



*Newsboys'*  
**NEW YEAR'S  
GREETINGS**  
*to their Customers  
after Independence*  
**Five Poems: 1784-1790**

For over two centuries until the early 1900s, news carriers delivered new year's greetings to their customers in the form of printed broadsides or, later, pamphlets that might include the new year's calendar. In exchange for the poetic greetings, the "news boys" expected tips from grateful customers. The verses were written anonymously by local writers (not the boys themselves), including the "Poet of the Revolution," Philip Freneau. These five poems trace the new nation's view of itself in the years after the 1783 peace treaty, from the "dismal prospects" of 1783 to the "clouded prospects" of 1786 to the "happy days" of 1790.

1784

**New Year Verses for Those Who Carry  
The *Pennsylvania Gazette* to the Customers**

January 1, 1784<sup>1</sup>

**H**ow things have chang'd since last New Year,  
What dismal Prospects then arose!  
Scarce at your Doors I dar'd appear,  
So multifarious were our Woes:

But Time at length has chang'd the Scene,  
Our Prospects now are more serene.

Bad News we brought you every Day,  
Your Seamen slain, your Ships off Shore,  
The Army fretting for their Pay——  
'Twas well they had not fretted more!  
'Twas wrong indeed to wear out Shoes,  
To bring you nothing but bad News.

Now let's be joyful for the change——  
The Folks that guard the *English* Throne  
Have giv'n us ample Room to range,  
And more, perhaps, than was their own;  
To Western Lakes they stretch our Bounds,  
And yield the *Indian* Hunting Grounds.

But pray read on another Year,  
Remain the humble Newsman's Friend;  
And he'll engage to let you hear  
What *Europe's* Princes next intend.——  
E'en now their Brains are all at work,  
To rouse the *Russian* on the *Turk*.<sup>2</sup>

Well — if they fight, they fight they must,  
They are a strange, contentious Breed;  
One good Effect will be, I trust,  
The more that's kill'd, the more you'll read;  
For gift Experience fully shews,<sup>3</sup>  
THAT WRANGLING IS THE LIFE OF NEWS.

<sup>1</sup> The anonymous author was Philip Freneau, known as the Poet of the Revolution.

<sup>2</sup> Russia and the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) fought a series of wars from the late 1600s through the late 1800s.

<sup>3</sup> Shows.

*Connecticut Courant*, Hartford, Connecticut, January 1, 1784

I'M come (you'll all expect) to express  
 My New Year's compliments on peace.  
 I give you joy, and own in rhyme,  
 It ne'er could come in better time,  
 But yet on some accounts I doubt it,  
 You are not all exactly suited;  
 For Peace comes hard at all adventures  
 On Merchants, Heroes, and News-printers.  
 To Heroes, peace is ne'er inviting,  
 Who get their fame and bread by fighting.  
 'Twas quite unkind to end the fray,  
 And throw them wholly out of play;  
 Our *Cincinnati*<sup>1</sup> give their words  
 To plowshares all to turn their swords;<sup>2</sup>  
 But when they come to ape the Roman,  
 I doubt they'll make indifferent plowmen.<sup>3</sup>

And 'tis as hard, were we to choose,  
 On us poor folks, who live by news;  
 We tell no more of tidings heavy  
 Of burning towns or sinking navy,  
 Of cannon's rear and trumpet's rattle,  
 And thousands slain at once in battle,  
 And beauteous virgins in affright  
 By foes all ravish'd in a night.  
 Strange tales, that give delight still stranger,  
 To gentle readers out of danger!

Yet though we've left the news you crave,  
 We'll make the best of what we have.  
 Our Papers yield a place that's fit  
 For all your politics and wit:  
 Your town resolves still want our care,  
 To print and show how wise ye are.  
 Here ev'ry scribbler in the nation  
 May praise or rail at commutation,<sup>4</sup>  
 Curse impost acts, and (what in them lies)  
 Pull down our Congress and Assemblies,  
 And laden with a popular hint,  
 Come forth and ease themselves in print.  
 Here we shall tell what's done and doing,  
 To save this happy land from ruin;  
 From us ye learn what each designs,  
 Who gets in office or resigns,  
 Who's doom'd to yield his civil breath,  
 And whom for popular perfection  
 You're bound to vote for, next election.

