

15 Presidents Irish Ancestry

Andrew Jackson (7th)

Benj. Harrison 23rd

Chester Arthur 21st

Woodrow Wilson 28th

James Buchanan 15th

U.S. Grant 18th

James Polk 11th

JFK

Ronald Reagan

Theo. Roosevelt 26th

F.D. Roosevelt

Grover Cleveland 22nd, 24th

Andrew Johnson 17th

William McKinley 25th

She tells me, 'These portraits, which were based on oil paintings and photograph, were created in McKelvey's studio in the centre of Belfast. Since he was one of the best artists of his time he managed to create strong likenesses and of course the whole collection is very appropriate for our story here at the Ulster American Folk Park.'

Surveying the collection as a whole, it strikes me that the faces represented resemble men one might meet on the street in Northern Ireland today. The number included reflects the fact that **one in four US presidents trace their ancestry back to Ulster.**

The exhibition includes a map of the north of Ireland illustrating the areas of the country whence the presidential ancestors came: **Polk and Buchanan from Donegal; Grant and Wilson from County Tyrone; Cleveland, Arthur, Jackson, Johnson, McKinley, Harrison and Theodore Roosevelt from County Antrim.** Six of the presidents were Democrats and five were Republican. **All of them were Protestants, mainly Presbyterians, though William McKinley was a Methodist, Chester Alan Arthur an Episcopalian and Theodore Roosevelt a member of the Dutch Reformed Church.**

Andrew and Elizabeth Jackson, the parents of the seventh American president Andrew Jackson (Democrat 1829-1837), left their home in the Boneybefore district of Carrickfergus in 1765 and sailed from the port of Larne to North Carolina, where their son was born in a frontier log cabin in 1767. Jackson trained as a lawyer then joined the army and rose through the ranks to become the victorious commander of the US troops who defeated the British at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815. Though strict, he was popular with his soldiers who said he was 'tough as old hickory' (the wood used to make baseball bats), and the nickname of 'Old Hickory' stuck. Jackson formed America's Democratic Party and his image still appears on the 20 dollar bill.

Believed to be related through his mother to the Irvine and Bulloch families of Larne, he described the Scots-Irish as 'a stern, virile, bold and hardy people who formed the kernel of that American stock who were the pioneers of our people in the march westwards.' On the campaign trail he excited audiences with his high-pitched voice and pounding fist. During his time in the White House, he negotiated the end of the Russian Japanese war which gained him the Nobel Peace prize. He controversially invited the black civil rights leader and educator, Booker T Washington to dinner which prompted the ragtime composer, Scott Joplin, to write his first opera, *A Guest of Honor*. At the time of his death in 1919 Roosevelt was able to say, 'No man has had a happier life than I have led; a happier life in every way.'

Woodrow Wilson the 28th president (Democrat 1913-21) was a grandson of James Wilson who emigrated to North Carolina from Dergalt near Strabane in 1807. Proud of his Ulster-Scots heritage, he once said, 'My father's father was born in the north of Ireland. I myself am happy there runs in my veins a very considerable strain of Irish blood and a Scottish conscience.' Wilson, who visited Belfast in 1899, was a lecturer at Princeton College before he became president. Though America remained neutral at the outbreak of World War I, Wilson led his country into war in order to 'make the world safe for democracy.' When his first wife, Ellen Louise Axson, died, he married a wealthy and capable widow, Edith Bolling Wilson, who greatly supported him towards the end of his presidency, especially when he suffered a stroke. After the war, Wilson negotiated the peace treaty that led to the formation of the League of Nations and won the Nobel Prize for peace in 1919.

Forthcoming events related to the exhibition include a talk by local historian Ronnie Hanna at Woodrow Wilson's ancestral home at Dergalt outside Strabane on September 11. On 28th September, at the Ulster American Folk Park, Irene Martin will describe her efforts to trace her own links with James Buchanan, 'In Search of Buchanan'. Heather Montgomery

John Knox. His Scottish born great grandfather Robert Bruce Polk (Pollok) settled first in Lifford in East Donegal before emigrating to Maryland around 1680. Polk, who was sometimes called 'Young Hickory' because of his close association with former president Jackson established the Smithsonian Institute and the Naval Academy and introduced the first US postage stamp. Having pledged to serve for just one term, he accomplished all his declared objectives and by the end of his presidency, the USA extended from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. Nevertheless he is regarded as one of his country's more inconsequential presidents.

James and Elizabeth Speer Buchanan, the parents of America's 15th president, James Buchanan (Democrat 1857-1861) hailed from Deroran near Omagh, though his father emigrated from Ramelton in Donegal in 1783. **Buchanan**, the only bachelor president in the White House, **once said, 'My Ulster blood is my most priceless heritage.'** He was unable to reconcile the sharply divided pro-slavery and anti-slavery lobbies in the north and the south or to deal with the secession that led ultimately to the American Civil War. Because of this he has been ranked by historians as one of the worst president in American history. On his final day in office, he remarked to his successor, Abraham Lincoln, 'If you are as happy in entering the White House as I shall feel on returning to Wheatland, you are a happy man.'

