



TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE HERMITAGE

Welcome to The Hermitage, Home of President Andrew Jackson! This document is for teachers, group leaders, chaperones, and the public in general to help you (and your students) visit The Hermitage. In italics following each section is a question for you to ask your group – but feel free to take the discussion in any direction you choose!

Upon Your Arrival

If time allows, check out our 23-minute orientation film. It's a condensed version of the History Channel's documentary, narrated by Martin Sheen, and the full version is available in our Museum Store. If you are a teacher participating in a Hands-on-History program at The Hermitage, the time you have allotted for your trip will determine if you have time for the film.

If you were to create a biography of Jackson, what topics would you focus on?

Andrew Jackson Visitor Center

As you progress through the hallway from the theater to the Museum, you can allow time to read the panels dedicated to the enslaved community at The Hermitage. Andrew Jackson owned about 150 slaves, and these panels feature original photographs and biographical information of just a few.

Which enslaved person did you find most interesting?

Portrait of Andrew Jackson

The portrait at the end of the hallway before you turn right towards the Museum is a portrait of Andrew Jackson painted by Ralph E.W. Earl. Earl was essentially the personal artist for Andrew Jackson, and the first artist in residence in Nashville. He married Rachel's niece – Jane Caffrey in 1817. Earl traveled to Washington with the newly-elected Jackson in 1829, and painted numerous portraits of Jackson and his friends. Earl also designed the Carriage Drive and concentric flower beds, and was responsible for the decorative interior painting at Tulip Grove. He combined his two interests – art and archaeology into one of the first Nashville museums Earl died at The Hermitage in 1838.

How does Andrew Jackson look in this portrait to you?

If you were to hire someone to create a portrait of you, what would you have them include to represent your interests?

Museum

While in the Museum you can see original artifacts belonging to the Jackson family. The large majority of the Jackson's belongings are in the Mansion, but this is a good representation. Be sure to check out the gold and onyx locket containing a lock of Andrew Jackson's hair. Locks of hair were common mementos in the 1800s.

What gifts do we give as keepsakes today?

Carriages and Mannequins

These carriages were used by Andrew Jackson both in Washington and at The Hermitage. A horse-drawn carriage could carry its occupants about 10 miles an hour, meaning it could take about an hour to get Jackson from The Hermitage to downtown Nashville.

The mannequins are reflective of the actual size of Andrew and Rachel Jackson. The clothes they are wearing are similar to what they wore to a ball celebrating the victory of the Battle of New Orleans.

How long would it take you to get from The Hermitage to your house at 10mph?

What do you wear to parties today? How do the outfits compare?

Path to Mansion

To your right you'll see the original iron gate, where visitors entered on their way to the visit the Jacksons. Note the presence of the newer red cedar trees on your way to the Mansion. These were planted to replace original trees that were destroyed by the April 1998 tornado. Also pause to examine the War Road (also damaged by the 1998 tornado). The War Road is an alley of trees created in 1914 by the Ladies Hermitage Association – the governing body of The Hermitage. Most of the trees are originals, though some have been replaced, and each tree comes from a different battlefield associated with Andrew Jackson.

How would you commemorate the life of Andrew Jackson at The Hermitage?

Fence Line

This fence line separated the Jackson's private yard space from the farm fields and work areas. Many years of testing and excavation uncovered the post hole lines where the Hermitage mansion yard fences ran. Evidence from the post holes combined with documentary sources showed that a fence once surrounded the mansion. In 2002, the yard fence was recreated as it stood historically.

What psychological impact would a fence separating the Jacksons have on the enslaved population? In what other historic instances have fences or walls been built as a physical and symbolic display?

Carriage Drive

This is the path designed by Ralph Earl. Jackson entertained many guests at The Hermitage, Sam Houston, James K. Polk, and Martin Van Buren among them. This driveway is the path they used upon arriving (note that the Mansion faces south).

What shape does the Carriage Drive make? Why?

The guitar-shaped drive was decorative, but also utilitarian, as well – the shape made it easier to maneuver carriages in the narrow space.

Mansion Front

The Mansion is built in a Greek Revival style, and reflects how it looked in 1837 – rebuilt after an 1834 fire in a Greek Revival style. Americans were trying to establish a uniquely American culture, and many looked to early Greece as a model. Have students look for an example of Greek mythology inside the house (wallpaper shows the story of the search by Telemachus).

Rachel never lived in The Hermitage as it looks today, having passed away in 1828.

Note that the Mansion Front and the Mansion itself is guided.

North exit

You will finish your tour and exit on the north side of the Mansion, or the back door. The back door and porch area looks out on to the yard area. As you exit, look up to the bottom of the balcony and note the existence of three bells. This was for the enslaved families living at the Triplex (more on that later), with a bell corresponding to one of the enslaved when called.

