“The Whole of Recorded Knowledge:” Jefferson as Collector and Reader.

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“Heaps of smoking ruins”

“Reading is my greatest of all amusements” Thomas Jefferson said to Abigail Adams in 1813. And read he did. Jefferson’s intense love of books and thirst for understanding led him to create a magnificent private library unrivaled in America. It became the foundation of our nation’s grand library, The Library of Congress. The nation’s oldest extant federal cultural institution is now also the world’s largest library. With collections that number over 150 million pieces, in all imaginable formats and in over 450 languages, the universe of the Nation’s Library is an extraordinary one. Its story began with Thomas Jefferson.

Washington was scorched. “The blazing of houses, ships, and stores, the report of exploding magazines, and the crash of falling roofs informed them...of what was going forward. You can conceive of nothing finer than the sight which met them as they drew near to the town,” This is how George Gleig, a member of the English troops during the War of 1812, recalled his experience during the invasion of Washington City. “The sky was brilliantly illuminated by the different conflagrations, and a dark red light was thrown upon the road, sufficient to permit each man to view distinctly his comrade’s face.” “Heaps of smoking ruins.”

On an unbearably hot and muggy day, August 24, 1814, an exhausted advanced guard of the English army marched to Capitol Hill. They had arrived by ship some fifty miles away, along with 4,000 other troops, including Mr. Gleig, only days before, but now found themselves in a somewhat abandoned City of Washington (as all male residents had fled the town). Meeting only limited resistance, the troops set about their appointed task – to destroy all public buildings in the fledgling capital city as retaliation for the massive destruction during the Battle of York in 1813 in which American forces looted and burned York (now Toronto), including the Parliament Buildings.

By day's end the House and Senate buildings of the Capitol were smoldering shells, the White house was burned, as was the Treasury and numerous other public buildings. The English Admiral Cockburn – jeeringly referred to as "The Ruffian" by the DC newspaper *The National Intelligencer* – capped the devastation with the dismantling of the newspaper's office – brick by brick. In addition, he ordered that all letter "C's" from the paper's type case be destroyed so that they could never print the name Cockburn again. Amidst the smoke and rubble, the remnants of the Congressional library smoldered and then disappeared.

The nucleus of the Library of Congress was thus forged in fire. In 1815 Congress purchased Thomas Jefferson's personal library–then the largest private book collection available in North America–to replace the 3,000 volume congressional library destroyed when the British burned the U.S. Capitol. Although he faced financial difficulties at the time, Jefferson generously offered his entire collection for whatever price found appropriate with the intention to "replace the devastations of British Vandalism" and enhance Congressional resources.

The collection was most appropriate for consideration, he claimed, because of its strength in "works relating to America." "Such a collection was made as probably can never again be effected, because it is hardly probable that the same opportunities, the same time, industry, perseverance and expense, with some knowledge of the bibliography of the subject would again happen to be in concurrence." There was no hyperbole here. Certainly the quality of the collection was indisputable, despite the fact that Jefferson's original report of the collection's size to Congress was nearly 3,000 volumes off. Jefferson's optimism was clipped when Joseph Milligan, the Georgetown book dealer who had appraised the collection at the request of Congress, announced the actual count of 6,487 volumes.

Jefferson's gesture, of course, met with rank partisan objections, with one Federalist opponent, Cyrus King of Massachusetts, claiming the library symbolic of Mr. Jefferson's "infidel philosophy." Mr. Jefferson's library, he warned, contained the "good, bad, and indifferent, old, new, and worthless, in languages which many can not read, and most ought not." Others objected to the expense given the circumstances of the time – after all, such a sum would well cover the expenses of enlisting more than 200 soldiers. In anticipation of this rancorous debate, Jefferson had defended his broad collecting interests in an 1814 letter, countering, "…there is in fact no subject to which a member of Congress may not have occasion to refer."

The Congressional decision took months. In the end the members acquiesced, and in January of 1815 voted to purchase the 6,487 volumes for nearly $24,000, a sum determined by Milligan, who proposed simply that books be priced by size: one dollar for a 12mo, three for an octavo, six for a quarto, and ten for folios. With that decision, the Nation's Library was restored.

Jefferson received word of the approval while at Monticello, where he happened to be entertaining two young gentlemen from Boston. George Ticknor and Francis Gray, young scholars armed with introductions from John Adams, were paying a visit to the former President and his library. They had the great fortune to witness the moment. Both, of course were doing what many had done before, seeking out intellectual counsel and reading advice from the great mind of the American enlightenment in the midst of his great library.

By 1815, Jefferson's Library was in itself a destination; the shear size of over 6,000 volumes was a sight to behold. Ticknor, a Dartmouth graduate, was soon after retained by Jefferson to acquire books abroad (Jefferson told Adams that "he is particularly the best bibliograph I have met with"). With a portfolio of letters of introduction to the likes of Du Pont and Lafayette, Ticknor served as Jefferson's agent in Europe, quickly picking up editions of classics for Jefferson's recreational reading in his retirement. True to Jefferson's ravenous appetite for books, 940 titles are listed in Nathaniel Poor's 1829 auction catalog of Jefferson's final library, often referred to as the retirement library. In the very moment that he let go of his library, Jefferson launched the acquisition of another collection.

Francis Gray, who went on in life to become an influential connoisseur of fine prints (he was also the recipient of a now famous letter dated March 4, 1815 in which Jefferson defines the race formula and attempts to separate the issue of slavery from race), thought the library to be nearly comprehensive in regards to the classical authors, although he noted that Mr. Jefferson was "very careless in the editions." His American holdings, however, were "without question the most valuable in the world."

