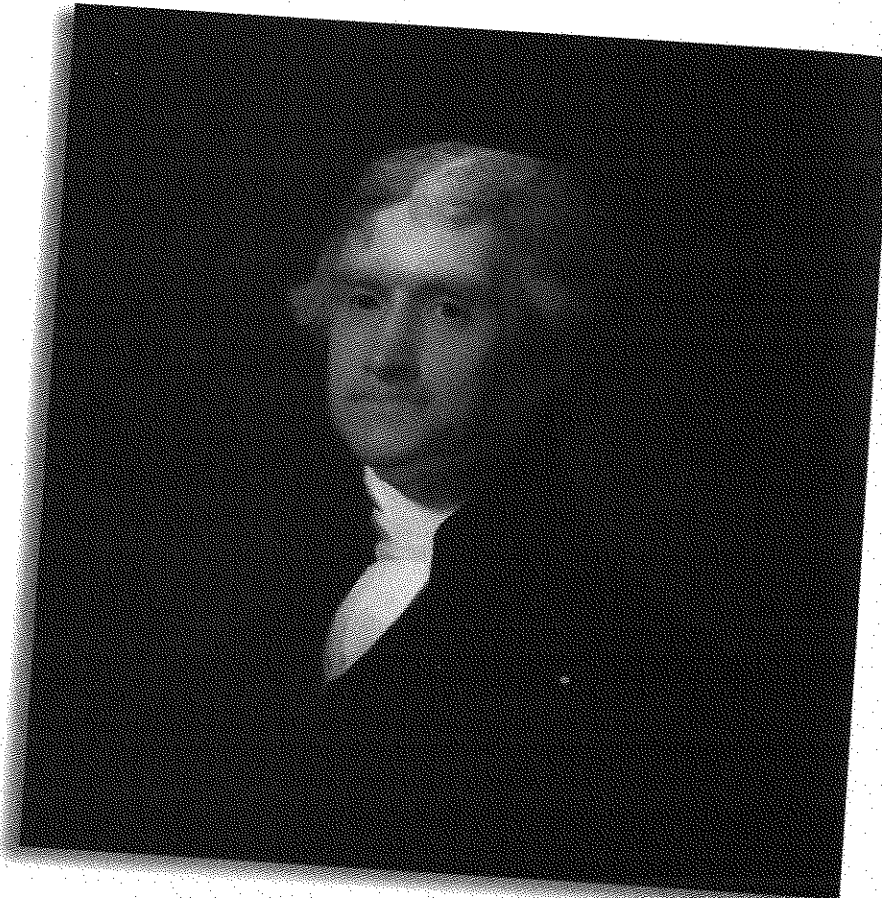


# THOMAS JEFFERSON, OUR THIRD PRESIDENT

This painting is a portrait of Thomas Jefferson, our third President.



## Thomas Jefferson's Epitaph

Before he died, Thomas Jefferson wrote his own epitaph, or words for his gravestone. Here is what it says:

"Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the statute [law] of Virginia for religious freedom, and father of the University of Virginia."

His gravestone does not say that Thomas Jefferson was the third president of the United States.

**M**any words can describe Thomas Jefferson. He was an inventor. He was a farmer. He was an architect. He was a lawyer. And, he was a Patriot. Let's take a look at who Thomas Jefferson was and what he did for our nation.

## Jefferson, the Man

Thomas Jefferson was born on his father's plantation in Virginia. When Thomas was 14 years old, his father died. That meant that Thomas, as oldest son, inherited the family land.

Thomas was a serious student. In fact, he finished college in only two years by studying 15 hours a day! He continued his schooling to become a lawyer. He took law cases all over Virginia.

When Thomas was in his 20s, he fell in love with Martha Skelton. When they were courting (an old-fashioned word for "dating"), they played music together. He played the violin. She played the harpsichord. One story goes that two other men were interested in Martha. However, both gave up after they heard the lovely music Martha and Thomas made together.

Thomas and Martha married on New Year's Day, 1772. They lived

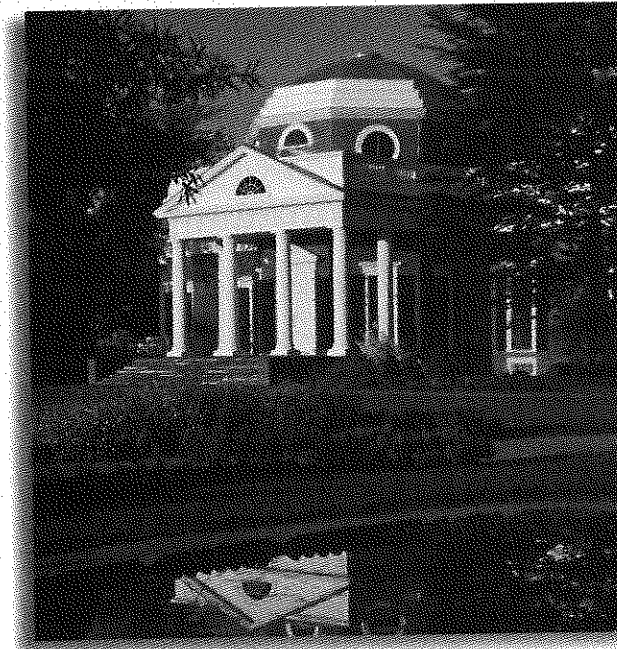
in a one-room house for a couple of years, until Thomas finished building the wonderful house he had designed. He built it on a hilltop near Charlottesville, Virginia. He called the new house Monticello (mahn tih CHEHL oh)—"little mountain."

Over the next ten years, Thomas and Martha had six children. Three children did not live to see their first birthday. A fourth child died when she was only 3-1/2 years old.

Martha herself died soon after her sixth child was born. Thomas never remarried. In fact, he was the first widower to be elected President of the United States.

## Jefferson's Political Life

Thomas Jefferson spent many years serving the state of Virginia. In Thomas' opinion, one of the most important things he did as a state representative was to write a certain bill. That bill guaranteed religious freedom in Virginia. In part, it said, "no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever. . . ." The bill also made sure that the people of Virginia could not be punished for their religious beliefs.

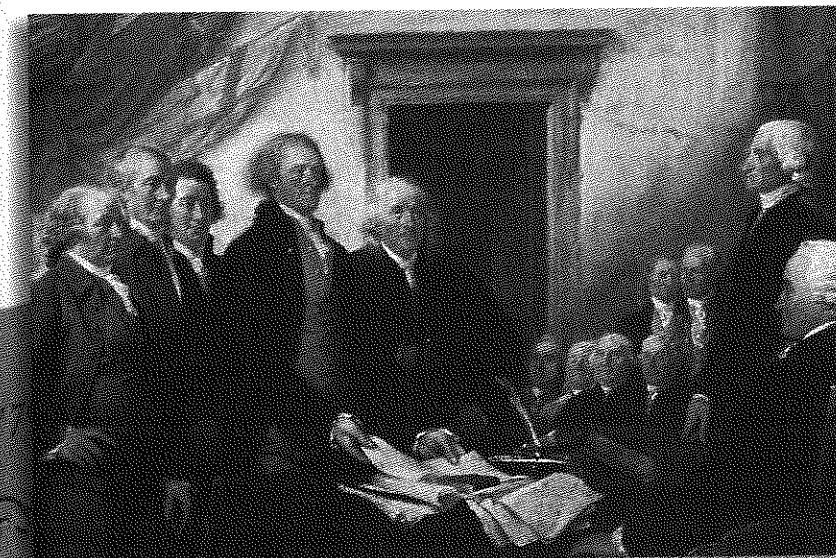


Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home in Virginia, is shown in this photograph.

Thomas Jefferson also served in the nation's government. In 1776, for example, Thomas was given an assignment. He was asked to write a document for the government. That document was to declare our nation's independence from Great Britain. From June 11 to June 28, Thomas wrote and wrote and wrote. Then, he presented the finished document to Congress. Congress then made changes to the Declaration of Independence. On July 4, 1776, it was adopted.

The Declaration of Independence stated that the United States wanted to be free. It declared "these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent States."

The Declaration of Independence did more than declare America's freedom. It also spelled out the human rights that should be protected by our government. "We hold these Truths to be self-evident," it said, "that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed [gifted] by their Creator with certain unalienable rights [rights that can't be taken away], that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness . . ." In addition, the Declaration of Independence explained that a government must protect these rights. If it does not, the people can get rid of that government and put in its place a new government. That belief explains why the Revolutionary War was fought.



The signers of the Declaration of Independence are shown in this painting.

In 1800, Thomas Jefferson was elected President of the United States. One of the acts for which he is remembered is his purchase of the Louisiana Territory. You will learn about the Louisiana Purchase later.

