



Architectural artifacts being catalogued

Monticello's Restoration Department is currently in the process of formally accessioning its extensive collection of architectural artifacts accumulated during restoration projects over the years.



JF/William L. DeWangr

Above, Jodi Frederiksen (left) and Carol Richardson examine tin-plated iron shingles from Monticello's dome.

Since about 1980 the great majority of materials from projects such as the restorations of Monticello's roof, the terraces at the corners of the house, and the house's window sashes have been labeled with information detailing

where they came from, as well as when and by whom they were saved. There are also a large number of artifacts associated with earlier work such as the 1955 restoration of the Entrance Hall ceiling, plus materials associated with 19th-century Levy-period repair work. Although most items are grouped by project, they can also be generally categorized by building material type such as masonry, wood, hardware, and paint and coatings.

The cataloging work is being done by Jodi Frederiksen, who joined the staff as a restoration intern in August. Working in conjunction with the restoration and curatorial departments, she is employing a modified version of the software program used by the curators for accessioning Monticello's

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decorative arts collection. When the process is completed, it will be possible to efficiently locate and keep track of all of these individual items.

Although of great value from the documentary standpoint, the numerous bricks, mortar and paint samples, nails, etc., that make up the bulk of the collection might be regarded as mundane or even boring by most. However, there are a number of items with interesting stories behind them.

For instance, there are Jefferson-era tin-plated iron shingles from Monticello's dome. Applied in the early 1820s, many of these shingles bear inscriptions scratched into the surface by visitors from the late 1820s and early 1830s. They remained encapsulated under later re-roofings until 1955, when they were carefully removed and stored in the Mulberry Row stable. Although the shingles were examined during the roof restoration of 1991-92, the inscriptions were not researched. This past fall, Frederiksen and Carol Richardson, a Monticello restoration specialist, were able to decipher and photograph approximately half of them. Research by Frederiksen has revealed that about one-third of these legible signatures belonged to students at the University of Virginia, and she plans to do additional research into the identities of these students and other individuals.

Another interesting item is the original brass lock from the East Front sash-doors. This lock was apparently removed and re-used on replacement doors installed sometime in the late 19th century by Jefferson Monroe Levy. It was retrieved when the Levy doors were replaced in the early 1980s with new mahogany doors of the correct configuration. The original lock was not put back on at that time owing to extensive wear, but an identical new lock was made and was recently installed.

The collection also includes original tools apparently lost by Jefferson's own workmen. One is a mason's line pin discovered in 2000 at the base of the chimney in the attic of the South Pavilion.



Jill Williams, L. Bevinger

Many of the shingles bear legible inscriptions made by visitors in the late 1820s and early 1830s.

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A beautifully wrought example of the blacksmith's craft, it was used by the mason to hold one end of a string line pulled from corner-to-corner in order to maintain level coursing. Judging by the carefully formed knife edge, it also appears to have served the purpose of a joint striking tool used to incise the fine line (called a "grapevine" joint) that occurs in Monticello's mortar joints.

To date, more than 3,000 individual items have been catalogued. This represents about three-quarters of the collection, and it is anticipated that the project will be completed later this spring.

— ROBERT L. SELF

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COMMENTS? newsletter@monticello.org