



William Pope DuVal in Territorial Florida (1822-1834)

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Abstract/Introduction:

In this project, my focus is on William Pope DuVal (1754-1854) and his legacy in Florida. DuVal served as governor of Florida Territory from April 17, 1822, till April 24, 1834. He was the first civilian governor of the Territory, succeeding Andrew Jackson's nine-month term as military governor. DuVal was also the longest-serving Florida governor in history.

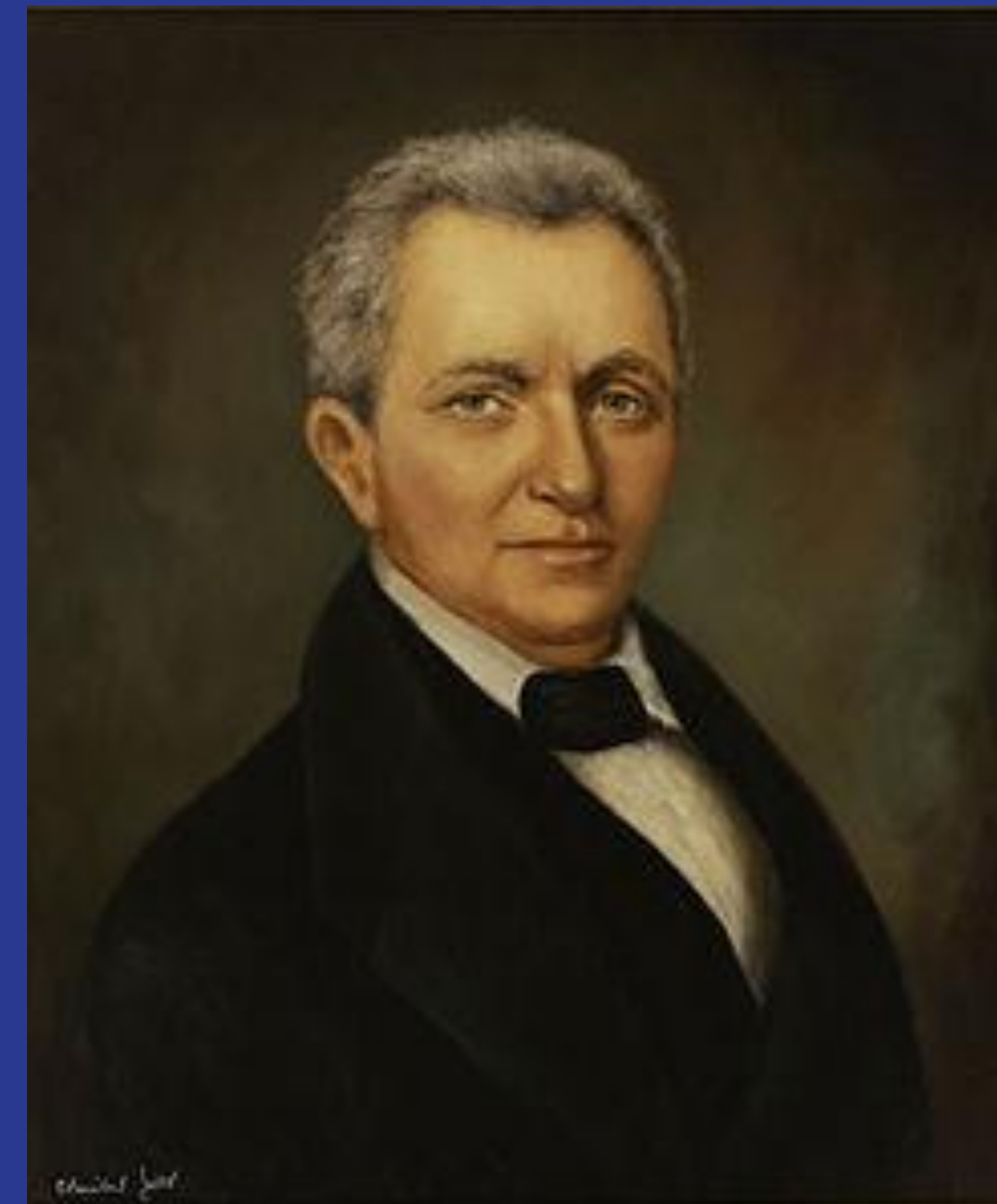
How did DuVal's character shape the character of Florida? What scenes from DuVal's life still speak to Floridians today? How can research help us recover the multidimensionality of this larger-than-life character? My research addresses those questions by exploring connections between DuVal's life story and the Ralph Ringwood stories published by America's first literary superstar, Washington Irving (1783-1859). I analyze stories that Irving based on DuVal's life to gain insight into DuVal as a public servant and Florida as a territory.

