

James Monroe Moves In To Governor's Mansion!



On February 13, 1811, during his fourth and last term as Governor of Virginia, James Monroe signed legislation authorizing construction of the gubernatorial residence known today as the Virginia Executive Mansion. When completed in 1813, the official residence was first occupied by Governor James Barbour and his family. As the second governor's residence constructed in the United States and the oldest such building still in use, it has been the home of 54 Virginia governors and their families. Although Monroe lived and worked in an earlier official residence on the same site, and played a critical role in creation of the successor building, he never lived in the Executive Mansion.

Until now.

On February 16, 2012, James Monroe finally "moved in" to the mansion in the form of his portrait painted by Rembrandt Peale. The painting was installed in the state dining room as part of the building's two-year bicentennial observance. Monroe's likeness replaces that of Queen Elizabeth I, which had been displayed in the dining room for decades.

James Monroe Museum Director Scott Harris, Curator Jarod Kearney, and Bowley Scholar intern Emilie Kracen were on hand to assist art handlers from Ely, Inc. and staff members from the Executive Mansion and the Library of Virginia with the installation. Measuring roughly four feet by five feet, the painting required many pairs of hands to be safely lifted and set on its hanging hooks.

The $\frac{3}{4}$ -length seated portrait of James Monroe, painted ca. 1817-1825 by Rembrandt Peale (1778-1860), is thought to be based on an earlier bust-length portrait of Monroe painted by Peale from life.



L-R: Bowley Scholar Emilie Kracen; Tom Camden, Director of Special Collections, Library of Virginia; Maureen McDonnell, First Lady of Virginia; JMMML Director Scott Harris; JMMML Curator Jarod Kearney (Courtesy Kathy Scott, Virginia Executive Mansion)

In his PhD dissertation at the University of Delaware entitled *The Portraiture of James Monroe, 1758-1831*, (published in 2005 shortly after his premature death from leukemia) David Randolph Meschutt noted the following about the large painting:

"The earliest record of the three-quarter length is a receipt dated December 16, 1893, recording its purchase by the Reverend Roswell Randall Hoes, the husband of Monroe's great-granddaughter Rose Gouverneur Hoes, from S. H. & H. Chapman, 'Numismatists and Antiquaries' of Philadelphia . . . [It] was inherited in 1933 by Gouverneur and Laurence Gouverneur Hoes from their mother . . . and Laurence inherited his older brother's half-interest of the portrait in 1943. The portrait remained in his possession and later in that of his first wife, Ingrid Westesson Hoes of Washington, DC, until her death in 1985, at which time it came to the James Monroe Museum in Fredericksburg."

The likeness of James Monroe created by Peale in both the small and large portraits has been widely used in historical and biographical publications, and was engraved for the regular issue United States Post Office five-cent stamp in 1958, the bicentennial of his birth.

To see a slide show documenting installation of the portrait, as well as other facts about the Virginia Executive Mansion, visit <http://www.executivemansion.virginia.gov/MansionEvents/>.