

President Andrew Jackson's First Term

By Charlie McBriarty

General Andrew Jackson's triumphs during the War of 1812 propelled him into the national spotlight. As early as 1820, the Tennessee legislature nominated Jackson as the state's favorite-son candidate for the upcoming 1824 presidential campaign. In the interim, the legislature elected Jackson to the U.S. Senate.

As the election year drew near, the ultimate fate of the two existing national political parties was questionable. The Federalist Party had virtually disintegrated and was not even able to nominate a candidate. The Democratic-Republican Party was severely divided and eventually nominated a total of four candidates. The first candidate was William H. Crawford from Georgia, who was elected at a sparsely attended party caucus. Other members of the party believed this caucus did not represent the "voice of the people," and they convened a party convention in Pennsylvania and elected Andrew Jackson as the candidate. Then two members of President Monroe's cabinet were added: John Quincy Adams, Secretary of State from Massachusetts, and Speaker of the House of Representatives Henry Clay from Kentucky. A fifth candidate, Vice President John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, was also being considered but he decided to run for vice president.

Each of the candidates tended to represent different parts of the country. The final vote count found Jackson received 152,901 popular and 99 electoral votes. Adams collected 114,023 popular and 84 electoral votes. Crawford won 46,979 popular and 41 electoral votes. Although Clay garnered 47,217 popular votes, his 37 electoral votes placed him in fourth place. Since none of the four candidates obtained a clear majority, the decision was shifted to the House of Representatives as required by the Twelfth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The Speaker of the House played a critical role in the ultimate resolution of who would become president. Ironically, the speaker was Henry Clay, the same man who throughout the campaign demonstrated his disdain for Jackson and finished fourth in the election. Prior to bringing the election to the floor for a vote, Clay forged an alliance with representatives from New England which was designed to defeat Jackson. When the House did convene, it elected John Quincy Adams, son of the second President of the United States, as the country's sixth president.

When President Adams took office, he appointed Henry Clay as his Secretary of State. Jackson and his supporters were outraged at this "corrupt bargain." They viewed Clay's appointment as a scheme ignoring the vote of the people while also putting himself in a favorable position to become president since the position of Secretary of State had been a stepping stone to the presidency. Adams himself and three of his predecessors (James Monroe, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson) had moved from this position to become president.

To rectify this situation, a campaign to ensure the election of Jackson in 1828 was launched almost immediately after Adams took office. The alliance of Adams and Clay was portrayed by Jackson's supporters as a scheme of special interests to exercise control without regard for the wishes of the people, while Jackson was depicted as the defender of everyman, committed to removing elitism from American politics. To verify support of Jackson's plan, the Tennessee legislature again nominated him for president. In October 1825 Jackson resigned from his seat in the Senate and traveled across the country building grassroots support for his quest for the presidency. During his journey he gained the endorsement of influential men from critical areas of the nation. From New York he attracted Martin Van Buren, Virginia publisher of the *Richmond Enquirer* Thomas Ritchie and from South Carolina John C. Calhoun. Realizing that the Democratic-Republican Party was no longer viable, Jackson and his followers founded a new political entity called the Democratic Party.

Meanwhile, President Adams focused his energies on the duties of the office and did nothing to prepare for his campaign for a second term.

During the campaign Jackson and Adams followed the established tradition of not becoming directly involved. Both relied on their supporters to speak for them. As the campaign evolved, the vitriol and personal attacks became intense. Jackson was labeled a murderer and a man with a vicious temper who was living in sin. His wife, Rachel, was brutally attacked as a convicted bigamist. On the other side Adams

was characterized as haughty, overly legalistic and as having a foreign-born wife. Interestingly, at least one of the attacks on Jackson was used to his advantage. Many of Jackson's antagonists referred to him as a "jackass." Jackson apparently liked the characterization and used it to his advantage during the campaign. To this day it remains the symbol of the Democratic Party.

The campaign resulted in a significant voter turnout, more than twice as many as those voting in 1824. Jackson received 642,553 popular and 178 electoral votes as contrasted to Adams with 500,897 popular and 83 electoral votes, making Jackson the winner. Jackson's beleaguered wife was bed ridden during most of the campaign and on December 22, 1828, died of a heart attack. Jackson attributed her illness and death to the personal attacks heaped on her throughout the campaign by Adams and his supporters.

On March 4, 1829, Jackson was inaugurated as the seventh President of the United States. He thereby achieved a number of firsts, including first frontier president, first citizen outside of the states of Virginia or Massachusetts to serve as president, first to take the oath of office on the east portico of the Capitol and first to invite the public to the inaugural ball in the White House.

President Jackson's tenure in office has been credited with spreading the concept of democracy. He believed his role was to transfer political control from the select few who controlled party politics and shift it to the voting public. He assumed that the power of his office was derived from the people and was above party politics. Having been elected from the rural frontier, he considered moneyed and business interests as corrupt. He was the first president to utilize the veto to block measures he assumed to be contrary to the best interests of the people. Jackson's use was fundamentally different from the first six presidents, who utilized their veto only to block legislation believed to violate the U.S. Constitution.

In his initial message to Congress in December 1829, he proposed the land west of the Mississippi River be allocated to Indian tribes. Supporters of this proposal were already at work in both the House and Senate on similar measures. In May 1830 Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act into law. This is credited as Jackson's first legislative victory.

Jackson's enforcement of the 1828 tariff eventually led to the resignation of his vice president, John C. Calhoun. In a widely circulated paper, Calhoun maintained that his home state of South Carolina had the right to "nullify" the tariff measure of 1828 and any other federally imposed laws that were not in the best interest of the state. The threat of the secession of South Carolina caused Jackson to pledge that he would send federal troops to enforce the law and maintain the Union. Jackson and Calhoun eventually split, and in December 1832 Calhoun was the first vice president to resign from office. He did so not only because of his split from Jackson but also to become one of South Carolina's U.S. senators.

A social scandal absorbed much of Jackson's attention during his first two years in office. The scandal, which the press identified as the "Petticoat Affair," centered on Peggy O'Neill Timberlake, the recent bride of Secretary of War John H. Eaton, a member of the president's cabinet. A longtime friend of Jackson and a widower, Eaton had served in the Tennessee legislature prior to his appointment as secretary of war. He had known Mrs. Timberlake for a number of years, and when her husband died they renewed their friendship and were married in 1829. The timing of the marriage created a major source of concern among the wives of the other members of the cabinet. The nub of the concern was the marriage occurred too soon after the death of her husband and she had not adhered to the socially ascribed grieving period. As a consequence, the ladies of the cabinet disassociated her from their social circles.

This Petticoat Affair had a disruptive impact on the members of the cabinet itself. Considering the abuse Jackson's wife Rachel had received during his campaign, it is not surprising that Jackson interceded directly into the fray in support of his friend Eaton and his bride. In spite of these efforts, the gossip and rumors continued. The replacement of the entire cabinet by the spring of 1831 proved to be Jackson's ultimate solution.

The first Democratic National Convention was convened in Baltimore in May 1832. President Andrew Jackson was selected to run for his second term and Martin Van Buren was chosen as the party's vice president on the first ballot. There will be more about the campaign, Jackson's second term and his life after the presidency next month.