

GRIT & GLORY

South Dakota Historical Society History Conference

June 1-3, 2026 - Fort Pierre, SD



conference schedule

Location: Drifters Event Center at 325 E. Hustan Ave., Ft. Pierre, SD

All times are in Central Daylight Time

EDUCATORS ONLY

Sunday, MAY 31 4:00 - 5:00 PM Registration, Cultural Heritage Center 900 Governors Dr. Pierre

Monday, JUNE 1

EDUCATORS ONLY

7:30 - 8:30 AM Registration at Drifters Event Center

8:00 - 8:30 AM Welcome Teachers & Key Info

David M. Grabitske, South Dakota State Historical Society Assistant Director & Museum Director

CHOOSE ONE Workshop

8:30 - 10:00 AM

Workshop 1A

Teaching Difficult Histories: The Legacy of Slavery (High School)

How do we teach the hardest parts of our history with honesty and purpose? This session helps high school educators explore approaches for teaching slavery within the context of the United States Constitution using demographic data, primary sources, and narrative accounts. Participants will examine ways to balance the “grit” of confronting injustice with the “glory” of critical reflection, reconciliation, and civic dialogue while gaining practical strategies to confidently teach difficult histories.

Dr. Christian D. Pirlet, Assistant Professor of Educational Technology, Northern State University specializes in technology integration in PK-12 settings. His primary focus has included the use of game-based learning to study student motivation in the social sciences.

8:30 - 10:00 AM

Workshop 1B

The Political Thought of the Declaration

This presentation promotes greater appreciation for the Declaration of Independence by comparing its ideas to ancient political thought and exploring key principles of modern political philosophy. Participants will examine concepts including natural equality, natural rights, and consent of the governed as expressed in the Declaration. The session concludes with Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, highlighting how it interprets the Declaration and calls Americans to preserve its ideals during the America 250 commemoration.

Dr. Jon D. Schaff specializes in American government, the presidency, and political thought., while also directing the Center for Public History and Civic Engagement at Northern State University. He’s passionate about helping students think deeply about what it means to live a good life and be an engaged citizen.

Monday, JUNE 1 *continued*

10:00 - 10:15 AM **Morning Mingle - meet & treat**

CHOOSE ONE Workshop

10:15 - 11:45 AM

Workshop 2A

Unpacking the Declaration for Young Learners (Elementary)

How can elementary teachers introduce foundational political ideas in meaningful ways? This session explores practical strategies for teaching the core principles of the Declaration of Independence, including equality, rights, and the purpose of government. Participants will examine age-appropriate methods such as storytelling, guided discussion, visual supports, and adapted primary sources while balancing the “grit” of complex ideas with the “glory” of empowering students to understand fairness, voice, and civic responsibility. Educators will leave with ready-to-use classroom strategies and discussion tools.

Dr. Christian D. Pirlet

10:15 - 11:45 AM

Workshop 2B

The U.S. Constitution

This session examines the fundamental characteristics of American slavery and explores how slavery is addressed within the United States Constitution.

Participants will consider how each constitutional provision related to slavery can be interpreted as both pro-slavery and anti-slavery. The session concludes with broader reflections on how the founding generation confronted the issue of slavery.

Dr. Jon D. Schaff

11:45 AM-1:00 PM **Lunch**

1:00-2:00

Using the New Museum in Your Classroom

Ronette Rumpca, Curator of Interpretation at the South Dakota State Historical Society Museum, creates educational content and experiences surrounding artifacts. She also leads the Suitcases for Education program, delivering hands-on materials to classrooms, museums, and libraries statewide.

2:00-3:00 PM

Founding Virtues for Teachers

Dr. Jon D. Schaff

3:00 - 3:15 PM

Afternoon Swoon - meet & treat

3:15 -4:15 PM

SimCivics at Black Hills State University

Jason McConnell, Director of Civic Engagement at Black Hills State University, will introduce SimCivics, an initiative creating immersive, standards-aligned simulations for K-12 social studies classrooms. Teachers will play a quick game and learn how historical role play can drive student engagement and civic learning.

