



The Freethought Society News

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20-Year Anniversary of Thomas Paine Day

by Margaret Downey

An afternoon and evening celebration took place on Sunday, June 8, 2014, marking the 20-year anniversary of the City of Philadelphia acknowledging “Thomas Paine Day.” The event was designed to coincide with a traditional American Humanist Association’s (AHA) post-conference activity. The AHA conference concluded at noon that day and shortly afterwards 80 people boarded two antique trolleys to enjoy a 90-minute city tour of Philadelphia. Dressed in colonial-themed costumes, **Jennifer Taylor** and I distributed fans to ticket-holding participants. The trolley tours ended at Dock Street near Thomas Paine Place (a small street located next to the Walnut Street Theatre). The Thomas Paine-themed walking tour started at that point.

Quite a few more Thomas Paine enthusiasts joined the free and open-to-the-public walking tour at 3:15 PM. Colonial-clad volunteers **Alan Gold** and Taylor assisted me. The group grew to about 90 people. This was my very first experience of leading a walking tour and I was glad that I had planned the route, written a script, staged the stops, and purchased a megaphone. Even with the large amount of people in tow, we managed to stay on the tight schedule I had charted.

I began the tour telling everyone that they were standing at a location that was once considered the most filthy section of Philadelphia. My story about the area included information on how the writings of Thomas Paine played a major role in cleaning up the location. His 1807 essay entitled “Of the cause of the yellow fever; and the means of preventing it in places not yet infected with it: Addresses to the Board of Health in America” played a major role in cleaning up the section as well as helping to stop the spread of Yellow Fever.

Soon we walked along the cobblestone ground of Thomas Paine Place and approached the *Common Sense* historical marker. There, actor **Steve Gulick** brought Thomas Paine back to life. I provided some facts about Thomas Paine and Gulick recited excerpts from *Common Sense*.

On the way towards the **Robert Morris** statue at 4th and Walnut Streets, the group was shown where **Dr. Benjamin Rush**, **Benjamin Franklin** and **Thomas Paine** enjoyed many garden walks and discussions. One can only imagine the conversations that took place in the Rush garden. Rush and Franklin encouraged Thomas Paine to write his pamphlet *Common Sense*, using words that appealed to hard-working colonists.

After a short stop at the **Robert Morris** statue, I took the group to the steps of the American Philosophical Society (APS) where I explained its historical importance and interesting connection to Thomas Paine. The world’s largest Thomas Paine memorabilia collection is housed in the APS building. One such item is a white marble bust which is kept in the office of the APS librarian. Because APS is closed on Sundays and I wanted the tour to enjoy seeing the entire bust, I pre-arranged for the bust to be turned to face an open window in that office. A friendly note in the window, placed there by the APS librarian **Martin Levitt**, wished us well.

We moved on to the portrait gallery located in the Second Bank of the United States building. The Thomas Paine portrait is located in the far right corner of the gallery. The artist is **Bass Otis** (Catalog Number INDE11881). The piece is likely a rendition or copy from English artist **George Romney**’s 1792 portrait of Thomas Paine (now missing). The

Romney work was well known in 19th century America through **William Sharp's** 1793 British engraving. American artists frequently copied Sharp's engraving, as Otis may have done in 1859. It is also speculated that perhaps Otis worked from a copy (now missing) by **Thomas Thompson** that once belonged to artist **Charles Wesley Jarvis**, Otis' mentor. The Thomas Paine portrait was given to the City of Philadelphia by **Dr. William Wright** and others in 1859.

The next stop was The Franklin Print Shop. An 18th century print shop is recreated on the site of Franklin's original property, thus the name. Independence National Historical Park rangers give demonstrations of the labor-intensive process of turning out a daily newspaper. Leather daubers stuffed with cotton are used to apply the ink. The hand-operated printing press on display is an original – not a reproduction. Printed products hang from the drying racks along the ceiling. Typesetting desks and various sized letters and numbers are included in the exhibit.

The easy walk back to 4th and Walnut Streets took the group to the 5:00 PM celebration site right on time. The celebration site was a lovely shaded outdoor amphitheater. Volunteers **Tom Melchiorre**, **Dan Hoffman**, **Tom Schottmiller**, **Susan Hibberd** and **Mary Giannone** had been working on the area set-up since 2:00 PM. The end result was lovely and welcoming. A twelve-foot-long exhibition table included a collection of framed and matted Thomas Paine Day City proclamations, a bust of Thomas Paine, free literature, and a variety of interesting colonial paraphernalia. Free water was offered to attendees and the free and open-to-the-public festivities started on time.

The celebration began with the presentation of an original song written by **James Klueh**. The live performance set the tone of the event and the crowd appeared to be excited about learning more about the great patriot and to hear additional music from the talented Klueh. He sang and played his guitar between each speaker on the program. Every song was performed to perfection. In the middle of the festivities, Klueh led the audience in a sing-along. The words to **Dan Barker's** song "The World is My Country" were distributed and everyone joined in the fun.

