

**Bibliomany Has Possessed Me\*:  
Thomas Jefferson, The Booksellers' Customer Extraordinaire**

\*(letter to Thomas Law, April 23, 1811)

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From dawn until mid-day, under fair skies and temperatures in the high 60s, we can imagine retired former President Thomas Jefferson has written letters, using his polygraph copying machine to make a duplicate of everything he sends to the outer world from his hilltop retreat at Monticello. The noon meal has come and gone, and the master of Monticello has been out now for a long afternoon of riding about his primary plantation, supervising a plethora of projects: the harvesting of grapes for multiple varieties of wine making, the productivity of his commercial nailery, and the painstaking particulars of wood choices and fittings at the joinery where further refinements on architectural details for his never-to-be-finished house are continuously underway. En route across the 5,000-acre plantation, Jefferson urges his slaves and their overseers on toward a successful harvest, but, if the truth be told, his enterprise is deeply flawed, never able to produce the income his habits of life and his extensive family really need.

And yet today, as so often at Monticello, Thomas Jefferson is delighted to have stimulating guests coming for dinner. A foursome of upstart entrepreneurs from the distant west coast of the continent has come to see him. A Mr. Bill Gates is one guest; he is rumored to have de-matriculated from Harvard College

but is now a fabulously successful builder of what he calls “communications bridges” (Jefferson, the writer and architect, likes the phrase) in a distant northwest territory village named after an Indian, Chief Seattle. A neighbor of Gates’ from the same village by Puget Sound is here tonight, too, a Mr. Jeffrey Bezos, a bookseller. Jefferson wonders to himself who could be buying many books in a distant northwest Indian village.

The two other visitors are Messrs. Larry Page and Sergey Brin. They have started a company in still-Spanish California, naming it, oddly, “Google.” Jefferson, though a serious etymologist himself, cannot parse the strange company name. Is it Greek, Arabic, Semitic? What could “Google” mean? Still, the ex-President finds fascinating their notion of building a universal library that in some hard to fathom way functions as a universal bookshop as well. In an uncharacteristically savvy financial move, Jefferson, perhaps intoxicated by the repartee, commits, tonight, to buying a subscription to Google, offered unabashedly by Brin and Page at an auspiciously low price “for those investors of courage and foresight, willing to get in early.”

The evening meal flows through multiple courses, like a well orchestrated symphony, as covered dishes ascend from the kitchen below the main dining room, in the plantation house dependencies. Various concoctions in the French style draw heavily on Jefferson’s extensive experimental vegetable gardens, a stone’s throw from the mansion. Good Bordeaux follows the meal, as a *digestif*, after the table cloth has been removed. Fastidious, Jefferson hates the errant spill. The gentlemen retire to the salon for fireside conversation. A slight chill in

the autumn evening air (this year's first frost is only two weeks away) adds briskness to their dialogue. Ideas flash around the room. Jefferson is never happier than in an atmosphere of fresh thinking, whether he finds it on the pages of a book or in dialogue with colleagues..., or even with his beloved grandchildren.

“How I would dearly love to visit a universal library myself.” Jefferson pauses to consider the notion. “And the have it here, in my own town or city: That would be a miracle. But the richness of such an opportunity is beyond all imaging, wouldn't you agree, gentlemen?”

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Alas, we can only speculate about the dinner table conversation Thomas Jefferson would have had with the likes of a Microsoft founder or the Google *wunderkinds*. But, we can bet good money quite safely on this proposition: Had there been an Internet in Thomas Jefferson's day, and had there been an Abebooks or an Amazon.com, Jefferson would have been the uber-shopper, the world's best book buying customer. On his own, without the help of zipping electrons or blinking satellites in the sky, Thomas Jefferson managed to build perhaps the greatest private library in Colonial America and in the early Republic. At its height (by 1815), the Jefferson library at Monticello held nearly 6,500 carefully chosen volumes, on all subjects, painstakingly catalogued and systematically shelved for ready reference.

Jefferson was not just a book collector, but a book user; not just a dilettante, but an aficionado; not just an acquisitive shopper but a connoisseur of books and all manner of printed materials, including maps and engravings. The books in his library accumulated as if like amoeba splitting and recombining themselves in the night. Jefferson's reconstruction of Monticello (it became, over time, a 21-room house) included a book room on the first floor, as well as his "cabinet" or study; there was also a magnificent Dome Room on the top floor. Because there were already a spacious parlor and dining room on the ground floor, and because access to the Dome Room was only by narrow, awkward staircases, it seems unlikely that this was meant to be another "public" space; rather, it may have been Jefferson's most important library space. Monticello historians are unsure. "Although quite beautiful with its large circular windows and oculus skylight, the Dome Room's function is not completely understood. The only known long-term occupants were Jefferson's grandson Thomas Jefferson Randolph and his bride, Jane Hollins Nicholas, who lived in the room for a number of months starting in 1815. By Jefferson's death, if not before, the room had become primarily a storage area." (<http://explorer.monticello.org>)

There was no Internet to help Jefferson assemble this magnificent library. Indeed, there was no bookstore in Charlottesville, the miniscule town adjacent to his plantation, in rural central Virginia. The University of Virginia did not yet exist (Jefferson would found it, himself, toward the end of his life and would design the campus, including the famous Rotunda that served as the college library). In Williamsburg, 122 miles away, the capital of the Virginia colony when Jefferson

was a student and then a member of the House of Burgesses there, the booksellers, who also worked as book binders and printers of useful items for government, merchants and farmers, could provide the occasional tome for Jefferson. The newspaper, *The Virginia Gazette*, also imported and sold books and served Jefferson well, yet slowly, from a limited stock. But, really, Philadelphia, a ride on horseback or by carriage of 260 miles (about eight days), or Baltimore 160 miles, were the closest meaningful connections Jefferson could have to the wider world of books.

When Jefferson was young (born in 1743), Philadelphia was the center of commerce and culture in the middle colonies, rivaling Boston in New England, and it had its share of brilliant minds, most of whom became intellectual colleagues of Jefferson's. The Enlightenment period of intellectual activity spawned a market for serious books. Book selling and the publishing trade in Philadelphia from the 1740s onwards grew rapidly on parallel tracks, but Jefferson's needs and desires in the world of books far outstripped anything the Philadelphia and Baltimore book dealers could provide out of their regular stock.

And so, the question arises: How did Thomas Jefferson acquire so many wonderful books, so many carefully chosen books, all so systematically assembled and organized: How did he do this...in the *absence* of many North American booksellers? The answer lies in the great cultural capitals, far on the other side of the broad Atlantic.

## THOMAS JEFFERSON'S BOOK DEALERS

- **JEFFERSON'S LIBRARIES / OUR RESEARCH TOOLS**

He began "collecting" books early and by default, inheriting, at age 14, his father's library from their family plantation, Shadwell. But that library burned, with the house itself, in 1770. The flames took with them nearly all of Jefferson's papers and books. By then Thomas Jefferson had passed through William and Mary, the college at Williamsburg; had studied law under George Wythe; had passed the bar and had come of age, inheriting 2,750 acres in Albemarle County, Virginia. He had toured Annapolis, Philadelphia and New York and had begun to construct a new house of his own, atop a hill near Charlottesville, a hill Jefferson would name "Monticello." Here he would build his personal library, although as the ensuing years were to show, wherever Jefferson went, he gathered more books and set up libraries to serve his immediate needs.

Jefferson was a highly unusual book purchaser. Perhaps more than any other figure in American history, we can trace the development of Jefferson's *mind* by watching his *library* grow. Jefferson's libraries are the products, also, of extensive dialogue and correspondence between Jefferson, his book dealers, and his many other literary and intellectual friends and colleagues, even, sometimes, his "enemies." Though Jefferson's libraries were nothing if not idiosyncratic, clearly, he did not build them by himself.

Windows onto this process of book buying and library building come to us from extraordinary tools and records, some of which Jefferson himself gave us,

some of which are products of the scholarly world's close attention to every detail of Thomas Jefferson's life. Jefferson's *Memorandum Books* record thousands of purchases, from books, to farm animals, to slaves. His correspondence – some 18,624 letters have been collected – leaves an elaborately detailed and often eloquent paper trail. Several attempts have been made to edit and publish the entirety of Jefferson's work, private and public: 1) H.A. Washington, 9-volume edition, 1853-54; 2) Paul Leicester Ford, 1892-1899, "The Writings of Thomas Jefferson"; 3) Andrew A. Lipscomb and Bergh, 1905, "The Writings of Thomas Jefferson"; and 4) the current effort, by Boyd, et. al., begun in 1950, "The Papers of Thomas Jefferson," at Princeton University Press (34 volumes to date, for birth to end of presidency) and at The Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies, Monticello (4 volumes to date, for the retirement years). This current project is the most comprehensive and includes letters to Thomas Jefferson which the other "Papers" did not.

For our purposes, most remarkable of all the scholarly tools is E. Millicent Sowerby's *Catalog of the Library of Thomas Jefferson* (1952-1959). (Sowerby) Working primarily with the 1815 catalog Thomas Jefferson prepared when he sold his library (to pay off debts) to the Library of Congress which had lost all of its previous meager collection in a fire set by the British who, to use Jefferson's term, "vandalized" Washington during the War of 1812, this a remarkable piece of patient, thorough – even obsessive -- bibliographic scholarship. While Sowerby's work necessarily excludes various other libraries and catalogs Jefferson made over the years, it is nonetheless a breathtaking achievement --

patient in detail, catholic in scope. But, then, these were, of course, the key qualities of its subject's own mind.