“The whole of recorded knowledge”

This, of course, was not the first library assembled by Jefferson; in his lifetime he would amass three collections. The 1815 collection was built in response to loss of his first private library, which had burned when his home at Shadwell was destroyed in 1770; only a very few books escaped the flames. Fire, in fact, seems to have followed Mr. Jefferson and his books – actually, fire and debt seems to have followed Mr. Jefferson. The cost of rebuilding the Shadwell collection would be considerable, and yet despite the political pressures and certain financial upheavals promised with the oncoming revolution, the young lawyer set out to build an even more extensive collection – one that would modestly encompass “the whole of recorded knowledge.” Jefferson’s intentions were ambitious, and he indicated at the time an intense desire to build a practical collection that chronicled human endeavor. Acquiring large numbers of books in the eighteenth-century colonies was no small undertaking. Availability of suitable stock was an issue, as was the expense, even for someone of the young Jefferson’s means.

Jefferson began amassing books at an early age; records indicate he routinely made modest and deliberate purchases once he had enrolled William and Mary in 1760. Throughout his studies and well into his law courses, Jefferson continued to build a working library, obtaining books from the offices of the Virginia Gazette in Williamsburg. In 1765, for example, he acquired thirty-two titles – predictably covering the range of interests that would characterize his lifetime of collecting – law, history, works in Italian, dictionaries, poetry (Milton, Young, and Shenstone), classical literature, agriculture, and, as we recently witnessed in Washington, D.C., a copy of the Koran.

Many of these early purchases carried forward to the 1815 Congressional purchase. William Stith’s *History of the First Discovery and Settlement of Virginia* (Williamsburg, 1747), for example, survives in the collection. Stith, the third president of William and Mary, wrote a history of Virginia up to 1624. He made use of a manuscript copy of the Records of the Virginia Company that Jefferson later purchased for his own collection. Although Stith’s work was laborious in its attention to detail, something that Jefferson would have found appealing, his work was less than well received by Jefferson. In his *Notes on Virginia* (1785) Jefferson noted that Stith was “a man of classical learning, and very exact, but of no taste in style. He is inelegant therefore, and his details often too minute to be tolerable even to a native of the country whose history he writes.” Other early acquisitions proved to be important in forecasting the young Jefferson’s future interests, such as a work he described in his catalogue as “James on gardening”; which was in fact John James’ English translation of Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d‘Argenville’s *Theory and Practice of Gardening* (London, 1728). But many titles, including several travel and voyages and histories, such as William Robertson’s *History of Scotland*, are absent from the 1815 list.

By 1773 Jefferson had already amassed a library of more than 1,250 titles. This was an ecumenical collection, both in source and subject. Many volumes were obtained through routine European sources, a necessity if one was to build a collection of any real size. Large caches of books were also acquired through purchase from neighboring collectors, including the purchase of libraries en masse. Acquiring large numbers of books in the eighteenth-century colonies, of course, was no small undertaking. The cost could be prohibitive and the availability of appropriate titles was an issue. Yet, others had tackled the task of building sizeable collections. Certainly early on Jefferson was familiar with William Byrd II’s library at Westover, an impressive collection of over 3,000 volumes; Jefferson later flirted with the idea of acquiring a portion of the library before Isaac Zane carried it off to the market in Philadelphia. Jefferson acquired books from Richard Bland, Peyton Randolph, and several William and Mary faculty members; he even added books left behind by the Royal Governor when he fled from Virginia. His time in Philadelphia during the Continental Congress gave him further entrée into new outlets for books, and it was there that he established several enduring relationships with booksellers and printers such as Robert Bell, William Duane, John Dunlap, and Nicolas Gouin Dufief.

Jefferson’s Philadelphia connection with Dufief enabled him to acquire several items from the late Benjamin Franklin’s personal collection in 1790. Dufief set aside a convolute of two pamphlets about taxation of the colonies: Matthew Wheelock’s *Reflections Moral and Political on Great Britain and Her Colonies* and Allan Ramsay’s *Thoughts on the Origin and Nature of Government*. Thanking Dufief, Jefferson commented that he was especially pleased to receive the “precious reliques of Doctor Franklin,” which he valued “not only for the intrinsic value of whatever came from him, but also my particular affection for him.” Franklin’s approach to his books stood in stark contrast to Jefferson’s pristine handling of his collection. Franklin had written lengthy and heated notes in the margins on nearly every page; in the preface of the first pamphlet, upon reading the author’s hope that “a better mode of election may be established to make representation more equal,” Franklin impatiently interjects “why don’t you get about it?”

Jefferson continued at a healthy pace of acquisition. The collection doubled in size within a decade and by 1783 Jefferson’s library numbered 2,640 volumes. By now it was evident that Jefferson was not merely collecting books, but rather, he was building a library, one that was being fleshed out according to a specific plan. This was clearly evidenced in his preparations to depart for Europe in 1784. Chief on the horizon was the opportunity to greatly expand his library. With his bibliographic partner, James Madison, Jefferson compiled and shared numerous lists and bibliographies, out of which a desiderata list emerged. This process would not only feed and shape Madison’s pending work on the constitution, but it also significantly sparked Jefferson’s construct of his collection as a series of subject chapters. In fact, it was here that Jefferson first began to deploy his sense of subject classification for his books. His 1783 collection catalogue employed the now familiar classification of History, Philosophy, and Fine Arts.

Jefferson spent five years in Paris (1784-1789), a period of time that was fundamentally important to his collection. To Jefferson, the French were more advanced in science and philosophical discussions than, say, the English. His own education pushed him in this direction, and his book buying experiences in Paris only further solidified this notion. Jefferson arrived in France with a book catalog of his collection and a desiderata list of the classics and the source texts of the enlightenment. He was ready to buy. Whenever he was not carrying out his duties as the American Minister to France, he haunted the Parisian bookstalls and placed frequent orders with dealers in London and the rest of Europe.

And while this certainly served to expand his coverage of European topics, this buying had a dramatic effect on his Americana holdings. Among other things, Jefferson acquired his copy of the Federalist papers in France. And he had assisted Madison in the preparation of those essays by sending Madison trunk loads of books from Paris. In his proposal letter to Congress in 1815, Jefferson highlighted the strength of his American holdings:

> *While residing in Paris, I devoted every afternoon I was disengaged, for a summer or two, in examining all the principal bookstores, turning over every book with my own hand, and putting by everything which related to America, and indeed whatever was rare and valuable in every science. Besides this, I had standing orders during the whole time I was in Europe, on its principal book-marts, particularly Amsterdam, Frankfort, Madrid and London, for such works relating to America as could not be found in Paris.*

Jefferson did acquire an extraordinary number of books from French dealers such Jacques François Froullé. He acquired Buffon's *Natural History* as well as Catesby's work on the Carolinas in Paris. After purchasing *Encyclopédie méthodique* from Froullé, Jefferson also enlisted himself as a representative of the work, both as a contributor of text (his *Act for Establishing Religious Freedom* appeared in full in the *Encyclopédie*, as did numerous notes on the American revolution prepared at the request of Jean-Nicholas Demeunier) but also as a fairly aggressive salesman. Paris was indeed the center of political philosophy, and as Jefferson's response to the *Encyclopédie* indicated, he yearned to participate. Soon after receiving his presentation copy of John Adams *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* in 1787, Jefferson thought to have the work translated into French. He turned to Froullé, whom he trusted implicitly: he was "one of the most conscientiously honest men I ever had dealings with." What emerged from the press, however, was something quite different from what Jefferson had suggested. Several of Froullé's circle found Adam's *Defence* to be a touch too Anglophilic for the time, especially his reverence for the English constitutional tradition. The translation was instead substituted by an attack on Adams, written by John Stevens and translated into French, and incorrectly attributed to William Livingston. Despite this fiasco, Jefferson nevertheless retained a copy of *Observations on Government, Including some Animadiversions on Mr. Adams Defence* (*Examen de gouvernement d'Agleterre compare* *aux constitutions des Etats-Unis)* for his own library, carefully annotating the title page to correct the misatrribution to Livingston.

Beyond his forays into French publishing Jefferson's book buying continued at a healthy clip. In addition to political philosophy, he added numerous classical authors in a hodge-podge of editions. Obviously the underpinnings of the pending French revolution were represented as well. But so too were travels and voyages, scattered literary authors, the history of Peru, Spinoza, Crevecoeur, a study of roman law, Ladvocat on bibliography, a study of American Indians, and the commissioned French edition of Ramsay's *History of the Revolution in South Carolina*. The list is a frenzy and offers us just a glimpse of what must have been a bibliophilic frolic.

Clearly the French book market had a profound impact on Jefferson's collection. Not only did the European market provide him the opportunity to elevate his Americana holdings and round out the representation of contemporary European thought, but it also transformed his entire notion of collecting. All in all, Jefferson purchased 1,850 titles during his five-year stint in Paris. Years later, the French influence behind the collection did not go unnoticed. Cyrus King objected, "It might be inferred from the character of the man who collected it, and France, where the collection was made, that the library contained irreligious and immoral books, works of French philosophers, who caused and influenced the volcano of the French Revolution which had desolated Europe and extended to this country."

Upon returning to America in 1789, Jefferson possessed a library twice the size of the one he owned at his departure – and with a considerable debt to show for it. By 1815, the Jefferson Collection stood at 6,487 volumes. For its time it was an utterly vast collection, and one that represented a substantial, and perhaps even imprudent investment on Jefferson's part.

Jefferson acknowledged that this was likely the largest library available at the time; his great pride in the collection, however, was not that of a bibliophile's. This was a library that chronicled human endeavor, and the books it contained were chosen with care and attention to the larger goal. His books, his collection, and its organization stood as the well source of fact from which he could pull together information and apply it to a changing world. Jefferson interacted with his books as if in an intellectual dialogue. They prompted ideas, they fed arguments, they posed puzzles, they offered practical advice, and they explained the unknown forces of the universe. Each book that entered his collection opened another opportunity. And because Jefferson often wrote to others regarding his books, we can follow along as Jefferson leaps, linking one idea to the next. This was not a library of casual learnedness or recreation; this was a universe of practical and useful thought that could alter the world. It was his enlightenment.

There is no doubt that in colonial America only one individual could accomplish this feat. Only Jefferson possessed the prerequisites for this achievement – the bibliographic acumen, the quest for enlightenment, a comprehensive approach to knowledge, and, admittedly, his considerable means, however unpredictable they might have been – all conspired to enable Jefferson to build a library that was truly unrivaled in America. This was to become the Library of Congress. This was the collection that had nursed the Declaration of Independence, that had guided early American diplomacy, that had fueled innovations in American technology, and that assisted a Virginia planter. And now this collection, built around Jefferson's notion of universal knowledge, was to serve as the source of inspiration and ideas for the new republic.

