

# The Madison Papers

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**B**EFORE discussing the project to publish the papers of James Madison I should like briefly to sketch the history of the papers themselves. The correspondence that Madison left consisted almost wholly of letters received. Unlike Jefferson, Madison rarely made copies of outgoing letters. In general, the copies left by him were either drafts or else copies that he made late in life, as in the case of some of his letters to Washington and Jefferson. In addition to his correspondence, Madison left many longer writings: essays and his invaluable proceedings and debates of the Constitutional Convention and of the sessions of the congresses of which he was a member. These papers he bequeathed to his wife, Dolly, with the intention that she publish immediately the constitutional convention debates, the debates in the congresses of 1782, 1783, and 1787, the proceedings of the congresses of 1776, and a limited number of the letters as he had arranged them. Mrs. Madison was not successful in having these published, however, and in 1837 she sold this group of papers to the United States Government for \$30,000. These were edited by Henry D. Gilpin, solicitor of the Treasury, and published in three volumes by the Government in 1840. A few years later, in 1848, Congress appropriated \$25,000 to purchase the remaining Madison papers owned by Mrs. Madison, who was by this time financially distressed. A part of this second purchase was published in 1865 in an edition of four volumes.

Actually the Government did not receive all the Madison letters it bought in 1848; for Madison's stepson, John Payne Todd, an inveterate gambler, sorely in need of money, sold 1,000 of the letters to John C. McGuire before the Government took possession. In 1892 Marshall Field bought the McGuire collection at auction and gave it to the Chicago Historical Society. This collection was

<sup>1</sup> Paper read at the annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association at Durham, North Carolina, November 1956, primarily to inform the association's members of completed plans for the publication of the Madison papers. The author was at that time assistant in manuscripts at the Alderman Library, University of Virginia. He is now acting curator of rare books and of the Tracy W. McGregor Library at the University of Virginia. Mr. Runge disclaims any official connection with the publication project itself and wishes to acknowledge the aid of Francis L. Berkeley, Jr., William M. E. Rachal, and John Cook Wyllie in the preparation of his paper.

turned over to the Library of Congress in 1910 after the Chicago society was reimbursed for the cost of the letters. Some time later, about 15 years ago, the Library of Congress acquired the papers of William Cabell Rives, the ante-bellum politician and diplomat from Virginia. Among Rives' papers were found about 500 of the Madison letters that the Government had purchased from Dolly Madison in 1837 and 1848. Rives had borrowed the entire Madison collection while he was writing his *Life and Times of James Madison*, and some of these borrowed papers, mixed with his own papers after his death, remained there until the Rives papers were acquired by the Library. Thus it was not until 1941 that the Government took final possession of all the papers it had bought about a century earlier.

In addition to the papers Madison himself accumulated, there are in the National Archives Madison's official papers as Secretary of State and a number of his state papers as President. These, with the collection at the Library of Congress, amount to some 19,000 items. The remainder of the Madison papers are scattered. Some of the more important are in collections in the New York Public Library, the Pennsylvania Historical Society, the Virginia Historical Society, the Virginia State Archives, and the University of Virginia. These collections, added to those in Government repositories, bring the total of Madison papers now known to something more than 20,000 items; and this is probably a conservative estimate. How many letters will be uncovered in other repositories and in private hands only time will tell. If the experience of similar publication projects applies to this one, as no doubt it will, there will be many.

On October 1, 1956, an event took place that had long been hoped for, particularly at the University of Virginia. That event was the opening of the editorial offices of the James Madison Papers at the University of Chicago. As with any occasion of this kind, many years of work led up to it. At the University of Virginia Library many years ago, John Cook Wyllie, the present librarian, who inaugurated the checklist of the Jefferson Papers in the 1930's, and Francis L. Berkeley, Jr., curator of manuscripts, who has given much of his time to the preservation and publication of important papers, began to checklist the Madison papers in much the same manner as they had the Jefferson and later the Monroe papers. The University of Virginia has always had close association with Madison, who was on its original Board of Visitors and was its second Rector. Its library still receives an income from a Madison endow-

ment, and its governing body's earliest archives are partly in Madison's hand. The library has for a number of years made occasional purchases of unofficial papers relating to the private life of Madison and to his work as a cofounder of the University. The Madison checklist, however, has been assembled not only from collections in Charlottesville, but from public and private libraries elsewhere, from dealers' catalogs, and from letters appearing or cited in published works. Whenever a letter or other document is located, whether the original or a printed copy, the date of the item, the personalities involved, and the source are noted on a card, which is filed chronologically in the checklist. This chronological census of Madison's writings now contains some 14,000 entries. The checklisting of Madison material is now, however, in arrears, because the library has in recent years acquired many rolls of microfilm of Madison letters in other institutions, and all of these are now ready for checklisting. All our files will, of course, be made available to the editors of the James Madison Papers, for their use, just as our Jefferson checklist was to the editors of the Jefferson Papers.

