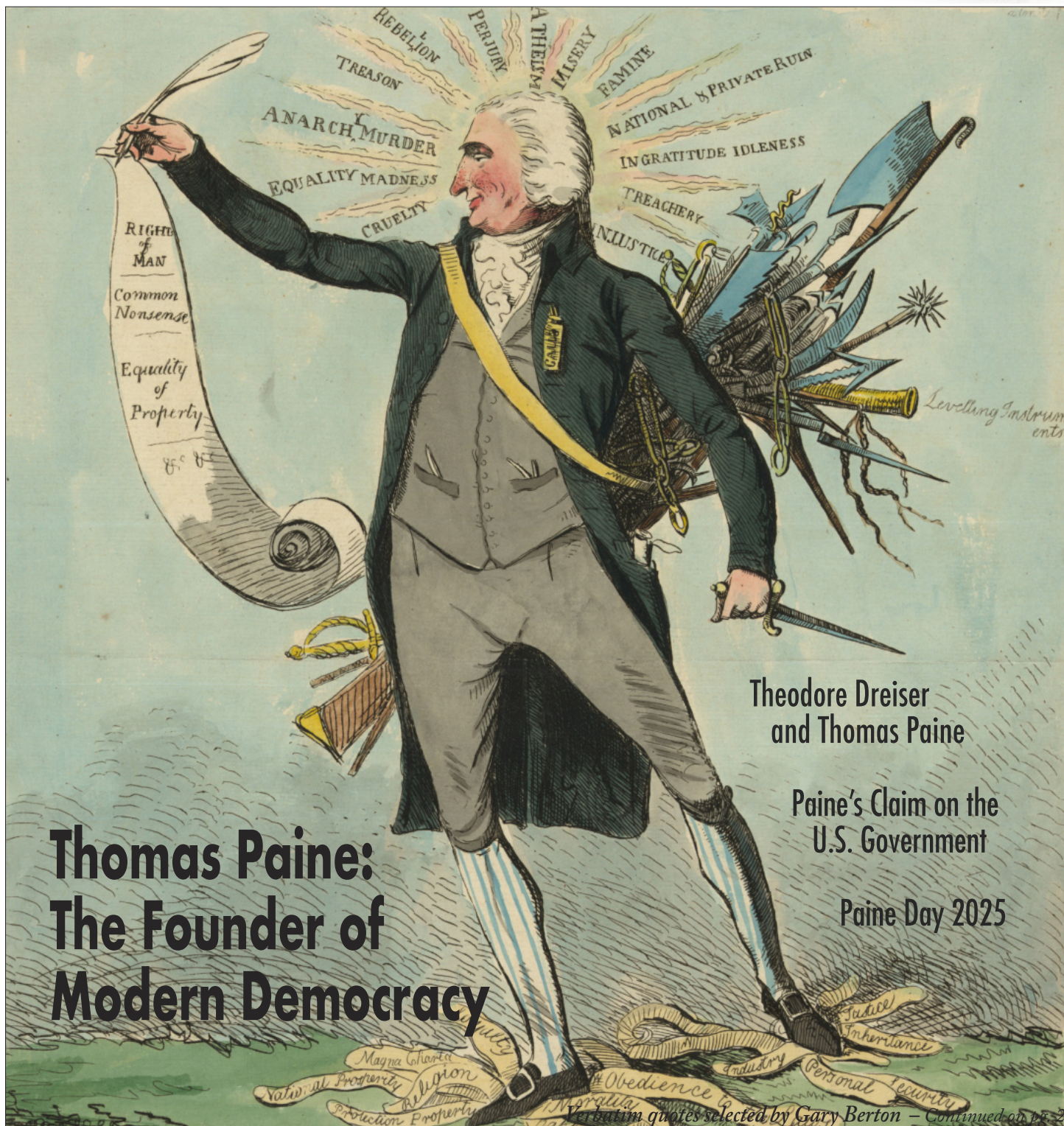
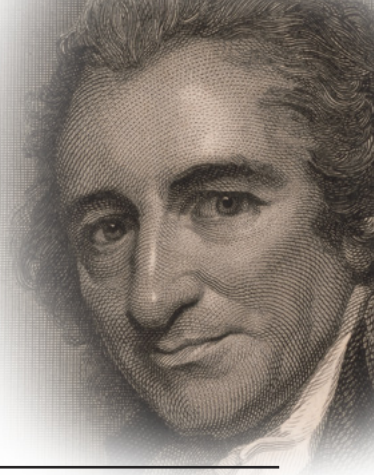


