

O. Amer Pre

Vicksburg, Mississippi 39180
September 10th, 1999

C - Span
The American Presidents Series
400 North Capitol Street - Suite # 650
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear sirs,

Please refer your American Presidents Series.

I am a local history nut. I write to call attention to three facts that are not very well known. # 1. The Andrew Jackson and the Reverend John Ford affair. # 2. President Theodore Roosevelt and the great Louisiana black bear hunt at Smedes, Mississippi, November, 1902. # 3. The Masonic Fraternity.

#1. - Andrew Jackson and John Ford affair.

Andrew Jackson in his younger days was up and down the Natchez Trace and was well known around the Mississippi Territory. He was famous for his loud and profane talk. Reverend John Ford was a Methodist preacher who had migrated to the Mississippi Territory before the War of 1812. His home was located on the Pearl River near present day Columbia, Mississippi. He had rooms for lodgers in his home. In this era, it was unheard of to turn any one away that wanted to spend the night. News was scarce, strangers were sought after, asked to eat with the family, encouraged to stay the night. Thus, when Reverend John Ford refused General Jackson permission to stay the night until he met certain requirements, it was important enough for Reverend John G Jones to record in his History of the Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The book is readily available. I am enclosing the information with the title and pertinent page.

The Reverend Jones' book is considered accurate and to my knowledge is seldom challenged or questioned. Even the "Daughter's of the American Revolution" accept it as accurate. The Mississippi Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met in the John Ford home and the nearby chapel on October 29th, 1818. The home still stands, today it is a museum operated the county historical society.

2. Theodore Roosevelt and the Great Bear Hunt at Smedes, Mississippi

In November, 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt traveled by special train from Washington, D.C. to Smedes, Sharkey County, Mississippi, on a bear hunt. He did not get his bear. Smedes was a plantation spur located approximately twenty - fives miles northward from Vicksburg in the heart of the Mississippi - Yazoo -Sunflower Rivers swamps and cane - brakes. Many people came to this area to hunt the Louisiana black bear.

Smedes was the headquarters for a 24,000 acre cotton plantation. The location is now a ghost town in the middle of a very large cotton field. Thus for four days in November, 1902, Smedes, Mississippi, was (perhaps) the capitol of the United States. The president's trip was well documented by The Commercial Appeal newspaper of Memphis, Tennessee. It ran several very long articles covering the incident. To the best of my knowledge, these articles are remarkably accurate.

I had heard tales of the President's visit all my life. However, I learned a number of things I did not know from my limited research of the Great Bear Hunt at Smedes, Mississippi. The facts include;

#1. It was simply a much bigger deal than I had any idea. People, including school children and brass bands, lined the tracks to wave at him and his train as it passed at 60 miles per hour. (The schedule was not announced.) The train stopped only at crew change points where huge crowds assembled. The president made it a point to shake the hands of the train crews that handled his train and thank them for a safe and speedy trip.

#2. To my knowledge, this was the first sitting president to visit this area of the South after the Civil War, or perhaps ever.

#3. It was during this visit that President Roosevelt became aware and thus became the first president that really came to realize that the people of the South had a problem. I refer to the white versus black people problem. Prior to his visit it was "Whether you like it or not this is the way it is." After Smedes he became much more aware that there was a problem. We still seek the solution to this problem today.

#4. He accepted the invitation with the understanding that he would come and be allowed to hunt as any private citizen might. The "managers of the hunt" and the "houndsmen" put forth all effort to make this a reality. Many newspapermen were irate at the treatment they received by the managers of the hunt to protect the president's privacy.

#5. In 1902, in Sharkey County, Mississippi, black people furnished the security for the president of the United States.

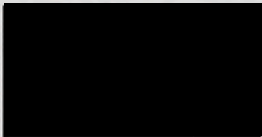
#3. - The Masons

I have made the statement that, until a person understands at least something about the Masonic Fraternity, they can never, really, understand American history. The mason's and the men who were mason's simply had too much to do with it. We Mason's are very proud that George Washington served as Master of His Lodge at the same time that he served as President of the United States. President Washington was sworn in as the 1st president with his hand on the Bible borrowed from the local Masonic Hall in New York. (Can you imagine, they forgot to bring a Bible and had to borrow one. It will not wash.) That Paul Revere and John Paul Jones were members of the Fraternity. And on and on including the last president who was a Mason, (to my knowledge) Gerald Ford.

It has been alleged the Boston Tea Party was planned at the local Masonic Lodge and was carried out by a group of Masons. It has even been alleged that one reason the American Colonies won their independence was that so many of the troops on both sides were Masons. As to the accuracy of these two statements I have not a clue.

Masons are taught not to brag or toot our own horn. Thus we have become very secretive. There is no reason for this. I have noticed that Bryan, appears to have some clue to this situation. Perhaps he has "Labored in the quarries and wrought his regular hours." Should you desire, I would welcome the opportunity to correspond with someone about the Mason's.

