JOHNE LOCKE (1632-1704)

John Locke was an Oxford scholar, medical researcher and physician, political operative, economist and ideologue for a revolutionary movement, as well as being one of the great philosophers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. His monumental Essay Concerning Human Understanding aims to determine the limits of human understanding.

Locke is most renowned for his political theory. Locke believed that the original state of nature was happy and characterized by reason and tolerance. In that state all people were equal and independent, and none had a right to harm another's "life, health, liberty, or possessions." The state was formed by social contract because in the state of nature each was his own judge, and there was no protection against those who lived outside the law of nature. The state should be guided by natural law.

The policy of governmental checks and balances, as delineated in the Constitution of the United States, was set down by Locke in his Two Treatises of Civil Government, as was the doctrine that revolution in some circumstances is not only a right but an obligation. In a "Letter Concerning Toleration" Locke argues for a separation between church and state.

DEMOSTHENES (384-322 B.C.)

Demosthenes was born in Athens, from a wealthy family so he got a good education. Demosthenes' parents died when he was only seven, and his guardians stole most of his money. He wanted to take them to court to get his money back. But to win court cases you had to be able to make good speeches, and Demosthenes could not speak clearly. People say that he put pebbles in his mouth, and made himself speak, so that would force him to learn to form the words.

By the time he was grown up, Demosthenes had learned to speak very well, so well that he did win his case, though there wasn't much money to get back by then. He became a professional orator, or speaker. He gave many political speeches, and he became an important leader in Athenian politics.

Demosthenes was one of the first people to see that Philip of Macedon was going to try to take over Greece. He warned the Athenians about the danger, but they didn’t really believe him. Later, when the Athenians realized that Demosthenes had been right, they sent Demosthenes along with some other men to try to bargain with Philip in Macedon, but it was too late.

After Alexander the Great died in 323 BC, Demosthenes tried to help Athens break free of Macedonian rule. Aristotle, who supported the Macedonians, left town. But Demosthenes’ revolt failed, and he was put in jail in 322 BC. He escaped from jail and ran away. When he was caught, he asked permission to write a letter. Before he arrived at his execution, he put the pen in his mouth. Many people said he had hidden poison inside the pen in order to kill himself. He was about 65 years old.