

Andrew Johnson

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Historic Site
Tennessee





Eliza McCordle Johnson and Andrew Johnson

"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 work." Andrew Johnson

often reminded 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, NC. His father, a hotel porter, died when Andrew was three. Apprenticed to a tailor as a child, he ran away at age 15 and traveled throughout the Carolinas, Alabama, and Tennessee. Eventually he settled in Greeneville, TN, a prosperous Scot-Irish town. Here he met Eliza McCordle, the daughter of a shoemaker and tavern keeper. Mordecai Lincoln, a relative of Abraham Lincoln, performed the marriage ceremony in 1827.

There is a persistent story that Eliza taught her husband to read. He had received some education as an apprentice tailor in Raleigh. It was customary 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 strongly supported public education. He loved words and recognized their power, which 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 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."

War brought hardship for the Johnsons. Although the state was under Union rule by 1862—Johnson became military governor—the Confederates still occupied pro-Union East Tennessee. They harassed Johnson's sons and sons-in-law for their Union stand and confiscated Johnson's property, using his house as a hospital and army headquarters. Eliza, other family members, and some of their slaves escaped through enemy lines. 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. In 1878 Greeneville citizens dedicated the cemetery monument to their beloved statesman. The federal government acquired the Johnson shop and homes one by one. Today the buildings and cemetery commemorate the life and work of a man who assumed the presidency during a time of crisis and helped restore the Union.



Johnson's tailor shop (above) was the center for local politics.

ALL PHOTOS THIS SIDE—NPS

Planning Your Visit

Andrew Johnson National Historic Site honors the 17th president by preserving his tailor shop and homes. His gravesite remains an active military National Cemetery.

Park units open from 9 am to 5 pm daily; closed Thanksgiving, Dec. 25, and Jan. 1. The

visitor center has information, exhibits, and the tailor shop that Johnson bought in 1831. An early home of the Johnsons, across the street, also includes exhibits.

Visit the Homestead, where the Johnsons lived from 1851, two blocks up Main Street from the visitor center. Its nine rooms, which include the Johnson family's original furnishings, are open to visitors. The cemetery where Andrew, Eliza, and other family members are buried is less than a half-mile from the Homestead.

An eagle perches atop the monument to Johnson in the cemetery (left).

Accessibility

We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all; for information call or check our website.

Related Sites

The Nathanael Greene Museum at Main and McKee streets and a museum and library on the Tusculum College campus also preserve Johnson memorabilia.

Getting Here

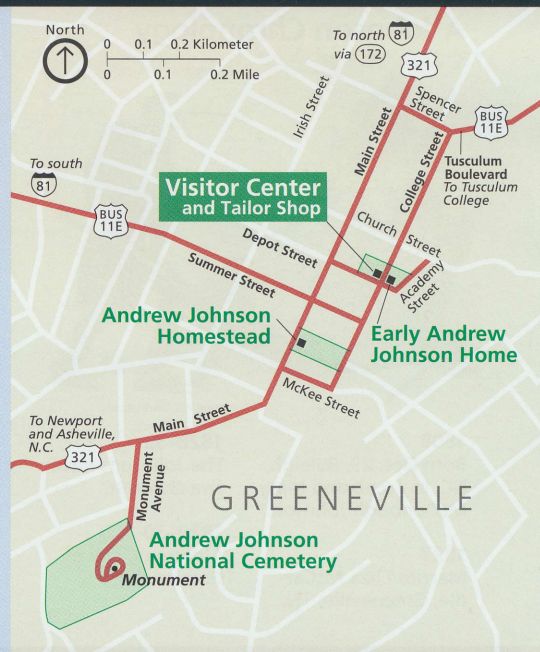
To Greeneville, TN, take I-81 north to exit 23 to US 11E north. From I-81 south take exit 36 to TN Rt. 172 south, then US 321 south.

More Information

Andrew Johnson National Historic Site
121 Monument Ave.
Greeneville, TN 37743
423-638-3551
www.nps.gov/anjo

