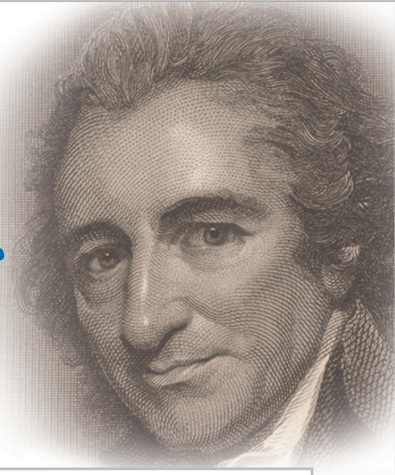
The Beacon



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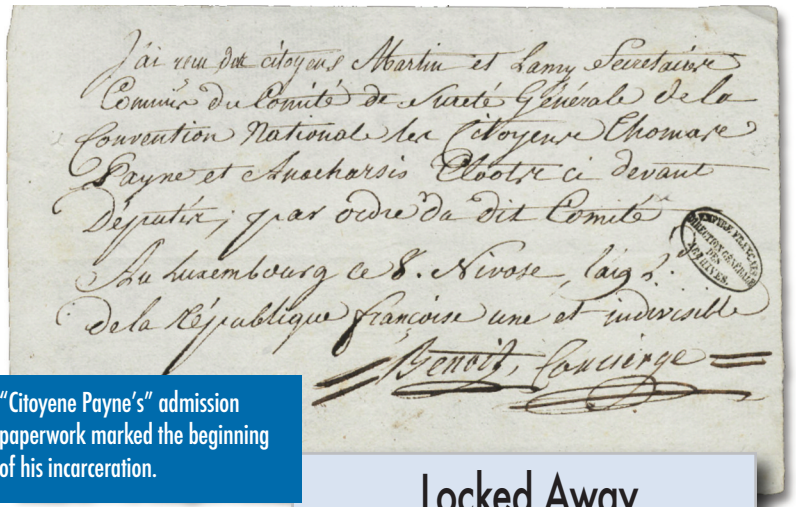
ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Paine's Humanitarian Math • Inside the Age of Reason

Paine in the Luxembourg

For almost eleven months, Paine was locked up in a converted palace that became a chamber of horrors.

By Joy Masoff



"Citoyene Payne's" admission paperwork marked the beginning of his incarceration.

On the day after Christmas, 1793, alone and surrounded by the ghosts of kings long past, and friends newly perished, Paine hastily finished baring his spiritual soul in the final pages of *The Age of Reason*. Solitude and silence were his companions as he wrote, "I trouble not myself about the manner of future existence. I content myself with believing…that the power that gave me existence is able to continue it, in any form and manner he pleases, either with or without this body…."

The next day, unable to bear the thought of being alone with his ghosts, he forced himself to visit White's Hotel—a meeting place for English speakers still in France after the decree against foreigners. Paine joined the few Americans still lodging there for a gallows-humor dinner. At midnight, he decided to stay the night, only to be roused at 3 AM by a pounding on his door. With supreme dread, he opened it to see a heavily armed guard and two agents of the *Comité de Sûreté Générale* who ordered that he be immediately "arrested and imprisoned as a measure of general security." The guards carried orders to take Paine directly to the Luxembourg prison, and demanded to see his papers, but he begged a favor. "I contrived, in my way there, to call on Joel Barlow, and I put the Manuscript of the work into his hands, as more safe than in my possession in prison; and not knowing what might be the fate in France… I addressed it to the protection of the citizens of the United States."

Paine was soon locked away with hundreds of other prisoners, his fate uncertain. He still had a great deal to say about the usurpation of God's universe by people using ecclesiastical garb and fabricated stories to coerce and dominate. Nonetheless, Paine had delivered a piece of his soul to Barlow's keeping, and he took some comfort in knowing that if he were to die, his voice would carry from beyond the grave.

