Thomas Paine-Themed Tour of Paris

The following script was used during a tour of Paris, France on September 23, 2017.

Margaret Downey portrayed Marguerite Brazier Bonneville. She was a French citizen and was very helpful to Thomas when he lived in Paris.

Julien Musolino portrayed Thomas during the tour. In the following script, Julien quoted the words Thomas Paine uttered in Paris and conveyed some of the most famous statements made in Paine’s writings.

We were also pleased to have Thomas Paine expert, Gary Berton as a host of the tour. The historical information about Thomas Paine and the French Revolution were vetted by Berton.

Stops and the addresses will be indicated in the script to allow anyone in possession of this document to find the location and read the information conveyed on that September day in 2017.

Thank you so much for your interest in learning more about Thomas Paine and the time he spent in Paris. From this point forward we will refer to Thomas Paine as “Thomas.”
Departure Location (Bourse du Travail 3 rue du Château d’Eau Paris in 10\textsuperscript{th}):

Thomas Paine was one of the leading figures of the French Revolution because he not only brought his revolutionary political theories to bear on the events transpiring in Paris, but he also threw his life on the line for them. He bore the sacrifices that revolutions demand of its leaders.

It was Thomas’s *Common Sense* which influenced the French people to throw off monarchy. *Common Sense* was reprinted in French after the American Revolution and publishers sold as many copies in France as they did in America.

Thomas took up the struggle against the pro-monarchist, reactionary theories of Edmund Burke in 1791 and 1792 when he wrote the *Rights of Man* in support of the French revolution.

Thomas was one of two foreigners who were seated in the French National Convention. He had a leading role in writing the 1793 French Constitution, which still stands today as the most progressive of world-constitutions.

Thomas, as in America, was not an on-looker, or sideline pamphleteer. He embodied both revolutions, and in large measure is responsible for the modern march towards democracy and equal rights for all.

Born in England, he emigrated to America with Franklin’s help in 1774 at the age of 37. He was already an accomplished writer and political ally of Franklin.

After the American Revolution, Thomas returned to Europe. Soon after arriving in France he was in the middle of revolution…much like what happened when Thomas left England to live in America. Thomas was elected to the National Convention from Calais, and he was greeted as a hero when he stepped onto the dock in France. Imagine him saying…

**Julien:** “FELLOW CITIZENS, I receive, with affectionate gratitude, the honor which the late National Assembly has conferred upon me, by adopting me a citizen of France: and the additional honor of being elected by my fellow citizens a member of the National Convention. Had those honors been conferred in an hour of national tranquility, they would have afforded no other means of showing my affection, then to have accepted and enjoyed them; but they come accompanied with circumstances that give me the honorable opportunity of commencing my citizenship in the stormy hour of difficulties. Convinced that the cause of France is the cause of all mankind, and that liberty cannot be purchased by a wish, I gladly share with you the dangers and honors necessary to success.”

We begin in a country retreat in Saint-Denis, then onto the home of James Monroe, the future president who took Thomas in after his imprisonment.

From there we will visit the site of the White’s Hotel where Thomas spent a lot of time as visitors from around Europe flocked to sit with him, and where he was eventually arrested.

Then onto the Tuileries which was the site of the National Assembly and Convention.
We will then pass over to the left Bank for one of the most important locations, unknown to almost everyone, where the Enlightenment was applied to governments and where the birth of modern democracy took place, followed by his place of imprisonment – the Luxembourg, and then to his residence with the Bonnevilles’ where he stayed until he left again for America in 1802.

Lastly, we will visit and learn about the Thomas Paine statue located on the outskirts of Paris.

We will not be following a chronological order in our stops due to time constraints and the locations of our stops. This script will transport you in time with a description of what went on at each location and dates will be provided for a full prospective.

**First Stop – 144 rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis:**

This is the Saint Denis stop. When the King of France was executed in January 1793, Thomas said:

**Julien:** “If the French kill their king, it will be a signal for my departure, for I will not abide among such sanguinary men.”

Thomas was suddenly trapped in what would become known as “The Reign of Terror.” He could not flee the country as the English fleet had control of the seas, and outside French controlled land in Europe, he would be a target. Thomas escaped to what was the countryside of Paris, Saint-Denis.