Methods:

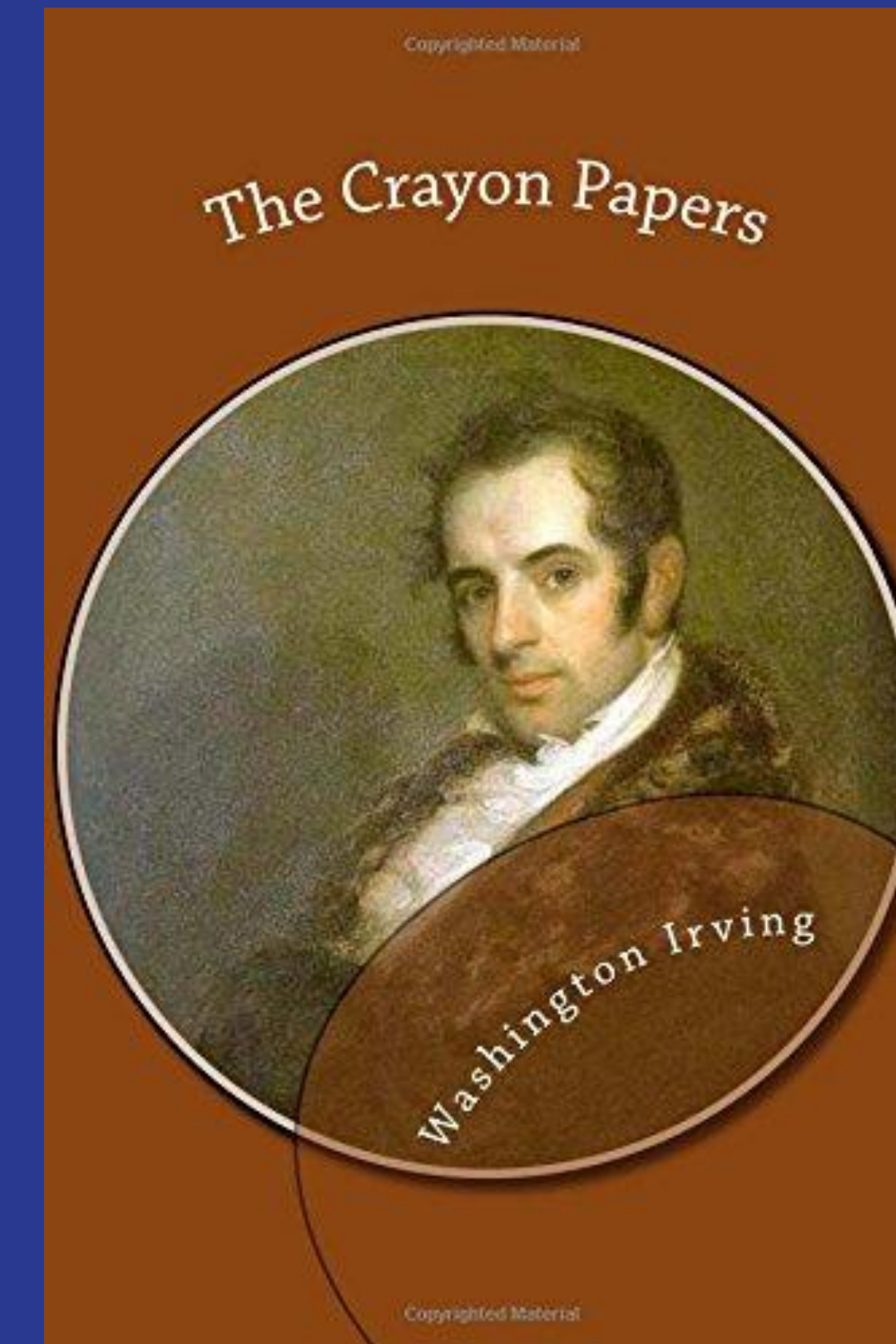
The use of case studies proved helpful in the research process, especially Frank L. Snyder's comparison of DuVal's masterful stories about his own life with Irving's deft fictionalizations in the Ralph Ringwood tales. Because DuVal's experience before he came to Florida was formative, preparing him for the role he would fill, my research examines a tale that Ralph Ringwood tells about his early life for clues to DuVal's habits of speech, thought, and worldview.

