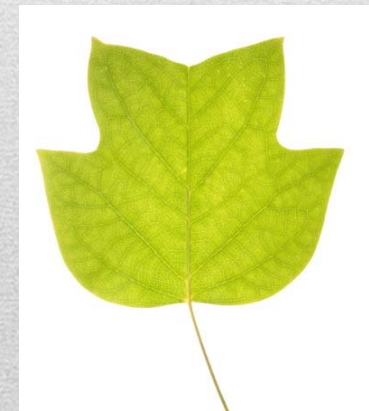


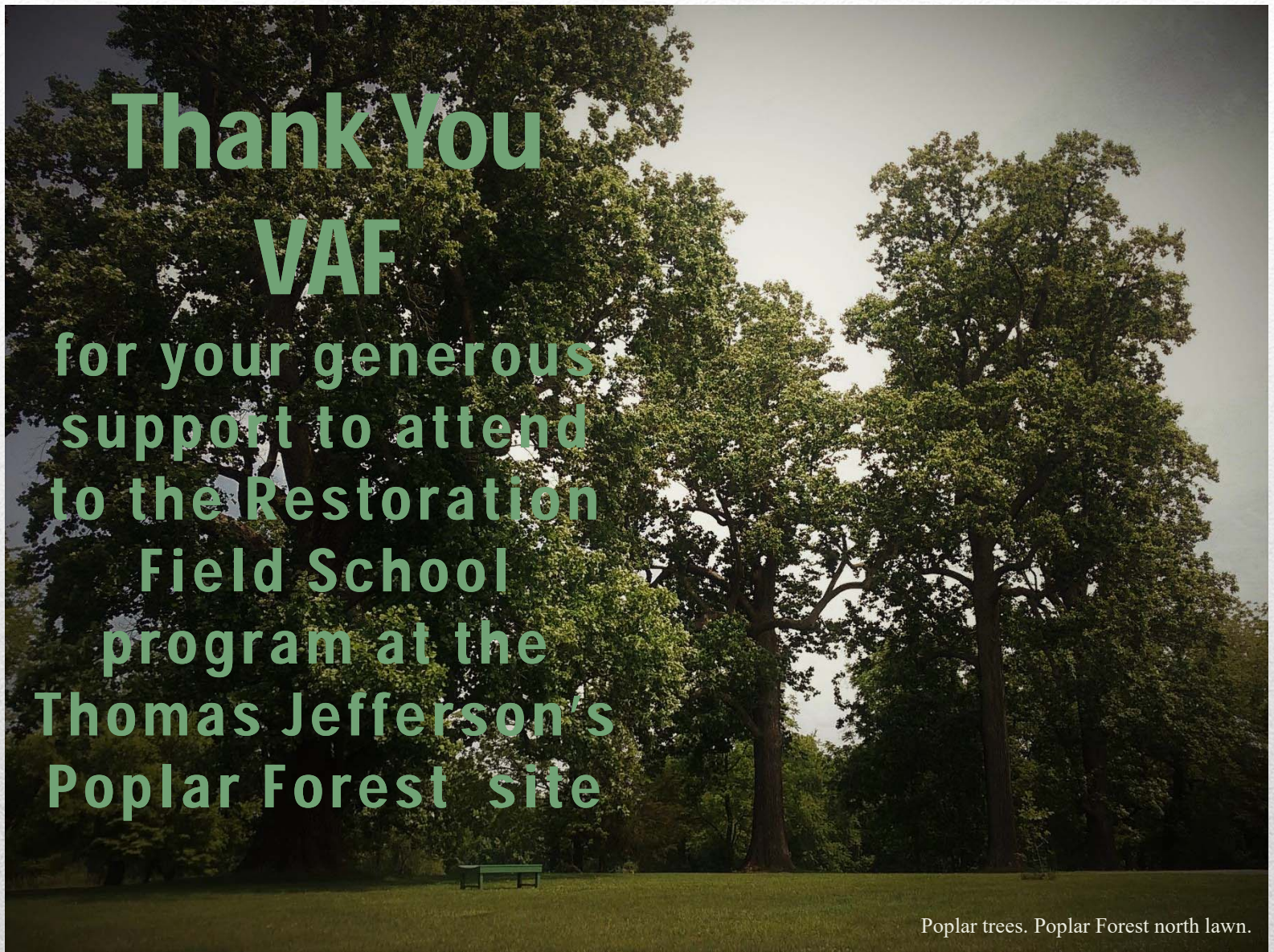
# Poplar Forest experience Spring 2017

Looking Forward for Poplar Forest II

Rebeca Fernandez

---





**Thank You  
VAF**  
for your generous  
support to attend  
to the Restoration  
Field School  
program at the  
Thomas Jefferson's  
Poplar Forest site

Poplar trees. Poplar Forest north lawn.



Poplar Forest's south façade, wing of offices, lawn, and slaves' house.

**M**y experience at the Poplar Forest Architectural Field School program was very beneficial for me in different ways. To start, meeting and interacting with people with different backgrounds, including Mr. Jefferson through his work. Then, visiting different historic restoration sites was an enriching experience. It was my time on the East Coast, that gave me historical context to better understand Colonial architecture—beyond books. In fact, this experience gave me perspective to understand the Midwest architecture where I currently live.

