



The Freethought Society News

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The Freethought News ezine is published by The Freethought Society (FS) for the nontheist community.

Free subscriptions are available for supporters, donors and like-minded individuals upon request.

Contact FS at:

newsletter@FtSociety.org

Attention writers!

Articles on topics of interest to freethinkers are welcomed and will be considered for publication.

Submit articles (5,000 word count maximum) for review by the FS editorial board.

Please submit articles with a bio and photo, a suggested title, and relevant photos/clip art to:

newsletter@FtSociety.org

FS is an educational nonprofit organization. Donations and financial support are encouraged and appreciated. For donation information, please see the last page of this newsletter.

Articles herein do not necessarily represent official positions of FS.

Tax Number: 23-2738574

2013 State Conference Announcement

The Freethought Society (FS) board is pleased to announce a collaboration with the board of the Pennsylvania Non-Believers (PAN) to co-host the second annual Pennsylvania Atheist/Humanist State Conference, September 13, 14 and 15, 2013. The conference is scheduled to take place at the Embassy Suites located at 9000 Bartram Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19153.

The discounted hotel price of \$130 includes free parking, Internet access, a complimentary daily breakfast, and tickets to a nightly happy hour. All rooms are suites. There is a limit of 5 people per room with a two bed feature. A couch-to-bed pull out is located in the living room area of each suite. Please call the following number to make your reservations as rooms will go fast at this low price:

Embassy Suites Reservation Phone Number: (215) 365-4500
(mention "113" to get the discounted price)
See photos at the Embassy Suites website:

<http://bit.ly/YMSZPc>

The opening of a Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Center at 7:00 PM, on Friday, September 13, 2013 in the grand ballroom of the hotel will kick off the weekend-long conference. Party guests will be entertained with live musical performances by **Aimee Streeter** and **James DeFrances**. DeFrances will be performing Frank Sinatra songs. **Joe Nickell**, author and skeptical investigator of the paranormal, will autograph his books throughout the evening. **Jamy Ian Swiss**, magician and Senior Fellow of the James Randi Educational Foundation, and Nickell will co-host anti-superstition games. A DJ will play anti-superstition themed songs, including Ladder Limbo, for everyone to enjoy.

Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Nurses and Doctors (**Tarina Dark**, **Margaret Downey**, **Shaun McGonigal**, **Tracy Lockwood** and **Tom Schottmiller**) will assist you through an interactive anti-superstition museum. **Magdalena Goss** will attend as the official Miss Fortune Teller. Please see the full-page party advertisement located elsewhere in this newsletter. Please print the flyer and use it to invite your friends, family, and associates. Please post the flyer on community bulletin boards in your town.

The conference continues on Saturday with plenary sessions (speakers and panel discussions) throughout the day, along with lunch and dinner entertainment. Sunday morning will include a plenary session as well. The conference ends at noon on Sunday, but optional post-conference activities are available. A Sunday afternoon group train trip to historical areas of Philadelphia is being arranged. A list of possible Philadelphia tourist attractions can be found at the link below. Conference attendees who are not sight-seeing are invited to attend a three-hour media training workshop sponsored by the United Coalition of Reason (UnitedCoR). The workshop will be conducted by **Fred Edwards**, who is the executive director of UnitedCoR.

The conference fee is \$113. The price includes the post-conference Sunday workshop, a Saturday buffet lunch and dinner, plenary passes, and a Friday night party ticket. Optional pricing is available at:

<http://meetup.panonbelievers.org/events/103500262/>

As of today's date, the speaker list includes **Jamila Bey** (Washington, DC journalist), **Rob Boston** (author and senior policy analyst at Americans United for Separation of Church and State), Representative **Mark Cohen** (Pennsylvania District 201), **James Croft** (representing the Harvard Humanist Community), **David Tamayo** (podcaster and founder of Hispanic American Freethinkers), **Lauri Lebo** (writer), **Tracy Lockwood** (former cult member), and **David Silverman** (president of American Atheists).

Speakers are being added to the schedule every week. Please visit the conference website (see ad below) to view speaker biographies, presentation descriptions and to get updates as more speakers confirm their attendance.

The Saturday afternoon entertainment is drummer, guitarist, composer and podcaster **George Hrab**. He is best known for performing rock, funk, and jazz and for exploring atheist, skeptic and science themes in his work. Hrab has released six albums as a solo artist and his CDs will be available for purchase. He is a national star and resident of

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

The Saturday night after-dinner entertainment is author and comedian **Dr. Joe Wenke** ("The Cultural Arsonist"). His stage show is based on his book *You've Got to be Kidding*, and his humor will set the stage on fire.

