

James Madison as an Archivist

By KATE STEWART

Library of Congress

“IT has been remarked that the biography of an author must be a history of his writings. So must that of one whose whole life has in a manner been a public life, be gathered from his official transactions, and his manuscript papers on public subjects including letters to as well as from him.”¹ James Madison thus expressed an appreciation for his own papers that is not unlike the sentiments voiced by more recent Presidents in appeals for their libraries. He and other outstanding Americans of his period were keenly interested in preserving and making available for research the unique source materials accumulated during their public services. In making their wills, they were concerned with the value of their papers. In some cases at least, their chief motive may have been the hope of financial benefit from publication rather than pure archival devotion. James Monroe left his papers and the “care & publication of them” to his son-in-law, Samuel Gouverneur.² Alexander Hamilton’s widow received “all his public and private papers . . . for publication as the only remaining legacy he had to bestow.”³ John Quincy Adams, however, had no thought of publication. Passing on to his son Charles Francis Adams both his own and his father’s papers, he established a valuable family archives with a *respect des fonds* regrettably missing in many collections.⁴ He recommended a fireproof building and suggested that Charles keep the books and manuscripts together as one library to be transmitted to his eldest son, adding that they should not be sold or disposed of as long as practicable.

Madison himself left his papers to the trusted Dolley:

and I also give to her all my manuscript papers, having entire confidence in her discreet and proper use of them. . . . it is not an unreasonable inference that a careful and extended report of the proceedings and discussions of that body [the Convention of 1787], which were within closed doors, by a member who

¹ “Autobiography,” in Madison papers, Library of Congress.

² Photostat of will of James Monroe, in John B. Murphy collection of Presidential wills, in the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

³ “Petition of Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton . . .,” S. Doc. 52, 29th Cong., 1st sess.

⁴ Murphy collection of Presidential wills. Scholars have recently welcomed the long-overdue lifting of the restrictions imposed by the Adams Trust; the papers are now being edited under the able leadership of Lyman H. Butterfield.

was constant in his attendance, will be particularly gratifying to the people of the United States, and to all who take an interest in the progress of political science and the cause of true liberty. It is my desire that the report as made by me should be published under her authority and direction.⁵

Madison's archival interests were most encouraged and influenced by Thomas Jefferson. Each had preserved some of the priceless records created when the nation had been formed and they must have spent many a long evening discussing the contents and the preservation of their papers. The practical aspects of preserving and arranging were important to both. Jefferson's almost invariable practice of keeping copies of outgoing letters and of making up his famous "Epistolary Record" could well have been followed by Madison. In the days before humidity-controlled, air-conditioned stacks, Jefferson sent Madison a copy of his letter of Jan. 16, 1796, to George Wythe, fellow-signer of the Declaration, in which are found practical instructions for the preservation of the laws of Virginia, the manuscripts

being so rotten, that on turning over a leaf it sometimes falls into powder. these I preserve by wrapping & sewing them up in oiled cloth, so that neither air nor moisture can have access to them. very early in the course of my researches into the laws of Virginia, I observed that many were already lost, and many more on the point of being lost, as existing only in single copies in the hands of careful or curious individuals, on whose deaths they would probably be used for waste paper. I set myself therefore to work, to collect all which was then existing, in order that when the day should come in which the public should advert to the magnitude of their loss in these precious monuments of our property and our history, a part of their regret might be spared by information that a portion has been saved from the wreck which is worthy of their attention & preservation.⁶

After his retirement from the White House in 1817 Madison returned to his farm Montpelier (now usually spelled *Montpelier*) in Orange County, Virginia. By 1818 he apparently had the farm work so well organized that he had begun working on his papers — "to employ a portion of my leisure in gathering up and arranging these, with others relating to other periods of our public affairs."⁷ Like any rational processor of manuscript material, he refused to commit himself as to how long the job would take:

It is my purpose now to devote a portion of my time to an exact digest of the voluminous materials in my hands. How long a time it will require under the

⁵ Copy of will, dated Apr. 15, 1835, in Murphy collection of Presidential wills.

⁶ Copy in Madison papers, vol. 19.

