
The Beacon

January 2025 • Vol 19, No. 1

THOMAS PAINE NATIONAL HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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



Thomas Paine, Privateer



by Joy Masoff

Imagine Thomas Paine as a “raw and adventurous” youth, scurrying up a ship’s rigging in storm-tossed waters, overwhelmed by the booms of two dozen cannons fired in unison, the clouds of choking smoke, and the violent lurches of a shuddering ship. In *Age of Reason*, Paine recalled the greatest dangers came “not by cannon balls, but by splinters from the inside of the ship that fly in all directions.”

Perhaps Paine’s worldview took shape in war. Paine biographers often cite his Quaker father and Anglican mother, his small-town upbringing in Thetford, his forced departure from schooling at age 12 to apprentice in staymaking, effectively ending his formal education. Debate persists if he made corset stays or rope stays for ships. Either way, for young Thomas, the purgatory of grueling, tedious handwork weighed on him.

“An English Privateer Engaging a French Privateer”

Painting by Samuel Scott (c.1702–1772).

Source; Wikimedia, Royal Museums Greenwich; National Maritime Museum

In Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, Ishmael went to sea “to hurtle after adventure and to inspect the self in a personal quest for truth and knowledge.” Young Paine apparently felt that same pull of the sea.

He first tried fleeing to the sea in 1756 on the privateer *Terrible*, commanded by Capt. William Death. Paine’s father pursued and begged his son not to go. Good thing, for the *Terrible* sank midway through its voyage with only a handful of survivors.

Paine’s next escape attempt in 1757 succeeded. He found adventure on the privateer *King of Prussia*. For more than six months, he pursued prizes from seized French merchant ships, a life-changing event.

Continued on pg. 2

Privateer Paine — Continued from Pg. 1

In “Thomas Paine, Privateersman,” historian Alice Berry writes, “most privateersmen, like their piratical counterparts, sailed not for the glory of King and country, but for profit.” All hands shared the bounty.

Understudied by biographers of Paine’s youthful years is the impact from his six months of shipboard life amid the Seven Years War. At age 19, he faced his first personal encounter with globalism. Paine worked with or fought against multinational ship crews. All profited directly from their oceanic capitalism.

Privateers had their own sociability. Anthropologist David Graeber in *Pirate Enlightenment*, describe a “collectivistic ethos” aboard ships of plunder, including privateers. Graeber writes they were “experimenting with new ways of organizing social relations ...happening not in the great cities of Europe — still under the control of various *Ancien Régimes* — but on the margins of the emerging world system, and particularly in the relatively free spaces.”

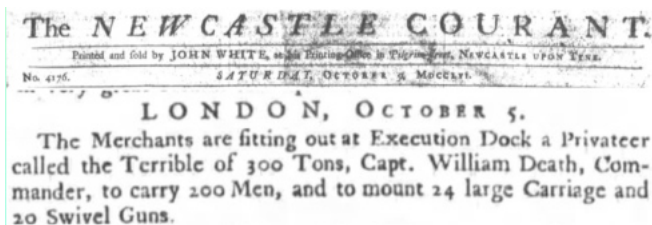
As an inexperienced sailor, Paine’s job was to be “able-bodied,” ready to fight when needed. A knowledge sponge, he was eager to learn the ways of the sea. His desire to learn from experience led him later to observe about seamanship lessons, “a few able and social sailors will soon instruct... active landmen in the common work of a ship.”

In his later years Paine told his old friend Thomas “Clio” Rickman that he had “seldom passed five minutes... however circumstanced, in which he did not acquire some knowledge.”

For Paine, as a curious young privateer exposed for the first time to a wide cross-section of humanity and worldviews, life at sea was a kind of higher education in the ways of the world.

Paine’s early practical education was put to good use two decades later when he wrote *Common Sense*. He was able to knowledgeably present precise costs for building a navy. He accurately calculated the “charge of building a ship of each rate [type], and furnishing her with masts, yards, sails and rigging, together with a proportion of eight months boatswain’s and carpenter’s sea-stores.”

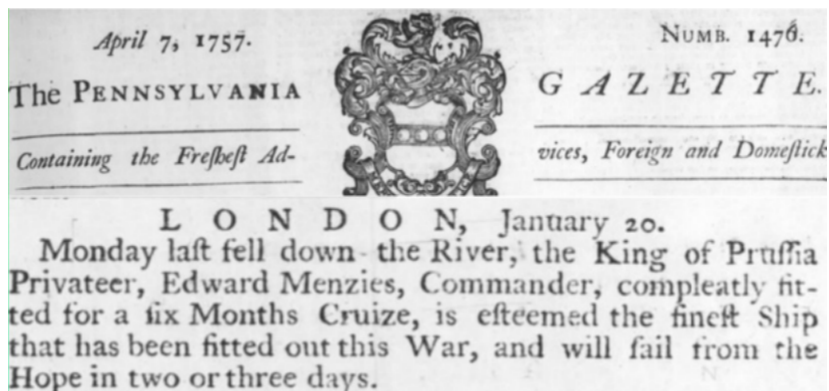
In coming years, Paine’s naval experiences filtered into his fiscal analyses like a political crystal ball to see the future. Paine asserted that for the British, “the expense of the navy is greater than the nation can bear.” He backed up his statement with detailed calculations of the interest rates for the navy debts that Britain was incurring.



British newspaper notice about the privateer Terrible.

Published in The Newcastle Courant, October 9, 1756

Source; newspapers.com



American newspaper notice about the privateer ship King of Prussia

Published in The Pennsylvania Gazette, April 7, 1757

Source; newspapers.com

In addition to advising his colleagues on the construction and operating costs of navies, he addressed matters of naval invention and engineering by writing about deployment of gunboats for invasion and defense, also the rights of neutral vessels in times of war. His reasoning sprang from knowledge and experience. Paine’s youthful months at sea gave him understanding he carried with him for the rest of his life. ▲

NOTE: Essay excerpted from *Thomas Paine and the Company He Kept*, a doctoral dissertation in progress by Joy Masoff, PhD candidate.

Joy Masoff serves on the board of the TPNHA.

The Comstock Act and 1900s leadership of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association

by Gary Berton with Judah Freed

Part Three of Three Parts

When most founding members of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association no longer served on the TPNHA board, others joined the association and took active leadership roles. They reflected the founding philosophy and ideas that prevailed at the turn of the century.

The philosophy of “anarchism” was popular in left-wing circles in the early 1900s. The American socialism advocated by northeastern progressives often mixed with anarchism. Emma Goldman, the ideological lightning rod, advocated an “anarcho-communist” philosophy, that did not separate from socialism, *per se*, until after World War I.

Edwin C. Walker and Theodore Schroeder stepped into TPNHA leadership in the early 1900s. Walker was presiding at meetings by 1901, becoming vice-president as TPNHA incorporated in 1906. Schroeder became the secretary at that time.

Edwin C. Walker was respected as a political philosopher and outspoken opponent of the Comstock Law. He wrote the 1903 pamphlet, *Who is the Enemy: Anthony Comstock or You?*



Edwin C. Walker

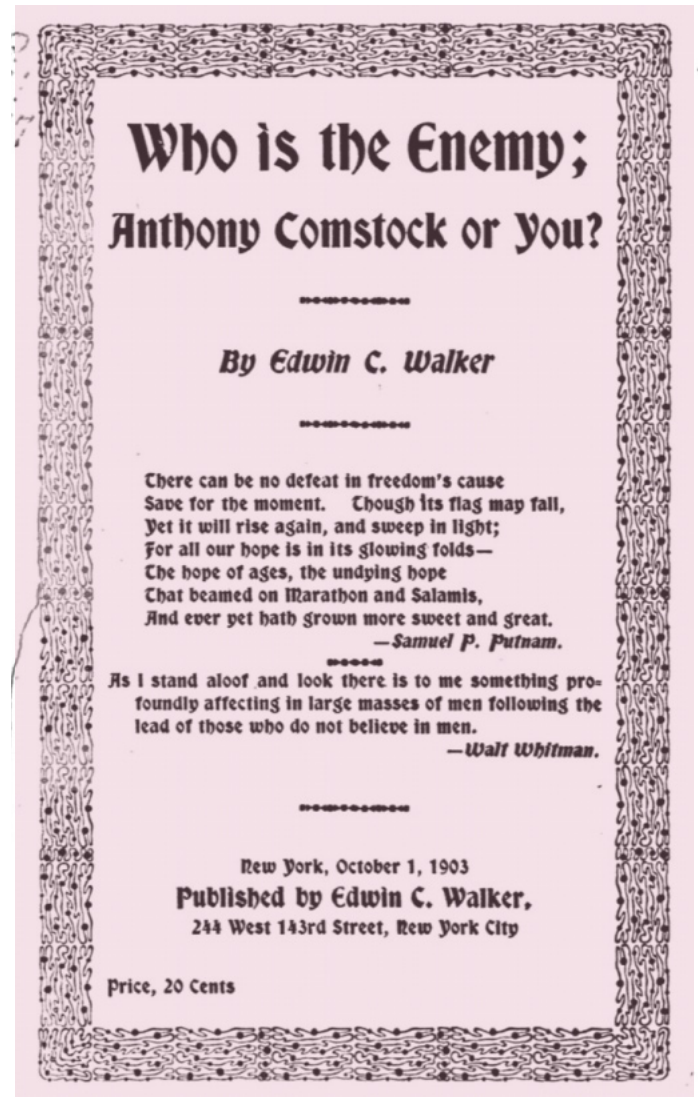
Source: Alchetron

Anthony Comstock or You?

His 1904 book, *Communism and Conscience*, espoused free-market anarchism (related then to individualist anarchism, anarcho-capitalism and libertarian socialism). “I can have little faith,” Walker wrote, “in the professed love of liberty of one who denies to me the opportunity to hear what he or she does not care to hear, just as I can have little faith in the

professions of the Censor who denies to me the opportunity to read what he does not care to read.”

The TPNHA’s leadership had anarchist affiliations beyond Walker. The leading representative and advocate for anarchism, Emma Goldman, had ties to TPNHA’s Ned Foote and William van der Weyde, plus the Manhattan Liberal Club and the Liberal League.



“Who is the Enemy” by Edwin C. Walker

University of Michigan, General Library archives. Source: Google Books

Theodore Schroeder grew up in Wisconsin, earned an 1898 law degree, practiced in Utah until relocating to New York in 1900. In 1902, Schroeder formed the Free Speech League (precursor of ACLU) with Lincoln Steffens, TPNHA founder Ned Foote, and other progressives. As a lawyer advocating free speech rights and sexual freedom, he defended Emma Goldman at her Comstock trial in Denver circa 1910.



Theodore Schroeder

Source: Alchetron

Continued on pg. 4

Comstock Act and TPNHA — From Pg. 4

At the 1905 rededication of the Paine Monument in New Rochelle, the speakers featured Schroeder with surviving TPNHA founders Thaddeus Wakeman and Ned Foote plus the New Rochelle mayor. A year later Schroeder was voted secretary of the TPNHA.

Schroeder wrote on the legal absurdities of Comstock. The Free Speech League in 1906 published his booklet, *What is Criminally "Obscene"?* and a three-part, *Freedom of the Press and "Obscene" Literature*. He compiled the 1909 *Free Press Anthology*. He wrote the 1911 book on press freedoms, *"Obscene" Literature and Constitutional Law*. Years later he wrote two 1945 biographic pamphlets about Thomas Paine. A Paine statuette sat on Schroeder's desk until he died in 1953.



Theodore Schroeder, 1952

Source: Wikimedia

Leonard Abbott exemplified a blend of anarchism and socialism among Progressive Era TPNHA leaders in the early 1900s. The son of a wealthy English merchant, he read Paine's *Rights of Man* as a student before immigrating to the United States in 1898.

Shortly after arrival in New York, Abbott met anarchist Emma Goldman. He befriended J. William Lloyd, a libertarian individualist anarchist and "natural law" mystic. The pair published *Free Comrade* from 1900 to 1912. Abbott joined the executive board of the Socialist Party of America in 1900. He joined Eugene V. Debs in leading the Social Democratic Party. He introduced Upton Sinclair to socialism in 1902. Abbott in 1906 joined the founding board of the



Leonard Abbott

Source: Wikimedia

Rand School. He was active in the TPNHA by 1908 and became president for one year in 1910.