The grandfather of the 17th president Andrew Johnson, (Democrat 1865-69) also named Andrew, came from Mounthill outside Larne in County Antrim. Johnson worked as a tailor for many years then became Mayor of Greeneville in East Tennessee, a town largely inhabited by Scots-Irish settlers. He was Vice President to Abraham Lincoln before assuming the Presidency on Lincoln's assassination in 1865. The shooting of the President was part of a conspiracy that planned to kill the vice president as well but Johnson's would-be assassin got drunk instead. As his portrait illustrates, Johnson was a handsome man who was always impeccably dressed.

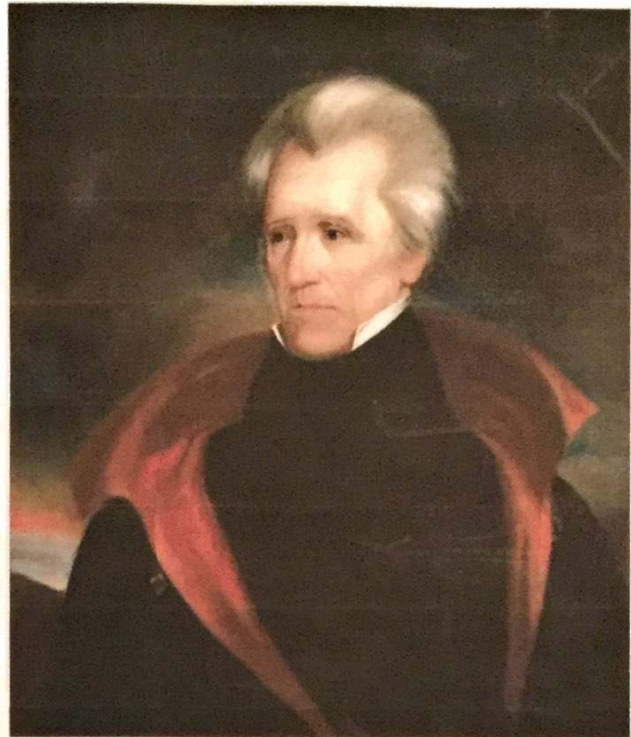
of Derganagh near Ballygawley. Sometimes referred to as 'US Grant', he successfully commanded the Union army in the American Civil War. As president he made peace with the Indians on the plains and restored stability after 8 years of war. **He was the first president to visit Ireland, arriving in Derry~Londonderry in 1879** where he was granted the freedom of the city. He commissioned his friend Mark Twain to publish his memoirs.

In 1801, the grandfather and father of Chester Alan Arthur, the 21st president (Republican 1881-85), emigrated to Canada from Dreen near Cullybackey in County Antrim and then settled in Vermont. Dignified, tall, and handsome, with clean-shaven chin and side-whiskers, it was said of Chester A. Arthur that he 'looked like a President.' A graduate of Princeton College he became a lawyer and won civil rights cases such as that of the African American, Elizabeth Jennings who was denied a seat on a Manhattan Street car. Commenting on his presidency, Alexander K. McClure recalled, 'No man ever entered the Presidency so profoundly and widely distrusted, and no one ever retired ... more generally respected.'

Arthur's successor, Grover Cleveland, who served twice as 22nd and 24th president (Democrat 1885-89 and 1893-97) had links with County Antrim through his maternal grandfather, Abner Neal. A lawyer, he became Governor of New York before rising to the presidency. Cleveland who weighed 250 lbs was the only president to get married in the White House. His young wife, Frances Folsom, gave birth to their first child in 1893.

