BOOK REVIEWS


Dr. Ralph Ketcham, author of this excellent biography of James Madison, has made use of the "immense amount" of new material available in the last thirty years about the fourth president of the United States. Professor of American Studies at Syracuse University, Dr. Ketcham has edited several books on Benjamin Franklin, been associate editor of Volumes 5 and 6 of the *Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (Yale University), and has edited Volumes 1 and 2 of the *Papers of James Madison* (University of Chicago).

James Madison is often overshadowed by his three predecessors. Casual readers may remember his being called "the Father of the Constitution" or may have mentally pigeonholed him as president of the United States during the War of 1812 when the White House and Capitol were burned by British troops. Readers may remember him as "that man" who keeps popping up in early American history wherever the action is, from the Stamp Act to the first rumbles of nullification, to Clay, Calhoun, Webster, and General Winfield Scott.

But today, Madison's life is far from being obscure. Dr. Ketcham states that "Madison has become one about whom information is now oppressively abundant. . . . I have envied Cy Syrett, who was able to remark while editing The *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, that he had considered dedicating his volumes 'to Aaron Burr who made completion of this task possible.'"

Two Madisons emerge from this lengthy, fascinating book. The first is Madison the Virginian, sustained by roots deep in Virginia history, for he belonged to the fifth generation of his family in the colony. As a member of a large and closely knit family with a huge cousinship, he had a sense of belonging. A major portion of his eighty-five years was spent in the Piedmont region. His years at Princeton also added an important dimension to his life, for it was here that he began his lifelong devotion to constitutional law.

Madison the Virginian, always devoted to his home state, matured into the second Madison, the statesman, still the Virginian, yet always seeing that his home state was only one part of the young United States and that the young states were only a small part of a big world. He was a close friend of all the great men who founded the new country — especially of Jefferson from 1779 to 1826. After his apprenticeship with the Committee of Safety of Orange County in 1774, he went
on to the Virginia Assembly and governorship of the state, then to cabinet positions with two presidents, finally became fourth president with a turbulent administration. As he drove himself despite his poor health to accomplish his formidable tasks, visits to Montpelier refreshed him.

The young nation was headed for great trouble. At first the rosy glow of independence from Great Britain and the presence of their revered commander in chief as first president, kept congressmen in order. Soon, however, small states feared the domination of large ones, the agrarian South opposed the industrial North, and the growing West worried about Indian raids and a possible closing of the Mississippi. There were too many "me-firsters." Heavy war debts and needed internal improvements had to be provided for, with nobody wanting to pay high taxes.

*James Madison. A Biography* is not an easy book to review. Dr. Ketcham pictures the enormity of the problems in minute detail in order to make the situation crystal clear. This is what makes the book valuable. He shows Great Britain stirring up the Indians of the Northwest, infiltrating seaborne cities with agents, impressing sailors, and fanning discontent in the United States during the war with Napoleon. Both French and English edicts closed European ports to Americans, ruining commerce. When the battle of Trafalgar made England master of the sea, and Austerlitz gave Napoleon control of the European continent, at least two American ships per week were seized. During the last half of 1807, Napoleon began wholesale confiscation of American ships and goods. But the worrisome question of what mischief Napoleon was planning in the Mississippi Valley was fortunately solved by the Louisiana Purchase from France.

Madison was helpless to combat this piracy. He had neither army nor navy to speak of when he needed support for his ultimatums. "There were seven militia cannon in all Pennsylvania, one musket for each five men." Seaport towns undercut his embargoes by sending their merchant vessels to sea between the reenactment of the law and establishment of regulations, by smuggling goods across the Canadian border, or by transshipment at certain West Indies islands. The prize trick of all came when British minister David Erskine modified his official orders, offering to rescind orders in council for exemption of Great Britain from the Nonintercourse Act. Over six hundred ships left for England whose cargoes would eventually fill British warehouses with needed American goods.
The worst undercutting came from within, from congressmen, editors, and even cabinet members (the cabinet was one of the most bungling in all American history). One member especially, Secretary of State Robert Smith, had to be removed for passing on information to his brother in the Senate and to newspapers, and insulting the French minister. There were serious plans for detaching New England and perhaps New York and New Jersey from the Union.

On the bright side: a War Hawk Congress, with young men like Webster, Calhoun, and Clay, who buckled down to winning the war. At the darkest hour, money came in through Alexander J. Dallas, and "Gallatin found three financiers, German-born David Parish and John Jacob Astor, and French-born Stephen Girard, who . . . placed the entire $16-million loan just authorized by Congress at interest rates only slightly higher than norms." Twelve new, young generals were commissioned.

After Napoleon's defeat in Russia, Great Britain released ships to send across the Atlantic to stop all shipping and to bombad sea-coast towns, exempting New England in order to create dissension. One of these coastal sallies brought about the burning of a great part of Washington, including the Capitol and White House. The defense of the city, if it could be dignified by such a term, resembled a chase by the Keystone Cops of early film days.

Again on the bright side: American victories, including Oliver Hazard Perry's on Lake Erie; Harrison's defeating northwestern Indians and killing Tecumseh; the successful defense of Fort McHenry at Baltimore; Macdonough's victory on Lake Champlain, which caused Wellington's veterans to retreat; and Jackson's defeat with great slaughter of Sir Edward Pakenham's ten thousand troops at New Orleans after the signing of the peace treaty at Ghent.

First news coming from Ghent was gloomy; Great Britain demanded part of Maine, removal of fortifications on the northern border, giving up Newfoundland fishing rights, losing almost all of the Northwest Territory in an Indian "buffer state," and yielding to Britain use of the Mississippi. Wellington, however, discouraged all this, which would have led to continuation of the war; and also the British people were tired of war taxes.

The final version of the treaty contained none of these demands but rather returned to the status quo before the war. It was like winning a second War of Independence.

At the end of his term, Madison, and his wonderfully helpful
Dolley, returned to Montpelier. Madison finished the mansion, once more farmed, and received guests. He gave much time to plans offering a solution to the problem of slavery. He was a delegate from Orange County to a Virginia convention for a new state constitution. He furnished "ammunition" for opponents of nullification and secession and wrote articles for newspapers. After years of work with Jefferson and Monroe on behalf of the University of Virginia, at seventy-five, he took the lead in this work. Then there were his papers to arrange, collect, and edit, practically a working history of the American Revolution, the Constitutional Convention, and four administrations.

This fine American died on June 28, 1836, at the age of eighty-five.

Dr. Ketcham closes with these words: "Madison's life reveals that he cherished the Union because only the cooperative power it released could bring the social justice necessary to fulfill the legal and moral equality of man. He furthermore cherished liberty because only it could open to man the opportunities due his limitless potential . . . ."

Pittsburgh

Florence C. McLaughlin


In writing the history of America's minorities, historians are frequently forced to employ a variety of research techniques. Thus, quantitative analysis and psychological and sociological perspectives have enriched much of our recent social history. Among the devices currently used to reconstruct our past, few offer a richer reward than oral history. The makers and participants of historical events certainly constitute a crucial source.

The study of the Jewish immigrant experience in Pittsburgh through oral interviews in *By Myself I'm a Book!* illustrates the effectiveness of one form of historical methodology. Interpreting the data collected from over two hundred interviews with Jewish immigrants who came to Pittsburgh between 1890 and 1924, the study offers a fascinating look at the complexity of immigrant adaptation in America. Indeed, the compilers, the Pittsburgh Section, National Council of