

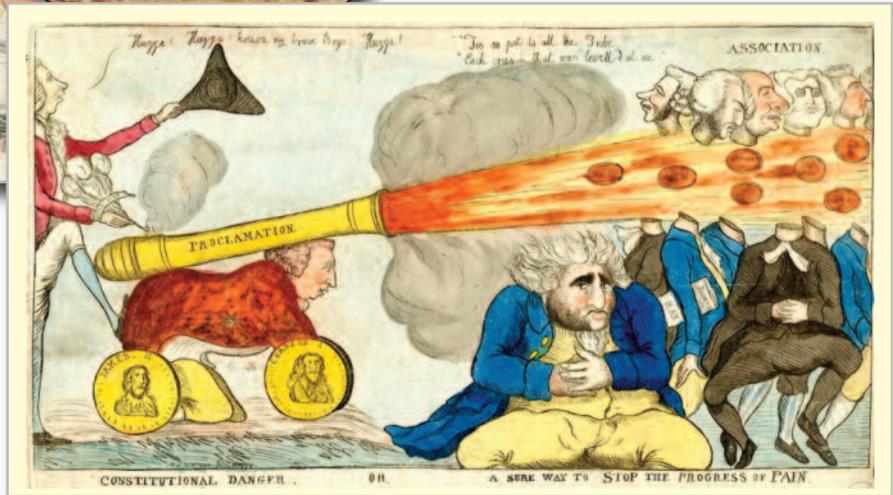
# The Beacon



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THOMAS PAINE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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



## Poison Pens

### The Damnation of Paine in Art

## Thomas Paine at 250

## Exploring the Archives

See page 3 for details of each of these works.



# Poison Pens

## Turning the Corner from Damnation to Praise



### Explore Thomaspaine.org!

The Thetford school Paine attended as a child, the houses he lived in, the prison where he almost died during the French Revolution—these are just a few of the many images available in TPHA’s growing Paine galleries. Since launching our new site last year, we have been busy adding to our collection of Paine images, making it a unique resource that is fascinating to explore.



Paine's school



“Thomas Paine Portraits” contains all the famous portraits of Paine plus a few you may never have seen, like this sketch of Paine (on the left), likely by his friend, the English poet William Blake.

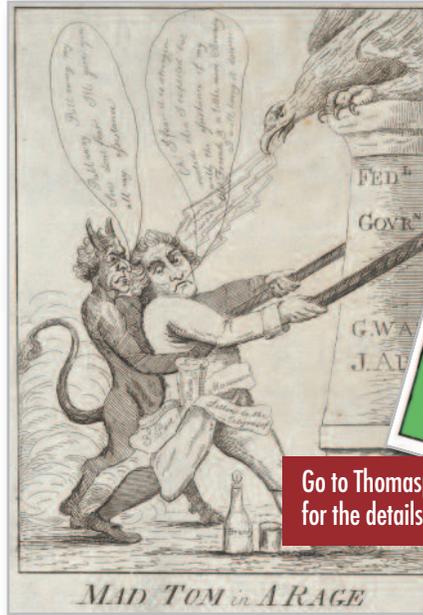
“Thomas Paine Monuments” offers all the statues and memorials that commemorate Paine, including those in the planning stages. Visit all six visual galleries to view Paine’s life and legacy in a unique new way.



A monument in Lewes, UK

*A detail from James Gillray’s 1798 political cartoon depicting Paine as a corseted crocodile clutching his “Defence of the 18 Fructidor.”*  
Pforzheimer Collection, New York Public Library

The British Museum



MID TOM in A RAGE

Go to Thomaspaine.org for the details



Illustration from Polyp's PAINE

By Adrian Tawfik

The TPHA collections offer viewers a vivid journey of how Paine’s public image has morphed over the last 250 years. Although there were some positive portrayals of Paine early on, his many enemies, both in Britain and America, eventually took aim at him with vitriolic, often violent imagery, seeking to defame him and attack his allies to quash his message of representative democracy and reason.

The gallery overflows with 1790s cartoons and sketches attacking Paine that were funded by the British monarchy. Created by famous political cartoonists like James Gillray, James Sayers, and Isaac Cruikshank, these images are often vicious, showing Paine’s execution and torture, or portraying him as a demon or in the form of a variety of beasts.