Jefferson's books began their journey to Blodget's hotel, the temporary national Capitol, in May of 1815. In preparation, President James Madison appointed George Watterston as Librarian of Congress, following a recommendation made by Milligan. Watterston would soon emerge as somewhat of a bibliographical villain, as he was responsible for altering Jefferson's arrangement of his library catalog. In 1815 Watterston produced a printed subject catalog, *Catalogue of the Library of the United States: To Which is Annexed, a Copious Index, Alphabetically Arranged*, (Washington: Jonathan Elliot, 1815), subfiled by author – a publication which retained Jefferson's subject chapters, but paved over the more subtle arrangements of chronology or influence dictated for some of the individual subjects. Jefferson was not pleased, and in a letter to Joseph Cabell complained that "the form of the catalogue has been much injured in the publication."

The library was shipped in the same pine bookcases that had stood in Jefferson's library all those years. Each book was wrapped and returned in order to its case. With cotton batten stuffed around the books to fill the voids, boards were nailed across the front of the cases and loaded onto horse-drawn wagons. As the collection that Jefferson had built and lived with for nearly fifty years pulled away, he sat down and wrote his friend and agent for the sale of the collection, the newspaperman Samuel H Smith, reflecting that it was "unquestionably the choicest collection books in the United States and I hope it will not be without some general effect on the literature of our country."

When Mr. Jefferson's books arrived in Washington, D.C., the Library of Congress found its center and its impetus. Throughout his life, Jefferson gathered books across a vast spectrum of topics and languages. The nation's library today mirrors this universal approach to collecting; the world's largest library is also the only national library that collects internationally in all subjects. Jefferson's strategy for building his library was a practical one. His collection was a working tool rather than a bibliophile's monument. It was the touchstone – the muse for Jefferson the statesman, politician, classicist, inventor, planter, architect, and scientist could easily be found on the shelves. From this collection Jefferson not only carefully compiled his significant political writings and culled principles that directly informed the Declaration of Independence, but he also drew the inspiration for the design of Monticello, the techniques for cultivating his vineyards, and the foundation for his inventive scientific studies.

Jefferson's collection would serve as the core of the Library of Congress for the next thirty-five years, until catastrophic fire again struck the Capitol on Christmas Eve 1851, destroying two-thirds of Thomas Jefferson's original collection. The surviving volumes, now on permanent exhibition, still serve Jefferson's driving purpose to have the sum of philosophical and practical endeavor readily available. In celebration of the Library's Bicentennial in 2000, we launched a project to reconstruct the 1815 Thomas Jefferson Collection. Some matching editions of those lost to fire have been located elsewhere within the Library's holdings. Other missing works have been accumulated through gifts and purchase.

This is a complicated and ambitious project, but good progress has been made. From the original desiderata of 4,000 items, the list has been reduced to the neighborhood of 300 items outstanding. The remaining titles are sought out on the antiquarian market; we are seeking the scarce as well as the common – the arcane as well as the mundane – and in nine different languages from three centuries published in all corners of Europe and the New Republic.

We will never be able to completely recreate the order of Jefferson's books. The standard reference for the 1815 collection is the bibliography begun in 1943 by E. Millicent Sowerby, as a Jefferson Birthday Bicentennial project. The first volume was published in 1952 and the last in 1959. Sowerby worked from a manuscript list of the books in 1815 and other Library of Congress lists. She also perused Jefferson's letters to uncover further descriptions of the books. Sowerby's *Catalogue* lists 4,931 titles. Lacking a directly applicable list, Sowerby valiantly tried to shoehorn the 1815 collection into the order that was established in a 1783 manuscript. The 1812 listing is lost, and the original list that was shipped with the books and retained by the Librarian of Congress, George Watterston, was also subsequently lost. In 1823, Jefferson commissioned Nicholas Trist to recreate this list. This manuscript also disappeared for some time. When it was finally rediscovered, an analysis of the Trist listing by Douglas Wilson and James Gilreath was published in 1989. It is likely that the Trist manuscript more accurately reflects the actual arrangement of the books in the 1815 purchase. As a tribute to Sowerby's work at the Library, her arrangement is represented in the permanent exhibition of the Thomas Jefferson Collection.

"Sometimes analytical, sometimes chronological"

The library's arrangement, which Jefferson described as "sometimes analytical, sometimes chronological, and sometimes a combination of both," followed a modified version of Francis Bacon's organization of knowledge, a system that had been embraced by d'Alembert in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. Divided into categories of Memory, Reason, and Imagination, and further parsed into forty-four "chapters," the organization of the collection placed within Jefferson's fingertips the span of his interests, from his intellectual pursuits to his more varied enterprises. Some of these categories remain familiar to us today – Ancient History and American History fall under the broad category of History, but Agriculture, Surgery and Mineralogy do as well, as part of the category of “History–Natural.” While Politics, Law, and History predominate as major subjects, the Jefferson Collection includes the domestic sciences, foreign language dictionaries, rhetoric, poetry, and routine working manuals. Certainly his beloved Greek and Latin classics were there–Tacitus and Thucydides as well as Plato, who Jefferson summarily dismissed as “such nonsense.”

Jefferson divided Memory (or History), into two distinct and logical categories – Civil History and Natural History. Much of his Ancient and Modern History holdings survived the fire, including his prized Americana collection. So too did his homemade bi-lingual and tri-lingual versions of classical authors─Latin and a Spanish editions of Tacitus, interleaved so that his Latin informed his Spanish.

