



# Orange County African-American Historical Society Newsletter

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February 2008

## 2007 Montpelier Slave Descendants Reunion

by Tom Chapman

The Orange County African American Historical Society (OCAAHS) and James Madison's Montpelier worked together to hold the second Montpelier Slave Descendants Reunion this past June to recognize, commemorate, and honor the legacy of enslaved African-Americans. The weekend event, entitled *A Living Legacy*, brought together over 125 descendants of Montpelier and Orange County slaves, scholars, and other individuals interested in African-American history. The goal of the event was to help participants learn more about the African-American experience in order to interpret American history more accurately. By finding and bringing together descendants of African-Americans once enslaved at Montpelier and at neighboring Orange County plantations the Montpelier Foundation and the OCAAHS wish to establish meaningful connections with the descendant community in order to carry out shared genealogical, social and cultural history research. In addition, through the workshops offered during the event, descendant community members were encouraged to pursue their own family histories through conversations with family elders, searching for documents, compiling family memorabilia and oral accounts, researching their genealogy and participating in DNA research.

The three day event began on Friday, June 8<sup>th</sup>, with registration, private tours of the Montpelier mansion, and a barbecue dinner catered by Big Jim's BBQ from Charlottesville. Frank Walker, local author and Orange County historian, provided a brief introduction to the history of the county during dinner. The evening festivities were a time for participants to meet with each other, renew old friendships and create new ones. Montpelier staff and interns from the University of Virginia and James Madison University manned the registration table providing information about the event, the DNA and genealogy research tables, oral history recording sessions and also took photographs of registered participants that were displayed on a bulletin board throughout the weekend. The new Visitor Center and duPont Gallery at Montpelier was the venue for the entire weekend.

Bright and early Saturday morning the reunion was officially kicked off with welcoming remarks by Michael Quinn, President of the Montpelier Foundation, and Rebecca Gilmore Coleman, President of the OCAAHS and also the Montpelier Slave Descendants Reunion Committee Chair. Dr. Matthew Reeves followed the welcome with a lecture and walking tour entitled *Unearthing Slavery's Roots at Montpelier* in which he discussed the archaeological discoveries of slave quarters and work areas and how these provide glimpses into the lives of James Madison's slaves.



Rebecca Gilmore Coleman, Dr. John Hope Franklin,  
Michael Quinn, Lisa Cantor

On Saturday the reunion was blessed and honored to have Dr. John Hope Franklin and Prof. Roger Wilkins provide our keynote address. Dr. Franklin is a preeminent historian who has literally written the book on African-American history. He is the author of *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African-Americans*, originally published in 1947 and now in its eighth edition. Prof. Wilkins is a

Pulitzer Prize winner and the publisher of the NAACP journal *Crisis*. The conversation that these two gentlemen had with each other, and which reunion attendees were privileged to hear, was an amazing and powerful experience for all. The address was open to the public and attracted wide attention from the local community.

The workshop portion of the reunion was held on Saturday afternoon. Dr. Beth Taylor, Montpelier's Director of Education, moderated a discussion entitled *Discovering Your Family History Through Oral Tradition, Public Records, and DNA Analysis*. The speakers for the workshop were Dr. Dianne Swann-Wright, Robert Vernon, and Dr. Bruce Jackson. Dr. Swann-Wright focused on the use of oral history as a means of connecting with the past, using her work for the *Getting Word* project at Monticello and her book – *A Way Out of No Way: Claiming Family and Freedom in the New South*. Mr. Vernon discussed his work as a genealogist and ethno-historian, specifically the use of public records to trace the history of African-American families across the barrier from slavery to freedom. And Dr. Jackson, the director of the African-American DNA Roots

Project at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, led a lively discussion on the use of DNA research in tracing African ancestry.

