, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>498</sup> Daniel Jordan to Lucian Truscott and John H. Works, Jr., 30 January 2001, Box 1 of 2: Monticello Association & TJF, Folder 8: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 1998-2001, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>499</sup> V.R. Shackelford, III to James J. Truscott, 10 May 2001, Box 1 of 2: Monticello Association & TJF, Folder 8: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 1998-2001, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>500</sup> “Jefferson Group Votes to Bar Hemings Kin.”

you less white.”<sup>501</sup> They merely wanted the *choice* to be buried in the cemetery. The Hemings family group wished for acknowledgement of their history and their identity. The MA would not fulfill the request.

The rancor of the business meeting spilled over into email correspondence. On May 20, 2002, Hemings descendant Julia Jefferson Westerinen wrote MA President Nat Abeles a long email in response to some of his claims. She fired, “We offered you our kinship which you refused. However, you cannot escape being related to us by blood.”<sup>502</sup> She also expressed her anger over MA members’ comments about Sally Hemings. During the meeting, various speakers allegedly called their matriarch “mentally defective or immoral.”<sup>503</sup> Lucian Truscott also expressed his abhorrence over MA actions. He described the MA as “a club with a very select membership which is based on who we want to let into the club, and who don’t.”<sup>504</sup> President Nat Abeles refused to release professional legal opinions about the graveyard to the larger MA membership body.<sup>505</sup> After the Annual Meeting even the TJMF, which changed its name to the Thomas Jefferson Foundation (TJF) in 2000, received countless hate mail meant for the MA.<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> “Jefferson Group Votes to Bar Hemings Kin.”

<sup>502</sup> Julia Jefferson Westerinen to Nat Abeles (email), 20 May 2002, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid.

<sup>504</sup> Lucian Truscott to Hemings Descendants,” 15 May 2002, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>505</sup> Lucian Truscott to MAC Members (email), 30 May 2002, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>506</sup> Various Hate Mail Letters, 7 May 2002, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

By summer 2002, MA members who initially supported the exclusion of Hemings descendants began to reverse their opinions. In July, Julia Jefferson Westerinen exclaimed, “And I am so happy Lucian finally has company!”<sup>507</sup> She had recently heard that David Works and other MA members had read more information on the Hemings descendants’ claims and realized their previous errors in judgment. MA member Susan F. Hutchinson wrote the Executive Committee incensed by the recent reports. She stated:

As (alleged?) descendants of the author of the Declaration of Independence, and the most famous and respected of U.S. presidents, we have a unique opportunity to play an important role in leading our still-scarred country to face the truth about slavery, so that we as a nation may heal and move forward.<sup>508</sup>

She argued that inclusive membership in the graveyard association could be a mechanism for reconciliation. In response, MA member Herbert Barger claimed, “The Hemings and Woodsons are just among the many tales told by other slave descendants to enhance their standings among their neighborhoods.”<sup>509</sup> Beyond their “tales,” Barger once again conveyed that DNA evidence was not as proof of familial linkage. The MA membership body had voted—the Hemings would not be welcome in their graveyard association. John Works, Jr. and his team had won.

With the Hemings war over, the victorious MA members attempted to reconstruct the many dilapidated family relations. On April 7, 2003, Works, Jr.

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<sup>507</sup> Julia Jefferson Westerinen to Debbie Truscott (email), 20 July 2002, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>508</sup> Susan Hutchinson to MA Members (email), 8 August 2002, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>509</sup> Herbert Barger to Susan Hutchinson (email), 9 August 2002, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

communicated, “This year I very much hope that we can all come together in the spirit of reconciliation and family friendship.”<sup>510</sup> The same day, Works sent an apology to Lucian Truscott. Truscott also atoned for his harsh words and they began a polite correspondence. In what became the last letter, however, Lucian realized they would never agree. The two cousins had different definitions of racism. He accused Works of “taking over” the Association.<sup>511</sup> All communication stopped.

