

Winter History & Heritage -- #1 (December 5, 2011)

We continue our study of America and the West with this first of nine consecutive weekly posts for the winter months of December, January, and February. Our triweekly history tests are based mostly on these posts and occur after #3, #6, and #9.

Our quarterly exam (Winter 2012 History & Heritage Test) will be ready, Lord willing, at the end of February.

Text sources for the various posts (appearing in either summary or Q&A form) include George Grant & Gregory Wilbur's *Christian Almanac* and William Bennett's *America, Volume 1*. Other sources added to the mix from time-to-time will likewise be indicated.

The teacher's prime object via the history & heritage blog is to engage both students and parents in our common civilizational inheritance. Hope you enjoy, and take a little time to discuss together, the content for this and subsequent weeks. **Merry Christmas!**

The Remarkable Leadership of Teddy Roosevelt -- (Almanac, Nov. 29)

After a crucial legislative setback, President Theodore Roosevelt (1858--1919) called the leaders of the Senate opposition to the White House on November 29, 1905, (early in TR's second term or first full term). The senators, expecting to be browbeaten or verbally abused, were pleasantly surprised when the president gently inquired as to the reasons for their opposition, and asked how he might serve them and the American people better in the future. "I learned more about leadership and greatness in that one incident," one of the senators remarked, "than in all my previous years in politics."

Roosevelt understood that fallen men living in a fallen world are bound to fail, at least some of the time (even if they possess the strength of character and encyclopedic learning of a Teddy Roosevelt). What mattered to him was the contest, the vigorous effort, an honest admission of mistakes, and a willingness to learn from those mistakes.

"Far better it is," he colorfully observed, "to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

Rosa Parks -- (Almanac, Dec. 1)

Born in 1913 in Tuskegee, Alabama, (home to the exploits of educator Booker T. Washington), **this African-American lady** sparked the modern civil rights movement by her behavior on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955? She refused to give up her seat in the front of the "colored-section" to a white passenger as requested, and suffered the indignity of arrest. In response, the local NAACP organized a bus boycott (lasting over a year) to challenge segregation in public transportation.

“Intolerable Acts” -- (America, Vol.1, p. 74)

American colonists gave **this name** to a series of punitive acts passed by the English Parliament in 1774 in response to Sam Adams’ skillfully executed “Boston Tea Party”? One of the acts closed Boston harbor, while another revised the hallowed charter of Massachusetts to take away popular election of the Upper House of the legislature. Still another extended Quebec southward to the Ohio River, bringing Catholicism, French culture, and the specter of absolute monarchy menacingly near the colonies.

Pope’s Day and the Father of Our Country -- (America, Vol.1, p. 80)

It was late 1775, with Patriot forces surrounding Boston (still held by the British), when George Washington, Commander of the Continental Army, put an end to Pope’s Day festivities (a traditional New England holiday) by military camp decree. Among other things, New England soldiers were making preparations to burn the pope in effigy.

Washington clearly found the revelry distasteful (he termed it “ridiculous and childish”), and he knew it could not help America’s standing with French Catholics in Canada or in France (not to mention the minority Catholic population in the colonies). Their support and assistance, Washington believed, were crucial if independence was to be achieved.

Even more importantly, Washington’s military decree gave us a hint of the American religious outlook as it evolved over time. Broadly speaking, a national consensus affirmed the truth and benevolence of Christianity, but with respect for its variety of expressions in distinct denominations and churches. Full freedom of religion for all Christians and Christian institutions became the norm, coupled with a fairly broad tolerance of dissenters whose beliefs fell outside the Christian orbit.

Saratoga -- (America, Vol.1, pp. 90-91)

This October 1777 victory in upstate New York, America’s biggest to date in the Revolutionary War, convinced the French to support fully the American cause? A British and Indian force of 6,000 led by General John Burgoyne surrendered after suffering many loses at the hands of Col. Dan Morgan’s sharpshooting riflemen, including Sgt. Timothy Murphy of Pennsylvania. Earlier, Burgoyne had bet a parliamentary colleague he’d beat the Americans and be back in Britain by Christmas Day.

FDR Lauds Timothy Murphy -- (Historian Roger McGrath in Sept. 2010 Chronicles)

The state of New York, in 1929, raised a monument to the Revolutionary War victory at Saratoga on the battlefield site. The monument was dedicated to Timothy Murphy, the son of Irish immigrants who settled the Pennsylvania frontier. New York’s governor at the time, Franklin Roosevelt, spoke these words for the occasion:

This country has been made by Timothy Murphys, the men in the ranks. Conditions here called for the qualities of the heart and head that Tim Murphy had in abundance. Our histories should tell us more of the men in the ranks, for it was to them, more than to the generals, that we were indebted for our military victories.