He stayed in a hotel that was on this site, in the rooms where Madame Pompadour had lived. Madame Pompadour was the mistress to Louis XV. Everyone knew this to be true and it was no surprise to anyone. That was the nature of the King, and he took full advantage of his power.

Thomas received a continual flow of visitors at this site. He entertained Mary Wollstonecraft, his friend Clio Rickman, Joel Barlow, and Thomas Christie.

There were many other visitors, but his days were spent in games with guests, and mostly in intense, inspiring conversations. Wollstonecraft described him as keeping everyone in astonishment and admiration for his keen memory and insightful views on genius and taste.

There was a small staircase from his rooms to the garden where he spent a lot of his free time. Let’s hear from Thomas himself describe his stay…

**Julien:** “The house, which was enclosed by a wall and gateway from the street, was a good deal like an old mansion farmhouse. The courtyard was like a farmyard, stocked with fowls – ducks, turkeys, and geese; which for amusement, we used to feed out of the parlor window on the ground floor. Beyond was a garden of more than an acre of ground, well laid out, and stocked with excellent fruit trees. The orange, apricot, and greengage plums, were the best I ever tasted.”

By April of 1793 the war of the monarchies of Europe against the French people was raging, and the political situation deteriorated from it. The moderates lost power to the Jacobins, and Thomas stood apart from both, but with each on certain principles. The internal uprisings by the priests and monarchical hangers-on caused both moderates and Jacobins to overreact, as war loses mounted. Repression began.
In a letter to Thomas Jefferson during this Thomas wrote:

**Julien:** “Had this Revolution been conducted consistently with its principles, there was a good prospect of extending liberty through the greatest part of Europe; but I now relinquish that hope. I begin to contemplate returning home.”

The pivotal events of the Revolution would be played out during Thomas’ days in Saint-Denis.

And for each one, he traveled into Paris to lend his weight to maintain the course of the Revolution without the power struggles, and personal vendettas.

By late Spring of 1793, Thomas had disagreed with yet agreed with both the Jacobians and the Girondists. At that point Thomas knew his days were numbered.

It was in the spring of 1793 here in Saint-Denis that Paine wrote his first draft of *The Age of Reason*, which appeared in a magazine as an article. He completed it here in Saint-Denis after October 1793 after the declaration for his arrest was issued.

Madame Bonneville, please read the arrest declaration…

**Margaret:** *Merci beaucoup, Monsieur Berton. This declaration implied the collaboration of Governor Morris, the Federalist American Ambassador to France, with Robespierre. We will tell you more about that later. “We, hereby demand that a declaration of accusation be passed against Thomas Paine, for the interests of America and France as well.”*

**Second Stop – 95 rue de Richelieu (IIe):**

This is the Hôtel Cusset. The location was once the James Monroe residence.

James Monroe, the newly appointed Ambassador to France, secured Thomas’s release from the Luxembourg prison on November 6, 1794 and brought him to this location.

The Monroe’s offered their home to Thomas for as long as he lived, but he remained with them only until 1797. Thomas feared that he was imposing on the Monroe’s far too long, and took up residence with the Bonneville family which you will hear about during the seventh stop of this tour.

Thomas arrived to the Monroe’s home very ill and malnourished after having been incarcerated for ten months. Both James Monroe and his wife Elizabeth are credited with saving Thomas Paine’s life… thanks to the loving care they provided.

**Julien:** *In addition to Age of Reason Parts I and II, which I wrote at the Monroe residence I also wrote several other pieces I’m very proud of. First let me tell you what I wrote in the piece I titled, Dissertation on the First Principles of Government:*

> “Every age and generation is, and must be (as a matter of right), as free to act for itself in all cases, as the age and generation that preceded it. The vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies. Man has no property in man, neither has one generation a property in the generations that are to follow.”
And now I want you to hear a little from my essay entitled *Agrarian Justice*, which I hope you will like:

“The accumulation of personal property is, in many instances, the effect of paying too little for the labor that produced it; the consequence of which is, that the working hand perishes in old age, and the employer abounds in affluence.”

