

*James Madison*

THE FORGOTTEN FOUNDER

A close-up photograph of a quill pen resting on a document with cursive handwriting. The document is slightly out of focus, but the words "S, July 4, 1770" and "States of America" are visible. The lighting is warm and golden, creating a historical and scholarly atmosphere.

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AMES MADISON, by 1831, was the last remaining survivor of the great founding generation who had won the Revolutionary War, secured American independence and established a republican government based upon individual liberty. He wryly observed: "Having outlived so many of my cotemporaries I ought not to forget that I may be thought to have outlived myself." In his advanced age, now crippled with rheumatism, Madison was confined to a single room at his beloved Montpelier. Despite his growing infirmities, he never lost his essential optimism or his staunch faith in republican government. He died peacefully on June 28, 1836, at the advanced age of 85. The following day, James Madison, fourth president of the United States, Father of the Constitution and perhaps the nation's greatest political thinker was interred alongside his parents in the small family cemetery located just a short distance from the site of their original Mount Pleasant dwelling.

With the news of Madison's death, the entire nation paused to honor its former chief executive.

President Andrew Jackson ordered all naval installations to render a gun salute in Madison's honor and instructed American ships to fly their flags at half-mast; soldiers and sailors were directed to wear mourning crape on their uniforms, "as a testimony of the high sense of feeling for the loss which our Country has sustained in the death of this great and good man." In Boston, John Quincy Adams, the country's last surviving ex-president, delivered an extended two-hour eulogy praising his predecessor while one newspaper reported, "The death of ex-President Madison, though an event not unexpected, has produced a sensation in the public mind corresponding with the distinguished talents and exalted character of the deceased." Although James Madison would never become as well known or universally revered as such luminaries as Washington, Jefferson or Adams, history has since validated Madison's enormous contributions to the nation, crediting him with creating an enduring system of constitutional government.

James Madison was born in 1751, a subject of King George II and a citizen of the most powerful empire on earth. He was raised on his father's 4,000-

*"Knowledge will forever govern  
and a people"*

plus acre tobacco plantation in the rolling hills of the Virginia Piedmont, the colony's frontier of western settlement. As a young boy, Madison was sent to a small boarding school run by Donald Robertson in King and Queen County. There, he excelled in his studies, which consisted of instruction in such traditional subjects as Latin, Greek and algebra but also included extensive reading in the political theory and philosophy of the Enlightenment. After five years at Robertson's school, Madison returned home to Orange County where he continued his studies under the tutelage of Thomas Martin, the local Presbyterian minister. Perhaps through Martin's urging, Madison enrolled at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) rather than the Anglican-run College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va. Always in frail health, he viewed the Tidewater region as "unhealthy for persons going from a mountainous region." In 1769 as relations between the American colonies and Great Britain continued to deteriorate, Princeton was a hotbed of Whig-patriot sentiment. Madison graduated in just three years but chose to spend an

additional year at the university to continue his studies under the Rev. John Witherspoon.

Upon returning home, the sedate life of a Virginia planter had limited appeal to the scholarly Madison. He preferred the world of books and intellectual pursuits to the tedium of raising, cultivating and curing tobacco. In a letter to his friend William Bradford, Madison lamented, "The value of a college-life like most other blessing[s] is seldom known but by its loss."

At Montpelier, Madison continued to read vigorously and became active in county politics, serving as a member of the county's committee of safety and as a colonel in the local militia unit. In 1776, he was elected to the Virginia Convention and General Assembly where he would play a significant, but distinctly subordinate, role to George Mason in drafting the landmark Declaration of Rights. Madison maintained that no government could coerce belief, force religious compliance or impose orthodoxy of thought. At his insistence, an even stronger statement for religious freedom was included in the final document, "That religion, or the duty which we owe our Creator, and the man-

ner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force and violence; and therefore, all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience." Several years later, Madison would elaborate on this theme in his Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments (1785), which further affirmed his strong commitment to the fundamental separation of church and state.

