



# The Levy Family and Monticello, 1834-1923: Saving Thomas Jefferson's House

*Melvin I. Urofsky*

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Each year more than a half-million people from around the world visit Monticello, but few realize that Thomas Jefferson's house was also home to the family of U.S. Navy Captain Uriah P. Levy and his nephew Jefferson Monroe Levy, a United States Congressman. Even fewer realize that without the Levy family's stewardship, there might not be a Monticello to visit. Although the Levys literally saved Monticello from ruin--not once, but twice--in the nineteenth century, and actually owned the property longer than Jefferson, the family's vital contributions to preserving Thomas Jefferson's home have been largely ignored or minimized. In a story filled with drama, irony, political wrangling, and legal battles, Professor Melvin I. Urofsky corrects the misconception that a "century of ruin and neglect" marked Monticello between Jefferson's death and the creation of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, the private, nonprofit organization that today owns and operates Monticello.

The story of the Levys and Monticello is a story of the blending of cultures and personalities, of Yankees and Virginians, of Jews and Christians, of city folk and rural people. It is the story of the power of a symbol, and how in America such symbols cut across lines of religion and class and ethnicity. And behind all of this is the towering presence of Thomas Jefferson.

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