Set against a lifetime of book collecting (thousands of volumes), we can look, here, at only a sampling of Jefferson's book buying. Nonetheless, a careful selection of titles creates a rounded out picture of Jefferson's library and his broad interests as well as a portrait of his booksellers. By the time we're done following Jefferson on his book explorations, we will have interacted with the many bookmen -- in numerous cities and countries and on two continents:

William Hunter and Joseph Royle, at *The Virginia Gazette*, Williamsburg

Robert Bell, Philadelphia

John Dunlap, Philadelphia

John Stockdale, London

Mon. Froullé, Paris

Koenig, Strasbourg

Van Damme, Amsterdam

Lackington, London

James Cheetham, New York

Nicolas Gouin Dufief, Paris, Philadelphia

J.P. Reibelt, Paris, Baltimore, New Orleans

William Duane, Philadelphia

Conrad, Philadelphia

Joseph Milligan, Georgetown

Hilliard and Cummings, Boston

Jefferson also acquired books with the help of various purchasing agents and friends, scattered around the Colonies, then the States and Western Europe. As a famous and influential man, he was the recipient of hundreds of "presentation copies," many of which came to him from authors or publishers using the time-tested subscription method of publishing and bookselling. What they wanted was what authors and publishers still want today: endorsements.

- **ORGANIZING THE UNIVERSE OF KNOWLEDGE: FRANCIS BACON'S AND JEFFERSON'S SCHEMES**

Jefferson was nothing if not organized. He kept records of everything he did, everywhere he went. His polygraph writing machine, enabling him to make copies of correspondence while writing it, speaks volumes about his inner urge to keep track of things in his ever more multi-faceted life. Perhaps from this inner impulse toward compulsive organization comes the scheme Jefferson spun out to impose order on his burgeoning library. He was, after all, a man of the Enlightenment -- with a compelling interest in organizing knowledge in a logical, comprehensive, systematic manner. And yet, Jefferson knew when to borrow another man's tools rather than forge his own entirely from scratch.

An English statesman and philosopher (what we might call a philosopher of science), Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626) was the chief figure of the English Renaissance. In his work *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Jefferson found a scheme for organizing all the subjects under the sun, or most of them, anyway. The scheme, and Bacon's writing generally, struck Jefferson as so brilliant that

Bacon became one of what he considered the troika of history's most phenomenal minds (Newton and Locke shared the honors).

Douglas Wilson, one of the great scholars of Jefferson's reading habits, tells us, "Jefferson arranged his 1783 Catalog of Books into three main sections-- History, Philosophy, and Fine Arts -- adapted from the three categories outlined by Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning*: Memory, Reason, and Imagination. Within Jefferson's three main divisions, he subdivided his catalog into 46 chapters: Ancient history, Modern history (Foreign, British, and American), Ecclesiastical history, Natural Philosophy, Agriculture, Chemistry, Surgery, Medicine, Anatomy, Zoology, Botany, Mineralogy, Technical arts, Ethics, Religion, Equity, Law (Common, Mercantile, Maritime, Ecclesiastical, and Foreign), Politics, Commerce, Arithmetic, Geometry, Mechanics (and Statistics, Pneumatics, Phonics, and Optics), Astronomy, Geography, Gardening, Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Poetry (Epic, Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, Dramatic, and Didactic), Oratory, Criticism, and Polygraphical (books covering several categories)." (Wilson) 35-41

Jefferson's mind was naturally systematic – though this did not protect him from some astonishing breaches of reason and logic as we will see when we come round to his thoughts on slavery. And so, periodically, Jefferson made lists of his books in some of his various libraries: at Monticello, his own primary plantation; at Poplar Forest, his second plantation, a retreat; in Philadelphia where he labored as a delegate in Congress; in Paris where he represented the fledgling United States as ambassador; and in Washington, during his two terms

as president. He made no list of the books at Shadwell, the estate he inherited from his father, Peter Jefferson, in 1757 and then lost in a fire in 1770 (although recently scholars have assembled a Shadwell library list from other documentary sources). Jefferson scholars have agonized over the questionable reliability and consistency of these lists, as they attempted to create a master catalog of all of Jefferson's books. In 2008 the Thomas Jefferson Libraries List was launched on the Internet, the results of a project at Monticello and The Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies. The project promises the most comprehensive and accurate library lists for Jefferson to date. ("Jefferson and Reading")

My selections of representative books come mostly from the 1815 list Jefferson prepared at the moment when he sold his Monticello library to Congress. These books (about 6,500) became the core of the new Library of Congress. Tragically, a fire in Washington on Christmas Eve, 1851 destroyed nearly two-thirds of them, and ever since LOC has endeavored to replace the missing titles. A carefully guarded rare book room at LOC is the repository for what remains of Jefferson's original books.

- **REPRESENTATIVE BOOKS AND BOOK DEALERS FROM THOMAS JEFFERSON'S LIBRARY**

**1) STITH, *History of the First Discovery and Settlement of Virginia*, purchased in 1764 from VIRGINIA GAZETTE, Williamsburg; printed and published by William Parks, 1747**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *History*

In Jefferson's youth, Williamsburg was the capital of the colony and then later of the new state. He came here to attend university at William and Mary and stayed on to study law under George Wythe. *The Virginia Gazette*, the colony's newspaper of record, published in Williamsburg, was also the main printing house, and in this era of American publishing, the printers were usually also the booksellers. The newspaper shop functioned as well as an importer of fine books from abroad. The *Gazette* was one of Jefferson's first book dealers.

In the account books ("Day Books") of the *Gazette*, we watch Jefferson popping in and out of the bookshop frequently – or sending his slave, Jupiter, to pick up items for him. Here Jefferson buys quires of paper, sheets of parchment and pasteboard, practical law books, a little guide to elocution (he never became an effective public speaker), gardening books, dictionaries, and books for pleasure reading varying from the sedate *Thoughts of Cicero* to the ribald *Satyricon*, bound in Morocco gilt.

As a student in Williamsburg, in 1764, Thomas Jefferson read widely in history. His purchases from the *Virginia Gazette* included William Stith's *History of the First Discovery and Settlement of Virginia*, William Robertson's *History of Scotland*, and David Hume's *History of England*. (Wilson) 16 Indeed, history became one of Jefferson's deepest lifelong intellectual concerns. It is no accident

that by the time he was cast in the role of chief drafter of the Declaration of Independence, in 1776, he had extensive knowledge of how the great empires of the past had risen and fallen, and how peoples had struggled for economic and political survival under the crushing weight of monarchical regimes.

Jefferson was not one to swallow any author's perspective without first subjecting it to close scrutiny. Stith's *History of the First Discovery and Settlement of Virginia* (1747), in eight volumes, came under just such close examination. (Sowerby) Vol. 1, # 463 Jefferson, from the beginning as a book collector, collected key primary documents about the earliest days of his beloved home state. His father, Peter Jefferson was a surveyor of boundaries, mostly in western Virginia, and a mapmaker. Thomas Jefferson's lifelong curiosity about the geography of North America certainly was rooted in his admiration for his father's work.

Jefferson's critique of Stith's history is typical of the hundreds if not thousands of responses he made to the books he acquired, as if he were in direct conversation with the authors. He often was in dialogue with them, via correspondence. Or, via correspondence with other readers whose opinions he respected. John Adams, his friend and rival, is the best example. And, Jefferson often corresponded with booksellers about the books he wanted or had received from them. We will see more of this in a moment.

Stith comes in for a bit of rough treatment when Jefferson refers to his work in the only book Jefferson himself ever wrote, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787). Stith had used the "Records of the Virginia Company," and Jefferson later

acquired that very manuscript. Writing to Hugh Taylor in October 1823, Jefferson calls Stith “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.” Jefferson himself, as a writer, was the consummate stylist, always aiming for the felicitous phrase. Stith was the cousin of Peyton Randolph, as was Jefferson; Randolph, another planter, had served as the first president of the Continental Congress. Jefferson purchased his library (between 1770 -- the fire at Shadwell -- and 1773).

**2) MILTON, *Milton's Works*, purchased in 1764 from VIRGINIA  
GAZETTE, Williamsburg; published 1753 by A. Millar**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *Fine Arts, Poetry: Narrative or  
Dramatic*

Jefferson no doubt read Milton on freedom of the press and on divorce, but we know he enjoyed the narrative poetry, too, and his collection of poets outstripped his library's holdings of literature in other genres. We will see that he and his wife loved Lawrence Sterne, the novelist, but on the whole Jefferson was skeptical about the effects of reading what we call “fiction”; indeed, he worried that the more sentimental novelists' work might be unhealthy for young female readers. But Milton definitely merited inclusion in a complete library, and Jefferson ordered a gilt binding of his complete works, to boot. (Sowerby) Vol. 5, # 4917

**3) BACON, *Of the Advancement and Proficiencie of Learning*, purchased in 1765 from VIRGINIA GAZETTE, Williamsburg; published 1674, printed for Thomas Williams**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *Philosophy*

Jefferson owned several of Bacon's books, but this was the most important, the one from which his own scheme for the organization of knowledge, and hence the organization of his libraries, was derived. (Sowerby) Vol. 5, # 4916

**4) SALE (translator), *The Koran*, purchased in 1765 from VIRGINIA GAZETTE, Williamsburg; published by Hawes, Clark, Collins and Wilcox, London, 1764**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *Philosophy, Ethics, Natural law and Nations*

The debate about why Jefferson bought a copy of The Koran continues to this day. Some speculate that it was an early step in the direction of a lifelong interest in comparative religion. Others suspect Jefferson, the law student, wanted to know about Koranic law because on the high seas American traders were running into trouble with pirates along the Barbary Coast of North Africa where the governments, such as they were, followed Islamic principles. In any case, this purchase represents what will become a pattern in Jefferson's book buying: He wants what no one else in the bookseller's immediate market area wants, and thus the bookseller becomes a special order importer for one customer. Moreover, Jefferson is not interested in just any version or translation

of The Koran: He wants Sale's. Throughout his book collecting career, Jefferson directs his book dealers to ensure that they order only the best translations in assuredly un-Bowdlerized texts. This puts a high demand on the bookseller who must join his customer, Jefferson, in a targeted, strictly defined search.

