

## Spring History & Heritage -- #1 (March 18)

In this, the first of our eight spring posts, we'll begin with a couple of *Almanac* entries and move to content from Brion McClanahan's book on the U.S. Constitution.

### **John Quincy Adams --- (*Christian Almanac*; Grant/Wilbur; Feb. 21)**

**This Massachusetts statesman (1767--1848)** witnessed as a boy the colonies' struggle for independence and, like his father, became a president of the United States? His career, moreover, resembled that of his father in several ways including attendance at Harvard, training in law, achievements in diplomacy (he authored the famous Monroe Doctrine while serving as secretary of state), and perseverance in the midst of divisive party politics. Both men, in fact, served only one contentious term in the White House.

### **Postbellum Charity --- (*Christian Almanac*; Grant/Wilbur; Mar. 12)**

"The Lord God on High has ordained and prescribed obedience in all matters. Huddled against the cold of the ocean, shivering urchins and penniless Confederate widows are but prods to the fullest expression of that obedience, drawing from the unified strengths of mercantilists, churchmen, craftsmen, and seamen. Akin to the primordial Gospel society in Jerusalem following Pentecost, our work corps allows the attention of each concern to be focused on provisions of mercy, grace, and peace. For the welfare of our own, we turn, not to Rome or Babylon, or Washington, we turn to hearths of our own making."

The passage above comes from the diary of former Confederate colonel and Presbyterian layman **Langdon Lowe (d. 1884)**. About fifteen years after war, Lowe led a highly successful revitalization effort in his native Charleston, SC, that put the unemployed and homeless (many of them former sharecroppers and slaves) back to work. Debris was cleared and the city's structures repaired. And Charleston, "the emerald of the South," was proving she was far from finished.

### **A Union & Government of the States (and not merely of the people) (*Founding Fathers' Guide to the Constitution*; McClanahan; p. 24)**

What if the States were not represented and were given no voice as States in the general government of the United States? What if the U.S. were merely a People's Union and a People's Government? John Dickinson (DE) took up this question at the Philadelphia Convention, as reproduced below by historian Brion McClanahan:

*If the state governments were excluded from all agency in the national one, and all power drawn from the people at large, the consequence would be, that the national government would move in the same direction as the state governments now do and would run into all the same mischiefs. The reform would only unite the thirteen small streams into one great current pursuing the same course without any opposition whatever.*

As McClanahan concludes, “Of course, Dickinson was referring to the problems several States were facing in 1787—such as, depreciated paper money, excessive democracy, and high taxes. Dickinson, then, saw the States as a hedge against the general government, a check on its power.”

### **Forecasting the Future of the Senate -- (*Founding Fathers’ Guide*; pp. 26-27)**

Some Founders were alarmed by what might become of the U.S. Senate, given the fact that the State legislatures could not recall senators from office in the middle of their 6-year terms (though the States were empowered to appoint them in the first place).

George Mason at the Virginia Ratifying Convention, for instance, noted that “They cannot be recalled in all that time for misconduct, and at the end of that long term may again be elected. What will be the operation of this? Is it not probable, that those Gentlemen who will be elected Senators will fix themselves in the federal town, and become citizens of that town more than of our State? They will purchase a good seat in or near the town, and become inhabitants of that place. . . The Senators living at that spot will vote themselves handsome pay, without incurring any additional expences.”

Mason (1725--1792) was apparently addressing only the proposed Senate at the time, but this teacher has never read or heard a more prophetic anticipation of the concentrated plutocracy (rule of the rich) that characterizes the entire U.S. political establishment. As you’re probably aware, the three richest counties and seven of the top ten in America today encircle Washington, D.C. And many have observed with dismay the lucrative career revolving door—from post to post in government, business, consulting firms, foundations, lobby groups, etc.—that is the nation’s capital.

### **“The Times, Places, and Manner of Holding Elections”**

***(Founding Fathers’ Guide to the Constitution; McClanahan; pp. 28-33)***

Art. I, Sec. 4 of the U.S. Constitution says **these procedures**, necessary for republican government, were to be determined by the States subject to final review by Congress? The seemingly matter-of-fact procedures were swept up in the larger battle between nationalists and federalists (or Federalists & Anti-federalists) over a prudent division of political powers. In this case the Constitution’s proponents (Federalists), who favored a congressional check or U.S. veto over the aforementioned State regulations, won.

(With respect to Article I, Section 4, the debates, says McClanahan, revealed wide recognition by the Framers of the fact that the States still had substantial authority over the general government. Congress may have the final say on electoral regulations, but the State legislatures could relatively easily disable Washington D.C. by simply refusing to appoint U.S. senators. This vital State check on central power was of course a casualty of the 17th Amendment’s provision for direct popular election of senators. The amendment came to pass in the Progressive Era of the early-1900s.)