How would you feel if you were constantly “on call?”

If you were to sit on the porch and imagine The Hermitage as a working farm/plantation, what would you see, hear, and smell?

Mansion Kitchen

Thanks to the heat from cooking and the risk of fire, the kitchen was separated from the Mansion in what was a common practice of the time. The enslaved Betty was the head cook for over 50 years. If you look under the table you'll see a door – that leads to the root cellar under the table where fruits and vegetables were stored.

Why were fruits and vegetables stored underground?

Eight cookbooks remain in the Jackson family library, as well as books on making wine and distilling whiskey. But nearly all of them were purchased after Rachel Jackson's death, so perhaps Sarah Yorke Jackson wanted to broaden the family's culinary horizons.

Back Steps

Note the presence of the iron object on the ground. What do you think that is? Keep in mind the paths would not have been paved. This was the boot scraper. Gentlemen would wipe their boots off to avoid tracking mud in the house.

Also note the cellar to the right. Every year before Christmas, the cellar was cleaned out so the annual shipment of goods from New Orleans could be stored.

What do you think the Jacksons would receive from New Orleans?

Smokehouse

Meat had to be preserved by salting, pickling, and smoking – and all of the meat was cured right here in the smokehouse. It is possible to cure the meat in both hot weather and cold weather. In hot weather curing, the required temperature range is 165° to 185° Fahrenheit – any hotter than 185° and the meat will shrink or split. Smoking at high temperatures also “cooks” away moisture and fat and are safe to eat without any further cooking.

The Jacksons used the smokehouse to prepare over 25,000 pounds of pork each year. They typically slaughtered the hogs in early winter, just after the first frost of the year, when temperatures weren't expected to rise above 35 degrees Fahrenheit.

How do we preserve our food today?

Triplex

The foundation before you was once an enslaved cabin built in the 1820s or 1830s that housed three families, and as many as 10-12 people lived in each “room.” Since the enslaved lived near where they worked, it’s a reasonable assumption that slaves living here worked in the Mansion. Artifacts found in the middle section of the Triplex include pins, buttons, needles, and sewing items. The building itself was demolished in the late 1800s.

Based on the artifacts found in the middle, what was the occupation of the enslaved person living here?

We do know that Gracy Bradley – purchased with her family by Andrew Jackson in Washington – was a skilled seamstress, and acted as a personal servant to Sarah Yorke Jackson, wife of Andrew Jackson, Jr. Gracy later married Alfred.

What would archaeologists be able to tell future generations about your life based on what they find in your bedroom?

The Hermitage Garden

Covering an acre of land, the Garden was originally laid out between 1819 and 1820 (as the Mansion was under construction) and was designed by an Englishman named William Frost. We do know that Rachel had a fondness for flowers, and while we unfortunately do not have an exact record as to what exactly was planted, we know that geraniums, daisies, wall flowers, polyanthus, box woods, and lemon trees were purchased in 1825.

We also know that herbs were planted, as well, both for food seasoning, bath water scenting, and medicinal purposes. Sage (used to treat mouth sores, mouth ulcers, and sore throat, and could be used as a compress on cuts and wounds); rosemary (thought to treat depression, headaches, muscle spasms, and a bile stimulant, as well as a digestive aid); fennel (thought to aid in weight loss and easing of menopause); mint (eased digestive problems, stomach cramps, upset stomach, nausea, vomiting, and colic in children); garlic (used in treatment of wounds, ulcers, skin infections, flu, strep, worms, kidney problems, and ear aches); chives (thought to control high blood pressure); and horehound (thought to suppress coughs, and was an expectorant, and could act as a cleansing agent for wounds) were all originally planted in the garden.

Today The Hermitage’s site operations staff plants only flowers, vines, and shrubs available in the United States before the Civil War.

*What are your favorite types of flowers?
Do we still use herbs for medicinal purposes?*

Rachel & Andrew's Tomb

When Rachel passed away in December 1828 (after Jackson's election, but before he went to Washington) at the age of 61, the Garden took on a more somber meaning for Andrew. At first a wooden "tomb house" was constructed over her grave, but in 1831 Andrew Jackson ordered a Greek Revival "monumental tomb" built, with her favorite flowers planted around the tomb.

The inscription on Rachel's tomb reads:

Here lie the remains of Mrs. Rachel Jackson, wife of President Jackson, who died the 22nd Dec 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 benefactor; to the rich an example; to the wretched a comforter, to the prosperous an ornament, her piety went hand in hand with her benevolence, and she thanked her creator for being permitted to do good. A being so gentle, and yet so virtuous, slander might wound but could not dishonor; Even death, when he tore her from the arms of her husband, could but transport her to the bosom of her God.