Monday, JUNE 1 *continued*

5:00 - 6:00 AM **Registration** desk is open at Drifters Event Center
If you have questions, please stop by.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

6:00 - 8:00 PM **Trivia Night: History Smackdown** - open to the public
Drifters Event Center
Hosted by the South Dakota Historical Society Museum Staff
Put your historical know-how to the test! Join history fans and curious minds for an evening of trivia covering South Dakota and American history. Bring a team or come solo, we'll place you with other players. Compete for bragging rights and fabulous prizes!

Tuesday, JUNE 2

7:30 - 8:30 AM **Registration**
Drifters Event Center

8:00 - 8:30 AM **Kickoff & Key Info**
David M. Grabitske, South Dakota State Historical Society Assistant Director & Museum Director

8:30 - 9:30 AM **Session 1: Founding Principles in South Dakota's Constitution**
Professor Patrick M. Garry, USD School of Law, local resident expert on the South Dakota Constitution.

9:30 - 9:45 **Morning Mingle** - meet & treat
Sponsored by ARTistic Storage

9:45 - 10:45 AM **Session 2: Meanwhile in the Black Hills...the Founding Principles Live On**
Mario Gonzales, has served as legal counsel to the Oglala Sioux Tribe, and has devoted much of his career to Indian legal issues.

10:45 - 11:45 AM **Session 3: U.S. Constitutional Law & American Indian Rights**
Hon. Frank Pommersheim, Emeritus Professor of Law at the University of South Dakota School with more than forty years of experience in Indian Law and Policy.

11:45 AM - 1:00 PM **Lunch**

1:00 - 2:00 **Session 4: Winter Counts Record the Revolutionary Era**
Christina Burke, Curator, anthropologist, and independent researcher.
Sponsored by Northridge Plaza - Glennis & Mark Zarecky

2:00 - 3:00 PM **Session 5: Round Table Discussion - Civic Education in our Republic in Grit & Glory**
Dr. Christian D. Pirlet, Assistant Professor of Educational Technology, Northern State University.
Sponsored by South Dakota Department of Education

Tuesday, JUNE 2 *continued*

- 3:00 - 3:15PM **Afternoon Swoon - meet & treat**
Sponsored by ARTistic Storage
- 3:15 - 4:15 PM **Session 6: Founding Mothers of Sioux Falls - the women who shaped the Queen City**
Podcast host Lori Kent, aka "Local Lou," shares her love for history with South Dakotans and beyond.
- 5:00 - 7:00 PM **Networking Social - History Unwinded**
Cultural Heritage Center, 900 Governors Dr, Pierre
Hosted by the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation
Enjoy an evening sipping and snacking, connecting with friends, and sharing stories...followed by a sneak peek of one of our new exhibits as you stroll through the gallery led by Francis Whitebird, David Grabitske, and Dan Moeckly. And don't miss the Curator's Nightcap!

Wednesday, JUNE 3

- 7:30 - 8:30 AM **Registration**
Drifters Event Center
- 8:00 - 8:30 AM **Welcome Back & What's Next**
David M. Grabitske, South Dakota State Historical Society Assistant Director & Museum Director
- 8:30 - 9:30 AM **Session 7: Little Houses of Liberty: Laura Ingalls Wilder, Rose Wilder Lane, and the American Revolution**
Dedra McDonald Birzer, Director and editor-in-chief of the South Dakota Historical Society Press and a lecturer in history at Hillsdale College.
Sponsored by Americans for Prosperity
- 9:30-9:45 **Morning Mingle - meet & treat**
- 9:45-10:45 AM **Session 8: First 4th in South Dakota and Beyond**
Dr. Benjamin F. Jones
- 10:45-11:45 AM **Session 9: The Northwest Ordinance Informs South Dakota**
Paul Finkelman is an American legal historian and is currently a visiting professor at the University of Toledo College of Law
Sponsored by State Bar of South Dakota
- 11:45 AM - 1:30 PM **Session 10: Awards Luncheon and Keynote Speaker**
1776 and All That: The Road to American Independence
Dr. Bradley J. Birzer, American historian, Russell Amos Kirk Chair in History at Hillsdale College and Fellow of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.
- 1:30 PM **Conference concludes**

Wednesday, JUNE 3 *Continued*

3:00 PM

South Dakota State Historical Society Board of Trustee Meeting

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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