

The James Monroe Papers 1772-1836



*Guide to the Scholarly Resources
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Introduction

James Monroe (1758–1831), born and educated in Virginia, was a soldier, a statesman, and the fifth president of the United States. He attended the College of William and Mary but left at age eighteen to join the Virginia regiment of the Continental Army as a lieutenant. Although he was wounded at the Battle of Trenton, he went on to become an aide to the Earl of Sterling with the rank of major. In 1780 he returned to Virginia, where he studied law under Governor Thomas Jefferson until 1783. The two men remained close friends until Jefferson's death in 1826.

Monroe's political life began with his election to the Virginia legislature in 1782. In the following year he was elected to the Congress of the Confederation, the national governing body created under the Articles of Confederation. When his term expired he returned to the Virginia legislature. In 1788 he was elected to the state convention to ratify the Constitution, which he opposed because he feared that it gave too much power to the federal government.

Monroe lost when he ran against James Madison for election to the First Congress. However, when a vacancy arose in the Senate in 1790, Monroe was chosen to fill it. Critical of Washington's administration, he opposed a number of presidential appointments as well as the establishment of the Bank of the United States. He left the Senate in 1794 to serve as minister to France, assigned the task of quieting French suspicions about American treaty negotiations with Great Britain. In the end he pleased neither the French government nor the American administration and, upon his return, published *A View of the Conduct of the Executive, in the Foreign Affairs of the United States*.

A term as governor of Virginia from 1799 until December 1802 briefly interrupted Monroe's diplomatic career. Early in 1803, President Thomas Jefferson sent him to France and then to Spain to negotiate the Louisiana Purchase and to determine the exact boundaries of Florida. The negotiations with Spain were particularly vexing. Equally difficult, however, was Monroe's next assignment in 1805 in London, where he was sent to straighten out the matter of seizure of neutral American vessels and the impressment of American seamen by Great Britain.

After his return, Monroe allowed himself to be put forward as a presidential candidate in the election of 1808, supported by several more radical members of the Republican Party, but he lost badly to Federalist James Madison. In 1809, Jefferson convinced Madison to offer Monroe the governorship of upper Louisiana, which Monroe refused. In 1810, he returned to the Virginia legislature and in January 1811 became governor for a second time. Then, in March 1811, Madison, in need of political allies in Virginia, appointed Monroe secretary of state.

Among the difficulties that Monroe faced in his new position were solving the problems posed by American neutrality regarding European wars and ironing out relations with Great Britain. In the latter, Monroe failed, and in June 1812 war was declared. Although the Orders in Council, which restricted neutral trade with Europe and allowed stopping and searching American vessels on the high seas, were eventually withdrawn, Monroe continued to justify the war on the grounds of impressments. However, he was willing to accept Russian mediation when it was offered and supported the Treaty of Ghent which ended the war. After serving as both secretary of state and secretary of war from August 1814 to March 1817 and with several

dramatic military victories to his credit (including those at Plattsburg and New Orleans), Monroe was in line for the presidency.

Monroe won the 1816 election by a narrow margin. Among the domestic issues confronting the administration during his two terms were the questions of internal improvements and of slavery. Although Monroe vetoed a bill calling for federal funding and oversight of improvements on the Cumberland Road, he issued a statement arguing that the federal government should have limited power to raise money for public works that would affect the common defense and the general welfare. Monroe's administration also presided over the famous Missouri compromise of 1820. Although Monroe had southern sympathies, he did not enter into the bitter congressional debate about the Missouri bill until it came to him for signature. He would have vetoed any bill that subjected Missouri to admission under restriction; the bill he signed admitted Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state. Slavery was to be excluded from Louisiana Purchase lands north of latitude 36°30'.

