The Freethought Society News

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Contact FS at: Ezine@FtSociety.org

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

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

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Scopes Trial Centennial Report

The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), the Center for Inquiry (CFI), and the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science (RDFRS) Scopes Trial Centennial event took place in Chattanooga, Tennessee July 18–20, 2025. The main conference activities, symposium talks, and receptions were held in the ballroom at The Chattanoogan Hotel.

The three-day program included upbeat musical performances, delicious food service, entertainment, in-person interviews, and a bus trip to Dayton to see the statue of the attorney for the defense **Clarence Darrow**, created by world-famous sculptor **Zenos Frudakis**.

The Friday night welcome reception was enhanced by an invitation from the Centennial event sponsors to attend wearing 1920s style clothing. Quite a few guests participated and the night's activities included an opportunity to move to the popular 1920s dance the Charleston.

After welcome addresses from **Annie Laurie Gaylor** (FFRF co-president) and **Robyn Blumner** (CFI Chief Executive Officer), CFI board member and attorney **Eddie Tabash** spoke about the current situation with the Supreme Court, separation of religion and government, and the troublesome executive orders that have been instituted. The conference theme, "A Century Later — the Fight for Science Education Continues," was exemplified by the first night of speakers.

To lighten the mood given the current state of affairs, comedian **Leighann Lord** took the stage. She had everyone in the room laughing and smiling with her terrific jokes, one liners, and commentary. Pianist **Dan Barker** (FFRF co-president) and vocalist **Tahira Clayton** rounded off the evening with a presentation of 1920s jazz hits.

The Saturday all-day symposium program featured a full slate of panels and talks covering topics such as the Scopes Trial's legal history, the interplay of science and religion in public education policies, the cultural legacy of the Scopes case, and contemporary challenges for science education. Panels included historians, lawyers, scientists, and secular activists. Presenters included author **Katherine Stewart**; author and professor **Christopher Cameron**; CFI director of education **Bertha Vazquez**; author and professor **Ed Larson**; author **Brenda Wineapple**; and the director of Duke University's School of Law Appellate Litigation Clinic **Richard Katskee**.

The afternoon ended with Blumner conducting an on-stage, in-person interview with United States Federal Judge **John Jones III**. He is famous for presiding over the landmark *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* case in Pennsylvania, which declared the teaching of intelligent design in public school science classes unconstitutional.

After a delightful evening banquet, actor **John de Lancie** and playwright **Kristen Tregar** presented their audio play, "The Dover Panda Trial." The cast was composed of local actors and the part of the narrator was played by actor **Marnie Mosiman de Lancie**. In a wonderful, serendipitous twist to the ending of the play, Judge Jones appeared on stage to personally read excerpts from his landmark decision. The audience erupted in a well-deserved standing ovation to show their appreciation for the impressive cast and script.

At 9:00 AM on Sunday, Dr. **Richard Dawkins** presented American linguist **John McWhorter** with the 2025 Richard Dawkins Award. The Richard Dawkins Award was founded in 2003 by **Margaret Downey** (president of the Freethought Society) on behalf of Atheist Alliance International. In 2019 the Award's presentation was moved to RDFRS.

Attendees then boarded comfortable buses for a pleasant ride to visit the Rhea County Courthouse and the Scopes Trial Museum in Dayton. Chairs and a stage for speakers were set up on the lawn of the Courthouse. Gaylor, Blumner, Frudakis, and Dawkins spoke about the importance of the trial, the history of the placement of the Darrow statue, and how the ongoing battle to teach scientific truths in public schools must continue. ◻

Photos from the Scopes Trial Centennial

(All photos on these pages were taken by Freedom From Religion Foundation photographer **Chris Line**.)

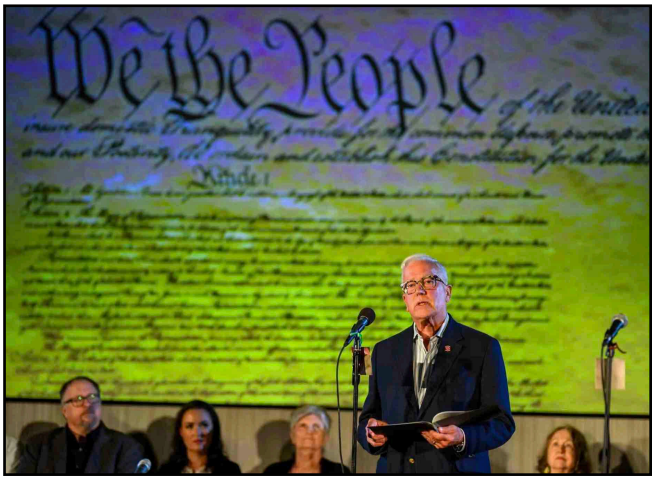
The above group photo captured most of the Scopes Trial Centennial attendees who attended the Friday night reception dressed in the style of the 1920s. Period costumes ranged from formal to casual and everything between.

Pictured left is comedian **Leighann Lord** in her roles as a welcome speaker and emcee. Find more information about her at: https://www.veryfunnylady.com/

Friday night jazz performers **Dan Barker** and **Tahira Clayton** are pictured above.

Annie Laurie Gaylor is pictured above left presenting author **Ed Larson** with the **Clarence Darrow** Award. The award is a miniature replica of the Darrow statue that was installed on the lawn of the Rhea Country Courthouse in 2017.

Robyn Blumner is pictured above right interviewing Judge **John Jones III** about his role in the landmark *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* decision. He is also pictured below left reading excerpts from his decision at the conclusion of the audio play "The Dover Panda Trial."



Actor **Marnie Mosiman de Lancie** is pictured right in her role as narrator of "The Dover Panda Trial." Her husband, **John de Lancie** wrote the audio play with playwright **Kristen Tregar**. Local actors volunteered to read parts highlighting the roles of science teachers, PTA members, journalists, school board officials, and members of the public.

Sculptor **Zenos Frudakis** is pictured left speaking about the perils of creating the **Clarence Darrow** statue.

The 2017 installation was hampered by protests, hate mail, and death threats. The project proceeded in spite of right-wing objections. On the day of unveiling, an armed bodyguard was needed. In the distance, jeers and taunts were heard, but as actor **John de Lancie** pulled the cover from the statue joyous cheers arose and effectively drowned out the naysayers. The day proceeded without incident.

The "READ YOUR BIBLE" sign is a reproduction of what was once placed on the facade of Rhea County Courthouse building during the Scopes Trial in 1925. The sign remains an inappropriate statement for the location.

Another Successful Dragon Con Parade for Skeptics

by Margaret Downey

Skeptics rarely have an opportunity to conduct public outreach to promote critical thinking skills; honor historical figures who questioned authority, tradition, and revelation; support science-based occupations; and encourage analytic reasoning. Labor Day weekend events held in Atlanta, Georgia provides that unique place for Skeptics, however. The Saturday parade has Skeptics walking past approximately 90,000 people who line the two-mile route. Millions also view the parade on television. This year the parade was covered by The CW, the local CBS channel, and Dragon Con TV.

Each year, Dragon Con TV selects a parade entry to highlight and promote separately from the live parade coverage. The Skeptic parade entry was honored to be the highlighted group this year, and a Dragon Con TV crew was assigned to conduct interviews as well as follow the parade participants.

Two "Star Car" convertibles lead the entry right behind the banner carriers. Actor **John de Lancie** rode in the first car. Magician, podcaster, and YouTuber **Brian Brushwood** occupied the second car. The de Lancie and Brushwood interviews can be viewed at the below link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lIEeBONRYWY

The Star Cars were followed by Skeptics representing various science occupations, word play costumes, and a few crowd favorites such as The Truth Fairy and Pastafarians.

"Skeptics in History" banner carriers ushered in the educational part of the Skeptics parade entry. Volunteer parade walkers represented neoplatonist philosopher, astronomer, and mathematician **Hypatia**; German-born theoretical physicist and philosopher **Albert Einstein**; American investigative journalist, sociologist, educator **Ida B. Wells**; mathematician and aerospace engineer **Mary Jackson**; and American computer scientist, electrical engineer, and transgender rights activist **Lynn Conway**.

After the parade participants met in the Skeptrack Room located on the second floor of the downtown Hilton Hotel. When I first took on the job title of Skeptic Parade Coordinator in 2010, the post-parade tradition of providing complimentary snacks and water began. As a way to thanking and honoring all the volunteers for their participation we also record a one-hour session in which I bring individuals onstage to tell us who they are, their parade experience, and much more. The interview sessions are recorded and available on the Skeptics YouTube channel at the below link:

https://www.youtube.com/@SkepticsTrack

I hope you enjoy the parade photos which were taken by me, **Michael Paulis**, and **David Condo**.

Should you want to volunteer as a parade participant in 2026, please contact me at the following email address:

margaret@FtSociety.org

Earmarked donations to help purchase more parade signs, car rentals, and costumes can be made at:

https://www.ftsociety.org/donate/

Prior to **John de Lancie** occupying the Skeptic's Star Car, he posed with Freethought Society (FS) board member **David Condo** and me. De Lancie was pleased to see someone portraying **Thomas Paine** as a "Skeptic in History." De Lancie is an honorary board member of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association. The organization is in the process of placing a memorial to Paine in Washington, D.C. For more information about this effort, please visit the following website: https://thomaspainememorial.org/

De Lancie's parade car was driven by **Keith Schuyler DuPree**. The director of the Skeptrack, **Derek Colanduno** is in the passenger seat, barely visible. He took on the role of escorting de Lancie to the parade site.

Brian Brushwood rode in the second Skeptic's Star Car during the Dragon Con parade. He is best known as the host of Scam School and Modern Rogue on YouTube, as well as the host of the World's Greatest Con Podcast. Learn more about Brushwood at: https://www.shwood.com/

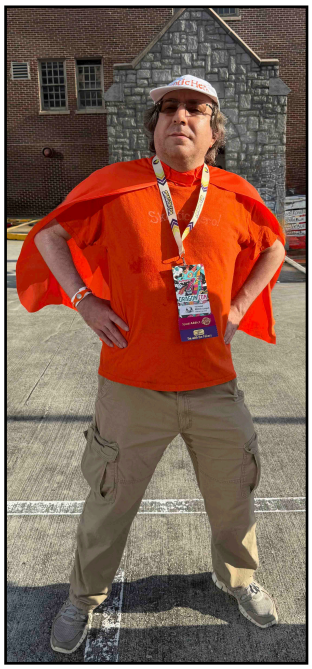
On the driver's side of the Barbie convertible is Dr. **Angie Mattke**. Her car is a huge hit in Atlanta, and she receives waves and honks as she runs her errands around town. Mattke is an avid supporter of the Skeptic parade entry and is the co-director of the Skeptrack. During Dragon Con she also serves as the host of the Skeptrack program, but her work begins with pre-event planning and post-event organizing. Thank you, Dr. Mattke!

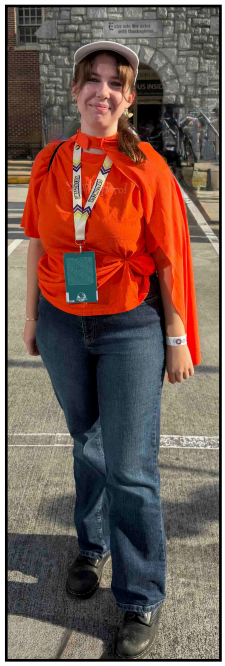
Artist extraordinaire **Celestia Ward** was a passenger in the 2025 Star Car. She designed and painted the T-shirts shown in the photo.

