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# The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787, Vol. 1

*From Yale University Press*

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to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, Vol. 1:

0 of 3 people found the following review helpful. course requirement  
By E. Clark  
Needed this book for my class.... a course requirement, I don't care for the book at all... but if you're into this kind of stuff... it is well written and very informative  
3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Gold Standard  
By VA Duck  
In 1911 Professor Max Farrand published what is STILL the final word on the activities of the "Federal Convention of 1787". These volumes contain the primary source relating to the Convention, most particularly Mr. Madison's notes, but also the notes of the Secretary, William Jackson and Delegates: R. Yates of NY, R. King of MA, J. McHenry of MD, W. Pierce of GA, W. Patterson of NJ, C. Pinckney of SC G. Mason of VA; as well as the "Virginia Plan", "New Jersey Plan", "Pinckney Plan" and "Hamilton Plan" and contemporaneous letters (Vol. III - Appendix). The volumes offer those interested in the Convention an unfettered look at the building of the Constitution, or a means of "double checking" a biographer's rendition of events - often with very "interesting" results! I have the three-volumes in electronic edition (from: The Online Library of Liberty) downloaded in kindle (.mobi) format. The ability to have the kindle, 'search find' is a HUGE advantage for fact checking, compiling instances, or research. For me, these are reference materials rather than an end-to-end read, otherwise I defer to reviewer, "greg taylor" who's earlier, very thorough review I enthusiastically second!  
64 of 64 people found the following review helpful. An ongoing review in four parts, part 1: What it is and how to prepare to read it.  
By greg taylor  
I am rereading these after many years. In working my way through these volumes, I realized that these books require some preparation on the part of the reader. I thought I would therefore tell you exactly what these books are and make some suggestions for preparing to read them. As will become clear when I explain what they are, for me to critique them would be presumptuous and odd.  
**WHAT THESE BOOKS ARE:** Max Farrand published the first 3 volume edition in 1911. He took all the available records from participants in the Constitutional Convention that were known at that time and published them together. These include the official journal of the Convention (kept by the Convention's secretary, William Jackson), James Madison's Notes on the Federal Convention, Robert Yates' Secret Proceedings and Debates of the Convention..., along with notes or papers written by Rufus King, James McHenry, William Pierce, William Patterson, Alexander Hamilton, Charles Pinckney, George Mason, and the Committee of Detail. These are arranged in a day by day format. So that on May 29th, the day that Edmund Randolph presented the Virginia Plan, we read the entries for that day in the Journal, by Madison, by Yates, by McHenry and by Patterson. And so on until we reach the end of Volume 1 on July 13th. Volume 2 completes the Convention. Volume 3 and 4 provide supplementary material such as letters of the individual delegates, the various plans presented to the Convention, etc. Volume 4 was added by Farrand in his 1937 edition and includes material discovered between 1911 and 1937. The whole set was reprinted for the Constitutional Bicentennial but the supplemental volume was reorganized and expanded by James Hutson and issued as Supplement to Max Farrand's *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*. It is available on under that name. Hutson is the chief of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress and has been one of the guiding lights of the Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution of the United States which now runs to well over 20 volumes and is the current standard for any research in the field. He was the perfect choice for the job of updating Farrand's great work.  
**SUGGESTIONS FOR READING THESE VOLUMES:**  
1. Buy them all before you start reading the first. Or, at least, buy Volume 3 before you start reading Volume 1. There are too many references to readings in Volume 3. You need to be able to read the Virginian, the Pinckney and the Patterson Plans. You will also want to read the day by day correspondence. I recommend that you read a days entry in Volume 1 and then read whatever entries are there for those days in Volume 3 and 4.  
2. It is probably a good idea to do some preparatory reading. Farrand himself wrote a good narrative of the Convention. There are many others. Try to choose one that doesn't just indulge in hagiography. M.E. Bradford wrote *A Worthy Company* which is short biographies of all the delegates. Very useful. I also suggest reading some good intellectual histories of the Convention. I just finished reading McDonald's *Novus Ordo Seclorum*. McDonald is as opinionated as always but he is also very learned and no one writes about the Constitution without opinion. You can choose among Bailyn, Woods, Appleby, Banning, Pocock, Adair and many others for this sort of stuff. (I suggest you try to read somebody whose political bent you don't agree with. I did that purposely with McDonald. That way you might actually catch a whiff of your opponent's ideas when you read the Convention notes. Just a suggestion.)  
3. Read these documents with organizing themes in mind. For example:  
a. Small states versus large states.  
b. Slave states versus less slave states. I have forgotten the exact number but I believe that in 1787 there were either only one or two states where slavery was illegal. I trust someone will write me with the correct information. In any case, it is fascinating to listen to all the ways the delegates talk about slavery without using the word. Not in their personal notes but definitely in their public utterances.  
c. Democracy versus Aristocracy.  
d. Liberalism versus Republicanism.  
And so on. I am sure that all of you can suggest many more. Choose several and watch the ways your themes interrelate in one person or more during the course of that summer in Philadelphia. I owe this idea to McDonald. He has obviously read his copy of Farrand many times with several different themes in mind. In *Novus Ordo Seclorum*, McDonald has an altogether brilliant section on Madison's constitutional theories (pp 204-209 of the

paperback edition) which he concludes by pointing out that Madison may not have had as much influence on the finished document as people normally think. McDonald notes that on the seventy-one specific proposals that Madison moved, seconded or spoke on, he lost 40 times (pp. 208-9). Obviously, McDonald read his copy once keeping track of who won on what issue. You got to love the guy for that. Anyway, those are my suggestions. It may seem like a lot of work. It is. But it seems to me that one thing that almost all of us (radical, liberal, conservative, libertarian) have lost sight of is that the Founders expected citizens to be participants. To give up a little for the greater good, to take some time to make the right choices, to be involved. To me that implies working a little to understand our history so that I am better able to participate in our democracy. That's my crazy idea and I am sticking with it.

The Federal Convention of 1787 engaged in the great and complex labor of framing the constitution for the union of the states. For thirty years afterwards, little was known of its deliberations, and nothing official was published. The variety of versions which began to appear thereafter tended to confuse rather than clarify the situation. When Mr. Farrand undertook the voluminous task of gathering into a single unit all available records which had been written or published by the Convention participants, he found that accuracy became the most important and the most difficult aspect of his task. Yet the accuracy he achieved has proved to be the most significant feature of his undertaking. The thoroughness of his research has made The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787 the one most authoritative source for students of constitutional law as well as lawyers and legislators who seek to understand the spirit of the Constitution in their interpretations of its provisions. The documents are reprinted exactly from the originals and presented in chronological sequence. Throughout Mr. Farrand discriminated carefully between statements of proceedings in the Convention and theoretical interpretations of clauses in the constitution, including only the former in his work. His footnotes provide cross references to the most important subjects and his general index is as exhaustive as possible. He also includes a special index, giving references for every clause in the adopted Constitution to enable the reader to trace the origin and development of any particular clause and to find every item within the Records that bears upon it. Originally published in 1911 in three volumes, the Revised Edition, published in 1937, incorporated in a fourth supplementary volume new material which came to light after the first printing. The Yale University Press is now pleased to announce the publication of the four-volume Revised Edition in paper-bound format. Will now be the standard authority on the work of Constitutional convention of 1787. New York Times  
Historians and constitutional lawyers have long desired to see all the records that exist of the formation of the Federal constitution, gathered into a record which shall be at once correct, critical, and comprehensive. Their wish is now gratified. The Nation