Thomas Jefferson is born, April 13, 1743

On this day in history, April 13, 1743, Thomas Jefferson is born. He would write the Declaration of Independence, be America's Ambassador to France, be the first Secretary of State and the 3rd President of the United States.

Jefferson was born to a plantation owning family. He inherited a large amount of land and slaves when his father died when he was only 14 years old. He was educated by private tutors until he began attending the College of William and Mary where he met eminent lawyer George Wythe. Jefferson became a protégé of Wythe, who trained him to become a lawyer. Over the years, Jefferson learned 5 languages, studied architecture, religion and science and learned to play the violin.

Jefferson first became involved in politics when he was elected to Virginia's House of Burgesses in 1769. As tensions increased with Great Britain, he wrote A Summary View of the Rights of British America, which detailed the grievances against England and the rights of the colonists, in 1774. Jefferson was sent to the Continental Congress from Virginia in 1775. When the time came to declare independence from Great Britain, the other members of Congress, who were impressed with A Summary View, asked Jefferson to write the first draft of the Declaration of Independence. Congress reworded portions of it, but the language is largely Jefferson's.

During the war, Jefferson continued to serve in the Virginia legislature and as governor from 1779-1781. While governor, he was nearly captured by British Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton at Monticello. After the war, Jefferson served for a time in the Confederation Congress and was appointed Minister to France from 1785 to 1789. When the new US Constitution was adopted, Jefferson returned to the United States and accepted an appointment from George Washington as his first Secretary of State. He soon became aligned with

James Madison and they formed the Democratic-Republican party to oppose Washington and the Federalist Party.

In 1796, Jefferson received the second highest number of votes for President and thus became Vice-President under John Adams, whom he opposed in most matters. In 1800, the unpopular Adams was not re-elected and Jefferson won the presidency, which he would hold for two terms. During his first term, Jefferson attempted to reduce tensions with the Barbary states of North Africa and made the famous Louisiana Purchase from Napoleon, which doubled the size of the United States. In 1804, he sent the famed Lewis & Clark Expedition to explore the new lands and find a path to the Pacific. During his second term, tensions increased with Great Britain, later breaking out into the War of 1812.

In his retirement, Jefferson founded the University of Virginia, which he had been planning for years. Though he inherited slaves when he was young, he was not able to release them by law. Jefferson advocated the abolition of slavery his entire life and was known to treat his slaves well. Jefferson wrote his own epitaph, which points out the three accomplishments he was most proud of: HERE WAS BURIED THOMAS JEFFERSON, AUTHOR OF THE DECLARATION OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE, OF THE STATUTE OF VIRGINIA FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND FATHER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA.