

Study Topics

AGRICULTURE

Jefferson received several honorary degrees for his contributions to agriculture, in particular for his invention of the mouldboard plow of least resistance. A model of the plow may be seen in the *Thomas Jefferson at Monticello* exhibition, which offers further information on Jefferson's interest in agriculture.

AMERICAN INDIANS

Notes on the State of Virginia, the only book Jefferson authored, gives a good account of his interest in Native Americans. Monticello's Entrance Hall was known as the Indian Hall because of the many artifacts on display. Jefferson excavated an Indian burial mound near Charlottesville and also conducted an in-depth study of Indian languages.

ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME

Jefferson was very interested in classical literature and was able to read in Latin and ancient Greek.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Jefferson is considered to have been the first scientific archaeologist in America. He excavated an Indian burial mound near Charlottesville using procedures still used by archaeologists today. Modern archaeological digs can be seen at Monticello during warmer weather. The artifacts found in these sites are on display in the exhibition, *Thomas Jefferson at Monticello*, and in the Monticello underground passage exhibit.

ARCHITECTURE

Jefferson was a self-taught architect. He designed Monticello, the University of Virginia, and the Virginia State Capitol building in Richmond. Architectural drawings and scale models are on view in the exhibition, *Thomas Jefferson at Monticello*. An original engraving of the ground plan of the University is displayed at Monticello.

ART

Jefferson wrote, "I am an enthusiast on the subject of the arts." Many paintings, sculptures, and engravings that Jefferson owned can be seen at Monticello.

ASTRONOMY

Jefferson, like many of his contemporaries, was very interested in astronomy. One of his telescopes is displayed in the Cabinet at Monticello, the other is in the exhibition, *Thomas Jefferson at Monticello*.

BIBLIOPHILE

Jefferson said he could not live without books. However he sold his collection of almost 7,000 volumes to the Library of Congress in 1815. The books currently displayed at Monticello represent some of the same titles from that collection.

BOTANY

Monticello's gardens and the Greenhouse show many of the hundreds of varieties of plants that Jefferson would have grown. The Lewis and Clark expedition brought back many new species of plants for Jefferson to study.

CUISINE

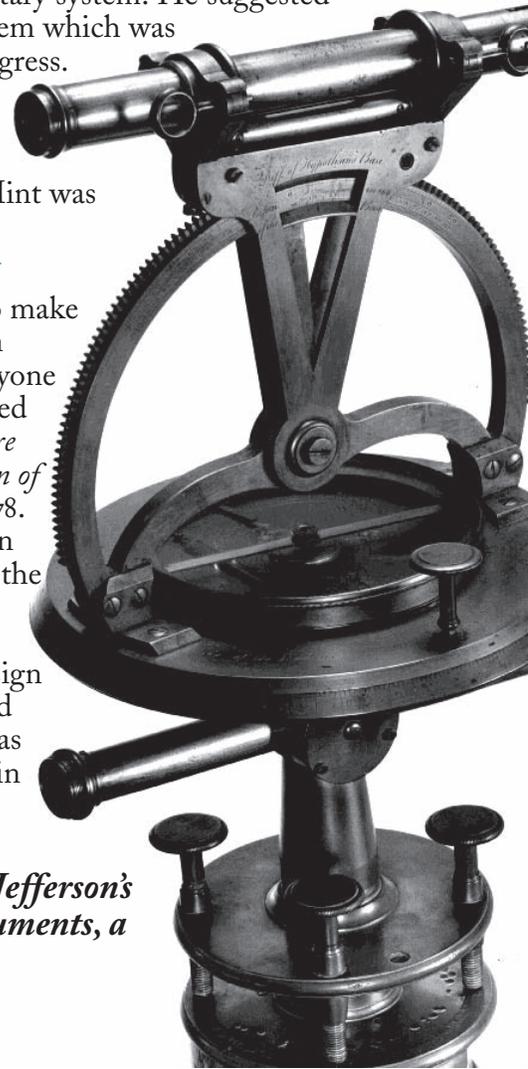
Jefferson cultivated a large variety of vegetables, fruits, and garden products not commonly grown on Virginia plantations. Jefferson's five years in France introduced him to French cuisine, which remained a favorite of his after he returned to the United States. Jefferson imported several unusual foods to America including macaroni and olives.