Natural History includes the hard and the applied sciences (although astronomy and physics are later treated as Philosophy). It is here that Jefferson’s role as one of the leading intellectual and scientific lights of North America becomes evident. Vast sections of his science holdings are gifts from authors, anxious to hear Mr. Jefferson’s reactions. In several instances, Jefferson strikes up an engaging and productive correspondence with scientists and inventors. Jefferson corresponded with Priestly regarding Phlogiston, and with others concerning Lavoisier’s discoveries. (Buffon, to Jefferson’s dismay, referred to chemistry as “mere cookery” and the laboratory as “the kitchen!”)

In 1810, Robert Fulton sent four copies of his new pamphlet *Torpedo War and Submarine Explosions* (New York, 1810) to Jefferson. Jefferson, who was aware of Fulton’s work, clearly had pondered the efficacy of employing this kind of ballistics in warfare. But Jefferson’s reply underlines his brilliant ability to draw connections and metaphor from disparate topics. His mind linked ideas far outside the topic of armaments, and he wrote instead on progress, the danger of living in the past, and even commented on the stagnant provincialism of the residents of Connecticut: “I have read your pamphlets on the Torpedo with pleasure... I am not afraid of new inventions or improvements, nor bigoted to the practices of our forefathers. It is that bigotry which keeps the Indians in a state of barbarism in the midst of arts, would have kept us in the same state even now, and still keeps Connecticut where their ancestors were when they landed on these shores...Your torpedoes will be to cities what vaccination has been to mankind."

However, Jefferson's correspondence with the leading French naturalist George Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707 1788), took on a different tone. In his ten-volume *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux* 1770-1783), Buffon embraced a particularly vexing French notion of the inferiority of American nature. He asserted that all animal and plant life, including humans, degenerated in America. These theories irritated Jefferson to no end. To refute assertions by Buffon and others that animal and plant life enervated in America, yielding a faint shadow of European species, Jefferson asked friends in America to send Buffon the hides and bones of several large animals. Buffon was inundated with animal parts. Jefferson wrote: "I am happy to be able to present to you at this moment the bones & skin of a Moose, the horns of another individual of the same species, the horns of the Caribou, the elk, the deer, the spiked horned buck, & the Roebuck of America." Jefferson then diplomatically asks the Frenchman to reconsider his views.

Of the eighty titles listed for Chapter 7 – History–Natural–Agriculture, only one book, a convolute of sixteen early nineteenth-century pamphlets on a variety of topics on practical agriculture, survived the devastation of the 1851 fire. But we know that Jefferson's holdings in the subject were nearly comprehensive for the age, ranging from Adam Dickinson's compilation of the ancient Romans writings on husbandry to the seventeenth-century work of Olivier de Serres, Henry the IV's agriculturist whom Jefferson considered "a prodigy for the age." Accompanying significant scientific works on agriculture and experimental husbandry we find ordinary farmer's vade mecums and straightforward guides to applied agriculture, such as Jethro Tull's book on Horse-Hoeing tillage (although the Tull book was listed with the 1815 purchase, it was missing at the time of delivery; the Library finally obtained a copy in 1942). In a pamphlet binding labeled *Tracts in Agriculture*, Jefferson bound in the essay by Richard Kirwin, *The Manures Most Advantageously Applicable to the Various Sorts of Soils,* (London, 1796), a copy most likely sent to him by William Strickland of York, England: "I am much indebted to you for Mr. Kirwan’s charming treatise on manures. Science never appears so beautiful as when applied to the uses of human life, nor any use of it so engaging as those of agriculture and domestic economy.” (1798)

Technical Arts

There are many ways to slice Jefferson’s collection to find the collector that lurks inside. Certainly the strength of his Americana holdings and his collections of things political are the products of an astute and experienced bibliophile. And as we have seen, Jefferson’s embrace of the enlightenment trinity of Memory, Reason, and Imagination guided an extraordinarily sophisticated approach to collecting, albeit on a sometimes massively wholesale basis.

But when we turn to chapter 15 – Technical Arts – we are introduced to Jefferson’s miscellany. Tucked away in the gap between Memory and Reason is the Technical Arts Chapter – a bit of a catchall containing Jefferson’s hobbies, a bit of contemporary science, a touch of applied technology, card games and other amusements. Technical Arts is ostensibly the last chapter in History; it is preceded by the Natural History section – which includes Natural Philosophy, Agriculture, Chemistry, Surgery, Medicine, Anatomy, Zoology, Botany, and Mineralogy, and is followed by the opening salvo of the Reason (Philosophy) section – called Philosophy -- Moral, with Ethics as Chapter 16.

In this space between Memory and Reason, we find a gathering of books familiar to most devoted collectors: books that don’t quite fit; books that seemed to have promise but defy category; interests that emerge as promising and then fade away as fad; gifts, mementos and presentation copies. Jefferson gives us an eighteenth-century view of the top drawer of a collector’s desk. In many ways, Jefferson was simply embracing his notion of the miscellany – the encyclopedia, reflecting Diderot’s prescription “to collect all the knowledge that now lies scattered over the face of the earth, to make known its general structure to the men among we live, and to transmit it to those who will come after us"

Alongside books on education, shorthand, gardening, accounting, military strategy, brewing, bee-keeping, and book-keeping, are works on the Technical Arts such as

James Weston's book on Stenography and shorthand, Caslon's type specimens, Parmentier on the potato, and even two works on Aerostation, or flying. When Jefferson received copies of Francis Green's work on speech and language for the deaf and dumb, *Vox Oculis Subjecta*. (London, 1783), he wrote a cordial letter of acknowledgment. However when it is suggested in 1816 that a school be established at Charlottesville, Jefferson takes a different tact.: "I know of no peculiar advantage which Charlottesville offers for Mr. Braidwood's school of deaf and dumb. On the contrary I should think the vicinity of the seat of government most favorable to it. I should not like to have it made a member of our college. The objects of the two institutions are fundamentally distinct. The one is science, the other mere charity. It would be gratuitously taking a boat in tow, which may impede, but cannot aid the motion of the principal institution."

