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Chapter Seven

RACHEL DONELSON ROBARDS JACKSON: A RELUCTANT FIRST LADY

Christina Mune

The Sprightly Pioneer Woman Who Sparked a Political Storm

Introduction

Although First Lady Rachel Jackson passed away a few months before the inauguration of President Elect Andrew Jackson, their marriage deeply affected Jackson-era Washington and the presidency itself. Rachel's legacy of a folksy, pioneer woman who loved home and church became an archetypal American image after her death, but the scandal of her failed first marriage and possibly premature remarriage to Andrew haunted her in life. Biographers' treatment of Rachel has changed drastically over the nearly two centuries that have passed since her death, yet certain themes of marriage, morality, and class persist. Scholars agree that the scandals that surrounded Rachel and Andrew set the tone for a new kind of politicking in America. Rachel's successor and daughter-in-law Emily Donelson also faced scandals of marriage and morality, since she was a significant player in the Petticoat Affair—a political upheaval that

rocked Jackson's Cabinet during his first presidential term. She, too, died before Jackson's presidency was through. A second daughter-in-law, Sarah Yorke Jackson, continued the duties of White House hostess until the end of Jackson's term.

Rachel's youth

Born on June 16, 1767 in Pittsylvania County, Virginia, Rachel Donelson was the ninth of eleven children born to Captain John Donelson and to Rachel Stockley Donelson. John Donelson was a well-regarded surveyor in Virginia and had served under George Washington in the Revolutionary War. As a child, Rachel had visited both George Washington's and Thomas Jefferson's house with her father, a member of the House of Burgesses (Harris, 2005). Yet most of the early twentieth-century biographical treatments of Rachel Jackson play up her rustic pioneer image, in accordance with her husband's early legacy. The narrative generally begins with the Donelson family's journey through untamed

American backcountry to Cumberland Gap, later Nashville, in the wild frontier of Tennessee. Largely derived from Laura C. Holloway's (1870) Victorian treatment of Rachel in *The Ladies of the White House*, the story relies on the journals of Captain Donelson and his fellow travelers. In Holloway's work, the twelve-year-old Rachel is described as "bright-eyed, black-haired, and sprightly" (Holloway, 1870: 287). Rachel's journey to Tennessee, in which she suffered first a terrible winter at Fort Patrick Henry and then a harrowing boat ride down the Holston and Ohio Rivers, during which the growing party fell under the attack of local Native Americans such as the Chickamaugas, are the stuff of political legend. In a *Being So Gentle: The Frontier Love Story of Rachel and Andrew Jackson*, Patricia Brady (2011) provides a somewhat more objective narrative. She, too, explores the journey through the journals of those present, but with a more balanced attitude toward the Native Americans and the terrain involved. Pamela Burke's 1941 biography of Rachel's niece Emily Donelson, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee* (Burke, 2001), also highlights the Donelsons' journey, relying on the stories that Rachel passed down to her young nieces and nephews. Not surprisingly, her book follows closely Holloway's version. As with everything surrounding the Jacksons' history, it can be difficult to separate fact from the long-standing legacies designed to defend Rachel's character later in her life.

Holloway described Rachel as having

grown up amid the trials and dangers of the frontier life, but the examples that she daily saw of noble fortitude, of calm bravery, and of heroic labor were worth many a tamer and weaker lesson of more civilized life.

(Holloway, 1870: 288)

Presumably this was Holloway's polite way of saying that Rachel lacked preparation for

the high society she would later be expected to inhabit, first as General Jackson's and then as President Jackson's wife. In her book *Dames and Daughter of the Young Republic*, biographer Geraldine Brooks (1901: 217) describes Rachel as a "regular pioneer type of woman, such as was often to be met with in the frontier towns of our country during the earliest days of the republic." Rachel was a "merry story-teller, a rollicking dancer, a daring horse-woman, and withal a most jolly and entertaining companion" (217–218). This description is reminiscent of one given by Andrew Jackson's biographer James Parton, who wrote that Rachel was the "best story-teller, the best dancer, the sprightliest of companion, the most dashing horsewoman in the western country" (Parton, 1860, 1: 133).

Another early biographical anthology, Meade Minnigerode's (1926) book *Some American Ladies*, takes a different tack in its lengthy section on Rachel Jackson, which is preceded by a nine-page description of how, after the initial publication of this biography in magazine format, the citizens of Tennessee condemned the work and Minnigerode for writing it. This author describes Rachel Jackson as "[t]he first essentially plain, simple, quite commonplace woman of the people to achieve the privilege of residence in the great house at Washington" (Minnigerode, 1926: 195). She then proceeds to disparage Rachel in relation to Mmes. Madison, Monroe, and Adams, eventually concluding that there was "nothing retiring or submissive" about Rachel, that "she liked a good time, and never failed to attract attention" (199). Not surprisingly, these statements raised the chagrin of early twentieth-century Tennessee natives dedicated to the legacy of the Jacksons. The similarity of Minnigerode's language to that used almost one hundred years earlier in other attacks, leveled not only against Rachel Jackson but also against Margaret (Peggy) Eaton, another controversial woman in Andrew Jackson's life,

illustrates the importance of studying the Jacksonian scandals if we wish to refine our understanding of politics, womanhood, and gender during that period and later.

Nearly forty years after Minnigerode, the treatment of the Jacksons in Margaret Bassett's (1964) *Profiles and Portraits of American Presidents and Their Wives* dedicates more pages to the wife than to the president himself—an unusual practice in works of this kind, but one that underlines once again the importance of the marriage scandal in framing popular perceptions of the Jacksons. Bassett delves into Rachel's mannerisms during her young womanhood, contextualizing her character within her pioneer upbringing. Bassett maintains that all the coarse, folksy traits ascribed to the frontier-raised Rachel by her later detractors are true: she smoked a pipe, used terrible syntax and had no grammar to speak of, and married Andrew Jackson under questionable circumstances. To Bassett (1964: 74), “none of these eccentricities are particularly relevant to the woman's character and personality”; all were acceptable traits of contemporary pioneer women. She concludes, like many others, that Rachel was “illiterate” given her poor spelling and grammar, but does not fault her for it.

Other scholars, such as Patricia Brady (2011), invoke the lack of opportunity for education in early Tennessee to explain Rachel's difficulties in writing, which her correspondence displays. Challenges included a dearth of educational institutions (especially for women), or even of tutors and the pressing need for women in Rachel's position to learn practical skills like horse riding, sewing and agriculture. Brady (2011: 32) submits that Rachel's letters prove her to be more educated than many of her fellow frontierswomen.

