

COMMUNITY

Birthplace fight killed Jackson memorial

In anticipation of the bicentennial of Andrew Jackson's birth on March 15, 1767, North Carolina and South Carolina leaders joined in proposing a national memorial to Jackson.

Andrew Jackson's major achievements were cited as three-fold: seventh president of the United States, founder of the modern Democratic Party and hero of the battle of New Orleans.

Carolínians were convinced that Jackson deserved a national monument as much as Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln.

It was thought the cost would be around \$20 million and that most of the money would come from the federal government. After all, some argued, there were federally maintained na-

tional monuments dedicated to presidents and no law said they had to be built in Washington, D.C. Mount Rushmore was proof of that.

In September 1965 the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce announced that Henderson Belk of the department store Belk family would donate 1,000 acres of his land that crossed over the state line near U.S. 521 in Lancaster County and N.C. 75 in Union County, N.C.

Henderson Belk, as did other members of the Belk family, owned extensive acreage in the area. Their father, William Henry Belk, had been born between Van Wyck and the N.C. line.

Exactly half of the memorial land would be in North Carolina and half in South Carolina. There would be entrances on opposite sides of the long rectangle.

Kenneth Whitsett of Charlotte designed the memorial, which was anchored by a stone replica of Jackson's

Tennessee home, the Hermitage. On the interior there were to be murals representing the high points of Jackson's life.

A reflecting pool would surround a statue of Jackson. A log cabin replica would represent his birth in the frontier country of the Waxhaws. In addition, there were to be eight native pine trees surrounding cabins — one tree for each of his years as president. Completing the frontier motif, there would be rail fences surrounding garden patches of cabbage, corn, beans, etc., planted in red clay.

Petitions were circulated. The N.C. petition stated that Jackson was a native of North Carolina but that they supported the proposed shrine straddling the two states. Some South Carolínians developed their own petition which claimed Jackson as an S.C. native but were also willing to accept the memorial being placed in both states.

But many South Carolínians believed that the park was a concession to North

Carolina's claim that they could and would not accept. Charles Lee, director of the S.C. Department of Archives and History, was unalterably opposed. Lee said a joint park jeopardized South Carolina's well-founded claim.

Other South Carolínians called the proposal an outright surrender and saw the whole thing as a Charlotte scheme to draw tourists to Charlotte, which would benefit Charlotte's hotels, motels and restaurants.

The 200th birthday of Andrew Jackson came and passed without a memorial being placed. Instead, South Carolina managed to build Andrew Jackson State Park and Union County, N.C., has recently built a museum honoring the man each state continues to claim as its own.

Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Saturdays.

Louise
Pettus



NEARBY
HISTORY