State Representative Mark Cohen was unable to attend the event. He was invited because his father attended the very first Thomas Paine Day in 1994. In his place, I had the great honor of reading the 2014 City of Philadelphia proclamation which was approved and printed by **Mayor Michael Nutter's** office the week before. The wording of the proclamation recognizes the important work of Thomas Paine and the fact that 2014 marked the 20-year anniversary of the Freethought Society celebrating Thomas Paine Day.

Event speakers included educator and Thomas Paine expert **Gary Berton**, former book store owner **Larry Robin**, and historian **Carol Fireing**. Gulick also entertained the crowd with his excellent portrayal of Thomas Paine.

Berton talked about historical events that happened in the area and highlighted how those events affected Thomas Paine. During his presentation, Berton mentioned that Thomas Paine questioned unethical business dealings of Philadelphia merchant Robert Morris in the late 1700s, then noted that a statue of Morris was erected nearby. Sadly, the city of Philadelphia barely acknowledges Thomas Paine's contributions and honest writing. Thomas Paine statue applications have been rejected since the 1940s and it was only in the last 20 years that a plaza, small alley, and skate park were named in his honor.

Robin presented an overview of Thomas Paine's exciting life, giving details about the many essays, pamphlets and books that inspired revolutionary thinking throughout the world. People in the audience were mesmerized by the story that included information about Thomas Paine's inventions and his close calls with death. Gulick, in the character of Thomas Paine, added exact quotes in various appropriate places in Robin presentation.

Carol Giesler informed us about the great work that was done by the Philadelphia Friendship League to honor Thomas Paine, including the commission of a bust and efforts to include him in public historical displays. The group is no longer in existence, but is best known for having helped to stop the use of Bible verses in the public school system.

At 6:30 PM many people gathered at the City Tavern restaurant, located just a few blocks from the amphitheater. The City Tavern is a replica of a historic 18th century building. Owner and Executive Chef **Walter Staib** cooks a variety of entrees using authentic 18th century recipes, which are served by colonial-clad waitstaff. The Thomas Paine group met in a beautiful period dining room. Called the "most genteel tavern in America" by **John Adams**, it was the favorite meeting place of many of the Founding Fathers and members of the First Continental Congress. It was not difficult to imagine Thomas Paine standing in the room eager for a debate and ready to question tradition, authority and revelation.

After people introduced themselves and I proposed a toast to the legacy of Thomas Paine, Klueh sang a wonderful original song. The food was outstanding, Klueh sang another song after dinner and everyone had a fantastic time. Pictured left are Taylor and I. The photo was taken as we began our hosting duties for Thomas Paine Day. □



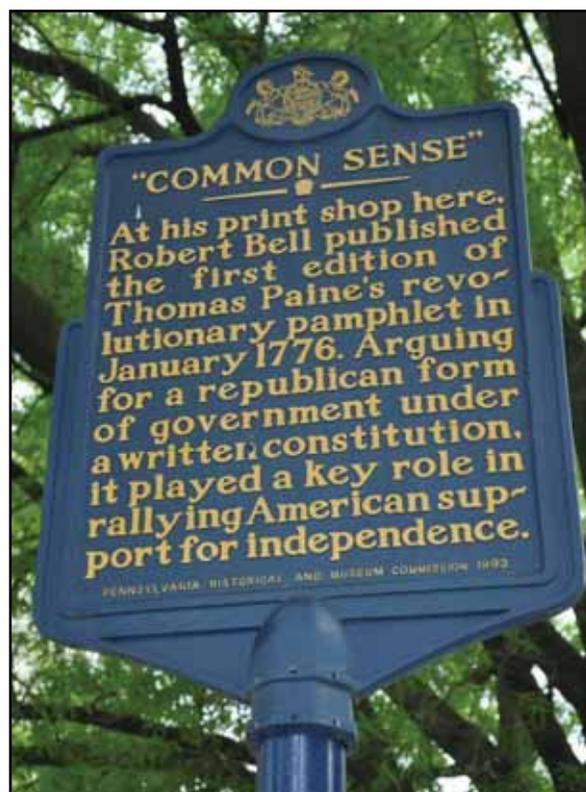
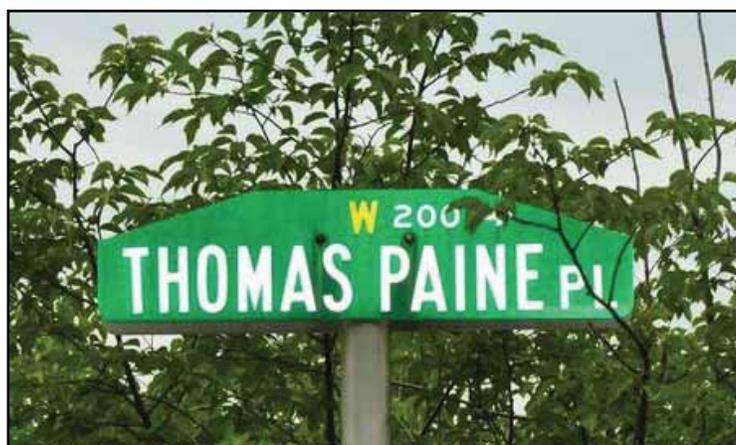
Photos of the 2014 Thomas Paine Day Walking Tour



Pictured left are (left to right) **Jennifer Taylor**, **Alan Gold**, **Margaret Downey**, and **Steve Gulick**. Taylor and Gold helped Downey with the first ever Thomas Paine-themed walking tour that took place on Sunday, June 8, 2014. Thomas Paine died on that day in 1809.