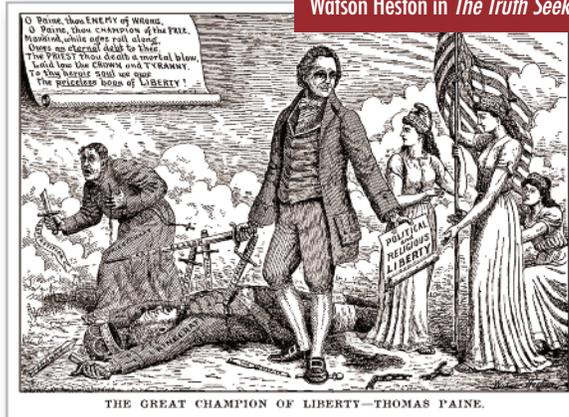
Curated from the British Museum, the Library of Congress, the American Philosophical Society, the New York Public Library, Truth Seeker magazine, the Musée Carnavalet in Paris, and others, our Paine editorial cartoons gallery is a colorful visual carnival. Although we are adding images on an ongoing basis, at this point we have over 130 Paine cartoons arranged in chronological order, spanning from the earliest we have discovered so far, made in 1777, all the way up to a sample of cartoons from Polyp’s 2022 graphic novel *PAINE: a Fantastical Visual Biography*.

Continued on Pg. 3



# Poison Pens—Continued from Pg. 2

Watson Heston in *The Truth Seeker*



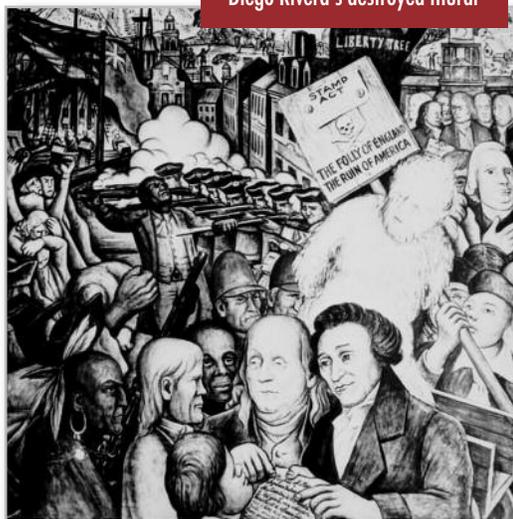
It is a delight to watch new generations of Paine supporters use political art to resurrect his image in counterpoint to the negativity of the 18th century, and, with it, his message. The political cartoons of the *Truth Seeker* magazine's Watson Heston are a

triumph of pro-Paine advocacy that are perhaps without equal. The 1880s illustrations by Joseph Keppler and Adolph Schwarzmamm also reflect the era's optimism and a changing public image of Paine.

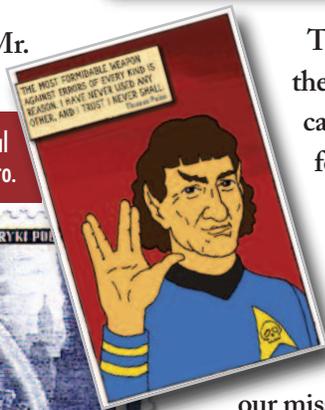
## PAINE'S REDEMPTION

By the 20th century, Paine illustrations turned less poisonous. Instead, we see Paine reflected in glory in a fresco by Mexican painter Diego Rivera's 1933 mural at Rockefeller Center (eventually plastered over by Nelson Rockefeller); a 1938 postage stamp from Poland to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution; and Paine portrayed as Star Trek's Mr. Spock.

Diego Rivera's destroyed mural



Polyp's tongue-in-cheek portrayal of Paine as an iconic cultural hero.



TPHA now has perhaps the largest collection of Paine cartoons and artwork to be found anywhere. Explore the galleries and the ever-evolving landscape of Paine's legacy. If you find other political cartoons or images that our missing from our collections, please reach out to share them with us at [info@thomaspaine.org](mailto:info@thomaspaine.org).

Adrian Tawfik is a TPHA Board Member and founder and Editor-in-Chief of the pro-democracy newspaper *Democracy Chronicles*.

