

Chapter XXXV.

President Andrew Jackson Visits Isaac Hill.

During the presidency of Andrew Jackson political bitterness was at its height and Concord shared in the country-wide temper with due measure of vindictive personal abuse. The editor of the Patriot was ardent in support of "Old Hickory" and this is not surprising. The two men had much in common: both suffered the handicap of early poverty and scant education, yet each had made a place for himself in the world of men of greater opportunity.

Gen. Jackson, hero of New Orleans in 1814, was more or less illiterate, violently self-willed, almost deliberately crude at times. On the other hand he was utterly fearless and thoroughly patriotic, with a genius for leadership which moulded the old anti-Federalists into an aggressive Democratic party. His name was anathema to the educated and aristocratic leaders among his political opponents and he capitalized the fact to create a certain class feeling which won the common people to his standard.

This was a man after Isaac Hill's own heart and the Concord man gave him full devotion, in return for which, the President promptly made him intimate confidant and adviser. Very soon Mr. Hill was called to Washington as Second Comptroller of the Treasury Department and, unofficially, he had great influence in the group styled by political adversaries as "the President's Kitchen Cabinet." As early as 1828, Isaac Hill was eagerly promoting the Jackson interests and in January of that year he accomplished a real feat in organizing a celebration of Jackson's New Orleans victory in this strongly Whig town of Concord. The gesture was a great success for, according to Dr. Bouton, "There was an immense concourse of citizens from this town and other parts of the State", and "a procession formed in front of the State House and moved to the old North Church where Hon. Isaac Hill delivered a discourse which was

the first ever delivered by him on a public occasion."There followed "a sumptuous dinner in the area of the State House"and in the evening there was a ball at the new Eagle Coffee House which established once and for all the reputation of that hostelry.

From that day on Isaac Hill fought all enemies of his hero with a fury which doubtless gave joy to the grim old soldier and so,when during the second Jackson administration,the President toured New England, it was a foregone conclusion that Concord should be included in the itinerary for Mr.Hill's sake.On Friday,June 28,1833,the President arrived in town accompanied by Vice President Van Buren,Secretary of War Lewis Cass (native of Exeter)and U.S.Senator Levi Woodbury who had been governor of our State and was destined to become Associate Justice of the U.S.Supreme Court.At the time of the visit,Woodbury was Secretary of the Navy.

The presidential party rode into town over the Londonderry Turnpike and a committee of escort met them in Bow.At the town line,the military companies awaited the arrival and when the President's barouche reached that point,Jackson left the carriage,mounted a beautiful white horse and headed the procession into town in a manner befitting a military hero.Up the dusty main street,through crowds of cheering men and the fluttering handkerchiefs waved by the ladies,the procession took its way the length of the street to Horseshoe pond and back through State St. and School St. to the Eagle Coffee House.There,in response to the clamor of the crowds,Jackson appeared on the balcony above the entrance and was introduced to the people by Congressman Henry Hubbard.

On Saturday there was a review of the State Militia in an open field which stretched westerly from the State House.Abiel Rolfe remembers that day and relates that"Keene Company had a splendid band and the Jackson Rifles from the Borough-all stalwart men and Jacksonian Democrats-had a fine band too.But the Keene musicians had a far more extensive repertoire;and so,it was said,the Borough band set itself to intensive

practice and within a few hours was able to play the show pieces of its rival.

On Sunday the President was punctilious in church attendance. In the morning he worshipped at the Old North; in the afternoon at the handsome new Unitarian Church, and still later, he attended a union service of Methodists and Baptists in the latter's church. A vivid account of the President's visit, including the service at the Old North, is to be found in the Diary of Sarah Connell Ayer. Mrs. Ayer, after her husband's death, had returned to Concord from Eastport, Me. and was making her home with her widowed mother-in-law, Mrs. Richard Ayer, in the homestead on the south corner of Centre road and the main street. Sarah Connell Ayer and her children had a most intimate contact with all the festivities of the Jackson visit since Mrs. Isaac Hill, the President's hostess, was a daughter of Mrs. Richard Ayer.

Mrs. Hill had three sisters in Concord who doubtless shared in the celebration and in later years the four gathered at the Bradley home on Penacook St. and a picture was taken of which we present a copy. From left to right these daughters of Capt. Richard Ayer are: Susanna (Mrs. Isaac Hill) Mary (Mrs. Isaac Frye Williams) Charlotte (Mrs. Washington Williams) and Elizabeth (Mrs. Richard Bradley). Mrs. Isaac Frye Williams lived on the site of present Cummings Block, north corner of Freight St., Mrs. Washington Williams lived for a time in Portsmouth and it is of interest to recall that in more recent years, her daughter, Josephine, left a generous legacy to our Margaret Pillsbury Hospital. Mrs. Isaac Hill's home was still on the site of Emmons Store, but she and her husband were already planning the brick "mansion" at 75 So. Main St.

