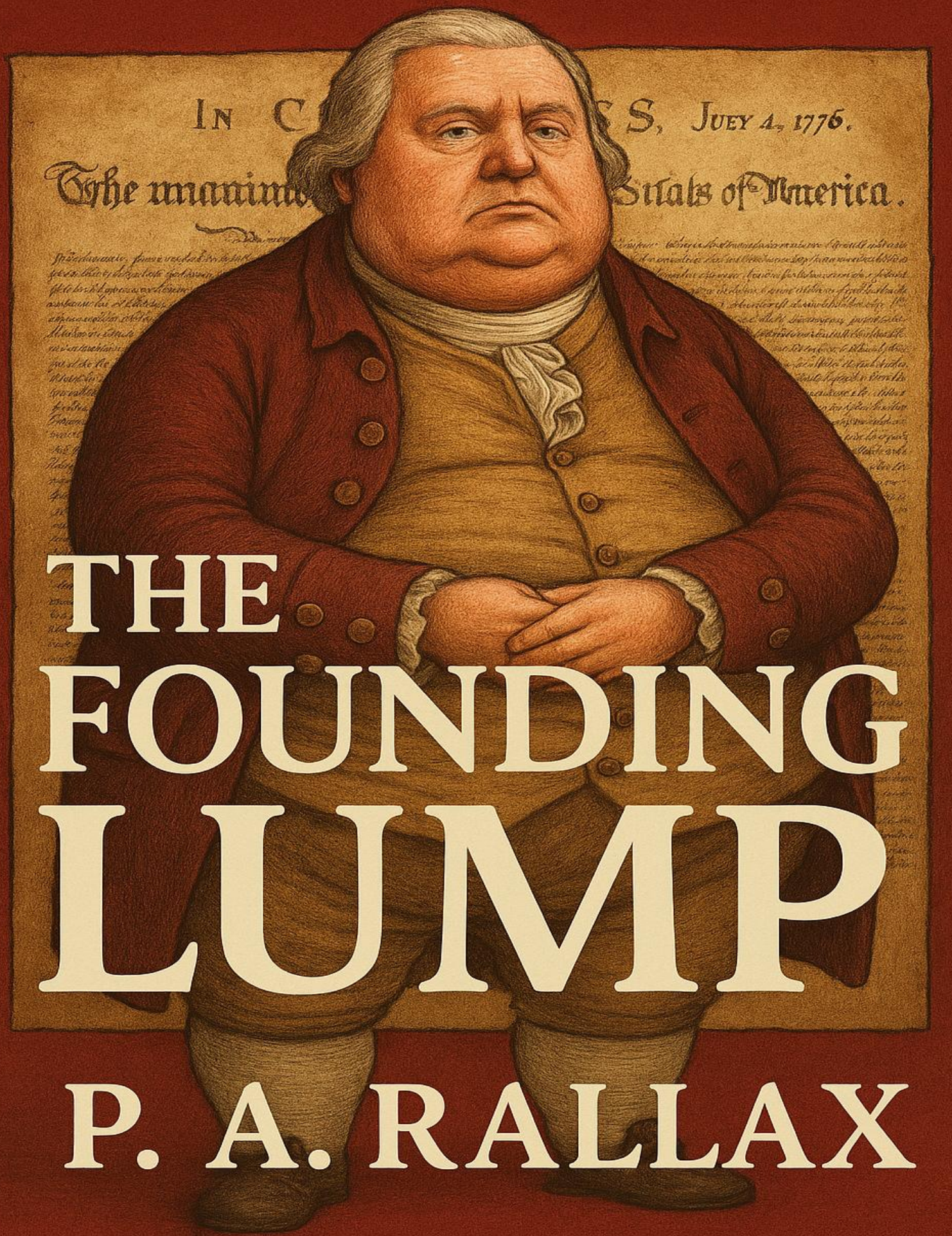
"Every republic begins with a clerical error."



