

Thomas Paine: An American Patriot

Based on a manuscript by Mae Kramer Silver

Last week Chapter 1

Common Sense Arrives *Common Sense* quickly becomes a “bestseller” throughout the 13 colonies.

Chapter 2 A Fresh Start in America

Thomas Paine came to America alone, making the long sea journey across the Atlantic Ocean that even in the early to late fall produced queasy stomachs and constant fears that the ship may not make it to another shore.

He left England in September, and entered the Philadelphia harbor on the shores of the Delaware River in November.

He carried with him a piece of paper that would seal his future.

It was not money, but a letter of introduction written by Philadelphia’s best-known citizen, Dr. Benjamin Franklin.

Franklin represented the colonies in England, trying to reconcile the growing differences with the motherland across the “big pond,” as the English saw the Atlantic Ocean.

The letter was written to Franklin’s son-in-law, Richard Bache.

“The bearer Mr. Thomas Paine is very well recommended to me as an ingenious worthy young man. He goes to Pennsylvania with a view of settling there. If you can put him in a way of obtaining employment as a clerk, or assistant tutor in a school, or assistant surveyor, all of which I think he is very capable, so that he may procure a subsistence at least, until he can make acquaintance and obtain a knowledge of the country, you will do well, and much oblige, your affectionate father.”



Paine arrived feet-first in the new land, carried on a stretcher, sick with cabin fever. The recovery was slow, but when he finally recovered he frequently visited a Philadelphia bookshop owned by John Aitken. Aitken did more than sell books. He was also publisher of a new publication, *Pennsylvania Magazine*. At a time when there was no television or radio to hear of current events, magazines and newspapers did the job. People were willing to pay the small fee to get a copy and would often sit around as groups in public houses to discuss the news. Thomas Paine loved that discussion and he loved the new magazine. He kept coming back to the bookshop, and he and Aitken often spoke together.

Eventually Aitken was so impressed with Paine that he offered him a job as associate editor of his magazine.

At first, the magazine had a circulation of 600. But soon after Paine started work there the circulation increased to 1,500. He attracted Philadelphia readers with his writing about nature, science, slavery, capital punishment, health, and even the weather.

Readers wanted to know, “Who was this new writer in town?”

They were asking the same question



one year later when Paine’s *Common Sense* was published with the byline of “Anonymous.”

Few people knew who the author was, but this was about to change.

That cold January wind was just like the feelings the colonists were beginning to feel about England.

People were getting restless. They were complaining about how they were being treated.

As they walked down the street in Philadelphia, Horace Schwartz and John Weiss had some choice words to say about a letter to the colonies from England’s King George III in early January 1776.

The letter was published on January 10, the same day *Common Sense* hit the streets in Philadelphia.

“The King says nothing has changed. Everything is fine and good. Does he know how upset we are?” asked John.

Horace laughed. “The King says nonsense and that’s what *Common Sense* says he means. No sense.”

“Let’s raise a toast to *Common Sense*. That makes sense!” said Walter Blau, who had just caught up with Horace and John.

Down the street from where Horace, John and Walter were talking, young Frederich Aitken took a break from selling *Common Sense* on the

street corner and swept the sidewalk in front of his father’s bookshop.

He loved his father’s bookshop, in which John Aitken’s magazine publishing office was nestled at the back of the building.

Whenever Frederich finished his chores, he listened to customers talk in the shop and breathed in the sharp smell of ink and paper. Because of his father’s business, he knew how to

read, unlike many young people. He often found his favorite book, squeezed himself into a corner and read.

“Frederich,” his father asked one night at dinner, “what idea do you have about this ‘Anonymous’ who has written *Common Sense*?”

Frederich shook his head slowly back and forth. “Maybe I know and maybe I don’t,” he answered.

Aitken replied, “I think you know more than you think.”

Frederich thought about that. “I will listen more carefully at the bookshop and let you know,” he said. Suddenly he had an important job to do and excused himself from the dinner table.

Q&A

Comprehension Question:

Explain what happened to the magazine’s circulation after Thomas Paine started to work there. What reasons are given for this increased number of readers?

NIE Activity: Thomas Paine began working for *Pennsylvania Magazine* as the associate editor. Look through the newspaper and find the information index. Notice how many different editors a newspaper can have! Each one is in charge of a different part of the newspaper. Read through the newspaper and find a section that you like.

Essay Question:

Thomas Paine enjoyed having discussions with others about the news of the day, and he began to discuss independence from England. Do you think the king should have arrested him for calling for independence?

Serialized Story Guide for Teachers, Students and Parents:

www.njreadforlife.org/paineguide.html

Designed by Terry Bellucci

Next week Chapter 3

Who Was “Anonymous?” Thomas Paine tells a story about an English boy who despised the way his country’s royalty treated ordinary citizens.

Read more about Thomas Paine: www.njreadforlife.org/paine.html