After a jam-packed day of activities and inspirational lectures reunion participants were treated Saturday evening to a reception and dinner in the Grand Salon of the duPont Gallery at Montpelier. The dinner was catered by Elmwood at Sparks, who provided some incredible food. The dinner's guest speaker was Dr. Michael Blakey, NEH Professor of Archaeology at the College of William & Mary, and also a local who can trace his roots back to African-American slaves from Orange County.

On Sunday morning the reunion was brought to a memorable conclusion with a wreath laying ceremony at the Montpelier slave cemetery and a religious tent service on the grounds, which was open to the public. Tom Chapman, Montpelier Research Coordinator and Reunion Committee member, provided the greeting at the wreath laying ceremony, and then introduced fellow participants, Rev. Dr. Youth Hardman-Cromwell and Dr. Hortense Hinton. Rev. Hardman-Cromwell led those gathered at the cemetery in prayer and then performed a libation to honor and commemorate the memories of the slaves who were buried in that sacred ground. All of those gathered then participated in a *Reading of the Names*, reciting the names of known Montpelier slaves one by one. Dr. Hinton was gracious and kind enough to provide an original poem that she had written for the occasion.

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*Letter from the President,*

*2007 was an exciting year for Orange County's African American Historical Society, filled with wonderful achievements on many fronts. As this newsletter will reveal, the OCAAHS succeeded in bringing to the community and the nation several important historical events. Thanks to the Arts Center In Orange and James Madison's Montpelier for partnering with us in these accomplishments. I look forward to our annual February exhibit and Juneteenth celebration at the Arts Center.*

*I wish to thank our Board of Directors for all they have done to keep the Society moving forward. I look forward to working with the Board again in 2008, continuing to explore our American Heritage so that future generations may benefit from preserving this rich history.*

*Thanks to members and contributors for helping us to meet our goals through membership and sponsorship. By becoming a new member or renewing your membership we will be able to continue to reach out to capture the many histories waiting to be told.*

*Sincerely,  
Rebecca Gilmore Coleman*

***"Only for a Moment"  
In Celebration of the Slave Descendants  
Reunion – Montpelier 2007***

*Author: Hortense B. Hinton Ed.D.*

*© June 10, 2007*

*Remembering is sacred.  
It revives and brings alive...  
The remembered and those who are wise enough to remember.  
It honors their gifts to us  
It acknowledges their presence with us always.  
Let us go there, Let us be there,  
Let's do it again  
If only for a moment*

*Let us feel the moment,  
...the love, the joy, the warmth  
...the pain, the fear, the terror  
...the absolute jubilation  
Whenever we want to, just feel the need to  
We can go there, be there, do it again,  
Can we imagine, know, understand?  
No, not really.  
But we still have to...*

*We need to remember  
It is dangerous to forget  
Don't want it to happen again  
Yet because of it, we are  
Our survival depends on it  
So we must go there, be there, must do it again.  
If only for a moment*

*Remembering is healing.  
The wounds are deep, the pain recurring, cannot be ignored  
Don't want to just survive, want to thrive  
Want to be whole, bring it all together  
So we gotta go there, really be there, do it all over again.  
If only for a moment*

*Remembering sustains us  
It restores us, keeps us real  
Keeps us moving forward, in spite of it all  
Without it we die --  
The remembered and those who failed to remember.  
So  
It is good for us to go there,  
It is good for us to be here,  
It is good for us to do this again and again  
and again  
If only for a moment*

## Visualizing the African American Past at Montpelier

*Matthew Reeves, Montpelier Foundation*

Montpelier recently installed four new visitor signs interpreting sites that are central to the African-American experience at the Madison plantation. The signs are located at sites where there are no visible semblance of the structures or features that were once there but where archaeologists have conducted extensive excavations to understand the use and appearance of the sites. The four sites included in this set of interpretive signs are the first plantation site for Montpelier (Mount Pleasant), the quarter complex for house slaves located in the yard of the mansion, the slave cemetery, and the plantation farm complex which includes the homes for field slaves

To allow visitors to understand the appearance and use of the site during the historic period, Montpelier archaeologists worked with local artist, Linda Boudreaux Montgomery, to create images portraying the appearance of the site during its historic occupation. The paintings are in a central oval on each sign and are designed to portray the site from the same perspective as the view of the site from the sign. An important step in creating these new signs was obtaining critiques and input from the Orange County African American Historical Society Board and from experts on architecture and African American life-ways.