Schneider and Schneider's *Biographical Dictionary of First Ladies* claims, however, that Rachel “was barely able to read and write” (Schneider and Schneider, 2010: 358). This text relegates Rachel Jackson to a

section titled “Presidential Spouses Who Did Not Live to Be First Ladies,” although Rachel receives twice as much space as any other deceased first lady. The work provides a succinct description of her life and some interesting tidbits that get lost in longer works, more concerned with specific areas of the Jacksons' history.

Contemporary physical descriptions of young Rachel are fairly consistent. Many of them confirm Holloway's and Brooks's later descriptions: an active girl with flowing black hair, dark eyes and notable horse-riding skills. Biographers often mention Rachel's tanned skin, in contrast to the pale-skinned standards of beauty of the period. Description of her dark coloring, which was sometimes attributed to her active life outdoors in Tennessee, appear many times in letters written by her peers, often disparagingly. Rachel would later be called Jackson's “bonny brown wife,” a label she received during the couple's trip to New Orleans in 1815 (Brooks, 1901: 227). Always described as stout or robust, Rachel would later become portly, perhaps due to trouble with her breathing and heart. Bill Harris (2005) gives us a quick but fair eight-page sketch on Rachel Jackson in *The First Ladies Fact Book*, which offers an especially enlightening comparison between Rachel's physical features and characteristics, as described by political detractors, and the woman's real appearance and identity (Harris, 2005: 126–127).

Marriages to Robards and Jackson

At the age of seventeen, this “sprightly” if undereducated young woman married Lewis Robards, ten years her senior. The new Mrs. Robards moved with her husband into her mother-in-law's Kentucky boardinghouse in 1785. During the same period Rachel's father was shot and killed by an unknown assailant while traveling the rough terrain between Virginia and Tennessee. It was said

that her father was killed by Native Americans in the area, but Rachel never believed it. According to her, Donelson “knew their ways too well” (Parton 1860: 133). Perhaps Rachel suspected foul play on the part of a specific party, but this is not revealed in available correspondence.

Among Rachel’s biographers, Brady (2011) and Boller (1989) provide the most detailed coverage of this time in Rachel’s life. The first volume of Remini’s (1977) *Andrew Jackson*, as well as James Parton’s (1980) *Life of Andrew Jackson*, offer significant analyses of this period. The pamphlets published by the Nashville Central Committee and the reports in the *Nashville Republican and State Gazetteer* during June 1827 are useful primary sources for those researching the events of Rachel’s first marriage.

Accounts of the Robards are similar across most narratives. Rachel appears as a friendly young woman who enjoyed keeping company with the men of the boardinghouse, as she would have in her community in Tennessee; Robards, as a man of violent fits of jealousy and constant accusations. Available details of Rachel’s time in the Robards’ boardinghouse appear to be based on narratives published during the campaign of 1828 by Jackson supporters. Particularly useful is the story of Judge John Overton, a lawyer reportedly staying in the Robards’ and, later, in the widowed Mrs. Donelson’s boardinghouses during Rachel and Lewis’s fitful union. Overton’s story is related quite fully in Parton (1860) and in Brady (2011). Corroboration by witnesses as well as by Rachel and Andrew themselves supports Overton’s testimony; but, again, the political nature of these remembrances must be pointed out.

Judge Overton claimed that, while the couple lived in Kentucky with Robards’ mother, Lewis accused Rachel of having inappropriate relationships with other men in the boardinghouse. At some point a certain Mr. Short became a particular target of

Lewis’ jealousy. According to Brady, Short even proposed that Rachel and he elope, although the biographer denies Rachel’s knowledge of Short’s intentions (Brady, 2011: 36). After discovering these communications, Lewis challenged Short to a duel but ended up accepting \$1,000 in damages from Short instead of fighting. The situation at home became increasingly hostile during the escapade, causing the couple’s first split in 1788, when Rachel was twenty-one years old. In some accounts, Rachel left Robards for her mother’s house on her own initiative; in others, Robards sent Rachel away, possibly asking her mother to send a family member to escort her back to Tennessee.

The truthfulness of Lewis’s accusations remains questionable. Overton’s 1828 story maintains that Robards’ own mother “always blamed her son Lewis, and took the part of her daughter-in-law” during disputes regarding Rachel’s alleged impropriety (Holloway, 1870: 277). One boarder, apparently backed by Lewis’s sister-in-law, accused Lewis of violence toward Rachel and indicated that it was the husband rather than the wife who was guilty of infidelity, which reportedly he committed by cajoling or forcing enslaved women to sleep with him (Remini, 1977: 44; Brady, 2011: 36).

Although Lewis’s mother and sister-in-law sided with Rachel and the Donelsons had already welcomed her home, all parties apparently preferred reconciliation. However, the terms necessitated that Lewis come to Tennessee and settle near Rachel’s family, likely to give assurance that he would be suitably supervised by those with Rachel’s interest in mind. The newly reconciled couple settled near the Donelsons’ land, on which Rachel’s mother now ran her own boardinghouse. Again, Rachel enjoyed spending time there in the lively company of the boarders (and perhaps feeling protected from her husband).

During this period a young, lanky lawyer had settled into widow Donelson’s rooms

and quickly fell in love with Rachel. Rachel reciprocated the feelings, reportedly drawn to the overtly chivalrous nature often described in connection with the then twenty-one-year-old Andrew Jackson. Andrew took an equal interest in Rachel and likely her dramatic misfortunes, in line with his reputation as a defender of women (Remini, 1977: 44). Again, Overton, then boarding with the Donelsons, states that Lewis created public scenes, displaying his jealousy of his wife even when the couple resided in Nashville. Lewis challenged Andrew both verbally and through a peace warrant against him, despite Jackson's request they duel. According to Overton's account, related in Brady (2011), the local frontier community did not take kindly to Lewis's cowardly pursuit of the warrant over the duel and basically ignored his accusations. By the summer of 1789 Lewis left Nashville, perhaps out of fear of Andrew, for Kentucky.

Disputes over the timeline of Rachel's initial marriage to Andrew are inevitable, given the level of scrutiny and politicking attached to it in later elections. According to Bassett (1964), in 1790 Rachel decided to visit friends in Natchez, then part of Spanish Florida, in order to escape any likelihood that Robards, having absconded to Kentucky in 1789, would come back and reclaim their marriage. Boller (1989) also states that Rachel initially planned to leave for Natchez with a family friend, Colonel Robert Stark, hoping to meet up with friends in that territory rather than submit to demands for the reconciliation that Lewis was rumored to desire. Andrew volunteered to accompany them in case of native attack along the way (Boller, 1989: 67). Brady claims that Andrew Jackson took Rachel to Natchez in order for the two of them to live together safely in the Spanish-owned land, outside the jurisdiction of the United States, where Rachel was legally married to Lewis. He also suggests that Andrew swore fealty to the Spanish king in order to relocate there (Brady, 2011: 48).

