

*The Papers of James Madison: Presidential Series. Volume 8: July 1814–18 February 1815.* Edited by Angela Kreider et al. (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2015. Pp. xlii, 711. \$95.00, ISBN 978-0-8139-3694-9.)

Anyone familiar with early American history will immediately recognize that the dates covered in Volume 8 of James Madison's presidential papers represent "the nadir and zenith" of not only Madison's presidency but also the War of 1812 (p. xxiii). This collection opens in the summer of 1814, when a string of military defeats, on the Great Lakes and in the nation's capital, had made an American victory against the British increasingly unlikely. The humiliating British invasion of Washington, D.C., in August underscored America's weaknesses. However, by February 1815, when this volume ends, American fortunes had changed dramatically. General Andrew Jackson scored an unlikely victory against the British at the battle of New Orleans in January, and a month later, the Treaty of Ghent arrived in America, announcing the war's conclusion on favorable terms. This volume, consisting of letters to and from Madison, his proclamations, his messages to Congress, the battle reports, and the treaties, documents the war's dramatic transformation from near collapse to ultimate success.

Madison's voluminous correspondence to and from generals, cabinet officials, and members of Congress offers numerous examples of the problems he

confronted as a wartime president: a lack of qualified military leaders, inconsistent and inadequate funding from Congress, ill-prepared civilian leaders, and regional disagreements about the need for a war with Britain. After dismissing the ineffectual John Armstrong as secretary of war, Madison turned to his Virginia friend James Monroe to serve in this role temporarily. Such an appointment was not necessarily unusual, but Monroe also retained his position as secretary of state. Further enriching discussion of the war's challenges are letters from private citizens. Two of particular interest come from leading inventors and entrepreneurs of the period: Eli Whitney and Robert Fulton. Whitney, who had invented the cotton gin in 1793, makes an appearance as a gun inventor and arms contractor who sought Madison's help in resolving a dispute with the War Department. Fulton helpfully informed Madison that one of Fulton's newly invented steamships "in the Potomac might probably have saved Washington" (pp. 190–91). Presidential proclamations provide a third way to understand the war's failures and successes: one called for a day of prayer and fasting; another urged national unity after the British burned the capital; and a third announced the Senate's ratification of the Treaty of Ghent.

While the main events of the War of 1812 may be familiar to most historians, this volume also contains dramatic moments, such as the hasty evacuation of Madison and his wife, Dolley, from the capital. They took refuge in different locations, and several days elapsed before they learned if the other was safe. (A map provides the path of their respective evacuations.) A second dramatic event concerns a presidential dinner party brought to a standstill by disturbing reports from the battle of New Orleans. Two weeks later, on February 3, 1815, a gleeful James Monroe provided Madison with "an account of a victory truly glorious" in New Orleans (p. 554).

Collections of presidential papers, such as the *Papers of James Madison* project, are invaluable resources for those who study the nation's first presidents. In addition to providing a chronological collection of the letters Madison sent and received, along with his proclamations, addresses, and other official documents, the series editors include detailed footnotes and other explanatory material to guide researchers. With J. C. A. Stagg, author of *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783–1830* (Princeton, 1983), serving as one of the lead editors, this work is in particularly capable hands. Volume 8 opens with a lively preface that explains the litany of controversies and challenges accompanying the War of 1812. The editors also helpfully provide a chronology of the major events that occurred between July 1814 and February 1815, as well as a list of the significant federal officers in Madison's tumultuous cabinet, on the U.S. Supreme Court, and in Congress. As with all presidential papers collections, this volume includes a detailed index to guide researchers.

Despite the volume's strengths, its final section, entitled "Supplement" and containing documents dating from December 1779 to April 1814, would benefit from greater explanation. The editors do not say why these papers are included. My assumption is that the documents were acquired after the publication of the earlier volumes of Madison's papers. If that is the case, the information might have been shared.

While presidential papers and other historical documents are widely available online, this published volume of James Madison's writings reminds historians of the importance of intelligently edited and comprehensively produced collections to fully understand historical events such as the War of 1812.

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