



History Makers

James Madison 1751–1836

James Madison was a soft-spoken, scholarly man. In the months before the convention, Madison studied the history of other confederacies that had failed. He saw that without a strong central government, states tended to concentrate too much on their individual interests and not enough on the common good. He came to believe that simply revising the Articles of Confederation would not be enough. Out of this research emerged the Virginia Plan, which provided the basic structure of the new government.

Madison may have made the greatest contribution of any of the Founders at the Constitutional Convention. His contributions were so important that he earned the title “Father of the Constitution.”

COMPARING Leaders

As you read through the chapter, look for other examples of Madison’s leadership. Compare his leadership qualities to those of American statesmen described in previous chapters.



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power to regulate trade among the states. Some delegates, led by Alexander Hamilton, called for a convention in Philadelphia the following May. Twelve states sent delegates to the Convention. Only Rhode Island declined.

Constitutional Convention The convention opened on May 25, 1787. The first order of business was to nominate a president for the convention. Every delegate voted for the hero of the Revolution, George Washington. Washington’s quiet and dignified leadership set the tone for the convention.

The delegates did not want to be pressured by the politics of the day. For this reason, they decided their discussions would remain secret. Much of what we know today about the debates and drama of the Constitutional Convention is thanks to Virginia delegate **James Madison**. In addition to contributing many ideas that shaped the Constitution, Madison took detailed notes on the proceedings.

Who Was There? The 55 delegates to the **Constitutional Convention**, as the Philadelphia meeting became known, were a very impressive group. Many had been members of their state legislatures and had helped write their state constitutions. Along with other leaders of the time, these delegates are called the **Founders**, or Founding Fathers, of the United States. Many of the delegates who helped draft the proposals presented at the Convention were already well known. Roger Sherman, a Connecticut delegate, was a signer of The Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation. Pennsylvania’s Gouverneur Morris had also signed the Articles of Confederation. Morris and Washington were friends.

Another prominent Pennsylvania delegate, Scots-born James Wilson, was known for his brilliant legal mind. Wilson worked with James Madison in pushing for a system of **popular sovereignty**, which

is a government system in which the people rule. He backed the election of a national legislature by the people to be “not only the cornerstone, but the foundation of the fabric.”

Who Was Missing? A number of key people were unable to attend. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were overseas at their diplomatic posts. But