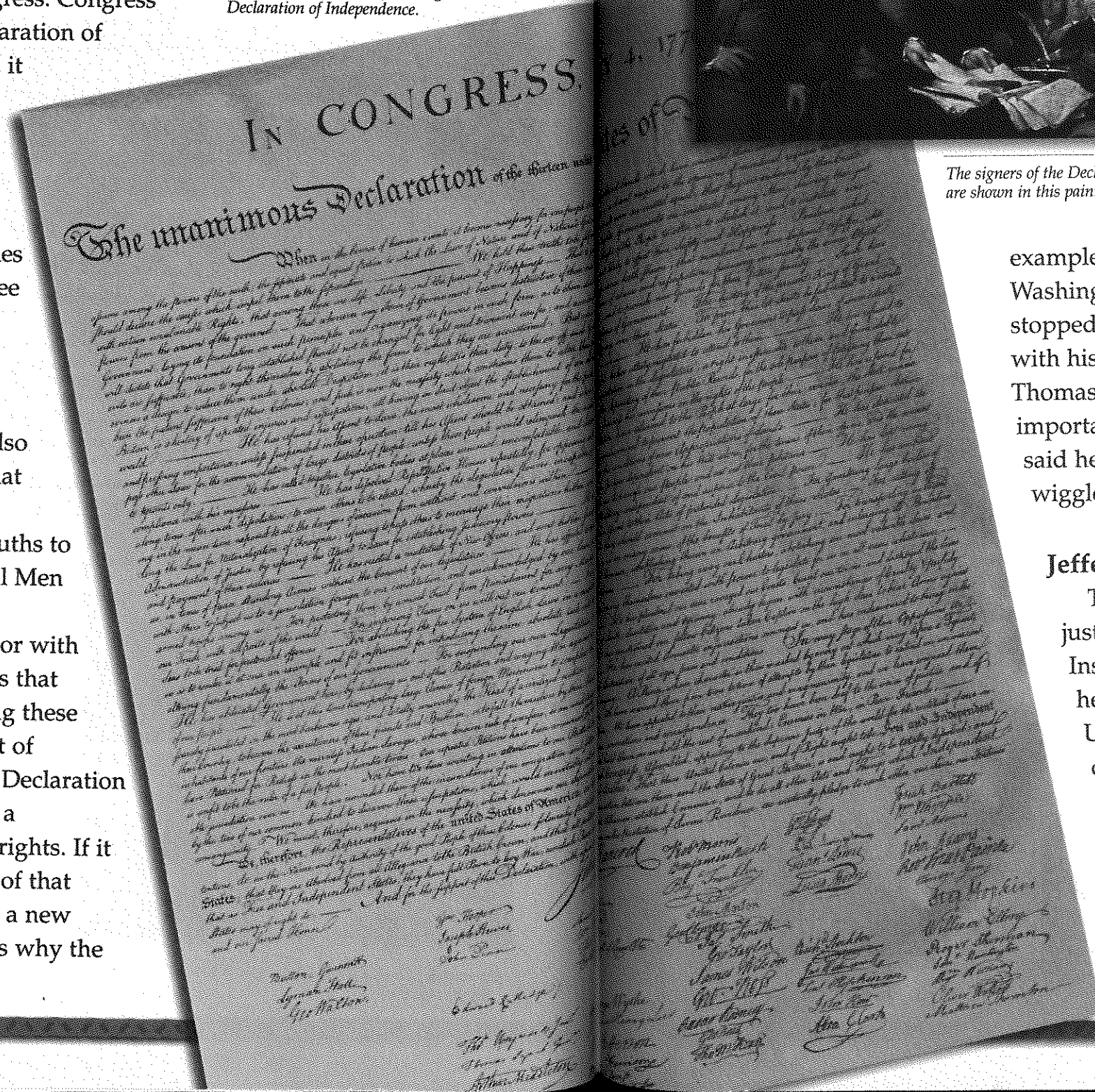
Thomas Jefferson made the presidency a more casual office. For

example, people used to bow to President Washington and President Adams. But Thomas stopped that practice. Instead, he shook hands with his visitors, as presidents still do today. Thomas Jefferson also was known to greet important people while wearing his slippers. He said he thought more clearly when he could wiggle his toes!