Gulick is holding a copy of Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense*. Gulick has portrayed Thomas Paine for many years and is a wonderful actor.

The photo was taken at the first walking tour stop where Gulick read portions of *Common Sense* to a crowd of 90 people. The stop included an overview of the *Common Sense* historical marker and how the alley next to the Walnut Street Theaters was named after Thomas Paine.



Pictured left are (left to right) **Patrick Colucci**, **Emil Volcheck** and **Dr. Kathleen Wilsbach**.

Volcheck is holding a parchment print that he obtained during the walking tour stop at the Franklin Print office. 18th century style prints are sold there for \$1. Volcheck contributed most of the photos used in the Thomas Paine Day report in this newsletter.

Photos of the 2014 Thomas Paine Day Celebration



Pictured above left is singer and songwriter extraordinaire **James Klueh**. His songs created smiles, laughs and a few tears. Klueh honored Thomas Paine's life by putting a collection of original songs together for the celebration. Some of Klueh's songs made use of Thomas Paine's poetry. Klueh will have a CD available for the 2015 Thomas Paine Day.

Pictured above right are actor **Steve Gulick** (left) and historian **Larry Robbin** (right). Their banter about the life and work of Thomas Paine was educational and interesting. Many in the audience were surprised to hear about the various times Thomas Paine almost lost his life. He overcame serious illnesses, escaped capture for sedition charges, was accidentally overlooked by executioners during his imprisonment in France, and survived a would-be assassin's bullet.



Pictured left is educator **Gary Berton**. His talk provided insight into the type of activism that Thomas Paine pursued his entire adult life. Berton incorporated interesting facts about the immediate area and the crowd was very pleased to learn so much more about the great freethinking hero and patriot Thomas Paine.



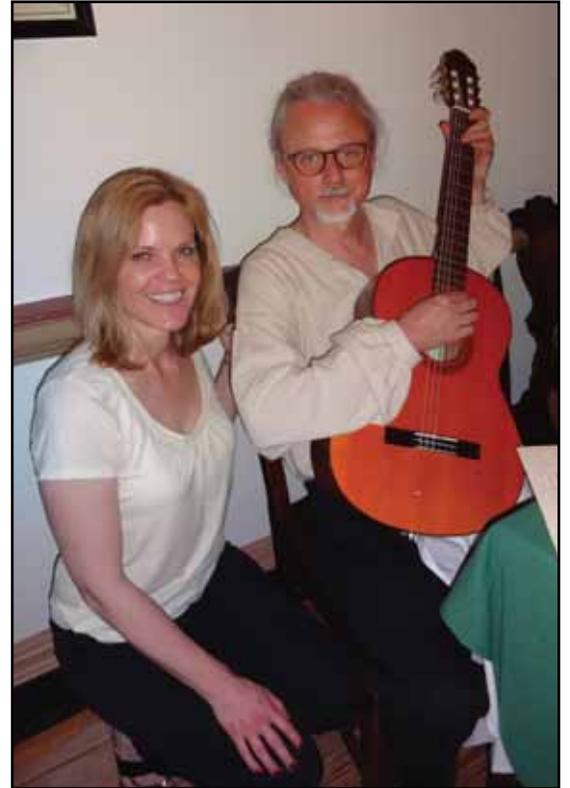
Pictured right is **Carol Giesler**. She enlightened the audience about why Thomas Paine should be honored while dressed in colonial costume.

Photos of the 2014 Thomas Paine Day Dinner



Thomas Paine Day volunteers **Jennifer Taylor** and **Greg White** are pictured on the left, dining at The City Tavern restaurant during the June 8, 2014 evening celebration.

Rhonda Nelson and **James Klueh** are pictured on the right as he prepares to entertain the dinner crowd. Klueh sang a very interesting original song about how Thomas Paine influenced the Irish Revolution. Klueh also made diners laugh when he sang a song about the fire that burned down a tavern frequented by Thomas Paine.



Pictured left are **Gary Betchan** (left) and **Tom Schottmiller** (right) enjoying each others company and a perfectly-cooked colonial style dinner.



Below are Thomas Paine enthusiasts **Ken Sambell** and **Dr. Margaret Thompson**.



At left are **Ron Solomon** and **Carol Solomon** as they enjoy the Thomas Paine Day Happy Hour at the historic City Tavern restaurant.

