

Andrew Johnson

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Historic Site
Tennessee



Eliza McCardle Johnson and Andrew Johnson

work." Andrew Johnson never lost an opportunity to remind people of his humble origins. He cited his own rise from poverty as proof that prosperity was not exclusively for the elite. Johnson was born in 1808 in Raleigh, N.C. His father, a hotel porter, died when Andrew was four. Apprenticed to a tailor as a child, he ran away when he was 15 and traveled throughout the Carolinas and Tennessee. Eventually he settled in Greeneville, Tenn., a prosperous Scotch-Irish town. Here he met Eliza McCardle, the daughter of a shoemaker. The two were married in 1827 in a ceremony performed by Mordecai Lincoln, a cousin of Abraham Lincoln.

There is a persistent story that Eliza taught her husband to read. He actually received some education as an apprentice tailor in Raleigh. It was the custom for employers to hire readers for the boys as they worked. Young Andrew asked for books and taught himself as much as he could. He hired readers at his own tailor shop in Greeneville. Eliza taught him writing and mathematics, and he joined debating clubs. Though he never attended school, Johnson was always a strong proponent of public education. It was a love for words and a recognition of their power that helped him to succeed. Johnson launched his career in his tailor shop, cultivating a commanding style of speech and participating in debates that were as much entertainment as politics in 1800s rural America. "There was no hurried utterance," wrote an opponent. "He held his crowd spellbound."

State offices (see *chronology on the other side of this brochure*) took him to Nashville for long months while his family remained in Greeneville. With almost no time to devote to tailoring, he eventually sold his business but kept the building and lot. In 1851 the family moved from the small brick house Johnson bought in the 1830s to a larger house—the Homestead. By the 1840s he owned a 350-acre farm east of town, along with flour mills and town lots. "There is no use in buying property," he told his son Robert, "unless there is a bargain in it."

"When I was a tailor," President Andrew Johnson told a crowd of supporters in 1866, "I always made a close fit and was always punctual to my customers, and did good

War brought hardship for the Johnsons. Although the state was under Union rule by 1862—Johnson became military governor—pro-Union East Tennessee was still occupied by the Confederates. Johnson's sons and sons-in-law were harassed for their Union stand. His property was confiscated and his house turned into a hospital. Eliza finally managed to escape through enemy lines to join her husband in Nashville. The family did not return home until Johnson's presidential term ended in 1869.

By then Johnson was the wealthiest citizen of Greeneville. A newspaper article described his business sense as "above the average for public men, for in his investments and business relations he manifests considerable shrewdness and tact." Johnson died in 1875 with an estate surpassing \$200,000; Eliza died six months later. The Homestead passed to their youngest son, Andrew Jr. Greeneville citizens dedicated the cemetery monument to their beloved statesman in 1878. One by one the Johnson shop and houses were acquired by the federal government. Today the buildings and cemetery commemorate the life and work of a man who assumed the presidency during a time of crisis and helped to restore the Union.



The Johnson tailor shop (above) was the center for local politics. The Johnsons moved from a smaller house to the Homestead (top) in 1851.

Planning Your Visit

Andrew Johnson National Historic Site honors the life and work of the nation's 17th president and preserves his two homes and his gravesite.

The park units are open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily; they are closed on Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. The visitor center has infor-

mation, exhibits, and the tailor shop that Johnson bought in 1831 and moved to this site. Across the street is an early home of the Johnsons, with exhibits.

A block and a half up Main Street is the Homestead, where the Johnsons lived beginning in 1851. Furnished with original family possessions, 10 rooms are open to visitors. Less than half a mile away is the cemetery where Andrew and Eliza Johnson are buried with other family members.

The marble memorial (left) has likenesses of the Constitution and the Bible; an American eagle perches on top.

Accessibility

The visitor center, the early home, and the cemetery are accessible to visitors in wheel-chairs. The Homestead is accessible on the basement level and first floor.