MA business proceeded as normal. President Nat Abeles sent out the invitation for the next 2003 Annual Meeting. He also emailed Lucian Truscott to explicitly explain to him the new guest policy. In 2002, Truscott had invited many too Hemings descendants. This year, he could only bring two people.<sup>512</sup> On April 24, 2003, Truscott vowed to end his ties with the MA.<sup>513</sup> He had had enough.

The situation became stranger just days before the Annual Meeting. The Hemings descendants accused MA President Nat Abeles of posing as a descendant of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson in a private Internet chat-room. Although he never posted, he had gained access to the private conversations of other participants. He first denied the situation, but after David Works threatened to remove him as president, Abeles eventually confessed that his wife had invented the persona to spy

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<sup>510</sup> John H. Works, Jr. to Fellow MA Members, 7 April 2003, Box 16, Folder: Annual Meeting 2003, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>511</sup> Correspondence Between Lucian Truscott and John H. Works, Jr.,” 7 April 2003, *Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society*, <https://www.tjheritage.org/john-works/lucian-truscott>.

<sup>512</sup> Nat Abeles to Lucian Truscott (email), 18 April 2003, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>513</sup> Lucian Truscott to Daniel Jordan (email), 24 April 2003, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

on the Hemings descendants.<sup>514</sup> Abeles and his wife were guilty of the deceit that they wrongfully pinned on the Hemings descendants for claiming Jefferson blood ties.

Works did not unseat Abeles, and at the Annual Meeting, the president decided to “color-code” each family line within the descendent group. This was also the first annual meeting that excluded Hemings descendants. Although proposed in good spirit, Abeles’ segregation of families by color was a fitting metaphor for MA participation in the larger Hemings-Jefferson debate.<sup>515</sup> They could not be colorblind.

Allies of the Hemings descendants attended the meeting despite the cloud of animosity. Lucian Truscott’s sister, Ginny, reported that an angry MA member stated that they did not want to associate with the Hemings descendants in life or death.<sup>516</sup> Conversely, other members, like John Works, Sr., invited two Hemings descendants as his guests. He later thanked them for attending and commented how he felt particularly moved by the group “prayer circle at the slave graveyard.”<sup>517</sup>

Just after the annual meeting, Joy Boissevain, custodian of the graveyard, informed MA members of her forced resignation. On May 26, President Nat Abeles had asked her to step down because she spoke poorly about him and the Association at the most recent graveyard memorial service. Joy smartly included her words from the gathering. After a thorough review of maintenance, she refuted Abeles’ guest policy. She declared, “To me this represents an unnecessary and inappropriate

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<sup>514</sup> Leef Smith, “At Monticello, a Feud Renewed,” *The Washington Post*, 2 May 2003.

<sup>515</sup> Nat Abeles to MA Members, 29 March 2003, Box 16, Folder: Annual Meeting 2003, Historian’s Papers, The Papers of the Monticello Association: 1869 to Present, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>516</sup> Lucian K. Truscott IV, “The Reunion Upon the Hill.”

<sup>517</sup> John Works, Sr. to Monticello Family Yahoo Group (email), 5 June 2003, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

restriction. . . .”<sup>518</sup> In her resignation letter to the MA membership, Boissevain cited the reason for her dismissal. She dared, “. . .to hold and express an opinion different from that of Association President Nat Abeles.”<sup>519</sup> Any internal dissent would no longer be tolerated. Abeles estimated that dictatorial rule would protect the family society from factionalist ruin.

