

Thomas Jefferson MONTICELLO

SPRING 2011

www.monticello.org

VOLUME 22, NUMBER 1

Jefferson Plants in White House Kitchen Garden

On March 16, 2011, Peter Hatch visited the White House to participate in the third annual planting of the kitchen garden with First Lady Michelle Obama and children from area Washington, D.C., elementary schools. This excerpt is from Peter's www.monticello.org blog post:

Michelle Obama declared in 2010 that the White House kitchen garden "has been one of the greatest things I've done in my life so far." The garden is a central feature of the First Lady's "Move On" initiative to create healthier American children by combating childhood obesity, improving school lunch programs and introducing children to the joys of gardening and fresh vegetable cuisine.

I was invited to participate in planting the White House garden in April 2010, and then again this year on March 16. I joined schoolchildren from Bancroft and Tubman elementary schools, the White House chefs and gardeners, and Mrs. Obama—all witnessed by a crowd of journalists—on a cool spring afternoon.

The garden was much improved over last year with its raised beds, improved soil, and new design. The soil was remarkable—it smelled good, the earthworms were everywhere, and it was humus rich and friable. If you judge a civilization by its soil, then, by the standards of the White House kitchen garden, we're mak-

ing real progress.

The gardeners and chefs organized the ceremonial planting by carefully setting out potted seedlings of cool-weather vegetables—lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard, cauliflower—for the fourth and fifth graders to do the actual planting.

Michelle Obama talked to the kids about her "Move On" initiative and the goodness of gardening and fresh produce. She'd say, "Let's hear it for spinach," and the kids, sitting at picnic tables covered with baskets of apples and red checkered tablecloths, would all cheer. The kids then moved into the garden and, with the help of Mrs. Obama, the chefs and gardeners, planted the various beds over the next hour. The two schoolchildren assigned to me, Shiva and Téah, were great kids, knowledgeable about both planting vegetables and eating them too. I told them many times they could work for me at Monticello.

We planted two beds devoted to Thomas Jefferson with about 50 "Tennis Ball" lettuce plants, 50 Brown Dutch lettuce plants, two rows of peas, 10 Brussels sprouts, 7 French artichokes, 40 plants of kale and 40 beet plants. Mrs. Obama had



Peter Hatch shares his gardening expertise with school children during the planting of the White House Kitchen Garden. TJF

told the kids how beets were a touchy subject at the family table because her husband does not like them, so planting them, of course, satisfied the "subversive" side of my character.

With all the tumult in the world today, what an experience to go to the White House—the center of the Western world—to plant vegetables with schoolchildren. What an affirmation of faith in the human condition to do something so elemental and so hopeful. In so many ways, Thomas Jefferson was first in food, first in wine and first in gardening, and to bring his gardens and plants to the White House kitchen garden was a profound and moving experience.