Andrew Jackson Genealogy

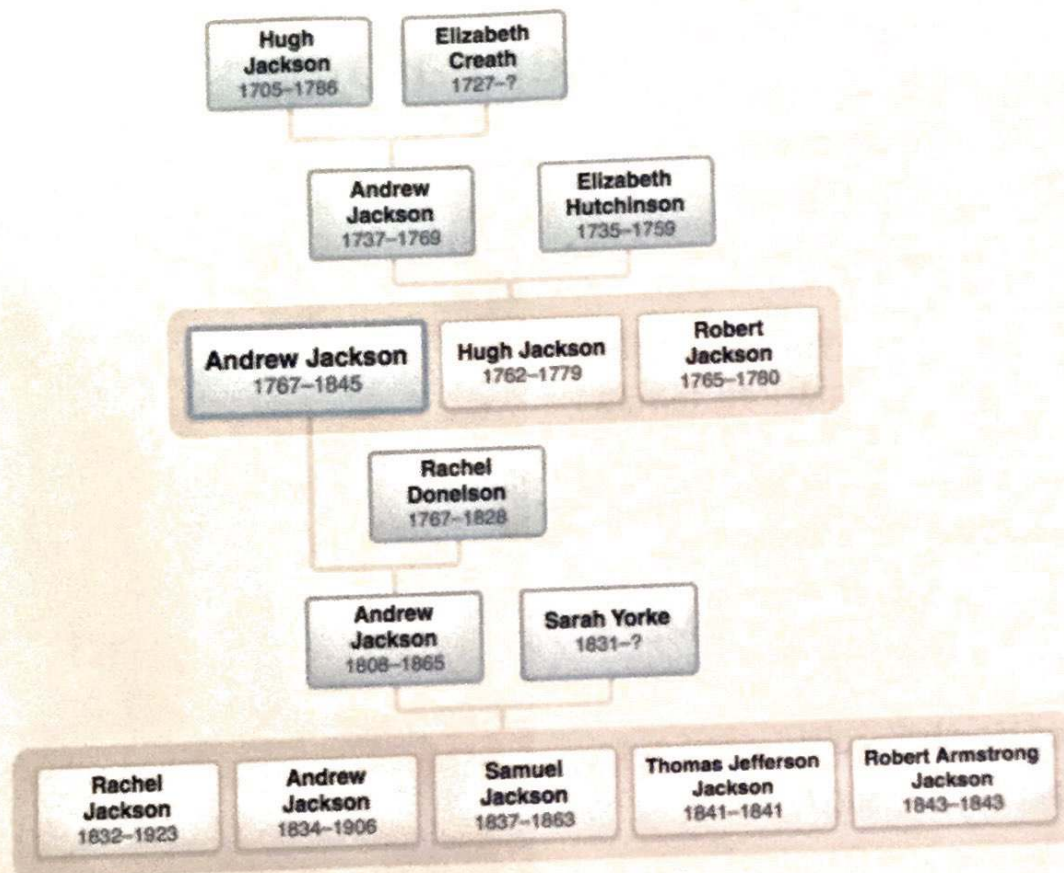
President Andrew Jackson, known today as the first "citizen president", personifies the American dream. Jackson's family history is filled with immigrants turned patriots, family loss and triumph. Andrew Jackson, seventh president of the United States, was the first of his family to be born in the Colonies on 15 March 1767 in the town of Waxhaws, on the border of North Carolina and South Carolina. His parents, Andrew Jackson Senior and Elizabeth



Hutchinson, and two brothers, Hugh and Robert, emigrated from Northern Ireland, coming to the Colonies to seek a better life. It is unimaginable that they would conceive of the idea that their youngest, Andrew, would one day become president of a nation that did not yet exist at the time of his birth.

Over the course of the first 14 years of Andrew Jackson's life, the immediate Jackson family tree witnessed much turmoil and strain framing who Andrew would ultimately become. Losing his father at the age of two, his mother at the age of 14, and his two brothers shortly thereafter, Andrew chose patriotism over grief, enlisting in the army, fighting against British tyranny during the Revolutionary War. He then studied law, ran for public office in Tennessee, rose in the army ranks in various wars and battles and sat as senator and finally, president of the United States.

Jackson Family Tree



Jackson Family History

As Andrew Jackson's formative years were marred with suffering and death, it is understandable that there is some confusion as to Jackson's family history. Although historians differ in opinion regarding the distant ancestry of President Jackson, his father, Andrew Jackson Senior, was born in Northern Ireland on July 20, 1737 to Hugh Jackson, a linen draper, and Elizabeth Creath. According to a family bible discovered in North Carolina, his parents were married on October 12, 1727 by Reverend James Craig at the parish church of Dundee, Northern Ireland. Andrew Jackson Sr. married Elizabeth Hutchinson, youngest daughter of Charles Hutchinson and Sarah McConnell at the parish church of Carrickfergus, Northern Ireland on February 7, 1759. Of this union came three boys, Hugh Jackson, born October 10, 1762 in Antrim, Northern Ireland; Robert Jackson, born October 16, 1765, in Northern Ireland, town not known; and Andrew Jackson Jr., born March 15, 1767 in Waxhaws, North Carolina.

Andrew Jackson Sr. and Elizabeth made the difficult choice to uproot themselves, as well as their two children Hugh and Robert, to sail across the Atlantic to the American colonies in search of prosperity and opportunity. It is believed they arrived soon after their son Robert was born and settled in the town of Waxhaws, on the border of North and South Carolina. Life became very difficult for the Jackson family as their father, Andrew Sr. died shortly after Andrew Jr. was born. During his early childhood, Andrew Jr. received sporadic education and when the American Revolution began, the Jackson family made their allegiance known.

