

*Lost: One Large Moose*

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE, PERHAPS in Paris, it is possible—just barely possible—that there still exists a set of moose antlers that once belonged to Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States. They would now be nearly 250 years old, but antlers are made of hard stuff; unless burned in a fire, they should have survived. Where are they? They spanned some four to five feet. The moose they came from had been a very large one, and that was the whole reason they were sent to Paris in the first place.

These antlers had once adorned the head of a moose living in the woods of Vermont. Jefferson, when American minister to France, went to great expense to have them imported to France. When last seen, they were part of the collections of the royal natural history museum, the Cabinet du Roi, in the Jardin des Plantes, having been sent there by Jefferson on October 1, 1787. But they are not there now. Perhaps they were lost, destroyed, or “borrowed” during the upheavals of the French Revolution. Were they ever formally added into the collections? Nobody knows.

The antlers arrived at Le Havre from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, via Southampton, England, in a large crate and were delivered to the Hôtel de Langeac, the rather grand house that Jefferson maintained on the Champs-Élysées. He kept them for only a few days. Although he had spent forty-five English pounds to obtain them, he gave them away almost immediately. Also in the crate were the bones and skin of another American moose, together with “the horns of the Caribou, the elk, the deer, the spiked horned buck, and the Roebuck of America.” All were presented to the royal collections; all are now lost. In fact, the moose skin arrived with most of the fur missing and possibly was not worth keeping anyway.