

Andrew Jackson Wins a Second Term

By Charlie McBriarty

The 1832 presidential election marked the beginning of a new method of selecting candidates to run for the offices of President and Vice President of the United States. When the congressional caucus process terminated during the 1828 election, the political parties filled the void by convening national party conventions and electing state delegates to identify their party's standard bearers for president and vice president.

The Anti-Masonic Party initiated the first national convention in Baltimore, commencing on September 26, 1831. During the three-day convention the delegates established a set of rules and regulations that eventually led to the election of William Wirt from Maryland as their choice for president and Pennsylvanian Amos Ellmaker as the candidate for vice president.

On December 12, 1831, the National Republican Party national convention was also held in Baltimore. Convention procedures were created, and Henry Clay from Kentucky was selected as the Republican presidential candidate and John Sergeant of Pennsylvania as the choice for vice president. This convention initiated the first party platform and first nominating speech, which was delivered by Peter Livingston of New York.

Baltimore was also the site of the third party convention, the first Democratic Party national convention on May 21, 1832. Robert Lucas of Ohio served as chairman of the convention, leading the delegates in the development of rules of order. Incumbent President Andrew Jackson from Tennessee and his choice for vice president, Martin Van Buren of New York, were both elected on the first ballot. However, less than a month later the Southern faction of the Democratic Party convened in Staunton, Virginia, on June 14 to select a vice presidential candidate more sympathetic to the Southerners' position on slavery than New Yorker Martin Van Buren. They elected Philip P. Barbour of Virginia as their candidate for the position. The Jackson-Barbour ticket appeared on the ballot in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina and Virginia. Shortly after being nominated, Barbour chose not to run and withdrew.

The election itself was not held on a specific date as it is today; rather, each of the existing 24 states held the election on various dates beginning on November 2. The Electoral College convened in the respective state capitals on December 5, 1832, to cast their votes; however, it was not until February 13, 1833, that the following results were made official:

- Jackson (Democrat) 701,780 popular votes and 219 electoral votes
- Clay (National Republican) 484,205 popular votes and 49 electoral votes
- Wirt (Anti-Masonic) 100,715 popular votes and 7 electoral votes
- In addition, noncandidate John Floyd of Virginia received 11 electoral votes from South Carolina.

Jackson viewed the wide margin of his popular support during the election as a mandate to proceed with his plan to stop the Second Bank of the United States. In late 1817 this private bank had been chartered for 20 years to manage the currency of the nation. One of the bank's most influential supporters was Henry Clay, a long-time adversary of Jackson. Determined that the Second Bank continue, Clay convinced the bankers to request that Congress renew its charter four years in advance of its official end date in 1836. Upon receipt of this request, both houses of Congress passed a measure renewing the charter and sent it to President Jackson, who promptly vetoed it.

Congressional efforts to override the veto failed. Subsequently, Jackson began the process of implementing his plan of removing federal funds from the bank and depositing them in various state banks, which were labeled as "Pet Banks." His initial attempts to execute this plan failed when two secretaries of the treasury declined to transfer the funds. However, his third appointee,

Roger B. Taney, complied with Jackson's directive, and his plan was ultimately successful. The Second Bank declared bankruptcy in 1841 and closed its doors.

The acrimony between Jackson and Clay was typified on March 28, 1834, when the U.S. Senate, led by Clay, officially censured the president for his efforts to revoke the charter of the Second Bank. The censure was short-lived and was expunged once Jackson's supporters captured control of the senate.

Clay was not the only opponent of Jackson. On May 6, 1833, in Alexandria, Virginia, Robert B. Randolph, a dismissed navy sailor, physically attacked Jackson. This is the first recorded incident of a president being assaulted. The first attempted assassination occurred on January 30, 1835, when Richard Lawrence pointed a pistol at the president; the pistol misfired. The determined Lawrence produced a second weapon, which also misfired. Legend has it that Jackson used his cane to subdue Lawrence.

The looming issue of slavery emerged during Jackson's second term. Jackson himself owned slaves, who worked on his Tennessee plantation. He viewed the slavery issue as being politically motivated and designed by both the Northern abolitionists and Southern activists to split the Union to achieve their particular goals. He also believed this issue was a threat to his fledgling Democratic Party.

One of the more troublesome issues arose when Northern abolitionists, using the U.S. Postal Service and focusing on Southern states, undertook a campaign of distributing antislavery propaganda throughout the nation. This resulted in the legislatures throughout the South enacting laws to prohibit the distribution of these epistles. Most of these laws conflicted with federal statutes, thus creating a problem for the postmaster general. Efforts to quell this problem were not totally successful, but the postmaster general acted to neutralize the situation. He chose not to sanction the local postmasters who delayed or stopped the delivery of mail, but did not issue orders requiring its delivery.

In Jackson's final address to Congress prior to leaving office in 1837, he cautioned that both Northern and Southern fanatics could split the Union, which would likely result in the end of the government envisioned by the founders of the nation.

During Jackson's two terms in office, the White House underwent several changes, including the addition of the north portico, which had been recommended by the building's original architect. Additionally, the interior was renovated, public rooms were revamped and a plumbing system of iron pipe was installed.

Perhaps the most noteworthy action of Jackson's time in office was his dealing with the national debt, which totaled nearly \$58 million when he took office. Jackson did not abide debt in his political or personal life, and characterized the country's debt as the "national curse." As his last years were drawing to a close, he reported the government had a balanced budget, was showing a surplus and the national curse was gone. The national debt was paid. This was the first time the nation had been debt free. Unfortunately, that status remained for one year and has never been repeated since.

Jackson retired to his plantation, The Hermitage, near Nashville, Tennessee. He was nearly 70 years old and suffering from a number of maladies, including blood poisoning from bullets near his heart which could not be removed. His determination allowed him to manage The Hermitage, where he received frequent guests. He also maintained an active role in the Democratic Party. On Sunday, June 8, 1845, he died and two days later he was buried in The Hermitage garden next to his wife, Rachel. He was 78 years-old.