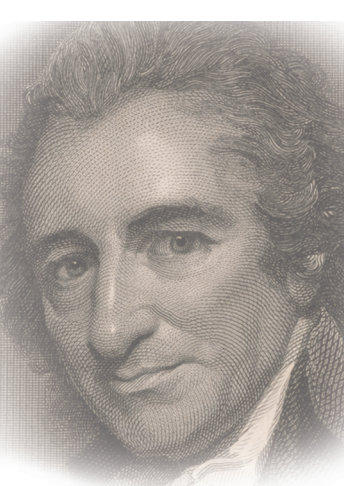


The Beacon

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THOMAS PAINE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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



Paine's First Crisis: Truth or Consequences

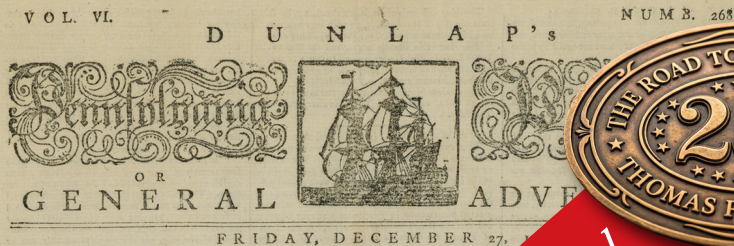
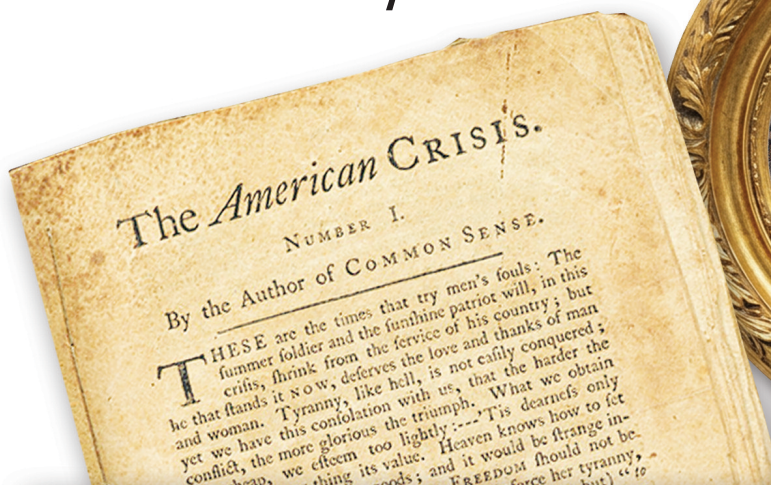
ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

The Birthplace of the Rights of Man

A New Paine Memorial in DC

Thomas Paine: Cyberhero

The American Crisis was front page news in America's newspapers.



Special

Edition

Paine's First *Crisis*: Truth or Consequences

In December 1776, Paine's electric lead, "These are the times that try men's souls," was spurred by the Continental Army repeatedly evading near-death experiences.

By Richard Briles Moriarty

Less than a year after *Common Sense* inflamed patriotic fervor, the thrill of the Declaration of Independence dissipated, and Washington despaired. The Army had evacuated from Brooklyn under cover of fog, escaped from Manhattan Island with serious losses, lost Forts Washington and Mifflin, suffered the capture of thousands of valuable soldiers, and retreated across New Jersey into Pennsylvania. Enlistments were expiring, and a decisive and devastating British victory seemed inevitable. On September 30, Washington railed against militia members in his troops. On November 27 he complained that "the enemy's progress" was checked by bad weather rather than "any resistance we could make." On December 13 he despondently predicted that, absent "speedy recruitment of a new army," the "game is pretty well up."

Paine, with his first *Crisis* as with *Common Sense*, filled the breach. Seeking no compensation and encouraging widespread publication, the first *Crisis* traveled "through the country as fast as galloping horses could carry it" and likely circulated in Washington's camp "within a day of its first publication."

