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Documentary History of the Presidential Tours of James
Monroe, 1817, 1818, 1819*. Edited by Dan Preston
and Marlena C. DeLong.

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On the Road with President James Monroe

David R. Hoth

The Papers of James Monroe, Volume 1: A Documentary History of the Presidential Tours of James Monroe, 1817, 1818, 1819. Edited by Dan Preston and Marlana C. DeLong. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003. 840 pp. \$125. ISBN: 0-313-31978-2.

The first volume of the long-awaited Papers of James Monroe uses mostly newspaper accounts, supplemented with correspondence and a few memoirs, to record President Monroe's tour of the northern states in 1817, his short tour of the Chesapeake Bay region in 1818, and his tour of the southern and western states in 1819. According to the introduction, these tours were particularly important because they became political events that "allowed the president to take his ideas directly to the people" (xxvii) and thus contributed, somewhat contrary to Monroe's desire to unify the nation, to the emerging shift of American politics toward more participatory democracy. Even so, one wonders whether it was wise to pull the tours out of the normal progression of Monroe's papers for special attention. Although a traveling president may have been something special, the sort of activities that surrounded his travels—the repetitive routine of welcoming speeches, dinners, and toasts—will be familiar to students of other nineteenth-century politicians, and the concentration in this volume becomes somewhat tiresome. The handsomely produced book runs to over eight hundred oversized pages of text—a heavy volume of near coffee table size. The 1817 tour alone takes more than five hundred pages. The editors should have exercised more selectivity—calendarizing or putting more material in footnotes—and the publishers might have done better to give up some of the white space and reduce design elements to produce a more reasonably sized volume.

Still, there is merit in having all three tours together. One certainly develops an appreciation of the stamina required for participation in these political rituals. Students of political rhetoric can mine the speeches for the values and symbols that resonated politically at this time. And the index might have provided a working list of local luminaries and politicians for the many communities visited.

However, serious problems in selection, transcription, annotation, and indexing compromise whatever value the volume has.

In selection the editors have opted for a very comprehensive approach and are to be congratulated for gathering a wide array of materials on the itinerary and ceremonial aspects of the presidential tours. However, since the avowed purpose of each trip was an inspection of military installations, one wonders if there is no documentation of Monroe's findings during those inspections. Did he not comment on what he saw? The editors' specific choice of sources is also questionable on two grounds. Most documentary editions have preferred to use manuscript documents over printed sources, but the editors have consistently chosen to print newspaper texts of speeches instead of using copies from the Monroe Papers at the New York Public Library or drafts from the Library of Congress Monroe Papers. If there is a reason for preferring the newspaper texts, the editors should have given it in their statement of editorial method. Nor is there any evidence that the manuscript texts have been compared to the printed texts. Was there never a variation?

Standard editorial practice would also have urged the editors to seek out, wherever possible, the original printings of the various documents instead of settling for reprintings from distant newspapers. For example, the *Essex Patriot* (Haverhill, Mass.), readily available on microfilm, could have been consulted for the reprinted commentary cited to the Boston *Columbian Centinel* of 23 June 1817. The editors would have found it in the issue of 19 July 1817, and then might have recognized that they were citing an issue of the *Centinel* that does not exist and were placing the commentary a month early and in the wrong context—preceding the president's arrival in New England rather than immediately after his visit to Massachusetts. Material about the president's visit to Savannah in May 1819 taken by the editors from the *Charleston Courier* was reprinted from the *Savannah Daily Georgian* and the *Columbian Museum & Savannah Advertiser* (both of 10 May). Brigham's *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers* indicates that the appropriate issues of those papers could be found at the Georgia Historical Society and the American Antiquarian Society, each of which would probably have been willing to send copies of the pages if the existing microfilm does not include them. That effort might have also produced other material for the editors to use. For example, the *Courier's* republication of a *Savannah Republican* text of 10 May, also selected by the Monroe editors, was incomplete (a longer version was reprinted in the *Raleigh Register and North-Carolina Gazette*). At a minimum the editors should have indicated that the *Charleston Courier* articles were reprints from other papers.

A slightly different problem arose with regard to Monroe's visit to Washington, N.C., on 8 and 9 April 1819. There the editors chose an account from the *American Beacon and Norfolk & Portsmouth Daily Advertiser* that states explicitly that it was omitting material published in the Washington paper (no longer extant). Given the frequency of republication, a reasonably diligent editor might have checked the *Raleigh Register and North-Carolina Gazette*, a major North Carolina paper readily available on microfilm. Had the Monroe editors done so, they would have found the full account in the *Register* of 23 April.

