



The James Monroe Museum and Memorial Library, located in historic downtown Fredericksburg, Virginia, is the largest repository in the country for artifacts and documents related to the fifth President of the United States. The public career of James Monroe (April 28, 1758-July 4, 1831) ranged from distinguished service in the American Revolution to two presidential terms. In between, he served in virtually all branches of local, state, and national government.

James Monroe was born on April 28, 1758, in Westmoreland County, Virginia, to Spence and Elizabeth Monroe. Among his early schoolmates was future U.S. Chief Justice John Marshall. In 1776, at age 18, Monroe left his studies at the College of William and Mary to accept a commission in the 3rd Virginia Infantry Regiment. He saw combat over the next two years (including the Battle of Trenton, in which he was wounded), endured the grim winter encampment of 1777-78 at Valley Forge, and was promoted three times from lieutenant to lieutenant-colonel.

From the 1780s to the 1820s, Monroe held offices that included membership in the Virginia Council of State (1782); Continental Congress (1783-86); and Virginia House of Delegates (1787-1790); U.S. Senator (1790-94); U.S. Minister to France (1794-96) and Great Britain (1803-07); Governor of Virginia (four terms, elected in 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1811); U.S. Secretary of State (1811-16) and Secretary of War (1812-13 and 1814-15, concurrently as Secretary of State).

Monroe's two terms in the White House (1817-1825) were so free of partisanship and strife that they were called the "Era of Good Feeling." During his presidency, he made extensive tours of northern and southern regions of the country (1817 and 1819); signed the Missouri Compromise to deal with the growing sectional divide over slavery (1820); granted diplomatic recognition to emerging South American Republics (1823-24); and promulgated the Monroe Doctrine, which declared the western hemisphere closed to further European colonization (annual message to Congress, 1823).

James Monroe married Elizabeth Kortright (1768-1830) of New York on February 16, 1786. Their long and happy marriage included three children: Eliza Monroe (1786-1840); James Spence Monroe (1799-1800); and Maria Hester Monroe (1802-1850). The family enjoyed a close bond, and stayed together for most of James Monroe's career, including diplomatic service abroad.

Monroe died at the New York home of his daughter Maria Gouverneur on July 4, 1831. An estimated 70,000 people witnessed his funeral procession to a gravesite in the New York City Marble Cemetery. In 1858 his remains were transferred to Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, and laid to rest in an ornate iron Gothic tomb that is one of the cemetery's most well-known memorials.



The James Monroe Museum and Memorial Library was opened in 1927 by Rose de Chine Gouverneur Hoes, James Monroe's great-granddaughter. Learning that the Fredericksburg property Monroe had owned as a young lawyer from 1786 to 1788 was about to be demolished for expansion of an adjacent gas station, she bought the lot and the old buildings situated there and used them to display her personal collection of Monroe family furniture, clothing, decorative arts, books and documents.

Rose's son Laurence Gouverneur Hoes dedicated the next 50 years of his life to expanding the collection and adding to the museum's physical space. Upon his death, Laurence ceded the museum and its collection to the Commonwealth of Virginia, and it is now administered by the University of Mary Washington.

Highlights of the collection include the Louis XVI Secretary that is believed to be the desk on which Monroe penned his famous Doctrine; a furlough signed by Monroe at Valley Forge; jewelry belonging to Monroe's fashionable wife Elizabeth, who was known by the French as "la belle Americaine;" and a fully-restored 1810 Astor pianoforte that was a favorite of the Monroes' younger daughter Maria Hester.

Today, the James Monroe Museum and Memorial Library is dedicated to the study, interpretation and presentation of the life and times of the fifth President of the United States. Its mission is also to trace the social, political and intellectual influence of James Monroe and to present it within the context of his life through exhibitions, publications, scholarly presentations, community events, and educational programs. A membership organization, the Friends of the James Monroe Museum, assists the museum in this mission.

As part of the University of Mary Washington, the museum is a valuable resource for students in the university's nationally-recognized historic preservation degree program. Student interns have opportunities to work closely with staff on all aspects of museum operations. The museum and its collections are also available to students and professors for specific class research projects and workshops.

Among the museum's annual community events is the James Monroe Lecture. Founded in 1988 with the support from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy and co-sponsored by the University of Mary Washington departments of History and Historic Preservation, the lecture brings a prominent historian to UMW each fall to speak on topics related to Monroe's life and career. Previous Monroe Lecturers include White House curators Betty C. Monkman, and William G. Allman, and noted presidential scholar Richard Norton Smith.

The museum is also dedicated to conserving its valuable collection, so that future generations can learn from it. In 2009, the conservation of the entire 48-piece Monroe costume collection was completed. The costumes – which include waistcoats worn by Monroe as a student at the College of William and Mary, the suit he wore while at the Court of Napoleon to negotiate the Louisiana Purchase, and Mrs. Monroe's elaborate 1786 wedding gown – provide an unprecedented glimpse into the personalities and daily life of the Monroe family.

The James Monroe Museum and Memorial Library is a National Historic Landmark owned by the Commonwealth of Virginia and administered by the University of Mary Washington. For hours of operation, directions, and other information, call (540) 654-1043, or visit www.jamesmonromemuseum.org.