

Musings

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On the Road with James and Gari

In the last month I traveled to two very different communities, located in different parts of the United States. Georgetown, South Carolina and Stockbridge, Massachusetts differ in many ways—geography, climate, history, regional culture—but they have at least one thing in common: each place has ties to the University of Mary Washington Museums.

Georgetown, South Carolina's third-oldest city, is located on Winyah Bay at the confluence of the Black, Great Pee Dee, Waccamaw, and Sampit rivers. Closely tied to indigo and rice production, Georgetown is the second largest seaport in the state. The city's economic importance made it a logical stop for James Monroe during his presidential tour of the southern states in 1819.



Prospect Hill Plantation (now called Arcadia), where James Monroe was welcomed for his stop in Georgetown during his 1819 tour (author photo).

I wrote previously about the traveling exhibit created by UMW students to commemorate the bicentennial of Monroe's tour that is circulating among some of the places he visited. One of these is Georgetown, which not only showcased the exhibit in the county library, but also organized a variety of related public programs. [\[Click for more details of my Georgetown experience.\]](#)

Monroe doesn't have a solitary lock on Georgetown where the UMW Museums are concerned—there's also an indirect Melchers connection. Robin R. Salmon is Vice President for Art and Historical Collections and Curator of Sculpture for Brookgreen Gardens, a 9,000-acre preserve at Murrells Inlet near Georgetown combining nature, history, and art. In 2018, Salmon was awarded the Gari Melchers Memorial Medal of



Robin R. Salmon (Paint Charleston Daily photo).

The Artists' Fellowship Inc. for her contributions to American sculpture and sculptors over a 40-year period. The Gari Melchers Memorial Medal is awarded to a person or an organization that has materially furthered the interest of the profession of the fine arts. The medal was established in 1945 to commemorate the late artist's generous services to the Fellowship, his genial comradeship, and his sympathetic understanding and great goodwill for artists.



The Gari Melchers Memorial Medal

Stockbridge, Massachusetts is a year-round resort area situated about as far west as you can go before running into New York. Set against the Berkshire Mountains and crossed by the Housatonic River, it is a far cry from South Carolina's Low County. The town is home to the Norman Rockwell Museum and Chesterwood, home and studio of sculptor Daniel Chester French. The latter institution, owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, is the administrative home

of the [Historic Artists' Homes and Studios](#) consortium (HAHS), comprised of 43 sites across the United States. Gari Melchers Home and Studio was a founding member of HAHS at its inception in 2000. I attended the HAHS conference held in

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Stockbridge, meeting colleagues from not only our own country but also from several artist sites in the United Kingdom. The HAHS motto "Witness Creativity," embodies the passion and diversity of artists spanning a wide range of time periods, genres, and cultural influences.

The Melchers relationship to HAHS and Stockbridge is evident, but is there a James Monroe connection? I'm glad you asked . . .



Margaret French Cresson working in the studio at Chesterwood (Wikipedia Commons).

An accomplished sculptor in her own right, Cresson created in 1929 the bronze bust of James Monroe that adorns the garden of the UMW museum that bears his name.

[One more Monroe connection here: Papers of James Monroe editor Dan Preston is also co-editor of the Papers of Daniel Chester French.]

As my recent travels demonstrate, you never know where you might find connections to UMW Museums in the Big Wide World!

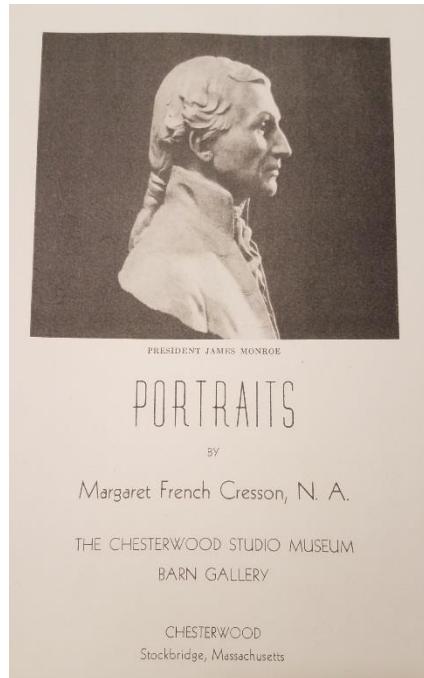


Dr. Stephen Sheppard, Professor Economic at Williams College, discusses the economic impact of art during the HAHS conference (author photo).

While Chesterwood is renowned as the home and studio of Daniel Chester French (sculptor of, among many other works, the statue of our 13th president located within the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC), it was also the residence and workplace of French's daughter, Margaret French Cresson.



Cresson's Monroe bust in the garden of the James Monroe Museum (JMM photo).



Catalog of Cresson's portraits, ca. 1930 (author photograph of exhibit at Stockbridge Town Library).