ECONOMICS

Jefferson is often known as the father of the American monetary system. He suggested the decimal system which was adopted by Congress. During his term as secretary of state the first United States Mint was established.

EDUCATION

In an attempt to make public education available to everyone Jefferson authored a *Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge* in 1778. He is also known as the Father of the University of Virginia for his architectural design of the school and grounds as well as his leading role in its organization.



One of Thomas Jefferson's surveying instruments, a theodolite.

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GEOGRAPHY

Jefferson's book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, details his interest in the geography of Virginia. Jefferson also played an active role in organizing the Lewis and Clark expedition which obtained new geographic information about the western United States.

LANGUAGES

Books in Jefferson's library attest to the fact that he was able to read in seven languages: Anglo-Saxon, English, French, Greek, Italian, Latin, and Spanish. He was also fascinated with American Indian languages and did an extensive study of their structures.

LAW

Jefferson was trained as a lawyer. The *Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom*, written by Jefferson, was adopted in 1786. Jefferson also worked on a revision of the laws of Virginia. He was a strong proponent for the addition of the Bill of Rights to the United States Constitution.

MECHANICAL DEVICES

Although he is known for only one invention, the mouldboard plow of least resistance, mechanical devices fascinated Jefferson. Some of these, such as the automatic doors, the wine dumbwaiters, and the folding ladder at Monticello, are adaptations of ideas Jefferson had seen or read about. During his term as secretary of state Jefferson became the first administrator of the Patent Office.

MEDICINE

Jefferson was one of the pioneers in the treatment of smallpox by having family members and slaves inoculated. A lancet used in smallpox vaccination can be seen in the exhibition, *Thomas Jefferson at Monticello*. A medicine chest can be seen in his bedroom at Monticello.

MUSIC

Jefferson said that "music is the favorite passion of my soul." He was an accomplished violinist and his daughters Martha and Mary played the harpsichord and piano forte. Musical instruments and sheet music can be seen in the Parlour at Monticello and in the exhibition, *Thomas Jefferson at Monticello*.

Monticello's weathervane.

NATURAL HISTORY

Many natural history specimens were on display in Monticello's Entrance Hall. The antlers and fossils seen today suggest the kinds of items that would have filled Jefferson's Entrance Hall museum.

PALEONTOLOGY

Jefferson was interested in the study of fossils, particularly those of the American Mastodon. He commissioned an excavation at Big Bone Lick, Kentucky, from which were taken fossilized remains of a mastodon. Some of these fossils are displayed in the Entrance Hall at Monticello.

RELIGION

Jefferson authored the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, adopted in 1786. He also compiled the "Jefferson Bible" which contained the life and teachings of Jesus.

RIDING

Jefferson believed that horseback riding was "healthful to his body, mind, and affairs" and he rode for several hours each day, even as an old man. A pair of his riding boots are displayed at Monticello. The stables located under the North Terrace are open to visitors.

SURVEYING

Both Thomas Jefferson and his father, Peter, were surveyors. A map by Peter Jefferson and Joshua Fry is displayed in the Entrance Hall at Monticello. Jefferson's theodolite and surveying chains are on display in the Cabinet at Monticello. Other surveying equipment can be seen in the exhibition, *Thomas Jefferson at Monticello*.

WEATHER

Jefferson was fascinated by the study of the American climate. He took daily temperature and wind direction readings even when he was away from Monticello. He installed a weathervane on the roof of the house which was attached to a compass on the ceiling of the East Portico. This allowed wind direction to be read from several rooms in the house.

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Jefferson made an extensive proposal for a new standardized system of weights and measures that would use a decimal ratio. This ratio was similar to that used in the coin system and would simplify the ordinary business transactions of all Americans, but Congress never passed the proposal. Jefferson also acquired and used several odometers to keep records of the distances he traveled.