A picture of bookselling in the Virginia colony and a portrait of Jefferson as a Virginia planter / book buyer emerge in the remarkable study of colonial reading habits made by Gregory and Cynthia Stiverson. They analyzed the data in the *Virginia Gazette's* two surviving Day Books. Williamsburg was a provincial trading center (although not on the coast and therefore it would never grow into a major city). Virginia's economy was overwhelmingly agricultural, and mostly based on tobacco. The College of William & Mary opens in 1693, and shortly thereafter (1699), Williamsburg becomes the capital (replacing Jamestown). The town "...was the home of some of the colony's most powerful, intelligent and genteel residents. Because it was the focal point of the colony's politics and the center of its culture, to many Virginians Williamsburg must have seemed like the hub of the universe." (Stiverson) 21

*The Virginia Gazette* shop housed the newspaper, printing office, bookstore, and stationers. William Parks, publisher, kept books a small part of the business until the early 1740s; by then, students and professors from the college patronized the shop frequently and it had increased its inventory. While many merchants in Williamsburg sold some books (Bibles, other religious tracts; *The Spectator* (the English literary and political magazine), none created a bookstore per se, except for Parks. Most of Parks' books were imported, but he

printed some too, and one, 1745, Stith's *History of Virginia...*, is a title Thomas Jefferson buys many years later. (Stiverson) (21-25)

The *Gazette* passed to William Hunter in 1750, and Joseph Royle succeeded him as proprietor of the press and the bookstore in 1761. Royle was a political conservative; he refused to print anti-government materials. The surviving Daybook from Jefferson's time (1764-66) covers a period when Williamsburg had this one printer and one major bookstore.

Most purchases were made on credit; few people had cash available. Farmers and planters sold one crop per year and had cash shortly after that; otherwise, they bought on credit most of the year. Also, currency was always in short supply. The store sold books, newspapers, stationery, advertising space in the *Gazette*, book binding services, job printing (handbills, etc.), and it ran the post office.

Of books sold here, the vast majority of revenue came from imported books and maps; local printing includes mostly cheap pamphlets. "As was the case with his predecessor, book sales nearly equaled the value of all non-book income, and the bookstore remained the single most important branch of the printing office business." (Stiverson) 35-36 Who were the typical book purchasers? Was Thomas Jefferson a representative case?

The extant Daybooks cover only two two-year periods; so, they give an incomplete record of the colony's total reading habits. But, they are all we've got, and they do give a glimpse. While more people bought pamphlets than books,

the sales of actual books reflect more accurately the literary taste of the period and locale.

In 1763 Virginia's population was estimated to be 121,000 people, white and black. The number of book purchasers, as seen through the Day Books, is small: 565 in a 4-year period. This is 1/2 of 1 %, a tiny portion of the overall population. Reading, especially book reading, was, therefore, decidedly an elite activity. Over half of those who patronized the bookstore bought only one or two titles. For analysis, the Stiversons called a "major purchaser" someone who bought four or more titles in either two-year period. The major purchasers in 1750-52 were 62 people; in 1764-66, 120 people. The bookstore served a large geographical area even by today's automobile-era standards. Williamsburg residents are only 30% of the purchasers.

Of people buying one book (in 1764-66), there were 109; of those buying 20 or more books, there are only seven. Jefferson is one of these. Granted, book aficionados can at this time order from book dealers in Baltimore or Philadelphia or even farther away. But, who are these major purchasers? Planters, like Thomas Jefferson, constitute the biggest group. They buy a lot of agriculturally related pamphlets and books, on a wide range of practical subjects; but they are a small percentage of the major purchasers group. Again, Jefferson, as planter, stands out. Lawyers are the second biggest group of purchasers. Thus, Jefferson belongs to two of the three highest purchasing groups. The third group is Merchants: Jefferson was never primarily a merchant, and it wasn't until 1794

that he began operating a nailery at Monticello. Conversely, school teachers rank near the bottom of the list.

Jefferson's purchases do not parallel the purchasing pattern among Planters, by category or genre. His tastes are catholic; the planters' tastes, as a class, are not. All purchasers buy heavily in religion, classics, *belles lettres*, law (the college and seat of government are here...), grammar and rhetoric (again, the college), and history is not an insignificant category. But very few people buy in many of the subjects Jefferson eventually takes seriously: dictionaries, medicine, math, natural history, and fine arts.

The major Virginia planters generally bought just over four books each year; obviously, at this rate, they could never have accumulated enough to build a large personal library as did Thomas Jefferson. The Stiversons conclude, "even upper class Virginians purchased books for adult reading infrequently. Finally, in spite of their superior social and economic status, major purchasers rarely bought nonessential books." (Stiverson) (33-36, 181-188, 210) Even at this early stage of his reading life, in 1764, Jefferson therefore emerges as a key exception to the general rule. (Sowerby) Vol. 2, # 1457

**5) BURGH, *Political Disquisitions*, purchased in 1775 from ROBERT BELL, Philadelphia; published by Bell and Woodhouse, Philadelphia, 1775**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *Politics*

Book collectors may have wildly divergent tastes and interests, but they all share the habit of being opportunists. They like a bargain. Book dealers know

this, and some of them specialize in creating a buzz around their inventory: "Buy it from me now or you may not get another good chance." Robert Bell, was one such hustler. A book auctioneer from Dublin, Bell had practiced such cutthroat business in Ireland that he was forced to leave the country by his bookselling colleagues. In Philadelphia Bell bought and sold books by the lot (often private libraries from estate sales). There was a brisk business in this area of book selling in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century colonies, so much so that it came under government regulation. Bell resisted the controls and eventually lost his license. He was known as a shady dealer. (Hayes) 191-193

Nonetheless, book aficionado and high minded political philosopher Thomas Jefferson did business with him. In 1775, while Jefferson labored with his colleagues in the Continental Congress over serious matters such as the possible justification for revolution, he bought books from several Philadelphia dealers, including Bell, Robert Aitken, John Dunlap, and Boinod and Galliard. It was a pirated edition of Burgh's three-volume work, *Political Disquisitions*, that Jefferson acquired from Bell. (Sowerby) Vol. 2, # 2720

"Pirated" in colonial days and the early years of the republic was a loosely relative term. The concept of copyright was vague. Assumptions about the inherently proprietary nature of intellectual property had only barely begun to emerge in Europe. Jefferson did not embrace the notion that a writer's ideas should belong exclusively to him or to his publisher for the life of the book or the life of the author or even longer. He thought that copyright protection of about 20 years was enough. And so, occasionally and apparently without compunctions,

Jefferson bought what in our time we might consider pirated books, titles still under copyright abroad but available from shifty book dealers in America, dealers like Robert Bell. Jefferson also liked Bell's inventory because these pirated editions were often in small format and cheaply bound. For a utilitarian book, that served Jefferson's needs well enough. (Hayes) 194 We will see him operating at the opposite end of the spectrum of taste and demand on many other titles where only the best editions, most beautifully bound, will suffice.

**6) PRICE, *Observations on the Nature and Value of Civil Liberty*, purchased in 1776 from JOHN DUNLAP, Philadelphia; published by T. Cadell, London, 1776**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *Politics*

A convergence: Bookseller John Dunlap, like many book dealers of his time, was a printer. But not just any printer. Dunlap is the man who printed the first copies of the *Declaration of Independence*, and Thomas Jefferson, the document's primary author, surely would have spent considerable time at Dunlap's printing house while proofreading the declaration. Dunlap had previously printed Jefferson's "A Summary View of the Rights of British North America." (Hayes) 194-195

Jefferson bought Price's book about civil liberty twice: Once for himself and once for fellow Virginia patriot Richard Henry Lee. (Sowerby) Vol. 2, # 2294 Its subject is obviously of a piece with the times. In periods of great political heat, whether the drift is to the right or to the left, publishers' and booksellers'

inventories tend to reflect what they think the public wants or needs to be reading. In stocking a book like Price's, in anticipating the needs of a customer like Thomas Jefferson, Dunlap, a patriot himself, supported the cause. In printing the Declaration of Independence, Dunlap, like its authors and signers, put his neck on the line.

**7) AESCHYLUS, *Tragedies*, translated by Schutz, purchased in 1783 and other years from Koenig (Strasbourg), Froullé (Paris), and Reibelt (New Orleans); published 1782**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *Fine Arts, Drama*

Pessimists don't make revolutions. But mature optimists, like Thomas Jefferson, recognize that there is great wisdom to be gleaned from narratives of tragedy. The works of Aeschylus informed Jefferson's view of life's hardships and purpose, and by any count, Jefferson had his share of losses. His father died when Jefferson was only 14; his family home, Shadwell, burned to the ground when he was 26; he and his wife, Martha Wayles Skelton, lost four children; Martha herself died at an early age in 1782 after the birth of their sixth child; a love affair in Paris, with the married Maria Cosway, could go nowhere; there were political defeats and near disasters, like the War of 1812. After all this, in the late in life correspondence of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, we find the two former statesmen ruminating on the fundamental existential questions: What are we doing here, and why is there suffering?

It is no surprise, then, to find that early on, Jefferson read the tragedies of Aeschylus. Here, Millicent Sowerby's work on Jefferson's library pays rich dividends. Jefferson read in several languages, including ancient Greek. He distrusted translators and liked to have editions of books, or sets of them, permitting a simultaneous reading in English and in the original language, if it were not English. And he knew that some translators were better than others. These predispositions led him to some careful book buying, via multiple book dealers.

C.G. Schutz was a translator Jefferson had confirmed was reliable. Jefferson acquired multiple volumes of the works of Aeschylus from various sources and, it appears, had them re-bound into one or two books. Working with the catalog of bookseller Armand Koenig of Strasbourg, Jefferson, living in Paris in 1789, bought the first two volumes, translated by Schutz. Three years later, writing from Philadelphia, Jefferson ordered a third volume of Schutz's translation from bookseller Froullé, in Paris. In 1806, during his second term as president, he bought additional volumes of Schutz's translation of Aeschylus, from bookseller J. Phillip Reibelt who had been in Baltimore for some time but was now situated in New Orleans. The requested books (including others besides the Aeschylus) would be supplied by a Mr. Guestier (a purchasing agent) coming over from Bordeaux and delivering to importers Mayer and Brantz presumably in Baltimore). As it turned out, the wrong books came to Jefferson and he had to untangle the mess through even more correspondence. The importers replied to

Jefferson that the mistaken books had come from Hamburg, en route to Reibelt in the U.S.

Reibelt came originally from a noble family in the Palatinate on the left bank of the Rhine, but when Jefferson had dealings with him, he operated primarily from Baltimore. Highly educated, Reibelt, in Europe, had been heavily engaged in diplomatic affairs. Jefferson had an intense correspondence (172 letters!) with him, as bookseller, over a three-year period, 1805-1808. (Jefferson) (See Library of Congress, American memory Project, at [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/d?mtj:0:./temp/~ammem\\_hu3N:](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/d?mtj:0:./temp/~ammem_hu3N:)) Their letters, in French, concern many books (sixty or more). (Sowerby) Vol. 4, # 4525 The President saw some promise in him in his diplomatic capacity and arranged for Reibelt to become Agent at the Indian Factory in Natchitoches, Louisiana, but Reibelt, caught in the crossfire of politics, lost his post, removed to Havana, and died there of yellow fever in 1809. (Rice)(Box 5, Folder 20)

All this just to read a few plays by an ancient Greek dramatist. No wonder, then, that Jefferson would choose a calf binding, with gilt lettering, when the plays were all bound together in 1807 by John March. Sowerby's patient research was unable to determine if this bound group of plays actually conflated English and Greek texts, but other copies of Aeschylus Jefferson bought in later years, or copies he had bound together, did. Compare this process of bringing books into your hands to what we can do today: On line, using Abebooks.com or Amazon.com or Google Book Search or Books in Print, we can find any translations we want in nanoseconds. FedEx will bring them to us overnight if

we're willing to pay. Binding them all together is another question (more easily available in Jefferson's day than in ours, actually, but we could go to Kinkos...). The point is that the book lover in Jefferson's time, had to be a passionate and exceedingly persistent and patient lover. Bookselling moved at glacial speeds.

**8) STERNE, *Complete Works and Tristram Shandy*, purchased in 1787 from John Stockdale, London; published 1780 by Strahan et.al., London**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *Fine Arts*

Although Jefferson stayed away from most of the fiction writers of his time, he liked Sterne, especially his *Sentimental Journey* (based on a real journey in France and Italy, in 1765, but probably "enhanced" as narrative). It's a well known story that, on her death bed, Martha Jefferson began reading a favorite paragraph from this book to her husband and then, unable to finish, he carried on. However, I like to think of Jefferson the self-styled scholar, on his estate in Charlottesville, amusing himself with studies and social discourse with the same enthusiasms and self-deprecating humor of Sterne's infamous character, Shandy.

According to Sowerby, Jefferson read Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* before 1771; it was on his list of recommended books sent to Robert Skipwith (Aug. 3, 1771). (<http://tjlibraries.dataformat.com/default.aspx>) Skipwith was related to Jefferson by marriage; he had requested Jefferson's advice about what to read and what to buy. Jefferson's annotated list says of Sterne's book, "...we neither know nor care whether Lawrence Sterne really went to France, whether

he was there accosted by the poor Franciscan, at first rebuked him unkindly, and then gave him a peace offering: or whether the whole be not a fiction. in either case we equally are sorrowful at the rebuke, and secretly resolve we will never do so: we are pleased with the subsequent atonement, and view with emulation a soul candidly acknowledging it's fault and making a first reparation...." [spelling is Jefferson's] (Sowerby) Vol. 4, #4335 Here we see Jefferson acting as literary critic, and his values are clear. In a letter to Peter Carr, a nephew, in 1787, Jefferson asserts "...the writings of Sterne form the best course of morality that ever was written."

Sterne was so much loved in the Jefferson household that multiple editions were acquired over a period of several decades and in various formats, from something larger than duodecimo (normally about five by seven and half inches), to ever smaller formats, presumably for portability. Over time, Sterne came to Jefferson's library from booksellers John Stockdale, of London, and Reibelt, of Baltimore, but in neither case did they come simply. Correspondence about formats, prices and bindings could take up weeks or even months. Nonetheless, in Jefferson's library organization scheme, there is no distinct category for literary prose. (Sowerby) Vol. 4, #4334 (Boyd) 163

**9) CONDORCET, *Reflexions sur l'Esclavage des Negres*, purchased in 1788 from Froullé, Paris; published 1781 under pseudonym "M. Schwartz" (Monsieur Black)**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *Philosophy, Moral, Ethics*

In Jefferson's library we find many books about Negroes and the slavery problem. He was interested in how other slave holding societies had established the practice and eventually worked their way out of it. The question of whether there were indeed inherent differences in mental and moral capacities between the races intrigued him. Enlightenment "philosophe" (scholar) and revolutionist Le Marquis de Condorcet, of France, was one of the several advocates for the abolition of slavery whom Jefferson read. Others included *Adresse a l'Assemblée Nationale pour l'Abolition de la Traite des Noirs*; Clarkson, *History of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade*; and Gregoire, *Enquiry concerning the intellectual and moral faculties of Negroes*. (Sowerby) Vol. 2, # 1376

Jefferson bought his two copies of Condorcet from bookseller Froullé in the Latin Quarter, in Paris, on August 6 1788. During his years in Paris, Jefferson loved nothing more than to spend the afternoons wandering from bookseller to bookseller, many of whom were *bouquinistes*, with stalls along the quais by the Seine. Froullé, Jefferson later wrote, was the only truly honest dealer among them.

**10) CHAMPLAIN, *Voyage de la Nouvelle France par le Sieur de Champlain*, purchased in 1789 from Froullé, Paris; published 1632, possibly by Le-Mvr, Paris**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *History, [then probably] Natural History*

Before the English had even begun a settlement at Jamestown, in 1609, the French were busy exploring North America, and foremost among their

adventurers was Samuel de Champlain. Between 1603 and 1629, he made several trips to the distant continent, interacted, with both success and disaster, with the Indians and mapped coastlines and interior sections of the northeast, in what is now both New England and eastern Canada. We preserve his name and his impact at Lake Champlain, set between territories that were, much later, to become New York and Vermont.

In April 1789 Jefferson bought a copy of Champlain's "Voyage" from bookseller Froullé in Paris. He had been on the trail of this extraordinary book for some time, having tried to acquire it a year earlier from a catalog of the Amsterdam book dealer Van Damme. That copy, sold off in a book auction, eluded Jefferson.

Colonial Americans had a natural curiosity about the west and the far north: What was out there? Was there a northwest passage to the Orient? Did the land roll on forever in unending forests? The Lewis and Clark expedition is still fifteen years away in the future, but by this time Jefferson had already assembled the most extensive collection of books about America in the world. Champlain was not to be missed.

The book was an elaborate publishing affair, in two large volumes, combining maps, narrative, samples of the native languages (a face to face translation of the Lord's Prayer, in French and Montagnais, a language of the Indians in Quebec). And it had the ring of truth. Champlain was the first governor of French Canada, the founder of Quebec, and the organizer of the first white settlement there, in 1608.

Jefferson's interest in the book was not merely antiquarian. In a 1798 letter to Thomas Mann Randolph, written in Philadelphia where Jefferson served as Vice President under John Adams, he requests that Randolph find the book in his Monticello library and send it over to the capital. The government needs it, he says, to help resolve a border dispute with England about the St. Croix River (in what is now extreme northern Maine). No one else in Philadelphia, no one besides Jefferson the consummate book collector, owned Champlain's one of a kind book. (Sowerby) Vol. 4, # 4003

**11) CICERO, *Works*, purchased in 1789 from Koenig, Strasbourg; published in Basel, 1524**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *Philosophy, Moral*

Sowerby describes this as a conflated book. Jefferson or the bookseller may have put together, with the help of a bookbinder, materials from two different texts. Gaza's Greek translation of Cicero was interleaved with the Latin text: Jefferson could read both and certainly did not want his Cicero diluted by further translation into English. Printed in Basel, the book was bound for Jefferson in calf, with gilt ornaments front and back. He bought it from Koenig's catalog. (Sowerby) Vol. 2, # 1314 Catalog shopping for books was common and important in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Book distribution was sparse, slow and expensive. Many titles were offered by subscription (if not yet printed) or, if rare, with detailed descriptions of contents, bindings, and author credentials. Jefferson generally preferred to buy unbound sheets, not only because he wanted control over the choice of binding (utilitarian for some texts, decorative for others), but

also because he often gathered in one volume materials the author or publisher might not have meant to place side by side. This is participatory book buying, in the extreme.

Throughout his adult life, Thomas Jefferson mused on the deep philosophical and theological questions. Although his home culture was predominantly Christian, he never became a regular church member of any denomination. Many historians and biographers associate Jefferson with the Deists, an unorganized segment of the intellectual class during the American Enlightenment period. We will see, below, that Jefferson took Jesus of Nazareth seriously, but not in the same ways as did most mainstream American Christians. His worldview and his underlying philosophy of life were informed by readings across an extraordinarily broad spectrum of thinkers, ancient and modern. Sowerby cites correspondence with Dr. Benjamin Rush, the preeminent physician of Jefferson's time, and with John Adams in which Jefferson carries on a discourse about Cicero's ideas. To Jefferson, Cicero was an appealingly sensible thinker, not at all a spouter of flim flam and blather like that other old Greek philosopher, Plato. Jefferson particularly admired Cicero's emphasis on the need for ethical behavior as the foundation of a good society.

**12) de BRY, *The Great or American Voyages*, purchased in 1789 from Van Damme, Amsterdam; published in Frankfort and Oppenheim, 1590-1619**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *History, Civil, Modern, American*

Eleven parts in three volumes; in folio format, at 37 x 26 cm: possibly as much as 196 years old when Jefferson bought it: This one was a major find of a very large book. Again, we see Jefferson in pursuit of the best information available about the early history of the Americas. He had tried to buy this work earlier, finding only the first part available. Then, in a catalog sent to him by the Dutch book dealer Van Damme, an upcoming auction was announced, and among the contents of the auction was the entirety of the de Brys' *American Voyages*. Theodorus de Bry, Johannes Theodorus de Bry and Johannes Israel de Bry had assembled the book. Written in German, it took different forms in its various editions (issued between 1593 and 1619) and never had a stable title, sometimes being called "Grand Voyages."