Paine's choice was either telling the truth or consequences that the Republic might fail. He chose truth-telling. In a February 1942 Fireside Chat, FDR quoted the opening phrases. FDR's choice was either telling the truth or consequences that the Republic might fail. He, too, chose truth-telling.

Cold, weary, hungry: the troops were desperate for hope.



Source: Alamy

Paine's writing style was startlingly new, has deeply resonated since, and remains fresh, approachable, and meaningful today. His deceptively simple prose clamored to be read aloud. Winter soldiers were warmed by campfires and by Paine's praise for those who fight for the Cause in its hour of need.

From Campfire to Fireside

After Pearl Harbor, the prospect that the Allies would prevail against fascism was more tenuous than that America, in late 1776, would prevail against Britain. FDR, in a Fireside Chat, enlisted the whole nation to transform itself into an "Arsenal for Democracy" in ways that no one else would have deemed feasible. Appropriately, he closed with phrases from the first *Crisis* that similarly made the presumably impossible seem inevitable.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0Stpw1TYH0>



FDR's fireside chats similarly galvanized Americans.

MYTH-MAKING

Though the core of Paine's first *Crisis* was truth-telling, it is encased in myths. The general public "knows" two "facts" about Paine:

- 1 - Paine's first *Crisis* was written on a drumhead; and
- 2 - Washington, before crossing the Delaware on December 25, 1776, ordered the first *Crisis* read to his troops. Each "fact" is a persistent evidence-free fable.

Continued on Pg. 3

The First Crisis *Continued*

In 1950, a statue in Morristown, New Jersey, carved into stone the myth that Paine wrote the first *Crisis* on a drumhead, with his rifle at the ready. That stirring story is contrary to all reliable evidence. The myth inspired the statue, one of only two full-length statues of Paine in the United States. Paine himself said that the first *Crisis* essay was composed entirely in Philadelphia.

The drumhead myth resonates because it is slightly tethered to reality. With firm writing surfaces scarce in army camps, drum heads doubled as desks. On October 28, 1776, an anonymous journalist—often assumed to be Paine—said he was using “a wooden pen on a drum head.” But no records suggest any other association between Paine and drumheads, much less his using them as writing surfaces. On close inspection, the potential that Paine wrote the first *Crisis* essay on a drumhead vanishes into mist, with concrete evidence firmly to the contrary.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

Paine related a detailed account in a January 1779 letter stating that he left Washington’s camp in early December 1776 for Philadelphia and, upon arriving, persuaded a printer who had suspended operations to reopen and publish his planned pamphlet. Paine said that he then “sat down,” in Philadelphia, “and in what I may call a passion of patriotism wrote the first number of the *Crisis*.” Paine’s own words, two years after publication, declared that he was not in Washington’s camp when he authored the essay, much less writing on a drumhead.

Paine’s January 1779 account is tempered by a later statement. Thirty years after publication, he responded angrily to a James Cheetham accusation that he avoided danger during the Revolution by asserting that he began the first *Crisis* while Washington’s Army retreated “from Fort Lee” and “continued writing it at every place we stopped at.”

Strong support for the 1779 version derives from circumstantial evidence and its relative proximity to publication. Paine’s calm and considered 1779 recollections were more detailed and reliable than his angry contentions three decades after the event. Reconciling these recollections, however, one could conclude that Paine jotted down notes while traveling with Washington’s Army. Alternately, Paine created the first *Crisis* in his mind while with the Army, occasionally observing the effects of his phrases in conversations with colleagues, and committed it to paper as a coherent whole in Philadelphia.

It stretches credulity to conclude that Paine’s 1779 account was erroneous and that, remaining in Washington’s camp, he sent a completed manuscript to Philadelphia for publication. Independent sources confirm that—as the 1779 account said—Philadelphia printers suspended operations in fear of a British invasion. Had Paine remained at Camp, what would have instigated any printer to reopen in order to print the first *Crisis*?

