

Holiday Evening Tours return in December

AN INTIMATE look at how the holiday season was observed in Thomas Jefferson's time and the rare opportunity to experience Monticello after dark will be available to visitors this December through Holiday Evening Tours.

These hour-long guided tours will begin at 5:45 p.m. on three Fridays (Dec. 12, 19, 26), four Saturdays (Dec. 6, 13, 20, 27), one Sunday (Dec. 21), and one Monday (Dec. 22) during the month. The tour groups will be limited to a maximum of 20 people.

Each Holiday Evening Tour will feature a relaxed-pace excursion through the rooms on the main floor of the house, which will be decked with local greenery, and a visit to the third-floor Dome Room. The tour content will focus on the atmosphere of fellowship that was at the center of the winter holiday season at Monticello.

"The holiday season is a special time to visit Monticello," said Gary Sandling, Monticello's director of interpretation and training. "We enjoy sharing the special look and feel of Jefferson's home in December, and Holiday Evening Tours are great way to experience that."

For Jefferson, the Christmas season was a time for family and friends as well as what he called "merriment." Although no documents exist to tell us how, or if, Jefferson and his family decorated Monticello for the season, it is known that in the America of the late 1700s and early 1800s holiday celebrations were much more modest than those of today. Socializing and special foods were the focal points of the season rather than decorations or lavish gifts. The customs that we think of today as traditional ways of celebrating Christmas, such as the decorating of evergreen trees and



the hanging of stockings, derived from a variety of national traditions and became widespread only in the 1890s.

But there are some holiday references from that era that we in the 21st century can easily relate to. Mince pie was a holiday favorite at Monticello – in 1813 Jefferson referred to "the season of mince pies" – and the music library included the Christmas favorite *Adeste Fideles*.

Tickets for Monticello's Holiday Evening Tours are \$45; no discounts apply. Reserved tickets are required and can be purchased with a credit card through the Web site monticello.org or by calling (434) 984-9822.

Holiday Evening Tours are not appropriate for children under age 6. Also, because the third floor of Monticello is accessible only by steep, narrow staircases, that portion of the tour is not handicapped-accessible and is not recommended for individuals who may have difficulty climbing stairs.

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