The bookseller recommended various titles to Jefferson, tempting him with chocolates, as it were. Their correspondence, all in French, went to and fro over a few months, with Jefferson specifying carefully what he wanted and did not want to buy. At the auction, Van Damme was to act in Jefferson's stead. Jefferson had been in Amsterdam for three weeks in March 1788, serving as one of the new nation's ministers plenipotentiary, to help John Adams negotiate for loans for the cash-poor United States. Jefferson also traveled for pleasure, learning about French wines, having a love affair with a dazzling lady, and...book hunting. We might assume that during this period in Amsterdam, Jefferson would have developed a rapport with bookseller Van Damme.

The Jefferson-Van Damme correspondence is typical for this customer's dealing with booksellers, although probably largely atypical for most customers of

the period. Repeatedly, Jefferson specified which edition of books he wanted (having studied booksellers' catalogs carefully); whether he would take unbound sheets or a bound book; what he might as willing to pay. The currency and credit arrangements made for an elaborate dance. Would it be French money, Dutch or English? Sowerby says it's not clear whether the auction took place in Amsterdam or London. Shipping instructions were detailed, too. The post was often unreliable; packages got wet. Jefferson spelled out his specifications in detail. One complication: His own address in this period was a moving target. (Sowerby) Vol. 4, # 3973

Thus, the effort required to buy or to sell a rare book, relative to the value of the object (Jefferson paid Van Damme 12 guineas) may seem to us today heavily disproportionate, but we shop for books in an age characterized by abundance of product, not scarcity, an age defined by convenience and speed, not by difficulty in obtaining information and by the demand for long patience.

**13) LOCKE, *Treatises on Government*, purchased in 1791 from James Lackington, London; publication date uncertain**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *Philosophy, Ethics, Natural Law & Nations*

Only a few bookshops, anywhere, have become must-see sights on a tourist's must-do list. In Oxford, it's Blackwell's; in New York, it's Strand Books. Lackington, booksellers, on Chiswell St. in London, was one of the best in

Jefferson's time. He bought from this bookstore, via catalogs, for many years, from the 1780s onwards until Lackington's death in 1815.

We find Jefferson, in 1791, residing in New York, the first national capital, where he serves as Secretary of State under President Washington. His friend in England, Alexander Donald, had sent him Lackington's latest catalog, and Jefferson sent back instructions about what to buy, lamenting in advance what he has learned to expect: That by the time his book orders reach the booksellers in Europe, "one half of what I wanted would be gone." (Cullen The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 22) 326

Jefferson had been re-reading Locke for years. In the run up to the revolution, Locke's ideas about the nature of human rights and the true source of government power (not divine right of kings but the consent of the governed) informed Jefferson's own philosophical view. Locke was one of the three legs of Jefferson's triumvirate of history's most brilliant men (along with Bacon and Newton). Pursuing the definitive editions of Locke's works was therefore a predictable move for the supreme book collector, Thomas Jefferson.

Sensing Jefferson's urgency, his friend Alexander Donald replied from London (January 3, 1792), "A few days ago I had the pleasure of receiving the letter which you did me the honour to write me on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Novemr. The very next day I went myself to Lackington's with your list." (Cullen The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 23) 8 Jefferson had friends and colleagues strategically placed in cities on both sides of the Atlantic. Some acted formally for him as purchasing

agents (he needed this when buying wine, for example, in bulk), and others simply stood at the ready to serve his bibliophilic interests.

**14) ARROWSMITH, *Arrowsmith's Map of the United States*,  
purchased in 1803, probably from James Cheetham, New York; published  
1802, London**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: *History, Natural History*

Often spread out for close inspection -- on Jefferson's desk or on the floor of his study -- were a sampling of one of his favorite pastimes: maps. Perhaps the "Map of America," the "Map of the United States," the "Map of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts," the "Map of Maryland" or others. Jefferson's library was a map lover's paradise. Jefferson collected many maps from cartographer Arrowsmith and from many other cartographers, ancient and modern as well. His love of maps and his belief in their importance -- for defining not just the outlines of a territory, but also for describing the natural conditions under which its inhabitants live -- was rooted, certainly, in his respect for his father's profession, land surveyor. To bookseller James Cheetham, in New York, Jefferson writes from the new capital city, Washington, in 1803, "I think I have seen advertised in some paper that an edition of Arrowsmith's map of the US. has been published at New York. I shall be glad to receive either that or the English [one] if to be had there. The latter would be preferred because I know the engraving is superiorly well done....."

Jefferson received a bill from Cheetham for \$15, a hefty sum translating roughly to \$223 in our time. ("Measuringworth.Com") Evidence of Jefferson's

determination to have the latest and the best cartographic information lies right here. In January 1803, he asked Congress to fund the Lewis and Clark expedition. A firm knowledge of the charted territories in North America was essential as a basis for the explorers' travels into the unknown parts. The purchase of the Louisiana territory was announced to the country on a festive July 4<sup>th</sup> this year. The upper Missouri beckoned.

Jefferson's map buying was driven by issues of cartographic quality more than price, and was orchestrated by a mix of opportunism and rumors of availability (in the young nation, expert printing and fine paper were in short supply), more than on loyalty to specific booksellers. His other Arrowsmith maps appear to have come from bookseller William Duane, from Rapine, Conrad & Co. (Washington), and other sources. (Sowerby) Vol. 4, # 3846-47-48 (Coalwell) Despite Jefferson's ambitious map collecting activity, there was no separate classification in his library scheme for cartography.

**15) PRIESTLEY, *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity*,  
purchased in 1804 from Dufief, Philadelphia; published 1793 by J. Johnson,  
London**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: Religion

Chiseled into Jefferson's tombstone, we see, as per his request, a short list of his major accomplishments: writing the Declaration of Independence, founding the University of Virginia, and drafting the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. These three were more important to him than having served, twice, as president of his country. It was not merely freedom to be a Christian within one of

the established denominations that Jefferson wanted to protect. He advocated a radical open-mindedness about all matters theological. Jefferson's library had a major component in its "comparative religion" section.

Priestley, a scientist and Unitarian theologian, had won Jefferson's admiration as a critic of church-based Christian doctrine. Essentially, the argument was that the miracles on which much of traditional Christianity is based – and over which so many wars had been fought – could all be stripped away to reveal the original teachings of Jesus. Jefferson worked sporadically on a project to construct his own "Bible" or set of gospels. With cut knife and scissors, he literally took Bible passages apart, tossing aside what he considered an unprovable and distracting overlay of miracle stories, and preserving what he saw as the fundamental ethical teachings of the master.

There were two results: The first version, in 1804, in English only, Jefferson called "The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth"; the second, re-done during the retirement years 1819-1820, in four languages (English, French Greek and Latin), he titled "The Life and Morals of Jesus." Jefferson saw Jesus as the premier philosopher of ethics. Writing to Henry Fry of Virginia, in 1804, he declares, "I consider the doctrines of Jesus as delivered by himself to contain the outlines of the sublimest system of morality that has ever been taught but I hold in the most profound detestation and execration the corruptions of it which have been invented by priest craft and established by kingcraft constituting a conspiracy of church and state against the civil and religious liberties of mankind..." (Sowerby) Vol. 2, #1526

Jefferson leaned toward Deism and Unitarianism, himself. He proposed to deconstruct, to demythologize the Gospels, removing all the "corruptions," so as to arrive at the essential ethical teachings. He believed that a rational Christianity could be a strong unifying force in the new republic, whereas a Christianity riven by factions squabbling over unverifiable miracle stories would always be politically unhealthy.

By April 1803 Jefferson had read Priestley's *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity*. On January 20, 1804, he ordered from bookseller Nicolas Dufief, of Philadelphia, "two copies of the New Testament in Greek or Greek and Latin, both of the same edition exactly; and two others in English, both also of the same edition and all four of the same format that they may admit of being bound up together." Within two weeks, the New Testaments arrived, "a pair of virtually identical English editions" published in Dublin by George Grierson in 1791 and 1799, and the Greek-Latin edition, published also in London by Wingrave. Jefferson took out his scissors and knife. Dufief, the bookseller, did his job well and quickly for this most particular of customers.

**16) PALLADIO, *Architecture of A. Palladio in Four Books*, possibly purchased before 1805 from J.P. Reibelt, Baltimore; published 1715**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: Fine Arts, Architecture

If Thomas Jefferson had not become an attorney who became a planter who became a politician, who became a statesman, who became a writer..., what would he have become? A good argument can be made that architecture

would have been his chosen profession. We are left with world-changing documents from Jefferson's pen, some of their ringing passages so eloquent and moving that students of democracy around the globe commit them to memory. But an equally stunning set of memorials to Jefferson's genius stands in the buildings he labored to perfect in his role as architect -- primarily his home, Monticello, and the core campus of the University of Virginia, and the Virginia State Capitol in Richmond. Monticello and the university's original grounds and buildings reached the peak of architectural prominence when the United Nations cultural wing put them on its list of World Heritage sites. No one I have ever met who has seen Jefferson's part of the now sprawling UVa campus has come away unimpressed by its beauty and inspirational energy. And Monticello is surely one of the greatest private homes in North America.

The architectural ideas Jefferson played with did not come out of thin air; they came from tradition. He was far less an innovator than a translator into modern terms of what had long ago been established as models and rules of proportionality, grace and beauty. Most of what Jefferson brought to America through architecture came from Italian architect Andrea Palladio (1518-1580).

Even before Jefferson's ancestral home, Shadwell, burned in 1770, he had access to a copy of Palladio's key work. Over the years, Jefferson acquired various editions of the book, in different formats. Palladio had gathered the principal concepts of ancient Greek and Roman architecture, systematically organizing his presentation around building types and components of buildings (roofs, windows, doors), and grounding all of this in a carefully explicated set of

principles both mathematical and aesthetic. Jefferson's various personal libraries contained editions of Palladio in the original Italian, English and French.