## The Cover Cartoons



*The Rights of Man; or Tommy Paine, the little American Taylor taking the measure of the Crown...*

A 1791 cartoon depicts Paine as a poor tailor making "Revolution Breeches." — National Portrait Gallery, UK

*Tom Paine's Nightly Pest*



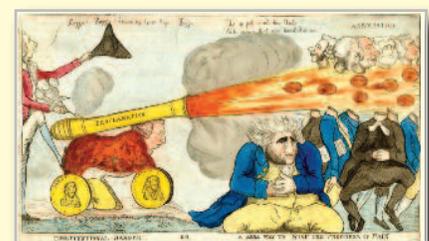
Paine dreams of judicial wigs, a dungeon and a gibbet. A pocket of his coat, which lies across the bed, contains a copy of *Common Sense* except that the alternative title is "Convincing Reasons for Britons turning Sans Culottes."

— The British Museum

*May the Knave of the Jacobin Club Never Get a Trick*

Tokens depicting Paine's death were widely distributed in England in the late 1790s.

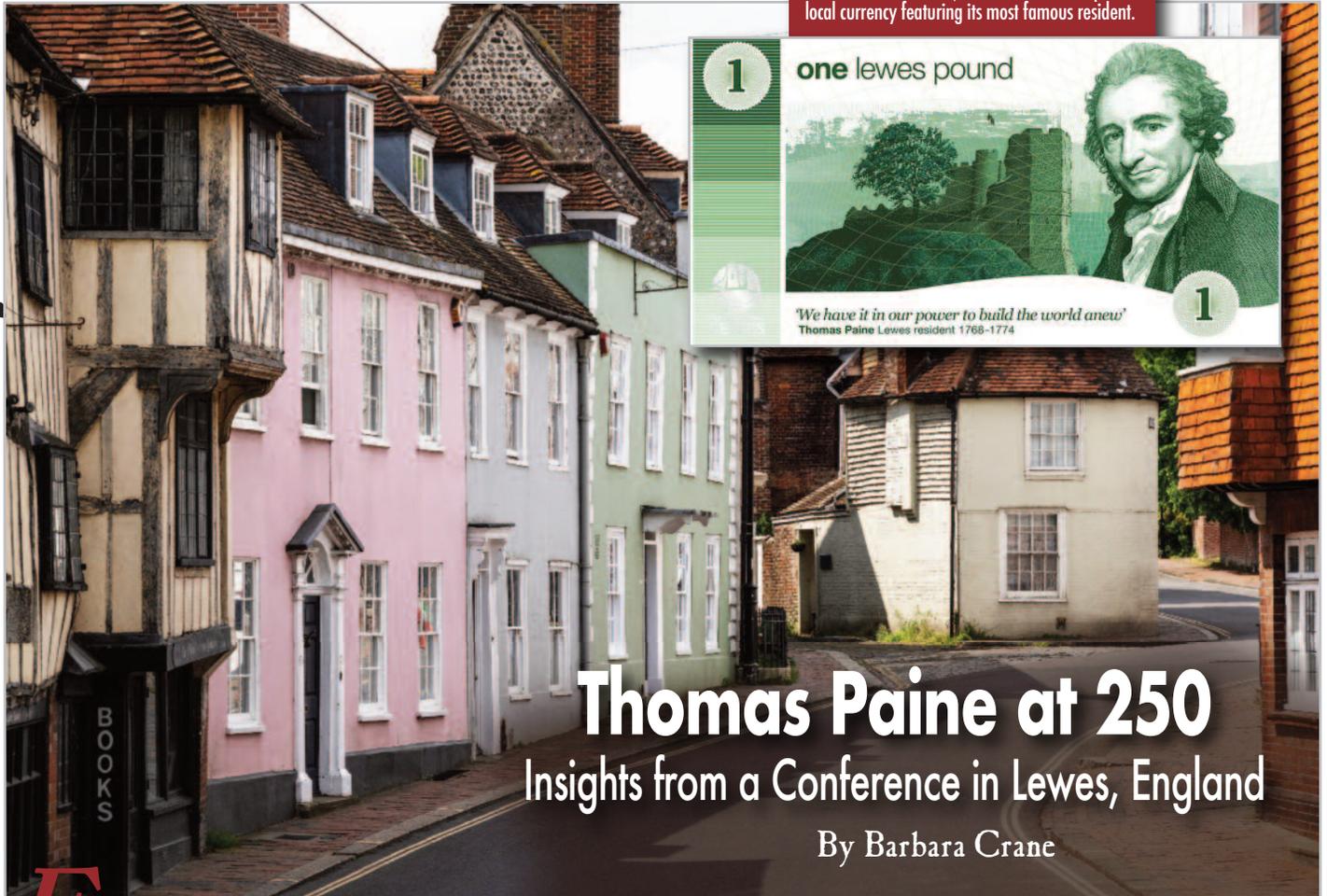
— The British Museum



*Constitutional Danger, or, a sure way to stop the progress of Pain*

A 1792 satirical print by William Dent shows William Pitt the Younger firing a cannon mounted on the back of George III from which issue balls of 'Reform' that decapitate Paine and his supporters.