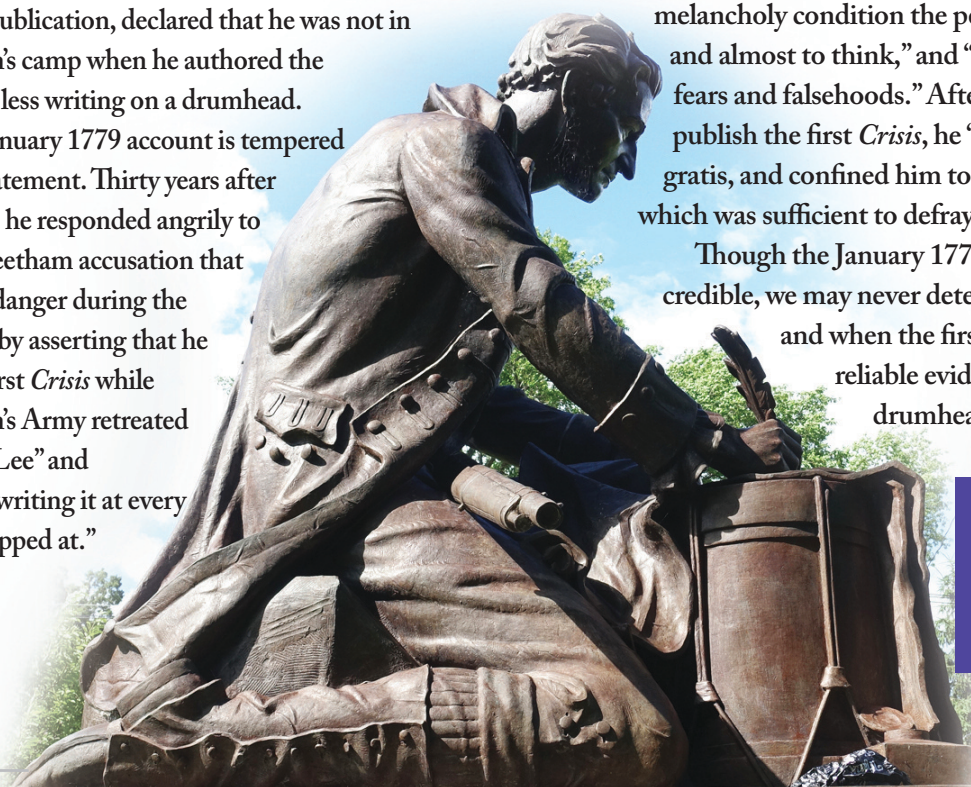
The most probable scenario confirms Paine’s courage and stamina. Paine recalled leaving Washington’s Camp for Philadelphia a few days after December 8, 1776. With the Camp then at Trenton Falls, on the west bank of the Delaware, walking or riding to Philadelphia was at least a 30-mile journey, and Paine likely traveled a circuitous route to avoid capture as his first *Crisis* gelled in his head.

He arrived in a nearly deserted Philadelphia with Congress in Lancaster with residents expecting an imminent British invasion. Paine perceived “the deplorable and melancholy condition the people were in, afraid to speak and almost to think,” and “nothing in circulation but fears and falsehoods.” After persuading a printer to publish the first *Crisis*, he “gave that piece to the printer gratis, and confined him to the price of two coppers, which was sufficient to defray his charge.”

Though the January 1779 version is eminently credible, we may never determine with certainty where and when the first *Crisis* was created. Still, all reliable evidence is opposed to the drumhead myth.

Sculptor George Lober’s 1950 Morristown, NJ statue depicts Paine using a drumhead as a desk. It makes for a powerful monument, but not a true representation.

Source: Alamy



The First Crisis *Continued*

A WASHINGTON ORDER?

