



Restored Cook's Room to Open













Numerous visitors to Monticello during Thomas Jefferson's retirement years noted the fine quality of food served at the former president's table. The dishes that caught their attention were likely prepared by the two principal slave cooks, Edith Fossett and Fanny, whose last name is not known.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Charles Trust of Richmond, the dwelling space next to the kitchen where those meals were made will be transformed and unveiled to the public in December.

Located under the South Terrace and probably within earshot of the strike of the kitchen's tall case clock, the Cook's Room is the first slave residence to be restored at Monticello. The room has been open to the public for many years, but without furnishings. As of December, it will be furnished with historically accurate reproductions of a bed, table, chest, chair, lamp, bedding, blankets, clothing, and personal items, all to tell the story of Edith Fossett and her family.

Edith Fossett (1787-1857) held one of the most responsible positions in Jefferson's household. Her capability was recognized at a young age. At 15, already married to blacksmith Joseph Fossett and pregnant, she traveled to Washington in 1802 with fellow slave Fanny to learn the art of French cookery from Honoré Julien, Jefferson's chef at the President's House. Edith and Fanny may also have learned to prepare desserts under the direction of Etienne Lemaire, the maitre de hôtel. Through Lemaire's purchases at local markets, they had access to choice ingredients, including oysters, pigeons, shad, oranges, artichokes,

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MONTICELLO



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Parmesan cheese, and pineapples. Lemaire later commended the skills of Edith and Fanny, writing to Jefferson in 1809 that they used ingredients “with economy,” and concluding: “I am persuaded they will give you much satisfaction.”

When Jefferson retired to Monticello, Edith and Fanny returned with him, taking over the chief cooking responsibilities from Peter Hemings. Edith was thus reunited with her husband, who had run away to Washington to see her without Jefferson’s permission, been caught, and sent back to Monticello.

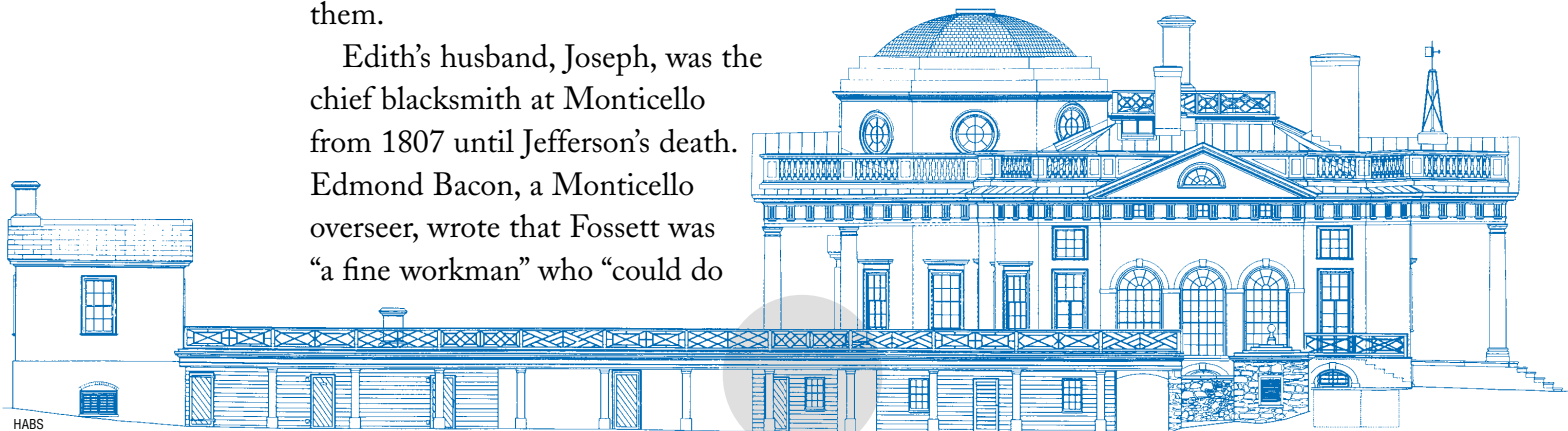
Although it is not known if either Edith or Fanny ever lived in the Cook’s Room, the decision was made to furnish the room as if it were occupied by Edith and her family, largely because more is known about them.

Edith’s husband, Joseph, was the chief blacksmith at Monticello from 1807 until Jefferson’s death. Edmond Bacon, a Monticello overseer, wrote that Fossett was “a fine workman” who “could do

anything it was necessary to do with steel and iron.” Edith and Joseph Fossett had eight children: James (born 1805), Maria (1807), Patsy (1810), Elizabeth Ann (1812), Peter (1812), Isabella (1819), William (1821), and Daniel (c.1824).

Unfortunately, no specific references have been found to indicate what the 10-by-14-foot room contained during the Jefferson era. An inventory of Jefferson’s property did not include items belonging to slaves. The refurbishing of the room has been based on documented provisions to Monticello slaves as well as knowledge of other sites. The cook’s residence at the President’s House in 1809, for example, contained a bedstead, bed, coverlet, chair, and pine table.

The Cook’s Room project is part of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation’s ongoing effort to restore and interpret all of Monticello’s



Location of the Cook's Room below the South Terrace.

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dependencies, including the kitchen, smokehouse, washhouse, and storage cellars.

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COMMENTS? newsletter@monticello.org