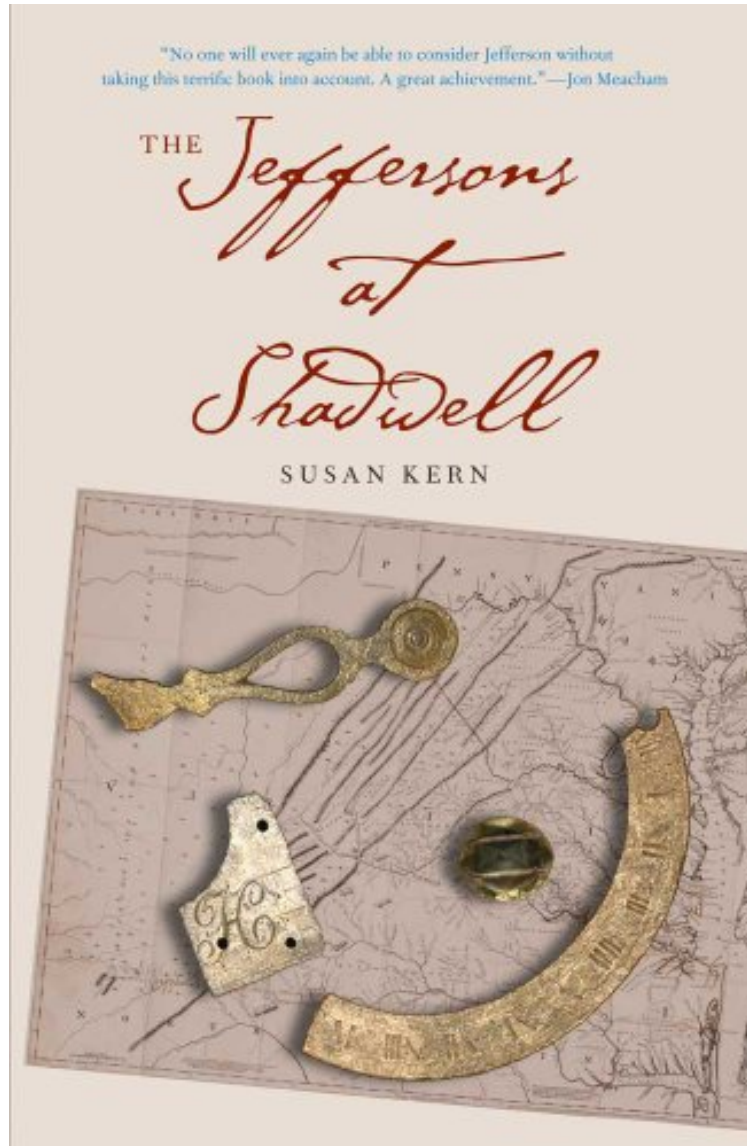


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The Jeffersons at Shadwell (The Lamar Series in Western History)

Susan Kern

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Susan Kern : The Jeffersons at Shadwell (The Lamar Series in Western History) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Jeffersons at Shadwell (The Lamar Series in Western History):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The boyhood home of Thomas Jefferson By Ronald H. Clark Shadwell was the childhood home of Thomas Jefferson, and it was situated adjacent to what he later developed into Monticello. For the period of the 1730's through the 1770's, it was the home of his parents, Peter and Jane