— The British Museum



From 2008 until 2025, Lewes had its own special local currency featuring its most famous resident.

1

one Lewes pound



'We have it in our power to build the world anew'  
Thomas Paine Lewes resident 1768-1774

1

# Thomas Paine at 250

## Insights from a Conference in Lewes, England

By Barbara Crane

**F**rom 1768 to 1774, when Thomas Paine sailed to America, he lived in the town of Lewes, England. In his honor, a conference was organized in Sussex, January 9-10, 2026, by **Thomas Paine: Legacy; the University of Sussex; and the Iona University Institute for Thomas Paine Studies**. About 40 scholars and Paine admirers met to share research findings and explore Paine's life, work, and global influence, with a special focus on the 250th anniversary of Paine's seminal work, *Common Sense*. They were also treated to tours of the charming medieval town of Lewes, and enjoyed experiencing part of the conference inside Bull House, Paine's residence while in Lewes, now open regularly as a historic site and an aspiring "center for democracy."

This article seeks to capture the major themes and only partially summarizes the wealth of information and wide range of perspectives exchanged during two full days of formal sessions and informal discussions. A number of presentations drew attention to the mutual influences between Paine and radical thinkers

supporting working-class and suffrage reform movements in England, Scotland and Ireland in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Presentations also addressed the widespread influence of Paine's ideas not only in England and America, but in France, Spanish America, and beyond. Starting with the German translation of *Common Sense* for the German community in Philadelphia, other Paine writings were thereafter translated into many languages. Participants often alluded to *Common Sense* as a living document, one that encourages people to think for themselves, evokes emotional responses, and deserves to be heard orally, as it often was when it was first published.

Presenters recognized Paine's writing as a call to action against tyranny and dogma not only in 1776, but throughout the 19th century and one still relevant for our time. Paine was praised as a political philosopher who was practical in his approach to institutions and the work of good government, which he regarded as essential to protecting freedom and achieving equality.

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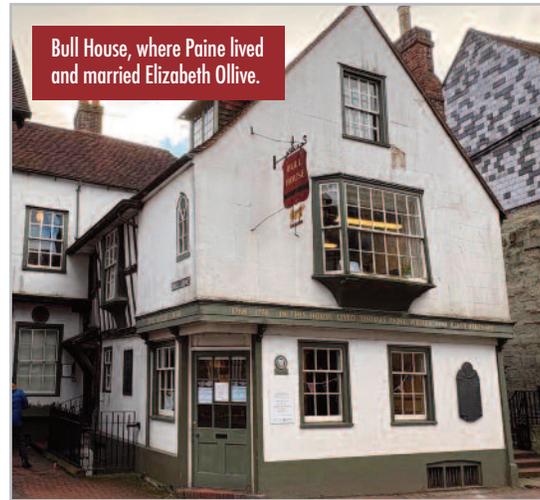
## Paine at 250—Continued from Pg. 2

Gregory Claeys, Professor Emeritus of History at Royal Holloway, University of London, and general editor of Paine's new *Collected Writings*, delivered a keynote presentation entitled "Thomas Paine and Three Revolutions That Weren't." The presentation highlighted Paine's roles in reform efforts in America, Britain, and France. Paine's ideal was a universal democratic republic with limits on concentration of power and executive authority. He envisioned a forerunner to the modern welfare state, governed by a popularly elected legislature. As Claeys concluded, Paine's ideal was unfulfilled in all three cases. In America, he was particularly disappointed by the Federalist constitution adopted in 1787.

