

Augmented reality tours to enhance James Monroe's Highland

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Body

For the first time in the United States, augmented reality tours will launch at George Washington's Mount Vernon and James Monroe's Highland. The College of William and Mary owns Highland, and it will be the first to host this new technology.

ARtGlass, a company that manufactures AR software for cultural and historic venues is collaborating with Epson, the provider of AR smart eyewear to create new experiences for visitors at Highland and Mount Vernon. While Highland will be the first site in the United States to use this technology, dozens of museums and palaces throughout Europe have debuted these AR experiences.

When we first launched ARtGlass in Italy, we knew that if we could overcome the challenges of bringing wearable AR tours to the Old World, we'd be ready for the New World," ARtGlass cofounder and CEO Greg Werkheiser said in a press statement. "We are thrilled now to help revolutionize cultural tours at U.S. sites."

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Highland is the first site to launch the tours, but Mount Vernon will soon begin to premiere tours during its peak season. The College owns the property at Highland and made headlines last year when the lost presidential home of Monroe was discovered. Executive Director Sara Bon-Harper said she hopes to use this AR to reach new audiences and attract new people.

"AR Brings historical figures to life and shares the sense of discovery here at Highland in ways that are both educational and entertaining," Bon-Harper said in a press statement. "We expect to draw more - and more diverse - visitors. ARtGlass platform will give our guests an exciting new way to experience our historic landscape and architecture at Mount Vernon. Washington loved the latest technology and many of our guests do as well. No doubt, through ARtGlass, we will be able to tell the Mount Vernon story in a new and compelling way."

According to Werkheiser, historic and cultural destinations such as Highland and Mount Vernon are popular travel destinations all around the world.

"U.S. museums and cultural sites attract more visits annually than pro sporting events and theme parks combined," Werkheiser said. "The future of history is bright."

Guests at these sites will use these AR glasses, the result of ARtGlass' partnership with Epson, to take tours and learn information about Monroe's former home. The company hopes that this will transform visitors' experiences with historic facts.

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From the beginning it was our intention to deliver real-world, near-term benefits to the public through the Moverio AR smart glasses," Epson's Director of Augmented Reality Solutions Anna Jen said in a press statement. "ARtGlass software and strategies, coupled with our glasses, will enable millions of visitors to U.S. historic sites to enjoy transformative experiences."

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In 1974, the College gained ownership of Monroe's Highland, and his property, located in Charlottesville, Virginia, is currently the only U.S. president's home owned by a university. Monroe received his education from the College before enlisting in the Continental army, similar to George Washington. The estate was bequeathed to the College by philanthropist Jay Winston Johns, who had previously received an honorary degree.

Until a few years ago, Monroe's home was assumed to be the surviving wing of a two-wing house, with a two-room lobby entrance typical of plantations during that time. According to Bon-Harper, who became executive director in 2012, this misconception has long been held.

After conducting new research, Bon-Harper and her colleagues believe there is much more to be unearthed, which leads Bon-Harper to believe that Monroe's home is actually much bigger than the one remaining wing that still stands today.

Currently, Highland hosts daily tours, community and private events and is the home to a museum shop.

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