

## Burwell Colbert, an enslaved butler

### Reading Level: Elementary School

Burwell Colbert was born a slave in 1783. At ten years old, he began working in the nail-making shop at Monticello. He trained to be a painter and a glazier, a person who sets glass in window panes. In 1805, Jefferson wrote that Burwell “paints and takes care of the house.”

In later years, Burwell was “the main, principal servant” (the butler) at Monticello. He directed the maids and helped serve the meals. He also cared for Thomas Jefferson, laying out Jefferson’s clothes and going with him on trips.

In 1826, Thomas Jefferson wrote, “I give to my good, affectionate, and faithful servant Burwell his freedom...” He also gave him three hundred dollars and an acre of land. Burwell, the faithful servant, was with Jefferson the night Jefferson died.

In freedom, Burwell worked as a painter and a glazier. He worked at the University of Virginia and for Jefferson’s friends and family. Records are not clear on the year of his death.



Burwell Colbert was known to have been at Jefferson’s side when his master died in this bed on July 4, 1826.