

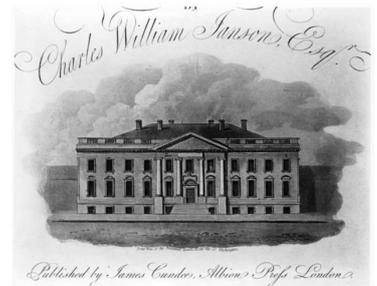
Edith Hern Fossett, an enslaved cook

Reading Level: Middle School

In 1787, Edith was born to David Hern, an enslaved carpenter, and Isabel, a house slave and farm laborer. She married Joe Fossett; together they had ten children.

In 1802, Thomas Jefferson decided that fifteen-year-old Edith should train to be a cook at the White House with Honoré Julien, who had been George Washington's chef. For almost seven years, Edith worked in the White House kitchen. Jefferson's guests noted: "never before had such dinners been given in the President's House. The meals were "cooked in the French style" and the dessert was "extremely elegant". For her service, Edith received a monthly two-dollar gratuity but not a wage.

In 1809, Jefferson retired from the presidency and 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.



The President's House,
where Edith trained as cook.



Joseph Fossett was freed in Thomas Jefferson's will, but Edith and their ten children remained slaves. When Jefferson died and Monticello was sold, Edith and two children were bought for \$505 by Joseph Fossett's brother-in-law, a "free man of color."

In 1837, Joseph freed his wife, five of their children and four grandchildren. The family resettled in the free state of Ohio sometime between 1837 and 1842. Edith died in 1854.