DID ANDREW JACKSON ATTEND SCHOOL IN YORK COUNTY?

Did Pres. Andrew Jackson attend school in York County? In northeastern York County there is a bronze marker at the juncture of Highways 274, 49, and 55 (Five Points) that indicates that a mile east of the point, in the direction of the Catawba River, is the site of the Bethel Academy. The sign says that young Andrew Jackson lived with the family of the Widow Howe and attended school at the academy.

In the southwestern corner of the county, at Bullocks Creek Presbyterian Church is the former site of Bullocks Creek Academy, a classical school established by the Rev. Joseph Alexander. Some claim that Jackson was a student at Bullocks Creek.

It is a fact that Andrew Jackson, born in 1767, first went to school at the Waxhaw Academy at his home church, Waxhaw Presbyterian Church, in Lancaster County. When the Revolutionary War reached the South Carolina upcountry in the summer of 1780, Andy Jackson was only 13 years of age but he served as a courier for Gen. William Richardson Davie. He and a brother were captured later and imprisoned at Camden in 1781, where both contracted smallpox. Andrew Jackson's whereabouts are well accounted for until his mother's death in December of 1782.

In *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, Vol. 1, published in 1980 by the University of Tennessee Press, there are printed some of the general's reminiscences of his youth. According to Jackson, following his imprisonment, he stayed with his uncle, Robert Crawford, "weak and feeble from disease". Next, "Having left Major Crawford's I paid a visit to Mr. Joseph White, Uncle to Mrs. Crawford, his son having lately established himself in the saddler's business and I remained, there about six months.... Having sold my property I then left for North Carolina to finish my studies." Jackson did not return to South Carolina.

When Jackson applied for a license to practice law in North Carolina, September 26, 1787, the application stated that he had lived in North Carolina for the past two years. The future president could not have been a student at Bullock Creek under Rev. Joseph Alexander. Alexander did not open his school until 1787.

On the other hand, the Bethel Academy was in operation before the Revolutionary War. Rev. Francis Cummins was pastor at Bethel Church, 1783-1789, and the claim is made that he taught Andrew Jackson. Dr. Maurice Moore, in Remeniscences of York, incorrectly names the Bethel pastor as William Cummins. Moore writes: "While living in the Bethel congregation, he [Rev. Cummins] opened a school of good standing, and numbered among his pupils, too, the future hero of New Orleans, General Andrew Jackson. I know this from his own lips. I dined with General Jackson in 1832, and the pleasure of my entertainment at the White House was greatly enhanced by the president's lively recollections of his schoolboy days in York...."

Moore's account becomes quite explicit when he has the president ask: "Can you tell me anything of Dr. John Allison, who married Miss Betsy Hill, while I was at Bethel, going to school to the Rev. Mr. Cummins?" Later on, Dr. Moore writes, "...when in company with President Jackson, of none did he inquire with more affectionate interest, than a 'blooming lass of his school days at Bethel, named Grizzy McKinney.' At the time of the conversation with General Jackson, she was my loved and respected landlady."

Some of Jackson's early biographers stated that he was a school teacher--not a student--after the Revolution. It is highly unlikely that 16-year-old Jackson taught school. Besides, Jackson never called himself a teacher but, more than once, said that he was an apprentice saddler.

Serious students of Andrew Jackson like the Hermitage historians and Robert Remini of the Univ. of Chicago, the best known Jackson biographer, agree that Andrew Jackson never attended school in York County. They say that all of the factual evidence available shows that the few years of schooling Jackson had in South Carolina were all at the Waxhaw Academy in Lancaster County.

By Louise Pettus