



**GREENSBORO HISTORICAL MUSEUM  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**GREENSBORO, NC (March 13, 2013)**

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Images available on request

## **Draped in Legend: A Velvet Dress, a Carriage Trunk and a First Lady Exhibit Opens March 26**

The red velvet dress of former first lady, and Guilford County native, Dolley Madison, will be the center piece of a new exhibit opening on March 26<sup>th</sup> at the Greensboro Historical Museum entitled *Draped in Legend: A Velvet Dress, a Carriage Trunk and a First Lady*. The dress, not on display in Greensboro in over 25 years, recently returned to the museum after having been on exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery. The dress was the highlight of the exhibition, *1812: A Nation Emerges*, where former First Lady Dolly Payne Todd Madison was featured in two sections of the exhibit. In addition to the gown, the newly-conserved Madison carriage trunk and other highlights from the Dolley Madison Collection will also be on display in the new exhibit. Due to its fragile condition, the dress will return to museum collection storage when the exhibit ends.

"This is a rare opportunity to see the carriage trunk and dress that were almost lost to us," explains Museum Director, Carol Ghiorso Hart. After James Madison died, Dolley faced financial hardship and had to sell the Madison estate in Virginia. She returned to Washington permanently, where she lived until her death in 1849. In his eulogy of her, President Zachary Taylor referred to Dolley as "the first lady of the land for a century." Her final legacy was to inspire the term by which presidents' wives have been known ever since.

Following Dolley's passing; the carriage trunk and the dress were auctioned off several times, and came to be in the possession of a distant and reclusive relative, Neva Kunkel. Ms. Kunkel passed away in 1956 and the executor of her estate discovered the collection hidden in her residence in Pennsylvania. Rather than have it sold at auction again, the citizens of Greensboro, led by the Dolley Madison society, raised \$5,000 and bought the collection. They then donated it to the Greensboro Historical Museum in 1963.

"There are some wonderful stories associated with Dolley's possessions," Ms. Hart said. "A few researchers think that her dress was made from the red velvet curtains she saved from being burned in 1814 as the British were approaching the capitol, but so far, we have not been able to definitively prove that." In addition to saving the White House draperies in the War of 1812, Dolley is also credited with saving silverware, official state papers, and a full length portrait of George Washington. "These stories helped define Dolley's life, and we are so pleased to be able to share that with our visitors." Hart concluded.

The Greensboro Historical Museum, a division of the City of Greensboro Public Library Department, is located at 130 Summit Avenue, in Downtown Greensboro's Cultural District. The museum is open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 10 am until 5 pm and Sundays from 2 pm to 5 pm. Admission is free. The Museum Shop features exclusive North Carolina and Greensboro items for all ages, offering history in every purchase. Visit [www.GreensboroHistory.org](http://www.GreensboroHistory.org) for more information.

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