Every so often the editors make odd choices for inclusion or exclusion of material. Why they included two items about the 29 April 1819 ox roast at Charleston (611–12), but not the letter inviting Monroe's attendance and the reply on Monroe's behalf (*Charleston City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, 1 May) is not clear. Or why print the poem on the president's departure from the *Charleston Courier* of 4 May 1819 (622–23), but not the poem on his arrival from the *Courier* of 26 April? In the larger cities, the editors might have improved their coverage by more frequently supplementing the most complete accounts with data drawn from other reports. Again, this effort might have saved the editors from error. They place an address to Monroe from the mayor of Annapolis on 29 May 1818, although it is dated May 28 in their transcription (525–26). Perhaps they believed from the letter's position on the page that it was delivered at a dinner held on 29 May, but another report originating with the Annapolis *Maryland Republican* and reprinted in the *Daily National Intelligencer* of 2 June and other newspapers states that the address was delivered "on Thursday evening" (28 May).

The most important part of any documentary edition is, of course, the transcriptions, and unfortunately here too the volume shows signs of hasty preparation and lack of attention to detail. A check of about twenty transcriptions, more than two-thirds from printed sources, revealed clear errors in more than half of them. The errors ranged from the relatively insignificant omission of punctuation, failure to capitalize a word, or use of "23rd" for "23d" (593); to the more significant substitution of "expression" for "impression" (594) and "restoration" for "renovation" (557); to the addition or omission of entire words ("ridiculous" omitted before "plight" on p. 537, for example).

I should also note that the editors take liberties with the literal text that are not noted in their brief statement of editorial method—for example, dashes are routinely changed to periods, although they write that "Punctuation has been reproduced as written, except commas." One can certainly sympathize with their comma policy, which allows the editors to omit commas for readability ("as

when they separate subjects and predicates”), but I suspect most editors would have opted to be more literal with the printed texts at least. Moreover, having given themselves the liberty to omit commas, why do the editors retain the duplicative “,” (565) or retain a comma separating subject and predicate (562), while deleting commas that affect the sense of the text (“gentleman usher and cashier” (538) is not the same as “gentleman, usher and cashier”). The editors’ decision to change words written in capitals or italics to regular typeface is also dubious, since it costs the reader knowledge of the original writer’s emphasis. Moreover, it creates other problems: “NEW CUSTOM HOUSE” becomes “new Custom House” even though the source text later renders the words as “New Custom House” (565).

The editors probably should have published the full datelines for all documents, even extracts. It might be helpful to know, for example, that Caesar Rodney’s letter of 20 March 1819 was written from Wilmington (557), and there seems to be no good reason for omitting the dateline from the first extract of 24 April 1819 Charleston City Council minutes and putting it in the second (datelines appear on both mss). Consistency is at least a minor virtue. Another more important inconsistency involves ellipses. Since the editors use ellipses at the beginning and end of their extracts from books, why do they not use ellipses to indicate when newspaper articles are excerpted rather than complete? In the latter case, unlike the former, the reader actually needs assistance to know that he is looking at an extract.

The annotation and indexing, however, are the weakest parts of this volume. To begin with, the source citations for the documents are faulty. Not only do the editors sometimes fail to indicate when a newspaper is reprinting from an earlier source, when they do note the reprint they are not always careful to use the correct title of the paper (should be *American Watchman* not *Delaware Watchman*, p. 535). In direct citations to newspapers, the editors often opt for a shortened form, rather than using the masthead title. This seems a little problematic for a documentary edition, but it is at least less dubious than the book citations, which are all short titles without any list of the complete citations. Moreover some book citations lack page numbers (all of the citations to *Memoir of Jeremiah Mason*, for example, and see p. 567 for another instance).

The vast majority of the annotations involve identifications of individuals mentioned in the newspaper accounts—indeed the editors seem disturbingly uninterested in other matters of substance that appear occasionally. When, for example, Monroe gives George Hay his thoughts on “the apparent menace of a challenge in Genl. Jacksons letter to Scott” (618), they do not even identify the

letter in question (Jackson to Scott, 3 Dec. 1817), still less give the reader any idea of the matter at controversy. Similarly, a quite interesting letter from Worden Pope to Monroe concerned with a land claim by the heirs of Edmund Taylor, Henry Clay's late speech against the Seminole War, and opposition to the branch Bank of the United States in Kentucky, and mentioning the opening of a canal and establishment of an armory, is annotated only by briefly identifying Pope and Joseph Jones (555–56). Taylor isn't even indexed (nor is Jones, for that matter). But even with the focus on identifications, the choice of whom to identify and whom to ignore seems disturbingly random.

