

Th: Jefferson

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Monticello's Tulip Poplar Bowls

There are little bits of the Monticello mountaintop across the globe. That's how artist Fred Williamson likes to think of the beautiful tulip poplar bowls he turns in his studio near the Skyline Drive. The wood comes from two trees taken down from Monticello's West Lawn.

"Little bits of Monticello are being treasured and preserved all over the place," said Williamson.

For decades two tulip poplar trees stood majestically next to Monticello, anchoring Jefferson's masterpiece to the south and north of the house. In 2008, the southwest tulip poplar was removed due to deteriorating health and concerns about its structural integrity. This tree was believed

to be more than 150 years old and may have been at Monticello when Jefferson lived here.

In June 2011, the north tree was taken down due to similar concerns. But the story of the beautiful tulip poplars at Monticello doesn't stop there.

Fred Williamson is one of the artisans selected to handcraft bowls from the remains of the trees. The tulip poplar bowls he creates are exquisitely designed to show the natural beauty and age of the wood. He describes the dynamic patterns and intricacies of the wood with an artist's passion.

"There's a real sense of connection with the tree," he said. "The wood was remarkable to work with, much harder than any poplar I'd experienced before, and with an

Fred Williamson in his studio.



immediate sense of age to it. The blackened inner hollow surface was especially tough, fire-hardened I liked to think, and provided the most distinctive bowls when featured as the upper edge."

Williamson says the bowls once again bring to life Monticello's historic trees. "I have always felt that my bowls essentially preserve a bit of the soul of a tree. They are thin, curved sections through the wood, often going from heart to bark, dried and polished smooth, and in the arcing surface you can read the history of the tree as well as see some of the stresses it might have undergone. Once completely finished and put in a house, they can last forever."

Products or artisans using the tulip poplar wood or wood claimed from Monticello include:

Frederick Williamson: Bowls
Huss & Dalton Musical Instruments: Guitars
Lee Thomas™ Putters: Monticello Putter
Channel Craft: Heirloom Hobby Horse
Kirk McCauley: Bowls, Chess Sets, Rolling Pins
Elbert Dale: Rolling Pin



Artist Fred Williamson turns a tulip poplar bowl made from a Monticello tree.