Comedian and producer **Ian Harris** has portrayed **Albert Einstein** for many years. This year his daughter **Bella Rochelle Harris** walked in the parade. The flying pig on the top of her head flaps its wings with a tug of a string. The cute stunt was a big hit and many onlookers pointed and laughed. Harris is an aspiring actor and has perfected many world accents.

Pictured right is first-time parade volunteer **Hannah Hutcheson.**

Carrying the Skeptics in History banner in the background of the photo are **Christa DeWald** (left) and **Heiko DeWald** (right).





Pictured above are two of the five volunteer banner carriers, **Mitchell Lampert** (left) and **Marguerite Xuereb** (right).

Above left **Jon Anderson** is enthusiastically interacting with parade onlookers dressed as the popular character The Truth Fairy. Many parents read the sign and nodded in agreement as they thought about not conveying the Tooth Fairy myth to their children.

Pictured above right getting ready to walk in the Skeptics in History section of the Skeptic's Dragon Con parade entry are (left to right) **Leighann Lord** as **Ida B. Wells**, **Mandisa Thomas** as **Mary Jackson**, **Cathy Miller** as **Madame Marie Currie**, and **Dana Bevan** as **Lynn Conway**. Onlookers cheered and clapped when this group walked by.

Fertile Grounds for a Budding Revolutionary: Following Thomas Paine's Footsteps in Lewes, England

by Daniel Brin

My article about a 2023 visit to Thetford, the village in northeastern England where **Thomas Paine** was born and spent his first 19 years, was published in this ezine. Continuing my goal of following the footsteps of Paine, I returned to England in May of 2025. There his trail led through the town of Lewes, near the country's southern coast in East Sussex. This was where Paine honed his rhetorical skills as well as his revolutionary passion for "making the world new again."

Paine was assigned to Lewes in 1768 as an excise officer for the British crown, collecting import duties on tobacco, chocolate, tea and other goods. At the age of 31 he had spent the previous 12 years trying out a variety of vocations — as a licensed privateer, a corset and sail maker (he had learned the profession as an apprentice for his father in Thetford) and a teacher. During that time he married **Mary Lambert**, who died giving birth to their child, who also died.

Paine first joined the Excise Service in December 1762 and served in the towns of Grantham and Alford before being dismissed in 1765, allegedly for "claiming to have inspected goods he did not inspect." After the service rehired him in 1768, effectively exonerating him of the accusations against him, he rented a room at Bull House (pictured below) on High Street in Lewes. His operations as an excise officer were based at the White Hart Inn, a few doors down the street.

Lewes was well suited for Paine, who enjoyed its vibrant economy and cultural life. The town hosted traveling theater groups and ballroom dances. Its newspaper, *The Sussex Weekly Advertiser,* reported on the comings and goings of important people.

No doubt Paine also appreciated the republican spirit that flourished in the absence of a local nobility or royally imposed civic bureaucracy. As a ratepayer and vestryman in the local parish, based at St. Michael's church across the street from his residence, Paine helped oversee the financial decisions made by parish officers.

Despite his profession as a tax collector — a historically unpopular role in any culture — Paine quickly became a prominent member of his adopted community. He was active in the Headstrong Club, a social group that met in a room upstairs at the White Hart. According to his biographer **Clio Rickman**, Paine was a frequent winner in the club's lively debates on social and political issues of the time. The prize of these informal competitions was the *Headstrong Book* or *Original Book of Obstinacy*, a copy of **Homer**'s writings that the winner could keep at home until the next contest. Rickman also records that Paine excelled at lawn bowling matches on the grounds of the ancient Norman castle that overlooked the town.

Paine's activities during his six years in Lewes brought him yet another distinction — as an organizer of the first union of government workers in history. Working secretly with his superiors in the Royal Excise Office, he composed his first pamphlet, *The Case of the Officers of Excise,* in which the future revolutionary crafted a passionate yet cogent argument for better pay for his colleagues, whose wages had been frozen for a century and, as a result, were often forced into corruptive practices to sustain themselves.

Approximately 4,000 copies of the 23-page pamphlet were printed in 1772, and language from it was used to compose a petition reputed to be signed by almost every one of the 3,000-plus excise officers in England and Wales. Paine was dismissed from the service in 1774, probably as a result of his activities related to the pamphlet and petition, setting the stage for his first voyage to America the following year. The Lords of the Treasury rejected the petition with a single word: "Nil."

There was one more development in Paine's life in Lewes that shouldn't be overlooked here: His marriage to **Elizabeth Ollive**. She was the daughter of **Samuel Ollive**, Paine's landlord at Bull House and owner of the small tobacco and grocery shop at the building's entrance facing High Street. When Samuel died in 1769, Elizabeth inherited the shop (her brothers already had businesses as watchmakers and weren't interested). Paine and Ollive wed at St. Michael's Church in March of 1771, though it's possible they had a prior ceremony at the dissenter chapel at Westgate, immediately next door to Bull House.

The couple continued to operate the shop through Paine's remaining three years in Lewes, but they eventually had their marriage annulled through mutual agreement. Paine waived his rights to Ollive's inheritance and received from her a sum of 45 pounds, which no doubt was useful in financing his forthcoming journey to America. The couple also agreed to never speak ill of each other, a condition they honored for the rest of their lives. Paine occasionally sent his ex-wife money after settling in the New World.