⁷ Madison to Charles J. Ingersoll, Jan. 4, 1818, in *Letters and Other Writings of James Madison*, 3:58 (Philadelphia, 1865), hereafter cited as *Letters*.

interruptions & avocations which are probable I cannot easily conjecture. Not a little will be necessary for the mere labour of making fair transcripts. By the time I get the whole into a due form for preservation I shall be better able to decide the question of publication.⁸

Dolley Madison, writing to her friend Mrs. Andrew Stevenson in 1826, expressed a thought that must have occurred to many manuscript assistants and archivists through the years:

my husband is fixed here, and hates to have me leave him. This is the third winter in which he has been engaged in the arrangement of papers, and the business seems to accumulate as he proceeds, so that it might outlast my patience, and yet I cannot press him to forsake a duty so important, or find it in my heart to leave him during its fulfillment.⁹

In spite of numerous visitors and necessary interruptions, Madison worked faithfully at his self-imposed duty. In 1827 he wrote to Robert Walsh, Jr., who had requested contributions to the *American Quarterly Review*, that retirement had not given him the free time he needed; his work was hindered by the mails, the "neighborly intercourse," the duties of a member of the Board of Visitors of the University of Virginia, and the "stiffening of the fingers which use the pen . . . Such has been the accumulated force of the causes alluded to, that I am yet to put a final hand to the digest and arrangement of some of my papers, which may be considered as a task due from me."¹⁰

In replying to queries about the possibility of publishing his papers and in answering reference queries, Madison frequently described the papers. He wrote to Tench Coxe, "The papers which I happen to have preserved are considerable, and some of them doubtless very valuable; but they are, for the most part, suited rather for general and future use than for occurrences of the day."¹¹ In reply to Charles J. Ingersoll, who was contemplating a history of the Revolution, Madison said, "But you much overrate, I fear, 'my private papers,' as distinct from those otherwise attainable. They consist, for the most part, of my correspondence with the heads of Departments, particularly when separated from them, and of a few vestiges remaining of Cabinet consultations."¹² The processor familiar with the mass of papers in the collections of more recent Presidents can deeply appreciate his references to "that portion of the mass

⁸ Draft of letter to Thomas Ritchie, Sept. 15, 1821, in Madison papers, vol. 69.

⁹ Allen C. Clark, *Life and Letters of Dolly Madison*, p. 223 (Washington, 1914).

¹⁰ Dec. 22, 1827, in *Letters*, 3:604.

¹¹ Nov. 3, 1823, in *Letters*, 3:342.

¹² Jan. 4, 1818, in *Letters*, 3:58.

which contains the voluminous proceedings of the Convention.”¹³ In this same letter Madison refers to the “mass of papers accumulated thro’ a long course of public life” and restates his determination to get along with the processing: “Becoming more & more aware of the danger of a failure from delay, at length I have set about it in earnest: and shall continue the application as far as health and indispensable avocations will permit.” He also complains of the “tedious arrangement” which had somewhat interfered with the tranquility in retirement that every ex-government worker dreams of and that Madison had expected “. . . after my final . . . return to a private station.”

The provenance of some of the Madison papers has been a challenging problem. In 1819 Madison, regretting that he had not always kept copies of the letters he had written, began writing to ask people to send copies of the letters he had written to them or to members of their families. Most of his friends were cooperative; but usually, instead of making copies, they sent the originals for Madison to copy or to keep. Countless valuable letters would have been forever lost without Madison’s enthusiastic collecting. In reply to his request for copies of his letters in George Washington’s papers, Bushrod Washington wrote that it would be a pleasure to furnish him with the letters “or such of them as can be found . . . for the papers sent to the Chief Justice and which are still at Richmond, have been very extensively mutilated by rats and otherwise injured by damp . . .”¹⁴ The next year, upon returning some of the Washington letters to Judge Washington, Madison expressed the hope that the “Chief Justice may not lose the opportunity of a recess” for looking up others. Madison also wrote to Jared Sparks to thank him for his promise to send copies of George Washington’s letters, “which are missing on my files.”¹⁵

Some of the gaps in the papers resulted from the failure of borrowers to return papers Madison had lent them. In 1828 he wrote to William Wirt: “Will you permit me to remind you of the letters from Mr. [Edmund] Pendleton, sent you some years ago when you were gathering materials for the Biography of Mr. Henry? I am now putting into final arrangement the letters of my correspondents.”¹⁶ Even the President was not spared. Writing to Monroe in 1820, Madison urged him to continue searching: “Perhaps the

¹³ Madison to John G. Jackson, Dec. 27, 1821; draft in Madison papers, vol. 69.