Related Sites

The Nathanael Greene Museum, at Main and McKee streets, and the Andrew Johnson Museum and Library, at Tusculum College, have collections of Johnson objects and documents.

Getting Here

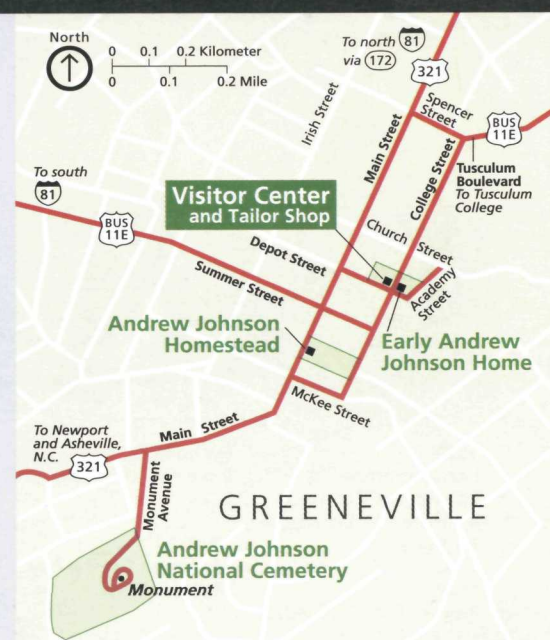
The park is located in Greeneville, Tenn. From I-81 northbound take exit 23 to U.S. 11E north into Greeneville. From I-81 southbound

take exit 36 to Tenn. Rt. 172 south, then U.S. 321 south.

More Information

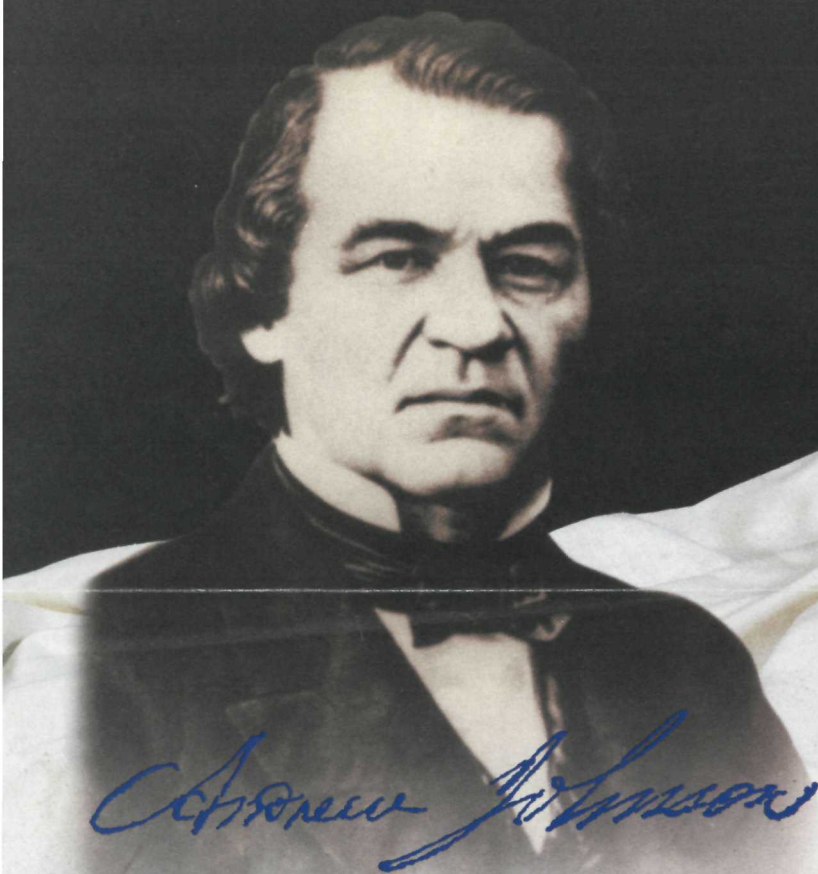
Andrew Johnson National Historic Site
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Greeneville, TN 37743
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The Constitution shall be saved and the Union Preserved.

