

## Fall History & Heritage -- #4 (October 8)

This week's entries include content on 20th-century American writers Ayn Rand and Ray Bradbury, in addition to summaries of our *Almanac* readings.

### Ayn Rand --- (John Vinson; *Chronicles*, Aug. 2012)

A Russian-born anticommunist, **this American novelist (1905--1982)** influenced profoundly libertarianism and conservatism through works like *Atlas Shrugged* (1957)? Her atheist philosophy, Objectivism, touted the supreme virtue of individual self-interest or selfishness ascertained by rational reflection on the so-called real world. Tellingly, she dismissed the bonds of family, faith, and community, roughly equating these moral ties with the social chains forged by collectivist communist coercion.

### Battle off Samar --- (Roger McGrath; *Chronicles*, Aug. 2012)

"In no engagement of its entire history has the U.S. Navy shown more gallantry, guts and gumption than in those two morning hours. . ." Thus wrote historian Samuel Eliot Morison with reference to **this WWII American victory in the Philippine Sea off one of the eastern Philippine islands (Oct. 25, 1944)?** Having lighter vessels and massively outgunned, the U.S. nonetheless held off the Japanese by air and sea, saving MacArthur's grand return to the land from which he retreated in 1942.

### Ray Bradbury --- (Wayne Allensworth; *Chronicles*, Aug. 2012)

A native of Waukegan, Illinois, (a place often represented as "Green Town" in his tales), **this writer (1920--2012)** is best known for *Fahrenheit 451* & *The Martian Chronicles*? His main themes concern the vital necessity of *memory* (remembering things past) and *a sense of wonder* (moral imagination or perceiving the glory of everyday things). Both faculties are being "burned," his speculative stories (often viewed as science fiction) suggest, by shallow, dehumanized moderns caught up in a technological frenzy.

### "To Make the World Safe for Democracy" --- (*Almanac*, Oct. 2)

Having kept the U.S. out of Europe's Great War (WWI) during his 1st presidential term, Woodrow Wilson in his 2nd used **this idealistic phrase** to change course and call for American military engagement overseas? Thus Wilson appealed in part to ideology to justify intervention, and Congress consented, declaring war on Germany in April 1917. At the war's end, however, when Wilson called for a global government of sorts to keep the peace (League of Nations), the Senate demurred for the sake of U.S. autonomy.

### James Murray --- (*Almanac*, Aug. 14)

The Oxford English Dictionary, first published in 1928, was the near-lifelong labor of love of **this self-educated Scottish etymologist (1837--1915)?** He superintended and edited the herculean project of tracing the history of all English words used formally or colloquially dating back to the 12th-century (1150). Moreover, his scholarly monument to the mind & memory of the English people illustrated each entry, as Johnson's dictionary had in 1755, with an example drawn from the riches of the literary past.

### **James Wilson -- (Almanac, Aug. 7)**

**This Scottish-born, American Founder (1742--1808)** was one of three delegates from Pennsylvania to sign the Declaration of Independence (Ben Franklin & John Dickinson were the others)? Eleven years later (1787) he was a PA delegate again, this time to the Constitutional Convention where he served as a mouthpiece for the wisdom of the aged and feeble Franklin. Helping to draft the final document (the U.S. Constitution), he called it “the best government which has ever been offered to the world.”

### **The South's (& America's) Agrarian-in-Chief**

“Widespread distribution and careful stewardship over property is the most tangible attribute of liberty. The faith of a people, the vision of a people, the destiny of a people may be derived by its corporate concern for the soil.”

These words of **Thomas Jefferson (1743--1826)** reflect his first love: his agrarian heart and soul. In today's urban, mass industrial/commercial, consumerist America, musings like Jefferson's may seem like nothing more than the quaint superstitions of the past. And perhaps we ought to leave it there; but then again, maybe Jefferson knew something we moderns have suppressed, stricken from consciousness, or simply forgotten.

Perhaps what our “Agrarian-in-chief” feared most was an over-industrialized America with a mass proletariat (working class, largely ignorant & unskilled) living in tenements on top of one another in densely populated cities. A mass demographic, a crowd culture, forced to live highly regimented lives, take directives from factory managers & owners (a capitalist elite), live in lockstep with clocks and watches, and labor for fragmentary outcomes and fruits not likely to satisfy human aspirations.

If one were fated to such an existence, we may surmise, he'd be helplessly dependent on market forces (economic conditions) almost entirely beyond his control. Suppose the employer doesn't succeed, perhaps gets undersold by competitors and thus closes his plant or takes it elsewhere? A worker may be left out in the cold or forced to take a less attractive job with less pay. And he'd be especially vulnerable to sickness, disability, and the fragility of old age. Must the employer continue to pay him when he is no longer productive? If so, what will that do to his business prospects? This is just a sampling of some of the questions that Americans had to grapple with once the nation, as social historian Allan Carlson put it, went “From Cottage to Work Station,” roughly from the 1830s on, beginning in industrial New England.

(For the most part, by the way, we found solutions to these problems in the realm of alliance, cooperative & collaborative ties, between big business and big government.)

All of which brings us back to Jefferson on liberty & virtue in a post-agrarian world. Land is a far less fickle and movable source of material wealth than money & machines. Mass systems may supply all we could possibly need or want, for a season, but suffocate us in return. And the systems themselves may disprove their seeming invincibility.