

Montevideo

and the Peter family cemetery

Seneca, Maryland

(2018 revision)

Montevideo, completed in 1830, was the home of John Parke Custis Peter and his family. Peter, the oldest son of Thomas and Martha Custis Peter of Tudor Place in Georgetown, built his home on the eastern side of Oakland, the Peter family's Seneca, Md. farm since the 1790s. (The original Oakland house collapsed or burned sometime in the mid-19th century, but vestiges of that farm remain off Partnership Road today.)

Montevideo bears a strong resemblance to the center section of Tudor Place, which was designed by William Thornton, a Peter family friend who was the architect of the first U.S. Capitol building, the Octagon, and Woodlawn Plantation. But Montevideo is a scaled-down version, without Tudor Place's Roman temple portico and flanking wings. There is no evidence that Thornton had a personal hand in designing Montevideo.

Thomas Peter was a tobacco exporter, large landowner in D.C. and Maryland, and mayor of Georgetown, following in the footsteps of his Scottish immigrant father, Robert, a co-founder and first mayor of Georgetown. John's mother, Martha Custis Peter, was the granddaughter and namesake of Martha Dandridge (Custis) Washington, the wife of the first President of the United States.

John P. C. Peter, who moved into his new home when he and his wife were newlyweds (he at 31 and she in her late teens), had already served a term in the Maryland House of Delegates (1826-'28), and he was managing his family's farm operations and nearby sandstone quarry, in the cliffs above the Potomac River.

The cemetery was established at Montevideo in the early 1830s, perhaps after the death of Thomas Peter in 1834. Thomas and Martha's young-adult daughter Columbia Washington Peter was the first of their immediate family to die, in late 1820. The Peter family did not have a family burial plot at Tudor Place in Georgetown or at Oakland, so she was buried first at their D.C. farm, Effingham, and probably reinterred at Montevideo after her father's death. The last Peter burial at Montevideo was Martha's in 1854.

Four members of the Kiplinger family, who have owned Montevideo since 1958 but are not related to the Peters, were buried beside the historic Peter family plot in recent years.

Montevideo was sold out of the Peter family in 1878, to Joseph Dyson, who never occupied the house. It was sold by Dyson heirs in 1944 to former Rep. James Barnes (D-Ill.), a two-term congressman who later served as a White House aide to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman during World War II, and then practiced law in Washington. Barnes and his wife intended to renovate the unoccupied and decaying house, but he died in 1958 before doing so. His widow sold the unrestored house and 150 acres to Austin and Gogo Kiplinger in 1958.

The Kiplingers restored the home, built a modern wing, added another 250 acres to the farm, and used it as their principal residence for the next half-century. Today it is owned by their son, journalist and publisher Knight Kiplinger, and his wife, Ann. Almost all the acreage of Montevideo is under farmland preservation easements, conserving it in its present state forever.

The Peters in Seneca

Oakland and Montevideo were established on a 333-acre tract Robert Peter had acquired in 1794, part of his and Thomas's estimated 11,600 acres throughout Montgomery County. Robert Peter's first landholdings in the county were some 2,500 acres in the Seneca area, along the Potomac River, bought at public auction in 1781, at the end of the American Revolution. It was land the state of Maryland confiscated from a prominent Tory and former mayor of Annapolis, Daniel Dulany the Younger.

The stone quarry and cutting mill that John P. C. Peter owned and operated in the 1830s and 1840s provided Seneca red sandstone for numerous C& O canal locks, lockhouses and the Seneca Aqueduct, and such major Washington buildings as the Smithsonian Institution, the original Corcoran Gallery of Art (today's Renwick Gallery), and St. Elizabeth's hospital. The quarry had been in operation since the late 18th century, but John Peter expanded production greatly.

His son, Thomas Peter, and Thomas' siblings sold the quarry and 614 acres of its riverfront acreage in 1866 for the handsome sum of \$70,000, to the newly formed D.C.-based Seneca Sandstone Company. (A decade later, the company went bankrupt, amid a scandal involving corrupt loans it secured from the Freedman's Bank, which led to the collapse of the bank and the wiping out of the savings of thousands of former slaves with deposits there.)

