

# FAME AND THE FOUNDING FATHERS





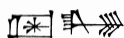
DOUGLASS ADAIR



ESSAYS BY DOUGLASS ADAIR

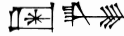
FAME  
AND THE  
FOUNDING  
FATHERS

EDITED BY TREVOR COLBOURN,  
WITH A PERSONAL MEMOIR BY  
CAROLINE ROBBINS  
AND A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY BY  
ROBERT E. SHALHOPE



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The cuneiform inscription that serves as our logo and as the design motif for our endpapers is the earliest-known written appearance of the word "freedom" (*amagi*), or "liberty." It is taken from a clay document written about 2300 B.C. in the Sumerian city-state of Lagash.

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## PREFACE

MANY DISTINGUISHED SCHOLARS wanted this book and have a part in it. Its concept is only minimally that of the editor; it is clearly Douglass Adair's book, albeit regrettably delayed by the editor's administrative distractions. Its publication owes much to many people: to Virginia Hamilton Adair, literary executor to her late husband; to Arthur Pierce Middleton and Marvin Harvey for permission to include articles in which they were collaborators with Douglass Adair; to Thad Tate, formerly editor of the *William and Mary Quarterly* (and now director of the Institute of Early American History and Culture), for his helpful cooperation on questions of copyright; to Moravian College for permission to include "Fame and the Founding Fathers"; to the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery for permission to reprint Adair's essay in *The Reinterpretation of Early American History* and his article in the *Huntington Library Quarterly*, and for allowing access to the Adair Papers now on deposit in San Marino; to the many historians who volunteered their recollections and professional regard for their late colleague; to Robert E. Shalhope for his historiographical essay; and to Donald Lamm, vice-president of W. W. Norton, whose combination of patience and enthusiasm is reminiscent of the real author of this volume.

But perhaps the most notable contribution comes from Caroline Robbins, whose "Personal Memoir" appropriately introduces Douglass Adair's essays and articles and confirms what many already know: it is impossible to consider Adair the historian without recalling Adair the person.

THE EDITOR has been fortunate in the preparation of this volume in having the assistance of the staff of the Institute of Early American History and Culture. With their advice and aid the following editorial method was adopted. Previously published pieces by Adair have been reprinted as they were in their original appearance, except that obvious typographical errors have been corrected and details of spelling, capitalization, italicization, and hyphenation have also been made consistent with the present Institute *Style Sheet*. In the footnotes, the mechanics of citation have also been standardized according to current rules of style, and in some cases, without indication, more bibliographic information has been supplied than was given in the original printing of an article. The two essays herein that are printed from unpublished Adair manuscripts, "The Jefferson Scandals" and "Clio Bemused," have been edited as though they were being prepared for publication in the *William and Mary Quarterly* today.

T.C.

# INTRODUCTION

*Trevor Colbourn*

THIS VOLUME is intended as a sort of valedictory, my farewell to the finest of friends. It is also a posthumous offering to the historical profession, the intellectual testament of an inspired teacher, scholar, editor, and writer that takes the form of a selection of some of the liveliest and the most influential writing by the late and very lamented Douglass Greybill Adair.

It is also, appropriately, a book that Douglass Adair had often been asked to furnish and one that he was increasingly tempted to prepare in the years before his untimely death. "I have a strong professional interest in *book publication*," he wrote to a colleague in 1960, "since the world of scholarship, as you know, rates one mediocre monograph as more of a scholarly achievement than a dozen brilliant articles." In the same year he confided to a good friend his proposal to compile a collection "under the title *Jefferson Scandals and Other Essays—the Horn Papers, my pair on the 10th Federalist, Hamilton's Pseudonyms and Religion etc.*" His purpose, he continued, was "to resurrect them from the old files of the [*William and Mary*] *Quarterly*, where no one ever saw them except a very small circle of constant readers, and make a book." This memorial volume includes all of the essays and articles that Adair had in mind at that time.

