

## **ALSSAR President Jim Griffith 2023-2024**

Installation Speech February 25, 2023

First, I want to thank President Bill Daniel for the wonderful job he has done over the past year. Alabama has a rich heritage of strong leadership and you have certainly continued and expanded on that heritage. Starting the Public Relations Committee, working closely with our District Leadership, being an active member of the Color Guard, attending meetings all over the state and the Southern District, and establishing our ongoing relationship with the new leadership at American Village. Many of the things that you did may not have been seen daily by our membership, but you were out there working, spreading the word of SAR, and making our name known. And for that, the entire membership of the Alabama Society says thank you! Good job Bill!



I am honored to be offered and to accept the position of President of the Alabama Society, Sons of the American Revolution. Our Alabama society has played a tremendous role in the history of SAR and will continue to play a major role in the foreseeable future.

Just this year, we have the President General Mr. C. Bruce Pickette as well as the Librarian General Dr. Fred Olive! Edmon McKinley is our National Trustee, heads up the George Washington Endowment Fund Board and is running for Chancellor General. We have had other national leaders over the years including our speaker tonight, Mr. Bill Stone who was our National Societies Historian General.

And, we have many more Minutemen per capita within our Society than most other states. And just to make it very clear, the Minuteman award is the highest award given out by the National Society. Only 6 are given out per year across all 38,000 members. That award is presented based on your impact, efforts, and tasks performed at the National Level. So, Alabama has played a major role within SAR, and I anticipate that will continue to be the case.

It is critical for all of us to remember that we are descendants of those individuals who founded a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. The great American Experiment, a democracy that has survived countless challenges and a government designed to grow with the people who ultimately give it its power. The greatest nation in the history of the world and we are the ones who are not only blessed to live within it but blessed to be the offspring of the founders. For this, I am also thankful and proud.

Now, with Alabama's history in SAR, a State President can be one of two things. A Caretaker or an Agent of Change. An Agent of Change can turn out to be one who is hung by the neck on the Courthouse Square in full view of the Citizens if not careful. But a Caretaker can have little to no impact on the Society moving forward too. So, what direction should the State President go? A Caretaker or an Agent of Change. Well, I believe in our case that a hybrid approach is most appropriate. For those

things that we do well, I promise I will not try to tweak. For those things that we do not do so well, I promise I will try to tweak. So, what is it that we do.

So, let's talk about SAR. This organization is founded on incredible principals as well and it is critical that we stay focused on those principals. Those principals are:

- Remembering Our Past...By honoring those who served or assisted the colonies during the Revolutionary War.
- Promoting Core Values...By protecting our Constitution and perpetuating American ideals and traditions.
- Shaping Young Minds...By educating our youth about the Constitution and those who developed the American ideals and traditions.

Anything that doesn't fall under Patriotic, Historic, or Educational should not be something that we spend time or money doing. That is the litmus test for me, and I think should be the litmus test for this society.

How do we live up to this mission? There are countless examples of how we live up to this mission, but some of these include: grave markings, development of educational materials (many, many of which are available on the SAR Website), the ongoing creation of the SAR museum, the SAR Library (an impressive facility located in downtown Louisville, KY, but also accessible online), preservation of historical documents, locations, memorabilia, etc.... And certainly, through our youth education programs. These are but a few of our initiatives and you can certainly expect that those initiatives will grow over time.

When you look at the national initiatives around the museum, the education center, and the library, then you can begin to see the ultimate impact that SAR is going to make on this country from a Historic, Patriotic, and Education perspective. And these things we do well not only at the national society, but here in Alabama too.

However, as exciting as this organization and our mission is, I think it's critical that we identify and begin trying to resolve issues that do exist. So, what are those issues:

- Membership – The membership in the State of Alabama has been trending down for several years now. Our peak membership was around 1,300 members. We have consistently lost approximately 10% of our members every year for the last 5 years. Now, we have backfilled many of those members the following year, thereby reducing the pain of those loses. But nevertheless, those loses have resulted in declining membership. Five years ago, our membership Statewide was 1,300 members. Today, that membership has just fallen below 1,000 for the first time in a long time. That issue must be resolved. It quite simply must be resolved. With fewer members we, the active members carry a heavier burden, financially, physically, emotionally... In every way, if we have fewer members, then the objectives of the organization don't go away. But the same goals still sit there and must be achieved by fewer people. So, we are going to discuss ways to address this issue momentarily.
- Money – As a result of those membership loses, the money available to our organization to help meet the mission of the SAR has declined. With less money, there are less options. That means that we have had to become more inventive in the ways that we meet our organizational

objectives within the State of Alabama. I have been asked the question if I would support a Dues increase and my answer is No. I don't mean that I would never support a dues increase, but I cannot in good conscience support a State increase when I know that there are rather significant national dues increase coming at the end of this year. But recapturing our focus on membership also addresses the money issue.

