



THOMAS JEFFERSON'S *Poplar Forest*



Thomas Jefferson, the Grandfather

"I consider all my grandchildren as if they were my children, and want nothing but for them."

Thomas Jefferson

April 30, 1816, Age 73

Thomas Jefferson, at the age of 73, began bringing his grandchildren to Poplar Forest. Two of Martha Jefferson Randolph's eleven children, Ellen, 19 years old, and Cornelia, 16, spent the most time at Poplar Forest and cherished the days with "Grandpapa."

"He will pay his Spring visit to Bedford this month. Cornelia is going certainly but they had not decided which of the remaining three will accompany him, as each puts in her claim."

Elizabeth Trist, friend of Thomas Jefferson, April 5, 1821

The thoughtful, charming and sometimes gossipy letters of Jefferson's granddaughters provide an intimate glimpse of life at the retreat.

"We saw, too, more of our dear grandfather at those times than at any other...He interested himself in all we did, thought, or read. He would talk to us about his own youth and early friends, and tell us stories of former days. He seemed really to take as much pleasure in these conversations with us, as if we had been older and wiser people." – Ellen Randolph

In 1856, at the age of 59, Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge recalled to Henry S. Randall her time at Poplar Forest:

"After dinner he again retired for some hours, and later in the afternoon walked with us on the terrace, conversing in the same delightful manner, being sometimes animated, and sometimes earnest. We did not leave him again til bed-time, but gave him his tea, and brought out our books or work. We did not leave him again until bed-time, but gave him his tea, and brought out our books or work. He would take his book from which he would occasionally look up to make a remark, to question us about what we were reading, or perhaps to read aloud to us from his own book, some passage which had struck him, and of which he wished to give us the benefit. About ten o'clock he rose to go, when we kissed him with warm, loving, grateful hearts, and went to our rest blessing God for such a friend."

When Jefferson's younger daughter Maria died in 1804, her only son, Francis Eppes, was two years old. Jefferson committed himself to Francis, whom he called "the dearest of all pledges," and took an avid interest in his education. As a teenager, Francis visited Poplar Forest during breaks from New London Academy, located just three miles away.

Poplar Forest was the first item in Jefferson's will. When Jefferson died in 1826, Francis Eppes inherited the house and 1,074 acres of land. The Eppes family lived at Poplar Forest between 1823-1828. Frustrated with life in Virginia, particular the cultivation of tobacco, Francis sold Poplar Forest in 1828 and moved to Florida, looking for new opportunities.

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