The value of any edition of Palladio depended directly on the quality of the reproductions of his drawings. The best publishers hired the best engravers, and Jefferson and his book dealers could distinguish excellent from mediocre work. Original editions were paid for by subscribers, but Jefferson bought existing copies. He bought a large folio edition and smaller editions. When he sold his library to Congress in 1815, four editions of Palladio went with it, but others stayed at Monticello. The book (or books, depending on how they were bound) were never widely available in the U.S. in Jefferson's time. He considered them a necessary prize. A Virginia builder, James Oldham, requested the loan of a copy from Jefferson in December 1804, and the President obliged, sending him a portable edition, saying "The chance of getting one in America is slender." (Sowerby) Vol. 4, # 4174 Bookseller J.P. Reibelt in Philadelphia was unable at this time to provide a cheaper edition in English to Jefferson who asked for one to assist Oldham, the builder. Oddly, despite the overwhelming importance of the Palladio books in Jefferson's library, we know little about where he acquired his various editions. (Sowerby) Vol. 4, # 4174 and # 4175, (Wills), (Burns Thomas Jefferson)

**17) BARTRAM, *Bartram's Travels thro' the Carolinas, Georgia & East & West Florida*, purchased in 1805 from William Duane, Philadelphia; published 1791, at Philadelphia by James & Johnson**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: History, Natural

What John James Audubon was to the birds of North America, William Bartram was to the plants of the southeastern United States. A naturalist and traveler, Bartram (1739-1823) roamed the forests and mountains collecting plant and soil samples and meeting the native peoples as well. He was a fine prose stylist, an indefatigable recorder of precise details, an energetic narrator: His descriptions of people and plants are readable, with pleasure, even today. To Jefferson they were gold nuggets.

Bookseller John Duane sold a copy of Bartram's eight-volume illustrated work to Jefferson for \$2.00. (Sowerby) Vol. 4, #4029 Here, not only could Jefferson enrich his knowledge of the botanical record in his home country, but also he could hear the voices of native people recorded in their own languages – from the Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws and others -- and he could learn about their governments and social customs. As de Tocqueville would later report to Europeans about the habits and customs of Americans (in his *Democracy in America*, 1835, 1840), so Bartram had reported about the Indians. He was one of the first North American anthropologists, though he is remembered more as a botanist.

Illustrated books of this scope were a big risk for any publisher, demanding the subscription method of bookselling. A prospectus provided the potential subscriber with a table of contents, some engravings, a specimen of the paper and typeface, and a sample of the prose; endorsements from sponsors or early subscribers enhanced the title page. Subscriber, receiving the package

through the mail, became, in effect, patrons to the publisher. Jefferson, however, on this book, came in after the first act, buying an already published work.

William Duane joined other booksellers in the new boomtown of Washington, during Jefferson's presidency. He started the Apollo Press and the Aurora Bookstore on Pennsylvania Ave. where Jefferson was a frequent visitor. (Hayes) 471

In a working class neighborhood of today's Philadelphia, on the banks of a not very clear Schuylkill river, with fuel storage tanks on the opposite shore and skyscrapers outlining the distant downtown cityscape (just blocks from Independence Hall) is Bartram's Garden, the home site of William Bartram's father, John (1699-1777), also a botanist-explorer. It is the oldest continuous botanical garden in America, and at its peak, over 2,000 native and exotic plants grew here. Not much remains today; a major infusion of cash is needed to make it thrive again. But, Thomas Jefferson and the other Enlightenment era savants all came here to see the plants and to talk science with the Bartrams. This is one reason why Jefferson later bought William Bartram's book. The Jefferson library at Monticello had numerous other books about gardening and farming, most of them practical, but William Bartram's opus soars above them all as a breathtaking accomplishment.

**18) LINNAEUS, *Abregé du Systeme de la Nature de Linnée*,  
purchased in 1806 from Dufour, Amsterdam, through agent T.H. Backer;  
published 1802 by Matheron at Lyon**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: History, Natural

Quadrupeds and crustaceans, anyone? Comparative anatomy as the evening's entertainment? Jefferson's mind never seemed to rest; his curiosity was boundless. And so, he stocked his library with science books for both reference needs and pleasure reading. Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), the great zoologist, sorted the species, put them in order, and laid the groundwork for the logic of Darwin's theory of evolution.

Jefferson had trouble getting this book. He tried first to buy it from Reibelt's 1805 catalog, but his order came in too late. He tried again with Reibelt's "Bordeaux catalog" in January 1806, but Reibelt's exporter there delayed his trip to the U.S., and the order was never fulfilled. In the middle of 1806, book dealer Dufour, in Amsterdam, finally met Jefferson's need. In an 8 vo [octavo, or 8-pages from a sheet] format, the book provided 299 pages, chockablock with data, plus 28 pages of engraved plates. (Sowerby) Vol. 1, #1017

By this time, the earliest reports from the Lewis and Clark expedition (of their first winter in the Mandan villages near the upper Missouri) had begun filtering back to Washington. News of previously undocumented species was among Lewis's notes to the President. The work of Linnaeus, the father of taxonomy, would have come in handy to the curious Jefferson, himself a classifier of books, plants and nearly everything else on his plantation. The Linnean system for naming, ranking and classifying organisms is still in use today.

**19) WEBSTER, *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language*, presentation copy received by Thomas Jefferson, 1806; published by Hudson & Goodwin, Booksellers, Hartford, and Increase Cooke & Co., Booksellers, New Haven, 1806**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: Fine Arts, Criticism, Languages

Though Jefferson could be competitive – his career as a politician proved this beyond all doubt – he never liked puffed up self-promoters. Webster, whom we think of as the father of American lexicography and dictionary publishing, did not win high marks from Jefferson who had his own ideas about how dictionaries should be constructed and how American English might be brought under systematic examination. *The Compendious Dictionary...* came to Jefferson as a presentation copy, no doubt in the hope that it would elicit an endorsement. It did not.

There were many dictionaries in Jefferson's library. He had a particular interest in languages, their histories and their recording by lexicographers, be they in ancient Greek or Algonquin or contemporary English. There must have been some connection between this curiosity about the origins and uses of words and the sonorous tones of Jefferson's own prose style as well as the graceful balance of form in his sentences and paragraphs. His standards were high.

Webster (1758-1843) was a merchandising boaster as much as a lexicographer. For his *Compendious Dictionary*, a work that was preliminary to more ambitious unabridged dictionaries still to come, he claimed to have added

5,000 words to the best available British dictionaries of American English. Webster maintained he had corrected the orthography, clarified the pronunciation, and improved the definitions. Bells and whistles were also attached: tables of moneys of commercial nations; tables of weights and measures; divisions of time among the Jews, Greeks and Romans; a list of US post offices; census figures for the US and data about exports; chronologies about what he deemed interesting events and discoveries.

Webster's printer was Sidney's Press; his co-publishers were Hudson & Goodwin, Booksellers, in Hartford, and Increase Cooke & Co., Booksellers, in New Haven, reflecting the need to spread the investment risk on a massive publishing project and indicating that at this stage in American publishing, vertical integration of printing, publishing, and bookselling (all around a single product) was common.

Jefferson was not taken in by all this. In a letter to James Madison, in 1801, he wrote, "... I view Webster as a mere pedagogue, of very limited understanding and very strong prejudices and party passions." (Sowerby) Vol. 5, #4850

This disinclination to take Webster seriously had not kept Jefferson from interacting with the lexicographer, however, in previous years. In 1790 Webster had sent to Jefferson a presentation copy of his book, *A Collection of Essays and Fugitive Writings*. Their ensuing correspondence is intense. The two men debate ideas in Webster's essays and ideas in Jefferson's own book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*...about the nature of republican government, the source of the

people's right to rebellion, and other political concepts. They also disagree about orthography; Jefferson was never a consistent speller. While the letters sent between them are always dispassionate and civil, their disagreements are clear.

(Sowerby) Vol. 5, #4928

**20) PALLAS, *Vocabulaires comparés des langues de toute la terre* par Pallas, printed for bookseller John Stockdale, London; published 1790; acquired for Jefferson by US Consul in Russia, Levett Harris, 1807**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: Fine Arts, Criticism, Languages

Now here was a dictionary into which Jefferson could sink his ever curious intellectual teeth. In two volumes, totaling 458 leaves or pages, we find such dazzling components as the numerals of 222 languages from around the world. But this is only the beginning. The preface was in Latin; the body of the book was in Russian which means its alphabet was Cyrillic. Russian was not one of the languages Jefferson read or spoke fluently, but he was undaunted in his approach to any language. Though the connection may seem at first remote, Jefferson's reason for wanting this book was an American one: It treated American Indian vocabularies seriously.

The Empress Catherine II of Russia had sponsored the scholarly work behind the book. Jefferson's letter of December 1817 notes her inquiry through Mon. de Lafayette (French military hero of the American Revolution) who in turn approached George Washington whose exploits among the Indians early in his military career had given him special knowledge of their languages. Jefferson

never had such frontier exploits although he did visit an Algonquin Indian tribe in Brookhaven Township on New York's Long Island while on an investigatory journey in June 1791 with James Madison. On this one day, Jefferson composed a vocabulary list of approximately 210 words. (Boyd) Vol. XX, 467–470

Typically, though, it was from the comfort of his study that he wondered about the Indian cultures to the west.

But Jefferson knew about Peter Simon Pallas (1741-1811), a *wunderkind* German naturalist and traveler, elected to the Royal Society at age 23. Empress Catherine appointed Pallas to a professorship in St. Petersburg. She requested that he compile a universal dictionary of basic vocabularies. The book, titled in French above, was called, in Latin, the *Linguarum Totius Orbis Vocabularia Comparativa*. It brought together 130 words or so from each of 200 languages, all printed in Cyrillic. The book's second edition added American Indian and African tongues.

Jefferson heard about the work and wrote to the American consul in Russia, Levett Harris, in April 1806. "At a very early period of my life, contemplating the history of the aboriginal inhabitants of America, I was led to believe that if there had ever been a relation between them & the men of colour in Asia, traces of it would be found in their several languages. I have therefore availed myself of every opportunity which has offered to obtain vocabularies of such tribes as have been within my reach, corresponding to a list then formed of about 250 words." Jefferson indicates that he has contemplated publishing his research, but now he hears about the work of Pallas, and the words gathered in

Asia compared to those gathered in America seem to suggest deep relations between the peoples of the two continents. Jefferson's anthropological hunch is right, of course, but it will take another hundred years or so to confirm it. Nowadays we have not only the cultural record of Asians who migrated into the Americas, but the DNA evidence as well, making the case for this informed guess on Jefferson's part incontrovertible.

