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FALL 2025 • VOLUME 12, NUMBER 2

Eliza Monroe Hay:

A President's Daughter Is Brought Home to Rest

In 1840, the body of Elizabeth “Eliza” Kortright Monroe Hay was laid to rest in an unmarked grave in Père-Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, far away from her country and her home state of Virginia. Now, after a two-year effort to repatriate her remains to America, she was laid to rest alongside her family members in the James Monroe presidential plot in Hollywood Cemetery on October 23, 2025.

How did Eliza come to die alone in poverty in Paris, with little notice by anyone? How could that happen to the daughter of a president?

Author Barbara VornDick made it her mission to find out, and her research revealed that Eliza lived a life in service to others and to her country, yet suffered a death amidst tragedy and betrayal. Who was Eliza? What is her true story?

A Life of Service and Sadness

Eliza was born on December 5, 1786, in King George County, Virginia, the first child of United States President James Monroe and his wife, Elizabeth Kortright. A few months later, Eliza's family moved to Fredericksburg, Virginia, where she spent her early years as her father began his law practice. In 1788, her family moved to a small farm in Albemarle County, and in 1799 to a larger plantation in Albemarle named *Highland*.

As Eliza grew up, her father became a statesman in service to his country, holding many elected and appointed positions. She traveled to Europe with her family twice, from 1794 to 1797, and again from 1803 to 1807, during her father's diplomatic assignments to France, Great Britain and Spain. While abroad, Eliza received an excellent education in Paris at the prestigious boarding school of Madame Campan.



Eliza Monroe Hay. Portrait, Watercolor on Ivory, a loan from the Halton Family in the collection of James Monroe's Highland. Photo by Gene Runion.

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Daughter

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Eliza Monroe Hay (continued)

After returning home, Eliza married George Hay, a Virginia District Attorney, in 1808. They resided at a plantation near Richmond named *Ashfield*, and in 1809, their daughter Hortensia was born. During the next several years, Eliza's father served as Secretary of State and Secretary of War in the administration of James Madison, and then became president in 1817.

Life in the White House

In the years leading up to her father's presidency, Eliza witnessed a steady decline in her mother's health. Realizing her mother's inability to manage the rigorous demands of First Lady, Eliza moved herself and her family into the White House for the eight years of Monroe's presidency in order to assist her mother. During that time, the social protocols of the White House were revised significantly so that the First Lady was no longer required to pay visits to diplomats' wives, or to entertain extensively. These changes were met with objections from the Washington, D.C. elites, who expected special attention from the First Lady. Although the issue was brought up in at least two cabinet meetings, James Monroe and Eliza were unwavering in their determination to protect the health of Mrs. Monroe. During these difficult years, Eliza faithfully cared for her mother and family while shouldering many First Lady social obligations.

Family Tragedies

During her life, Eliza demonstrated many virtues such as devotion to family, fortitude, and a sense of duty. She also willingly extended her considerable nursing skills to family, friends and strangers. Eliza frequently traveled to the homes of relatives who were ill. During her father's presidency, she volunteered to care for the sick of Washington, D.C. during two epidemics while dismissing danger to her own health. After the Monroes retired from public life in 1825, Eliza moved her family into her parents' home, Oak Hill, in Loudoun County, Virginia, to care for her mother, and her husband who was also ailing. On September 21, 1830, her husband died, and two days later, on September 23, 1830, her mother died. For the next nine months, Eliza persevered to provide nursing care to her father until he died on July 4, 1831. Thus, Eliza suffered the staggering losses of her husband, mother and father within ten months. A few years later, Eliza's only surviving child, Hortensia, died in 1834.

In 1838, Eliza was advised to take a sea voyage to improve her health, so she sailed to France and resided in Paris at 62 Champs Elysées. While in Paris, Eliza waited for the inheritance due her from her Father's estate, but it never arrived. She hired lawyers to get it, but still, after nine years, she had never received a cent. She became destitute, increasingly ill, and unable to return home. Eliza died on January 27, 1840, and was buried in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris by the graciousness of a Consul at the American Consulate in Paris, Daniel Brent, who purchased her grave plot with his own money.

