Merrymaking at the Madisons': Feasting, Alcohol, and Political Strategy

Christine Hope Heacock

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Merrymaking at the Madisons': Feasting, Alcohol, and Political Strategy

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Anthropology

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the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Approved by the Committee, April 2012

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Elite entertaining has been a well-examined aspect of social life during the years of the American Revolution and Early Republic. While historic sites belonging to elite members of society have been examined both documentarily and archaeologically, entertaining has not been widely recognized for the potential political underpinnings it contains. In this paper I examine elite entertaining through the lens of feasting at James Madison’s Montpelier. I apply theoretical models typically used in prehistoric and Old World contexts in order to better understand the potential motives behind these activities.
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Introduction

Entertaining has been a key feature of elite sociability and social respectability in the historic period, but few historical archaeologists have explored the strategic underpinnings of elite entertaining. Entertainment serves as a way to gain allies, maintain power, and display a family’s wealth. Drawing on the ideas of Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden I examine the concept of entertainment during the historic period within in the framework of Old World archaeological models of feasting. While feasting has been more widely discussed among archaeologists working in prehistoric Old World societies, this topic has been mostly neglected in historic contexts.

In 19th-century Virginia, British Colonial elites regularly hosted feasts for one another. One figure famous for engaging in this activity was Dolley Madison, wife of James Madison, 4th President of the United States. During her time in Washington, Dolley held formal and elaborate dinner parties (Allgor, 2006). Dolley used these occasions to bring both political allies and political foes to the President’s table. Although this practice continued when the Madisons returned to their Virginia home Montpelier, the role of such dinner parties appears to have shifted from creating political alliances to maintaining a high social status after Madison’s presidency. The Madison’s emphasis on elaborate and expensive dining events is unusual given their dire financial straits and must, therefore, reflect some broader social strategy of status signaling. As the Madisons kept up the appearance of a wealthy family with a large home and frequent dinner parties, they actually had very little income. The sale of James’ papers from the proceedings of the Continental Congress would provide financially for Dolley as a widow. As a result,
the Madisons made sure to create a sense of living history at Montpelier to ensure that these documents would retain some monetary value after James’ death.

Archaeological discussions of feasting examine the strategic nature of these events and explore the nuanced forces that lead people to engage in this activity. Hayden provides a list of archaeological signatures of feasts to help detect feasting practices in the past and many of these characteristics are evident in the archaeological assemblages at Montpelier. Michael Dietler’s model of patron-role feasting, which sees hospitality as a way to reinforce institutionalized relations of asymmetrical social power, is also relevant to the discussion of entertaining at Montpelier. Unlike feasts in which there is reciprocal obligation present, such expectations are absent in the patron-role model. Rather, hosts are constantly in their role and so are their guests, creating a continual unequal relationship of status and power (Dietler, 2001).

Both documentary and archaeological evidence attest to the practice of ritual feasting at Montpelier. Dolley’s personal letters, as well as the first-hand accounts of visitors reveal the extravagance with which she entertained. Archaeological evidence of feasting was left behind in the context of a trash deposit (referred to throughout this paper as Dolley’s Midden) associated with the post-presidential retirement years (1817-1836). Serving platters, fashionable ceramics, and an overwhelmingly large amount of vessels related to the consumption of alcoholic beverages are indicative of feasting at the site.

In contrast to Dolley’s Midden is the assemblage from the Northwest Yard. This assemblage represents the table James and Dolley at Montpelier before James’ return to politics in 1801. The ceramic and glass vessels found in this assemblage show the wealth
of prominent Virginia planters, but lack the archaeological signatures typically associated with feasting. The contrast between the pre-presidential Northwest Yard and the post-presidential assemblage in Dolley’s Midden lies in the distribution of certain types of vessels and ware types. Dolley’s efforts to make sure her table reflected the latest fashion is illustrated by the presence of British and French porcelains in Dolley’s Midden, while such vessels are scarce in the Northwest Yard deposit. However, the greatest disparity between the two deposits lies in the number of glass vessels. There is a disproportionately large amount of wine and champagne bottles in Dolley’s Midden. Few such wine bottles are present in the Northwest Yard, and champagne bottles are completely absent during those earlier pre-presidential planter years.

Frederick H. Smith’s notions of alcoholic marronage and sociable escape offer a framework for understanding the patterns of alcohol consumption during Madison’s retirement years. Wine and champagne bottles found in the deposits show that the Madisons were engaging in elite drinking practices and investing in the sociable art of drinking. Although James Madison was not much of a drinker, he kept an ample supply around to indulge his many visitors. These social occasions in which the Madisons were surrounded by friends and well-wishers, may have in themselves been a means for the couple to not only reaffirm their high social standing, but escape back to a time in which there was more social and financial security.
Historical Background

Early Life and Political Career

James Madison Jr. was born March 16th, 1751 to James and Nelly Conway Madison. His childhood was spent at the family home, Mt. Pleasant, in Orange County Virginia. The family moved to the newly constructed Montpelier in 1764. Located on the same family land as Mt. Pleasant, Montpelier would serve as James’ home until his death in 1836. During his life, Montpelier underwent two extensive renovations; each coinciding with his elevating political and social status.

![Montpelier's First Floor 1764](https://example.com/montpelier_floor_plan_1764.png)

Figure 1 Montpelier's First Floor 1764
The Digital Montpelier Project
Madison was a slight, sickly man only standing at 5’6” tall. His constant fear of illness forced him to stay indoors and devote much of his time to his studies. As for his education, Madison was primarily educated by the minister Donald Robertson and then an Anglican rector. In 1769 he attended College of New Jersey (now Princeton). What he did not have in charisma and stature, Madison more than made up for with the power of his intellect and fairness of temper. In 1776 he was elected delegate to the Virginia Convention. From 1780 to 1784 Madison served as the Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. In 1784, Madison was then elected to the Virginia House of Delegates where he served until 1786. In 1787 his presentation of the Virginia Plan at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia served as the outline for the U.S. Constitution. This led to Madison’s legacy as architect of the Constitution, which in itself would have secured his place in history. However, his political career was far from over. In 1789 he was elected to the House of Representatives and served in this position for four terms (The Montpelier Foundation, 2007).