But that's not all! Atheist Australian singer and songwriter **Shelley Segal** will rock the house on Saturday night right after Wenke's performance. Segal released her two albums *An Atheist Album* and *Little March* recently in Australia and she will be bringing CDs to autograph and sell throughout the conference.

FS and PAN are seeking volunteers to help with this exciting and unique event. Volunteers will receive a complimentary Friday night dinner, discounted conference passes, a conference DVD, and the thanks of everyone who attends the conference. A list of pre-conference and conference volunteer jobs is located at the conference website. Please consider attending or volunteering. Print the bottom portion of this page and help us advertise now.

save THE DATE

SEPTEMBER 13, 14, AND 15, 2013
PHILADELPHIA, PA



CONFERENCE

Friday	Friggatriskaidekaphobia Party Hosted by The Freethought Society www.friggatriskaidekaphobia.com
Saturday	Speakers, Lunch, Dinner & Entertainment
Sunday	Speakers & Workshops.
Tickets	\$113 (Includes admission to the Friggatriskaidekaphobia Party)

FIND US ON FACEBOOK AND MEETUP:
www.facebook.com/Atheistpa
<http://meetup.panonbelievers.org/events/103500262/>

HOTEL

\$130 per night
Includes free parking, Internet access, complimentary breakfast, and tickets to a nightly happy hour. All rooms are suites. There is a limit of 5 persons per room with a double bedroom feature. A sofa bed is located in the living room area of each suite.

Please call the following number to make your reservations as rooms will go fast at this low price:

Embassy Suites Reservation Phone
Number: 215-365-4500
Mention code "113" to get the discounted price.

For more information, go to:
www.atheistpa.org

DJ, Dancing, Games, Piñata, Mirror Breaking,
Leprechaun Bowling, Ladder Limbo and Prizes.
Interactive Museum of Superstitions.
Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Center nurses and
doctors will award you a Clean Bill of Mental Health.



SPECIAL GUESTS:

Joe Nickell (signing his books)
Magdalena Goss as Miss Fortune Teller
Jamy Ian Swiss
Caricatures \$13.00
Vocalists Aimee Streater and James M. DeFrances
More stars to be revealed soon!

*The 2013
Friggatriskaidekaphobia*
Treatment Center
& Party*

7:00 PM Friday, September 13, 2013

Hosted by The Freethought Society
Admission: \$13; Students and Seniors: \$10;
13 and under: free

More fun events all weekend long!
For more information, visit
www.ftsociety.org

Crudités, Dessert table
Cash bar



Embassy Suites: 9000 Bartram Ave., Phila., PA, 19153
Discount: \$130/night; free parking, Internet, breakfast, happy hour

**Frigga-triska-ideka-phobia is a fear of Friday the Thirteenth*



Honoring the 50th Anniversary of U. S. Supreme Court Case of *Abington School District v. Schempp*

by Margaret Downey

The First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia hosted the 50th Anniversary celebration on Sunday, February 24, 2013 at its lovely downtown Philadelphia location at 2125 Chestnut Street. Hosting this event in the Philadelphia area was most appropriate in that the incident that spurred the 1956 lawsuit took place in Montgomery County, which borders the city.

At that time, 16-year-old **Ellery Schempp** was moved to compose a letter to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) complaining about the daily reading of Bible verses. Also, each morning, the Lord's Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance were recited in each public school classroom. As Schempp grew older, he became very aware of how offensive some of the passages must have sounded to his Jewish classmates.

Schempp had also read **Henry David Thoreau's** essay *On Civil Disobedience* during that time. He was confident that the Constitution was on his side when he penned his letter to the ACLU. Schempp was an honor student, on the track team, and active in his Unitarian church youth group. His liberal parents taught him to think for himself so he was motivated and encouraged to take a bold stance. Schempp also had a wonderful mentor, his English teacher **Alan Glatthorn** so he knew he was not alone in his quest for justice.

Glatthorn started a voluntary Thursday evening discussion group for his Honors English students. The Glatthorn group was an inspiration to Schempp. "It was a wonderful forum for testing ideas. We talked about everything from politics to civil rights to sex. If you made a bad argument, the others would pounce on it. So we really learned which statements would succeed and which would fail, and how to make them politely," said Schempp.

Members of the Glatthorn group decided to protest the mandatory Bible reading and prayer, but one by one, for fear of damaging their college chances or provoking parental disapproval, the other students decided to drop out of taking any action.

"So it came down to me," Schempp said. On a Monday morning he remained seated during morning devotions, silently reading from a copy of the Qur'an he had borrowed.