- Culture – The culture of the United States has changed over the years. Although I don't necessarily understand the changes that have occurred, this is certainly not the first time that people of my age group have not understood the changes that have occurred in the next generation. The point here is that we must figure out how to adapt to these changes if we desire to bring the next generation into this organization. And frankly, I don't have this one figured out yet. But we have some younger people in this organization that might be able to help with that concern.
- Politics – We are a non-political organization. We are an 501(c)(3) organization and discussing politics in these meetings is a big no-no. This is more and more difficult to prevent as our nation and our Citizens continue to be pulled further in one direction or the other. Let me assure each of you that this organization does not care about your politics. We have many political views across our membership. And many of those political views might surprise you. But who cares? That has absolutely nothing to do with who we are!

So, what do we do today to tackle these issues. Please help us to resolve these problems. Please consider this as a call for “all hands-on deck”. If membership is dropping, then funds are dropping. If membership is dropping, then our ability to meet the goals and objectives of this organization are dropping. As I mentioned before, we have a rich SAR history in Alabama, but we must have people to continue that legacy. I am implementing a program that I refer to as the 4-R's. Now, at various meetings you may here a variety of definitions for these R's, but this particular combination is mine.

- Retain – I am an old Sales Guy who sold technology for many years. And the one thing that is widely known in the industry is that it is 5 times more expensive to acquire a new customer than it is to keep an existing one. So, I want to encourage you to work hard at keeping your existing members. Engage them, contact them, mentor them... And, when it's time for dues, contact them directly via email, via mail, via a phone call, or by going to their home. If they don't feel welcomed into the organization, if they don't feel like they are an active part of the organization, they are likely to not renew their membership. So, it is critical that you engage with all your members and encourage their participation. The more invested they are, the more they will invest in the organization. I am asking that each Chapter establish a mentor for new members. That mentor will be responsible for getting individuals involved in your Chapter. And, as a State Society I am not going to sit here and think that we can simply cast down requirements to each of the Chapters. The State Society does have some powers, but they are very limited. And we all know that the rubber meets the road with the local Chapters. So, the only way that the State Society can do anything is to be there for the local chapters. So, I would like to initiate a once-a-month call with all the Chapter Presidents to identify ways that the State Society can assist those Chapters in being successful. Whether it is presentations that are needed, call assistance to members, mentoring the mentors, or just simply building friendships around the State. All these items are important and the only way to impact our local chapters is to engage proactively with them. And that is what I intend to do.

- Reinstatement – I am providing a list of every Compatriot who has dropped from every Chapter over the last 5 years (excluding the recent reconciliation). I'm not asking to contact every one of them although I think it would be a great idea to do so. However, if 10% is good enough for the Lord, then 10% is good enough for me. This list includes 578 people who have dropped over the last 5 years. I'm asking each Chapter to go after and recover 10% of their list. I have each list here and would like for a representative from each Chapter to take this list back and start that effort immediately. I would like to receive updates on those efforts at each BOM and I would like to include that in a monthly update.
- Recruit – Many people are not members of SAR because they don't realize that it exists. So, I'm asking each Chapter to become involved in your community if you are not currently. I'm asking each Chapter to get your name out there, recognized, and in the public arena. I'm asking each Chapter to assign someone as your Director of Public Relations. And I'm asking that each Chapter choose whatever PR effort is most appropriate for your Chapter. We have included 5 Cheat Sheets that are also available and, on the table, below. Please get a copy of each and begin considering ways to get your Chapter out into the public.
- Re-energize – How many of you remember how you felt when you discovered that you descended from someone who fought in the Revolutionary War? I can tell you that that was a momentous occasion for me. I went to bed excited that evening and woke up the next morning still excited. I continue to be excited about that to this day. I remember my Father's reaction to becoming a member of SAR.