The Beacon

July 2025 • Vol 19, No. 4

THOMAS PAINE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1884 • New Rochelle, New York • ThomasPaine.org



Theodore Dreiser
and Thomas Paine

Paine's Claim on the
U.S. Government

Paine Day 2025

**Thomas Paine:
The Founder of
Modern Democracy**

Quotations selected by Gary Berton - Continued on p. 2

About Thomas Paine

Thomas Paine: Founder of Modern Democracy

by Gary Berton

Part One of Two Parts

Thomas Paine is the founder of modern democracy. In word and deed, he crafted the democratic movement in three countries, and it spread on its own around the world.

As a result, Paine was slandered, attacked and marginalized for 200 years, a victim of the largest disinformation campaign in history. His image and words were actually banned, right up to and including the McCarthy era in America, when his books were banned, even the fictional accounts like *Citizen Tom Paine* (1943) by Howard Fast.

The pre-eminent founder of American democracy was not recognized as such for centuries. “But such is the irresistible nature of truth,” Paine said, “that all it asks, and all it wants, is the liberty of appearing.”

The Thomas Paine Historical Association was founded to correct this situation. In 1884 New York City, dozens of leaders of the progressive era came together under this organization to hold up Paine as the symbol of democratic rights and government. United by their commitments to civil rights, free speech and women’s reproductive rights, they were key suffragists, socialists, anti-clericalists, anti-monopolists, anti-imperialists, and idealists. An organization with Paine’s name on it must have the soul of Paine as its engine.

We cannot discuss the roots and ideology of democracy without Thomas Paine. The literal origin of modern democracy is *Common*

The literal origin of modern democracy is *Common Sense*.

Sense, Paine’s call for revolution against British rule, in particular, and against monarchy itself. Among all the Whigs (the name back then for the progressive-leaning political figures), only Paine endorsed this qualitative leap of ending monarchical government.

Paine started and popularized among people the idea of democracy without kings — not Locke, not Montesquieu, who looked after their class not common people. Paine later followed up with *Rights of Man*, which became the bible for the Age of Democratic Revolution.

Paine himself, in his life and works, is the “Democratic Manifesto.” In 1777 Philadelphia, in the heat of defeating not only Britain but

The pre-eminent founder of American democracy was not recognized as such for centuries.



Thomas Paine statue by Gutzon Borglum, parc Montsouris, Paris.

Photograph by Issy-Les-Moulineaux, France.

COVER ART: Thomas Paine holding scroll “Rights of Man,” his head surrounded by injustices, standing on labels for morality and justice.

Political cartoon, 1792. Artist unknown.

Source for both images: Wikimedia Commons

Continued on pg. 3



American writer Theodore Dreiser, 1917.

Photograph by Ira L. Hill

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Impact of Thomas Paine

Theodore Dreiser and Thomas Paine

by Frances Chiu

When we hear the name Theodore Dreiser, we think of his novels, *Sister Carrie* (1900) or *An American Tragedy* (1925), adapted into George Stevens' film, *A Place in the Sun* (1951). We tend to forget *Tragic America* (1931) or *America is Worth Saving* (1941), his commentaries on Depression-era America.

Tragic America was almost immediately banned from bookstores and libraries. The Carnegie Library in Pennsylvania reportedly burned all copies. *America is Worth Saving* was critically dismissed with few reviews. The fact Dreiser joined the Communist Party in 1945 made his political ideas all the more suspect and suppressed.

