

TJ Sentinel

February 2008 .. Issue 066



January 19, 1749: Isaiah Thomas

On this day in 1749, the Patriot printer Isaiah Thomas was born. In 1770, Thomas established the Massachusetts Spy, the first newspaper aimed at middle-class readers. While other papers were happy with 400 subscribers, the Spy had a circulation of 3,500. Thomas used the Spy to rally support for the cause of independence. Targeted by the British, he smuggled his press out of Boston to Worcester a few days before the Battle of Lexington and Concord. There, he continued publishing his newspaper. After the war, Thomas became the foremost publisher and printer in America. In 1812, he established the **American Antiquarian Society**, which today is one of the nation's most complete collections of printed work.

In the years leading up to the Revolution, Isaiah Thomas played a critical role in rousing the people of Massachusetts to resist British rule. As the publisher of the ardently pro-independence Massachusetts Spy, he understood the power of newspapers to stir people to action. He used his paper so effectively that the British eventually sought his arrest and execution. Thomas managed to escape with his printing press to the relative safety of Worcester; from there he continued to provide news and promote the American cause throughout the war.

Isaiah Thomas was born in Boston in 1749. His father deserted the family a few years later, leaving his mother with five children and no means to support them. The family was in such desperate straits that the city's Overseers of the Poor arranged for six-year-old Isaiah to be apprenticed to the printer Zechariah Fowle. Fowle taught the boy to set type, and Isaiah is said to have learned his alphabet and his type blocks at the same time. Thomas was a quick student and by the time he was in his teens, he was managing the print shop and was considered to be an excellent printer. In time, conflict between the master and his precocious apprentice prompted the younger man to leave Boston. He dreamed of going to London. He wandered from Nova Scotia to South Carolina, taking tem-

**Next Meeting: Feb. 9th
Breakfast @ 8am
West Dining Hall
Aldersgate Village
~ 8:45 am <Program TBA>**

"Please note this new address for Brian - zebrasrs@sbcglobal.net ."

For attendance at the meeting, please respond to Brian Vazquez at sarbmvy@sbcglobal.net ."

could not raise the money for the trip abroad. Finally, in 1770, the restless 21-year-old returned to Boston. He reconciled with Fowle, and the two became partners. They began publishing the The Massachusetts Spy. Fowle soon retired, and Thomas continued the business on his own.

By 1770, many people in Boston were coming to resent British policies towards the colony. Young Isaiah Thomas strongly supported the cause of independence. He was allied with John Hancock, Paul Revere, and other Boston Patriots. The Sons of Liberty were rumored to meet at the offices of the Spy. The British considered Thomas so dangerous that he later recalled "he had the honor of being included with John Hancock and Samuel Adams in a list of twelve persons who were to be summarily executed when taken." Each time Thomas printed an article critical of the British, he placed his shop and his personal liberty at risk. British officials considered such public attacks the acts of a traitor. In 1771, an irate Governor Thomas Hutchinson ordered that Thomas be prosecuted for malicious libel, but the grand jury refused to indict the printer. There were still plenty of Bostonians who supported the British, and they hanged Isaiah Thomas in effigy. British soldiers paraded before the Spy

TJC webpage:

http://members.cox.net/tjchptrtopekaks/TJC_SAR.htm

office, and Thomas was threatened with tarring. Thomas was undeterred. He was determined to use his printing press to undermine British authority. At night, he secretly published handbills for the Sons of Liberty. He arranged for special post riders to exchange news and papers with likeminded citizens in other colonies. Thomas knew that stories of British abuse of American rights made people angry and spurred them to action. Three days before the eventful morning of April 19, 1775, Thomas came to the conclusion that he could not safely remain in Boston. As he later wrote, referring to himself in the third person, he "had rendered himself very obnoxious to the friends of the British administration; and, in consequence, the tories and some of the British soldiery in the town, openly threatened him with the effects of their resentment . . . He was induced to pack up, privately, a press and types, and to send them in the night over Charles river to Charlestown, whence they were conveyed to Worcester".

As soon as the printing press reached Worcester, however, he resumed publishing the Spy. The paper carried eyewitness accounts of the battles of Lexington and Concord, which helped solidify support for the Patriot cause in the early days of the conflict.

