

**Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters**<http://tjrs.monticello.org/>

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Providing users with accurate and authentic transcription of archival material is the mission of Monticello's *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters* project, the "online companion" to *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series* project that published Jefferson's early nineteenth-century correspondence.<sup>1</sup> The digital project covers the span of three centuries, but heavily focuses on 1809 to 1830, with previously unpublished material to or from Jefferson and his family that touches on social, economic, and scientific (e.g., agriculture) topics.<sup>2</sup> The project contains an important resource for Early American research, the database. While the project's database is available to everyone, it is geared more towards the student and scholar; these user groups would be familiar with this type of database in seeking text about the founding father as it emulates library databases such as JSTOR in function and form with tools like keyword and field searching menus.

Although users can complete successful searches without database assistance as many database users do, it is more effective and efficient to read the search tips, definitions, and the guidelines not only on the project site itself but also the project "About" page on the *Retirement Series* site. The extensive rules and guidelines can be cumbersome and even intimidating to first-time researchers, such as college students, and possibly inhibit use from this demographic. However, with frequent use and knowledge of the research topic, a researcher can become an advanced user of the project, as the resource strives for pinpointed accuracy in search results. For example, searching for Jefferson quotes about slavery from 1771 to 1791, with a keyword of "emancipation" yields two results that mention the possibility and concerns about emancipating slaves, with linked subject headings for the broader category of slavery. The project is a database of specificity, allowing the user to find particular quotes and letters on a variety of topics relevant to Jefferson and his family.

The project strives to ensure the most accurate results by taking a "literal approach to transcription" that includes illegible, missing, or misspelled words by today's standards in the original material, but the content is explained in the sub notes.<sup>3</sup> A

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<sup>1</sup> "The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series," *Monticello.org*, accessed May 1, 2018, <https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/tjpapers>.

<sup>2</sup> "About Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters," *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, accessed May 1, 2018, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/content/about-jefferson-quotes-family-letters>.

<sup>3</sup> "About Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters," *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters*, accessed May 1, 2018, <http://tjrs.monticello.org/content/about-jefferson-quotes-family-letters>.

user can find specific texts through a keyword search or use the drop-down menu that refines by date, topic category, recipient, repository collection, and/or author. The user can also limit their search pool by letter or quote further explained with a hovering tool. The hover tool enhances the project's aim for clarity and understanding. For example, places such as towns or counties are underlined, and hovering the mouse makes a pop-up appear to clarify the place as it is or known presently. The hovering tool also identifies people under a nickname or abbreviation. All search results have a printing option with another added benefit of a linked PDF copy of the original document, if it has been digitized and provided. Not all features are as effective; the montage of portraits of Jefferson's family and friends and pictures of correspondence displayed on various pages could be a supplemental tool for the text, but they are not able to be enlarged and have small descriptions which render them as an aesthetic choice rather than as usable material. One remedy would be to take advantage of the hover tool one can use for letters and quotes for a clearer explanation of the individual renderings and paintings. Despite this shortcoming, the *Jefferson Quotes and Family Letters* project provides a trusted source of Jefferson and his family's thoughts and life events, as well as a lens into Virginia life while also teaching researchers how to search web scale discovery systems on a case study level, as the database searches across multiple repositories.