

Frances (Fanny) Gillette Hern, an enslaved cook

Reading Level: Elementary School

Frances (Fanny) Hern was the daughter of Edward and Jane Gillette. She had twelve brothers and sisters. The family worked as field slaves at Monticello.

Fanny married David (Davy) Hern. He was an enslaved blacksmith and wagon driver. In 1806, Thomas Jefferson picked Fanny to come to the White House. At the time, he was president. He wanted to train Fanny and her sister-in-law Edith to be cooks.



Monticell's kitchen, restored to its 1809 configuration

At the White House, Fanny and Edith trained with a French chef. She did not earn a wage. Her husband visited every six months. He arrived at the White House with letters and crates of supplies from Monticello. He traveled back to Monticello with seeds, trees, geese and hogs.

In 1809, Jefferson left the White House. He was no longer the president. Fanny, Davy, Edith and Edith's children traveled back to Monticello. They drove a wagon through a snow storm "half-leg deep." Fanny and Davy had eight children. Five died at a young age.

Fanny continued to work as a cook in the Monticello kitchen. She and Edith fixed vegetables, roasted meat, and made ice cream, a favorite dessert at Monticello. Jefferson's guest praised the meals, "The dinner is always choice and served in the French style."