

# The Beacon

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THOMAS PAINE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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## Thomas Paine on the Federalists and Oligarchy

by Gary Berton and Judah Freed

**T**he Federalist Party, anointed by most historians as the founding party of the new United States, shaped the U.S. Constitution, adopted in 1787. Their conservative and nationalist ideas were voiced in 85 newspaper essays, collected in “The Federalist Papers,” to counter arguments against the plan from those who wanted more democracy in the new government.

America’s first official political party, Federalists dominated the government from 1789 to 1801. Founded by Alexander Hamilton, fronted by President John Adams, The Federalist Party favored plutocracy, a strong central government ruled by a few rich power brokers. Their 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts legalized deporting immigrants and stifling free speech.

**A** man under the tyranny of party spirit is the greatest slave upon earth, for none but himself can deprive him of the freedom of thought.

— Addressed to the Opposers of the Bank

**T**he manners also, and language of any party is another clue that leads to a discovery of their real characters. When the cause and principles of a party are good, its advocates make use of reason, argument, and good language. Truth can derive no advantage from boisterous vulgarity. But when the motives and principles of a party are bad, it is necessary to conceal them; and its abettors having principles they dare to acknowledge and cannot defend, avoid every thing of argument, and take refuge in abuse and falsehood.

— Letter To the Citizens of the United States VIII

Drawing on deep Tory sympathies in New England, the Federalists advocated London’s agenda in America. They blocked Paris interests after the French Revolution.

### The Federalist Party favored plutocracy.

British leaders called the Federalists the “English Party” and “Oligarch Party.” Adams was seen as a monarchist after proposing hereditary succession for the U.S. presidency.

The Federalist Party lost the 1800 election to the Democratic-Republican Party, led by Thomas Jefferson, who won votes by upholding states’ rights over Hamilton’s federal power, as with the central bank. Jefferson fought Hamilton’s autocratic claim of “implied powers” not granted in the Constitution.

President Jefferson in 1802 invited Thomas Paine to return to America after his imprisonment in France by Robespierre, urged on by the American minister to France, Gouverneur Morris, a Federalist.

Writing letters to the nation from New Rochelle and then Greenwich Village, Paine waged war against the Federalist usurpation of the American Revolution. He championed the principles of democracy. Federalists were his enemy as much as the British lords.

Here are some of Paine’s analyses. ▲

**T**hey correspond to the story told of a man who was become so proud and famous for lying that he disdained speaking truth lest he should lose his character.

— Letter To the Citizens of the United States VIII

Verbatim quotes selected by Gary Berton — Continued on pg. 2

## Paine on the Federalists

— From Pg. 1

**W**henver politics are applied to debauch mankind from their integrity, and dissolve the virtue of human nature, they become detestable; and to be a statesman on this plan, is to be a commissioned villain. He who aims at it, leaves a vacancy in his character, which may be filled up with the worst of epithets.

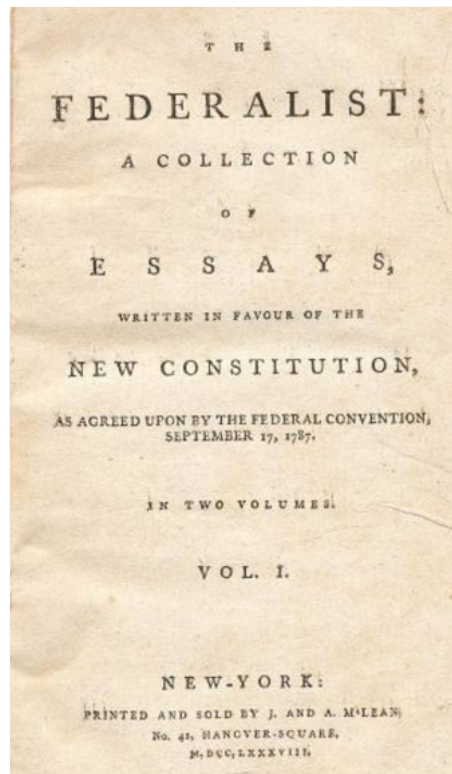
— Letter to Abbe Raynal

**T**hough hypocrisy can counterfeit every virtue, and become the associate of every vice, it requires a great dexterity of craft to give it the power of deceiving. A painted sun may glisten but it cannot warm. For hypocrisy to personate virtue successfully it must know and feel what virtue is, and as it cannot long do this it cannot long deceive. When an orator foaming for war, breathes forth in another sentence a *plaintive piety of words*, he may as well write **HYPOCRISY** on his front.

