

# Andrew Johnson

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE • TENNESSEE



Andrew Johnson's life reveals his steadfast belief in democracy. Mindful of his own humble background and the struggle it involved, he respected the will of the people. To him public office represented an opportunity for service, not a means for personal gain or glory. Typical of his championship of the common man were his efforts as Governor of Tennessee to broaden the scope of public education, and, as U.S. Representative, to secure the passage of a homestead bill.

Today at Andrew Johnson National Historic Site, you can see the physical surroundings in which these beliefs were shaped. The tailor shop, where he obtained much of his education while working at his trade, is now preserved within a brick building. His home, constructed after he had achieved prominence in the field of politics, is a comfortable yet modest dwelling which has withstood the ravages of time. These places illustrate a fundamental principle of American democracy—that a man, no matter how humble his origin, can become President of the United States.

President Andrew Johnson posed for Matthew Brady who took this picture. Brady is well known for his Civil War photographs.

***He was an immense worker and student, but always in the practicalities of life . . . His faith in the judgment of the people was unlimited, and to their decision he was always ready to submit. One of the people by birth, he remained so by conviction.***

—JEFFERSON DAVIS

Davis gave this evaluation of Johnson, the Senator, in 1865. The former President of the Confederate States had served in the U.S. Senate with Johnson.

## FROM TAILOR SHOP TO WHITE HOUSE

Andrew Johnson's success was achieved in the face of adversity. He was born in Raleigh, N.C., on December 29, 1808. His early life was marked by the hardships of poverty, and he was only 4 years old when his father died. He soon had to assume his share of the family's support, and instead of going to school, he became a tailor's apprentice. Before completing the full term of apprenticeship, however, he decided to work for himself. In 1826, he and his family moved to Greeneville, Tenn., where he soon established himself in his trade.

*Take it quietly UNCLE ABE and I will draw it closer than ever!!*

*A few more stitches ANDY and the good old UNION will be mended!*



The date of this cartoon is unknown, but it probably was a product of the 1864 presidential campaign. Johnson, the vice-presidential candidate, with his tailor's needle and scissors sews the Union back together with Lincoln's help

Tennessee State Library

There he met Eliza McCardle. They were married on May 17, 1827, when Johnson was 18 years old. Mordecai Lincoln, a justice of the peace and a second cousin of Abraham Lincoln, performed the ceremony.

Johnson was successful as a tailor, and within a few years he was able to buy a shop. The shop was a small frame structure, which Johnson moved to its present location. A brick building in which he lived from sometime in the 1830's until 1851 stood across the street from the shop.

To remedy his lack of education Johnson employed young men to read to him as he worked. Sometimes Eliza assisted with the reading. Although not enrolled in Greeneville College, he joined a debating society connected with the school and each week walked 4 miles to attend or take part in the debates. These weekly debates helped Johnson become a better public speaker.

Johnson's first venture into politics was in 1829 when, with the support of the workmen of the town, he was elected an alderman of Greeneville. The next year he was reelected, and in 1834 became mayor. From then on his rise was steady. He served in the lower house of the State legislature, then in the State senate. In 1843, he began the first of five consecutive terms as U.S. Representative. He was elected Governor of Tennessee in 1853 and reelected 2 years later. In 1857, when sectional controversy over slavery was nearing a climax, Johnson was elected to the Senate of the United States.

Although a Southerner and a slaveholder, Johnson stood firmly on the side of the Union. On December 18 and 19, 1860, he delivered in the Senate one of the greatest speeches of his career. Abraham Lincoln had been elected President a short time before; South Carolina was about to pass an ordinance of secession; and Southern Congressmen were urging their States to withdraw from the Union. But, from the floor of the Senate, this Tennessee Senator proclaimed his faith in the Union and insisted that the Federal Government had authority under the Constitution to execute laws within the States, and therefore a State resisting such execution "placed itself in the rebellious or nullifying attitude." As for himself, Johnson said, "I intend to stand by the Constitution as it is, insisting upon a compliance with all its guarantees. . . . It is the last hope of human freedom."

