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Although Kentucky law forbade dueling, mere legislation could not stop what some people considered the means for an insulted man to maintain his honor. The history of the commonwealth is replete with stories of wronged individuals issuing a challenge to their detractors.

Among the notable characters that participated in a duel on Kentucky soil was none other than Andrew Jackson. Never one to receive an insult without a stern reaction, he readily accepted a violent conclusion to an affair of honor. On May 30, 1806, Jackson, and attorney Charles Dickinson, both of Tennessee, chose Logan County, Kentucky as the site of their duel.

Why did two Tennesseans leave their state for Kentucky to settle their differences? The answer is simple. Both men were prominent in their state, and neither of them wanted to be culpable to the Tennessee authorities for participating in a duel. After all, Jackson, had a law practice, and had served as a judge of the Tennessee Court of Appeals, and as a congressman. He owned some 50,000 acres, and had great influence in both political, and economic matters in Tennessee.

Dickinson also had his reasons for not fighting a duel in his home state. He was a popular figure in Nashville society. He also had a reputation of being the best pistol shot in all of Tennessee. His demeanor, however, suffered when he indulged in too much drink. His friends noted that he had a tendency to talk too freely, and often made disparaging remarks about prominent people.

Some Tennesseans would not have been upset if someone dealt with Jackson. During his career as an attorney, and as a politician, he had made a number of dedicated enemies. They would be pleased indeed, if someone removed Jackson from their state, alive or dead. Since Dickinson was such a crack shot, he would do nicely to rid Tennessee of the unpredictable Jackson.

Dickinson's reputation of drinking too much, and being loose-tongued, made him an ideal candidate to eventually challenge Jackson to a duel. Since both Dickinson and Jackson admired fine racehorses, and both men loved to attend the races, it was inevitable that the two would one day be brought together in a less than friendly manner. In the fall of 1805, the two men did have a confrontation.

A race between Jackson's horse Truxton, and Captain Joseph Erwin's excellent horse, Ploughboy, did not occur as scheduled. Ploughboy went lame, and Captain Erwin withdrew his horse and paid the forfeit with notes. This satisfied all concerned, but one. Dickinson was Erwin's son-in-law. Feeling pressure from Jackson's enemies, Dickinson became convinced that Jackson, and those who associated with him had to be less than the best people in the community.

Dickinson, according to local gossip, had made some unkind remarks regarding Rachel, Jackson's wife. Since their marriage, gossip had tainted Rachel as an adulteress. Their reasoning for this slander came from an unfortunate misunderstanding between Rachel and her first husband, Lewis Robards of Harrodsburg, Kentucky. Jackson and Rachel had met Jackson in 1790, at the home of her mother, Mrs. John Donelson. As a widow, Mrs. Donelson had opened her home to boarders to help maintain her household. Jackson boarded there after his arrival in Tennessee. Rachel and Jackson became attracted to one another, and Robards, known as a very jealous man, left the Donelson household for Kentucky.

In a fit of pique, Robards requested that the Virginia legislature (Kentucky was still part of Virginia) grant him permission to divorce his wife. He received the right to proceed with the divorce, but did not act upon it for another two years. During this time, Jackson and Rachel presuming the divorce had taken place, married in the summer of 1791.

When word arrived that Robards had not finalized the divorce proceedings, Jackson and Rachel found themselves living in a social quandary. In 1793, the Mercer County Court Robards request for a divorce from Rachel. The Jacksons then remarried in January 1794. The damage to their reputations had already been done. For the remainder of their married life, Jackson and Rachel had to suffer from malicious gossip regarding their early relationship.

Jackson took any remarks that might sully his wife's good name as a personal affront. When he heard that Dickinson had spoken badly about Rachel, he called on Dickinson to account for his words. Taken aback by the confrontation, Dickinson apologized, telling Jackson that he did not recall any remarks, but was drunk, and did not mean to give offense. Jackson accepted Dickinson's explanation and let the matter drop.