Schempp explained to his homeroom teacher that, "in good conscience" he could no longer participate in morning devotionals. The teacher immediately sent him to the principal, **Eugene Stuhl**, who was furious. For the rest of that high school year, Schempp spent homeroom periods in the guidance counselor's office, perfecting his algebra skills.

The February 2013 celebration revealed much more information about the Schempp case and those interested in learning more purchased a book written by **Stephen D. Solomon**. *Ellery's Protest: How One Young Man Defied Tradition and Sparked the Battle over School Prayer* is available through Amazon for \$26.95 (hardcover) and \$14.90 (paperback), with free shipping for orders over \$25. The book has a four star rating and is highly recommended to

those interested in learning about this landmark decision on separation of religion and government.

Rachel Karasick, the Unitarian Universalist director of religious education, led a group of children in a little reenactment of the religious words that Ellery had to endure hearing over his school's morning public announcements. The children pretended to be in a classroom and even recited the Pledge of Allegiance. The recreation of what it was like for Schempp was entertaining, sweet, and a disturbing reminder of what it was like at most public schools in the early 1960s.

It was such an honor to be included in the ceremony, and I shared the stage with Schempp, Solomon, **Mary Catherine Roper** (representing the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania) and **Janice Rael** (representing the Delaware Valley Chapter of American United for Separation of Church and State).

Below is my statement.

It's my great pleasure to speak today as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United States Supreme Court decision in *Abington School District v. Schempp*.

Today, we've heard about how significant the court case was to the preservation of separation of religion and government in the public school setting. My comments will focus on the importance of becoming a plaintiff as we battle to maintain the Jeffersonian Wall of Separation.

What Ellery and his family did as concerned citizens of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1956 is quite remarkable. Ellery was only a teenager attending a public high school when he noticed the intrusion of religion on class time. His ethical and socially conscientious upbringing was a factor in Ellery's brave approach to stop Bible readings in the public school setting.

I knew his parents Sidney and Edward well. They were very proud of the Supreme Court decision, but even prouder of how their son stood up for the Constitution and fellow students of all religions. I'm sure Ellery would agree that he owes his values, passion and dedication to do the brave thing to his stellar parental upbringing.

Imagine how strong a person you must be to not only bring a Koran to school, but to also refuse to stand for the Lord's Prayer. According to Ellery, he had no interest in Islam. He, in fact, didn't know anything about it. Ellery only wanted to prove that there were other holy books in the world other than just the Bible.

Repercussions to the family were immediate.

The principal at Ellery's school was a lay minister in the Methodist Church. His hostile attitude became evident when Ellery's applications to colleges were met with dis-recommendation letters.

Ellery's siblings also suffered. Donna and Roger were bullied and physically pushed around at school. They were

called “communists” and members of the family were labeled as “Antichrists.”

Students on the school bus would yell, “Now passing the commie camp” as it rolled past the Schempp house. Several times the family came home to find excrement smeared on the front door. The Schempps received thousands of hate-filled letters.

After his protest and after Ellery wrote a letter to the ACLU outlining why he wanted to stop Bible readings in public schools, he was never again forced to take part in prayers or Bible readings. Ellery, however, was forced to sit in his guidance counselor’s office for the 15 minutes – the time it took for the homeroom class to complete the Bible readings and prayers. He didn’t have to take part in any of the devotions, but he could hear them over the public address system.

Ellery’s parents always stood by their son. After all, not only was he their son, he was also a courageous and thoughtful teenager. During that time a few other parents understood the importance of this fight. They realized that devotional practices in a public school setting truly interfered with their right to give their children a religious education of their own choosing according to their own religious beliefs.

Bible reading and Christian prayers endorsed in the public school setting means that certain taught beliefs could run contradictory to what parents intend to teach their children.

After getting to know Ellery, his family and the details of their ordeal, I knew that his story should be told. I thought that young, thoughtful students could be inspired and motivated to take action when they noticed a violation of separation of religion and government. Five years ago, I contacted Wisconsin playwright **Nicholas Schweitzer** and suggested that he write a play specifically for high school drama teachers to produce.

Schweitzer created a wonderful play about Ellery’s case and it has been brought to life in several high school productions as well as on the stages of community theaters. The play is entitled *One Step Braver*, and it captures Ellery’s courageous stance in the face of adversity.

Will the play inspire another student? Only time will tell. In the meantime, we should all realize that becoming a plaintiff in a lawsuit is no easy task. Some very good potential lawsuits are not pursued because plaintiffs simply cannot be found.

