



John Peter Zenger (Profiles in American History)

Karen Bush Gibson

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John Peter Zenger was a German immigrant who came to the United States at the age of 13. He soon became a printer's apprentice and learned everything he could about printing. He published the first independent political newspaper in the American colonies, *The New-York Weekly Journal*. The British colonial government became angry about articles in the newspaper that criticized the government. They demanded to know who wrote the articles. Although Zenger wasn't the writer, he refused to tell and was arrested for printing seditious libel. After eight months in jail, a sensational trial was held that found Zenger not guilty. John Peter Zenger and his trial influenced freedoms of speech and press that were later made a part of the Bill of Rights. But the consequences of the Zenger trial reached even farther. As one of the founding fathers who wrote the U.S. Constitution, Gouverneur Morris said, "The trial of Zenger in 1735 was the germ of American freedom, the morning star of that liberty which subsequently revolutionized America."

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