The house called Montevideo (sometimes written as Monte Video and derived from the Latin phrase *Montem Video*, “I see the mountain,” referring to the view of Sugarloaf Mountain to the north) was completed in late 1830 for John Parke Custis Peter, and his wife, E. (Elizabeth) Jane Henderson Peter, of Williamsburg, Va.

Miss Henderson, a second cousin of her husband through her mother, Elizabeth Peter Henderson, was a daughter of the Rev. James Henderson, a professor at the College of William & Mary and an Episcopal minister of Westover Parish in the York/Hampton region of Tidewater Virginia. He and his wife are buried in the churchyard of Bruton Parish in Williamsburg.

John and Jane Peter were married in February, 1830 at Montanverde, the Seneca home of his uncle, Maj. George Peter (on the east side of Seneca Creek, on today’s Berryville Road, and restored in 2015 from dilapidated condition). After living with John’s parents at Tudor Place, the couple probably moved to their new country home late that year, when it was completed under the supervision of John’s younger brother, George Washington Peter, who lived nearby. It was about that time that the C&O Canal, begun in Georgetown in 1828, reached Seneca, providing easier transportation to and from Tudor Place. John and Jane Peter had nine children at Montevideo, one of whom died in infancy, and Jane and her second husband, the Rev. Charles H. Nourse, had two additional children.

When John and Jane Peter moved to Montevideo, not only did his parents already have their Oakland farm nearby, but his uncle, Maj. Peter, had lived much of the year at Montanverde from 1812 through his death in 1861.

Maj. Peter served in the War of 1812, leading the Georgetown Artillery militia with distinction at the Battle of Bladensburg, after which he went into politics. He was elected to Congress in 1814, 1816 and 1828 and was active in national Democratic Party affairs. He was acquainted with Abraham Lincoln in the 1840s and ‘50s and entertained the future president at Montanverde. (The Georgetown mansion where Maj. Peter lived in the 1820s, located today at 3017 N Street, was briefly the home of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy in 1963-‘64, after the assassination of her husband, President John F. Kennedy in November of 1963.)

The Cemetery

The Peter family plot is a small square enclosed by a simple wrought-iron fence, typical of mid-to-late 19th century rural cemeteries. It lies northwest of the house.

Four of the five tombstones in the Peter plot were cut from Seneca red sandstone at the family's stone-cutting mill, with only one--that of an infant son--made from a different stone, a kind of gray sandstone (perhaps from another vein in the Peter family quarries).

The largest, a tall obelisk on a rectangular base, is that of John Parke Custis Peter, who built and lived at Montevideo. His father, mother and sister are buried beneath ledger stones—horizontal, rectangular slabs that originally stood like tables about 30 inches off the ground, supported by six square stone legs. For stability in later years, the six legs were laid on their sides beneath the slabs.

When Austin Kiplinger and his wife, Gogo, bought and restored an abandoned Montevideo in 1958-59, the cemetery was so overgrown that it was impossible to know how many graves it contained. Gogo was buried here in 2007, to be followed by their son Todd the following year, Austin in 2015 and Todd's widow, Dana, in 2016. Gogo and Todd lie beneath rough-cut boulders of Seneca sandstone found on the farm, and the ashes of Austin and Dana will be marked later by similar stones.

Peter Family Graves

Thomas Peter, b. Jan. 4, 1769 (inexplicably inscribed "1776" on his tombstone and never corrected), d. April 16, 1834, age 65. He was a tobacco exporter, business investor and major landowner in Montgomery County, Md., of which Georgetown was part until the new capital city was created in 1791, and thereafter in D.C. Like his father before him, he served as a mayor of Georgetown.