### PAINE AND THE JUNIUS LETTERS

A second keynote presentation was made by the respected political scientist and historian Danielle Allen, James Bryant Conant University Professor at Harvard. Like Claeys, Allen affirmed that Thomas Paine was forming his ideas and beginning to write eloquently long before he arrived in America. She described her discovery of a close relationship between Paine and Charles Lennox, the reform-minded Duke of Richmond who lived near Lewes. Her research on Lennox will be published later in 2026 under the title *Radical Duke: How One Aristocrat—and the American Revolution—Transformed Britain*. Among other things, she looked closely at the Junius letters: seditious attacks on the British monarchy that called for universal male suffrage, published during the period from 1768-1772. The actual

authors were kept secret, constituting a mystery for centuries. Allen has concluded that the Junius letters were underwritten by the Duke and that Paine was a key author of many of the letters, recruited by the Duke to advance his agenda. Allen reached her conclusions on the roles of the Duke and Paine in the Junius letters independently of the editorial team assembling Paine's new *Collected Writings*, which also recognizes Paine's hand in the Junius letters based on computer-assisted text analysis.



**Paine's ideal was a universal democratic republic with limits on concentration of power and executive authority.**



Panelists included TPHA's Scott Cleary, with Josh Dight, Anthony Kalume, and Robert Wolff. Shown below are keynote speakers Gregory Claeys, Danielle Allen, and TPHA's Paul Myles.



Paul Myles, member of the TPHA Board, reported on his continuing research into Paine's early writing while in Lewes. Various presentations also examined Paine as a man with many gifts and a social being with varied friendships and influential networks throughout his career. His writings tell us little about his views on gender relationships. As one presenter described, he married a local Lewes woman and schoolteacher, Elizabeth Ollive, in 1771. Although their marriage dissolved in 1774, both the content of the separation agreement and the evident mutual respect between the two may provide an indication of Paine's relatively enlightened perspective on women.

The enthusiasm and engagement of younger scholars in Lewes suggests that scholarship about Thomas Paine and exploration of the context and impact of his work will continue to yield new insights well into the future.

Barbara Crane is the TPHA Vice President and a political scientist. The author thanks TPHA Board members Scott Cleary, and Paul Myles, also in attendance in Lewes, for their review of this article.

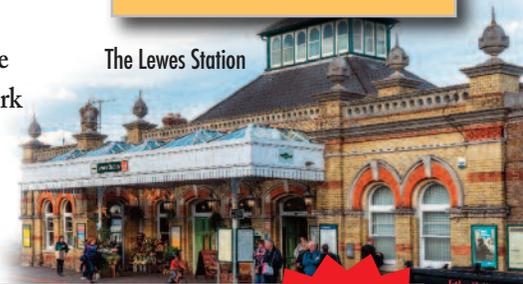
# The Lewes Railway Project

By Paul Myles

**B**ack in 2020, I was asked by the South Coast Rail Partnership (SCRP) if I could create a poster exhibition about Thomas Paine in the four waiting rooms in Lewes Railway Station. I was keen to tell the story of two men, Thomas Paine and General Gage, Britain's Commander-in-Chief in North America at the outbreak of the American Revolution. Both had strong links to Lewes, Paine residing here from 1768 to 1774 and the family seat of the Gage family at Firlie just five miles East of Lewes. Covid struck and froze the work but I recently suggested that we could mark the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence by resurrecting the project.

The posters were hung in late December 2025, this time badged as a TPHA project with my having recently joined its Board. As I hung the posters, public engagement was immediate! People kept asking questions while I hung them! It was very heartening as I had no idea that it would work at all. The challenge was to give enough information without too much detail. Judging from the initial responses I think we got the right balance.

Paul Myles is a TPHA Board member, former director of the TPSUK, Paine researcher, and author.



## From Humble Servant to Friend

By Frances Chiu

Like many other writers in 18th-century England, Thomas Paine used the familiar valediction "Your humble and obedient servant," or some variation thereof, throughout the 1770s and much of the 1780s. To Richard Lee, for instance, he would close with "Your affectionate humble servant"—and to Benjamin Franklin, "yr Obliged and Affectionate Hbl servant." There are some exceptions such as in a letter to Timothy Matlack on October 30, 1777, which is signed with just Thomas Paine—probably because it was an explanatory message enclosing other letters.

However, Paine's valedictions changed over the course of the late 1780s. In a letter to Kitty Nicholson Few, he simply signed off with "Thomas Paine"—but only after writing "God bless you all! and send me safe back to my much loved America!" A letter to Jefferson closed with "I remain yours affectionately." In 1790, Paine continued to sign his letters to friends with variations on "I am my dear friend yours very affectionately." For more formal occasions, or addressing those in more elevated positions whom he respected, he would still use some variant of "your humble servant" such as in a letter to George Washington of October 26, 1789, where he signed it "your most affectiona. obedient Hbl servant."

