

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

Remarks at Montpelier  
Montpelier, VA  
7/9/98

**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Montpelier, Virginia  
July 9, 1998**

Thank you so much, it is such a pleasure to be here on this beautiful afternoon where we are blessed with enough cloud cover that it is not quite as warm as it would be otherwise. And it seems like such a large crowd of people gathered to celebrate this very important day with these two remarkable announcements that we have just heard. I want to thank everyone associated with Montpelier, and with all of you who have worked so hard to bring this day to fruition. I want especially to thank Congressman Bliley, the proud occupant of the Madison seat in Congress, for his tireless efforts to preserve Montpelier, and for his singular commitment to the Dolly Madison coin, which I think is a long overdue recognition of her important role in our nation's history.

And, of course we would not be here without Dick Moe and Nancy Campbell, and all of the members of the Trust. They have given our nation an extraordinary challenge. Every single day they challenge us to remember what is important about who we are as Americans, and to preserve the past that not only is a part of what is long gone, but really continues to inform us today and help lead us into the future. I am delighted that the trust is working with the White House on the "Save America's Treasures" campaign, and I am confident that with the kind of leadership that Dick and Nancy, and all of you associated with the trust give, we will have many such occasions as this where important announcements will be made, and more and more Americans will appreciate the significance of historical preservation.

I also want to thank and applaud Kathy Mullins for the work that she has done and her staff...(applause). I hope all of you have chance to visit the "Discovering Madison" exhibition that Ralph Applebaum, who's here with us on the stage, has designed. It's very informative and interesting and I think will give you all some new insight into Dolly and James Madison, and the life that they lived here. I also want to congratulate and thank Glen Moreno, and the new Montpelier property council, for stepping up to the plate and making sure that the challenge the trust has issued will be met. I look forward to hearing about the successful completion of that challenge campaign in 2003 when the work gets completed, the money is collected, and Montpelier really demonstrates all that it can to the public as they visit.

Now, I also want to thank the extraordinary generosity of Norman and Lyn Lear. The papers of our founding fathers and other significant early Americans are an ongoing project. I was surprised to learn, when I looked into this a few years ago, how many papers has still not been properly cataloged, edited, or made available for publication. The gift that the Lears give today will help us to continue this very important work. I thought that what Mr. Lear said today was particularly significant because he was not only talking about his own gratitude for the

blessings our country has given him, but he was recognizing how those blessings continue to flow and how we must continue into the future for us to keep pace with everyone who came before us, whether it's a beloved grandfather, or James and Dolly Madison. This generous gift will help edit, compile and publish at least eight volumes of correspondence and letters from James Madison, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and John Adams. By doing so it will help ensure that the ideas and ideals which built our nation survive forever. We could not have a better person to help oversee the expenditure of those funds than Bill Ferris, the chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, who will work along with the National Archives to collect and safeguard the writings of those Americans who we continue to look for inspiration from.

There are so many to be thanked today but I think that the real lesson of our gathering here was really summed up by James Madison. He once wrote, "The origin and outset of the American Republic contain lessons which posterity ought not to be deprived." I could not agree with President Madison more. In fact I believe, as we move toward a new century-- and indeed, a new millennium -- those lessons need to be learned over and over again. Not only by students and children, but by all of us. We need to be educated and inspired time and time again by the American story written here by James and Dolly Madison, and written by so many who came before. Because, it is only by understanding where we came from -- looking squarely at our past, appreciating the sacrifices and difficulties others endured for us to be enjoying what we enjoy today -- that we can hold dearly those ideals and values that should be cherished, and pass them onto our own children and grandchildren. Norman's son Ben is here -- and I see other children in the audience -- and I want every one of them to appreciate what brought many of us here today, to understand the significance of the lives of James and Dolly Madison. Not as a history lesson, to be read about and put on a shelf, or maybe be tested about, but as a living reminder of what each of us must do to keep pace with the country that we are blessed to live in.

I'm also pleased that the work here at Montpelier will give a great deal of time and attention to one of my favorite predecessors, Dolly Madison. Ever since I was fortunate enough to move into the White House with my husband I have been reading everything I could get my hands on about the women who lived there before me, and what a remarkable group of women they are, indeed. And, we are finally recognizing their contributions. Some of you may have seen recently the new and improved exhibition at the Smithsonian. It used to mostly just show the gowns that the women wore when their husbands were inaugurated. But a few years ago it began, once again, bringing to life all of the activities that these women engaged in and the roles that they played in helping their husbands and contributing to our country. And, there are few who did more than Dolley Madison, a woman of strength, of conviction, energy, and joy. Not only a wonderful hostess but a very skilled diplomat with a tremendous political ear, who could bring people together, have them work together, and then send them out feeling that they were charged with a mission to help try to do whatever President Jefferson or President Madison wanted to see accomplished.