*Hello Dolley!*

During his third term in the House of Representatives, James met his future wife, Dolley Payne Todd in 1794. Dolley came from a Quaker family and had previously been married to a Quaker lawyer in Philadelphia, John Todd. Sadly he, and their infant son William, died during a yellow fever epidemic leaving Dolley a 26-year old widow with a 2 year old son, John Payne Todd. Dolley was a very popular woman in Philadelphia known for her beauty and charm. James convinced Senator Aaron Burr to arrange a meeting with the young widow. Theirs was a whirlwind courtship and the two were married within 4 months of meeting one another. By marrying a non-Quaker, Dolley was
expelled from the Society of Friends. Her expulsion could not have been too traumatic as her high energy, sociability, and knack for unusual fashion were not attributes consistent with the ideals of Quaker womanhood.

Although a match between herself and the shy “Little Madison” seemed like an unlikely one, it proved to be mutually beneficial. In James, Dolley found a companion, financial supporter, and step father to her young son. Through Dolley, James found his right hand in public politics. While James was the intellect, Dolley was the public face of his administration and greatest advocate to help him get elected as President of the United States. Her charm and aptitude in social settings helped gain her husband many supporters.

Perhaps the only downfall to this match was Dolley’s son Payne. A bit of a challenge as a child, Payne would be disastrous to his family as an adult. An alcoholic and a compulsive gambler, Payne would amass a great amount of debt that would be paid off by his stepfather. Additionally the sale of the Montpelier home following James’ death was a result of Dolley paying for the philandering ways of her son. Although she was a strong, intelligent woman, Payne turned out to be Dolley’s blind spot and greatest weakness (ibid).

*The Honeymoon Years*

The family moved to Montpelier in 1797 at the end of Madison’s fourth term in Congress. In anticipation for his new family, Madison made some renovations to the mansion. He added a thirty foot extension to the north end of the mansion, consisting of four rooms: a dining room, and three bedrooms; one downstairs, and two upstairs, as well
as an external kitchen. James lived here with Dolley until 1801 when Thomas Jefferson became President and called upon Madison to be his Secretary of State. James accepted and came out of his retirement. Dolley also had a role to play during the Jefferson administration and acted as hostess for the widower president. This would prepare her for her role as First Lady during her husband’s presidency.

Figure 2 Montpelier's First Floor in 1797
Presidency

In 1808 Madison won the presidential election against Charles Cotesworth Pinckney. Legend has it that Pickney noted after his defeat, “I was beaten by Mr. and Mrs. Madison. I might have had a better chance if I faced Mr. Madison alone.” Dolley clearly played a key role in politics by using her skills in the domestic sphere of women to influence the political world of men. This would be a continuing trend throughout Madison’s presidency as his wife worked tirelessly to support her husband in his political career.

When the Madisons arrived at the Executive Mansion it was hardly a place to host lavish parties. During this time, Dolley transformed what was the presidential mansion into a stage for public politics. She worked with architect Benjamin Latrobe to make the interior of the house suitable for entertaining not only American politicians but foreign delegates as well. However, not wanting to imitate the royal courts of Europe, Dolley merged simplicity and refinement creating a unique brand of American elegance.

After successfully renovating the interior of the White House, Dolley started to hold her Wednesday Drawing Rooms. These events served as an opportunity for political opponents to socialize and discuss politics outside of regular Washington business hours. Dolley created a comfortable and hospitable atmosphere in the hopes of ending the fierce political segregation that held the young government in its grasp. Invitations were not required in order to attend, so even members of the public could have the opportunity to meet their president. If politicians disagreed or had an unfavorable opinion of her
husband, Dolley made sure to captivate and disarm them before introducing them to James.

Under Madisons’ administration, the country once again faced conflict with Britain in the War of 1812. While James defined his presidency by not sacrificing personal liberties in a time of conflict, Dolley also made a name for herself. When British troops invaded Washington, she waited until the last minute to leave her home. Before she fled to safety, she made sure to rescue the Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington (realizing it was a strong national symbol and likely war trophy) as well as important government documents. British troops burned the city, but Dolley campaigned for the rebuilding of Washington instead of moving the capital to Philadelphia. She continued to host her Wednesday Drawing Rooms and dinner parties at their residence. With the end of the conflict, the country experienced a surge of patriotism that ended Madison’s term in office on a high note (ibid).

Retirement

At the end of Madison’s second term as president in 1817, he returned with Dolley to Montpelier. While in office he had made additional changes to the estate to match his rising social status. During his first term, he merged the duplex into one large house with a drawing room and a grand entrance. These renovations took place between 1809 and 1812 and made Montpelier a more suitable place to entertain guests.
James and Dolley entertained an almost constant stream of visitors. Among them was General LaFayette. In 1824 Dolley wrote to John George Jackson,

"We have lately had a visit from Gen LaFayette and family of a few days—the former, you know, was an old friend of Mr. M---’s. I was charmed with his society—and never witnessed so much enthusiasm as his appearance occasioned here."

There certainly seemed to be a sense of living history at Montpelier. Dolley made sure to mention that such a famous person is an old friend of her husband’s. The mention of such familiarity with an international icon helped reinforce her husband’s status as an important historical figure.

During a time before presidential pensions, Madison was left to make a living for himself after his time in office. Unlike his career in politics, Madison’s attempts at

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1 Dolley Payne Todd Madison to John George Jackson, 27 November 1824
running a profitable plantation were not successful. In a letter to her son Payne in 1832, Dolley recounts the uncertainly of their finances:

"Mr. Madison is better—a few days ago he was ill, & I now hope he will soon be well enough for me to leave him on an expedition to the Court House. It would be quite an event, for me to go there—5 miles from home! the last tobacco both of M's Madisons and John's was a failure, the first sold at 5$—the last at 7$—When 17 was expected—so it goes with planters—I would rather earn, or receive the salary of one of A. Ds daughters, than depend on a plantation for pin money." ²

Despite these financial hardships, the Madisons continued to entertain. It is interesting to see that Dolley acknowledged their financial woes but continued to spend money (or build credit) when it is clearly not a practical choice.

