

Society Member to Supervise the Building of James Monroe’s Birthplace House

Charles Belfield, a councilor of the War of 1812 Society in the Commonwealth of Virginia has been designated as the supervisor to build the James Monroe birthplace house and out buildings in Westmoreland County, VA. This is a part of the James Monroe Birthplace Park that is also soon to be developed. Below is what was placed in the local newspaper





Charles Belfield showing drawings of the James Monroe replica house to tavern guild members.

History recreated

Exact replica James Monroe to be built by local artisans

BY COLSTON NEWTON

The Northern Neck, particularly Westmoreland County, enjoys being the birthplace of presidents George Washington and James Monroe and General Robert E. Lee, but only Monroe was a true Northern Neck. The others left Westmoreland as babies. Monroe, the fifth president, lived on his family's farm at Monroe Hall near Oak Grove until he was 16 years old and went to college.

The James Monroe Memorial Foundation means to gain more notice for the only true native

son of the Northern Neck to be president and plans to do it, in large part, by building an exact replica of the house Monroe's father, Spence, built at Monroe Hall.

Foundation board member Charles Belfield was handed the job of getting the house built in early July. He already had plans drafted by Colonial Williamsburg and decided, to the extent possible, he would have Northern Neck craftsmen build the house.

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Once the house is up, attention will turn to recreating outbuildings and barns integral to the original farm. There will also be a walking path through a park demonstrating the sort of farming Monroe and his forebears engaged in.

Belfield said he wants the house to be as authentic as possible and asked the guilds help.

Roger Amidon of the Tavern blacksmiths said they would be glad to help with fashioning such things as hing-

es and door latches. Mark Payne of the woodworkers guild said the guild couldn't do some things but would be happy to fashion such things as mantle pieces and moulding. Judy Mooers of the Spinners and Weavers noted that her guild could supply such things as coverlets made in the 18th century style and with 18th century designs.

Belfield said that when people hear about the project they are anxious to help. If all goes well, he said he hopes to have the house framed up by next spring.

The authentic house will be a boost to tourism, Belfield thinks.

.Below is a replica he has made of what the home and outbuildings of the original farm will generally look like when completed. This house and farm is adjacent to the current Visitors Center and Museum on the property that visitors can now visit.



Below is extracts from the James Monroe Memorial Foundation website

<http://www.monroefoundation.org/monroe-birthplace.html>

JAMES MONROE BIRTHPLACE PARK, VISITORS CENTER & MUSEUM

4460 James Monroe Highway, Colonial Beach, VA 22443

804-214-9145

Hours of Operation

Memorial Day to Labor Day, Saturday and Sunday from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM

No Charge for Admission. Donations Kindly Accepted.

BACKGROUND

In 1976 the College of William & Mary began the archaeological survey of the James Monroe Birthplace and uncovered the ruins of the Monroe Family Home. Unlike George Washington, whose Westmoreland birthplace is now a National Park, Monroe did not leave the family farm at three years old. James Monroe spent his entire youth working the farm until he left for his education at The College of William & Mary. The archaeological team uncovered a 20' x 58' house foundation which coincided with the known 1845 etchings of the birth home. The archaeological study clearly indicated that James Monroe's beginnings were humble. The family resided in a small four room, rough cut wooden farm house with few outbuildings on a 500 acre farm filled with wetlands.

In 2001 Susan Nelson- Warren Byrd Landscape Architects of Charlottesville were commissioned by the County of Westmoreland, Virginia to prepare a master plan for a multi-phase development of James Monroe's Birthplace site. The county's desire was to create a unique, economical, and attractive park that celebrates the birth and life of our nation's fifth president under the 2nd U.S. Constitution, James Monroe, while providing passive recreation for the local residents.

