

PBS brings past presidents to life

Like them or not, they are interesting characters

You often hear that a president is supposed to unify the country, but more often he is a divisive figure. That's not surprising considering that almost half the voters favored the other candidate.

Love them or hate them, the people who have risen to the highest office in the land are usually characters with interesting life stories. Buried deep in the PBS website (pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/collections/presidents) is a great collection of videos and stories about U.S. presidents.



KEVIN O'NEILL
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"American Experience" is a PBS television series that covers subjects relating to our country and its history. The Presidents collection gathers all the videos from the series about the presidency, along with other material on the office. It presents them in an organized, easy to view manner.

As you scroll down through the collection, the first thing you encounter is Films. There are 15 films featured that focus mostly on more recent or noteworthy presidents. A large photo with a headline and brief summary link to the actual video and related content. Trailers, clips from the documentaries, articles, interviews, timelines and image galleries of the selected president are examples of the content you can view.

Keep scrolling down and you come to Features. There are more

articles on presidents, other significant people who impacted the presidency and major events that shaped presidents or were shaped by them.

Much of the history will be familiar to most people, but you also will find stories that you probably never heard that give insight to the character of the presidents. For instance, when South Carolina nullified a federal tariff it didn't like, President Andrew Jackson threatened to collect the funds at gunpoint. President John Tyler married 22-year-old Julia Gardiner just months after his wife died. Julia is credited with starting the custom of playing "Hail to the Chief" when presidents arrive. And George Washington was so worried about what to wear at the nation's first presidential inauguration that he collaborated with a Connecticut cloth maker to design a "made in America" suit. It was finished just in time and rushed on horseback to the waiting president elect in New York City.

The Presidents collection is nicely designed and fun to browse through. It's full of strong images and videos, good typography and fascinating stories. The main problem with it is the navigation. Because the collection is a section of the larger PBS website, clicking on a link often will take you to other, unrelated sections. And since there's no direct link to the collection on the main site, it's easy to end up far from where you started with no easy way back.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a staff artist for The Times-Tribune. Share your favorite websites and apps with him at koneill@timeshamrock.com.