Testimonials in support of Andrew's presidential bid in 1827 indicate that he returned to Nashville to continue his work in the law, but after hearing that Lewis Robards had petitioned to divorce Rachel in 1791 he went again to Natchez to marry her, wrongly believing that the divorce already granted. It was not until 1793 that the Jacksons, living happily together on their own land since the fall of 1791, found out that the divorce had never been secured. After some debate, the couple married again in Nashville on January 15, 1794, by which time the divorce was final.

However, Boller (1989) questions the validity of the Natchez marriage—according to Boller and Remini there are no records of it—and points out, like some other authors, that it is unlikely that Andrew Jackson, a lawyer and, later, a state supreme court judge, would not know the requirements and process of a divorce in Tennessee or Kentucky (both were under the purview of the Virginia legislature). Additionally, the eight notices requesting Rachel's appearance before the court on the subject of her adultery, published in the *Kentucky Gazette* in the winter of 1792, after the Jacksons' return to Nashville in the fall of 1791, would likely have been seen by friends and family, if not by Andrew himself (Boller, 1989: 68–69). Remini's analysis minces no words: Rachel knew that, by falling in love with Andrew and retreating to Natchez in 1790, she was committing adultery. Remini also contends that Andrew's accompaniment of Rachel to Natchez amounts to a calculated move to force Lewis Robards into suing for divorce, so that the two could marry legally (Remini, 1977: 65).

Such questions apparently did not plague their Nashville community, friends or family, as Andrew's practice continued to grow once he went back home, and his civil and military career flourished. Boller suggests that this lack of concern on the part of contemporaries in the 1790s reflects the esteem the couple maintained in the community.

One Nashville neighbor later wrote that, at the time, “no one believed they acted criminally” (Boller, 1989: 69). Brady (2011) points out that self-marriage and self-divorce were real and important concepts to frontier people, living as they did in areas where little official authority existed, and Boller’s discussion provides additional support for this assessment (Brady, 2011: 45–46; Boller, 1989: 68–69). Recent scholarship on frontier life affirms this idea, as do a number of newly published narratives from contemporary pioneers in the west.

Life at the Hermitage

Biographers agree that Rachel preferred staying home with her family, friends, and many visitors rather than accompanying her husband in his ceaseless campaigns and traveling. After spending some years at Jackson’s plantation at Hunter’s Hill, which they had to sell in 1804, they moved into a log cabin next door, on an unimproved lot of 425 acres. Eventually, under Rachel’s careful stewardship and economy along with Andrew’s continued success in politics, the lot and cabin grew into a 1,200-acre estate with a comfortable mansion known as the Hermitage. A detailed, more contemporary description of the Hermitage can be found in Holloway (1870).

Bassett (1969) describes Rachel as a Virginia planter-class autocrat—benign and tolerant—who watched her husband’s fighting, gambling, and politicking from afar. She stayed at the Hermitage during most of Jackson’s appointments, and in this she was no different from most political wives, who similarly refrained from traveling with their husbands to Philadelphia and other political capitals during those early years of the republic. Rachel begrudged Andrew’s constant absence, writing in 1812: “Do not, my beloved husband, let the love of country, fame and honor, make you forget you have [a wife]” (Boller, 1969: 69).

Still, Rachel was uninterested in accompanying him, even as she frequently worried over his absences. He consistently complained about ill health and loneliness, and this pushed Rachel’s already nervous temperament into occasional neurotic outbursts. By all accounts Rachel was an anxious woman. She wrote to Jackson during the War of 1812: “Where’er I go, where’er I turn, my thoughts, my fears, my doubts distress me” (Boller, 1989: 69).

Despite such worries, her kindness was widely noted as well. At the Hermitage as in their previous residences, Rachel and Andrew showed unfailing hospitality, taking in nieces and nephews, friends, supporters and even Jackson’s army acquaintances and boys who served under him. Details of this hospitality, usually through the letters of the Jacksons’ friends and family, are available in numerous sources. Rachel is often associated with a love of young people and a desire to have them near her, to hear their stories, and to keep the Hermitage a lively place to stay. Her numerous nieces and nephews seemed to fulfill this need through many fond remembrances of “Aunt Rachel” in their correspondence. The Jacksons’ propensity to take on wards in lieu of their own children supports this theory.

Although the couple remained childless throughout their marriage, the Jacksons raised four children as their own at the Hermitage. The first was adopted through Rachel’s family, when her brother Severus had twins. One of the twins, a boy, was presented to the Jacksons and they named him Andrew Jackson Junior. He was legally adopted the day after his birth in 1809, through the Kentucky legislature. The second was a three-year-old Creek Indian boy found by Andrew during the Creek War in 1813: Lincoyer or Lynconya. Rachel also reared Andrew Jackson Hutchings, the son of Andrew’s deceased army friend, and Andrew Jackson Donelson, their nephew and, later, secretary to President Jackson.

It must have been a cause of constant sorrow to Rachel that she could not bear children, as motherhood was regarded in the nineteenth century as necessary for the achievement of true Christian womanhood, especially for a woman so focused on home and family as Rachel. Brady (2011) provides the most thorough account of Rachel's experience with childlessness, although more work in that area of this first lady's life is needed. According to Brady (2011: 67), in August 1795 the Jacksons purchased Alexander Hamilton, M.D.'s book *On Female Complaints*, a popular work on curing sterility. It is likely that Rachel would have internalized the blame for the couple's lack of offspring, in accordance with the medical and moral beliefs of the period. While it is possible that Rachel was infertile—she bore no children to either husband, while Lewis Robards had nine children with his second wife—Andrew too may have contributed to their infertility, as no illegitimate offspring has ever been attributed to him.