The dinners hosted by the Madisons were not only frequent but exhibited a refined taste. In 1825 Congressman George Ticknor wrote,

"The table is very ample and elegant, and somewhat luxurious; it is evidently a serious item in the account of Mr. M's happiness, and it seems to be his habit to pass about an hour, after the cloth is removed, with a variety of wines of no mean quality."³

They were also a great variety of foods available to the guests at the Madison's table. Food was "not only abundantly, but handsomely provided; good soups, flesh, fish, and vegetables, well cooked- desert and excellent wines of various kinds." These are but two of many accounts by visitors attesting to the extravagance with which the Madisons entertained.

² (Dolley Payne Todd Madison to John Payne Todd, 20 July 1832)

³ Ingersoll, "Visit to Mr. Madison"; George Ticknor, Life, Letters, and Journals of George Ticknor (2 vols; Boston1876),1:347
As James got older, not even his failing health could keep him from participating in these dinners. While he was bedridden, a doorway between the dining room and his study allowed for him to interact with guests as they dined at the mansion. As was the story of his life, even with a body that seemed to betray him, Madison’s mind remained just as sharp and clear as any day of his youth. Perhaps this was one of the ways in which the Madison sought to keep his legacy present to all who visited Montpelier.

James Madison Jr, passed away on June 28th, 1836. As Paul Jennings, Madison’s manservant recalls:

“I was present when he died. That morning Sukey brought him his breakfast, as usual. He could not swallow. His niece, Mrs. Willis, said, "What is the matter, uncle Jeames?" "Nothing more than a change of mind, my dear." His head instantly dropped, and he ceased breathing as quietly as the snuff of a candle goes out.”

With James’ death came the end of entertaining at Montpelier. The dining room was no longer filled with the chatter of guests, the clinking of glasses, or the lively reminiscence of a Founding Father. Dolley remained at Montpelier for only 2 more years before the strain and loneliness of plantation life without her husband took its toll. She returned to her beloved Washington where she died in 1849.

---

4 Jennings, Paul.. *A colored man's reminiscences of James Madison*. (Brooklyn, 1865),20
Finding the Feast: Methodology

Archaeological work at Montpelier began in the 1970’s. It is currently under the direction of Dr. Matthew B. Reeves. Most investigations have focused on bringing the lifestyle of the Madisons and the enslaved community to life. Excavations have uncovered a burned kitchen from Mt. Pleasant, middens associated with the mansion (the focus of this thesis), the lives of the enslaved community, as well as Civil War encampments on the property. For the purposes of this thesis, only two assemblages will be discussed, both of which are associated with those living in the mansion.

Archaeological investigations in the Fall of 2007 revealed Dolley’s Midden, located on a downward slope northeast of the mansion. Over 25,000 artifacts were recovered, including more than 25 pounds of glass, bone, and ceramics (Reeves and Rich, 2009). In 2007, Matthew Reeves and Melissa Rich of the Montpelier Archaeology Department, conducted a minimum vessel count from the Dolley’s Midden site. As a result of the analysis, 250 individual historic vessels were identified: 154 were ceramic and 96 were glass.

Another mansion-associated deposit found at Montpelier corresponds to Madison Sr.’s household. This site is known as the Northwest Yard. Excavated in 2002 by the Montpelier Archaeology Department, the Northwest Yard deposits predate Dolley’s Midden and reflect the taste and style of a wealthy late colonial/early Republic Virginia planter. The assemblage was found on the outer side of the north mansion wall, which was taken down during Madison Jr.’s first renovations in 1797. It was found above the deposit from the wall and is capped by the renovations taking place in 1808 (Trickett,
The presence of a large quantity of Chinese and French porcelain vessels are indicators of the family’s wealth. In 2009, Kimberly Trickett and Christine Heacock from the Montpelier Archaeology Department conducted a minimum vessel analysis from the Northwest Yard and identified 189 individual vessels, including 167 ceramic and 23 glass vessels (Trickett et al, 2009).

Table 1 Comparison of Ceramic Types Present in Dolley’s Midden and NW Yard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ceramic Type</th>
<th>Dolley’s Midden (Count)</th>
<th>Northwest Yard (Count)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shell-edged pearlware</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer-print pearlware</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Willow</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creamware (edge decorated)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand-painted Pearlware</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Salt-glazed Stoneware</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porcelain (Fitzhugh Moth Pattern)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porcelain (Fitzhugh Medallion pattern)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoneware (brown)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Porcelain</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Porcelain-Nast Pattern</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Porcelain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Porcelain (Bamboo and Peony)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Porcelain-Blue Underglaze</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Porcelain-Imari Style</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Porcelain-Overglazed</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Porcelain-Nanking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Porcelain-Canton</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Porcelain-no visible decoration</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whieldonware</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. Coarse Earthenware</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. Fine Earthenware</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Earthenware (no visible decoration)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoneware-other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>154</strong></td>
<td><strong>167</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The comparative chart shows that there is a greater variety of ceramic types present in Dolley’s Midden. The Northwest Yard has 15 types of ceramics while Dolley’s Midden has 20. The quality and quantity of porcelain in these two assemblages also attests to the shifts in taste that took place over a twenty-year period at Montpelier.
Porcelain is the most frequently occurring ceramic type in both middens. Porcelain represents 36% of the vessels recovered from Dolley’s Midden and 33% of vessels in the Northwest Yard. While the percentage of porcelain from the two sites is similar, there is a great disparity in the frequency of Chinese porcelain between these deposits. In the eighteenth century, Chinese porcelain was a relatively rare and exotic ceramic style associated with the wealthy. Chinese porcelain comprises 96% of all porcelain found in the Northwest Yard, while it only represents 44% found in Dolley’s Midden. The remaining 56% of porcelain found in Dolley’s Midden are either French or English, which would have been more fashionable and, perhaps expensive, during the 19th-Century. The increase in French porcelain may reflect the growing appreciation of French goods and the increasing trade with France after the American Revolution. This disparity illustrates a shift in taste occurring at Montpelier.

