

"Saving Monticello"

Presented by author Marc Leepson

April 11, 2020, 3:00 pm

New Market Area Library

When Thomas Jefferson died on the Fourth of July 1826 -- the nation's fiftieth birthday -- he was more than \$100,000 in debt. Forced to sell thousands of acres of his lands and nearly all his furniture and artwork, in 1831 his heirs bid a final goodbye to Monticello itself. The house their illustrious patriarch had lovingly designed in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, his beloved "essay in architecture," was sold to the highest bidder.

Saving Monticello offers the first complete post-Jefferson history of this American icon and reveals the amazing story of how one Jewish family saved the house that became a family home to them for 89 years -- longer than it ever was to the Jefferson's. With a dramatic narrative sweep across generations, Marc Leepson vividly recounts the turbulent saga of this fabled estate. Twice the house came to the brink of ruin, and twice it was saved, by two different generations of the Levy family. United by a fierce love of country, they venerated the Founding Fathers for establishing a religiously tolerant and democratic nation where their family had thrived since the founding of the Georgia colony in 1733, largely free of the persecutions and prejudices of the Old World.

Rich with memorable, larger-than-life characters, beginning with Thomas Jefferson himself, the story is cast with such figures as James Turner Barclay, a messianic visionary who owned the house from 1831 to 1834; the fiery Uriah Levy, he of the six courts-martial and teenage wife; the colorful Confederate Colonel Benjamin Franklin Ficklin, who controlled Monticello during the Civil War; and the eccentric, high-living, deal-making egoist Jefferson Monroe Levy. Pulling back the veil of history to reveal a story we thought we knew, Saving Monticello establishes this most American of houses as more truly reflective of the American experience than has ever been fully appreciated.

Marc Leepson is a journalist, historian and the author of nine books. A former staff writer for Congressional Quarterly in Washington, D.C., he has been a free-lance writer since 1986. He has written for many newspapers and magazines. From 2008-2015 he taught U.S. history at Lord Fairfax Community College in Warrenton,

Virginia. He graduated from George Washington University in 1967. After serving in the U.S. Army from 1967-69, including a year in the Vietnam War, he received his honorable discharge and went on to earn a Master's Degree in history from George Washington University in 1971. He lives in Loudoun County, Virginia.

The Richmond Times Dispatch says of Leepson's book: "*Diligently researched, copiously noted, "Saving Monticello" is a work of historical importance, a valuable addition to Jeffersoniana and Jewish-American history, and a cautionary tale of historic preservation.*"

This program is free of charge. For more information or questions, contact Bev Butterfield at (540) 335-5396.