But what happened next?



The Luxembourg

Locked Away

Paine was arrested on December 28, 1793. Ostensibly, his crime was being foreign-born, even though he had been made an honorary citizen of France when he took a seat at the National Convention.

The Luxembourg was a converted palace. It was opulent on the outside, but now its windows were partially boarded up, and its grand rooms were hastily divided into smaller cells that housed anywhere from two to fifteen prisoners. Still, it was one of the nicer political prisons. The warden, Jean-Louis Benoit, received new arrivals—many of them dignitaries—with a degree of grace. Arriving inmates were allowed to socialize in the remaining gathering places, where new friendships saved sanity with "tiny committees being formed in ever narrower circles." For prisoners of a certain status, life could be made somewhat bearable. Choral groups performed, cards were dealt, conversations conducted, and flirtations sometimes led to lovemaking. Fellow inmates described Paine as "cheerful and hopeful" and "the confidant of the unhappy, the counselor of the perplexed." But optimism would only go so far.

Paine in the Luxembourg *Continued*

Paine grew close to many of the inmates only to lose them. Paine's "citizen of the world" friend from the Convention, the Prussian-born Anacharsis Cloots, was beheaded on March 24: one of many who had shared new ideas about a universal world government with Paine. Outside the prison walls, once-colleagues began denouncing their former comrades, and there was a new bogeyman— *le modérantisme*— moderation. As a result, Jacques Danton, Camille Desmoulins, and Paine's friend Hérault de Séchelles, were all accused of "pernicious *modérantisme*" and executed on April 5, 1794, three months into Paine's imprisonment.

Danton, it is said, grasped Paine's hand and said, "That which you did for the happiness and liberty of your country, I tried in vain to do for mine. I have been less fortunate, but not less innocent. They will send me to the scaffold; very well, my friends, I shall go gaily."

LIFE AND DEATH DURING THE TERROR

At first, Paine had pen and paper and the kindly ministrations of Benoit, who sympathetically ran the prison. Paine wrote furiously at night by candlelight, shaping the prose that would become part two of *The Age of Reason*. Some days he shared his work with his fellow prisoners. But word got out about the liberality of the prison, and the inmates were soon segregated by sex. The kindly Benoit was removed, and under the rule of a new warden, things deteriorated. As the months passed, there were no more candles, no more ink. But it did not matter: A few years later Paine recalled,

> "Pen and ink were then of no use to me: no good could be done by writing, and no printer dared to print; and whatever I might have written for my private amusement, as anecdotes of the times, would have been continually exposed to be examined, and tortured into any meaning that the rage of party might fix upon it; and as to softer subjects, my heart was in distress at the fate of my friends." - Thomas Paine

On February 24, Paine wrote to Gouverneur Morris, the American Minister to France. "You must not leave me in the situation in which this letter places me. You know I do not deserve it, and you see the unpleasant situation in which I am thrown…They have nothing against me except that they do not choose I should be in a state of freedom to write my mind freely upon things I have seen." In an understatement, Paine admitted that the two were "not on terms of the best harmony," but asked Morris to honor his position and let Congress know what had happened to him.

Paine and Gouverneur Morris

Morris was well aware of the pain he was inflicting. In a letter to Jefferson, he wrote "I must mention that Thomas Paine is in prison, where he is amusing himself by publishing a pamphlet against Jesus Christ." He went on to say "I am inclined to think that if he remains quiet in prison, he might be forgotten, whereas if he draws attention to himself, the long, suspended axe might fall upon him." Morris justified his refusal to claim Paine as an American, stating that "in view of his birth, his naturalization in this country, and the position he held, I strongly doubt his right to it." The stonewalling continued. In a mid-February, letter to the French Minister, Morris wrote, "Thomas Paine has just asked me to claim him as a citizen of the United States. Here (I believe) are the facts concerning him. He was born in England. Having become a citizen of the United States, he acquired great fame there thanks to his revolutionary writings. As a result, he was adopted as a French citizen, then elected a member of the Convention. His conduct since that time is outside my jurisdiction."