Despite exclusion by the MA, Hemings descendants used the opportunity to organize. In July 2003, the TJF hosted a Hemings family reunion at Monticello. Twelve members of the MA, including some Truscotts and John Works, Sr., also attended.<sup>520</sup> After the Sunday church service, held in the African American burial ground, attendees danced and prayed. Before moving to the Jefferson family graveyard, MA member Susan Hutchinson offered an apology for her ancestor’s participation in slavery and the behavior of the MA.<sup>521</sup> Another MA member, Prinny Anderson, opened gates of the exclusive cemetery. Anderson remembered, “We stood under the old oaks on a warm June morning, in an enormous circle, holding hands, sharing prayers, hymns and invocations to our linked ancestors.”<sup>522</sup> For most, it was a magical, bonding experience. The weekend indicated that a new organization, like the one the MAC suggested, should be created.

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<sup>518</sup> Joy Rotch Boissevain, “Report of the Custodian of the Monticello Association Graveyard,” 4 May 2003, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>519</sup> Joy Rotch Boissevain to Cousins, May 2003, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>520</sup> Lucian K. Truscott IV, “The Reunion Upon the Hill.”

<sup>521</sup> Julia Jefferson Westerinen to Monticello Family Yahoo Group (email), 21 July 2003, Box 2 of 2, Folder 9: The Hemings Family Controversy/Hemings Membership & Attendance: 2002-2003, Papers of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, External Relations, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>522</sup> Prinny Anderson, “Gathering the Community at Monticello,” Undated, *Coming to the Table*, <http://comingtothetable.org/stories/stories-action/gathering-community-monticello/>.

Anderson attended the 2005 Hemings reunion and started The Monticello Community Gathering (TMCG) with her Hemings relatives. Where the MA had been rigid, TMCG welcomed all. Membership was open to any descendants of people who worked or lived at Monticello. On July 13, 2007, 250 people attended the event. It was a gathering of many different kinds of descendants—of people who helped care for or contribute to Monticello.<sup>523</sup> In spite of the MA's stubbornness, a better and more representative organization emerged out of the rubble of family graveyard battles.

### **Commemoration of African American Burial Ground**

As the MAC deliberated the MA membership policy in 2001 and 2002, the TJF began publicizing its research about the burial ground connected to Monticello's enslaved community. After the 2001 excavation of Park Cemetery, a committee of TJF historians, including Cinder Stanton and Dianne Swann-Wright, and archaeologists, like Sara Bon-Harper, formed to plan the commemoration of the site.<sup>524</sup> In March 2001, the committee solicited advice from influential historians and activists concerning the excavations. Civil Rights activist and historian Julian Bond suggested digging into the burial shafts, "If you can at the very least date the graves..."<sup>525</sup> Public historian Rex Ellis, on the other hand, advised that nothing

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<sup>523</sup> Anderson, "Gathering the Community at Monticello."

<sup>524</sup> "Request for Design Concepts," 2001, Series 37, Box 1 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 5: Design Competition, Special Projects, Papers of The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>525</sup> African American Advisory Board Member Comments, 21-23 March 2001, Series 37, Box 1 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 1: Planning Commemorative Ceremony (March 21, 2001-October 5, 2001), Special Projects, Papers of The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

should be done “quickly and without deliberation.”<sup>526</sup> Many suggested consulting Dr. Michael Blakey, who expertly directed the excavation of the African Burial Ground in Manhattan in early 1990s. Finally, historian Reginald Butler wondered if the descendants of the enslaved community should decide the next step. In the end, Butler supported commemoration of the space, but worried about further disturbance.<sup>527</sup> On September 21, 2001, Bon-Harper invited all Monticello staff to participate in the free and public burial ground commemoration on Saturday, October 6 at 4 pm.<sup>528</sup>

Much like the Mount Vernon commemoration of the black burial ground, the TJF asked a luminary to speak at the service. Julian Bond gave the remarks. He powerfully stated, “He [Jefferson] buried them as property; we honor them as people.”<sup>529</sup> After over 200 years, the graves of enslaved people could be cared for and commemorated like the white graves 1500 feet north of them.