The Jacksons' adoption of the Creek Indian boy Lynconya is dealt with differently depending on the position of the author and the sources used. Parton (1860) describes the boy as being saved from the dead breast of his mother on the Talluschatches field, a tale that most other authors relate, and claims that the child was raised at the Hermitage as a son. However, Burke (2001: 46) cites Jackson's personal correspondence (which called the boy "savage") and argues that Lynconya may have represented more of an exotic playmate for Andrew Junior than an equal ward. Bassett (1969) also sees Lynconya as a figure sent to the Hermitage as a pet for Andrew Junior, but one that Rachel quickly grew to love and took on as her own. Burke's research indicates that Lynconya may have run away to his own people sometime in 1824, although Parton's (1860) account claims that Andrew took Lynconya to Nashville, to deliver him to an apprenticeship in harness making. All her biographers agree that Rachel was emotionally

distraught over Lynconya's death from tuberculosis at the age of sixteen, just a few months before her own, in 1828. The details of the Jacksons' relationship with the Lynconya may be of interest to those studying Andrew Jackson's policy and relationship with Native Americans.

By all accounts Rachel lived the life of a southern plantation woman, with the added burden of an absentee husband. At the time of his election, Andrew Jackson owned nearly a hundred slaves who worked at the Hermitage as well as at his Mississippi plantation (Cheatham, 2014). According to Brady (2011), Rachel found friendship with one of them, an enslaved woman named Hannah, who was instrumental in the running of the household and largely responsible for its success, as Rachel became increasingly ill from heart palpitations and shortness of breath. These complaints began in 1825 but seemed to grow worse with the stress of the campaigns (Boller, 1989: 70). Hannah gave multiple interviews regarding her life at the Hermitage under the Jacksons, including one to Jackson's biographer James Parton. She gave two others to local newspapers, the *Cincinnati Commercial* in 1880 and the *Nashville Daily American* in 1894, covering the Jacksons' treatment of their slaves at the Hermitage. Although Hannah described Andrew as generally paternalistic, Mark Cheatham sheds light on violent punishments administered to the Jacksons' slaves—treatments akin to those on other southern plantations. Rachel once complained that her enslaved servant Betty had "been putting on airs, and [was] guilty of a great deal of impudence" on account of taking in neighborhood washing without Rachel's permission. For that Betty was whipped 50 times while tied to a public whipping post (Cheatham, 2014). Although early works on Rachel note the close relationship between slave and master and are often steeped in the paternalistic rhetoric typical of slave owners' defenses of that "peculiar institution," modern scholarship on the

antebellum South provides better insight into Rachel's connection with enslaved women like Hannah and Betty. It is telling that Hannah left in 1863, once the Civil War gave her a chance to emancipate herself; according to Sarah Yorke Jackson, Rachel's daughter-in-law, Hannah went "over to the Yankees" (Cheatham, 2014).

Letters between Rachel, Andrew, and her family and friends illustrate the deeply religious person Rachel became later in her life. She joined the Presbyterian Church in 1819 under the Reverend Gideon Blackburn, a minister with a growing following in Tennessee at the time. As part of the Second Great Awakening, Rachel was one of many women who took strongly to Protestant and evangelical faiths during the period. She persuaded some of her family members to join the Presbyterian faith, although her husband did not show any religious inclination until much later in life, after Rachel's death. Brady (2011) dedicates a good portion of the chapter "Great Convulsions" in *A Being So Gentle* to the history of religion in Rachel's family, the growth of her religious feelings, and the place of faith on the frontier. According to Brady, these differences over religion contributed to Rachel's and Andrew's divergent opinions on what constituted a happy life—one of fulfilled ambition versus one of quiet living at home and doing good (Brady, 2011: 110). Remini, and later Boller, argue that Rachel's deepening devotion to religion and to more moralistic behaviors stems from remorse over her early wild years and over the constant accusations of impropriety that resulted (Remini, 1977: 59–60; Boller, 1989: 69). According to Remini (1977), "[i]t is possible her later life constituted one long act of expiation" (59–60). No other biographer goes so far, however. Instead she is often described as a model of Protestant charity and forgiveness. Her personal letters constantly cite God and Jesus as a source of comfort. As with many Protestant women of the time, her religion informed her

prejudices. This is especially apparent in her description of Floridian "savages" during her stay in Pensacola with Jackson in 1821.

Travelling with Andrew

After General Jackson's triumph in the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, Rachel and Andrew visited New Orleans to celebrate. According to Minnigerode's uncited sources, the Creole and the French ladies helped Rachel with proper New Orleans clothing and etiquette, to the extent of standing behind her while she accepted guests at various balls and banquets and moderating her comments (Minnigerode, 1926: 215). Yet even here she was met with some ridicule, as when a European businessman pointed out the strange pair made by the long, thin Andrew dancing with the short, stout Rachel (Brady, 2011: 143–144). Her dark complexion and folksiness were at odds with the social circles Jackson's rank put her in; yet Rachel reportedly enjoyed herself.

In contrast to Rachel's celebratory time in New Orleans, she was considerably less enthusiastic six years later during Andrew's appointment as governor of Florida territory, which took them again through New Orleans and on to Pensacola, where Jackson would serve his term. By comparison to Tennessee, she saw Florida's inhabitants as heathen and the place as a "Great Babylon" (Brady, 2011: 162). Jackson's acceptance of the Pensacola governorship in 1821 had been partly in hopes of moving Rachel to a more temperate climate, where the weather might help clear up burgeoning issues with shortness of breath reported in her letters and Andrew's. Florida's beauty at least did uplift her spirits. In her letters to her friend Elizabeth Kingsley, Rachel pens wonderfully detailed descriptions of the territory, painting a picture of exotic fruits and flowers, crumbling houses, overgrown squares, and a diverse, multilingual population. However,

Rachel also describes her disgust with the fact that the largely Catholic or unreligious Floridians did not respect the Sabbath. She writes:

The Sabbath [is] profanely kept: a great deal of noise and swearing in the streets; shops kept open; trade going on ... They were so boisterous on that day I sent Major Stanton to say to them that the approaching Sunday would be differently kept.

(Jackson et al., 1996: 80)

Once Jackson was governor, she pushed for him to establish and enforce rules requiring Floridians to close their businesses on Sundays and to refrain from gambling, drinking, and dancing (Brooks, 1901: 231–234; Minnigerode, 1926: 221–226). According to Minnigerode (1926: 222), the people of Florida “hated her,” as they did their new Governor Jackson, for this and other punitive controls enforced in the newly acquired land.

After four months Rachel experienced no improvement to her health and the two left after Jackson resigned the “arduous” task of his governorship (Brooks, 1901: 231). Schneider and Schneider’s brief account of Rachel’s life highlights the Jacksons’ quick retreat from Florida not only as the results of her distaste for the lax morality or unimproved health, but also from Governor Jackson’s inability to appoint his friends into office there, “in part the reason of his coming” (Schneider and Schneider, 2010: 359).

