

Thomas Jefferson MONTICELLO

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Columns Return to 'Rendered' Appearance

Monticello's iconic west front has been undergoing a major change in the past few months. The columns on the Southwest Portico are being restored to their original Jefferson-era appearance.

Unlike the columns on the Northeast Portico, the columns on the "nickel view" were made of specially molded "compass" bricks instead of stone. They were then "rendered" or covered in a smooth stucco-like coating to mimic the appearance of stone; a common 18th- and 19th-century practice.

Monticello's architectural team, headed by Robert H. Smith Director of Restoration Robert L. Self, has taken great care to ensure the project would have no negative effects on the columns.

Historic paint consultants Frank S. Welsh and Susan L. Buck conducted paint analysis. They discovered the original render and a heavy dirt layer, leading each to conclude that the render dated from Jefferson's time.

An architectural conservation team designed and is now implementing the conservation process. Materials Conservation Collaborative, LLC of Philadelphia used a combination of steam-based

paint removal and a special blasting system (originally developed to clean the Statue of Liberty in 1986) to complete the project safely and efficiently.

The final phase of conservation began in April. The remaining paint was removed and the Jefferson-era

render will be repaired as necessary using period-appropriate materials; the earlier repairs will be repainted to match the historic surface. The final phase of the project is scheduled to be finished before the Fourth of July for all of Monticello's visitors to enjoy.

Architectural conservator Andrew Fearon reattaching loose rendering on the west column using an acrylic emulsion.





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1. Conservation technicians Seth Gartland and Toby Canfield installing a custom-made steam jacket on the north column.

2. Area of failed rendering on the west column that will be repaired using a lime-based patching mortar. The squared-off areas are where samples were removed for analysis.

3. Conservation technician Seth Gartland executing the final cleaning of the surface using a special low-pressure blasting system originally developed to clean the Statue of Liberty.

4. Overall view of the West Portico taken 4/12/13. Note older repairs on the lower portion of the two middle columns.

5. North inner column nearing completion. The older repair area on the lower quarter of the shaft has been in-painted to match the original rendered surface.



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