



# Staff Takes First Steps on “Retirement Series”

*The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series* was established at the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation late in 1999. The project’s core mission is to prepare the definitive edition of Jefferson’s papers and letters, incoming as well as outgoing, for the period from his retirement from the presidency in March 1809 to his death on July 4, 1826. A letterpress edition produced to the highest scholarly standards to be published by the Princeton University Press will consist of more than 20 volumes. The first members of a projected staff of 10 have been hired, furniture and computers have been purchased, and work on the project has commenced.

As its essential first task, the *Retirement Series* staff is creating an electronic database recording the whereabouts of and other information on every known text of every Jefferson document of the retirement period, as well as information on thousands of documents that Jefferson described in his epistolary record but which are not now known to exist. This invaluable resource, previously available only as a card file at the sister project at Princeton University devoted to Jefferson’s earlier years, will provide information on tens of thousands of texts owned by more than a thousand repositories and private collectors. The *Retirement Series* will use its database not only as an essential bibliographic tool but also to track its own editorial progress as each document is verified, annotated, and readied for publication.

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## *This Issue’s Other Stories*

-  DIGITAL ARCHAEOLOGY ARCHIVE
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# MONTICELLO

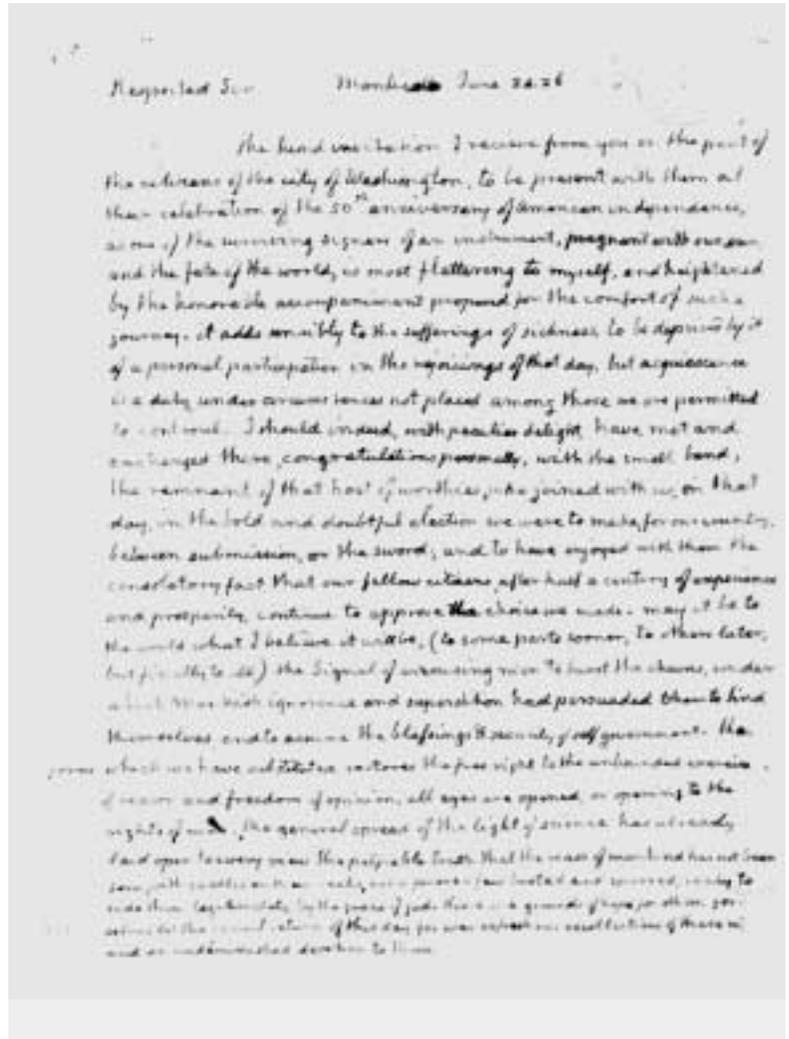


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Before editorial work can begin in earnest, the project needs to obtain high-quality copies of each of the extant texts of retirement-period Jefferson documents. Wherever it is economically and logistically feasible, the project will work to obtain color digital scans taken from the original manuscripts. In other cases, scanning will be done from microfilm. Obtaining fresh pictures rather than working from photocopies of old black-and-white copies will enable the editors to work with maximum accuracy and will reduce the need to travel to the locations of widely dispersed originals to check unclear passages.

As one of the first editorial projects aiming at a fully electronic document archive, the *Retirement Series* also will benefit from the ability to link these images directly to its internal database and to back up its entire body of texts off-site. And, in an initiative made possible by new technologies, the project hopes to release the database online as part of Monticello’s Web site, enabling anyone in the world to determine how many letters Jefferson may have written to or received from a given individual, the dates of specific documents, and where particular texts are located. Transcriptions and, whenever the owners permit it, images of the actual manuscripts also will be available. As the work of the *Retirement Series* progresses, the



One of the many Jefferson letters to be published in the “Retirement Series.”

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accuracy of the database entries and the transcriptions will be verified and necessary corrections will be made.

The long-term goal is to expand this work over Jefferson’s entire lifetime and make as much of it as possible freely accessible on the Internet, updated and maintained in perpetuity by the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation. Planning is still in its early stages and resources for the expanded database have not yet been identified, but the editors are excited by the vision of a single reference tool providing worldwide access to bibliographic information, text images, and transcriptions covering the entire documentary legacy left by Thomas Jefferson. They are pleased to be taking the first steps toward achieving that great goal.

– J. JEFFERSON LOONEY

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**COMMENTS? [newsletter@monticello.org](mailto:newsletter@monticello.org)**