



CDT Helping Hands Column: Sept. 15, 2021

Madison Shapes Successes of U.S. Constitution

By Keith Bierly

James Madison is the single greatest American in U.S. history. He was the 4th president of the United States, but his prior accomplishments far outweighed his two terms as president. He never practiced law, but many legal experts believe he had a greater impact on the development of western civilization law than any other individual in history.

The United States Constitution, adopted by the Founding Fathers on September 17, 1787, is the greatest civil document in world history. It was the work of many founders –including Madison, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Gouverneur Morris, Robert Morris, John Adams, Samuel Adams, George Mason, George Wythe, Patrick Henry and James Monroe.

Madison, like many of his colleagues, lived and breathed politics and democracy his entire life. But his knowledge, his powerful intellect, and more than 200 speeches at the Constitutional Convention led to his much-deserved title as Father of the U.S. Constitution. He co-authored The Federalist Papers, a series of essays promoting adoption of the Constitution. Madison's views prevailed and eventually, he outlived every single member attending the Convention.

Standing 5 feet 4 inches and barely weighing 100 pounds, Madison was a walking contradiction. Nervous and anxious, he would often collapse into a seizure, yet the force of his ideas on democracy led to success after success. He was essentially shy and reclusive, yet he was an incredible builder of consensus.

After originally opposing a Bill of Rights to accompany the main document, Madison reversed course and shepherded the First Ten Amendments through the First Congress in 1791. Little Jimmy, as he became known to many, believed it became essential to have these rights enshrined forever in the original document.

Madison was the first sitting President to join our troops in battle during the War of 1812. He co-founded the modern Democratic Party, the longest surviving political party in world history, and served as chancellor of the University of Virginia. When we think of our great gift of a living, breathing U.S. Constitution, we should remember this giant of democracy on Sept. 17, Constitution Day.

This year, Constitution Day Centre Inc. is organizing its annual celebration with a public event and a Zoom talk. On Sept. 26, Sunday, local teams will compete in a Constitution

Day Jeopardy event. The public is invited to have fun and learn more. The 2021 Madison Award for Civility in the Community will be presented to a local honoree. On Oct. 6, Dr. Greg Ferro will moderate a panel on the U.S. Constitution and PA Elections with Acting Secretary of the Commonwealth Veronica W. Degraffenreid and Philadelphia City Commissioner Al Schmidt. More information is at www.constitutiondaycentre.org

Keith Bierly is founding president of Constitution Day Centre Inc.