—Andrew Johnson, 1869

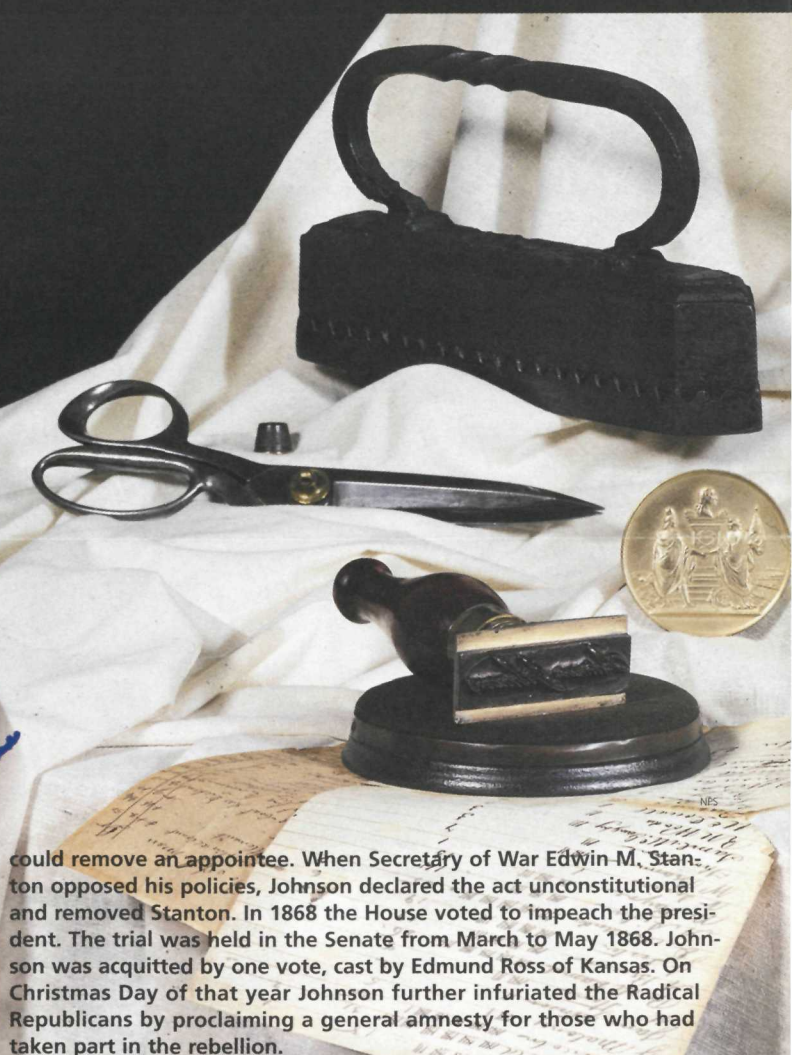


The public image of Andrew Johnson was always that of an uncompromising idealist, extolling the agrarian democracy of Thomas Jefferson and fellow Tennessean Andrew Jackson. In time of trial, he sought support from the people. Johnson formulated his political philosophy early on: a strict interpretation of the U.S. Constitution, a belief in states' rights, a notion that the public lands belonged literally to the people, and an aversion to government spending. At first, Johnson was able to reconcile the words of the Constitution with the idea of slavery. He needed the pro-slavery votes and even owned slaves himself. His defense of slavery waned as Southern secession threatened to destroy the Union.

As a local and state official, the perennial working-class candidate built a loyal constituency and solidified his position as a leader of the Democratic Party. His terms as U.S. Representative and Senator gave him a chance to put his philosophy into action on the national level. The Homestead Act, which some consider his greatest contribution, was the practical outgrowth of his agrarian ideals. He introduced a bill to open public lands to anyone who would farm a 160-acre parcel. It became law in 1862.

