

## Thomas Jefferson & Philip Mazzei a tale of two patriots who loved wine and freedom



### Monticello and Mazzei

The inspiration for the layout and architecture of Thomas Jefferson's mountain-top home, Monticello, are clearly Italian. There is also ample evidence to suggest that Jefferson's long conversation with his Florentine-born neighbor, a talkative Italian wine merchant named **Philip Mazzei**, inspired the language used in the Declaration of Independence. In an article translated by Jefferson, Mazzei wrote, "**all men are by nature equally free and independent**".

**Phillip Mazzei** appeared at Monticello in the winter of 1774, accompanied by Jefferson's London merchant-agent, Thomas Adams. He became a houseguest at Monticello, brightening the last two months of 1774, for Jefferson, who had lost his sister Elizabeth (age 29) earlier that year.

Mazzei, then 43, had been trained a surgeon in Florence, worked as a ship's doctor, then practiced in the Middle East before settling in London, where he had been a wine merchant for many years. A well-known horticulturalist, he had sailed to Virginia to introduce the culture of grapes, olives and whatever fruit trees would flourish there, and had brought his own crew of Italian vineyard workers with him.

Jefferson indulged some of his favorite activities: building, gardening, buying and selling land. He drew up the charter of a joint stock company for his new friend and neighbor, Philip Mazzei, buying a fifty-pound sterling share in a scheme to cultivate silk, grow wine grapes, and raise olive trees on Mazzei's slopes near Monticello, all without slave labor and relying on Italian vineyard workers imported from Tuscany.

From April 1774, his notebooks were crammed with plans and expenditures to produce wine in the first large-scale viticulture experiment in North America. That he was not alone in this inability to foresee events is testified by the other shareholders, who included both George Washington and Lord Dunmore. According to local legend, Jefferson was able to greet the thirty workers in their own Tuscan accent. The men, who had heard only English for many months, wept.

Mazzei was born **Filippo Mazzei** in Tuscany. He studied medicine in Florence and practiced in Italy and the Middle East for several years before moving to London in 1755 to take up a mercantile career as an importer. In London he worked as a teacher of Italian language. While in London he met the Americans Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Adams of Virginia. They convinced him to undertake his next venture.

In 1773 he led a group of Italians who came to Virginia to introduce the cultivation of vineyards, olives, and other Mediterranean fruits. Mazzei became a neighbor and friend of Thomas Jefferson. Mazzei and Jefferson started what became the first commercial vineyard in the Commonwealth of Virginia. They shared an interest in politics and libertarian values, and maintained an active correspondence for the rest of Mazzei's life.

**Mazzei's contribution** was acknowledged by John F. Kennedy in his book *A Nation of Immigrants* in which he states that **The great doctrine 'All men are created equal' and incorporated into the Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson, was paraphrased from the writing of Philip Mazzei**, an Italian-born patriot and pamphleteer, who was a close friend of Jefferson. A few alleged scholars try to discredit Mazzei as the creator of this statement and idea, saying that "there is no mention of it anywhere until after the Declaration was published". This phrase appears in Italian in Mazzei's own hand, written in Italian, several years prior to the writing of the Declaration of Independence. Mazzei and Jefferson often exchanged ideas about true liberty and freedom. No one man can take complete credit for the ideals of American democracy.

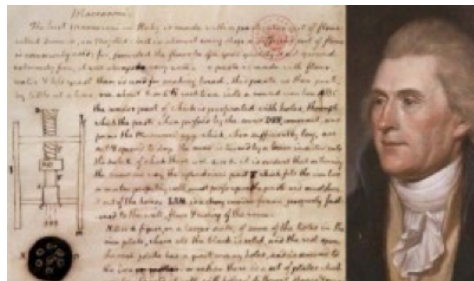
**The history of the Mazzei family** is closely woven into Tuscany's winemaking history, as well as the regions rich political and cultural past. Ser Lapo Mazzei (1350-1412) a winemaker from Carmignano is considered father of the Chianti name. The extraordinary Fonterutoli estate in Chianti has been owned by the Mazzei family since 1435 and has passed down through 24 generations. The Mazzei family's winemaking influence has extended far beyond the realm of Tuscany. In 1774, Filippo Mazzei (1730-1816) was asked by his friend Thomas Jefferson to plant a vineyard at the Jefferson estate in Monticello, Virginia. Jefferson was inspired not only by Filippo's (Philip's) viticultural knowledge but also by his ideas regarding equality. The great doctrine All men are created equal, which was incorporated into the Declaration of Independence by Jefferson, was paraphrased from the writing of Philip Mazzei. Philip's highly significant contributions to Italian American culture and philosophy were commemorated on a U.S. postage stamp entitled Patriot Remembered.

### Jefferson on Wine

Jefferson, who seldom dined alone, discovered that fine wines and food were a great way to meet informally with political friends and foes, never talking politics, but dropping a hint here and there of how he felt on a subject. Jefferson's first exposure to Italian wines had been during his trip into northern Italy in 1787, and he was particularly impressed with those made from the Nebbiolo grape. He served 250 bottles of Nebbiolo while President, but his favorite Italian wine was from the hilltop of Montepulciano about 40 miles south of Siena in southern Tuscany.



In 1980 USPS issued a 40c airmail stamp with portrait of **Philip Mazzei... Patriot Remembered.**



Thomas Jefferson's notes and design for a wine press were influenced by his friend and vineyard / wine business partner Philip Mazzei