

A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA'S FIRST LIBRARY
AND ITS JEFFERSONIAN CATALOGS

by

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IN 1984, a manuscript catalog of Thomas Jefferson's library resurfaced at the Library of Congress. The rediscovery was announced by Douglas L. Wilson, who proposed that the catalog—dated 1823—reestablished Jefferson's system of library organization, lost after a fair copy of Jefferson's catalog disappeared with the transfer of his library to Congress in 1815. This 1823 manuscript filled an archival void in Jefferson studies and advanced a new and enduring view of Jefferson's book collecting habits in the final decade of his life (1815-26). In a subsequent analysis and edition of the rediscovered catalog, written with James Gilreath, Wilson affirmed that the document in question was a copy of Jefferson's catalog drawn up to reestablish the arrangement of his books, "in his own order."¹

Gilreath and Wilson's account captures the first part of a complex story. In this article, we offer an alternative analysis of the 1823 catalog. Drawing on new materials, including another recently resurfaced Jeffersonian booklist, we argue that the surviving textual, bibliographical, and provenance evidence repositions the 1823 catalog as the originating document of the University of Virginia's library. Not only does the catalog reconstruct the arrangement of Jefferson's

* The evidence examined here was first presented in a talk delivered at the annual meeting of the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia (BSUVA) in March, 2018. We would like to thank the BSUVA for their support. We are grateful in particular for the encouragement, editorial wizardry, and care of David Vander Meulen. We would also like to thank the indefatigable staff of the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia: David Whitesell, Molly Schwartzburg, Regina Rush, Penny White, Heather Riser, George Riser, Joseph Azizi, Gayle Cooper, and Krystal Appiah. This project would not have been possible without their patient assistance. Our research was supported at various points by the Kenan Endowment Fund of the Academical Village, the Jefferson Trust, and the Robert H. Smith International Center for Thomas Jefferson Studies.

1. The first announcement of Douglas Wilson's discovery appeared in James Gilreath's review of E. Millicent Sowerby's *Catalogue of the Library of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, DC: The Library of Congress, 1952). See Gilreath, "Sowerby Revirescent and Revised," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 78, no. 2 (1984): 219-32. There, Gilreath observes that "Wilson's [forthcoming] article offers another document which contains a strikingly different order for many chapters [of Jefferson's catalog]" (230). An analysis followed in 1989: *Thomas Jefferson's Library: A Catalogue of Books in His Own Order* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress).