

SAR Americanism Elementary School Poster Contest 2018 - 2019

James Madison and Our Nation's Founding Documents

James Madison Jr. was born on March 16, 1751, at Belle Grove Plantation near Port Conroy, Virginia. In 1769, he enrolled at Princeton University where he studied Latin, Greek, science, geography, mathematics, rhetoric and philosophy. In 1774, Madison took a seat on the local Committee of Safety, a pro-revolution group that oversaw the local militia. Of short stature and frequently in poor health, Madison never saw battle in the war, but he rose to prominence in Virginia politics as a wartime leader. With the enactment of the Virginia constitution, Madison became part of the Virginia House of Delegates. Madison lost re-election to the House of Delegates in April 1777, but the House of Delegates elected him to the Virginia governor's Council of State later that year. In that role, he became a close ally of Thomas Jefferson, who served as Governor of Virginia from 1779 to 1781. Madison served on the Council of State from 1777 to 1779, when he was elected to the Congress of the Confederation and served there until 1789.

The **Articles of Confederation**, Formally the **Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union**, was an agreement among the 13 original states of the United States of America that served as its first constitution. It was approved, after much debate (between July 1776 and November 1777), by the Second Continental Congress on November 15, 1777, and sent to the states for ratification. The Articles of Confederation came into force on March 1, 1781, after being ratified by all 13 states. A guiding principle of the Articles was to preserve the independence and sovereignty of the states. The federal government received only those powers which the colonies had recognized as belonging to king and parliament. The Articles formed a war-time confederation of states, with an extremely limited central government. While unratified, the document was used by the Congress to conduct business, direct the American Revolutionary War, conduct diplomacy with foreign nations, and deal with territorial issues and Native American relations. The adoption of the Articles made few perceptible changes in the federal government, because it did little more than legalize what the Continental Congress had been doing. That body was renamed the Congress of the Confederation; but Americans continued to call it the *Continental Congress*, since its organization remained the same. As the Confederation Congress attempted to govern the continually growing American states, delegates discovered that the limitations placed upon the central government rendered it ineffective at doing so. As more states became interested in meeting to change the Articles, a meeting was set in Philadelphia on May 25, 1787. This became the Constitutional Convention. It was quickly realized that changes would not work, and instead the entire Articles needed to be replaced. From Madison's thoughts, notes, and work, the delegates from Virginia all met prior to the start of the Convention. They hammered out the details of what became known as the Virginia Plan. The Virginia Plan was reported to the Convention by Edmund Randolph, *Virginia's* governor, on May 29, 1787.

James Madison – Father of the Constitution

Virginian James Madison has been called the **Father of the Constitution**. He arrived in Philadelphia for the Convention almost two weeks early so that he could start thinking about what he wanted the Convention to accomplish. From his point of view, there were a few main problems with the Confederation. The states were under no obligation to pay their fair share of the national budget; they violated international treaties with abandon; they ran roughshod over the authority of the Congress; and they violated each other's rights incessantly.

Madison's idea, certainly not an original one, but unique for the new United States, was to recreate the United States under an entirely different form of government - a republican model. In a republic, the people are the ultimate power, and the people transfer that power to be replaced with the federal government under the Constitution. The new Constitution provided for a much stronger federal government by establishing a chief executive (the President), courts, and taxing powers.

Unable to do much of anything, the people who were there sat down and talked amongst themselves. The group consisted of some of the great political minds of the time; besides Madison, was Alexander Hamilton, George Read, and Edmund Randolph. Most were dissatisfied with the current system of government. The delegates decided that another conference, "with more enlarged powers" meet in Philadelphia the following summer to "take into consideration the situation of the United States, to devise such further provisions as shall appear to them necessary to render the constitution of the Federal Government adequate to the exigencies of the Union." The report was written by Alexander Hamilton and sent to Congress for its consideration on September 14, 1786. Congress approved the plan to hold another, more sweeping conference on February 21, 1787. The wheels were now in motion, though few had any inkling of the momentous changes that were about to come available.

As in the United States today, the people would elect their representatives to govern. This contrasted with the Confederation model of the time, when the states appointed members of Congress. His vision included separate authorities with separate responsibilities, allowing no one to control too much of the government; and a dominant national government, curbing the power of the states.

On June 8, 1789, James Madison addressed the House of Representatives and introduced a proposed **Bill of Rights** to the Constitution. Some of Madison's opening list of amendments didn't make the final cut in September. One of two amendments rejected by the states was eventually ratified in 1992 as the 27th Amendment; it restricted the ability of Congress to change the pay of a sitting Congress while in session. (The other proposed amendment dealt with the number of representatives in Congress, based on the 1789 population.)

And the second part of the new "Article VII" did survive in the Bill of Rights. It read, "The powers not delegated by this Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively."

Another interesting twist in Madison's proposed Bill of Rights was a different version of what became the Second Amendment.

"The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed; a well-armed and well-regulated militia being the best security of a free country: but no person religiously scrupulous of bearing arms shall be compelled to render military service in person," said Madison.

And the final, big difference that Madison wanted was the entire Bill of Rights interwoven within the Constitution, and not appended at the document's end. That idea didn't pass muster with Congress because there were concerns of an appearance that the Constitution was being rewritten. Madison dropped his support of "interweaving" the amendments during the House debate about moving his already amended Bill of Rights to the Senate. In the end, many core ideas introduced by Madison in June 1789 made it into the ratified version of the Bill of Rights.

More than three months later, Congress would finally agree on a final list of Rights to present to the states. The House agreed on a version of the Bill of Rights that had 17 amendments, and later, the Senate consolidated the list to 12 amendments. In the end, the states approved 10 of the 12 amendments in December 1791.

President Thomas Jefferson wanted to ensure that he controlled his administration's foreign policy, and he selected the loyal Madison for the position of Secretary of State. Many contemporaries and later historians noted that Madison and President Jefferson ignored their "strict construction" of the Constitution to take advantage of the **Louisiana Purchase** opportunity. The Senate quickly ratified the treaty providing for the purchase. The House, with equal alacrity, passed enabling legislation.

Despite Federal Party opposition, Madison won his party's presidential nomination at the January 1808 congressional nominating caucus. The Federalist Party mustered little strength outside New England, and Madison easily defeated Federalist Charles Pinckney. At a height of only five feet, four inches, and never weighing more than 100 pounds, **Madison became the most diminutive president. He was an American statesman and Founding Father who served as the fourth President of the United States from 1809 to 1817. His term included the War of 1812. He is hailed as the "Father of the Constitution" for his pivotal role in drafting and promoting the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights.**

Madison died at Montpelier on the morning of June 28, 1836 at the age of 85. He is buried in the family cemetery at Montpelier. He was one of the last prominent members of the Revolutionary War generation to die. His will left significant sums to the American Colonization Society, the University of Virginia, and Princeton University, as well as \$30,000 to his wife, Dolly. Left with a smaller sum than Madison had intended, Dolly would suffer financial troubles until her own death in 1849.

On-line References – History of James Madison and The Bill of Rights.

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Image 1 of James Madison. Notes for Speech on Constitutional Amendments. June 8, 1789.

