

lar destination for tourists, but it does need a few things. That's why we're looking at the museum now."

Dunn looks enviously at the stream of visitors to Gordonsville. "There's got to be something to do on Main Street," he says turning back to Orange. He'd like to see stores open on Sundays, more restaurants, more governmental commitment.

"When tours come to visit Montpelier, when they leave, they can take a right or a left. If you take a right and there's nothing to see, boy that's a bummer. But if you have something close at hand, it makes a tourist destination that much richer," adds Bryant.

The Building, The History, and the Museum-

Built in 1928, the building that houses the James Madison Museum used to be a car dealership. In 1976, a considerable gift from the Taylor family of Meadowfarm established the Bicentennial Commission and provided funds to create, among other things, Taylor Park, Spotswood Plaza and a museum in honor of Orange's most famous native son (he actually wasn't born in Orange County, but came here as an infant). And so the James Madison Museum came into being. It pretty much muddled along.

Six and a half years ago, Gobar walked in. "I was just astounded when I walked in the front door," she remembers. "I wasn't sure I should stay. But I recognized the fact that there is an amazing number of wonderful artifacts here. The collection was fantastic but they had no conception of how to

display them, and the building itself was a total disaster." Floor tiles were broken. Some walls were "wavy," and the fluorescent lighting of the homemade exhibits was, well, ghastly. Anne and a troupe of volunteers rolled up their sleeves and went to work.

"With some of the expertise I had developed over the years plus the hard work of the volunteers...what was accomplished in the first three years of my coming was very gratifying." New floors, new paint, new exhibits, new lighting, new gift shop, a new entrance on the side. But then state funding ran out and some of the grander plans fell by the wayside.

Now those plans are re-awakening. Next month they will rebuild the balcony and steps leading from the upper level to the Hall of Agriculture. They hope to install an elevator for the handicapped and establish more storage space.

As far as displays are concerned, conspicuously missing is a comprehensive interpretation of Orange County's considerable role during all four years of the Civil War. And Dunn also says the winemaking story needs to be told. "Orange County is one of the leading winemaking counties in the entire state. So, there's a lot here."

Dunn continues. "I think for a long time, the museum didn't have as much to offer, as it has in the last five years. Now people can come into the museum and get a sense of the county, the flavor of the county."

Dunn walks through the current eclectic exhibit, "Thirty Years of Collecting." He points to a simple wooden box with a slot in the top. It used to be the ballot box for the Barbour District from 1870 until

the 1920s when, with the recently won women's right to vote, the box became too small to hold all the ballots...a stuffed ballot box, as it were, but for all the right reasons.

"We're at a point where we have to make some decisions that affect the long-range outlook...we're looking at five to 20 years down the road, and this building is not going to be adequate in five years. Something is going to have to happen...If you move this museum, where would you put it?"

'A reliable stream of income'-

If Dunn has used that phrase once in this conversation, he's used it a dozen times, but it still always boils down to money, doesn't it? For the record, the James Madison Museum muddles through with two employees on a \$90,000 operating budget and a capital improvements budget of \$40,000. "There's money there, it just isn't very much and it's never enough," sighs Dunn.

The "reliable stream of income" question is in fact the first one on the eight-point list of questions that was sent to the membership recently. At \$4 per head (less for children, seniors and AAA members) the museum will not survive on gate receipts from its average 5,000 visitors per year. Other than shaking down the usual 600 people locally who consistently give to worthy causes, Dunn has some ideas: 1) Go after some grant money, which is something this former Carter Administration public affairs hand has some experience with and, 2) Do something with the Hilltop.

Ah... the old Hilltop...those of us old enough to remember can

almost see Charlotte and Les, cigarettes dangling on lower lips, doling out burgers and beers at this legendary greasy spoon. It turns out that the museum owns this building, and although it has been abandoned for the past 10 years, there is a recent flurry of interest in leasing it. That would provide a small but "reliable stream of income." Film at 11.

Dunn looks across the street at the brand new, garish red Advance Auto Parts store and shakes his head, "an inappropriate structure for an historical area to say the least," he mutters, adding, the zoning ordinance needs teeth to prevent that from happening again. He points to the Orange County Historical Society across the street where he used to be executive director. "They have the documents and we have the artifacts. So there was always some synergy there," he says of their relationship, adding "It could be closer and it could be more productive."

Further up the street one of the residents of the President Madison Inn shuffles his way downtown. What would be the highest and best use for that building, he wonders? Or maybe we should build something new... "a multi-purpose building that the county might float bonds on and rent space to various organizations to conduct their business within that complex, the purpose... to relieve them of having to spend so much of their money on the buildings that they occupy."

