

# Th: Jefferson

# MONTICELLO

WINTER 2013

[www.monticello.org](http://www.monticello.org)

VOLUME 24, NUMBER 2

## From the President

Dear Friends,

This year we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, an editorial project launched at Princeton University in 1943 with the enthusiastic support of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Thomas Jefferson Bicentennial Commission. The goal of the project is to produce the definitive edition of the papers of Thomas Jefferson. More than 40 volumes have already been published by Princeton.

The *Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series* is one of the most historically significant scholarly initiatives undertaken by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation. In 1999, we partnered with Princeton University to accelerate the process of preparing and publishing the letters and papers documenting the period of Jefferson's post-presidential years, 1809-1826, when he was in residence at Monticello.

J. Jefferson Looney is Monticello's editor of the *Retirement Series*. Jeff and the Series were profiled recently by *The Washington Post's* Michael Laris, who wrote: **"Thomas Jefferson died 186 years ago. But J. Jefferson Looney still wants the nation's third president to speak for himself ... Jeff says when he is done, he wants readers hundreds of years from now to have 'pretty close to the ultimate tool kit' for understanding Jefferson."**

A part of Monticello's Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies, the *Retirement Series* is preparing for publication the more than 13,000 surviving letters and documents that Jefferson wrote and received between his return to Monticello in 1809 at the close of his second presidential administration and his death on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1826.

We have produced nine of a projected 23 volumes of the *Retirement Series*, with most of this material also available online as a part of the University of Virginia's Rotunda electronic imprint. A free Internet edition of these volumes, made in collaboration with the National Archives, now advances our long-term goal of circulating Jefferson's ideas to the widest possible national and international audience.

During his retirement, Jefferson kept himself extraordinarily busy. The breadth of his correspondence with a host of American and foreign statesmen, inventors, educators, friends, family, and



ordinary citizens is truly astonishing. As Jefferson returned to the pleasurable pursuits of farm and family, he also kept himself well apprised of state and national politics, composed his memoirs, and sold his beloved library to Congress to replace the one burnt by the British during the War of 1812.

In addition, Jefferson spent much of the last dozen years of his life founding the University of Virginia. In this he played an extremely active role, deeming few aspects of the work beneath his notice. Jefferson designed the school's buildings and curriculum, chose the books for its library, arranged for the hiring of its faculty, helped raise both public and private funds for the institution, and served as an officer and board member for many years. He conveyed his pride in his role as father of the University of Virginia by listing this accomplishment as one of three to be carved onto his tombstone (the others being his authorship of the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom).

Despite their intrinsic value, the vast majority of Jefferson's retirement papers have never before been published. In our most recent volume, Jefferson writes to his son-in-law John Wayles Eppes about the education of his grandson Francis Eppes, the only surviving child of Jefferson's daughter Maria. **First published in the *Retirement Series*, and featured below, the letter is particularly prescient for Jefferson's desire that young Francis supplement his study of Latin and French by learning Spanish, "a language which will be very important to an American; as we shall have great**

**intercourse with Spanish America within his day.”**

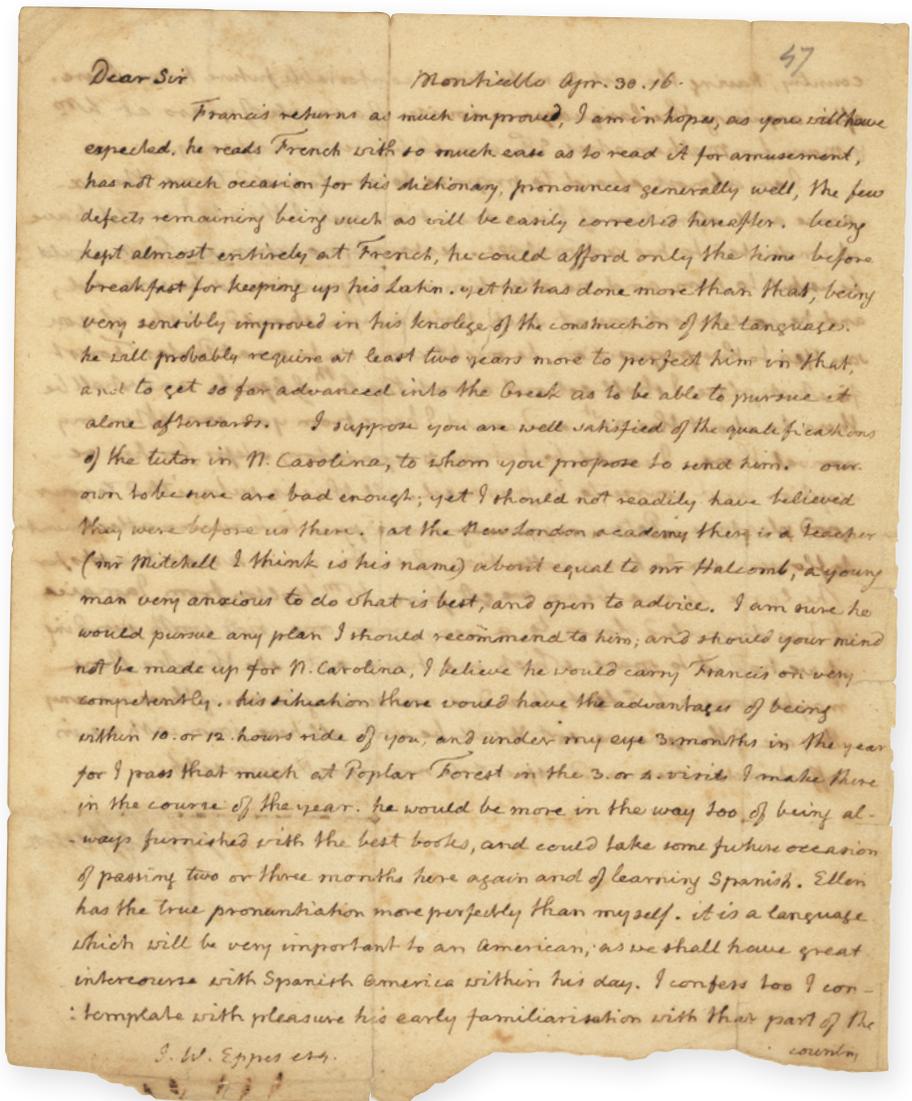
The *Papers of Thomas Jefferson* project is already transforming Jefferson studies, and its completion will inevitably produce a surge of new scholarship. I hope you will join me in celebrating the dedication of scholarly editors like Jeff Looney who, over seven decades, have been creating what will be the “ultimate tool kit for understanding Jefferson.” If you’d like to learn more about how to support this ambitious and consequential project, please contact Joshua Scott, Monticello’s Director of Development, at [jscott@monticello.org](mailto:jscott@monticello.org).