Johnson's refusal to follow Tennessee into secession increased his prestige in the North. During the Civil War, he became an adviser to President Lincoln on Southern affairs. A personal following of some 13,000 "Andy Johnson Democrats" promptly entered the Union Army as volunteers. After much of Tennessee had been recovered by Union military forces, Lincoln appointed Johnson as military governor with the rank of brigadier general. When the National Union Convention of 1864 was searching for a strong running mate for Lincoln, Johnson was selected. Upon Lincoln's assassination in April 1865, he succeeded to the Nation's highest office.

## THE PRESIDENTIAL YEARS

Johnson was faced with the tremendous postwar program that Lincoln had only begun. Like his predecessor, Johnson held that no State could secede from the Union. Therefore, the Southern States, even though they had taken up arms, had never been out of the Union. As soon as they had ceased to resist, they could assume all the functions of government guaranteed to them by the Constitution. The program was to be accomplished through a generous and helpful attitude on the part of the Federal Government toward the South.

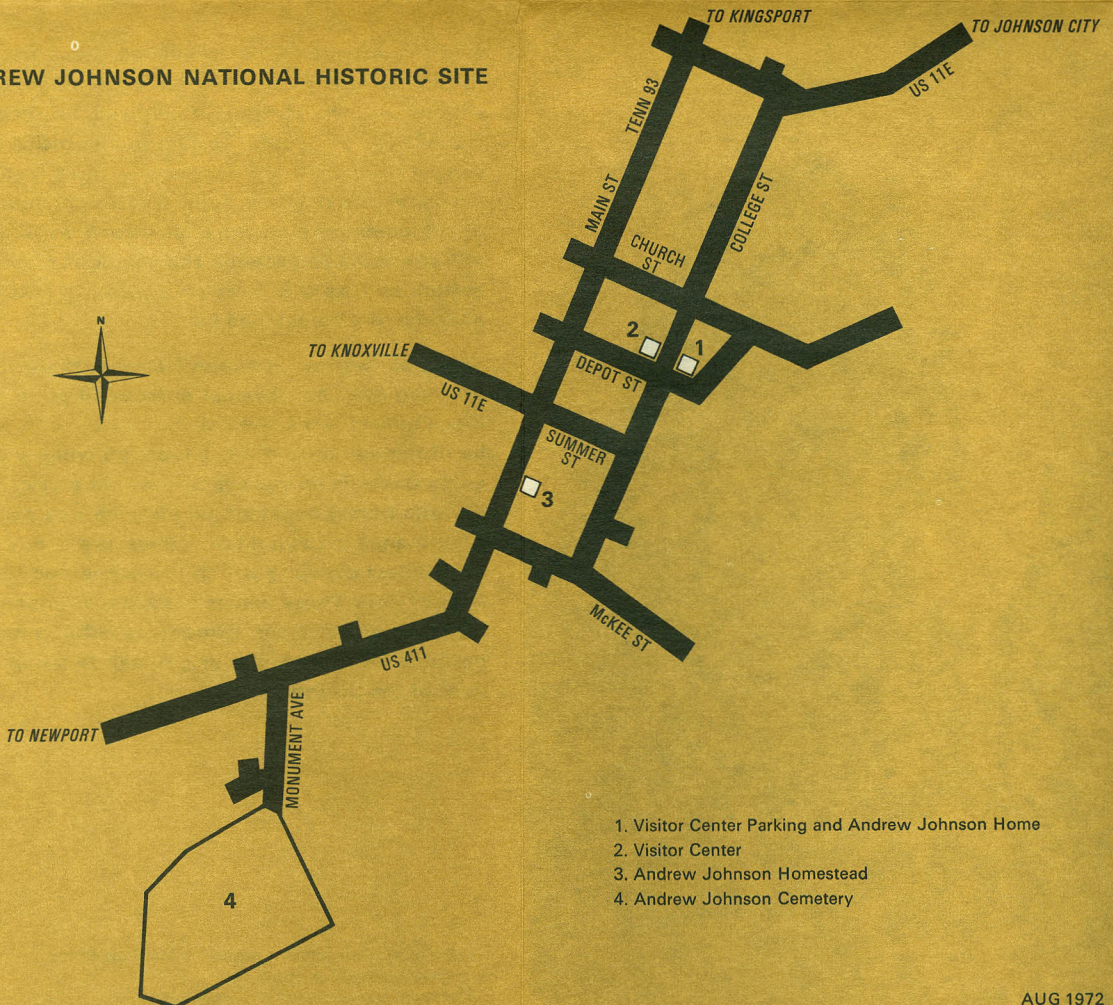
Johnson, however, lacked both Lincoln's prestige as a victorious war-President and his political finesse in handling opposition groups. His policy was soon frustrated by Congress. Seeking to regain political control of the country and to curtail the powers of the Presidency, which had increased during the war, a group of extremist Republicans in Congress, the Radicals, denied seats to newly elected representatives from the South. This move ensured Radical control of the legislative branch by preventing Southern Democrats from joining forces with Northern Democrats. The Radical influence soon extended to two-thirds, thus destroying the effect of the President's vetoes and enabling Congress to enact its own reconstruction program. Military rule of the South, enfranchisement of the Negro (in the South only), and disenfranchisement of Confederate veterans were its key features.