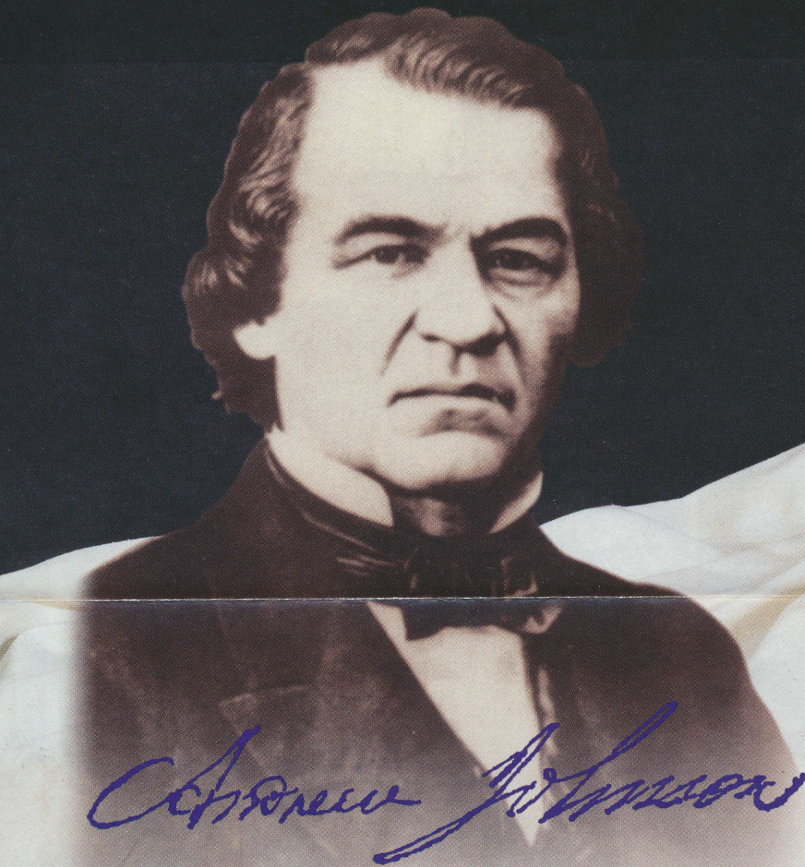
For firearms regulations check the park website.

Andrew Johnson National Historic Site is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities visit www.nps.gov.



The Constitution shall be saved and the Union Preserved.