Of the 143 titles in this chapter, only one survived the 1851 fire, item number 1182, the work of Sir Benjamin Thompson, count von Rumford. Jefferson held the first American edition from the third London of Rumford's *Essays, political, economical, and philosophical*. (Boston, 1798 – 1799, 2 volumes). Count Rumford's curious and checkered past makes him an ideal inclusion in Chapter 15. An American born Loyalist, he returned to England after the Revolution, made his way into a friendship with the Duke of Bavaria (hence becoming a Count of the Holy Roman Empire) and went on to some degree of fame for improving the design of stoves and chimneys. He built up quite a reputation as a nutritionist and wrote several essays on the benefits of coffee over tea. Many credit him with inventing the folding bed and he made many improvements in the design of lamps. His main scientific accomplishment in later life was his large role in founding the Royal Institution in 1800. His *Essays* cover this and more, including American food and cookery and in approach embodies the spirit of a miscellany.

A passionate gourmand, Jefferson acquired a stock of standard French recipes for sauces, fruit tarts, French-fried potatoes, blood sausages, pigs' feet, rabbit, pigeons, and various other dishes. Among the most popular of these recipes at Monticello was one for vanilla ice cream, written by Jefferson, often accompanied with his own recipe for Savoy cookies. His interests covered all aspects of food, including scientific investigations, such as Antoine-Auguste Parmentier's *Les Pommes de Terre* (Paris, 1781). Parmentier not only promoted the potato, but also worked to perfect bread, extracted sugar from sugar beets, and was responsible for the first mandatory small pox vaccination. Nevertheless, the New York *Post* sneered at the time of the 1815 purchase that there were no less than ten different works on cookery, nine being in foreign languages. Today, of course, the Library sparked by Jefferson's collection is home to two internationally famous gastronomy collections.

Jefferson's ongoing interest in the practical application of science registers throughout the Technical Arts. When he received a copy of John Dorsey's study *On the Subject of Weights and Measures* (1808), he foreshadowed the metric debate by noting "It will give me real pleasure to see some good system of measures & weights introduced and combined with the decimal arithmetic…" That same year he received another work, this one on the Dynamometer, a device developed by Regnier that had several applications, not the least of which was to allow one to determine the strength of a work animal. Jefferson received a version of the device in 1808 and became enamored of it. It was stolen from his belongings in 1810.

Jefferson first witnessed the flight of a hot air balloon while in France. His interest was reflected by the seven titles on aerostation in this Chapter. Jefferson again witnessed a balloon launch in Philadelphia, the first hot air balloon ascension in America, on January 9, 1793, and marked the event by adding Jean Pierre Blanchard's *Journal of My 45th Ascension, being the First Performed in America on the Ninth of January 1793*. Five days later he recalled: "…we were entertained here lately with the ascent of Mr. Blanchard in a balloon. The security of thing appeared so great that every body is wishing for a balloon to travel in. I wish for one sincerely, as instead of 10 days, I should be within 5 hours of home."

It was indeed a sense of practical application that characterized the gathering of materials in Technical Arts. The titles held a mirror to the Enlightenment, documenting how the domestic sciences could be applied to daily life. Mathematics emerges as Jefferson's fascination with cryptography here, and ancient language evolves into code and shorthand. One of four books on shorthand, Thomas Shelton's *Tachy-Graphy* (London, 1646) was collected. Its application was made clear when Jefferson wrote in 1764 to John Page, who would later become a member of Congress and Governor of Virginia: "We must fall on some scheme of communicating our thoughts to each other, which shall be totally unintelligible to every one but to ourselves. I will send you some of these days Shelton's Tachygraphical Alphabet and directions."

Such interest in code would play out famously when Jefferson later developed for Lewis and Clark a cryptographic code to be used by them to send protected reports back to the President while on their expedition. Jefferson presented them with the cipher, instructing them "communicate to us, at seasonable intervals, a copy of your journal, notes & observations, of every kind, putting into cipher whatever might do injury if betrayed." The scheme was never used but the sample message provided by Jefferson reveals much about his expectations for the expedition: "I am at the head of the Missouri. All well, and the Indians so far friendly." In 1820, in response to receiving a new manuscript of a work on stenography, Jefferson noted: "…accident threw Shelton's tachygraphy into my way when young, and I practised it thro' life. Although it had serious defects, I have not looked into any other with fewer…"

The range of the Chapter is impressive, interests ranging from the battle field to the study, from bee-keeping to brewing. Twenty-six books addressed military strategy and warfare. Of Tadesusz Kosciuszkio's *Manoeuvres of Horse Artillery* (New York, 1808), Jefferson remarked that it is "a branch of the military art which I wish extremely to see understood here." As one would imagine, Jefferson's interests in pastimes were usually of a studious nature. Nonetheless, he demonstrated and interest in the mathematical complexity of chess and card games, as seen in Edmond Hoyle's *Whist, Quadrille, Piquet, and Back-Gammon* (1746). And Techincal Arts served as working manuals for the day-to-day operation of Monticello, whether it be Stephen White's *Collateral Bee Boxes...or Method of Managing Bees* (London, 1764), or William Ellis' *The London and Country Brewer* (1750). The Jefferson Project is still trying to locate the 1804 edition of *The Theory and Practice of Brewing*, one of nine books on brewing and distilling. Jefferson had lent his copy to Captain Merewether and later urgently recalled from him because "we are this very day beginning the business of brewing Malt liquors.