A tireless effort begins

When VornDick's research revealed the tragic circumstances of Eliza's death, she knew that Americans needed to bring her home. It was the right thing to do. A repatriation campaign began in August, 2023 to return Eliza's remains to America on behalf of her living descendants, who were required to submit the formal request documentation. VornDick acted as their representative in managing the logistics involved on both sides of the Atlantic.

By December 2023, three Virginia women joined VornDick in the effort, and the *Bringing Eliza Home Project* was founded as a tax-exempt organization under the umbrella of Historic Fredericksburg Foundation, Inc. VornDick published the first biography of Eliza so the truth about her life would be known, and together with her team members Maureen Goonan, Kathryn Willis, and Sue Henderson, traveled the state of Virginia giving presentations and raising money to bring Eliza home.

After two years of diligent work, permission was granted by the City of Paris for Eliza's exhumation and repatriation, and she arrived at Dulles International Airport on May 21, 2025. The reinterment date was set for October 24 to allow time to raise the additional funds needed for the burial and to obtain the necessary permissions. As it turned out, the James Monroe plot is owned by the Commonwealth of Virginia, who purchased it when the state exhumed the body of James Monroe in New York and brought it home to Virginia in 1858, the 100th anniversary of Monroe's birth. In 1903, the bodies of Monroe's wife, Elizabeth, and his daughter, Maria,

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Eliza Monroe Hay (continued)

were also exhumed and brought to rest with Monroe in Hollywood Cemetery

Eliza's burial in the plot required permissions from three Virginia state agencies: the Department of General Services, the Art and Architectural Review Board, and the Department of Historic Resources. They kindly assisted VornDick in completing the necessary paperwork, and all agencies approved Eliza's reinterment. Jackie Lipford, Public Relations and Media Coordinator of the Dept. of General Services, managed the many aspects of the reinterment at Hollywood Cemetery for VornDick, including security, traffic flow, seating and the press. Other members of the DGS also volunteered to assist in this historic event.

The *Bringing Eliza Home Project* was a grass roots effort, solely funded by donations from people who learned of Eliza's tragic end and felt strongly that she should be brought home to join her family. Many organizations offered pro bono services, which were crucial to the success of this mission, including Found and Sons Funeral Chapels and Cremation Service, Anubis International Assistance, and Historic Fredericksburg Foundation,

Inc. Many individuals, organizations and institutions supported the project, including VA State Senator Bryce Reeves, his Senior Advisor Chris Snider, The James Monroe Memorial Foundation, The James Monroe Museum, James Monroe's Highland, The Board of Visitors of the University of Mary Washington, the City of Fredericksburg, Oatlands Historic House and Gardens, Hollywood Cemetery, and many chapters of the Sons of the American Revolution, Daughters of the American Revolution, and the National Society of Daughters of 1812.

Eliza's reinterment is an example of Americans coming together to right a wrong, even after two centuries. It teaches us that there is no time limit on justice; no expiration date. It took 185 years, but we have welcomed Eliza home. May she rest in peace.

Contributed by Barbara VornDick, M.Ed.
Coordinator - *The Bringing Eliza Home Project*;
Author - *Eliza's True Story: The First Biography of President Monroe's Eldest Daughter*; and
Interpreter of History - *James Monroe's Highland*



A color guard awaits the arrival and reinternment of Eliza Hay's remains

Courtesy of Bill Draper

Historic Maps To Receive New Life:

Richmond Conservators Restoring and Preserving Hand-Drawn Treasures

One of Hollywood Cemetery's latest projects is the conservation of two hand-drawn maps.

The maps, detailed with numbered plots and landmarks, are living documents for a specific time in Hollywood Cemetery's early history. When completed, both will hang in Hollywood's administrative office.

Wendy Cowan and Mary Studt, owners of Richmond Conservators of Works on Paper, each bring three decades of expertise to the project. They've been doing private commissioned work together for 20 years, giving new life to damaged pieces.

They devoted one day to thoroughly examine each map's fragile condition at Hollywood Cemetery's office. Information gathered was used to make a proposal for work that ranges from \$27,600 to \$45,600, depending on the extent of treatment. "One of the most difficult aspects of private conservation is doing an initial examination and providing a quote for treatment," Cowan said. "There are numerous unforeseen and underlying issues that frequently occur."