During the American Revolution, Madison served in both the Virginia government and the Continental Congress. Just three years after the signing of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the hostilities with Britain, the Confederation government was in serious peril, beset by factionalism and petty disagreements. Debtor farmers in rural Massachusetts led by Daniel Shays were in open rebellion. Meanwhile, on the Chesapeake Bay commercial disagreements over oyster fishing jeopardized interstate relations between Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Delaware, and posed the threat of additional fighting. It was painfully obvious to Madison that the current government was woefully inadequate. These growing problems dramatized the need for an

*ignorance;*

*who mean to be their own governors*

*must arm themselves with the **power** which knowledge gives."*

**James Madison is born in Port Conway, Va.**

*French and Indian War Begins*

**Begins formal schooling with Donald Robertson**

*Stamp Act passed*

*Boston Massacre*

**Received B.A. degree from the College of New Jersey**  
*Benjamin Franklin begins writing his autobiography*

*Boston Tea Party*

**Member of the Orange County Committee of Safety**

**Becomes a Colonel in the local militia**  
*Battles of Lexington and Concord*

**Delegate to the Virginia Convention**  
*Thomas Paine publishes Common Sense*  
*Independence Declared*

**Elected to the Continental Congress**

*Treaty of Paris ends the Revolutionary War*

**Writes the Remonstrance on Religious Liberty**

1751

1754

1762

1765

1770

1771

1773

1774

1775

1776

1779

1783

1785



effective and stable government, and it was clear that immediate and dramatic action was required to preserve American liberty.

During the late summer of 1786, delegates (including James Madison and Alexander Hamilton) from five of the 13 states assembled in Annapolis, Md., to discuss the commercial failures of the Articles of Confederation. The meet-

ing, however, failed to achieve the necessary quorum and was forced to adjourn in abject failure. The delegates did succeed in issuing a call for all of the states to reconvene in May 1787 in Philadelphia “to render the constitution of the federal government adequate to the exigencies of the Union ... [and] for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation.”

Madison used this interlude to study the failed history of past confederacies. He concluded that these previous efforts at governance had been doomed because their decentralized structure encouraged member states to promote their own selfish interests over that of the common good. Amending the articles under the current system would be impossible, so Madison concluded that the United States



would need a wholly new constitution, one that would create a distinctly republican form of government with a strong federal government and with clearly defined powers.

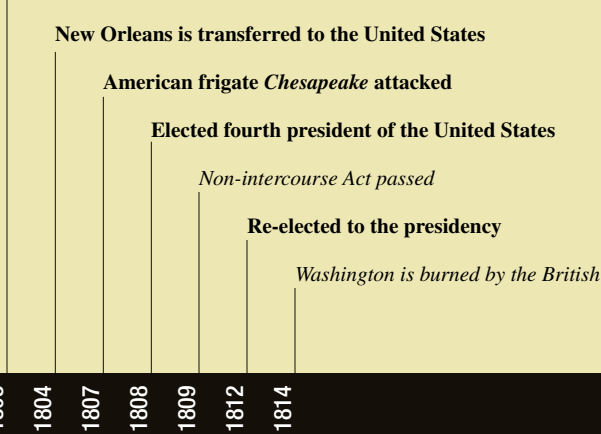
Madison's vision for the new government was encapsulated in the Virginia Plan, which was introduced to the convention on May 29 by the state's governor, Edmund Randolph. It called for the estab-

lishment of three distinct and separate branches of the federal government — the executive, judicial and legislative. Madison initially favored a bicameral legislature with representation in both houses based upon a state's population. The new chief executive, he hoped, would be chosen by this legislature while the federal judiciary would serve as an arbiter of disputes. Importantly, Madison also

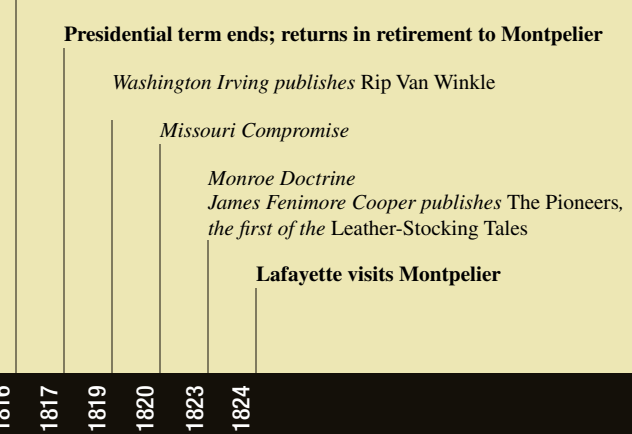
believed that the federal Congress should have the ability to veto any state law.

Madison carefully recorded all of the subsequent debates at the convention although his notes would not be published until several years after his death. The notes revealed that, for one of the few times in history, men were discussing the very essence of human nature and argu-

### The *Philadelphia* is captured by Tripoli



### Founding of the American Colonization Society



ing about the essential characteristics of effective government. During the hot summer months, the delegates anguished over how to craft a new federal system strong enough to adequately enforce its laws while guaranteeing human liberty and civil rights.

