

UPDATE

By Dennis Blanton, *The archaeological investigation*
James Madison University *at Fort Harrison*

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Dr. Blanton

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The investigation involved excavation of 14 small shovel tests and three larger units. Placement of the latter was guided by findings from the shovel tests and our own questions about activities surrounding the house. Every test and unit produced artifacts, among other kinds of useful information, some of which is provoking questions about the original orientation of the stone structure.

We were not expecting the sheer quantity of artifacts that was recovered in what is now the front part of the

property, especially from the earliest period of occupation. Fairly large numbers of ceramic fragments, building materials, and animal bones were present in several of the tests, especially those closest to or in the Koogler's pasture. Better still, much of this early material was present in a largely intact "midden" layer. And in the pasture unit we also documented a hearth of fired soil overlain by a distinctive ash deposit – all strongly suggestive of the location of a simple structure. In short, the artifacts within these layers date from the latter part of the 18th century and the initial decades of the 19th century. Among the interesting items found are pieces of "delft"-style ceramic, kaolin clay smoking pipe fragments, and several buttons.

All told, these findings are indicating that what is now presented as the front yard of the Harrison house might well be the original rear yard. The artifact-rich midden is typical of habitual disposal of debris out the back door, and the new evidence of a simple structure comports with expectations about placement of outbuildings/dependencies in a rear yard. Only additional archaeology can determine the true nature of the buildings and the activities that left this evidence but possibilities abound. Especially intriguing ones include the prospect the structure was housing for slaves, the original detached kitchen, or even the original – though temporary - Harrison house.

More than anything, we are grateful for the opportunity provided to JMU students of archaeology. Fort Harrison is the perfect laboratory for training the next generation of Valley archaeologists. And who wouldn't want to work at a place with such interesting history, where cookies and kettle corn are ever-present, and the hosts are so welcoming and keen on the activity!



JMU's student field work yielded buttons, Civil War percussion caps (left), ceramic fragments, bones and other materials in what Dr. Blanton refers to as a "largely intact midden layer." Many of the finds date to the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Photos by
Richard Martin



Archaeology students from James Madison University spent a series of Saturdays this fall on Fort Harrison's grounds, both inside the fence and in nearby fields. Led by Dr. Dennis Blanton, their field work yielded widely ranging artifacts. Along with finding the artifacts, the students will also research them and prepare reports.

Fort Harrison

335 Main Street, Dayton, Virginia ■ www.fortharrisonva.org

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A Heartwarming Story

Nearly 200 years later, Mary Stuart Harrison's skills are recognized

Mary's quilt was lying on the bed in an upstairs chamber, folded in a small pile, and waiting for us to notice. One day we invited Gloria Comstock, the curator at the Virginia Quilt Museum, to come out and examine our quilts and coverlets. Gloria spotted Mary's quilt and suddenly Fort Harrison is in the middle of an exciting project to preserve, display and educate our visitors about the quilting skill of Mary Stuart Harrison, the creator of this wonderful textile.

We know very little about Mary Stuart Harrison. But we do know that she was a skillful quilt maker.

The quilt was donated to Fort Harrison in 1985 by Mrs. Carrington Harrison of Staunton. The Fort Harrison collection also includes a beautiful white counterpane which was made around 1821 by Mary Stuart Harrison. The counterpane includes the initials "PH" for Peachy Harrison and was donated by Margaret Craig Sheehy.

— Pat Early, Director

Dr. Peachy Harrison married Mary Stuart in February 1804. They would have eight children, including Gessner Harrison, who would become a distinguished educator and Dr. Peachy Rush Harrison, who would also become a prominent physician in Harrisonburg.



The quilt (at left) made by Mary Stuart Harrison features extraordinarily intricate work, with creative variation in the quilting of the background. Her skills are highly unusual, and the quilt will be conserved to protect her work in the years to come.

Dr. Peachy Harrison and his wife, Mary Stuart, were the last Harrisons to own the house now known as Fort Harrison. Dr. Harrison and his family lived on the northwest corner of Court Square in Harrisonburg, where he practiced medicine for many years. In 1821, they sold the Dayton house, which he had inherited at the death of his father Benjamin, to the John Allebaugh family. At that point the house left Harrison ownership, but the Harrison legacy continued.

Dr. Peachy Harrison died in 1848. Notice of his death was printed in the Baltimore Sun:

"The last Rockingham (Va.) Register announces the death of Dr. Peachy Harrison, a venerable and distinguished citizen in the 72d year of his age. He represented Rockingham in the Legislature, and was a member of the Convention that met in Richmond in 1829, to revise the State Constitution."

Mary died nine years later. Both are buried in Woodbine Cemetery in Harrisonburg.



SEE INSIDE!

***We ask your help in conserving
Mary Stuart Harrison's quilt by funding
one of the 61 unique stars.
Details are in our special insert!***



Archaeology update on pages 2-3



There's a LOT happening at Fort Harrison!

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