Sincerely,



1a. - Andrew Jackson and The John Ford Affair

A Complete History of Methodism as connected with The Mississippi Conference of the
Methodist Episcopal Church, South, written at the unanimous request of the Conference
by Reverend John G Jones = A Member of the Conference, Volume II. =
From the Beginning of 1817 to 1845.

Nashville, Tennessee; Dallas, Texas -Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South
- Printed for the Author - 1908 -

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1908 - by J A B Jones,
in the office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

(Page # 17) Chapter I. 1818 - 1824

The Mississippi Annual Conference, held at Midway church, November 07th, 1817, selected "Ford' Meeting House, Pearl River, Mississippi State," and "October 29th, 1818," as the place and time for the holding of the next session. Nothing to the contrary appearing of record, it is presumed that the Conference met at the time and place appointed. Ford's Meeting House was the residence of the Honorable and Reverend John Ford, local preacher, and was built about 1811 or 1812. It was here that the Conference had met in 1814. The building still stands, and is practically in the same condition in which it was at the time of the session of the Conference. This house was notable in its day. Not only were Conferences held there, but also political conventions.

It is related that once while Andrew Jackson was "laying out" or surveying the military or government road through Mississippi territory to New Orleans he asked for accommodations for himself and his companion officers for a week. Mr. Ford promptly replied; "Certainly, General, but on two conditions." "What are the two conditions, Mr. Ford?" "The first is that we hold family worship night and morning, and it is expected that every one sheltered under this roof be (Page # 18) present. And the second condition is this; I am told, General, that you are a profane swearer. If you are to be my guest, you must not take the name of God in vain while you are in my home." Both conditions were accepted by the General for himself and for his friends. For one week General Jackson was not heard to utter an oath.

Bishop McKendree was severely ill during the whole session, and the meetings were held in his small bedroom. The General Minutes do not disclose the Secretary's name.

2b. - Teddy Roosevelt and the Great Bear Hunt at Smedes, Mississippi
Taken from

The Commercial Appeal,
Published Daily - Memphis Tennessee,
Thursday Morning, November 13th, 1902

Roosevelt After Bear

Comes South to Hunt in Cane - brakes - Guest of President Fish
Cincinnati, November 12th - Tonight President Roosevelt is speeding on his way to Smedes, Mississippi, about twenty - five miles north of Vicksburg for a four day bear hunt. The place selected for the hunt is some miles from the railroad. *****

Taken from
Hunting North America 1885 - 1911

Castle - Pages # 399 - 406

Edited by Frank Oppel and Tony Meisel

President Roosevelt's Mississippi Bear Hunt
by Lindsay Denison with Photographs by the Author

(Mr. Denison was one of the three special correspondents to accompany the president's party.)

Of course, the president cannot stir from Washington without a following of stenographers, for this own emergencies, and federal guards, and press reporters. Only one

But against all the rest of the world, the road between Smedes' plantation and the Little Sunflower camp was guarded by Negroes armed with repeating rifles. These pickets were armed not only with guns, but with "white man's orders," which made the guns more than empty threats. This was demonstrated. A young man of Vicksburg contemptuously facing the muzzle of one of these rifles on the outskirts of the camp, remarked meaningfully that it was a new thing in Sharkey County for a Negro to presume to raise so much as his little finger against a white man.

"Dass all right," stammered black Wallace, trembling with a peril which he knew right well was not a whit less than that of the young man in front of him, "*but I done got mah ordahs from white folks.*" And the young man turned in his tracks and went back to Vicksburg, and wrote of "outraged ethics."

#3c. - The Masons

A good example, and a story I like, about the behind the scenes activities of the Masons is illustrated in the following story. This story has been printed in several books for Masons. The story is said to have happened during the hey day of railroad travel during the 1920s.

The Mason's Wife

The "traveling man" and his family lived in Chicago. He was in Miami when he was stricken suddenly and violently ill. He was placed in the hospital. He was not expected to live. A telegram was dispatched to his wife to hurry. She packed a small bag, rushed to the depot, bought a ticket, and just managed to catch the fast train. Unfortunately, she left her hand bag, complete with tickets and money at the ticket counter. She was wearing her Mason wife's pin.

The train was leaving the station when she discovered the missing hand bag. She explained to the conductor. He sent a telegram of inquiry. The station master had recovered the handbag complete with tickets and money. He was placing it on the next train four hours later. She was to get off at the next stop and wait for that train when she would be re - united with her handbag. Thus she would arrive in Miami several hours later and the husband may be dead. She was very upset.

A traveling salesman, feeling the fraternity and comradely of all traveling men, tried to launch a campaign to raise money to purchase her a ticket. The Conductor showed no interest and discouraged the idea. He simply stated that this was not necessary and that when the train reached Miami, she would be aboard. The salesman inquired and insisted upon knowing, "Why."

The conductor finally and reluctantly explained, "That lady's husband is a Mason, I am a Mason, all the conductor's that will be handling this train between here and Miami are Mason's, she will be passed from one Mason to another until this train arrives in Miami. Her hand bag will arrive on the next train. She will retrieve her hand bag, present her tickets, etc. What harm can be done." Thus - the train kept going, when it arrived in Miami she was on it.