

**James Madison to George Mason, December 29,  
1827. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison,  
ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons,  
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**TO GEORGE MASON. VA. HIST. SOC. MSS.**

Montpellier, Dec. 29, 1827.

Dear Sir: —I am much obliged by your polite attention in sending me the Copies of the Remonstrance in behalf of Religious Liberty which with your letter of the 10th came duly to hand. I had supposed they were to be preserved at the office which printed them and referred Mrs. Cutts to that source. Her failure there occasioned the trouble you so kindly assumed. I wished a few copies on account of applications now & then made to me and I preferred the Edition of which you had sent me a sample, as being in the simplest of forms, and for the further reason that the pamphlet edition had inserted in the caption, the term “toleration” not in the Article declaring the Right. The term being of familiar use in the English Code had been admitted into the original Draught of the Declaration of Rights but on a suggestion from myself was readily exchanged for the phraseology excluding it.<sup>1</sup> The Biographical tribute you meditate is justly due to the merits of your ancestor Col. Geo. Mason. It is to be regretted that highly distinguished as he was the memorials of them we record, or perhaps otherwise attainable are more scanty than of many of his contemporaries far inferior to him in intellectual powers and in public services. It would afford me much pleasure to be a tributary to your undertaking; but tho' I had the advantage of being on the list of his personal friends and in several instances of being associated with him in public life I can add little for the pages of your work.

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1 *Ante*, Vol. I., p. 32.

My first acquaintance of him was in the convention of Va. in 1776 which instructed her delegates to propose in Congress a Declaration of Independence and which formed the Declaration of rights and the Constitution for the State. Being young and inexperienced I had of course but little agency in those proceedings. I retain however a perfect impression that he was a leading champion for the Instruction; that he was the author of the Declaration as originally drawn and with very slight variations adopted; and that he was the Master Builder of the Constitution & its main expositor & supporter throughout the discussions which ended in the establishment. How far he may have approved it in all its features as established I am not able to say; and it is the more difficult now to discern unless the private papers left by him should give the information as at that day no debates were taken down and as the explanatory votes, if such there were, may have occurred in Committee of whole only, and of course not appear in the Journals. I have found among my papers a printed copy of the Constitution in one of its stages, which compared with the Instrument finally adopted, shews some of the changes it underwent, but in no instance at whose suggestion or by whose votes.

I have also a printed copy of a sketched constitution which appears to have been the primitive draft on the subject. It is so different in several respects from the other copy in point & from the Constitution finally passed that it may be more than doubted whether it was from the hand of your grandfather. There is a tradition that it was from that of Meriwether Smith whose surviving papers if to be found among his descendants might throw light on the question. I ought to be less at a loss than I am in speaking of these circumstances having been myself an added member to the committee. But such has been the lapse of time that without any notes of what passed and with the many intervening scenes absorbing my attention my memory can not do justice to my wishes. Your grandfather as the Journals shew was at a later day added to the committee being doubtless absent when it was appointed or he never would have been overlooked.

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The public situation on which I had the best opportunity of being acquainted with the genius, the opinions & the public labours of your grandfather was that of our co-service in the Convention of 1787 which formed the Constitution of the U. S. The objections which led him to withhold his name from it have been explained by himself. But none who differed from him on some points will deny that he sustained throughout the proceedings of the body the high character of a powerful Reasoner, a profound Statesman and a devoted Republican.

My private intercourse with him was chiefly on occasional visits to Gunston when journeying to & fro from

the North, in which his conversations were always a feast to me. But tho' in a high degree such, my recollection after so long an interval can not particularize them in a form adapted to biographical use. I hope others of his friends still living who enjoyed much more of his Society will be able to do more justice to the fund of instructive observations & interesting anecdotes for which he was celebrated. . . .