Through negotiation, argument and compromise, Madison's original plan was modified and

the new Constitution slowly took form. The preamble asserted that the new government's sovereignty came not from the states but rested with the people. The remainder of the document carefully delineated and divided power while instituting an elaborate system of checks and balances to prevent abuse since, as Madison astutely observed, "All power in human hands is liable to be abused." Finally, on

Sept. 17, the Constitution was completed, 39 of the assembled delegates signed the document and the convention adjourned.

Ratification of the Constitution required approval by nine of the 13 states and was by no means certain. Its opponents still had many serious objections to the document and feared that the proposed new federal government would usurp the power of the

*John Quincy Adams inaugurated as president*

**Becomes the rector at the University of Virginia  
Thomas Jefferson and John Adams both die on July 4th,  
the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence**

*Andrew Jackson elected president*

**Participates in the Virginia  
Constitutional Convention**

*Webster-Hayne Debate in the Senate  
Congress passes the Indian Removal Act*

*Alexis de Tocqueville visits America*

*William Lloyd Garrison begins publication of the Liberator*

*Nullification Crisis*

**Writes *Advice to My Country***

*Texas declares independence from Mexico;*

*The Alamo falls*

**James Madison dies at Montpelier at age 85**

1825

1826

1828

1829

1830

1831

1832

1835

1836



states. They also insisted upon the inclusion of a formal bill of rights to guarantee civil liberties.

In New York where ratification was in jeopardy, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay enlisted Madison to help draft a detailed defense and explanation of the Constitution and a justification of its political philosophy. The resulting 85 essays, which would become collectively known as the Federalist

Papers, were syndicated in newspapers throughout the state and widely circulated throughout the country. It was an intellectual barrage unprecedented in American history and for which the opponents of the Constitution were ill prepared.

The Constitution was eventually ratified by 12 states (Rhode Island would finally do so in 1791), and the first Congress under the new sys-

tem of government convened in May 1789. Madison had narrowly won election to the House of Representatives and although skeptical of “parchment barriers,” he reluctantly came to accept the need for certain amendments to achieve consensus within all of the states in order to “make the Constitution better in the opinion of those who are opposed to it.” Madison personally introduced

12 such amendments in the House, 10 were ultimately ratified by the states. This new Bill of Rights thus joined the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as part of the new American creed.

Over the next years, Madison remained in government service and served as Secretary of State under Thomas Jefferson. He was elected President in 1808 and became the first American chief executive to preside over a congressionally declared war. The War of 1812 was marked by many political setbacks and military defeats, including the burning of the new federal capital; but the nation successfully emerged from the conflict with its honor intact, its independence maintained and its republican ideology preserved. John Adams acknowledged, “[Madison’s] administration has acquired more glory and established more Union than all of his three predecessors, Washington, Adams and Jefferson, put together.”

Upon his retirement in 1817, Madison returned to Montpelier where he maintained an active correspondence and served as the rector of Thomas

Jefferson’s new University of Virginia. As the intellectual mastermind of the Constitution, many politicians sought his advice and wisdom. Madison, though, modestly maintained: “You give me a credit to which I have no claim in calling me ‘The writer of the Constitution of the U.S.’ This was not, like the fabled Goddess of Wisdom, the offspring of a single brain. It ought to be regarded as the work of many heads and many hands.”

In 1834 at the age of 83 and nearing death, Madison was distressed over the country’s growing sectional divisions and the ugly specter of nullification. He offered one last piece of wisdom to his fellow citizens: “As this advice, if it ever see the light will not do it till I am no more, it may be considered as issuing from the tomb, where truth alone can be respected, and the happiness of man alone consulted. It will be entitled therefore to whatever weight can be derived from good intentions, and from the experience of one who has served his country in various stations ... [and has] adhered through his life to the cause of its liberty. ... The advice nearest to my heart and deepest in

my convictions is that the Union of the States be cherished and perpetuated. Let the open enemy to it be regarded as a Pandora with her box opened; and the disguised one, as the Serpent creeping with his deadly wiles into Paradise.”

Today, James Madison deserves to be remembered with Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Adams and Hamilton in the pantheon of the early American republic. As the great Henry Clay recalled, “after Washington [Madison is] our greatest statesman and first political writer.”



