

**Your on the
Street Reporter**



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Presidential Places

The Hermitage: Andrew Jackson's Home and Grave

Presidential Places

George Washington	Birthplace
Andrew Jackson	Home and Grave
Abraham Lincoln	Home, Museum, and Tomb
Herbert Hoover	Childhood Home, Museum, and Grave
Harry Truman	Birthplace, Home, and Museum/Library
Dwight D. Eisenhower	Childhood Home and Museum
Ronald Reagan	Museum and Grave
Richard Nixon	Childhood Home, Museum, and Grave
George H.W. Bush	Museum/Library
William Clinton	Childhood Home
William Clinton	Museum/Library
George W. Bush	Museum/Library

Reflections on Visits to Presidential Places: Government Graft

Pending:

George Washington	Mount Vernon
Thomas Jefferson	Monticello
James Madison	Montpelier

And others as I travel America

Presidential Places

Hundreds of books, movies, and television programs are available about the homes, libraries, museums, birth, and burial places of America's Presidents. I cannot hope to replicate these works, nor do I wish to. My hope is that the essays in the *Presidential Places* series offer different and humorous perspectives about several of America's revered historical places.

Many of the places we visit in this series are called *libraries*. They are unique places containing historical information about America in general and specifically about an American president during his time in office.

Here is one definition of such a library: "A repository of historical information, where many books are kept."

Here is an alternate and more accurate definition: "A repository of historical information, where many books are kept away from the public."

Here is another definition of a presidential library, "A library, whose contents are forbidden to be examined by people who paid admission to enter the library and examine its contents in the first place. Therefore, Disneyland-like exhibits are created to placate the crowd."

A fourth definition: "Thinly disguised attempt to bolster the public image of a former President."

These definitions are acceptable to those who flock to presidential places. After all, presidential places are crowded places. The visitors must be curious about White House dinner menus, presidential pins, catchy campaign slogans, first-ladies' gowns, and other artifacts of American politics. Because these places vary in how they are named, I use the words *museum* and *library* interchangeably. It appears most of the places have buildings and rooms that serve both as museums and libraries.

In each of these places I visited, I had my fill of political drivel. But of more importance, I witnessed a deep sense of pride the site creators have about these places. And time and again, I beheld the thankfulness and patriotism of American citizens who were aware, while knowing America's faults, that the country offered a better way of life than many other nations. Even with tongue in cheek, I carried away a sense of American citizens' reverence for America and for America's Presidents' contributions to this legacy.

It is my goal in *Presidential Places* to provide you with some lesser-known and humorous aspects of Americana as well as a sense of the pride and patriotism of the sites' creators and visitors.

Unless otherwise noted, the cover page depicting the face of a U.S. President is sourced from Google.

Presidential Places **The Hermitage: Andrew Jackson's Home and Grave**

April 13, 2005

Hello from your on the Street Reporter. These last few days, with Reporterette accompanying me, I have been traveling through Kentucky and Tennessee, meandering around this part of America looking for points of interest, of which there are many. I also continue to luxuriate during these times of retirement from having to chase the dollar, of which there are fewer.

One fascinating place in this part of America is the home of Andrew Jackson: the Hermitage. It is located a few miles east of Nashville, Tennessee. Figure 1 is a picture of the home where Jackson and his family spent their later years.¹ Although he owned the plantation for forty-one years, his career kept him at other places most of his life. But he did die there in 1845.



Figure 1. Jackson's home.

I have read several books and articles about Andrew Jackson. I came away from these readings with distaste for the man. My impressions have nothing to do with his political views, some of which I like and some I do not. I apologize for this upcoming profanity, as I do not use swear words in my writings unless they beg for use. I defend this seeming prudence in an effort to promote articulation.

In modern terms, Andrew Jackson was what people would call an a--hole, and a dangerous one. He was quick tempered, bullying, and arrogant. Some historians state his ill-tempered personality was a guise, that he used it to intimidate and scare people...all the more reason for my distaste. It is one thing to rage against a fellow human because of a lack of control over one's mind. It is another to display phony rage at innocent people in order to further one's agenda.