Jefferson. Thereafter it fell into disuse and eventually was put into agricultural production, further obliterating the household buildings. Substantial archaeological excavations have been undertaken on the site, especially during the 1990's. The author participated in some of this work. As it turns out, this is a book of very many pleasant surprises. I had assumed it would be focused on archaeological discoveries, which to an extent it is. But it is so much more. The author wants to use the Shadwell site as a case study in how "material culture", such as the household items excavated at Shadwell, when combined with the more traditional historical tools of documents (such as wills, surveys, maps, probate records, diaries, and family records) can add to a more nuanced historical analysis than documents alone. I was surprised as well at the extensive research conducted by the author in secondary and traditional primary documentary sources--her 55 pages of detailed endnotes attest to her diligence. The author also is interested in how culture spread in colonial Virginia, particularly by socioeconomic means and not just geographic diffusion. The fact that Jefferson, Madison and others, living on the edge of a primitive continent, nonetheless were cosmopolitan in their outlook and sufficiently educated to draft the Declaration, the Constitution, and the Federalist Papers, attests to why this is such an important topic. Another surprise is that the author devotes substantial attention to the enslaved peoples who also lived at Shadwell; even interactions with Indians and their culture that occurred are also covered. The book is organized into chapters on key topics: the house itself; women's work (including care of children, choosing furnishing, food preparation, and the use of household slaves); the material culture of a well-to-do Virginia gentry family; slave life and fieldwork; the business conducted by Peter Jefferson (surveying and land investment); elite culture and interactions; family history, including kinship networks for both the elite and the enslaved; and some possible influences upon TJ from growing up and spending his entire life in a slave society. So there is quite a lot of solid analysis in this book. In effect, the author is using Peter Jefferson's family as a case study in the elite, intellectual leadership of colonial Virginia: its interaction with other elites; coexistence with slaves; economic activities; town development; and church involvement. Peter Jefferson was, we might say today, ambitious and "on the make," using his ability to loan money and public offices to enhance his power and family's standing. As interested as I am in TJ, I must admit the picture of his father that emerges makes it quite understandable as to why he emerged to be the unique individual he was. The author also, as an aside, works to refute any contention that TJ and his mother Jane were at odds throughout their lives. These and other facets of the author's analysis render this just an indispensable book on colonial Virginia and the early life of Thomas Jefferson.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars
By Jeffrey P. Lawrentz
Great book on a subject that has long needed to have been written about. Nice job!!
3 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Not what I expected, but interesting nonetheless
By Alain Manning
The title suggested that the book would be about the Jeffersons life at Shadwell, of which very little is known. I was expecting to be enlightened as to Thomas's childhood relationship with his parents. I found the book to be more about the geological diggings at Shadwell, which were interesting in their own way. The maps are difficult to understand, probably due to their size, and not detail. In the end I learned about the sort of life the Jeffersons might have experienced based on what has been discovered during the dig, and the size and shape of their house. I suppose information about the relationship between Thomas and his parents is lost because of the Shadwell fire and that Thomas burned all his communication with his mother. Too bad, I wish some letters had survived to give us a glimpse into Thomas' thoughts about his mother. It seems most historians site a rough relationship between them.

Merging archaeology, material culture, and social history, historian Susan Kern reveals the fascinating story of Shadwell, the birthplace of Thomas Jefferson and home to his parents, Jane and Peter Jefferson, their eight children, and over sixty slaves. Located in present-day Albemarle County, Virginia, Shadwell was at the time considered "the frontier." However, Kern demonstrates that Shadwell was no crude log cabin; it was, in fact, a well-appointed gentry house full of fashionable goods, located at the center of a substantial plantation. Kern's scholarship offers new views of the family's role in settling Virginia as well as new perspectives on Thomas Jefferson himself. By examining a variety of sources, including account books, diaries, and letters, Kern re-creates in rich detail the daily lives of the Jeffersons at Shadwell from Jane Jefferson's cultivation of a learned and cultured household to Peter Jefferson's extensive business network and oversight of a thriving plantation. Shadwell was Thomas Jefferson's patrimony, but Kern asserts that his real legacy there came from his parents, who cultivated the strong social connections that would later open doors for their children. At Shadwell, Jefferson learned the importance of fostering relationships with slaves, laborers, and powerful office holders, as well as the hierarchical structure of large plantations, which he later applied at Monticello. The story of Shadwell affects how we interpret much of what we know about Thomas Jefferson today, and Kern's fascinating book is sure to become the standard work on Jefferson's early years.

From Publishers Weekly
Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was born and raised in Shadwell, the Virginia plantation home of his father, his mother, their eight children, and more than 60 slaves. When it burned in 1770, Jefferson moved to nearby buildings that soon became Monticello. Shadwell vanished from history until archeologists began digging up the site in 1943. A former archeologist for the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Kern combines their findings with existing documents, letters, wills, and business records to deliver a scholarly portrait of life in the pre-revolutionary

South that overturns some popular perceptions and historians' views, most particularly that Jefferson's father was a hardy frontiersman rather than a member of the gentry. According to Kern, Shadwell was equipped with all the material and cultural trappings of elite Virginia society. Kern leaves no stone unturned, and primarily academics will appreciate her lengthy enumeration of archeological remains, inventories, itineraries, and demographic statistics, but she provides an intensely fact-based account of the young Jefferson's "well-ordered, well-connected world," from the layout of his childhood dwelling and its contents to the lives, possessions, and social position of his parents, neighbors, hired hands, and slaves. Illus., map. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. Kern's re-creation of the daily routines at Shadwell is both painstaking and path-breaking. All future students of Jefferson will turn to this as the standard account of his childhood world. Lauren Winner, Duke University