Similarly mythical is the “fact” that Washington ordered the first *Crisis* read to the troops. Washington, an aloof micro-manager, favored written orders that often dwelled on minutiae, such as three different written orders addressing the right of a Major to wear a sword. Of his carefully preserved written orders, those issued during December 1776 were silent regarding Paine and the first *Crisis*. Neither Paine nor his works were mentioned in any written Washington order during the entire Revolutionary War.

Expanding the inquiry to Washington's letters and other papers, Washington praised *Common Sense* in April 1776 in a private letter. By contrast, no Washington writing mentioned Paine during the year following publication of the first *Crisis* and no writing during Washington's lifetime ever referenced it. Washington only alluded to the entire *Crisis* series (published between 1776 and 1783) once, by implication, in a 1784 letter.

But did Washington issue a written order regarding the first *Crisis* that somehow escaped preservation or, uncharacteristically, issue an oral order? If so, why does no contemporaneous first-hand account hint at any such order? Records confirm that in July 1776, Washington ordered the *Declaration of Independence* read to his troops. Had Washington ordered that the first *Crisis* be read to the troops, some secondary or tertiary contemporary evidence would surely signal that action.

Benjamin Rush left Philadelphia on December 20, 1776 to join Washington's camp as a volunteer physician. Did Rush give the first *Crisis* to Washington upon arriving? Rush did not say so, instead reporting that Washington was in deep despair even as he prepared to cross the Delaware. More democratically than the top-down myth, did copies of the pamphlet circulate in the Camp? Did soldiers consume and repeat Paine's prose, pass copies amongst colleagues, and absorb his inspired phrases as they mentally prepared for the daunting tasks of crossing the ice-choked Delaware River and waging the Battle of Trenton?

These two myths about Paine and his first *Crisis* resonate because they are slightly tethered to reality. Whatever occurred may have originated in garbled retellings of actual events: an anonymous journalist reporting use of a “drum head” in October 1776 and Washington ordering the Declaration read to his troops in July 1776.

Richard Briles Moriarty, a TPHA Board member, has often written about Paine. He is the author of a forthcoming book, *Paine Portraits on Trial: Why the Laurent Dabos Attributions are Wrong and Why That Matters*.

MORE MYTH-MAKING

Historians repeatedly state that the first *Crisis* was published on December 19, 1776 in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. But the *Gazette* suspended operations throughout that month. All evidence indicates the essay was first published as a pamphlet and only later reprinted in newspapers.

In 1895, William S. Stryker wrote that during the Battle of Trenton, soldiers cried out “These are the times that try men's souls.” Paine's opening lines becoming a battle cry—while appealing and even likely—is another unverifiable myth.

TELL THE TRUTH

As in 1776 and 1942, the choice is either telling the truth, or consequences that the Republic might fail. Will we choose truth-telling? The opening phrases of the first *Crisis* are as relevant now as 250 years ago:

THESE are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated....

Read the entire first *Crisis* at <https://thomaspaine.org/major-works/the-crisis-i/>

Marie's Crisis Cafe

The building at the location where Paine died in Greenwich Village, 59 Grove Street, was reportedly a brothel in the 1850s and a “boy bar” in the 1890s. In 1923, the Greenwich Village Historical Society installed a plaque to honor Paine. In 1929, Marie DuMont, a French citizen, created

a restaurant/speakeasy named *Marie's Crisis Café* in honor of Paine. She commissioned a WPA project—etched glass murals—depicting the American Revolution on one side and the French Revolution on the other. For many decades, it's been a gay bar specializing in showtunes. One may envision Paine smiling and raising a glass.



Memorializing Paine

Long-Overdue Recognition on the National Mall

By Margaret Downey

More than two centuries after Thomas Paine helped ignite the movement for American independence, Congress has taken an important step toward giving him the recognition many historians believe he has long deserved.