When the Civil War broke out, Johnson was the only senator from a seceding state to remain in Congress. Like President Lincoln, Johnson believed that secession was unconstitutional. Therefore, he had every right to keep his seat. In December 1860, in a speech to Congress, he proclaimed, "I intend to stand by the Constitution as it is, insisting upon a compliance with all its guaranties. . . . It is the last hope of human freedom." If that meant abolishing slavery, so be it. Most of his fellow Southerners felt betrayed. Johnson was nearly killed by hostile crowds during a train ride through Virginia in 1861. In the North he was a hero. Lincoln appointed him military governor of Tennessee in 1862. In 1864 Johnson replaced Hannibal Hamlin as Lincoln's running mate; "Andy Johnson, I think," said Lincoln, "is a good man." On April 15, 1865, upon Lincoln's assassination, Andrew Johnson became the 17th president of the United States.

President Johnson battled with Thaddeus Stevens and the Radical Republicans over the course of Reconstruction. Johnson wanted to re-admit the southern states much as they were before the war, minus slavery. The Radicals, who controlled Congress, sought to demolish the South's capacity for reviving a sectional conflict. Fearful that Johnson would replace Radicals in the South, Congress passed the Tenure of Office Act requiring Senate approval before a President



could remove an appointee. When Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton opposed his policies, Johnson declared the act unconstitutional and removed Stanton. In 1868 the House voted to impeach the president. The trial was held in the Senate from March to May 1868. Johnson was acquitted by one vote, cast by Edmund Ross of Kansas. On Christmas Day of that year Johnson further infuriated the Radical Republicans by proclaiming a general amnesty for those who had taken part in the rebellion.

President Johnson's administration was shaped by his unwavering belief in the Constitution. He opposed the 14th Amendment and vetoed the Civil Rights Act and statehood for Nebraska and Colorado—all of whose constitutionality he questioned. Amid the political turmoil Johnson managed to reopen seaports, federal courts, and post offices in the South. His most far-reaching achievement, the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867, remained unappreciated until long after Johnson left office. Johnson returned to Greeneville in 1869, no less ambitious than ever. He was again elected to the Senate in January 1875. Six months later Andrew Johnson died. The memorial over his grave reads: "His Faith In The People Never Wavered."



Senator Edmund Ross of Kansas (standing, far left) cast the vote that acquitted Johnson in his 1868 impeachment trial.

A Johnson Chronology



1808
Born December 29 in Raleigh N.C., to Jacob and Mary McDonough Johnson.

1827
Marries Eliza McCordle,

Greeneville, Tenn. They have five children, 1828–52.

1829–30
Alderman for the city of Greeneville.

1832
Appointed trustee of Rhea Academy, Greeneville.

1834
Mayor of Greeneville.

1835–37
Tennessee State Legislator, Democratic Party. Defeated 1837 and re-elected 1839.

1840
Presidential elector; supports Democrat Martin Van Buren.

1841
Tennessee State Senator.

1843–53
U.S. representative, 1st Congressional District

of Tennessee. Term marked by fiscal conservatism, opposition to tariffs, support for annexation of Texas, campaign for Homestead Bill.

1853–57
Governor of Tennessee. Reforms public education, establishes State Agriculture Dept. and public libraries.

1857–62
U.S. senator. Continues support of Homestead Bill, urges popular election of president, U.S. senators, and federal judges. Delivers famous anti-secession speech Dec. 18–19,

1860. Only senator from seceding state to return to Capitol after outbreak of Civil War.

1862–64
Military Governor of Tennessee. Establishes provisional government. Emancipates slaves in Tennessee. Advocates general amnesty for secessionists.

1865
Vice president of the United States.

1865–69
17th president of the United States as of Lincoln's death April 15. Seeks to restore

Union; opposes radical Reconstruction. Signs purchase of Alaska Territory, 1867. Impeached 1868 for violation of Tenure of Office Act; acquitted in May. Proclaims general amnesty for secessionists in December 1868.

1875
U.S. senator. Only former president to return to U.S. Senate. Dies July 31; buried in Greeneville.

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