All of these signs are located on the visitor walking paths and form a walking tour that covers the core experience for African American history at Montpelier. Members of the Orange County African American Historical Society are encouraged to visit Montpelier to see the signs. For more information or for copies of the signs see our website at <http://www.montpelier.org/explore/archaeology/index.php>.



## It Was a Weekend to Remember

*by Dr. Patrice Grimes*

The festive setting, the constant buzzing of people sharing experiences and the moments to honor those who had gone before us. Those who attended the 2007 Montpelier Reunion knew we were part of something very special. The speakers, displays and sightseeing tours helped us to better understand our past to make accurate sense of our present.

I'll remember the hundreds of people from all walks of life and regions of the USA who came together to listen, learn and reflect on the heritage of Montpelier and Orange County. I'll treasure John Hope Franklin and Roger Wilkins' eloquent and powerful conversation, and never forget that our community's story is one important part of a larger American history – a history that each of us must acknowledge, study and build on to move forward. But it is the faces of the Orange County High School students that I will remember most, as they listened attentively to Dr. Franklin, like their ancestors in African villages once sat at the feet of their elders learning their customs and traditions.

In our hectic modern lives, it is so easy to focus on today and ignore the past. The Reunion reminded us that we must consciously 'make the memories' — for ourselves and for our children — and never tire of doing so. Documenting the past, through written accounts, oral histories, photographs and family keepsakes, makes our lives more rich and complete. In keeping our shared legacy alive, it's not just what we do today, it's what we leave behind. I look forward to the next Reunion, and I hope to see you there!

## Orange County Population Mapping

In conjunction with the Montpelier Slave Descendants Reunion 2007, Bob Vernon has combined land and personal property tax records with the 1870 U.S. Census to map the locations of all Orange County families recorded in that census. On June 4, he gave us a view of his work in progress during a joint meeting with the Orange County Historical Society. It was exciting to see how much historical insight can be gleaned by thoughtful combination of information available from different sources.

## 2007 Exhibit Focused on Education

by Clara Colby

Before the late 1960s, part of keeping African-Americans “in their place” meant keeping students physically in their place, in schools separate from white students. Our 2007 exhibit, *Orange County’s African-American Schools: A Sense of Place in Education*, showed the locations of some of the places of African-American education in Orange County, what they were like, and what the teachers and students involved made of those places.

African-Americans have a long history of fighting hard for educational opportunities. During the era of slavery, various laws were passed to limit education of African-Americans for fear it would make it more difficult to keep people in bondage. As early as 1740, in the wake of the 1739 Stono Rebellion, South Carolina made it illegal to teach or employ any slave to write. After the Nat Turner Rebellion of 1831, Virginia and other states passed laws against teaching slaves (and sometimes free people of color) to read and write. Although these laws were not always enforced, there are plenty of stories indicating that they were enforced often enough to make attaining even the most basic literacy difficult even for highly motivated individuals.

We know of a number of antebellum Orange County African-Americans who were literate, but we haven’t yet tracked down information about how they were educated, nor what educational opportunities were provided in the first decades after emancipation. The earliest information we have gathered so far about Orange County’s African-American schools dates to the turn of the twentieth century. We also know of classes being offered in private homes in the early twentieth century. We are currently trying to capture as much information as we can from folks who have living memories of education in the twentieth century, as well as stories, photos and documents passed down to them. Our exhibit provided an overview of the schools from the early to mid-twentieth century, going into greater depth about Shady Grove (see following Shady Grove article) to show the types of detail that can be drawn from written and oral recollections of those still with us, as well as from the school system archives.



