Jefferson’s private suite, where he did much of his reading and writing, provides a view of his passion for knowledge. In Monticello’s Entrance Hall, his wide-ranging interests and dedication to learning about the world around him are on full display.

But to understand the heart of family life within the Monticello household, one needs to venture up a narrow staircase to explore the second and third floors. Occupied primarily by Jefferson’s daughter, sister and grandchildren, the private quarters upstairs illustrate the dynamics of family life in the early 1800s, including how their lives were interwoven with those of enslaved people. When Thomas Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, there were 13 family members residing at Monticello, ranging in age from 2 months to 71 years.

After extensive research, a major restoration of the upstairs rooms was completed in 2015 as part of the Mountaintop Project. This restoration reveals family stories to guests who visit these upper floors as part of Monticello’s Behind-the-Scenes Tours.
The youngest of Jefferson’s six sisters, Anne Scott Jefferson Marks came to live permanently at Monticello in 1812 after the death of her husband. Marks had few options and limited financial resources, but Jefferson was fond of his sister and happily provided her with a place to live. Other members of the family, however, found “Aunt Marks” to be somewhat exasperating. Jefferson’s granddaughter Mary once wrote her sister Virginia, “[Aunt Marks] would not let me drink my tea without her advice.” And their brother Benjamin echoed the sentiment, exclaiming, “I wish Aunt Marks would let me alone ...!”

Marks lived at Monticello until her death in 1828, outliving Jefferson by just over two years. Scilla, an enslaved woman, was Anne Marks’ primary caregiver in her final illness. Both women were born at Shadwell and knew each other for almost their whole lives.
Jefferson was a devoted grandfather who paid special attention to the education and welfare of his family. As he planned the expansion of Monticello in the 1790s, he designated a room to serve as a nursery — reflecting a hope that his extended family would spend considerable time with him at his home. Over the years, a number of Jefferson’s young grandchildren, great-grandchildren and their visiting cousins occupied the Nursery. Priscilla Hemmings, an enslaved woman owned by Martha Jefferson Randolph, oversaw the care of the children in the Nursery. After Hemmings’ death in 1830, Cornelia Randolph wrote of her, “there were a thousand little attentions she paid us, & some very troublesome to herself.”

I often ask guests to consider how Priscilla Hemmings might have felt caring for and raising children that would one day grow up to own her and her husband. — A.H.

Until 1825, five of Jefferson’s six granddaughters resided full time at Monticello. Situated directly above Jefferson’s Cabinet, this bedroom was occupied by at least two of Jefferson’s granddaughters. Paired with the windows beneath, the second-story windows sit low to create the exterior appearance of a single-story house. From this room, Ellen Randolph Coolidge remembered hearing her grandfather “frequently thus singing the old Psalm tunes, or the old Scotch melodies.”

Martha Jefferson Randolph and Thomas Mann Randolph’s seventh daughter, Septimia Anne Randolph, described a small walnut cabinet that held her “dolls, their furniture and their clothes, and many playthings.” It was designed by Jefferson and built in Monticello’s joinery by an enslaved carpenter, thought to be John Hemmings.
GRANDSONS’ ROOM

This large, unheated room was likely occupied by Jefferson’s grandsons during his retirement, and reflects their interests and experiences growing up at Monticello. Jefferson took an active role in the education of his grandsons, teaching them surveying and ensuring they had access to a college education. The room’s twin alcoves that accommodate double beds are practical, space-saving examples of French influences that Jefferson incorporated into his home. Preserving the illusion that the house is one tall story, skylights in recessed alcoves provide sunlight and ventilation.

This space mimics the Hall, illustrating Thomas Jefferson’s commitment to educating his grandsons to be a part of the next generation of American citizens — and revealing his unwavering confidence and optimism for the future. — A.H.

Cornelia Randolph, one of Jefferson’s granddaughters, was an aspiring artist. Her floor plan of Monticello’s first floor and its contents were one of the sources that helped us restore the house to the way it was during her grandpapa’s retirement years, from 1809 to 1826. — K.Q.
Rather than placing a grand stairway at the center of his house, Jefferson installed elegant but compact staircases in each wing. With efficiency in mind, he designed them to be narrow and steep to save “space that would make a good room in every story.” Only 24 inches wide, the staircases were inspired by those in the “new and good” homes Jefferson saw in France. As one houseguest recalls, “When we went to bed we had to mount a little ladder of a staircase.”

I ask our guests to think about the people who lived in this house traveling these stairs. The women would have worn long dresses, perhaps carrying a child, books or linens; the enslaved young men would have been carrying firewood or luggage. — K.Q.

Every time our guests see the back of a nickel in their pocket change, I hope they think, “I stood inside that dome,” and they remember something they learned during their tour. — K.Q.

DOME ROOM

One of the first domed rooms in an American home, this large space was based on the Temple of Vesta in Rome. Although the Dome Room was primarily intended to be viewed from the outside, this “noble and beautiful apartment,” as one visitor described it, served many purposes. Sometimes called the “skyroom,” it was used for guests, as temporary living quarters for Jefferson’s grandson and his wife, and for storage.

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CUDDY

Just off the Dome Room, a small, unfinished attic space was claimed as a private hideaway in 1823 by two of Jefferson’s granddaughters, Virginia and Cornelia Randolph. The girls called the space the “Cuddy,” which is a small nook on a ship. Private spaces for reading, drawing and studying were often hard to find in a house crowded with Jefferson’s family and frequent guests. Describing the room, Virginia wrote that “having furnished this apartment with a sopha to lounge upon, though alas! without cushions, a high & low chair & two small tables, one for my writing desk, the other for my books; and breathing through a broken pane of glass and some wide cracks in the floor, I have taken possession with the dirt daubers, wasps & humble bees; and do not intend to give it up to any thing but the formidable rats which have not yet found out this fairy palace.”

SEE IT FOR YOURSELF

Have you always wanted to go upstairs at Monticello? Our Behind-the-Scenes Tours provide a fuller picture of what one of Thomas Jefferson’s granddaughters called “the bustle and hurry” of life at Monticello.

These tours take you through the first floor and upstairs to explore the private quarters, including the iconic Dome Room. Along the way, you will see unique architectural features and visit restored spaces that reveal the complexities of family life at Monticello. Learn about the Jefferson, Hemmings and Randolph families, as well as other free and enslaved people who lived and labored in the house.

For more information, visit monticello.org/bts.

The Cuddy reveals the difficulties for the young Randolph women to find privacy to pursue their own interests and pursuits — a space floors away from the cellars and their responsibilities in learning to manage a household. — A.H.