

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Hermitage

Twelve miles from Nashville we visited the Hermitage estate, the home of Gen. Andrew Jackson, seventh president of the United States. The Hermitage is maintained by the Ladies' Hermitage Assn., organized in 1889 for the purpose of preserving the properties of Gen. and Mrs. Jackson as a national shrine, and to perpetuate the story of his life as a soldier, senator, and president.

Built by Gen. Jackson, hero of the Battle of New Orleans, first Tennessee senator, governor of Florida, and later President of the United States, the Hermitage beautifully overlooks 500 acres of rolling Tennessee land. It is claimed to be the only national shrine completely furnished with original pieces. It was a joy and an education to be privileged to tour the rooms, the old-fashioned formal garden of great beauty and to stand before the tomb of this great man and his lady, which have formed such a sentimental part of the estate.

Gen. and Mrs. Jackson lived happily on this beautiful estate and made the Hermitage a "real home" for three generations of the Jackson family. Authorities say that it reflects their characters and tastes. The spacious garden of flowers and shrubs was Mrs. Jackson's hobby, and is still maintained. Around the house and in the estate, grounds are the fine trees that shade the lawn.

We learn from the booklet, which is presented to each visitor to the Hermitage, after the payment of a small fee, that the furnishings in the great hall to which we were first admitted, contains the original hat rack, umbrella stand, two mahogany sofas, pier table, Brussels stair carpet and brass rods, and the chandelier. The interesting pictorial wallpaper was printed by duFour in Paris, about 1825. The complete strip, we read, consisted of 25 strips in colors, and was ordered by General Jackson in 1835, being the original paper used when the house was rebuilt. It was shipped by way of New Orleans up the Mississippi and Cumberland rivers. This paper is of outstanding historical interest, one of the few historic scenic papers preserved in this country. The paper represents the legend of the travels of Telemachus in search of Ulysses, his father, and is that part of the story of his landing on the island of Calypso, He is accompanied by Mentor.

In October 1930, the paper was removed from the walls by Mr. James Wilson from the Metropolitan Museum In New York, for the purpose of treating the walls to ensure the preservation of the paper, and was then put back. This paper and the story which we have here related, was probably the most fascinating part of the tour of the Hermitage.

The very formal front and back parlors contain nothing but the original furnishings. The crystal chandelier, the Parisian marble vase and French china vase on wall brackets, the gold oval mirror, the mantle of Italian marble, mahogany whatnot, large mahogany sofas, two adorable small sofas, and much else in the two rooms were used by the Jacksons at the Hermitage. The original lace curtains were removed in 1950 because they were worn frail and placed in the museum. The original red brocatelle draperies were replaced in 1954 with exact reproductions of the fabric, which was also used to replace the upholstery on the red chairs and the matching draperies in the back parlor. Much of the furnishings and appointments in the house had been used by General Jackson during his residence in the White House. These have all been returned by members of the family or by friends who have had them in their possession for many years.

Gen. Jackson's bedroom is as it was the day he died. Across the hall is the bedroom of Andrew Jackson Jr., Gen. and Mrs. Jackson had no children. In 1809 they adopted the infant son of Severn Donelson, brother of Mrs. Jackson, and named him Andrew Jackson, Jr. He bore that name and became heir to all the estate. The furniture in this room was purchased by Jackson in 1834.

The office and library depict the character of Jackson in its furniture. For 30 years, it is said, the Hermitage was the political center of the United States, and Andrew Jackson was the most influential man of his party. There are over 400 books housed here in exceptionally fine bookcases of the period. The books were all owned and used by General and Mrs. Jackson. Another feature of the furnishings of the entire house are the handsome portraits, pictures, and engravings which hang on the walls of the eleven rooms, many of which are fine oil paintings of the general, Mrs. Jackson or members of the family.

There is the old outdoor kitchen, the smoke house and the cabin of Uncle Albert, the faithful Negro slave of the Jackson family, furnished and on view within a stone's

throw of the handsome old brick mansion. Many notables were entertained there during the life of General Jackson and hundreds have visited the Hermitage since its purchase and restoration by the Ladies Heritage Association.

It was Mrs. Andrew Jackson III, who conceived the idea of the Ladies' Hermitage Assn. The organizers were Andrew Jackson III, Mrs. Mary C. Dorris and, Mr. and Mrs. William A. Donelson. It was in February of 1889 that a committee applied to the State of Tennessee and were granted a charter incorporating the Ladies' Hermitage Association. The objects in the charter were to purchase from the State of Tennessee certain land, including the land and tomb of Andrew Jackson, and "to beautify, preserve, and adorn the same throughout all coming years, in a manner most befitting the memory of the great man, and commensurate with the gratitude of his countrymen." The house, tomb and surrounding buildings were conveyed to the association on April 5, 1889. Later all the original 25 acres were conveyed to the association, and again in 1935, conveyed the remainder of the original 500 acres Hermitage farm tract to the board of trustees to be administered by the association.