

# Th: Jefferson

# MONTICELLO

SUMMER 2010

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

VOLUME 21, NUMBER 1

OPENING IN JUNE

## New views of life at Monticello

By Elizabeth Chew

VISITORS to Monticello will be afforded new insights into domestic life during Thomas Jefferson's 56 years on the "little mountain" through five restoration and interpretive initiatives to be unveiled in June.

"New Perspectives on Life at Monticello"—the newly restored and refurnished Dining Room, Wine Cellar, and South Pavilion plus an exhibition in the house's central cellar and tours of the upper floors—will reveal in greater detail than ever before what everyday life was like for Jefferson, his family members, and the enslaved men, women, and children whose work made the household function.

"These new additions to our interpretation are truly exciting," said Leslie Greene Bowman, president of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation. "In 1797 Jefferson wrote, 'I am happier at home than I can be elsewhere,' and today we are delighted to offer these new avenues for exploring life at Monticello during his times."



The transformation of Monticello's Dining Room is the centerpiece of the new initiatives. The most noticeable change will be the color of the room's walls. The much-copied Wedgwood blue that has inspired dining rooms throughout America over the years has been replaced by chrome yellow.



The Dining Room walls have been painted chrome yellow, a color chosen by Jefferson around 1815. TJF

Research conducted in the 1930s—before the advent of scientific paint analysis—indicated that the Dining Room walls had once been blue, and the Wedgwood blue paint was applied in 1936. However, extensive recent research indicated that the oldest layer of blue paint on the walls was from the post-Jefferson period and that Jefferson had chosen a brilliant chrome yellow for the Dining Room around 1815. This 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 walls will be enhanced by several important furnishing additions: a reproduction of a  
Continued on next page.

COMMENTS?  
[newsletter@monticello.org](mailto:newsletter@monticello.org)

# Th: Jefferson

# MONTICELLO

**Monticello** is a newsletter published twice each year by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Inc. The Thomas Jefferson Foundation is the private, nonprofit corporation that has owned and operated Monticello since 1923. Its mission is preservation and education.

© Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Inc., 2010

# New views of life at Monticello

Continued, Page 2.

sideboard similar to one Jefferson bought in 1790; a French marble console table; and an interpretation of the Abbeville carpet that Jefferson purchased in France in the 1780s.

The new Dining Room interpretation also marks the first time Monticello curators and archaeologists have collaborated regarding ceramics used for dining in the main house. Excavations around the room's perimeter and provenance studies reveal that although the Jefferson family owned Chinese and European porcelain, in Jefferson's retirement years they most frequently used pearl ware, a type of English earthenware that was less expensive than porcelain but with some of its characteristics. In order to show dishes of this type, the Foundation has borrowed a set of green shell-edged pearl ware from the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

"The interpretation of the Dining Room will speak to Jefferson's taste and ingenuity, and to the significance of dining with him at Monticello," said Susan Stein, Monticello's Richard Gilder Senior Curator and Vice President for Museum Programs. "Jefferson was famous for his hospitality and played host to his large extended family and frequent, numerous guests. Jefferson's granddaughter Ellen Randolph Coolidge described



**Monticello's Bob Self working on the restored dumbwaiter in the Wine Cellar.** T.J.F.

Monticello as a 'feast of reason,' where ideas were discussed and valued."



Jefferson is equally well-known for his appreciation of wine. The restoration of Monticello's Wine Cellar, connected to the Dining Room above by a dumbwaiter system, will provide detailed information about Jefferson's wine interests

"Recognition of Jefferson as America's first wine expert originates with his experiences in vineyards in Europe, his pursuit of quality wines for importation, and his role as wine adviser to Presidents Washington, Madison, and Monroe," said Justin Sarafin, Monticello's dependencies project coordinator. "And, of course, his cellar at Monticello."

Inventories and correspondence in Jefferson's handwriting that offer insight into his provisioning and consumption patterns over time have been used to inform the refurnishing of the Wine Cellar with period-appropriate wine vessels and

paraphernalia. The space's importance, aside from its obvious connection to the Jeffersonian meals in the Dining Room, 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 visitors to enter the Wine Cellar and see it as it looked during Jefferson's retirement years (1809-26). Furnished with glass bottles—the vessels for transporting wine to the Dining Room via dumbwaiter—the cellar will illustrate various methods of laying bottled wine in bins and crates.

Visitors also will be able to see 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 replaced 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.



Domestic work in the Monticello house will be the focus of "Crossroads," the new exhibition being installed in the house's central cellar, adjacent to the Wine Cellar and directly beneath the entrance Hall. The display will give visitors a sense of the constant interaction and activity required to keep Monticello running and introduce them to some of the people who worked to sustain the Jefferson household.

