

Young Hickory Review

Andrew Jackson is, no doubt, has the most recognizable name of any person who ever lived in our area. There have been thousands of books written about him—most of them centered on his presidency but with a hefty number dealing with his military exploits.

Just published is Hendrik Booraem's exceptionally well-written "Young Hickory." It is not the first time that "Young Hickory" has been used as a title, one that is usually reserved for children's books. Booraem's "Young Hickory," in contrast, is a book written for adults but could be read and enjoyed by a bright teen-ager.

The 318 page book covers the life of Andy Jackson from birth to the time he left the Carolinas to make his fortune in Tennessee. With Andy as the central character, Booraem also gives us an in-depth study of Scots-Irish life in the Carolina Piedmont frontier of the late 1700s. Booraem refers to the Waxhaws of our area as an "immigrant community" and indeed that is what it was during the youth of Jackson.

The author cannot not answer the eternal questions of "Where was Jackson born—NC or SC?" and "Which port did the Jackson's use to enter America—Philadelphia or Charleston?" The answers to those questions will probably never be agreed upon.

Six chapters deal with Andy and the Revolutionary war (only 13 years of age he was a British prisoner in Camden jail where he caught smallpox). A high point of the book, in this reviewer's opinion, is the chapter, "The School of Manners, 1783-1784."

Young Andy, 16, visited Charles Town and glimpsed the life of a city for the first time. Booraem neatly sandwiches Andy's adventures in Charleston (high-stake gambling and observance of the behavior of gentlemen) in a larger context (the differences of upcountry and lowcountry, among others).

There are 58 pages of notes that are as fascinating as the text and sometimes even more so. Besides the usual indication of the source, Booraem's notes often are used to justify the assertions he makes or to compare an earlier Jackson interpreter with others. Or, Booraem may define and explain the terms he uses. An example: "The term "Scotch-Irish" was far less common than "Irish" in eighteenth-century America for emigrants from Ulster." He also states that "Scotch-Irish" during the colonial period was more likely to be derogatory than was "Irish."

Booraem includes an appendix, "Augustus C. Buell's 'History of Jackson, A Note to Researchers and Librarians.'" Buell was one of the earliest Jackson biographers. Booraem ably makes the charge that Buell's undocumented history has "contaminated" numerous books on Jackson. Buell did not use primary sources but many writers who came after Buell treated his book as if it were a primary source.

Booraem also lists 21 errors or fabrications of Buell. For example, it is often written that Andy received a 300 pound inheritance from his grandfather in Ireland. Not true.

Buell said Jackson attended the school of "Professor Branch." Booraem writes: ". . . . A fabrication; Buell gives no source, and the name Branch does to occur in any record of the Waxhaws." Jackson did attend a school taught by William Humphries. Buell gave the teacher's name as Rev. David Humphries. William Humphries was not a minister, etc.

Also, very handy for researchers, is a time line of the first 21 years of Jackson's life beginning with his birth in March 1767 and ending with April 1788 when he left Salisbury, N. C. for Tennessee.

"Young Hickory" is Hendrik Booraem's 4th book. He has taught history at Rutgers Univ., the State Univ. of New York and at USC-Aiken and currently lives in Pennsylvania. He has received awards for previous books. We would not be at all surprised if he receives a prestigious award for his latest.

WRITTEN by Louise Pettus