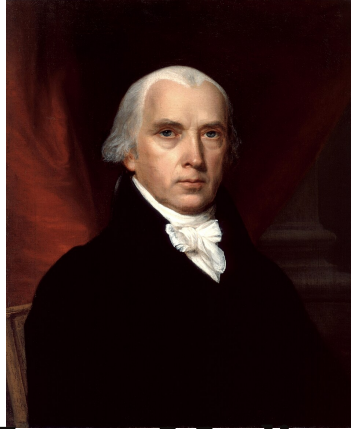




James Madison

March 16, 1751 - June 28, 1836

Orange, Virginia

James Madison, fourth President of the United States, died at Montpelier in Orange County, Virginia, on June 28, 1836. He was eighty-five. The last years were debt, a failing plantation, and the editing of notes he had taken in 1787 when a room in Philadelphia was inventing a government. Born at Port Conway on March 16, 1751, he was the principal architect of the Constitution and of the Bill of Rights, Jefferson's ally, and a wartime president who watched Washington burn.

He was a small man with a large paper trail: notes of the Convention, Federalist essays written at speed, and a retirement spent making sure the record would outlast the men who had wanted it fuzzy. Dolley Madison kept the house and the country's memory of him warmer than the documents alone would have done; she also saved Washington's portrait from the fire, which the country preferred to the footnotes.

Montpelier is the place. The graveyard is on the grounds. Enslaved people built and kept the house the notes were written in. This memorial does not omit that labor. The Constitution is still the argument he started; the plantation is still the bill he did not pay.

He said a republic must be large enough to dilute faction and then watched factions learn the Constitution's rooms. Dolley sold furniture to pay the bills after he died. Orange County keeps the cemetery. The notes of 1787 remain the reason the house is still argued over, brick by brick. He left notes so complete that later men could not easily lie about the room. The plantation accounts are complete in another way. Montpelier's cemetery holds both facts in the same ground.

Services

Died at Montpelier on June 28, 1836. Interment in the family cemetery on the grounds.

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