

Native Carolinian Andrew Jackson

By Charlie McBriarty

In 1765 Andrew and Elizabeth Hutchinson Jackson, the Scots-Irish couple who would become the parents of the seventh President of the United States, and their two young sons, Hugh and Robert, emigrated from Northern Ireland, following neighbors to the Waxhaws section of the Carolinas to begin farming. Because the border separating North and South Carolina was not identified until some years after their arrival, it is debatable as to which state can lay claim to the birthplace of their third son, Andrew, who was born on March 15, 1767. Tragically, his 29-year-old father was killed in an accident just three weeks before Andrew's birth.

With the help of her brothers, the grieving Elizabeth Jackson assumed the responsibility for raising the three children in the Waxhaws wilderness. The Revolutionary War did not affect the Carolinas for a few years, but when it did the Jackson family would be tragically impacted.

The oldest son, Hugh, died near Charleston, South Carolina, during the Battle of Stono Ferry in 1779. He was just 16. One year later Andrew, at age 13, joined the local militia as a patriot courier. During that same year Andrew and his remaining brother, Robert, were captured by the Redcoats. During their captivity they nearly starved, and Andrew's refusal to clean the boots of a British officer resulted in the officer's slashing Andrew with his sword, leaving scars on his face and left hand. In addition, both boys contracted smallpox. Both were near starvation in April 1781 when their mother secured their release. Nevertheless, Robert died of the disease on April 27 at age 17. Just seven months later Elizabeth contracted cholera and died in November 1781 in her early 40s. Only 14-year-old Andrew remained. He nurtured a lifelong antagonism toward the British, blaming them for the deaths of his mother and two brothers. The scars on his hand and face served as a lifelong reminder that the British were responsible for his troubles.

The orphaned Andrew remained under the care of his uncles. In his late teens he undertook the study of law in Salisbury, North Carolina. At age 20 he was admitted to the bar and started his legal career in what is today northeastern Tennessee. In spite of his lack of family connections or support of influential friends, he became a prosperous attorney. In 1788 he was appointed prosecuting attorney for the western district of North Carolina. During that same year he moved to the frontier town of Nashville, Tennessee, where his legal practice began to flourish, leading to his becoming a wealthy landowner.

It was in Nashville that Jackson met his future wife, Rachel, who was the married daughter of the boarding house owner where he lived when he initially arrived. Rachel's marriage was not satisfactory to either party, and by 1790 the couple had separated. Jackson maintained that when he understood that Rachel's husband had been granted a divorce he and Rachel were married. However, it was later discovered the divorce had not been finalized. This invalidated the marriage and identified Rachel as a bigamist. In 1794, when the official divorce was finalized, the couple remarried.

Jackson was sensitive about the circumstances surrounding his marriage, and he was offended by any negative comments about Rachel. In fact, in May 1806, a Charles Dickinson published an article about the couple's marriages. Jackson took exception to the article and formally challenged Dickinson to a duel. There are several accounts of the duel, but there is no question that Dickinson fired the first shot, which struck Jackson in the chest. It is not known whether Jackson's pistol misfired and he fired a second shot—or if he deliberately delayed his initial shot, which killed his opponent. There is no question that the bullet hitting Jackson was lodged close enough to his heart that removal was life threatening so it remained for the rest of his life.

Six years after his arrival in Nashville, Jackson and John Overton formed a profitable land speculation partnership that focused on buying nearby land of the Chickasaw and Cherokee Nations and reselling it at a much higher price. Jackson also dabbled in land development, and in 1803 built his first home and the first general store in Gallatin, Tennessee. One year later he acquired the Hermitage, a 360-acre plantation that became a profitable cotton producer. Periodic acquisition of nearby property eventually resulted in the Hermitage property totaling 1,050 acres, which significantly increased its profitability.

Jackson's path to the presidency was attributed primarily to his military career. His inauspicious initial experience as a militia courier during the Revolutionary War was the beginning. As early as 1801 he was given the rank of colonel and appointed commander of the Tennessee militia. Within a year he was promoted to the rank of major general of the militia. However, it was his service during the War of 1812 that brought him into the nation's spotlight. His first significant victory came in March 1814 at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in the Mississippi Territory, where his troops won an overwhelming victory over the British-supported Red Stick Choctaw Indians of North Alabama and Georgia.

In recognition of this victory, Jackson was given responsibilities as commander of not only the Tennessee militia but also the U.S. Regulars and the Indian Warriors of the Cherokee, Choctaw and Lower Creek Nations. Commander Jackson led his 5,000 troops and engaged in the January 8, 1815, Battle of New Orleans, where they faced 7,500 British-led forces. Though outnumbered, his forces were victorious. Word of this successful battle quickly spread, and Jackson received military honors as well as the thanks and praise of the nation. This battle was also a turning point, and the war ended with the ratification of the Treaty of Ghent on February 17, 1815. Although the war had ended, Jackson's military service was not finished.

The Territory of Florida had been claimed by Spain and was governed as an outpost of that country. For a number of years, runaway slaves from neighboring plantations of Southern states found a safe haven in the Spanish Florida Territory. When the War of 1812 was being waged, Seminole Indians in Florida were aiding the British Army, and many of the runaway slaves joined the Seminoles in their support of the British.

With the conclusion of the war, a growing number of plantation owners took it upon themselves to pursue and recapture their runaway slaves in Florida. As the number of owners searching for runaways multiplied, the disruption created significant turmoil in the territory. Spain expressed outrage over this troublesome intrusion to President James Monroe. In December 1817, the president called on General Jackson to deal with the situation, whereupon Jackson gathered an army of approximately 3,000 soldiers and marched into the territory. He chose to first battle the Seminole villages, which were the haven of many runaways. Next he proceeded to attack Spanish settlements, and finally took control of the forts at Pensacola and St. Marks.

It did not take long before the Spanish government realized their efforts to control this territory in the New World were futile. Negotiations were held and an agreement transferring the Florida Territory to the United States was finalized in 1819. In addition, a \$5 million Spanish debt was forgiven. In March 1821, Madison appointed Jackson as the military governor of Florida. Before the end of that year, Jackson successfully organized the governance of the new territory, created a judicial system and identified William Pope DuVal as his civilian replacement as governor of the territory.

Next month we will explore Jackson's political path to the presidency as well as his life in retirement.

This Month's Puzzle Solutions

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