

Evidence Handout for Thomas Jefferson, Founding Foodie: Fact or Folklore

1. Folklore- According to food historian, Andrew F. Smith, claims that Jefferson introduced waffles are unproven. Early Dutch settlers did; however he did buy four waffle irons in Amsterdam. The first patent in the United States for a waffle iron was not until 1869, so he may have been the first to bring the irons over. (DeWitt, 114-115)
2. Folklore- He did serve potatoes fried “in the French manner” at a state dinner in 1802. He makes scant mention of potatoes in his papers other than the mention of Irish dependence on them. (DeWitt, 118)
3. Folklore- Small quantities of vanilla beans had been imported prior to Jefferson’s Parisian tenure, but he did enjoy it and later imported to Monticello. (DeWitt, 121)
4. Folklore- Macaroni, an early generic term for pasta, had already been brought over by the English as noodles. He may have been the first to Import a pasta machine from Italy.(DeWitt, 121-122)
5. Folklore- Italians had invented what we know as ice cream in the sixteenth century. Both George Washington and Jefferson imported ice cream makers. (DeWitt, 122) Also beginning in 1755, an ice cream recipe appeared in Hannah Glasse’s. *The Art of Cookery*, a popular cookbook throughout the colonies. Around 1770, Lord Botencourt served it to guests in Williamsburg, VA. Jefferson certainly promoted it and served it often. His recipe for ice cream is one that remains and is written in his own hand. (Fowler, 173)
6. Folklore- Monticello researchers have not been able to confirm this story. Beginning in 1809, he started planting tomatoes at Monticello according to Peter Hatch. Tomatoes were rumored to be poisonous because they were part of the nightshade family that included poisonous jimson weed and henbane. (DeWitt, 166)
7. Folklore- Thomas Jefferson could not be called a vegetarian as we understand the term today. Many of his family members and contemporaries wrote that he ate mostly vegetables but some meat. In Jefferson’s own words, “I have lived temperately, eating little animal food, and that not as an aliment, so much as a condiment for the vegetables which constitute my principal diet.” (Fowler, 5)
8. Fact- Records from the President’s House document this. (DeWitt, 151) it was served this way at Monticello as well. He called beer and cider his “table liquors” and served them with dinner, unlike wine which he served after dinner. (DeWitt, 181)

Works Cited

DeWitt, Dave. *The Founding Foodies: How Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin Revolutionized American Cuisine*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2010. Print

Fowler, Damon Lee. *Dining at Monticello: In Good Taste and Abundance*. Charlottesville, VA:

Thomas Jefferson Foundation. 2005. Print.

There is so much more to learn about this early American food star. Bon appetit!

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