



# PHILIP MAZZEI

## *A Patriot Named Furioso*

By Abbey Dean

If one's choice of friends is, in fact, a true judgment of character, then Philip Mazzei was surely a picture of respectability. Or, if nothing else, he clearly had a taste for power and influence, with iconic figures such as George Washington, John Adams, James Madison and Benjamin Franklin in his regular correspondence.

However, Mazzei, an Italian-born wine merchant, surgeon and horticulturist, was undoubtedly closest to his longtime friend and neighbor, Thomas Jefferson.

In 1773, after working as a wine merchant in London for 18 years, Mazzei sailed to Virginia to conduct agricultural experiments and indulge his curiosity in Colonial politics. According to Monticello's Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia, he brought a tailor, laborers and Maria Martini, who became his wife in 1774.

Intent on growing wine in the region, Mazzei was persuaded by Jefferson (then an acquaintance through a shared business connection) to settle on the south side of Monticello. By 1778, Mazzei had purchased 700 additional acres, naming his farm Colle, Italian for hill.

Though credited with introducing wine growing in Monticello, Mazzei's wine production was marred by bad luck and bad weather, though he

remained convinced that Virginia's climate and soil was "better calculated" than any other for wine.

While failing to get his wine venture off the ground, Mazzei was much more successful in establishing himself as a patriot. He spoke publicly, promoting Jefferson's ideals of religious freedom

constitution. Jefferson even shared with Mazzei his "Rough Draught" of the Declaration of Independence.

In fact, the famous doctrine "all men are created equal" was likely inspired by Mazzei, whose following words were published in a 1774 issue of the *Virginia Gazette*: "All men are by nature equally



Philip Mazzei

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first in churches and later as a pamphleteer. He contributed articles railing against the British government to John Pinkney's *Virginia Gazette* (1774–1775) under the pseudonym "Furioso."

In fact, Mazzei's "Instructions of the Freeholders of Albemarle County to their Delegates in Convention" was used to help Jefferson write a new state

free and independent. Such equality is necessary in order to create a free government." According to John F. Kennedy in his 1958 book *A Nation of Immigrants*, this phrase appears "in Mazzei's own hand, written in Italian, several years prior to the writing of the Declaration of Independence."

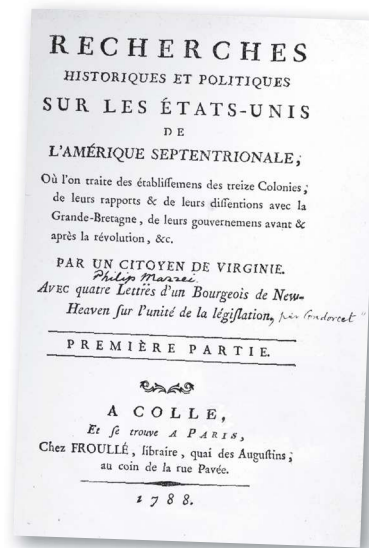
In 1778, Jefferson, Patrick Henry and others, decided that Mazzei's

many talents could best be utilized to help the war effort abroad. For years, Mazzei served as Jefferson's secret agent in Italy, gathering useful military information, sharing political rumblings and even acquiring weaponry to send back to the Continental Army.

Years later, with the war won, Mazzei returned to Colle in 1783. He hoped to receive a consular post but failed to do so. Two years later, he left Virginia to travel throughout Europe, though his wife, Maria, would stay at Colle until her death in 1788. She was buried in Jefferson's family graveyard in Monticello.

Even while he was traveling, Mazzei remained close to his American compatriots, especially Jefferson. In 1788,

likely with some assistance from his Virginia friends, Mazzei published a four-volume history of the Colonies in French, *Recherches Historiques et Politiques sur les États-Unis de l'Amérique*



Title page of a 1788 edition of a book from Thomas Jefferson's library on the history and politics of the United States, which he helped Philip Mazzei prepare in Paris in 1786.

*Septentrionale*. As the first published history of the Revolution, Mazzei's work was instrumental in countering British and French propaganda about the war.

Though Mazzei remains relatively unknown, he played a pivotal role as a constant advocate for the Patriot cause. Even after he left Virginia, Jefferson and Mazzei continued to correspond, their letters revealing a shared fascination in horticulture, with Mazzei even sending Jefferson several varieties of seeds and plants to Monticello.

Eventually, Mazzei retired to Pisa, Italy, in 1792, and remarried in 1796. In the final years of his life, Mazzei established himself as a gardener and completed his memoirs before his death in 1816.

On first hearing of the death of Mazzei in a letter from Thomas Appleton, Jefferson wrote this heartfelt response in July 1816.

*"Your letters ... brought me the first information of the death of my ancient friend Mazzei, which I learn with sincere regret. He had some peculiarities, and who of us has not? But he was of solid worth; honest, able, zealous in sound principles moral and political, constant in friendship, and punctual in all his undertakings. He was greatly esteemed in this country ..."*

In the same letter, Jefferson writes that he has "no doubt" that Mazzei's writings about the American Revolution will "furnish some good materials for our history, of which there is already a wonderful scarcity."

No doubt it was Mazzei's careful documentation of the country's founding, admiration from the nation's foremost men and unique contributions that resulted in a 1980 commemorative stamp to honor the 250th anniversary of his birth. A 40-cent airmail stamp bears his name and an original portrait of Mazzei, with just two words above his likeness: "Patriot Remembered."

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