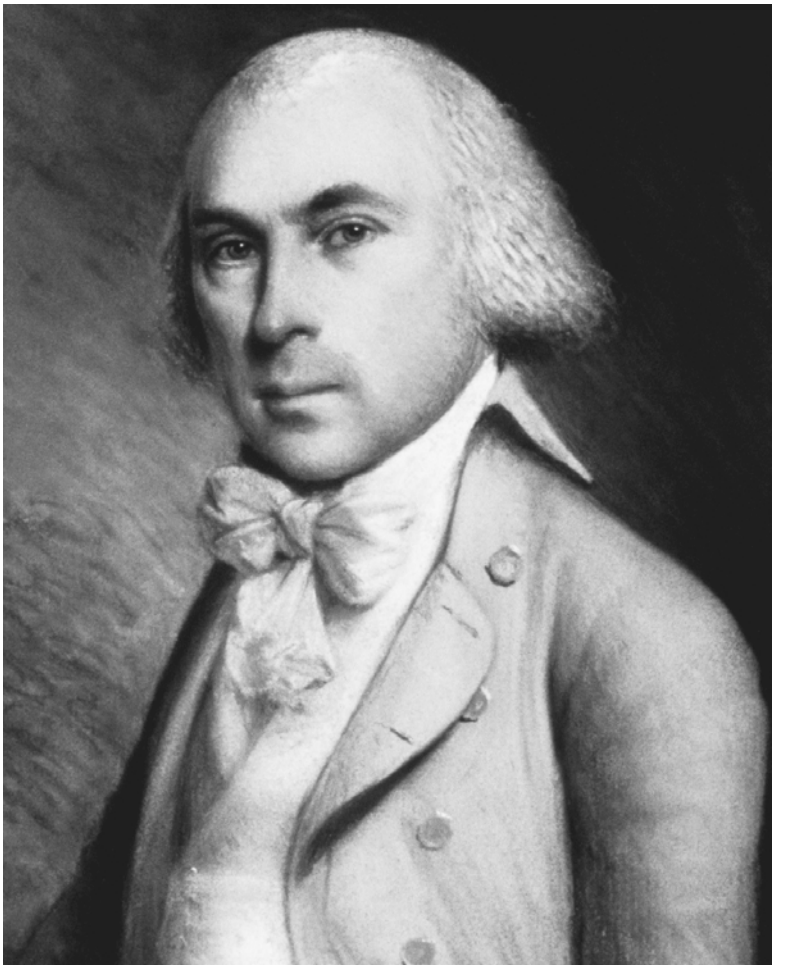
James Madison

Born March 16, 1751 (Port Conway, Virginia)
Died June 28, 1836 (Montpelier, Virginia)

U.S. president, secretary of state

"The advice nearest to my heart and deepest in my convictions is that the Union of the States be cherished and perpetuated."

Between 1780 and 1817, James Madison's overriding goal was the success of American independence. Madison directed key aspects of the formation of the new nation. At the age of twenty-nine, he produced a plan for ceding (giving up) Virginia's western land claims, a plan that prompted the successful ratification (approval) of the nation's first constitution, the Articles of Confederation. When barely thirty-five, Madison worked with the Virginia legislature to pass a document written by his friend **Thomas Jefferson** (1743–1826; see entry in volume 1) that provided a basis for religious freedom in America. At thirty-six, he was the chief author of the U.S. Constitution, which was adopted by the states in 1788. A year later, he pulled together suggestions by the states for additions to the Constitution; these additions became the Bill of Rights. For eight years, from 1801 to 1809, he served under President Jefferson as secretary of state. From 1809 until 1817, Madison served as the nation's fourth president. He retired feeling convinced that American independence was secured.



James Madison. *(© Corbis.)*

Young Madison

Born on March 16, 1751, to James Madison Sr. (1723–1801) and Nelly Conway Madison (1732–1829), James was the first of eleven children. He grew up on a prosperous tobacco plantation in Virginia called Montpelier, which was home to over one hundred slaves.

James's early education with tutor Donald Robertson between 1762 and 1767 instilled in him a love of learning. His second teacher, the Reverend Thomas Martin, was a graduate of Princeton, then called the Presbyterian College of New Jersey.

Most likely at Martin's urging, young Madison decided to attend Princeton rather than the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, where most sons of wealthy Virginians were educated.

Madison left for Princeton in 1769. Intent on his studies, he graduated in only two and a half years at the age of twenty. His rigorous regimen of study, which was self-imposed, left him exhausted. He recovered at Montpelier while helping his father manage the property. However, Madison's first interest was reading and learning all he could. Madison Sr. allowed his son to order books on many subjects—philosophy, law, economics, sciences, literature, history, and politics. Madison could competently read books written in French, Greek, Italian, Latin, Spanish, and Hebrew.