Martha Custis Peter, b. Dec. 31, 1777, d. July 13, 1854, age 76 (the last burial at Montevideo). Wife of Thomas Peter. The First President's step-granddaughter, she was born at Mount Vernon during the Revolutionary War to Martha Washington's son, Jackie.

After her father's death from illness at the end of the war, she and her older sister Eliza Custis were raised by their mother, Eleanor Calvert (Custis) and her mother's new husband, David Stuart, who was selected to be a commissioner of the new District of Columbia by George Washington. Martha's younger siblings—two sisters and a brother—were raised by George and Martha Washington at Mount Vernon; the brother, George Washington Custis, later built the great Classical Revival mansion, Arlington, where his daughter and son-in-law, Robert E. Lee, lived at the

start of the Civil War; today it is called the Custis-Lee Mansion in Arlington Cemetery.

Through her long marriage to Thomas Peter, Martha Custis Peter was the *grand dame* of Georgetown, entertaining at Tudor Place all the leading statesmen of her day, including the Marquis de Lafayette.

She is thought to have disapproved of her daughter-in-law's marrying so soon (13 months) after her son's death in 1848, and she reportedly had chilly relations with Jane and her new husband, the Rev. Charles Howard Nourse, who had previously worked at Montevideo as the Peter children's tutor. When she died in 1854, Martha was memorialized at her Georgetown home, then taken to the family graveyard at Montevideo in a long procession of carriages on a hot summer day, to be buried after dark by torchlight.

Columbia Washington Peter, b. Dec. 2, 1797, d. Dec. 3, 1820, age 23. (Tombstone is inexplicably inscribed, erroneously, with the years "1798" and "1821".) She died unmarried, after a short illness, and was buried first at Effingham, the Peters' small farm within the District of the Columbia. She was reinterred at Montevideo in the early 1830s, perhaps when her father was buried there in 1834, establishing the family plot at John's farm. She was the sibling of sisters America and Britannia Peter and brothers John Parke Custis Peter and George Washington Peter.

John Parke Custis Peter, b. Nov. 14, 1799, d. Jan. 19, 1848, age 48, reportedly from tetanus (called "lockjaw" in that era), contracted from being stuck with an infected rusty nail while working on the farm. He was proud of his family ties to the first President, and his obelisk tombstone identifies him as "Great Grandson of Martha, Relict [widow] of Washington." He was named after his great-grandfather, the very wealthy John Parke Custis of Williamsburg, Va., whose death left his young widow, Martha Dandridge Custis, the richest woman in America before her marriage to George Washington.

John P. C. Peter was educated at Yale University, and had been, before his marriage, a member of the Maryland House of Delegates (1826-28). He served as president of the Board of Education for the Darnestown District in 1839.

After moving to Montevideo from Tudor Place in late 1830 with his wife Jane Henderson Peter, John P. C. Peter farmed the property with 20-some enslaved laborers, and he also directed the family's sandstone quarry and milling operations along the Potomac River at Seneca Creek. Interested in modern agricultural practices (such as crop rotation, guano fertilizer, and

soil conservation), John Peter was the first president of the Montgomery County Agricultural Society in 1844-46.

Three of the Montevideo slaves, all young men, escaped in 1831 and apparently headed north to Pennsylvania. John Peter advertised, in Washington's *National Intelligencer* newspaper, a \$150 reward for their capture and return to Montevideo; their fate is not known.

E. Jane Henderson Peter (b. 1811/12?, d. 1877), who was in her late teens when she married the 30-year-old John Peter, gave birth to nine children at Montevideo between 1831 and 1844. Thirteen months after her husband's death in 1848, when she was 36, she married the Rev. Charles Howard Nourse, a teacher and minister who was four or five years younger than she was and had been the live-in tutor of the Peter children at Montevideo.

Nourse had resigned in 1847 to start a new Presbyterian church in Poolesville. It has long been suspected that the romantic feelings between Jane Peter and the young schoolmaster Nourse—a widower with a young son--began before her husband John's death, and may have been a factor in his leaving the Peters' employ the year before. Still living in the Poolesville area, the Rev. Nourse came back to console the grieving widow, and 13 months later, he married her and moved into Montevideo with her children and his son, Charles, Jr. (b. 1844), and they had two more children together.