After a brief respite at the Hermitage, Rachel accompanied Andrew to Washington, DC in 1822, during his stint as senator, and again in 1824, during his election campaign of that year. Rachel was inclined to stay home in Tennessee, but both her husband and John Eaton, a long-time Jackson political supporter, persuaded her to accompany Andrew to Washington. Reports of her time there vary.

According to the couple’s correspondence, Rachel and Andrew stayed largely out of

society during their periods in Washington, although during this 1824–1825 visit she enjoyed meeting Peggy O’Neal Timberlake, the future Peggy Eaton, the woman who would disrupt Andrew’s career so drastically during the Eaton or Petticoat Affair a few years later. Jackson wrote that, instead of attending parties with Washington society, he and Rachel mostly stayed “at home smoking our pipe” (Brady, 2011: 185). Rachel’s letters from 1824 reveal that she had formed religious objections to the plays, balls, and parties frequented by the Washington elite, although this is rarely cited as the reason for her lack of interest (Jackson, 1996: 456). More commonly Rachel’s biographers refer to her nature as a homebody and to her retiring personality rather than her religious inclinations in order to explain her decisions to stay in with her husband. Andrew’s letters from this period reflect a politician quietly gaining favor through personal connections and intimate conversations.

Some biographers claim that Washingtonians were disappointed that the potential first lady did not smoke pipes in Washington drawing rooms and prove herself a country hick. Others, like the amateur Tennessee historian Susan Sawyer in her work *More Than Petticoats: Remarkable Tennessee Women*, quote one guest’s description of Rachel when meeting her at a January 1825 Washington party: “stout, vulgar, illiterate” (Sawyer, 2000: 25). This mirrored responses to Rachel Jackson’s 1815 appearances in Washington after the triumph of the War of 1812. Contemporaries then reported her as “totally uninformed in mind and matters,” but softened this vision by describing her as “extremely civil in her way” (Sawyer, 2000: 24–25). Reports of Rachel’s illiteracy and vulgarity a decade later were likely exacerbated and propagated by her husband’s political enemies, who frequently used the Jacksons’ pioneer origins to cast doubt on their character and on Andrew’s ability to lead a nation. With no diplomatic experience or

Cabinet appointments under his belt, Andrew could be easily dismissed by 1824 presidential contenders such as Adams, Clay, and Crawford as a “military chieftain” and country bumpkin. The Jacksons’ disputed marriage dates provided fodder for those wishing to show Andrew as immoral or wild. These themes would become central to the infamously dirty anti-Jackson campaigns of 1828, which seem to taint the recollections of many who aligned themselves with opposing camps.

Despite vehement and scathing attacks on Jackson as a murderer on account of his war exploits in the election of 1824, he had won the greatest percentage of the popular vote. Still, without a majority vote (over 50 per cent) earned by any candidate, the election of the president fell to the House of Representatives, where Henry Clay influenced the selection of Secretary of State John Quincy Adams for the post rather than that of the more popular Jackson. Jackson and his supporters did not give up their presidential ambitions and continued to campaign through the next four years. Even with her increasingly troublesome heart condition, Rachel was occasionally persuaded to join him, as she did during the 1824–1825 Washington visit. Rachel also accompanied her husband for the anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans in January 1828. On both of these visits observers described a Rachel much changed from the spirited pioneer woman of her youth. Charlotte Van Cleve, the daughter of one of Jackson’s officers at the time of Rachel’s death, recalls an older Rachel as a

coarse looking, stout, little old woman, whom you might easily mistake for [the general’s] washerwoman, were it not for the marked attention he pays her, and the love and admiration she manifests for him. Her eyes are bright, and express great kindness of heart; her face is rather broad, her features plain, her complexion so dark as almost to suggest a mingling of races in that climate where such things sometimes

occur. ... Her figure is rather full, but loosely and carelessly dressed ... so that when she is seated she seems to settle into herself, in a manner that is neither graceful nor elegant.

(Van Cleve, 1888: 82)

Researchers must carefully consider the origin and the place of such descriptions, which may have been tainted by the anti-Jackson campaigns in the 1820s or the Petticoat Affair muckraking during Jackson’s presidency. Nevertheless, sufficient reports exist that corroborate the descriptions of Rachel as stout, obese, or of full figure to assume it is true. Her fight with heart disease, indicated in letters as shortness of breath and chest pains, may have been either a result or a cause of this physical condition. Regardless, the couple’s affection for each other seemed never to wane.

Rachel’s heart condition continued to worsen once she was back home in Tennessee after the first failed presidential run. In 1824 Andrew stated that those attacking his wife “would attempt to disturb the repose of an innocent female in her declining years.” Bassett (1969: 81) believes Jackson meant these words literally, not just in political rhetoric. By 1825 Rachel had become so weak she was unable to attend events in Nashville (81).

The campaign of 1828

Rachel’s good name had begun to suffer soon after Lewis Robards received a divorce for his wife’s adultery in 1793. As early as 1804 the Jacksons had faced political hostility on account of Rachel’s “adultery” with Jackson while she was still married to Robards. In that year, Jackson challenged the Tennessee governor and political enemy John Sevier to a duel after Sevier told Jackson: “I know of no great service you have ever rendered your country except taking a trip to Natchez with another man’s

wife" (Parton, 1860: 164). As a prominent founding family of Nashville, the Donelsons would have been spotlighted and discussed in the local papers and taverns for such indiscretions. These accusations only grew stronger with Andrew's political ambition. The smears that circulated in the 1824 campaign foreshadowed the devastating slander of the dirty campaign between Adams and Jackson in 1828.

The mudslinging politics associated with the 1828 election is largely considered the worst in history up to that point; it was the first time that a potential first lady was attacked with such blatant vigor and disregard for propriety. Of the first lady anthologies, Paul Boller's (1989) *Presidential Wives* offers readers an excellent recap of the systematic slandering of Rachel as a bigamist in the 1828 election, an episode also known as the Robards Affair, laying out a succinct timeline of pamphlets, plays and responses. Henry Clay's supporter Charles Hammond was among the worst of the scandalmongers; he published three issues of an anti-Jackson tract in 1827 and 1828, first in the *Cincinnati Gazette*, then as a journal titled *Truth's Advocate and Monthly Anti-Jackson Expositor*, and finally as a pamphlet under the name *View of General Jackson's Domestic Relations, in Reference to his Fitness for the Presidency* (Hammond, 1828). These publications recounted the Jacksons' courtship as an "indecent outrage," as Rachel was a married woman at their initial meeting. Hammond labeled the couple "creatures of passion," a phrase that would have deeply disturbed a pious Rachel. In thinly veiled attacks against her, Hammond takes Jackson to task for his role in exposing Mrs. Jackson to political attacks—because, unlike examples of "female excellence ... who subjected all her actions to the restraint and regulations of propriety," Rachel had let loose "her feelings, inclinations and passions, regardless of the decorum which alone renders the sex estimable." She was a "female aberration" (Hammond, 1828: 20–21). The pamphlet

asked the public: "Ought a convicted adulteress and her paramour husband to be placed in the highest offices of this free and Christian Land?" (14).

