

# Thomas Paine: *An American Patriot*

Based on a manuscript by Mae Kramer Silver

*Last week* Chapter 7

Exiled Patriots Hatch a Plot

The Battle of the Kegs is "fought" by patriots living in Bordentown, N.J.

## Chapter 8

### Good Ideas in Print Shaped a Nation

#### The United States of America

Those words, first put together by Thomas Paine, showed his concern not only for the individual and for the state, but for a nation of many states holding many individuals.

As these thoughts came from many of his earlier writings, they entered the debates and dialogues of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention held in Philadelphia from May to September, 1787.

However, Thomas Paine wasn't there. He was in Paris promoting his iron bridge invention.

The war had ended, and Thomas Jefferson, also in Paris, was America's consul to France and John Adams was in London as America's consul to England.

However far away the three men were, their ideas about America and its first Constitution could quickly be put on paper and mailed.

But in truth, their ideas were already so well known that the delegates to the Constitutional Convention knew to present, to debate and to defend them.

With elder Dr. Benjamin Franklin as their eyes and ears at the Convention, he never let the ideas of Paine, Jefferson and Adams stray far from what the delegates wrote.

Before America's Constitution was completed, the delegates had added 10 amendments, tagged the Bill of Rights.

They aptly placed as the First Amendment these words:

**"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."**

Thomas Paine's ideas reflected through his writing of *Common Sense* and his

*The American Crisis* articles during the American Revolution are clearly evident in this great document: the Constitution of the United States of America.

Paine's work as advocate of the common man was far from over, however. He went to England from 1787 to 1792, where he wrote another important document, *The Rights of Man*.

He escaped arrest in England because of what he wrote and fled to France, where he was welcomed as a hero.

While in France he wrote *Age of Reason* and helped write a new French constitution.

During the French Revolution and its Reign of Terror, Paine was arrested in Paris in 1793 and sentenced to death for his views. He was sent to the deadly Luxembourg prison, where, like Paine, thousands of prisoners remained without a trial.

On June 24, 1794, the Reign tightened its terror, and for the next 47 days citizens went to the guillotine at the rate of 30 a day.

Suffering from strain, Paine collapsed into a coma and appeared close to death. He couldn't eat, speak or even cry. Authorities moved him for special care and allowed doctors to help him.

While death hovered over him, the sentence of the guillotine was pronounced. His name was next on the list of those to be executed.

But then something happened.

The prison procedure called for marking with chalk the cell door of those scheduled to die that day.

But to allow ventilation into Paine's cell, someone left his cell door open enough to hide the deadly chalk mark.

The death squad never saw the mark.

It wasn't long after that that the times changed.

In August, Paine's friend James Monroe became the American Consul in Paris.

Consul and Mrs. Monroe rescued Paine from Luxembourg and took him to their residence on November 6, 1794.

At the Paris residence of Consul and Mrs. Monroe, Thomas Paine began to write Part 2 of *Age of Reason*.

One day, a knock at the Monroe residence in Paris produced a big surprise for Thomas Paine.

Standing in the hallway were three people-- a very tall young man holding the hand of a little girl and a young woman.

It was Frederick from Philadelphia.

"Oh, Mr. Paine, we heard you were in prison," he said. "We asked to see you but they would not let us."

Paine, overcome by surprise, had to sit down.

"I cannot believe my eyes," he said. "Why are you here? And, Frederick, who is this child?"

Frederick answered, "Mr. Paine, this is my daughter, little Anna Marie. Anna Marie, say hello to Mr. Paine."

Anna Marie stood before Paine and gave a curtsy. "How do you do, Mr. Paine," she said.

"Well, most of the time I am not speechless, but today I am," Paine replied. "How old are you little lady?"

"I am eight years old, almost nine. How old are you?" Anna Marie asked.

"I am 56 years old, but today I feel almost nine," Paine said with a warm smile. "But why are all of you here?"

"Our family is here on business," Anna Marie responded. "We have learned

French from the deBonnevilles. Do you know them? We must all meet."

Later that week they all dined at the home of Nicholas deBonneville, who owned a publishing company in Paris. A great and lasting friendship began at dinner that night.

Nicholas and his wife, Marguerite, invited Paine to stay with them. That visit lasted five years.

However, Paine and the deBonneville's could not stay in France because their views were too liberal for the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte. Paine left Paris and came back to America, along with Marguerite and her three sons, leaving Nicholas behind in Paris. She dropped the "de" from the family name to better fit in as new immigrants to America.

For a time, Paine lived at his property in New Rochelle, New York, which had been donated to him by the New York State legislature for his role in the American Revolution. However, his worsening health forced him to live with the Bonneville's in New York City, where he died on June 8, 1809.

Paine was buried on the grounds of his New Rochelle property.

But one night in October 1809, William Corbett, an enthusiastic admirer of Paine, dug up his coffin and arranged to ship it to England where he hoped to erect a monument in Paine's memory.

Corbett's plans failed, the coffin disappeared, and Thomas Paine's remains have never been recovered.

There is no grave for the man whose words helped to fuel the American Revolution ... no grave for the man who spent a large portion of his life in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, whose only purchased home was in Bordentown, N.J., and who was lifelong friends with Frederick and Anna of Philadelphia.

*Q&A*

**Comprehension Question:** Thomas Paine did not write the U. S. Constitution, but how is he connected to it?

**NIE Activity:** Today's newspapers and media sources are products of the First Amendment to our Constitution and our Bill of Rights. Explain this statement and find examples in the newspaper to defend your explanation.

Designed by Terry Bellucci

## Don't Stop Now

The Web site of the New Jersey Newspaper Foundation offers more about Thomas Paine: [www.njnf.org/paine.html](http://www.njnf.org/paine.html)  
**Serialized Story Guide for Teachers, Students and Families:**  
[www.njreadforlife.org/paineguide.html](http://www.njreadforlife.org/paineguide.html)