

The French Connection

By: John Macon

As a history buff, it's always been more interesting when major historical figures are somehow connected to the family. While this didn't happen as often as I would have liked, Virginians do tend to have a lot of interesting connections. Of course if anyone asks, the Madisons have some of the most interesting connections of people who have made their mark in history! For example, our Virginia Madison Family is descended from King John of England (the legendary Robin Hood's nemesis). Our Taylor ancestors in Virginia were responsible for several U.S. Presidents, namely James Madison and Zachary Taylor. In addition, Zachary Taylor's daughter, Sarah, married Jefferson Davis who became the President of the Confederacy. The Taylors of Virginia are also apparently responsible for the beautiful silent screen movie stars, Lillian and Dorothy Gish, who were very proud of their relative, Zachary Taylor. According to Burke's Peerage, four of the first five United States Presidents were closely related by blood or through marriage: Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Monroe.

It becomes really interesting when one includes the families of the spouses of James and Nelly Conway Madison's children. Some of our relatives, in particular, Dolley Payne, are said to have been descendants of Pocahontas and John Rolfe which really extends the family tree back in the Old Dominion. Dolley was also a relative of both Patrick Henry and the unreconstructed Confederate, Jesse James. President Madison's nephew, James Madison Rose, was among the heroes who lost their lives defending the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas. The Macons also have their illustrious family members, several of whom married famous Virginians, with Martha Dandridge Custis becoming the wife of George Washington, and Mary Ann Randolph Custis becoming the wife of Robert E. Lee. As for the Hites, many a young Madison family "Wahoo" has made the "road trip" from the University in Charlottesville to Staunton to visit the college which bears the name of Nelly Madison Hite's granddaughter, Mary Baldwin.

As for royalty, and this may be a stretch.....the Willises appear to have the top spot with the Bonaparte connection.

Catherine Willis, a kinswoman of President James Madison, married Prince Charles Louis Napoleon Achilles Murat, the son of the King and Queen of Naples and a nephew of the Emperor Napoleon. The marriage took place in Tallahassee, Florida, on June 12, 1826. Achilles' father, Jochim Murat, had been a Grand Marshall of France before becoming the King of Naples and Duke of Berg. Achilles' mother, Caroline Bonaparte Murat, was the Emperor Napoleon's sister. Catherine's father, Col. Byrd C. Willis, would not consent to the marriage of his daughter and Achilles Murat without first getting the consent of the Murat and Bonaparte families (with good reason which will be obvious later). Initially the Prince's family was opposed to the marriage until they were apprised of Catherine's family connections which included being a relative of the Madison, Byrd, and Carter families of Virginia, and a grandniece of George Washington. Prior to her marriage to Catherine's mother, Mary Lewis Willis and some of her children spent several weeks with Joseph Bonaparte, the ex-king of Spain, at his magnificent home near Bordentown, N.J. Achille and Catherine lived happily for many years at "Lipona" which was Prince Murat's plantation in Jefferson County, Florida.

In addition to the family connection, there are some interesting tidbits of history about the Bonapartes and the Madisons. During 1803, which was the year that Catherine Willis was born in Fredericksburg, Va., James and Dolley Madison became friendly with Napoleon's youngest brother, eighteen year-old Jerome Bonaparte, and the beautiful seventeen year-old Elizabeth "Betsy" Patterson of Baltimore. On Christmas Eve 1803, Jerome and Betsy were married in Baltimore. The newlyweds went to Washington on their honeymoon where they were the house guests of



Family members at 2002 reunion.

the Madisons. Unfortunately, Jerome's marriage was not to last as Napoleon refused to acknowledge Betsy as his sister-in-law. Napoleon had the marriage annulled stating that Jerome was a minor who had married in a foreign country and did not have his mother's permission. Jerome was summoned back to France, where Napoleon made him the King of Westphalia. The unfortunate but beautiful Betsy Patterson Bonaparte, not as lucky as Catherine Willis would become, stayed in Baltimore. Over the years, the Madisons kept in touch with her. Betsy became a good friend of Dolley's son, Payne Todd, while he was a student in Baltimore at St. Mary's College, ensuring that he was properly entertained.

In the early part of 1815, Payne Todd was an attache to the American delegation in Europe. Payne was as fluent in French as he was in English, and was to be part of a delegation to meet with the Emperor Napoleon. This meeting never took place and the closest Payne got to the Emperor was to be seated nearby at the opera. Payne thus was able to describe Napoleon to his parents even though Madison did not have a high regard for Napoleon. Later that same year this "near" meeting had little effect, as Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo, Madison made clear that he regarded him as a blood thirsty adventurer the world was well rid of.

