

**Concise Timeline for Joseph Coolidge Library &
Discovery of Books Owned by Thomas Jefferson at Washington University**

“Remember that *his* library will not be sold again, and that all the memorials of T. J. for myself and children, and friends, must be secured now!—this is the last chance!” —Joseph Coolidge to Nicholas P. Trist, 11 Feb. 1829

- 1796, Oct. 13 Eleanora Wayles Randolph (Ellen) is born, the fourth child of Thomas Mann Randolph and Martha Jefferson Randolph.
- 1798, Oct. 30 Joseph Coolidge Jr. (Coolidge) is born, the second child of Joseph Coolidge and Elizabeth Bulfinch Coolidge.
- 1809 Jefferson retires from the presidency to Monticello.
- 1809-1825 From age 13 to 28 Ellen lives at Monticello along with her mother and siblings. There she is taught by her mother and her grandfather, mastering Greek, Latin, French, and Italian.
- 1815 Jefferson sells some 6,700 volumes from his library at Monticello to the United States Congress to replace the congressional library destroyed when the British burned the Capitol in 1814. He continues acquiring books and begins his Retirement Library collection at Monticello.
- 1817 Coolidge graduates from Harvard.
- 1824, May Coolidge arrives at Monticello, with a letter of introduction from Harvard professor George Ticknor, and meets Ellen.
- 1824, Nov. 24 Coolidge returns to visit Monticello. He watches the reunion of Jefferson and the Marquis de Lafayette on Monticello’s lawn and is among the 400 men who dine with Lafayette the following night in the unfinished Rotunda at the University of Virginia.
- 1825, May 27 Ellen marries Coolidge in the parlor at Monticello.
- 1825, fall Ellen and Coolidge arrive in Boston. Ellen’s baggage from Monticello is sent by sea to Boston and sinks en route. Everything is destroyed, including her books, papers, and writing desk. Jefferson sends Coolidge the desk on which he wrote

the Declaration of Independence as a replacement for all that Ellen has lost. Ellen uses it for her correspondence with her family at Monticello.

- 1826-1831 Ellen gives birth to six children, including one set of twins. Her eldest child, and the only one born before Jefferson's death, is Ellen Randolph Coolidge (1826-1894).
- 1826, Mar. 16-17 Jefferson wills his library to the University of Virginia.
- 1826, July 4 Thomas Jefferson dies at Monticello. His library catalogue at the time of his death listed 931 titles, representing some 1,600 volumes.
- 1826, ca. Oct. Jefferson's grandson and executor, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, deposits Jefferson's books at the University of Virginia for safekeeping, with the understanding that they may need to be sold to settle Jefferson's debts.
- 1828, Dec. Randolph reclaims Jefferson's books from the University of Virginia for sale.
- 1829, Feb. 11 Coolidge requests Nicholas Philip Trist (who also married another of Jefferson's granddaughters, Virginia Randolph) to buy specific books of interest to him and Ellen at the auction sale in Washington, D.C. of Jefferson's library.
- 1829, Feb. 27 Jefferson's library is sold in Washington, D.C. at the auction rooms of
- Mar. 11 Nathaniel Peabody Poor. There are no known surviving sale records from this 1829 dispersal sale of Jefferson's library.
- 1829, July 16 Coolidge receives books Trist acquires for him during the sale.
& Sept. 16
- 1855, Jan. 24 Edmund Dwight (1824-1900) marries Ellen Randolph Coolidge in Boston.
- 1879 Joseph Coolidge Jr. dies in Boston, three years after his wife. His estate is divided between his four surviving children, including his daughter Ellen Coolidge Dwight.
- 1880, Mar. Ellen and Edmund Dwight present Joseph Coolidge's library to Washington University in St. Louis. University chancellor, William Greenleaf Eliot (1811-1887), receives the gift from the Dwights. At the time of the gift, there were no references in contemporary reports that Jefferson's books were among the 3,000 volumes.