CONDITIONS WORSENED

At first, Paine made the best of it, writing and philosophizing with the other captives, but mentally he was living on a life-or-death precipice, day after day. Sometime in May 1794, Paine developed a persistent fever that steadily worsened to the point that his friends believed he would perish. In a strange bedfellows' twist, ever-social Paine found comfort in friendships with several British prisoners. Among them was General Charles O'Hara, who had stood in for the defeated Lord Cornwallis at the surrender at Yorktown, Virginia. Now a fellow inmate, O'Hara shared his quarters with two British

Continued on Pg. 4

Paine in the Luxembourg *Continued*

physicians, Drs. Bond and Graham. The relationship most likely saved Paine's life.

For several weeks, Paine hovered near death, kept alive solely by the ministrations of his worried prison mates as they forced sips of water and broth across his parched lips. There is a possibly-apocryphal myth—that Paine learned of, believed in, wrote about, and carried to his grave—that he was scheduled to be executed, but was spared when his cellmates left the door to their room wide open to get some fresh air, in the hopes of making Paine more comfortable. In its open state, it had supposedly been carelessly chalk-marked by an inattentive guard: a chalk mark serving as a sign that the prisoners within were to be taken to the guillotine. The next day, with the door closed, no chalk mark could be seen, and Paine survived. Whether true or not, Paine believed it to be true. Aware of his abandonment, perhaps Paine was clinging to the hope that someone—the Supreme Being he still deeply believed in—was looking out for him. Paine's faith was deep-seated yet, tragically for his future legacy, misunderstood.

THREE MONTHS OF PLEADING

On the day that Maximilian Robespierre climbed the steps to the guillotine, France began limping "psychologically, emotionally, and intellectually from trauma toward the resurrection of the Convention," wrote the historian Jonathan Israel. History began being rewritten: Bertrand Barère—the puppetmaster of the Terror's *Committee of Public Safety* and his faction somehow could say (as he later did in the case of Paine's arrest) that they feared for their own lives at the hands of the Robespierrists. Robespierre was recast as the face of the terror, which turned the public's gaze away from Barère and his destructive minions.

On August 16, 1794, a month after Robespierre's execution, Paine received news that James Monroe, now in Paris, had replaced the despised Gouverneur Morris as Minister to France. Gathering his strength, Paine excitedly wrote that "a new minister from America is a joy to me." But freedom remained elusive and Paine's optimism was sorely tested. Over the next three months, he wrote almost weekly to Monroe. Each exchange revealed Paine grappling with feelings of abandonment and a growing despair.

> "During the time I laid at the height of my illness they took, in one night, 169 persons out of this prison and executed all but eight. The distress that I suffered at being obliged to exist in the midst of such horrors, exclusive of my own precarious situation, suspended as it were by the single thread of accident, is greater than it is possible you can conceive." – Thomas Paine

Week after week Paine remained in a fast-emptying prison, with Monroe seemingly helpless to free him. Paine wrote, "I am now almost the oldest inhabitant of this uncomfortable mansion—and I see twenty, thirty and sometimes forty persons a day put in liberty who have not been so long confined as myself—Their liberation is a happiness to me, but I feel sometimes, a little mortification that I am thus left behind."

RECOVERY AND RENEWAL

Could the horror of incarceration and the almost daily confrontations with death be erased from Paine's memory? It would take almost 18 months for Paine to physically recover from the experience, as he was nursed back to health by the Monroes in their Paris home.

Did imprisonment change him? Paine wrote about his ordeal both during and after the event, sometimes with a detached calm and other times with barely suppressed rage. As Paine's biographer, Moncure Conway, described it, "He was now and then in strange juxtapositions." Paine's months as a political prisoner deeply affected him physically, emotionally, and philosophically, impacting both his actions and his writings, but he refused to be silenced. He had once more lived through the "times that try men's souls" but there were still battles to be fought over faith, loyalty and a better future.