The Thomas Paine Memorial Association (TPMA) welcomes the introduction of the *Common Sense 250 Act of 2026* (H.R. 9600), legislation sponsored by Representatives Jamie Raskin (D-MD-08) and Victoria Spartz (R-IN-05). Once enacted, the bill will authorize a memorial honoring Paine in Area I of Washington, DC's monument core: an honor reserved for individuals whose contributions to the United States are of "preeminent and lasting historical significance."

The legislation arrives as the nation commemorates the 250th anniversary of its founding and the 250th anniversary of *Common Sense* and the first *Crisis*. Paine's words helped inspire the birth of the United States, yet he remains one of the few major founding figures without a memorial in the nation's capital. For many supporters, the absence of a memorial to Paine on the National Mall has become one of the nation's most significant historical omissions.

Representative Raskin emphasized the historic significance of the legislation, saying, "On the 250th anniversary of the publication of *Common Sense*, our legislation finally brings the great Tom Paine from the attics and libraries of history to a place of shining prominence on our National Mall, establishing the dazzling national memorial he deserves." Representative Spartz said, "As we celebrate America's 250th anniversary, we remember Paine's timeless words, 'These are the times that try men's souls,' important words that helped rally General Washington's army. Their sacrifices remind us of the price so many Americans paid to secure our freedom: a precious gift we have a solemn duty to preserve."

The Bill is the culmination of decades of effort by supporters throughout the United States and abroad. If Congress approves the legislation, supporters will have up to seven years to complete fundraising, finalize the memorial's design, secure approvals from federal commissions, and construct the monument on an approved Area I site.



AFTER DECADES OF EFFORT...

TPMA has enlisted internationally acclaimed sculptor Zenos Frudakis, whose clay model is seen below. Upon learning that the legislation had been introduced, Frudakis reflected on the significance of the project. "As a sculptor, there are few honors greater than being entrusted with preserving the memory of someone who helped change the course of history. My goal is to create a Thomas Paine who speaks not only to his own time, but to every generation that believes in freedom, reason, and the power of ideas."

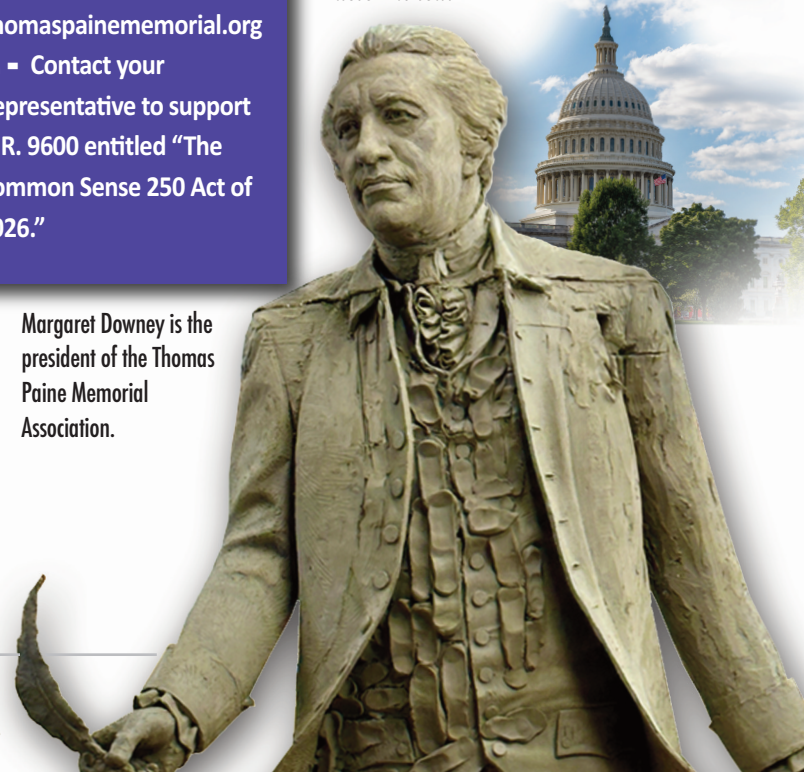
The memorial is an opportunity to restore one of America's most influential founders to his rightful place among the nation's honored architects of liberty. For 250 years, the capital he helped bring into being has had no memorial to him. TPMA seeks to correct that, and Area I is the prestigious location where he belongs. There is no more appropriate time to recognize the writer whose words helped make American independence possible.