THE FOUNDING LUMP

A Historical Satire

"Every republic begins with a clerical error."

by

P. A. Rallax

The Founding Lump: A Historical Satire
Written by P. A. Rallax

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Chapter 1: The Ink-Stained Stranger

As transcribed from the recovered papers of Bartholomew Ignatius Lump, date unknown

They say the Continental Congress was a sacred meeting of minds—noble men gathered in Philadelphia to forge a vision, draft a declaration, and drink responsibly.

They are wrong.

I was there. And if I wasn't *technically* there, I was certainly nearby enough to be remembered by someone, someday. This is that day.

My name is **Bartholomew Ignatius Lump**, and history does not remember me. But it should, albeit perhaps briefly and with a note of apology.

I arrived in Philadelphia in the spring of 1775. Or perhaps the autumn of 1774. My accounts are clearer on the price of ink than on the year. I was carrying three things:

1. An ink satchel not entirely full of ink,
2. A coat two sizes too important,
3. And a letter of introduction I wrote myself, addressed "To Whom It Surely Concerns."

My original purpose was simple—I had been hired (in theory) to deliver ink refills to the Committee on Stylings, a short-lived branch of the Congress focused on making important things look more... parchmenty.

But upon arrival at Carpenters' Hall, I made the mistake of walking confidently.

Confidence, I've learned, is the universal password. I nodded at the doorman, adjusted my lapels, and strolled into the chamber as if I were late for a meeting no one else knew had been scheduled. Within

minutes, I was seated at the far end of the long oak table, silently adjusting my quill and furrowing my brow with great legislative intent.

No one questioned me.

They assumed I belonged. Or worse, that I was someone's cousin.

My first contribution to American governance occurred entirely by accident.

As the esteemed delegates debated whether to declare independence or merely suggest it with a passive-aggressive tone, I scribbled a note to myself in the margin of my ledger:

"*Indulgence = nice word. Try for draft.*"

The note was misread aloud by John Hancock, misinterpreted as a motion, and—through a flurry of parliamentary confusion—adopted as a resolution. Thus, the first draft of the independence debate was phrased in such a way that it sounded less like rebellion and more like a firm request for time off.

I meant to correct the error, but by then, people had started clapping.

What surprised me most was how quickly one became indispensable at a constitutional gathering. You merely had to be **willing to write things down.** Men with powdered wigs twice my volume leaned over to ask for quills, for clarifications, for the correct spelling of "tyranny."

(For the record, I spelled it "*tear-any,*" which no one corrected.)

By the end of that week, I was not merely an observer—I was being referred to in passing as "our ink steward," "the gentleman in the shadows," and on one occasion, "possibly with Franklin."

Let the record show: I was not with Franklin.
He smelled of wet parchment and genius. I smelled of warmed vinegar and accident.

It wasn't long before I developed my first principle of governance:

If you can't lead them, confuse the minutes.

I began keeping official notes of each session—not because I was asked, but because the official recorder had a tendency to nap mid-debate. My version of events was, admittedly, more interpretive than literal. I described silences as "vigorous reflection," disagreements as "philosophical layering," and long lunch breaks as "civic fasting."

By the time anyone realized the inaccuracy, my notes had already been reprinted and cited by multiple delegates who had failed to take their own.

And that, dear reader, is how I became a fixture in America's founding conversations: not through vision, not through valor, but through **verbatim improvisation** and a very lucky seating arrangement.

I didn't set out to shape the birth of a nation.
I just had the good fortune to sit down before anyone asked me to leave.

Chapter 2: The Ale That Birthed a Nation

In which several drafts are consumed, but only one is signed

There are moments in history that historians revere—declarations thundered across parchment, liberty forged in candlelight, solemn men with solemn pens defining the course of human freedom.

And then there was **a Tuesday night in the summer of 1776 at the Liberty Tavern**, which smelled mostly of barley, ink, and unresolved father issues.

The Congress adjourned early that evening, having spent six hours arguing over whether "inalienable" or "unalienable" sounded more poetic when yelled. The consensus: both were impossible to spell after the third glass of cider.

Naturally, the tavern was full.

I took my usual stool near the far end of the bar, beneath a portrait of King George that someone had embellished with a mustache and a price tag.

I was midway through a disappointing tankard of weak ale when I summoned the barkeep, a portly man named Remus whose apron looked like it had lost three wars.

"This," I declared, slapping the table, "is not liberty. This is **liquid betrayal**."

"I don't brew," he grunted.

"Then consider this a formal protest."

In the spirit of patriotism (and mild intoxication), I pulled from my satchel a spare sheet of parchment and began composing a letter. My intent was a scathing critique of the beverage, but I may have overreached. I remember the first few lines:

When in the course of human consumption, it becomes necessary for one drinker to dissolve the bonds between ale and expectation…

It escalated quickly from there. Something about natural rights, dissolving political bands, and malt-based tyranny. I believe I also accused the tap of being complicit in British taxation, though my phrasing was more poetic than legally actionable.

I signed it at the bottom:
Bartholomew Ignatius Lump, Representative of Disappointed Palates
…and promptly passed out.

I awoke the next morning in the tavern's back storage room, cradling a sack of oats and a candle stump. Franklin was there, inspecting the parchment I had left on the bar.

"Curious phrasing," he muttered. "Did you mean this as a metaphor?"

"I meant it to be a complaint."

"Well," he said, folding the page delicately, "several delegates believe it's the finest proto-declaration yet."

"…Declaration of what?"

"Of independence, of course. From tyranny. From monarchy. From Remus' ale."

He paused, then added, "Jefferson is already rewriting it. He's adding semicolons."

Thus began the myth that I had helped draft the Declaration of Independence.

In truth, I drafted a complaint under the influence of betrayal and barley.
But history, as I've learned, prefers good prose to accurate context.

My original title, *A Toast to Better Ale*, was wisely discarded.
Jefferson replaced it with *A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America*—which, I admit, had a certain *gravitas*.

My phrase ‘We the People’ failed to make the Declaration. Years later, it resurfaced in the Constitution. No one remembers that it began on the back of a tavern receipt I used to blot the ink.

And so, my second principle of governance was born:

If you want to be remembered, complain poetically and fall asleep near witnesses.

Chapter 3: On the Unsanctioned Chairperson

In which seating becomes status, and silence becomes power

It is a truth rarely acknowledged that in every great room where decisions are made, the most powerful person is not the loudest voice—it is the one **already seated when everyone else walks in**.

And so I, Bartholomew Ignatius Lump, achieved my third political breakthrough:

I sat down early.

It began innocently. I'd arrived two hours ahead of a scheduled Committee on Structural Phrasing (they had recently split from the Committee on Rhetorical Balance over the placement of commas). I'd meant to nap. But as the other delegates trickled in, there I was—elbows squared on the table, quill in hand, eyes narrowed at a blank parchment.

No one disturbed me.

They assumed I was either taking notes, reviewing drafts, or drafting reviews.
Several nodded respectfully. One apologized for interrupting.
Within an hour, I was being referred to as **Chairperson Emeritus by Proximity.**

By midweek, I had repositioned my seat three inches to the left, directly in line with the sunbeams from the stained-glass window. This lent my silhouette a mystical quality that proved helpful during votes.

When asked whether I was chairing the Committee on Committee Formation, I simply replied, "I've always preferred to facilitate the facilitation."
The response, I believe, was misinterpreted as wisdom. I was not corrected.

I issued no rulings, but I hummed approvingly at key moments.

Soon, the question was not *"Who is Lump?"*
It was *"Has Lump spoken?"*

I brought a small brass bell from home.
I rang it twice daily—once to begin "deliberations," and once for something I termed "conceptual adjournment," a phrase so vague it caused immediate compliance.

I recorded none of the proceedings, but gave the appearance of meticulous shorthand.
To this day, no one knows my pages were filled with recipes, speculative bird names, and a running list of people who might be spies (including myself, twice).

Franklin confronted me once in the hallway.

"You're not a chairperson," he said, mildly amused.

"No," I replied. "But I do sit well."

He looked at me for a long moment.

"Carry on."