— Letter to the Citizens of the U.S. VI

**U**njust measures must be supported by unjust means. No sooner was their scheme reprobated by men of integrity and independent principles, but invention was put to the rack, and truth to defiance, to weaken the credit of those who opposed the injustice of their proceedings. This man was bribed and that man was hired, and slander and falsehood, the ministering angels of malevolence, had full employment.

— Addressed to the Opposers of the Bank



### *The Federalist Papers*

*The Federalist, 1788, the collected essays by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, who favored centralized federalism, which Thomas Paine opposed. Federalists reacted with lies and abuse that discredited Paine.*

Source: New York Public Library, Digital Collections

**I** am enough acquainted with life and the world, to know, that abuse is the evidence of want of argument, and that those who use it, have no right on their side. There is a dignified calmness in conscious rectitude, which descends not to abuse. It can reason but it cannot rage. It cannot quit the strong fortress of rectitude to skirmish in the fields of vulgarity.

— Letter to the Citizens of the U.S. VIII

**T**he true greatness of a nation is founded on the principles of humanity.

— Prospects on the Rubicon

**T**here are not two things more opposed to each other than war and religion; and yet, in the double game, those leaders have to play, the one is necessarily the theme of their politics, and the other the text of their sermons. The week-day orator of Mars, and the Sunday preacher of Federal Grace, play, like gamblers into each other's hands, and this they call religion.

— Letter to the Citizens of the U.S. VI

**T**here is a general and striking difference between the genuine effects of truth itself, and the effects of falsehood believed to be truth. Truth is naturally benign; but falsehood believed to be truth is always furious. The former delights in serenity, is mild and persuasive, and seeks not the auxiliary aid of invention. The latter sticks at nothing. It has naturally no morals. Every lie is welcome that suits its purpose. It is the innate character of the thing to act in this manner, and the criterion by which it may be known, whether in politics or religion. When anything is attempted to be supported by lying it is presumptive evidence that the thing so supported is a lie also. The stock on which a lie can be grafted must be of the same species as the graft.

— Letter to the Citizens of the U.S. III

**C**haracter is much easier kept than recovered, and that man, if any such there be, who, from sinister views, or littleness of soul, lends unseen his hand to injure it, contrives a wound it will never be in his power to heal.

— The Crisis XIII



## About Thomas Paine

# Thomas Edison's Salute to Thomas Paine

By Barbara Crane

**T**homas Edison, among the most famous men of the early 20th century, played a vital role in restoring the public reputation of Thomas Paine. A great admirer of Paine since his youth, Edison attended the 1925 groundbreaking ceremony for the Thomas Paine Memorial Building in New Rochelle.

Pulitzer Prize winning political biographer Edmund Morris, in his 2019 *Edison*, tells how Edison found Paine as a child in Michigan before the Civil War. Edison's father, a "radical, randy, secessionist," Morris writes, "had 'larned' him the complete works of Thomas Paine when he was still a newsboy on the Grand Trunk Railroad."



**Thomas Edison at the 1925 groundbreaking for the Thomas Paine Memorial Building**

*Shown (l-r) Cyril Nast (an Edison executive), Thomas Edison, TPNHA president William van der Weyde.*

Source: Thomas Paine Historical Association

Edison's affinity for Paine led him to befriend William van der Weyde at the Thomas Paine National Historical Association. To introduce van der Weyde's 1925 biography, *The Life and Works of Thomas Paine*, he wrote:

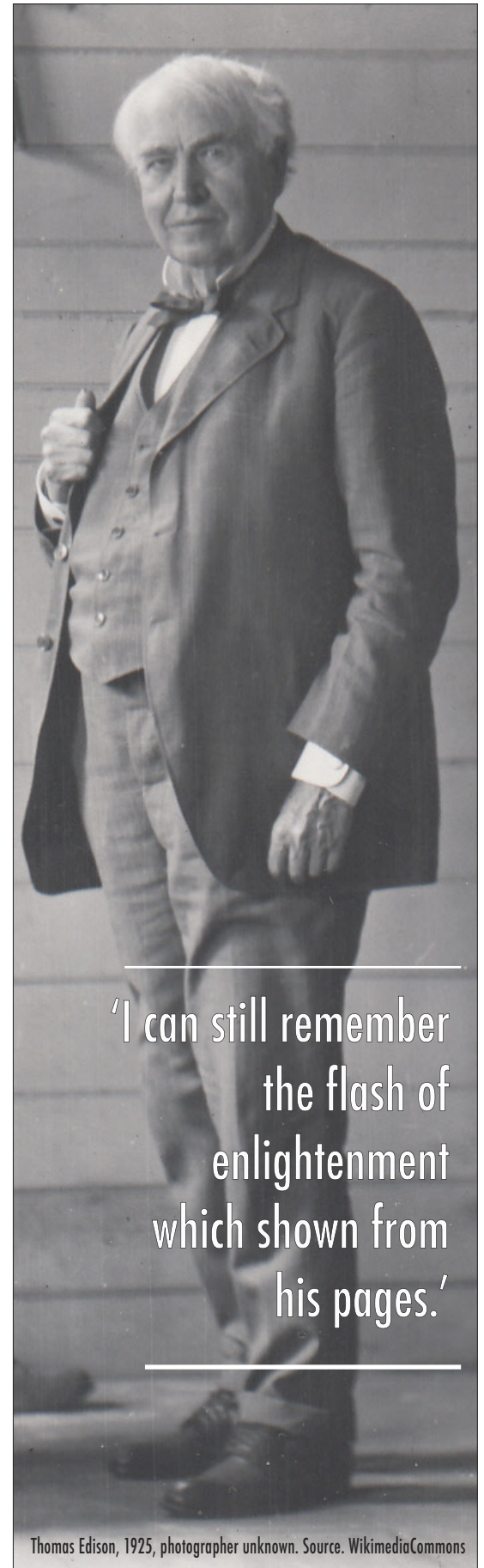
"I have always been interested in this man. My father had a set of Tom Paine's books on the shelf at home. I must have opened the covers about the time I was thirteen. And I can still remember

the flash of enlightenment which shown from his pages. It was a revelation, indeed, to encounter his views on political and religious matters, so different from the views of many people around us....

"Many a person who could not understand Rousseau, and would be puzzled by Montesquieu, could understand Paine as an open book. He wrote with a clarity, a sharpness of outline and exactness of speech that even a schoolboy should be able to grasp....

"He has been called an atheist, but atheist he was not. Paine believed in a supreme intelligence, as representing the idea by which other men often express the name of deity....

"He conceived and designed the iron bridge and the hollow candle, the principle of the modern central draught burner. The man had a sort of universal genius. He was interested in the diversity of things." ▲



*'I can still remember  
the flash of  
enlightenment  
which shown from  
his pages.'*

Thomas Edison, 1925, photographer unknown. Source: WikimediaCommons

## About Thomas Paine

# Paine's 'English Accent'

By Richard Briles Moriarty

Thomas Paine's words leap from the written page. How did Paine sound when speaking? Raised in Norfolk, Paine lived in England until age 37 when he sailed to America in 1774. One may assume he spoke with a British accent distinctly different than how English was spoken in the American colonies. That assumption, like other assumptions about Paine, calls for deeper inquiry. Upon inspection, the evidence is that Paine sounded as if he was born in America.

Despite a general belief among English speakers in Britain that it was Americans who rejected traditional rules for speaking, the contrary is true. This is confirmed in a 2018 article by BBC commentator Christine Ro, "How Americans preserved British English."

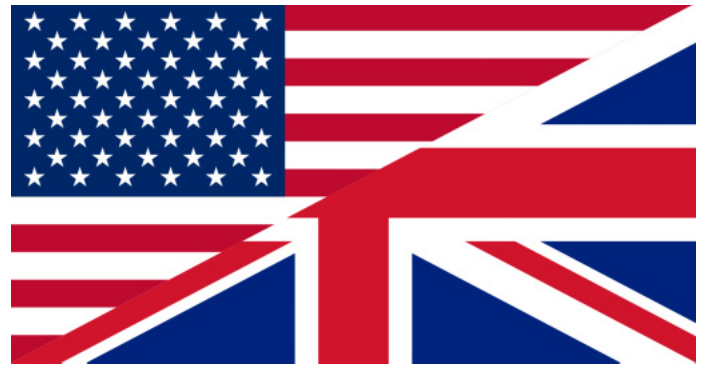
Contemporary observers expressed surprise at how well English was spoken in America in the late 18th century. A visitor to Philadelphia in the 1760s was startled that "the English tongue" was "spoken by all ranks, in a degree of purity and perfection surpassing any but the polite part of London."

