

Winter History & Heritage -- #8 (February 13)

Most entries this week are based on *The Christian Almanac* (Grant/Wilbur) and *America, Volume 1* (Bennett). One comes from a column by historian Roger McGrath in the current issue of *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture* (Feb. 2012).

Election of 1824 -- (*Almanac*, Feb. 9)

John Quincy Adams, son of an illustrious Founding Father and U.S. president, won the presidency himself by virtue of a vote cast in the House of Representatives following **this inconclusive election?** The contest was turned over to the House by the Constitution's 12th Amendment when none of the candidates gained a majority of electoral college votes. Andrew Jackson of Tennessee did not prevail (at least on this occasion) though he won a plurality of both the popular and electoral votes.

Kamikaze -- (Roger McGrath; *Chronicles*, Feb. 2012)

With origins in an astounding triumph over a Mongolian armada in the 1200s, **this Japanese word for "divine wind"** names the deadly aerial attacks used against the U.S. in the waning months of World War II? The first of the attacks took place in October 1944 in Leyte Gulf in the Philippines, and they became a common feature of Japanese strategy by March 1945. "The mission," writes historian Roger McGrath, "was clearly suicidal but in keeping with Japan's *bushido* ('way of the warrior')."

Washington, Religious Liberty, and the Jews -- (*America*, Vol. 1, p.141)

One of the most inspiring expressions of the early American commitment to a generous toleration of non-Christian religions came from the pen of President Washington in a letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, (1790).

The president concluded his message with this fond hope (alluding to the promise of the Scriptures): "May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid."

In his letter, Washington actually went well beyond the bounds of toleration, generous or grudging, citing the still higher "inherent natural rights" in religion of all men and sects. The new Government of the United States, he assured the Jews, "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance. . ."

Amendments 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 -- (*America*, Vol. 1, pp. 142-143)

These five amendments to the Constitution, part of the famed Bill of Rights (1791), were intended to limit the judicial and law enforcement powers of the U.S. Government? Prohibited practices included "unreasonable searches and seizures," forcing the accused to testify against himself, and "cruel and unusual punishments." In the colonial era imperial Britain had transgressed grievously in some of these matters, most notably in the general search warrants called "Writs of Assistance."

Washington D.C., becomes the Nation's Capital -- (America, Vol. 1, pp. 144-146)

This decision favorable to the South, agreed upon around 1790, served as the political tradeoff for congressional acceptance of Hamilton's plan for retiring war debts? Jefferson and Madison were of a mind to block the Treasury secretary's scheme, which funded speculators at par (\$100 for a \$100 bond note) and assumed state debts still outstanding. But when Hamilton proved willing to swap votes, the two Virginians fell in line and pledged their influence to persuade Southern colleagues to do likewise.

National Bank -- (America, Vol. 1, p. 147)

This feature of the national financial system was justified by its programmatic architect (Hamilton) as essential to the new government's access to credit and to American commercial development? Jefferson and Madison objected to its constitutionality, but it came into being nonetheless when President Washington and Congress supported it. Its constitutionality, argued Hamilton, was by virtue of the "implied powers" granted Congress in the "necessary and proper clause" (Article 1, section 8).

Jefferson Takes His Stand -- (America, Vol. 1, pp. 147-148)

The agrarian philosopher Thomas Jefferson (1743--1826), in his *Notes on Virginia*, argued that good manners and mores, not to mention providing for oneself life's basic necessities, made urbanization and industrialization bad policy for America.

Jefferson wrote: "The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body. It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigour. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution."

Jefferson preferred, "for the general operations of manufacture," that America's "workshops remain in Europe." Far better, he thought, to send our raw goods to workmen there than to bring an immigrant proletariat (industrial working class) to our shores. We could simply import whatever mass-produced goods we needed.

What are we to make of, to our ears, such a strange sounding view of the world? Is it just New World chauvinism or the snobbery of frontiersmen? Perhaps. But it may also be that a society skewed toward massive cities and mass production and consumption will inevitably lose its way and its soul. As one French scholar put it, people are like apples. If they live stacked one upon another, they will rot.

Jefferson may have perceived a slavish spirit, demoralized and helplessly dependent, in the urban masses. They simply were not fit (even if the blame lay mostly elsewhere) for the duties and privileges of republican liberty.