Thomas Paine Philadelphia Walking Tour

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Start at the **Sheraton Hotel** on Dock and 2nd Streets:

If you would like to use the facilities in the Sheraton, please enter the lobby area and turn to your left. The facilities are located down the hall near the ballrooms. Start your tour at the outside valet parking area.

Born in Thetford, England, on January 29, 1737, Thomas Paine spent the first thirty-seven years of his life in obscurity. Having lost his job as a poorly paid tax collector for trying to obtain better conditions for his fellow workers, he immigrated to America in November 1774.

Arriving in Philadelphia with letters of introduction from Benjamin Franklin, whom he had met in London, Paine soon secured employment as an editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*. The owner and printer of the magazine was Scotsman Robert Aitken. He set the policies for the newspaper, ensuring that all articles would, "avoid the suspicion of prejudice on the controversial issues of religion and politics."

Most of Paine's early contributions to the *Pennsylvania Magazine* were light-hearted, informative essays – but his best works were those that violated Robert Aitken's policy by lashing out at British rule. Paine wrote articles using pseudonyms such as "Atlanticus," "Aesop," and "Vox Populi."

Paine was a man ahead of his time and he had great observation and problem-solving abilities. You are standing in a place that was once the most filthy and unhealthy sections of the colonies (Dock and 2nd Streets). Paine noticed the dangerous disease spreading conditions, and he wrote about this area being the source of a potentially disastrous health crisis. He delivered his message to the Board of Health and entitled his cautionary essay, "Of the Cause of the Yellow Fever; and the Means of Preventing It in Places Not Yet Infected with It."

Soon the area was reconstructed, eliminating standing water, sewage, and trash. As a result, a more catastrophic Philadelphia outbreak of Yellow Fever was averted. Many credit Paine's words of caution as the reason the cleanup action was taken. More importantly, Paine arrived in America at the perfect time to advance his views and thoughts on revolution and injustice.

When Paine accused the English government of limiting the social and political opportunities of American women and showed sympathy to Native Americans, Robert Aiken dismissed Thomas Paine as a writer for the magazine.

In lively conversations and writings, Paine continued to promote the notion that America should not simply revolt against taxation, but demand independence from Great Britain entirely.

On January 10, 1776, Thomas Paine expanded this idea in a forty-seven-page pamphlet entitled *Common Sense*.

On your way to see the *Common Sense* historical marker, stop at the side of the theater to note a street named "Thomas Paine Place." **The *Common Sense* Historical Marker** is located at 3rd Street and Thomas Paine Place. See marker details at:

https://www.hmdb.org/map.asp?markers=32264,137767,135462,31061,31068,137816,137817,31076,50804,192886,83445,137684,106433

The publication of Paine's *Common Sense* was a watershed of the American Revolution. At the time, most colonists were still wavering about the idea of independence from Great Britain, but Paine's pamphlet galvanized opposition to the Crown and served as the final catalyst for political separation.

After the British attacks on Lexington and Concord in the spring of 1775 growing sympathy for the American cause flourished. Some of Congress's greatest advocates of independence, including Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush used the writings of Thomas Paine to test public opinion before making a definitive commitment themselves.

When Franklin and Rush encouraged Paine to detail his arguments in a single pamphlet, he obliged by writing *Common Sense*. From late autumn 1775 until the publication of the tract in January 1776, Paine spent his days in his rented rooms just a few blocks from this location, writing about revolution. At nightfall, he visited taverns to engage in political debate.

Paine was a painstakingly diligent writer. A brief paragraph might take him days or even weeks because he scrutinized each sentence. *Common Sense* advocated American independence in language the common man and woman could understand and, ultimately, defend. Only a few days before the release of *Common Sense*, King George delivered his opening speech to Parliament calling for suppression of the American rebellion.

Common Sense gave the Crown a direct and unequivocal response that was instantly copied, parodied, and translated into the language of every country that sympathized with the American cause. Nearly 120,000 copies of *Common Sense* were sold in the first three months after its release. By the end of the year, approximately 500,000 copies had found their way into bookstores, private libraries, and taverns in both Europe and America.

Common Sense convinced many colonists who had previously been neutral about independence and the hope that they should separate from England. On July 2, 1776, when Congress voted for independence, Paine's efforts were realized.