Andrew's inscription simply reads:

General Andrew Jackson

Note the presence of the tombstone of Alfred, just north of Andrew and Rachel's tomb. Alfred requested that the Ladies Hermitage Association bury him next to Jackson's tomb, and he is the only former slave to be buried in the Garden. His gravestone reads, "Uncle Alfred" because at the turn of the 20th century, the terms "uncle" and "auntie" were considered polite ways to address elderly black people.

How does that make you feel today? Do you consider that a derogatory remark?

Alfred's Cabin

Alfred's Cabin is one of just three standing Hermitage slave cabins on the property today (the first Hermitage farmhouse and kitchen are the other two). Recent studies show that this cabin was built in 1841.

All of the slave dwellings were approximately 20x20, single story units with a small loft (likely for children to sleep), a door, window, and fireplace. Excavations of these dwellings have uncovered root cellars, underneath the floorboards and accessed by a hatch door. The variability in their locations, size, and construction indicates that the slaves, and not the Jacksons, built them.

Alfred lived in this cabin until his death in 1901. After emancipation, and Andrew Jackson Jr.'s death in 1867, Alfred bought some of General Jackson's furnishings, including one of his beds. In order to get it into the cabin, he had to cut off the frame's legs.

Most couples at The Hermitage had more than five and sometimes ten children, so you can imagine how crowded these cabins would be.

How would the cabin feel in the winter and summer?

How would you feel if you were Alfred, seeing the difference between your cabin and The Hermitage Mansion?

Springhouse

This building was built in the early 19th century when the Jacksons first moved to the property (note its proximity to the first Hermitage farmhouse/kitchen). The spring passing by was known by the Jacksons as “Gravelly Spring.” The Springhouse is built of Tennessee limestone.

How would the Springhouse keep water cool?

The spring was an important feature of the property, as a year-round source of fresh water and, with its thick stone structure, could be used to chill dairy and other food products. Until a well was dug near the Mansion’s back porch, the enslaved workers had to carry water from the Springhouse to the Mansion every day. In 1850, The Hermitage produced 1,000 pounds of butter. The water in the Springhouse kept the milk cool while the cream off thousands of gallons of milk, and churning that cream into butter. The Jacksons would then sell the butter in Nashville.

The spring is still in use today – we use it to water the Hermitage’s gardens and lawns.

First Hermitage Farmhouse / Kitchen

Originally, these two buildings were together. No, really. On July 5, 1804, Andrew Jackson purchased the farm of Nathaniel Hays, who had claimed the property as a land grant in the early 1780s. Later, he and Jackson were neighbors, and Jackson bought the land he would expand into an 1100-acre plantation. These two buildings comprised the Jacksons’ home for 17 years, from 1804 until the Mansion construction was completed in 1821.

The first floor contained a large single room on the first floor, two bedrooms on the second floor, and an attic loft. After Jackson bought the farm (literally, not figuratively), he had a 30’ x 18’ log kitchen built, which doubled as the cookhouse and slave quarters for Betty, the cook, and her family. Around 1813 Alfred Jackson, Betty’s son, was born in the kitchen.

In the 1820s, Jackson converted the building into a single-story slave cabin, removing the first floor, building a new brick chimney, and removing window glass and doors, as well as removing the interior staircase, wallpaper, and trim.

When the Ladies’ Hermitage Association took over the stewardship of The Hermitage, these buildings were in such bad shape that the very first actions they took was repair and restore the original Hermitage buildings. This was the first historic preservation project in Tennessee, and one of

the first in the United States as a whole. They are currently restored to their original appearance as slave quarters.

What sort of historic preservation would you be interested in for your hometown?

What parallels do you see between the first Hermitage as the home of a future president, and the home of former slaves?

Garden area

For most farm families in Jackson's time, nearly all of the food the family ate came from the farm. Animals and poultry provided meat, milk, and eggs. Grain, especially corn, provided the basis for bread, cereal, and desserts. Fruits and vegetables were available only at certain times during the year, but could be dried for future use. Potatoes, turnips, and onions, kept well for long periods of time.

The government began keeping records of agricultural production in 1850, and while the 1850 census focused on commercial crops, the report on The Hermitage mentions several crops, such as potatoes, peas, beans, butter, and livestock. There was an orchard on-site, but the census doesn't mention it. The Hermitage farm produced a variety of fruits and vegetables, but the Jacksons had mixed feelings about fruit. Their knowledge of disease was poor, and they thought fruit was related to cholera – an epidemic disease spread by unsanitary water. If they washed the fruit in unsanitary water, it could have helped spread the disease.

Wealthy families like the Jacksons could also afford to import food from New Orleans, or buy it from stores in Nashville. We know that Java coffee, gunpowder tea, white sugar, Malaga grapes, almonds, raisins, oranges, and oysters were at least rare treats at The Hermitage.

How would you feed 150 people? How big would your garden need to be, and what would you feed them? What delicacies would you import from somewhere else?