Paine's time in the Luxembourg reinforced his faith in a supreme being while shattering his faith in organized religion.

Joy Masoff, a TPHA Board member, has just completed her dissertation with *Thomas Paine and the Company He Kept,* from which this segment is excerpted.

In Paine's Own Words... The Age of Reason



Why the Urgency to Complete *The Age of Reason*?

Paine finished the first part of *The Age of Reason* just before his arrest. In the preface to *Part the Second*, he says he completed it only about six hours before a guard came for him.

One reason Paine chose to write the work was due to the abolition of the priesthood in France during the Revolution. It made the work urgent, lest, as he wrote, "in the general wreck of superstition, of false systems of government, and false theology, we lose sight of morality, of humanity, and of the theology that is true." This passage shows he wrote in protest against the atheism of France's de-Christianization campaign, not only against the abuses of Christianity.

Paine still had more to say on the subject. He wrote *Part the Second* after his release from prison in November 1794, while recovering at James Monroe's Paris residence. In it, he dissected the New Testament.

These passages capture Paine's spiritual essence. Paine was writing in an almost stream-of-consciousness manner, with some paragraphs only a sentence or two long.

A PROFESSION OF FAITH

• I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.

• I believe the equality of man, and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy.

• I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church.

• All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.

• I do not mean by this declaration to condemn those who believe otherwise; they have the same right to their belief as I have to mine. But it is necessary to the happiness of man, that he be mentally faithful to himself. Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what he does not believe.

REVELATION AS HEARSAY

Here is the epistemological core of Paine's case against scripture:

• No one will deny or dispute the power of the Almighty to make such a communication if he pleases. But admitting, for the sake of a case, that something has been revealed to a certain person, and not revealed to any other person, it is revelation to that person only. When he tells it to a second person, a second to a third, a third to a fourth, and so on, it ceases to be a revelation to all those persons. It is revelation to the first person only, and hearsay to every other, and, consequently, they are not obliged to believe it.

CREATION AS THE TRUE WORD OF GOD

Here is Paine's positive affirmation of faith, the heart of his deism.

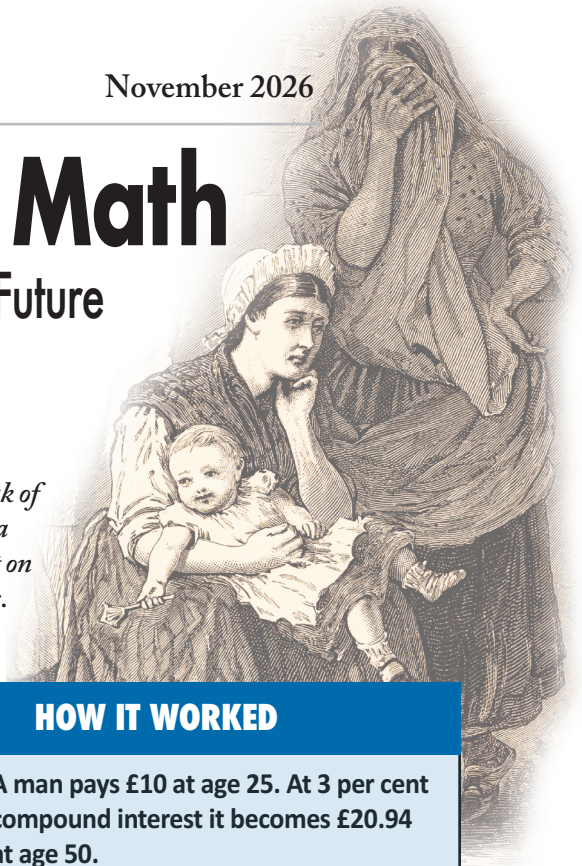
• It is only in the CREATION that all our ideas and conceptions of a word of God can unite. The Creation speaketh an universal language, independently of human speech or human language, multiplied and various as they be. It is an ever existing original, which every man can read. It cannot be forged; it cannot be counterfeited; it cannot be lost; it cannot be altered; it cannot be suppressed. It does not depend upon the will of man whether it shall be published or not; it publishes itself from one end of the earth to the other. It preaches to all nations and to all worlds; and this word of God reveals to man all that is necessary for man to know of God.

