

SC Story

One Claim States Jackson Born At Sea

By Ron Chepesiuk
and Louise Pettus,
Winthrop College

Where was Andrew Jackson born? As quickly as "Old Hickory" emerged as the Hero of New Orleans (1815), the controversy over Jackson's birthplace began.

Jackson, himself, had no doubts. On a number of occasions he affirmed his certainty that he was born in Lancaster District, S.C.

By 1824, when Jackson first campaigned for president, there were three biographies, all giving South Carolina as the place of birth.

In a letter to James H. Witherspoon in 1829, Jackson referred to Lancaster District as the "land of my birth."

When the Nullification Controversy split the state with Calhoun followers bitter over Jackson's stand for the Union, Jackson threatened to use federal troops to enforce tariff collection. Jackson's stern message to South Carolina began, "Fellow citizens of my native state."

There is no doubt that Jackson believed that he was born in South Carolina. Skeptics, like retired North Carolina Sen. Sam Ervin Jr., delight in pointing out that though Jackson was present at the event, he was not aware of the world that he was a credible witness. Senator Sam, writing in the *Charlotte Observer*, April 20, 1982, reiterated the old argument that Jackson's belief would not be accepted as evidence in a court of law.

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Less than a month after Jackson's death in 1845, Col. S.H. Walkup of Union County, N.C., made a Fourth of July speech in which he presented a number of affidavits attempting to prove Jackson was born in North Carolina. Then and now, many North Carolinians believe Jackson was born in the cabin of his uncle, George McKemey (McCamey).

In 1858, when Col. Braxton Davinport put forth the claim that Jackson was born in Berkeley County, Va., (now W.Va.), Walkup's interest in proving that Jackson was born in North Carolina revived. Walkup sent a letter to the "North Carolina Argus," which was reprinted across the nation.

James Parton, who wrote the "Life of Andrew Jackson" in 1860, picked up the Walkup allegation, giving great weight to the testimony of Sarah Lathen who was 7 years of age at the time of Jackson's birth.

The *Charleston Mercury* sneered at Parton's account with the statement, "When the Redheaded Andy, the Bully, Gambler, Horse Racer and Duellist became the Caesar of his time . . . the old ladies brushed up their memories, renewing themselves like the eagles. . . ."

Besides North Carolina and South Carolina claims, cases were made for Jackson's birth on the high seas; in Ireland; York County, Pa.; Augusta, Va.; and the already mentioned Berkeley County, Va.

The late Don Herd Jr., after an exhaustive study of the question, was convinced that the evidence for South Carolina's case was overwhelming. Interestingly, Herd also made the statement that, "were it not for the South Carolina claim, the case of Jackson's birth at sea would be the strongest claim." Herd thought the North Carolina claim to be very weak.

North Carolinians have not given up easily. In 1910 the Charlotte Daughters of the American Revolution built a monument to Jackson at the site of the McKemey cabin. In 1981 the North Carolina Legislature appropriated \$61,050 and hired seven archaeologists to dig at the site in a "scientific attempt" to prove Jackson a son of North Carolina.

South Carolina's first marker was erected in 1928 at the site of the Crawford-Wrenn house in Lancaster County, where Jackson said he was born.

In 1952 a 350-acre tract was purchased by South Carolina, and development of the Andrew Jackson Historical State Park began. The first-rate park has, besides the usual camping and recreational facilities, a fine museum, frontier schoolhouse replica and a meeting house.

The spacious grounds contain one of the state's finest art treasures sculpted in bronze and donated by Anna Hyatt Huntington, one of the world's greatest artists.

In larger than life size, Mrs. Huntington placed the youthful Jackson bareback on a horse "looking over his native hills, to wonder what the future holds for him."