¹⁴ Bushrod Washington to Madison, Sept. 14, 1819, in Madison papers, vol. 66.

¹⁵ Madison to Judge Washington, Oct. 14, 1820, and to Sparks, Jan. 5, 1828, in *Letters*, 3: 182, 609.

¹⁶ May 5, 1828, in *Letters*, 3: 632.

remaining letters, or a part of them, may have escaped your search. Will you be so good as to renew it whenever and wherever the convenient opportunity may admit?"¹⁷ Jefferson was frequently able to supply copies of letters from his well-preserved papers.

Madison urged the preservation of the papers of others who had been active in public life. In his correspondence with biographers and historians he makes many references to the papers of his contemporaries.¹⁸ He pointed out, however, the need of caution in using such sources, observing that it was a "habit in Mr. Jefferson, as in others of great genius, of expressing in strong and round terms impressions of the moment." Madison went on to say, "It may be added that a full exhibition of the correspondence of distinguished public men through the varied scenes of a long period, would, without a *single exception*, not fail to involve delicate personalities and apparent, if not real, inconsistencies."¹⁹

Madison's strong feelings about preserving the history of the early years of the republic is expressed in a letter to Dr. William Eustis on July 6, 1819:

Ought you not to do equal justice to other things of a public bearing which may exist in no other memory or memoranda than yours, or in none where they will not perish with the possessor? The infant periods of most nations are buried in silence, or veiled in fable; and perhaps the world may have lost but little which it need regret. The origin and outset of the American Republic contain lessons of which posterity ought not to be deprived; and, happily, there never was a case in which a knowledge of every interesting incident could be so accurately preserved. You have lights, I am persuaded, which ought not to be forever under a bushel.²⁰

Besides trying to complete his correspondence files, Madison collected and preserved other perishable records and information. His interest in the origin of the "Constitution of Virginia and its accompanying Declaration of Rights" prompted him to write to George Graham, Commissioner of the General Land Office, that he had heard that among the papers left by Col. George Mason there was "one containing the 'Declaration of Rights' in his own hand. This paper may be a proper link in the chain of the proceedings. In whose hands are those papers? Or can you yourself procure me a *literal* copy of that particular paper, or any others throwing light on the investigation?"²¹ In a reply to Thomas S.

¹⁷ Nov. 9, 1820, in *Letters*, 3: 188.

¹⁸ See Madison to various correspondents, in *Letters*, 3: 365, 582, 607, and 4: 198, 306.

¹⁹ Madison to Nicholas P. Trist, May 1832, in *Letters*, 4: 218.

²⁰ *Letters*, 3: 140.

²¹ Apr. 5, 1827, in *Letters*, 3: 575.

Hinde, denying the rumor that he was writing a history of the country, he wrote: "The authentic facts, which it appears you happen to possess relating to the criminal enterprise in the West during the administration of Mr. Jefferson, must merit preservation as belonging to a history of that period; and if no repository more eligible occurs to you, a statement of them may find a place among my political papers."²²

Madison recognized the desirability of having his manuscript collections supported by the best reference library obtainable. Originally among his papers were many pamphlets and broadsides, which are now in the Rare Book Room of the Library of Congress.

In 1810 President Madison received a report from a congressional committee that had been appointed "to inquire into the state of the ancient public records and archives of United States." On April 28 of that year he signed an act to provide "as many fireproof rooms as shall be sufficient for . . . all the public papers and records . . . of the state, war or navy departments."²³ Madison's concern with the preservation of material in the public archives prompted him to send a document, the "Talk" with the Indians at the beginning of the war, to be "officially preserved as one proof of the spirit and policy of the administration in relation to the Indians."²⁴ He was familiar with the arrangement of government archives and often sent for information from the State Department records.²⁵ In a letter to William Plumer, Jr., Madison approved of his plan to write a history of the war, and said that he was sure that the departments or officers of the Government "will be always ready to contribute proper information for an undertaking laudable in its object . . ."²⁶

Writing to Monroe in 1820, Madison asked, "What is to become of the secret journals of the old Congress, and when will the press give them to the public?"²⁷ Shortly before his death he again mentioned his interest in them: "I cannot but think, however, that the

²² Aug. 17, 1829, in *Letters*, 4:45.

