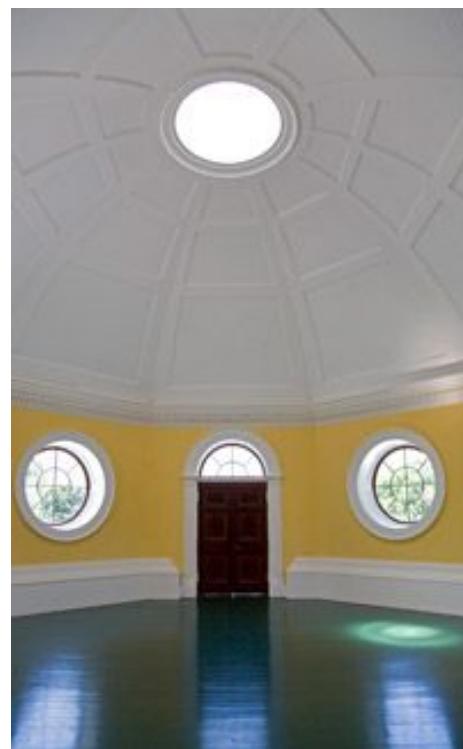


The Dome Room, The Intern Cave and Other Historical Adventures

by Samantha Lin - October 21, 2011

After my freshman year at Georgetown University I returned to my hometown for a summer internship in the Education and Visitor Programs Department at Monticello. I thought it would be absolutely stimulating but not too adventurous. But judging by the title to this mini-memoir, I bet y'all can guess how wrong I was.

My first unexpected adventure was to the infamous dome room. The interns went on an architectural tour of the house. I could hardly keep up with the neoclassical-this and the Palladio-that. I was so intently focused on jotting down the history of the friezes while we walked up the tiny staircase to the third floor that I drifted into the Dome Room in a daze. When I looked up from my notes I immediately felt dwarfed. The windows were abnormally large, the floor was green and everything was symmetrical: combined with the dizzying heat the room took on a dreamlike quality.



This was only enhanced as our guide Martin talked about how Jefferson, the man obsessed with efficiency, delighted in “romanticism” and as he showed us the secret cuddle his granddaughters called their “fairy palace”. Here was an adventure I had not seen coming.

My second big adventure is one that began on my very first day as a guide in the house and hasn't ended yet: my relationship with my fellow guides. The guides sit in what is nicknamed the “Freezer” before going out on tour. It is the second guest bedroom on the first floor. It is at once a library, a debate hall, a classroom and a parlor. In the mornings I can walk in chat about shoes (comfort is a priority), learn about the Randolph family and have a friendly competition naming European capitals. The topics often vary wildly but they always return to a common factor: Jefferson. The passion for



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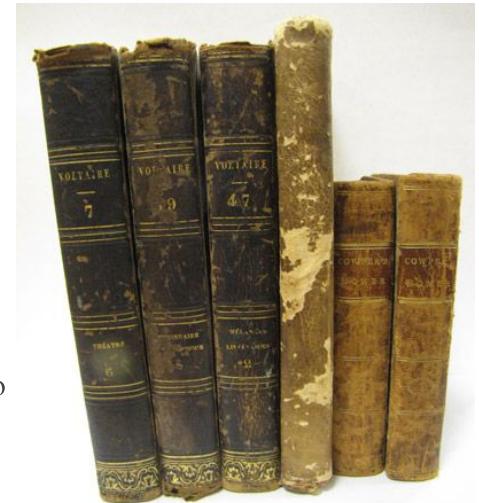
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images/domeroom_0.jpg) Monticello's Dome Room

Jefferson and the joy of knowledge for knowledge's sake are prevalent and incredible. In the Freezer a mixture of retired teachers, geologists and NASA engineers as well as bartenders, lawyers, military men and my fellow interns reminded me of an important truth I had almost forgotten—that learning is (cliché as it sounds) fun. Their love of history, their generous Southern attitude and their willingness to enlighten me was an exhilarating change from a competitive university atmosphere. I can also blame them for my frequent usage of the word “y'all”.

My third historical adventure was because of my dual internship responsibilities. As an intern in the Education & Visitor Programs department I gave tours three days a week and worked with school tour programs in our office (fondly called the Intern Cave) for the remaining two days. Monticello offers various school programs, including one in which students analyze different “pockets” with re-created historical items in order to understand the different roles that people played on the Monticello plantation. For this activity, real 19th century books added a very special element for the young students who did the activity. They were handled frequently and despite precaution showed serious wear. So Jacqueline Langholtz, Manager of School & Group Programs, and I decided to go book shopping. On one of my last days in the Intern Cave Jacqueline and I hopped into her car and drove to a fabulous local bookstore. We dove into the depths of the winding book shelves, losing each other among the towering stacks. We struck gold in the Classics section, a tiny-dimly lit offshoot just beyond the History room, where we found a small two-volume set of “The Iliad of Homer” from 1838. Three more compilations of Voltaire’s work from the 1820’s and a Latin book from 1814 later and we were headed back to Monticello with our discoveries. I could only imagine the reactions of the visiting students as they felt and, in my opinion, most importantly, smelled the same books that Jefferson and his grandchildren would have read. This was history come to life again and Jacqueline and I had helped revive it.



(<https://www.monticello.org/sites/default/files/images/antiquebooks.jpg>).

One Latin volume, a two-volume Iliad, and three volumes of Voltaire from the 19th century were the day's catch.

I was wrong to think my summer would be tame. My friends traveled from Ulaanbaatar to Utah but I traveled from 1743 (Jefferson’s birth year) to 2011, a span of 268 years. I found adventure behind every corner in that unexpected and quirky house and learned to never ever ever think that I finally knew it all. The Dome Room whispered truths about Jefferson’s whole character that was elusive and not easily defined. Guides told me about the sordid affairs of the immense Randolph family and of the water negotiations between Israel and

Syria. Antique books reminded me that history is never “passed on” but alive today if you only stop and smell... the pages. This summer Jefferson himself would have been proud of my adventuring ways, after all, he is the one who supported the Corps of Discovery.

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