All food for thought. He just wants to be sure that everyone along Caroline and Main Streets, not just the James Madison Museum, is prepared for what the future is bringing, because, like it or not, the tourists are coming.

Orange, are you ready?

James Madison Museum

At a crossroads

Imagine this: You are walking along Main Street, Orange when a car with Minnesota plates pulls up. "What is there to see and do here?" asks the father of a family of four. What do you say? "Uhhh...Nothing?" Shame on you!

Send them to the visitor's center at the Orange Train Station; they'll at least be pointed in the right direction. Or, point out the various stores, galleries and restaurants, not just on Main Street but on May-Fray, Byrd, Chapman, Caroline, and Madison Road. Or direct them to The Arts Center in Orange or JS Mosby's Antiques and Artifacts, or the Orange County Historical Society. But, would you think to send them to the James Madison Museum? Would you? In fact when was the last time you were there? This writer is embarrassed to say, he knocked on the wrong door...didn't even know the entrance was now on the side of the building.



The cutting of a ribbon and several speeches officially opened the Orange County Bicentennial Commission's Museum of Agriculture Saturday, July 3, 1976. Orange County Board of Supervisors Chairman R. Lindsay Gordon, III, center in light coat, is about to cut a ribbon stretched across the front door of commission headquarters on Caroline Street in Orange where the James Madison Museum of Agriculture is located. Taking part in the ceremony from left are: James Cortada, president of the Orange County Historical Society, Gordon District Supervisor R. Monroe Waugh, Orange Mayor Robert P. Butler, Gordonsville Town Councilman Emmett Dunnavant, Gordon, Bicentennial Commission Chariman William H.B. Thomas, director of research and design for the Bicentennial Commission Joseph Morse and C.W. McPherson, the commission's administrator. Commission Chairman Thomas said Orange County has had a long heritage of farming and "it can take pride that James Madison of Montpelier, fourth President of the United States and father of the constitution, was considered by Thomas Jefferson the best farmer in Virginia. Madison contributed significantly to agricultural reform that had far-reaching effects throughout the nation." For these reasons, the commission believes it altogether appropriate to establish this museum during the bicentennial year of 1976. Review file photo

The James Madison Museum is at a crucial juncture. It could go backward and just fade away; it could muddle along as it has for the past 30 years; it could take a wrong turn, or...it could move forward.

A Crossroads-

The James Madison Museum is at a crucial juncture. It could go backward and just fade away; it could muddle along as it has for the past 30 years; it could take a wrong turn, or... it could move forward.

Museum board president Warren Dunn and past president, Arthur Bryant are seated in museum administrator Anne Gobar's cluttered and crowded office. Every horizontal surface supports stacks of stuff: documents, boxes of artifacts, and the like, all mute evidence that the James Madison Museum has run out of space. All three nod their heads somberly to the crossroads question.

"That's exactly where we are," confirms Dunn. "We're in the middle of a strategic planning process right now that I think could ultimately have rather significant changes to the museum. What we're trying to do is build upon the strengths...we're just at a point, given both financial considerations and what's happening at Montpelier, that this is a good time to take a look at it...a really hard look at it."

Gobar agrees. With a lifetime of experience building up small museums and watching them blossom, she's been here before. "Every museum reaches that point. And if you don't move forward, you're never going to go anywhere. You lose the interest of the community. You'll lose the interest of potential visitors. And we've reached that stage."

Doing nothing is indeed an option. After all, Dunn makes a point in his recent newsletter to the museum membership: "It is a genuine measure of how much a community values you if, year after year they somehow come through and cough up enough for the institution to muddle through one more year." But to Dunn and Bryant and Gobar and the other members of this highly-motivated museum board, "muddling through" is just not good enough. Besides, if we just sit down in the middle of the crossroads, we're going to be run over by a couple of trucks.

One of the trucks is the tourist invasion that is coming. The other is a restored Montpelier, due to reopen to the public in a little more than a year. The James Madison Museum board wants to be ready for that event, and is launching this campaign to find out just what it should



Photos by Phil Audibert

Above, the past and current presidents of the James Madison Museum Board, Arthur Bryant (left) and Warren Dunn gather beside the museum's crown jewel, the Campeache chair. Both men are helping prepare a strategic plan for the museum's long range future. Below, Dunn and James Madison Museum Administrator, Anne Gobar go over plans to rebuild the balcony and stairs leading from the upper level to the Hall of Agriculture. Note the Arjalon Price patent house in the background.



do...a strategic plan, due out in May, that will systematically take into account the opinions of all interested parties.

