

Liberty & Learning

"Knowledge will forever govern ignorance."



G A Publication of the James Madison Center G

A Message from the Director

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Liberty & Learning*, the tri-annual publication of the James Madison Center. The Center was founded in 1999 to increase the public's awareness of the contributions of our nation's fourth President and Father of the United States Constitution. Located on the campus of James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, the Center also seeks to promote James Madison's belief in responsible citizenship and informed debate.

During his lifetime, Madison came to believe that a well-educated citizenry was essential to the health and well being of the American Republic. In 1822 he wrote, "Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors, must arm themselves with the power that knowledge gives." The Madison Center recognizes

and celebrates the key role that teachers play in advancing Madison's goal. The newly created Donald Robertson Project (named for Madison's tutor) is designed to assist educators by offering seminars, digital resources, in-service training and course materials. Additional information about this project and other activities can be found on the Center's website (www.jmu.edu/madison/center).

James Madison's unwavering commitment to liberty, the rule of law, and the Constitution remain vital elements in our nation's ethos. We are committed to providing accurate information as well as quality programs about James Madison and his era and look forward to working with you.

Philip Bigler, Director

Donald Robertson: An Educator for the Leaders of the New Republic Part I

Dorothy A. Boyd-Rush, Ph.D.

Those who have read on the life and times of James Madison, the fourth president of the United States, have likely encountered at least a passing reference to Donald Robertson. In his later years, Madison commented, "All I have been in life I owe largely to that man [Donald Robertson]." But, what do we actually know about Robertson?

Born in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1717, a son of Charles Robertson and his wife, Isabella McDonald, Donald Robertson was educated at Edinburgh and was a licensed preacher of the Gospel, although he was likely not ordained. Sometime before 1745, he married Henrietta Maxwell, who died in Scotland while Robertson was crossing the ocean to Virginia.

One of the Latin entries in his family Bible indicates that he landed in Virginia on 29 March 1752. He would remain a widower for over eleven years.

An educator from the beginning, he was initially employed as a tutor in the home of Colonel John Baylor of Newmarket in Caroline County, Virginia. Five years later, Robertson established a

*"All I have been in life I owe
largely to that man."
James Madison*

private school in nearby King and Queen County, in what was then Drysdale Parish.

An extant account book in Robertson's own hand, in the collection of the Virginia Historical Society, ends in the year 1775 but the presumption is that the school continued after that date.

Shortly after the establishment of his school, Robertson married as his second wife Rachel Rogers. Her sister Ann's marriage fifteen years earlier to John Clark of King and Queen County made her the aunt to three icons of the early republic, George Rogers Clark, Jonathan Clark and William Clark.

Three children were born to Robertson and his second wife: Charles, Lucy and Isaac. When Robertson died in 1783 at the age of 66, his wife and two children survived him. Many who had attended his school undoubtedly also remembered him fondly.

Did you know...

- ◆ *That when James Madison's father was born in 1723 Orange County did not exist? Orange was only created in 1734 from Spotsylvania - which in turn had been created much earlier in 1720-21 from Essex, King and Queen and King William Counties.*
- ◆ *That during the years before James Madison served in Washington City as Thomas Jefferson's Secretary of State (1801) he had especially close ties with the Shenandoah Valley? In 1783, his favorite sister, Eleanor or "Nelly," married a descendant of Jost Heydt, namely Major Isaac Hite, Junior. Together they built Belle Grove, located near Middleton in Shenandoah County, Virginia. The limestone house, which was completed in 1797, clearly benefited from the architectural advice of Thomas Jefferson.*
- ◆ *That Belle Grove Plantation and James Madison's ancestral home, Montpelier, have something very special in common? They have both been recognized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and are designated as National Historic Landmarks.*

James Madison and the Origins of Religious Freedom in America

Sandra Gioia Treadway
Deputy Director
Library of Virginia

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For two centuries, America's commitment to religious toleration and freedom of belief has shone as a beacon of hope in a world plagued by ethnic and religious hatred. Virginia played an important part in establishing this cherished tradition when in 1786 the General Assembly passed the now-famous Statute of Religious Freedom. This legislative milestone marked the first time anywhere in the world that a government endorsed freedom, not just toleration, for religious thought and expression. Thomas Jefferson drafted this remarkable document, which he considered along with the Declaration of Independence to be one of his life's greatest accomplishments. Few people know, however, that while Jefferson was in France serving as our nation's ambassador, his friend James Madison was hard at work steering the Sage of Monticello's stirring words successfully through the assembly.

At the end of the Revolution, many Episcopal and Presbyterian clergymen believed that state support of religion and education was essential to ensure the success of the American experiment with republican government. In 1784 Patrick Henry introduced legislation, rooted in English traditions of toleration, for the support of teachers of the Christian religion. Virginia's Baptists, Methodists and Quakers, who had been persecuted in colonial days by the established church, opposed the measure. In the closing moments of the legislative session, Madison was able to postpone a vote on Henry's plan – but to win the day for genuine religious freedom he needed a groundswell of public support.

Madison engineered a public-relations coup by writing "A Memorial and Remonstrance" arguing that Henry's proposal contradicted the Virginia Declaration of Rights, the ideals of

Vol.1 #1

enlightened republican government and the right of minority viewpoints: “Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity in exclusion of all other Religions,” Madison warned, “may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all other Sects?” George Mason, principle author of Virginia’s Declaration of Rights, had Madison’s essay printed as an anonymous broadside. In county after county, citizens were reminded that “Torrents of blood have been spilt in the old world,” in vain attempts to suppress “all difference in Religious opinion.” In America, by contrast, “Time has at length revealed the true remedy” – religious liberty.