Before Bond, Daniel Jordan welcomed the guests. The Baptist Union Church Choir and Ry Wilson, a trumpeter, each performed twice. The names of enslaved people who lived at Monticello from 1770 to 1827, printed in the commemoration

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<sup>526</sup> African American Advisory Board Member Comments, 21-23 March 2001.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> Sara Bon-Harper to Monticello Staff, 21 September 2001, Series 37, Box 1 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 1: Planning Commemorative Ceremony (March 21, 2001-October 5, 2001), Special Projects, Papers of The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia; Invitation: Ceremony of Commemoration, 6 October 2001, Series 37, Box 1 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 3: Commemorative Ceremony (October 6, 2001), Special Projects, Papers of The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>529</sup> Julian Bond, “Speech at Commemorative Ceremony,” 6 October 2001, Series 37, Box 1 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 3: Commemorative Ceremony (October 6, 2001), Special Projects, Papers of The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

pamphlet, were read aloud. The TJF installed a new permanent wayside sign about the history of the cemetery and the people buried within it.<sup>530</sup>

The Burial Ground Committee decided to hold a memorial design contest, like the one sponsored by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association.<sup>531</sup> In July 2001, Bon-Harper commented, “We’re looking for sketches at this point and we’re open to almost any ideas.”<sup>532</sup> Unlike Mount Vernon, the Foundation was willing to accept submissions from anyone (landscape architects to children) by September 15, 2001.<sup>533</sup> The winner would receive a \$1,000 honorarium.<sup>534</sup>

The Burial Ground Committee invited a cadre of academics, descendants and public historians to select two winning designs. The first winner, Lance Hosey of Charlottesville, planned “a circle of tall stone pillars with climbing ivy.”<sup>535</sup> The second winner was a team, Katherine A. Towson of Watertown, Massachusetts and Roger Charles Sherry of Charlottesville. They proposed a path to the burial ground lined with native trees.<sup>536</sup> President Jordan was pleased with the archaeology department. On April 11, 2001, he wrote a memo to the “A Team,” stating, “Your

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<sup>530</sup> “African-American Burial Ground Commemoration,” 6 October 2001, Series 37, Box 1 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 3: Commemorative Ceremony (October 6, 2001), Special Projects, Papers of The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>531</sup> Foundation Seeks Design Concepts for Memorial at Slave Burial Ground (Press Release), 11 July 2001, Series 37, Box 1 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 5: Design Competition, Special Projects, Papers of The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>532</sup> Michael Killian, “Anonymous, but Not Forgotten,” *The Chicago Tribune*, 16 July 2001.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid.

<sup>534</sup> “Request for Design Concepts,” 2001.

<sup>535</sup> Sara Bon-Harper to Cinder Stanton, 18 April 2002, Series 37, Box 1 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 5: Design Competition, Special Projects, Papers of The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

field work was exemplary, and the results will literally change the Monticello landscape—for the better.”<sup>537</sup> Yet, it would take several years the project to progress.

By 2006, the memorial plans had changed because of TJF plans to build the new David M. Rubenstein Visitor Center and Smith Education Center at the site of the Shuttle Station. The two winners of the memorial competition would collaborate on the design. Less emphasis would be placed on a path leading to the burial ground because plans for the visitor center and enlarged parking lot would include a “greensward” path.<sup>538</sup>

By February 2007, it became clear to the TJF that funding would be an issue. The committee estimated the cost of the memorial would be around \$20,000.<sup>539</sup> The development team had not been fundraising for the memorial.<sup>540</sup> One year later, the TJF removed paving around the burial ground and planted shrubs to make the area more tranquil. They did not want to “over” landscape because of the pending memorial construction.<sup>541</sup>

Pressure to begin construction of a memorial mounted by mid-2008. The Foundation wished to have a permanent commemoration piece at the site when the new visitor center opened in 2009. The TJF had little time to fundraise, plan and execute the memorial. Staff members became concerned that the memorial would