All interested parties includes not only the museum's board, staff, and membership, but also the museum's peers such as Montpelier itself, the historical society, The Arts Center in Orange and the visitor's bureau, to name just a few. And once they've heard from them, they will approach county and town governments, even the public at large so that, "when we do roll out the strategic plan there is a sense of ownership in it," says Bryant. "If we ignore these other groups, what would be their incentive to support our efforts...we want them to have a part and to be involved."

What's in a Name?

It is likely, when all is said and done, that the James Madison Museum will have a new name because of what Bryant terms, "the confusion that that name causes." He explains. "The important thing to remember is when the James Madison Museum was created there was no public recognition of James Madison in Orange County. Montpelier was still in private hands."

That has all changed now. "It's not a museum of James Madison, nor do I think it ever really was," he continues. "We just want to be perceived as a museum in its own right for the county as a whole or the area or region as a whole."

Currently, one room at the museum is devoted exclusively to Orange County's most famous resident. Created by the students of a Mary Washington Exhibit Design class, it provides a comprehensive overview of this extraordinary man, not only as the Father of the Constitution and the nation's fourth president, but also as a resident of Orange County. The room also displays several pieces of Madison's tableware and furniture including the crown jewel, the Campeache chair, which was a gift to Madison from his close friend Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson also referred to his Orange County friend as "the best farmer in the world," and it is interesting to note that the new logo for the museum does not sport a symbol of the Constitution such as a quill pen, but rather a plow. That's because the rest of the museum's

3,000+ artifacts in its permanent collection have little or nothing to do with Madison. For example, one of the recent rotating exhibits covered the distinctly non-Madisonian topic of the forced resettlement of Blue Ridge mountain folk in Madison County to make way for Shenandoah National Park.

And so the James Madison Museum is really a museum that focuses on the heritage of the entire area. To the rear of the building stretches the cavernous Hall of Agriculture that displays all manner of farming tools and equipment, as well as a Model-T and a rare Velie automobile in the same room as an entire patent house dating back to 1733. A name change is virtually assured "to make sure there is no confusion between what the museum is and what Montpelier is," says Dunn.

To the average person, it would seem a no-brainer to combine the two...to even move the James Madison Museum lock stock and barrel out to Montpelier. That is easily said, but not easily done. "There may be certain pieces that we have that would be nice out there, but the

lion's share of our museum doesn't tell the story of James Madison's presidency," explains Bryant. "So, it's really less a natural fit than one would think. The name is what really makes people wonder why..."

And even with a new name the museum will still not abandon Mr. Madison. "He is a part of the history of Orange County," reassures Dunn. "He certainly has a role to play. The question is what is the emphasis?"

The Montpelier Factor-

"It's very friendly now, but that was not always the case," observes Gobar of the relationship between the museum and the presi-

dential home. In fact some donors to the James Madison Museum have stipulated that their items may not go to Montpelier. "In the early days when Montpelier was first open there apparently was a great deal of resentment, and I really don't know the details of what brought that about," continues Anne. "This is something that when I came six years ago I said has got to disappear."

Apparently it has. In fact, when it comes time to talk to peer groups about the museum's future, Montpelier Director, Michael Quinn's name tops the list. "Certainly it is in his interest to make sure that we're successful," reasons Bryant. "He needs a rich destination in the Town of Orange to supplement what he's doing out there."

What they are doing out there should be a reality in a little more than a year...an authentic down-to-the-nail restoration of Montpelier to the tune of \$23.5 million. The new visitors center opens this spring. "I think that our role in this process is getting our destination up to speed to take advantage of what it's going to be like three to five years

from now," continues Bryant. "Three hundred thousand people aren't coming to Montpelier next year, but over time it's going to grow to that and we, here, the arts center, anybody on Main Street needs to be prepared for that transition."

Orange, are you ready?

Keeping the Feet on the Street-

"We've got some high-powered ideas that are floating around in Orange to create a real tourist destination," observes Dunn. "There's no reason that Orange cannot be a very popu-

The James Madison Museum is open year round, weather permitting: weekdays and Saturdays 10-5, and Sundays 1-5.

Admission is \$4 adults, \$3 seniors & AAA members. Orange County kids get in for free, out-of-county are admitted for \$1.

Exhibits change every four months.

Currently the gift shop is having its semi-annual book sale...new books donated by Von Holtzbrinck Publishing Services...90 percent off!