A Jackson biographer had this to say about his disposition. He was like a volcano and full of "blood-curdling oaths." [That part of his persona I would like to have witnessed. An oath is an oath, but blood-curdling?] Nonetheless, given his behavior of engaging in duels and other fights,

¹ <http://thehermitage.com/learn/mansion-grounds/jacksons-tomb/>. Thanks to the Andrew Jackson Hermitage association for the illustrations shown in Figures 1, 3, and 4. I snapped many photos of the mansion and surrounding ground, but this incompetent photographer inadvertently deleted most of them.

his oaths and threats were taken as genuine.² In his dignified office as President of the United States, on the last day of his presidency, he said he had only two regrets: Not being able to kill two of his political enemies: Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun. He spoke his mind; that is for sure.

It is unfair to take events of over 150 years ago and extrapolate them to the present times. Still, one can imagine the reception of, say, outgoing President Bill Clinton declaring, “My only regret is not shooting Ken Starr and hanging Monica Lewinsky.”

Jackson's EEO Programs

Jackson was a renowned military man. He made his mark in the War of 1812 and gained more fame with his 1815 campaign against the Seminole Indians who lived in Florida. These Native Americans made the mistake of thinking the South belonged to them, and the white folks had could carve-up Europe for their turf. False hopes, as Jackson was instructed to stop the Seminole's raids in their *own* lands. He did so by fighting and defeating the Seminoles.

Jackson's Florida campaign increased his popularity, especially in the West, and in consonance with Spain's diminishing power, it influenced Spain's decision to sell the Florida territory. In 1819, Adams concluded the purchase of Florida, and in 1821 Monroe appointed Jackson governor of the newly organized Florida Territory.³



It's been said, "What's yours is yours, until I want it." Some Andrew Jackson historians are critical of Jackson because of his so-called ethnic cleansing of Native Americans in what is now southern and southeastern parts of the United States. As President, in 1830 he signed the Indian Removal Act. The act gave the president the power to “negotiate” with five tribes for their removal to federal territory west of the Mississippi River, an area that became parts of Oklahoma and Texas, and shown in Figure 2.⁴ In turn, they would give up their homelands.

Figure 2. Go West Young Indian!

Jackson was criticized bitterly for his actions. He dismissed his critics as being hypocrites. After all, the critics (notably, those living in the northern United States) were living and prospering on land previously occupied by Indians. He had this to say about the matter, with my comments in brackets:

² H. W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson: His Life and Times* (New York: First Anchor Books, 2006), np.

³ “Andrew Jackson,” Microsoft © Encarta © Reference Library 2005.

⁴ “Indian Removal,” Map, Wikipedia.

Humanity has often wept over the fate of the aborigines of this country, and philanthropy has long been busily employed in devising means to avert it, but its progress has never for a moment been arrested, and one by one have many powerful tribes disappeared from the earth. ... But true philanthropy reconciles the mind to these vicissitudes as it does to the extinction of one generation to make room for another. [Generational replacement does not come from forcing the previous generation from their homes.]... Philanthropy could not wish to see this continent restored to the condition in which it was found by our forefathers. [Philanthropy might not so-wish, but it is a good bet that the displaced folks would.] What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms, embellished with all the improvements, which art can devise or industry execute, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion?⁵ [Those very savages would so-prefer.]

The cliché “hindsight is 20-20” may be trite, but it is still a chestnut of wisdom. Using this retrospection, it is instructive to remember that since the Neolithic period (maybe earlier), hunter/gatherers began to be “cleansed” of their hunting and gathering grounds by farmers, the time in human history when agriculture was invented. The farmers needed considerable turf to plant their seeds, and the hunter/gatherers were impediments to their progress.

In considering these episodes in Andrew Jackson’s controversial life, it is instructive to keep in mind that the Native Americans did their share of cleansing. During the French and Indian War, the Europeans recorded that Native American tribes regularly practiced (what is now called) imperialism and cleansing on one another. Lewis and Clark learned that ethnic warfare was not restricted to just one set of privileged humans (Anglo-Saxons). They came across tribes that had been subjugated by other tribes to the point of poverty and humiliation.

I do not justify the cleansing of Native Americans from their ancestral homelands by my country. But this noble claim is written in 2005. Call it what we will, ethnic cleansing, imperialism, colonialism, etc., the practice is part of human’s DNA.

The Duel

Jackson married Rachel Stockley Donelson, supposedly twice. Rachel had an unhappy first marriage, and Jackson supposedly married her after her separation and assumed divorce. The latter had not yet taken place, so after the divorce was finalized, they were remarried in 1784. The two were devoted to each other, and Rachel took care of the Hermitage estate during Jackson’s frequent absences.