—Andrew Johnson, 1869

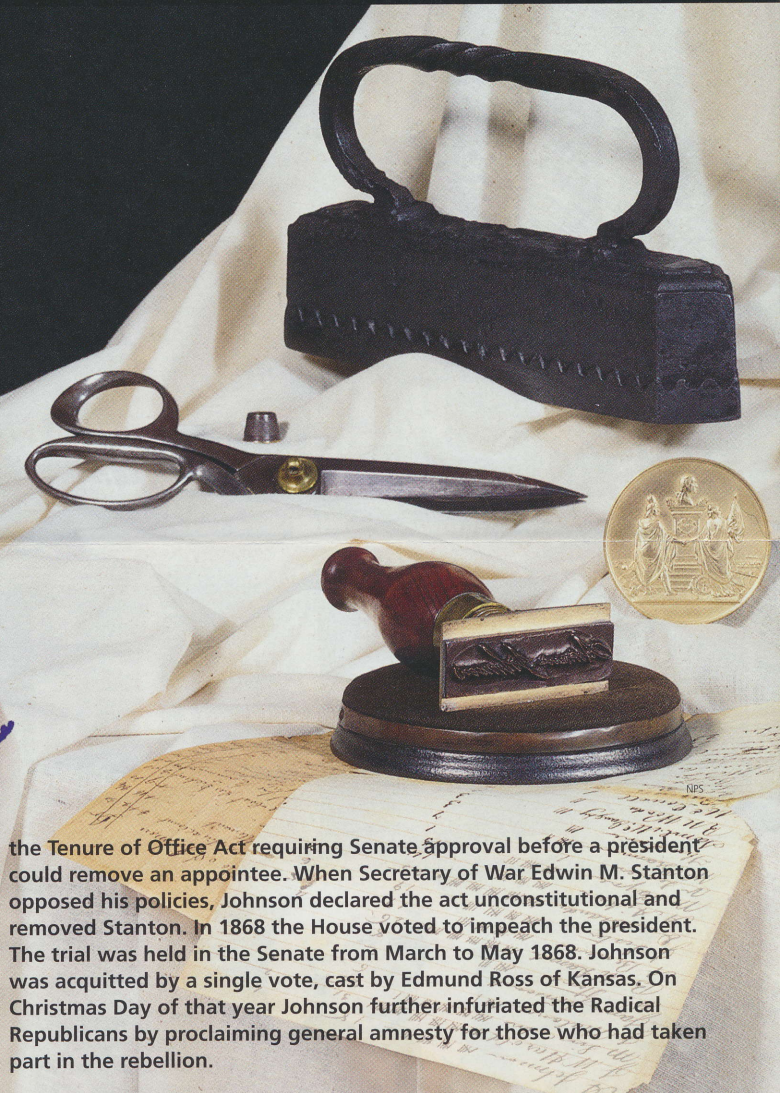


Andrew Johnson's public image was that of a resolute idealist who extolled an agrarian democracy popularized by Thomas Jefferson and fellow Tennessean Andrew Jackson. In times of trial, he sought the support of the people. Johnson formulated his political philosophy early on: a strict interpretation of the US 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 enslaved people 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 Democratic party leader. His terms as US representative and senator gave him a chance to put his philosophy into action on the national level. In 1843 he introduced a homestead bill, a practical outgrowth of his agrarian ideals, to create opportunity and esteem by providing land to the landless. After it became law in 1862, anyone who agreed to live on and farm a 160-acre parcel of public land could claim ownership after five years.

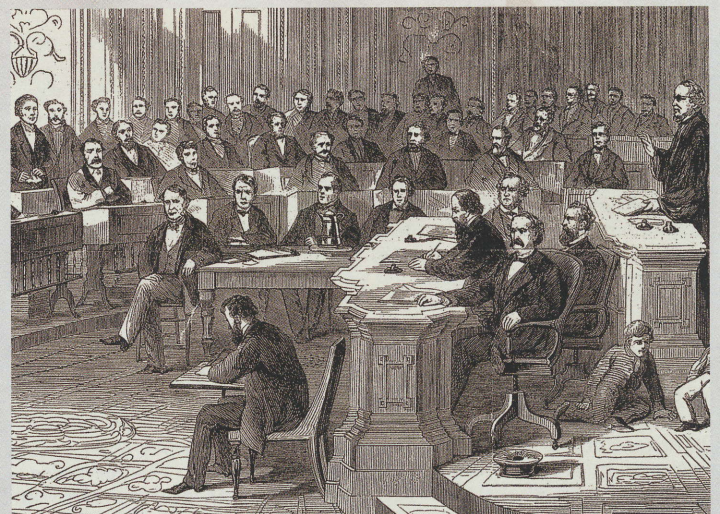
When the Civil War broke out, Johnson was the only senator from a seceding state to remain in Congress. Like President Lincoln, Johnson believed that secession was unconstitutional. Therefore, he had every right to keep his seat. In December 1860, in a speech to Congress, he proclaimed, "I intend to 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, but 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 a single vote, cast by Edmund Ross of Kansas. On Christmas Day of that year Johnson further infuriated the Radical Republicans by proclaiming general amnesty for those who had taken part in the rebellion.

Johnson's administration was shaped by his unwavering belief in the Constitution. He opposed the 14th Amendment and vetoed the Civil Rights and Statehood acts for Nebraska and Colorado because he questioned their constitutionality. 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 Greenville 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.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



A Johnson Chronology

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

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



TENNESSEE STATE LIBRARY

1808

Born Dec. 29, Raleigh, NC, to Jacob and Mary McDonough Johnson.

1827

Marries Eliza McCordle, Greenville, TN.

1828–52

The Johnsons have five children.

1829–30

Alderman, city of Greenville.

1832

Appointed trustee of Rhea Academy, Greeneville.

1834

Elected mayor, Greeneville.

1835

Elected state legislator (Democrat), Tennessee. Defeated 1837; reelected 1839.

1840

Presidential elector; supports Democrat Martin Van Buren.

1841

Elected state senator (Democrat), Tennessee.

1843–53

US representative, 1st Congressional District, Tennessee. A fiscal conservative, he opposes tariffs; supports annexation of Texas and Homestead Bill.

1853–57

Governor, Tennessee. Reforms public education; establishes State Agriculture Dept. and public libraries.

1857–62

US senator. Continues to support Homestead Bill. Supports popular election of president, US senators, and federal judges. Delivers famous anti-secession speech Dec. 18–19,

1860. Only senator from seceding state to return to Capitol after Civil War breaks out.

1862–64

Military governor of Tennessee. Establishes provisional government. Frees slaves in Tennessee. Advocates general amnesty for secessionists.

1865

As Lincoln's running mate, elected vice president of the US; becomes president upon assassination of Lincoln.

1865–69

17th president of the US. Seeks to restore Union; opposes radical Reconstruction. Signs purchase of Alaska Territory, 1867. In 1868, impeached for violating Tenure of Office Act; in May he is acquitted. In Dec. 1868 he proclaims general amnesty for secessionists.

1875

US senator. Only former president to return to US senate. Dies July 31; buried in Greenville.

