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## **PRESIDENT JAMES MONROE VISITS HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA**

By Coy E. Michael

On June 2, 1819 three men on horseback arrived at the Eastern edge of Huntsville. They inquired as to a place to spend the night and were advised there was an Inn on the public square. The men were not immediately identified until they arrived at the Inn. Soon word spread through the town that President James Monroe was here with, Mr. Gouveneur, his private secretary, and Lieutenant Monroe, of the Army.

The *Alabama Republican* newspaper printed on June 5, 1819 contained the following: “No intimation of his intention to visit our town had been received by any individual in it, but the citizens solicitous to shew their respect to the Chief Magistrate of the Union, appointed a committee to wait upon his Excellency and invite him to a public dinner.

On Wednesday at 4 o'clock, the President and suit together with more than one hundred of the most respectable citizens of Madison County sat down to a sumptuous entertainment prepared by Capt. Irby Jones, at which Col. LeRoy Pope acted as President assisted by C.C. Clay and Henry Minor Esqrs., as Vice-Presidents. After the cloth was removed, C. C. Clay Esqr. addressed the President [with a lengthy speech]. Twenty-one toasts were given. The first toast was to “Our Country” followed by toasts to Major General Andrew Jackson, to General John Coffee, to our Navy, to Agriculture and many more. The President rose and gave an additional toast “To the Territory of Alabama –

may her speedy admission into the Union advance her happiness, and augment the national strength and prosperity". He returned thanks to the company for their kind expressions toward him.

The *Alabama Republican* continues: "The company rose from the table about sunset highly delighted with the entertainment they had received and the opportunity they had enjoyed of demonstrating their great regard and affection for Mr. Monroe, who now appeared to them more like a plain citizen than the Chief Magistrate of a great nation".

The Presidential visit was part of his tour through the south to examine the various fortifications and to strengthen them against foreign aggression.

The President left the following day, toward Nashville, escorted by a number of respectable citizens several miles on his way, the whole company being on horseback.

The *Nashville Gazette*, Saturday, June 12. 1819, reported the following: On Wednesday last about 3 o'clock, p.m. James Monroe, Esq. President of the United States, arrived in Nashville. He left the residence of Major General Jackson, on that day accompanied by the General, his Staff and Major General Gaines. --- A few miles from town he was received by a body of Volunteers under to order of Cols. Williamson and Phillips and a large collection of citizens on horseback, who escorted him to town."

Prior to his visit to Huntsville President James Monroe visited Brainerd Mission, in the Chattanooga area, on May 27 and 28, 1819<sup>i</sup>. He was accompanied by General Edmund Pendleton Gaines. This was the first

presidential visit to the Hamilton County area. He donated \$1,000 as a personal gift to the work of the mission. The mission was established in 1817 as a religious and an educational institution for Cherokee Indians. The mission ended in 1838 with the Cherokee removal.

The Jackson County Chamber of Commerce published a brief early history of the county. A paragraph from that article follows: "It is very probable that Jackson County had a very important visitor ride down its old stage road the latter part of May 1819. President James Monroe visited the Brainerd Mission School for Cherokee Indians on May 27 and May 28, 1819 and arrived in Huntsville, unannounced, June 1<sup>st</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> The History of Hamilton County and Chattanooga, Tennessee, Vol. 1 by Zella Armstrong, Lookout Publishing Company, Chattanooga, Tennessee 1931.