Because of the confusing controversy surrounding the marriage(s), a writer named Charles Dickinson published a disparaging article about the affair. Jackson was insulted and challenged Dickinson to a duel. The resulting story is straight out of Hollywood.⁶

⁵ H. W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson: His Life and Times*, 490.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 137-139.

Jackson knew his adversary was a fine shooter. Nonetheless, Jackson decided to let the man have the first shot. Regardless of one's opinion about Jackson, he was not faint of heart. Dickinson did shoot first and wounded Jackson in the chest. According to the witnesses of the duel, Jackson had also pulled his trigger, but the gun did not fire because it had been placed in the half-cocked position. Jackson realized his mistake. Then, taking careful aim---with Dickinson looking at him incredulously, knowing he was soon to be dead---Jackson killed the man. According to the dueling rules of the day, Jackson was entitled to a shot, but the rules were not clear if a half-cocked shot was actually a shot. Whatever the rule was, Jackson was, thereafter, lambasted as a vengeful, dishonorable killer.

The House⁷

We took a guided tour of the interior of the house. Figure 3 shows a floor plan of the first floor. The second floor consists of four bedrooms. Notice that the kitchen is adjacent and close to the house. Because of the danger of fire, the kitchen in many upper-class colonial homes were housed in a separate building and removed by many paces from the main building. Still, the inhabitants of those fire-prone dwellings had to be careful. The first floor of the Hermitage has seven fireplaces. The guide made a joke that many people, who considered Jackson as an ill-informed country bumpkin, claimed he never used the library room, and thus had no need for a fireplace. On the contrary, Jackson was an eager reader, and spent much of his later years reading.

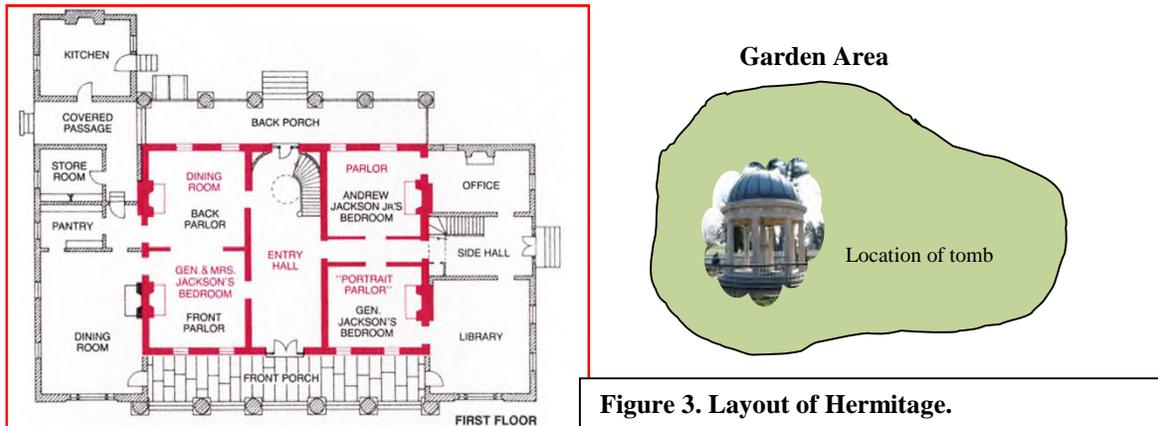


Figure 3. Layout of Hermitage.

As seen in Figure 4(a), the entry hall is one of the most impressive parts of the house. In these modern times, it is now decorated with scenic wallpaper and the busts of two friendly politicians who served in Jackson's cabinet. According to the guide, a slave woman named Hannah was appointed to greet all visitors and guests in this hall before they were admitted into other parts of the house. The entire mansion has been restored to its state while the Jacksons were alive. Very impressive work on the part of the Andrew Jackson Heritage association, evidenced by one of the house's seven bedrooms, one depicted in Figure 4(b).

⁷ <https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=the%20hermitage%20plantation>



Figure 4. Inside the house.

Resting Places

After Rachel Jackson died on December 22, 1828, Jackson buried Rachel in her garden (one of her favorite places) located by the side of the house as shown in Figure 5.⁸ Jackson hired architect David Morrison to build a tomb for both Rachel and Andrew, as well as to remodel the house. As the conclusion of his second term in office (1837), he returned to the Hermitage where he stayed (traveling little) until his death in 1845. His declining health kept him from visiting the tomb



Figure 5. Tomb of Andrew and Rachael Jackson.

