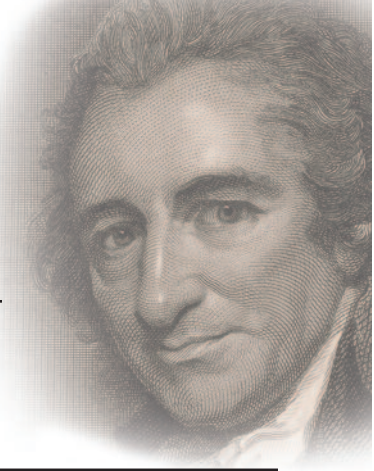


# The Beacon

January 2026 • Vol 20, No. 1

THOMAS PAINE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1884 • New Rochelle, New York • [Thomaspaine.org](http://Thomaspaine.org)

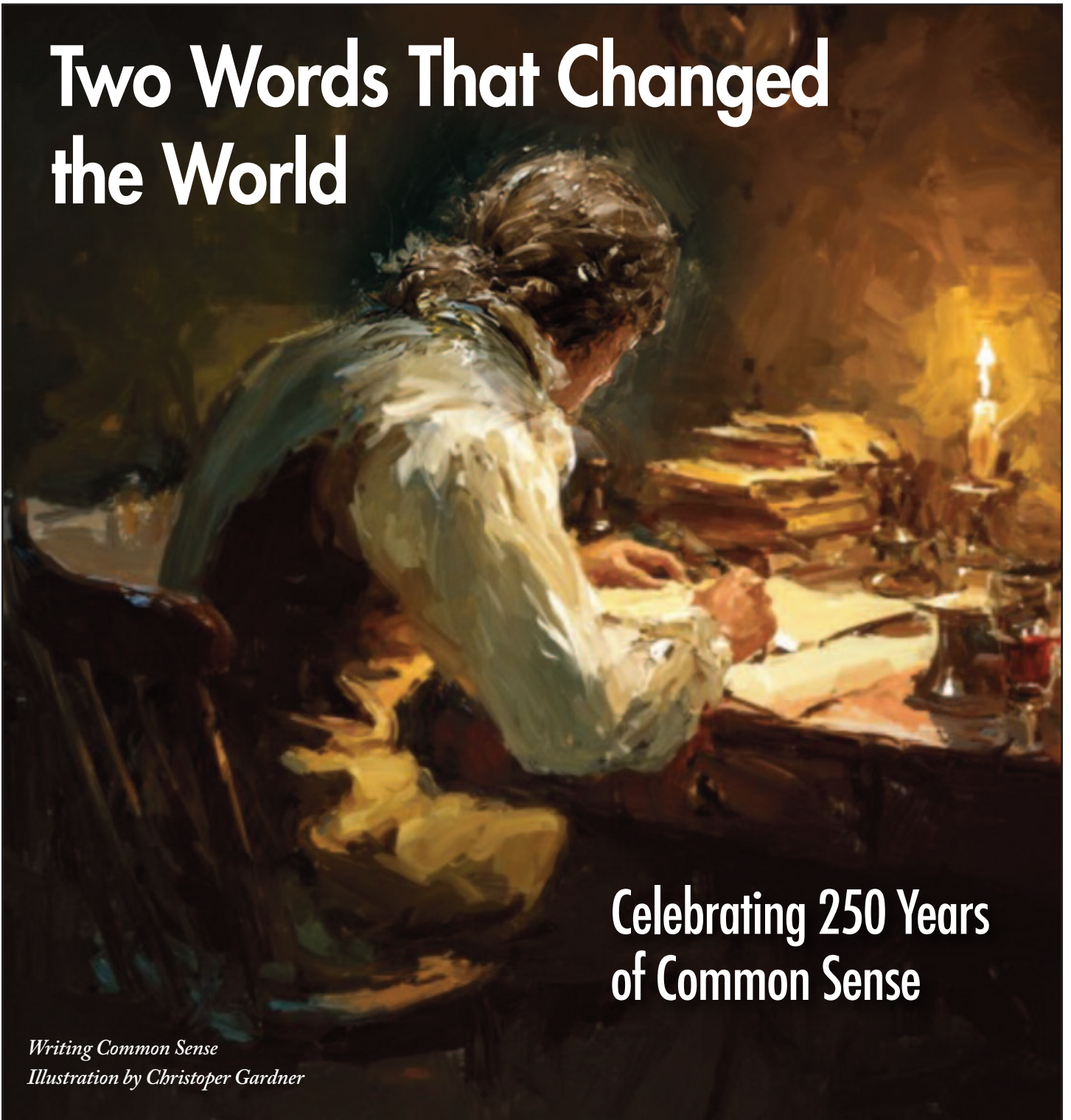


## Two Words That Changed the World

Celebrating 250 Years  
of Common Sense

*Writing Common Sense*

*Illustration by Christopher Gardner*



# The Context of Common Sense

## Analyzing Paine's Words

By Gary Berton

**G**eneral Washington of the Continental Army had no opinion about achieving independence. Most people were advocating reconciliation, to make peace, make a deal and carry on, with Britain still in charge of the American people: men like Benjamin Rush and John Dickinson, praised by history as “Founders,” led the movement for reconciling.

Following the language of *Common Sense*, 96 local and state Declarations of Independence were written, repeating the language of *Common Sense*, leading to the national declaration, and largely incorporating Paine's ideals, as well as the steps needed to follow these ideals.

This was the beginning of the Age of Democratic Revolutions, and the concept of democracy based on equality.

Gary Berton is the president of the TPHA and an editor of the new six-volume *Thomas Paine: Collected Writings*, coming this summer from Princeton University Press.

TO HENRY LAURENS, JANUARY 14, 1779

*“I think the importance of that pamphlet was such that if it had not appeared, and at the exact time it did, the Congress would not now be sitting where they are (representing independent states). The light with which that performance threw upon the subject gave a turn to the politics of America which enabled her to stand her ground. Independence, followed in six months after it, although, before it was published, it was a dangerous doctrine to speak of . . .*

*In order to accommodate that pamphlet to every man's purchase and to do honor to the cause, I gave up the profits I was justly entitled to . . . I gave permission to the printers in other parts of this State (Pennsylvania) to print it on their own account. I believe the number of copies printed and sold in America was not short of 150,000 – and is the greatest sale that any performance ever had since the use of letters . . .”*

