

Waxhaws earned title of the 'Cradle of Genius'

Today is the 231st anniversary of Andrew Jackson's birth. Jackson, born in the Waxhaws of the Carolina backcountry of immigrant parents from Northern Ireland, was the first president to be closely associated with the frontier.

What are the characteristics of a frontiersman?

Various biographers of Jackson describe him in varying terms, some of them complimentary, some not. He has been described as self-reliant, hot-headed, loyal, independent, wild, combative, venturesome and riproaring.

Robert Remini, the best of the Jackson biographers, titled the first chapter of his book "A Roaring, Rollicking Fellow." Remini quotes another biographer on Jackson: "a patriot and a traitor. He was one of the greatest of generals, and wholly ignorant of the art of war. ... A stickler for discipline, he never hesitated to disobey his superior. A democratic autocrat. An urbane savage. An atrocious saint."

The Waxhaws (an area with its

heart in upper Lancaster County and its extremities in Chester County and Union County, N.C.) was settled almost entirely by Scots-Irish folk who came down from western Virginia and Pennsylvania.

One of the most interesting things about Jackson's youth is that he was not the only Waxhaws lad to find his way into politics. In fact, so many eminent politicians came from the Waxhaws that the community was called the "Cradle of Genius."

In the year 1829 (the year Jackson took office as president), four more Waxhaws natives took office. These were a U.S. senator from South Carolina, the governor of South Carolina, the district's representative in the U.S. House and Lancaster District's state senator.

The U.S. senator was William Smith, a schoolmate of Jackson's at Waxhaw Academy. Smith, a fine scholar of Latin and Greek with a brilliant legal mind, had, if anything, even more political enemies than Jackson. But, in common with Jackson, he was a staunch Unionist who fought John C. Calhoun "tooth and nail."

Smith was twice a U.S. senator and had been a judge when he was nominated by Jackson to the U.S. Supreme Court. Smith declined

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and moved to Alabama.

Stephen D. Miller had been in both the U.S. House and the S.C. Senate. In the House, Miller had been a protege of William Crawford, U.S. senator from Georgia, an opponent of Jackson and a relative of the Crawfords of the Waxhaws. A "Nullifier," Miller would form the States Rights party in opposition to Jackson's threat to punish South Carolina for its threat of secession.

James Blair, nicknamed "The Waxhaw Giant" for his physical size of 6 feet 6 or 7, and 350 pounds, was as colorful a character as ever set foot on Waxhaws soil. Blair was elected sheriff of Lancas-

ter County and at the age of 28 was elected general of the 8th Brigade of state militia.

Blair shared a lot of characteristics with Andrew Jackson. Blair's biographers, like Jackson's, would often follow praise for accomplishments with such phrases as "hot-spur temperament," "indulged in excess" and "both loved and feared."

Blair, under the influence of pain and drugs, committed suicide at the age of 48.

John Stewart, the state senator elected in that remarkable election of 1828, held many offices of trust: justice of the peace, magistrate, postmaster, militia officer and census-taker.

Between 1785 and 1829, the following Waxhaws men served in the S.C. legislature: Samuel C. Dunlap Jr., Archibald Cousart, John Montgomery Sr., William Simpson, James Massey Sr., Samuel Dunlap, Benjamin Massey, John Montgomery Jr., John Nisbet, Robert M. Crockett, George Douglas Blair and Samuel Roger Gibson.

No wonder the Waxhaws was called the Cradle of Genius.

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