

Thomas Jefferson MONTICELLO

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FOUNDATION LAUNCHES

Save Thomas Jefferson's Treasures FUND

Since its earliest years, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation has devoted its resources to finding, acquiring, studying, and exhibiting objects owned by Thomas Jefferson and his family and used at Monticello. Thanks to the generosity of friends and other foundations, Monticello recently made some singularly important acquisitions—one of the original, now iconic “Jefferson cups,” two gold and glass ink bottles, a pair of shoe buckles, a pocket notebook, a coin purse, a razor and case, spectacles with their original case and lenses, and two family-owned books. They were offered to Monticello by a civic-spirited family member who wanted them to remain on exhibit at Monticello rather than go to public sale.

Of all of the objects associated with Jefferson, the Jefferson cups are the best known. In 1810, Jefferson commissioned silversmith John LeTelier of Richmond, Virginia, to make eight silver tumblers, or beakers, to his



ABOVE: A pair of green-tinted spectacles and other personal objects that belonged to Thomas Jefferson.

LEFT: Silver tumbler, iconic today as a “Jefferson cup.”

specifications. Jefferson’s design, similar to a Chinese tea bowl, was based upon a smaller version that he had acquired in Paris, also silver with a gilt-washed interior. After Jefferson’s death, Martha Jefferson Randolph distributed the treasured cups to her surviving children.

Among the other prized objects recently acquired is a particularly important pair of spectacles,

complete with their accompanying interchangeable lenses and a case. President Jefferson described exactly what he wanted—complete with measurements and a full-size drawing—in an 1806 letter to their Philadelphia maker, John McAllister. These spectacles precisely match Jefferson’s specifications. Remarkably, a descendant of McAllister gave the original letter to Monticello several years ago.

The spectacles, notebook, buckles, razor, and coin purse were

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removed from the desk on which Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence before it was presented to the nation in 1880. "Personal objects like these, some of which are currently exhibited in Jefferson's Cabinet and Bedchamber, help evoke Jefferson's presence," said Susan Stein, Richard Gilder senior curator and vice president for museum programs.

Dozens of donors, especially those associated with the Monticello Cabinet, the heart of philanthropic support at Monticello, contributed the funds to purchase the objects.

"We are thrilled that the iconic Jefferson cup and these significant personal objects will continue to provide a tangible connection to Jefferson for visitors for generations to come," said Leslie Greene Bowman, president and CEO of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation.

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Monticello curators have been keeping records on the whereabouts of Jefferson objects since the 1920s, but many items unknown to us still remain with private owners. We receive regular, often weekly, queries by telephone, letter, and email. "Is this Thomas Jefferson's...?" As object detectives, we evaluate things through a combination of written evidence, provenance, and connoisseurship. To help acquire the objects associated with Monticello that curators discover, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation has created the special "Save Thomas Jefferson's Treasures" fund. For more information on "Save Thomas Jefferson's Treasures," visit our website: www.Monticello.org/treasures