

# Americans for Madison.org

July 2008 — Hadley Nagel, Editor/ Publisher -- To join us or for more information, visit our website at <http://www.americansformadison.org> -- © Americans For Madison, 2008

## MADISON'S HIDDEN MEANING

*New York, NY*-- Most people know James Madison as the father of the *U.S. Constitution* and its *Bill of Rights* as well as a co-author of the *Federalist Papers*. Yet, to some scholars, one of the more titillating collections of documents that Madison authored are certain of his letters that are now rarely--*if ever*--read.

Although Madame deStael's Benjamin Constant might describe these other writings as a *Liberty of the Ancients* and not a *Liberty of the Modern*, before the time of secure phone lines and encrypted email such a *Liberty of the Ancients* could easily become a liberty that was a life threatening matter.

Like befell Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton and eventually a statistically significant number of naval officers such as Stephen Decatur, Madison could have found himself challenged to a duel or perhaps sentenced to death or exiled for writing the wrong thing. So caution was essential when it came to this manner of communicating.

Nothing in Revolutionary America operated quite as notoriously as Vienna's *Black Chamber*—which, like clockwork, extracted secrets from letters and quickly dispatched them on their way—but nevertheless, Madison faced a multitude of obstacles that stood ready to twist his simplest of correspondence into a fatal affair.

### *The Conway Cabal: The tip of an iceberg!*

The *Conway Cabal* certainly reveals that there was a great deal of sniping, griping and other machinations during this period but George Washington and his opponents were not the only subjects for intrigue. A Patriot could quickly fall victim to a gossipy messenger's roving eye or a Royalist or a multitude of others with opposing political agendas.

Madison was frequently troubled by his ongoing need to both transmit and receive secret messages. More than once he complained that his letters were withholding key information due to the lack of a cipher. At other times, his correspondence could be entirely in cipher as was the case in one dated May 28, 1782 to James Monroe's uncle Joseph Jones, a member of the Continental Congress from Virginia.

Incoming messages could be just as taxing. The story is often repeated that he frantically wanted to read a letter from Jefferson but their shared deciphering code—sometimes referred to as their code of 1785—was unavailable and assumed left locked at home in his desk at Montpelier. Indeed, such frustration comedy occurred more than once.

As a leading thinker in a turbulent time, it is easily understood why Madison had to be preoccupied with ciphers but he could not use a single code for all his letters. In one letter he openly lamented to Edmund Randolph that he could not discuss a particular matter since he knew Colonel Theodorick Bland used the same encryption method.

Such overlapping users as well as discoveries of actual codes have continued to enable scholars to piece together what was really being communicated among America's Founding Fathers. For instance, the "nomenclator" used by Benjamin Harrison V for correspondence with Madison and others has survived to permit deciphering.

A real Rosetta Stone, however, exists in a particular metal cylinder that was created by Madison's predecessor as President. Having previously served as Ambassador to France, Jefferson was well aware of both the extent some would go to intercept letters as well as the dangers that could transpire once intercepted. In response, he created a cipher cylinder that, while not post-quantum, was post-Caesar shift ciphering and a new gold standard for coding.

### REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA'S ROSETTA STONE?

The ingenuity of Jefferson's device is clear from the subsequent use of similar cipher wheels in Europe. Originally adopted in the early 1790's, the U.S. government arguably only ended its use in 1946 when the Signal Corps' cipher device M-94 was replaced by increasingly complex electronic devices.

Not all of Madison's encrypted letters are thought to contain political machinations. Several use code to deal in a sensitive manner with such personal matters as illness, money and relationships. To explore coded letters by Madison, visit [www.americansformadison.org](http://www.americansformadison.org) and its links to sites at the Library of Congress, the Gilder Lehrman Collection, Yale Law School and the University of Virginia.

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

*Washington, D.C.*—Key legislation involving the legacy of James Madison remains pending before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. As the opening salvo in the forthcoming bi-centennial salute to the Madison Presidency of 1809-1817, HR 3640 was introduced to construct a national monument for the key founder of the Nation.



