

# Mr. Jefferson MONTICELLO

## Jefferson's Wine Cellar

Attempts to grow *Vitis vinifera* at Monticello and Thomas Jefferson's support for the establishment of an American wine industry have led him to be described as America's "first distinguished viticulturist" and "the greatest patron of wine and winegrowing that this country has yet had." Jefferson believed that "we could, in the United States, make as great a variety of wines as are made in Europe, not exactly of the same kinds, but doubtless as good." Jefferson promoted



wine, a stated "necessary of life," as a beverage of health and temperance, as opposed to liquors. Jefferson's recognition as the most knowledgeable wine connoisseur of his time originates with his experiences in vineyards in Europe, his continuing pursuit of high quality wines for importation, and his role as wine adviser to Presidents Washington, Madison, and Monroe.

The restoration of the Wine Cellar in the passage beneath the Monticello house will bring to life the story of Thomas Jefferson and wine. Inventories and correspondence in Jefferson's hand that offer insight into his provisioning and consumption patterns over time and have been used to inform the refurnishing of the space with period-appropriate wine vessels and paraphernalia. The Wine Cellar's importance, aside from its obvious role to the Jeffersonian meals in the Dining Room above, will be enriched by stories of the enslaved workers who were responsible for its maintenance.

A new platform above the original brick floor will allow Monticello visitors to enter the Wine Cellar and see it as it looked and functioned during Jefferson's retirement years. Furnished with glass bottles – the vessels for transporting wine to the Dining Room above via dumbwaiter – the cellar will illustrate various methods of laying bottled wine in bins and crates. As glass bottles were re-used until they were no longer viable, Jefferson's inventory of bottles on hand in 1794 contained approximately 40 percent English-style bottles and 60 percent French-style, reflecting his preference (after his European travels) for ordering wine bottled and shipped directly from the vineyard, an unusual practice at the time. (Wine was typically purchased in casks from merchants and then drawn off into bottles at its final destination; some of Jefferson's wines were provisioned in this manner). By requesting that his French wines be estate-bottled and thus cutting out the middleman, Jefferson wanted to ensure the quality of the wine and its security during subsequent shipping.

Visitors also will be able to see the house's only surviving double-thickness door and the workings of the restored, original wine dumbwaiters. Consisting of four individually-weighted lifts, the devices allowed four bottles to be pre-positioned behind the locked doors on either side of the Dining Room fireplace. They were easily replenished by signaling someone in the Wine Cellar below to pull the lifts down into the cellar; reloaded, the weighted lifts then ascended back up to the Dining Room, providing almost invisible operation.