I also think, often, as I walk through the White House about the lives of the people who

have lived there before us and the singular acts of courage that occurred time and time again as Presidents and their families faced difficult, challenging times. But I am also aware that many of those stories are not as well known as they should be; one of my favorites concerns Dolly Madison. During the War of 1812, in the year 1814, her husband was our last President to be an actual Commander in Chief in the field. He was out leading his troops against the advancement of the British forces, and Mrs. Madison had prepared a wonderful meal for her husband and his officers for their return to the White House. Word came from her husband that the British had broken through the lines and they were on their way to Washington and they could not be stopped and she had to flee. Well, in a letter that she wrote to her sister -- which will be included in the Madison papers -- she described being within the sound of a cannon. But she did not leave when she was first ordered to do so. Instead, she decided she had to stay behind to collect the most valuable items of the house. Those were not the account books of the house, those were not her personal possessions, those were items that represented the founding of our republic. And, the most important one, to her, she felt, was the fabulous Gilbert Stewart portrait of George Washington which hangs in the East Room of the White House. Some of you may have seen it. Here's what she writes in her letter to her sister: "Our kind friend, sister Carol, has come to hasten our departure, and is in a very bad humor with me, because I insist on waiting until the large picture of General Washington is secured, and it requires to be unscrewed from the wall. This process was found too perilous for these tedious moments, I have ordered the frame to be broken and the canvas taken out. It is done, and now dear sister, I must leave this house."

I think of Dolley Madison not only taking time to gather the picture, a copy of the Declaration of Independence and other valuables, but to write to her sister. If you think of the extraordinary stories we've heard about our patriots of the past this one, I think, ranks right up there. But, she did get out in time, just in time she escaped, and the British came. And, I've never really appreciated this, I've told the British Ambassador several times, the British officers sat down, ate the meal Mrs. Madison had prepared, and then burned the house to the ground. If you visit the White House you can still see some of the scorch marks on the North Portico which we have left unpainted to remind us always that we have to be vigilant, and we have to remember that house was once burned, and had to be rebuilt, in order to continue to represent Democracy and the home of our President. But because of Dolley Madison, Gilbert Stewart's portrait of George Washington still hangs proudly in the East Room today.

So, there is so much to be learned and appreciated, about both James and Dolly Madison. Dolley Madison understood very well the importance of history. Whether it was saving that portrait or transcribing her husband's letters and essays when he was stricken with Rheumatism, she understood how significant it would be to future generations like ours to know what the founders thought, the debates they had, the arguments and discussions that led to our founding ideals. They knew that none of us own our nation's past, but we are all caretakers of it, with the responsibility to safeguard the gifts we have received and to pass them on to all who come after us. That is the idea behind the White House millennium program, and especially our plan to save America's treasures.

Now we know that the year 2000 will bring out all kinds of celebrations, people are already planning what party they will attend when New Year's Eve strikes and we are in a new century. And there is room for a lot of fun, new products like Millennium toothpaste, for example. But I hope that it is not just that, not just a passing moment, not just a celebration, but real time for reflection and appreciation. Because we are all joined together as Americans. We are one nation, under God, and we have many of the same hopes and aspirations for ourselves, for our communities, and for our country.

On Monday the President and I will kickoff this tour and the "Save the America's Treasures" effort by standing before the Star Spangled Banner at the Smithsonian. I will then go to Ft. McHenry where, you may recall, that banner was waving during the War of 1812 when the Star Spangled Banner was written. I'll travel on to see the laboratory and home of Thomas Edison where just boxes and boxes of his works and adventures have been sitting unopened for years and where we hope to draw attention not only to our founding patriots and their work, not only to our wars, not only to our great men and women who served in politics, but also our scientists, our artists, our creative geniuses who have contributed so much to America over the years.

So, during this next week and then during the next years many of us will be working together to try to highlight the treasures of America that have helped to make us who we are. That's why what you're doing today and these two announcements are so important. Because, I hope, that in years to come, more and more Americans will appreciate the contribution of James and Dolly Madison. I sometimes think that President Madison is underappreciated in our country today. Not as many Americans as I would like know and appreciate his role as the father of our constitution. He made extraordinary contributions which are still relevant today; many of the debates that are going on in our country today, and many of the debates that go on in our Congress, harken back to the debates that happened at the end of the 1700s and the beginning of the 1800s. So if we think about what Madison did, using the power of the written and spoken work to give life to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Virginia resolution, then we can learn more about the issues that are facing us today as well.

Because of today's announcement, future generations will look to Montpelier and see a part of America's memory. But not just that, they will also see a road map to our future. I hope that all of us who are gathered today will think of ways that we can give gifts to the future to celebrate the new century and the millennium. Just as our founders took a great leap of faith, and imagined their future with confidence, so must we. In this time of great blessings there is no time to rest on our laurels, to take for granted our liberties, to not think about what we should do to make sure this country remains strong into the future. It is up to each of us, and probably more than anything else, the two announcements and the gifts that we recognize and celebrate today will help us not only honor the past, but imagine a future that gives great hope to every American. Thank you all very much.