EXPLORING THE LANDSCAPE OF SLAVERY
By David Thorson, Monticello guide

Named for the mulberry trees once planted along its 1,000-foot length, Mulberry Row was the vibrant, ever-evolving Main Street of Monticello’s enslaved community. More than 50 years of archaeological research, examination of primary source records and restoration of the landscape have culminated in a deeper understanding of slavery at Monticello.

Mulberry Row reveals enslaved individuals not as anonymous property, but as people navigating the world of slavery, retaining their dignity, affirming their humanity and striving for inclusion in Jefferson’s vision that “all men are created equal.” This provides a more complete — and more complex — view of life at Monticello. Overlooking the 5,000-acre plantation, where three-quarters of those living at Monticello were enslaved, Mulberry Row was lined with more than 20 dwellings, workshops and sheds, serving as home to some 40 individuals and families, including skilled artisans, cooks, household staff and children who were set to work at the age of 10 as weavers and nail makers.

The restoration of the landscape of slavery along Mulberry Row includes structures, original objects and stories of those held in bondage who called Monticello home. A further transformation of Mulberry Row will include construction of a contemplative site recording the names of the 607 human beings enslaved by Jefferson. Visiting Mulberry Row provides an opportunity to explore the ways that the institution of slavery intertwined the Jefferson family, overseers, free white craftsmen and the enslaved community; and to contemplate the legacies of slavery in America today.

A LOOK INSIDE THE STOREHOUSE FOR IRON
This is one of several buildings that have been restored or re-created during the past decade, including the Hemmings Cabin and Textile Workshop.

1. **Interior Wall**
   Re-created in 2014 based on Jefferson’s meticulous records and using period construction techniques, the Storehouse for Iron is typical of the living quarters and workshops that once lined Mulberry Row. Built in 1792, it initially served as a tin smithing shop, but was later repurposed into a storage site, blacksmith’s shop, slave quarters and nail-making shop. The objects fashioned by enslaved artisans, sold to supplement Jefferson’s income and used at Monticello, included tinware, copperware, horseshoes, harness chains and furniture hardware.

2. **Workbench**
   Nail making was a source of income for Jefferson. Up to a dozen enslaved children, ages 10 to 16, worked 14 hours a day, six days a week, making nails by hand. The Storehouse for Iron was one of three sites where nail rod shipped from Philadelphia was transformed into nails through the use of heat, hammers and hard labor. While Jefferson closely monitored production and counseled against whippings, to “be resorted to but in extremities,” free white overseers such as Gabriel Lilly frequently used whippings to spur production.
Smith’s Bick Iron
A bickiron is a specialized anvil with double-rounded horns used by metalsmiths to fashion cups, cookware and furniture hardware. Blacksmiths also used bickirons to make chains, wagon wheel components and tack hardware. This device illustrates the high level of skill Isaac Granger Jefferson and Joseph Fossett brought to their trades.

This tin cup, likely made by Isaac Granger Jefferson, was found during excavations of Mulberry Row.

Forge
In the mid-1790s, Isaac Granger Jefferson (1775–1846) labored here as a tinsmith, blacksmith and nail maker. After training as a tinsmith in Philadelphia, he practiced his trade here for two years until Jefferson reassigned him to nail making as a more profitable industry. Given as a wedding present to Jefferson’s daughter Maria, he subsequently became the property of Jefferson’s oldest daughter, Martha. When and how he gained his freedom is not known, but in the 1840s he was living as a free man, blacksmithing in Petersburg, Virginia.

Bellows
Monticello’s head blacksmith, Joseph Fossett (1780–1858), was a member of the Hemings family and husband of Edith Hern Fossett, Monticello’s head cook. Jefferson chose the Fossetts for these key positions, granting them material comforts and the ability to move more freely than others he held in bondage. One of the five people freed in Jefferson’s will, Fossett saw the rest of his family sold to pay Jefferson’s debts. He succeeded in freeing his wife and most of his children from slavery and moved his family to Cincinnati, where his descendants became pioneers in the civil rights movement.

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To find out more about the lives of the enslaved people who lived and labored at Monticello, visit monticello.org/slavery.

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