

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dreams of the Future

Dear Friends,

When I wrote to you in the previous edition of this magazine, the world looked quite different. On Monticello mountain, we have spent much of 2020 navigating the challenges presented by COVID-19 and the trauma of another chapter of racial tensions in our history. We know that you face similar setbacks in your own homes and communities.

In times like these, history can feel like a double-edged sword, supplying evidence of progress *and* of repetition. Perhaps that is why Thomas Jefferson wrote to John Adams, in 1816, “I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past.”

When the late congressman and civil rights leader John Lewis visited Monticello in 2017 to receive the Thomas Jefferson Foundation Medal in Citizen Leadership, he told us, “I was inspired by Jefferson, by Dr. King, by Gandhi and others, to get in trouble. I call it good trouble, necessary trouble.”

History matters now more than ever. The past supplies us with a road map for civic engagement. In times of national turmoil, historical knowledge can suggest the “necessary trouble” that will move the country toward the “dreams of the future.”

In that spirit, Monticello remains committed to bringing history forward into national and global dialogues. Realizing that vision in the midst of a global pandemic has demanded creativity and clarity of purpose. As you’ll read in these pages, we have pivoted into the digital realm, with generous support from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Our Facebook livestreams have provided a dynamic platform for conversations that connect history with our present-day lives. In this issue, you’ll get a sampling of some of these topics, ranging from fulfilling the promise of the Declaration to preserving historic plants for future generations. These discussions have already been viewed more than half a million times by audiences around the world. I invite you to log in and join us.

Earlier this fall, we launched a digital version of our annual Heritage Harvest Festival, reimagined as an ongoing series of



Gabriel Zakaib

courses and conversations on food, farming and gardening. And on a weekly basis, we continue to bring the power of place on this mountaintop to you, at home, through virtual tours, field trips and livestreamed events.

Since mid-June, we have been welcoming visitors back to Monticello, where we have implemented enhanced safety protocols and a redesigned experience, including self-guided tours and new outdoor educational stations. Longtime patrons will be excited to learn that, for the first time in our history, photography is allowed inside the house.

These changes – and your continued support – have made it possible for us to retain and redeploy every member of our staff during this difficult time. We are profoundly grateful to the thousands who have engaged with us in person and online, demonstrating a commitment to our core mission and to the value of cultural institutions in shaping America’s path forward.

Thank you for returning to the mountaintop, for engaging with us virtually and for trusting us to help educate your family at a moment when kitchen tables have become classrooms. Here is our commitment to you: the team at Monticello will continue to innovate, to engage in crucial conversations about our shared history, and to make the lessons of the past accessible on a variety of platforms.

Wishing you well,

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Leslie Greene Bowman".

Leslie Greene Bowman
President

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Hit the Trail

Stay up to date with all the latest events and happenings on the Saunders-Monticello Trail. Sign up by emailing trail@monticello.org.

Monticello magazine is published twice yearly by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation Inc., the private, nonprofit organization that has owned and operated Monticello since 1923. Its twofold mission is education and preservation. Questions, comments and address changes should be directed to Monticello magazine, P.O. Box 316, Charlottesville, VA 22902; info@monticello.org. View archives at monticello.org/magazine. **Editor:** Robert Viccellio (Viccellio Communications). **Design:** Monica Pedynkowski, John McKee (Calendar). **Artwork and Photography:** Unless marked, images © Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello. **Photos:** Ian Atkins, Tabitha Corradi, William Dillon, Stacey Evans, Thad Jackson, Leah O’Connell, Jane Rogers, Gabriel Zakaib. **Contributors:** Peggy Cornett, Diane Ehrenpreis, Gardiner Hallock, Lucy Macon, Lucy Middelfort, Dianne Pierce, Karen Quillen, John Ragosta, David Thorsen, Samantha Willis, Mary Blair Zakaib. © 2020 Thomas Jefferson Foundation