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Guide to the James Madison and Dolley Madison Collection 1780-1848



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.MADISONJD
Title	Madison, James and Dolley Madison. Collection
Date	1780-1848
Size	0.25 linear feet (1 box)
Repository	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract James Madison (1751-1836) fourth President of the United States of America and Dolley Madison (1768-1849), wife of James Madison. The collections contains consist of two letters (1780, 1818), three partly printed documents, an addressed envelope in Madison's hand, four engravings of Madison, an autograph quotation signed by Dolley Madison, and two engravings of Mrs. Madison.

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Madison, James and Dolley Madison. Collection, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Biographical Note

James Madison Jr. was born in Port Conway, Virginia, on March 16, 1751 to Nelly and James Madison Sr., a tobacco planter. He was the oldest of twelve siblings. He was educated at the Innes plantation by Donald Robertson. Madison eventually enrolled at Princeton University, where he graduated in 1771 after studying Latin, Greek, science, geography, mathematics, rhetoric, and philosophy. While at Princeton, he helped found the American Whig Society, a political debate society.

After college, Madison became involved in politics. During the American Revolutionary War, he served on the Virginia State legislature from 1776-1779. While there, he became the protégé of Thomas Jefferson. He gained prominence in Virginia politics, and in 1780, was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates. He assisted in the created of the Northwest Territory as a federally

supervised territory. By the end of his time in the Virginia House of Delegates in 1786, Madison became frustrated with the “excessive democracy” he saw.

Arguably, Madison’s most important contribution to American politics was his involvement in the creation of the U.S. Constitution. The Constitution was created in response to the perceived failing of the Articles of Confederation (1781). Madison, aided by a crate of books sent to him by Thomas Jefferson from France, engaged in intense study of different forms of government. This study, combined with his experience from the Virginia legislature, informed his constitutional views.

The Federalist Papers were a series of 85 newspaper articles published by Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay to explain and defend the new Constitution. The Papers have been called “the most important work in political science...” because of its role in encouraging the anti-federalist states to ratify the Constitution.

In May of 1794, Madison was introduced to Dolley Payne through a mutual friend, Aaron Burr. Payne was born in New Garden, North Carolina on May 20, 1768. Her parents, Mary Coles Payne and John Payne Jr., were Quakers. Following the American Revolutionary War, the Payne family moved north to Philadelphia. While there, Payne married a Quaker lawyer, John Todd. In order to provide for her family after the death of her father in 1792, Payne opened up a boardinghouse. In 1793, however, she once again moved south to Virginia to live with her daughter, Lucy, and her husband, George Steptoe Washington (a nephew of the first American president, George Washington). Payne was widowed at 25 when a yellow-fever epidemic broke out, killing her husband, his parents, and her son (William Temple).

Madison and Payne presumably met at social events in Philadelphia (the House of Representatives met there from 1790-1800). It was not until Burr formally introduced them, however, that their romance began. Madison and Payne married on September 15, 1794. Following Madison’s time as Secretary of State under President Thomas Jefferson, Madison was elected to the presidency himself in 1809. Having acted as the de facto first lady for the widowed Thomas Jefferson, Payne, by now known as Dolley Madison, was already well-known and liked for her social graces by the time Madison took the White House. Her weekly gatherings bolstered her husband’s reputation and helped define the role of the First Lady.

Madison’s political career continued its upward trajectory until his retirement from the presidency in 1817. He then retired to Montpelier, his family’s tobacco plantation in Orange County, Virginia. He turned his attention largely to the financial situation of his plantation. Like Washington and Jefferson before him, Madison left the presidency less wealthy than he entered it. Madison’s financial troubles mounted as his health deteriorated. Though his political life continued until 1826 when, at the age of 78, he was chosen as a representative to the constitutional convention to revise the Virginia constitution. After this contribution, Madison

was increasingly ignored by the new leaders of American politics. He died in 1836, the last of the American founding fathers.

Scope Note

The James Madison Collection consist of two letters (1780, 1818), three partly printed documents, an addressed envelope in Madison's hand, four engravings of Madison, an autograph quotation signed by Dolley Madison, and two engravings of Mrs. Madison. The 1780 letter refers to the difficult financial situation facing the young republic, John Jay's journey to Europe, John Paul Jones, and the Marquis de Lafayette. The 1818 letter refers to business affairs at Madison's plantation, Montpelier. The engravings are done from original paintings by Alonzo Chappel (1828-1887), an American painter who focused on early 19th century American history.

The collection was previously part of the Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection.

Subject Headings

- Jay, John, 1745-1829
- Jones, John Paul, 1747-1792
- Lafayette, Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert Du Motier, marquis de, 1757-1834
- Madison, Dolley, 1768-1849
- Madison, James, 1751-1836
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- United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783
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INVENTORY

Box 1

Folder 1

Bound manuscripts, James Madison and Mrs. Madison, 1780-1848