In 1820, Monroe was reelected with all but one electoral vote. It was during his annual message to Congress on December 2, 1823, that he presented the first version of what would later become known as the Monroe Doctrine: that American continents were "not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers." His declaration was prompted by Russian claims to all land that extended 100 miles into the Pacific above the 51st parallel and also by claims by France and Spain, which, in the face of South American and Latin American rebellions, were attempting to reassert their power in the Western Hemisphere. Although the Monroe Doctrine was invoked infrequently in the decades immediately following its articulation, it became one of the most powerful and functional statements of American foreign policy.

After leaving the presidency, Monroe returned to Virginia and was elected to the state's constitutional convention in 1829, becoming its presiding officer. In the spring of 1830, after his wife's death, he moved to New York City to live with his daughter and her husband. He died there on July 4, 1831.

Scope and Content

The James Monroe Papers consist of two series, **Correspondence (1772–1836)** and **Writings (1785–1831)**. The **Correspondence** is largely political, focusing on constitutional issues; Monroe's tenure as minister plenipotentiary to France; Virginia politics; treaty negotiations with Great Britain, France and Spain; and also domestic issues including slave trade and the spread of slavery in the United States, internal improvements, and the Bank of the United States. Also discussed are foreign policy and war issues concurrent with Monroe's duties as secretary of state and secretary of war during the War of 1812 and as president of the United States. Correspondents include John Quincy Adams, John Jacob Astor, Andrew Jackson, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Timothy Pickering, and Fulwar Skipwith.

The **Writings** contain manuscripts of Monroe's autobiography and also of *The People, The Sovereign*; *Some Observations on the Constitution*; and *A View of the Conduct of the Executive*. Also included are notes, drafts of speeches and articles on foreign and domestic policy, draft of treaties with Great Britain and Spain, a rough draft of a proposed Bill of Rights, and copies of Monroe's cipher and the Jefferson-Monroe cipher.

Reel Contents

Reel No.	Box No.	Folder/Contents
Correspondence (1772-1836)		
1	1	Correspondence re gift and purchase of these papers to NYPL in 1899 Jefferson-Monroe cipher (transcript) Miscellaneous newspaper and auction catalog clippings Monroe Papers, 1772-1781 Monroe Papers, 1783-1785 Monroe Papers, 20 Jul 1785-11 May 1787, negotiations with Spain Monroe Papers, 1786 Copy of the "Virginia Plan" submitted to the Federal Convention, as adopted by Committee of the Whole, 13 Jun 1787 Monroe Papers, 1791-1792 Speech on opening the doors of the Senate Monroe Papers, 1794
1	2	Monroe Papers, 1795
1	3	Monroe Papers, 1796-1801
2	4	Monroe Papers, 1802-1805
2	5	Monroe Papers, 1806 Great Britain, 1806 Treaty, signed 31 Dec 1806 Notes, memoranda, etc. Monroe Papers, 1807-1808
2	6	Monroe Papers, 1809-Jul 1813
3	7	Monroe Papers, Aug 1813-1815
3	8	Monroe Papers, 1816-Oct 1817
3	9	Monroe Papers, Nov 1817-Jun 1819
4	10	Monroe Papers, Jul 1819-Apr 1822
4	11	Monroe Papers, May 1822-Jul 1824

Reel No.	Box No.	Folder/Contents
4	12	Monroe Papers, Aug 1824–1836 Removal of Monroe's body from New York to Richmond, Virginia, 1 Jul 1858
5	13	Miscellaneous papers and undated letters Assistance to General and Madame Lafayette while minister to France; see autobiography Letters to Monroe arranged alphabetically by writers Undated letters and papers, A-E Undated letters and papers, G-K Undated letters and papers, L-R Undated letters and papers, S Undated letters and papers, T-V Miscellaneous, undated, no names, etc. Undated letters and papers, writers unknown

Writings (1785–1831)

