



Restoration Focuses on ‘Working’ Monticello

Virtually every day of the year, the Monticello plantation buzzed with activity on Mulberry Row, in the gardens, in the distant fields, in the main house, and especially in the “dependencies.”

Just before daybreak, cook Edith Fossett would begin her long workday in the kitchen, next door to the room she shared with her family. In the spring and fall, Peter Hemings would bring casks of just-brewed ale from the plantation’s brew house to a storage cellar. Other enslaved workers tended to a variety of domestic tasks in the smokehouse, wash house, dairy, and additional cellars, all in support of life in the main house.

After extensive research, followed by careful restoration and refurnishing, four of Monticello’s dependency spaces – the Cook’s Room, North Privy, Beer Cellar, and Storage Cellar – have been



The restored and furnished Cook’s Room.

brought back to life and opened to visitors. A fifth room, the Kitchen, is undergoing significant reconstruction and restoration in preparation for its reopening late next year (see Kitchen Project story). In addition, the original walls of the north cellar passageway and the rear side of the stable will be stabilized.

All of these projects are part of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation’s long-term plan to return the Monticello mountaintop to its appearance during Jefferson’s day. Visitors exploring the dependencies will gain insight into the “working” Monticello – how the house functioned on a daily basis – as well as the opportunity to better understand slavery and the diverse community of people who lived and worked at Monticello. Reader rails – waist-high

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MONTICELLO



Dependencies

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panels with text and illustrations – help tell the various stories to visitors.

“Dependencies,” an uncommon term, puzzles many. It was used generally by Jefferson to describe an appendage to a building. More specifically, the term refers to the workspaces, storage areas, and slave quarters that were tucked beneath the Monticello house and its terraces, concealed from above and partly hidden from below. Architectural historian Camille Wells has described the concealment of the dependencies as “the most highly articulated example of how slavery affected the design of building.”

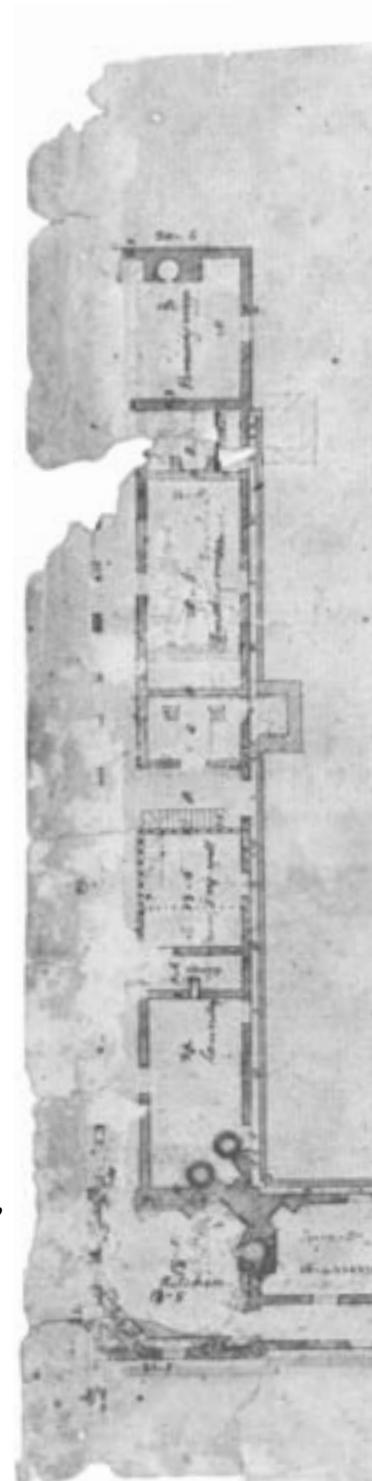
At most plantations of Jefferson’s era, the workspaces – kitchen, icehouse, dairy, wash house, etc. – occupied separate outbuildings. But Jefferson’s scheme was conspicuously different. With many of Monticello’s numerous workspaces shielded from view rather than dotted across the grounds, Jefferson could better enjoy Monticello’s dramatic landscape of “mountains, forest, rocks, rivers” that he said spread before him in “the workhouse of nature.”



Pages from Martha Jefferson Randolph's account book listing kitchen activities.

Located directly on axis with the path from the house to the Vegetable Garden, the dependencies were the crossroads of the plantation, a point of intersection between its black and white communities. It was here that Jefferson family members interacted with slaves to see that a host of tasks were accomplished. For example, under their mother Martha Jefferson Randolph’s tutelage, Jefferson’s granddaughters served one-month stints as “housekeeper,” choosing menus and carrying the keys to the locked cellars that contained foodstuffs and other supplies.