It may come as a surprise to some of you that the longer a separation of religion and government entanglement goes unchallenged the more difficult it becomes to stop it.

I know this first hand as the lead plaintiff who tried to remove an old Ten Commandments plaque from the façade of the Chester County Courthouse. The final decision in the case declared that history could trump the Constitution. You see, no one else had complained for 80 years, so the court concluded the plaque could stay as it must not have been so offensive.

I penned my motto “Do not hesitate to litigate” as a result of the convoluted decision.

While we, today, applaud Ellery Schempp and his entire family for realizing back in 1956 that a concerned citizen

must not hesitate to litigate, others have noticed the importance of this case.

Ellery is the 1996 recipient of the Religious Liberty Award from Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the 2005 recipient of the Religious Liberty Award from the American Humanist Association, each well-deserved awards. Today, we celebrate not only Ellery as a very special person, we celebrate the Constitution! We do so aware that there are many varieties of beliefs, both social and religious.

As the courts continually expanded on decisions concerning prayers at graduation, at football games, and proselytizing in public school settings, we must remember the entire Schempp family and support others like them.

If you can’t step forward to become a plaintiff, please support and encourage those who are willing. Join and help finance efforts by the American Civil Liberties Union, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and, of course, the Freethought Society.

We are not citizens of a Christian nation! We are citizens of a nation that values freedom from religious intrusion. We are one nation under the Constitution!

I close with these important words: Do not hesitate to litigate!



Pictured above are **Ellery Schempp**, (left) and his brother **Roger Schempp** (right) who lives in Pennsauken, New Jersey. Ellery lives in Medford, Massachusetts. Their sister, **Donna Schempp-Rute**, lives in Oakland, California. She was unable to attend the event, but sent her best wishes to all.

Photos of the 50th Anniversary of U. S. Supreme Court Case of *Abington School District v. Schempp*



Pictured left are **Janice Rael** and **Ellery Schempp**. Rael is the Vice President of the Delaware Valley Americans United for Separation of Church and State. She delivered a wonderful speech and highlighted the fact that the court ruling made it clear that parents -- not public school officials -- have the right to direct the religious upbringing of children. The Schempp decision also makes it clear that concepts like force and coercion are completely incompatible with real religious liberty. The decision also stands as a strong rebuke to the idea that the majority gets to rule in matters of religion.

Pictured below are **Ellery Schempp**, **Margaret Downey** and **Stephen D. Solomon**. Solomon's speech provided the audience with some local history. He talked about the Philadelphia Prayer Riots that took place in Philadelphia, Kensington and Southwark in 1844. Death, property destruction and injuries occurred when it was thought that Catholics were determined to have their prayers and their Bible interpretations taught in the public schools rather than the traditional Protestant versions. The event was early evidence that great harm can come to a community when religious neutrality is abandoned.

Pictured below are **Mary Catherine Roper**, the Senior Staff Attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania and **Ellery Schempp**. In her "testimonial" (a word commonly used in Unitarian Universalist service), Roper talked about the historic significance of the court case. She conveyed important legal details about the decision. The Justices ruled that the use of Bible verses and public prayer did not withstand the structures of the Establishment Clause of the Constitution. The prayer and religious exercise did not have a secular legislative purpose. Also the primary effect advanced and encouraged religion -- specifically Christianity.



The Freethought Society's (FS) 2013 Three-Month Activities Calendar

March 28-31

There is no specific Freethought Society event scheduled for the month of March. Instead, FS supporters are encouraged to attend the American Atheists (AA) 2013 National Convention. The convention -- Celebrating 50 Years of Reason! -- will be held in Austin, Texas.

It has been an amazing fifty years since American Atheists started in Austin, with **Madalyn Murray O'Hair**. Now AA is heading back to where it all began.

Come celebrate with AA at the Hyatt Regency Austin (208 Barton Springs Road), just a short distance from downtown Austin. The hotel is also right next to the famous Bat Bridge. The special rate of \$106/night is no longer available. The hotel is sold out.

The overflow hotel is the Wyndham. Call 800-996-3426. The room block name is "American Atheists." There will be a free shuttle running during the conference between the Hyatt and the Wyndham.

See the AA website at: www.atheists.org for a list of presenters, and please note that Freethought Society President **Margaret Downey** is an invited participant.

April 1

The Freethought Society and the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia are pleased to announce the return of **Roy Zimmerman** and his "Wake Up Call" performance on **Monday, April 1, 2013**. At \$18 (students and seniors half price), he's not foolin' around.

