



What's in Store?

Be sure to stop by the Museum Store for fun and unique gifts to fill those Christmas stockings this month.



For the children on your list you will find an assortment of colonial-era toys such as wooden yo-yos, cup and ball toss, dominoes, pick-up-sticks, wooden spin tops, buzz saws, eagle zipper pulls, compass and spyglass key chains, and more. These are easy on your pocket too; all are priced right about \$5 each.



For the adults on your list check out our stemless James Monroe wineglass (\$5.99), locally-made Virginia-themed bangle bracelet (\$15.95), James Monroe Museum Desk Calendar (\$4.75), Absorbing History Conversation Coaster Set (\$4.75), The Presidents Playing Cards (\$7.90), and the many wax seal and ink writing sets on display starting under \$20.



Whether you are stuffing stockings or just need a quick gift, remember the Museum Store as your holiday shopping destination!

You can find information about other holiday merchandise on our [website](#).

Upcoming Events



Friday, December 1, 6:00-8:00 PM
A Monroe Christmas Holiday Open House
Location: James Monroe Museum

Celebrate the holidays at our annual Open House featuring President James Monroe, seasonal music played on the harp, Elizabeth Monroe at the Monroe family's Astor pianoforte, and a reception with colonial hot chocolate, hot cider, and cookies. While you're here be sure to check out the Museum Store holiday specials!



Saturday, December 2, 9:30 AM-12:00 PM
Deck the Halls
Location: Monroe Hall, room 116, University of Mary Washington

There are still a few tickets left for our beloved annual event Deck the Halls with Fredericksburg's own Jan Williams! Jan will demonstrate how to craft beautiful holiday arrangements from local evergreens and flora. Refreshments are served, and all attendees are entered in a drawing to win the decorations created during the presentation! Advance registration is required. Tickets are \$30/person or \$25/person for Friends of The James Monroe Museum. Please contact our Public Programs Coordinator [Lynda Allen](#) to purchase tickets.



Friday, January 5, 6:00-8:00 PM
Winter Fireside Songs and Tales with Eve Watters
Location: James Monroe Museum

Enjoy an all-ages evening of traditional Virginia stories, music, games, and riddles, with harp, dulcimer, and pennywhistle. Musician and storyteller Eve Watters offers charming examples of the music, songs, stories, and other domestic amusements of the era.



Saturday, January 6, 10:00-11:30 AM
The Monroe Cipher
Location: James Monroe Museum

Learn how to write your own coded messages! Heidi Stello, Editorial Assistant for The Papers of James Monroe, shares the secrets of The Monroe Cipher and discusses how ciphers were an essential element of diplomacy in Monroe's time. Family friendly.

[Calendar of Events](#)

This month's featured artifact is a portable writing set owned by James Monroe and likely used during his residency in Fredericksburg. Designed for travel, this set includes a quill, a wooden pen with a metal nib, and a square-sided ink bottle fitted in a leather carrying case. As a fledgling lawyer looking to build a reputation, Monroe navigated the circuit courts of Virginia quite extensively. For example, in a March 20, 1789 letter to Larkin Stanard of Fredericksburg, Monroe writes of one of his business journeys (original spelling and grammar preserved):

"I sit out Thursday next with Judges Mercer & Parker for the districts of Stanton and Charlotteville."



Writing sets such as this one were essential for the copious traveling Monroe undertook not only during his law career but as a public servant. Epistolary (skilled) letter writing was fundamental to the work Monroe undertook both for official communication and private networking. Indeed, the importance of writing increased dramatically in late 18th century America as road networks expanded and postal services became better regulated. Monroe was well educated in the art of letter writing. His academic career began with enrollment at Campbelltown Academy in Westmoreland County at the age of eleven. When he entered the college of William and Mary at sixteen he was advanced enough to be admitted into the upper division. Monroe's handwriting was often difficult to read, as evidenced by the following note to Daniel Parler, adjutant general of the U.S. Army, on April 25, 1818:

"I send you my decision in the case of Major Hall which, if you can read it, you will have copied and carried into immediate effect."

Writing instruments of the late 18th century included quill pens, metal nib pens, and graphite pencils. Quill pens were created by first selecting a strong flight feather. The plume was typically cut back, then the end sliced off at an angle. A slit was cut vertically into the long angle of the end, and concavely shaped on either side to form the nib. The favored style of writing, known as roundhand, necessitated a sharp point to create a fine line on the upstroke and a wider line on the downstroke. To this end, quill pens had to be continuously sharpened to refine the point, which helped give rise to the prevalence of "penknives" or folding knives. Metal pens had similar nib shapes with the vertical slit and concave sides. They were a bit stiffer than quill pens, but eliminated the necessity of sharpening. Graphite pencils, although available during the late 18th century, were often little more than sticks wrapped in string or in wooden holders. Elizabeth Monroe would have used a graphite pencil on her ivory memo pad exhibited in the Museum's Orientation Gallery.



The most common ink used during Monroe's law career was iron gall ink. Made from iron sulfates, gum, and the gall of oak or other trees, the ink was durable and locally available. Inkmaker William Allason of Falmouth, Virginia, writes in his Letter Book (1770-1787) the following iron gall ink recipe:

“Arabic, three ounces; vitrol (green vitrol) two ounces; Galls, three ounces; white wine two pints and a half; beat the Galls put them with the wine into an earthen vessel, set it in the sun for six days, stir them every day twice or thrice, then sit it over a moderate fire for a half a day or a day; then strain it having dissolved some vitrol and Gum in a little wine, put it into it, then set it in the sun three days more, and it is made. To keep it from freezing put into it a little aqua vitae - You may use Rain or River water instead of wine.”

Iron gall ink fades from black to a lighter brown, which is why many of the letters written by Monroe have a brownish hue today.

We invite you to come see James Monroe's writing set in our Featured Artifact case!

[Visit the Museum!](#)

Winter Hours, and Closings

The Museum will shift to our winter schedule for the months of December, January, and February: Monday through Saturday 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM and Sunday 1:00 - 4:00 PM. The Museum will be closed on December 24 and 25, and January 1.



It seems hard to imagine with the 50-degree weather in Virginia at the moment, but winter weather will arrive soon! For weather-related closures we will post updates on our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page. You can also consult local media outlets [Fredericksburg.com](#) and [B101.5](#).



The James Monroe Museum

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