

# The Traveling Professor ~ David Johnston

*American History Storyteller*

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**I. The Greatest Founders of America:** This series will tell the story of the men and women who were instrumental in providing the inspiration and the leadership to create our Constitutional Republic. These men and women led our nation with exceptional skill through the Revolutionary War, through the creation of our Constitution and through the early years of our fledgling Republic, and are most responsible for providing the foundational blocks that created the United States of America, the most powerful nation on earth and still today the standard bearer for freedom and democracy across the world.

1. **George Washington** was the irreplaceable man who was "*first in peace; first in war; and first the hearts of his countrymen!*" Washington served as the Commanding General of the Continental Army during the American Revolution, the President of the Constitutional Convention, and two terms as the first President of the United States. Because of his personal stamina, commitment and integrity he rightly earned the title: '*Father of our Nation*'.
2. **Alexander Hamilton** was Washington's right-hand man and personal secretary/aide-de-camp during the Revolutionary War. He was one of the key contributors to the Constitutional Convention and the writing of the U.S. Constitution. Also, Hamilton served as the first U.S. Secretary of the Treasury in Washington's first cabinet and designed, promoted and passed through the U.S. Congress the foundational institutions that established the American financial, banking and economic system.
3. **Benjamin Franklin** was an inventor and philosopher who is considered by many to be one of the greatest minds of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Franklin's key contribution to the Revolutionary War was his service as the Ambassador to France and his diplomatic skill in getting the French to agree to a treaty of defense with the fledgling United States. His efforts ultimately led to the stunning victory of the Continental Army at Yorktown in October 1781 when the French fleet showed up and trapped Cornwallis and the British Army leading directly to England's ultimate defeat in the War.
4. **Thomas Jefferson** was on the committee tasked with writing the Declaration of Independence in June 1776, and was selected by the committee to author the document. Following the Revolutionary War, he served in the important position of Ambassador to France, our key ally during the War. Also, Jefferson served in Washington's cabinet as the first U.S. Secretary of State and he served as the third President of the U.S., and he is often called '*The Father of Democracy*'.
5. **John Adams** was one of the key men who sparked the American Revolution while serving in the Continental Congress by his passionate pleas for action against England and his early support of Washington as the Commander in Chief

of the Continental Army. Also, Adams served as the first Vice President under Washington and served as the second President of the United States.

**6. James Madison** was one of the youngest Founders and lived the longest life of the men (d.1836). Madison is known as The Architect of the American Constitution because of his leadership in convening and contributing to the Constitutional Convention of 1787. He personally recruited George Washington to participate and he ultimately lead the Convention. Also, he served as the fourth President of the United Sates during the War of 1812, and was married to Dolley Madison, one of our most remarkable and intriguing First Ladies!

**7. John Jay** is probably the least known of the founding fathers, and yet he was instrumental in so many ways. He was a member of the U.S. peace treaty delegation, along with John Adams and Benjamin Franklin, at the end of the Revolutionary War and one of the signatories on the Treaty of Paris. He served as the first Chief Justice of the United States. He was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 and wrote portions of the Federalists Papers (along with Alexander Hamilton & James Madison) which were instrumental in leading the 13 States to approve the Constitution. Jay was sent to Britain by George Washington in 1794 to negotiate a treaty of neutrality with Britain. Although highly controversial, the Jay Treaty, as it was called, was instrumental in keeping the U.S. out of the war between England and France, and in establishing Britain as our most important trading partner.

**8. Martha Washington** was widowed at a young age with two children. She married George in 1759 and together they established their home at Mt Vernon, Virginia. By all accounts Martha and George had a close and loving marital relationship. During the years of the Revolutionary War George never returned home to live at Mt Vernon, but Martha traveled to live with George in the encampments of the Continental Army even joining him in winter quarters. She served as the inaugural first lady of the United States, defining the role of the president's wife and setting many precedents that future first ladies would observe.