Paine's Humanitarian Math

Probability, Kindness, and the Governable Future

By Paul Myles

Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man: Part the Second* (1792) and *Agrarian Justice* (1796) chart Paine's evolution from a political writer to a humanitarian. His ideas were as revolutionary as those in *Common Sense*. With the *Case of the Officers of Excise*, Paine, critical of the status quo, had developed his humanitarian thinking into workable solutions at a national scale. By the 1790s, Paine had become a visionary thinker offering a plan for what would become a precursor to modern-day social security programs. Interestingly, it is possible that the idea was first kindled more than 25 years earlier in the pages of the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser*, Paine's local newspaper in Lewes, England, where Paine lived from 1768 until 1774.



The heartbreak of poverty was a common sight on British streets.

MATH AND MORALITY

In October 1771, an article appeared in the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* proposing life annuities with probability entering the provincial language of practical social reform. Old age and poverty were treated not simply as fate, providence or personal failure, but as measurable risks that could be pooled and altered through institutional action.



Francis Maseres

The article was "A Proposal for the Establishment of Life Annuities in several Parishes in England, for the Benefit of the Infirm and Aged Poor." Its pseudonymous author, "Eumenes," was Francis Maseres: a mathematician, Whig lawyer, former Attorney-General of Quebec and Fellow of the Royal Society. The proposal first appeared in the *London Public Advertiser* on July 22, 1771 and became a 1772 pamphlet for the "industrious poor." A resulting bill passed the House of Commons before failing in the Lords. William Lee, the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser's* editor, devoted two editions to a live national reform proposal.

Maseres drew upon Thomas Simpson's annuity tables, Edmond Halley's mortality observations, and Richard Price's 1771 work on reversionary payments. He was advocating for a deferred pension based upon compound interest and a mortality credit: the capital of those who die remains for those who survive. Maseres adjusted for the longer lives of country inhabitants and considered how parish officers should safeguard the accumulated fund.

HOW IT WORKED	
1.	A man pays £10 at age 25. At 3 per cent compound interest it becomes £20.94 at age 50.
2.	Simpson's table predicts that only 204 of 426 men aged 25 will survive to 50.
3.	The pooled capital gives each survivor £43.72, sufficient for an annuity of about £3.84 a year - £3 16s. 8½d.

OF CHANCE AND FATE

The "Doctrine of Chances" was originally the work of Abraham de Moivre, a French mathematician and probability theorist. Based on that, Thomas Bayes wrote "An Essay Towards Solving a Problem in the Doctrine of Chances," which Richard Price found among Bayes's papers and communicated to the Royal Society after Bayes's death. Maseres expressly cites Price, and scholarship shows that he consulted Price about the annuity proposal.

The calculation printed in the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* is actuarial probability, not an application of Bayes's theorem. Nevertheless, Price supplies a documented personal and intellectual conduit between Bayes's work on reasoning under uncertainty and Maseres's application of probability to human welfare.

Continued on Pg. 7

Paine's Humanitarian Math *Continued*

THE CONNECTION WITH PAINE

Paine was living in Lewes and serving in the Excise when Lee printed the Maseres article. Excise work required practical numeracy, measurement, tables, and exact accounting. Maseres deliberately explained the calculation step-by-step and Paine would have been able to follow its structure regardless of whether he was capable of constructing the underlying mortality tables.