In 1952 Philip M. Hamer, director of the National Historical Publications Commission, who has encouraged many other projects of this kind, in cooperation with a Virginia committee consisting of David J. Mays, Lyman Butterfield, William J. Van Schreeven, and Francis L. Berkeley, Jr., began to move for more concrete results. Colgate W. Darden, Jr., president of the University of Virginia, soon became interested; and in 1954 the University of Chicago Press offered to underwrite the publication of the papers provided that means could be found to support an editorial project. At this point Leonard D. White of the Chicago political science faculty came forward with the proposal that he and William T. Hutchinson of the Chicago history faculty join in editing the papers. At last the project had an editor; and when Lawrence A. Kimpton, chancellor of the University of Chicago, expressed his interest in seeing the publication become a reality, plans rapidly materialized. It is due to Professor White's initiative and energy that the project has at last taken shape and has crystallized so rapidly in the last 18 months. During 1955 and 1956 the universities of Chicago and Virginia joined to underwrite the project. Grants for the editorial work have been made by the Ford and Rockefeller foundations, and an appropriation has been received from the Virginia General Assembly.

While the money was being raised, an overall organization for the project was formed. An advisory board was created, as for other such projects, with President Darden as chairman, Chancellor

Kimpton as vice chairman, and Julian P. Boyd, Irving Brant, Dumas Malone, and John Cook Wyllie as members. This board had its first meeting on December 1, 1956, at the University of Virginia.

Unlike most other projects of similar purpose, which usually have one chief editor, this one is largely controlled by a board of editors. The board consists of the two representatives of the University of Chicago, Professors White and Hutchinson, and the University of Virginia representative, William M. E. Rachal, editor of the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*. These board members, working part time, will assume actual direction of the assembling of a complete file of photocopies of the Madison papers and will establish policies for editing and publication.

Ralph L. Ketchum, on leave of absence from his post as assistant professor of history at Syracuse University, has taken the position as full-time associate editor of the project. In this position Mr. Ketchum will work under the direction of the editors, and will carry on the details of administration and editorial procedures. The other staff member is Jean Schneider, the executive secretary. This staff began active work on the project on October 1, 1956. Additional staff members will be appointed as the need arises.<sup>2</sup>

The edition that the editors now have in mind will run to about 22 volumes, with the papers arranged in a single chronological sequence. The format will be similar to that of the Princeton edition of the Jefferson papers, and the work will be published by the University of Chicago Press. It is planned to publish the entire correspondence, both letters written by Madison and those written to him, and all of his tracts, essays, and other writings. Some letters will be printed in abstract only. For instance, a letter written by Jefferson to Madison that is to be printed in full in the Princeton edition of the Jefferson papers might well be printed in abstract form only, if the entire contents are not important or if the editors have not been able to add new information from their study of Madison. In each case the relative importance of the letter will govern the decision. In the case of form letters, documents, and the like, representative samples will be selected and printed in full. It is assumed that it would be of little value to print all routine letters and documents, for example those appointing postmasters and army officers, signed by Madison. But samples will be printed, and others will be listed with their location given. In speaking of these form

<sup>2</sup> After this paper was delivered, William H. Gaines of the *Virginia Cavalcade* accepted a position as editorial assistant to Mr. Rachal. Mr. Gaines, however, resigned this position effective July 1, 1957, to become associate editor of the *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.

letters and documents, Julian P. Boyd has stressed their importance to legal historians interested in the development of writs, to the administrative historian interested in forms and procedures, to the cultural historian interested in the spread of printing, and to the biographer who needs to be aware of the daily stresses that his subject undergoes in his official chores.<sup>3</sup> Whenever a document or form letter relates to an important personage, it will probably be printed in full. At present the editors do not plan to include any letters of Dolly Madison other than those she exchanged with her husband. They do, however, plan to collect all of the Dolly Madison correspondence.

For at least the next 2 years, the editorial staff will be concerned wholly with assembling a complete photocopy file of the Madison papers and establishing editorial policy and procedures. Present plans call for publication of the first volume in 1960; and, if estimates are correct, 12 years will elapse before the final volume comes from the press. During this time the editors will of course cooperate with other editorial projects and in turn will need the cooperation not only of other editorial projects but also of public and private libraries, private collectors, historians, and many others. Ever since the Princeton Jefferson publication project first got under way, it has become more and more evident that today's publication of the papers of great men is a cooperative enterprise.

Besides the 1840 and 1865 editions of Madison papers, already mentioned, there has been one other previous attempt to get the papers into the public domain of the scholar: the nine-volume edition of 1900, edited by Gaillard Hunt. But all these editions suffer from the usual faults of 19th-century editing: incompleteness, selectivity, expurgation, and error. With this new and complete edition of the papers of the "father of our constitution," a conspicuous gap in the publication of the papers of the leaders of the revolutionary and early national periods will be filled.

<sup>3</sup> Julian P. Boyd, "Some Animadversions on Being Struck by Lightning," in *Daedalus; Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 86, no. 1, p. 54.