THOMAS PAINE

## Did You Know?

When the first edition of *Common Sense* appeared in colonial bookshops, the work was unsigned, and its author remained a mystery to many readers. It became an instant bestseller.

Robert Bell, the first printer of *Common Sense* refused to allow Paine to make additions when it came time for subsequent printings, but Paine still had a lot to say.

Another print shop, owned by William and Thomas Bradford, stepped in, put Paine's name on the cover, and soon, updated new editions poured off their presses



# Common Sense

## How Thomas Paine Made the Case for an Independent and Democratic America

By Barbara Crane

**C**ommon Sense, published in January 1776, is well known for its strong advocacy of independence from Britain. Less known, but of vital importance, is Paine's insistence that it is essential to create republics in which the people as a whole—not any one person—are sovereign. Ridiculing the unwritten English "Constitution" that all American factions then cherished as a repository of their rights, Paine asserted that democratic government is properly created only through written constitutions based on the equality of all people and framed by and for the people themselves and for their happiness and freedom. He affirmed in *Common Sense* that "in free countries the law ought to be King."

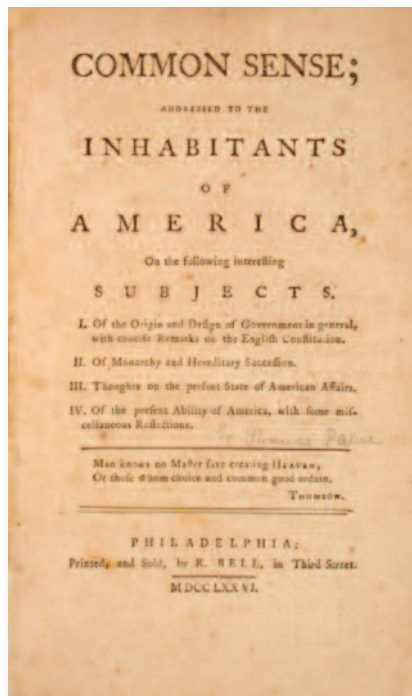
Paine envisioned a single legislative chamber, subject to frequent direct elections by the people, that controlled any executive and judiciary departments. He stressed the urgency of establishing a "Charter" immediately, for a "continental form of government...while we have it in our power."\*

Beyond prescribing in detail the elements of a future democratic America governed by a written Constitution, Paine made the case in *Common Sense* for immediate and unified action by the colonists to fight for their independence from Britain, including these eight key messages.

\*Read more about Paine's constitutional vision on page 3

**"The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind."**

THOMAS PAINE



**1.** Not only should every American care about the assault on their natural rights, but the cause of America is "the cause of all mankind." Paine stressed that the choices made by Americans in 1776 would affect all who come after them, repeatedly emphasizing the urgency of action. He appealed to their idealism, offering a thought exercise in which people could meet sequestered in a "state of natural liberty" and shape a society starting from fresh principles in which all would remain "perfectly just to each other."

**2.** Government is necessary because people are not always good. To be free, they therefore need security, especially protection from others. But, Paine pointed out, government can cause intolerable suffering as evidenced by the excesses of monarchy and all systems of hereditary succession. All people are equal, and no one has the right to set himself up as a monarch and presume that his descendants will be worthy of leadership. Monarchs are isolated from, and don't really know, the interests of the people. If they are minors, or aged, they can easily be manipulated by those around them. Paine drew on the lessons of history to support his argument and cited the Bible's rejection of monarchy.

**3.** Paine asserted that Britain's claim of providing protection for America served only Britain's interests. Paine believed America was most interested in trade and that, as long as America remained a colony of Britain, it would be drawn into European wars. Those born in America were not enemies of France and Spain and an independent America would be at peace with France and Spain.

Continued on Pg. 3

## Common Sense—Continued from Pg. 2

**4.** Reconciliation with Britain was not possible; there must be a final separation. It was absurd for an island to govern a continent that was three or four thousand miles distant.

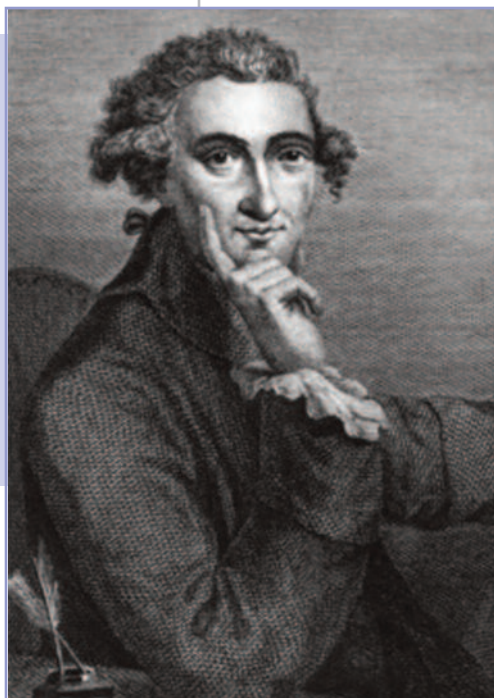
**5.** As an independent nation, Paine believed, the American continent could be “the glory of the earth.” He saw it as the “asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe.” Significantly, Paine called for religious tolerance and diversity of religious opinions.

**6.** For Paine, the events of April 1775 (the battles in Lexington and Concord) and other barbarous actions of Britain further demonstrated the impossibility of reconciliation. Reconciliation would only lead to more revolt later and to dissension among the colonies that were beginning to unite behind a continental government—colonies that were strong in numbers and natural resources. The challenge of fighting for America’s independence should not be left to future generations.

“Can we but leave posterity with a settled form of government, an independent constitution of its own, the purchase at any price will be cheap.”

*Thomas Paine*

**7.** In *Common Sense*, Paine explicitly called for a “declaration of independence.” He asserted that assistance to the American cause from other countries such as France and Spain would come only if America pursued independence rather than reconciliation.



**8.** Paine saw the potential for America to reopen trade and reconciliation with Britain on different terms, once independence was achieved. He ended *Common Sense* with an inspiring call for all to join together as good citizens and friends.

### *Thomas Paine and the Dialogues of Early America*

An engraving by William Angus used for the frontispiece for the 1791 *Letter to Abbe Raynal* based on a confiscated portrait by Paine’s friend Charles Willson Peale. John J. Burns Library

## Paine’s Constitutional Vision

By Richard Briles Moriarty

Paine’s constitutional vision in *Common Sense* was far different than the system established eleven years later in 1787 through the United States Constitution. His proposals sent John Adams into a rage. The opposing views that Paine and Adams expressed in 1776, choices between democratic structures and ones that are deeply anti-democratic, are at the core of many issues currently troubling the United States.

These issues are superbly analyzed in Jett Conner’s “Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* and a Plan for America,” *Journal of the American Revolution*, (November 20, 2025), <https://tinyurl.com/xxwpxcd4>, and his 2018 book, *John Adams vs Thomas Paine: Rival Plans for the Early Republic*, (Westholme, 2018).

Barbara Crane is the TPHA Vice President and a political scientist. Richard Briles Moriarty is the TPHA Secretary and a former attorney.



# A Sign for the Times

## The Many Sides of the Paine Monument

**I**n celebration of the 250th anniversary, a historic marker was recently placed at the Paine Monument adjacent to the TPHA Headquarters on North Avenue in New Rochelle, NY. The monument was first erected in 1839, with money raised through "public contributions." It was situated just a few feet from where Paine was buried in 1809. His former 277-acre farm, a gift from the State of New York for his role in America's independence, extended up the hill. The monument was repaired and rededicated on May 30, 1881. The bronze bust, sculpted by Wilson McDonald, was added to the monument and dedicated on May 30, 1899. It was rededicated in 1905, when the City of New Rochelle took ownership.

An iron fence protects the monument, and, as a result, many people do not know that all four sides of the obelisk have famous Paine-isms carved into the stone. The new marker shares these timeless messages.

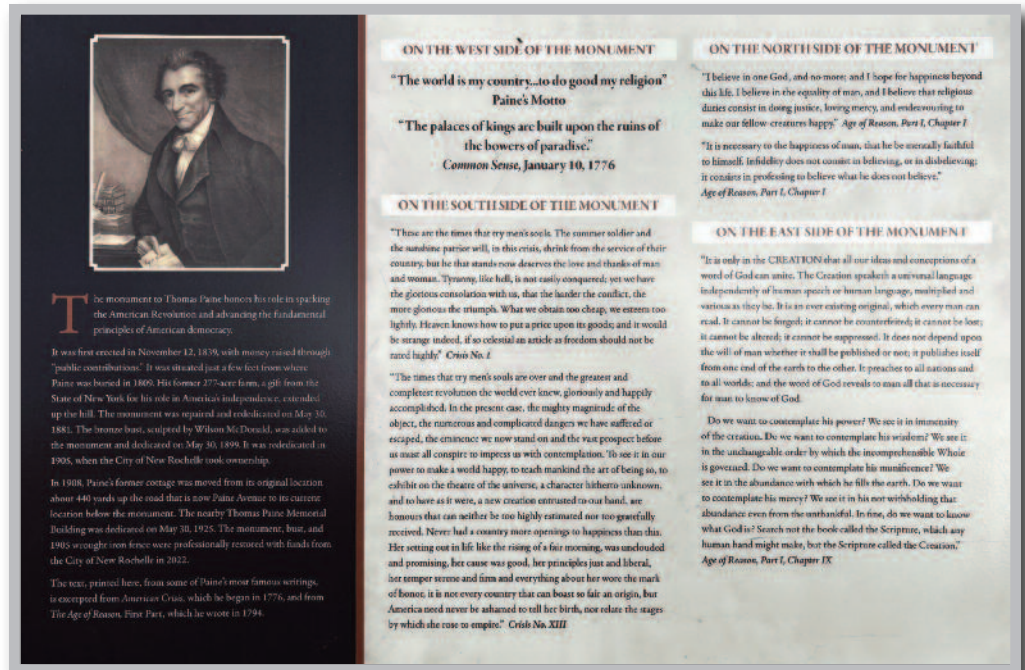
### ON THE WEST SIDE

"The world is my country...  
to do good is my religion"

*Paine's motto*

"The palaces of kings are built  
upon the ruins of the bowers of  
paradise."

*Common Sense,  
January 10, 1776*



The monument to Thomas Paine honors his role in sparking the American Revolution and advancing the fundamental principles of American democracy.

It was first erected in November 12, 1839, with money raised through "public contributions." It was situated just a few feet from where Paine was buried in 1809. His former 277-acre farm, a gift from the State of New York for his role in America's independence, extended up the hill. The monument was repaired and rededicated on May 30, 1881. The bronze bust, sculpted by Wilson McDonald, was added to the monument and dedicated on May 30, 1899. It was rededicated in 1905, when the City of New Rochelle took ownership.

In 1808, Paine's former cottage was moved from its original location about 440 yards up the road that is now Paine Avenue to its current location below the monument. The nearby Thomas Paine Memorial Building was dedicated on May 30, 1925. The monument, built, and 1805 wrought iron fence were professionally renovated with funds from the City of New Rochelle in 2022.

The text, printed here, from some of Paine's most famous writings, is excerpted from *American Crisis*, which he began in 1776, and from *The Age of Reason, Part I*, which he wrote in 1794.

### ON THE SOUTH SIDE

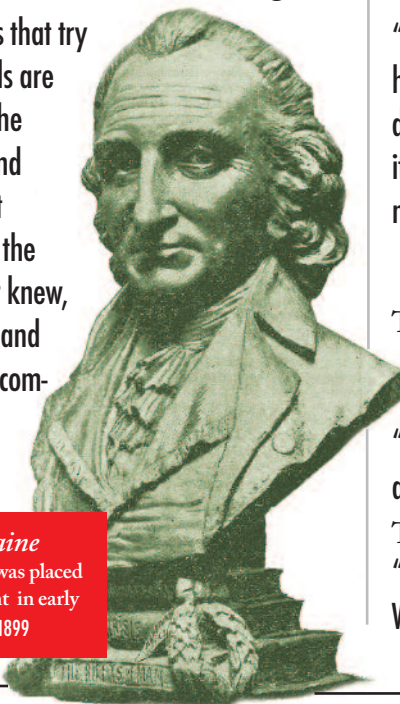
Two long quotations cover this side.

The top features the famous opening paragraph from *Crisis I* that begins:

"These are the times that try men's souls."

The second offers the long first paragraph of *Crisis XIII* which begins:

"The times that try  
men's souls are  
over and the  
greatest and  
completest  
revolution the  
world ever knew,  
gloriously and  
happily accom-  
plished."



**Colossal Bronze Bust of Paine**  
Sculpted by James Macdonald, it was placed atop the capstone of the monument in early 1899.  
The Truth Seeker, June 3, 1899

### ON THE NORTH SIDE

"I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life. I believe in the equality of man, and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy." *Age of Reason, Part 1, Chap. 1*

"It is necessary to the happiness of man, that he be mentally faithful to himself. Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what he does not believe." *Age of Reason, Part 1, Chapter 1*

### ON THE EAST SIDE

Two more long quotations from *Age of Reason, Part 1, Chapter IX*, cover this side. The first begins with:

"It is only in the CREATION that all our ideas and conceptions of a word of God can unite."

The second begins with:

"Do we want to contemplate his power? We see it in immensity of the creation."

# Celebrate 250 Years of Common Sense

January

2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
28	29	30	31	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 10  
2 PM EST**

## VOICES OF COMMON SENSE:

*Readings from Thomas Paine's  
Clarion Call for an Independent  
and Democratic America*

A one-hour celebration of the 250th anniversary of *Common Sense* will feature live readings by members of the New Rochelle community including students, elected officials, and civic leaders, as well videoed readings by international and national Thomas Paine enthusiasts.

TPHA Board member Lisa Burton will moderate the event, and readings will be followed by questions and discussion with Gary Berton, TPHA president.

▲ **WHERE:** Thomas Paine Memorial Building, 983 North Avenue, New Rochelle, NY, and on Zoom. Zoom registration is open with links on the website.



**FRIDAY, JANUARY 9 - SATURDAY, JANUARY 10  
COMMON SENSE AT 250**

*Legacies of Democracy from Paine to Today*

Lewes, England was the place where the Thomas Paine first became a political powerhouse. Join us in person or virtually for a remarkable program featuring Paul Myles, noted Paine historian, and many others.