Getting to Lewes is simple: Hop on the train that leaves London Victoria Station every half-hour, starting at 5:59 AM. The ride lasts a little more than an hour and takes passengers

through London's southern suburbs and the farmlands of East Sussex. The Lewes stop is at the bottom of a hill that leads up to High Street. Turn left and you're in the world that Paine called home for six years, 1768-74.

You will suddenly find yourself in front of the White Hart Inn. This hotel and eating establishment, built in the 16th century, was refurbished and modernized in 2024, though the dark wood-paneled entryway, parlor and stairwell retain an 18th century vibe. Feel free to visit the upstairs meeting room that once hosted the original Headstrong Club.

In the back of the White Hart is a bright modern restaurant where I met with **Richard Powell**, a retired diplomat who leads a revived version of the Headstrong Club. This club meets once a month in an upstairs room at the Elephant and Castle Pub, a few blocks away, and is chiefly a lecture series featuring local and visiting experts on topics ranging from national politics to health care to legal reform. While the format sometimes includes some debating, it's not the free-for-all exhibition of wit and "obstinacy" that Paine enjoyed so much.

After lunch, Powell took me on a walking tour of sites of interest to Paine enthusiasts. Sites included:

* **The Ancient Norman Castle**: It was built shortly after William the Conqueror's victory in the Battle of Hastings in 1066. The castle is closed to visitors, but one can look over a low wall and get a clear view of the green lawn where Paine loved to play "bowls." The grounds include a lovely path that leads back down to High Street.

* **The Historical Mural in Lewes' Market Passage**: At this site visitors will find a large mural that runs through the old Market Tower from Market Lane to Market Street. This passage features Paine. The passage depicts Lewes as a town known for its medieval streets and a rich history as a market town.

* **The Rights of Man Pub**: This is a rather contemporary establishment that honors Paine with a name lifted from the title of one of his most important works. Broadsheet replicas of pages from *Rights of Man* are pasted on the ceiling. Unfortunately, this pub did not offer Tom Paine Pale Ale, which is produced at the Harvey and Son Brewery elsewhere in Lewes.

* **St. Michael's Church**: This is the church where Paine and Ollive were officially wed, but the couple also may have had a ceremony across the street in the dissenter chapel at Westgate, next to Bull House. The bride's grandfather, **John Ollive**, was a pastor at the dissenter chapel.

* **The Thomas Paine Statue**: Located below High Street in front of Lewes' public library, the statue was created by **Marcus Cornish** and installed by the Lewes Town Council in 2010. The statue is smaller than I expected. It is about six feet high including its plinth, but it is impressive for its evocation of a man struggling against the forces of oppression as he brought his enlightened ideals to light.

* **The Retail Shop Close to Harvey and Son Brewery**: The brewery is located near a bridge spanning the River Ouse. This is the only place where I could find bottles of Tom Paine Pale Ale during my Lewes visit. While they don't ship this product overseas, a person might consider secreting a bottle in his or her luggage to take home. Just saying.

* **Antique shops**: Most shops are offering Thomas Paine statuettes and knickknacks, including some nice but pricey decorative pitchers.

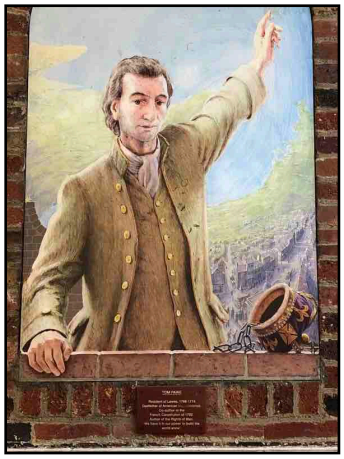
* **Fifteenth Century Bookshop**: A very enjoyable place to browse for new and used books.

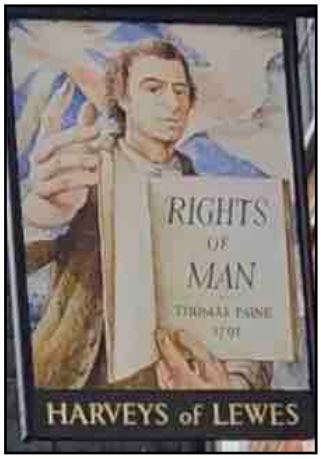
* **The Tom Paine Printing Press and Galley**: A business selling cards, posters and other gifts. The printing press is not connected to Paine, though it was manufactured in his time.

The most fascinating site along my Lewes excursion was Bull House, the 15th century building where Paine dwelled and, with his wife, operated a tiny shop that sold groceries and tobacco. A photo of it appeared earlier in this article. Note that across a lintel spanning the front of whitewashed structure is a legend in gold letters: "1768-1774. IN THIS HOUSE, LIVED THOMAS PAINE, WRITER AND REVOLUTIONARY."

These days, the building houses the head office of the Sussex Archaeological Society, led by its executive director, **Leanne O'Boyle**. O'Boyle is founding director of Thomas Paine: Legacy and she is a fellow of the prestigious Society of Antiquities of London. As an archaeologist, O'Boyle has a passion for understanding the building's history and structure. She pointed out displays of prints, paintings, embroideries and other artifacts relating to Paine, including a mill stone he may have used at the site. Among the rooms was Paine's likely quarters during his stay at Bull House. It was especially thrilling to stand in the small storefront where Paine and his wife sold their wares. At Bull House visitors can purchase a book about Paine's life in Lewes or simply leave a donation.

The visit to Lewes lasted about eight hours, including lunch at the White Hart and stopping to sip on a warm beer at the Rights of Man pub. It was time well spent in a place of significance for historians and others who admire Paine, his ideas, and his important role in world history. □





Pictured above left, **Thomas Paine**, the town's most famous citizen, is depicted in Lewes' Market Passage. The mural was painted by **Julian Bell** in 1994.

