The only birthday I ever commemorate is that of our Independence, the Fourth of July.

- Margaret Bayard Smith quoting Thomas Jefferson, 1801

There is no more inspirational place to celebrate the Fourth of July than Monticello, the home of the author of the Declaration of Independence. Since 1963, more than 3,000 people from every corner of the globe have taken the oath of citizenship at the annual Monticello Independence Day Celebration and Naturalization Ceremony. Jefferson himself hoped that Americans would celebrate the Fourth of July, what he called “the great birthday of our Republic,” to “refresh our collections of [our] rights, and undiminished devotion to them.” The iconic West Lawn of Monticello provides a glorious setting for a ceremony steeped in patriotic elements.

“Monticello is a beautiful spot for this, full as it is of the spirit that animated this country’s foundation: boldness, vision, improvisation, practicality, inventiveness and imagination, the kind of cheekiness that only comes from free-thinking and faith in an individual’s ability to change the face of the world — it’s easy to imagine Jefferson saying to himself, “So what if I’ve never designed a building before? If I want to, I will…”

- Excerpt from Sam Waterston’s remarks at Monticello, 2007

It is said that we are a nation of immigrants. The list of those who have delivered the July 4th address at Monticello is a thoroughly American story. In 1995 there was Roberto Goizueta, the man who fled Cuba with nothing but an education and a job, and who rose to lead one of the best known corporations: The Coca-Cola Company. There is the woman who fled Czechoslovakia as a girl, uncertain of where she would “fit in” to America, who became the first woman to serve as secretary of state: Madeleine Albright. Frank McCourt spoke of his return to America from Ireland at age nineteen, arriving with only the gift of the English language, a gift he shared with millions in the Pulitzer Prize-winning Angela’s Ashes.
July 4th at Monticello is an emotionally powerful experience that celebrates not only “the great birthday of our Republic,” but the ideas of the Declaration of Independence, the nation’s birth certificate. The words that Jefferson called “an expression of the American mind” that “all men are created equal” and have a right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” changed the world and continue to reverberate today. The real meaning of the Fourth of July goes beyond fireworks and picnics, and is found in the mosaic of stories told by the nation’s newest citizens as they address the crowd at Monticello. This July 4th will mark the 241st anniversary of American independence. Jefferson, the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, died at Monticello on the 50th anniversary, July 4, 1826.
1963  Sir Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia
1964  Henry J. Taylor, former U.S. Ambassador to Switzerland
1965  Helde Alphaud, Ambassador of France to the United States
1966  Torben Ronne, Ambassador of Denmark to the United States
1967  Henry H. Fowler, Secretary of the Treasury
1968  Eugene V. Rostow, Undersecretary for Political Affairs, Department of State
1969  U. Alexis Johnson, Undersecretary for Political Affairs, Department of State
1970  J. Sergeant Reynolds, Lieutenant Governor of Virginia
1971  Mills E. Godwin, Jr., former Governor of Virginia
1972  Harry F. Byrd, U.S. Senator from Virginia
1973  Albertis S. Harrison, Jr., Justice, Virginia Supreme Court, and former Governor of Virginia
1974  Louis B. Wright, Director Emeritus, Folger Shakespeare Library
1975  Dumas Malone, Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation Professor of History, Emeritus, Univ. of Virginia
1976  Gerald R. Ford, President of the United States
1977  Caryl Parker Haskins, Trustee, Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation
1978  John N. Dalton, Governor of Virginia
1979  Clifton Waller Barrett, Trustee, Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation
1980  Charles F. Baldwin, Ambassador in Residence, Univ. of Virginia
1981  Merrill D. Peterson, Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation Professor of History, Univ. of Virginia
1982  Charles S. Robb, Governor of Virginia
1983  J. Kenneth Robinson, U.S. Representative, 7th Congressional District of Virginia
1984  John O. Marsh, Jr., Secretary of the Army
1985  John W. Warner, U.S. Senator from Virginia
1986  Kenneth W. Thompson, Director, White Burkett Miller Center for Public Affairs at the Univ. of Virginia
1987  Gerald L. Baliles, Governor of Virginia
1988  John Charles Thomas, Justice, Supreme Court of Virginia
1989  Henry J. Abraham, James Hart Professor of Government and Foreign Affairs, Univ. of Virginia
1990  L. Douglas Wilder, Governor of Virginia
1991  Jacques Andreani, Ambassador of France to the United States
1992  Carl Sagan, David Duncan Professor of Astronomy and Space Sciences, Cornell U.
1993  John T. Casteen III, President, Univ. of Virginia
1994  David McCullough, biographer and historian
1995  Roberto C. Goizueta, Chairman and Chief Operating Officer, The Coca-Cola Company
1996  Richard Moe, President, National Trust for Historic Preservation
1997  Gen. Colin L. Powell, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense
1998  Andrew Young, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations
1999  James S. Gilmore III, Governor of Virginia
2000  Madeleine K. Albright, Secretary of State
2001  Vartan Gregorian, President, Carnegie Corporation of New York
2002  Frank McCourt, author
2003  Allen H. Neuharth, founder of USA Today and The Freedom Forum
2004  W. Richard West, Jr., founding director of Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian
2005  I.M. Pei, architect
2006  Christo and Jeanne-Claude, artists
2007  Sam Waterston, actor
2008  George W. Bush, President of the United States
2009  Tom Perriello, U.S. Representative, 5th Congressional District of Virginia
2010  Tracey Ullman, actress and comedienne
2011  Muhtar Kent, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, The Coca-Cola Company
2012  Nadia Comaneci, gold-medal-winning Olympic gymnast
2013  Dave Matthews, lead vocalist/guitarist for Dave Matthews Band
2014  David Rubenstein, Co-Founder and Co-CEO of the Carlyle Group
2015  Terence McAuliffe, Governor of Virginia
2016  Dr. Larry J. Sabato, founder and director of the Univ. of Virginia Center for Politics
2017  Rabbi David Saperstein, Former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom
INDEPENDENCE DAY SPEAKERS AT MONTICELLO

Dr. Larry J. Sabato, 2016

Governor Terence McAuliffe, 2015

David M. Rubenstein, 2014

Dave Matthews, 2013

Nadia Comaneci, 2012

Muhtar Kent, 2011