It was during this period that the Great Debate on Colonial Naming Conventions arose. Should we refer to ourselves as "States," "Provinces," or something less French?

I remained quiet throughout, then cleared my throat and said:

"I believe the people will decide what we are called. We should simply provide a blank space and let them mispronounce it over generations."

The room nodded.
Someone wrote it on the wall.
A new committee was formed to discuss what I meant.

Thus, my third principle of governance:

Authority, like furniture, need not be earned—only well-placed and difficult to remove.

Chapter 4: The Compromise Misheard 'Round the World

In which two rooms become two chambers, and a closet becomes a mystery

Compromise, I am told, is the cornerstone of democracy.
But in my experience, it's more often the result of one person mishearing another, nodding with great confidence, and hoping the mistake becomes tradition.

Which is precisely how I created the Congress you know today.

It began in the summer of 1787 with a discussion—if that's the word for twenty-seven men yelling with Latin accents—about how legislative authority should be structured. Some argued for a single, grand assembly. Others proposed multiple regional councils. A man from New Hampshire suggested we let Canada decide and got glared into silence.

Then came Madison. Or Monroe. I've never been entirely sure which was which.
He declared, in a voice that soared with conceptual majesty:

"We must form a **bicameral** system!"

Now, I must confess something. At the time, I believed the word "bicameral" referred to the preferred **smoking arrangement** of refined gentlemen—two distinct lounges, divided by a curtain and a mutual fear of eye contact.

Inspired, I immediately submitted a floor plan for "the People's Lounge" and "the Aristocratic Alcove," with a **third room labeled "Unassigned Reflections."**

They were approved unanimously, though it's possible no one read the labels.

Within days, my sketch was being copied and engraved into the first architectural plans for the Capitol. My only request—that the alcoves

have different chair heights for symbolic drama—was accepted and later codified into law.

Someone eventually asked what purpose the **third room** served.
I replied, "It is for those who no longer wish to represent but are not yet ready to leave."
They called it *The Cloister of Conscience*.

Years later, the door was locked.
To this day, no one has the key.

When it came time to name the chambers, I scribbled "The Big Room" and "The Room That Thinks It's Bigger" in my margins. A fellow delegate misread my handwriting and suggested "Senate" and "House."

I rang my brass bell. A decision had been made.

Of course, this birthed problems.
The Senate wanted elegance. The House wanted noise.
The third room developed a slight echo and a reputation for existential muttering.

But structurally, it worked.

And so, the bicameral system was born—entirely by accident, drawn from a misunderstanding of Latin and a deep-seated desire to avoid awkward hallway encounters.

This, dear reader, led me to my fourth principle of governance:

If your mistake results in stability, call it "vision."

Chapter 5: The Federalist Affliction

In which clarity is sacrificed for style, and pamphlets are mistaken for principle

The Federalist Papers, as they are now revered, were a series of eighty-five persuasive essays authored by men of great intellect and even greater page counts.

I read three of them.
Misunderstood all of them.
Then decided to write my own.

It began out of spite, as most civic writings do.

A certain delegate—Hamilton, I believe, or possibly one of his more aggressive footnotes—had published a tract so dense I feared it might one day be used to deflect musket fire. His language soared, twisted, rebounded upon itself, and emerged triumphant but incomprehensible.

In contrast, I believed governance should be **digestible**, preferably in three paragraphs or less and written at a reading level just above "town crier."

And so I drafted **The Federalist Pamplet**—a lean, heartfelt, and questionably spelled collection of arguments in favor of "*whatever keeps us from being colonies again.*"

My pamphlet included such essays as:

- **"Why Kings Are Distracting"**
- **"Checks, Balances, and What to Do If They Cancel Each Other Out"**
- **"Elections Are Like Pie: Messy, But Preferable to War"**
- **"Federalism: A Word We Should All Agree to Pretend We Understand"**

It was 14 pages long, folded into quarters, and distributed via hat.

One copy landed in the hands of Franklin, who read it during lunch and commented that it was "an admirable blend of confusion and intent."

