

## THOMAS JEFFERSON'S RECIPE FOR FRENCH VANILLA ICE CREAM

While the claim that Thomas Jefferson introduced **ice cream** to the United States is demonstrably false, he can be credited with the first known recipe recorded by an American. Jefferson also likely helped to popularize ice cream in this country when he served it at the President's House in Washington.

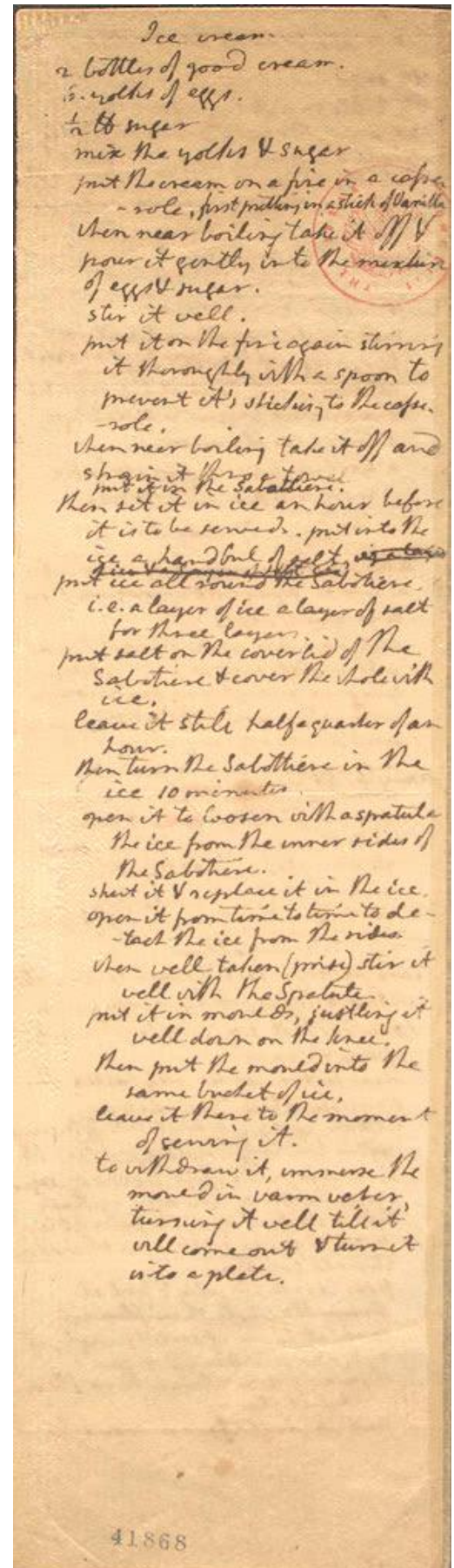
One of only ten recipes surviving in Thomas Jefferson's hand, the recipe for ice cream most likely dates to his time in France. Although Jefferson himself did not note the source, Jefferson's granddaughter [Virginia](#) recorded a virtually identical recipe sometime later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and attributed it to "Petit," indicating that [Adrien Petit](#), Jefferson's French butler, was the original source of this recipe.<sup>1</sup>

Ice cream recipes appear in French cookbooks starting in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, and in English-language cookbooks in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Hannah Glasse's popular *Art of Cookery* (1751 edition) contained a recipe for ice cream.<sup>2</sup> There are accounts of ice cream being served in the American colonies as early as 1744.<sup>3</sup>

If he had not tasted it before, Jefferson no doubt encountered ice cream during his time in France (1784-1789), and it was made and served in his kitchens for the rest of his life. Among the items filling the 86 crates of belongings that Jefferson had shipped back from France were "quatre moule a glasse" [four ice molds].<sup>4</sup> [James Hemings](#) noted "2 Freising moulds" in his 1796 inventory of the Monticello kitchen;<sup>5</sup> "4 Ice moulds" were noted in an inventory of the President's House in Washington in February of 1809;<sup>6</sup> and in [Martha Jefferson Randolph](#)'s inventory of Monticello's contents in 1826, she noted "1 ice cream freezer" and "1 ice cream ladle."<sup>7</sup>

Recipe for ice cream in Thomas Jefferson's hand, Library of Congress.