With best wishes for a happy holiday season,

Sincerely,

Leslie Greene Bowman, President and CEO

Read the article from *The Washington Post* about Jeff Looney and the *Papers of Thomas Jefferson* at [www.monticello.org/WPost](http://www.monticello.org/WPost).



**Letter from Thomas Jefferson to John Wayles Eppes**

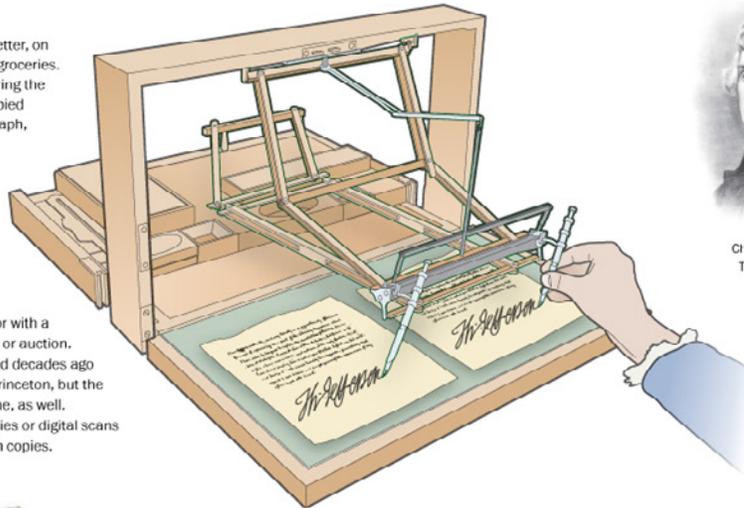
Courtesy American Philosophical Society

## From the president's hand to the Internet

Here's how a document goes from Thomas Jefferson's pen to historian J. Jefferson Looney's hands and eventually into a book and exhaustive online database:

### 1. WRITING

The retired Jefferson writes a letter, on any topic from government to groceries. Nearly everything he wrote during the last 20 years of his life was copied with a machine called a polygraph, which held a second pen that created a copy as he wrote.



Charcoal drawing of Thomas Jefferson

### 2. ACQUIRING

The letter ends up in a library or with a descendant, autograph dealer or auction. Most documents were gathered decades ago by Looney's predecessors at Princeton, but the Monticello group acquires some, as well. The team tries to get photocopies or digital scans of both originals and polygraph copies.

### 3. TRANSCRIBING



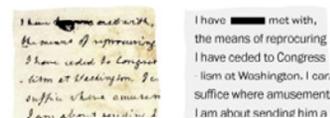
A copy is sent to keyboarders in India for transcribing and basic Internet formatting. (Looney considered using grad students, but they would've taken longer and cost more.)

### 4. TIDYING



Digital technicians take the first shot at deciphering parts that the transcribers mark as illegible. They also clean up the files and improve the formatting.

### 5. EDITING



If we included a separate step for every bout of painstaking editing, this graphic would be twice as long. But the most arduous part occurs when editors compare the transcription against the original, character by character, three times.

### 6. CORRECTING



Jefferson's spelling was quirky. He dropped letters on purpose and ignored the "I before E" rule. The team does not correct intentional misspellings but fixes and notes obviously unintentional errors.

### 7. ANNOTATING



Editors add notes, biographies of people mentioned and other information to flesh out the letter's context. Fact-checkers scour everything not written by Jefferson to make sure it is accurate.

### 8. "SENSE READING"



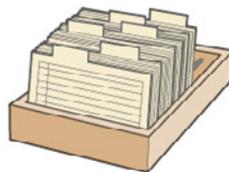
A fresh team reads the text for the first time, looking for big-picture errors, contradictions, or things that just don't sound like Jefferson. They talk it out with the original team, and Looney referees any disagreements.

### 9. "PARANOIA CHECKS"



That's Looney's term for the final step before sending a compilation of letters to Princeton University Press for printing. He makes sure titles are correct, no documents have been dropped or duplicated, etc.

### 10. INDEXING



After galley proofs come back, the team starts the index. All people in the book are indexed, as are book titles and authors, organizations, broad themes and just about anything else someone might want to search for.

### 11. PUBLISHING



One final file goes to the printer and another will be used on a public Web site. Jefferson's 70,000 or so papers will span 75 to 80 volumes, including pre-retirement correspondence that is edited at Princeton.

Reprinted with the permission of *The Washington Post*