

# FRENCH CUISINE & MONTICELLO'S ENSLAVED COOKS

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Politicians, socialites, diplomats, neighbors and curious strangers often sat at Thomas Jefferson's table. Many remarked not just on the amicable conversation that they shared with Jefferson, but also on the sophisticated cuisine. The Washington socialite Margaret Bayard Smith described the dinners in the Jefferson White House as "republican simplicity ... united to Epicurean delicacy." At Monticello, Bostonian George Ticknor wrote that the "dinner was always choice, and served in the French style."

*However, most of the French cooking that Jefferson enjoyed was not prepared by French chefs but instead by several remarkably talented enslaved cooks –all of whom remained invisible to the guests who shared Jefferson's table.*

James Hemings – an older brother of Sally Hemings – helped bring French cuisine to America. While in Paris with Jefferson, who served as U.S. Minister to France from 1784 to 1789, Hemings trained with a number of accomplished French cooks before becoming the chef de cuisine at the Hôtel de Langeac, Jefferson's private residence on the Champ Elysées, in 1787. His dishes were served to scientists, diplomats and aristocrats, including Duc de La Rochefoucauld and the Princess Lubomirska of Poland. Hemings – who was considered a free man on French soil – returned with Jefferson to America in 1789, bringing knowledge of sophisticated recipes like crème brûlée, meringues and "maccaroni" with him. Hemings again became Jefferson's chef while the statesman served in George Washington's cabinet, serving sumptuous dishes like capon stuffed with Virginia ham and boeuf à la mode to political allies and even enemies like Alexander

Hamilton. In 1793, reluctant to return to Monticello after nearly a decades-long absence, Hemings struck a bargain with Jefferson. Hemings would pass on the "art of cookery" to other Monticello slaves in exchange for his freedom. For nearly two years, Hemings, assisted by his brother Peter, produced meals in the kitchen in the cellar of the South Pavilion for the Monticello table. Four of Hemings' recipes survive today, one for "Snow Eggs" and three for dessert creams.

Six years after James Hemings left Monticello as a free man, his niece, the slave Edith Hern Fossett, became an accomplished French-inspired chef in her own right. From 1802 to 1809, Fossett was apprenticed to Honore Julien, Jefferson's French chef in the White House. There she assisted in the preparation of "profuse and extremely elegant meals" for guests as distinguished and varied as an envoy from Tunis and Osage Indian chiefs. One White House guest remarked that "never before had such dinners been given in the President's House." One Congressman related the dishes he ate in a single White House meal: "Rice soup, round of beef, turkey, mutton, ham, loin of veal, fried eggs, fried beef, a pie called macaroni," and ice cream, a "dish somewhat like a pudding," as well as fruit and "plenty of wine."

When Jefferson retired from the presidency in 1809, Fossett returned with him to Albemarle County, where she became head cook in the new Monticello kitchen under the South Terrace, transforming "plantation fare" into "choice" meals. Fossett, along with another enslaved cook, Frances Hern, prepared the two main meals at Monticello: breakfast and a late-afternoon dinner. Assisted by young enslaved boys, such as Hern's brother Israel Gillette, the enslaved chefs baked breads, cooked vegetables from the garden, prepared meats on the stew stove or in the hearth, and made desserts. Hern and Fossett likely prepared several French-inspired dishes for Jefferson's table, including bouilli (boiled meat), veal glace, meringues, macarons, blancmange and ice cream.

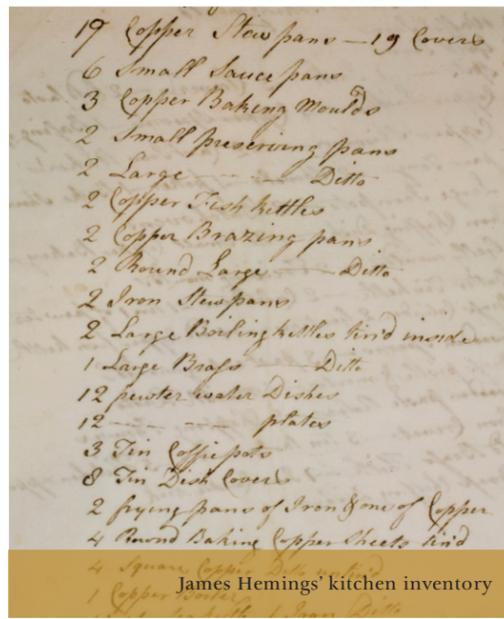


## HOST A JEFFERSONIAN DINNER

Jefferson encouraged the connection between food and sociability and cherished lingering conversation over fine wine. Host your own Jeffersonian Dinner and enjoy lively discussion with family and friends.

Learn more about this tradition and find historical recipes at:

[monticello.org/  
 JeffersonianDinners](http://monticello.org/JeffersonianDinners)



JOIN US  
 NEXT YEAR!  
 HHF 2017  
 SEPTEMBER 8TH AND 9TH

## EXPLORING SOUTHERN CHEFS AND FOODWAYS THE 10TH ANNUAL HERITAGE HARVEST FESTIVAL

Monticello celebrated southern chefs and foodways at the 10th Annual Heritage Harvest Festival. Patrick O'Connell, this year's keynote speaker, kicked off the festival at a Friday Night Opening at the Paramount Theater.

Watch O'Connell's remarks and his lively panel discussion with Joel Salatin, David Shields, Michael Twitty and Ira Wallace, as well as key moments of the festival, at [HeritageHarvestFestival.com](http://HeritageHarvestFestival.com).