Did Dreiser draw upon the ideas of *Common Sense*, *Rights of Man* and *Age of Reason*? In the spirit of Thomas Paine, *Tragic America* and *America is Worth Saving* reflect upon the undue political and economic might wielded by the wealthy and powerful, and its repercussions. One may view them as the *American Crisis* papers for those times that tried the souls of Depression-era Americans.

Continued on pg. 6

Paine: Democracy's Founder — *Continued from Pg. 2*

also the American Tories, Paine formed the Whig Society, the first revolutionary party in the world. He followed it up in 1791 Paris by forming the Social Circle of anti-monarchical activists, the second revolutionary party in the world. [For clarity, The Sons of Liberty was not a political party. The militant Boston group in the early 1770s focused on disrupting the British militarily, but it lacked an ideological foundation or vision of government to be a real political party.]

Paine helped craft the world's first two truly democratic constitutions.

In Philadelphia and in Paris, Paine helped craft the world's first two truly democratic constitutions. The first lasted 14 years in America before succumbing to the oligarchic structures of the Federalist Party's new constitution. The second was never enacted due to the 1795 counter-revolution in France. These documents reveal the origins of today's struggle.

Do not be confused by the antiquated structures called "democracy" from ancient Greece, where every landed elite sat together and made laws as slaves served them food and drink. Modern democracy could not emerge until the Enlightenment took root, and the political theory of Paine was deeply rooted in it. The emerging new classes coming out of the Dark Ages would contend for dominance. Paine stood with the lower classes, where he came from, and never wavered.

The very word "democracy," as we use it today, originated with Paine's *Rights of Man*. Before that, "democracy" only referred to the Greek's elite government. The term is still used in that context today, when we hear oligarchs using it to defend their privileges while the majority still languishes in need. ▲

Read Part Two in the September 2025 Beacon.

Gary Berton is the president of the Thomas Paine Historical Association. (Originally published in *Democracy Chronicles*. Lightly edited for *The Beacon*.)

By Thomas Paine

A Claim on the United States for Renumeration of Expenses

Paine submitted this claim for reimbursement of wartime travel expenses to the U.S. Senate in 1808, a year before his death in 1809. [Verbatim]

TO THE HONORABLE SENATE
OF THE UNITED STATES

New York, January 21, 1808.

THE purpose of this address is to state a claim I feel myself entitled to make on the United States, leaving it to their representatives in Congress to decide on its worth and its merits. The case is as follows:

Towards the latter end of the year 1780, the continental money had become so depreciated, a paper dollar not being more than a cent, that it seemed next to impossible to continue the war.

As the United States were then in alliance with France, it became necessary to make France acquainted with our real situation. I therefore drew up a letter to Count de Vergennes, stating undisguisedly the true case: and concluding with the request, whether France could not, either as a subsidy or a loan, supply the United States with a million sterling, and continue that supply, annually, during the war.

I showed the letter to Mr. Marbois, secretary to the French minister. His remark upon it was, that a million sent out of the nation exhausted it more than ten millions spent in it. I then showed it to Mr. Ralph Isard, member of Congress for South Carolina. He borrowed the letter of me, and said, "We will endeavor to do something about it in Congress."

Accordingly Congress appointed Colonel John Laurens, then aid to General Washington, to go to France and make representation of our situation, for the purpose of obtaining assistance. Colonel Laurens wished to decline the mission, and that Congress would appoint Colonel [Alexander] Hamilton; which Congress did not choose to do.

'As I never had a cent for this service, I feel myself entitled, as the country is now in a state of prosperity, to state the case to Congress.'



Surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown.

Painting by John Trumbull, 1787.

Source: Detroit Institute of Arts, Wikimedia Commons,

Colonel Laurens then came to state the case to me. He said he was not enough acquainted with political affairs, nor with the resources of the country, to undertake the mission; "but," said he, "if you will go with me, I will accept it"; which I agreed to do, and did do.