Life-size figures in the space will "present" enslaved butler Burwell Colbert; Jefferson's daughter and plantation mistress Martha Jefferson Randolph; Priscilla Hemmings, chief nurse to Jefferson's grandchildren; Israel Gillette, a teen-age house servant; Betty Brown, a seamstress and lady's maid who spent more time working in slavery at Monticello than any other person; and Harriet Hemings, an enslaved girl who learned needlework and other skills from her female relatives. Each figure

## Polo Ralph Lauren sponsor of Dining Room restoration

The Thomas Jefferson Foundation is grateful to Polo Ralph Lauren for its sponsorship of the Dining Room restoration at Monticello.

The gift by Polo Ralph Lauren has made it possible for Monticello to restore, refurnish, and reinterpret the room where dining with "Mr. Jefferson" made history.

Polo Ralph Lauren is a leader in the design, marketing, and distribution of premium lifestyle products in four categories: apparel, home, accessories, and fragrances.

The company has been a longtime supporter of great American treasures, including funding for the preservation of the original Star-Spangled Banner at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

# New views of life at Monticello

Continued, Page 3.

will be accompanied by a museum case of archaeologically recovered objects representing items they may have worn, carried in their pockets, or used in their jobs, including shoe buckles, a pocket knife, beads and earrings, thimbles, scissors, pins, and an iron.

The exhibition's interactive components will include a model of the wine dumbwaiter for visitors to operate and functional door locks, emphasizing the importance of locked storage spaces that led Jefferson's granddaughters to refer to housekeeping as "carrying the keys."



Monticello's new Behind the Scenes Tours will provide additional insight

into daily life during Jefferson's day. These hour-long, small-group tours, to begin at 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. daily from June 11 through Labor Day, will take visitors to the upper floors of the house, where Jefferson's extended family and visitors lived in what one of Jefferson's granddaughters called "the bustle and hurry of an almost perpetual round of company."

"Each tour will visit rarely seen second- and third-floor bed chambers, which will be undergoing restoration over the next few years, plus the Dome Room on the third floor," said Gary Sandling, Monticello's vice president of visitor programs and services. "Participants will learn about Jefferson's family members who lived upstairs and the work of enslaved domestic staff who served the family and their visitors, plus see the design and layout of the upper floors."

Because Monticello's upper floors can be reached only by steep, narrow stairs, these tours are not handicapped-accessible and are not recommended for individuals who may have difficulty climbing or descending as many as 75 stairs unassisted. Children must be able to climb and descend stairs unassisted by an adult. These tours are recommended for adults and children 7 and older.



While the Dining Room, Wine Cellar, "Crossroads" exhibition, and upper-floors tours will treat life during Jefferson's retirement, the newly restored interior of the South Pavilion, popularly referred to as the "honeymoon cottage," will illustrate the beginning of the Jefferson family's life at Monticello.

**A drawing for the life-size figure of Priscilla Hemmings that will be part of the new "Crossroads" exhibition.** GB McIntosh



**Visitors will be able to see the upper room of the South Pavilion as it may have been furnished in the early 1770s.** TJF

The brick South Pavilion, the first structure built on Monticello mountain, has two rooms, one over the other. The reinterpretation and refurnishing of the upper room will allow visitors to view the space as it may have appeared in the months following the marriage of Thomas Jefferson and Martha Wayles Skelton.

When Jefferson moved to Monticello in November 1770 he occupied the upper room of the pavilion. When he brought his bride to Monticello in January 1772, the lower level had been finished as a kitchen and new furnishings had been acquired for the upper room, including a large bedstead and expensive bed curtains that added a measure of privacy as well as color to this small, multifunctional space.

While there is no known inventory of the contents of the upper room at that time, documentary and archaeological evidence suggests a number of furnishings. These include the large bedstead with fashionable hangings, a crib, Venetian blinds, three types of chairs, a secretary bookcase, a dressing or bureau table, fireplace equipment, a dining table, pewter and cream ware table wares, and brass candlesticks.

The textiles in the room—vibrant printed cotton lined with green silk—are designed to represent fashionable and expensive choices for Virginians



# New views of life at Monticello

Continued, Page 4.

of the early 1770s. The new reproduction mahogany bedstead in the room is based on a surviving 18th-century Virginia bed at Carlyle House Historic Park in Alexandria. Its large proportions derive from recently interpreted notations in Jefferson's Memorandum Books, where he recorded the measurements for his own bedstead using a code.



Major support for "New Perspectives on Life at Monticello" has been provided by the National Endowment for

the Humanities, the Florence Gould Foundation, Polo Ralph Lauren, Abby and Howard Milstein, and The Roller-Bottimore Foundation

"In different ways, each of these new offerings adds breadth and depth to our knowledge and understanding of Jefferson and life at Monticello," Bowman said. "We are proud to introduce them, and confident that they will enhance the experiences of all of our visitors."

*Elizabeth Chew is Monticello's curator.*