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<sup>537</sup> Daniel Jordan to the ‘A’ Team, 11 April 2001, Series 37, Box 2 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 10: Site Archeology, Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>538</sup> Notes from Meeting, of The Monticello Burial Ground Committee and Advisory Panel, 14 April 2006, Series 37, Box 2 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 10: Site Archeology, Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>539</sup> Sara Bon-Harper to Daniel Jordan, 30 January 2007, The Monticello Burial Ground Committee and Advisory Panel, Series 37, Box 2 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 10: Site Archeology, Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>540</sup> “Plans for the African American Cemetery,” 4 June 2008, Series 37, Box 2 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 10: Site Archeology, Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*

“cast Jefferson in a negative light.”<sup>542</sup> Conversely, Bon-Harper’s committee worried that an ignored burial ground next to a brand new visitor center would send the wrong message.<sup>543</sup> The TJF found itself in the typical public historian’s role—caught between various stakeholders with little monetary flexibility.

By summer, the committee decided to shift its priority from commemoration to interpretation.<sup>544</sup> The interpretative sign erected in 2001 would stay and new directional signs would guide visitors to the site. Another wayside sign would describe the archaeological discoveries and the 2001 commemoration ceremony. The TJF would place several benches around the site for contemplation. By the following year, the committee would publish a brochure about the burial ground. Also over the next twelve months, new memorial plans would be drafted.<sup>545</sup> However, in December 2008, the TJF Planning Department notified the Burial Ground Committee that the new president of the TJF, Leslie Greene Bowman, did “not have the latitude to pursue a memorial at this time.”<sup>546</sup> Plans for a commemoration project of the African American burial ground halted because the TJF allocated funds to other projects. White people still made the decisions concerning the black sacred space.

The lack of a memorial at the black burial ground speaks to the priorities of the TJF, public historians, and the American public as a whole. In February 2017,

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<sup>542</sup> “Plans for the African American Cemetery.”

<sup>543</sup> Ibid.

<sup>544</sup> The Monticello Burial Ground Committee and Advisory Panel Meeting Notes, 15 July 2008, Series 37, Box 2 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 11: Recent Discussions (Jan. 2007-June 2010), Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>545</sup> Natasha Sienitsky to Ann Taylor (email), 16 July 2008, Series 37, Box 2 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 11: Recent Discussions (Jan. 2007-June 2010), Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

<sup>546</sup> Memo, 22 December 2008, Series 37, Box 2 of 2: African American Burial Ground, Folder 11: Recent Discussions (Jan. 2007-June 2010), Special Projects, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, The Jefferson Library, Monticello, Virginia.

Gayle Jessup White, Monticello's Community Engagement Officer and a descendant of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson, claimed that the TJF, still under the leadership of Bowman, had plans for a permanent memorial at the African American burial ground. It is at least one hundred and ninety years old. If memorialization occurs, it will be the last group burying ground, and the only non-white one, eternally honored at Jefferson's Monticello.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

On September 17, 2016, I sat on the Monticello lawn, the same location as the 1827 slave auction, to attend a public summit called “Memory, Mourning, Mobilization: Legacies of Slavery and Freedom in America” hosted by the TJF. After the brilliant panel conversations of influential historians like Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Annette Gordon-Reed, and firsthand history from descendants of the enslaved people of Monticello, I explored the landscape of the estate. I walked down Mulberry Row to the Jefferson family graveyard.

From within the gated cemetery, first cousins Anna “Deane” Begiebing and Linda Carr greeted me and motioned me inside. Today, MA members can invite guests into the sacred space, a privilege my hosts seemed to delight in. While they relaxed and picnicked, I asked Carr if she had ever purchased a do-it-yourself DNA kit to learn more about her family. She responded that the Jefferson descendants had no need for scientific tests. They knew their history. With a power only few have, she began to point out family members’ graves all around us. The Jefferson family tree was written on the landscape. Linda would say to her cousin, “Oh you know the Carrs, they all have big heads,” or “They’re always late.” The MA painstakingly protected their ownership of the historic plot because it stored their identities past and present. For centuries, descendants of the enslaved community did not have the same privilege.