Were you aware that every now and then (maybe once a year or so) we get Expedited approvals of applications for individuals who have expressed a desire for nothing more than to be a member of the Sons of the American Revolution before they die? On Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup> of last year, we had an applicant who was approved for membership. His name was Christopher Andrew Williams. Benny Hannah delivered his certificate and swore him in on the afternoon of Monday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022. He was a 47-year-old man who was suffering from Cancer and was home on Hospice Care. His only expressed wish was that he had his SAR certificate on display at his visitation. Mr. Christopher Andrew Williams passed away less than 48 hours after the delivery of his certificate and swearing in. His certificate was displayed at his visitation.

That is the energy and excitement that I would like to see from every Chapter in the State of Alabama as well as in the State Society. So how do we do this? Communication's Director responsible for expanding our presence in social media, responsible for enhancing our recruitment through the creation of trifold and responsible for enhancing our daily/weekly/monthly/yearly communications with our members State-Wide. Public Relations Director, monthly email to all members as well as all drops.

Chapter Viability – If you look at Article 6 of the State By-Laws you will see requirements for the creation of a new chapter. However, the requirements for pulling a charter are extremely limited. The only thing required by the by-laws for pulling a charter is failure to pay dues or failure to elect officers. My conversations with our State Chancellor Jay Maples makes me realize that our By-Laws need to be changed. Now, for clarification purposes, I have no desire to pull anyone's Charter. However, the State Society cannot be held hostage either. In other words, if a Chapter is not meeting and doing nothing to pursue the three goals discussed earlier of SAR, then we have no recourse available to us but to pull a

Charter. If there are requirements in the By-Laws for the creation of a Chapter, shouldn't those same requirements be active to maintain one?

National Congress – As you know the Alabama State Society voted during our Fall Board of Manager's meeting to support the Southern District in the Congress to be held 5-years from now. In fact, we voted to support this effort up to a total of \$15,000. To push our efforts forward, I have asked Mr. Eric Alford to head up a committee made of members of his choosing to ensure that we stay on track to meet the requirements for this Congress. Eric, as we have discussed, I will request that you give a report to each Board of Managers meeting to update us on the progress of this effort and any other initiatives that you see coming at us in relation to the National Congress. I have absolute full faith and confidence in your abilities to make sure that Alabama maintains the focus necessary to ensure that we do our part for the Southern District hosted Congress coming up in a few years.

Public Relations – Bill Daniel appointed me to head up the Public Relations Committee at the State Level. I would like to take the same action and appoint our new Vice President, Mr. Michael Martin, to take over the helm of the public relations committee and continuing to push those efforts forward. These efforts include the creation of numerous best practices that can help each Chapter of Alabama SAR to get a head start on any of these programs.

Our new Recording Secretary, I would like to make a request. I would like to make sure that you request and receive information from each Chapter on their progress toward reinstating 10% of the last 5 years losses in membership. 10%... Now, that does not include last year's losses. You need to recover a minimum of 10% of them as well.

State Assistance is not intended to be financial. If you resolve your membership issues, you will begin to resolve your financial ones. And that responsibility is on you. However, if you are needing resources, ideas, special events, presentations, etc... If there is anything that you might need to get your Chapter on track, back on track, or just simply would like a presentation, then please do not hesitate to ask. As President of the State Society, I have no desire and no plans to stand up here and crack any type of whip because quite frankly, that whip doesn't exist. However, I do believe there are some very simple questions that could and should be asked to determine if what we are doing is right. And I plan to ask those questions. But I'm not just sticking my hand out asking for something. I'm sticking my hand out with resources offering something too. Our relationship with each Chapter is reciprocal and that requires communications. It requires a relationship that exists beyond a BOM or State Convention. It requires a relationship between the State Officers and the local Chapter Officers. And it requires information flow, resource flow, and the 4 R's going both directions. And it requires friendship. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, so let's help to pick each other up and rebuild our membership. I commit to each Chapter to do my best in making sure this happens.