*Newly renovated Shady Grove School*

## Shady Grove School Restoration

by Ruth Mallory Long

On September 1, 2007, a large crowd gathered at Shady Grove to celebrate the restoration of the Shady Grove School. Former students and faculty shared cherished memories about their days there.

The Shady Grove School was erected c. 1925. It is a one-story, 2 room school of frame construction with a metal covered wood roof. The building stands on a solid concrete foundation and the interior finish is of plain tongue and groove wood sheathing on the side walls and ceiling. The floors are ordinary wood flooring. The building was heated by stoves vented to one brick chimney. It is located just behind the Shady Grove Baptist Church on Piney Woods Road just off of Monrovia Road, Orange, Virginia. Some of the teachers of The Shady Grove School included: Mrs. Elsie P. Johnson, Mrs. Evelyn C. Jones, Mrs. Lucy P. Jones, Mrs. Florence Redd, Mrs. Blanche Quarles, Mrs. Mabel Shirley, Mrs. Charlotte Towns, Mrs. Hattie White, Miss Hattie V. White.

The school was in use until approximately 1953-54. From then on the students starting going to the new Lightfoot Elementary School on Rt. 522 in Unionville, Virginia.

Many families who once attended the Shady Grove School still live in the neighborhood and attend the Shady Grove Baptist Church. Some of these families include: Alexander, Ellis, Jackson, Lindsay, Long, Poindexter, Richardson, Sawyer, White, Williams, Willis. The Shady Grove School was purchased by the Shady Grove Baptist Church and was dedicated as the Shady Grove Baptist Church Sunday School Building on June 9, 1957. It was also used for wedding receptions and church dining hall.

Two other schools were built in the same style of the Shady Grove School in Orange County—the Monroe Wood School which burned years ago and the Thornhill School which has been remodeled as a residence.

In January 2006, Rev. Joseph A. Moore, pastor of the Shady Grove Baptist Church, and its members decided to restore the Shady Grove School. Since that time, the windows have been repaired, all missing window panes replaced, the roof painted and the chimney repaired. Plans are being made to paint the exterior soon. Further plans are being made to paint the interior. Several school desks that were used around the late 1920s or early 1930s have been donated. The Shady Grove School still has its original chalkboard.

There are still former students of the Shady Grove School living in the area: Eleanor Alexander Burley, Cephus Daniel, Jr., Dalcine Howard Daniel, Charlie B. Long, George Long, Sr., Elaine Sawyer Richardson, Howard Richardson, Lee Richardson, Archie Lou Poindexter, Lillian Shumake and Elwood White to name a few.



## Pioneering Educator Honored

by: *Rebecca Gilmore Coleman, President*

The late Gussie Bayton Taylor's name was selected by the Orange County School Board to rename the old Prospect Heights Middle School. The school is located at 200 Daily Drive, in the town of Orange and is now called the "Taylor Education Administration Complex." The selection also commemorates the name of President Zachary Taylor.

The OCAAHS Board of Directors sent a letter in December 2006 to the School Board requesting that the old middle school be named after Gussie Bayton Taylor.

According to school board records Ms. Taylor, an African American educator, came from Essex County to teach in Orange County in 1925. Records show that in 1948 she held a master's degree, and she had acquired her education from several colleges, including the University of Virginia.

She was involved in the Orange County School system for 43 years. Before integration she was the supervisor of Black education. She retired in 1968. However, in 1974 she was hired as a consultant by the Orange County school system as a recruitment specialist for the Early Childhood Stimulation Program, which preceded the Head Start Program. She died in 1989 at the age of 86.

Gussie Taylor was well loved and respected by all citizens in the Orange community. She was very instrumental in helping to make integration of the schools a peaceful experience for all children.

## Art, History and Celebration

by *Laura Thompson*

On June 19, 1865, Union soldiers led by Major General Gordon Granger landed at Galveston, Texas, to enforce President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and declare freedom for all slaves in the state. Each year thereafter, former Texas slaves and their descendants joined in a celebration of freedom on June 19, and the day became known as "Juneteenth."

