

A historic property in Montpelier is returning to its original state – a floodplain

Vermont Public | By [Elodie Reed](#)

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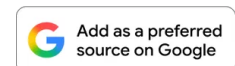


Elodie Reed / Vermont Public

To get ready for climate change, Montpelier is deconstructing a historic home on the property of the city’s founding settler, Jacob Davis. In this photo taken Tuesday, Aug. 5, Dave Giese with the company Deconstruction Works cleans out materials from the 19th-century Greek Revival house.

About two miles west of downtown Montpelier, there’s an island

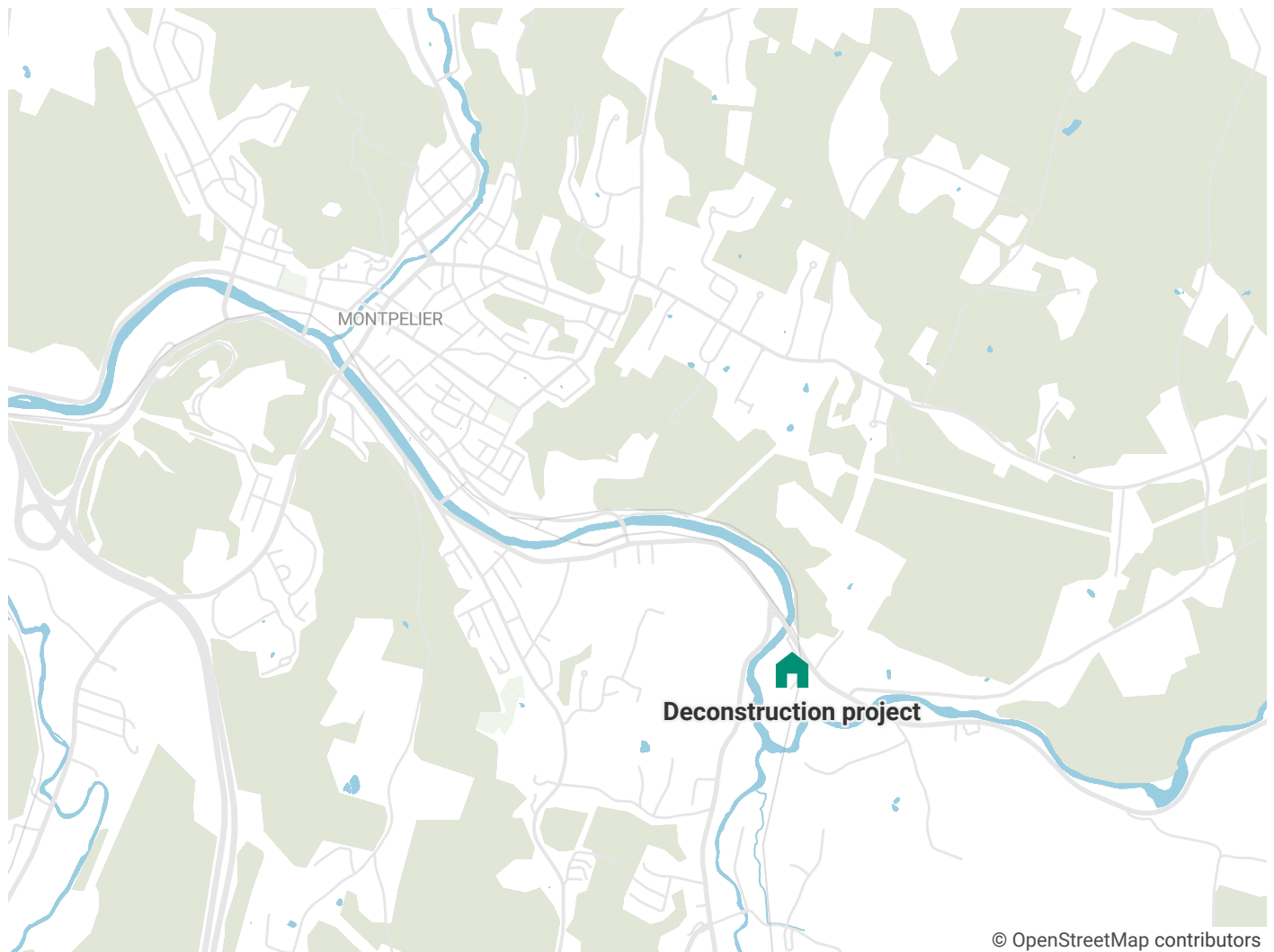
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By the road, though, is a 19th-century Greek Revival house, a barn and the ell that connects the two. Or, at least, that’s what was there. The day I visit in early August, all that’s left of the ell is an open platform. There’s no roof on the second floor of the house.