YOU CAN HELP!

- 1 - Become a member of Thomaspainememorial.org
- 2 - Contact your Representative to support H.R. 9600 entitled "The Common Sense 250 Act of 2026."

Margaret Downey is the president of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association.

A 7-foot-tall study by Zenos Frudakis captures Paine, pen and paper in hand at his most determined.



Thomas Paine: Cyberhero

By Adrian Tawfik

An Iconic Hero for a New Generation

Thomas Paine has been championed by a surprising new group: young gamers. Paine is a frequent character in enormously popular video games today. Game designers—often highly-educated youth based in college towns like Seattle and Austin—are spreading Paine’s message to a massive, global, and young audience.

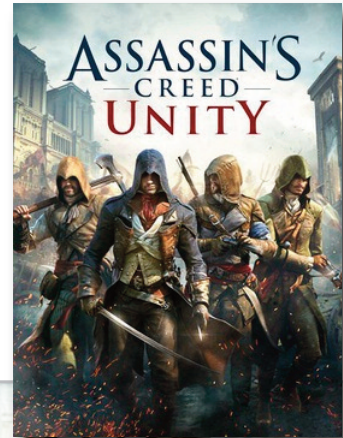
It is estimated that there are 3.6 billion active video game players in a given year, with annual sales at roughly \$300 billion compared to \$40 billion for the global movie box office. Outside of school, hundreds of millions of kids across the world today are being exposed to Paine through video games. But what version of Paine are they being exposed to?

Some of the exposure to Paine is refreshingly straightforward. In the dystopian action role-playing video game *Deus Ex*, set in 2052, Paine’s pamphlet *Common Sense* exists as an in-game book, available for players to read in full within the cyberpunk futurescape.

Paine appears in the game *Assassin’s Creed III* and its sequel *Assassin’s Creed Unity*, a game set in Paris during the French Revolution that immerses players in a world shaped by Enlightenment philosophy. Paine’s ideas about popular sovereignty and the rights of citizens echo throughout the narrative. In one mission called “The American Prisoner,” players must locate Paine in the Luxembourg prison. After a conversation with Paine, you are sent on a quest to recover lost sections of *Rights of Man* and return them to Paine. At the end of the mission, Paine refuses an offer to be broken out of prison and sends players on their way by saying, “Let them do what they will with me.”

Paine has appeared in multiple editions of Sid Meier’s *Colonization* series, estimated to have sold 51 million copies. In the popular sequel, *Civilization IV*, you can have Paine join your team as a recruitable “Founding Father” to inspire “revolutionary sentiment” and “accelerate independence movements” in the world you are building. The benefits of adding Paine to your team reflect his historical role in “mobilizing public opinion” and “legitimizing rebellion.” Also, when Paine enters a player’s “Continental Congress,” their “scientific advances” score increases. Paine is portrayed as a valuable asset.

Set in 2077, the reference to Paine in *Fallout 4* is more playful. A character named Tommy Paine and his friend Brad Franklin—seen stealing rations from the Boston Police—serve as a humorous nod to the two good friends. The post-apocalyptic *Fallout* series is known for its unique humorous critiques of power structures and societal collapse. Referencing Paine, even humorously, reinforces the franchise’s recurring theme: what kind of society deserves loyalty and when is rebellion justified? Paine has a lot to say about these important questions and there is a young audience clamoring for real-life action heroes.



BACK TO THE FUTURE

There are dozens of video games that feature Paine: the mobile strategy game *War of Nations*, the government simulation game *The Political Machine*, and many more. What’s important is the numbers. It is estimated that there are about 3.6 billion active video game players in any given year, including over 1.4 billion in Asia alone: Three billion opportunities to share Paine’s brilliance and originality with an enthusiastic audience.

