FOLLOWING the CLUES

Thomas Jefferson’s fastidious record keeping has revealed a wealth of information about the objects inside the house at Monticello during his lifetime. Since the creation of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation in 1923, curatorial sleuths have pieced together clues to track down many original objects. These have been returned to the house in order to better interpret the history of Monticello, but the location of some objects remains a mystery to this day.

MISSING:

Thomas Jefferson’s terrestrial and celestial globes

LAST SEEN:

Edgehill, Thomas Jefferson Randolph’s Albemarle County plantation, 1875

BACKGROUND:

In 1806, Jefferson finally received the globes he had been wanting for at least 14 years: a pair of 18-inch “New British Globes” made by William and Thomas M. Bardin. The terrestrial globe featured the latest cartographic renderings of the continents and oceans, while the celestial globe charted the stars and constellations. Jefferson shipped the globes to Monticello in November 1807.

The Cabinet at Monticello, with the stand-in globes in place. The 18-inch Bardin terrestrial and celestial globes currently displayed in the Cabinet match Jefferson’s — but we will always wonder what happened to the originals.

CLUE NO. 1

An annotated floorplan by Jefferson’s granddaughter Cornelia Randolph notes the globes sitting underneath the ledgers in his Cabinet (number 26). The floorplan has more clues: Not only does it tell us the globes’ location; it also confirms what kind of frames held Jefferson’s globes. Globe frames ranged from simple, low frames to fancy, taller stands. Jefferson’s stands were the cheapest available and also the shortest, the only ones that would fit under the ledgers.

CLUE NO. 2

Jefferson’s grandson Thomas Jefferson Randolph bought the globes for $66 at the 1827 estate dispersal sale. He took the globes to his nearby plantation, Edgehill, and they remained there until his death in 1875. The globes appear on an inventory of Randolph’s estate, but they are not included in his will and no further documentation has been found ... yet.
WALL BRACKETS, LOST AND FOUND

A pair of original wall brackets from the Entry Hall stayed with the house until around 1940, when they were removed after having been erroneously identified as non-Jefferson objects.

OUT IN THE COLD
The brackets turned up at a Charlottesville antique shop, where a picker acquired one or both. One bracket eventually caught the attention of a curator at Colonial Williamsburg, who correctly realized that it was an 18th-century object.

HOMECOMING
Monticello curator Susan Stein was contacted by her peer, who relayed that he thought he might have a bracket from Monticello. Physical evidence confirmed his suspicion: When placed atop an existing nail, the bracket fit perfectly. Soon after, the bracket was returned to its rightful place.

CLUE NO. 1
Jefferson’s note, “Manner of arranging my books at Monticello when I return,” reveals that he owned a large library bookcase, a tripartite piece with a slightly projecting center section. See the sketch and his comment: “Place my large book case at f.” This bookcase was already 10 years old by the time this note was drafted.

CLUE NO. 2
Knowing the scale and footprint of the lost bookcase, we conducted a search that revealed it was based on a design from Thomas Chippendale’s pattern books. Williamsburg cabinet shops (where we believe it was built) used this book, and Jefferson owned a copy as well. Note the projecting center section.

CLUE NO. 3
Jefferson used the bookcase to store books and legal documents. The original note identifying the contents for “Press A” survives. The bookcase may have a nail hole inside one of the doors, a remnant of where this note was tacked. The bookcase was probably removed to Edgehill Plantation shortly after Jefferson’s death, and possibly was shipped to Boston as part of Ellen Randolph Coolidge’s legacy from her grandfather.

DO YOU HAVE A LEAD ON THESE MISSING ITEMS?
If so, please contact the curatorial staff at preserving@monticello.org.

Gardiner Hallock, vice president for architecture, collections and facilities, examines the back of the bracket.