

Fort Harrison

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

VOLUME 31 Special Issue - December 2016

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.

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.

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.

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



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.



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!

UPDATE

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

Students enrolled in JMU's Historical Archaeology course this fall have completed a program of limited field work in the side and front yards. Analysis of the findings is now underway and each student will soon prepare an interpretive report. In the meantime there are some preliminary results to share.

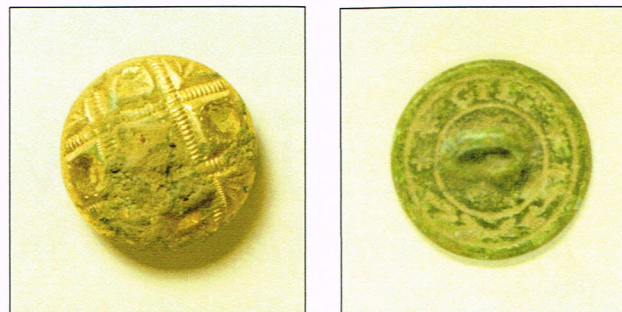
The investigation involved excavation of 14 small shovel tests and three larger units. Placement of the latter was guided by findings from the shovel tests and our own questions about activities surrounding the house. Every test and unit produced artifacts, among other kinds of useful information, some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



Keep the Stars Shining!



Save a complete star for \$75 and receive a lovely 8" x 8" print of your star on archival giclée canvas, ready for framing. Each of the 61 stars has its own unique character, so yours will be unlike any other! The perfect gift for yourself or someone else!

When Mary Stuart Harrison was selecting her lovely fabric colors by candlelight after her day's work was done, little could she have imagined that nearly 200 years later, folks across the Commonwealth would be astounded by her skills.

As a member of our Fort Harrison family, you are part of Mary's story. Her exemplary work deserves to be repaired and protected for future generations.

There are 61 different stars on this extraordinary quilt. We ask that you help save at least one point on a star – or perhaps an entire star – through your special contribution. Your commitment will help to fund the quilt's repair and conservation as well as support the ongoing care of this quilt and other artifacts in the Fort Harrison collection.

YES! I want to help care for Mary's quilt. Please sign me up for

_____ complete 8-pointed star(s) @ \$75.00 each
Qty

_____ point(s) of a star @ \$10.00 each
Qty

I have enclosed my check in the amount of \$ _____

Your Name _____

Address _____

Please clip and return to Fort Harrison, P.O. Box 366, Dayton, VA 22821

TURN THIS PAGE & READ ABOUT THE PLANNED CONSERVATION!



CONSERVATION OF THE MARY STUART HARRISON QUILT.

This magnificent eight-point star quilt, hand pieced and hand quilted by Mary Stuart Harrison in 1820, measures almost 105 inches square. The star blocks, with alternating plain cream ground blocks, create a very pleasing overall design. Typical of the early nineteenth century quilts, hand quilted stitches fill every space. Both the design and execution of the hand quilting by Mrs. Harrison demonstrate her skill level as a needlewoman (and I believe her joy of creating) and add another dimension of beauty to the overall quilt design. With quilting 12-14 stitches to the inch, closely stitched parallel lines fill the star blocks while double-lined crosshatch, clam shells, and feathers fill the background.

The quilt's condition is fragile at this point due to several factors: the fabrics used in the stars break down over time due to the mordants that were used in the dyes, stains from unknown sources are found in background, and there are two places where there is breakdown (i.e. holes) through all three layers. To help stabilize the quilt so it can be displayed, conservation measures will be taken. This process involves applying tulle to the stars to keep the layers stable. Various shades of tulle will be used in an effort to 'make it disappear' as the eye scans the quilt. Other measures will be used to repair/stabilize the holes. The stains, though unsightly, are part of the quilt's story if you will. To address/remove the stains, wet cleaning may provide a solution, but not without risks. My recommendation at this point is to first stabilize the quilt and then assess whether wet cleaning would be appropriate.

– Paula Caldwell



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.

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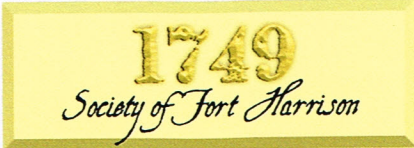
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