

This Old House

Restoring a masterpiece

Spring 2023

Monticello has always been a work in progress, beginning with Jefferson's initial directions in 1768, extending through the Levy ownership from 1834 until Jefferson M. Levy sold Monticello to the Foundation in 1923, and continuing today, work continues to build, maintain and restore this internationally important World Heritage Site. Since acquiring Monticello, the Foundation has been committed to the preservation and restoration of Jefferson's mountaintop home, ensuring that it reflects his architectural vision — including the house, gardens and Mulberry Row.

The scholarly approach that has marked the stewardship of this World Heritage Site began with the restoration of the North Wing in 1938. Since then, generations of architects, historians, restoration experts, curators and archaeologists have worked together to restore Monticello, interpreting a wealth of physical and documentary evidence.

https://monticello.sharepoint.com/:i:/r/sites/MarkO431_p.jpg?csf=1&web=1&c=hgLETP Reconstruction of the South Terrace in 1941

The Roof

From the time Thomas Jefferson began planning Monticello in the 1760s, he took a keen interest in the question of how to shelter himself effectively and economically from the weather. He approached the issue from the vantage point of both architect and engineer and considered some of the most progressive roof structures and coverings of his time. In at least one case he can be credited with a truly innovative roof form — the “zigzag” or “terras” roof.

The restoration of Monticello's roof and dome, started in 1991 and finished in 1992, was a major undertaking. The Foundation faithfully restored what was, in its time, one of the most complex roofing systems on any house in America, especially with its iconic dome. Just as they have for many other projects at Monticello, Jefferson's extensive notes helped guide work on the roof.

The roof restoration included a lengthy list of repairs and careful reconstructions. Tinned stainless steel shingles replicated the tinned iron shingles that covered the dome and main roof in the 1820s. Painted stainless steel was substituted for the painted sheet iron that covered the upper terras roof after 1803. A new balustrade

was constructed that closely followed Jefferson's classical design and incorporated more than 50 original balusters. The dome was restored, and 11 skylights made in the Jeffersonian style were installed.









West Portico Columns

In 2013, the columns on the West Portico were restored to their original Jefferson-era appearance. These columns on the “nickel view” of Monticello were made of specially molded “compass” bricks — a common way to construct columns in the 18th and 19th centuries because it was easier and cheaper than building with solid stone. They were then “rendered” or covered in a smooth stucco-like coating to mimic the appearance of stone. The West Portico columns, which were not constructed until 1823, replaced temporary ones fashioned from tulip poplar tree trunks.

Historic paint consultants Frank S. Welsh and Susan L. Buck discovered the original render, dating from Jefferson’s time, survived. They also determined that at least 19 coats of white paint had been applied to the columns, but only after the original render had been exposed to the elements for quite some time, leaving a thick layer of dirt.

As part of the conservation process, a combination of steam-based paint removal and a special low-pressure blasting system (originally developed to clean the Statue of Liberty) was used to complete the project safely and efficiently. Finally, the original render was repaired with period-appropriate materials, restoring the columns to their appearance during Jefferson's final years.