Zimmerman's one-of-a-kind performance begins at **7:30 PM** at the Ethical Society's building located at **1906 South Rittenhouse Square**. Zimmerman sings satirical songs -- original songs about class warfare, creationism, same-sex marriage, guns, marijuana, abstinence, Republicans (a lot of songs about Republicans), ignorance, war and greed.

In 2012, Roy and his wife and co-writer **Melanie Harby** traveled 47,000 miles to complete a 50-state tour of all 49 states. (Hawaii was "Omission Accomplished," he says.) "Wake Up Call" is a funny, tuneful and unabashed progressive look at what they saw and heard across America in the Obama Era.

His songs have been heard on HBO and Showtime. He has recorded for Warner/Reprise Records, and he's been profiled on NPR's *All Things Considered*. *Sing Out!* magazine writes, "Zimmerman is a guy on the left skewering folks on the right with rapier-sharp lyrics ... underneath the caustic satire is a man who is surprisingly optimistic."



April 23

Please join us at **7:00 PM** on **Tuesday, April 23, 2013** for **Gary Berton's** presentation, "How Thomas Paine Changed the World." The presentation will take place at the **Ludington Library** in the large meeting room located on the main level. The library address is **5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania**. A SEPTA stop is located across the street from the library.

Thomas Paine is one of the most important political philosophers in human history. His radical ideas changed how people look at government, human rights, equality and justice by empowering the people to free themselves and form their own political goals. Most of his achievements in political philosophy are accepted conventional wisdom today. The rest are still too radical. Berton will highlight Thomas Paine's great wisdom and ideas that were so much ahead of his time.

Berton is the Coordinator for the Institute for Thomas Paine Studies and the Secretary of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association. Berton has been an independent scholar on Thomas Paine for 45 years. He is a professor at Iona College in New Rochelle, New York, teaching the first college course ever offered in the United States on the political philosophy of Thomas Paine.

May 21

Please join us at **7:00 PM** on **Tuesday, May 21, 2013** for **Toni Van Pelt's** presentation entitled, "Affecting Public Policy and Protecting Our Secular Democracy: How it Works and How You Can Influence the Process." She is the Public Policy Director for the Institute for Science and Human Values.

The presentation will take place at the **Ludington Library** in the large meeting room located on the main level. The library address is **5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania**. A SEPTA stop is located across the street from the library.

Scientific thinking is being challenged culturally in the United States today as never before.

One of the major strengths of any lobbying effort lies in its grassroots participation. There are a variety of tactics that are useful and each is employed at strategic times. How does our government work? Why it is important for you to participate? Please attend for an interactive discussion we hope you will find both enlightening and galvanizing.



The Freethought Society (FS) promotes freedom of thought, expression and choice. FS also advocates separation of religion and government. FS publishes *The Freethought Society News* every other month. The newsletter is delivered as an ezine via email and is complimentary to supporters, donors, like-minded individuals and those who are interested in learning more about freedom of thought.

Monthly events take place in many locations across the United States, with emphasis in the tri-state area of Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey. FS activities and services depend on the financial contributions of supporters. Funds may be sent using this form or via the FS website (www.FtSociety.org/donate/). All contributions to FS are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law (Tax ID Number: 23-2738574). Please [donate](#) generously.

Yes! I want to:

become a supporter of FS (Please enclose checks payable to the Freethought Society):

\$30 Individual Supporter **\$35 Family Supporter** **\$20 Student** **\$1,000 Supporter for a Lifetime**

become a "Freethought Star" by setting up an automatic monthly donation to FS from my bank or through

PayPal in the amount of (circle one): **\$5** **\$10** **\$15** **\$20** **\$25** **\$30** **\$35** **\$40** **\$45** \$____ (other per month)

earmark a donation to (insert project, event or committee name): _____

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State and Zip: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone: _____ Cell: _____

Check here if you prefer your sponsorship to remain anonymous.

FS will email a complimentary newsletter to potential supporters. Please provide contact information for anyone who might be interested in receiving an FS newsletter.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Use this same form to bid on the use of the FS St. Croix Cottage.

FS's cottage in St. Croix is available for use the 11th week of each year. In 2014, the week offered will be March 16-23 (Saturday-Saturday). The yearly maintenance fee for the beachside cottage at Chenay Bay Beach Resort is \$900.

The lowest bid FS can accept must meet that cost.

The bid is for a one-week stay in cottage number 6 and does not include travel, rental car or food expenses. If you are interested in placing a bid for the use of this property, please return this form to the address below:

Freethought Society
P.O. Box 242
Pocopson, PA 19366-0242

Email a bid to:

<http://bit.ly/XJfFWX>

For additional information see:

St.Croix@FtSociety.org

