

Mr. Jefferson MONTICELLO

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EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

Behind-the-Scenes Tour

VETERAN TOUR GUIDE Ed Imhoff arrived armed with vast knowledge of the inner workings of Thomas Jefferson's household. He smiled broadly at the eager crowd gathering to participate in Monticello's new Behind-the-Scenes tour. Their anticipation was palpable – this was no ordinary tour.

"You are among the first to see the upstairs of Mr. Jefferson's home. Please ask questions along the way," he said, beckoning the group to enter the house.

The group's interests varied, ranging from architecture to history. Some came to Monticello from across the country, as far away as Oregon, others from Charlottesville. They came to celebrate birthdays or enjoy vacation getaways, donning cameras and bursting with questions.

In June 2010, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation introduced the Behind-the-Scenes tour to its list of programs. The special tour series sold out immediately, and the initial end date scheduled for September 6 was pushed back to 2011. More than 3,000 people took the tour in its first three months.

While Monticello's most frequently purchased traditional house tour provides visitors with a glimpse into Jefferson's life, the new Behind-the-Scenes tour sheds additional light on Jefferson's family and servants – the people who brought the house to life. The unfinished spaces provide an opportunity for guides to educate visitors on restoration efforts.

"I can't believe I'm in a piece of history," said Joan Purnell, visiting from



Visitors take in the Dome Room during a Behind-the-Scenes tour. T.J.F.

Philadelphia. "I've been through tours here a number of times before and each one is different. Each guide offers a different piece of history or information." Imhoff pointed out the unique windows located low on the wall in the second-floor room. Jefferson's sister Anna Scott Jefferson Marks, known as "Aunt Marks" to Jefferson's children and grandchildren, slept here. The room's features include its small alcove for a bed and a small hearth and flue for a wood stove.

The group took the narrow stairs again. The first stop was a large room with two sky-lit windows, known as the *North Bedroom*. The visitors admired the beautiful pine floorboards and the two alcoves that would have been occupied by Jefferson's grandchildren during his retirement.

"You'll notice the glass does not meet up here," Imhoff said, pointing at the skylights. "There are little spaces where the glass overlaps. That was Jefferson, the physicist,

"Seeing it this way, it feels like it really was a community."

BEHIND-THE-SCENES VISITOR
VICTORIA BROWN

Behind-the-Scenes Tour

creating windows that wouldn't fog."

All around the room, visitors nodded their heads and peeked through the glass panes.

Down the hall, the grand entrance to the Dome Room awaited them. As the tour made its way into the sun-kissed yellow room, the crowd broke into 'oohs' and 'aahs.'

Victoria Brown couldn't help but gasp when taking in the beauty of the Dome Room's large circular windows and oculus skylight.

"It was amazing to see the second floor and the Dome Room. I was amazed by the arch," said Brown. A Charlottesville resident, Brown had visited Monticello before, but she didn't want to miss the opportunity to be one of the first upstairs.

"Seeing it this way, it feels like it really was a community," said Brown, echoing the sentiment of others during the visit.

Imhoff's characterization of the rooms gave a vivid picture of those who took up the space and how different areas were used.

Steering the explorers in the opposite direction from the Dome Room's entrance, Imhoff swung open large doors, revealing the "cuddy" or attic space over the Northwest (Garden) Portico. The space was used as a hideaway by two of Jefferson's adult granddaughters, Virginia Jefferson Randolph Trist and Cornelia Jefferson Randolph. Jefferson's granddaughters had furnished the small space with a

sofa, tables, chairs, a desk and a book. In a letter, Virginia Jefferson Randolph said, "I have taken possession with the dirt daubers, wasps and humble bees; and do not intend to give it up to any thing but the formible [sic] rats which have not yet found out this fairy place."

As a graduate student living in Charlottesville, Lauren Purnell had visited Monticello many times. "When I read in a New York Times article that the second and third floors were open, I bought tickets as soon as my parents were able to visit," said Purnell.

She spent her 30th birthday climbing the narrow stairs with her family and friends to the rooms she had only imagined before. "I always tried to picture what they looked like; now I know," said Purnell. "I feel more attuned to Jefferson's family and how his household worked." When Purnell entered the Dome Room her face lit up, her eyes scanned up and around, and a smile stretched across her face.

"Few things live up to the expectation. In this case, the Dome Room exceeded my expectations," she said.

The group filled the room, snapping photographs and looking up at the dome. Imhoff continued telling the story of Jefferson's grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph and his bride, Jane Hollins Nicholas, who lived in the room for a short time.

Imhoff smiled as his tour group snapped photos, mouths agape. "It's always fun," he said.

The Behind-the-Scenes tour

debuted in June 2010. Tickets continue to sell out for the exclusive daytime tour that takes visitors behind the scenes of Monticello. The tour provides access to private second-floor bedrooms once occupied by members of Jefferson's family, along with the iconic Dome Room on the third floor. Visitors will conclude their tour in the cellar of Monticello where they can view the newly installed *Crossroads Exhibition: Domestic Work at Monticello*.

During the tour, visitors can see unique interior architectural features, learn about on-going restoration efforts, and gain insight into what one of Thomas Jefferson's granddaughters called "the bustle and hurry" of life at Monticello.

Prices

Behind-the-Scenes tours include a guided, first-floor House Tour at no additional cost, if desired. Please choose one of the following two options:

Behind-the-Scenes Tour Only: \$37

Behind-the-Scenes & House Tour: \$37

For more information log on to:

www.monticello.org/visit

Guide Ed Imhoff describes the Dome Room to visitors during a Behind-the-Scenes tour. TJF