Porcelain Categories

Since porcelain serves as a main ceramic marker for elite taste at Montpelier, the categories into which it has been separated should be discussed. Chinese porcelains and other exotic goods have long been associated with elite tastes. The trend seems to have started in the 17th-century with Queen Mary II of Orange. Her use of Chinese porcelain as a decorative element in her home secured the ceramic’s association with wealth and refinement (Cocks:1989) She made other decisions reflecting refinement and good taste, such as the chartering of the College of William and Mary in 1693. Robert Leathe (1999) discusses the association of Chinese export porcelain with the wealthy families of
Charleston, South Carolina during the 18th-century. According to Leathe, the manufacture of British and French porcelains expanded and these wares began to replace Chinese porcelain in elite dining in the early 19th-century.

The abundance of Chinese porcelain in the Northwest Yard deposit is highly variable. The presence of Canton, Nanking, Fitzhugh patterns, and Imari style Chinese porcelain illustrate the wealth of the Madisons and help secure the date for the deposit. The Canton pattern has a wide date range between 1785 and 1853. Canton is generally considered a lower-quality type of Chinese porcelain, especially in comparison to Nanking porcelain (Madsen, 1995). Its absence in Dolley’s midden is by no means surprising. Nanking porcelain is characterized by the use of trellis, diaper, and spearhead patterns along the rim (Mudge 1962). It has a date range from (1765-1820). Nanking porcelain is characterized by finer brushwork and better-detailed painted. Vessels with patterns that were not easily identified were given the generic label of “blue underglaze.” Although not exactly pinpointed, their presence is still important as it shows that Madison Sr. was adhering to the tastes of elites during the 18th-century. Several vessels featuring blue underglaze painting and red overglaze enamelling were recovered from the Northwest Yard. These are decorated in the Imari Style and date from 1700 to 1760. These porcelains were meant to imitate Japanese porcelains being produced during this period (Godden 1979:172).

Two decorative styles recovered in the Fitzhugh Butterfly pattern and the Fitzhugh medallion pattern serve as a Chinese example of shifting tastes between the two deposits. The Fitzhugh Butterfly pattern is a source of debate among experts. While some characterize this pattern under Nanking, others categorize it under the Fitzhugh pattern.
These ceramics date from 1765-1800. This pattern is completely absent in Dolley’s Midden. Since the manufacture date ends in 1800 they would have been out of fashion by the time of Madison’s retirement. The lack of such vessels is a testament to Dolley’s preoccupation with embracing the latest fashion.

The Fitzhugh Medallion style was one of the later porcelains manufactured for the American market and dates from about 1800 to 1820. The change in the type of Fitzhugh patterns found in these two deposits shows that the Madison made an effort to acquire the most stylish ceramics available at the time of the retirement years.

Figure 4 Vessel 535 Showing Fitzhugh Medallion Pattern

Figure 5 Vessel 536 Showing the Fitzhugh Moth Pattern
**English Porcelain**

One prominent English porcelain found in Dolley's Midden was the Bamboo and Peony pattern. This transfer-print porcelain is characterized by large peony flowers, sprigs of bamboo, a bridge, and a spearhead pattern. It was manufactured by Davenport of Longport, England (Reeves and Rich, 2009) between 1815 and 1825 and represents the Madisons acquisition of the most fashionable dinnerwares available. The quality of Davenport wares is generally considered finer than anything produced by his contemporaries. His best works are seen in what he provided for royalty and the gentry (Hughes, 1955). Transfer-print porcelains were generally more expensive than other ceramics available at the time. George Miller's CC index values for porcelain and transfer-printed vessels show that these ceramics were at the height of their value around the time of Madison’s retirement (Miller, 1999).

**French Porcelain-Nast Pattern**

One exciting aspect of Dolley’s Midden is the appearance of the presidential porcelain at Montpelier. When Washington was burned down, most of the Presidential china was burned with it. The set was purchased in 1806 when Madison was Secretary of State from the factory of Jean Népomucène Hermann Nast (Klapthor, 1999). This set stands in stark contrast to other porcelains present with a series of orange-gold wheel patterns outlined in black.

Figure 6 Vessel 549 Illustrating Bamboo and Peony Pattern
Although there are no significant differences between the two middens in terms of vessel forms, there are some interesting disparities present in the data. Vessels associated with serving, such as tureens, are present in Dolley’s Midden but absent in the Northwest Yard. There are also fewer vessels that can be positively identified as to their specific use. Vessels more often fall under general categories such as “teaware” or “flatware” than specific use categories such as “dinner plate” or “dessert plate”.

Figure 7 Nast Porcelain fragment found in Dolley’s Midden as it compares to a complete example
Table 2 Vessel Forms Present in Dolley’s Midden and NW Yard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vessel Form</th>
<th>Dolley’s Midden</th>
<th>Northwest Yard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chamberpot</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee cup</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee cup with handle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flatware- side plate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flatware- Soup Plate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flatware-breakfast plate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flatware-dessert plate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flatware-dinner plate</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flatware-general</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flatware-plate</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollowware</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollowware- Bowl</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollowware- Bowl/cup</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollowware- Mug</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollowware- Pitcher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving Platter</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving- Tureen</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving- Tureen, lidded</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving vessel-footed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving vessel-unidentified</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaware</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaware- Teapot</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaware-cup</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaware-saucer</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarian-jar</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarian-jug</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarian-milkpan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>154</strong></td>
<td><strong>167</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Glass

It is interesting to see that the greatest disparities between Dolley’s Midden and the Northwest Yard occur in the distribution of glass vessels and not in ceramics. When comparing these two middens, there seems to be a great discrepancy in terms of vessels associated with the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Not only are there four times as many glass vessels in Dolley’s Midden, but there is a much higher variability of glass
vessel types present. While only 6 varieties are found in the Northwest Yard, 19 varieties are found in Dolley’s Midden. Moreover, while only 4 wine bottles could be positively identified in the Northwest Yard, there were 33 wine bottles present in Dolley’s Midden (see Table 3). Such a large number of alcohol bottles is not simply the result of the longer time period represented at Dolley’s Midden since there are still twice as many wine bottles present per year at Dolley’s Midden than in the Northwest Yard. There is also the presence of a demijohn in Dolley’s Midden, and an absence of such vessels in the Northwest Yard.