Thus while we strive for your good will,  
 We hope you'll like to see us still,  
 And pay us once a year, as right,  
 As you do beggars, for the fight.

<sup>1</sup> The Society of the Cincinnati was formed in 1783 of American and French officers in the Continental Army. It was widely criticized as undemocratic for its restricted membership to officers and their sons, for some too reminiscent of European nobility with hereditary titles.

<sup>2</sup> Return to peacetime. "And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Isaiah 2:4 [and Micah 4:3; Old Testament].

<sup>3</sup> I.e., when the Cincinnati members return to their peacetime lives, many as wealthy plantation owners, they may still consider themselves as an elite group ("ape the Roman").

<sup>4</sup> The Commutation Act, passed by Congress in 1783, provided officers with five years' full pay, replacing a 1780 provision granting half-pay pensions for life. The law was hotly debated, opponents resenting their taxes used to maintain officers in idle luxury, and supporters defending pensions for those who led the nation's victory in war.

1786

New Year Verses for 1786  
Addressed to the Customers  
of the *Columbian Herald*  
by the Printers' Lads Who Carry It

Charleston, South Carolina, January 1786<sup>1</sup>

“OLD Eighty-five is past and gone,  
“Another year comes hurrying on  
“To quit us in its turn;  
“With outspread wings and running glass  
“Thus time’s deluding seasons pass!”  
So Parsons say, and mourn.

Their gloomy strain adds grief to grief;—  
We are the *boys* that give relief;  
With sprightly wit and merry lay,  
Our various page to all imparts  
Amusement fit for social hearts,  
And drives the monster *spleen*, away.<sup>2</sup>

Abroad our leaves of knowledge fly,  
And twice a week they live and die,  
Short moment of repose!  
Fair to your view, our toils display  
The monarch’s aim, what patriots say,  
Or sons of art disclose.

Whate’er the barque of commerce brings,  
From sister states or foreign kings,  
No atom we conceal;<sup>3</sup>  
All Europe’s prints<sup>4</sup> we hourly drain,  
All Asia’s news our leaves contain,  
And round *our world* we deal.

If falsehoods sometimes prompt your fears,  
(Like recent stuff from proud Algiers,  
That give our merchants pain)<sup>5</sup>  
Remember ’twas no homespun tale,  
And *truth* shall over lies prevail,  
And claim her rights again.

If British isles (that once were free  
In Indian seas, to you and me)  
All entrance still restrain,<sup>6</sup>  
Why, let them starve with all their host  
When British pride gives up the ghost,  
And courts our aid in vain.

We fondly hope another year  
Will all our clouded prospects clear,  
And commerce stretch her wings;  
New tracks of trade, new wealth disclose,  
Where’er the wandering sailor goes,  
In spite of growling kings.

Materials thus together drawn,  
To tell you how the world goes on,  
May surely claim regard—  
One simple word we mean to say,  
“This is our jovial NEW YEAR’S DAY,  
And now—our toils reward.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The anonymous author was Philip Freneau, known as the Poet of the Revolution.

<sup>2</sup> I.e., drives away sad and melancholic moods.

<sup>3</sup> I.e., no matter what news arrives in European newspapers delivered by merchant ships, the Herald will reprint news important to its readers.

<sup>4</sup> I.e., all Europe’s newspapers.

<sup>5</sup> The Barbary pirates in north Africa regularly plundered U.S. and European ships, capturing their cargoes and crewmen.

<sup>6</sup> By a controversial provision in the 1783 peace treaty, U.S. merchants could not trade in the ports of the British West Indies.

<sup>7</sup> I.e., reward our labor with tips.