Another reached Washington, who said nothing, but allegedly stared at it for a full minute and then used it to clean his spectacles.

I considered both to be endorsements.

The Pamplet received mild attention and one formal rebuttal titled "*Sir, No,*" written by Madison in elegant italics. I took it as proof that my ideas were disruptive, and therefore patriotic.

Of particular note was my proposed **Unity Scale**, a simple system for deciding national laws:

- 1 Bell Ring = Suggestion
- 2 Bell Rings = Guideline
- 3 Bell Rings = Law
- 4 Bell Rings = Emergency, Duck Immediately

Though it was never adopted officially, I'm told echoes of it remain in certain small-town city councils and two cheese-based communities in Vermont.

This chapter of my contributions taught me the following:

Most political theory is judged not by what it solves, but by how confidently it is stapled.

Thus emerged my fifth principle of governance:

Be brief. Be loud. Leave room for someone else to blame you.

Chapter 6: The Accidental Clause

In which flexibility is mistaken for foresight and a stain becomes policy

No one truly reads clauses until they become inconvenient.
Which is how I managed to sneak one in completely by accident.

It happened before the pamphlet, on a humid Thursday—the kind of day that makes parchment curl and tempers uncurl. The committee was finalizing the Constitution's language, each word examined like sacred law and argued over like spoiled inheritance.

My job, unofficial as always, was to provide ink and nod at key intervals.

While transcribing a particularly long-winded provision about legislative powers, I dropped a blot of ink directly between the words "*necessary*" and "*proper.*"

Rather than start over—a tedious process requiring candles, apologies, and emotional strength—I simply drew a long dash to connect the two, and continued.

Someone leaned over.

"What's that line mean?"

I panicked.

"It's the… **Elastic Clause.**"

A pause. Then nods.

"Brilliant," said Monroe (or a man wearing Monroe's confidence). "It implies implied powers. That which stretches without breaking."

I nodded sagely, despite having meant no such thing.

The term caught on immediately.

"The Elastic Clause" was debated, embraced, feared, and eventually referenced in no fewer than seventeen future Supreme Court decisions.

I, meanwhile, used it to justify my request for three additional cushions and a second bell.

Flush with success, I experimented with other "intentional accidents." These included:

- **The Commerce Misplacement** – a misfiled shipping invoice that created the Interstate Commerce Clause
- **The Commander-in-Brief** – a shortened title intended for a speech heading that became a misinterpreted executive power
- **The Winking Pardon** – a sarcastic marginal doodle next to a list of crimes, which was interpreted as a framework for presidential absolution

History, it seems, has an appetite for whatever it can't prove didn't happen.

By week's end, I was considered a "theoretical framer"—a term no one defined but everyone repeated with reverence and a dash of legal ambiguity.

Thus emerged my sixth principle of governance:

Ink makes history. Even when it's spilled.

Chapter 7: The Great Seal, Misapplied

In which a family crest becomes national identity and birds are misinterpreted

Earlier still, when tasked with designing the Great Seal of the United States, I assumed they meant something **literal**—perhaps for pressing into wax, perhaps to affix onto jars of important pickles.

What they actually meant, I later discovered, was **a national emblem** that would symbolize unity, dignity, strength, and purpose.

Unfortunate, then, that I submitted my family crest.

The Lump family had always been practical folk. Our ancestral motto—translated loosely from the rural Latin—was:

"*May It Be Functional, If Not Impressive.*"

Our seal featured:

- A sneeze-prone eagle (technically a turkey, but facing east)
- A gear (symbolizing either industry or dad's vacuum repair shop)
- A motto ribbon that read:
  "Semper Unclogged"

I sketched it hastily and left it in the submission pile between two elaborate designs involving radiant suns and Greco-Roman figures arm-wrestling over trade.

Naturally, mine was chosen.

Why? Because simplicity reads as profundity when viewed through tired eyes.

Franklin, ever suspicious of grandeur, praised it for its "unpretentious aggression."
Washington, mistaking the gear for a wheel of war, nodded solemnly.
Jefferson asked only if the bird could "look more majestic and less… startled."

