

NEWS RELEASE
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hffi.org/bringing-eliza-home

THE BRINGING ELIZA HOME PROJECT

A Welcome for Eliza

180 years after her death in Paris, Eliza Monroe Hay has finally returned home.

On June 13 at Oatlands in Loudoun County, the remains of President James Monroe's eldest daughter were honored in *A Welcome for Eliza* ceremony. Dignitaries, supporters, and representatives of historical groups gathered to witness the presentation of her coffin in a solemn ceremony.

Pallbearers included a direct descendant of Eliza, Michael Kamtman, and others with strong ties to the Eliza project. They were accompanied by an SAR Color Guard, representing several chapters of the Virginia Society, Sons of the American Revolution.

After the presentation of Eliza's coffin, speakers addressed not only the rightness of Eliza's return, but also gave tribute to Barbara VornDick, Eliza's biographer and chair of the Eliza project. It was she who relentlessly pursued permissions to repatriate Eliza's remains.

VornDick uncovered primary sources that revealed Eliza's unhappy story. Wrongly deprived of her inheritance and falsely maligned, Eliza found herself in France with inadequate means to return home. At her death in 1840, she was interred in a modest, unmarked grave.

After an arduous six years of research, and dozens of forms, VornDick finally obtained permission to bring her remains back to the United States.

Sen. Bryce Reeves, an ardent supporter of the effort, praised VornDick for her efforts. "Eliza would not be here today if not for [VornDick's] remarkable, intelligent work," Reeves declared. "[Her] research culminated in two important things: Barbara published *Eliza's True Story, the First Biography of President Monroe's Eldest Daughter* in 2024; and the exhumation and repatriation of Eliza to Virginia so that she can be rejoined with her parents," he said. Her reinterment in the Monroe family plot in Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond will take place in October of this year.

Reeves observed that the effort is "the most important event for women's history in the Commonwealth since the unveiling of the Virginia Women's Monument in Richmond."

Michael Kamtman, of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and Eliza's direct descendent, shared his gratitude, comparing the discovery of Eliza's story and the return of her remains to a reunion with someone long lost and dearly missed. "This is a beautiful and powerful moment for me, and it is possible because of someone who up until two years ago was a complete stranger. I'm referring, of course, to Barbara VornDick...Thank you, Barbara." Kamtman, assistant professor in the

department of Theater and Dance at Wake Forest University, was visibly moved. “At this moment, I am filled with gratitude to say again, Welcome home, Grandmother Eliza,” he concluded.

Monroe interpreter and Smithsonian Institution program assistant Jay Harrison III read excerpts of a letter from James Monroe to Eliza, revealing love and admiration for his daughter. Then, Monroe interpreter Beau Robbins read an excerpt of a letter from Eliza’s husband to his wife. Robbins concluded that the “return of Eliza’s remains to the United States is the most important repatriation since that of John Paul Jones [in 1906].”

Lori Kimball, of Oatlands, welcomed the small group to the Oatlands Carriage House, and presided over the ceremony. Pallbearers included Kamtman; Chris Snyder, senior advisor to State Senator Bryce Reeves (Snyder greatly aided in the repatriation); Nancy Ocasio, from the staff of Highland (James Monroe’s home in Albemarle); and Jeff Goonan, who also aided the return.

Significant pro bono services were offered by Anubis International Assistance in exhuming and transporting the remains from Paris to Dulles; Historic Fredericksburg Foundation, Inc., which receives donations to the Eliza project under its non-profit status; and Found & Sons Funeral Chapels and Cremation Service, which received the coffin, and transported and stored Eliza’s remains.

Members of The Bringing Eliza Home Project include VornDick, chair; Maureen Goonan, financial manager; Sue Henderson, Community and Public Relations; and Kathryn Willis, Communications and Fundraising.

More information may be found at hffi.org/bringing-eliza-home.

Background info for the Bringing Eliza Home Project

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dzV4Vw0Fsh5000_TNfmF2XRorgtkd6Ct?usp=sharing

Photos of Eliza project and Welcome Eliza program

https://photos.google.com/album/AF1QipMclcHHKff7A3WkHia3c0lCFZ_E2QhLL2cNbjD5

Photo subjects (Kathryn Willis photos)

James Monroe portrait

Fredericksburg VA home where the Monroes lived

Barbara VornDick headshot

Cover of the Eliza Monroe biography (Barnes & Noble)

Leslie and Michael Kamtman with Jay Harrison

VA SAR Combined Color Guard

VA SAR practicing for procession

Oatland’s Lori Kimball and Found & Sons Julie Found

Highland’s Nancy Ocasio and husband

Chris Snyder and Sen. Bryce Reeves

Kathryn Willis (Eliza Project) and Shelby Chandler, James Monroe Birthplace

Arrival of casket
Oatland's Lori Kimball
VA SAR Color Guard sentinel with casket
Michael Kamtman
Jay Harrison
Beau Robbins
Brass plate on Eliza's coffin
Reception gathering