Reason

The category of Reason (or Philosophy) was also bifurcated. Jefferson started with Moral

Philosophy, covering law, religion, equity, and politics, and then moved on to pure Philosophy, which in Jefferson's schema included mathematics, astronomy and, interestingly, geography.

Jefferson's own preoccupation with religion as a philosophical construct is made transparent when "Religion," "Politics," and "Ethics" are all organized under the rubric of "Philosophy--Moral." It is within this framework, then, that the essay by the Scottish naval doctor and Anglican minister, James Ramsey (1733–1789), could be comfortably categorized as a work of philosophy. Ramsey's *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (Dublin, 1784) sparked an intense pamphlet debate on the nature of slavery and the slave trade. Although Ramsey lived on and benefited from the work on a sugar plantation in the Caribbean, he nonetheless argued for reform and abolition, and, as a result, published one of the central documents in the abolition effort. Perhaps more to the point, the most Jeffersonian aspect of the classification scheme is the relegation of Religion to Chapter 17 – "Philosophy – Moral – Jurisprudence – Religious," speaking directly to Jefferson's view of religion as a moral ethical code.

Jefferson organized everything in his library around this triad of central concepts. Such was even the case with numerous political tracts, especially those he felt most influential to the Revolutionary cause. These were routinely bound together year by year and categorized under politics. One such volume contained great rarities for later researchers; it included Jefferson's own copy of his *A Summary View of the rights of British America,* edited in his hand. Jefferson did not intend this pivotal text to appear as a pamphlet. And clearly the pamphlet, which was printed in Williamsburg by Clementina Rind in 1774, never saw the sweep of Jefferson's astute editorial gaze at its printing. Only years later, as Jefferson prepared his writings for a collected works, did he subject the text to his editorial hand.

"The Summary view was not written for publication," Jefferson noted to publisher John Campbell in 1809. "It was a draught I had prepared of a petition to the king, which I meant to propose in my place as a member of the Convention in 1774. Being stopped on the road by sickness, I sent it to the Speaker, who laid it on the table for the perusal of the members. It was thought too strong for the time & to become the act of the convention, but was printed by subscription of the members with a short preface written by one of them." "Its true merit," Jefferson would later remark in 1815, was "in being the first publication which carried the claim of our rights their whole length, and asserted that there was no rightful link of connection between us and England but that of being under the same king."

Even by 1809 the pamphlet was a great rarity. Jefferson noted to Campbell that he knew of no other copy available at that time. In delivering his copy, Jefferson impressed upon the publisher the value he attributed to the piece: "I have but a single copy of the pamphlet you ask for, and that is bound up in a volume of pamphlets of the same year and making one of a long suite of volumes of the same nature. I mention this to impress you with the value I set on the volume as a part of the history of the times, and to justify a request of attention in the use and return of it."

This was, of course, the collection from which Jefferson culled his political and philosophical notions – the raw ingredients, if you will, of the political vision that ultimately shaped the stance of the revolution and informed the Declaration of Independence. (In fact, he carried several of these books with him to Philadelphia). On June 11th, in anticipation of the impending vote for independence from Great Britain, the Continental Congress appointed five men – Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert Livingston – to write a declaration that would make clear to all the people why this break from their sovereign, King George III, was both necessary and inevitable. The committee then appointed Jefferson to draft a statement.

We can easily view the major political tenets put forward by Jefferson and locate their inspiration in corresponding books in his library. One must discuss, for example, the influence of the work of the Scottish moral philosopher Lord Kames (Henry Home, 1696-1782) in the context of Jefferson's Library. Jefferson accumulated ten titles of the Scottish Jurist, and it is evident that his works such as *Essays on the Principles of Morality* and *Principles of Equity* had an impact on Jefferson's construction of the role of natural rights in politics and rational deism in religion. Jefferson's copy of *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1751) is one of the few books annotated by Jefferson. Lord Kames was a leader of the "moral sense" school that advocated that men had an inner sense of right and wrong. It is likely that this text provided in part the philosophical foundation of the phrase "pursuit of happiness."

Jefferson, in fact, owned three editions of *Principles of Equity*, a work he finally admitted was flawed because of Kame's excessive metaphysical arguments. Of the three editions, the 1760 and 1767 were acquired as folio, the 1778 as a two-volume octavo. Jefferson attempted to acquire them through Dublin, as he preferred the Irish octavos because of their size as well as their price. Jefferson also mirrored Kame's interest in legal documents, and, like Kames, assembled a large gathering of legal cases, documents, and briefs.

But it is in Jefferson's copy of *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (Edinburgh, 1751, 2 volumes) that we have an opportunity to experience the dialogue Jefferson had with his books. Following a section in which Kames notes: "Putting an enemy to death in cold blood is now looked upon with distaste and horror," Jefferson observed, in an uncharacteristically lengthy annotation in the margins. "This is a remarkable instance of improvement in the moral sense. The putting to death captives in war was a general practice among savage nations. When men became more humanized the captive was indulged with life on condition of holding it in perpetual slavery." He goes on to cite Montesquieu and then concludes: "if we have no right to the life of a captive, we have no right to his labor; if none to his labor we have none to his absent property which is but the fruit of that labor."