Shortly thereafter, Napoleon's brother, Joseph Bonaparte, the ex-king of Spain, came

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Letter from the Society President

Dear Cousins,

As we find ourselves thrust into turbulent times, the word family is a good one on which to dwell. We all have immediate families and extended families but we also have families with whom we have not stayed in touch. The Madison Family probably falls into that category. Thus the purpose of this newsletter is to reunite the family of Madison Descendants. We want to help you keep in touch with your Madison heritage.

The goal of our first newsletter in a very long time is to provide a family forum, in which to get to know your board of directors, communicate with other family members, read articles of both genealogical and historical interest and get up-to-date information on Montpelier, the life long home of our ancestor, James Madison. Through the newsletter you can search for family connections and ask questions which may help unravel the sometimes confusing family tree!

Staying in touch costs money so we also include an annual dues notice – a very important tool to help fund this newsletter and defray costs of our next tri-annual family reunion, to be held at Montpelier in 2005. Please pay your dues promptly and, if possible, become a life member.

I close with hopes that these are indeed times when the Madison Family can strengthen family ties and pride in our heritage through participation in the National Society of Madison Family Descendants and its newsletter.

Sincerely,

Ann B. Thornton, President

The Madison Family Cup

The Madison Family Cup is prominently displayed in the front hall at Montpelier for all visitors to see as they arrive at the mansion. It is a large sterling silver covered urn resting on a black walnut base with silver plaques which list the annual honorees. A large silver plaque states the purpose of the cup, and reads as follows:

“The Madison Family Cup awarded by the National Society of Madison Family Descendants for outstanding contributions to the preservation and development of Montpelier.”

The cup has been given every year since its inception to the following recipients:

- 2001 – The DAR, Virginia Chapter
- 2002 – Peyton Lewis
- 2003 – The Garden Club of Virginia

Your Board of Directors suggests candidates for this honor every year at their annual board meeting and a vote is taken to determine the winner after serious discussion of each candidate.

The caliber of the past honorees is evident. The DAR has given their loyalty and financial support to Montpelier for over 50 years. Peyton Lewis is a playwright and historian who produced a CD rom on the life of James Madison which is used as a teaching tool in every middle school in Virginia. The Garden Club of Virginia has rehabilitated the formal gardens at Montpelier with unusual zeal.

As family members, we are all proud to honor institutions and individuals who work so hard for Montpelier.



2004 Calendar of Events

MARCH 16: James Madison Birthday Celebration: Special ceremony at 1:00 p.m. with the United States Marine Corps at the Madison Family Cemetery. Free admission. For information: 540-672-7365.

MARCH 21: Keswick-Farmington Hunt Club Point-to-Point: Pony, flat track, and steeplechase races. Mule jumping competition. Gates open at 10:00 a.m., post time 12:00 noon. Fee. For information: 434-980-9926.

APRIL 17: Garden Week in Virginia: Montpelier's horticulturist will provide guided tours of Montpelier's elegant formal garden throughout the day. Tours offered at 11:00 a.m., 12:00 noon, 1:00 p.m., 2:00 p.m. For information: 540-672-2728 ext 104.

MAY 1 & 2: Montpelier Wine Festival: Sample Virginia wines and relax at Montpelier. Enjoy music, specialty foods, kid's activities, kite contests and challenges, vendors and crafters, and more. Saturday: 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; Sunday: 12:00 noon to 5:00 p.m. Admission \$10.00 advance / \$15.00 at gate; includes wine tasting. Under 21: \$5.00; under 12: free. For information and corporate packages: 540-672-2726 ext 104.

MAY 20: Dolley Madison Birthday: Enjoy the gracious hospitality of America's first First Lady on her birthday. Birthday cake for all, and free admission to Montpelier for anyone who shares this birth date with Dolley Madison! For information: 540-672-2728 ext 104.

JULY 18: Summer Evening at Montpelier: Program of the "period lively arts" – music, dance, and theatre – presented by the Rappahannock Colonial Heritage Society. Bring your own picnic, or purchase a barbeque dinner at Montpelier. Grounds open at 6:30 p.m., with a concert at 7:30 p.m. Admission is complimentary to Friends of Montpelier, \$5.00 for the general public. For information: 540-672-7365.

JULY 23 – 25: Orange County Fair: Annual Celebration of rural life in Piedmont Virginia. Hours – Friday 3:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.; Saturday 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.; Sunday 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Sponsored by the Orange County Fair Board and the 4-H club. Fee. For information: 540-672-2271. Additional information is available online at www.orangecountyvafair.com.