An Englishman visiting during the Revolution observed in his diary that, although "the inhabitants of this Country are composed of different Nations and different languages, yet it is very remarkable that they in general speak better English than the English do."

Until the end of the 18th century, English was spoken virtually the same way in England and America, assert Patricia T. O'Connor and Stewart Kellerman in *Origins of the Specious: Myths and Misconceptions of the English Language* (Random House, 2009).

Today's British accent emerged in the 19th century. As the century progressed, Americans largely retained traditional ways of speaking English while England radically deviated from those linguistic roots. Spoken British English and American English diverged.

**Until the end of the 18th century, English was spoken virtually the same way in England and America.**



Wikimedia Commons

On the cusp of the 19th century, the English began dropping the final "r" sound from words like "mother" and "far" to say "mothah" and "fah." By the early 1800s, educated Britons were saying "lahf" and "bahth" and "dahnce" while pronouncing the "h" in "herb."

O'Connor and Kellerman report speakers in England began dropping whole syllables. For example, they shortened the word "secretary" to "sec--tree," cutting off the next to last syllable. Americans continued to pronounce "secretary" and other words in the traditional way, articulating all syllables, as England had.

So, when Paine arrived in Philadelphia, speaking the English he'd spoken for 37 years in England, both he and those hearing him may have noticed little difference in their respective accents. We have no record of how Paine heard the speech of Americans, nor how they heard Paine's speech. We have clues.

Among the few surviving comments on how Paine spoke English came from the Englishman Abraham Raimbach, upon meeting Paine in Paris in 1802. He observed that Paine was "fluent in speech, of mild and gentle demeanor, clear and distinct in enunciation, and his voice exceedingly soft and agreeable."

While recognizing the paucity of evidence for how Paine actually spoke, it's reasonable to extrapolate. We know that Paine, upon arriving in Philadelphia, rapidly fit into the political and social cultures he found in his new home. Since residents of England and America at that time spoke English in ways that were virtually indistinguishable, the way Paine spoke blended in well with the way Americans spoke. ▲

**Richard Briles Moriarty** practiced law for 42 years, and served 28 years as an Assistant Attorney General for the Wisconsin Department of Justice. In retirement, he is researching Thomas Paine.

## Opinion on Thomas Paine

A response to Prof. Carvalho

# Where have you gone, Thomas Paine?

By Bro. Kevin Griffith, CFC

Growing up in New Rochelle, I've always been intrigued by Thomas Paine. As a young student in New Rochelle's Catholic schools, I enjoyed educational class trips to the Thomas Paine Cottage. These trips reinforced what we were being taught in school that Thomas Paine's writing of *Common Sense* played an important role in the American revolution.

As I grew older, I wondered why this national historical site did not seem very popular. The cottage grounds were usually empty, and the museum building felt off limits, unlike my childhood tours. I'd recall childhood play on the Paine property beside the stream and lake. I'd ponder why this national historical site wasn't getting the attention Paine deserved.



Bro. Kevin Griffith

I'm delighted to see public interest in Thomas Paine and his contributions to America's founding is gaining traction.

In recent years, I'm delighted to see public interest in Thomas Paine and his contributions to America's founding is gaining traction.

I'm also delighted with the academic presentations by the Paine Association, such as the talk by Dr. Carvalho, which stimulated this essay.

When I heard Carvalho's ideas, my first impression was that Thomas Paine's writings remain as pertinent today as in the revolutionary era. Most assuredly, the administration in the White House now would have had Paine arrested for his writings as a foreigner. It seems we have come full circle from the days of the revolution to the modern presidency.

For instance, many of the debates on voting rights in Paine's day are relevant in America today. The same can be said about conversations around the criteria or qualifications to be a citizen.

Paine says that aristocracy and oligarchy should be rejected. Likewise, Paine says the worst kind of government is one where decisions are subject to the passions of a single individual. I advise those in the White House to study Paine's writings on what a democratic republic should look like.

Borrowing from Paul Simon, one might be tempted to ask, where have you gone, Thomas Paine? ▲

Paine says the worst kind of government is one where decisions are subject to the passions of a single individual.

Bro. Kevin Griffith, CFC, D. Min, Edmund Rice Christian Brothers, is a resident of New Rochelle.

