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**A fascinating history constitutes Leland-Madison Park in Orange**

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Just off Route 20 near its intersection with Route 628 in [Orange County](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/provinceorstate/tags/orange-county/) lies [Leland-Madison Park](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/leland-madison-park/). It is not of grand scale and is little known to many, but it memorializes a meeting between two men that resulted in the First Amendment to our Constitution.

The Madison was, of course, [James Madison](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/james-madison/), our fourth [president](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/position/tags/president/). [Leland](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/john-leland/) is less well known, and it is my hope that this little vignette will evoke your interest in learning more about [him](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/john-leland/).

[Elder John Leland](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/elder-john-leland/) was born May 14, 1754, in [Grafton](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/city/tags/grafton/), [Mass.](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/provinceorstate/tags/massachusetts/) He became a [member](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/position/tags/member/) of the [Baptist Church](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/organization/tags/baptist-church/) in 1775 and by 1776 was in [Virginia](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/provinceorstate/tags/virginia/). [Leland](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/john-leland/) settled in the Culpeper area and pastored at, among others, what became Culpeper [Baptist Church](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/organization/tags/baptist-church/).

He, as did others, preached from place to place and conducted revivals, which were well received. In the course of his stay of some 15 years in [Virginia](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/provinceorstate/tags/virginia/), he preached about 3,000 sermons and formed two large churches.

During these early years in the formation of our nation, Baptist preachers were often jailed for their attempts to preach and deliver their messages to the people. A license to preach was required (and it was difficult to obtain, as the laws and customs of the time favored the [established church](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/organization/tags/baptist-church/).) Some of these Baptist preachers were jailed in the [Culpeper jail](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/facility/tags/culpeper-jail/).

It was during the later years of his stay in [Virginia](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/provinceorstate/tags/virginia/) that Elder [John Leland](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/john-leland/) and [James Madison](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/james-madison/) met (near the location of the Leland-Madison Park). In 1788, with the final state endorsements of the Constitution being sought, [Madison](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/james-madison/) asked [Leland](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/john-leland/) to endorse the Constitution for [Virginia](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/provinceorstate/tags/virginia/). [Leland](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/john-leland/) promised his support with one condition: [Madison](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/james-madison/) must develop an amendment in the Constitution to assure religious liberty.

As we all know, [Madison](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/james-madison/) did so, and as a result we find in our Bill of Rights the First Amendment, which reads: “[Congress](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/organization/tags/congress/) shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for redress of grievances.”

Elder [John Leland](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/john-leland/) returned to [Massachusetts](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/provinceorstate/tags/massachusetts/) in 1791 and continued his ministry throughout the remainder of his life. He died in [Chesire](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/city/tags/chesire/), [Mass.](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/provinceorstate/tags/massachusetts/), on Jan. 14, 1841, having preached what became his final sermon just 6 days prior.

In the book “Wellspring of Liberty” by [John Ragosta](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/john-ragosta/), we find the following passage: “Compared to either Anglicans or Presbyterians, a large number of Baptist ministers provided active military service.

Most notably, at least nine Baptist ministers who had suffered significant persecution for their previous preaching served during the Revolution. [William McClanahan](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/william-mcclanahan/), a Baptist [minister](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/position/tags/minister/) who had suffered incarceration, formed a company of the Culpeper Minutemen.”

This company of the [Culpeper Minutemen Battalion](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/organization/tags/culpeper-minutemen-battalion/) was known as the “Fighting Baptists.” One of [Capt.](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/position/tags/captain/) McClanahan’s descendents, [Larry McClanahan](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/person/tags/larry-mcclanahan/) of [Nashville](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/city/tags/nashville/), [Tenn.](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/provinceorstate/tags/tennessee/), returns to [Culpeper](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/facility/tags/culpeper-jail/) on occasion and led the commemoration of the Battle of [Great Bridge](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/facility/tags/great-bridge/) held in [Culpeper](http://www2.starexponent.com/topics/types/facility/tags/culpeper-jail/) a few years ago.