Another interesting aspect in the distribution of glass is the absence of vessels associated with the drinking of champagne in the Northwest Yard. There are 10 champagne bottles and one champagne glass found in Dolley’s Midden. This can be a testament to the lavishness with which the Madisons entertained in the years following the presidency as opposed to his retirement after serving in Congresses. Although he was nationally recognized, James Madison expanded on his national celebrity by serving as the Nation’s president during a time of crisis. As a result, they would not have been subject to the same pressures to entertain people outside of the family as well as local and regional elites. Having been the leader of the country for 8 years and one of the Founding Fathers, James Madison was likely expected to be able to afford expensive imported alcoholic beverages. Dolley’s role in the social scene in Washington would also add to this pressure. Dolley served as national hostess for 16 years, in an unofficial capacity under Jefferson’s administration, and then officially while her husband was in office. Her role as First Lady, as well as her particular taste for the most fashionable dress, meant her
presence gave those in Orange County and surrounding areas a glimpse into the opulence of Washington life once they retired.

**Table 3 Comparison of Glass Vessels Between Deposits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glass Vessel Type</th>
<th>Dolley’s Midden (count)</th>
<th>Northwest Yard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottle Case</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottle- Champagne</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demijohn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottle-general</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine Bottle</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceutical Bottle</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceutical Vial</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweetmeat Bottle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candelabra</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruet bottle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking vessel</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finger bowl</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stemware</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stemware-champagne</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumbler</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified table glass</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footed Unidentified table glass</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown-lidded</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>96</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The remains of ceramic and glass vessels are a major component of historical archaeology. Comparing such vessels between Dolley’s Midden and the Northwest Yard illustrates a shift in dining habits over 40 years at the Virginia plantation. These comparisons illustrate an increase in entertaining at the mansion. Each midden reflects fashionable dining at the time of deposit. However, in the case of Dolley’s Midden, there is a greater variety of vessels and a significantly larger amount of glass vessels related to
the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Champagne, a beverage still relevant to elite
drinking in modern times is absent in the earlier deposit. Quality and quantity show that
the family has achieved an even greater social and economic status from being wealthy
planters. By 1817, the Montpelier had gone from being the home of wealthy planters in
Orange Country, to displaying and signifying the wealth and status of a national leader
and fashion icon.
Feasting in a Time of Famine?

Feasting offers a framework for understanding assemblages from Montpelier. While historical archaeologists have examined the dining habits of 18th-century elites, entertainment has typically served as the lens through which such opulence has been explored. Feasting, on the other hand, offers another perspective on such activity, but emphasizes the political and strategic nature of such events. Dolley’s dinner parties were politically motivated events during her time in Washington. However, once they retired to Montpelier, the entertaining of guests is best characterized as a form of feasting aimed at crystalizing the patron role of the Madisons and ensuring their prominent legacy.

Demonstrating Elite Tastes

In her examination of prestige negotiation among colonial elites, Mary Beaudry (2010) discussed the role of extravagant entertaining at the Spencer-Peirce Little Farm in Newbury, Massachusetts. Beaudry traced the many owners of the estate and found that Nathaniel Tracy, the property owner, acquired and resided at the home starting in 1778. Beaudry notes the luxurious way in which the family lived and their reputation for using their home as a place to display their wealth. A merchant by trade, Tracy engaged in government-funded privateering during the American Revolution and amassed a fortune. However, a series of misfortunes knocked the family down financially and they could no longer entertain guests by 1786. According to Beaudry, “lavishing hospitality upon guests in one’s home provided the choicest opportunity for enhancing prestige, for in
such contexts the wealth, taste, and social genius of host and hostess could be displayed in a multiplicity of ways. (Beaudry, 2010)

Although Beaudry acknowledges the ways in which dinner parties and other forms of entertainment helped in the display of one’s wealth and increase prestige, she does not examine these activities through the lens of feasting. While Beaudry acknowledges a kind of strategy on the part of the host and hostess in maintaining prestige, such activity does not seem to have the aim of benefitting the hosts in the future. The Tracy family, famous for entertaining, stopped doing so when their financial status no longer allowed them to participate in such lavish activities. This seems like a logical reaction in response to financial hardship. However, this pattern contrasts sharply with the Madisons. Even with their shifting fortunes, James and Dolley continued to lavishly entertain their guests. Although the Madisons and the Tracys were both famed for their entertaining they did so on entirely different scales and perhaps for entirely different reasons.

The Tracys acquired their fortune very rapidly. The home in which they lived was not one built by their family, but purchased, suggesting they were part of the nouveau riche class. Beaudry even relays an incident in which Mr. Tracy tried serving frog soup to a group of Frenchmen visiting his home, showing his misunderstanding of French cuisine. Even with a fortune, he could not hide the lack of pedigree tied to his name.

