

History on the Rocks: Gadsby's Historic Ice Well

Mr. Jefferson's Ice Well

Ice Well Temp: 42: Alexandria Temp: 64

It seems the plague was going around my household and felled me for a number of days, however thanks to modern medicine and sports drinks, I am revived and back in the saddle today to bring you my favorite president; yes, I am partial and the story of his ice well.

Besides being the author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson could be considered the first foodie in America. He liked his good wine, he liked his fine food, and he liked his ice cream. He constructed the ice house at Monticello in 1802-1803, already a pro at it since he built one at the President's House (aka White House) a year prior. While at the President's House, he worked hard to elicit expressions of astonishment from the Indian delegations that came to visit and succeeded when wine bottles in ice-filled coolers were on the table in July.

In planning for his private ice well, he - in typical Jefferson fashion - took notes on ice houses through Italy, France and Virginia to make sure he had the most effective plan. He built his under the North Terrace, the cooler side of his property, and it was 16 feet below ground, 6 feet above and had an opening 9 inches square so that a person may not get in at them. It was used for food preservation as well as for chilled beverages and of course ice cream production. One can just imagine how challenging it would have been to transport tons and tons of ice from the Rivanna River up to the top of the little mountain.

Visit Monticello's website for more in-depth information on the [ice house](#) and some great primary documents (including Mr. Jefferson's [ice cream recipe](#))!



*Monticello, "little mountain" in Italian.
A long way to get ice.*



Jefferson's Ice House

And a side note from my last blog - one of my esteemed peers who can weld a mean chisel and hand plane found that when Jefferson was [President Jefferson](#) across the river on March 4 1801, it was about 55° F at noon. A nice springish day like today. Not a good day for ice preservation.

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