This war for American freedom caused terrible heartbreak to Andrew Jr., forcing him to ally himself, heart and soul to fighting for freedom, or allowing himself to be destroyed. A young 14 years old Andrew Jr. decided to join the American forces in the War, subsequently being captured at the battle of Hanging Rock. While a prisoner of war he received a wound to his arm for refusing to blacken the boots of his British captors. His brothers Hugh and Robert enlisted in the conflict as well and both were killed; Robert from wounds received as a prisoner of war after being captured with Andrew and Hugh at the battle of Stono. His mother, Elizabeth, fell ill with ship fever returning from Charleston, South Carolina, where she had been helping friends and neighbors held as prisoners of war in Charleston Harbor.

After the horrific formative period of the Revolutionary War, Andrew Jackson chose to study law in Salisbury, North Carolina. He then moved to Jonesboro, Tennessee and began his political career as the Solicitor of the Western District of North Carolina. During this time he married Rachel Donelson. Later, during his first campaign for the presidency he received criticism for marrying Rachel before her divorce was final. Jackson blamed her early death in 1828 partially upon this harsh criticism. They were unable to have their own children but adopted a son, Andrew, born December 4, 1808 in Davidson, Tennessee. From this son came a limited amount of

Jackson descendants as Andrew III had four sons, two of which died in infancy, one dying during the Civil War, and one daughter. Their surviving son Andrew IV had two children and their daughter Rachel had nine children, thus limiting the amount of "Jackson" descendants.

Andrew Jackson lead a very politically prominent life, elected to the fourth and fifth congresses after Tennessee entered the Union, the United States Senate, the State Supreme Court and ultimately the United States Presidency, elected to two terms. President Jackson was also a very well respected military leader serving during the Creek War, becoming Major General in 1814 during the War of 1812, defeating the British in New Orleans, as well as serving in the 1st Seminole War, overthrowing the Spanish governor in Florida. President Jackson is not only one of the most beloved US presidents, but one of the most revered historical figures in US history, proving that anyone, no matter the economic or personal circumstance, can rise to greatness.



Ancestral Homes

BELOW:

This tiny stone outbuilding is all that remains of the ancestral home of the Kennedy family; their story is told at the Kennedy Centre, New Ross.

Just over the border into Donegal at Lifford ¹³, near Strabane, Cavanacors House, built in 1600, was the home of Captain Robert Polk who emigrated to Maryland about 1860 with his wife, a Miss Tasker, also from Strabane. His great great great grandson, James Knox Polk, became the 11th US President (1845-49).



BELOW:

The birth and baptismal certificate of President Ronald Reagan's great-grandfather, who emigrated first to England, and then, in 1858, to America.

The Kennedy ancestral home still stands in the tiny village of Dunganstown ⁴⁸, but is now no more than an unimpressive stone outbuilding at the entrance to a farm occupied by Mary Anne Ryan, a cousin of the late President.

This may be a disappointment to the many Americans who visit it; but a new Kennedy Centre has been opened in New Ross ⁴⁷ nearby from where his great grandfather emigrated. Apart from telling the Kennedy story, it claims that anybody whose ancestors sailed to Ellis Island in New York from any part of Ireland or Liverpool between 1848 and 1925 can trace them through its database. A grander memorial to the late President is the John F. Kennedy Arboretum. Extending to 252 hectares, with 4,500 trees and shrubs from all over the world, it lies at the foot of Slievecoilta, a 271m hill south of New Ross. A motor road runs to the summit, from which six counties of Ireland can be seen on a clear day. The project was initiated with financial help from American citizens of Irish origin, and is now run by the Irish Forestry Board.

Taking the main road west from Waterford to Clonmel, and then minor roads, you arrive at Ballyporeen ⁵¹, the ancestral village of President Reagan. The family house was pulled down at the time that Ireland joined the Common Market when, in a spirit of optimism, many small farms were amalgamated into larger units; the Reagan cottage stood in the way. However, the village does have a Ronald Reagan Centre which tells the story of his visit by helicopter on 3 June 1984 when he was shown the register in which was recorded the baptism of his great grandfather in the Church of the Assumption in 1829; and there is now a public house named after him.

Birth and Baptismal Certificate

Diocese of Waterford & Lismore Parish of Ballyporeen

On examination of the Register of Baptisms of above Parish I certify that according to it Michael Reagan was born on the 26th day of September 1829, and was baptised according to the Rites of the Catholic Church on the 3rd day of September 1829 in the Church of St. Assumption Ballyporeen by the Rev. John Redmond

Parents Thomas Reagan (Dooley)
Margaret Murphy

Sponsors William Reagan
Catherine Walsh

Confirmed no record Married no record

Signed Yr. Father Canon P. S. S.

Given this 26th day of September 1829 at Ballyporeen, Co. Wick, Ireland.

VERITAS SO. LIT. DUBLIN