

Leland Madison Park
Route 20, Orange County, Virginia





1754



1841

ELDER JOHN LELAND
COURAGEOUS LEADER OF
THE BAPTIST DOCTRINE
ARDENT ADVOCATE OF THE PRINCIPLES
OF DEMOCRACY
VINDICATOR OF SEPARATION
OF CHURCH AND STATE.

NEAR THIS SPOT IN 1783, ELDER JOHN LELAND AND
JAMES MADISON, THE FATHER OF THE AMERICAN
CONSTITUTION HELD A SIGNIFICANT INTERVIEW
WHICH RESULTED IN THE ADOPTION OF THE
CONSTITUTION BY VIRGINIA. THEN MADISON,
A MEMBER OF CONGRESS FROM ORANGE PRESENTED
THE FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION
GUARANTEEING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, FREE SPEECH AND
A FREE PRESS. THIS SATISFIED LELAND AND HIS
BAPTIST FOLLOWERS.

PRESENTED BY EUGENE BUCKLIN BOWEN, PRESIDENT
BERKSHIRE COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS CHAPTER
SOULS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

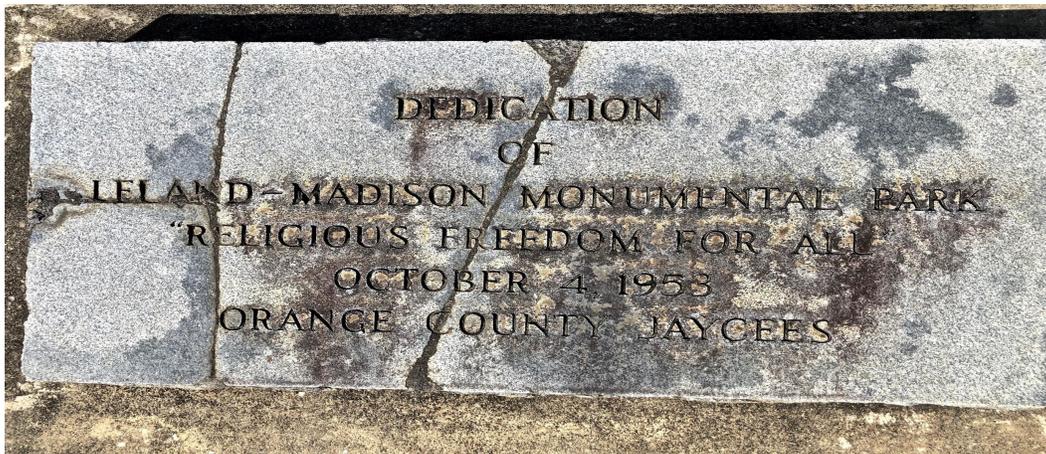
The inscription ON the monument reads:

**“ELDER JOHN LELAND (1754-1841)
COURAGEOUS LEADER OF
THE BAPTIST DOCTRINE
ARDENT ADVOCATE OF THE PRINCIPLES
OF DEMOCRACY
VINDICATOR OF SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE.**

NEAR THIS SPOT IN 1788, ELDER JOHN LELAND AND
JAMES MADISON, THE FATHER OF THE AMERICAN
CONSTITUTION HELD A SIGNIFICANT INTERVIEW
WHICH RESULTED IN THE ADOPTION OF THE
CONSTITUTION BY VIRGINIA. THEN MADISON,
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PRESENTED BY EUGENE BUCKLIN BOWEN, PRESIDENT
BERKSHIRE COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS, CHAPTER
SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION”

The footstone at the base of the monument reads:



“DEDICATION
OF
LELAND MADISON MONUMENTAL PARK
‘RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR ALL’
OCTOBER 4, 1943
ORANGE COUNTY JAYCEES”

The Background:

Preachers and Politicians:¹

*Two of the key players in the struggle for religious freedom in Virginia played out their roles on the Orange County stage in the late eighteenth century. One of these was James Madison, an Anglican aristocrat by birth and a Presbyterian by education, whose contact with the dissenting Baptists in his native Orange County would shape his thinking and mold the religious character of the new nation he helped to create. The other was Elder John Leland, a Massachusetts Congregationalist by birth and a firebrand Baptist by virtue of an emotional religious experience at the age of eighteen, whose strong views and skillful political maneuvers secured the inclusion of the doctrine of the religious freedom in the constitution of the new United States of America.*²