Membership Acquisition, Recovery, and Sustainment (MARS) – I am asking David Jones to head up this committee. The purpose of this committee is to assist in meeting the goals of a 10% uptick in membership by reconciliation next year. I am only asking for 10% total growth in Alabama. We closed reconciliation out this year at 999 members. I'm asking that we close out next year at 1099. I'm asking this committee to proactively engage with Chapters, establish membership guidance, coordinate with each Chapter, and help us to add value to the Chapters so that we are overall and more closely knit group of compatriots. The State Society doesn't hover over the State Chapters with a big stick. And any assumption of that, in my opinion is wrong. We should be adding value to the local chapters. We should

have a team of people prepared to give presentations when needed to the various local chapters. We should darn near provide a “help line” to guide local chapters when needed. The fact is, we have very little authority over local chapters. It does exist, but it is not significant power. The way to resolve the issues with our chapters is for the State to add value to the chapters, not just expect a report three times a year. I am asking for engagement. I am asking for requests to attend your meetings. I am asking that we have additional officers who will attend those meetings. When a chapter requests the State President or the State Commander of the Color Guard, I would hope that the state could respond with multiple attendees. Let’s give more than we get. Let’s reorient ourselves and make the Chapters want to succeed because they are a part of such an incredible organization whose hands are reach out not asking for something but offering something. Let’s offer what we can across the entire state and let’s reverse this membership issue.

(Picture of Washington’s Tent) What if I told you that our State Society has one of these! What if I told you that our State Society not only has this tent, it is available TOMORROW to put up at a school! There are a huge variety of programs that could be taught in this tent. But the tent exists and is available. I have the blueprints, I have the tent, I have the stakes, the tie downs, and the trailer to haul this tent. I even have the certification that the fabric is fire resistant in case a Fire Chief starts asking questions. And we are in the process of defining programs around this tent. The American Village has already requested it for Memorial Day and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Now, we are scheduled to go and install the tent for them during Spring Break in March. After the tent is setup, we will take pictures and begin identifying specifically what other components may need to be in the tent as well. But imagine this. Imagine that the tent is setup on a school campus. And imagine students going to “education” stations outside of the tent. Imagine that the first station focuses on the conflict prior to the “Boston Massacre”. So, the first station focuses on taxes and the growing frustrations around those. Then the students go to a second station that take you from the Boston Massacre (March 5, 1770) up to April 18, 1775. Then, on April 19, 1775, they go into the tent to learn about the war. And when they enter the tent, George Washington stands from behind his desk and welcomes them into the tent. And he begins talking about the War. The actions that ultimately led to the Declaration of Independence. And General Washington then offers a copy of the Declaration of Independence. Maybe then the students move to a second section of the tent where they learn about the Constitutional Convention and the challenges of that effort. Then, the students leave the tent with a copy of the Declaration of Independence as well as the Constitution. And although all these talks/presentations and reenactors are not yet identified, the possibilities of this are endless. And I can assure you that this tent will be used. It is also being offered for use by the National Education Committee of SAR. So, I can imagine that this tent will ultimately travel around the South and Southeast. And this can be another fine example of how Alabama is continuing to be a leader within the national society.

In summary, we are proud members of an incredible organization with a great opportunity to make a difference in our country. We are the offspring of men and women who gave everything to create this great nation of the people, by the people, and for the people. And Alabama has stood tall and stood proud as significant contributors to this organization. And for that, I am proud to be a very careful and loving Caretaker. But there are problems that must be solved. As an old sales guy I used to always state that sales fixes everything. Well, I believe that, and I believe that membership in the Alabama State Society and the strength of our member Chapters can also solve all problems. So, my first issue to resolve is membership. Let’s stop the downtrend right now. Let’s make the calls, let’s go by the people’s

houses, let's get them involved, let's establish those relationships and let's make them **active** members, not just members of SAR.

So, please pick up a copy of your dropped members here on the table in front of me. Please get the recruiting brochures on the table below me. Please start your Public Relations efforts. Please mentor your members. Please stay focused on what this organization is all about! And please do not hesitate to contact your State Society as there are many people ready to help this State meet its objectives and that can't happen if a close relationship with each chapter doesn't exist. The State Society desires a personal relationship with each Chapter and each member. So, let's get busy. Let's get busy with diligence and dedication and pursue the business of SAR, the Alabama Society, and each Chapter in the State of Alabama. And while doing these good works and running into roadblocks which invariably await us in every step of progress, let's remember a famous quote from the Civil War era. A Tennessee Admiral named David Farragut who is quoted as saying – "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead".

Thank you!

Jim Griffith  
ALSSAR President  
2023-2024