After Jackson returned to the Hermitage, his duel wound and injuries from war and brawls began to take their toll. Daily, Jackson visited the tomb as long as his health allowed. When unable to visit in person, he could easily see the tomb from his office or library, as shown in Figure 3.

Residences are Relative

Before taking leave of the Hermitage, look at the picture in Figure 6. I took this snapshot of a slave cabin located on Jackson's land. He typically kept around twenty slaves and over his life, owned about one hundred slaves.

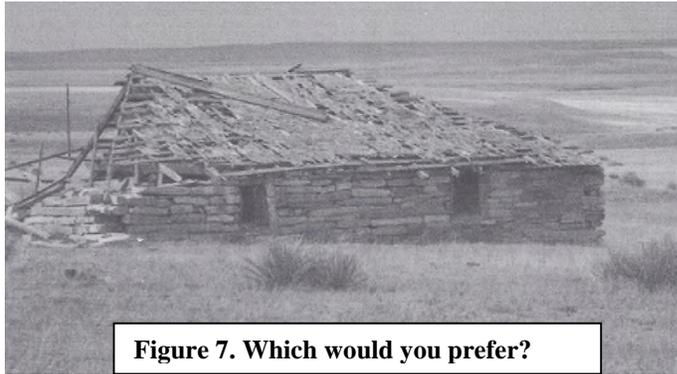


Figure 6. Slave quarters.

⁸ <http://thehermitage.com/learn/mansion-grounds/jacksons-tomb/>.

While viewing this building, some other tourists next to me made comments about the woeful homes the slaves lived-in and the miserable existence they had while they were forced to eat and sleep in the dwelling. I silently agreed. But I also recalled a house where my Dad lived during the early 1900s in New Mexico. An example of the house (but not the actual house) is shown in Figure 7.

Dad's father and mother decided to migrate from desolate Borden County in West Texas to an even more desolate part of the country: an area that was to become the southeastern part of New Mexico. It was a stick and mud brick hut, partially dug into the ground, and was appropriately called a dug-out. Dad's home on the harsh high plains of America was smaller than the house shown in Figure 7.⁹



My father told me some of the older boys in the family had to sleep outside (in the bed of a horse-drawn wagon), as the dug-out could not accommodate eight children and two adults.

I am not equating the lives of my parents to those of slaves. My grandfather chose to live in the dug-out. Slaves could not choose where they lived. But it is

striking how much bigger and more grandiose our homes are today. When I visit my hometown in New Mexico and pass-by my old home and the homes of my childhood friends, I'm struck by the smallness of the dwellings in which we lived. Even the expensive homes of the 1950s, those still standing in my hometown, are modest houses, when compared to those we live-in today.

I suppose we need more room now because....who knows why? Are we overweight? Do we need more privacy? Have the Joneses across the street built an addition to their kitchen, and we must do the same? Anyway, be sure and visit the Hermitage if you are near Nashville. And by all means, don't pass up the museum store.

Postscript

I have been making fun of Presidential "Libraries" in these reports, making a joke about the absence of books in the public areas of these libraries. The truth is I favor the approach taken by the newer libraries. With rare exceptions, Joe and Josephine Citizen have little interest in the minutiae of the minutes of a Presidential cabinet meeting, or the telephone conversations between a President and an economist about Fed Funds and interest rates.

I suspect a Presidential library that is a "place where [only] books are kept" would attract only scholars and other cerebral people. For myself, I am past the point in my life where I want to

⁹ "Half-Dugout located between Taylor Springs and Abbot, Northeastern New Mexico (Photograph by Carleen Lazzell, August 14, 2009)." I had the pleasure of meeting Carleen on two occasions. She was instrumental in my being given an award by the Historical Society of New Mexico for my book, *The Light Side of Little Texas*, as well as supporting my other work. She has since passed away, and I have placed her on the dedication page of my *2084 and Beyond* book.

read detailed descriptions about national budgets and White House menus. Just give me some colorful displays and maybe a hologram image or two. I'll pay my admission and be thankful to someone who takes the time and effort to create interesting placeboes to help me pass my passing days.

While I was watching a TV program about the new Abraham Lincoln Presidential *Museum* (not library), a spokesperson made these comments about potential visitors, "We want to get them in the gut as well as the cranium." He also said. "The point (of this museum) is to feel the history."

Points well taken. And I can't wait to see the Lincoln museum, which is noted for its hologram displays. I hope it has a curio store.

Your on the Street Reporter