On the other hand, Montpelier was a family home. It was built by James Madison’s father on land that had belonged to the family for generations. The Madisons were already established elites in Orange County long before James Madison Jr. ever
became president. It is in this difference that the pressure to entertain would push the
Madisons to do so when it made no rational financial sense. Evidently, more was
expected from a former president and his famous hostess-wife than from a privateering
merchant. Additionally, the aforementioned dependence of the Madisons on the
maintenance of James status as a national figure after his death served to increase the
pressure to entertain notable guests

Martha Zierden (1999) also discusses prestige negotiation in her examination of
merchant Nathaniel Russel’s rise to the top society in Charleston, South Carolina. The
presence of imported porcelains from Britain and China reflect the expensive tastes of
elite society in Charleston. Zierdan also emphasized the need of the elite to purchase the
newest wares available in order to display wealth. This behavior is also evident at
Montpelier in Dolley’s Midden, where the number of British and French porcelains
exceeded those in the earlier deposit. The presence of champagne and wine bottles also
attests to the emphasis on fashionable display and wealth. Zierden’s observation that
those holding higher positions in society used tablewares, teawares, and other
commodities to display their wealth is also present at Montpelier. Zierdan’s study of
Charleston identifies archaeological markers of elite status that are equally germane to
the material culture recovered from Dolley’s Midden. The use of fine ceramics, as well as
the knowledge of how to properly use them, were part of the social performance of dining
that the Madisons used to reinforce their position as patrons. While there is inequality
created by the act of hosting, the display of the most fashionable and expensive ceramics
was crucial for securing a permanent host status. Not only did the Madison feed large
groups of people, they also served their guests on the finest dinnerwares available.
In conjunction with the use of the “right” ceramics, there must also be an appropriate venue for entertaining to take place. In James Jordan’s (1988) discussion of dining rooms in Charleston, Jordan describes the dining room as a “public stage for the gentleman planter, merchant, or professional.” Madison’s renovations in 1797 included an additional dining room. At the time, there was a separation between his home with Dolley (occupying the north end of the mansion) and the space shared by James Madison Sr. and Nelly Conway Madison. Yet, while he was president, Montpelier was transformed into a place suitable for entertaining. Architecture was one more way in which the Madisons displayed their wealth and created the proper environment for entertaining.

Upon arriving at Montpelier guests would immediately be greeted with the sight of the sprawling mansion. After ascending the stairs of the portico and entering the home, they would see the impressive drawing room. The museum-like appearance served as a showroom to testify the Madisons’ wealth. After this, they would be treated to a dinner on the most fashionable service available, eat fine foods, drink the best wine and champagne, and be regaled by the stories of a former president while being charmed by a woman who was the toast of Washington. The Madisons used every means of display available to them in order to communicate their high social standing. Through architecture, food, drink, and art they would preserve the family’s legacy in Orange country and ensure the maintenance Madison’s national celebrity.
Theoretical Discussions of Feasting

Historical archaeological studies of elite households in New England, South Carolina, and other areas have stressed the use of material culture to investigate the way elite dining and entertaining expressed wealth. These earlier studies overlook the nuanced nature of elite entertaining and overlook the strategic nature of elite dining and drinking performances. The concept of feasting offers an alternative and more nuanced approach. Feasting has been examined by archaeologists working on prehistoric and small-scale societies, and feasts are defined by certain universals, including the presence of large groups of people and surplus food. Feasts also possess specialized eating and drinking vessels. Feasting by Aztec nobility, for example, is not only documented on ancient codices but also marked by the presence of elaborate ceramic vessels at feasting sites (Smith et al 2003).

Brian Hayden lays out a list of archaeological markers of feasts, emphasizing foods and vessels types as key markers of these events. Archaeological signatures of feasts according to Hayden are: food (rare or labor intensive), preparation vessels, serving vessels, food-preparation facilities, special food-disposal features, feasting facilities, special locations, associated prestige items, ritualized items of etiquette, pictorial and written records. The Dolley’s Midden assemblage at Montpelier has all of these features. The presence of elite-type foods (young pig), porcelain serving vessels, four kitchens on the property, middens, dining hall, expensive porcelain, large amount of alcohol bottles all conform to Hayden’s markers of feasting. Documentary accounts of dinner events at Montpelier also describe the political and strategic feast-like atmosphere of these events.
While some of the attributes of feasting are present in the Northwest Yard, they do not satisfy the criteria laid out by Hayden nearly as well as Dolley’s Midden. While there are certain prestige items present, they are not too different from what one might expect from a wealthy plantation owner in late eighteenth century Virginia. The drastic differences in the distribution of glass vessels between the two middens illustrates feasting with a much higher frequency of vessels associated with recreational drinking occurring during the Retirement Years. In short, the materials recovered from the Northwest Yard at Montpelier paint a different picture, one that, while indicative of elite dining habits, downplays the social, organizational, and strategic nature of feasts.

