



Screwed up your finances? You're in good company

By Nancy McAllister

History has a lot of lessons to teach us, one of them being that our popular images of iconic figures don't give us the full picture of who they really were. When it came to managing money, for instance, many of them didn't practice what they preached—not even luminaries like Thomas Jefferson, according to historian David McCullough. In fact, Jefferson often told his daughter Patsy to never “buy anything which you have not the money in your pocket to pay for.” McCullough also says that Jefferson warned his daughter that the pain of debt was far greater than doing without whatever it was she wanted.

Jefferson himself, though, rarely denied himself anything, no matter how extravagant. In Paris, he once bought a chariot he desired and had it reupholstered in green Moroccan leather. The total cost: more than 15,000 francs—at a time when the average French worker's annual wage was about 800 francs. Jefferson spent as much on his chariot as an average worker would earn in 19 years. When Jefferson left the presidency, he also left behind a \$10,000

tab for wine. And when he died in 1826, all of his possessions were auctioned off to pay his creditors.

Other famous people have had money problems as well:

- Mark Twain built a spectacular house with the first floor interior designed and furnished by Tiffany associates. But because of a series of bad investments, he was forced to declare bankruptcy and embark on a worldwide lecture tour in order to pay the bills.
- Musical genius Amadeus Wolfgang Mozart handled his money badly, too—borrowing from one creditor to pay another. Much like many people today use credit cards to pay debts. Mozart died a pauper.