We sailed from Boston in the Alliance frigate, Captain Barry, the beginning of February, 1781, and arrived at L'Orient the beginning of March. The aid obtained from France was six millions livres as a present, and ten millions as a loan, borrowed in Holland, on the security of France. We sailed from Brest in the French Resolve frigate the 1st of June, and arrived at Boston the 25th of August, bringing with us two millions and a half of livres in silver, and convoying a ship and a brig laden with clothing and military stores. The money was transported in sixteen ox teams to the National Bank at Philadelphia, which enabled the army to move to Yorktown to attack, in conjunction with the French army under Rochambeau, the British army under Cornwallis. As I never had a cent for this service [French funding to win the war], I feel myself entitled, as the country is now in a state of prosperity, to state the case to Congress.

Continued on pg. 5

Paine's Claim — Continued from Pg. 2

As to my political works, beginning with the pamphlet *Common Sense*, published the beginning of January, 1776, which awakened America to a declaration of independence, as the President and Vice President both know, as they were works done from principle, I cannot dishonor that principle by asking any reward for them. The country has been benefited by them, and I make myself happy in the knowledge of it. It is, however, proper to me to add, that the mere independence of America, were it to have been followed by a system of Government, modelled after the corrupt system of the English Government, it would not have interested me with the unabated ardor it did. It was to bring forward and establish the representative system of Government, as the work itself will show, that was the

'All the civilized world know[s] I have been of great service to the United States, and have generously given away talent that would have made me a fortune.'

leading principle with me in writing that work, and all my other works during the progress of the revolution. And I followed the same principle in writing the *Rights of Man*, in England.

There is a resolve of the old Congress, while they sat at New York, of a grant of three thousand dollars to me. The resolve is put in handsome language, but it has relation to a matter which it does not express. Elbridge Gerry was chairman of the committee

who brought in the resolve. If Congress should judge proper to refer this memorial to a committee, I will inform that committee of the particulars of it.

I have also to state to Congress, that the authority of the old Congress was become so reduced towards the latter end of the war, as to be unable to hold the States together. Congress could do no more than recommend, of which the States frequently took no notice; and, when they did, it was never uniformly.

After the failure of the five per cent, duty recommended by Congress, to pay the interest of a loan to be borrowed in Holland, I wrote to Chancellor Livingston, then Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Robert Morris, Minister of Finance, and proposed a method for getting over the whole difficulty at once; which was, by adding

a continental Legislature to Congress, who should be empowered to make laws for the Union, instead of recommending them; so the method proposed me their full approbation. I held myself in reserve, to take the subject up whenever a direct occasion occurred.

In a conversation afterwards with Governor Clinton, of New York, now Vice President, it was judged that, for the purpose of going fully into the subject, and to prevent any misconception of my motive or object, it would be best that I received nothing from Congress, but leave it to the States individually to make me what acknowledgment they pleased.

The State of New York made me a present of a farm, which, since my return to America, I have found it necessary to sell; and the State of Pennsylvania voted me five hundred pounds, their currency. But none of the States to the east of New York, or the south of Philadelphia, ever made the least acknowledgment. They had received benefits from me, which they accepted, and there the matter ended. This story will not tell well in history. All the civilized world know[s] I have been of great service to the United States, and have generously given away talent that would have made me a fortune.

I much question if an instance is to be found in ancient or modern times of a man who had no personal interest in the cause he took up, that of independence and the establishment of a representative system of Government, and who sought neither place nor office after it was established, that persevered in the same un-deviating principles as I have done, for more than thirty years, and that in spite of difficulties, dangers, and inconveniences, of which I have had my share.

Thomas Paine. ▲

'They had received benefits from me, which they accepted, and there the matter ended. This story will not tell well in history.'

EDITOR'S NOTE: Paine submitted a similar claim to the Speaker of the House of Representatives on February 28, 1808, with a March 7 follow-up letter since "I have not yet seen an account of any proceedings upon it." The Committee on Claims evidently never acted on Paine's request.

