



Ten things that make ANDREW JOHNSON

a fascinating person

The bicentennial of Andrew Johnson's birth occurred not long ago (Dec. 29, 2008). And in honor of America's 17th president, I have come up with a list of things that, in my opinion, make this much-maligned man from Greeneville a fascinating person:

1. Andrew Johnson was one of the least-educated presidents. He never attended school and is believed to have taught himself to read. Later, his wife, Eliza, helped him improve his reading and writing skills and taught him some mathematics.
2. When he was 14, Johnson's mother apprenticed him to a tailor in Raleigh, N.C. He might have stayed in Raleigh forever had he not gotten in trouble for a foolish prank, which led him to (illegally) run away from his apprenticeship. Johnson ended up with his own tailor shop in Greeneville in 1826.
3. Few Americans have served as many political offices as Andrew Johnson. He was an alderman, mayor, state representative, state senator, U.S. representative, U.S. senator, Tennessee governor, U.S. president and then, years after he was president, U.S. senator again.



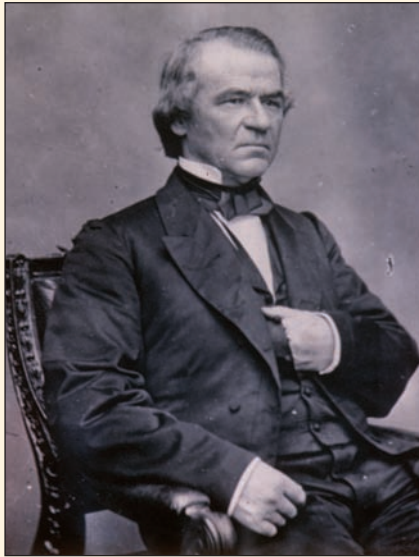
4. After the Civil War broke out, every U.S. senator from a seceding state withdrew from the U.S. Congress except one — Andrew Johnson. This act made him a hero in the eyes of Unionists and a villain in the eyes of Confederates, and it was the main reason President Abraham Lincoln appointed him military governor of Tennessee after the Union Army took over Nashville. Already unpopular in Nashville, Johnson became more so as military governor, ordering every adult male to take an oath of allegiance to the U.S. government or be sent to prison.
5. During the Civil War, the town of Greeneville changed hands from Confederate to Union troops several times. Soldiers and officers from both sides stayed in Andrew Johnson's home. Some of the Confederate soldiers who stayed there wrote insulting messages to the military governor of Tennessee on the walls of the house. You can still see some of these mes-

Above, a statue of President Andrew Johnson stands outside the Andrew Johnson National Historic Site Visitor Center in Greeneville. At left, the Andrew Johnson Homestead is also part of the site.



sages at Andrew Johnson's home in Greeneville.

6. Lincoln's first vice president was Hannibal Hamlin of Maine. But when he ran for his second term, Lincoln dropped Hamlin from the ticket and chose Johnson, probably because he wanted to send a message with his choice about reconciliation.
7. On April 14, 1865, Lincoln was assassinated as part of a conspiracy to kill several other governmental leaders, including Johnson and Secretary of State William Seward. However, Seward survived his wounds, and Johnson's would-be assassin did not follow through on plans to kill him. After Lincoln's death, Johnson was inaugurated as the 17th president.
8. The U.S. Constitution allows the House of Representatives to impeach a president for "high crimes and misdemeanors" and, if impeached, for the U.S. Senate to vote to remove a president with a two-thirds majority. In February 1868, Johnson became the first president ever impeached. The stated reason for this act was his violation of an 1867 law called the "Tenure of Office Act." But the real reason Johnson was impeached was because of his repeated clashes with the so-called Radical Republicans over how to deal with the defeated South: Johnson supported amnesty and voting rights for former Confederates and vetoed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Reconstruction Plan of 1867.
9. Having been impeached, Johnson's impeachment moved on to the Senate. However, in May 1868, the Senate fell one vote short of removing Johnson from office. (No less than seven Republican senators broke ranks and voted against removing Johnson, including Joseph Fowler from Tennessee.) Johnson then served out the remainder of his term and left office in March 1869.
10. Before he died, Johnson said that when he was dead he would need "no softer pillow than the Constitution and no warmer blanket than the American flag." Because of this, America's 17th president is buried with his head resting on



his copy of the Constitution and his body wrapped in an American flag.

Regardless of how you feel about Andrew Johnson's legacy, you should visit the Andrew Johnson National Historic Site in Greeneville — a place that wonderfully puts in perspective his life and the era in which he lived. The site actually consists of several things, including a visitor center, Johnson's tailor shop, the two homes in which he lived for most of his life (when he wasn't in Washington or Nashville) and his grave. Helping make the site a treasure is the fact that, compared to most presidential homes, the things surrounding the properties haven't changed much in appearance since Johnson lived here (compared to, say, the Hermitage, home of Andrew Jackson, in Nashville). In Greeneville, you feel like it hasn't been that long since Andrew Johnson was there. ☺

The Andrew Johnson Homestead in Greeneville is open for tours every day except New Year's Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day.



Tennessee History for Kids

Bill Carey is a Nashville author and executive director of "Tennessee History for Kids," an online Tennessee history textbook.

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