

THE PAPERS OF JAMES MADISON, *Volume II, 1801-1802.*

Edited by Mary A. Hackett, J. C. A. Stagg, Jeanne Kerr Cross, and Susan Holbrook Perdue. (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1993. xliv, 562 pp. Preface, acknowledgments, editorial method, Madison chronology, index. Cloth \$60.00, ISBN 0-8139-1403-5).

Nearly four decades have passed since inception of the modern edition of the James Madison papers. Conceived in an era when studying the actions of public men still dominated historical inquiry, the project was met with considerable enthusiasm and support. Its promise was a comprehensive compilation that held forth no less than an historical documentary of the great Virginian. Progress toward that goal proceeded apace after the first volume was released in 1962. The total number of volumes, now approaching two dozen, follow Madison from his youth to the early years of the nineteenth century.

This latest addition to the Madison Papers is the second volume in a series devoted to Madison as secretary of state. Encompassing the interval between August 1, 1801, and February 28, 1802, the volume opens to reveal a Madison who has been secretary a scant three months. He has yet to learn the

routines of office or to chart a course in foreign affairs that is consistent with national interests or the precepts he shares with Thomas Jefferson, his friend, intellectual soul-mate, and president. That scene contrasts noticeably with one at the conclusion of the volume. By March 1802, Madison appears very much in command of his department and its policies. Abroad, save for a small war with Tripoli, the nation is at peace, the bothersome Franco-American alliance was a thing of the past, and the equally vexatious Jay's treaty is near expiration. At home, the changeover from a Federalist to a Jeffersonian-Republican regime is well in hand, as are reductions in federal expenditures, and prosperity seems at last assured.

Madison's passage is amply revealed in the documents that make up the volume. Individually, none of the items has quite the compelling force of, say the notes on the happenings at the constitutional convention, but cumulatively they are suggestive of how Madison grew in his understanding of what his position entailed upon him. Moreover, they show how he shaped his office as an entity more involved with foreign policy than with domestic affairs of state. In short, there is a lot here for anyone interested in Madison the thinker and department head, diplomacy, or the workings of an early-national period bureaucracy.

Editorial apparatus is essentially that established at the beginning of the project. General editor Stagg and his staff hew to the high standards of documentary editing established by Julian P. Boyd. From what one can tell at a distance, their selection of items is appropriately inclusive. But Stagg and company have wisely chosen to abstract ones that are already in print. The annotations are fulsome, though not to the point of excess. Inclusion of a volume index, which is a key finding aid, enhances the value of the work, especially for those who are not Madison scholars. Thus the Madison Papers remains what it has always been—an outstanding exemplar of its genre.

Projects such as this have come under increasing criticism. There are those in this season of intense preoccupation with ethnic and cultural diversity who have little use for the lives of dead white males. Some decry the "leisurely" pace at which the work has proceed or the large investment of money at a time when there are fewer and fewer dollars for all scholarly undertakings in the liberal professions. Others view such long-term projects as dinosaurs. Still others doubt the very validity of

documentary editing itself, arguing that few scholars, students, or lay public actually use the product.

Such censure is misplaced. To the extent it is ever possible to know history, that knowledge comes from the documentary record of bygone ages. Editions like the Madison Papers enable us to arrive at precise, intelligent generalizations about past realities.

University of New Orleans

Warren M. Billings