One map label reads "Compiled from old sectional maps of J. Notman, Joseph J. Pleasants and C.P.E. Burgwyn and drawn by John R. Hooper 1910." The other said it was laid off by Jos. J. Pleasants and designed by J. Notman of Philadelphia with the latter name misspelled with a double "t". The date of one map's creation is lacking, but the persons involved offer clues to an 1840s provenance.

Both maps are coated in varnish, which darkens and yellows with time and obscures ink markings. The coatings have become rigid with age, making the paper brittle and susceptible to tears, punctures and warping. Acids migrating from the frame and backing materials have weakened both papers. The conservators noted that masking tape and glue, used through the years to fix rips and tears, ultimately created more challenges with staining, and they identified surface dirt and mold.

The most painstaking part of the project is removing varnish without disturbing ink. Since relocating the

maps to their studio, Cowan and Studt have completed written and photographic documentation and are slowly removing surface soil with vacuums, brushes and cosmetic sponges.

The work is highly technical. If the varnish on the larger map cannot be removed, treatment may involve washing in special solutions. A suction disk and microscope are used to keep any ink that may have applied between varnish layers intact.

The final step is to hire a professional framer who will replace the acidic backing with a supportive alkaline backing board and a spacer or window mat to prevent direct contact of the paper with glass.

While this is Richmond Conservators of Works on Paper's first job for Hollywood Cemetery, Cowan and Studt have worked on original artwork by Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, and Childe Hassam as well as original documents by George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Edgar Allan Poe, and Robert E. Lee, and early maps by John Smith and John Mitchell.

Studt has always loved the sciences and working with her hands. So paper conservation work that delves into chemistry, composition and deterioration combined with the intellectual challenges in putting things back together again were a perfect fit.

Cowan particularly enjoys the diversity of the work. "It's a job where you're constantly learning, always doing something different," she said. "We get to meet so many different kinds of people and hear their stories through their artwork."

Ultimately, an important piece of Hollywood Cemetery's history will be preserved. "When people look back at their life, we can say we have preserved a lot of things that people care about," Studt said. "We contribute to the preservation of things that tell important stories to people. It's a really satisfying thing to do."

(continued on page 5)

Historic Maps (continued)

Regarding Creators of the Maps

John Notman, a Philadelphia architect who designed the City of Brotherly Love's rural cemetery, Laurel Hill, was hired to come to Richmond in 1847 after a survey of the cemetery property was completed. Notman is credited with the name "Holly-Wood" after noting the large number of holly trees, an evergreen long associated with immortality. His plan stood out for its system of winding roads designed to make it easier for carriages to navigate the rugged, steep landscape.

Joseph Pleasants, an engineer who performed two surveys of the cemetery, was responsible for laying out the grounds after Notman's plan was approved.

When Hollywood acquired 33 acres in 1877, Collinson Pierrepont Edwardson Burgwyn, a civil engineer and land surveyor, won the design contest with a \$300 prize for the new property. Pleasants, again, supervised the laying out of the new ground, just as he had with the Notman plan 30 years prior.

John Hooper, a well-known florist and Oregon Hill native, was elected Hollywood superintendent in 1889, and launched a series of projects to enhance and beautify Hollywood. He was appalled by inadequate burial records and prepared maps of each section showing gravesites with names and dates of interment.



One of two original maps of Hollywood Cemetery being examined initially on site before removal for extensive restoration and preservation by Richmond Conservators of Works on Paper

Turmoil, Financial Hardship, and Devastation Wrack Hollywood

Through the years Hollywood Cemetery has manifested the best and worst of times, the Civil War era most tragically the latter.

Its grounds were rough and unkept. The Soldiers' Section burial ground for Southern casualties was lined with crude wooden headboards and at times strewn with dead bodies.

An October, 1864 letter to the Richmond Dispatch signed "a frequent Hollywood visitor" set the scene: "Imagine the feelings of those who have loved ones buried there, when they visit the graves of those loved ones and find cows pasturing, hogs rooting, goats climbing, and children making a playground of that hallowed spot."

These dark days fell on the heels of Hollywood's best years since its founding in 1847. Initial controversies regarding its location, design and rights-of-way had abated, and the garden-like sanctuary welcomed record numbers of visitors. Richmonders embraced the cemetery's beauty while the city thrived with burgeoning tobacco, manufacturing, wheat and corn milling, and metalworking industries.