Sarah Connell's lively Diary of her girlhood days in 1809 has been quoted in an earlier chapter. One wonders if, when widowed Mrs. Samuel Ayer met the dignified Secretary of the Navy these years later, the two recalled their first meeting at Dartmouth commencement when the

charming young Sarah heard and approved young Woodbury's graduating oration and later stole away from her "favorite Mr. Ayer" to take "a ride to Norridge with Mr. W.". The Diary keeps discreet silence.

In quoting from the Diary, names in parenthesis have been interpolated in order that the reader may readily identify the persons referred to:

"June 22, 1833. This forenoon Charlotte (Mrs. Washington Williams) and myself call'd at Mrs. (Isaac) Hill's. Everybody seems to be busy in making some arrangements for the reception of the President. He is now on tour through the New England States, and is expected to be in this town in the course of the next week.

"June 26. The town is thronged with people from all parts of the state. Eight companies of militia, ordered out for escort duty, have arrived. The companies have been reviewed by the Commander in chief; ****It is reported that the President is sick, and that it is doubtful if he is able to pursue his journey.

"June 27. The President was to have been here today, but sickness has retarded his journey. He is expected tomorrow. Our boys (the various Ayer grandchildren, including her own son, Samuel H. Ayer) are going to join the escort at Bow, and I have been busy preparing their uniform. This little company is to be reviewed with the others, and the young soldiers are as "large as life."

"June 28. Information was received by an express that the President would be here at one o'clock. The President was mounted upon an elegant white horse, and the procession moved under the conduct of the escort, to the north end of main street, down state street, and through school street to the Eagle Coffee House. The President and suite were put in possession of convenient rooms provided for their accommodation. In the evening Mrs. Hill had a party. The Vice President Martin Van Buren, the Secretary of War, Mr. Cass, and the Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Woodbury, the President's private Secretary, Maj. Donaldson and Col Earle, who composed

the President's suite were all there; also many other distinguished guests. I was a little confused when, taking Mr. Hill's arm, I was introduced to the Vice President and Secretaries.

"June 29. At 9 o'clock the President reviewed the troops; at 11 o'clock he visited the branches of the government assembled in the Representatives Hall. He was addressed by Gov. Dinsmoor, and introduced severally to the Counsellors and Representatives, in the presence of an immense concourse of people, who thronged the galleries, and every avenue leading to the Hall. At 7 in the evening we walk'd over to the State-House. A large number of gentlemen and ladies had assembled on the area and were introduced to the President. Every one appeared highly gratified.

"Sabbath 30th of June 1833. The President and his suite spent the Sabbath with us. They attended church at the Rev. Mr. Bouton's in the forenoon, at Rev. Mr. Thomas' in the afternoon, and a third service at the Brick Meeting House where a discourse was delivered by the Rev. Mr. Dow. I was at meeting in the forenoon. The President, Vice President, and his suite, our good old Governor Dinsmoor, and Mr. Hill, sat very near us, in pews prepared for them; so that I had a full view of President Jackson's countenance during divine service. He did indeed appear to be a devout worshipper. Mr. Bouton's discourse was indeed most appropriate. His text was in Luke, 10th chapt. part of 20th verse. Mr. Bouton addressed the President in a most faithful and impressive manner. The President appeared most affected. Many times did I notice the tear as it stole down his furrow'd cheek. When our worthy pastor fix'd his eye upon him, then rais'd it upwards, and concluded his address by saying, and now Sir, our hearts desire and prayer to God for you is, that after your journey through life is ended, your career of usefulness and honor is terminated you may rejoice in finding your name written in heaven; etc. The President bow'd his head, and look'd as though his whole soul responded, amen,

When I saw him rise, and bend over in the attitude of prayer, his countenance the index of ^{the} devotional feelings of his heart, I could not regard this aged patriot without feelings of the deepest reverence. I felt ready to exclaim can this be Gen. Jackson? he whom his enemies accuse of infidelity, gross immorality and cruelty? Let them blush, and hide their faces, in remembrance of those false accusations; and endeavor to imitate his private and public virtues.

"In the evening Mrs. Hill sent for us to come down, as she expected the President to call and take his leave, and she wish'd to introduce her Mother (Mrs. Richard Ayer) to him; accordingly Mother, sister Charlotte, Sarah (sixteen year old daughter of the diarist) and myself, walk'd down, accompanied by Mr. Williams (Jared W. of Lancaster) president of the Senate and his wife. The President came in, and Mr. Hill led him up to Mother and introduced her; he took both her hands in his, and tenderly inquired after her health. He extended a hand to each of us, as we were severally introduced to him. Little Andrew Hill (Isaac Andrew, namesake of Jackson) got between his knees, and seemed to feel perfectly at ease there. He patted the little fellow on the head, and remark'd that he was a fine boy, and might yet be President of the United States; his Mother remark'd there was not much chance for it; he replied, as much as for him at his age; she then observed she could scarcely desire it; he said, it was indeed no enviable situation; it was what might be termed a dignified, ab-
much
ject slavery. The President being / fatigued, retired early.