Although Juneteenth began in Texas, it is now celebrated in communities throughout the U.S. Unlike the Fourth of July, Juneteenth celebrates freedom for *all* Americans.

During the summer of 2007 the OCAAHS and The Arts Center in Orange (ACO) joined forces to produce the First Annual Downtown Orange Juneteenth celebration. The event featured "The Riches of Family" - vibrant paintings by Richard Hyman chronicling one family's travels from slavery to freedom. There was plenty of food for the stomach as well as the soul. The Arts Center gallery walls resounded with the voices of the Shady Grove Baptist Choir, and the recently completed OCAAHS documentary, "A Sense of Place" was premiered.



*Artist and educator Annie Green*

The documentary funded through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities "We the People" program, was produced by veteran documentary film producer Lon Holmberg and film editors Deborah and William Torrico. It includes interviews and images relevant to the important and largely overlooked period in history leading up to and including integration of Orange County schools. Memories of African-American school students and administrators are shared, along with historical research.

## Learning Experiences . . .

**High School Students Seek to Understand History of Orange County Desegregation** -- Across the nation in many of today's social studies classrooms, many contemporary students think that learning history is boring because history has been taught as a bunch of random facts, of dates and people that are memorized for a test and forgotten tomorrow. In addition, it is hard for students to comprehend that there is a relationship between the past and the present, and they have no concept that issues of today were created by the events yesterday. Many students believe that history is something that is far removed from them and their lives. It is as if the historical past is something that happened elsewhere and not in the students' own backyard.

The younger generations in Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) do not understand that Orange County has always been in the mainstream of American history and Orange residents have actively participated in such events as the American Revolution, World War II, and the Civil Rights Movement. To engage high school students in practical and new methods of learning history, the OCHS' African American Studies courses, in connection with the OCAAHS and UVA, will work together to engage students in hands-on historical inquiry and presentation processes that consider multiple perspectives of the desegregation of OCPS to help foster lifelong learning and connections with their local history.

2008 marks the 40th anniversary of school desegregation in Orange County. With this in mind, the African American Studies students of OCHS, who will be learning how to be historians, will collect oral histories from community members. The high school students are seeking interviews with former students of OCPS, teachers, administrators, school board members, central office staff, and others involved between 1954 to 1975.

The collection of oral stories will allow the younger generation a hands-on approach to interpret, to explore, and to understand their local history. Students will collect data through interviews and using primary resources to create a digital archive that informs their peers, future and present high school students, and teachers of all grade levels, local community members, and scholars about their research and will document the history of integration in Orange County, Virginia.

In May 2008, the digital archive that the students have created will be presented at the 'Past-Present-Future Forum' that will feature local citizens, educators, and scholars who will share their year's work. This project will start in early September and continue throughout the 2007-2008 school year. If you are interested in helping OCHS with this project by providing interviews, helping by donating equipment or other forms of assistance please contact Mrs. Rachel Carlton-Mthethwa at (540) 661-4300 or rcarlton@ocss-va.org.

**As summer interns for the Montpelier Slave Descendants Reunion.** Molly Broemmelsiek and I worked with Tom Chapman from May through July to help make the event a success in any way that we could. For Molly, an undergraduate history major at the University of Virginia, this internship was a chance to work in the field of public history for the first time. For me, this internship was a great chance to learn how to conduct oral history interviews and how to use them in conjunction with document-based research to better understand historical communities.



*Dr. Franklin, Tyrell Graham, Brittany Davis, Erica Williams, Jeffrey Carey, Dr. Wilkins, Marissa Downs, Wyatt Pratt, Rachel Carlton-Mthethwa in the Grand Salon at Montpelier*

Working on the reunion was a very meaningful experience for both of us. We met many members of the OCAAHS at the registration table that weekend and enjoyed learning about the family histories of many attendees. We were also grateful to the several participants who found the time to sit down with us to record oral history interviews. Whether through conversations, photographs, family trees, or anecdotes, many participants contributed very valuable information about their families that will help Montpelier and the OCAAHS to develop a much fuller understanding of African-American life in

Orange County.