**9. Abigail Adams** was the wife and closest political advisor to her husband John Adams, as well as the mother of John Quincy Adams. She is remembered for the many letters she wrote to her husband John Adams while he attended the Continental Congress in Philadelphia in th 1770's. John frequently sought the advice of Abigail on many important matters of the new U.S. government. Their letters are filled with intellectual discussions on government and politics. Historians have consistently found Abigail to rank among the three most highly regarded first ladies in American history.

**10. Eliza Hamilton** was the daughter of Philip Schuyler, an influential New York politician, and the wife of Alexander Hamilton. Her husband was the key advisor to George Washington and one of the most influential Founding Fathers until he was killed in a duel with Aaron Burr in 1804. Eliza lived to be 97 years old, 50 years after her husbands death, and spent her life trying to preserve the memory and honor of her husband. In her later years she became known as the last living link to the Founding Fathers (she died in 1854). She is also recognized as

an early American philanthropist for her work with the Orphan Asylum Society of New York City.

**11. Dolley Madison** was the incredibly popular and powerful socialite in Washington D.C. for almost 20 years during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson and her husband James Madison. She was famous for holding Washington D.C. social functions in which she invited members of both political parties, essentially spearheading the concept of bipartisan cooperation. Dolley helped to create the idea that members of each political party could amicably socialize, network, and negotiate with each other without violence, which was common before her influential presence in D.C. By innovating political institutions she did much to define the role of the President's spouse and is considered one of our greatest First Ladies.

**II. The American Civil War ~ The Crucible of Freedom:** This series will tell the story of the American Civil War, the greatest conflict in our nations history, and how the crucible (the severe test & trial) of the war was instrumental in re-forming and re-shaping our national politics, constitution, industry, military, culture, music and almost every aspect of American life.

**1. Background to the Conflict:** We will examine the many steps and decisions that led to the Civil War starting with the U.S. Constitution which was written by many who desperately wanted to protect the enslavement industry, moving through the Missouri Compromise & the SCOTUS Dred Scott decision of 1857 and the presidential election of 1860.

**2. Major Battles of the Civil War:** We will give an overview of the war and the battles starting with Ft. Sumter, moving through the many dark days of the conflict for the Union, the battles of Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Vicksburg, the Peninsula Campaign and ending with the surrender of Lee at Appomattox Courthouse.

**3. The Brilliance of Abe Lincoln as Commander in Chief:** Lincoln was a self educated man who came from rural Kentucky roots and rose to become one of our most popular and beloved presidents who led our nation through the challenging years of the Civil War. This story/lecture will trace Lincoln's humble origins through his years as a circuit riding lawyer and his victory as the first U.S. President of the Republican party in 1860. We will focus on his hands on approach to the Civil War and the self taught skills he acquired to understand military strategy, become the most actively involved Command in Chief in US history. His leadership was a key ingredient that lead to a Union victory over the Southern Confederacy.

**4. The Military Genius of General U.S. Grant:** Grant rose through the ranks of the Union Army during the war by his military genius, bulldog tenacity and string of military victories. He became the Commanding General of all Union forces in February 1864 and led the Union Army to victory over the Confederacy. He then went on to serve two terms as the U.S. President following the war. In many ways Grants legacy was stolen by revisionist historians in the South following the

Civil War which somehow elevated R.E. Lee to a place of preeminence above Grant. In recent years this tragic historical misinterpretation has been upended and Grant has once again taken his place as the hero of the Civil War and the great general, man and leader that he truly was.

**5. The First Minnesota Volunteers at Gettysburg:** The most famous regiment of soldiers to ever come out of Minnesota is the 1st MN Volunteers. They were the very first infantry regiment to be volunteered for duty in the Civil War in April 1861 by Governor Ramsey. Besides serving with honor at First Bull Run (1861) and at Antietam (1862), they saved the day by their famous charge on July 2, 1863 at the Battle of Gettysburg. As Minnesotans we celebrate the soldiers of the 1st MN Vol. Regiment that we might never forget the courage and sacrifice of these brave men who saved the day on July 2, 1863 and possibly saved our Union!