Within a brief time, Dickinson again, while inebriated, made an uncharitable statement on the character Rachel Jackson. This time Jackson went to Captain Erwin and asked him to restrain his son-in-law from slandering Rachel. The matter might have ended there, if Thomas Swann, a friend of Dickinson, had not circulated a story that Jackson had questioned the validity of the notes given by Captain Erwin to Jackson for the forfeit of the horse race.

Jackson became furious when he heard this gossip. He threatened to cane Swann for his calumny. When the two did meet at Winn's Tavern, Jackson made good his promise to punish Swann. After enduring Jackson's wrath, Swann wrote a column in the Nashville newspaper, the *Impartial Review and Cumberland Repository*, giving his view of Jackson's actions. Jackson replied in a two-column attack on Swann. He called Swann a "puppet and lying valet for a worthless drunken, blackguard scoundrel... Charles Dickinson."

Dickinson labeled Jackson "an equivocator and a coward." He then dared Jackson to challenge him. Nothing came of this exchange due to Dickinson leaving Nashville on a trip to New Orleans.

The tensions between the two men became worse when a rematch between Truxton and Ploughboy took place on April 3, 1806. Truxton horse won the race and netted some \$10,000 for Jackson and his supporters. This had been more than a horse race; it had now become an affair of honor.

Dickinson returned to Nashville on May 20, and felt prepared to end his difficulties with Jackson once and for all. He had practiced his already excellent marksmanship, and could now finish off Jackson with relative ease. The residents of Nashville knew that it would only be a matter of time before the two men would face each other on the field of honor.

On May 21, Dickinson prepared to publish his opinion of Jackson in the newspaper. He called Jackson "a worthless scoundrel, a poltroon and a coward." General Thomas Overton warned Jackson that these remarks would appear in the paper on May 24. Jackson went to the editor of the paper and read the inflammatory statement for himself. He then proceeded to send a challenge to Dickinson and demand satisfaction.

Dickinson and Jackson agreed to meet on Friday, May 30, 1806 at Harrison's Mills on the Red River, in Logan County, Kentucky at seven in the morning. Both men agreed that the distance between the two duelists would be 24 feet. At the command of fire, the two could discharge their pistols when they pleased.

Serving as seconds, Thomas Overton stood for Jackson, and Hanson Catlett for Dickinson. Both men swore to shoot down either man if they fired before the signal to do so. Overton called out to Dickinson, "Are you ready?" Both men replied in the affirmative. Overton called on the men to "Fire!"

Dickinson fired first. Observers saw a small puff of dust rise from Jackson's coat near the area of his heart. Jackson clutched his chest. Instead of falling to the ground, Jackson steadied himself, and raised his pistol toward his opponent. Horrified, Dickinson faltered, and cried out, "Great God, have I missed him?" Overton ordered Dickinson to stand his ground. Dickinson stood at the appointed spot and turned away as Jackson readied to fire his weapon.

To Jackson's dismay, his pistol did not fire. He cocked the gun again and fired a shot that struck Dickinson in the side and, the bullet had proceeded toward the opposite hip. Blood quickly gushed from the wound. Jackson had been wounded. Dickinson's bullet had struck Jackson just over the heart, but had grazed the breastbone, and broken some ribs. The wound was worse than Jackson would admit. He told his friends not to let Dickinson know that he had wounded him.

Friends carried Dickinson to a house where he was placed on a mattress. Bleeding profusely, Dickinson's blood soon completely soaked his bed. Throughout the day, Dickinson cried out in extreme agony. About nine o'clock in the evening he asked why the lights had been put out. Within five minutes of his question, Dickinson died.

Andrew Jackson's wound remained with him for the rest of his life. It did not heal, and caused him pain and ill health. His enemies did not let him forget his dueling past. As a candidate for the presidency, Jackson endured insults and ridicule for his participation in dueling. Although he went on to win two terms as president, he could never forget that day in 1806, when he and Charles Dickinson shed their blood on the soil of Kentucky.