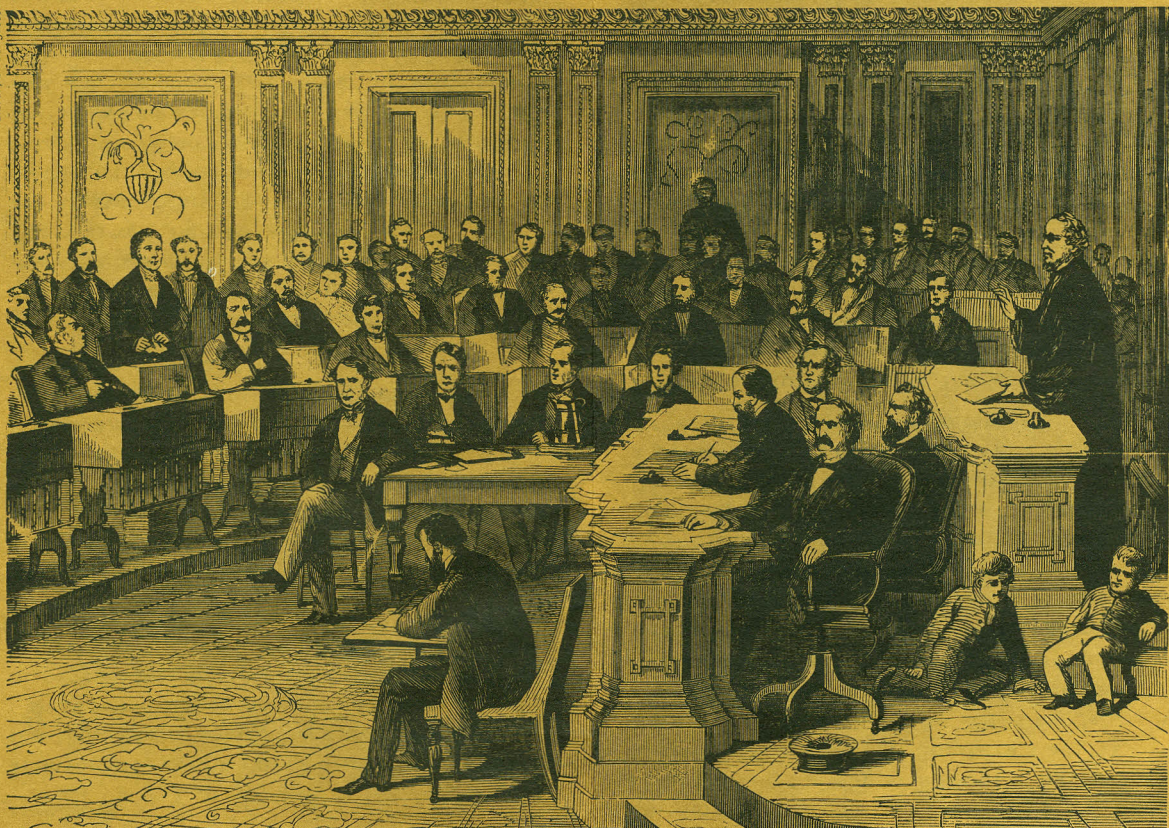
The struggle between a resolute Executive and an equally unyielding Congress led ultimately to impeachment proceedings against Johnson. The issue was joined over the Tenure of Office Act, which limited the power of the President to remove officials whose appointments had been approved by the Senate. Johnson regarded the act as unconstitutional and, in 1867, removed Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton from office. Johnson was then impeached by the House of Representatives. The trial was held before the Senate from March to May 1868. The final vote was one short of the two-thirds needed for conviction. The "not guilty" vote of Senator Edmund Ross of Kansas decided the issue. His vote and that of six other Republican Senators ensured that government under the constitutional system of checks and balances through three equal branches of government would continue.

