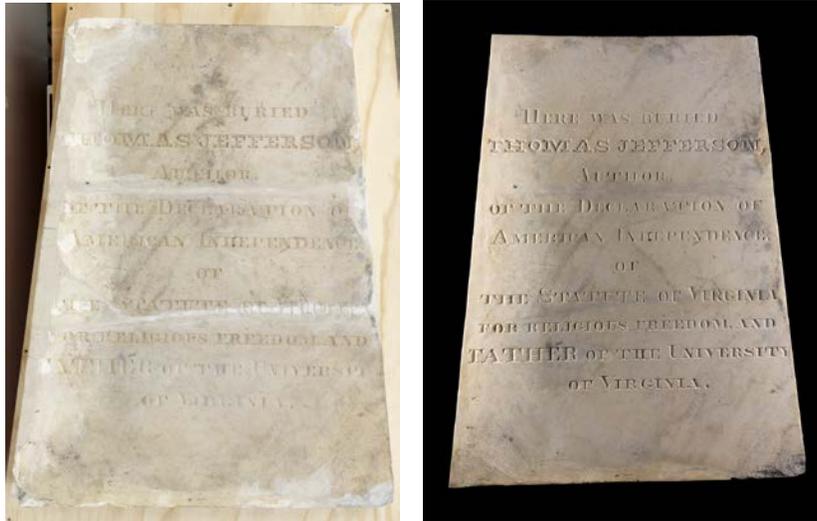


Analysis and Treatment of Thomas Jefferson's Fire-Damaged Marble Tombstone Plaque



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The original gravemarker for Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), third U.S. President, was cut and engraved according to his instructions and erected in 1833 in the graveyard of his Virginia home, Monticello. In 1883 the scandalous condition of the gravemarker led to a congressional appropriation for a replacement copy at Monticello, and the original gravemarker was given by Jefferson's heirs to the University of Missouri in Columbia. In 1892 the building it was stored in was destroyed by fire. Since then, the plaque was displayed only on special occasions, encased in a wooden box.

The poor condition of the plaque and a proposal for a new display case led to its transport to MCI for treatment. Examination coupled with historic photographs made clear that the plaque had been badly damaged by the fire and quickly (and not very well) repaired afterward. At MCI, the plaque was surface cleaned, disassembled, reassembled, and consolidated. Among analyses by MCI staff were sourcing of the marble using stable isotope analysis, thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) of calcined samples to determine the extent of recarbonation, and scanning x-ray fluorimetry (XRF) as well as scanning electron microscopy accompanied by hyperspectral analysis to identify elements in soiling and accretions on the surface. After treatment, the plaque was also photographed for photogrammetric reproduction of two exemplars by the Smithsonian's Office of Exhibits Central.

MCI
*Topics in
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10:45 am
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