

Thomas Jefferson

MONTICELLO

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Connoisseur in Chief

THOMAS JEFFERSON'S LEGACY as our “founding foodie” and “the only American epicurean president” has had a lasting impact on our culinary consciousness. Food writers cite Jefferson’s views and culinary practices in all kinds of stories about our national cuisine.

Recent articles in publications from *The New York Times* to *Garden and Gun* have looked to Thomas Jefferson to help answer such culinary questions as: Why do Americans love ice cream? Are peas good in guacamole? Does the Virginia wine industry have a bright future?

Although we cannot put words in Jefferson’s mouth on the merits of peas in guacamole, there is a lot that Monticello does know about Jefferson’s place in American food history. In many ways, Jefferson was the architect of American life, bringing substance and style to the new nation.

At Monticello and the President’s House (now known as the White House), Jefferson was renowned for his hospitality and the fusion of Old and New World flavors served at his table. After a visit to Monticello in 1824, Daniel Webster observed, “Dinner is served in half Virginian, half French style, in good taste and abundance.”

Jefferson was an ever-curious and experimental epicure, gathering and incorporating the best elements of the food traditions he experienced or read about in the Americas and Europe.

Although Jefferson was not the first to introduce foods like ice cream and macaroni to America, he can certainly be credited with popularizing



The dining room at Monticello, home to Jefferson’s renowned hospitality and where dinner was served “in good taste and abundance.”

the dishes. Visitors to the President’s House during his administration frequently noted ice cream in their observations, and on at least two occasions they enjoyed it enclosed in a warm pastry, comparable to a cream puff. On Independence Day in 1806, Jefferson hosted a presidential open house for the public and offered homemade ice cream to his guests. Family manuscripts contain a wide array of ice cream recipes,

including one in Jefferson’s own hand for vanilla ice cream.

Not everyone was a fan of Jefferson’s experimentation with Continental fare. Fellow Founding Father Patrick Henry criticized Jefferson for the manner in which “he has abjured his native victuals in favor of French cuisine.”

On wine, there is little disagreement that Jefferson was America’s most knowledgeable connoisseur and our “first distinguished viticulturist.”

Jefferson’s tastes were informed by his time in France, and his tasting notes from his tour of Southern France and Northern Italy – the first detailed modern accounts of wine in English – remain valuable to wine drinkers today.

Jefferson once called wine a “necessary of life” and imported wine from Europe for both the President’s House and Monticello. His guests frequently praised his selections; one wrote, “His wine was truly the best I ever drank, particularly his champaign [*sic*] – It is delicious indeed.” Ever the plant pioneer, Jefferson also grew a wide variety of grapes at Monticello and fervently believed that “we could in the United States, make as great a variety of wines as are made in Europe, not exactly the same kinds, but doubtless as good.”

Today, guests can tour Monticello’s culinary spaces and gardens, and celebrate Jefferson’s legacy as a revolutionary gardener and “founding foodie” at the Heritage Harvest Festival every September. Monticello historians continue to mine family letters and manuscripts for recipes used at Monticello. *Dining at Monticello*, edited by Damon Lee Fowler and now celebrating its 10th year in print, is also a great resource for anyone interested in trying recipes enjoyed during Jefferson’s time.



200th Anniversary!

PAGE 5 • THE 1815 SALE OF THE
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The main reading room in the Thomas Jefferson Building at the Library of Congress.



Listen to the panel discussion on Jefferson and the paradox of liberty featuring Tom Brokaw at www.monticello.org/May2

On May 2, descendants of enslaved families planted two trees on Mulberry Row in honor of their ancestors who lived and labored on the mountaintop during Jefferson’s time.

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