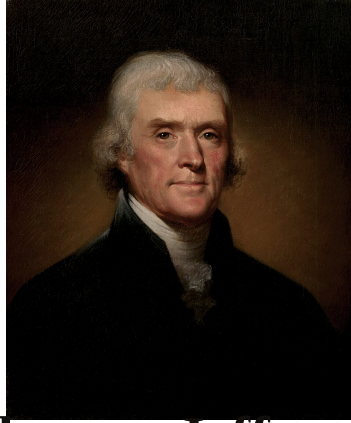




Thomas Jefferson

April 13, 1743 - July 4, 1826

Charlottesville, Virginia

Thomas Jefferson died at Monticello, on the mountain above Charlottesville, Virginia, on July 4, 1826. He was eighty-three. He had asked, near the end, whether it was the Fourth, as if the calendar itself were a last piece of architecture. John Adams died the same afternoon in Quincy. The country that had argued over both men buried them on the holiday they had made.

He was born at Shadwell on April 13, 1743, wrote the Declaration of Independence at thirty-three, served as minister to France, secretary of state, vice president, and president, and doubled the mapped republic with the Louisiana Purchase. He founded the University of Virginia and designed the house that was workshop, stage, and contradiction: a student of liberty who held people in slavery, including Sally Hemings and the children the record no longer allows a polite silence about.

He kept a farm book as carefully as a constitution. He redesigned plows, collected languages, and spent himself into debt that the house could not outrun. The epitaph he wrote names three things and omits the presidency: the Declaration, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and the university. That was not modesty so much as a theory of what should last.

Monticello is still the place he chose to die. The family graveyard is on the slope, a short walk from the rooms where he measured light and human beings with the same instruments. This memorial does not sand the plantation off the sentence.

Visitors still climb the mountain for the views he arranged and the rooms he measured. The Hemings descendants and the Jefferson descendants now walk the same slope, which is the only honest tour. He died

owing money. The university did not.

Services

Died at Monticello on July 4, 1826. Interment in the family graveyard on the mountain.

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