## Introduction

---

In general, the Poplar Forest program was an extraordinary experience that exceeded my expectations. I knew, that I would learn a lot more about restoration and conservation being in a field school. In my opinion, there is not sophisticated technology in classrooms that can simulate the experience of learning on the site. The theory needs to be reinforced with images or even more hands-on work. Touching, exchanging ideas and other sensorial interactions always completes the learning process—at least for me. I believe that my learning background and Travis McDonald’s teaching program were a wonderful match.



Poplar Forest (PF) restored north façade.



PF interior restoration process.



Rivermount House’s plaster sample.

## Field School Program

---



Vince Fastabend, PF Restoration Supervisor, talking about ADA provisions for PF historic site.

The Historic Restoration program, gave me the opportunity to meet very interesting people from which I enriched my knowledge in historic preservation and motivated me to keep working on my career.

## People

---

Travis is a tremendous architectural historian and gifted educator. His program has an everyday balanced workflow between classroom, site visits, and practice documentation and investigation toward a real project. Travis teaches us the importance of working as a multidisciplinary team to achieve a high quality historic restoration project. I was impressed with his respect and recognition for his colleagues and craftsmen that on a daily basis watch over Poplar Forest's restoration and conservation.



T. McDonald, lecturing at the wood shop.



T. McDonald, restoration process lecture.

Craftsmen, collectors, and archeologist shared with us their work experience and challenges for the ongoing restoration as Poplar Forest. Each shared how through the process of restoration they have learned about the Jefferson's design mind and the builder's techniques. The team at Poplar Forest is always open to find new evidence, raise questions, and pursue new challenges.



Recreating PF's wood moldings.



Gob Self historic hardware lecture.

Meeting with directors and coordinators of a variety of house museums thought the importance of delivering the right historical information for educational purposes. Each of our lecturers also shared with us details about the intense work of researching, interpretation, and planning for restoration and conservation. I learned about the economic challenges of restored sites and the challenges to keep people interested in their historic properties as part of the American legacy. Every restored project was unique; therefore each of them required a tailored approach for a successful restoration project.

For two weeks, I spent most of my time with ten fellow students in this program. We became a temporary family. Coming from different backgrounds, we lived and worked together toward the same goal of learning the process of high quality historic restoration. We had a wonderful time exchanging our everyday experiences and thoughts around dinner.



PF team at the Monticello dome room.



I learned about Thomas Jefferson, through his letters, notes, objects and designs. Each item describing his designs and construction desires for his projects was valuable evidence to undertake the restoration of Jefferson's Poplar Forest. Correlating the written evidence and ghost marks at Poplar Forest with his other previous built projects was supporting evidence to better understand Poplar Forest. This methodology was one of my most exciting experiences as an example of how to support research with evidence.



Thomas Jefferson statue at the UVA's Rotunda.



Jefferson's traveling and drawing instruments.

The site visits during our program were fascinating, including a case study site survey and research of the Rivermont House. Each of the sites were unique with tremendous visual information. We visited over ten historic properties with a range of restoration approaches. Some sites were highly conserved and restored like Monticello and Montpelier. In contrast, Barboursville mansion was a stabilized ruin, and other was a ruin such as Randolph-Macon College. These examples were perfect for raising questions and discussion.



Monticello's northwest façade.



Montpelier front façade.

## Places

---

Sites displayed contrasting restoration and interpretation approaches. James Monroe's Highland home is being studied for a possible re-interpretation of its restored interior. The Anne Spencer House has been preserved and conserved since the owner passed away. Very little intervention has been done in the house, but its famous garden was restored by the Hillside Garden Club in 1983. Then, the University of Virginia is a unique historic campus that is not a museum, but an active university used lived in. Its constant restoration and conservation is part of the institution's regular maintenance program.



Barboursville mansion. Stabilized ruins.



First Randolph-Macon College. Ruins.



Poplar Forest, on-going restoration project.



First Randolph-Macon College Principal's house.



Preswold Plantation, an example of restoration, preservation, and conservation work.



Preswold Plantation. Office, restored and conserved.



The Anne Spencer House.



Anne Spencer House's garden.



University of Virginia current student dorm.



Farmington plantation house (Farmington Country Club).



University of Virginia, restored and conserved. I continuous use since 1819.

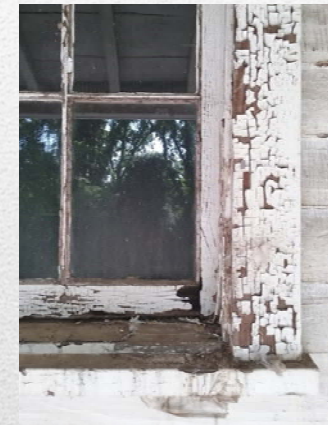
All that I learned in the classroom, lectures, the ongoing Poplar Forest restoration work— where we can see the process of restoration in some areas, and the other visited sites, were critical for me and the fellow students to do our own documentation and investigation of the Rivermont House assignment as a group for our historic report.



Rivermont House. PF team survey and historic research project.



Wood molding survey.



Windows survey.



Evidence of sash joined by pegs.



Hardware survey.

- The field school program complimented and reinforce the preservation theory that I learned in my Master in Historic Preservation
- Buildings can be read, if you know how to see
- Preservation is a process with a variety of possibilities
- Reading the building raises questions to guide research
- Research leads to a preservation plan

## **Main Take Aways**

---