Thomas Paine News

Paine Stage Play Preparing for 250th Anniversary of USA



Ian Ruskin portrays Thomas Paine

For the 250th Anniversary of the country, actor Ian Ruskin is slating performances of *To Begin the World Over Again: The Life of Thomas Paine*.

The 75-minute one-man play dramatizes significant moments in Paine's life and his role in the founding the United States of America, the French Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment. Ruskin shows how Paine's ideas changed the world.

For info or to book a date, see RuskinProductions.com or email info@ruskinproductions.com. ▲

Princeton University Press announces Collected Writings

Princeton University Press has officially announced the June 2026 publication of *Thomas Paine: Collected Writings*, "the first major new edition of Paine's works, bringing together all his writings in six breathtaking volumes that dramatically revise our previous understanding of his activities as a writer and his importance as a democratic theorist in the age of revolutions."

Paine's "contributions to revolutionary debates in America, Britain, and France were unparalleled in its time."

TPHA has coordinated the international effort with president Gary Berton as an editor. ▲



Paine Day at TPHA Building hosts Mayor of New Rochelle



Mayor Yadira Ramos-Herbert

The 2025 Thomas Paine Day in New Rochelle on June 8 drew Mayor Yadira Ramos-Herbert, County Legislators Terry Clements and Judah Holstein, and State Senator Shelley Mayer. Iona University Prof. Scott Cleary read Thomas Paine's poetry. ▲

Dreiser and Paine — Continued from Pg. 3

A century before Occupy, Dreiser in *Tragic America* declared, "...this system — which the capitalists would have us believe to be the work of sheer fate — is actually no more and no less than the absolutely planned and executed method by which the banks bring on a state of prosperity for only 1% of the people."

Dreiser, like Paine, saw oligarchy as a serious threat to ordinary Americans.

efficient managers for the benefit of all Americans!"

Dreiser, like Paine, viewed oligarchy as a serious threat to ordinary Americans, who were sacrificed to rich overlords by a complicit government. Dreiser, like Paine, urged populist action: "We want a government for all the people! No enormous wealth in private hands! We want efficient managers for the benefit of all Americans!"

Undeterred by the repression of *Tragic America*, Dreiser wrote *America is Worth Saving* (1941). His Paineite invective railed against European aristocracy and American corporate leaders poised to gain large profits from the war, whatever their view of Hitler.

Dreiser saw little difference between Hitler's armies and the British imperialist armies that enslaved and decimated Indians, Chinese, and South African blacks. He opposed U.S. military involvement until Germany invaded Russia and Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

Dreiser's ideas appear to echo Paine's criticisms of British imperialism in *Pennsylvania Magazine* and *The Crisis*. While Dreiser's interpretations run counter to Paine's belief that war is a threat to commerce, a similar pacifism and desire for enlightenment resonates. ▲

Frances Chiu, PhD, serves on the TPHA board. She teaches at The New School and publishes on Medium.

[HOME](#) [ABOUT](#) [DOCUMENTS](#) [MEMBERSHIP](#) [Q](#)

The THOMAS PAINE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION


The TPHA is the oldest historic association for a Founder, established in 1884. We are the authority on the life, works, and legacy of Paine, and have been assisting scholars and authors for decades.

FEATURED LINKS

- The Collected Writings Project
- Sherman's Copy of the Declaration of Independence
- Paine Documents
- Paine Gallery
- Major Milestones
- The D.C. Memorial Project
- The Paine Store (Coming soon)
- The Beacon / Studies in Thomas Paine

Thomas Paine

Visit our new website
at ThomasPaine.org



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

TPHA MEMBERSHIP - Dues & Benefits

- Individual** - \$25 yearly (Beacon subscription)
- Family** - \$40 yearly (Beacon subscription)
- Supporter** - \$100 yearly (Beacon, Paine lapel pin)
- Donor** - \$500 for 1 year (Beacon, lapel pin, personal plaque)
- Benefactor** - \$1,000 yearly (All above & Memorial Building plaque)
- Patron** - \$2,500, 1 year (All the above & a set of 2026 six-volume *Thomas Paine: Collected Writings*, signed by the Editorial Board.)

