For Immediate Release

Contact: Carolyn Holmes, Executive Director
          Ash Lawn-Highland
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Subject: EXHIBIT OPENING FOR 254TH BIRTHDAY OF JAMES MONROE

**Ash-Lawn-Highland Hosts the Opening of a Exhibit Illuminating James Monroe's
Role in the War of 1812 with a Celebration of his 254th Birthday**

To celebrate James Monroe's 254th birthday, Ashlawn-Highland will open an exhibit on
Saturday, April 28th, *"A Senior Statesman at War: James Monroe and the Second War of
Independence, 1812-1815."* It commemorates Monroe's roles during the War of 1812.
Highlighted in this show will be new acquisitions belonging to the one American
statesman who served in more high public offices than any other President!

A Senior Statesman at War … will showcase an extraordinary private collection of rare
Americana, including a general's field desk, a large painted drum, and other examples of
military wares and weaponry used during the War of 1812.

The exhibit also includes two documents recently donated by a Baltimore family:
Instructions to Privateers… signed by James Monroe as Secretary of State and an
infantryman's commission signed by President Madison and by Monroe as Secretary of
War.

Throughout 2012 America will observe the 200th anniversary of this "second war for
independence," and Ash-Lawn-Highland will join the commemoration by opening,

In 1811 President James Madison appointed James Monroe Secretary of State. Monroe
moved his family from Richmond, Virginia, to a townhouse on "I" (now Eye) Street in
Washington, D.C. and began his official duties – most of which concerned the threat of
pending war with Great Britain. Continued impressment of American seamen by British
Naval ships was bringing war closer to the American shores, and Monroe, a seasoned
diplomat, worked tirelessly to keep the two nations at peace. To little avail.

*I came into the office [Secretary of State] which I now hold with the best disposition to
promote, as far depended on me, an accommodation of all differences between our
countries, and as such has been unquestionably the wish of the President [Madison], but
under the instructions of your minister [Foster] here, it has been utterly impossible to
succeed…* [Monroe to Lord Auckland, c1811]

Mounting pressure, both from England and the American "War Hawks," led President
Madison to ask Congress to declare war on Great Britain on July 17th, 1812. War raged
in Ohio, the Northwest Territories, Canada, and along the eastern seaboard. On the high
seas, the *US Constitution* gained notoriety when it defeated the British frigate *Guerriere*

off the coast of Nova Scotia, and later, defeated the *Java* off the coast of Brazil, thus earning the nickname, "Old Ironsides."

As the war escalated, Monroe tried to submit his resignation as Secretary of State in order to take a military assignment, but Madison persuaded him to remain at his side in Washington. By 1814, as the war moved into the Chesapeake and closer to the Capital City, Monroe tried to convince the President that John Armstrong, Secretary of War, was incapable of protecting the eastern seaboard. Madison was not persuaded, and in August of 1814 Washington fell to the British.

Poet Francis Scott Key witnessed the American troops at Fort McHenry in Baltimore repulse a strong British fleet. On the back of an envelope he wrote the poem which eventually became our national anthem, "Oh say can you see by the dawn's early light…" These words became a rallying cry for a much beleaguered nation.

Just in time for Monroe's birthday on April 28th, "*A Senior Statesman at War*" will open with highlights of our 5th President in a way that few have seen before – as a senior statesman before he becomes president. Monroe, will be seen as a diplomat, soldier, colleague, and confidant who assists the President Madison in negotiations before, during and after the "Second War of Independence."

The celebration of President James Monroe's 254th birthday will continue Saturday, April 28th. The day of celebration will include refreshments, cider and cookies, from 11 AM to 3 PM and local residents will be admitted free from 10 AM to 12 PM. For information call 434-293-8000 or email info@ashlawnhighland.org.

Ash Lawn-Highland is open daily from 11 am to 5pm November – March, and 9am to 6pm April – October. Tours are $12 for adults ($11 for seniors and AAA members), $6 for children (ages 6 to 11) and $5 for local residents (Albemarle, Augusta, Buckingham, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa, Nelson, Orange and Rockingham counties). Ash Lawn-Highland is located off I-64, exit 121, past Jefferson's Monticello at 2050 James Monroe Parkway. For information, call 434-293-8000 or visit www.al-h.us

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