*Five miles east of the Town of Orange in Orange County, Virginia stands a towering oak (called “**Madison’s Oak**”) under whose branches a monument has been erected to commemorate the meeting between these two men in 1788, supposedly on that very spot. Surrounding the oak and the monument is an eight-acre park named Leland-Madison Memorial Park owned and maintained by the Goshen Baptist Association. The park and monument were dedicated by the Orange County Jaycees on October 4, 1953 with the help of a nationally known columnist, Drew Pearson.*

*In the Spring of 1788, a convention was being held in Virginia to consider the ratification of the new document drafted the year before in Philadelphia by James Madison and others to serve as the Constitution of the new republic, called the United States of America. Orange County was entitled to elect two delegates to that convention and the Baptists were determined to elect one of their own who would join Patrick Henry and other powerful leaders in opposition to this document which they considered to be woefully inadequate, particularly since it did not directly address the question of religious freedom. Elder John Leland was their candidate and his election seemed assured in a county where the Baptist influence had long been dominant.”*³

*Despite Madison’s strong public defense of the new Constitution in the Federalist Papers and elsewhere, there was strong opposition, even in Virginia, where Patrick Henry took a strong stand against ratification. Some of the strongest attacks came from the Baptists in his native state.*⁴

*Acting in support of a resolution adopted by the Baptist General Committee meeting in Goochland in March 1788, which determined that the new constitution did not make sufficient provision for “**the secure enjoyment of religious liberty**,” Elder John Leland offered himself*

¹ Ulysses P. Joyner, Jr., *The First Settlers of Orange County, Virginia 1700-1776* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, Inc., 2003), 206.

² *Ibid.*, 206.

³ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

as an Anti-Federalist candidate from Orange County to the Virginia convention called to consider ratification.⁵

Madison hurried home from Philadelphia and met with Leland, perhaps under the big oak tree in today's Leland-Madison Park, and discussed with him the details of the constitution and the Baptist objections. It is said that opposing candidates also met in public debate in presence of most of the voters of the county and Madison **"mounted a hogshead of tobacco and for two hours addressed his fellow citizens in a calm, candid and statesmanlike manner, presenting his side of the case and meeting all of the arguments of his opponents. Though he was not eloquent, the people listened with profound respect."** The arguments won over Elder Leland and with Madison's commitment to introduce a religious freedom amendment to the new constitution, Leland withdrew and threw his support, and that of the Baptists, to Madison, who won the election and ultimately the ratification by the Virginia convention.⁶

Additional information from Frank Walker in *Remembering: A History of Orange County, Virginia*:

*"Madison was also elected to represent Orange County in the Virginia legislature for the years 1784-87. He again found himself having to deal with Patrick Henry, whose leanings towards the re-institution of some sort of state-supported religion for Virginia flew in the face of Madison's strong commitment to religious liberty. In opposing Henry (successfully), Madison got to know Elder John Leland, a Massachusetts-born Orange County Baptist leader. Leland commanded a large following of Baptists--voters--in Orange County, and he and Madison would have a historic meeting involving them in 1788..."*⁷

*There is a small park on the side of Route 20, just west of Unionville, that commemorates the meeting between Madison and Leland. The actual place of the meeting is not known. It was March 1788, and it is unlikely that the elder Madisons were already "taking the waters" at Orange Springs in the southeastern end of the county. That would have otherwise been a logical meeting place. In any event, Madison and Leland met and discussed Leland's concerns. The two men knew each other from working together on state legislation, and it probably did not take long for each to make his points. The upshot was a promise by Madison that he would personally see to the adoption of amendments to the Constitution which would include freedom of religion language. That was enough for Leland. He advised his followers to vote for Madison, which was tantamount to election. Leland returned to his home near Rhoadesville, and Madison went on to Montpelier to enjoy family and friends."*⁸

The ancient oak tree in Leland-Madison Park referenced in the history above may no longer be standing. The *Orange Review* reported in June 2012 that the large oak was uprooted during a violent rain and wind storm on June 29, 2012.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 213-214.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁷ Frank S. Walker, Jr., *Remembering: A History of Orange County, Virginia* (Orange, Virginia: Orange County Historical Society, 2004), 116.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

Note 1: Leland's home was believed to have been somewhere along today's Route 742--Strawberry Hill Road.⁹

⁹ *Ibid.*