²³ 2 Stat. 590; Wayne C. Grover, "The National Archives at Age 20," in *American Archivist*, 17:99 (Apr. 1954). See also Percy Scott Flippin, comp., "The Archives of the United States Government; a Documentary History, 1774-1934," a typescript (1938) in the National Archives Library.

²⁴ Madison to Thomas L. McKenney, May 2, 1825, in *Letters*, 3:488.

²⁵ Madison to Edward Everett, Feb. 18, 1823, to Henry Wheaton, July 11, 1824, to Samuel H. Smith, Nov. 4, 1826, and to Dr. J. W. Francis, Nov. 7, 1831, in *Letters*, 3:298, 443, 533, and 4:200.

²⁶ July 14, 1815, in *Letters*, 2:608.

²⁷ Nov. 19, 1820, in *Letters*, 3:188.

preservation of the original journals of the Legislature is undervalued . . ." ²⁸

Madison, who once referred to himself as "the only surviving source of information on certain subjects now under investigation," ²⁹ was harassed with requests to aid in the preparation of books or articles, to comment on recently published material, and to search his papers for information when someone's character had been impugned. His self-imposed duties as a reference librarian were time-consuming and tedious. Always scholarly and thorough, he often expressed regret at not being able to do more; because of rheumatism in his hands he was "in a manner disqualified for researches which require the handling of papers." ³⁰ He always encouraged the use of original source materials and once scolded Henry Lee for not looking for the material he wanted in Lee's father's papers. ³¹ In answering reference questions Madison shared the feelings of all archivists who have to deal with an inquirer who has not read the printed material available on his subject. Writing to James Robertson, who was interested in writing a history of the Constitution and Articles of Confederation, he mentioned a few printed sources, but he did not feel it necessary to list others which would "fall within your obvious researches . . . The Library at Philadelphia is probably rich in pertinent materials. Its catalogue alone might point to such as are otherwise attainable." ³² Isaac Lea was referred to a young institution, the Library of Congress; Madison did not have the Virginia newspapers he had suggested as sources and did not know where they could be found, "unless, indeed, they should have been included in the Library of Mr. Jefferson, now forming part of that of Congress." ³³ Madison's cognizance of materials to be found in the archives of the States appeared in a letter of Mar. 19, 1836, to C. Fenimore Williston: "The archives of the States seem, therefore, the resort first presenting itself." ³⁴ And he showed his respect for historical societies in a letter thanking Frederick Peyster for the published collections of the New York Historical Society: I sincerely wish it every success in its laudable undertaking, and that its example may be followed in all the States composing our Union. Such Institutions will

²⁸ Madison to William C. Rives, Apr. 19, 1836, in *Letters*, 4:432.

²⁹ Madison to ———, June 28, 1831, in *Letters*, 4:187.

³⁰ Madison to James T. Austin, Feb. 6, 1832, in *Letters*, 4:215.

³¹ Aug. 14, 1833, in *Letters*, 4:306.

³² Mar. 27, 1831, in *Letters*, 4:167.

³³ Apr. 3, 1828, in *Letters*, 3:626.

³⁴ *Letters*, 4:431. Unfortunately Richard Bartlett, member of the New Hampshire Historical Society, did not send out his questionnaire about the preservation of State archives until a few months after Madison's death.

afford the best aids in procuring, and preserving, the materials otherwise but too perishable, from which a faithful history of our country must be formed — a history which, if well executed, will be superior to the most distinguished, in the authenticity of its facts, and inferior to none in the lessons which it is the province of the Historian to convey to posterity.³⁵

Madison was not infallible as a practicing archivist. He once made a mistake as to the identity of Benjamin Franklin's handwriting; 2 years later he wrote to apologize and correct his error.³⁶ He attempted to make amends for his horrible practice of mutilating valuable documents for autograph collectors by supplying in his own hand the missing name. On a George Washington letter of Dec. 6, 1795, he wrote, "The paragraph cut off, sent as a requested autograph to the Rev. Mr. Sprague."³⁷ In this case he also supplied the last line of the letter.