Remini, the foremost modern source on Jackson's life and times, includes copious quotations from the pamphlets and newspapers involved in the exploitation and scandal. Volumes 2 and 3 of Remini's *Andrew Jackson* (Remini, 1981, 1984) are thus invaluable for studying this and the later Eaton Affair—a similar scandal involving long-time Jackson supporters John and Peggy Eaton. Remini digs deeply into the Jackson camp's response to their opponents' accusations; he also considers the publications of the Nashville Central Committee, a group of Jackson supporters specifically convened to combat accusations from Adams' camp and to get Jackson elected in 1828. The committee prepared a carefully written 30-page defense addressing every charge laid out against the Jacksons, especially those that painted Andrew as the immoral seducer of an improperly passionate Rachel Robards. Even as the smear campaign escalated, the Nashville Central Committee continued to refer to the pamphlet as its final word on the matter, although duel-prone Andrew likely wanted a more pro-active solution. For its part, the Jackson campaign smeared Adams as well, spreading, through party newspapers and pamphlets, rumors of his corruption and aristocratic tendencies. But, to Andrew, the attacks made on his wife and on his deceased mother were particularly egregious and immoral, going beyond the regular political mudslinging.

The emergence in the 1990s of research focusing on gender and power in Jacksonian America allows a more complex understanding of the Robards scandal. Norma Basch's (1993) article "Marriage, Morals, and Politics in the Election of 1828" explores the politicized and gendered nature of this scandal, devised by the Adams camp and used rather effectively during the campaign.

According to Basch, “marital fidelity stood as a trope for national unity, adultery represented political chaos” (Basch, 1993: 893). By highlighting accusations of infidelity, inappropriate passion, and lack of chastity, Jackson’s detractors slandered Rachel’s and Andrews’ character, depicting them as unfit to inhabit the White House and as a threat to civil order and to America’s superior morality. The same methods would be put to work in the Eaton scandal once Jackson took the White House.

Of additional interest for those studying the legacy of Rachel Jackson is Sarah Jeanine Hornsby’s (1994) doctoral dissertation “The Protection of an Icon: Nashville, the Ladies Hermitage Association and the Image of Rachel Jackson, 1915–1945.” Hornsby compares images of Rachel constructed by authors like Minnigerode with a portrait of her produced in 1936 by biographer Mary French Caldwell, in a book titled *General Jackson’s Lady*, and with another, which emerges from Nellie Treanor Stokes’ short pamphlet *Rachel Jackson*, published in 1942. These last two biographies are long out of print and suffer from the subjectivity of their time as well as from the influence of the Ladies Hermitage Association, which commissioned them. However, Hornsby’s analysis of these various twentieth-century biographies and their contrasting depictions of Rachel as a gender archetype—pious, domestic ideal Victorian; folksy, loose hussy; capable woman of the Old South—will provide first lady scholars with great insight into their subject.

Death at the Hermitage

In all narratives, the blame for Rachel’s death is inevitably laid at the door of the rampant scandalmongering of the 1828 election. It seems likely that her heart trouble was exacerbated by her propensity for anxiety, which the scandal, a move to

Washington, and worry about her ability to fit in with the fashionable ladies there had all intensified. The constant fits of crying described by most in the weeks before her death indicate that Rachel, already seriously ill with a long-term disease, may have been experiencing an emotional breakdown (Burke, 2001: 85).

The putative first lady withstood a number of emotional and physical blows during the election returns of 1828. In the summer of that year her adopted Creek son Lynconya had died of tuberculosis. By most accounts she was overwrought with sorrow for his death, which happened despite her efforts to nurse him. The Hermitage was then overrun with political allies and supporters, as Jackson finished up his bid, winning with 56 percent of the vote. Bassett tells us that, as victory was declared, those loyal to Jackson poured into the estate, looking for rewards and celebration. Rachel strove to provide suitable hospitality while living in dread of her upcoming trip to Washington, so far from the home and family she had cherished her whole life, and built largely on her own (Bassett, 1969: 81–82). In December 1828, in preparation for the inauguration and the move to Washington, Rachel went shopping in Nashville. By some accounts, she overheard a group discussing the scandals associated with her while she rested in the best hotel in Nashville; according to other accounts, she stopped at her family’s newspaper office, where she read the committee’s rebuttal of the Adams party’s vehement attacks against her. Both stories might be true, given the political atmosphere after the election.

Rachel was stricken with the graphic nature of the attacks, which she had been previously unaware of, busy as she was with running the Hermitage and shielded by family and friends. She was distraught enough to speak of refusing to move to the White House with her husband. As she told Emily Donelson:

I'll never forget it! Listening to them, it seemed as if a veil was lifted and I saw myself, whom you have all guarded from outside criticism and surrounded with flattering delusions, as others see me, a poor old woman. I will not go to Washington, but stay here as often before in Mr. Jackson's absences.

(Burke, 2001: 120)

On December 17, 1828 Rachel fell ill and was put to bed for three days. It is largely believed she had suffered an initial heart attack due to long-term angina. Feeling better a few days later, she took visitors, but then contracted what was diagnosed as pleurisy. On December 22, while getting ready for bed, Rachel was stricken with another heart attack, fell out of a chair, and never regained consciousness. According to Brady (2011: 221), Jackson demanded that Rachel be bled, though the surgeons knew it was useless. When a cut on her arm let out no blood, he demanded they try the scalp. When that was also unsuccessful, he held her in his arms without cease except for a few hours when her nieces readied her for burial. Andrew Jackson declared, "my heart nearly broke" (Bassett, 1969: 82).

