



PROJECT MUSE®

*The Papers of James Madison: Presidential Series. Volume 11:
1 May 1816–3 March 1817, with a Supplement, 1809–1815*
ed. by J. C. A. Stagg (review)

Lawrence Peskin

Journal of Southern History, Volume 89, Number 2, May 2023, pp.
346–347 (Review)

Published by The Southern Historical Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/soh.2023.0068>

the JOURNAL OF
SOUTHERN
HISTORY

May 2023 • Vol. LXXXIX, No. 2

Published Quarterly by the
SOUTHERN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/891060>

The Papers of James Madison: Presidential Series. Volume 11: 1 May 1816–3 March 1817, with a Supplement, 1809–1815. Edited by J. C. A. Stagg and others. (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2020. Pp. xliv, 780. \$115.00, ISBN 978-0-8139-4436-4.)

This volume completes the James Madison Papers Presidential Series. It covers most of the last year of the Madison presidency, from May 1816 to March 1817, and includes a short supplement of additional letters from Madison's entire tenure as president. The editors provide a succinct preface that ably lays out the major themes of the correspondence.

Reading a 780-page volume such as this from cover to cover is a somewhat strenuous exercise that gives a good sense of the quantity of paper coming across even a lame-duck president's desk. Items range from Madison's 1816 message to Congress and diplomatic reports, to routine requests for offices or pardons and short notes between the president and various officials.

The biggest surprise here may be the outsized importance of Spain. A collapsing empire in 1816–1817, Spain nevertheless remained a threat because of its interests in the Western Hemisphere. Madison and his correspondents expressed particular concern about Spain's claims to Florida as they negotiated for control of lands in what is today the southeastern United States. They also contended with rumors that Spain planned to recapture the recently ceded port of New Orleans. Overseas, Spain interfered with negotiations between the United States and Algiers when the delayed return of a captured vessel prompted a war scare. Spain's omnipresence helps correct what, until recently, has been the usual interpretation of this period as one of frontier-building and domestic conquest. For example, Spain does not have an entry in the index of C. Edward Skeen's book *1816: America Rising* (Lexington, Ky., 2003).

Readers of this journal will be particularly interested in the voluminous correspondence on treaties and negotiations with the Creek, Chickasaw, and Cherokee Nations. The editors have included a number of petitions and ad hoc responses from local settlers and, occasionally, from Native Americans, adding valuable perspectives. Much of this material also relates to Spain, in the sense that this diplomacy was tied to the acquisition of Spanish lands in the Southeast as well as to concerns about access to New Orleans and the lower Mississippi River Valley.

Whether read sequentially or used for reference, a hardcover collection almost seems an oddity in our digital age. Its heft and the clarity of the fonts provided sensory and visual pleasures not available in online browsing. I also enjoyed the opportunity to read the letters in the order they were produced rather than via online searches.

Nevertheless, readers who are not well versed in the period likely will be frustrated by the lack of annotations identifying correspondents, such as Henry St. George Tucker, to provide one of many examples. Cabinet officials also tend not to be identified, though readers will often be able to figure them out through context. The index sticks mostly to proper names. To use my own current interest as an example, the letters are full of references to consuls and consular appointments, but there is no specific index entry for consuls, the consular service, or similar concepts.

Many of these letters are already available on the Founders Online (National Archives) website. To take a somewhat random example, I found a May 5, 1816, letter from Madison to Jonathan Russell there with identical annotation. The online version benefited from hyperlinks to other letters between the two correspondents, as well as hyperlinks that lead to all of Russell's correspondence with Thomas Jefferson in the Jefferson Papers, which, unlike the Madison Papers, provides a very useful biographical note about Russell. One can also readily search on many terms not included in the index, including *consul*.

Thus, while this volume is beautifully put together and a pleasure to have on the bookshelf, the limitations compared with the online version will likely confine it primarily to libraries and collectors.

Morgan State University

LAWRENCE PESKIN