Today, Paine's *Common Sense* is widely regarded as a powerful expression of the American mind, just a step-in order of importance below the Declaration of Independence. Paine's greatest legacy, however, may well have been his faith in the ability of common people to determine their own political destiny.

You should now walk towards the **American Philosophical Society**. The address is:

104 South 5th Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

The American Philosophical Society was founded in 1743 as a home for thinking about nature, machines, industry, and governance – the outgrowth of an idea fostered by Franklin.

The American Philosophical Society is the oldest surviving learning organization in the country. The name "The American Philosophical Society" is derived from the concept of "natural philosophy," which was the 18th century name for the study of nature. The name has nothing to do with "philosophy" (political or otherwise), as we understand it today. Early members were what we would today call "scientists" and "technologists."

The American Philosophical Society is the largest collection of Paine memorabilia. Colonel Richard Gimbel bequeathed the collection to the American Philosophical Society in 1971. Gimbel was a wealthy department store heir. In the Gimbel collection there are 65 letters or manuscripts in Paine's own hand. One such manuscript is his notebook for the pamphlet *Common Sense*.

There is a beautiful work of art located in the office of the American Philosophical Society's Executive Director. The Thomas Paine bust you see in the window of the side alley is made of white marble. Hopefully, the shades will be open so you can see the bust. The bust is in the Director's private office – not for public viewing – a situation the Thomas Paine Memorial Association and the Freethought Society would like to rectify. Visits to the office to see the bust are made by calling the American Philosophia Society at: (215) 440-3400.

On July 4, 1876, the Liberal League of the United States set aside $1,3200 to secure the services of a Boston freethinker, Sydney H. Morse, who sculpted the beautiful bust. In 1905, the bust was on placed on display at Independence Hall. By 1926, the bust was refused a niche because according to the powers that be, Thomas Paine was "an infidel." City Council members declared that Thomas Paine was "immoral."

Paine was unjustly vilified for his book *The Age of Reason* which criticized organized religion and a belief in a supernatural God. The book promoted a Deistic worldview which advocates a rationalistic theology that generally rejects revelation as a source of divine knowledge and asserts that empirical reason and observation of the natural world are logical, reliable, and sufficient.

Paine was also hated when in 1796, he wrote a scathing open letter to President George Washington. In the published letter he wrote: "…the world will be puzzled to decide whether you are an apostate or an impostor; whether you have abandoned good principles or whether you ever had any." This harsh criticism of Washington was also used as evidence that the bust should not be on display.

It is said that the writings of Thomas Paine were instrumental in the creation of the Declaration of Independence penned right here in Old City Philadelphia by Thomas Jefferson.

You should now proceed to the Second Bank and Portrait Studio. The address of the **Second Bank** is:

420 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

The bank building is modeled on the Parthenon in Greece. The history of the building can be read on the plaque affixed to the Second Bank facade, but most importantly, some of you may need to know that there is a bathroom facility in the basement area.

The portrait studio is a self-guided tour, but if you have a cell phone, you can call the following number to hear all about the gallery.

Gallery Hotline is: (267) 519-4295, then press the numbers: 21

Thomas Paine Portrait information:

The portrait of Thomas Paine was done in 1859. It is attributed to Bass Otis, but it derived by an English artist George Romney's 1792 portrait. Dr. William Wright gave the portrait to the City of Philadelphia in 1859.

You should now travel to the **Print Shop** and **Benjamin Franklin Court**. Make sure they are open for visitors. The phone number is: (215) 597-8974. The address of the Print Shop is:

318 Market Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

Note that the Print Shop closes at 5:00 PM. **The Franklin Post Office and Museum** is also interesting and located near the Print Shop. The address of The Franklin Post Office and Museum is:

316 Market Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

The Franklin Post Office and Museum is the only Colonial-themed post office operated by the United States Postal Service. It is a living portrayal of a bygone Colonial lifestyle, and it is the only active post office in the United States that does not fly the American flag because there was not yet one in 1775 when Benjamin Franklin was appointed Postmaster General. The postmark "B. Free Franklin" is still used to cancel stamps. The museum on the second-floor features displays of postal history and memorabilia.

We hope you enjoy your visit to Philadelphia! Questions? Margaret Downey, Founder and President of the Freethought Society is available at any time via phone. She is also the President of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association: (610) 357-9432.