Clearly, he underestimated the influence and impact of the *William and Mary Quarterly*. He never realized the full measure of his reputation as the gifted practitioner of a rare style of historical jour-

nalism or recognized the high regard in which his articles were held by numerous readers. If Caroline Robbins is correct in her view that Douglass Adair was troubled by "a feeling of rejection by colleagues during life," then he made himself the most tragic victim of skewed self-judgment (ironically, itself a favorite Adair phrase). Those whose professional respect he sought and valued knew him and recognized him for what he was: a man of uniquely brilliant insights whose work they admired and frequently cited. As John Pomfret has observed, "How many times, in speaking to a colleague about Madison, Jay, or Hamilton, has one heard the rejoinder, 'You know, Adair (or Douglass) thinks . . .'" When reviewing Gerald Stourzh's recent book, *Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government* (1970), Gordon Wood remarked that "Douglass Adair would have liked this book, for he understood better than most historians the peculiarities of the intellectual world of the late eighteenth century. It is thus especially fitting that this book . . . is dedicated to his memory." It was fitting indeed, for Douglass Adair was the thoughtful and unselfish negotiator of the publication of Stourzh's book, a role he played for other historians many times.

DOUGLASS GREYBILL ADAIR died by his own hand on May 2, 1968. His death was a personal tragedy as well as a public loss. He was a man of rare gallantry, grace, courtliness, wit, and style. To some he seemed an eighteenth-century philosophe who had strayed into the twentieth century by some happy accident.

Adair's curriculum vitae tells too little of the man. Born in New York City, he grew up in Birmingham and Mobile, Alabama, majored in English at the University of the South in Sewanee and then went on to Harvard, where he received an M.A. in 1935. He spent a brief period in Washington, D.C., as research assistant to Walton H. Hamilton, with whom he wrote *The Power to Govern* (1937),<sup>1</sup> and

1. He later declared it to be "chiefly the writing of Walton Hamilton; he was extremely generous to add my name on the title page."

then returned to graduate school at Yale. There he was awarded the doctorate in 1943. His study of "The Intellectual Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy" is a minor classic among dissertations. He taught briefly at Princeton before moving to the College of William and Mary, where his association with the *Quarterly* from 1946 to 1955 brought fame to both. For the remaining thirteen years of his life, he contributed by his teaching and scholarship to the distinction of the Claremont Graduate School.

His published writing over these years was substantial and significant. Skill in historical detective work was first revealed in his extraordinary study of "The Authorship of the Disputed Federalist Papers" (1944). This was followed in 1947 by "The Mystery of the Horn Papers," written in collaboration with Pierce Middleton. In 1948 there appeared an edition of Robert Munford's *The Candidates*, co-edited with Jay B. Hubbell. "The Tenth Federalist Revisited" (1951) and " 'That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science': David Hume, James Madison, and the Tenth Federalist" (1957) give evidence of their continuing significance by the number of times they have been reprinted. Adair's sustained concern with the intellectual origins of the Constitution had its most recent exposure in " 'Experience Must Be Our Only Guide': History, Democratic Theory, and the United States Constitution," contributed to *The Reinterpretation of Early American History: Essays in Honor of John Edwin Pomfret* (1966), edited by Ray Allen Billington.

Adair's editorial talents were not confined to the *Quarterly* only. He entered into a happy and productive partnership with John A. Schutz, which resulted in *Peter Oliver's Origin and Progress of the American Rebellion* in 1961 and *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805-1813*, in 1966. Subsequently he embarked upon (but did not live to complete) an edition of David Ramsay's *History of the American Revolution*; at the same time he began work with Martin Diamond on a new edition (with commentary, concordance, and glossary) of *The Federalist* papers; and one

of his last interests was an examination of the authorship of the *Annual Register*, to be studied with the aid of computer technology.

What does Adair's work signify for the historiography of early America? In a profession that places value upon being first with a new interpretation, a new insight, Adair's niche is secure. When he wrote his extraordinary doctoral dissertation at Yale, historians were still very much inclined to treat ideas as determined by nonrational economic factors. Adair was among the first to challenge the prevailing views of Charles Beard and his disciples and to consider carefully the classical legacy to the Founding Fathers and their inheritance from the seventeenth-century English republicans. At the time of Adair's death Martin Diamond concluded that "his outstanding merit as a historian and scholar was an acute awareness of the importance of ideas in determining the conduct of men and in shaping affairs. . . . This is not to imply that ideas are disembodied forces which explain the whole of human behavior, but only to suggest that ideas achieve a force and life of their own and determine conduct as much as they are themselves determined by external forces."