In 1854, the Nourses and their blended family moved across the Potomac to nearby Leesburg, Va. Perhaps the Nourses moved out of Montevideo because Jane Peter Nourse's oldest son, Thomas Peter, would be turning 21 in 1855 and inheriting Montevideo, which was being held in trust for the Peter children. In 1860, according to the U.S. census that year, Thomas (age 26) and his wife and two young sons were living at Montevideo.

The Nourses, like the Peter family in Georgetown and Maryland, were Southern sympathizers, and perhaps they found Virginia more congenial than Maryland. The Rev. Nourse started two boarding schools in Leesburg, and during the Civil War he was arrested by Union forces and accused of spying for the Confederacy. Nourse was imprisoned in the "Old Brick Capitol" building on Capitol Hill, before winning his release through the influence of highly placed friends.

The Rev. Nourse's son with his first wife, Maria Robertson, Charles Howard Nourse, Jr., enlisted as a teenager with the illustrious Confederate cavalry unit of Marylanders led by Poolesville's Elijah Veirs White, and after the war, he became a prominent physician in Darnestown, Md. He married a local girl, Alice Darby, whose father, Upton Darby, owned the

Seneca grist mill on Seneca Creek at River Road and helped start the Seneca Mills School on River Road across from Montevideo (today restored as a “living history” museum).

It is not known if young Thomas Peter continued to hold the family’s slaves at Montevideo at the start of the Civil War in 1861. Slavery remained legal in Maryland through the first three years of the Civil War, because Maryland remained in the Union, and the slaves of Maryland were not freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, which applied, ironically, only to slaves in the Confederate States.

Most of Western Montgomery County supported the Confederacy, but it was heavily occupied by Union forces in Darnestown and Poolesville. Slavery in Maryland was abolished by the state legislature in 1864.

Infant Son of J. P. C. and Jane Peter, b. July 18, 1837, d. Aug. 13, 1837, almost four weeks old. With footstone inscribed “I.S.” for “Infant Son.” In Peter family genealogies he is listed as David Peter, named after his great-uncle, Thomas Peter’s brother.

Additional stones in the cemetery--crudely shaped and uninscribed—are of unknown origin.

Kiplinger Family Graves

Austin H. Kiplinger, b. Sept. 19, 1918, Washington, D.C., d. Nov. 20, 2015, Rockville, Md. Reared in Washington and Arlington, Va. Lifelong journalist and publisher, head of the company founded by his father, journalist W. M. Kiplinger, in 1920. Navy aviator in World War II. Civic leader active in supporting education, mid-career journalism training, symphonic music, historic preservation, and equestrian sports.

Mary Louise Cobb Kiplinger (known as Gogo), b. March 14, 1919, in Bronxville, N.Y., reared in Chicago, Ill, m. journalist Austin H. Kiplinger in 1944, lived in Maryland from 1956 until her death on July 15, 2007 at Montevideo, age 88. Homemaker and mother of sons Todd L. and Knight A. Kiplinger.

Todd Lawrence Kiplinger, b. Nov. 10, 1945 in Evanston, Ill., lived in Maryland from 1956 until his death at home in Bethesda, Md. on Oct. 4, 2008, at 62. Married Dana Stifel (Watkins) of Washington, D.C., in 1985. Father of Miss Cameron Todd Kiplinger and step-father of Dana Tyler

Watkins (Taylor) (Constanda) and Alexandra Rawleigh Watkins (Morse). A longtime executive of the Kiplinger publishing company.

Dana Stifel Watkins Kiplinger, b. Aug. 29. 1949, Washington, D.C., d. Jan. 9, 2016, Weston, Conn. Reared in Washington, D.C., Homemaker, volunteer, devoted wife and mother.

(Researched and written by Knight A. Kiplinger; last revised, Jan. 2018)