The pub sign, above right, hangs above the door of The Rights of Man pub. The artist is unknown, but it appears his artistic style is similar to the mural portrayal of Paine.

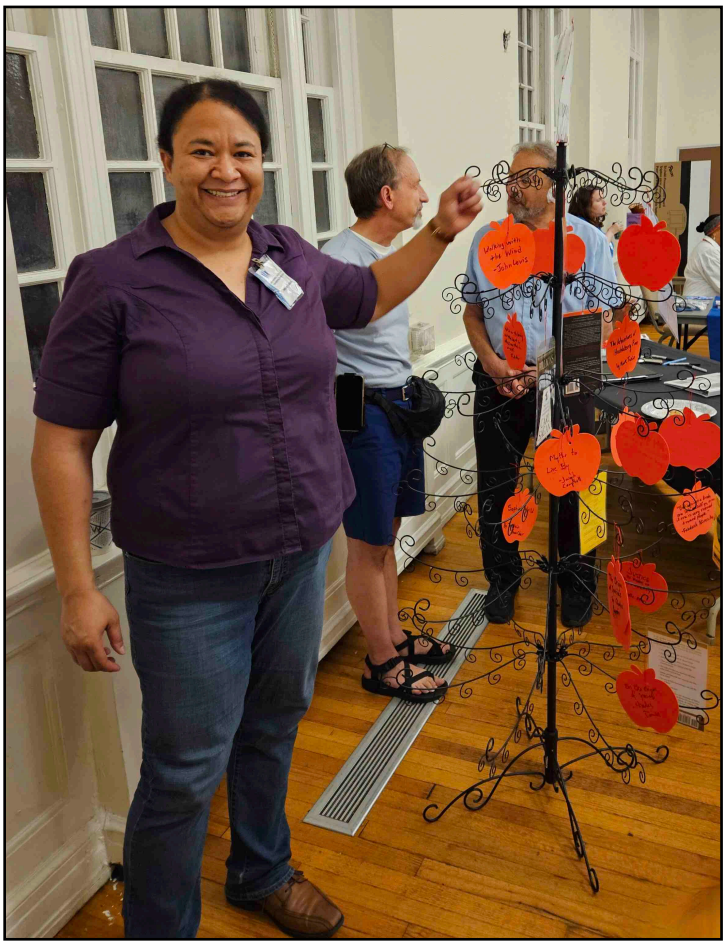
"Speed Deeding" in Philadelphia

by David Condo

On July 25, 2025, Freethought Society (FS) board member **Alan Gold** and I represented FS at a community outreach evening event that took place during the national assembly of the American Ethical Union (AEU). The event was held at the Philadelphia Ethical Society (PES) and organizers encouraged visitors to browse through "stations" in the main assembly hall where local and national groups hosted a variety of "deeds." Each station was a mix of festivities, activism, and networking for all attendees.

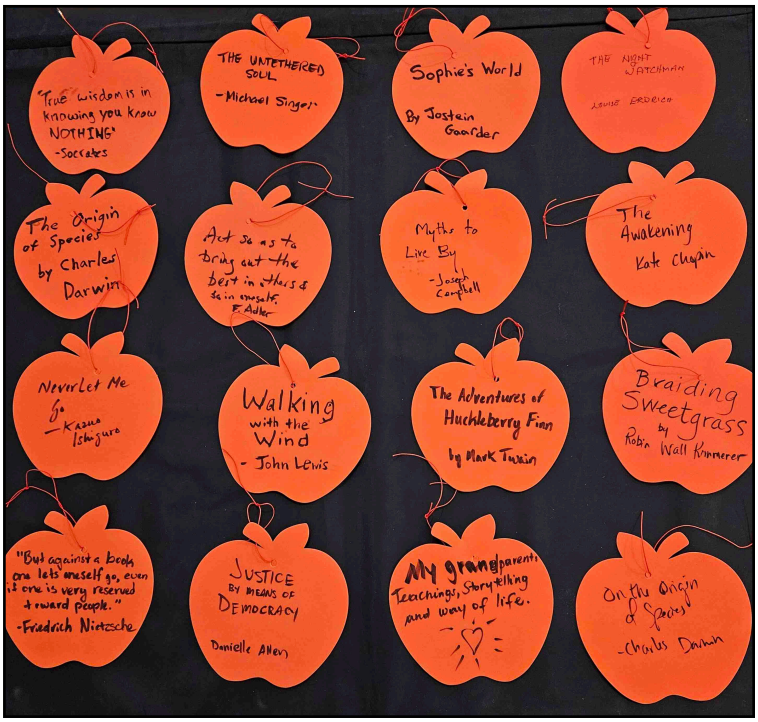
The FS station showcased a display of the organization's printed literature and a newsletter signup sheet. We also incorporated a new variation of *The Tree of Knowledge* winter holiday initiative. We asked visitors to the FS station if they wanted to create their own "apple ornament" and help us decorate the wrought iron tree we had on display.

By writing a favorite secular book or quote on the (foam) apple, attendees enjoyed sharing their personal inspirations and learning more about a secular way to celebrate any holiday season. Although this ad hoc tree did not match the grandeur of the usual 12' high *Tree of Knowledge* that is displayed at PES each winter, we also had a handbook describing the history of *The Tree of Knowledge* on the table.

The contents of *The Tree of Knowledge* book include a summary of the original design created by FS founder and president **Margaret Downey**, the important battles for representation in public spaces, and the different versions of a *Tree of Knowledge* created by various freethinkers and nontheist groups across the country.

Throughout the event both Gold and I spoke with visitors about many other FS initiatives. Gold was invited to give a speech to the entire room about FS volunteer opportunities. The evening was a great reminder of how much common ground different organizations can have, and how cooperative programming can introduce freethought to new and receptive audiences.