Jefferson asked Harris to get him this highly unusual book with its multiple languages and alphabets, though he had no idea what it might cost. Harris replied that his inquiries about the book had led to *culs de sac*. The book "has never been publicly exposed to sale here." The Empress distributed the limited edition to scholars in Europe, but it was not printed for general distribution. Nonetheless, a Count Romanzoff, turned up a rare copy and made a gift of it to Jefferson which Harris sent to America, care of booksellers and importers J. & J. Dorr, of Boston. They moved it on to Jefferson, in Washington. Harris reminded Jefferson that the book is in Cyrillic, and no translation to a language Jefferson could read had ever been made, at least not in Russia. But Jefferson had heard about a report on the book at the Celtic Academy (perhaps at Dublin). Harris promised to seek out the translated work among the booksellers of Paris.

(Sowerby) Vol. 5, #4737

This tale of international book buying serves, for our purposes, to illustrate that curiosity knows no bounds and is not daunted, in the best of minds, by delays. The bookseller or the purchasing agent functions as the outstretched arms of the curious book buyer. Even without the Internet, these arms can reach

around the world, across all cultures, and backwards through all recorded human time.

**21) DUFIEF, *A New Universal and Pronouncing Dictionary of the French and English Languages*, purchased in 1810 from Nicolas Gouin Dufief, Philadelphia; published by Dufief, printed by T & G Palmer, 1810**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: Polygraphical

The Jefferson-Dufief correspondence, ostensibly mundane letters between book purchaser and bookseller, turns out to be an extended editorial discussion between Jefferson -- a vector or critic of the works Dufief produced (he was another lexicographer) -- and the author-publisher, Dufief, himself. There are many detailed letters, some of them amounting to long, thoughtful essays or reports. In Dufief, Jefferson found the ideal bookseller, one who not only procured books for him, but also could talk about them and even write them with the same sophistication as other more loftily situated authors.

Dufief, as bookseller-publisher, used the same methods, however, as everyone else in the trade, then and now. He hyped his books. The title page of his new French and English Dictionary aims to make sure no possible customer fails to see the relevance and utility of this new work. He says it's meant, "For the use of The French and English Student, the Divine, Civilian, Lawyer, Justice of the Peace, Physician, Surgeon, Mineralogist, Chemist, Botanist, Agriculturalist, Apothecary, Mariner, Soldier, Merchant, Banker, Mathematician, Natural Philosopher, Astronomer, Geographer, Historian, Antiquary, Biographer,

Architect, Printer, Painter, Manufacturer, Mechanic; and, in fine, For the Benefit of all who may consider a knowledge of either Language an acquisition in their respective situations in life.”

In September 1810, Dufief solicited Jefferson's subscription for this as yet unprinted dictionary, saying that he knew Jefferson would respond well to the news of a serious new dictionary, one promising to be highly useful. And he engages Jefferson in “reviewing” the book, as though Jefferson were a vettor: *“Si vos occupations ou plutôt les travaux dont vous vous occupez pour le bien de la société vous permettent de lire the Analysis, Je serai charmé de savoir ce que vous pensez de mon plan de dictionnaire.”* This was a delicious request the retired president could not refuse. In accepting the invitation to subscribe, Jefferson also ordered yet another book from Dufief, again a work by Cicero....

In February 1811, the multi-volume dictionary arrived at Monticello, although the Cicero did not. Dufief could not find it but promised to keep looking. Six months went by until Jefferson was ready to reply to Dufief. He gave the dictionary what every publisher and author long for, the perfect blurb. “I recieved some time ago your valuable dictionary, and have now had time & trial enough to pronounce it the very best French & English dictionary which has ever been published. it's handy size too increases it's convenience. the 3<sup>d</sup> volume is a treasure.”

Jefferson did, however, have some editorial quibbles, one concerning the presentation of the various alphabets. He wanted them integrated. Two years later, writing to Samuel Demaree who had requested advice about books useful

in learning French, Jefferson delivered a bibliographical report the likes of which only a well trained reference librarian might generate, citing Dufief's work as the best of the lot. He concluded, "Dufief is the best person you can apply to for any French books you may want . . ." (Sowerby) Vol. 5, #4822

**22) LEWIS, *History of the Expedition under the command of Captains Lewis and Clark, to the sources of the Missouri, thence across the Rocky Mountains and down the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean*, purchased in 1814 by subscription from printer-publisher-bookseller Bradford and Inskeep, Philadelphia; published by Bradford and Innskeep, Philadelphia, 1814**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: Geography, America

It is hard to imagine the excitement and, perhaps, the adrenaline rush of power Thomas Jefferson must have felt at the moment of signing the agreement that purchased the Louisiana Territory for the United States. For about three cents an acre, with the stroke of a pen, the president added 30,000,000 acres, more than doubling the United States in size. It was and still is the greatest land deal in history: not a bad day's work for a land surveyor's son.

For decades Jefferson had pondered what lay out there, beyond the mapped and documented territories that in 1800 stopped not far west of the southern sections of the Mississippi. The big question was whether a navigable water route passed through the northwest to the Pacific Ocean. And, what about those woolly mammoths? Did they still roam the plains as legend had it in

Jefferson's time? And, who were the native peoples out there beyond the horizon? Were they just like the Indians of the eastern seaboard, or were their cultures significantly different? The president was determined to find answers to these and many other questions arising from economic, geopolitical, anthropological, botanical, zoological concerns.

The first step toward answers was, of course, the Lewis and Clark expedition – the Corps of Discovery -- starting from St. Louis in 1804, and heading to the source of the Missouri River, wherever that might be, and then somehow, over the Rocky Mountains, and then down to the west coast by way of the Columbia River which of course was known from its western mouth by seafaring men and traders. The expedition took two years and four months (May 1804 – September 1806), and the notebooks of Lewis and Clark have become priceless documents for the lens they provide on the exploration of the West. Much of what they saw and recorded in their notebooks, especially Lewis's notebook, had never been seen by any white man before. New native peoples, new species of plants and animals, new landscapes. The journals of Meriwether Lewis rank with those of the other great explorers who crossed other continents and oceans.

Lewis had reported in person to the president in 1807, after returning from the expedition, but we have no record of their dialogue. It was always Jefferson's intention that a book should be made from the notebooks Lewis and Clark would bring back to Washington. And yet, no matter how well suited for the leadership and research role Lewis played on the expedition itself, he turned out to be a

man with a fatal flaw. We see it now probably as bipolar disorder, but in his time it was recognized as a predisposition for a profound melancholy. After returning to St. Louis and, there, taking on an administrative post as Governor of the Louisiana territory, Lewis was to work on shaping his notebooks into a book. He was under contract with publisher C. & A. Conrad & Co, but he made no progress at all. The publishers complained later to Jefferson that "Gov. Lewis never furnished us with a line of the M.S...." Lewis's personal life had unraveled, and, hoping to find better times, he headed again for Washington and another anticipated meeting with his mentor, Thomas Jefferson. The meeting never took place, because, en route across the Natchez Trace, Lewis committed suicide in a country inn.

The making of a book out of his mass of materials – two trunks' full -- fell to others. The materials all came to Jefferson who consulted with Clark; together, they agreed on a way to push the project forward. Clark was an executor of Lewis's estate. Jefferson wrote to the publishers, "...be assured I shall spare no pains to secure the publication of his work, and when it may be within my sphere to take any definitive step respecting it, you shall be informed of it..." Clark engaged Nicholas Biddle (financier, writer and editor) of Philadelphia to edit Lewis's journals. By 1811 that task was done, but the publisher was by then in financial trouble. Bankruptcy ensued, and they never printed the book. Another publisher-printer, Bradford and Inskeep, took on the job and managed to bring out the book in 1814, but they, too, went bankrupt by the time the book was

released. Biddle was elected to the legislature in 1813 and appointed Paul Allen to replace him as editor.

Working behind the scenes was Thomas Jefferson in what was, perhaps, his most extensive involvement in any book making process. Of course he became a subscriber to the finished book, ordering a dozen copies, unbound (he would chose special bindings himself, some inexpensive and practical, others handsome and expensive). But this was the least of it. The publishers (who were the printers and therefore the initial booksellers under the subscription method of bookselling) had engaged Jefferson to write an introduction that would serve as a biography of Meriwether Lewis.

In his "Life of Captain Lewis," which became part of volume one, Jefferson attributes to Lewis a "courage undaunted." This phrase, inverted, serves as the title of historian Stephen Ambrose's fine book about the expedition, *Undaunted Courage* (1996). The captain, Jefferson said, "had a firmness and perseverance of purpose which nothing but impossibilities could divert from its direction." He was "careful as a father of those committed to his charge, yet steady in the maintenance of order and discipline." About Lewis the scientist, the observer of the natural world: Lewis was "honest, disinterested, liberal, of sound understanding, and a fidelity to truth so scrupulous, that whatever he should report would be as certain as if seen by ourselves."

On this *History of the Expedition* project, Thomas Jefferson enjoyed, perhaps, his most intricate relationship with any bookseller or publisher. He had purchased the territory for his country, conceived of the expedition, politically

sponsored it, arranged for the training of its leaders, guided their research, and then, upon their return, encouraged their relations with publishers. In the midst of the publishers' and booksellers' financial troubles, Jefferson urged them all onwards, cooperated with the editors, and had even written an important part of the book. On this unprecedented project, the line between book purchaser and book publisher or book seller blurred considerably. In the end, in the final stages of the project – its actual publication -- Thomas Jefferson himself became part of the Corps of Discovery. (Sowerby) Vol. 4, #4168 (Burns Lewis & Clark) (Ambrose)

**23) NEWTON, *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (*Principia Mathematica*), purchased in 1814 from Nicolas Gouin Dufief of Philadelphia; published by H.D. Symonds, London, 1803**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: Philosophy, Mathematical

With Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727), we come to the third, and final, member of Jefferson's triumvirate of the world's most brilliant thinkers. Newton joins Bacon and Locke. Here, Jefferson bought the first English translation of what remains to this day one of the seminal works of mathematical thinking. Its scope was ambitious: One section is unabashedly entitled, "Newton's System of the World." But, that was just the point, to lay down the rules by which our universe functions. The three-volume work was all aquiver with calculations, formulae, diagrams and brain-teasing explanations of why things are the way

they are. Newton's explanation of the forces of gravity was only one of the book's many contributions.