After getting out of prison, Thomas was warmly received back into the National Convention and was reinstated with humble kindness.

He addressed the Convention, but denounced the new constitution which created a senate for life and restricted voting by property ownership. After speaking his mind, Thomas never returned to the Convention.

He did stay active in assisting the government with American related matters, and began earnestly helping Americans in France.

**Third Stop – White’s Hotel, 1 rue des Petits-Pères puis 7 passage des Petits-Pères (Xe):**

We are now at the White’s Hotel. White’s Hotel originally occupied two spaces during the time Thomas used the facilities. It was a central meeting place for foreigners in France. White’s Hotel has been known by many names – they are “The American White’s Hotel,” “White’s Hotel angloterra,” and “White’s Hotel Philadelphia.”

Thomas stayed here when he visited Paris in 1787, in 1788, and again from 1792. In 1792, he moved to Saint-Denis.

This is the spot where Thomas met with American diplomats while living in Saint-Denis, including Joel Barlow. Thomas would eventually be arrested and sent to the Luxembourg prison the day after a social event at this location.

Nicholas Bonneville, Thomas’ dear friend and Paris famous printer, attended a large dinner here with Thomas. Perhaps Madame Bonneville knows more details about the incident that unfolded that night.

**Margaret:** Yes, my husband told me the startling details of that dinner which gives everyone a perspective about the type of person Thomas was.

**During the dinner Thomas was assaulted by the Englishman and monarchist Captain Grimstone. Grimstone was in France to escape the English debtors’ prison and he was very drunk at the time. He denounced what he perceived as Thomas’ treasonous politics and struck him from behind. Grimstone was immediately arrested for attacking a member of the Convention. This was a death sentence for Grimstone, but Thomas went to his rescue with the Committee of Public Safety. Thomas got Grimstone out of jail using his great influence and the respect officials had for his judgment. Thomas even supplied the money to get Grimstone out of the country.**
Edmund Fitzgerald, the great Irish revolutionary, spent time with Thomas here in the fall of 1792. He said this about Thomas, “There is a simplicity of manner, a goodness of heart, and a strength of mind in him that I never knew a man before to possess.”

Thomas in turn drew up a statement of the affairs of Ireland that led to his membership in the United Irishmen.

The night of Thomas’ arrest on Christmas Eve followed a celebratory dinner at the White’s Hotel as a result of finishing *The Age of Reason, Part I*.

He expected arrest at any moment in that December month, as foreigners were to be jailed to combat external threats. The police demanded his papers, to which he said Joel Barlow held some. The whole group trekked to Barlow’s residence at the Hotel Britain, where they found the first 33 pages of the manuscript. Thomas then informed them the rest were in Saint-Denis, so they all trekked up there, his rooms were searched, his manuscript read by the police lieutenant. After many tense minutes, the lieutenant said, “It is an interesting work; it will do much good.”

In total, it took 12 hours to arrest him. Then Thomas was on his way to the Luxembourg Palace prison.

**Julien:** *This is what I wrote in The Age of Reason Part II:*

“I have furnished myself with a Bible and Testament; and I can say also that I have found them to be much worse books than I had conceived. I observe, that all my opponents resort, more or less, to what they call Scripture Evidence and Bible authority, to help them out. They are so little masters of the subject, as to confound a dispute about authenticity with a dispute about doctrines; I will, however, put them right, that if they should be disposed to write any more, they may know how to begin.”

**Fourth Stop – Tuileries Palais des Tuileries vers la place du Carrousel (1er):**

We are now at Tuileries.

In August 1792, the people of Paris stormed the Tuileries Palace. By September of that year, it became the seat of government, housing the Convention and Assembly, along with the offices of the Committees.

The following information will take some imagination. The Palace proper sat on the west side of the Louvre, perpendicular to the Seine. A wing extended along the Seine some two hundred yards, then perpendicular again to form a three-sided box. Past that were the gardens.

The Palace contained the largest structures for public gatherings in Paris. The Palace was burned by what many regard as the second French Revolution – the Paris Commune of 1871. The Palace sat unused until it was demolished in 1883.