*“But what is **government** itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?  
If men were angels, no government would be necessary.*

*If angels were to govern **men**, neither external nor internal controls  
In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great **difficulty**  
you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next*



## Historical Myths, Misconceptions and Inaccuracies

**D**OLLEY MADISON did not invent ice cream, despite popular legend. This elegant dessert apparently had its origins in seventh-century China and was enjoyed for centuries with various modifications and innovations. Ice cream was first introduced to the American colonies circa 1744. It was considered a delicacy since the ice required to produce and store the confection was difficult to obtain, especially in the hotter climates of the South. George Washington served it at Mount Vernon; and Thomas Jefferson even recorded his own recipe for vanilla ice cream, which called for “two bottles of good cream, 6 yolks of eggs, 1/2 lb. Sugar.” One guest at Monticello marveled, “ice-creams were produced in the form of balls of the frozen material inclosed in covers of warm pastry, exhibiting a curious contrast, as if the ice had just been taken from the oven.” As an elegant and refined hostess, Dolley served ice cream on special occasions during both

Jefferson and Madison’s administrations including her husband’s second inaugural in 1813.

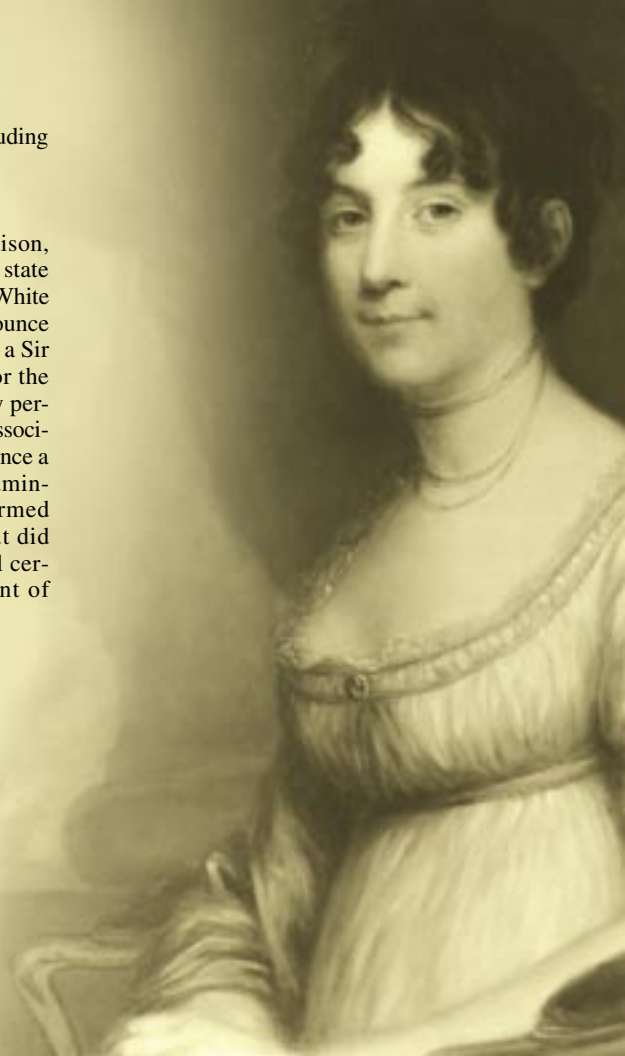
### HAIL TO THE CHIEF

Popular legend maintains that Dolley Madison, frustrated that her husband’s appearance on state occasions often went unnoticed, ordered the White House band to play *Hail to the Chief* to announce the president’s arrival. The song, based upon a Sir Walter Scott poem, was actually written for the theater by James Sanderson and was widely performed during the War of 1812. It was never associated with Madison and was not used to announce a presidential arrival until the John Tyler administration. Afterwards, the tune was performed sporadically at White House functions but did not become the official part of presidential ceremonies until adopted by the Department of Defense in 1954.