Some three years earlier Adair himself had attempted a measure of self-identification in a long letter to Robert E. Brown at Michigan State:

I am, of course, as you charge, a historical determinist in the de Tocqueville sense, holding that the experience of each of us draws a circle of wider or narrower dimensions around each of us, and that our freedom of choice and options of necessity take place within this circle. And, of course, as you know, the "area" [*sic*] of experience that I have been most fascinated in for our eighteenth century friends is the realm of symbolic experience—their reading, their formal college training, etc.—which I feel structured and determined to a significant degree the physical world they saw with their eyes, or didn't see. The *Common* response of a Henry, a Rush, an Otis to the Stamp Act was *not* random, it was a response conditioned by a particular taught view of English Classical history that produced a very specific—

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one might say predictable—reaction, although the personal history and temperaments and the particular environments of these men was [*sic*] quite different. . . . It is my own feeling that we really can't break into the eighteenth century semi-closed circle that determined their meaning and expectations when they talked about the limits and possibilities of politics and social organization.

His concern was always with motivation and the frame of reference that can help us to understand that motivation. His discovery of the remarkable relevance of "English Classical history" was one he generously shared with others.

With the marvelously accurate vision afforded by hindsight, we can see his scholarly liaison with Caroline Robbins as quite logical and inevitable, a liaison that furnished the foundation for the definitive contributions of such friends and admirers as Bernard Bailyn, Jack Pole, and Gordon Wood. Adair influenced a generation of scholars whose writing persistently reflects his insight, his curiosity, and his enthusiasm for people, past and present.

Despite his excellent publication list and his obvious influence, Adair often expressed dissatisfaction with his accomplishments, but he did not choose to live to publish the major monograph of which so many colleagues believed him easily capable. When well-intentioned friends chided him on his failure to bring forth his long-expected study of the intellectual origins of Jeffersonian democracy, he would shrug and remark that historians who mattered had already read his Yale dissertation; and he was right to the extent that the list of borrowers resembles a who's who in early American history. He worked in his own way, often content to explore a subject and then contribute his ideas and insights to others who would bring the study to full realization. Frequently Adair's own publications came with the helpful midwifery of friends and admirers like Margaret Kinard at the *Quarterly* or Edmund P. Willis at the 1966 Moravian College Conference.

Adair saw no point in attempting to patent ideas. He enjoyed stimulating others and took satisfaction in their success. Page Smith has remarked that "in my scholarly career I have never known anyone who was so much a source of ideas and inspiration for others as Douglass Adair. For me visits with Douglass were always an opportunity for a kind of intellectual gourmandizing. . . . He made conversations feasts of wit and reason and kindness. I valued his critical judgments more than those of anyone I know."

Such comments occur with remarkable frequency in any discussion of Adair's professional achievement. John Pomfret recalls Adair's "creative enthusiasm," how he was always seeking the idea behind the fact. Jack Greene remembers Adair the critic demonstrating that "criticism need not be negative" and, as Greene observes, that "to be devastatingly generous obviously requires far more imaginative power." As another one of his former students put it, Adair never exercised "a critic's virtuoso at the expense of other men's works, although he could be very exacting in his demands upon his fellow historians." Indeed, he was never less than intellectually honest and never less than kind, a man who found it easier to help others than himself. Lawrence Towner vividly recalls his first encounter—by correspondence—with Douglass Adair: "His response, for me, epitomizes the man he was. It was brilliant; it was kindly; it had half a dozen other subjects in it that he thought, quite rightly, needed investigation (all far better than the subject I proposed); and it represented a commitment then, and forever after, to me as a new friend and, despite the fact I was only a graduate student, a new colleague. That was Douglass Adair."

Perhaps Adair's happiest quality was his infectious enthusiasm, which in turn enhanced his extraordinary talent as a teacher of both peers and students. Indeed, recalls Joyce Appleby, "There was a quality about his relation with the past which went beyond enthusiasm. The past was alive to him—it was life, perhaps, and in his open



exploration of history and man through history, he removed the barriers which usually loom up to make the past seem quaint or different."

But Wilbur Jacobs probably savored in a unique if melancholy fashion Adair's influence as teacher. Taking over Adair's seminar at Claremont the semester after his death, Jacobs reported:

The legacy of Douglass Adair seemed everywhere around. Somehow Douglass had unconsciously projected his dynamic personality into the very student body of the graduate school of history. There was scarcely a student I met . . . who was untouched by the Adair magic. Time and again these students seemed to reflect flashes of Adair himself; his creative powers, his eager idealism, his humane spirit, and his chivalrous admiration for the underdog. Sometimes the impact of Adair on students was almost overwhelming, especially when they attempted seminar papers and dissertations on profound topics that seemed to me to be the meat of unfinished books that Douglass had envisioned for himself. . . . He was always so generous . . . that his own work undoubtedly suffered.