Fine Arts

Imagination (or Fine Arts) ranged from Architecture to literature, logic, criticism and rhetoric. Of all the facets of his collection, this is the area in which Jefferson's proclivities and tastes determined the titles represented. History and Reason present in a manner almost a documentary overview of the thought and writings of the eighteenth-century – even if this is largely a depiction of how the *philosophes* viewed their intellectual universe. The Fine Arts section, on the other hand, is the immediate product of Jefferson's biases regarding the arts of the imagination. His reverence for Architecture and the landscape is evident by the extensive coverage they receive. His attitude toward literature, especially prose fiction and amatory poetry, is similarly mirrored by the paucity of titles represented. Elsewhere Jefferson prided himself in building a collection that mapped the growth and implementation of a vast spectrum of ideas. When documenting the Fine Arts, however, Jefferson shaved the possible corpus of works down to a matter of taste.

Jefferson's literary taste was somewhat conservative, and his collection was relatively selective – Shakespeare is present, as is Cervantes, Sterne, and Milton. Jefferson preferred straightforward reportage to the fanciful, and his theater selections seemed to have been based on familiarity rather than any attempt to survey the history of the literature. The only work of tragedy in Jefferson's collection that survived the 1851 Christmas Eve fire is a case in point -- *The Works of Mr. Thomas Otway; in Three Volumes. Consisting of his Plays, Poems, and Letters* (London, 1768). Otway, a Restoration dramatist, typically wrote in rhymed verse. His plays and poetry retained popularity until the mid-nineteenth century. Item number 4440 in the Jefferson Collection was Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (London, 1773). The gifted young black poet Wheatley (ca. 1753-1784) was celebrated as "the extraordinary poetical genius" of colonial New England even before this compilation of her poems was published in September 1773. Not yet eight years old when she was brought to America from Africa in 1761, Wheatley was educated by her mistress, and her first poem was published in a Rhode Island newspaper when she was only fourteen. Her pious elegies for prominent English and colonial leaders became popular and were often reprinted in colonial newspapers or as broadsides. Franklin was a proponent and it is likely that Jefferson followed suit by adding this title to his collection.

Of all of Jefferson's pastimes, music was his "favorite passion." He practiced his violin daily, having started as a young boy and played with his sister Jane before her death. The large library of music he eventually collected contained works by old masters such as Vivaldi (d. 1741), Corelli (d. 1713), and Handel (d. 1759), plus works by contemporary composers such as Carlo Campioni (1720-1788) and Joseph Haydn (1732-1809). Also present in the collection is Peter Prelleur's *The Compleat Tutor for the Harpsichord or Spinnet wherein is Shewn the Italian Manner of Fingering*. Jefferson did not play the harpsichord, so his interest in the instrument was on behalf of his daughter Martha. He took on the study with characteristic zeal and eventually commissioned a bespoke harpsichord for his daughter, asking Jacob Kirckman "to make for me one of his best harpsichords with a double set of keys." Once the instrument was received, he encouraged Martha to follow his same regimen of practice: "Do not neglect your music. It will be a companion which will sweeten many hours of life to you."

In the Chapter devoted to Logic, Rhetoric and Orations we find John Quincy Adams' *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory* (Cambridge, 1810). This two-volume set was sent by post by John Adams as a gesture to Jefferson following their reconciliation in 1812. Adams inscribed the title page "John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Jan. 1. 1812," and sent a letter to Jefferson informing him that the package was on its way: "I take the Liberty of sending you by the Post a Packett containing two Pieces of Homespun lately produced in this quarter by one who was honoured in his youth with some of your Attention and much of your kindness." Jefferson assumed Adams was sending two samples of cloth. In characteristic style, he responded with a lengthy discussion of the virtue of homespun, forcing a vexed Adams to reply: "The Material of the Samples of American Manufacture that I sent you, was not Wool nor Cotton nor Silk nor Flax nor Hemp nor Iron nor Wood. They were spun from the Brain of John Quincy Adams."

"I cannot live without books."

Upon hearing of the sale of Jefferson's library to Congress, John Adams wrote to Jefferson on October 28, 1814: "By the Way I envy you that immortal honour: but I cannot enter into competition with you for my books are not half the number of yours." Jefferson did not reply to Adams' letter until June 10, 1815, but wrote "I cannot live without books, but fewer will suffice where amusement, and not use, is the only future object."

And so it was that the "choicest collection of books in the United States" laid the foundation for the world's largest library. It is possible today to select nearly any type of material or format in the Library of Congress collections and somehow relate it back to Jefferson's vision. Jefferson, of course, is ever present in the institution he helped to launch – both in the specific content of the collections as well as in its spirit of inclusiveness and utility. For fifty years Jefferson's book collection served as a touchstone for his political vision, and soon after as a true foundation for his fledgling nation. For centuries since it has been the model of the Nation's Library. Reconstructing this landmark collection provides fresh insights into the mind of Thomas Jefferson and the world from which he drew his revolutionary ideas. It was the wellspring to one of this nation's deepest thinkers–the drafter of the Declaration of Independence, the third President, and a true visionary who helped mold a new form of government.

In the richly ornamented hall of the building named in his honor, and amidst thousands of volumes, we can rediscover the dialogue Jefferson carried on with his books–his ideas, his time, and the universe that surrounded him. Perhaps most important, it will revitalize the principle on which the Library of Congress has been built–that knowledge and free access to it, by both leaders and those governed, are essential to democracy.