

# Th: Jefferson

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## The travel diary of Jefferson's granddaughter published by Monticello scholars

THOMAS JEFFERSON PROMISED HIS 5-YEAR-OLD GRANDDAUGHTER Ellen Randolph that if she continued her rapid progress in learning to read and write, one day "you will become a learned lady and publish books yourself." Jefferson and his daughter Martha saw to it that Ellen became a learned lady, but she never became a published author until now. This fall the Thomas Jefferson Foundation and the Massachusetts Historical Society will bring Ellen's first book—her London travel diary—to the printed page.

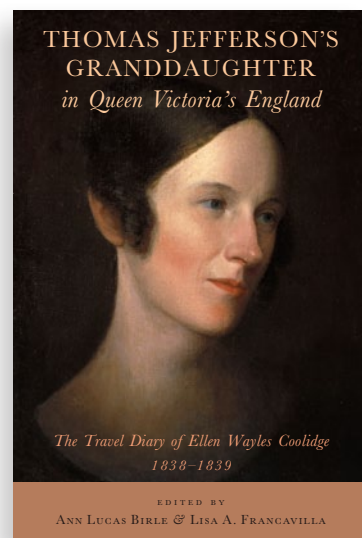
Ellen Wayles Randolph was the fourth child of Jefferson's daughter Martha and Thomas Mann Randolph. She began corresponding with her grandfather when he was president, and over the years Jefferson nurtured her powers of observation and her writing skills. After Jefferson retired from the presidency in 1809, Ellen, her mother and her siblings came to live with him at Monticello. Jefferson's home was Ellen's university. Under Jefferson's supervision, Ellen learned to read Latin, Greek, French and Italian. She was known for her ability as a conversationalist, and Jefferson's physician was so impressed by Ellen's confidence that he wrote to her grandfather, saying, "If she were not a woman, and obliged to be content as a wife and mother, I believe she could have been president."

Ellen was lured away from Monticello by Joseph Coolidge, Jr., a Harvard-educated merchant; after their marriage in 1825, the couple lived in Joseph's native Boston. Ellen and Joseph's family quickly grew, with six children in as many years, and Joseph became actively engaged in the China trade. Ellen dreaded his absences and suffered in the months he was away. Joseph determined in 1838 to bring Ellen with him to London, where he was negotiating financing for his firm. The trip was Ellen's first experience outside the United States. In keeping with the habits of her youth, Ellen made careful observations and put pen to paper to record the details of life.

Ellen's diary conveys the sense of wonder that pervaded London in the summer of 1838, when the coronation of a new queen made all things seem possible. Ellen first saw Queen Victoria in Hyde Park, where the new monarch was taking daily early morning rides:

*I have been again to Hyde Park, where I got another sight of the young Queen .... It is surprising what a feeling of loyalty women*

*Thomas Jefferson's Granddaughter in Queen Victoria's England: The Travel Diary of Ellen Wayles Coolidge, 1838-1839*, edited by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation's Ann Lucas Birle and Lisa A. Francavilla and co-published by the Massachusetts Historical Society and the Thomas Jefferson Foundation (available at [www.monticellocatalog.org](http://www.monticellocatalog.org)).



*of all nations seem to have towards this sovereign of their own sex. We are so seldom called to fill high places that our hearts are stirred at once with pride & love when we see the destinies of a great people even nominally committed to hands like our own.*

The Coolidges gained entry into some of the most celebrated drawing rooms, artists' studios and ceremonies of the time. Ellen records the details of her conversations with writers such as Samuel Rogers, Thomas Carlyle and Anna Jameson and activists including Charles Sumner and Harriet Martineau. She gives firsthand accounts of the fashioning of the young queen's image by the artist Charles Robert Leslie, and she happens to be standing in the studio of sculptor Sir Francis Chantrey when the clay model of his bust of Queen Victoria arrived, still wet, from the queen's sitting at Buckingham Palace. Ellen takes notes as she watches the queen open Parliament and records both newspaper and salon accounts of the first scandal of the queen's reign.

Throughout her stay, Coolidge's family and her youth are never far from her mind. The smell of a tobacco warehouse, news of her mother's schoolgirl friends, and memories of the Scottish songs sung by her grandfather while working in his study all bring Coolidge's thoughts home to Monticello. The publication of Ellen Coolidge's diary makes available to scholars a remarkable female perspective and serves as a reminder that Thomas Jefferson was not the sole beneficiary of the intellectual and social riches that he gathered around his mountaintop home.