Errors in dating some of the papers he was working on after his retirement may be attributed to the uncertain memory of an old man as well as to the absence of adequate reference sources. The modern archivist's problem of not being able to find a document that obviously "should be there" is one that Madison would have appreciated. "It happens, odd as it may seem, that I cannot find, among my papers, printed or manuscript, a copy of the Message" — the veto message of Mar. 3, 1817.³⁸

Madison, perhaps influenced by Jefferson, often stated his belief that public records should be available to inspection. Thanking Daniel Webster for some congressional documents, he wrote, "Among the characteristic attributes of our Government is its frankness in giving publicity to proceedings elsewhere locked up as arcana of State."³⁹ In sending five dollars to John Brannan for "the volume containing the official letters of the military and naval officers during the late war," Madison wrote, "it is due to the men who have given such noble examples for future emulation, to the country boasting them, and to all to whom such documents may be objects of patriotic curiosity, or materials for historical or other use, that they should be put into the best forms for preservation, and into situations diffusively accessible."⁴⁰ Writing to John McLean about the proposed publication of the archives of the Con-

³⁵ 1833 [?], in *Letters*, 4: 325.

³⁶ Madison to Jacob Engelbrecht, Oct. 20, 1825, June 20, 1827, in *Letters*, 3: 502, 585.

³⁷ Stan V. Henkels, comp., *Catalogue No. 694; Washington-Madison Papers Collected and Preserved by James Madison, Estate of J. C. McGuire*, p. 60 (1892).

³⁸ Madison to Trist, June 3, 1830, in *Letters*, 4: 87.

³⁹ Feb. 25, 1825, in *Letters*, 3: 484.

⁴⁰ July 19, 1823, in *Letters*, 3: 328.

federation, Madison said, "It seems very proper, that whatever is valuable in the unpublished Archives of the Revolution, and may no longer be under a seal of secrecy, should be secured against the waste and casualties of time by a multiplication of printed copies . . ." ⁴¹ This is the same philosophy expressed by Jefferson in a letter to Ebenezer Hazard in 1791:

They are curious monuments of the infancy of our country. I learn with great satisfaction that you are about committing to the press the valuable historical and state-papers you have been so long collecting. time & accident are committing daily havoc on the originals deposited in our public offices. the late war has done the work of centuries in this business. The lost cannot be recovered; but let us save what remains: not by vaults and locks which fence them from the public eye and use, in consigning them to the waste of time, but by such a multiplication of copies, as shall place them beyond the reach of accident. ⁴²

Madison had a continuing interest in the publication of historical material and never failed to agree with suggestions that his own papers should be published, but he held that such publication should be posthumous — posthumous as to others as well as himself. ⁴³ Writing to Thomas Ritchie in 1821 he explained his hesitancy to publish at that time:

It is true as the public has been led to understand that I possess materials for a pretty ample view of what passed in that assembly [the Convention of 1787]. It is true also that it has not been my intention that they should forever remain under the veil of secrecy. Of the time when it might not be improper for them to see the light, I had formed no particular determination. In general it had appeared to me that it might be best to let the work be a posthumous one; or at least that its publication should be delayed till the Constitution should be well settled by practice, & till a knowledge of the controversial part of the proceedings of its framers could be turned to no improper account. Delicacy also seemed to require some respect to the rule by which the Convention "prohibited a promulgation without leave of what was spoken in it." . . . The legitimate meaning of the instrument [the Constitution] must be derived from the text itself . . . ⁴⁴

This hesitancy may be traced to the assembling of the Convention on May 29, 1787, when, in spite of Jefferson's objections, Madison's wish prevailed that nothing spoken in the house should be printed or communicated without permission. Madison thought that such an order would "save both the convention and the community from a thousand erroneous and perhaps mischievous re-

⁴¹ Feb. 2, 1824, in *Letters*, 3:362.

⁴² Draft, Feb. 18, 1791, in Jefferson papers, vol. 61, Library of Congress.

⁴³ Madison to Henry Lee, Aug. 1824, in *Letters*, 3:449.