After the event, I was invited by PES to give a presentation to their group about the FS Freethinkers Supporting Safe Streets initiative. An announcement about the date and time will appear on the FS Facebook page as well as the FS Meetup group.

I hope the photos included in this article will inspire readers to create a unique and personal version of *The Tree of Knowledge* this holiday season. ◘



Deborah Goddard is pictured left after having placed her apple on the Freethought Society's (FS) wrought iron *Tree of Knowledge*. Goddard has experience in secular and skeptic organizing, queer activism, and racial justice work. As the Vice President for Programs at American Atheists (AA), she helps develop campaigns for activists and affiliates, manages national programs, and coordinates the national convention. She also has served on the board of Humanists International since 2020. She was at the Speed Deeding event representing AA.

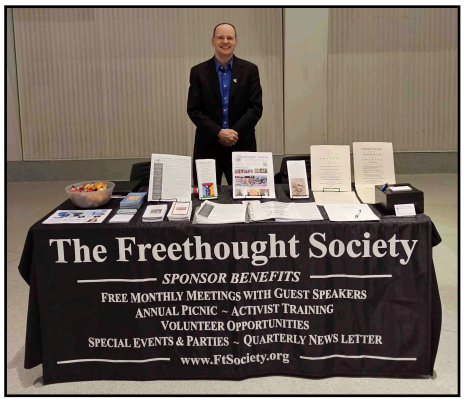
Pictured above are some examples of the on-site *Tree of Knowledge* decorations that were created by folks who stopped by the FS Speed Deeding display. Some people wrote names of books and authors, favorite quotations, and sentimental messages.

If you or a group you are affiliated with would like help with a *Tree of Knowledge* display this winter, please see the FS website section devoted to this holiday symbol:

https://www.ftsociety.org/menu/tree-of-knowledge/

Safety in Cincinnati: Presenting at the 2025 Secular Student Alliance National Conference

by David Condo



The Secular Student Alliance (SSA) held their annual conference from July 17-19, 2025, and the Freethought Society (FS) supported the event by sponsoring an exhibit booth and by giving two presentations to attendees from across the country.

The SSA conference took place at the University of Cincinnati, and showcased a variety of engaging presentations on current issues, grassroots organizing, and leadership training. From executives of secular organizations to popular YouTube personalities and experienced activists, the conference featured over 30 speakers in both general and breakout sessions. The programs gave attendees a wide access to content while allowing students to customize their own schedule. The weekend also offered social gatherings, professional development sessions, and entertainment events. The program gave all attendees a wonderful glimpse into opportunities throughout the secular community.

I had the pleasure of staffing the FS exhibit booth during the conference, and it was delightful introducing students from a variety of backgrounds to the organization and speaking to them about FS's work, their educational goals, career aspirations, and about their experiences on campus.

The FS booth highlighted previous winners of our annual student scholarship and information about our many events, projects, and resources that are available to students. The sheer variety of engagement was one of the most interesting parts of the experience, as some students were raised without any religion while others had to break away from a childhood of indoctrination.

Some students were already invigorated activist leaders, while others were more drawn to the social and networking benefits of the conference. Many attendees didn't know as much about past freethinkers, but a few were well-versed in the movement's history, and some people even specifically mentioned their admiration of **Thomas Paine**! Staffing a freethought booth is tremendous fun, particularly at a conference like this when the attendees are especially friendly and inquisitive.

One unexpected benefit was also meeting the hosts of other exhibit booths at the conference, and I enjoyed chatting with representatives from Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Black Nonbelievers, Secular Women, American Atheists, the American Humanist Association, and the Secular Coalition for America. We exchanged stories of challenges and successes over the past year and it was inspiring to see the strong diversity of initiatives within our community as well as the common ground that we share.

I was a featured speaker on two occasions for the conference. During a panel for all attendees on Saturday morning, I was joined by **Jasmine Banks**, **Sean Rivera**, and **Jen Scott** as we discussed how students (or anybody) can increase their personal safety while attending and participating in protests.

In the afternoon, Scott and I held a breakout session on the organizing end of protests and building activist partnerships. We delved into the finer points of organizing demonstrations, including how best to work with civic leaders and law enforcement officials before, during, and after a protest — an important process needed to maximize both the safety and the positive impact of the event. We also took questions and received feedback from students throughout the weekend. Discussing their concerns was a fascinating window into important trending issues and modern campus activism.

Banks brought over a decade of experience in progressive advocacy and organizing. As a leader with vision of Generation Common Good, she works to build a future where everyone belongs and has the power to create long-term change in their communities. Banks has also served as a keynote speaker, therapist, Chief Marketing Officer, and small business owner.

Rivera spent five years working with local city councils in his area and was the statewide field director for a successful voter registration project. Sean spent most of his undergraduate years organizing protests, rallies, and volunteering for campaigns as the president of his university SSA.

Scott is a native Ohioan from Forest Park, Ohio. She attended Northwestern University, earning a degree in Chemistry. In 2015 she began another path in life — that of a community organizer and grassroots activist. She now serves the Director of Advocacy, working with the state and local advocacy teams to make real change. Jen was recently recognized for her LGBTQ+ advocacy by the City of Cincinnati and received the Rafiki Award in 2024, presented by Cincinnati Black Pride. In her spare time she expresses her love of science by running Science on Tap Cincinnati, a science education program.

SSA conference organizers also did a great job being sensitive to individual needs and preferences throughout the event. They recognized that it was the first such conference for many of the attendees and they went out of their way to make a welcoming and safe space. They offered fun photo opportunities without pressure or time limits; they color-coded conference badges to indicate how a person preferred to be approached; and they emphasized that these and other social distinctions were natural and beneficial. As a natural introvert, I really appreciated this attention to the many personality variations in any given audience.

