

Featured Letter: Hostility to Dogs

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[To%20PeterMinor%2024Sept11.pdf](https://monticello-www.s3.amazonaws.com/files/old/inline-pdfs/To%20PeterMinor%2024Sept11.pdf)). Thomas Jefferson sometimes indulged in colorful overstatement. On 17 Sept. 1811 Peter Minor (1783–1827), a fellow Albemarle County landowner who later served as secretary of the Agricultural Society of Albemarle, requested Jefferson's support for his scheme to reduce the canine population. Minor hoped to obtain legislative approval for imposition of a tax on owners, who would presumably kill some or all of their dogs to avoid the tax. The proposed levy would be used to compensate owners of livestock killed by dogs. Minor complained that dogs were killing merinos and other valuable sheep breeds. He also deplored the proliferation of an animal that often developed rabies, with fatal consequences for humans bitten by mad animals. Jefferson shared Minor's keen interest in establishing the merino in Virginia and responded with the bloodthirsty letter below. Late the same year he and Minor both signed a petition in which more than seventy Albemarle County residents unsuccessfully called for such a tax. Despite his stated support for total extermination of dogs, at precisely the same time Jefferson kept working sheep dogs on his estate and responded favorably when his correspondents asked for their offspring.



To Peter Minor

DEAR SIR

Monticello Sep. 24. 11

I participate in all your hostility to dogs, and would readily join in any plan for exterminating the whole race. I consider them as the most afflicting of all the follies for which men tax themselves. but as total extirpation cannot be hoped for, let it be partial. I like well your outlines of a law for this purpose: but should we not add a provision for making the owner of a dog liable for all the mischief done by him, and requiring that every dog shall wear a collar with the name of the person inscribed who shall be security for his honest demeanor? I believe your calculation of their numbers & cost is far within bounds; & I am satisfied that taking the whole mass of dogs in the state into consideration, the average of what they get fairly & unfairly of the food fit for man, would¹ feed a man. are there not as many sheep and

hogs annually lost to the owners, by dogs, or with their aid, as there are dogs in the state? the petition to the legislature should I think refer to the wisdom of the legislature whether the law should be general, or confined to the counties below the ridge, or local to such counties only as shall chuse to be named in it, but should pray ultimately that if no other county concurs, it may yet be made the law for the county of Albemarle. I know of no service I can render in this business, unless perhaps to write to some friends in the legislature to interest themselves in promoting it. accept assurances of my esteem & respect.

TH: JEFFERSON

PoC (MHi); at foot of text: "P. Minor esq."; endorsed by TJ.

below the ridge: east of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

¹TJ here canceled "main."

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