



IMLS Backs Inventory of Jefferson's Books

Thomas Jefferson owned an estimated 8,000 books during his lifetime, but there's no comprehensive list of the titles in his libraries.

Thanks to a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, that won't be the case for long.

The Thomas Jefferson Foundation has been awarded \$140,140 by the IMLS in support of its Thomas Jefferson's Libraries project to create a detailed inventory of Jefferson's books. The result will be an annotated bibliographic database containing searchable records for every Jefferson-owned title in the Thomas Jefferson Portal online catalog, available through Monticello's Web site.

An avid bibliophile, Jefferson assembled at least three libraries over the course of his life, including the "great library" of approximately 5,000 titles that he sold to Congress in 1815. He compiled lists of his collections over the years, and he organized his books into a classification scheme that divided the books into three main categories – history, philosophy, and fine arts – with three dozen subdivisions.

For Thomas Jefferson's Libraries, a team of researchers and catalogers at Monticello's Jefferson Library will examine Jefferson's inventories and other sources, including correspondence in which he referred to books and the lists of titles sold after his death. Entries for each title in the catalog will include basic facts (author, publisher, date, and subjects) and supplemental information such as notes, current location, and, whenever possible, links to full-text versions of the book. The entire project will take three years to complete.

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Book Inventory

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“Jefferson’s books were a major source of his ideas, and we believe that compiling and making available what’s known about the titles he owned will provide an invaluable resource for students and scholars,” said Foundation Librarian Jack Robertson, the project’s director. “The bibliographic data will create intriguing new ways to collate and correlate Jefferson’s sources of ideas and inspiration.”

To demonstrate the scope, search capabilities, and potential for use by students and scholars, a pilot project covering some 100 titles classified by Jefferson in his “Geography–America” section is now available online by going to <http://tjportal.monticello.org> and entering “jefferson’s libraries” in the Quick Search box.

Monticello was one of four institutions in Virginia to receive funding in 2004 through the IMLS’ Museums for America grants program, which awarded \$16.5 million to 186 museums and libraries across the country. Monticello must match the amount of the grant from non-federal sources.

The IMLS is an independent federal grant-making agency dedicated to helping the nation’s museums and libraries serve their communities.



Copies of Homer’s “Iliad” and Virgil’s “Aeneid” that were owned by Jefferson.

COMMENTS? newsletter@monticello.org