▲ **WHERE:** Lewes, UK. For a schedule of events see

<https://theitps.org/%20common-sense-at-250-legacies-of-democracy-from-paine-to-today/>

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 4 PM EST  
THOMAS PAINE AND THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR**

Join Jack Kelly, historian and author, for an in-person talk based on Kelly's new book, *Tom Paine's War*.\* This is an "exploration of our nation's birth...a story of the power of words—and the power of belief—and how both speak as well to America's current crisis."

▲ **WHERE:** Thomas Paine Memorial Building, 983 North Avenue, New Rochelle, NY and on Zoom. Zoom registration is open with links on the website.

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 24, 2 PM EST  
CONFLICTING PHILOSOPHIES OF GOVERNMENT**

*in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution –  
A Perspective from Thomas Paine*

Join Gary Berton, President of the Thomas Paine Historical Association as he talks about the myths of the nations founding, and the road not travelled.

▲ **WHERE:** Bordentown Historical Society, 302 Farnsworth Ave, Bordentown, New Jersey, 08505

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 7 PM EST  
THE TIMES THAT TRIED MEN'S SOULS:**

*Thomas Paine's Service During the Revolutionary War,*

An exciting Paine birthday event has been organized by the Freethought Society and co-sponsored by TPHA and others. Jack Kelly, author of *Tom Paine's War*, will be the keynote speaker

▲ **WHERE:** This is a Zoom event and registration is required. Visit <https://thomaspainememorial.org/celebrate-thomas-paines-birthday-with-a-zoom-webinar-jan-29/> to register

**Go to [www.thomaspaine.org/about/events](http://www.thomaspaine.org/about/events) to register or to get details for each zoom link**



## MORE UPCOMING 2026 EVENTS!

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21  
2 PM EST**

### THOMAS PAINE AND THE RIGHTS OF MAN

Frances Chiu, Associate Teaching Professor at the New School and author of the *Routledge Guidebook to Paine's Rights of Man* offers an in-depth discussion of this all-important Paine work.

▲ **WHERE:** Via Zoom. Registration is open with links on the website.



**SUNDAY, MARCH 8,  
2 PM EST**

### THOMAS PAINE AND HIS FRENCH CONNECTIONS

Gary Berton, TPHA president, and Joy Masoff, doctoral candidate, will speak about Paine's 15-year long stay in France and his experiences during the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon.

▲ **WHERE:** Thomas Paine Memorial Building, 983 North Avenue, New Rochelle, NY and on Zoom. Registration is open with links on the website.

**SUNDAY, MAY 9,  
4 PM EST**

### COMMON SENSE WAS NOT ENOUGH

With a May 1776 Pennsylvania election going sideways, was independence doomed? William Hogeland (*Declaration: The Nine Tumultuous Weeks When America Became Independent*) and Richard Briles Moriarty (TPHA Board member and Paine scholar) escort you on the roller-coaster ride that made independence possible.

▲ **WHERE:** Via Zoom. Registration is open with links on the website.

## For New Generations of Paine Admirers

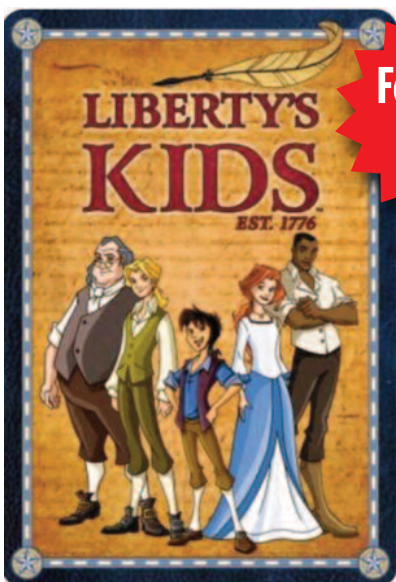
### The TPHA Board Recommends...