Rachel was buried on Christmas Eve, at her beloved Hermitage. Over 10,000 people attended the service. The mayor of Nashville, Felix Robertson, signed a resolution requesting the inhabitants of that city to "abstain from their ordinary business on the to-morrow, a mark of respect for Mrs. Jackson" (Holloway, 1870: 305). A more complete description of her funeral, derived from interviews that included Rachel's daughter-in-law Sarah Jackson Yorke and quotations from her death notices, can be found in Holloway (1870). An inscription, written by John Eaton, was put on her headstone, reading:

Here lie the remains of Mrs. Rachel Jackson, wife of President Jackson, who died December 22nd 1828, aged 61. Her face was fair, her person pleasing, her temper

amiable, and her heart kind. She delighted in relieving the wants of her fellow-creatures, and cultivated that divine pleasure by the most liberal and unpretending methods. To the poor she was a benefactress; to the rich she was an example; to the wretched a comforter; to the prosperous an ornament. Her pity went hand in hand with her benevolence; and she thanked her Creator for being able to do good. A being so gentle and so virtuous, slander might wound but could not dishonor. Even death, when he tore her from the arms of her husband, could but transplant her to the bosom of her God.

(Parton, 1860: 159)

According to Parton, President Jackson never recovered from the death of his wife; he even changed his speech and behavior so as to be less profane, more "correct," and tried to keep his domestic affairs as Rachel would have (Parton, 1860: 159).

Emily Tennessee Donelson: The Besieged White House Hostess

Emily Tennessee Donelson was born on June 1, 1807, the thirteenth child of John Donelson, Rachel Jackson's brother, and his wife Mary Purnell, in Donelson, Tennessee. Barely seventeen, Emily married Andrew Jackson Donelson, her first cousin and the ward of Rachel and Andrew Jackson, during the divisive fall of 1824; this made her an adopted daughter-in-law of the Jacksons'. The most exhaustive biography of Emily Donelson is Pamela Wilcox Burke's (2001) multivolume work *Emily Donelson of Tennessee*. Through letters, anecdotes, and some colorful historical re-creations, Burke fully explores Emily's young life in Tennessee (the "Volunteer State"), her family connections and heritage, her time in Washington (with a focus on the events surrounding the Petticoat Affair and other contemporary issues of interest), and the life-long sickness leading to her early death. Burke's work,

originally published in 1941, was heavily edited by Jonathan Atkins and rereleased in 2001 by the University of Tennessee Press in a more manageable but less interesting edition, which is the one referenced here due to its availability to current scholars. Schneider and Schneider (2010) is another source of note for Emily Donelson; the two authors provide a less romantic, if very brief, overview of Emily in their “biographical treatment.”

Emily initially went to school in a log house close to what is now the Hermitage church. Since Rachel Jackson’s late eighteenth-century childhood in a newly established Nashville, more educational opportunities had been made available to young ladies of the area, an initiative funded in part by the Jacksons and Donelsons (Burke, 2001: 60). In 1820, at the age of thirteen, Emily entered the Nashville Female Academy, a local school with about one hundred students. Emily was later removed due to health issues and spent much time instead at the Hermitage, with aunt Rachel and the large family clan there (Burke, 2001: 84).

Two weeks after marrying Andrew Jackson Donelson, her cousin, in a Presbyterian ceremony at the Hermitage, Emily and her new husband left Tennessee for Washington with their aunt Rachel and uncle Andrew Jackson, the presidential nominee. During this trip to Washington, Emily, unlike her aunt Rachel, strove to don the latest styles, to attend the most fashionable parties, and to make friends with important ladies. According to Burke (2001), with the election campaign underway, Emily longed for Rachel to take initiative in politicking for Andrew, as Mrs. Adams and Mrs. Crawford did for their men and as Emily did for her husband and uncle. Burke provides an image of Emily as young newlywed, enjoying the exciting life of Washington despite her aunt’s lack of enthusiasm for the campaign.

Early accounts of Emily take note of her sense of fashion, poise, likability, and virtuous behavior—an indication that she was well

received in Washington society. It seems fitting that Emily Donelson became the White House hostess after Rachel Jackson’s death, since Rachel herself had originally requested Emily go to Washington in her stead after the general’s electoral victory in 1828. Rachel wrote to Emily that year:

I will be of no advantage to my husband in the White House and I wish never to go there and disgrace him. You will go and take care of his house for him and I will stay here and take care of everything until he comes back.

(Schneider and Schneider, 2010: 359)

While some Washingtonians made comments on Emily’s lack of social polish, inevitable in a woman raised in rural Tennessee, she was often praised for the great food and drink she offered and enjoyed—including spirits, which she reportedly did not shy away from. However, Emily was not ashamed of her upbringing, chastising a foreign minister: “grace is cosmopolite, and like a wildflower, is much oftener found in the woods than in the streets of a city” (Schneider and Schneider, 2010: 364).

The correspondence between Emily Donelson and her husband Andrew, President Jackson, General John Coffee, Margaret (Peggy) Eaton, Vice President Van Buren, and Mary Eastin (Emily Donelson’s cousin) is useful in helping us fully understand the fallout between President Jackson and Emily Donelson over the infamous Petticoat Affair. This scandal involved the Washingtonian Peggy Eaton and her husband John Eaton, Jackson’s appointment as secretary of war. During Jackson’s first term (1829–1833), great strife arose between Peggy Eaton and the wives of other Cabinet members over rumors that Peggy had been John Eaton’s mistress before their marriage, and possibly even before Peggy’s first husband’s death at sea in 1828. Peggy’s humble origins may have further exacerbated the unpopularity of her social presence.

President Jackson defended her honor and refused to snub either Mr. or Mrs. Eaton socially or politically, as he was encouraged to do by many of his advisors—including Emily and Andrew Donelson. Holloway (1870), who rails against the scandalmongers who attacked Rachel Jackson in 1828, avoids almost totally the Eaton scandal, saying only that Emily would accept Mrs. Eaton graciously at the White House due to her status as Cabinet wife, but refused to visit Eaton at her own home—an important social acknowledgement at the time. Emily told her uncle that it did not suit a virtuous woman to visit a lady with such a reputation, and “the President never alluded to the distasteful subject again in her presence” (Holloway, 1870: 327).

Burke provides far more insight into the long brewing conflict between Donelson and Eaton by using letters by both women and their Washington contemporaries. Essentially, Peggy dismissed Emily as a young, unsophisticated lady, easily influenced by Washington women who did not have Emily’s or President Jackson’s best interest at heart. Conversely, Emily regarded Eaton as a questionable woman, not welcome in the social circle made up largely of the wives of Cabinet members that Emily had immersed herself in. Both had the ear of President Jackson and a lot of political capital to lose depending on whose side the president took.