Dr. Daniel Gomes de Carvalho, Professor of Modern History at the University of São Paulo, Brazil, on February 15 spoke at the Paine Building on *The Age of Reason*.

"By criticizing the adulterous connection between the church and state," he said, "by demonstrating the impossibility of the Bible being the word of God, and by proposing the equality of all creatures before God, Paine had devastating effects on the governments using religion to maintain hierarchies and oppression." As a consequence, "the question of democracy was at the heart of religious debate at the time."

The debate continues. ▲



Prof. Daniel Carvalho



## Meet the TPHA Board

# Why Thomas Paine is so Fascinating to Me

by Scott Cleary, PhD

A Canadian who grew up outside Toronto, I first heard of Thomas Paine *very* briefly in high school when my Canadian history classes spent as little time as possible on the American Revolution. That was more about the Loyalist expulsion to Canada than the achievement of American independence.

My next encounter with Paine came about 20 years ago when I applied for my current job as a professor of English at the university in New Rochelle. I had earned my Ph.D. in 18th-century literature, so I was applying for the 18th-century literature job at a university in New Rochelle. I noticed the Thomas Paine Cottage and museum were fairly close to campus. In my job interview, I asked about the relationship between the Paine sites and school. They replied that there was no relationship, and I noted to myself that if I got the job, I would like to try to build that relationship.

Fast forward to 2009 and the first stirrings for transferring archival materials from the TPHA Memorial Building to the university library. I met Gary Berton then. His knowledge and passion about Paine was contagious. We helped start the Institute for Thomas Paine Studies at Iona and we organized in 2012 the first International Conference of Thomas Paine Studies.

This was a real watershed for me. In so many ways, it launched me fully into my Thomas Paine research. That conference allowed me to edit *New Directions in Thomas Paine Studies* (Palgrave, 2016), the collection of essays arising from that conference.

At that 2012 conference, over lunches and coffee, we began to work and plan for what's become *Thomas Paine: Collected Writings* (Princeton, 2026), the six-volume scholarly edition of Paine's works and correspondence, which will definitively re-write the conventional early-American narratives about Paine. Historians have so much wrong, and we are about to correct the record, which is exactly the original goal of the TPHA.

I will never forget the day after the conference when I looked at the table of contents in Philip Foner's two-volume edition of Paine's works. One section listed Paine's "songs and poems," and I knew I had a unique connection to Paine. My academic specialty is poetry, so I decided to write a book on Paine and his poetry, which I've done, *The Field of Imagination: Thomas Paine and Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Virginia, 2019).


Paine used poetry throughout his life — in print and manuscripts — to explore political ideology as well as human feelings. That's what makes Paine so interesting, compelling and fascinating to me. ▲

**Scott Cleary**, a Professor of English at Iona University, is author of *The Field of Imagination: Thomas Paine and Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (University of Virginia Press, 2019). He's an associate editor of the forthcoming *Thomas Paine: Collected Writings* (Princeton University Press, 2026), and serves as secretary of the TPHA.

***Thomas Paine: Collected Writings* will definitively re-write the conventional early-American narratives about Paine.**



Scott Cleary  
TPHA Board




**By Thomas Paine**

## John Crow

Upon finding, at age eight,  
a dead crow in the woods:

Here lies the body of John Crow,  
Who once was high, but now is low.  
Ye brother Crows take warning all,  
For as you rise, so must you fall.



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**THOMAS PAINE DAY**

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**THOMAS PAINE MEMORIAL BUILDING**

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3:30-4:30 Thomas Paine Prose and Poetry  
 Advancing the cause of democracy

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 Light refreshments • View the exhibits

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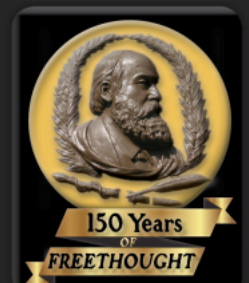
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 Thomas Paine: Collected Works, autographed by the Editorial Board.)



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 longer than TPNHA has existed. The Truth Seeker was the main force behind our formation in 1884.

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

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# *The* THOMAS PAINE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



## About TPHA

**T**he 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 is managing the international project to complete and publish *Thomas Paine: Collected Writings*, which may double 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

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THOMAS PAINE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
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*The Beacon* is a bimonthly publication for the members and friends of the Thomas Paine Historical Association

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

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