Archaeological signatures of feasting during the retirement years are not only present in the form of glass and ceramic vessels, but also in faunal remains and architecture of the mansion at the time. After Madison’s presidency, the duplex has been merged to have one grand portico. After climbing the steps to the front entrance, guests would be greeted by the sight of a drawing room meant to impress with paintings and curiosities. The front of the home serves more as a public space, with Nelly’s best room in the front (what used to be her dining room). The only existing dining room is now the one Madison added in 1797. The house has clearly been remodeled to be a space for entertaining and not simply two separate homes.
Table 4 Markers of Feasting as Described by Brian Hayden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feasting Attribute</th>
<th>Description by Hayden</th>
<th>Presence in Dolley's Midden and Montpelier</th>
<th>Northwest Yard and Mansion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Rare or labor-intensive animal species, &quot;recreational&quot; foods</td>
<td>Suckling pig, wine bottles, champagne vessels, coffee, and tea</td>
<td>Wine bottles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation Vessels</td>
<td>stoneware (scarce but still present)</td>
<td>stoneware</td>
<td>stoneware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving Vessels</td>
<td>Unusual number of vessels, unusual quality</td>
<td>French, English, and Chinese Porcelain, Tureens</td>
<td>Chinese porcelain (absence of tureens)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food-preparation facilities</td>
<td>Unusual number and/or size</td>
<td>Four kitchens (2 in house, 2 external), barbeque pit in South Yard</td>
<td>Only one external kitchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Food Disposal Features</td>
<td>Feasting Middens</td>
<td>Dolley's Midden</td>
<td>Northwest Yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feasting Facilities</td>
<td>Special structures</td>
<td>Added dining room and outside lawn for barbeques</td>
<td>Dining room (not exactly for feasting and more function)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Locations</td>
<td>Loci associated with nuclear households</td>
<td>Dining room</td>
<td>Typical dining room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated Prestige Items</td>
<td>Presence or absence, and relative abundance of prestige items</td>
<td>Finger bowl</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritualized Items of Etiquette</td>
<td>Ritualized vessels for consumption of alcohol</td>
<td>Wine and Champagne Bottles, and stemware</td>
<td>Stemware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictorial and Written Records</td>
<td>Letters by DPM and family</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although I use his markers of feasting, I do not entirely ascribe to Hayden’s models of feasts in the Montpelier context. There are three basic types of feasts Hayden discusses: alliance and cooperation feasts, economic feasts (for gain), and diacritical feasting (meant to display status). Alliance and cooperation feasts can be used to create solidarity and gain political supporters. While the Madisons may have wanted to achieve these goals, it does not make sense during the retirement years and would probably be more applicable to their time in Washington. Economic feasts can be competitive, used
to pay tribute, or acquire political positions. Again, this model does not fit well the Montpelier context because Madison’s formal political life is largely behind him. Diacritical feasting aims to display wealth and status. While a provocative and somewhat fitting model, I believe Dolley’s dinners were strategic and not solely motivated by display.

It could be argued that this historical context contains elements of all three of Hayden’s models. The Madisons could be simultaneously attempting to gain supporters, help James papers retain monetary value by keeping him socially relevant, while also hoping to reinforce the illusion that they were still wealthy. What makes me reject this notion is the timing of these meals and their frequency. The Madisons ran the North portion and South portion of the house on different schedules. Nelly Conway Madison was alive for many years after James’ retirement. The South side of the mansion was run on her schedule and differed not only in timing but in decorative style. As Margaret Bayard Smith observed during a visit to Montpelier:

“One wing of the house, during her lifetime, was exclusively appropriated to the venerable and venerated mother of Mr. Madison.....aged matron preserved the habits and hours of her early life, attended by old family slaves and surround by her children and grandchildren. Under the same roof, divided only by a partition wall was thus exhibited the customs of the beginning and end of a century; thus offering a strange but most interesting exhibition of the difference between the old and the present age.”

While Nelly Madison maintained the old habits of a Virginia planter, Dolley and James maintained their Washington lifestyle. This was not only clear in the stream of visitors, but in a display of urban refinement by adhering to a completely different timetable than

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the “old ways.” This also served as a way to give visitors a taste of the urbanity and
trendiness of the Washington lifestyle. This would have set the Madisons apart from
other wealthy planters in the area. The presence and close proximity of Nelly Conway
Madison and her adherence to more traditional country customs would have made the use
of time even more evident. Having the antithesis of an urban lifestyle existing in the same
household would have made the refinement of the Madisons even more apparent.

It is this dualism at Montpelier that makes me believe that feasting here is much
more complex than just containing elements of all three models laid out by Hayden. Any
wealthy plantation owner wishing to make a good impression could have pursued these
goals. What makes this different is Madison’s role in the nation’s history and the impact
of Dolley Madison on the trends of high society in Washington.

Michael Dietler’s discussion of the patron-role feast offers a better fit for the
Madisons. Staying at Montpelier and entertaining a constant stream of guests put James
and Dolley in the role of continual and generous hosts. As Dielter points out, guests
acknowledge that they are in a subordinate status to their hosts and serve to maintain the
superior status of the host. This type of hosting becomes expected of those in high
political and social positions (Dietler 2001).

Dietler also mentions that if such hosts do not maintain high standards in regard to
the quality and amount of food provided, dissatisfaction among those in the community
usually occurs. The existence of first-hand accounts by visitors to Montpelier during the
retirement years shows that there would have been a great deal of pressure on the
Madisons. Any decline in standards would have been quickly noted and discussed,
which would put the Madisons in a vulnerable position. After playing hostess on part of
the entire country for so many years, Dolley would have been expected to maintain this role during James’ retirement.

Before James’ retirement from the presidency, Montpelier was already experiencing the pressures of this social obligation. As Dolley writes in 1808 to Anna Payne Cutts from Montpelier,

“We have had a continuel round of company-which has been burthensome tho I have taken no kind of trouble with them-the day I was most sick 15 or 20 dined here of the family & connection but I did not quit my bed or know anything about them”

Even at a time when such hospitality was something the family could afford, it still took its toll. This round of guests occurred before the renovations done by Madison during his presidency. Perhaps such incidents helped inspire the reconstruction of the mansion into a more grand space, which facilitated feasting and was more befitting the status of the nation’s leader.

In addition to using feasts to display and maintain a higher social status, as well as function as a type of advertisement to keep the Madison legacy relevant and lucrative, the Madisons also used feasts as a means of escape. While the Madisons may not have been drinking too much themselves, the creation of a festive and pleasurable atmosphere would have probably been welcome in contrast to the quiet isolation of plantation life.

Having redefined the habits of elite behavior in Washington, Dolley did not seem to be entirely enamored with the country lifestyle. She continually noted her discontent with living at Montpelier, away from the high society of Washington. As she writes to her friend Sarah (Sally) Coles Stevenson,

6 Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Anna Payne Cutts, 3 June 1808

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"I have just now received by post your welcome letter my ever dear cousin, and cannot express my anxiety to embrace you once more! But a spell rests upon me and withholds me from those I love best in this world—not a mile can I go from home—and in no way can I account for it, but that my Husband is also fixed there. This is the third winter in which he has been engaged in the arrangement of papers, and the business appears to accumulate as he proceeds—so that I calculate its out-lasting my patience and yet I cannot press him to forsake a duty so important, or find it in my heart to leave him during its fulfillment."7

Such dissatisfaction with the quiet life at Montpelier seems to have been a source of anxiety for Dolley. Her understanding of the importance of the eventual selling of her husband’s papers coupled with the knowledge of their financial woes may have led Dolley to use entertaining as a means of distraction from their harsh reality and help her rekindle memories of happier times of national influence and financial comfort.