After the 1909 execution in Spain of freethinker Francisco Ferrer, Abbott worked with Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman to establish the Ferrer School and colony as educational centers for anarchist philosophy. The school was forced to close after a 1914 anarchist bombing against John D. Rockefeller. Abbott spoke about the bombers killed to a crowd of 5,000.

TPNHA links to activist anarchists could not have happened without the blessings of founder Thaddeus Wakeman, a guiding hand of the association until his passing in 1913. Respected as a political philosopher, **T.B. Wakeman** was a social progressive with an affinity for anarchist views. A Monist (monism versus dualism), he held that all existence has one origin, so all individuals share natural unity and equality. Wakeman stepped up when needed to become president in 1908 and 1911, meanwhile mentoring younger TPNHA leaders.

James F. Morton, an anarchist writer, served as the president between Wakeman in 1911 and William van der Weyde in 1914. Morton encapsulated the politics of previous leading board members. He graduated from Harvard with W.E.B. DuBois and became active in the NAACP in opposition to bigotry. A personal friend of writer H.P. Lovecraft, Morton wrote for *Truth Seeker*, *Discontent* and *Mother Earth*. He was part of the Ferrer School in New York City.

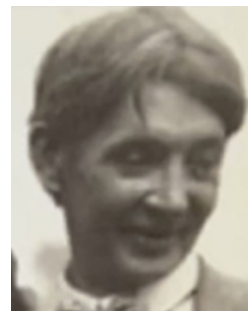


James F. Morton

Source: Wikimedia

William van der Weyde, a noted photojournalist, succeeded Schroeder as TPNHA secretary in 1909. He served as secretary until becoming president in 1914, serving as president until he died in 1929. His legacy includes locating Paine's death mask and a lock of his hair, still archived in New Rochelle.

An innovator in photography for newspapers and night photography, he photographed significant people of his day, such as Walt Whitman, Mark Twain and Capt. Alfred Dreyfus of France.



William van der Weyde

Source: TPNHA

William van der Weyde and his photographer father were members of the Manhattan Liberal Club. For *Mother Earth*, he wrote, "Thomas Paine's Anarchism." His premise and arguments have since been undercut by modern Paine scholars, yet his anarchist influence is clear. "Paine

was an ardent believer in civilization and education," he wrote. "Were men [*sic*] but sufficiently civilized, they would have no need for government."

More than anarchism, Paine and free thought has united and guided the TPNHA since 1884.

Continued on pg. 5

By **Thomas Paine**

The Administration of a Republic for the Public Good

Excerpt from *Dissertations on Government*, Etc. (Philadelphia, February 18, 1786) [Verbatim text]

NOTE: Paine wrote and published this essay in Philadelphia amid 1786 debates with federalists over revising the Articles of Confederation, eventually yielding the U.S. Constitution.

THE administration of a republic is supposed to be directed by certain fundamental principles of right and justice, from which there cannot, because there ought not to, be any deviation; and whenever any deviation appears, there is a kind of stepping out of the republican principle, and an approach toward the despotic one. This administration is executed by a select number of persons, periodically chosen by the people, who act as representatives and in behalf of the whole, and who are supposed to enact the same laws, and to pursue the same line of administration, as the people would do were they all assembled together.

The Public Good is to be their object. It is therefore necessary to understand what Public Good is.

Public Good is not a term opposed to the good of individuals; on the contrary, it is the good of every individual collected. It is the good of all, because it is the good of every one: for as the public body is every individual collected, so the public good is the collected good of those individuals.

The foundation-principle of Public Good is justice, and wherever justice is impartially administered, the public good is promoted; for as it is to the good of every

man that no injustice be done to him, so likewise it is to his good that the principle which secures him should not be violated in the person of another, because such a violation weakens his security, and leaves to chance what ought to be to him a rock to stand on.

But in order to understand more minutely, how the Public Good is to be promoted, and the manner in which the representatives are to act to promote it, we must have recourse to the original or first principles, on which the people formed themselves into a republic.