I made its eyebrows sharper and the wings wider. They clapped.

It was then engraved onto several official letters, stamped into congressional chairs, and accidentally used as the watermark for all military pensions for the next thirty-seven years.

At some point, an actual eagle was added, possibly by a more patriotic hand.

But deep in the archives, beneath layers of edits and oil paint, my original sketch remains—feathers fluffed in confusion, gear slightly off-center, and the motto barely legible beneath a teacup stain.

Years later, when asked to clarify the meaning of the seal's components, I responded:

"It represents the noble bird of liberty protecting the gears of governance while sneezing away the dust of monarchy."

They wrote that down. They still teach it in three states.

Thus emerged my seventh principle of governance:

If it's stamped in gold, no one will admit they don't get it.

Chapter 8: Exit Through the Founders' Closet

In which the footnotes are scrubbed, the door is closed, and one Lump vanishes in plain sight

It is a strange thing to watch a nation form—
Stranger still to realize it's forming around you.

Back at the Constitutional Convention, the document was nearly complete.
The ink was drying. The speeches were rehearsed. The chairs were bolted.
And somewhere between Article I and my third helping of molasses cake, I began to sense something terrible was happening:

They were taking it seriously.

Once, I was a well-placed scribbler, a seat-warmer with flair.
Now I was being cited in footnotes. Asked for clarification. Offered actual responsibility.

A young clerk approached and asked if I would sign the final parchment.

"For what reason?" I asked.

"To acknowledge your role in the birth of our republic."

I stared at the quill. It stared back.

In that moment, I knew:
History had misunderstood the joke.

That night, I crept into the archives—just beyond the Committee Room's annex, where the early drafts were kept alongside empty rum barrels and unfinished oaths.

Armed with a lantern and a healthy sense of literary guilt, I began editing.

- Striking my name from attendance rolls

- Annotating my own quotes as "possibly hearsay"
- Filing all records of my seal design under "Decorative Drafting – Miscellaneous"

One document labeled me "Lump, Observer-Class." I crossed it out and wrote:

"Chair? Ghost? Typo?"

Then I folded my best bell inside a linen napkin, left it atop my chair, and walked into the closet.

Not a metaphorical one.
A literal broom closet behind the chamber doors—though I preferred to call it the *Founders' Vestibule of Discretion*.

And I shut the door.

I remained inside for twenty-two minutes, listening to voices grow distant and fainter. When I emerged, powdered wigs were being boxed. The parchment had been sealed. A janitor nodded at me.

And just like that… I was no longer required.

I left Philadelphia the next morning.

By then, my seat had been claimed by a man with better posture and no detectable humor. My seal had been revised. My clauses reinterpreted.

But my influence?
Still there.
Quiet. Confusing. Improvised.

Exactly how I meant it.

Thus emerged my final principle of governance:

If you cannot lead the nation, leave it with questions only you could have asked.

Chapter 9: Rediscovered

In which a drawer is opened, a manuscript is found, and a nation is forced to reread itself

The document was discovered on a Tuesday, naturally—
the least trustworthy day of the week.

Elise Hardwick, a junior archivist at the Library of Congress with a fondness for unsolved footnotes and discontinued ink types, was combing through a drawer marked simply: *"Misc. – Furniture Inventory (1775–1789)"*

She was looking for a missing ledger from the Third Bench Compromise.

She found **this.**

Bound in twine. Faded. Smelling faintly of molasses, ink, and attic dust. A hand-scrawled title on the cover:

"The Lamentations and Confessions of Bartholomew Ignatius Lump: Chairperson Emeritus by Proximity"

At first, she assumed it was a satire. A hoax. A discarded stage prop from one of the more experimental 4th of July re-enactments.

But the parchment was authentic. The ink consistent with late 18th-century formulations. And the handwriting—a strange blend of elegance and barely controlled panic—matched several anonymous notations scattered throughout early congressional records.

She read the entire thing in one sitting.
She laughed, frowned, then read it again.

