



**Uncovering History and Pursuing Dreams:
Belle Grove Plantation Bed and Breakfast**

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Brett and Michelle Darnell hope to bring “the forgotten Founding Father” James Madison to life through the very first Bed and Breakfast at the Belle Grove Plantation, the birthplace of our nation’s fourth President. With a breathtaking view of the Rappahannock River in Port Conway of King George County, Virginia, Belle Grove Plantation is nestled in an American history hotspot off of US 301. The Darnells’ story is truly an amazing testament of pursuing dreams. This two year process of research, planning, prayer, and business development has been a labor of love.

Brett Darnell was born in Pennsylvania and grew up in Ohio, while Michelle was born and raised in South Carolina. Brett and Michelle met at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, while they were both serving in the US Military in June of 1985, and wed in October the following year. In 1988, the Darnells sparked their shared love for history when they purchased their first home together in Dayton, Ohio. The two restored both the inside and outside of the 1885 brick house to its traditionally historic appearance. In June of 1992, the Darnells moved to Chesapeake, Virginia, where the family resides today with 23 year old daughter Alexa and 20 year old son Tyler.



Every wedding anniversary in October, Brett and Michelle have upheld their tradition of visiting a Bed and Breakfast in a historic location. Speaking of their October 2010 anniversary trip to James Madison's lifelong home Montpelier, the Darnells exclaimed, "...the story of Madison really captured us." James' wife Dolley sent countless love letters to her traveling husband, as Michelle wrote many similar letters to Brett when away on Military duty. After 24 years of witnessing one another's love of history each October, the couple agreed it was time to embark on their own Bed and Breakfast journey. The hunt began.

On a Thursday afternoon in July 2011, Michelle came across an online advertisement for a plantation owner seeking to lease the home as a Bed and Breakfast. Michelle claimed, "As soon as I saw it was the birthplace of James Madison, it was DING and I was sold." The Darnells quickly expressed interest to the Austrian owner of Belle Grove Plantation, and Michelle dove into 11 months of research at the Library of Virginia and the Historic Society of Virginia. The couple spent months visiting Bed and Breakfasts around the country, gathering ideas for commercial business success and guest approval. Just a mere 412 days and an 80 page business plan later, the Darnells proudly attained the lease. The couple is currently in the process of generating a preliminary sight plan for a zoning package to be reviewed by King George County.

Brett and Michelle hope to open Belle Grove Plantation Bed and Breakfast on March 16, 2013, James Madison's birthday. The house was built in 1791 after the original structure in which James Madison was born burned down; the exact location of the first house remains a mystery the Darnells seek to uncover. The inside of the plantation holds four guest suites: two master suites upstairs and two junior suites downstairs, all four including a bathroom with an exquisite claw foot bathtub. In devotion to American history and James Madison, a US Constitution will be found in every suite. The kitchen will be operated by former Sous Chef Michelle, who will serve guests the delicious items from her menu, ranging from crab stuffed crepes to Mediterranean bruschetta. The house also includes a parlor, library, formal dining room, smaller dining room in which Michelle will host wine and cheese hours for arriving guests, and a basement complete with a jacuzzi and sauna.

The Darnells have put countless months of effort into uncovering historical treasures stored in Belle Grove Plantation and are beyond thrilled to open the house to the world this spring. For more information

and to support the cause, please visit the blog site and Facebook page of Belle Grove Plantation Bed and Breakfast: <http://viriniaplantation.wordpress.com/> and <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Belle-Grove-Plantation-at-Port-Conway/271783509524776>
