

The Andrew Jackson Magnolia tree story, part 2

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on March 2, 2010)

This *Historically Speaking* column continues the intriguing saga of the historic Jackson Magnolia tree at the White House and sprouts from that tree over the years covering more than 180 years. John Rice Irwin, Founder of the Museum of Appalachia tells the story of this majestic tree that began in Tennessee, went to Washington, DC as a sprout, then returned to Tennessee as more sprouts and eventually replaced itself at The Hermitage, near Nashville.

On Friday, April 14, 1995, a formal ceremony was held at the Museum of Appalachia to plant two cuttings from Senator Howard Baker's Magnolia tree located at his home in Huntsville, TN. This tree had grown from a cutting taken from the Jackson Magnolia at the White House and given to Baker by President Ronald Reagan upon his retirement as Chief of Staff to "take back to Tennessee."

The Jackson Magnolia stands to the southwest of the White House just west of the South Portico. It was planted there from a sprout taken to the White House by Andrew Jackson that came from his dear departed wife Rachel's favorite magnolia tree at the Hermitage near Nashville. This fine and majestic old magnolia tree stood on the grounds of the Hermitage near the grave of Andrew and Rachel Jackson until 1998.

John Rice said of the ceremony in a formal invitation, "We've named one [of the magnolia trees] Andrew Jackson, and Senator Howard H. Baker, Jr., himself will plant it in front of the Hall of Fame. The other tree has been named Howard H. Baker, Jr., and it will be planted by one of the state's most respected political leaders, Eugene Joyce of Oak Ridge."

John Rice then tells of the lunch where he and Senator Baker agreed upon the idea to bring cuttings to the Museum of Appalachia, "It was June of 1993 and I had the honor of having a late lunch with Tennessee's Howard Baker, Jr., at this home in Scott County. It was a sort of lazy afternoon and the Senator had eased away from the national limelight, but even so, 'urgent' calls were relayed to him by his assistant Fred Marcum during the 'meal' the three of us, with a little help, had put together. It consisted of sandwiches and vine ripened tomatoes from my garden, and Oreo cookies for dessert."

He continues the story, "Near the glassed-in sun room where we dined, there was a beautiful, young magnolia tree, a little out of place, I thought in that Cumberland Mountain region. I asked the Senator about it, and his story telling, love-of-history inclinations were set in motion."

As John Rice continues his story he said, "When Andrew Jackson went to the White House as the Nation's 7th president, Baker related, he took a cutting from a magnolia tree from his home, The Hermitage, near Nashville. This branch was planted in the White House lawn in memory of his beloved wife Rachel, who had died..." Rachel died on December 22, 1828, just a mere two weeks after he won the election to the presidency and prior to his March 4, 1829 inauguration.

Next John Rice said, "The tree grew and it prospered. It has been admired by every president ever since. In February, 1987, President Reagan asked the immensely popular and highly respected Baker, who had recently retired from the U. S. Senate, to become the White House Chief of Staff, a position he held until July, 1988. When Baker left this office to come back home to Tennessee, President Reagan and members of the National Park Service, gave the Senator a cutting from old Andy's tree, to 'bring back to Tennessee.'"

"Baker, who is a National Republican Leader, was obviously willing to forgive Jackson for helping to start the Democratic Party, and the Senator was happy to have a memento from this great Tennessean to add a bit to the perpetuation of the memory of one of America's greatest, and most colorful presidents.

"I wanted to include Senator Howard Baker in the Museum of Appalachia's Hall of Fame, and I told him that I'd like to have a cutting from this historic tree, to plant in front of the Hall of Fame building to

The Andrew Jackson Magnolia tree story, part 2

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on March 2, 2010)

augment the Baker story. He readily agreed, and the University of Tennessee President Joe Johnson arranged for cuttings from the boughs of the tree in Baker's yard to be nurtured until they were healthy little trees themselves.

"Some two years year later, the two sprouts were ready...and I thought, too, that it would be most fitting if the Senator would plant one tree in honor of 'Old Hickory.' I relayed this idea to Baker's assistant, Fred Marcum, who immediately contacted the Senator, somewhere between Russia and Washington. Senator Baker enthusiastically agree, but only if we'd feed him one of our old time, country cooked Tennessee meals. The deal was on!

"Then it occurred to me that we should plant both trees, one in honor of and named for Andrew Jackson, and one named for Howard Baker, Jr. The Senator will plant the one for Jackson and Eugene Joyce, one of Tennessee' most able 'elder' statesmen, will plant the one honoring Senator Baker.

The rest is history. The two trees were planted in a ceremony held at the Museum of Appalachia in front of the Hall of Fame on April 14, 1995. The Senator planted the Andrew Jackson tree and Eugene Joyce planted the Senator Howard Baker, Jr. tree.

However, the story of the Jackson Magnolia did not end there. In 1996 a cutting from the Jackson Magnolia tree line was provided to Senator Lamar Alexander who planted it at his home near the Smoky Mountain National Park. It is well over 30 feet tall now.

In 1998, officials at the Hermitage were distraught over the recent loss of many trees at the Hermitage at the hands of a severe storm and tornado including the original Southern Magnolia from which the Jackson Magnolia's sprout was taken. They noticed the articles in the newspapers about the Jackson Magnolia cuttings coming back to Tennessee and the event of April 14, 1995 at the Museum of Appalachia.

They requested a cutting from the magnolias at the Museum of Appalachia to replace the original tree, which had just been destroyed by the devastating tornado that struck the Nashville area on April 16, 1998. The Honorable Lewis Donelson, last descendant of the Jacksons officiated at the setting of the tree replacing the original magnolia that Rachel Donelson Jackson favored and from which Andrew Jackson took a sprout to plant the Jackson Magnolia at the White House.

In 2008, five more cutting were successfully propagated from the Museum of Appalachia's magnolias. So, the Jackson Magnolia continues to spread to various locations. It is becoming more and more widely grown into mature Southern Magnolia trees.

On June 19, 2009, John Rice Irwin talked to the Hermitage folks and said he, "learned that the original magnolia tree is indeed gone. The young sprout is now a 35-foot tree. Current officials at the Hermitage were not aware of the history of how it was obtained. They were elated to learn of its circuitous route. They plan to incorporate this information into Hermitage literature."

So, the Jackson Magnolia has now returned home and is a healthy and growing young Southern Magnolia set to bring pride to generations of visitors to the Hermitage just as the Jackson Magnolia brings pride to the occupants and visitors to the White House and the same can be said for the two Magnolias (Andrew Jackson and Howard Baker, Jr.) at the Museum of Appalachia.

This proud old specimen of Southern Magnolia continues to delight and remind many of its roots in the history of our nation. It's huge expanse of descendents across our nation convey the treasure of watching stately and magnificent trees age with dignity and serve as a constant reminders of our wondrous past and the individuals who helped make our country great.

The Andrew Jackson Magnolia tree story, part 2

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on March 2, 2010)

Thank you John Rice Irwin, for once again causing our history to live at the Museum of Appalachia for the present and future generations.



John Rice Irwin stands in front of the Hermitage Magnolia/Jackson Magnolia/ Howard Baker Magnolia/Museum of Appalachia Southern Magnolia planted by Howard Baker, Jr. and named in honor of Andrew Jackson that was used to provide a cutting to replace the original Magnolia at the Hermitage, the tree from which Andrew Jackson took a sprout to the White House in honor of his beloved wife Rachel



John Rice Irwin stands in front of the Howard Baker, Jr., Magnolia planted by Eugene Joyce with the Museum of Appalachia Hall of Fame in the background