Adrian Tawfik is the webmaster and Social Media director for the Thomas Paine Historical Association.

Rediscovering the Birthplace of *Rights of Man*

By Ian Harris

Thomas Paine lived in London from 1791 to 1792, residing mainly at No. 7 Upper Marylebone Street, the home of his longtime friend from his days in Lewes, Thomas Clio Rickman and his wife. Paine wrote *Rights Of Man: Part the Second* and published *Letter Addressed To The Addressers* from that house. But where exactly was the house? Is it still there?

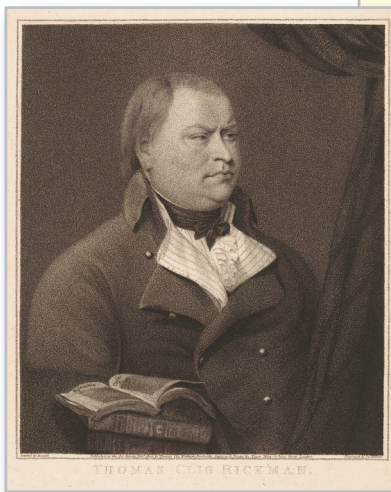
What is agreed is that the street numbering has changed since 1792. Barb Jacobson, former secretary of the Thomas Paine Society UK, wrote an excellent article about this topic in 2010, isolating the site to an apartment block at 148 New Cavendish Street. Jacobson wrote that earlier writers who claimed the house was located at 154 New Cavendish Street were in error, unfortunately so because 154 is one of the few 18th century houses remaining.

A FAMILY MEMORY

While doing a bit of family genealogy, I entered the fray. About 125 years after Thomas Paine lived at No. 7, my grandparents and uncles moved to No. 4 Upper Marylebone Street. My father was born in that house in 1919. As a child, I remember my father pointing out the Rickman house. When I saw Barb Jacobson's article and resolved to visit New Cavendish Street for the first time in 50 years, eyeball logic, combined with my limited knowledge of 1937's renaming and renumbering, suggested that 154 was correct—148 was an error.

Searching the electoral rolls from 1935 and 1939 offered proof of renaming and renumbering. Almost every house had occupants who spanned the changes. The confusion stemmed from a series of 1792 maps with many houses not labelled. The relevant map shows three unlabelled units at the eastern end of the block, placing No. 7 at 148 New Cavendish Street. But it is clear from the renaming and renumbering in the 1930s that the three houses Harwood left un-numbered were actually 1, 2 and 3 Upper Marylebone Street. An early 19th century walking guide was in accord with my numbering.

Next, I investigated the archive of Howard de Walden Estate, a property estate that dates from 1715. Their archive contained documents that including plans drawn up circa 1800, as the basis of lease books. That numbering accords with my hypothesis.



A Poet's Advertisement (July 4th 1791).

THOMAS CLIO RICKMAN

Takes this method, respectfully to inform his numerous friends, acquaintances and the public that he has entered into business, and to hand them his card...

....No. 4, Upper Marylebone-Street, London, Thomas Clio Rickman, Bookseller and Stationer...

The mystery truly started to unravel when I found an article in the October 26, 1926 *Worthing Herald* republishing a historical extract from the paper's June/July 1791 edition. Not No. 7, but No. 4. Something twiggled in my memory. I'd seen reference Rickman at No. 4 before.

In Jacobson's 2010 article, her perceived misidentification was a letter from Rickman to Joshua Reynolds: *From Thomas Rickman, No. 4 Upper Marylebone Street, July 19 – 1791*. Both of the No 4 Upper Marylebone Street references were in July 1791. All subsequent written references to the exact address (October 1792 being the earliest) say No. 7. I took a deeper look at the history of the Horwood Plan. The first page of the Horwood Plan, including Upper Marylebone Street, was mapped between October 1790 and June 1792. Horwood had not made a mistake, but a diligent record of the state of affairs at that time. The three un-numbered units on the north-east corner of that street were presumably still under construction. A visit to the Westminster Archive to examine the rates books for the Parish of St. Marylebone confirmed my theory, reflecting the yearly changes as the property moved from not listed, to being labelled No. 4 and finally as No. 7.