The later parallel between Maseres and Paine is striking. In *Rights of Man, Part the Second*, Paine estimates the proportion of the population above fifty, begins annual support at fifty, increases it at sixty, calculates the national cost, and describes the conversion of accumulated individual taxation into a tontine[1]. Both texts join age, contribution, survivorship, annuity and public administration.

Maseres asked how a prudent poor man could purchase an income to be paid out in old age. Paine asked what society owes that person, as a right, after a lifetime of taxation.

MASERES, 1771	PAINE, 1792
Voluntary payment by individual disadvantaged persons	Provision financed from public taxation
Parish administration	National administration
Prudent purchase of future security	Support asserted as a political right

Paine's advance was therefore not the invention of annuity mathematics, but its conversion into democratic social policy.

OLDER FORMULATION	PROBABILISTIC FORMULATION
Providence or fate	Risk and probability
Individual misfortune	Measurable population pattern
Charity and poor relief	Annuity, insurance and entitlement
Enduring social condition	Alterable environmental circumstance
Relief after failure	Intervention to change future outcomes

[1] A tontine is an annuity shared by subscribers to a loan or common fund, the shares increasing as subscribers die until the last survivor enjoys the whole income.

WAS PAINE INFLUENCED?

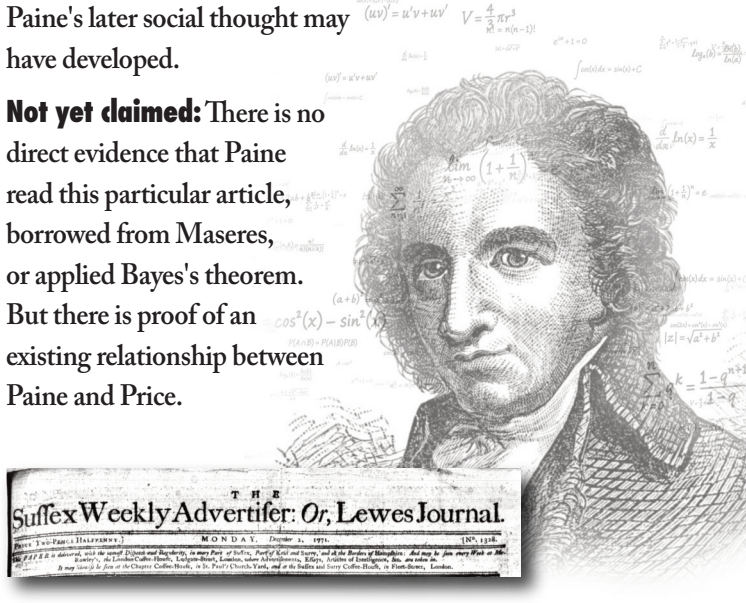
Probability did more than improve prediction. It made human vulnerability governable. Once mortality, poverty and other hazards could be represented as distributions rather than isolated acts of providence, institutions could pool risk and attempt to change expected outcomes. Over subsequent years, this reasoning became foundational to pensions, insurance, epidemiology, public finance and social policy. Populist rhetoric may periodically prefer certainty and intuition, but the machinery of the modern state continues to operate probabilistically.

WEIGHING THE EVIDENCE

Established: The Maseres article was printed in Paine's Lewes environment; it invoked the "probabilities of human life." Price connected its intellectual network to Bayes; and Paine later employed closely comparable age, annuity, and investment scheme reasoning.

Defensible inference: The article formed part of the probabilistic and reformist print culture from which Paine's later social thought may have developed.

Not yet claimed: There is no direct evidence that Paine read this particular article, borrowed from Maseres, or applied Bayes's theorem. But there is proof of an existing relationship between Paine and Price.



Probability transformed misfortune from an inscrutable fate into a measurable risk; social reform then became the deliberate attempt to alter the odds.