"July 1. The President, Vice President, Gov. Woodbury, Maj. Donaldson Col. Earle left this town, on their return to Washington. It was the intention of the President to have visited Maine, and prosecute his journey further east and north, but the fatigue of his journey had been so great and his health so much impaired, that he was obliged to give it up, and return immediately home, the nearest way. Mr. Hill was to accompany him as far as Providence."

Thus ends the Diary's description of President Andrew Jackson's

visit to our town—a visit undisturbed by political recriminations and marred only by the indisposition of the famous man. To the latter fact is probably due the tradition that the President "neglected all the dainties and ate bread and milk" during his stay at the Eagle Coffee House. Nothing was lacking otherwise to make this visit a success. Concord was at hightide of prosperity. Lean years were soon to come, but for the time all was hopeful and gay. Those who thronged the streets to honor the President bore testimony by their attire, to the change from old time thrift and sober simplicity, to an extravagance typical of the time.

One who remembered that visit wrote—"It was a period when the women wore enormous bonnets, or very broad brimmed Leghorn hats, loaded with gay ribbons and artificial flowers; when waists were high under the arms and leg-o-mutton sleeves were huge at the tops, and skirts were full and sufficiently short to show a coquettish ankle. The squires to these dames wore broadcloth suits of blue or brown or green, with gilt buttons, buff waistcoats, cravats of white cambric and ruffled shirts stitched by fair hands. For full dress, a bottle green coat was stylish, and the collar must have turned up points which fairly hid the lower part of the wearer's face." Here and there were country folk in homespun, but on the whole it was a colorful crowd of gaily uniformed military men and showily dressed civilians which greeted President Jackson on these festive days in the year 1833.

Well on to seventy years later, Isaac Andrew Hill still carried a silver half dollar pocket piece in memory of President Jackson. At the time of the visit to Concord he was a little boy of five or six—the youngest of Isaac Hill's sons. His father took him with a twelve year old lad—also a namesake of the President—into the Eagle Coffee House to meet the great man whose name they bore. The President treated

them with charming courtesy and picked up little Andrew Hill and held him on his arm while he presented each lad with a silver half dollar with its Eagle on one side, its Liberty on the other. And he said, according to Isaac Andrew Hill's story of the incident-"I make you the same gift as I do to all my children-the eagle of your country. Here, my sons, is the eagle of your country, which during my life I have endeavored to honor and defend. Keep it in remembrance of me, and if ever it shall be assailed by a foreign or domestic foe, rally under its pinions and defend it to the last."

Said Mr. Hill these many years later, "I can see the old man now as he stood holding me, while the tuft of hair, as I looked into his face, stood up on his high forehead as stiff as if it had been waxed. Those were imperialistic days and 'By the Eternal' had his arms around me then. I have carried that half dollar near my heart until, they say, it is worth only twenty-five cents, Mexican." It is no wonder that when, a day or two later, the President sat in the best room of the Hill home, little Andrew snuggled up to him confident of his gentle friendship.

Another memory of the Jackson visit was written by the late Maj. Lewis Downing and printed later in the Monitor-Patriot (10/16/ 1941):

"I belonged to a boys company which did good service on this occasion and elicited much praise from the General. The late ~~ex~~ Mayor Benjamin Franklin Gale was captain of the company which consisted of 24 or more boys from 12 to 16 or 17 years of age, all uniformed with white frocks, trimmed and duly decorated with red ribbon, and each member carried a long red stick, with a tin shaped spear on the end, making a formidable weapon in time of peace.

"I remember we camped out two nights in the area between the house of Gen. Joseph Low, which was then back from the Main street, opposite School, and the house of Isaac Hill a few rods south, making quite a nice place for our camp, especially being so near the two houses. We pitched

our tent the night before the arrival of Gen. Jackson, had our guard the same as the older boys, and the next morning took up our march in company with the 'Light Infantry' and 'Artillery', with other out of town companies, going as far as the 'Old Tavern' just on the brow of the hill in Bow.

"On arrival of Gen. Jackson, and after going through the usual speeches of such occasions, we began our march homeward, and in going up Main street we were cheered with the rest for our fine military appearance and good conduct, I suppose. We returned to our camp that night, and though the guard was on duty all night, my impression is some were out at a late hour, and found considerable difficulty in getting back to camp without the countersign.

"The next day there was a grand review west of State street in the rear of the state house, in which our company was enrolled, and was applauded many times.*****I cannot at this time recall the names of many of the members, but know the 'Low boys' and the 'Hill boys' were among them. 'South-enders' and 'North-enders' commingling as though no feud existed between them, as at times there was."