When a people agree to form themselves into a republic (for the word Republic means the Public Good, or the good of the whole, in contradistinction to the despotic form, which makes the good of the sovereign, or of one man, the only object of the government) when, I say, they agree to do this, it is to be understood, that they mutually resolve and pledge themselves to each

other, rich and poor alike, to support and maintain this rule of equal justice among them. They therefore renounce not only the despotic form, but the despotic principle, as well as governing as of being governed by mere Will and Power, and substitute in its place a government of justice.

By this mutual compact the citizens of a republic put it out of their power, that is, they renounce, as detestable, the power of exercising, at any future time, any species of despotism over each other, or doing a thing not right in itself, because a majority of them may have strength of numbers sufficient to accomplish it. ▲

'The Public Good is to be their object. It is therefore necessary to understand what Public Good is.'

'They therefore renounce not only the despotic form, but the despotic principle.'

Comstock Act and TPNHA — From Pg. 4

Premiere 1900s events for TPNHA — rededication of the Paine monument in 1905, the 1909 centennial of Paine's death — were covered by Truth Seeker editor **George Macdonald**, who succeeded brother Eugene. He led TPNHA committees into the 1910s.

Honorary TPNHA vice presidents active in the 1910s and 1920s included **Ernst Haeckel** (German zoologist, Darwinian biologist and Monist with ties to Wakeman); **Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner** (freethinking English philosopher and peace activist, the daughter of English atheist writer and Member of Parlia-

Continued on pg. 6

Comstock Act and TPNHA — From Pg. 5

ment, Charles Bradlaugh); **Anatole France** (Nobel Prize winning author and freethinker); **Eden Phillpotts** (English novelist, poet and dramatist), **Georg Brandes** (Danish critic and scholar who advanced realism and naturalism); and **William Archer** (Scottish author, theatre critic and reformer in London).

The formative first 40 years of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association provides the historical memory informing our efforts. A broad-minded board now directs our affairs. We're renovating the Memorial Building, reviving The Beacon and revamping our website (stay tuned). The association today plays a leading role in Thomas Paine Studies, advancing scholarship on Paine and his impact in world history. We're a global



**Thaddeus
Wakeman**

Source: Horsesoldier



**George
Macdonald**

Truth Seeker



**Emma
Goldman**

Wikimedia



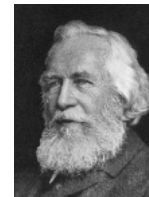
**Anatole
France**

Wikimedia



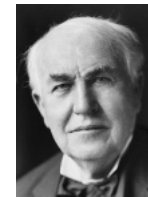
**Hypatia
Bradlaugh**

TPNHA



**Ernst
Haeckel**

Wikimedia



**Thomas
Edison**

Wikimedia



**Cyril
Nast**

NY Public Library

The association in 1925 built the Thomas Paine Memorial Building in New Rochelle near the Paine Monument, backed by freethinking inventor **Thomas Edison**. He became vice president. His advertising manager at New York Edison, **Cyril Nast**, became the treasurer to manage construction under van der Weyde. At the groundbreaking ceremony, **Norman Thomas**, a perennial Socialist Party presidential candidate, gave the keynote address.

TPNHA president van der Weyde took ill shortly after completion of the Memorial Building. He finally died in 1929 at the onset of the Great Depression. The association's fortunes declined with depleted resources.

As leaders departed, the association was sustained by well-meaning staffers. The Memorial Building was used by other groups. TPNHA in the 1980s united with the local Huguenot historical group that ran the relocated Paine Cottage museum at the site.

Paine advocates began to reassert management of the Memorial Building in the 1990s. TPNHA regained independence. The association has evolved substantially since its first four decades, dropping politics and beliefs other than Paine's own views.

The Thomas Paine National Historical Association has evolved substantially since its first decades, dropping politics and beliefs other than Paine's own views.

The association remains an all-volunteer organization supported by the American and world freethought community and friends of Thomas Paine.

resource for those researching Paine's life and works. We're now preparing for the 2026 release of the six-volume *Thomas Paine: Collected Works*, coinciding with the 250th anniversary for the publication of *Common Sense*.

The association remains an all-volunteer organization supported by the American and world freethought community and friends of Thomas Paine. Educating the public on Paine and his legacy is increasingly vital today.