SEPTEMBER 17: Constitution Day: Celebrate the birthday of our nation's charter at the home of James Madison, Father of the Constitution. Program includes United States Marine Corps re-enlistment ceremony. For information: 540-672-7365.

OCTOBER 2 – 3: Fall Fiber Festival & Montpelier Sheep Dog Trials: Displays, demonstrations, and workshops focused on the fiber arts, organized by The Fall Fiber Festival of Virginia, Inc. Saturday – 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Sunday – 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Fee. For information: 434-296-8533 (from Virginia) or 800-784-9285 (out of Virginia). Additional information is available online at www.fallfiberfestival.org.

NOVEMBER 6: Montpelier Hunt Races: 70th running. Jack Russell Terrier races, flat track and steeplechase races, including the Noel Laing Stakes and the Madison Plate, make for a special day in the country. Gates open at 9:30 a.m., post time 1:00 p.m. For ticketing information and details on corporate and hospitality packages: 540-672-0027.

NOVEMBER 11: Veteran's Day at Montpelier: Free admission for those who have served, or are serving, in the Armed Forces of the United States. For information: 540-672-2728 ext 104.

Letter from Michael C. Quinn

From Montpelier

Never has the future of Montpelier been so bright! The Constitutional Studies Center is rapidly taking shape, and will become the nation's leading educational resource on Madison's ideals and the Constitution. Funding has come through to build a distinctive and safe entrance for our visitors. Plans are proceeding on a new Visitor Center on the grounds. But the centerpiece of Montpelier will always be the mansion, the home of James and Dolley Madison.

The vision for the mansion is equally promising. Last year, we completed an exhaustive study funded by the estate of Mr. Paul Mellon, which revealed that the Madison home survives and can be completely and authentically restored. Just in the last few weeks, our discussions with the family of William du Pont have reached a positive conclusion. The restrictions on the mansion, established at the time of its transfer to the National Trust, have been lifted. With these building blocks in place, it is now possible to envision a future with the mansion restored to the Madison era. While it is too soon to announce such a future, it is closer than ever.

The moral and financial support of the Madison family has been a mainstay for the Montpelier Foundation. Even as we work toward a brighter future, we must deal with short-term setbacks: the loss of State funding, a downturn in the economy, and slowing tourism. Your help enables us to overcome these obstacles and place James Madison's Montpelier firmly on the path to becoming one of the nation's great historic homes.

Michael C. Quinn, President

HOT OFF THE PRESS

Final approval has been granted by the Mellon Foundation for a \$20 million restoration of Montpelier. The restoration will return the house to its glory days of 1810. Work to commence immediately.

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incognito to the United States. Joseph and his retinue decided to take sanctuary with James and Dolley Madison at Montpelier. When James got wind of his plans, he ordered his staff in Washington to divert the party. The usually hospitable Madisons felt that the country had enough trouble with Spain and Europe for that matter and it would not have been appropriate for Joseph to be at Montpelier. Joseph changed his course and ended up in the Philadelphia area where he eventually built his home, Point Breeze, near Bordentown, N.J. where eleven years later Mary Willis would be his guest. In 1836, following James Madison's death, Gov. James Barbour of Virginia in his address during the August memorial meeting in Orange County contrasted the colossal ambition and wretched end of Napoleon to the disinterested (unpretentious) and devoted labors of Madison, at whose peaceful departure "every hill and valley of this vast republic resound with benedictions on his name" (there were

so many memorial services throughout the country that Barbour summed them up as "a national funeral").

In 1847, Achille Murat died. His widow, Catherine, visited Napoleon III when he was Emperor of France where he treated her as Princess Murat. Catherine returned to Florida after the War between the States. Louis Napoleon, in 1866, fearing Catherine might be in need, sent her \$40,000 for immediate necessities and settled upon her an annual annuity of \$50,000 francs. Catherine used her money generously and was a major benefactor in preserving George Washington's Mount Vernon for the nation. After her death, her sister received her annuity from France until Napoleon III was overthrown.

There are so many interesting stories relating to our family and this is just the tip of the iceberg. Over time, we will continue to find stories that enhance our knowledge of our family's history.

Bibliography

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[Lillian Gish, The Movies. Mr. Griffith and Me](#) by

Lillian Gish with Ann Pinchot

[The Madisons A Biography](#)

by Virginia Moore



Madison Family cemetery 2002 reunion

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Type of Membership: Single () \$25.00, Family () \$35.00 per household, Lifetime () \$500.00

Make check payable to: National Society Madison Family Descendants

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