The entire weekend was an incredibly helpful pulse check for secular students across the country, but it also was an inspiring glimpse for all attendees at the energy, hope, and leadership that the next (and current) generation is bringing to the freethought movement. I would recommend attending an SSA conference to anybody as an educational experience, as a networking opportunity, and just as a fun event! It was a great reflection of the momentum and potential of our secular community. ◘

Neglect in the Name of Love

by Herb Silverman

What should be done when parents rely on religion instead of medicine to heal sick children?

In the Bible, Mark 16:17-18 provides a terrific and affordable solution to meet a health care crisis:

"They will pick up snakes, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them. They will place their hands on the sick and cure them."

The only drawback is that, in reality, this technique is more effective in reducing over-population than in healing the sick.

While this may be an extreme example, we don't always have easy answers for where the parent rubber meets the child road. Assuming that parents love their children, some parents still act badly in the names of love and religion. The American Academy of Pediatrics states that corporal punishment is not only harmful psychologically and physically, it is also an ineffective behavioral strategy. Nevertheless, some parents justify such measures because the Bible (Proverbs 13:24) talks about the problems of sparing the rod. The statement is that whoever spares the rod hates their children. This means that children should be disciplined. The shorthand version that people like to use is "Spare the rod, spoil the child."

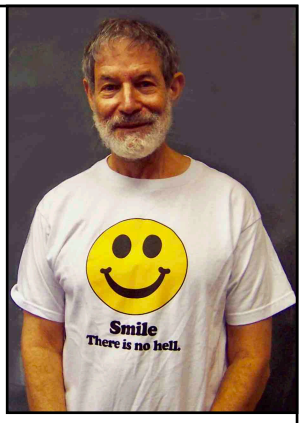
But how bad is bad enough for the government to overrule religion? Since our secular government must be neutral regarding religion, what we call parental abuse should be independent of whether that abuse is justified by religious or secular reason. Of course, both motive and mental stability should be factors in determining whether the abuse constitutes a crime and what kind of punishment, if any, should be meted to a parent.

As a society, we insist parents observe certain norms regardless of religious belief: education at school or at home until at least age 16; protection from sexual or physical abuse; adequate food and shelter; and medical care to the best extent possible. When parents are identified as either unwilling or incapable of providing such minimal care, the child needs external pro-tection.

Snake handling aside, many parents reject modern medicine and pray that their child be healed, since they believe all things are possible through God. But we know many serious illnesses are not healed through prayer, regardless of the sincerity of those prayers. So, the government must step in to protect the child from medical neglect.

Though adults are free to use prayer, crystals, tarot-cards, or exorcists to try to cure themselves, society must step in to prevent such "cures" being the only treatment for children with serious illnesses. Compassion for parents who love their children goes only so far. Perhaps this is an example of what Nobel Prize-winning Physicist **Steven Weinberg** meant when he said:

"With or without religion, good people will do good things and bad people will do bad things. But for good people to do bad things – that takes religion."



Herb Silverman is a regular contributor to the Freethought Society's (FS) quarterly publication *The Freethought Society News*.

His past submissions can be found at the following FS website page:

https://www.ftsociety.org/herb-silverman-articles/

Silverman is the author of two books, *Candidate Without a Prayer* and *An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land*. Both books are available online and at your local bookstores.

Silverman welcomes communication from readers. He is also available for national and world-wide speaking engagements. Contact him at the following email address:

silvermanh@cofc.edu

Planned Parenthood Volunteer Opportunities

The threat to abortion access across the country is more dangerous than anything we have seen in nearly half a century. At Planned Parenthood there is a role for everyone who is interested in helping protect sexual and reproductive health care. Choose how you want to help, whenever you have time, and Planned Parenthood will provide the tools you need to take action. Sign up at the below link to become a part of the Planned Parenthood Action Fund: https://www.plannedparenthood.org/get-involved

When you become a volunteer for the Planned Parenthood Action Fund, they will connect you with a steady stream of resources, training, and anything else you need to help defeat anti-reproductive rights lawmakers, stop bad laws, and protect access to Planned Parenthood health centers. You can choose how you want to help, whenever you have time. Actions could include anything from flooding a member of Congress with calls, to joining a phone bank, to meeting other volunteers online, or reminding friends and neighbors to register to vote. Whatever it is, it will be what's truly needed, right when it's needed most — and signing up will give you the support and instructions you need to take action. Help secure reproductive freedom for all!

Freethought Society Calendar Page

To receive notices about Zoom events, become a member of The Freethought Society Meetup group. Join at: **https://www.meetup.com/Freethought-Society-Meetup/**. Each listing will have a unique Zoom link listed in the description of the event. FS meetings have security features and will be recorded for replay on social media. Those who join the meeting consent to be recorded and agree to abide by the FS Anti-Harassment and Code of Conduct Policy found at the FS webpage: **https://www.ftsociety.org/freethought-society-code-of-conduct/**

November 1

On Saturday, November 1, 2025, the traditional Secular Day of the Dead/Dia de los Muertos Secular International Online Event will take place at **Noon PDT/3:00 PM EDT**. Please register for this event at the following Zoom link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/hGs5BhhVQEOm8Y2nLodUNg

This event is hosted by **David Tamayo**, **Margaret Downey**, and **Memo Benumea**. Actor, producer, and director **Jon Huertas** will deliver an inspiring welcome.

Tamayo will present his recorded farewell visit with the late **Hector Avalos**, who was a professor of Religious Studies at Iowa State University, a cultural anthropologist, and the author of several books on religion. Avalos was an atheist and advocate of secular humanist ethics.