She brought it to her supervisor.
He flagged it for review.
The review committee passed it along with a formal stamp:

"No known relevance. Possibly inspirational. Definitely problematic."

It was filed under *Historical Satire / Ambiguous Origins*.

It became a footnote in a graduate thesis.
Then a curiosity in a podcast.

Then… a whisper.

And so, buried under centuries of order, emerged one final truth:
That maybe—just maybe—everything started not with a dream, or a declaration…
but a very confident man with no qualifications, a good seat, and a strong opinion about chairs.

Taped to the final page was a single note in a familiar hand:

If found, file appropriately.
If believed, deny gently.
And if you're laughing—
good.

—B. I. Lump

Epilogue: The Clerk's Warning

Filed posthumously, approved never, and preserved forever

To Whom It Might Confuse,

If you are reading this, then congratulations. You have made it to the edge of the official record—where history begins to sweat under questioning and the truth adjusts its wig before reentering the chamber.

I was the Clerk. No other name is required.
I filed what they told me. I stamped what they feared. I shelved what they swore never existed.

And yes—**I knew Lump.**
Not well. Not voluntarily. But I knew him.

He existed precisely where no one expected him and contributed exactly what no one could verify.

He was not a Founding Father.
He was more like a Founding Footnote.

A man who wandered into history's room and, through confidence and clutter, **became part of the furniture.**

Some say he never existed.
Some say he *only* existed—on paper, in margins, between the lines of oaths and echoes.
Some say he left before the ink dried, not out of cowardice, but because he'd already written the joke.

All I know is this:

I found a memo, long after the Convention disbanded.
No seal. No date. Just a scribble at the top:

"*Every republic begins with a clerical error.*"

And at the bottom, a faint signature:

B. Lump
(File under: Performance.)

End of file.
For now.

Postscript from the Author

Filed retroactively, edited in real time, approved by no one

If you've made it this far, I owe you both a thank you and an informal apology. This story was never meant to be written, which is precisely why it had to be.

The tale of Bartholomew Ignatius Lump began—as all proper constitutional satire does—with a misfiled document, a missing lunch, and a deeply untrustworthy memory of how things probably never happened. I asked myself: *What if the most influential figure in American history wasn't a founding father, but a founding mistake?* Not a villain. Not a hero. Just… present.

And so Lump was born—not with a cry, but with a confused nod, a brass bell, and a receipt that somehow became doctrine.

I did not expect him to take over the narrative.
I did not expect him to make me laugh.
And I certainly didn't expect him to make *sense*.

But here he is. The architect of absence. The philosopher of partial attendance. The man who gave democracy its first shrug.

He taught me that governments, like theater, begin in confusion and continue mostly because no one is willing to admit they've lost the script.

And that history—glorious, solemn history—is often the long shadow cast by someone who just *sat down early and refused to leave*.

To those wondering whether any of this is "true," I offer the only defense appropriate for modern citizenship:

That depends entirely on whether you believe it should be.

— P. A. Rallax
(Chair Emeritus of Satirical Affairs, Filing Cabinet 4B)

About the Author

P. A. Rallax is a writer, observer, and enthusiastic participant in the errors of history. While no official biography has ever been successfully verified, it is widely believed that Rallax was either born in the basement of a legislative archive or spontaneously generated during a particularly tedious constitutional debate.

He is best known for his unconventional narrative style, which blends fiction, satire, and faintly believable bureaucratic errors into something that resembles both a story and a state audit. He does not appear in public but is said to reside somewhere between the fiction and nonfiction sections of well-organized libraries.

Rallax is not affiliated with any political party—a decision he claims was mutual. After several failed attempts to register under "None of the Above," he was quietly blacklisted for "excessive use of irony during civic procedures." He now votes exclusively via annotated post-its left in national landmarks.

His earlier work, *The Lump Doctrine* trilogy, was reportedly inspired by a recurring dream in which democracy is run by seat-fillers, and no one notices.

P. A. Rallax does not offer public commentary.
He leaves memos and lets the laughter—or sticky notes—follow.