Richmond and Hollywood's prosperity quickly turned in April, 1861 when Virginia seceded. The home artillery, organized to help defend the city, fell under the command of Col. Thomas Ellis, Hollywood's president.

Henry St. George Tucker, a member of the Governor's Guard who died of disease, was the first Confederate soldier buried at Hollywood. After the Battle of Manassas in July, wounded soldiers were brought to Richmond for care, and the capital city soon became the South's principal hospital center. More than 80 Richmond war hospitals sent their dead to Hollywood and Oakwood Cemetery.

Soldiers' Section

Hollywood initially donated two unused acres for what became known as the Soldier's Section, and the Confederate government funded an expansion adjoining that section. Officers were typically buried in Section

R, later called the Officer's Section. When bodies began being buried outside Hollywood's boundaries on city-owned land, John Harvie sold Hollywood an additional 6.5 acres in 1862.

In an agreement with the Confederate War Department, Hollywood imposed a burial fee that barely covered expenses. Undertakers typically charged \$5 per burial, according to surviving records. Paper tickets, known as toe tags, and marked coffins were supposed to include each soldier's name, rank and regiment, along with cause, date and place of death. The chaos of the times created gaps and conflicts, however, so collecting accurate burial records remains a challenge to this day.

Each day, a Confederate chaplain performed funeral rites. Some days, the minister would sanctify and bury dozens of bodies while the coffins were still above ground.

With the start of the Peninsula campaign in 1862, casualties mounted, and the Confederate Congress established martial law in Richmond.

The overload of deaths took a toll. Laborers were in short supply. Convicts, Irish immigrants and African Americans were hired.

An iron Newfoundland dog brought to Hollywood near the end of war attracted much attention. The statue, owned by Richmond photographer Charles Rees, was reputedly moved to a safe spot to prevent its being used as scrap metal in the war.

Notable burials

Notable Hollywood burials during the Civil War years include former President John Tyler, Gen. James Longstreet's three children who died of scarlet fever, and Catherine Hodges of the 5th Regiment of Louisiana volunteers, a nurse known for her colorful Zouave dress who traveled with the soldiers. Others include President Davis's 5-year-old son Joseph who fell from White House

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Civil War Years (continued)

Daniel, and 13 Confederate generals, including J.E. B. Stuart. Seven generals were reinterred elsewhere.

While tragedies played out on cemetery grounds, the events roiling Richmond were equally bleak: inflation, a smallpox epidemic, a bread riot, overflowing prisons and hospitals, and the devastating Richmond Evacuation fire.

Hollywood's first president, Isaac Davenport, was killed when a hotel wall collapsed on him during the fire. The cemetery was spared the blaze although records kept at the treasurer's office burned. The Farmers Bank books, where the company's account was kept, also burned.

Cemetery surpluses through these bleak years were invested in Confederate bonds, valued at \$50,000, which survived the fire but were ultimately worthless.

A month after the occupation of the city by Federal forces, Union surgeons sent bodies to Hollywood without paying fees or complying with rules. They did, however, carefully note where soldiers were buried. Ellis wrote the Army chief quartermaster reminding him that Hollywood was private property and suggested a \$2.50 charge for each grave, which may have saved the cemetery financially.

Caring for the graves of the Confederate war dead was a stated but impossible priority due to limited resources. The U.S. government appropriated money for the Union dead and established 72 national cemeteries for their reinterment, including those at Hollywood.

When no similar provisions were made for the graves of the Confederate dead, Richmond church ladies stepped in.

Hollywood Memorial Association - A timely blessing

Two hundred women originally formed the Hollywood Memorial Association of the Ladies of Richmond in 1866 to raise money to enclose, arrange, returf and place the graves of the Confederate dead. Memorial Day ceremonies at Hollywood were an initial focus. An estimated 800 people helped clean up, mound graves, haul gravel, align and replace headboards. Reportedly, about 20,000 people attended the first event.

The Association held monthly meetings and collected 25 cents from each attendee. They asked farmers to send lists of Confederate soldiers buried on their farms, but no list or records of reinterments to Hollywood survive. They

held bazaars to raise money and compiled a ledger of dead soldiers from wooden headboards.

Three 1867 Reconstruction Acts limited expressions of Confederate sympathy so official Memorial Day celebrations were prohibited that year, but an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 people, mostly women and children, placed flowers on soldiers' graves. Memorial Day celebrations at Hollywood ultimately resumed and continue through the current day.