When the state legislature reconvened in October 1785, it faced nearly a hundred petitions relating to this question from groups of citizens across the commonwealth. Some 10,929 Virginians (10,918 men and 11 women) signed petitions opposing state support for religion. Madison’s arguments appeared more or less verbatim in about 20 percent of these appeals. Only eleven counties offered support for Henry’s legislation. Madison kept his role in the petition campaign a secret for more than forty years, but his political skills and quiet leadership were clearly the deciding factors in making the Statute for Religious Freedom a reality.

The Library of Virginia’s collections include not only the parchment enrolled copy of Virginia’s Statute for Religious Freedom but also a rare printed broadside of Madison’s “Memorial and Remonstrance” and all the surviving citizen petitions. These treasured documents, carefully preserved in the archives for future generations, remind us not only of Madison’s influence at a critical point in our history, but also of the enduring importance of this legacy. The political partnership between James Madison and thousands of ordinary Virginians bore fruit on 16 January 1786, when the General Assembly adopted the Statute of Religious Freedom and changed forever the course of American and world history.

To learn more about Madison’s role in the passage of the Statute of Religious Freedom, see:

- Thomas E. Buckley, *Church and State in Revolutionary Virginia, 1776-1787* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1977);
- Robert A. Rutland and William M.E. Rachel, eds., *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 8, (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1973), 295-306;
- and, Sandra Gioia Treadway and Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr., *The Common Wealth: Treasures from the Collections of the Library of Virginia* (Richmond, Virginia: Library of Virginia, 1997), 132.

Primary Source Link: [The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom](#)

1786

To the Public

National Religious Freedom Day

Wednesday, January 16, 2002

“We the General Assembly of Virginia do enact that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.”

Mining the Sources:

Despite what some students believe, not all the records of the past have been neatly abstracted and/or placed in a database. Many rich veins of archival material dating from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century have still not been touched let alone exhausted. Orange County records are no exception. Like their neighbors, the Madison family in Orange relied heavily on its slaves. Although some were emancipated, most were not. What follows is a list of free Negroes in part of Orange County for the year 1810. Unfortunately, although providing valuable and often underutilized snapshots of Virginia society, such lists are few and far between.

A List of Free Negroes and Mullatoes Within the District of Belfield Cave Commissioner in the Upper District of the County of Orange [Virginia] for the Year 1810¹

Transcribed by
Dorothy A. Boyd-Rush, Ph.D.²

Persons Names	Sex³	Place of Abode	Occupation
James Conally	M	Bound to William Smith	Shoemaker
Salley Conally	F	Living with William Smith	Keeps his house
John Hanger	M	Living with Clement Lockett	Ditcher
Betty Conally And child	F	Living on Robert B. Long's land	Makes a crop
Winston & Fountain	M	Living with John Williams	Works in the crop
	M	Living with Ditto	Ditto
Ann Moss	F	Living on George ___man's ⁴ land	Sells cakes & beer
Milly Conally & Two children	F	Living with Gilbert Hamilton	Keeps his house

Juda	F	Living with Gideon Dunn	Does house business
William	M	Living with John Walters	Works in the crop
Ann [& Two children	F	Living with William Melone	Cropeing & house business
Shamus & Enosin		Living with Jasper Hanes, on order of court to bind them to said Hanes	Plantation business
Rachael Tyre	F	Living on Robert Wilson's land	Trade not known
Fanny ditto	F	Living with Ditto	Ditto
Hardin ditto	M	Living with Ditto	Ditto
Abbey	F	Living with Ditto	Ditto
Whitfield a child	M	Living with Ditto	Ditto
Allen [?] Ditto	M	Living with Ditto	Ditto
Susan ditto	F	Living with Ditto	Ditto
Drucilla Ditto	F	Living with Ditto	Ditto
Nancy Conally	F	Bound to James Easton	Ditto

Belfield Cave
Commissioner
June 12, 1810

(Footnotes)

¹The Library of Virginia has microfilmed this list for Orange County: Orange County, Reel 565. Unfortunately, this reel cannot be accessed by interlibrary loan.

² Dr. Boyd-Rush is a professor of history affiliated with the James Madison Center at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia. Support from the James Madison Center made this transcription possible <http://www.jmu.edu/madison/center/>

³ The actual column was divided in two and “male” and “female” were the designators used.

⁴ The surname is obliterated by a hole in the paper occasioned by a fold.

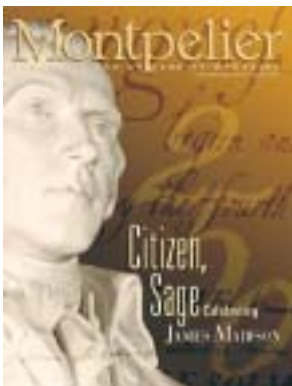
Key Links:

The Founder’s Constitution: University of Chicago

Montpelier: James Madison’s Home in Orange, Virginia

The Federalist Papers: Library of Congress

Important Documents in American History: Provided by the Federalist Society



Access JMU’s Special James Madison’s 250th Birthday Issue



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