### Jefferson Retires

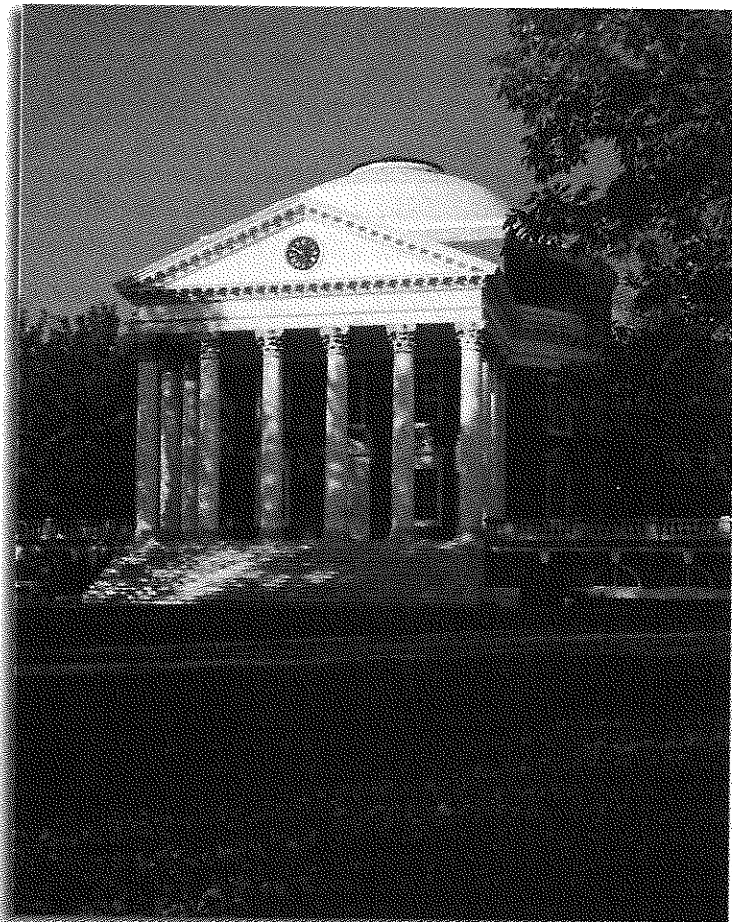
Thomas Jefferson did not stop working just because his term as president was over. Instead, he completed one project of which he was most proud. He founded the University of Virginia. He, himself, designed the buildings. He defined the courses that would be offered. And, he hired the first teachers. At the University of Virginia, Thomas also introduced the idea of electives. An elective is a course you take because you want to, not because you have to.

This is an illustration of the original Declaration of Independence.



After his retirement, money problems plagued Thomas Jefferson. He had spent more to run the White House than he made as president. So, he left office in debt.

Thomas spent a lot of money in his private life, too. For example, Thomas had many visitors at Monticello. In fact, one of his servants observed that "many weeks the 26 spare horse stalls were not sufficient [enough] for the visitors' mounts [horses]." Sometimes, 50 people stayed at Monticello at one time. Some visitors stayed for months!



This photograph shows one of the buildings at the University of Virginia, which Thomas Jefferson founded.

By 1826, Thomas owed over \$107,000. He needed money so badly that he even started a lottery, offering Monticello as the lottery prize. Monticello remained his home, however, when he didn't sell enough lottery tickets.

### Jefferson Dies

By the time Thomas Jefferson was in his 80s, his health was failing. By July 2, 1826, he was drifting in and out of consciousness. On the evening of July 3, he wakened and spoke his last words.

"Is it the Fourth?" he asked. "It soon will be," his doctor answered. The next day, July 4th, on the fiftieth anniversary of our nation's birth, Thomas Jefferson died. Later that day, the nation's second president, John Adams, also died. John Adams did not know of Thomas' death. It is said his last words were, "Jefferson still survives."

### Show What You Know

1775-1810

In 1825, Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to his grandson. In the letter, Thomas listed ten pieces of advice. He thought that if his grandson followed this advice, he would live a better life. Here is the list Thomas Jefferson wrote:

1. Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today.
2. Never trouble another for what you can do yourself.
3. Never spend your money before you have it.
4. Never buy what you do not want, because it is cheap; it will be dear [expensive] to you.
5. Pride costs us more than hunger, thirst, and cold.
6. We never repent of having eaten too little.
7. Nothing is troublesome that we do willingly.
8. How much pain have cost us the evils which have never happened.
9. Take things always by their smooth handle.
10. When angry, count ten, before you speak; if very angry, a hundred.

Choose one of the ten points listed here. Write what you think one of the points really means and why you think it is good advice. Then, for a whole week, try to follow the advice of the point you have chosen. For example, for a week, you might count to ten every time you are angry (#10). At the end of the week, decide whether your life was better because you followed Thomas Jefferson's advice.

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