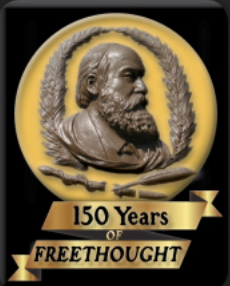
THE TRUTH SEEKER

WORLD'S OLDEST FREETHOUGHT PUBLICATION | FOUNDED BY D.M. BENNETT IN 1873

The **Truth Seeker** has been the world's foundational source of freethought information since 1873, longer than TPNHA has existed. The Truth Seeker was the main force behind our formation in 1884.

*The Thomas Paine Historical Association
thanks our "sister" publication for their leadership.*

Visit TheTruthSeeker.net



The THOMAS PAINE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



About the TPHA

The Thomas Paine Historical Association upholds the mission of educating the world about the life, works and legacy of Thomas Paine.

TPHA was 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. We assist scholars, authors, journalists, readers and anyone interested in Paine's life and work.

TPHA has managed the international project to complete and publish *Thomas Paine: Collected Writings*, which doubles the corpus of known writings.

In New Rochelle, we operate the Paine Memorial Building and Museum, built 1925, where we hold educational programs. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, we gratefully welcome member support sustaining our efforts. ▲

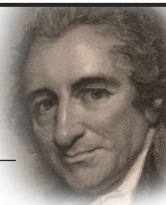
Thomas Paine Historical Association

983 North Avenue • New Rochelle, NY 10804-3609
tpnhamail@gmail.com

The Beacon

July 2025 • Vol 19, No. 4

THOMAS PAINE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
Founded 1884 • New Rochelle, New York • ThomasPaine.org



The Beacon is a bimonthly publication for the members and friends of the Thomas Paine Historical Association.

The Beacon from TPHA extends the serial volumes of Gilbert Vale's influential *The Beacon* in the mid-19th century, both restoring the legacy of Thomas Paine.

The Beacon – Editorial Committee:

Judah Freed (Editor) Frances Chiu
Gary Berton Adrian Tawfik

Board of Directors

Gary Berton,
TPHA President
Walton, NY

Barbara Crane,
TPHA Vice President
Political Scientist
New Rochelle, NY

Scott Cleary,
TPHA Secretary,
Professor of English,
Iona University
Bedford, NY

Eric Nowakowski,
TPHA Treasurer
Assoc. Director, Accounting
Purdue Pharma
Larchmont, NY

Roderick Bradford
Editor, *The Truth Seeker*,
and documentarian
San Diego, CA

Lisa Burton
Director, Gov't Engagement,
HOPE Community Services
New Rochelle, NY

Frances Chiu
Professor of Literature and
History, New School, NYC
West Hartford, CT

Judah Freed
Journalist and author,
Making Global Sense
Denver, CO

John Heidenreich
Chemistry Teacher
New Rochelle, NY

Josh Klein
Professor of Criminal
Justice, Iona University
New York, NY

Joy Masoff
Author and publisher
Five Ponds Press
San Marino, CA

Greg McMurray
Writer, Paine scholar
New York City, NY

Richard Briles Moriarty
Retired Asst. Attorney
General for Wisconsin
Duluth, MN

Connor Murray
VP of Administration,
Student Government
Assn. at Iona University.
New Rochelle, NY

Paul Myles
Writer, Paine Researcher
Sussex, UK

Jonathan Scheick
Adjunct Professor, Health
Brookdale Comm. College
New Jersey

Edmund Smith
Retired Science Teacher
Connecticut

Adrian Tawfik
Founder and editor,
Democracy Chronicles
Woodbury, NY

Stuart Wright
Chartered Accountant
Town Councillor
Thetford, Norfolk, UK

Benefactors

Nimick Forbesway
Foundation

J.H. Johnson Charitable
Educational Trust

World Union of Deists

Joy Masoff

Todd Stiefel Foundation

Matt & Luann Jacobs

Barbara Crane

Julia Holofcener