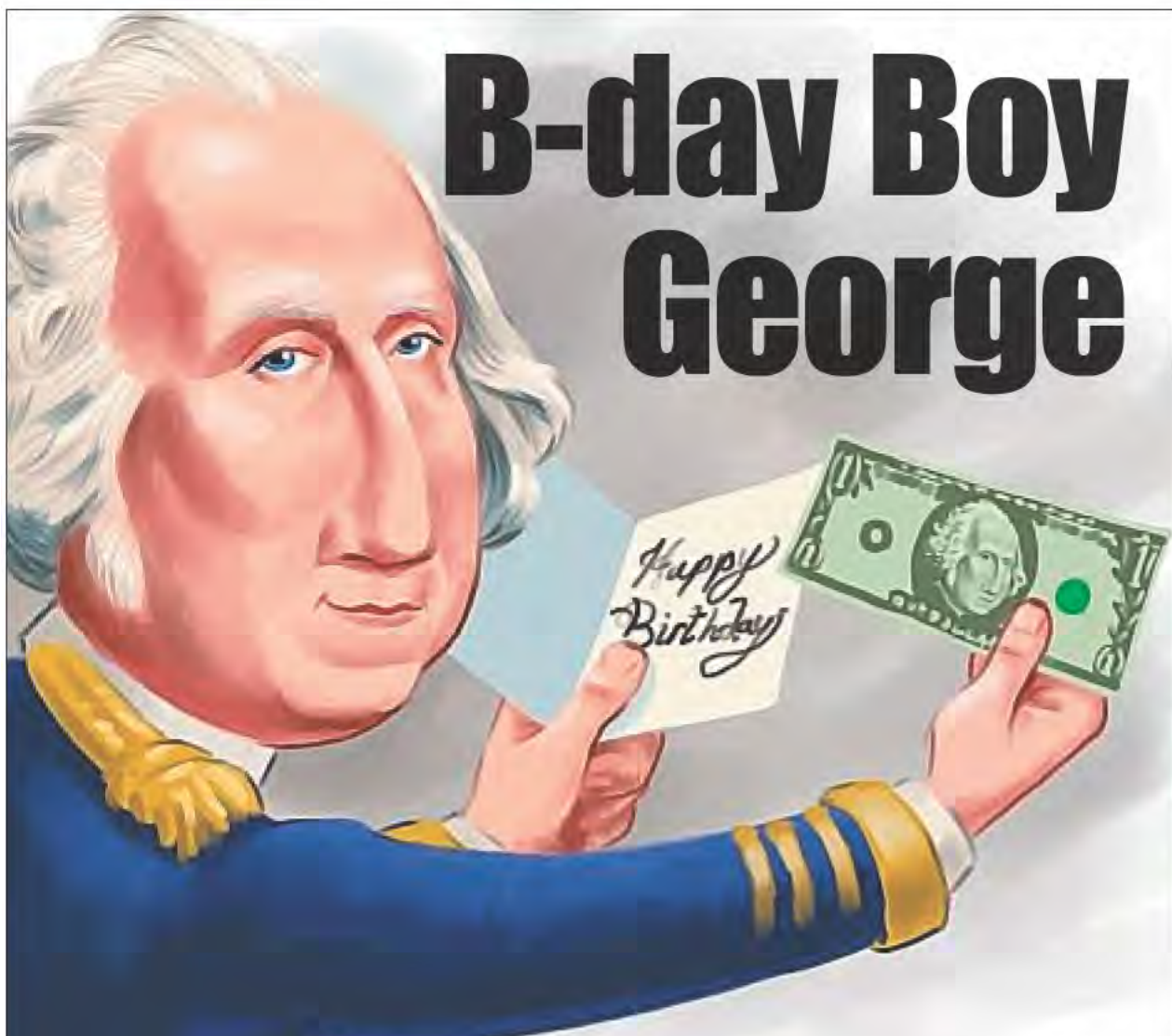


B-day Boy George



Informative presidential website in need of update

Today would be George Washington's 282nd birthday if he were still with us. Abraham Lincoln would have been 205 on Feb. 12. President Washington, the Father of our Country, was instrumental in creating the United States. President Lincoln, the Great Emancipator, was instrumental in preserving it. We honor these two historical giants by combining their birthdays into a generic Presidents' Day that is basically another Monday off for government workers and bankers.

Washington and Lincoln are probably the most beloved presidents, and their lives have been thoroughly documented in print and on screen. In fact, most of the remarkable — and not so remarkable — 43 men who have held the office have been studied and written about extensively over the years.



KEVIN O'NEILL
InSites

If you're interested in learning more about any of them, but not enough to read a book, C-Span has a nice little website devoted to presidential history at AmericanPresidents.org.

The cable network started as a channel devoted to covering Congressional proceedings, but it has grown into several channels focusing on all aspects of politics and history. For the network's 20th anniversary (in 1999) a television special on American Presidents was produced. The website was developed as a companion resource to the series and is maintained to this day.

Old school

While the information on the site is current, it looks a bit dated. The narrow design of the pages appears to be a relic from the days of smaller computer monitors. Of course, now that mobile devices are so prevalent, the design is once again appropriate if viewed on a phone or tablet instead of a desktop screen.

Despite its compact size, it contains quite a bit of information. Four links at the top of the page take you to sections on presidential places, gravesites, a portrait gallery and a section for teachers.

The Presidential Places section allows you to search by state or president to locate points of interest related to past chief executives. The search results consist of a list of links to other websites devoted to those places. Typically the sites are birthplaces, museums, libraries, gravesites, memorials or other significant locations.

The Gravesites section contains links to pages within the site devoted to the final resting places of all of the deceased presidents and vice presidents. There are photos and maps of each of the sites.

The Portrait Gallery has paintings of all of the presidents, including the current resident of the White House. They were all done by artist Chas Fagan. They appear to be very well-done portraits, but unfortunately they are displayed too small to really make much of an impact.

The Teachers section contains multiple resources for educators to use in the classroom. C-Span's original television series, "American Presidents: Life Portraits," is available online, although I had trouble viewing the videos. I was prompted to download a separate program to view them, which I didn't want to do. It may be that the technology used for the clips has not been updated since the show aired back in the days of the Clinton presidency. In fact, this is a recurring problem with the site. Even though there is information on all of the presidents up to Obama, other resources on the site have not been updated. There are other educational elements in this section that are useful though, such as timelines, quizzes and curriculum units.

Pick a president

The most interesting part of the site is the individual pages for each president. There's a drop-down menu on the home page with a list of all of the presidents. Selecting a name brings you to the corresponding page. The pages contain general biographical information and highlights of their tenure. There are also many links to additional information. The more prominent presidents have more links available.

Many have video links that do work, although the quality of the images and sound is not great. It's like watching an old, worn-out VHS tape. Most of the pages have transcripts of letters written by the men to wives, world leaders, friends and others. It's enlightening to read these communications in the language of the time they were written. The subjects range from George Washington courting a young lady to Kennedy warning Soviet Premier Khrushchev in blunt terms about the severity of the Cuban missile crises.

While the site could use some updating, it manages to keep your interest.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a graphic artist for The Times-Tribune. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.