"Today we're taking the nogging out," explains Dave Giese, with the company Deconstruction Works. "So in the old houses, they used brick as kind of the insulation."

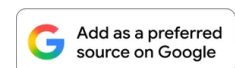
Floodplain restoration in Montpelier



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The company is taking apart the buildings board by board — and brick by

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"As much brick as we can take off of it," he adds.

Showing me around the site is Ben Doyle. He's a Montpelier city councilor and president of the Preservation Trust of Vermont. It's a plot twist, but — it's the preservation group that's leading the effort to take down these historic buildings.

Even though they sit [on the property that once belonged to Jacob Davis](#), the founding settler of Montpelier. (He's also [the person who named the city.](#))



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Dave Giese of Deconstruction Works, left, and Preservation Trust of Vermont President Ben Doyle (who is also a Montpelier city councilor) stand on the second floor of the historic house.

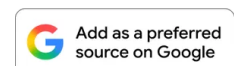
Doyle says removing the buildings solves several problems. [First, the property's been vacant for more than a decade.](#)

"No one wanted to say, 'Hey, we own this property and we'll take care of it,'" he says.

And then there's the [catastrophic flooding that hit Montpelier especially hard in 2023](#), and that has returned to Vermont every summer since.

"I came down here and like, went through this doorway and there's like water

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Water lines from the 2023 flooding are close to the roof on a shed down by the open fields on the property.

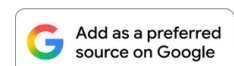
A coalition led by the Preservation Trust of Vermont received \$395,510 from the state's [Flood Resilient Communities Fund](#) to pay off the property's mortgage and deconstruct the buildings. FEMA is also reviewing an application that would help fully restore the floodplain on the property.

"And when that happens, we're going to get dump trucks on site and take out about 24,000 cubic yards of material," Doyle says.

He says this will reduce [future localized flooding](#).

"When you start to aggregate dozens of projects like this across the entire watershed, then you're really starting to make a difference," he adds.

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Returning the property to a floodplain is expected to build resilience during future flooding along the Winooski River watershed.

Rebecca Diehl studies river systems as a research faculty member at the University of Vermont, and she agrees that this project, located on a nice-sized floodplain, can contribute to downstream flood resilience.

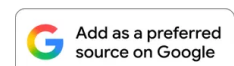
"The stretch around Montpelier doesn't have substantial access to floodplains, right?" she says. "It's fairly well confined in the valley. And then you add on top of that, kind of the roads and the infrastructure. ... And so this project in particular does represent a really amazing opportunity."

Before this property became a floodplain restoration project, it was a home for at least seven families. These families lived there across two centuries, as Montpelier developed all around them. Railroads, a cement plant, car traffic.

[A historical review of the property](#) gives a glimpse of what its occupants got up to. They:

- Drove dairy cows through early morning river fog in the mid-20th century;
- threw a maple sugar party in 1914;
- and won top prize for their chickens at the 1877 county fair.

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Historians think they were built right after his family sold the property in the 1830s.



Preservation Trust Of Vermont / Courtesy

A 2001 photograph of the historic buildings on the property of Jacob Davis. This photo is on file at the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation.

And prior to Euro-Americans displacing [Wabanaki peoples from their ancestral homelands](#), floodplains like this [along the Winooski River](#) supported horticulture. [Corn, beans, squash.](#)

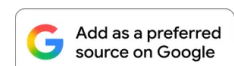
Now, it's to a preagricultural state that the property will return.

"The highest and best use of a floodplain is to serve as a floodplain," Ben Doyle says. "And that's what this will do."

I ask Doyle whether he thinks about giving up history for the future. And he says yes, he does.

"All the time," he says. "But at the end of the day, it's the reality of climate change. I personally believe preservation isn't about locking everything in amber, right? It's about how do we take this and make it work for us now and for the future?"

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Following the deconstruction of the historic buildings on the property that once belonged to Montpelier founding settler Jacob Davis, the land will return to its original state as a floodplain.

Corrected: August 15, 2025 at 6:54 AM EDT

This story has been updated with a more accurate description of the impact of this floodplain restoration project.

Have questions, comments or tips? [Send us a message.](#)

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