During Johnson's administration, Alaska was purchased from the Imperial Russian Government and the French were forced, by application of the Monroe Doctrine, to withdraw their support of Emperor Maximilian in Mexico.

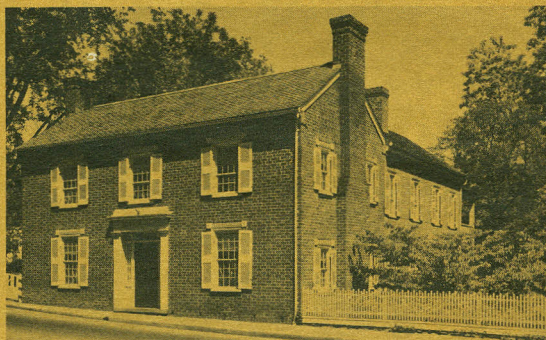
After his Presidential term, Johnson returned to Greeneville. His interest in politics continued, and on January 26, 1875, he was elected to the U.S. Senate, the only former President to return to Washington as Senator. He died soon afterwards, on July 31, 1875.

## ANDREW JOHNSON NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE





Senator Edmund Ross of Kansas stands at far left to vote "Not Guilty" in the impeachment proceedings against President Johnson. The wood engraving appeared in *Leslie's Magazine* in June 1868.



Above is Johnson's tailor shop in Greenville. It is now enclosed within the visitor center. Below is the Johnson family home which he purchased in 1851. It has been restored and is open to the public.

#### ABOUT YOUR VISIT

The park consists of Johnson's tailor shop, his two Greenville residences, and the cemetery in which he is buried. The park is open every day, except December 25, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The tailor shop, which Johnson acquired in 1831, remained in the hands of his heirs until purchased by Tennessee in 1921. The State later enclosed it in a brick building. Today that building, at the corner of Depot and College Streets and 1 block east of Main Street, also houses the park's visitor center, museum, and office.

Across the street from the shop is the brick building in which Johnson lived from the 1830's until 1851. It is not yet open to the public.

Johnson purchased the two-story brick house on Main Street—1 block south of Summer Street (U.S. 11E)—in 1851 when it still was unfinished. It served as his home until he died. The Federal Government purchased it in 1941 from the Johnson heirs. Restoration was completed in 1958. This house is open to the public.

Andrew Johnson Cemetery, which is at the end of Monument Avenue and 1 block south of West Main Street, was donated to the Federal Government in 1906 by the Johnson heirs and was administered by the War Department as a national cemetery until 1942. Since then, it has been administered by the National Park Service. On the monument over Johnson's grave are these words: "His faith in the people never wavered."

## **ADMINISTRATION**

Andrew Johnson National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Depot Street, Greeneville, TN 37743, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

**National Park Service**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**