Thomas Paine is an inspiring mentor for progressives to libertarians who value reason, freedom of thought and democracy. As T.B. Wakeman said at our founding, we act "to perpetuate the memory and works of Thomas Paine, to obtain and disseminate accurate information about him, to refute the various slanders and fables that have been circulated concerning him." ▲

END OF THE THREE-PART SERIES.

Part One is in the September 2024 Beacon.

Part Two is in the November 2024 Beacon.

Gary Berton is president of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association. **Judah Freed** edits The Beacon and serves on the TPNHA board.

Thomas Paine News

Celebration slated for Thomas Paine's Birthday on January 29

The birth of Thomas Paine was recorded in Thetford, Norfolk, England as January 29, 1737. The Gregorian calendar shifts the date to February 9, yet January 29 is the birthdate cited worldwide.

A 2025 Paine's Birthday celebration on Zoom will happen Wednesday, Jan, 29, at 7 PM EDT.

The special guest speaker will be artist Steve Simon, who will discuss Paine's life and the portrait he painted (right) to honor Paine's accomplishments.

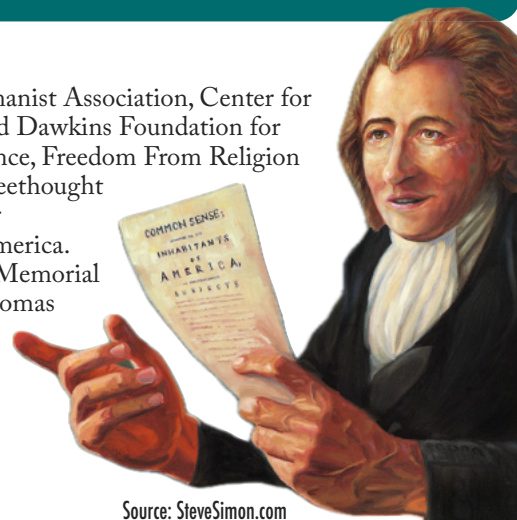
Margaret Downey, the Paine Memorial Association president, will host the event. The presenters scheduled include Rep. Jamie Raskin, TPNHA president Gary Berton and Paine scholar Frances Chiu. Cosponsors' closing speakers will be Robyn Blumner, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Fish Stark, and Steven Emmert. Nnenna Onwukwe will host the final audience Q&A. ▲

Pre-registration for this Zoom event is required.

CLICK LINK HERE > AmericanHumanist-org.zoom.us

Cosponsors:

American Humanist Association, Center for Inquiry/Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science, Freedom From Religion Foundation, Freethought Society, Secular Coalition of America. Thomas Paine Memorial Association, Thomas Paine National Historical Association.



Source: SteveSimon.com



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

TPNHA Membership Dues and 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)

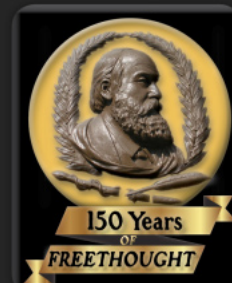
Patron - \$2,500, 1 year (All the above & a set of 2026 six-volume *Thomas Paine: Collected Works*, autographed by the Editorial Board.)



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 National Historical Association thanks our "sister" publication for their leadership.

Visit TheTruthSeeker.net





THE THOMAS PAINE NATIONAL HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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

About TPNHA

The Mission of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association is to educate the world about the life, works and legacy of Thomas Paine.

TPNHA 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.

TPNHA is managing the international project to complete and publish *Thomas Paine: Collected Works*, 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. ▲

The Beacon

January 2025 • Vol 18, No. 6

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



The Beacon is a bi-monthly publication for members of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association

The Beacon from TPNHA extends the 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)
Gary Berton

Frances Chiu
Adrian Tawfik

To see print layout, in PDF menu select: View > Page Display > Two-Page View.

Board of Directors

Gary Berton,
TPNHA President
Walton, NY

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

Scott Cleary,
TPNHA Secretary,
Professor of English,
Iona College
Bedford, NY

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

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

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 College
New York, NY

Greg McMurray
Writer, Paine scholar
New York City

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

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

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

Jonathan Scheick
Professor of Psychology,
Brookdale C.C., clinician.
New Jersey

Edmund Smith
Retired Science Teacher
Connecticut

Adrian Tawfik
Founder and editor,
Democracy Chronicles
Woodbury, NY

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