Like so many other Massachusetts businessmen, Thomas suffered financially during the war. The number of subscribers to the Spy fell from 3,500 before the war to 200. Everything but the printing press he managed to move to Worcester was destroyed or stolen during the British occupation of Boston. According to family legend, Thomas was the first person in Massachusetts to read the Declaration of Independence when the express rider carrying it from Philadelphia to Boston stopped in Worcester. It was July 14, 1776, and Isaiah Thomas took the

Guests: Theresa Klotzbach, Sarah Ganser, Kaylor Coover, Corry Collier, Marilyn Chittenden, Elva Banning, Doris Wullschleger, Medford Shively, Wayne Wasson

Minutes: Members and guests of the Thomas Jefferson Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution met for breakfast in the west-dining hall at Aldersgate on January 12, 2008. There were 16 members and 9 guests present. Following the breakfast, members and guests met in the Wesley Auditorium.

President Brian Vazquez opened the meeting and called upon Compatriot Elborn Mendenhall to give the invocation. President Vazquez then led in the pledge of allegiance to the flag and the pledge to SAR. President Vazquez then introduced Sarah Ganser who gave a program on the mentoring program provided by the Breakthrough House for mental illness. President Vazquez and Compatriot Elborn Mendenhall then gave a program on some interesting internet genealogical websites. Vice President Ken Coover then introduced scouts Kaylor Coover and Corry Collier and discussed the SAR orations program. President Vazquez then asked Compatriot Roger Johnson to distribute copies of the Chapter minutes from the December 8, 2007, meeting. Compatriot Martin Klotzbach moved that the minutes be approved as presented. Compatriot Elborn Mendenhall seconded the

seconded the motion and it was approved by the members. A Chapter Treasurer's report was not available. Compatriot Martin Klotzbach then gave an update on color guard activities, ladies auxiliary activities, State and National SAR upcoming events and a new member incentive program. President Vazquez discussed Chapter membership and calling activities. President Vazquez then presented Dorothy Slemmons, widow of deceased Chapter member Robert Slemmons, with a recently approved supplemental membership.

Under old business, Compatriot Ramon Powers moved that the Chapter life membership and fee schedule as presented in the January 2008, Chapter newsletter be adopted. Compatriot Martin Klotzbach seconded the motion. After discussion, Compatriot Powers amended his motion to include the provision that life membership fees be accounted for in a separate Chapter fund to be administered by the Chapter Executive Committee consisting of the Chapter President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary. Compatriot Jim McHenry seconded the amended motion and the original motion as amended was approved by the members.

Under new business, Vice-President Ken Coover read from a prepared statement regarding the patriotism of two of the candidates currently running for President of the United States. Compatriots Jim McHenry and Patrick Huntley then gave their opinions regarding the prepared statement.

Compatriot Martin Klotzbach moved that discussion be tabled. Compatriot Elborn Mendenhall seconded the motion and it was approved by the members.

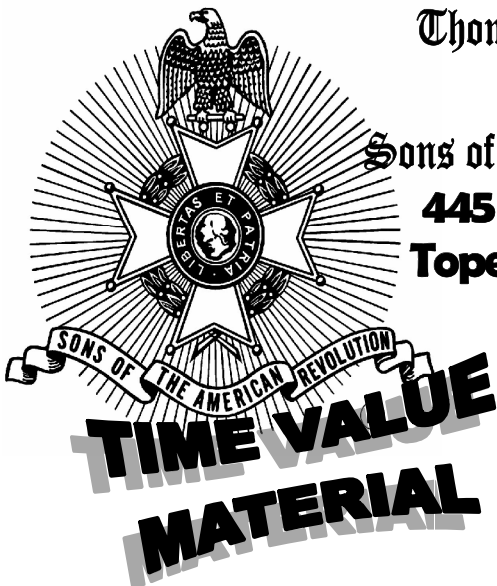
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Isaiah Thomas (cont. from page 1)

document to the steps of the meetinghouse and read it aloud to a crowd of rejoicing citizens. Thomas settled in Worcester where he eventually prospered as a printer and bookseller. He owned a printing house in Worcester and another in Boston; together they housed 16 presses. He also owned bookstores in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Albany, New York, and Maryland. He wrote A History of Printing in America and amassed a personal library of 8,000 volumes.

In 1812, he used his considerable wealth to establish a society dedicated to preserving the "literature of liberty"- the newspapers, broadsides, books, pamphlets, and letters that had shaped public opinion during the revolutionary period. He donated his private library and a generous endowment. Then he personally visited newspaper offices and purchased as many back issues as he could. He believed that newspapers were the single best records of the thoughts and actions of common people - the people who made the revolution a success. Located in Worcester, Thomas's **American Antiquarian Society** is today the most complete private repository of American printed works through 1876 and a lasting tribute to one man's passionate faith in the power of the printed word.

Source: Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities <http://www.massmoments.org/moment.cfm?mid=24>



**Thomas Jefferson Chapter
Kansas Chapter
Sons of the American Revolution
445 N.W. Valencia Rd
Topeka, KS 66615-9635**