



The Framing of the Constitution of the United States (1913)

Max Farrand

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Max Farrand, Ph.D. (1869 – 1945) was an American historian, who taught at several universities and was the first director of the Huntington Library. Farrand taught at Wesleyan University, then after several years at Stanford University, and a year at Cornell University, he became a professor of history at Yale University (1908-1925). His particular area of interest and expertise was the Founding Fathers, the organization of the United States after the American Revolutionary War.

Drawing on the rich store of materials in his "Records of the Federal Convention," Professor Farrand here presents the story of the making of the Constitution in narrative form. We think he does himself less than justice in describing it as "a brief presentation of the author's personal interpretation of what took place in the federal convention, merely a sketch in outline, the details of which each student must fill out according to his own needs." It is of course not the final word on the subject. It may be that the definitive history of the convention of 1787 will never be written. None the less, this volume is a valuable contribution to American historical literature. It is comprehensive without being diffuse, it contains all that is essential for the general reader, it is accurate in all details and free from any bias, and it is embellished by a clear, pleasant, and graphic style. It is, moreover, of absorbing interest, not only as a recital of momentous events, but from the manner in which the personal characteristics and the political opinions of the members of the convention are exhibited.


Here we have a "close up" view of the fathers of the Republic, as they labored through the long weeks of an unusually hot summer, not at all harmonious in their thoughts upon the formation of the new government, not free from spirited and even acrimonious debate, but all earnestly bent upon the accomplishment of their tremendous task, and finally uniting in the composition of the most important of all political instruments.

Here we see the august Washington, carefully abstaining from participation in the debates, even when the convention sat in committee of the whole, lest his immense influence should overawe the other delegates, yet unable wholly to suppress his smiles or frowns as he favored or disapproved the proposals brought forward. Here also we have pictures of the venerable and philosophic Franklin, casting counsels of moderation upon the stormy waters of debate; of Madison, the methodical, learned, and industrious, the scholar in politics, yet more than anyone else the father of the Constitution; of the small and tense frame of Hamilton, the aristocrat, as he delivered his one great speech in the convention; of Luther Martin, able and (as some thought) unscrupulous, inconceivably tedious and prolix, and yet the author of the "supreme law of the land" clause; of the brilliant and slightly presumptuous youth from South Carolina, Charles Pinckney; of William Pierce of Georgia, that most excellent "mixer," blessed with a sense of humor, who placed posterity under an obligation by recording in familiar phrases his personal impressions of all his fellow delegates; and of those gifted men and solid citizens Mason, King, Ellsworth, Sherman, Gerry, Wilson, Randolph and the two Morrisses.

In these days, perhaps more than at any other time, it is important that American citizens should acquaint themselves with their Constitution. This cannot be done by a mere perusal of its text. A knowledge of its spirit, its great purposes, its historical bases, can be gathered only from a study of why and how it came to be made. To all who value the institutions of our country and desire an intelligent appreciation of their worth and the reasons for their existence Professor Farrand's excellent work is highly commended.

Originally published in 1913; reformatted for the Kindle; may contain an occasional imperfection; original spellings have been kept in place.

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