So there you have it. Evidence that the house was briefly No. 4 but soon became No. 7 Upper Marylebone Street, before finally becoming 154 New Cavendish Street in the 1930s. Today, it is a coffee shop. Paine probably would have liked that.

In July 2025, I wrote an open letter to the TPHA and English Heritage and have applied to install an English Heritage Blue Plaque at 154 New Cavendish Street. English Heritage, the group that manages historic monuments in England, are very receptive and are investigating the evidence. With any luck, there will soon be a new monument to the life and works of Thomas Paine in London.

Ian Harris is a London-based journalist and historian.

A Special September Event

REDISCOVERING THOMAS PAINE:

What New Documents Reveal

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19 AT 1 PM

Join members of the international Editorial Board behind the newly released six-volume *Thomas Paine: Collected Writings* (Princeton University Press) for a discussion of groundbreaking new discoveries about Paine's life and work. Speakers include Editor-in-Chief Gregory Claeys (University of London), along with Gary Berton (past TPHA President) and TPHA Board Member Scott Cleary (Iona University). The collection adds roughly 200 newly attributed works and 180 newly discovered letters to Paine's

known writings—revealing him as an active voice in British political reform years before he ever set foot in America in 1774. Hear how these findings are reshaping our understanding of Paine and his enduring legacy.

WHERE: In person at the Thomas Paine Memorial Building, 983 North Avenue, New Rochelle, NY. Also available via Zoom – register at thomaspaine.org

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See our new
updated exhibit
panels when you
visit the building.



...OR view the new
panels at
thomaspaine.org



IMPORTANT
ANNOUNCEMENT

The Gary Berton Award FOR Thomas Paine Scholarship

The Thomas Paine Historical Association (TPHA) announces an annual award in honor of Gary Berton, the President Emeritus of TPHA. The award will be presented each year to a college or graduate-level student who submits an article, book chapter, essay, or thesis featuring original scholarship related to Thomas Paine.

CRITERIA FOR THE AWARD INCLUDE:

- **ORIGINALITY**— addressing a subject related to Paine's writing and legacy that has not been addressed or has been less well-developed previously
- **DEPTH AND QUALITY OF RESEARCH**—and evidence underpinning the conclusions
- **QUALITY OF WRITING**—The writing may have been previously published or should be suitable to submit to a scholarly publication. Submissions may also be considered for publication by TPHA in *Studies in Thomas Paine* or *The Beacon*.

SUBMISSIONS ARE DUE FEBRUARY 1, 2027.

Please send to info@thomaspaine.org with "Gary Berton Award Submission" in the subject line. The award of \$500 will be announced each year on Thomas Paine Day (June 8th).

THOMAS PAINE

of Paine

COLLECTED WRITINGS

VOLUME V — 1758 to 1772

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SCOTT CLEARY, CARINE LOUNISSI

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Barbara Crane • Frances Chiu
Judah Freed • Richard Briles Moriarty
Adrian Tawfik

Our mission is educating the world about the life, works and legacy of Thomas Paine. We were 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. The TPHA relies on funding from people like you! We welcome any and all contributions and look forward to sharing new discoveries in this all important 250th anniversary year! Visit: www.thomaspaine.org

THE TRUTH SEEKER is the world's foundational source of freethought information since 1873: longer than TPHA has existed. The publication was the main force behind our formation in 1884. Learn more at TheTruthSeeker.net.



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Florida Veterans for Common Sense

An all-volunteer nonprofit advocate for veterans inspired by Thomas Paine to defend democracy, liberty, equality, and human rights.

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