*on government would be necessary.*

*lies in this:*

*place oblige it to control itself.”* *Federalist No. 51*



## America's First Lady

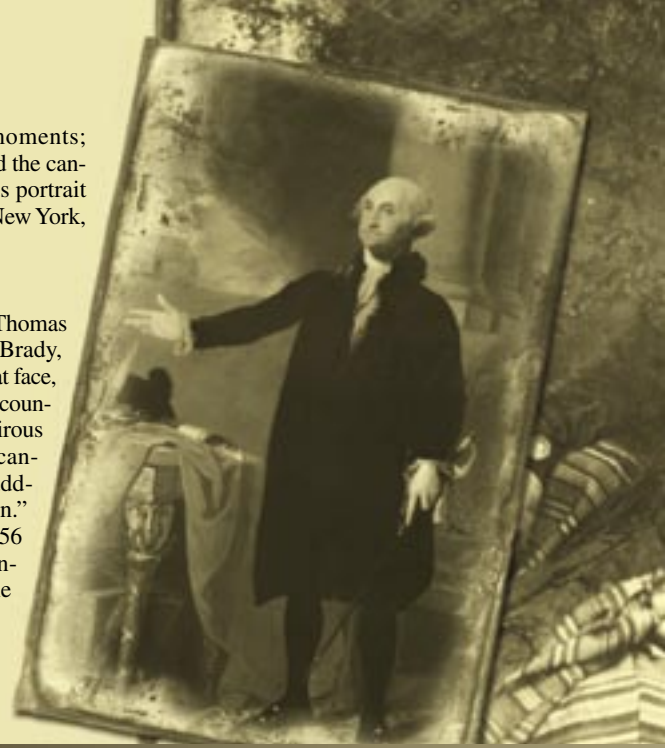
### DOLLEY AND THE WAR OF 1812

At the battle of Bladensburg, a superior force of British regulars routed American militia units. The federal capital was now completely unprotected and vulnerable to attack. Despite the imminent peril, Dolley Madison calmly remained at the President's House organizing the evacuation of crucial papers, documents and valuables. In a letter to her sister, Dolley wrote that she could hear the cannonade from the battle and used a telescope to "discern the approach of my dear husband ... but, alas, I can descry only groups of military wandering in all directions." Finally, with British troops approaching the federal city, Dolley was convinced to leave but only after she saved the famed Gilbert Stuart painting of George Washington: "Our kind friend, Mr. [Charles] Carroll, has come to hasten my departure, and is in a very bad humor with me because I insist on waiting until the large picture of Gen. Washington is secured, and it requires to be unscrewed from the wall. This process was

found too tedious for these perilous moments; I have ordered the frame to be broken, and the canvass taken out it is done, and the precious portrait placed in the hands of two gentlemen of New York, for safe keeping."

### DOLLEY AND BRADY

In 1848, Dolley Madison was invited by Thomas Ritchie to be photographed by Matthew Brady, "He is very desirous of daguerreotyping that face, which is so well known to so many of our countrymen, but which so many others are desirous of seeing, in some form or other ... he cannot think his gallery complete without adding your face to his interesting collection." The resulting portrait disappeared until 1956 when it was discovered in a barn in Allentown, Pa. It was eventually donated to the Library of Congress.



*"Notwithstanding a thousand faults and blunders,*

*[Madison's] Administration has acquired more glory and established more Union than all of his three predecessors.*



## Did You Know ...?

- The term “first lady” was first used in 1849 to honor Dolley Madison.
- Dolley Madison was forced to sell Montpelier to pay the debts of her son, Todd Payne. She moved to Washington, D.C., where she lived until her death in 1849.
- Madison would not allow his notes on the Constitutional Convention to be published until his death; he hoped that the sale of this material would provide financial security for his widow.
- The only official government monument to James Madison is one of the Library of Congress’ buildings named in his honor in Washington, D.C.
- Madison was the first president in history to preside over a declared war.
- The jacket that Madison wore during his inauguration was woven from wool harvested from sheep raised at Montpelier.
- Madison was 17 years older than Dolley. The couple married in 1794; their 42-year union produced no offspring.

- Madison was just 5 feet 4 inches tall — the shortest American president.
- Madison never left the United States during his lifetime.
- Madison authored 28 of the Federalist Papers. In Federalist No. 10, Madison explained the need for republican government and dealt with the problem of factions. In Federalist No. 51, he wrote, “But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary.”
- The 27th Amendment to the Constitution was originally proposed by James Madison in 1789 but was not ratified until 1992.
- The battle of Antietam, the bloodiest day in American history with 23,000 casualties, was fought on the 75th anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution. President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation shortly thereafter.

*Written by Philip Bigler ('74/M.Ed.'76)*

*Designed by Oleg Yagolnikov ('04)*



*Washington, Adams and Jefferson, put together.” — John Adams*



**JAMES  
MADISON**  
UNIVERSITY

THE MADISON CENTER

MSC 1020

Wilson Hall, Room 205

Harrisonburg, VA 22807

phone: 540.568.2549

fax: 540.568.7043

[www.jmu.edu/madison/center/](http://www.jmu.edu/madison/center/)

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