

Edith Hern Fossett, an enslaved cook

Reading Level: Elementary School

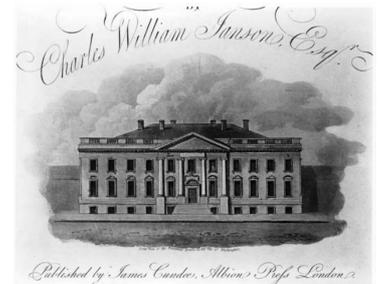
Edith Hern was born in 1787. Her father was David Hern, a carpenter. Her mother was Isabel, a housemaid and farm worker. Both were slaves. Edith married Joseph Fossett, and they had ten children.

When Thomas Jefferson was president, he picked Edith to train to be a cook in the White House. For almost seven years, Edith worked in the White House kitchen. She “cooked in the French style” and fixed fancy desserts. For her hard work, she received a gift of two-dollars a month. She was not paid a wage.

In 1809, Jefferson left the White House. Edith returned to Monticello to be the head cook. She and Fanny Hern, her sister-in-law, prepared vegetables, roasted meat, and churned ice cream, a favorite dessert at Monticello.



Monticello's kitchen, restored to its 1809 configuration



The President's House in 1807.

Edith's husband, Joseph Fossett was freed in Thomas Jefferson's will. Edith and their ten children remained slaves. When Monticello was sold, Edith and two children were bought for \$505.

In 1837, Joseph was able to free his wife, five of their children and four of their grandchildren. The family left Virginia for the free state of Ohio. They settled in Ohio between 1837 and 1842. Edith died in 1854.