I walked down the hill to the African American graveyard. The identities of the people buried here are unknown. Descendants of the enslaved community use the space to honor their ancestors and grieve the trauma of slavery. This burial ground

does not inform descendants of specific family traits. Instead, it represents the broken family systems caused by slavery. This is a somber location—no one picnics here.

The MA's long control over the Jefferson family graveyard mirrors the MVLA's ownership of Mount Vernon. As the two organizations strove to honor the patriarchs unconditionally, they continually felt their power threatened by external pressures, whether private movements or federal initiatives. Also, both groups have had to confront accusations of racism because of their membership demographics. The MA has never included a black person within its ranks. Until the late twentieth century, the same was true of the MVLA. Finally, the MVLA controls the memorialization of both the black and white burial grounds. The MA, however, has exercised unrelenting power over Jefferson's grave. Another white organization, the TJF, ignored the African American burial ground at Monticello for seventy-five years. Through the constant memorialization of presidential graves, white organizations uplifted the cultural importance of Washington and Jefferson while they allowed black historical identity to drift into the shadows. The antithetical treatment of black and white cemeteries at Mount Vernon and Monticello reveal trends in the American historic house museums' interpretation of black history.

Both sites employed white superintendents who ignored or did not act on the oral histories of the black burial grounds offered by longtime black employees. At Mount Vernon, Edmund Parker informed Superintendent Harrison Howell Dodge of the black burial ground in the 1880s. It would not be until 1929 that the MVLA would install the paternalist, "faithful servant" memorial at the site. Another black guard of Washington's tomb, George Ford, informed Dodge multiple times of his

parents' graves near the new memorial. Their plots were not commemorated. At Monticello, Randolph Crawford claimed he talked with Resident Director James Bear about the African American cemetery in the parking lot. Bear did nothing to preserve the site from potential destruction. Instead, Crawford protected the site's physical legacy and historical memory.

At both Mount Vernon and Monticello, black workers helped bury and entomb the famous white enslavers, and later white employers, on the plantations. At Mount Vernon, the tomb guards, all of one race, watched over the sacred remains of Washington. Conversely, at Monticello, only enslaved black people could only help with white burials. The casual racism of many Jefferson descendants left no room for black involvement in the Jefferson burial ground after Emancipation. Today, the silences of black history continue as the white organizations that run the sites do not convey these essential facts about black protection and white exclusion. Edward Linenthal signals the "processes of erasure" with touchstone terms such as "marginalizing, suppressing, concealing, masking."<sup>547</sup> His solutions to these charges recall the black burial grounds at Mount Vernon and Monticello—he describes "excavation, uncovering, remapping, reconstructing."<sup>548</sup>

In the late twentieth century, the white owners of the African American burials grounds at Mount Vernon and Monticello, the MVLA and the TJF, responded to the "re-discovery" of the burial grounds in opposite ways. In an effort to barely meet the demands of Frank Matthews and his NAACP group, the MVLA hastily erected a memorial at the burial ground with little forethought about archaeology and

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<sup>547</sup> Linenthal, *Slavery and Public History*, 214.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

research. Conversely, the TJF authorized several intensive studies of the black burial ground, but never memorialized the site. Within the archives of the TJF African American Burial Ground Committee, one can find several articles and notes on the MVLA's commemoration of their similar site. The TJF may have observed the rash actions of the MVLA and decided to act in extreme caution. Today, the Mount Vernon archaeology team continues to discover more about the enslaved community through its excavations at burial ground despite the inaccessibility of certain sections beneath the 1983 memorial. The TJF vows to erect a memorial soon.