Thomas visited this location in 1781 when he came to Paris for the first time with John Laurens. They were here to negotiate aid from France to finish the American Revolutionary War with Britain.
En route to France, in a ship commanded by Captain John Barry, the first to captain an American Navy vessel, they were attacked twice by the British, and Barry was seriously wounded. They bravely fought these naval battles with great success.

The money and supplies returned by them from France to America were used to bolster the Bank of Philadelphia, arm and clothe the troops for the Revolution War, and to march on Yorktown. Paine received no recognition for this pivotal trip.

When Thomas triumphantly returned to Paris in September of 1792, he took his seat at the Convention at this very site.

The work to write the Constitution of 1793 was done here as well. So too were the passionate speeches Thomas heard and made to the Convention including his speech to spare the life of Louis XV.

It was here that Thomas spoke to the National Assembly for the last time in 1795. In that speech Thomas denounced their newly enacted Constitution of 1795.

Julien: I address the following to the French National Convention. The date is October 22, 1792.

“In the name of the deputies of the department of Pas de Calais, I have the honor of presenting to the Convention the felicitations of the General Council of the Commune of Calais on the abolition of royalty. There was formed among the crowned brigands of Europe a conspiracy which threatened not only French liberty, but likewise that of all nations. Everything tends to the belief that Louis XV was the partner of this horde of conspirators.”

When the vote was called to execute the king, I did not stay silent. I said:

“I am aware of the excitement and anger aroused by the perils to which France, and especially Paris, have been subjected; and yet, if we could only catch a glimpse of the future, long after all this excitement and anger have passed away, it is not unlikely that the action which you have sanctioned today will assume the aspect of having been performed from a spirit of revenge rather than from a spirit of justice. My solicitude for the welfare of France has now been transformed into concern for her honor.”

We all know the fate of the King and it was honorable, humanistic, and thoughtful of Thomas Paine to attempt to spare his life.

Fifth Stop – Hôtel de la Monnaie, 11 Quai de Conti (VIe):

Welcome to the Hotel de la Monnaie, were Paine visited frequently in 1788 and 1789, to meet with the Marquis de Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson.

For all those who strive for democracy, this is sacred ground. People have always fought for a humane existence, and the 18th century saw that struggle bolstered by the fight for their rights with an eye towards taking ownership of government, stoked primarily by Thomas Paine.
Throughout a year between 1788 and 1789, Thomas Jefferson was the Ambassador to France, Lafayette enjoyed an exalted status among the people in their fight for rights in France, and Thomas Paine was introducing himself to Europe. The three would meet and discuss politics and philosophy, and it was here that Jefferson received his education in what would become “Jeffersonian Democracy.” Lafayette would soon lead the overthrow of monarchy in Paris. Their discussions mark the modern progressive movement’s birth. As Lafayette said at the time:

“Mr. Jefferson, Common Sense, and myself are debating the new French constitution proposals, in a convention of our own as earnestly as if we were to decide upon it.”

In many ways they did—Thomas Paine became a leading figure in writing the 1793 constitution. All the modern forms and norms of left-wing politics indirectly emerged from these meetings. Jefferson led the movement in America; Lafayette in Europe. Each of them preserved a space for a growing democratic movement which emerged in the wake of the death of feudalism. In spite of the enormous shortcomings of slavery and feudal leftovers, the foundation of modern democratic philosophy took shape. Thomas Paine was the catalyst for that space which created the democratic movement. This site was its birthplace.

There are few letters between Jefferson and Thomas during this period. We know this because when Thomas moved in with the Bonneville family he had very little written correspondence in his procession. Perhaps this is because most of the communication between Jefferson and Thomas was done face to face, and they sat together frequently.

In Jefferson’s papers, there was found a remarkable letter, that for centuries was thought to have been penned by Jefferson, himself. A leading Jefferson biographer, Gilbert Chinard, called this letter the epitome of Jefferson’s democratic philosophy.

This letter was actually written by Thomas Paine and sent to Jefferson, and it exemplifies Thomas’s espousal of the rights of man.

