



VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Story of Virginia

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Virginia Historical Society and Altria Group present *The Private Jefferson: From the Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*

Richmond, VA — On October 15, 2016, the Virginia Historical Society (VHS) and Altria Group will present *The Private Jefferson: From the Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* as a new special exhibition in the Virginia Sargeant Reynolds gallery. Admission to the exhibition is free for VHS members.

Beginning in 1898, the large collection of Thomas Jefferson's private papers was given to the Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS) by the president's great-grandson, Thomas Jefferson Coolidge of Boston. The exhibition is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to view in Richmond papers that left Virginia nearly one hundred fifty years ago, following Jefferson's death and the marriage of his granddaughter Ellen Wayles Randolph to Joseph Coolidge of Boston.

Jefferson gave to the world the American vision that "all men are created equal" and are entitled to the "inherent & inalienable" rights of "life, & liberty, & the pursuit of happiness." Exhibition viewers will be able to read those words in Jefferson's personal handwritten copy of the Declaration of Independence, as well as in the draft of the Declaration as it was edited by his fellow committee members, and in a copy of the first printing of the Declaration distributed in Philadelphia in 1776. All three documents are extremely rare and are among the most important in American history.

Jefferson's innumerable contributions to the nation's founding and development include his service as governor of Virginia, as congressman, as minister to France, as secretary of state under George Washington, as vice president under John Adams, and as third president of the United States. He is revered also for his decisions to make the Louisiana Purchase and establish the military academy at West Point and for designing some of the greatest buildings in America.

Jefferson was not untouched by controversy. He hated slavery, which he called a "moral depravity," and in 1784 he almost succeeded in passing in Congress a ban of slavery in the territories. But he continued to hold slaves at Monticello. One biographer has labeled Jefferson an "American Sphinx." The Jefferson papers provide windows into his personality and motivations.

William Rasmussen, Lead Curator and Lora Robins Curator at the VHS, says, "Jefferson was interested, it seems, in everything—from the sciences to the cultures of Native Americans, from religious beliefs to gadgets at Monticello. He spoke five languages. What I find so extraordinary about him is the breadth and brilliance of his intellect. In architecture, for example, few Americans to this day have matched Jefferson's accomplishments."

VHS members receive complimentary admission to all special exhibitions. Admission for nonmembers is \$10 per person. The exhibition will be on display through January 15, 2017, and is generously sponsored by Altria Group. *The Private Jefferson* is organized by the Massachusetts Historical Society.

The Virginia Historical Society (VHS)—a privately funded nonprofit organization—collects, preserves, and interprets the Commonwealth's history, linking past with present to inspire future generations. The VHS is located at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond's Museum District. Hours are Monday – Sunday 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for the galleries and museum shop, Monday – Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for the library. For more information about the VHS call (804) 358-4901, visit vahistorical.org, or connect with the VHS on Facebook and Twitter.

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