## ...HR 3640 NOW PENDING BEFORE 110<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS

Led by the enthusiastic co-sponsorship of **Representative Brian Baird (D, WA-3)** and **Representative Baron Hill (D, IN-9<sup>th</sup>)**, the legislative process that seeks adoption of HR 3640 and the creation of a James Madison Memorial Commission remains in committee referral before the House Natural Resources and its Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands.

*How to Email a Take Action request to your Legislator*

To alert your Washington, D.C. representatives of your interest in action on HR3640 visit our website—

<http://www.rallycongress.com/americansformadison/>

—designed exclusively to transmit emails to Washington, D.C. legislators regarding HR 3640.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

The summer is a great time to head-off "to the fields" to visit places related to Madison. Of course, one of America's greatest destinations is Washington, D.C. So, if you're headed there, be sure to ask your legislators about their positions on HR 3640. I'll also be in Charlottesville, VA exploring the original letters of James Madison preserved in vaults at the University of Virginia. Later, I'll travel to Madison's Montpelier in Orange, VA to join in the final preparations for the September 17th grand re-opening of the "great house" after a 4-year historically accurate restoration. It should be fun. Perhaps we'll cross paths!



Jefferson's Cipher wheel consisted of 26 numbered wooden wheels on a metal spindle with letters randomly inscribed around the edge of each wheel. @ThomasJeffersonFoundation.

## MADISON EXPERTS TO CONVERGE ON OCTOBER 2<sup>nd</sup> at 6PM for AFM's 1<sup>st</sup> Public Bi-Centennial Event at NYC's NYHS

*New York, NY*—With legendary U.S. historians **Joseph J. Ellis** and **Sean Wilentz** scheduled to join AFM Founder **Hadley Nagel** and NYHS CEO **Louise Mirrer** on the podium, plans continue to expand for **Americans for Madison's** first public Bi-Centennial event in celebration of the 1809-1817 Madison Presidency on October 2<sup>nd</sup> at the

### *Chance to see Madison Treasures in the NYHS Collection*

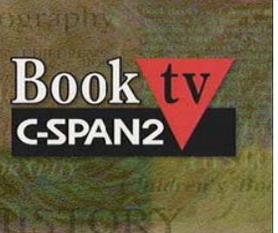
Although the NYHS is expected to have many Madison treasures on exhibit, both its 1817 portrait of Dolley Madison by Bass Otis (1784-1861) and its 1833 Asher Durand Brown (1796-1886) of James Madison are anticipated to take center stage. Unlike Chester Harding's 1830 likeness, the NYHS's 1833 Madison is based upon Gilbert Stuart's 1805 portrait. Initially an engraver who immortalized John Trumbull's vision of *The Declaration of Independence* for the \$2 bill, Brown first copied a lot when he switched to oil painting in 1830. By 1837, however, he joined Thomas Cole as a key Hudson River School painter. In 2005, the NY Public Library sold its Brown's *Kindred Spirit* (of 1849) at Sotheby's NY for a purported \$35 million.

## Cheney Announcement Expected Soon

*Jackson Hole, WY*--**Lynne Cheney** is expected to announce within days this year's winner of the James Madison Book Award.

Given to the book that best represents excellence in bringing knowledge and understanding of American history to children in elementary and middle schools, the sixth annual prize is expected to include a cash award of \$10,000.

Last year's winner was *A Dangerous Engine: Benjamin Franklin, from Scientist to Diplomat*. Written by Joan Dash, the book featured drawings by Dušan Petričić published in the prior year by the Frances Foster Books imprint of Farrar, Straus and Giroux.



*The October 2<sup>nd</sup> AFM event is expected to be rebroadcast on C-SPAN 2 to a global audience.*

**New York Historical Society.** The event will begin at 6 P.M. and include a lively discussion of Madison and his Presidency. Afterwards, an open question and answer session will be followed by the historians autographing their books.