Papers and Drafts

5	13	Grant of 164 acres to "Thomas and Zacheus Sherley" bearing signature of James Monroe, governor of Virginia, dated 23 Nov 1801 Relations with Spain, 1819–1820 Florida and South America Notes, drafts, etc. by Monroe Brackenridge, "Notes on Spanish-American affairs" Notes on constitutional and like subjects by Monroe Treaty of Ghent, 1814 Draft of part of a speech (in Virginia Convention?) on the government under the Confederation and that under the proposed Constitution; draft of part of a paper, or speech, relating to the state of nature and the social compact theories of government Draft of a paper, or address, relating to the Constitution, government, and history of the United States and the Democratic-Republican Party Notes, drafts, etc. relating to claims against United States for compensation for outlays during Monroe's European missions Rough draft of proposed Bill of Rights, removed from S. J. Tilden Papers, undated France—Constitution of 1795, "Notes on the Subject of a Constitution" "Mr. Monroe's Cypher," undated (used during Monroe's mission to Europe, 1803), <i>see</i> Irving to Monroe, 2 Mar 1805 Monroe Papers, autographs of Monroe Sketch of Thomas Paine "Blotter" used by Monroe as president in 1818, as shown by dates of various referred to events
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Reel No.	Box No.	Folder/Contents
5	13	<p>“A View of the Political Situation of the United States at the Commencement of the French Revolution”; “Some Political Notes”</p> <p>Resolutions (several drafts) relating to foreign policy of the United States, introduced by Monroe in the Virginia House of Delegates, with part of a draft of a speech apparently relating to same subject. Date probably from 1808, when Monroe was a candidate for president and a member of the Virginia House, or from 1810, when he was again a member.</p> <p>Draft (incomplete?) of a paper on the Federalist Party</p> <p>“A Plan of Executive Government for the University of Virginia”</p> <p>Internal improvements; veto of Cumberland Road Act, 4 May 1822</p> <p>“Views on Subject of Internal Improvements” (scattered sheets of drafts)</p> <p>Miscellaneous notes by Monroe (cannot be classed by subject or date)</p> <p>Missions to England, France, and Spain, 1803–1807</p> <p>Defence of Conduct</p> <p>Notes and drafts of letters, articles for newspapers, etc.</p> <p>Letter to speaker of U.S. House of Representatives, 20 Nov 1830; petition of Albemarle County, Virginia, both relating to Monroe’s claims against government</p> <p>French mission, 1794–1796; miscellaneous</p> <p>Foreign affairs—France and England; miscellaneous notes</p> <p>Draft relating to relations between France and the United States and politics</p>

Letterbook, Monroe and Others, 1777–1802

Notes on Aristotle
 Journey to Spain, 1804–1805
 Diary (Mar 1804–May 1805)
 Letterbook (Nov 1804–Jul 1805)
 Report on U.S. trade with West Indies

Autobiography of James Monroe

6	13	<p>Writings, autobiography to 1799</p> <p>Writings, autobiography to 1799 (copy of a few pages apparently by Samuel L. Gouverneur)</p> <p>Writings, autobiography, European mission, 1803 (4 folders)</p> <p>Writings, autobiography, European mission, 1803, Spain, 1803–1804 (2 folders)</p> <p>Writings, autobiography (notes and scattered sheets)</p> <p>Facsimiles</p> <p>Transcripts</p> <p>Photostats of originals not owned by NYPL</p> <p>Clippings from auction catalogs</p>
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Reel No.	Box No.	Folder/Contents
		<i>The People, The Sovereign</i>
6	13	Writings, <i>The People, The Sovereign</i> (drafts) (7 folders) Writings, <i>The People, The Sovereign</i> (notes and scattered drafts) (3 folders)
		<i>Some Observations on the Constitution</i>
		Writings, <i>Some Observations on the Constitution I</i> (May ? 1788) (one complete draft and incomplete drafts or copies)
		<i>A View of the Conduct of the Executive</i>
		Writings, <i>A View of the Conduct of the Executive</i> (copy and original draft) (typewritten copies, 5 folders)