1787

Verses on the New Year, 1787  
Humbly addressed by the Lads who distribute  
the *Independent Gazetteer* to the Customers

Philadelphia, January 1, 1787

Now like a ghost has *eighty-six*,  
Fairly departed over Styx,<sup>1</sup>  
And in its place from azure heav'n,  
Descends the placid *eighty-seven*.  
May this new year propitious be,  
As was the glorious eighty-three,  
When Independence crown'd with peace,  
Bid war and desolation cease.<sup>2</sup>  
May commerce still remain to bless,  
While virtue adds true happiness;  
May wealth roll in from ev'ry quarter,  
As flows the limpid stream of water,  
From ev'ry country old and new  
*Macao's* port and rich *Peru*.  
May we no longer hear of quarrels,  
I mean such as may injure morals;  
But those delightful stories, which  
Make *devils* fat and printers rich:  
A stinging libel told in rhymes  
A gentle hint against the times;  
From *Vermont's* state some angry squabble,  
And noise and smoke from *Boston's* rabble.<sup>3</sup>  
Their feats will keep our trade alive;  
*Devils*, when knaves fall out, will thrive.

Tho' o'er our heads, wild, black'ning tempests roll,  
And wint'ry storms, loud thunder from the pole;  
Tho' flakes of snow bespangle o'er the ground—  
Fearless of all, we take our usual round,  
And never from the line of duty swerve,  
Our customers with latest news to serve.  
Some small *douceur*<sup>4</sup> our trouble will repay  
And glad our spirits on this new year's day;  
Will make us smile, and that too, with great reason,  
And cheerful bear the rigors of the season.

Accept this wish, which shall not be the last,  
“May each new year be happier than the past.”

<sup>1</sup> *Styx* (pronounced stiks): in Greek mythology, the river over which the souls of the dead were ferried to Hades.

<sup>2</sup> The final peace treaty with Britain was signed September 3, 1783.

<sup>3</sup> Referring to Shay's Rebellion in Massachusetts, during which several leaders escaped to Vermont.

<sup>4</sup> *Douceur* [French]: a tip.

1790

New Year Verses of Those Who Carry  
the *Pennsylvania Gazette* to the Customers

Philadelphia, January 1, 1790

AS glides our flying hours so swift away,  
And one short minute forms another day;  
So doth one day commence the new born year,  
Like minutes past the former doth appear.  
Our sins with the old year let's bid adieu!  
And with thanksgiving welcome in the NEW.  
But pause awhile —— and study to relate  
Events part past, part in the womb of fate;  
Events, the like the world ne'er yet brought forth  
Nor Goths, nor Vandals, from the frigid north.  
The last year produc'd strange revolutions,  
Change of systems, change of constitutions,<sup>1</sup>  
The rich are humbled and the great brought low,  
The poor are raised and the mighty bow;  
But long foretold in ancient revelations,  
The fall of empires and the rise of nations.  
Th' electric spark of FREEDOM, gender'd in the west,<sup>2</sup>  
Beneficently burst and settled in the east;  
Like Sol's bright rays, diffuse his blessings round,  
O happy land! where but one spark be found.  
O hear kind Heav'n, and grant our good allies<sup>3</sup>  
May share our blessings, virtuous grow and wise;  
Licentious acts and tumults, cursed sound,  
(Like hated Bastille) level'd with the ground;<sup>4</sup>  
Still hear my pray'r, may FREEDOM blaze still more  
And scorch the torrid *Africanian* shore;  
May its bright rays emancipate the world,  
And SLAVERY<sup>5</sup> at length to Satan hurl'd,  
Then in fair FREEDOM's path the world will run,  
Like us be govern'd by a WASHINGTON.  
Thrice happy, happy days on earth we'll find  
"Peace and good will henceforth to all mankind."

<sup>1</sup> In 1789 occurred the French Revolution and, in the United States, the installation of the first government under the new Constitution.

<sup>2</sup> I.e., engendered in the western world.

<sup>3</sup> The French (U.S. allies in the Revolutionary War).

<sup>4</sup> The Bastille prison in Paris was stormed by rioting citizens on July 14, 1789, at the beginning of the French Revolution.

<sup>5</sup> In this context, "slavery" refers to oppression by despotic rulers (as George III was deemed by American Patriots) as well as the enslavement of Africans.