⁴⁴ Draft, Sept. 15, 1821, in Madison papers, vol. 69.

ports."⁴⁵ In 1799 Jefferson was trying to persuade Madison to make public some of his vast knowledge of the affairs of state:

there has been a general complaint among the members that they could hear but one side of the question, and a great anxiety to obtain a paper or papers which would put them in possession of both sides. . . . this summer is the season for systematic energies & sacrifices. the engine is the press. every man must lay his purse & his pen under contribution to the former. it is possible I may be obliged to assume something for you. as to the latter, let me pray & beseech you to set apart a certain portion of every post-day to write what may be proper for the public [and] send it to me while here. . . . You can render such incalculable services in this way as to lessen the effect of our loss of your presence here.⁴⁶

Although neither Jefferson nor Madison ever fully recorded the history they so often urged others to write, both realized how valuable their own papers would be to future historians. In 1823 Jefferson was encouraging Judge William Johnson to finish his history of parties:

We have been too careless of our future reputation . . . Mr. Madison will probably leave something, but, I believe, only particular passages of our history and these confined to the period between the dissolution of the old and commencement of the new government, which is peculiarly within his knowledge. After he joined me in the administration, he had no leisure to write. This too, was my case. But although I had not time to prepare anything express, my letters, (all preserved) will furnish the daily occurrences and views from my return from Europe in 1790, till I retired finally from office. These will command more conviction than anything I could have written after my retirement; no day having ever passed during that period without a letter to somebody. Written too in the moment, and in the warmth and freshness of fact and feeling, they will carry internal evidence that what they breathe is genuine. Selections from these, after my death, may come out successively as the maturity of circumstances may render their appearance seasonable. But multiplied testimony, multiplied views will be necessary to give solid establishment to truth. Much is known to one which is not known to another, and no one knows everything. It is the sum of individual knowledge which is to make up the whole truth, and to give its correct current through future time.⁴⁷

Madison has been criticized for altering his letters and manuscripts during the time that he was working on them after his retirement. Perhaps the strongest charges of this kind were made by

⁴⁵ Quoted in Irving Brant, *James Madison; Father of the Constitution, 1787-1800*, p. 19 (New York, 1950).

⁴⁶ Feb. 5, 1799, in Madison papers, vol. 21.

⁴⁷ Mar. 4, 1823, in Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 12:277-279 (New York, 1904).

William W. Crosskey in his *Politics and the Constitution in the History of the United States*, when he attempted to convict Madison of falsifying his notes of the Federal Convention. Crosskey, referring to "certain spurious passages," assigns to Madison the motives for "forging them." This book has been reviewed by Irving Brant,⁴⁸ who had earlier pointed out in his biography that Madison, hoping for the publication of his papers after his death, undertook some editorial revision and did an honest job of it, not changing his notes to conform with a later point of view on States rights.⁴⁹ Mr. Brant thinks that if Mr. Crosskey's charges were true, Madison would be rated as one of the most accomplished forgers in the world's history. Madison would have had to replace four pages of the original notes on the debates (written on folded sheets bound together, a part of the Madison papers at the Library of Congress) "with fictitious notes written after 1819 on a blank sheet of paper with the same watermark as that used in 1787 and duplicate at about the age of 70 a youthful handwriting which had disappeared from all his other writings." Mr. Brant continues:

Perhaps the best commentary on all this was furnished by Madison himself when Jonathan Elliot sent him in 1827 the proof sheets of his book containing the debates in the Virginia Convention and asked him to correct his speeches. Replying that he found passages that were defective, obscure, unintelligible or erroneous, . . . Madison told the editor that "it might not be safe nor deemed fair" to correct them after so many years. "If I did not confound subsequent ideas and varied expressions with the real ones, I might be supposed to do so."⁵⁰

Matters of the heart may have warranted some censoring. On Apr. 22, 1783, Madison wrote in code to Jefferson to tell him of his happiness at being engaged to 16-year-old "Miss Kitty" — Catherine Floyd. Almost half a century later, when he was nearly 80 years old, Madison obliterated the passage and wrote in the margin "undecypherable." The letter to Jefferson, Aug. 11, 1783, in which Madison described his disappointment when the engagement was broken, was written in carefully guarded language; but Madison later thoroughly inked out the passage. Able scholarship and the fading of some inks over the years have revealed some of the deleted matter, but not even modern photographic skills have succeeded in revealing all of it.⁵¹ This mutilation was done by a

⁴⁸ In *Columbia Law Review*, 54:443-450 (Mar. 1954).

⁴⁹ Brant, *Madison, 1787-1800*, p. 22.

⁵⁰ Brant, in *Columbia Law Review*, 54:447.

⁵¹ For interesting discussions of these letters, see Brant, *James Madison the Nationalist, 1780-87*, p. 28 (New York, 1948); and Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 6:262, 335 (Princeton, 1952).

sensitive man who was probably protecting his own feelings as well as those of his beloved Dolley.

