

Reinterpretation of Wine Cellar under way

By Justin Sarafin

Because of his attempts to grow *Vitis vinifera* at Monticello and his eager support for the establishment of an American wine industry, Thomas Jefferson has been described as America's "first distinguished viticulturist" and "the greatest patron of wine and winegrowing that this country has yet had."

Jefferson believed that "we could, in the United States, make as great a variety of wines as are made in Europe, not exactly of

the same kinds, but doubtless as good." Though this vision never came to fruition during his lifetime, Jefferson's reputation as a wine expert is undisputed, stemming from his visits to vineyards in Europe; his continuing pursuit of high quality wines for importation; his role as

wine adviser to Presidents Washington, Madison, and Monroe; and his Wine Cellar at Monticello.

Jefferson's cellar contained bottles from France, Portugal, Spain, Hungary, Germany, and Italy, and he served wine after dinner daily in the belief that it was good for the health. Orders for casks and bottles of wine were made on at least an annual basis. For example, in January 1820 Jefferson recorded receiving 382 bottles of various wines and one cask of "Muscat of Rivesalte." The next January, he noted that the Muscat "is out, to wit 62 gallons in 11 months." The cellar also featured bottle-holding dumbwaiters that went through

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Research has guided the development of reproduction glass bottles that will be placed in the refurbished Wine Cellar.

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its ceiling and into both sides of the mantelpiece in the Dining Room above, which allowed wine bottles to be discarded and replenished with minimal intrusion.

Jefferson's Wine Cellar has recently undergone archaeological study and is being further investigated to determine the location or configuration of period wine bottle binning or shelving arrangements. After the shelves and bottles that had been installed in the 1960s were removed, Monticello archaeologists began their work. Findings from their test square confirmed that the room's brick floor is original, but their work did not yield any evidence of wooden or brick binning structures. As expected, many shards of green wine bottle glass were discovered.

Removal of the mid-20th century plaster ceiling revealed the original beams above; these will be studied along with the four interior brick wall surfaces for clues that might indicate what type of wine storage method was used in the space. Photographs taken in the late 1960s that show the interior walls before sandblasting will be compared against evidence that may still be visible today.

The Wine Cellar project is part of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation's ongoing effort to restore and reinterpret all of Monticello's dependencies – the living quarters, work areas, and storage spaces located beneath the house. The physical and interpretive revisions planned for the Wine Cellar will represent a more accurate view of how the space looked and functioned during Jefferson's retirement years (1809-26).

Plans for the Wine Cellar include conservation of the original dumbwaiter, which will be more easily viewed by visitors after the installation of a platform with interpretive reader rails similar to those in the restored Beer Cellar nearby. The reader rails will tell the stories of those who were responsible for maintaining the cellar and what types of activities and tasks such responsibility entailed. The importance of the Wine Cellar to the functioning of the Dining Room above will be highlighted.

Since the Wine Cellar was last furnished in the 1960s, much



Dumbwaiters rise from the Wine Cellar to both sides of the mantelpiece in the Dining Room.

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new research and scholarship has been done with regard to Jefferson and wine, including information about how imported wine was shipped and how it was processed and consumed at Monticello. Jefferson's detailed Farm Book wine

inventories reveal his preferences and illustrate general patterns of wine provisioning and consumption. Ongoing research will help determine the most appropriate method of bottle storage, and new furnishings such as reproduction glass bottles, casks, and wine testing and tasting implements will illustrate the processing of wine into vessels suitable for transportation in the dumbwaiter and for table use.

The restoration and reinterpretation of Monticello's Wine Cellar has been made possible by the support of Howard P. Milstein, a member of the TJF Board of Trustees, and The Roller-Bottimore Foundation.

Justin Sarafin is Monticello's dependencies project coordinator.



Monticello's Bob Self (left) and Rob Newcomb removing the Wine Cellar's mid-20th century plaster ceiling.

COMMENTS? newsletter@monticello.org