**6. Music of the Civil War:** The Civil War has been called "*The Musical War*" because of the astounding impact that music had on the conflict. Over 50,000 soldiers served as musicians on both sides of the battle, over 10,000 songs were written during the short 4 years of the war, and over 1,200 bands played and performed for soldiers and officers throughout the war. The music of the Civil War rang true in the hearts and minds of the soldiers, and throughout America, many years after the conflict had ended. Dave & Jeanie Johnston will tell the story of *The Music of the Civil War* and play many of the most important songs of the conflict using vocals, guitar, trumpet, bugle, harmonica and drums.

**7. Photography of the Civil War:** Since photography was invented in the 1840s, the American Civil War was the first major conflict that was recorded by photographers. We will examine the role that photography played in recording the events on the battlefield and the lives of the soldiers who fought in this great conflict. We will also examine the 19th century science of photography and the creativity of the photographers who used this new medium to record often ghastly battlefield scenes. These photographers then, for the first time, brought the horrors of war to civilian non-combatants through their pictures which appeared in newspapers across the land.

**8. Reconstruction and the Myth of the Lost Cause:** We will discuss the three constitutional amendments (13th, 14th & 15th) that emerged from the Civil War and the successes and failures of reconstruction when the conflict ended. Even though the Union won the war and defeated the Confederacy, Southerners somehow claimed the historical narrative and in many ways re-wrote the story of the Civil War. They first totally upended the attempts at Reconstruction and began to deny liberated enslaved people their newly gained constitutional rights. They also turned the Civil War into a story of Northern Aggression and a conflict for Southern States Rights. They re-wrote the story of the battle field and transformed General Robert E. Lee into the hero and greatest general of the war, and made General US Grant into a drunken butcher. This talk will examine and debunk the myths of the lost cause, which sadly are often taught today across America, and attempt to set the historical record straight.

**9. G.A.R. ~ The Grand Army of the Republic:** By the end of the Civil War in 1865 over 2 million men had served in the Union forces and their lives had been forever changed by the experience. They had known incredible hardship, the agony and pain of battle, death and defeat, and the exhilaration of victory. But most of all, Civil War Vets had experienced an incredible depth of camaraderie and friendships with their fellow soldiers that forever changed their lives. Because they longed to continue those friendships when the war ended, they formed a fraternal organization that many of them were actively involved in for the rest of their lives called ***The Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.)***. G.A.R. posts sprang up across the country and over half a million Vets along with thousands of women participated. The local G.A.R. Post was a safe place that Civil War Vets could gather to talk about their war experiences and find community and help in times of need. This talk will tell the story of this remarkable fraternal organization with the origin of G.A.R. following the war and tracing their history and impact until the last Civil War Vets began to die off by the 1930's - 1940's.

**III. Other Talks:** The Life of Teddy Roosevelt; Franklin Roosevelt; Eleanor Roosevelt; Harry Truman; The Story of the American Revolution; The Greatest First Ladies of America; The Native American Experience; The African American Experience; Travel Talks on Jerusalem, Yellowstone National Park, Alaska, and other special travel destinations. David has many other talks that he has given over the years and is available to speak on a variety of historical topic, locations and people. Please contact him if you have a topic/person that you would like him to speak on.

## Background Bio

**David Johnston** is a life long Minnesotan who grew up in Richfield. He has been married to Jeanie Johnston since 1980 and together they have two married children and two grandchildren. David & Jeanie reside in the Dayton's Bluff neighborhood of St. Paul with their two cats and own and operate ***Jeanie's Journeys Tours & Travel***. David graduated from the University of Minnesota with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History, and from Bethel Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree. He served for 42 years as a pastor in churches throughout the Twin Cities Metro area and outstate Minnesota. He is completing his studies in 2024 for his doctorate degree from United Theological Seminary of St. Paul. David has taught history to senior groups in community centers throughout the Metro area over the last 25 years, including teaching at the ***Augsburg College of the Third Age***, and ***Southwest Minnesota State University Gold College*** (Marshall, MN). David is an ***American History Storyteller*** who strives to make history come alive in a compelling fashion that brings life and energy to the characters and events he portrays, and are easily understandable and accessible for all audiences.