In another instance, however, Madison *did* change, rather extensively, an early letter to conform to public opinion of a later day. Until 1953 Madison's letter of Oct. 17, 1784, to Jefferson concerning the time he had spent with the Marquis de Lafayette was known only in the version Madison had created in his old age. He not only obliterated Jefferson's decoding in places but in some cases skillfully altered the numbers of the code and obviously attempted to imitate Jefferson's handwriting. Portions of the obscured matter have been published for the first time in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.⁵² As an example of the changes made by Madison, his revised version of one sentence — the only one previously known — reads, "In a word, I take him to be as amiable a man as can be imagined."⁵³ The original version, now exposed, reads, "In a word, I take him to be as amiable a man as his vanity will admit."⁵⁴ Lafayette's triumphal tour in the United States a few years before Madison received his letters to Jefferson made him hesitate to leave his original opinion for all to see.

Whatever Madison's reasons were for making a few changes in his "voluminous mass" of letters, we can be grateful for the measure of archival conscience that led him to preserve even mutilated letters rather than to choose the easier method of destroying them altogether.

The considerable contributions made by Dolley Madison to the care and preservation of the papers must not be forgotten. In spite of spies and intrigues, she managed to secure irreplaceable papers one hot August day in 1814 when the British came to Washington. According to legend Madison's papers relating to the Constitutional Convention of 1787 were stuffed into the little red leather-bound chest now preserved in the stacks of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. Her anxious husband (according to a letter written by Dolley to her sister, Lucy Washington Todd, on Aug. 23, 1814) had left her, on his way to the forces defending Washington, "beseeching me to take care of myself, and of the Cabinet papers, public and private."⁵⁵ A less romantic but no less valuable contribution made by Dolley was her efficient manage-

⁵² 7:444-452.

⁵³ *Letters*, 1:106.

⁵⁴ *Jefferson Papers*, 7:446.

⁵⁵ Katharine S. Anthony, *Dolley Madison; her Life and Times*, p. 224 (New York, 1949).

ment of the household at Montpelier, which gave Madison more time for his papers. She was the "friend and amanuensis" in the years when Madison was increasingly handicapped by rheumatism.⁵⁶ She willingly entertained all the people Madison invited to come and stay with them while doing research in the Madison papers. Jared Sparks spent

five delightful days at Mr. Madison's. . . . I have been busy also in copying and abridging curious papers, with which he has furnished me, relating to the history of the old Congress and other events . . . He seems busy in arranging his papers. While he was in the old Congress, he rarely kept copies of his letters, though he wrote many. He has recently succeeded in procuring nearly all the originals from the descendants of the persons to whom he wrote them. I imagine he has preserved all the materials for a history of the convention for framing the Constitution, and probably of his later political life.⁵⁷

Madison also profited by the exchange of information with his guests. Reporting to Monroe on another visit made by Sparks 7 years later, Madison wrote that Sparks "is, I find, possessed of a great and valuable mass of official information relating to the Cabinet policy of G. Britain and France during our Revolutionary period, having been allowed access to the secret archives of both, and even to take copies from them . . ." ⁵⁸ Undoubtedly Montpelier was, for a time, the ideal Presidential library: the papers finally arranged, the archival creator himself happily aiding the searcher, and a genial, liberal hostess presiding over a well-run plantation home! It is likely that Dolley would have welcomed the financial support now available to Presidential libraries under the Federal Records Act of 1950, but Madison himself favored a centralized repository: "an original record known to exist in a central repository can always be consulted for public or private purposes." ⁵⁹ It would have been difficult, however, for Madison to have refused congressional appropriations for secretarial assistance. In his so-called "Autobiography" he complained of being diverted from his farm and his books "by an extensive and often laborious correspondence (as his files show) which seems to be entailed on Ex-Presidents, especially when they have passed a like prolonged &

⁵⁶ Madison to W. A. Duer, June 5, 1835, in *Letters*, 4: 378.

⁵⁷ Herbert B. Adams, *Life and Writings of Jared Sparks*, 1: 567 (Boston, New York, 1893).

⁵⁸ Madison to James Monroe, May 18, 1830, in *Letters*, 4: 83.

