

Visitor center construction enters new stage

At the foot of Jefferson's "little mountain," the new gateway to Monticello is beginning to take shape.

Designed to provide new and enhanced educational, exhibition, service, dining, and shopping features in one location, the 42,000-square-foot Thomas Jefferson Visitor Center and Smith History Center is being built at the site formerly occupied by Monticello's ticket office and shuttle station.



Monticello's interim ticket office and shuttle bus station.

Most of the site work for the new center was completed by the end of February. The list of projects included drilling 72 wells for the center's geothermal heating and cooling system; placing new electrical, data, and plumbing lines; installing, connecting, and burying storm-water drainage pipes; creating a new picnic area; establishing new pedestrian paths and handicapped parking spaces; re-grading and expanding sections of the visitor parking area; and converting a former residence near the construction site into offices for Monticello staff members.

One significant step was taken Jan. 5, when Monticello's ticketing and shuttle bus operations were moved to a new interim facility, located just south of the construction site.

Two weeks later, after all salvageable materials had been removed, the

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ticket office and shuttle station that had been in use since the 1970s was demolished. The structure's wood framing and siding were shredded for mulch while the stones from the building's foundation and chimney were salvaged by the site contractor, Parham Construction Co.

of Charlottesville. The Thomas Jefferson Foundation made efforts to find another home for the structure but they proved futile, as the cost of dismantling, transporting, and re-erecting the building far exceeded its material value.

The erection of wood panel fencing around the construction site, for both aesthetic and safety reasons, was completed in mid-March, and excavation for the new building was begun later in the month.

Despite all the construction and related activity, Monticello's various tours are continuing without interruption and visitors should experience no inconveniences. In fact, many visitor services have been upgraded.

"The temporary facilities in many ways represent improvements over what we had," said Kat Imhoff, Monticello vice president and coordinator of the construction project. "At the interim ticket office, we have an additional window that is protected from the weather. The food service facility and garden shop will be closer and more convenient to the ticketing and shuttle bus services, and we have improved the vehicle and pedestrian traffic flows in the visitor parking area."

Construction of the new center is scheduled to be completed by the fall of 2008. Related work will extend into 2009.

Designed by Ayers/Saint/Gross, Architects + Planners of Baltimore, the Thomas Jefferson Visitor Center and Smith History Center will consist of five pavilions organized around a central courtyard. Intended to blend into the landscape, the center will be



The ticket office and shuttle station that had been in service since the 1970s was demolished in January.

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constructed of natural materials such as fieldstone, brick and cedar, and will include numerous environmentally sensitive features.

The five central components of the facility will be a reception pavilion for visitor information and ticket sales; a two-story exhibition pavilion with spaces for both permanent and changing exhibitions; the two-story Smith History Center with facilities for Monticello's education programs on the lower level and a multipurpose theater on the courtyard level; a café building with indoor and outdoor seating; and a retail pavilion with indoor and outdoor spaces.

The complex also will feature a freestanding all-weather education pavilion, to be situated a short distance away and connected by a woodland path.

The cost of the entire project has been set at \$53 million, \$10 million of which is for endowment.

COMMENTS? newsletter@monticello.org