My research collected some primary documents, including a letter from DuVal to President James Madison, dated from Tallahassee on November 14, 1826. However, the most effective method I found for grasping the vitality and complexity of William Pope DuVal, a formative figure in Florida's history, was analyzing the stories about DuVal's life that Washington Irving put into the mouth of Ralph Ringwood. To the right, you will find an example of such analysis.

The the right, ab example of such analysis is shown.



DuVal's official Portrait as Governor of Florida. Portrayed him as a larger than life figure; mainly due to his demeanor.



Cover of the Washington Irving book about Ralph Ringwood. These stories are based on DuVal's real life experiences.

Excerpt of Story-

"It came to pass, during the days of my juvenility, while I was yet what is termed 'an unlucky boy,' that a gentleman of our neighborhood, a great advocate for experiments and improvements of all kinds, took it into his head that it would be an immense public advantage to introduce a breed of mules, and accordingly imported three jacks to stock the neighborhood. This in a part of the country where the people cared for nothing but blood horses! Why, sir! they would have considered their mares disgraced and their whole stud dishonored by such a misalliance. The whole matter was a town talk and a town scandal. The worthy amalgamator of quadrupeds found himself in a dismal scrape: so he backed out in time, abjured the whole doctrine of amalgamation, and turned his jacks loose to shift for themselves upon the town common. There they used to run about and lead an idle, good-for-nothing, holiday life, the happiest animals in the country." (Snyder 26)

Conclusion/New Questions:

Reading William Pope DuVal's character through the lens of Washington Irving's Ralph Ringwood anecdotes can yield interesting insights into how Florida's longest-serving territorial governor shaped our state. This project focused on DuVal's early life. What remains to be learned from analyzing Ringwood stories about DuVal's dealings with Native Americans? What aspects of DuVal's larger-than-life personality will other stories spotlight? How might those insights be put onstage and performed today?

Analysis:

This excerpt, from the Ralph Ringwood story by Washington Irving that is based on DuVal's tales about his early life, spotlights three illuminating aspects of William Pope DuVal's character: delight in big words, ambivalence about mixed breeds, and admiration for reinvention.

Note the grandiloquent phrases – "during the days of my juvenility," "amalgamator of quadrupeds," "abjured the whole doctrine of amalgamation" – suggesting how Florida's larger-than-life governor is imprinting the territory with big ideas about identity.

Note the contradictory attitudes toward cross-breeding – "an immense public advantage to introduce a breed of mules" versus "dishonored by such a misalliance." This unsettled outlook on "amalgamation" sheds light on DuVal's shifting policies about racial and cultural amalgamation in Florida, which was the first territory to enter the USA as officially multicultural.

Note the subtextual admiration for inventiveness and starting over – "a great advocate for experiments and improvements of all kinds" paired with "so he backed out in time." This expresses a deep-seated belief in people's capacity for remaking themselves in a new "part of the country" that has become synonymous with Florida.

Resources:

- Duval, William Pope (1784–1854)*. TSHA. (n.d.). Retrieved January 13, 2022, from <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/duval-william-pope>
- Snyder, Frank L. "William Pope Duval: An Extraordinary Folklorist." *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 69, no. 2, Florida Historical Society, 1990, pp. 195–212, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30148606>.
- William Pope duval*. Museum of Florida History. (n.d.). Retrieved January 13, 2022, from <https://www.museumoffloridahistory.com/collections/governors-portraits/william-pope-duval/>