



{ THE BEACON }

"Reason obeys itself; ignorance submits to whatever is dictated to it."

Thomas Paine



T. Paine

THOMAS PAINE NATIONAL HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

thomaspaine.org

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Why "The Beacon"?

GILBERT VALE (1788– 1866), was a British-born New York astronomer, navigation teacher and author of *The Life of Thomas Paine* published in 1841. Vale published *The Beacon*, a monthly freethought periodical with the subheading: "Follow that Philosophy which is according to Nature." Vale's motto was "He who will not reason is a bigot; he that cannot is a fool; and he who dares not is a slave."

Vale was the first "Paineite" to investigate and debunk the rumor that Thomas Paine did *not* recant his unbelief in Christianity on his deathbed.

Vale raised funds – through the columns of his *Beacon* – to build the Paine monument at the author-hero's farm in New Rochelle, New York. The 1839 dedication of the twelve-and-a-half-foot-tall marble column was the first of many Decoration/Memorial Day celebrations held near the Paine cottage and monument. (In 1899, a "Colossal Bronze Bust" of Paine — created by Wilson MacDonald — was set atop the column.)

Although Thomas Paine and freethinkers were often called atheists and infidels, according to Vale, the majority of freethinkers were *not* atheists. Vale wrote extensively on the opinions of the subscribers to his *Beacon* and summarized the belief system of his fellow freethinkers: "Among Free Inquirers, the being of a God is an open question; many believe, some disbelieve, and many more are in doubt."

In 1850, D.M. Bennett (1818-1882), the founder of the *Truth Seeker*, visited Vale, and was transformed from a devout Christian into a freethinker. In 1873, D.M. Bennett began publicizing Paine's seminal role in the founding of the nation — and the worldwide freethought movement — in his *Truth*

Seeker that continues to champion Thomas Paine today. [<http://thetruthseeker.net>]

We honor Vale for his contributions to correcting the false narratives and marginalization of Paine and continue his example.

Paine lived in Mystic, Connecticut?

An article in the journal *The Log of the Mystic Seaport* in December, 1948 recounts an oral history of the Haley family there. It seems that Captain Nathan Haley, according to the oral history, was a friend of Thomas Paine, having been the captain of the ship that brought him back to America in 1802. Haley had embraced the political and religious philosophy of Paine, and had remained friends.

In 1803, we know that Paine traveled first from Washington, DC to Bordentown, NJ. From there he went to New York City and was celebrated in receptions and dinners. From New York, Paine did not go directly to his farm in New Rochelle, but instead traveled to Connecticut, ostensibly to arrange schooling in a Deist academy for the two Bonneville boys he was attending to. There were other suitable academies and it has been unexplained why he chose Connecticut. He did stay there for several months.

Now we may have a tie to Connecticut, Capt. Haley. The *Log* reports "*The Haleys lived on Pistol Point and it was there that Capt. Nathan took him, to the home of his father, Jeremiah. But the house that Tom Paine occupied was a "little" house, it was said, nearby Jeremiah Haley's. We can only speculate whose house it was but it seems likely it may have been an earlier house of Jeremiah's, before he built a larger pretentious place.*"

The account also includes the name of the ship that brought Paine over, the *Neptune*, and Haley was not the captain of that ship at the time, and it was assumed Haley had arranged the passage. The friendship between Haley and Paine may have predated the voyage in France, as Haley had ties to France at the time, bringing back to America a French wife. The two men had similar world views, and Haley requested that "*no religious ceremony be performed at his funeral.*"

The Paine Statuette

In 1882, two years before the Thomas Paine National Historical Association was formed, a statuette was created by David Richards celebrating Thomas Paine. It is probably the first sculpture of Paine. The creation of the statuette shows the growing atmosphere in support of Paine which led to the formation of TPNHA soon after.

One of the dozens of copies of the statuette was part of the TPNHA Collection, but it went missing in the 1980s. All attempts to retrieve it were unsuccessful. If anyone in the New Rochelle area has any knowledge of this statuette, please contact our Association. The present holder may have honestly purchased it, not knowing it was stolen. All information will remain confidential. [Picture of statuette is to the right.]

Here is Robert Ingersoll's letter to Richards at the time. Ingersoll was a great orator, lawyer, and freethinker of the time, and was Paine's leading advocate:

LAW OFFICE OF Robr. G. INGERSOLL,

DAVID RICHARDS, Esq.:

WASHINGTON, D. C., Dec. 30, 1882.

MY DEAR FRIEND —

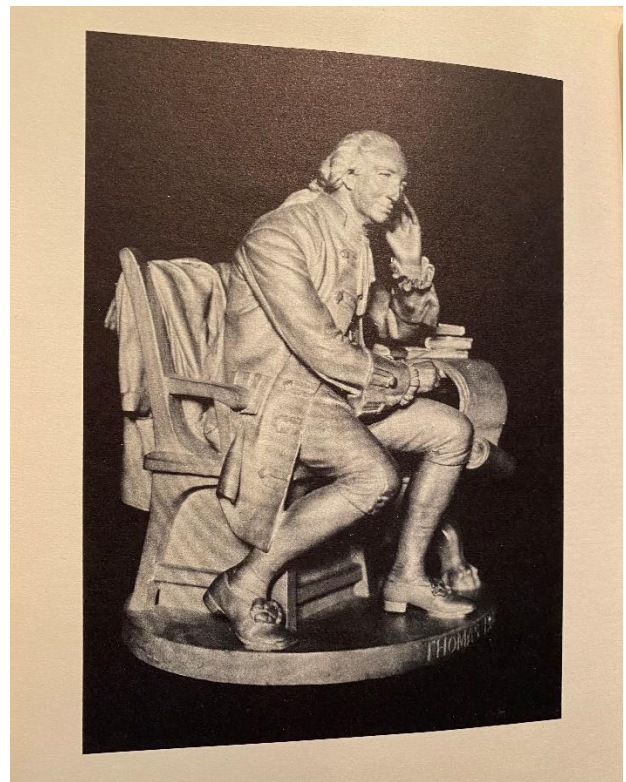
Your Statuette is incomparably the best I have ever seen. It is in perfect taste. The position, the drapery, the surroundings, are all admirable. You have given to PAINE a noble, a reflective and kind face. The whole work' shows MERIT OF THE HIGHEST ORDER, and I am delighted with it.

I thank you more than I can express—not only for presenting me with the statuette—but for having made it.

I feel under a certain personal obligation to every man who in any way assists in rescuing the name of that great thinker - a disinterested patriot, and an intellectual hero - from the malice of superstition and from the calumnies of those who have enjoyed, and who are now enjoying, the fruits of his labors. Thanking you again and again, I remain,

Yours always, R. G. INGERSOLL

If you are not a member of TPNHA, you can join at www.thomaspaine.org and receive the Newsletter as well as other benefits, and also to support our work.



From *The Truth Seeker*, 1907:

“LYNCHING

Mr. R. M. Powell, in the Truth Seeker of December 12, infers that I believe “the cause of negro rapists is a low state of civilization of the whites.” I believe and said nothing of the kind. If he will substitute the word “lynchings” for “rapists” the inference would be fair. As for the negro “rapists,” I am still awaiting evidence of their existence. Mr. Powell sincerely believes in it, but millions believed sincerely that witches rode through the air on broomsticks. When we have solid legal evidence that the crime is prevalent among the negroes it will be time enough to explain the phenomenon; at present, I can only regard the facility with which honest gentlemen like Mr. Powell accept rumors of the kind as akin to the credulity of the believers in witchcraft. What this country most needs is a professorship of skepticism in every college; not to restrain credulity about dying old-world superstitions and tales, but to cultivate in our people a critical instinct to confront the growing superstitions of to-day – political, social and moral – to question every official or authoritative statement; and a critical judgment to distinguish facts from fables easily springing from prejudices and panics.

MONCURE D. CONWAY.”

[Editor: Conway was the first President of the TPNHA after incorporating in 1906, and author of the impactful Paine biography in 1892.]

Speech at the Juneteenth Event at the Thomas Paine Memorial Building June 19, 2021

The Thomas Paine National Historical Association was founded in 1884 by political activists and freethinkers. It united the leaders of progressive political groups of the time into one body – socialists, anarchists, ex-abolitionists, activists for women's voting, health and reproductive rights, labor unionists, free speech advocates against the Comstock Act, and advocates for human rights of all kinds. All of them freethinkers. Our Association continued this activism with people like Leonard Abbott, a leader of the Socialist Party, T.B. Foote and E.B. Wakeman, who ran for office with the People's Party, several Board members had ties to Emma Goldman, and James Morgan, organizer of NAACP and friend of W.E.B. DuBois. The founders of our Association saw Paine as the symbol of the fights of their day, which remain the fights of today.

The mission of the Association was to correct the false propaganda that historians used to marginalize, dismiss and mis-characterize Paine's life, works, and legacy, which persists to this day, as lazy historians just pass on the tropes as established fact. Our Association is embarking on the ultimate realization of our mission to educate the world about Paine this Fall, when we will begin the official collected works of Thomas Paine, with an editorial board of the leading Paine scholars in the world led by our Association. This Building will be the center of that work, here in New Rochelle.

The importance of Thomas Paine to New Rochelle, the country, and the world can be seen in his final writing as he lay dying in Greenwich Village – it was a letter to President Jefferson and he wrote it under the guise of being A Slave, in order to disguise his authorship from Jefferson (who would have known from his interactions with Paine anyway), but mainly to provide a greater emotional impact. Paine and Jefferson were friends since they sat down together in Philadelphia to create the Declaration of Independence.* This letter written by Paine to Jefferson unleashed the decades of fury Paine harbored against slavery and Jefferson's hypocrisy. Paine only wrote and organized against it anonymously. No one had been able to identify the author of the letter, until now. It is appropriate that we announce the author here on the celebration of Juneteenth. It was the first call for reparations to slaves as part of the demand for completely annihilating the barbarous practice of slavery and make amends to some degree.

A challenge was presented by a benefactor of history, Mr. Lapidus, to discover who the author was, and the Institute for Thomas Paine Studies (ITPS) at Iona College took up the challenge after other historians failed

to do so. I was part of that team. The letter was written on Nov 30, 1808, and the original can be found in the Jefferson Papers online at the Library of Congress by just entering that date. Why Paine chose that date is unknown, other than he landed in America on Nov. 30 (but in 1774), and late 1781 was the approximate time Jefferson's "Notes on Virginia" and the peace agreement to end the Revolutionary War occurred.

When Michael Crowder and I, both of us from ITPS, first read it, we both had the same reaction – this sounds like Paine. It was a strong, perhaps the strongest, denunciation of slavery ever written, culminating in a demand for reparations for all slaves immediately freed going back to 1781, 27 years, and anyone continuing the practice of slavery are "a set of inhuman scoundrels, and ought to be tar'd and feather'd and tyed to the tale end of a dung cart, and horse-whipt throughout the country, from state to state, and forever after banished from human society." (from the Letter)

An article for a book from Cornell U Press has been completed and it will be published later this year presenting the proof of authorship. The content points to Paine: he addresses William Duane editor of the Aurora newspaper and close ally of the Jefferson presidency, and to Jefferson. The letter takes to task Duane's hollow praise of America while he ignored slavery, and Jefferson's complacency by ignoring the utter corruption and inhumanity of creating the wealth of America through torture and brutality. The author had intimate knowledge as well as a history with both men. The context of the letter is that the author was disguised, it is not in Paine's handwriting, and it was sent anonymously pretending to be a slave. The handwriting was that of Paine's caretaker Mde. Bonneville, whose first language was French, so she misspelled many basic words as you will see.

The computer text analysis of the letter, developed over 10 years at ITPS, overwhelmingly points to Paine when compared to all the abolitionist writers of the day. This methodology has far outpaced other author attribution software, by increasing accuracy to 90% plus, compared to the standard of 65%.

Let me read one paragraph from the 24 page letter: Paine is speaking to Jefferson as a slave, the first part refers to the Slavery Clause taken out of the Declaration by Congress without any objection from Jefferson, and knowledge of that Clause was not publicly known, only someone close to the Committee who produced it:

"What your reasons can be for keeping open that execrable market where MAN shall be bought and sold, which you wrote so warmly against in the year '76, and condemn'd as a mark of disgrace, of the deepest dye in the Christian king of G. Britain, I cannot conceive. Is a crime of this execrable nature any more criminal in the Christian Crown of Britain, than in

the Christian Executive of America? If not, what are your reasons, sir, for suffering us since 30th. Nov. '81 to be trodden under foot & abused in such an inhuman & brutal manner? Are not Our rites as well secured to us by every law of natures God as any man's in the universe? we think so; therefore, sir, we consider ourselves, intitled to our yearly wages from that very hour, and no man in the government (except a tyrant) can dispute our demand a single moment. And you may depend on this sir, that we shall never be reconciled to this government till we git it, & our freedom with it.—I think sir, you can't do yourself & your country a greater honour, nor your unfortunate country men a greater piece of justice and mercy, then by freeing your slaves & paying them their yearly wages from '81 to this day. And then, if any slave-holder in America shall here after refuse or neglect so to do, let him or them be made an example of, and their heads be hung in gibbets for an everlasting monument; & a terror to tyrants & evil doers. O! Thomas, you have had a long nap, and spent a great number of years in ease & plenty, upon our hard earned property, while we have been in the mean time, smarting under the cow-hide and sweating in the fields to raise provision to nurse tyrants to cut our throat and perpetuate our own bonds."

Thomas Paine is the benchmark, the inspiration, the guide, the inspirer of the secular democratic trend in world history. His legacy is all around us: in Black Lives Matter, in separation of church and state, in the sanctity of government for, of and by the people, in civil and human rights.

The bible of these first principles is in the writings and political struggles of Thomas Paine.

And New Rochelle is the center of this legacy:

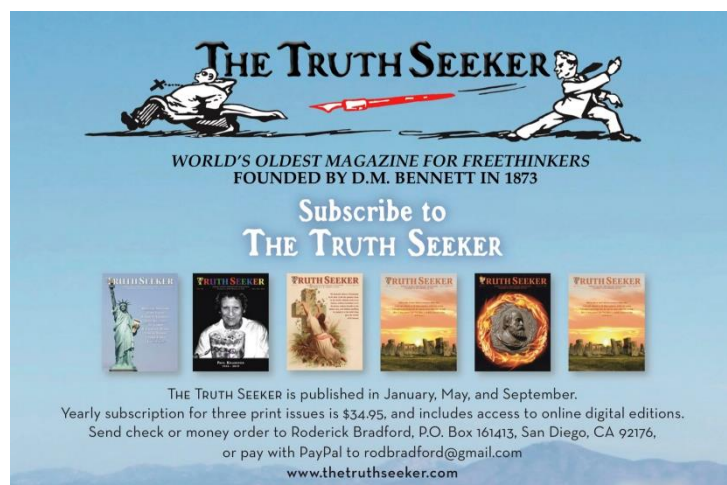
- * it is here that the recognition of his services to the Revolution was awarded,
- * here that the first monument to an American Founder was erected,
- * here that the only structure where Paine lived and wrote in America is still standing,
- * here that the headquarters of the Association that corrected the important legacy of Paine sits,
- * here that the resulting Institute for academic work should raise Paine to the level of vast importance,
- * and here that the official Collected Works of Thomas Paine will be produced for the first time.

It is not arcane historical curiosity that we look to Paine, but the inherent values unseen in the world before Paine, that remain today as the values we fight to establish still. His imprint on the movement for real democracy, not democracy in name only, is indelible and foundational,

as is his blueprint for a rational society free of superstition.
Gary Berton

* The creation of Paine's position of authority in the Committee of Five to draft the Declaration is proved by the discovery in 2012 of an early draft with a note from Adams testifying that Paine gave "permission" to have that copy made. See www.thomaspaine.org main page for a link to the article.

VIDEO LINKS AT <http://tpnha.org>



Thomas Paine Festival in New Rochelle, June 16-18, 2022

TPNHA will co-host a Festival next year at the unique historic sites associated with Paine in New Rochelle, New York – the Thomas Paine Memorial Building, the Paine Monument, and the Thomas Paine Cottage Museum. The Festival, marking the new beginning for these sites as the Thomas Paine International Historical Center, will feature a symposium, historical exhibits, scholarly Paine related presentations, and a variety of social and family-focused events honoring Paine's legacy. Members of the Editorial Board for the Collected Works of Thomas Paine and leaders in the freethought movement will speak. The Festival is expected to attract several hundred scholars, history enthusiasts, and other people from around the world and local community members. A website will be available soon with further information about the program of events, hotel accommodations, registrations, etc. Offers of presentations or expressions of interest in attending may be sent to:

tpnhamail@gmail.com or painecottage@optonline.net.

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