- 1880, Mar. 3 *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* cites a meeting held by Eliot in which he reports “additional library room is also found necessary by the acquisition by the University of the Coolidge library of 3,000 volumes.”
- 1880, Mar. 8 “The President [WG Eliot] reported that he had received from Mr. & Mrs. Edmund Dwight of Boston a gift of about 3000 volumes being the Library of Joseph Coolidge, dec[ased] ... it was resolved ... that the Books be properly labeled and placed in suitable cases, and that the alcove in which they stand shall be known as the Joseph Coolidge alcove of the Library.” (Washington University Board of Trustee’s *Minutes*, Book B, p. 59)
- 1880, Apr. 15 “Edmund Dwight, Esq., of Boston has just donated 3,000 rare volumes, to be known as the “Joseph Coolidge Library.” (*St. Louis Globe-Democrat*)
- 1880, Aug. “Rev. Dr. W. G. Eliot (t. 1834), chancellor of Washington University, says in a recent report, “A valuable gift has just been received through Edmund Dwight [Harvard, 1844] of Boston, being the library of Joseph Coolidge [Harvard, 1817], lately deceased, and numbering about three thousand volumes, many of which are rare, and of great value. They will be properly labelled, and arranged in a separate alcove, which will be known as the ‘Joseph Coolidge Library.’” (*Harvard Register*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (August 1880), p. 168)
- 1880, Dec. “About a year ago, Chancellor Eliot received for the use of the university more than 3,000 volumes from the family of the late Joseph Coolidge, of Boston, who was a man of wealth and culture. New cases were at once procured, and a rearrangement of the Library-room was made. Cosy alcoves gave us additional room for books and more retired and comfortable places for study.” (*Student Life*, Vol. 4, no. 3 (December 1880), p. 41-42)
- 1895 “LIBRARY AND READING ROOM. Room No. 10 of the East Wing, University Hall [on Washington Ave., built 1861, enlarged 1871 – east wing would have been towards 17th Street], is used as a reference library and reading room. Here all necessary books of reference are provided, and also a good selection of periodical literature. No attempt is made at present to gather a general library. During the year 1880 a gift of about three thousand volumes was received from the family of the late Joseph Coolidge, of Boston. The collection, known as the Coolidge Library, is especially rich in excellent editions of Italian and French authors, and is a very material addition to the usefulness of the library.” (*Catalog*

of the officers and students in Washington University, with the courses of study for the academic year 1895-96 (1895), p. 94)

1905 Books comprising the Joseph Coolidge Library move, together with the rest of the holdings of the Washington University library, from the University's original location on Washington Avenue in downtown St. Louis to the current campus west of the city. They are housed in the newly built Ridgley Library from 1905 until 1962, when the main library moves into a larger five-storey building—the John M. Olin Library.

2010, Oct. 20 Monticello researcher, Ann Lucas Birle discovers the *Harvard Register* reference to the 1880 gift. She shares this with Monticello librarian Endrina Tay, who has been tracking down extant Jefferson books from the 1829 sale.

2010, Nov. Tay searches for each of the known titles that were acquired by Coolidge in 1829, and gives a candidate list to Washington University's Curator of Rare Books, Erin Davis.

Jefferson typically marked his books by adding his initial "T" to the I-quire signature, and his initial "I" (for J in the Latin alphabet) to the T-quire signature. This, along with other characteristics, helps experts determine Jefferson's ownership. Tay requested Davis to check for the presence of this distinctive ownership mark.

2011, Jan. Davis at Washington University finds Jefferson's bookmark in 74 volumes, representing 28 titles.

Miranda Rectenwald, Archives assistant at Washington University, locates an undated library ledger bearing "c" annotations, likely designating volumes that were part of the Coolidge Library. This ledger represents the only known catalog of the Joseph Coolidge Library.

2011, Feb. 21 Washington University and Monticello formally announce the discovery on national media.

Ann Lucas & Endrina Tay

February 9, 2011; rev. February 11, 2011 with additions from WUSTL; rev. March 11, 2011; rev. July 8, 2011