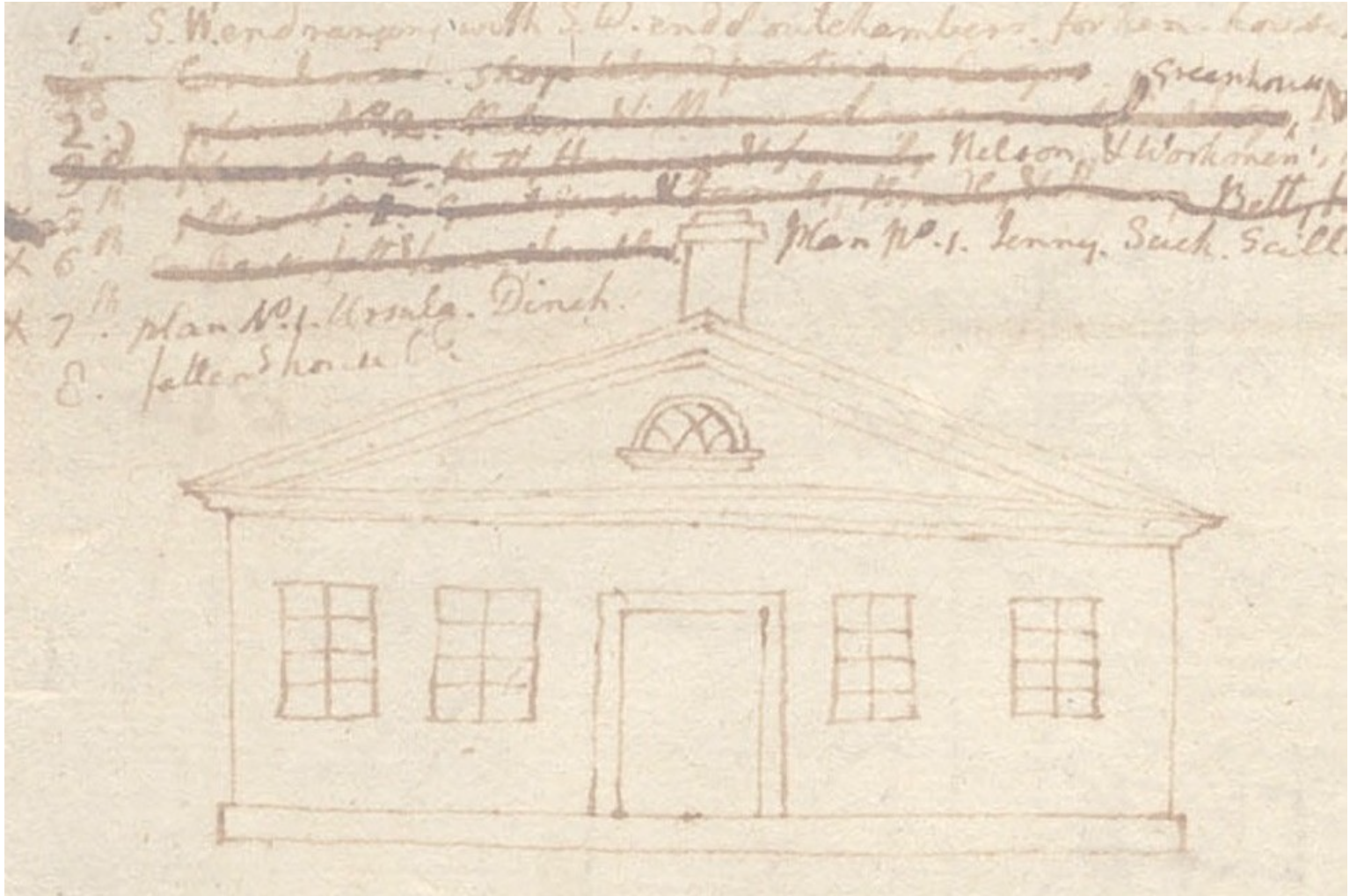
Textile Workshop

One of the first buildings on Mulberry Row, this mortared stone structure was built around 1778 as a free workmen's house. It served as living quarters for skilled white woodworkers and masons who lived here during the construction of Monticello. During the interval between the construction and remodeling of the main house (1784–96), this building housed enslaved people who worked on the mountaintop, principally members of the Hemings family.

By 1815, the structure had become a textile workshop, where the Hems, Gillettes and other enslaved families produced summer-weight cotton and hemp as well as winter woolens.

Monticello archaeologists discovered several bricks after excavating the floor, which provided key information for the restoration of the original brick floor. The building offered several other clues that revealed what it once looked like. Cuts at the ends of the original ceiling joists survived, showing the angle of the roof's

pediment. The shape of the building's unusual triangular vestibule was revealed by holes in the walls that held the plates framing it. Original plaster provided evidence for whitewashed walls, and elements of an original window frame showed the size of the windows and how they were trimmed. The restored building features an exhibit about Mulberry Row and a room depicting the factory where enslaved workers turned cotton, hemp and wool into cloth.