In the last few decades, a new scrutiny of Eaton and the Petticoat Affair has been made by Jacksonian and gender study scholars. Notable are Leon Phillips’ *That Eaton Woman: In Defense of Peggy O’Neal Eaton*, published in 1974; John Marszalek’s (2000) *The Petticoat Affair: Manners, Mutiny and Sex in Andrew Jackson’s White House*; and Catherine Allgor’s (2002) *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government*. All are recommended for scholars seeking to study the issue and Emily Donelson’s involvement.

The strained relationship between Emily and one of Andrew Jackson’s favorites

endangered Emily and Andrew Donelson’s position in the White House on many occasions. President Jackson sympathized with the scandalized Eatons, who suffered under criticism and gossip regarding their marital fidelity—much as he and Rachel had. According to Marszalek (2000: 48–49), direct comparisons were made between Rachel, an accused bigamist, and Peggy. Letters written in early 1828 reveal that Washington society had decided that Mrs. Eaton would make a suitable lady in waiting for Mrs. Jackson, as “birds of a feather will flock together.”

In 1830 Emily Donelson either removed herself from the White House or was sent away by the president (accounts diverge on this point) over disagreements with him on how best to handle the Eaton issue. Emily sided strongly with Floride Calhoun, John C. Calhoun’s wife, and her followers, expressing distaste for the reportedly immoral Peggy. She did not see Peggy as suffering from the same attacks as her aunt Rachel; instead she used Rachel’s legacy as a pious Christian lady to claim that her aunt would have agreed with her own position. According to Allgor’s (2002) analysis of contemporary narratives, Emily snubbed Peggy at the inaugural ball, refusing to speak with her, just as did Floride Calhoun and a number of other Cabinet wives. Allgor states that snubbing Mrs. Eaton was necessary for all the Washington women who relied on their social “whirl”—their ability to successfully climb the social ladder—for furthering the interests of their husbands and families. No wife with hopes for advancement in Washington’s social hierarchy could be caught with a woman ostracized from the majority of social functions (Allgor, 2002: 204). Despite her uncle’s protest and sympathy toward the Eatons, it is likely that Emily’s own refusal to socialize with his supporters was based on her understanding of how best to solidify the place of both the Jacksons and the Donelsons in Washington society. This

division of the president's Cabinet over the Eatons' treatment in Washington signifies that the Petticoat Affair had serious political underpinnings. Andrew Jackson was stalwart in his sympathy with the reviled Peggy, writing to her: "I [would] rather have live vermin on my back than the tongue of one of these Washington women on my reputation" (Allgor, 2002: 201).

There are accounts of Margaret Eaton being called the "unofficial first lady" after Emily's departure in 1830, although officially it was Mary Ann Lewis, a supporter of the Eatons, who was appointed to the official hostess post until Emily's return in September of 1831. It was in that year that the Petticoat Affair was eventually settled, through the resignation of John Eaton as secretary of war—along with that of Secretary of State Martin Van Buren, who had attempted to negotiate peace in the Cabinet during the controversy, and of almost every other member of the Cabinet. With a newly elected Cabinet and all the new Cabinet wives, Washington society could again function normally.

Emily went on to serve as White House hostess through Jackson's reelection and until June 1836, when after many years of diminishing health she returned home to the Donelson's Tulip Grove plantation (then called Poplar Grove), where she died of tuberculosis on December 19, 1836, just shy of thirty years old.

Sarah Yorke Jackson: From Mistress of the Hermitage to White House Hostess

Sarah Yorke Jackson, born in July 1805, in Philadelphia to a wealthy mercantile family, married Andrew Jackson's adopted son, Andrew Jackson Junior, on November 24, 1831. Although President Jackson was unable to attend the couple's wedding in Philadelphia, he threw multiple parties for his son and new daughter-in-law at the White House during the 1831–1832 seasons.

Newly elected President Jackson initially appointed Sarah mistress of the Hermitage upon Rachel's death in 1828, ostensibly to prevent any rivalry from occurring between her and Emily Donelson. Sarah's story is always closely tied to the Hermitage, where she not only served as mistress but also bore all five of her children. Her first child, born in November 1832, was named Rachel, after her deceased mother-in-law. Sarah became White House hostess for the remainder of Jackson's term, after Emily Donelson's departure from the White House in June, 1836, until Van Buren's swearing in on March 4, 1837—less than ten months.

Sarah's reign as hostess proved to be uneventful, and little is written about her in the literature. The second and third volumes of Remini's *Life of Andrew Jackson* (Remini, 1981, 1984) provide brief glimpses of Jackson's affection for Sarah and her life at the White House. Rachel Jackson's biographer Laura Holloway did correspond with Sarah while writing *The Ladies of the White House* in 1870. Sarah's recollections give some insight into her perception of the events of the Jackson presidency, especially in relation to Rachel, her mother-in-law. At the time of Holloway's interviews Sarah lived as a guest in the Hermitage, which had been willed to her husband after President Jackson's death in 1845 but sold to the state of Tennessee in 1856, due to the family's financial troubles. The state government allowed Sarah to reside there as a guest to the historic property until her death on August 23, 1887.

Conclusion

Her absence from the White House during President Jackson's tenure leaves Rachel Jackson less analyzed than many other first ladies. The devastating loss of her personal papers and correspondence during the 1834 fire at the Hermitage silenced her story even further, leaving us to sift through other's

letters, stories, and remembrances to discover this first lady. Vivid stories of her as a sprightly young pioneer stand in sharp contrast to the ill, anxious old woman whom many saw at the Hermitage in 1828. The scandals and dirty politics that influenced this change are ripe for further study and analysis from the perspective of the woman who lived through them.

Emily Donelson's status as White House hostess leaves her often omitted from anthologies regarding the ladies of the White House, but new research into the Petticoat Affair casts increasing light on Emily's life and the gendered power dynamics of Jacksonian Washington. Sarah Jackson Yorke is even less studied—perhaps more exciting stories of her time at the White House simply wait to be discovered. Emerging scholarship regarding life on the western frontier, women in early republican politics, and gender relations in the nineteenth century will continue to inform our understanding of these women. A growing interest in ephemera and material culture, together with increased access to the personal letters of Jackson and his contemporaries, will hopefully inspire more researchers to look closely at the life of these Jacksonian ladies and their impact on American history. As anomalies among first ladies—one, an elected president's wife who never served as first lady; and two who hosted in the White House but remain somewhat obscure in their posts—the Jackson women serve to underline how the positions and backgrounds of first ladies require an expansive understanding, which can stretch to include a broad and nuanced view of this role. Such an understanding will only enrich the evolving field of first lady scholarship.

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