

An Assembly of Demigods

Luther Martin

William Pierce: Sketches of Members of the Constitutional Convention

Mr. Martin was educated for the Bar, and is Attorney general for the State of Maryland. This Gentleman possesses a good deal of information, but he has a very bad delivery, and so extremely prolix, that he never speaks without tiring the patience of all who hear him. He is about 34 years of age.

James Madison to Eliza House Trist, New York, January 27, 1788

I have not yet seen L. M.—’s publication of which you give so flattering an account. It is impossible I think that he can be a very formidable adversary to the Constitution; though he will certainly be a very noisy one.

Manasseh Cutler Journal, February 23, 1805

Mr. Luther Martin, Attorney-general of Maryland, spoke five hours [in defending Justice Samuel Chase in his impeachment trial]—did not conclude. Very pertinent, much law knowledge, and much well pointed humor.

William Plumer: Memorandum, February 23, 1805

Mr. Martin really possesses much legal information & a great fund of good humour—keen satire & poignant wit. He is far from being a graceful speaker. His language is often incorrect—inaccurate & sometimes is too low. But he certainly has *talents*—& from 27 years close application, & much practice, he has acquired much knowledge of the principles of law, the rules of Court & forms of practice.

Benjamin Galloway* to Thomas Jefferson, Annapolis????, January 5, 1805

[Martin] indulged in the almost daily practice of appearing in the Courts of Justice...intoxicated with spirituous Liquor, and that the Dignity of the State of Maryland is severely wounded by reason of the appearance of the Attorney General in its Courts of Justice in said condition.

*Benjamin Galloway had filed a motion to impeach Luther Martin as Attorney General, and included a copy of the charges in a letter to Thomas Jefferson.

Thomas Jefferson to George Hay, Washington, D.C.?????, June 19, 1807

Shall we move to commit L[uther] M[artin]...this unprincipled & impudent bull-dog?

Harman Blennerhasset Diary, Washington, D.C., October 29, 1807

Luther Martin has just made his final immersion into the daily bath of his faculties, after a series of apparitions, in all the phases of his accustomed orbit. Whether in a stage-coach, or a tavern, he is indefatigable, under the united stimulus of egotism and benevolence, to harass the gratitude or tax the patience of his friends. At 3 o'clock, A.M., on the Saturday morning, at Richmond, he joined us in the coach, and neither the privation of sleep, nor the fatigue of the journey, have in the least checked his loquacity, or lessened his good humor. He read to me an able pamphlet, on the subject of Jefferson's rejection of the new British Treaty, while we were jolting and jarring over as bad a road as any country can lament, with more dispatch than I can peruse it in my chair. His strong memory made him interesting all the way, in his anecdotes and stories; and he is not unhappy in his powers of ridicule, which is well pointed, until it soon becomes blunted by the suggestions of his benevolence and the abrasions of his verbosity, which, like the revolutions of a grindstone, soon wear away the subject applied to it, without undergoing itself any sensible diminution.

Joseph Story to Samuel P. Hay, February 16, 1808

With a professional income of \$10,000 a year, he is poor and needy, generous and humane, but negligent and profuse. He labors hard to acquire, and yet cannot preserve. Experience, however severe, never corrects a single habit. I have heard anecdotes of his improvidence and thoughtlessness which astonish me. He is about middle size, a little bald, with a common forehead, pointed nose, inexpressive eye, large mouth, and a well formed chin. His dress is slovenly...All nature pays contribution to his argument, if, indeed, it can be called one...But everyone assures me that he is profoundly learned, and that though he shines not now in the lustre of his former days, yet he is at times very great. He never seems satisfied with a single grasp of his subject; but he urges himself to successive efforts, until he moulds and fashions it to his purpose. You should hear of Luther Martin's fame from those who have known him long and intimately, but you should not see him.