Jacobs has another memory, one others have known: "I remember particularly his comradeship at a history convention when he comforted me after a critic on a paper I had read made what I thought was an ungentlemanly commentary. After the session Douglass came up to me, put his arm on my shoulder and said 'Come, let me buy you a drink, and I'll tell you what that fellow was trying to say.' And he did, but coming from Douglass the criticism was a delight to hear."

Such warm remembrances of Adair's counsel in part account for the extraordinarily favorable response from the profession to the recently established Douglass G. Adair Memorial Award. Announced in early 1972 by the Claremont Graduate School and the Institute of Early American History and Culture, the quadrennial award is given for the most significant article published in the *William and*

*Mary Quarterly*.<sup>2</sup> (The first covered the years 1964 to 1972; the next selection will occur in 1976.)

It is perhaps too evident that it is still difficult to write of Douglass Adair without being far more personal than is professional custom. But perhaps some of the reasons emerge. As Keith Berwick has remarked, Adair's "example and encouragement were constant sources of nourishment" for many of us. We believe the pages that follow will help explain why.

2. It is a remarkable testimony to Adair's impact on his time that sufficient funds were raised in his memory to enable the award committee to set the prize at \$500 plus a gold medal. In Mar. 1973 in Claremont, Calif., the first Douglass Adair Award was presented to Edmund S. Morgan for "The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXIV (1967), 1-43.

# DOUGLASS ADAIR

## A Personal Memoir

*Caroline Robbins*

AT THE American Historical Association meeting in December 1946, Felix Gilbert brought over to me and introduced a large man who seemed somewhat formal in manner, saying, "You are both interested in Algernon Sidney, I believe." We settled down to talk. Adair was, I realized, southern. I also immediately became conscious of an engaging grin that as friendship progressed and meetings were more frequent, suggested an overwhelming pleasure in encounter and an all-enveloping welcome. On this first occasion I was questioned rapidly but listened to with rare attention, and before our talk ended, I had undertaken to write about Sidney for the *William and Mary Quarterly*. "What is it?" I ignorantly asked—and received a mild rebuke for not knowing this important journal of which, as I was to discover later, Douglass had recently become the editor.

Since 1943 Douglass had taught at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, after instructorships at Princeton (1941–1943) and Yale (1939–1941). A master's in history from Harvard in 1935 was followed by three years in Washington before he went to Yale, where he was to receive his Ph.D. degree in 1943. As a research assistant at the Social Security Board (1936–1938), it was in Washington that he collaborated with Walton H. Hamilton on *The Power To Govern: The Constitution—Then and Now* (New York, 1937). A

timely book, it also combined for Douglass two lifelong interests: modern politics and the constitutional creation of the Founding Fathers. During his year at Harvard Law School (1933–1934) he had met and courted Virginia Hamilton. They were to have three children—Robert, Douglass, and Katherine Sidney—who no doubt brought their parents the normal quota of anxiety, but also indisputably an enormous amount of pleasure. Such biographical information was achieved slowly, however. In over twenty years of warm acquaintance, we were to converse for hours, after a quick exchange of personal news, about Madison, Jefferson, Hamilton, their antecedents and successors. Reminiscences about childhood and education were in short supply—I was not Boswell, and Adair always had academic problems and questions to discuss.

At this first meeting I told Douglass of my early plans, frustrated by the appearance of Vernon L. Parrington's *Colonial Mind*,<sup>1</sup> to analyze and trace the sea change undergone by emigrant Pilgrims and others this side of the wide Atlantic. He told me of his interest in David Hume and Madison (which was later to be brilliantly illustrated in " 'That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science' " in the August 1957 *Huntington Library Quarterly*), as well as in some seventeenth-century republicans. So a kind of partnership was formed. My article was duly dispatched and, to the accompaniment of the kindest of compliments, torn apart. Even in the printed version (July 1947), incorporating my meek agreement to nearly all suggestions, I discovered an extra sentence I had not fathered and a footnote *a* following my note 27 referring to the third president's use of Sidney. Douglass had been unable to resist inserting a few lines about his own "The New Thomas Jefferson" (*Quarterly*, January 1946), in which the phrase "the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs . . .," used by the Virginian, was traced to the dying speech of Richard Rumbold, executed in 1685, two years

1. Vol. I of Parrington's three-volume *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York, 1927–1930).