Jefferson turned first, in 1792, to Lackington, of London, through the bookseller's catalog to acquire his *Principia*, but it appears that Lackington could not provide. Eventually, Jefferson bought this 1803 edition from a trusted source, Dufief. Sowerby shows about forty titles acquired from him, but not all of these authors were as erudite as Newton. One book was about beer making, and another was called *Horse Hoeing Husbandry*. Over time, Jefferson bought several other books by or about Newton, using various book collectors' methods (catalogs, subscriptions, inquisitive correspondence, or random hunting).

(Sowerby) Vol. 4, # 3720, 21

**24) MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY, *Pharmacopoeia of the Massachusetts Medical Society*, purchased in 1815 from Joseph Milligan of Georgetown; published by E. & J. Larkin, Greenough and Stebbins, Boston, 1808**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: Medicine

A Virginia plantation far out in the country, at long distance from any major town, was in a sense an island. Though the plantation traded goods and services with surrounding farmers and tradesmen, it was by and large self sufficient. This meant that when medical help was needed, most often it came from someone on the plantation itself. As planter, and as scientist, Jefferson took responsibility to know the latest thinking about medicine. When in Philadelphia, he was a friend

and colleague of Benjamin Rush, the colonies' greatest physician. The pharmacopoeia was what we would call today a "physician's desk reference," a book listing hundreds of ailments and remedies.

But, it's the bookseller connection that interests us here. We know that the book was purchased in loose sheets, though we're not completely sure from whom. Most likely it was Joseph Milligan whose shop was in Georgetown, the village adjacent to Washington. There are 87 extant letters from Jefferson to Milligan, evidence of the frequency of his "shopping" here. Milligan's stock was diverse. From this bookshop Jefferson bought pamphlets on canal building, the flora and fauna of Louisiana, and a wide range of other topics. He also turned to Milligan, repeatedly, for book binding, trusting him for good work and reasonable prices. Relatively few booksellers were themselves expert binders, as was Milligan. (Hayes) 472 (Malone) 12 (Sowerby) Vol. 1, # 872

And, finally, it was Milligan's care in handling books and his honesty that led Jefferson to choose him in 1815 as the book dealer who would pack, crate and ship the Monticello library for its ride to Washington and its new home in the as yet unformed "library" of Congress.

**25) WALTON, *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*, purchased in 1824 from Hilliard and Cummings of Boston and Charlottesville; published by Thomas Roycraft, London, 1655-57**

Jefferson Library Catalog Category: Religion

In the years before his death, Thomas Jefferson was fully engaged in one of the most ambitious projects of his life, the founding and construction of the University of Virginia, at Charlottesville. Not only did he obsess about every detail of the architectural plan, the buildings' construction, the layout of the gardens, and the landscaping of the site, but he burrowed down deeply into curricular matters as well. As chairman of a board of overseers, he recruited and hired faculty. But most fundamentally, the key to the plan for educating Virginia's rising young men was to be reading, and the key to their reading was to be a goodly supply of books.

The university's most prominent building was and remains its "Rotunda," functioning, in Jefferson's scheme, primarily as the library. But how to fill it with books? The one-title-at-a-time process that will satisfy the needs of a private book collector with infinite leisure and budget would not be appropriate here. Jefferson prepared a catalog of books to be purchased, across many subject areas, generally tied to what the expected demands of the curriculum would be. His list for the university library was not a clone of the 1815 list of titles he had collected at Monticello. This was a reconsidered plan, suited to the expected needs of students and professors.

Consistent, however, with Jefferson's longstanding intellectual interests were many selections of individual books. *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*, compiled by Brian Walton, for instance, was a multi-lingual translation of the Bible. English alone would never do (!) in a Jeffersonian library. The book symbolizes Jefferson's determination that "his" university would be ecumenical rather than

parochial. Jefferson has a taste for the grandiose project as well: This "Bible" was a six-volume affair, weighing in with an impressive 5,776 pages.

Jefferson found booksellers who could gather many titles under the prescribed various subject headings and deliver them all at once. He worked with Walker Gilmer, a Jefferson protégé who became a professor at the university, and even more productively with bookseller William Hilliard (Hilliard and Cummings), of Boston. In March 1826, 732 volumes in two boxes arrived at Charlottesville. Jefferson inspected most of the books, even noting that one should have been rejected...for a proofreading error.

Three months later, on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1826, fifty years to the day after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson passed away, but his book collecting legacy lives on. The books he sold to Congress formed the core of what became one of the world's great libraries. The books he ordered for the University of Virginia became the core of one of the world's great university libraries, although, in fact, many of the titles Jefferson proposed for the university library were never delivered to or retained by the school, and many were reclaimed by his estate after his death to help defray costs in covering his debts. Today, the university owns fewer than 250 titles originally specified, acquired and provided by Thomas Jefferson.

Through all his book collecting and book buying years, Jefferson had no local bookshop in Charlottesville to patronize. The village was simply too small and remote to sustain a bookseller. After Jefferson was gone, and soon after the university began to function, Hilliard and Cummings set up a bookshop in the

town, with the idea of serving faculty, students and local residents. The Bostonians may have had Cambridge, Massachusetts in mind (with Harvard providing a steady flow of customers), or downtown Boston, where clusters of booksellers thrived.

The shop in Charlottesville failed. Students complained of high prices; faculty may have complained of inadequate stock. But it's hard not to imagine that Charlottesville's first bookseller failed because it did not have Thomas Jefferson in the neighborhood to do what he had always done so well in bringing books, booksellers, and people together. (Bruce) 190-191 (Wills)

## **CONCLUSION**

Thomas Jefferson, in assembling his various libraries, consistently and assiduously sought particular editions of specific books, choosing on the basis of several variables:

- quality of translation, quality of prose
- reliability of the author
- reliability of the printer (not to Bowdlerize or otherwise adjust the text)
- legibility of the printing, which included not only the imposition of type on the page, but also the selection of the fonts used in the work
- quality of plates or engravings in the work
- quality of the paper
- size of the format (folio, quarto, octavo, etc.)

- method and quality of binding, or the option to buy a book in unbound sheets (for binding at a later time, to Jefferson's own specifications)
- length of time required to receive shipment of a book
- price

Jefferson saw the bookseller not just as a middleman or as a retailer but as a collaborator in his search for good new books and acceptable or desirable old books. Embracing these same booksellers, often, as fellow intellectuals, he carried on a lively correspondence with many of them about the contents of books as well as about all of the purchasing variables noted above.

Whatever else we say about Thomas Jefferson as a buyer of books, we need to remember that his bibliomania was expensive, and not just in personal financial terms. For, like everything else making up the astonishingly rich life of Jefferson, this activity, too, was built on the backs of slaves. Jefferson was perhaps the greatest polymath the American colonies and new nation ever produced. Or at least he was on a par with Franklin. He certainly had the broadest curiosity. But curiosity is costly. Jefferson's books were not just a practical necessity; often, they were a deliberate indulgence. He had the lover's passion as implied in the term "bibliophile" and the maniac's sense of urgency as implied in the term "bibliomaniac." While sometimes Jefferson could poke fun at himself for this acquisitive mania, the source of his income, the cash flow that supported, or at least attempted to support his indulgences, was no laughing matter.

Thomas Jefferson's libraries were built with revenue made from farming and from other small agriculturally-related businesses, all of them powered by slave labor. In the case of Jefferson's book buying, the irony could not be heavier: While slaves labored to produce income the master could use to purchase – among many other luxury items such as fine wine, rich fabrics and beautifully crafted furniture – books about anthropology, philosophy, political theory, economics, literature, etc., these same slaves were generally denied any formal education, and most were deliberately kept illiterate or semi-literate.

At various points in his early legal and political career, Thomas Jefferson advocated for and even introduced bills calling for the eventual manumission of slaves. He clearly recognized slavery as a curse on the culture, and he worried about the conflict that would come, inevitably, when its demise should finally arrive. But, having lost several votes on his proposals to move the colony and then the state of Virginia toward emancipation, he essentially gave up, leaving the issue to be solved by a later generation. "But as it is," Jefferson wrote, "we have the wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other." (Ford)

Over the years, Jefferson's speculations about the mental capacities of black people wavered between, on the one hand, assuming Negroes were inherently inferior and not subject to improvement, and, on the other, deciding to take a slave woman as mistress who would then become the mother, DNA evidence now suggests, of at least one, if not more, of his children. All the while, the slave plantation culture of which Jefferson was a leading example prohibited

Afro-Americans from the very self improvement for which he so prized his own library. All men are created equal, but some are more equal than others. We are all endowed by our Creator with the right to pursue happiness, but not literary happiness...if we are black. We are all endowed with the right to expand, enjoy and exercise our liberty, which surely is something reading will support, but not if we have colored skin.

And so we need to stay sober in our praise of Thomas Jefferson for his book buying and reading habits. In and of themselves, his book collecting and his use of books mark him as a giant among intellectuals, a man nearly without peer in his time or any other. But such personal self development came at great cost to hundreds of human beings – held in bondage all their lives – whose own intellectual and moral development was stunted by Jefferson, the paradigmatic book collector.

We are left, then, with an historical irony in which admiration for Jefferson the bibliophile, the bookseller's "customer extraordinaire," must be tempered by our understanding of the cultural context in which such bibliomania was even possible. With some certainty, however, we can say that if there were any truth – *and there was* – to Jefferson's famous comment in a letter to John Adams, made shortly after the removal of the Great Library for shipment to the Library of Congress, in 1815, that "I cannot live without books," then there must also be truth to something Jefferson probably never said explicitly but which we can now assert, definitively, for him: "I cannot live without booksellers." (Cappon) 443

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