

Thomas Jefferson MONTICELLO

Monticello's Dining Room

The transformation of Monticello's Dining Room is the centerpiece of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation's restoration initiatives in 2010. The repainting and refurnishing of the room will present a more historically accurate interpretation of the space, provide visitors with fresh insights into domestic life at Monticello during Jefferson's time, and highlight Jefferson's celebrated ingenuity and taste.

The most noticeable change to the Dining Room will be the color of its walls. The much-copied Wedgwood blue that has inspired dining rooms throughout America over the years will be replaced by chrome yellow. The blue color dates only from 1936, before the scientific analysis of paint existed. Extensive recent research by paint experts indicated that Jefferson chose a brilliant chrome yellow for the Dining Room around 1815. It was one of the most fashionable colors of the time and also one of the most expensive: Chrome yellow pigment cost \$5 per pound, twice as much as Prussian blue and 33 times more than white lead.

The chrome yellow of the walls will be enhanced by several other important changes to the Dining Room. Added to the furnishings will be a reproduction of a sideboard originally made by New York cabinetmaker Thomas Burling, similar to the one likely owned by Jefferson; a French marble console table; and an interpretation of the Abbeville carpet (similar to a Wilton) that Jefferson purchased in France in the 1780s. These will complement the eclectic and comfortable mix of furnishings in the room, such as the French fauteuils that were used with Hepplewhite and Sheraton-inspired shieldback chairs made in New York and Philadelphia, and the dining tables, all made in Virginia and one in Monticello's joinery, that were assembled to accommodate the size of the particular dinner or breakfast party.

The new interpretation of the Dining Room will also speak to the significance of dining with Jefferson. Famous for his hospitality, Jefferson played host to members of his large family and numerous guests at Monticello. The Dining Room was frequently crowded with family and guests, invited and uninvited.



Monticello Dining Room

Jefferson's granddaughter Ellen Randolph Coolidge described Monticello as a "feast of reason," where ideas were discussed and shared. To minimize interruptions during meals, Jefferson installed a revolving door with shelves for platters of food and placed wooden shelves on wheels (dumbwaiters) near diners so that they could remove their own soiled dishes.

The cuisine at Monticello was exceptional. Daniel Webster described it as "half Virginian, half French." Jefferson's enslaved cooks had at their disposal the bounty of Monticello's gardens, where at least 330 different vegetable varieties and 170 fruits were cultivated.

Jefferson is equally well-known for his appreciation of wine. The concurrent restoration of Monticello's Wine Cellar, located in the passageway beneath the house and connected to the Dining Room by a dumbwaiter system, will provide detailed information about Jefferson's interest in wine.

