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## Niagara Q&A/

Jan Johnpier

# History leads to a lifetime calling

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**WILSON** – Jan Johnpier tells the story of an 18-year-old who preferred fun-loving, teenage pastimes to what she perceived as the antiquated volunteer efforts of her mother, older sister and aunt.

Her female relatives belonged to the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), but it held little interest for the teen until she, herself, became a member at age 25.

That membership would lead to a new passion for history, a dedication to volunteerism, national exposure, and ultimately, a career change.

Johnpier was that teen.

Now 44, she has held office on the local level and chairmanships on the state and national levels with the DAR. She currently oversees its national Information Specialist Committee, as one of its three vice chairs.

Founded in 1890, the DAR counts 177,000 members worldwide and is the largest women's service organization in the world.



**Jan Johnpier is active in DAR.**

Johnpier also heads the New York Society of the National Society United States Daughters of 1812, a smaller national service organization with similar goals. It was founded in 1892 and has a membership of 5,500.

In addition, Johnpier operates her own web design business, LakeOntarioDesign.com, from her Wilson home. She and her husband, Jack, are parents of nine-year-old Brooke.

"Jan's involvement with the DAR and the Daughters of 1812 have had a national impact and she is admired and respected throughout the country as a major voice in protecting our American culture and heritage," said Lee Simonson, Lewiston's 1812 volunteer director.

Johnpier recently took some time from her busy schedule to chat about the two organizations and what they mean to her.

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# Ancestor buried in Youngstown

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## Let's start at the beginning – how did you first get involved?

My mother, Jeanette Brooks, and her sister, Shirley Canfield, joined the DAR in the 1970s. My older sister, Phila Ibaugh, later belonged and when I turned 18, my mom wanted me to join, but I said, 'No.' I was more interested in doing things 18-year-olds like to do. She kept pestering me and finally, when I was 25, I gave in, but I said, "Don't ever expect me to attend meetings or anything."

That was 19 years ago and I've served as chapter regent, honorary chapter regent, state chair and am currently a national vice chair. I absolutely love it!

## How does one qualify?

You must be a woman, at least 18, who can document her lineage back to the Revolutionary War.

## How did you know you had a Revolutionary War ancestor and who was he?

My mother's grandmother, Helen Hand, documented our lineage back to the war. Our ancestor was Windsor Johnston, born Nov. 9, 1761, a private out of the New Jersey militia, who also took an oath of allegiance to the patriots' cause in 1780. He died Nov. 16, 1853, and is buried in Tower's Cemetery in Youngstown.

His son, David Johnston, was a private in the War of 1812, out of the Vermont militia, and he died on Dec. 20, 1858. The family had moved from Vermont to Porter after the war and he is also buried in Youngstown.

## How does one trace her lineage if she hasn't completed a family genealogy?

The DAR national headquarters in Washington, D.C. has a genealogical library, which is free for the public to use (visit: [www.dar.org](http://www.dar.org)). We have a Genealogical Research System, which you can use, even if all you have is a name. It searches the name and gives a listing of members under that name – and it's exciting because those would be your cousins!



## CONTINUED FROM NIAGARA WEEKEND

It's required (for DAR membership) that you have birth, marriage and death certificates for the first three generations, so that's you, your parents and grandparents. Prior to that, you can use U.S. Census records, Bible records or church records, but the federal Census didn't start using names until 1850. So before that you have to resort to land grants, wills or probate records or any kind of document you can find. You have to be able to connect each generation from yourself back to the ancestor who served in the war.

### **What are your duties as DAR national vice chair?**

I administer the Help Desk, and oversee seven volunteers, as well as serve as the lead national vice chair. It's a 24/7 entity. People email us questions and we answer them. We deal with a plethora of subjects, from "What are the dues?" to "The state regent is coming to our chapter meeting and what is the protocol? Do we wear white gloves?" to "Where can I find a (specific) form?"

### **And what sort of projects does the DAR take on?**

We are all volunteers. We provide a "Good Citizen Award" to someone who shows outstanding efforts in being a good citizen. We promote patriotism and further education with our flag essay contests for fifth- and sixth-graders, because we try to reach out to the community, and young people, in particular. We have provided scholarships in the past. We place plaques at places of historical significance and mark graves to honor our Revolutionary War patriots. We work with veterans, too. For example, we collect items for veterans in Buffalo each December and send cards to soldiers overseas.

### **How big is the Niagara Falls chapter?**

There are 132 chapters in New York State. There are 78 members in the Niagara Falls chapter and we meet the first Saturday of each month (except January, July, August and September) at various locations around Niagara County.

### **Tell us about your involvement with the National Society United States Daughters of 1812.**

The DAR is much, much larger. The Daughters of 1812 is only in the continental U.S. and has 5,500 members. While many women are eligible for the DAR, not as many are eligible for 1812 and a lot of people don't even know about it. The website is: [www.usdaughters1812.org](http://www.usdaughters1812.org).

The Niagara Frontier Chapter meets the second Saturday of the month at the Lockport Town and Country Club.

I joined in 2002. The Daughters of 1812 contributed money for a plaque at the site of the Tuscarora Heroes Monument in Lewiston, on the local, state and national levels. We are in the process now of raising funds to purchase a plaque for a new War of 1812 Peace Garden in Albion. We also mark graves, like the DAR does. We are also working on a huge restoration of a War of 1812 cemetery in Jefferson County that is in ruins.

As state president, I've charged our members with getting the word out about the War of 1812. Everyone knows about the Revolutionary War, but people don't know much about the War of 1812 or why it occurred.

### **How did your involvement in these organizations lead to a new career?**

I was a hairdresser for 19 years and never dreamed I'd do anything other than that. But you never know where life will take you.

In 1997, the DAR only had a national website. The Niagara Falls chapter wanted one of its own and a member, the late Isabel Hobba, said, "Jan's young. She can figure this out." She got me interested in this and really encouraged me. Websites were new and trendy and it reeled me in. I took adult education classes, developed a website for the chapter, then later got a degree in computer science. Ours was the first chapter in New York State to have its own website linked to the national site.

It helped me develop a staunch passion for web design. And, I developed an interest in history by developing websites for other chapters. Now, I absolutely love it.

### **What has your involvement in these service organizations meant to you?**

I never expected this opportunity to give back. The work we do is really appreciated and it really makes a difference. We are preserving history, we're educating people, and we're providing opportunities. It makes you feel good.

*Know a Niagara County resident who would make an interesting question-and-answer column? Write to: Niagara Weekend Q&A, The Buffalo News, P.O. Box 100, Buffalo, NY 14240, or email [niagaranews@buffnews.com](mailto:niagaranews@buffnews.com).*