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An Eighteen Month Project

Restoration of Monroe’s Beloved “Birdcage” Complete

For over a year and a half, scaffolding has protected President James Monroe’s final resting place in Hollywood Cemetery, as the ornate cast iron monument surrounding his sarcophagus underwent a meticulous historic restoration off-site. In March, the scaffolding was removed—revealing the monument’s extraordinary new look.

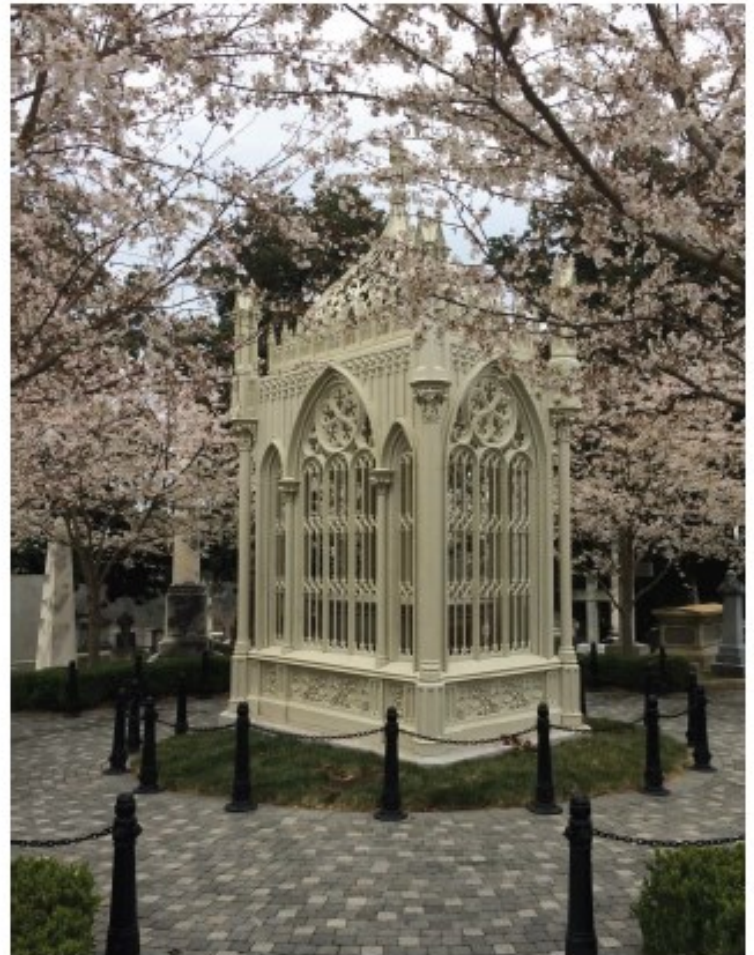
“If you’ve been to Hollywood Cemetery before and you’ve seen ‘the Birdcage,’ you are in for quite a surprise. We’re very pleased that we were able to restore it to its original color,” said Dena Potter, Director of Communications for the Department of General Services (DGS), which funded the restoration, which cost just over \$1 million.

No Longer Painted Black

Once painted black to cover years of patching and repairs, the monument now boasts a color that Potter calls “natural buff”—determined to be the original color following a paint analysis. “The black was beautiful, but with it now restored to its original color you can see all those gorgeous details that were there but didn’t stand out before,” she said. “It’s absolutely stunning.”

The Department of General Services—which oversees the care of a dozen historic properties, including the Capitol, the Governor’s Mansion and the Lee Monument—began the restoration process in September 2015. The iron canopy was disassembled into 340 larger pieces (later broken down further) and removed from the cemetery.

A laser scan revealed about 40% of the pieces would need to be recast. “Some pieces had hairline fractures; others had deteriorated to a greater extent,” said Potter.



After a year and a half of extensive restoration, the “Birdcage” has been returned to Presidents Circle

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Partial Donor List January 1 - April 6, 2017

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The historic rehabilitation was overseen by New York conservator Abigail Mack, with consultation by Andrew Baxter of Richmond. The conservators photographed and catalogued every piece as it was disassembled. All work for the project was completed in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

The Team

Mack and Baxter worked closely with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, as well as general contractor W.E. Bowman, Chase Architectural Metal, and the OK Foundry Company, all of Richmond. The project managers were Fred Garrett of Bowman and Scott Kim with DGS.

Located in Presidents Circle, the Gothic Revival monument was designed by noted architect Albert Lybrock and installed in 1859. The monument is a National Historic Landmark that is also listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register.

The monument is made of 618 cast iron pieces and 2,500 fasteners. All the fasteners needed to be replaced—one of the project's unanticipated expenses that helped drive up the cost. The project was originally budgeted at \$900,000. The sarcophagus was also cleaned and cared for in the restoration.

Canopy Reassembled Off-Site

"Before returning the canopy to the site, we actually reassembled most of it in the warehouse to make sure everything was going to fit back the way we hoped it would," said Potter. Fortunately, the pieces fit perfectly—which she

Painted in its original natural color, exquisite cast iron designs are once again visible



credits to "the thorough and careful job" of the conservators and contractors.

DGS completed the restoration in time for the bicentennial of President Monroe's election as the fifth U.S. president on March 4, and for the annual wreath-laying ceremony that takes place on April 28th, Monroe's birthday.

"I have been by to see the restored monument, and am very impressed," said Peter Broadbent, a Richmond attorney who serves as vice-president of the James Monroe Memorial Foundation, which oversees the wreath-laying ceremony. "Since everyone in Richmond has been use to seeing the black color for more than a century, seeing the monument in what we are told is its original cream color is initially surprising, but that color blends in very well with the stone monuments around it."

According to Hollywood's General Manager David Gilliam, "The Monroe Tomb is one of the most visited sites in the cemetery. It was truly missed while it was being restored. Nonetheless, the result was worth the wait. I believe this was a detailed restoration of beautiful metal artwork of which the Commonwealth of Virginia can be proud."

"I think a lot of people are really going to enjoy the change," said Potter. "We put a lot of thought into how we were going to do this. For over a century, we've been patching it and filling it and caulking it and this was really our one shot to do it well and do it right, and do something that would last for future generations."