

**LETTERS OF JOSEPH
JONES OF VIRGINIA:
1777-1787**

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Letters of Joseph Jones of Virginia: 1777-1787 by Joseph Jones

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JOSEPH JONES

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LETTERS

OF

177-39

JOSEPH JONES

OF VIRGINIA.

1777-1787.

WASHINGTON:
DEPARTMENT OF STATE.
1889.

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NOTE.

FEW details of the life of Joseph Jones are accessible, although he appears to have played a part by no means unimportant in Virginia politics during and subsequent to the Revolution. He was born in Virginia in 1727, and appears in the colonial House of Burgesses as a representative of King George County. At the outbreak of the war he was a member of the Committee of Safety, and in 1776 served in the Virginia Convention. One year later he represented the State in the Continental Congress, resigning to accept the position of judge of the General Court (January 23, 1778), a position that he filled for more than a year (till October, 1779). From 1780 to 1783 he served in Congress, and at a later date appears to have taken an active interest in continental and State affairs, without holding any political appointments. He was a member of the Virginia Convention in 1788, and accepted an appointment to the bench in 1789. His death occurred October 28, 1805.

The interest of Judge Jones' letters lies mainly in the careful picture he gives of the condition of Virginia politics subsequent to the treaty of peace with Great Britain. The importance of that State in deciding the course of federal events of that time can hardly be overestimated; and the struggle of internal factions over such questions as the grant of the impost, the cession of western territory to Congress, the payment of British debts, the commercial polity of the States, and finally the steps that led up to the Federal Constitution, are not only of great interest in themselves, but of vital importance as showing on how little incidents the fate of the Confederation at times depended during these most critical years of constitutional development, if the term may be applied to a period when experience was framing in a definite form what were the rudiments of an instrument of government. The same contests occurred in other States, but nowhere were they conducted with such intense bitterness, or with such an array of talent on both sides, as in Virginia. The correspondents of Judge Jones were men of note, the leading spirits of the day; and his position, from its being somewhat outside of the actual scene of strife, was advantageous for forming a judicial, though by no means unbiased opinion on the current events, as he was a strong partisan. During the administration of Washington he naturally sided with the Jefferson faction, which, mainly under the influence of the foreign relations of the States, soon developed into the Republican party, and became

recognized as such after the retirement of Edmund Randolph from the Cabinet had left no representative of the opponents of the Federalists in the council of the President.

The letters printed in this volume are principally from Judge Jones to Madison, and are given for publication through the kindness of their possessor, Mr. F. B. McGuire. I have added a few others found in the Washington and Jefferson collections deposited in the Department of State, and a small number of letters from Washington and Madison to Jones. In the Gouverneur manuscripts there is a remarkable series of letters from Jones to Monroe, of which two are printed in Mr. Gilman's sketch of Monroe's life; but these manuscripts are at present not open to examination. Short notes are given where they may aid to an understanding of the text.

A number of letters from Madison to Jones are printed in the first volume of "The Papers of James Madison" (edited by Henry D. Gilpin), and for the convenience of the reader the dates and subject matter are here noted, with the pages of volume in which the letters may be found:

	Page.
Philadelphia, 19 September, 1780	51
Discussions in Congress on Mr. Jones' resolutions; the Vermont affair.	
Philadelphia, 17 October, 1780.....	53
Action of Congress on the clause relating to Indian purchases; military news.	

	Page.
Philadelphia, 20 October, 1780.....	55
Uneasiness occasioned by the disappointment of foreign succors; gloomy prospects for the army in winter; a remedy suggested.	
Philadelphia, November, 1780.....	60
The Vermont business; new arrangement of the army.	
Philadelphia, 14 November, 1780	61
State emissions of currency the bane of every salutary arrangement of the public finances; defensive condition of the magazines; inroads of the enemy into New York.	
Philadelphia, 21 November, 1780	62
Suggestions for legislation in Virginia; depreciation of State emissions; the policy Virginia should pursue relative to a territorial cession.	
Philadelphia, 25 November, 1780.....	64
Instructions to Mr. Jay, relative to the Mississippi claims of Spain; difference of opinion on the subject between Mr. Madison and his colleague.	
Philadelphia, 28 November, 1780	67
Suggests the liberation of slaves to make soldiers; has inclosed to the governor a copy of the act of Connecticut ceding her territorial claims to the United States; the association of merchants in fixing the depreciation likely to prove salutary.	
Philadelphia, 5 December, 1780.....	69
Letters received from Mr. Jay and Mr. Carmichael, their tenor, and the advice of the Georgia delegates in consequence.	
Philadelphia, 12 December, 1780.....	72
Colonel Laurens appointed Envoy Extraordinary to France; Mr. Laurens in captivity; M. Sartine removed from the Navy Department and the Marquis de Castries appointed his successor.	

	Page.
Philadelphia, 19 December, 1780.....	76
<p style="margin-left: 40px;"> Regrets that the Assembly had not taken up the subject of the Western lands in time to have the result communi- cated to the Legislature of Maryland before their rising, and that so little progress had been made in levying soldiers. </p>	

It will be noticed that the letters are confined to a single year, but the subsequent communications appear to have been lost. Writing to Monroe, in 1820, Madison said: "My correspondence [with Judge Jones] ran through a much longer period, of which I have proofs on hand; and from the tenor of the above letters, and my intimacy with him, I have no doubt that my communications were often of an interesting character. Perhaps the remaining letters, or a part of them, may have escaped your search." (*Works*, III, 188.)

WORTHINGTON C. FORD.

WASHINGTON, *January, 1889.*