The doors of all the dependencies were locked, as were kitchen lockers, cupboards, and trunks, and only a select few individuals were entrusted with keys. Theft was common on plantations, and security was a constant consideration. Despite the precautions taken at Monticello, reports of theft included the corn cribs, charcoal sheds, poultry yard, wash house, and wine cellars. Thomas Mann Randolph,



Massachusetts Historical Society

A detail of Jefferson's 1772 plan for the basement and dependencies of Monticello.

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Jefferson's son-in-law, noted the disappearance in 1801 of "80 gallons of Coles best cider, in 3 days exactly, under 2 locks & keys."

The Beer Cellar, which was opened to the public this past summer, tells the story not only of beer and brewing at Monticello but also of its various brewers, beginning with Jefferson's wife, Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson. From her arrival at Monticello just after their

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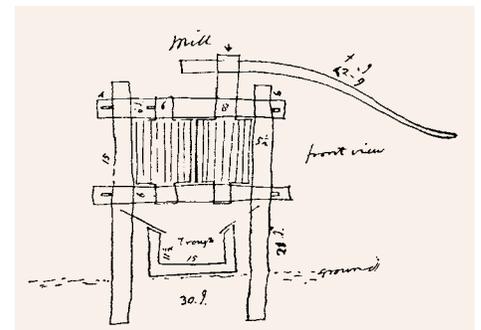
Monticello's Beer Cellar is now open to visitors.

marriage in 1772, she recorded the brewing about every two weeks of a 15-gallon cask of "small" beer, a low-alcohol beverage meant for quick consumption. Much later, Peter Hemings, according to Jefferson, learned brewing "with entire success" from Joseph Miller, a British brewer detained in Albemarle County during the War of 1812. Hemings, who Jefferson said "possessed great intelligence and diligence, both of which are necessary," brewed about a hundred gallons of ale every spring and fall.

The ale was stored in corked bottles made of green glass, which usually held a quart, or stoneware jugs, which held either a quart or a "pottle" (half-gallon). Once bottled, the ale was stored upright in boxes packed with sand. Visitors today can enter the Beer Cellar on a raised platform and see the room furnished with historically accurate reproductions of casks, bottles, corks, wooden boxes, and other objects. The glass and stoneware bottles echo the shapes of bottleneck shards excavated at Monticello.

Apple cider was another common table drink at Monticello. The bottling of cider was supervised by the slave Ursula, of whom Jefferson wrote, "There is nobody there but Ursula who unites trust and skill to do it." Her husband, plantation overseer Great George, was a knowledgeable cider maker. The cider was stored in large casks, such as those displayed in the Storage Cellar next to the Beer Cellar.

The recently opened North Privy is one of two "necessaries" at either end of the all-weather passageway. Although indoor privies were rare in America at the time, no less than five such privies served Monticello. The interior restoration of the North Privy is based on



Jefferson sketch for a cider mill.

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Dependencies

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Jefferson's floor plan and a surviving original seat at Poplar Forest. Just who at Monticello made use of which privy remains a bit of a mystery, as this sort of thing is absent from the documentary record. Jefferson had his own, and family members presumably used the facilities located on the first- and second-floor south passages. The use of locks on some privies indicates that access was restricted. Pierre S. du Pont de Nemours, who visited Monticello in 1816, wrote that he had access to one "through an underground tunnel, level with the cellars and built for that purpose." An additional "necessary house of wood 8. feet square" on Mulberry Row (now vanished) likely was used by free and enslaved workers.

The Cook's Room, the first of the dependencies to be completed in the current project, is the first slave dwelling space at Monticello to be restored and furnished. Located under the South Terrace next to the kitchen, the 10-by-14-foot room contains furniture, bedding, blankets, clothing, and personal items to tell the story of the cook Edith Fossett and her family, who probably moved there in 1809. Foundation staff members drew on documentary records and Monticello's archaeology collection to re-create the room.

The Foundation also will stabilize the rubble-stone walls dating from 1802 that line the north cellar passageway and the rear side of the stable. All three walls are about 18 inches thick and have been stressed by soil pressure and deteriorated mortar. Every effort will be made to preserve these original walls by meticulously excavating behind them; consolidating the backside with mortar; constructing a secondary wall to alleviate soil pressure and isolate tree roots; and installing effective drainage. The first step, however, will be an archaeological investigation of a five-foot wide trench along the walls to learn more about Jefferson's tree-planting scheme.



TJF / Robert C. Lautman

The cellar passageway.

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There will still be much more work to be done over the next five years. The remaining part of the dependencies project will address Monticello's smokehouse, wash house, dairy, icehouse, cellars, and additional slave quarters.

- SUSAN R. STEIN

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COMMENTS? newsletter@monticello.org

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Reproductions of the stoneware jugs that were used to store ale brewed at Monticello.