In the twenty-first century, both the MVLA and the TJF have attempted to improve their interpretations of slavery at the burial grounds and the plantations in general. It continues to be a volatile and complex process. Still, as Joanne Melish explained, "the most intelligently conceived and well-meaning projects can run afoul of misunderstanding, misinformation, false assumptions and deep-rooted suspicion that are the legacies of the very silences and distortions the projects seek to correct."<sup>549</sup> These issues have dogged the MA, the MVLA and the TJF since their creation. Today, the roadblocks to inclusive memorialization continue to be rooted in misconceptions, shame, and unrealized prejudices surrounding race and heritage.

In 2017, visitors to Mount Vernon can experience two wreath-laying ceremonies everyday. At noon, crowds gather around the New Tomb for a short ceremony, including the Pledge of Allegiance. At 12:45 pm, visitors can turn around and head down the brick pathway to the African American Burial Ground. A facilitator reads a portion of Governor Wilder's 1990 speech and then picks two

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<sup>549</sup> Joanne Melish, "Recovering (from) Slavery: Four Struggles to Tell the Truth," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, edited by James Oliver Horton and Eleanor Horton (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006,) 133.

audience members to read aloud two short biographies of enslaved people who lived and worked at Mount Vernon. The equality, down to the length—the Mount Vernon website slots 15 minutes for both—of the two ceremonies shows remarkable strides by the Association towards an integrated history.

The wounds of descendants of enslaved people also remain highly visible. The prolonged trauma of slavery created the initial harm. The negation of black history and the lack of burial ground preservation into the twenty-first century never let the wounds completely heal. In July 2017, the TJF began excavations of, what the Foundation believes, is Sally Hemings's bedroom in the mansion. She may have given birth to several of Jefferson's children in this room.<sup>550</sup> Many newspapers then reported that the TJF had uncovered the bedroom of Thomas Jefferson's *mistress*. In a subsequent editorial in the *Washington Post*, Britni Danielle replied:

Language like that elides the true nature of their relationship, which is believed to have begun when Hemings, then 14 years old, accompanied Jefferson's daughter to live with Jefferson, then 44, in Paris. She wasn't Jefferson's mistress; she was his property. And he raped her.<sup>551</sup>

Today, most historians agree that a sexual encounter occurred; yet few elect to categorize it as rape. Recall that at the 1983 Mount Vernon burial ground dedication, Judith Burton read an original poem, at one point exclaiming, "A people raped of a heritage!" This violent imagery challenges the idolization of Washington and Jefferson still perpetuated at the historic house museums. Acknowledgement of enslavement's trauma along with the erection of memorials (an acknowledgement of

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<sup>550</sup> Michael Cottman, "Historians Uncover Slave Quarters of Sally Hemings at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello," *NBCNews.com*, July 3, 2017.

<sup>551</sup> Britni Danielle, "Sally Hemings Wasn't Thomas Jefferson's Mistress. She Was His Property." *The Washington Post*, July 7, 2017.

silence) returns heritage into the hands of those whose ancestors carried the burden of bondage. Commemoration is as much for the descendants as for the ancestors.

Despite the absence of a memorial at the black burial ground, the TJF has made an effort to incorporate more black history into its overall interpretation of the estate. On February 4, 2017, the Foundation hosted John Franklin, director of partnerships and international programs at the National Museum of African American History and Culture, to lecture on the new museum. He declared, “To study slavery, we have to look at the entire planet.” Broadly interpreted, this includes what lies underneath the earth’s surface. To study slavery, the commemoration of African American burial grounds at prominent plantations, including other sites like James Madison’s Montpelier, must not be overlooked. Similarly, historians must examine black burial grounds in the context of the commemoration of white burial grounds. In 2017, a potential memorial at Monticello and continued efforts at Mount Vernon inform the American public that race and blood shaped the landscape at the Founding Fathers’ plantations and continue to do so. The segregated sacred landscapes of the two historic house museums speak to how Washington and Jefferson built America — according to, and because of, race and blood as well.

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