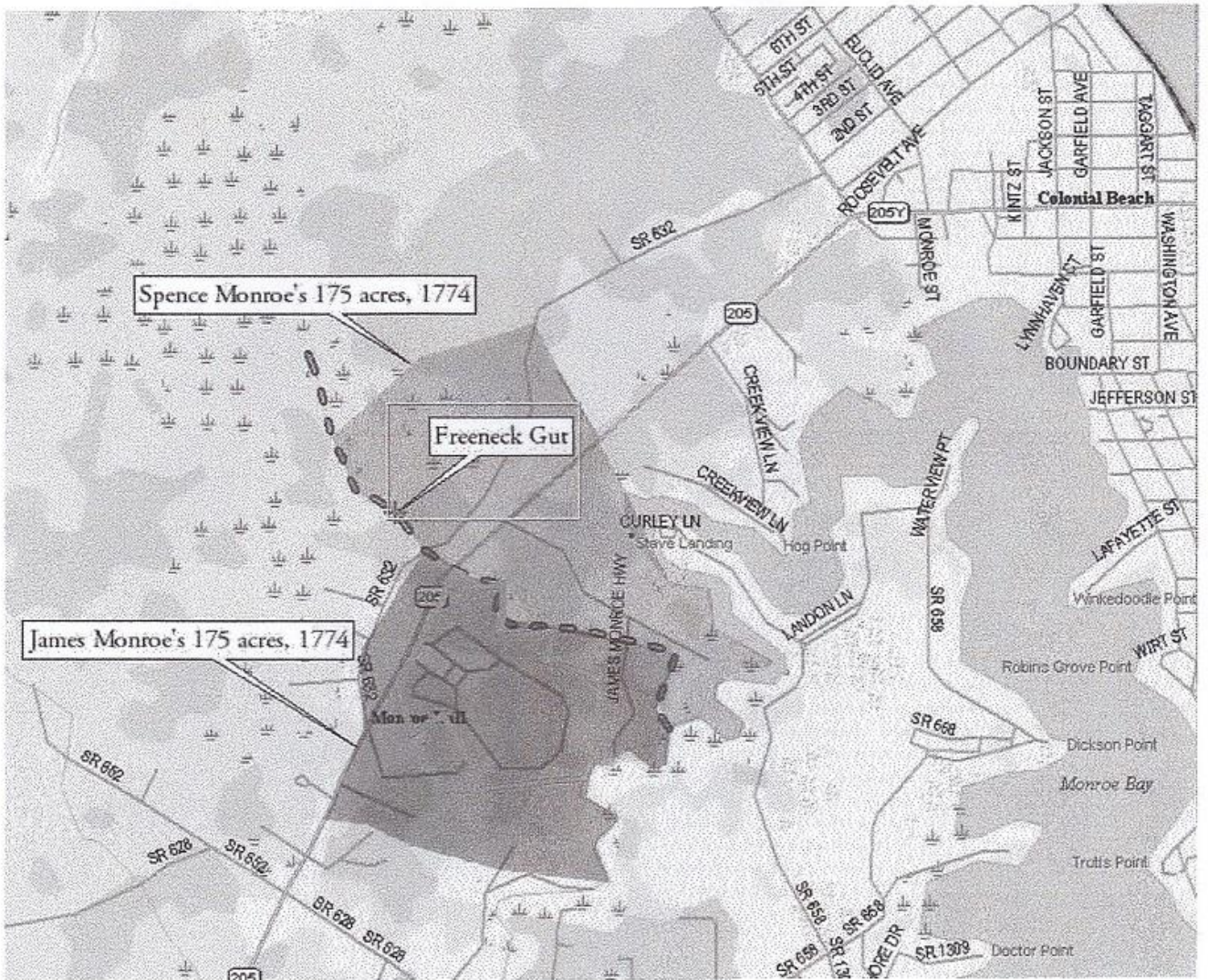


Figure 1. Approximate extent of Monroe birthplace farm in 1774.

The above shows the approximate Boundary of Spence Monroe's Property

The plantation where President James Monroe was born in 1758 consisted of 250 acres extending northwestward from Monroe Creek and lying on both sides of the tributary Freeneck Gut. Through a 1764 purchase, the property grew to 350 acres by the time James Monroe was six years old. Unfortunately, no document prior to 1774 includes a plat, useful boundary description, or even precise acreage. On the other hand, the location and extent of the property in 1758 and 1764 generally can be inferred from various sources. In 1737 Spence Monroe, James Monroe's father, inherited an unspecified amount of land through the will of his grandfather William Monroe (Deeds and Wills 8, pt. 2:471-473).

In 1764 Spence Monroe added to his holdings by purchasing a 100-acre tract from his neighbor Francis Gray (Deeds and Wills 14:298-301). By the time James Monroe and his brother Spence each inherited one-half of the property in 1774, the total acreage stood at 350 acres. James Monroe's portion lay on the south side of the dividing line, described as follows: .beginning at the mouth of Freeneck Gutt, extending up the meanders of the said Gutt to the present Hogpen, from thence a course until it intersects Monroe's line... (Deeds and Wills 16:128). Freeneck Gut runs about 200 feet northeast of the archaeological remains of the Monroe dwelling, flowing eastward into Monroe Creek.

The 250-acre size of the family's plantation when James Monroe was born is inferred by later transactions. Six years after Monroe had left Westmoreland to attend the College of William and Mary and then serve in the Revolutionary War, he described the old homeplace in a newspaper advertisement: For SALE, the fifth of January next...About 500 acres of land in Westmoreland county on Monroe's creek, within a mile and a half of Potowmack river. It is perfectly level and rich; has standing on it, a quantity of valuable oak timber, adjoins the creek, large marshes which with part of the adjoining land, may be turned into a good meadow. There are also on the tract, a dwelling house with a passage and several rooms below and above, with a kitchen, barn, stables, and other necessary out-houses... (Virginia Gazette, Richmond: Purdie and Dixon, No. 94, 23 Dec 1780). In fact, when Monroe finally sold his property to Gawen Corbin in 1783, the deed recorded its size at 550 acres. This more precise estimate probably can be attributed to a survey made before the final sale, although unfortunately no plat was filed with the deed. The only other conveyance of land involving James Monroe in Westmoreland County's well-preserved court records is a purchase of 200 acres from Nathaniel Gray in February 1781 (DB 16:154-155). Subtracting these 200 acres from the 550-acre sale to Corbin, James Monroe must have acquired a total of 350 acres through inheritance from his family.

Apparently, this 350 acres included not only his "moeity," or half, of his father's estate, but also his brother Spence's portion as well. No deed records the sale of Spence Monroe Jr.'s property and by 1782 when the first land tax records appear he is absent from the rolls. National Park Service historian Charles Porter (1937) suggests he may have died intestate, leaving his portion of the property to his brother James Monroe. In all likelihood, then, James Monroe inherited 175 acres in his own right from his father in 1774. Sometime between 1774 and 1782, he also acquired the other 175 acres that his brother Spence had inherited. It is likely that all of the land James Monroe inherited from his father lay within the original tract his father had received in 1737. Since the 100 acres Spence Monroe Sr. purchased from Francis Gray in 1764 lay to the north of Freeneck Gut, it became part of the inheritance of

Spence Jr. (Porter 1937). The remaining 75 acres constituting the younger Spence's portion of the 1774 estate would have been from the 1737 estate.

Therefore, all 175 acres of James Monroe's inheritance (south of Freeneck Gut) most likely were part of the holdings owned by his father in 1758. Based on these assumptions, when James Monroe was born, the elder Spence Monroe's property probably consisted of about 175 acres on the south bank of Freeneck Gut and 75 acres on the north.

Spence Monroe's will, the 1780 advertisement, and subsequent court records indicate that the eastern boundary was the bank of Monroe's Creek. Although the will only vaguely describes the western boundary as "Monroe's line," the property may have extended to Route 632, which was the main road between Oak Grove and the Irish Neck (Colonial Beach) prior to the twentieth century. This older road runs on a parallel course about 150 ft. west of Route 205 in the vicinity of the Monroe dwelling site (compare 1892 and 1933 versions of Wakefield-Montross 15-minute topographic quadrangle maps). Assuming the western boundary was along the road, a rough outline of James Monroe's inherited 175 acres was estimated with the help of a mapping program (TopoUSA) that calculates acreage as shapes are drawn over a base map. If the property extended farther west, the southern boundary would need to be pulled north (Figure 1).

A similar, rough boundary was drawn for the inheritance of Spence Monroe, Jr. to the north of Freeneck Gut. While highly conjectural at this point, having these rough boundaries plotted on a modern map is a useful first step toward future historic preservation efforts. Potential for further boundary information exists among the papers of Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee and a discussion of his real estate transactions at the Virginia Historical Society. In 1799, Lee purchased the 550 acres Monroe had sold to Corbin. More precise boundaries also might be determined by tracing plats or metes and bounds for adjacent properties that indicate an identifiable property line for one of the Monroe holdings discussed here. These possibilities will be explored further during the course of research for this project.