

Martha Wayles Jefferson, Jefferson's wife

Reading Level: Middle School

Little is known about Martha Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson's wife. Her granddaughter described her as "a graceful, ladylike and accomplished woman."

But no portraits of her have survived, and few documents remain that were written by her.

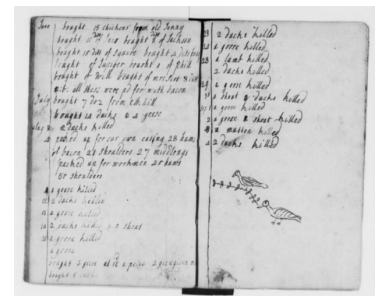
Martha Wayles was born October 19, 1748 in Charles City County, Virginia. Her first husband, Bathurst Skelton died two years after their marriage. Martha and Bathurst had a young son named John, who died when he was three years old.

Martha married Thomas Jefferson in 1772 on New Year's Day. She was twenty-three years old. Martha brought many slaves with her, including Betty Hemings and her children. The slaves became Jefferson's property.

Jefferson and his new bride moved into Monticello's "outchamber" while the main house was being built. It is now called the South Pavilion. Martha shared with Jefferson a love of music and record-keeping.

During her ten years of marriage, Martha gave birth to six children. Two daughters and a son died as infants. Four months after Lucy, her last daughter, was born Martha died. She was thirty-three years old. Lucy died two years later from whooping cough. Only two daughters, Martha and Mary, survived to adulthood.

Thomas Jefferson loved his home and his wife. He believed that his "heart would be happier enjoying the affections of a family fireside." He was devastated by his wife's death and never remarried.



Two pages from house-keeping records Jefferson's wife kept in the unused pages of one of his law books. The sketch of the birds is by her.