



Houdon Bust Tops List of New Acquisitions

One of the best-known and most admired likenesses of Thomas Jefferson has found a permanent home at Monticello.

A plaster portrait bust of Jefferson sculpted from life by Jean-Antoine Houdon has been acquired by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation through a gift from the Gilder-Lehrman Collection of New York and its principals, Richard Gilder and Lewis E. Lehrman. Gilder was a member of the Foundation's Board of Trustees from 1993 through 2001.

The portrait by Houdon served as the model for Jefferson's image on the Indian Peace Medal (1801) and the U.S. nickel (1938). The bust with terra cotta

patination was first loaned to Monticello in 1993 and has been on display in the Parlor continuously since 1997.

"This is a truly generous gift, and we are extremely grateful to Mr. Gilder and Mr. Lehrman," said Susan R. Stein, Monticello's curator. "We are also thrilled to be the owners of this important American icon."

Jefferson sat for Houdon, whom he considered the finest sculptor of his age, shortly before he left Paris in 1789. Houdon's working method was typical of sculptors of his time. He first produced a likeness in terra cotta, a malleable reddish-brown clay.

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Houdon's 1789 bust of Jefferson.

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From the terra cotta he made a more durable plaster cast. This model was then used to produce a marble bust and/or more plasters, some of which were given terra cotta patinations, or coatings, to achieve rich surface tones.

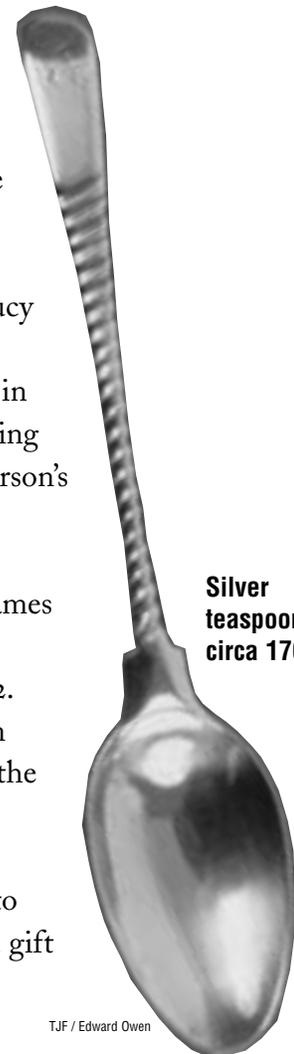
In Jefferson's case, the likeness was produced in marble – which today is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston – and in several different plaster versions. To create a “gallery of worthies” at Monticello, Jefferson purchased 10 or 12 terra cotta-patinated plasters from Houdon, including likenesses of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, the Marquis de Lafayette, Voltaire, Turgot, and himself. The bust acquired by the Foundation is not one of those Jefferson brought from France to Monticello. As it still bears the seal of the French Royal Academy, it is likely the work that was exhibited in the Salon of 1789. It is the finest of the surviving plasters, and retains its original terra cotta patination.

Monticello also has acquired a number of other notable pieces in recent months, including:

- One of a set of cherry and oak side chairs attributed to Peter Scott of Williamsburg, circa 1770. This gift by Lucy Legrand completes the set of six, the other five of which already were owned by the Foundation. They are on view in the South Square Room. The chairs may have been wedding gifts to Thomas and Martha Jefferson, perhaps from Jefferson's law tutor and mentor, George Wythe.

- A silver teaspoon with a twisted handle that once belonged to Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson, made by James Tookey in London, circa 1768. This spoon was brought to Monticello by Martha Jefferson upon her marriage in 1772. This gift by Elizabeth Eddy Cornwall, widow of Jefferson descendant Charles Eddy, completes a set of five spoons, the other four of which already belonged to the Foundation. They are on view in the Tea Room.

- Five sheets of architectural drafting paper, believed to have been purchased by Jefferson in Paris. This also was a gift by Mrs. Cornwall.



**Silver
teaspoon,
circa 1768**

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■ A two-volume work, *Rapports du Physique et du Moral de l'homme* (“Relationships Between the Physical and Moral Faculties of Man”) by P.J.G. Cabanis, published in Paris in 1815. This third edition of Cabanis’ work was owned by Jefferson in his retirement library. This particular copy was owned by Nicholas Trist, and may also be the one owned by Jefferson. It was another gift by Mrs. Cornwall.

■ A letter dated March 31, 1826, from Jefferson at Monticello to an unknown recipient at the University of Virginia. The letter, addressed “Dear Sir” and concerning subscriptions to scholarly journals, was a gift by John Woods Harris.

■ An 1802 medal commemorating Jefferson’s inauguration as president and 25 years of American independence, engraved by John Reich and struck by the U.S. Mint. The medal, which was purchased at auction, features an image of Jefferson based on the Houdon bust on one side and an allegorical figure of Liberty on the other. Jefferson sent one of these medals to each of his daughters.



TJF / Edward Owen

1802 commemorative medal.

■ Four 18th-century hand-colored circular engravings of buildings in Paris that Jefferson visited and admired. The subjects include the *Halle au Bled*, or municipal grain market, and the *pompes à feu*, or steam engines used to pump water from the Seine. The engravings were discovered in a Paris print shop and purchased there.

COMMENTS? newsletter@monticello.org