**Julien:** “After I got home, being alone and wanting amusement, I sat down to explain to myself (for there is such a thing) my ideas of natural and civil rights, and the distinction between them. Suppose twenty persons, strangers to each other, to meet in a country not before inhabited. Each would be a Sovereign in his own natural right. His will would be his law, but his power, in many cases, inadequate to his right; and the consequence would be that each might be exposed, not only to each other, but to the other nineteen. It would then occur to them that their condition would be much improved, if a way could be devised to exchange that quantity of danger into so much protection; so that each individual should possess the strength of the whole number. As all their rights in the first case are natural rights, and the exercise of those rights supported only by their own natural individual power, they would begin by distinguishing between those rights they could individually exercise, fully and perfectly, and those they could not. Of the first kind are the rights of thinking, speaking, forming and giving opinions, and perhaps are those which can be fully exercised by the individual without the aid of exterior assistance; or in other words, rights of personal competency. Of the second kind are those of personal protection, of acquiring and possessing property, in the exercise of which the individual natural power is less than the natural right. These I conceive to be civil rights, or rights of compact, and are distinguishable from natural rights because in the one we act wholly in our own person, in the other we agree not to do so, but act under the guarantee of society.”
Sixth Stop – Luxembourg Prison of Luxembourg (now Sénat) 15 rue de Vaugirard (VIe):

We are now at the actual building of the Luxembourg Palace Prison.

This is where the prisoners of the French Revolution were housed, and where most were marched to the guillotine.

Thomas was housed here from December 1793 to November 1794. During those 11 months, Thomas was gravely ill and at times even delirious with fever and serious infections. He was 58 years old.

Thomas was kept in a cell with three Belgians. He was, however, free to roam the common halls during the day, and he conversed with most of his fellow prisoners. Nearly every day, Thomas could only stand by to watch his friends taken away and killed.

Let’s get a first-hand account of what poor Thomas went through in this building on one particular day.

**Julien:** “One hundred and sixty-eight persons were taken out of the Luxembourg in one night, and a hundred and sixty of them guillotined next day, of which I now know I was to have been one; and the manner I escaped that fate is curious, and has all the appearance of accident. The room in which I was lodged was on the ground floor, and one of a long range of rooms under a gallery, and the door of it opened outward and flat against the wall; so that when it was open the inside of the door appeared outward, and the contrary when it was shut. I had three comrades, fellow prisoners with me, Joseph Vanhuele, of Bruges, since president of the municipality of that town, Michael Rubyns, and Charles Bastini of Louvain. When persons by scores and by hundreds were to be taken out of the prison for the guillotine it was always done in the night, and those who performed that office had a private mark or signal, by which they knew what rooms to go to, and what number to take. We, as I have stated, were four, and the door of our room was marked, unobserved by us, with that number in chalk; but it happened, if happening is a proper word, that the mark was put on when the door was open, and flat against the wall, and thereby came on the inside when we shut it at night, and the destroying angel passed by it. A few days after this, Robespierre fell, and Mr. Monroe arrived and reclaimed me, and invited me to his house. During the whole of my imprisonment, prior to the fall of Robespierre, there was no time when I could think my life worth twenty-four hours, and my mind was made up to meet its fate. The Americans in Paris went in a body to the Convention to reclaim me, but without success. There was no party among them with respect to me. My only hope then rested on the Government of America, that it would remember me. But the icy heart of ingratitude, in whatever man it be placed, has neither feeling nor sense of honor. The letter of Mr. Jefferson has served to wipe away the reproach, and done justice to the mass of the people of America.”

When Thomas mentioned the Jefferson letter, he is referencing a hand-written invitation to him to return to America.

The role of the Federalist leaders, who comprised the George Washington administration especially Governor Morris the American Ambassador to France, who made attempts to eliminate Thomas, was clear.

News of his imprisonment was kept from Washington, and Morris acted persistently to make sure America disowned Thomas, making it politically easy for Robespierre to execute him.
Thomas referred to this group of Federalists as “The American Reign of Terror.” The Federalists did not last as a viable party in America after 1808.