Although Jefferson definitely was not the first to introduce ice cream to the United States, during his presidency it certainly became more well-known. There are no less than six references to ice cream being served at the President's House between 1801 and 1809; several times guests described it being served inside of a crust or pastry. Manasseh Cutler, a Congressman from Massachusetts, wrote in 1802, "Ice cream very good, crust wholly dried, crumbled into thin flakes."<sup>8</sup> Samuel Latham Mitchell described "balls of the frozen material inclosed in covers of warm pastry, exhibiting a curious contrast, as if the ice had just been taken from the oven."<sup>9</sup> After serving as Jefferson's cook for the duration of his presidency, Honoré Julien opened a catering and confectionary business on F Street in Washington, advertising in June of 1810 that he would serve "ice creams on Sunday next, and afterwards every Wednesday and Sunday, during the season ...."<sup>10</sup>



According to food historian Karen Hess, the first ice cream recipe published in the United States appeared in Richard Briggs's *The New Art of Cookery*, first published in [Philadelphia](#) in 1792.<sup>11</sup> Ice cream remained only scantily represented in American cookbooks for some years, but after the first decade of the 19th century it was evidently becoming more commonplace. [William Short](#) wrote to Jefferson in 1821, wryly describing what he called "Wistar Parties" in Philadelphia, at which "Cakes, almonds, raisins, ice creams, wine & all the paraphernalia of the Ladies tea parties, are exhibited."<sup>12</sup> By 1824, Mary Randolph, a Jefferson relative by marriage, included more than twenty recipes for different types of ice cream in her cookbook, *The Virginia House-Wife* (1824), and the confection was well represented in later recipe collections of the Jefferson family.<sup>13</sup>

- Anna Berkes, 6/28/13

### **Thomas Jefferson's Vanilla Ice Cream**

*makes about 4 pints (2 quarts, 1/2 gallon)*

6 yolks of eggs  
1/2 lb sugar (1 1/4 cups)  
2 bottles (quarts) of good cream (4 pints)  
1 vanilla bean

Mix the yolks and sugar together. Put the cream on a fire in a casserole, first putting in a stick of vanilla. When near boiling, take it off and pour it gently into the mixture of eggs and sugar. Stir it well. Put it on the fire again, stirring it thoroughly with a spoon to prevent it's sticking to the casserole. When near boiling, take it off and strain it thro' a towel. Put it in the Sabottiere\* then set it in ice an hour before it is to be served. Put into the ice a handful of salt. Put salt on the coverlid of the Sabottiere and cover the whole with ice. Leave it still half a quarter of an hour. Then turn the Sabottiere in the ice 10 minutes open it to loosen with a spatula the ice from the inner sides of the Sabottiere. Shut it & replace it in the ice open it from time to time to detach the ice from the sides when well taken (prise) stir it well with the spatula. Put it in moulds, justling it well down on the knee. Then put the mould into the same bucket of ice. Leave it there to the moment of serving it. To withdraw it, immerse the mould in warm water, turning it well till it will come out and turn it into a plate.

\*The Sabottiere is the inner cannister of what we now know as an ice cream maker.

### **Modern Version (adapted by Marie Kimball)**

Beat the yolks of 6 eggs until thick and lemon colored. Add, gradually, 1 cup of sugar and a pinch of salt. Bring to a boil 1 quart of cream and pour slowly on the egg mixture. Put in top of double boiler and when it thickens, remove and strain through a fine sieve into a bowl. When cool add 2 teaspoonfuls of vanilla. Freeze, as usual, with one part of salt to three parts of ice. Place in a mould, pack in ice and salt for several hours. For electric refrigerators, follow usual direction, but stir frequently.<sup>16</sup>

## **Further Sources**

- David, Elizabeth, and Jill Norman. [\*The Harvest of the Cold Months: The Social History of Ice and Ices\*](#). New York: Viking Penguin, 1994.
- Oliver, Lynne. The Food Timeline. ["Food Timeline FAQs: ice cream & ice."](#)