Paul Myles, a TPHA Board member, is reading the S*ussex Weekly Advertiser or Lewes Journal* line-by-line for the years 1768-1776, which include six of the years Paine lived in Lewes. The editions and his metadata will be available eventually on Harvard's online library *Curiosity* available free worldwide.

Coming in the New Year

THE FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY'S THOMAS PAINE BIRTHDAY EVENT

FRIDAY, JANUARY 29, 2027
1PM TO 2:30PM EST

A SPECIAL ZOOM EVENT

The Thomas Paine Memorial Association (TPMA) and other cosponsors are planning their annual Zoom celebration of the birth of Thomas Paine. The event will highlight Paine's newly discovered works, identified through sophisticated computer-assisted analysis and extensive historical research.

The program will feature presentations on Paine's literary writings before his arrival in the American colonies in 1774, personal letters he penned, poetry he enjoyed writing, and other manuscripts he signed using a variety of pseudonyms.

A welcome address from Congressman Jamie Raskin and Congresswoman Victoria Spartz will start the program. Hosts of the event are TPMA president Margaret Downey and board member Christopher Cameron. Special guests include Paine researchers Gary Berton (past TPHA President) and TPHA Board Member Scott Cleary (Iona University).

ZOOM LINK TO COME IN OUR JANUARY ISSUE

The Beacon
is a bimonthly publication of the Thomas Paine Historical Association (TPHA)

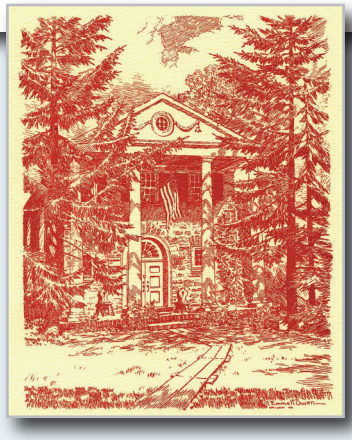
Editor: Joy Masoff •
Editorial Committee: Gary Berton
Barbara Crane • Frances Chiu • Scott Cleary
Judah Freed • Richard Briles Moriarty
Paul Myles • Adrian Tawfik

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 Poetic Paine

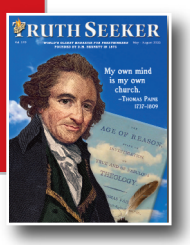
The following lines were written at a tea-table when Paine was asked what kind of woman he should prefer.

Give me kind Heav'n — if this wide world has one —
The girl that loves me for myself alone,
Whole soul disdains the subterfuge of art,
Attends to nature nor belies her heart;
With dauntless freedom to the breast replies,
And owns within the language of her eyes.
Give me a girl that feels the mutual chain,
Nor meanly triumphs in a lover's pain;
Whose reason shakes off ev'ry yoke beside
What nature forms, and gentlest love has ty'd;
Whose feelings strongly rivetted to mine,
Grow to each sense and round my bosom twine.
Give me, — or kindly quench the tender fire
That wakes the throbbing impulse of desire —
Give me the girl whose eyes, with decent ease,
Beam on mankind and unaffected please;
While, strickly faithful to the voice of love,
She scorns all passion but our own to prove.
But this deny'd, may Heav'n in pity give,
With dull insensibility to live:
May cold indiff'rence guide each groveling thought
To senseless apathy 'till Nature's brought;
And when my term of vegetation's o'er,
May earth receive me to revive no more.



In this holiday season, we wish you all the joys of friendship, the warmth of human kindness, a generous spirit, and a loving heart.

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.



TPMA Thomas Paine Memorial Association
Working to build a monument to Paine in Washington D.C.
Thomaspainememorial.org.

Florida Veterans for Common Sense
An all-volunteer nonprofit advocate for veterans inspired by Thomas Paine to defend democracy, liberty, equality, and human rights.
FloridaVeteransforCommonSense.org/Contact@flvcs.us
FLORIDA VETERANS For Common Sense

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