The Honoring Ceremony portion of the event will include the following participants: **Dan Barker**, the co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, will honor the life and work of political cartoonist **Steve Benson**. Actor, monologist, and author **Julia Sweeney** will deliver an appreciation of the life of singer, songwriter, and social activist **Jill Sobule**. Podcaster, author, and public speaker **Seth Andrews** will honor the life of scientist and professor **Abby Hafer**.

Prizes will be awarded in the following categories:

Best Female Hair Adornment
Best Male Hair Adornment
Best Female Face Makeup
Best Male Face Makeup
Best Zoom Box
Best Overall

Sponsors of the event include the Freethought Society, Hispanic American Freethinkers, the Center for Inquiry/Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, Black Nonbelievers, Secular Coalition for America, the American Humanist Association, and the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

December

Please save the date of **Sunday**, **December 7**, **2025** to attend the Freethought Society and Philadelphia Ethical Society annual decorating of the *Tree of Knowledge* at **11:00 AM EST**. Additional program address and details will be available at the following link:

https://phillyethics.org/programs/platforms/

January 29, 2026

Please plan to join us for the yearly celebration of the official birthdate of one of the most important founders of the United States of America, **Thomas Paine**. The online event, entitled "The Times That Tried Men's Souls: Thomas Paine's Service During the Revolutionary War," will take place on **Thursday**, **January 29**, **2026** at **4:00 PM PST/7:00 PM EST**. Pre-registration is required at the below link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/ga-dvEPuR0iLzT5LA45BOw

A memorial to Paine is pictured below. The memorial depicts Paine writing *The American Crisis* papers during the Revolutionary War. It was sculpted by **Georg Lober**. The memorial was dedicated on July 4, 1950 in Morristown, New Jersey.

The January 2026 event is sponsored by the Thomas Paine Memorial Association (TPMA), Black Nonbelievers, Thomas Paine Historical Association, Freethought Society, Freedom From Religion Foundation, Thomas Paine Society, Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, American Atheists, Secular Coalition for America, American Humanist Association, and Center for Inquiry/Richard Dawkins Foundation for Science and Reason. TPMA president **Margaret Downey** and TPMA board member **Christopher Cameron** will host the live online event.

Congressman **Jamie Raskin** and Congresswoman **Victoria Spartz** will deliver opening words. Little known facts about Paine's military service will be disclosed and **Jack Kelly**, author of *Tom Paine's War,* will be the keynote speaker. Actor **Ian Ruskin** will read excerpts from Paine's *The American Crisis* papers, which were often written in battleground locations. **Gene Jones** from Florida Veterans for Common Sense will talk about Paine's heroism and how the government repaid his service. A video created by caretakers of the Thomas Paine Cottage, **Suzanne Tanswell** and **Gary Bush**, will be shown. The cottage is located in New Rochelle, New York.

The Question-and-Answer segment will feature Thomas Paine expert **Gary Berton** along with TPMA Board Members Downey, **Frances Chiu** and **Joy Masoff**. The event will end with a casual social hour and toasts to Paine's legacy are welcomed. The first toast will come from sculptor **Zenos Frudakis** as he shows us the progress he has made creating a statue of Paine.

The Freethought Society (FS) promotes freedom of thought, expression, and choice. FS also advocates for separation of religion and government. We assist nontheists, educate the public about nontheism, and provide social opportunities where like-minded individuals can meet, socialize and share ideas.

FS publishes *The Freethought Society News* every other month. The publication link is sent in an email notification and is complimentary to supporters, donors, and those who are interested in learning more about freedom of thought.

Monthly events take place in locations across the United States via Zoom or in-person when possible. FS activities and services depend on financial contributions from supporters. Funds may be sent using this form or via the FS website (**www.FtSociety.org/donate/**). All contributions to FS are tax-deductible (Tax ID Number: 23-2738574). Donations can be earmarked for use in a committee (see list below), project, and/or an event. Donations not earmarked will be applied to a general fund which finances office-related expenses. Please donate generously.

Yes! I would like to:

( ) become a supporter / renew support of FS (Please enclose checks payable to The Freethought Society):
$35 Individual Supporter $45 Family Supporter $25 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 $50 $55 $_____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 send a complimentary ezine to potential supporters. Please provide contact information for anyone who might be interested in receiving an FS publication. FS will never share or sell a subscriber's contact information.

Name: _____Email: _____

Mail this form to: Freethought Society, 19744 Beach Blvd. #140, Huntington Beach, CA 92648 or scan and email this form to: Ezine@FtSociety.org

Volunteer Opportunities Through The Freethought Society

Supporters of FS often want to do more than just make a financial contribution. Listed below are committees designed to fulfill the mission, goals, and vision of FS. Volunteers are needed in all committees listed. Please contact FS to volunteer at:

volunteers@FtSociety.org

Anti-Discrimination Educational Committee
(nontheism explained in classroom settings)

Community Outreach
(locate tabling opportunities)

Diversity Outreach Committee
(developing programs to appeal to underrepresented groups)

Free Speech Zone Committee
(research and implement displays in public venues)

Freethinkers Supporting Safe Streets
(fosters communication with law enforcement)

Helping Hands
(provides helpers to seniors in emergency situations)

Jump Into the Jean Pool
(collection of jeans for donations)

Literature Placement for the Incarcerated
(provides freethought literature to prison libraries)

Meetup Committee
(planning events)

Monthly Meeting Coordinators
(schedule, manage speakers, and venues)

Secular Celebrations
(develop new nontheist celebrations)

Sole Searching
(collection of athletic shoes for donations)

Southern California Secular Coalition
(connect, share, and grow together)

Speakers Bureau
(provide FS a resume, photo, and speech subjects/titles)

Thomas Paine Memorial Committee
(work on themed events)

Tree of Knowledge/Winter Display Committee
(promote and support the concept nationwide)