For those to whom he bore some resentment or hostility, he omitted any valediction, adding only his signature. We see this in a letter to John King (1793), Gouverneur Morris (1794), and Daniel Isaacs Eaton (1795). But Paine's most famously assertive valediction can be seen in his letter to Home Secretary Henry Dundas (of Britain), reproaching the latter for issuing a proclamation that sought to suppress "seditious" writings. Here, Paine signs his letter with great aplomb, writing "Not your obedient humble Servant, But the contrary, THOMAS PAINE." A far cry indeed from his earlier valedictions! Later in life, a new signature appeared: "Yours in friendship." Less courtly, but so much more heartfelt!

*I am  
your Lordship's  
much obliged and  
Obedient Humble servant  
Thomas Paine*

*Yours in friendship  
Thomas Paine*

EXPLORING  
HISTORICAL  
ARCHIVES

# A Winter Recap All available to watch on our YouTube Channel



New Rochelle Mayor Ramos-Herbert shares a passage.

## READING COMMON SENSE

On January 10th—the 250th anniversary of the publication of *Common Sense*—TPHA hosted a communal reading of selected portions of Paine's transformative pamphlet by the New Rochelle community. Readers included students, elected officials, civic leaders and—through video links—international and national Paine enthusiasts. Highlights included:

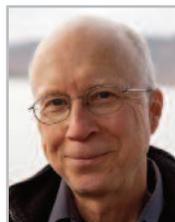
Readings by New Rochelle Mayor, Yadira Ramos-Herbert; New Rochelle City Council Member Sara Kaye; Westchester County Legislators Terry Clements and Judah Holstein; N.Y. State Senators Nathalia Fernandez and Shelley B. Mayer; N.Y. State Assemblypersons, Amy Paulin and Steve Otis. These readings focused on words that speak to the ongoing debate on the rights and role of citizens in a democratic republic. TPHA Board member Lisa Burton moderated the event, and readings were followed by a discussion with TPHA President Gary Berton.

## TOM PAINE'S WAR

Award-winning author and historian Jack Kelly spoke about his new book, *Tom Paine's War*, examining the power of words and belief, and how both speak to America's current crisis.

The Declaration of Independence will be 250 years old in July, but two essays of that era appealed even more directly to Americans' feelings. *Common Sense* offered a straightforward argument that upended the fraud of monarchy and dismantled the idea of aristocratic privilege. Kings had no divine right to rule—they could only rule themselves. Paine turned a rebellion over representation and taxes into a true revolution.

Having inspired patriots to declare their independence, Paine volunteered as a militia private. He saw George Washington's army suffer grievous defeats and slogged through the mud with retreating troops to Pennsylvania. There, he wrote *The American Crisis*, the most stirring rallying cry in our history. With Paine's words ringing in their ears, Washington and his men crossed the Delaware River and defeated the enemy at Trenton. The battle reversed the fortunes of the campaign and of the revolution itself.



## DR. CARVALHO RETURNS

In January, Professor Daniel Gomes de Carvalho of the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil

presented recent work on Paine in both Lewes, UK, and subsequently in New Rochelle. He analyzed the evolution in Paine's thought from a commitment to unicameralism (governance by a one-house legislative body) as reflected in *Common Sense*, to his later support for bicameralism. Paine came to believe that having two legislative bodies to debate policy issues and build consensus would provide the best safeguard for democracy, provided that the legislatures were equivalent to one another in representing voters (thus no upper and lower houses of parliament for example).

Gomes de Carvalho argues that this evolution was not a conservative retreat. Paine believed in universal suffrage and working for economic equality among all people, without requiring private property as a prerequisite to vote. Not only should there be no monarchy but there should be popular sovereignty without the aristocracy that arises from unequal wealth.



## DR. FRANCES CHIU ON RIGHTS OF MAN

Dr. Frances Chiu, a TPHA Board member and Associate Teaching Professor at The New School in New York, addressed the themes of hereditary privilege and government along with the concept of welfare and public assistance for the elderly in Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*. Even though Paine drew upon many ideas from obscure and not-so-obscure Enlightenment writers in 18th-century Britain, America, and France, he went much further in advocating better living standards and education. Paine was not only the most populist among the American founding fathers, but he made little effort to conceal his working class roots.