⁵⁹ Madison to Rives, Apr. 19, 1836, in *Letters*, 4: 432. See also Madison to B. W. Leigh, May 1, 1836: "It is clear, I think, that a preservation of the original journals derives, from their legal authenticity and constant accessibility at a known spot for public or private purposes, a peculiar value . . ." *Letters*, 4: 433.

diversified career in the public service.”⁶⁰ Although both Jefferson and Madison, following the precedent set by George Washington when he left office, considered their papers personal and took them to their homes in Virginia, they respected the public archives and contributed wherever possible to their preservation and accessibility. Soon after leaving the White House in 1809 Jefferson forwarded to Madison “several letters which must have been intended for the office, & not the person named on the back. They belong therefore to your files.”⁶¹

Madison’s fears about the disposition of his papers were realized. In 1857, hearing that the State Department had placed them in the hands of William C. Rives, the Madison biographer, Edward Coles “recalled very forcibly & fearfully . . . the embarrassment Mr. Madison felt in disposing of his papers after his death and his apprehensions, often expressed to me, that they might get into the hands of bad men, who might filch or alter them.”⁶² After Madison’s death many of the papers were sold outside the Government — another result of not listing or specifically defining “papers.” Happily many of the alienated papers were restored to the main body of the Madison papers at the Library of Congress when the Chicago Historical Society sold its Madison collection to the Government.

Mrs. Madison, to whom the President left his papers, confirmed his wishes for early publication. In her letter to President Jackson, offering the manuscripts to the Government, she wrote, “His anxiety for their early publication . . . may be inferred from his having them transcribed and revised by himself; and, it may be added, the known wishes of his illustrious friend Thomas Jefferson, and other distinguished patriots, the important light they would shed for present as well as future usefulness.”⁶³ President Jackson, in transmitting Dolley’s proposal to Congress on Dec. 8, 1836, said that he was “persuaded that the work of Mr. Madison . . . well deserves to become the property of the nation, and cannot fail, if published and disseminated at the public charge, to confer the most important of all benefits on the present and succeeding generations, accurate knowledge of the principles of their Government, and the circumstances under which they were recommended and embodied in the Constitution, for adoption.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ “Autobiography,” in Madison papers.

⁶¹ Mar. 24, 1809, in Madison papers, vol. 37.

⁶² Edward Coles to Rives, Feb. 3, 1857, in William C. Rives papers, Library of Congress.

⁶³ Nov. 15, 1836, in Henry D. Gilpin, ed., *Madison Papers*, 1:xvi (Washington, 1840).

⁶⁴ Gilpin, *Madison Papers*, 1:xviii.

Madison would have rejoiced at the "multiplication of copies" provided for in Public Law 85-147, signed by President Eisenhower on Aug. 16, 1957, authorizing and directing the Librarian of Congress to index, arrange, and microfilm the Presidential papers in the Manuscript Division of the Library. Within the past year work has begun on a long-overdue, definitive edition of Madison's papers. This 12-year project is a cooperative undertaking of the University of Chicago and the University of Virginia; both the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations have made substantial grants.⁶⁵ The National Historical Publications Commission has made valuable contributions to the planning. It is interesting to compare these plans for a 22-volume edition with an undated plan found in the William C. Rives papers, apparently in the handwriting of Dolley Madison: "Exclusive of the Debates &c disposed of to Congress I estimate that the correspondence & writings of Mr. Madison will contain matter sufficient to form 6 vol^s of equal size with Tucker's Life of Jefferson." ⁶⁶

Madison, careful, painstaking historian, would share our gratitude that after 121 years the records he cherished will become accessible to all. As an archivist he knew all the routine problems of today: processing, reproductions (by transcript instead of microfilm), writing acquisition letters for new materials, answering reference inquiries of people who failed to give adequate information and of others who expected to use restricted materials, protecting literary rights ⁶⁷ and trying to find records that had been destroyed. He had, indeed, the fundamental qualifications for anyone working with manuscripts — a deep feeling for the past and a great respect for the papers upon which its history is recorded.

⁶⁵ *New York Times*, Nov. 18, 1956, p. 125. The spelling of Mrs. Madison's first name is the subject of a more recent announcement in the *Times* (Apr. 13, 1958). The editors will use "Dolley," the spelling which she used in signing her will.

⁶⁶ Rives papers, box 150.

⁶⁷ Madison to Martin Van Buren, draft of a letter objecting to the publication of his letters without permission, in *Letters*, 3: 174.