

THOMAS PAINE AND THE NEW MEDIA

A Report from Mariam Touba

About a Wide-Ranging Conference Organized by the Institute for Thomas Paine Studies, Iona College, New Rochelle, NY

The large conference program can be viewed at,

iona.edu/microsites/institute-for-thomas-paine-studies/events/international-conference-of-thomas-paine-studies.aspx

"Revolutionary Texts in a Digital Age: Thomas Paine's Publishing Networks, Past and Present" was the theme for a very full three days in October at Iona College in Thomas Paine's late-life hometown of New Rochelle. The gathering was well-managed and well-funded, a very promising sign for the long-term life of the Institute for Thomas Paine Studies. The stacked program gathered several principal constituencies of scholars: documentary editors (providing a primer for a much-needed new edition of Paine's collected works), young scholars of the early republic, academics in the newly-defined field of Digital Humanities, and those who are actively studying and writing on Thomas Paine.



The panels and speakers worked best when these themes intersected, as when keynote speaker, noted Paine scholar Seth Cotlar, took a dark look at the question of whether Paine would have embraced the new media. Back in the 1990s, the answer was "Of course," and Cotlar read from articles from that era, bursting with optimism about all the possibilities for democracy and widespread dialogue. The prognostications now make us wince as we consider the "fake news," trolls, and extreme

partisanship that pervade the Internet. A related roundtable on how historians can stay engaged with public issues through both traditional forums, such as newspapers, and social media was full of good-sense suggestions from actual practitioners.

While I love learning more about the Revolutionary period and the early republic, I was most engaged by those relatively few panels that dealt exclusively with Thomas Paine. There, the papers spoke to each other, and the discussion was focused. A panel on abolitionism encouraged us to look at the antislavery movement of the Founding era as a force for communitarian good without judging it by the uncompromising moralistic framework of individual rights put forth by William Lloyd Garrison and later activists. In this way, we can appreciate Paine and those who worked for gradual abolition as colonies became states. These discussions, however, were marked by some disputation on attribution, as there is no longer a consensus on what writings are actually Paine's, an issue that is likely to affect Paine scholarship going forward.

I was intrigued by the panel featuring French scholars who provided insight into how Paine's works were translated and distributed; here we heard interesting remarks on the composition of *Agrarian Justice*, where one portion of the text leaves us only

with Paine's prose as it was translated into French and back to English. Among the three academics from France was Carine Lounissi, who has just published *Thomas Paine and the French Revolution* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Her Paine focus is on political theory rather than biography, but it is groundbreaking. I hope the volume will get wide distribution in university libraries; her own findings and her summary of French Paine scholarship that has followed on Bernard Vincent's writings make this the most important work on the subject—in English or French—since the days of Moncure Conway and Alfred Owen Aldridge. Overall, these French scholars are decisively putting to rest the idea that Paine was a marginal figure who was "in over his head" among the participants in that revolution.

I presented two papers, one that examined Thomas Paine's wartime journalism for the Pennsylvania press in the fall of 1776. Biographers have remarked on these articles but no one had compiled or examined them. My second paper was given at the request of the organizers of a panel on "commemorations," a growing topic for interest of scholars of the American Revolution and early republic. Outlining how my longtime employer, the New-York Historical Society, treated Paine over the centuries (the Society was founded during Paine's lifetime, in 1804) turned out to be a pleasure. Even with Federalists among its founders and presidents, I did not find examples of disrespect, and there was always an interest in collecting whatever N-YHS could on Paine. A little-known fact is that the Society's founder, John Pintard, accompanied John Wesley Jarvis and fellow artist Alexander Anderson to Greenwich Village at the news of Paine's death in June 1809, presumably for the purpose of paying his respects.

Finally, and hardly least, was the "bombshell" revelation of a document, still in private hands, that, once validated, places Thomas Paine among the five known framers of the first draft of the Declaration of Independence in June 1776. More on this elsewhere in the *Bulletin*.

[See below ...*Paine and the Declaration*... ALSO, see page 5, for an outline of an unpublished paper by the late Klara Rukshina.]

THOMAS PAINE AND THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

"The Declaration of Independence and Thomas Paine's Influence"

by Gary Berton in *The Freethought Society News*, January-February issue,
www.ftsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/January_February-2019-Ezine-Web.pdf

and "Exploring the Origins of Paine's Forgotten Text; The Declaration of Independence"

by Michael Bruno and Alison Robles in *The Ionian*, student newspaper of Iona College, October 31, 2018

"The Institute for Thomas Paine Studies [of Iona College, New Rochelle, NY] hosted an international conference from Oct. 11 to 13. At the conference, Gary Berton, a coordinator for the ITPS, announced his claim that a newly discovered, authenticated and partial draft of the Declaration of Independence proves that Thomas Paine was involved in its creation." (*The Ionian*)

The document is page 1 of what was probably a two-page copy of a draft of the Declaration which had been in use by Roger Sherman, one of the five members of the committee assigned in June 1776 by the Continental Congress to draft a Declaration. (The five were: Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston.)

Most exciting about this page 1 is the note on the reverse, in

John Adams' handwriting: "A beginning perhaps -- Original with Jefferson -- Copied from original with T.P.'s permission." And the page was initiated by Benjamin Franklin. This document is called "the third draft" (albeit a partial draft), being the third now known. It is also called the "Sherman draft", although it had been

Continued on page 5, *Paine and the Declaration*

...Paine and the Declaration, from page 4

in the hands of both Adams and Franklin before becoming Sherman's copy.