After the reunion, Molly and I followed up our oral history interviews by conducting archives-based research about several African-American families in Orange County. Molly focused on the Jackson, Golden, Tyree, and McIntosh families, and I concentrated on the McDaniel, Ellis, May, Madison, and Adams families. By combining information from the oral histories with census records; birth, death, and marriage records; deeds; newspapers; and wills, we were able to build extensive family trees for many of the families. We also researched African-Americans who had once been slaves of the Madison family, such as Ben Stewart, Solomon Taliaferro, and Ailsey Payne. As the depth of these family trees grew, they began to reflect communities of people who maintained close connections through many generations.

Although we only began to trace the connections among African-American families, our research shows the value of tracing genealogical threads in the process of weaving history. Building family trees helped us begin to understand African-American communities in Orange County as well as social relationships between African-American and white families in the area – themes critical to teaching the history of Montpelier and Orange County. Molly and I were both so pleased to be able to contribute to Montpelier's research initiative regarding African-American life during slavery and after emancipation. We enjoyed meeting many members of the OCAAHS and look forward to learning where future research leads!

*Whitney Martinko is a graduate student in the history department at the University of Virginia.*

**Reunion** *(continued)*

Rev. Hardman-Cromwell officiated at the tent service, joined by Dr. Hinton, Rev. Isaac E. Howard, and the Rev. James McIntosh. The music, the sermon message, the view from the visitor center overlooking the mountains in the distance – these all combined to make the Sunday morning service a moving and reaffirming experience for all involved.

The Montpelier Foundation and the OCAAHS are extremely thankful for the support provided by Wachovia, the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, the Gilder Foundation, the Richard S. Reynolds Foundation, the Inez Duff Bishop Charitable Trust, and the Gilbert and Idiko Butler Foundation. The members of the Montpelier Slave Descendants Reunion Committee, who made the event possible through their tireless efforts, include: Rebecca Gilmore Coleman, Tom Chapman, Clara Colby, Joan Graves, Patrice Preston Grimes, Bettye Kearse, Matthew Reeves, Beth Taylor, and Bryan Wright.

Even though the reunion has passed, the memories will stay with us for some time to come. In addition, the reunion was only the beginning in a larger project to establish meaningful connections between Montpelier, the OCAAHS, and members of the African-American community. If you are interested in participating in this project please contact Tom Chapman at the Montpelier Foundation – (540) 672-2728 - tchapman@montpelier.org

**Orange County African-American Historical Society:  
Preserving Our Heritage**

Founded in February 2000, the Orange County African-American Historical Society seeks to explore African-American contributions to the cultural and historical heritage of Orange County, Virginia. We also seek to enhance and promote awareness of the accomplishments and contributions of people of African descent as organic and essential components of our community, and of our nation at large. Toward those ends, we endeavor to identify, research and preserve African-American legacies, lore, and historical sites.

The Society works in close cooperation with the Orange County Historical Society, and we are grateful to that organization for allowing us to use their facilities.

The Orange County African-American Historical Society is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization.

**Orange County African-American Historical Society**

130 Caroline Street  
Orange, Virginia 22960

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please check the appropriate category:

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**The Orange County African-American Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.**

If you wish to get involved, please indicate your interest(s) below.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Genealogy                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Events       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic Sites Research/Documentation | <input type="checkbox"/> Publicity            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oral History                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Programs |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Archival Research    |



**Q: What are they doing?**

**A: At the Montpelier Slave Descendants Reunion, Dr. Bruce Jackson and his assistant, Dr. Jamie L. Wilson (background), take cheek swabs for the African-American DNA Roots Project.**



**Orange County African-American  
Historical Society**

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