



Andrew Jackson, also known as "Old Hickory," was America's 7th president (serving between March 4, 1829 and March 4, 1837).

He was not without controversy, particularly for the way he used the "spoils system" (to staff key government positions) and the way he viewed Native Americans (forcibly removing the Cherokee Nation from their tribal lands to reservations in the "Indian Territory.")

At the same time, Jackson—more than any of his predecessors—tried to be representative of "the common man" in American society.

Jackson's Tennessee home, called "[The Hermitage](#)," is now a museum. Its website provides a version of "[Old Hickory's](#)" life story:

No one could have possibly imagined the story that would become Andrew Jackson's life.

Despite a humble beginning and the numerous tragedies woven throughout his childhood, young Andrew Jackson became a fiery, passionate fighter determined to take life by the reins and succeed.

Early Life

Andrew Jackson was born on March 15, 1767, near Lancaster, South Carolina. His parents, Andrew and Elizabeth, along with his two older brothers, Hugh and Robert, emigrated from Ireland two years earlier.

Jackson's father, for whom he was named, died shortly before he was born. Raised by his widowed mother in the Waxhaws settlement located near the North Carolina and South Carolina border, Jackson grew up with a large extended family that were also Scots-Irish immigrant farmers. His mother had hopes of him becoming a Presbyterian minister but young Jackson quickly dashed those hopes with his propensity for pranks, cursing and fighting.

Saved, Yet Orphaned

The battles of the American Revolutionary War that raged in the Carolinas from 1778 to 1781 had a devastating effect on Jackson's life. Andrew, along with his brothers, joined the patriotic cause and volunteered to fight the British and when he was only thirteen.

His oldest brother Hugh died of heat stroke following the Battle of Stono Ferry in 1779. In 1781, Jackson and his brother Robert were captured. During their captivity, a British officer slashed Jackson with his sword after he refused to polish the officer's boots. Additionally, both Andrew and Robert contracted smallpox in prison and were gravely ill when their mother arranged for their release in a prisoner exchange. Shortly after their release, Robert succumbed to the illness and died. Jackson survived.

After Jackson recovered, his mother traveled to Charleston to aid the war effort by nursing injured and sick soldiers. Tragically, while there she contracted cholera and died leaving Jackson an orphan at the young age of fourteen.

A Spirited Youth

After the war, Jackson briefly resided with members of his mother's family but soon went to Charleston and embarked upon a campaign of youthful adventure and mischief.

About this time, Jackson received a modest inheritance from a grandfather still in Ireland. When his money ran out, Jackson finished school and, although he disdained studying, worked as a schoolteacher for a short period. Tall and lanky with red hair and piercing blue eyes, Jackson was known for his fiery temper, fearlessness, playful personality and daring spirit.

Budding Lawyer

In 1784, when he was seventeen, Jackson decided to become an attorney. He moved to Salisbury,

North Carolina, where he studied law by apprenticing with prominent lawyers. After three years, Jackson received his license to practice law in several counties scattered throughout the North Carolina back country. To supplement his income he also worked in small-town general stores.

While living in North Carolina, Jackson gained a reputation for being charismatic, wild and ambitious. He loved to dance, entertain, gamble and spend his free time with friends in taverns.

A Start in Public Office

Soon after his twenty-first birthday, Jackson's friend and mentor, John McNairy was elected Superior Court Judge of the newly formed "Western District" by the North Carolina General Assembly. This territory stretched from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River. As one of his first acts, McNairy appointed Jackson as the district's prosecuting attorney.

In 1788, Jackson followed the Wilderness Road across the rugged Allegheny Mountains to Jonesborough, TN and practiced law briefly in Jonesborough and Greeneville. In the fall of 1788, he moved to Nashville.

General Andrew Jackson

During the War of 1812 General Andrew Jackson led his troops through enemy territory to victory in several tide-turning battles.

In doing so, he greatly aided our nation's victory in the war. This led to the procurement of millions of acres in the present-day southern United States, including Florida. Just as significant, his victory ignited a spirit of confidence and patriotism across the nation at a time when it was desperately needed.

Early Military

Jackson's toughness and determination reminded his troops of a firmly rooted Hickory tree, and earned him the nickname "Old Hickory."

In spite of his frequent disagreements with the government on military actions and of his ragtag troops who frequently tried to go home when their enlistment was up, Jackson caught the nation's attention by delivering the final blow to end the Creek War.

Part General, Part Everyman

Jackson astounded the country with his sharp strategy in battle and go-getter attitude since he was a "common man" with no formal military training. This, along with winning New Orleans, put Jackson on the map politically for his road to the White House.

President Andrew Jackson

As president, Andrew Jackson strengthened the power of the presidency, defended the Union, gained new respect for the United States in foreign affairs, and pushed the country toward democracy.

Candidacy

General Andrew Jackson's military exploits painted him as a natural leader who both represented the common man and brought swift action to important matters of the day.

Although his candidacy brought controversy and even deep personal loss upon him, Jackson was beloved by the country whom recognized in him a unique spark they believed would take the nation to new heights.

Changing the Game

Jackson was different. No one like him had ever served as president. He made executive decisions based on his personal beliefs and did what he could to protect the common man.

Besides the tremendous work he achieved in office and in the military, President Jackson left a legacy resulting from his unorthodox, action-first mentality that pushed the boundaries for what both the president and the nation could achieve.

Jackson's Legacy

Even today, Andrew Jackson is still awash in a storm of controversy. His life is full of contradiction, much like the country he helped build. One of his earliest biographers called him "a democratic autocrat" and "an atrocious saint."

Without fail, every generation of historians has reshaped and revised our understanding of Jackson and will no doubt continue to do so. The reason is simple; Andrew Jackson is inextricably woven into the fabric of America.

The Age of Jackson

America during the Age of Jackson was a nation brimming with possibility and growing into a golden, young adulthood. Though born far from the wealth of the northern elite, Jackson was able to expand the powers of the President beyond any before him. The result was indelible changes in the government.

Though Jackson also fought hard to restore a nation of "We the People" and give voice to all those he represented as President, this expansion of democracy did not include everyone. Slavery remained a pervasive part of American society as did the continuing displacement of Native Americans. Opportunities for women and free blacks were still largely nonexistent under Jackson's presidency.

Nevertheless, Jackson helped to inspire a uniquely American sense of promise and hope; the idea that anyone can succeed through hard work and natural ability, rather than through unearned power and privilege.

In his farewell address, which he gave on the 4th of March, in 1837, Jackson said:

I thank God that my life has been spent in a land of liberty and that He has given me a heart to love my country with the affection of a son.

This image, depicting a portrait of Andrew Jackson, shows us how he appeared about five years before he was elected President. Thomas Sully created the painting in 1824.

Click on the image for a better view.

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