What of other drafts? Copies of the Declaration were created during the Carpenters' Hall meetings (June 18 to 25, 1776), but few have survived or been recovered. The "original first draft" has been lost; it was presumably what Jefferson used in penning his "Rough Draft". So what now exist are: the John Adams copy held at the Massachusetts Historical Society; the Jefferson copy which is the text for the Rough Draft; and the Sherman copy.

Berton believes that Paine didn't receive public credit for a role in drafting the Declaration because he was not a member of the Continental Congress. "[Paine] should not have been there, which adds even more weight to his involvement." "He probably acted as Franklin's representative." Berton claims the third draft was circulated to Franklin, who was ill at that time; he initialed the copy as his, and thereafter transferred it to Sherman. (From email interview with *The Ionian*.)

Later events, as Berton recounts, are as follows. Sherman gave the copy to Colonel Alexander Lowery, who passed it on to his relatives. It was later discovered in a box of papers by an elderly man in Bowden, Georgia. It was in an Estate Auction booklet of General Hugh White, a brigadier general in the War of 1812. The current owner, who is anonymous, purchased these items in 2009 from the elderly finder. Col. Lowery had been a member of the Committee of Correspondence (of Lancaster County, PA), an organization that challenged colonial rule prior to the American Revolution. He was present in Carpenters' Hall on June 24, 1776 when discussions concerning the Declaration took place.

According to Berton, "It has been commonly accepted that his *Common Sense* led to the Declaration in content and language,

but now we see him an active, even leading, organizer."

[The document] has been entered into the Declaration Resources Project at Harvard University, which focuses on "creating innovative and informative resources about the Declaration of Independence," according to the Project's website. The Project finds that the only T.P. in Philadelphia political circles then was Thomas Paine, so "T.P." on the Sherman document must refer to him.

A major part of the Berton Freethought Society article lays out some of the politics in America of 1776 (and later), with Paine, Thomas Young, Timothy Matlack, among many more, as leaders of a revolutionary-democratic-declaration group in opposition with the conservatives—separatist but hardly democratic—such as Benjamin Rush, John Adams, John Jay, and others. In large part, the opposing poles can be represented by Paine and Adams, although Adams yielded eventually on the Declaration, possibly due to the influence in the drafting committee of Franklin, a powerful leader in the policymaking and strategies of the Congress. Berton submits that another reason for the absence of Paine's name in the Declaration process was due to his radical positions; he had many political enemies and his name would not aid in bringing around the timid members in support of a Declaration.

Ed: So far, we have not found a publication of the ITPS conference available, nor is there any new information at the Declaration Resources Project at Harvard University. Obviously, the document is of major interest to scholars, historical societies and Paine societies, so stay tuned, particularly at these websites,

iona.edu/microsites/institute-for-thomas-paine-studies.aspx
and declaration.fas.harvard.edu/resources

—by Martha Spiegelman

"WHO WROTE THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE?"

So asked Klara Rukshina in her paper of that provocative title

At the time of her death in January 2010, Klara Rukshina had several nearly complete manuscripts to comprise her monograph, *The Origin of Modern Democracies*. She was a highly regarded historian and Paine authority, and was a member of the TPF Board of Directors. TPF is working on the publication of the full book, *The Origin of Modern Democracies*.

Klara Rukshina's paper, *Who Wrote the Declaration of Independence?*, is a meticulously well-documented presentation. Here, I offer a small sample of her extensive, detailed paper because it relates to the revelation, noted above, of a document placing Paine as a writer of the *Declaration*.

First reviewing thoroughly the arguments in *Common Sense*, the political landscape in 1776 America, the content of the *Declaration*, and the positions and activities of the five members of the committee assigned to draft a declaration, she then posits three possibilities:

"So, we have three versions regarding the authorship of the *Declaration of Independence*:

the first one is most generally recognized: the author is Thomas Jefferson;

the second one is at least not disputed and presents authorship as collective work;

the third is invariably neglected: the author is Thomas Paine. We will examine them in this order."

Covering several pages, Rukshina shows that Jefferson, by his own letters to individuals, was too busy, not interested, not informed sufficiently, not convinced for independence, to fulfill the task of writing a declaration. She quotes Pauline Maier [Professor of American History, Harvard], in doubt of Jefferson as the author:

[the Committee] "left no minutes of its proceedings, and the account of its work written nearest the event, Thomas Jefferson's 'Notes of Proceedings in the Continental

Congress' is succinct to a fault ... Both Jefferson and John Adams later helped flesh out that bare-bones story. However, most of their testimony on the drafting process was written between a quarter and a half century later, which even at that time raised questions about its accuracy, and, it turns out, for good reason. What they said *contains one mistake after another.*" (*Italics by KR*)

Rukshina asks: "What do the authors (John Adams and Thomas Jefferson) try to hide and why are they doing it!?! Would not it be much simpler and unequivocal to declare earlier: "It is I, Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the *Declaration of Independence*." Or, "I am Thomas Jefferson, the author of the *Declaration of Independence*."

In an emphatic point, Rukshina again turns to Maier:

"Learning how the *Declaration of Independence* was written is more like assembling an immensely complex jigsaw puzzle in which some pieces are 'teases,' serving only to mislead, while others necessary to complete the picture have probably been lost forever."

Then, having rejected Jefferson, Maier makes the assumption: "...the story of how the *Declaration* was written — is reasonably clear. It includes not a single talented writer

Continued on page 6, *Who Wrote the Declaration*