Historical document suggest that Madison did not engage in excess drinking. As his manservant Paul Jennings (1865) recounts:

"He was temperate in his habits. I don't think he drank a quart of brandy in his whole life. He ate light breakfasts and no suppers, but rather a hearty dinner, with which he took invariably but one glass of wine. When he had hard drinkers at his table, who had put away his choice Madeira pretty freely, in response to their numerous toasts, he would just touch the glass to his lips, or dilute it with water, as they pushed about the decanters. For the last fifteen years of his life he drank no wine at all."8

Dolley could also attest to this aspect of her husband’s character. When she wrote to Charles Jared Ingersoll concerning her husband’s personal habits she noted that James “Was ever temperate but reasonably fond of generous diet & good wines-tea-and Coffee."9

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7 Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Sarah (Sally) Coles Stevenson, February 1820
8 Jennings, Paul.. A colored man’s reminiscences of James Madison. (Brooklyn, 1865),
9 Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Charles Jared Ingersoll, 15 May 1839
Archaeological evidence however shows that a great amount of drinking was taking place at Montpelier during the retirement years. While no one would suggest Madison was a drunkard by any means, the fact that the temperance movement was taking place at the time of Jennings’ memoir is interesting. The high regard in which the Founding Fathers were held coupled with his association with the family could be motivating factors for Jennings to keep Madison’s memory pure. While archaeological evidence does not seek to discredit the accounts by Paul Jennings and Dolley, it can raise questions as to whether the picture painted of Madison is based on fact or romanticized memories of a national icon. Given the pressures Madison faced financially and the emotional stress caused by his step son Payne, anyone could sympathize with the man for indulging in a few drinks to make daily life a little more bearable.

The occasional drink would not account for the great discrepancy in the data concerning artifacts associated with the consumption of alcohol. These documents attesting to Madison’s moderation support the more likely possibility that the increased number of alcohol bottles between the middens is evidence of Madison trying to meet the demands of his role as constant host. Alcohol plays a role in feasting by increasing sociability among guests and contributing to the overall secondary function of feasting at Montpelier as a means of escape.

Even in the absence of documentary evidence, artifacts and architecture attest to the function of feasting as patron-role. Montpelier’s relative isolation from surrounding neighbors and prominence in Orange County, sets the home apart from the common
population. The house itself serves to show a kind of chiefly presence. Archaeological deposits representing only refuse from the house and not every vessel used show that there was a great deal of feasting occurring.

Such an emphasis on displaying wealth may lead one to believe that diacritical feasting could also be used as a model for Montpelier. Like patron-role feasting, diacritical feasting conveys exclusiveness (ibid). However, since the Madisons are constantly entertaining guests from all social and economic backgrounds, they are communicating their message of superiority to a wider audience. It is not enough to simply display one’s elite status if James’ papers are to be sold and have monetary value. It is much more effective to have guests happily accept a subordinate role to the family in a very enjoyable way.

So, while other models of feasting can be applied, Dielter’s patron-role feasting is the most appropriate in the context of the retirement years. One could argue that feasting at Montpelier shifted from diacritical to patron-role between the two deposits. At first, Madison may have been using fine Chinese porcelain to communicate wealth and status to a small group of family members and other wealthy planters. This would only serve to communicate refinement without the expectation of pay-off in the end. James Madison Jr.’s notoriety on a national level and financial hardships endured by the plantation would necessitate a shift in the motives for feasting on the estate.
Conclusions

The dining habits of elite members of society in 19th-century Virginia have been thoroughly explored in the literature of historical archaeology. Examining these rituals through the lens of feasting sheds light onto the motives that may have been driving forces for these events. At James Madison’s Montpelier, archaeological and documentary evidence both serve to help understand events at the mansion during the retirement years from 1817-1836.

Dolley’s national legacy as a talented hostess makes Montpelier an ideal place to study feasting. Archaeological remains in Dolley’s Midden give a clear picture of elite dining habits through the quality and quantity of fine ceramics and abundance of alcoholic bottles. When compared to the earlier deposit of the Northwest Yard, Dolley’s efforts to maintain the highest standards of entertaining are even more apparent. Her use of British and French porcelains stands in stark contrast to the abundance of Chinese porcelain present in the Northwest Yard, a testament to her use of visual markers to display status.

The great disparity of alcohol bottles between the two middens is another piece of evidence for feasting occurring during the retirement years. The use of elite and recreational beverages is a marker of feasting behavior as discussed by Brian Hayden. Dolley’s Midden not only contains more vessels associated with alcohol consumption, it also has a greater variety of the types of alcoholic beverages consumed. The absence of champagne-related vessels in the Northwest Yard but clear presence in Dolley’s Midden is one such marker of elite uses of alcohol. Additionally, remarks regarding Madison’s
temperance in terms of alcohol consumption show that such an abundance of alcohol-related vessels are the result of extensive entertaining.

Documentary evidence conveying that the Madisons rarely left their home, in addition to constantly entertaining visitors, firmly establishes their activities in the realm of patron-role feasting as discussed by Michael Dietler. Their chiefly presence in Orange County is displayed through the architecture of the mansion, relative isolation, and elaborate parties. In the hopes of maintaining James Madison’s legacy so that papers to be published after his death would provide for Dolley as a widow, the couple endured the burden of being constant hosts.

Feasting at Montpelier not only communicated the superior status of the Madisons to their guests but may have also helped remind the couple of happier times in Washington. These social engagements may have also acted as a means of escape for the couple from financial difficulties and an uncertain future. This examination of feasting behavior at James Madison’s Montpelier shows the potential of 19th century elite dining habits by looking beyond the fashionable aspects of entertaining and investigating the strategy behind these activities.
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