Upper Floors

On Monticello's second and third floors, nine rooms were restored and furnished during the 2013-2018 Mountaintop Project. Occupied primarily by Jefferson's eldest daughter, son-in-law, sister, grandchildren, and guests, these private quarters illustrate the dynamics of family life in the early 1800s, including how their lives were interwoven with those of enslaved people.

Of all the upstairs spaces that were restored, reinterpreted and furnished during the 2013-2018 Mountaintop Project, the Nursery was the most complex. After being repurposed over the years by the Levy family as a bathroom and storage room, the room required extensive architectural restoration to show its function after Jefferson's retirement from the presidency.

 [Nursery before restoration](https://monticello.sharepoint.com/:i/r/sites/Markcsf=1&web=1&c=mHE2zx)
(<https://monticello.sharepoint.com/:i/r/sites/Markcsf=1&web=1&c=mHE2zx>). The Nursery before restoration

Manuscript evidence indicates that Jefferson specifically designated a room to serve as a nursery in the expanded Monticello in the 1790s. In 1809, his daughter Martha Jefferson Randolph and her family moved to Monticello. Priscilla Hemmings, an enslaved servant, cared for more than a dozen of Jefferson's grandchildren and great-grandchildren and their visiting cousins.



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www.s3.amazonaws.com/files/resources/nursery-
overhead-shot.jpg](https://monticello-
www.s3.amazonaws.com/files/resources/nursery-
overhead-shot.jpg)).The Nursery after
restoration and the addition of new
furnishings

In 2014, restoration department staff removed features such as Levy-era flooring, cement plaster and modern insulation. To return the Nursery to its original appearance, they investigated surviving original elements such as molding, flooring and wall plaster. Curators pored through family inventories, letters and notes to identify what furnishings were used in the Nursery and drew from Monticello's collection of original baby clothes to add period details to the room.

Terrace Railing

Installed circa 1940, the Chinese-inspired railing around Monticello's terraces had, by 2016, weathered to the point that repairs were not feasible. Historic documents suggest that the first railing Jefferson planned for the terraces used Chinese-inspired panels, but it is unclear whether this railing design was ever installed because it appears that the terraces lacked any protective railings by the 1820s.

What caused Jefferson to start planning for the second terrace railing? It may have been an accident in 1822 when he fell from the North Terrace stairs and broke his wrist. Soon afterward, he developed detailed designs for new railings. His extensive notes for the second railing survived — and included sketches, a list of lumber needed, and very specific construction details that even included the type of nails to be used.

These records reveal that the new railing was completely different from the earlier Chinese-inspired design. Composed of vertical bars held in place by horizontal rails, the design was drawn from traditional English paling or picket fences rather than Chinese patterns. Documents show that Jefferson installed at least one section of this railing on the South Terrace.

Installed in 2016, the new railing is an accurate reconstruction of an important Jefferson-era feature. The railings are painted the same dark green as the Venetian porch blinds. The color — which also matches the window blinds — reflects the dark color used to illustrate the railings in all three Jefferson-period depictions and a paint sample taken from a surviving fragment of a Venetian porch blind.

Notes for railings on the Terraces. 3 ft. high.



laths 1 1/2 thick 4 1/2 wide 8 ft long
 uprights or styles 12 1/2 wide 3 ft long 1 1/2 thick
 the laths to be nailed in alternate panels, the one panel to the style, the next on each side to the style ^a b.
 the panels being separately prepared, are nailed face to face together so that the rails of all are in a line. Nails 3 1/2 ft long passing thro both styles and the intervening rail clinch each pair of styles together c are brackets at the foot of each side to steady it to the floor.





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