



# Old Hickory's Nephew: The Political and Private Struggles of Andrew Jackson Donelson (Southern Biography Series)

*Mark R. Cheathem*

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Though remembered largely by history as Andrew Jackson's nephew, Andrew Jackson Donelson was himself a significant figure in nineteenth-century America: a politician, planter, diplomat, newspaper editor, and vice-presidential candidate. His relationship with his uncle and mentor defined his life, as he struggled to find the political and personal success that he wanted and his uncle thought he deserved. In *Old Hickory's Nephew*, the first definitive biography of this enigmatic man, Mark R. Cheathem explores both Donelson's political contributions and his complex, tumultuous, and often-overlooked relationship with Andrew Jackson.

Born in Sumner County, Tennessee, in 1799, Donelson lost his father only five years later. Andrew Jackson soon became a force in his nephew's life, seeing in his namesake his political protégé. Jackson went so far as to predict that Donelson would one day become president. After attending West Point, Donelson helped establish the Jacksonian wing of the Democratic party and edited a national Democratic newspaper. As a diplomat, he helped bring about the annexation of Texas and, following in his uncle's footsteps, he became the owner of several plantations. On the surface, Donelson was a political and personal success.

But few lives are so straightforward. The strong relationship between the uncle and nephew -- defined by the concept of honor that suffused the southern society in which they lived -- quickly frayed when Donelson and his wife defied his uncle during the infamous Peggy Eaton sex scandal of Jackson's first presidential administration. This resulted, Cheathem shows, in a tense relationship, full of distrust and suspicion, between Donelson and Jackson that lasted until the "Hero of New Orleans" died in 1845. Donelson later left the Democratic party in a tiff and joined the American, or Know Nothing, party, which selected him as Millard Fillmore's running mate in 1856. Though Donelson tried to establish himself as his uncle's political successor and legator, his friends and foes alike accused him of trading on his uncle's name to gain political and financial success.

The life of Andrew Jackson Donelson illuminates the expectations placed upon young southern men of prominent families as well as the complexities and contradictions in their lives. In this biography, Cheathem awakens interest in a nearly forgotten but nonetheless intriguing figure in American history.



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