Seventh Stop – 10 rue de l’Odéon (VIe):

It is here, that the Bonneville family opened their doors to Thomas. He was a respected friend and was beloved by Nicholas Bonneville who was a revolutionary printer in Paris from the beginning of the revolution through the dictatorship of Napoleon.

After leaving the Monroe residence Thomas moved in with the Bonneville’s to stay temporarily. He stayed with the Bonneville’s for 5 years. Marguerite Bonneville was pregnant with her third child at this time. When he was born, the Bonneville’s named him “Thomas Paine.”

This is how much they loved their friend, Thomas Paine.

In 1802, Thomas departed for America, shortly after having spent a few months in Bruges with an ex-cellmate. Upon leaving for America, he invited Madame Bonneville and her three sons to join him. Nicholas Bonneville had been arrested for opposing Napoleon.

In America, Thomas looked after Madame Bonneville and her sons the rest of his life and willed to them his entire estate upon his death on June 8, 1809.

During his time with the Bonneville’s, Thomas wrote prolifically defending his book *The Age of Reason*.

He also wrote many other religious publications and started what he called “Theo-phanthropy.” This was his effort to advance the Deist movement.

Let’s hear Thomas describe Theo-phanthropy in his own words…

**Julien:** “The universe is the bible of a true Theophilanthropist. It is there that he reads of God. It is there that the proofs of His existence are to be sought and to be found. As to written or printed books, by whatever name they are called, they are the works of man's hands, and carry no evidence in themselves that God is the Author of any of them.”

Theophilanthropy did not become a popular philosophy, in itself, but it became an important trend within Deism.

Thomas had many visitors – some famous – some not.

One day during Thomas’s residency with the Bonneville’s, there was a knock on the door. There standing before Madame Bonneville was Napoleon Bonaparte!

Napoleon requested an audience with Thomas. The visit did not last a long time.

Thomas later described Napoleon as not only a dictator, but also “the completest charlatan that ever existed.”
Napoleon was still hopeful that Thomas would agree to help in his quests and told Madame Bonneville that “a statue of gold should be erected to Thomas Paine in every city of the universe.”

During another visit, Napoleon confessed to Madame Bonneville that he slept with a copy of Rights of Man under his pillow.

Thomas wrote regularly for Nicholas Bonneville’s La Bien Informe, a radical democratic opposition journal to Bonaparte and the oligarchy. He also advised the French government on foreign affairs, and the potential to invade England.

After 1799, a crackdown on opposition by the government which included the closing of La bien Informe, Paine wrote little more while in Europe.


This statue was sculpted by Gutzon Borglum. It was created when Joseph Lewis lobbied the French government to commission it, which they did, and hored the well-known Borglum. Borglum was also the Mount Rushmore sculptor.

Borglum was born in Idaho. He studied under Auguste Rodin in Paris.

He created many statues including a life-size of Woodrow Wilson and Abraham Lincoln. The Woodrow Wilson statue was commissioned by Poland to honor the US President for championing a united Poland.

In 1941, the sculptor disclosed that he was a strong opponent of German fascism. This enraged the Nazis who melted his statue of Woodrow Wilson statue down to cast bullets. This was to show their power and to deliver a sign to Borglum that he should be silent about his anti-Nazi feelings. Nazi soldiers searched for this statue of Thomas Paine in Paris for many months. The caster buried it immediately upon the Nazi entrance into Paris.

On the other hand, Borglum was a member of a notorious hate group in American. He belonged to the Klu Klux Klan. He claimed that he joined the Klu Klux Klan simply to get the jobs related to sculpting Confederate leaders. Historic records indicate, however, that he was very active in promoting the organization.

There are a total of 4 life-size statues of Thomas Paine. You can see a very nice statue of Thomas Paine in Morristown, New Jersey. In Bordentown, New Jersey where I shared a home with Thomas, you can see a statue in a public park.

The two statues in New Jersey are not gold, but another gold statue of Thomas Paine can be found in the place of his birth…Thetford, England.

So, we may not have fulfilled Napoleon’s dream of a Thomas Paine “statue of gold…in every city of the universe,” but who knows what the future will hold.

Mesdames et messieurs, this concludes the official Thomas Paine-Themed Paris, France Tour.