Public life begins

Madison's life took a new meaning when the first shots of the American Revolution (1775–83) were fired at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts. Madison wholeheartedly embraced separation from Britain and creation of a republican form of government, one run for and by the people. Orange County voters elected him as a delegate to the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1776 in Williamsburg. On June 7, 1776, the convention delegates adopted the Declaration of Rights and a constitution written by a fellow delegate, George Mason (1725–1792).

Twenty-five-year-old Madison made a favorable and lasting impression on the other Virginia delegates. His next official duty was to serve on Virginia's Privy Council or Council of State. The council aided Governor Patrick Henry (1736–1799) in carrying out his duties. In 1777, those duties generally had to do with the war effort and included recruiting soldiers and ordering supplies. Madison kept a close watch on the war's progress. He had become a revolutionary through and through, and from this time on, his whole life was dedicated to the success of the American Revolution.

In June 1778, the General Assembly of Virginia chose Madison as a delegate to the Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia. Madison declined, saying he preferred serving on the Council of State. In 1779, Thomas Jefferson succeeded Henry as governor, so for the first of many occasions, Madison

James Madison and the Library of Congress

James Madison was a bibliophile, a lover of books. He began his library at his home in Montpelier, Orange County, Virginia. His father allowed James to purchase books on any topic that he found interesting. James was interested in most subjects—philosophy, law, economics, sciences, literature, history, and politics. He could also read in six languages—French, Greek, Italian, Latin, Spanish, and Hebrew—so his library was not confined to books written in English. By the time Madison retired to Montpelier in 1817, his library contained several thousand books, less than one-third in English.

When Madison was a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress in 1783, he naturally volunteered to serve on a committee called the Committee on Books. Congress hoped to start a library for congressional research and asked the committee to look into the idea. Madison made a list of three hundred titles that should be purchased for such a library. The titles included books on law, politics, history, geography, war, language, and subjects related to the United States. The three hundred titles represented about thirteen hundred volumes. The list, in Madison's handwriting and dated January 24, 1783, is still preserved at the modern Library of Congress. Unfortunately in 1783, Congress had no funds for a library, so the list was never used.

In 1800, Congress passed an act signed by President John Adams that established the Library of Congress. It was first housed in one room in the first and only completed wing of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Congress appropriated $5,000 to buy books. Between 1801 and 1814, the library's collections grew rapidly under the presidencies of Thomas Jefferson, another bibliophile, and Madison. During the War of 1812, British troops almost completely destroyed the collection when they marched on Washington and set fire to all the government buildings. Immediately, President Madison signed an act of Congress to buy Jefferson's private library of 6,487 books to replace the collections lost in the fire. Thereafter, the library continued to grow.

In 1897, the library moved into an elaborate sandstone building just east of the Capitol. A second library building was completed in 1938. In 1980, the third building, the largest library building in the world, was completed and named the James Madison Memorial Building. The 1897 structure was renamed the Thomas Jefferson Building, and the 1938 building was renamed the John Adams Building in honor of the nation's second president. These three buildings make up the Library of Congress, the world's largest library. They house 130 million items—books and other printed material, recordings, photographs, maps, and manuscripts—that are available for use by Congress and the American people.

served under Jefferson. Madison immediately liked the personable Jefferson and enjoyed conversing with him. Likewise, Jefferson took note of Madison's intellect, energy, and commitment to the cause of American independence. Jefferson and

Madison began what would be almost fifty years of cooperation and friendship. However, Madison's time under Jefferson ended when the Virginia General Assembly insisted that Madison join the state's delegation at the Continental Congress.

Serving in the Continental Congress

Madison arrived in Philadelphia in March 1780 to begin his service in the Virginia delegation at the Continental Congress. Madison's two primary accomplishments during his almost three-year stay in Congress involved the cession of western claims by states and fierce support for U.S. navigation rights on the Mississippi River.

When Madison took his seat in Congress, the ratification process of the Articles of Confederation was stalled. The chief obstacle to approval was disagreement among the states over ownership and use of western lands, which at that time meant the region between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River.

Madison came up with an idea about how to resolve the issue of western land use. By January 1781, he produced a plan for cession of Virginia's western claims; the document was called "Virginia's Cession of Western Lands to the United States." The plan suggested that Virginia give up its western land claims to Congress so that the land could be used for the common good of all the states. It also provided a cession model for the six other states holding western claims. Several years of negotiation between Congress and Virginia followed before the plan was agreed to. Nevertheless, the other states realized in 1781 that if Virginia, America's most influential state, was willing to cede its claims, the rest of the states holding claims should do likewise. When Madison submitted his proposal, Maryland was the only state still holding back its approval of the Articles of Confederation. Once they were convinced that all the states holding claims would give up their lands, Maryland's delegates signed the Articles on March 1, 1781, and the nation's first constitution was officially in force.

The second issue that consumed a large part of Madison's time was navigation rights on the Mississippi River. Pioneers in the Ohio River valley and those settled in western areas bordering the Mississippi, such as Kentucky, needed to send their