While some Hollywood records were lost in the fire, Ellis still had originals in his possession and reproduced the company's 450-page burial record.

The Pyramid

Money from a profitable Hollywood Memorial Association bazaar in 1867 funded the construction of a Soldiers' Section monument. Charles Dimmock, a lawyer who served as a captain of engineers and supervised the construction of some Confederate defenses, was tapped to design it. The pyramid style design called for the 90-foot structure to be covered with ivy and other evergreen vines. A steam engine dry stacked the large blocks of James River granite. The Latin inscriptions on the base of the monument translate to "In eternal memory of those who stood for God and country." *See photos on page 8.*

By 1868, business had returned with some normalcy. Confederate veterans continued to find their final resting places at Hollywood well into the 20th century, and the Soldier's Section remains a top draw for visitors. Civil War historian Chris Ferguson said, "People come to better understand their Confederate legacy and where these men are buried."

Hollywood's bleak, foreboding landscape of the 1860s stands in marked contrast to the well-kept grounds of today. According to General Manager David Gilliam, "The maintenance in the Soldier's Section is now included in our efforts to maintain a high standard of care for the entire cemetery grounds."

*Information for this story was largely compiled from John Peters' book, **Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery**, and with input from Civil War historian Chris Ferguson whose works include **Southerners at Rest: Confederate Dead at Hollywood Cemetery**.*

Civil War Years (continued)



Charles H. Dimmock (1831 – 1873). A Richmond engineer and designer of the ninety-foot Pyramid.

Courtesy of the Library of Virginia



The Pyramid, constructed of blocks of James River granite, was dedicated “To the Confederate Dead” and unveiled in 1869, two years after construction began. This scene depicts an annual Memorial Day celebration in the early 1900’s honoring the dead interred in the Soldier’s Section (estimated at 18,000 individuals, including 3,000 reinterred in Hollywood from the battlefields of Gettysburg).

Courtesy of The Valentine

A memorial plaque unveiled in 1915 honoring the tireless efforts of the Hollywood Memorial Association and the United Daughters of the Confederacy in establishing and lovingly maintaining the Soldier’s Section



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Felled White Oaks Begin a New Life



A new boardroom table has recently appeared in Hollywood's offices. Created from the wood of two of Hollywood's most majestic trees, the table is a gift from the Van Yahres Tree Company, the Cemetery's long time arborist and tree care provider.

For over two centuries, a family of white oaks watched over the Harvie plot, the original section of Hollywood Cemetery. They bore witness to the birth of the cemetery and the nation itself. In 2003, Hurricane Isabel felled all but two. Through years and storms, the two oak brothers stood together above ground as their roots joined hands below. In 2021, a storm proved too much for one. Every year thereafter, the last remaining oak declined little by little until it could no longer stand alone. Through their fallen bodies, a table was born. The legs, carved from the fallen oak in 2021 support the tabletop made from the last remaining oak. Brothers together again.

Christmas Tours

Christmas at Hollywood: Holiday Traditions Tour (December 2025)

- **Sunday, December 21 – 3:00–4:30 p.m.**
- **Monday, December 22 – 3:00–4:30 p.m.**
- **Tuesday, December 23 – 3:00–4:30 p.m.**

Tour Focus:

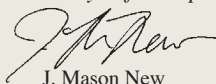
- Virginia holiday traditions
- The story of Charles Minnigerode and the first Christmas tree in Williamsburg
 - Colonial and Victorian-era Christmas customs
- Reflections on remembrance and tradition during the holiday season

Limit: 20-30 people

Please R.S.V.P to Kelly Wilbanks at kwilbanks@hollywoodcemetery.org.

2025 Contributors to Friends of Hollywood Cemetery

We are indeed grateful to the following donors for their generous support of Friends *through November 6, 2025*. You have enabled us to raise awareness of Hollywood and to continue vital monument and fence restoration. Thank you for helping us to preserve Hollywood Cemetery for generations to come.



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A large gathering attends the reinterment ceremony of President Monroe's daughter, Eliza Monroe Hay, in Presidents' Circle. The "birdcage" in the center of the photograph contains her father's sarcophagus and is surrounded by the markers of other family members.

Courtesy of Bill Draper