One sympathizes with the editors, for there are an enormous number of names. Had they decided to identify only those people who are functionally important in the volume—say those who wrote Monroe, the mayors of the towns, the chairmen of committees, etc.—or even had they decided to limit their identifications to those who achieved importance beyond the local level, the decision would have been understandable. Instead the editors apparently tried to identify everyone, but without putting much imagination or effort into the search. For example, on page 563, four naval captains appear as guests at a dinner in Norfolk. Three are identified in this volume, but Arthur Sinclair is not, even though the same sources used for the other captains (the editors are to be commended for citing sources) provide sufficient information to identify him. For example, on pages 545 and 546, the editors give the program of a concert that Monroe attended at Norfolk. Whether the editors should have felt obliged to discuss the composers of the music is arguable, but they annotated by identifying four of them. Of four other composers left unidentified, a ten minute search on Google turned up probable identifications for three. “[Pucilta]” is probably Vincenzo Pucitta (the editors, who had silently corrected “Quartelt” to “Quartett,” might have guessed that a double “t” was intended here); “Pergoleri” is probably Giovanni Battista Pergolesi; and Shaw might be Oliver Shaw. Incidentally, none of these composers, even those identified, are indexed. Another example: on page 558, Monroe mentions “Dr Brockenbrough in Richmond” with whom he hopes to establish credit. The man is neither identified nor indexed, though Monroe was probably referring to John Brockenbrough (1773–1852), who was important enough to rate an entry in the new *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*. The editors seem to have made little use of E. G. Swem's *Virginia Historical Index* (standard for locating periodical entries about Virginians) or the Internet, either of which would have revealed George Ott's War of 1812 service for an identification on p. 545. Obituary indexes would have helped with men such as Robert Brough and George Washington Camp (561); both had obituaries in the *Richmond*

Enquirer. Scanning newspaper advertisements sometimes helps: the paper that mentioned John B. Cooper also revealed his current occupation as proprietor of the Steam-Boat Hotel in Hampton, Virginia, which could have added to his identification (547). The editors might also have made use of the letters of application and recommendation for identification of federal officeholders.

The apparent lack of research (and a certain editorial hubris) is indicated by an embarrassing error on page 147, where the editors address Joseph G. Swift's statement that Monroe visited Stonington, Conn., "to compliment the brave Captain Palmer for his townsmen—led by himself—in repelling the assault of the 'Ramillies'." This, they assert, "seems to be an error, for there is no mention of a Captain Palmer in the accounts of the defense of Stonington in 1814. He is perhaps referring to Captain Jeremiah Holmes, who commanded a small company of local militia." The editors do not identify the accounts consulted, but if they had turned to pages 73–75 of Richard A. Wheeler's *History of the Town of Stonington*, a book that they cite in the preceding note, they would have found a letter from Amos Palmer of Stonington to the Secretary of War, 21 Aug. 1815, describing his actions "as chairman of the committee of defence" in the repulse of the *Ramillies*.

With so many people to discuss, the editors' decision to keep most identifications short is wise, especially as they cite their sources. However, they could have used dates of service more extensively when available. When they write, for example, that Joseph B. Skinner "was an attorney, businessman, and a member of the North Carolina assembly" (568) the reader may believe that Skinner was in the assembly at the time of Monroe's visit in 1819 (his most recent service had been in 1815). One also wonders why the editors decided not to use middle names in many (but not all) of their identifications and index entries. Skinner appears in their source as Joseph Blount Skinner.

The problems with the identifications are exacerbated by the inadequate indexing. Was the Major Cooper mentioned in Swift's *Memoir* and identified by the editors as John B. Cooper, formerly commander of a company of cavalry (547), the commander of Capt. Cooper's Cavalry (565)? The editors' failure to index the latter entry leaves the reader uninformed. Captain John Kay appears at the Norfolk celebration in 1818 (532) and again, as Captain Kay, in 1819 (562), but with neither entry indexed, the reader might miss that connection. Will every reader understand that when Monroe says he "lost my rank in the army, by entering into Ld Stirling's family" (618) he is writing of his Revolutionary War service as aide-de-camp for Maj. Gen. William Alexander, Lord Stirling? Perhaps—the editors mentioned on page 50 that Monroe had served as Stirling's

aide—but since neither entry is indexed under either Alexander or Stirling, the reader might not remember. Other heroes of the Revolution get similar short shrift from the index. Horatio Gates, Johann Kalb, and Benjamin Lincoln are mentioned but not indexed; and Gen. Jedediah Huntington has the misfortune of being identified and indexed by the editors as Jeremiah Huntington, even though the document itself gets his name correct. George Washington appears in the index, but when Monroe refers to him as “Genl. W.” on pages 618 and 619, the index misses him.

Subject entries are very limited. At a minimum, the editors could have offered subentries under Monroe for letters to and letters from. The “official correspondence” subentry is perplexing. Why, for example, do Richard Rush’s letter of 26 September 1817 (508) or Joseph G. Swift’s letter of 10 November 1817 (509–10) not qualify?

As editors we all know that no project is free from error, but what is particularly scary about this catalog of mistakes and omissions is that I must confess to having given only a cursory glance at much of the volume and having hardly checked the annotation at all. How many more errors would a serious effort at fact checking disclose? An editor who reads a paper of 29 April and puts the events of “yesterday” on 27 April is just not paying attention (599). The Papers of James Monroe is a very important project that can do much to elucidate our understanding of the Revolutionary and Early National periods of American history. Unfortunately, unless the editors produce better volumes than this, they will do a disservice not only to Monroe but to documentary editing and the historical profession by creating an unreliable product that will nonetheless be the only text available for generations to come. We can only hope that this first volume is a sort of shakedown cruise that will lead to more polished work in the future.