#### LIBERTY'S KIDS: EPISODES 112 AND 118

Fiesty kids, reporting for Ben Franklin's newspaper, cover the events of America's rebellion. Two excellent episodes spotlight Thomas Paine.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VYXM9U2Y7I>

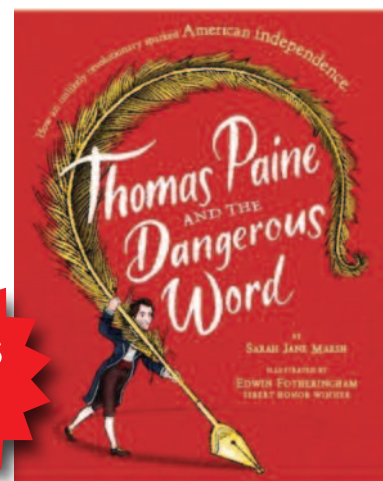
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EF7qNcOI\\_NM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EF7qNcOI_NM)



**For ages  
7-12**

Share the power of  
*Common Sense* with  
young people!

**For ages  
6-10**



#### THOMAS PAINE AND THE DANGEROUS WORD

Sarah Jane Marsh's prize-winning book shares the tale of an English corset-maker's son, who dared to change his destiny, enduring years of struggle until a meeting with Benjamin Franklin brought Thomas Paine to America in 1774...and into the heart of the American Revolution.

National Council for the Social Studies Award Winner

# Paine Goes Social

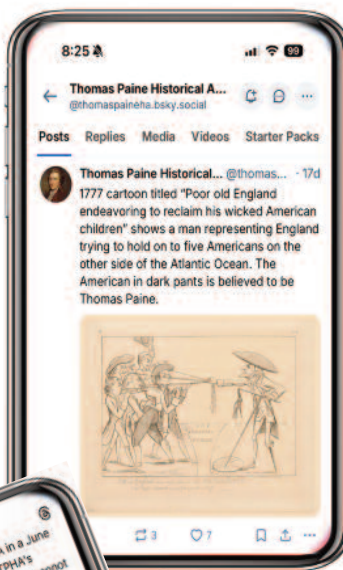
**W**hat would Thomas Paine make of social media? Would he scroll through *Bluesky* or *Threads*, to catch up on the latest news? Would Paine's posts be witty, strident, or both? Please join us on your favorite social network and help us build up our following! You will discover all sorts of fascinating facts about this American icon. Be the first to hear about exclusive offers and special events, stay updated on the latest content and news, and help us share new discoveries about Paine! Through our new social media channels you can also help us spread knowledge of Paine's great works and make the world a better place!



Feel free to share your thoughts with us via a post!



Find little known facts and fascinating trivia.



## KEEP IN TOUCH!

We want to hear from you, so join and follow us at Bluesky, Threads, and X. Find us online and follow, share, and add your thoughts.



<https://bsky.app/profile/thomaspaineha.bsky.social>



<https://threads/thomaspaineha>



<https://x.com/thomaspaineha>

Visit us online at  
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[www.facebook.com/groups/47885719076/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/47885719076/)

[www.youtube.com/@thomaspaineha](https://www.youtube.com/@thomaspaineha)

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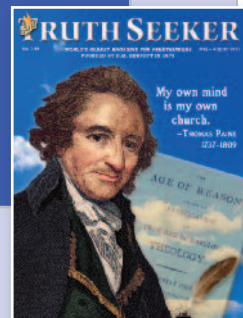
### Editorial Committee:

Gary Berton • Barbara Crane  
Frances Chiu • Judah Freed  
Joy Masoff • Richard Briles Moriarty  
Adrian Tawfik •

The TPHA upholds the mission of educating the world about the life, works and legacy of Thomas Paine. We were founded in 1884 to correct the record on Thomas Paine by refuting negative propaganda and slanders perpetrated against him by most historians in the 19th century. We've since become the most reliable and accurate source of information about Paine worldwide.

The TPHA is entirely funded by people like you! We welcome any and all contributions and look forward to sharing new discoveries in this all important 250th anniversary year! Visit [www.thomaspaine.org/membership](http://www.thomaspaine.org/membership)

THE TRUTH SEEKER is the world's foundational source of freethought information since 1873: longer than TPHA has existed. The publication was the main force behind our formation in 1884. Learn more at [TheTruthSeeker.net](http://TheTruthSeeker.net)



### Florida Veterans for Common Sense

An all-volunteer nonprofit advocate for veterans inspired by Thomas Paine to defend democracy, liberty, equality, and human rights.

[FloridaVeteransforCommonSense.org/Contact@flvcs.us](https://FloridaVeteransforCommonSense.org/Contact@flvcs.us)