

0. TREASURES ... LOST and FOUND - Story Preface

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Thomas Jefferson's birthplace, at his family's Shadwell (Virginia) home, burned to the ground in 1770. This is an engraving of the Shadwell mill. Engraving by Lossing & Barritt. Online, courtesy New York Public Library Digital Gallery; Digital ID: 1253619. EDITOR'S NOTE: American railways did not exist when Jefferson was born and lived at Shadwell.

Shadwell, the Jefferson family home, burned in 1770. Little of value survived, except Tom's violin. Nothing is left to examine except a marker, although archeologists have worked at the site over the years.

Because Jefferson himself rarely wrote about his personal life, the record of his childhood is sketchy. Willard Randall notes:

Jefferson had a lifelong aversion to revealing his personal life except to members of his own family, and then only discreetly, and he was always silent about his grief at the time of death of people close to him...Most other traces of his childhood were obliterated when Shadwell burned in 1770, destroying ...almost all trace of the crucial formative period of Thomas Jefferson's childhood and youth and the development of his extraordinarily complex personality. (Thomas Jefferson: A Life, page 13.)

Throughout his long life, Jefferson lost many people who were close to him. Death, in the eighteenth century, was a frequent family visitor. His father, for example, died suddenly - in 1757 - when Tom was only fourteen.

Peter left "to my son Thomas" his treasured possessions: land, books and mathematical instruments. He also left explicit instructions about Tom's immediate future. The boy was to receive "a thorough classical education."

Acting on her husband's wishes, Mrs. Jefferson sent her son to the log-cabin Classical School for Boys, run by Dublin-born clergyman James Maury. Tom lived at the Albemarle County school for two years, coming home on weekends and holidays.

In addition to Greek, Latin, and the classics, Rev. Maury taught his students about manners and morals. Beyond the typical subjects of math, history and literature, Maury had a keen interest in geography - and in a special river, someplace west of Virginia. Before Jefferson became his pupil, Maury had written:

Some persons were to be sent in search of that river Missouri, if that be the right name of it, in order to discover whether it had any communication with the Pacific Ocean.

The "French and Indian War" interfered with such exploratory plans, but the desire to discover a passage to the west coast continued.

Who can say how long Jefferson pondered Rev. Maury's comments - and his own father's role as a map maker - before he personally sent Lewis and Clarke to explore the Missouri River?

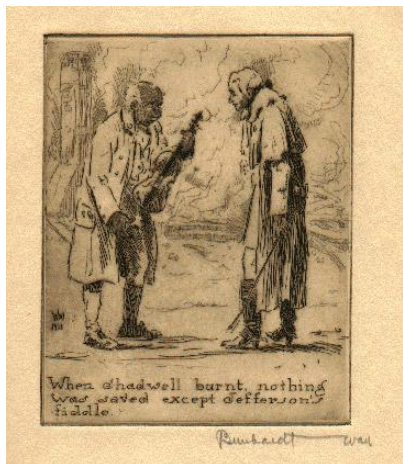
See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/TREASURES-...-LOST-and-FOUND-Thomas-Jefferson>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/TREASURES-...-LOST-and-FOUND-Thomas-Jefferson>

Media Stream



Thomas Jefferson's Violin - Survived Fire

Online, courtesy Dorothy B. Sloan Books.

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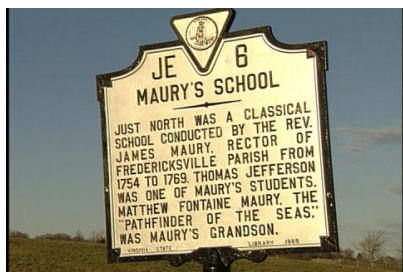


Shadwell - Thomas Jefferson's Birthplace

Image online, courtesy monticello.org website.

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Maury's School - Historic Marker

Image online, courtesy the Virginia Center for Digital History.

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