

Andrew Jackson's Inauguration

Many of Andrew Jackson's supporters turned out on the streets of Washington, D.C., to observe his inauguration on March 4, 1829. To them the inauguration marked the beginning of a great new era for the common people. To others, the events of inauguration day were too rowdy. In the following document, an observer named Margaret Bayard Smith describes what she saw that day. The excerpt (including misspelled words) are from a letter Mrs. Smith wrote to a friend.

"[Washington] March 11th, Sunday [1829]
Thousands and thousands of people, without distinction of rank, collected in an immense mass round the Capitol, silent, orderly and tranquil, with their eyes fixed on the front of that edifice, waiting the appearance of the President... The door... opens, ... the old man with his grey locks, that crown of glory, advances, bows to the people, who greet him with a shout that rends the air... It was grand,--it was sublime! An almost breathless silence, ... and the multitude was still,---listening to catch the sound of his voice, tho; it was so low, as to be heard only by those nearest to him. After... his speech, the oath was administered to him by the Chief Justice...

[Now I] will give you an account of the inauguration in mere detail... By ten o'clock the Avenue was crowded with carriages of every description, from the splendid Barronet and coach, down to wagons and carts, filled with women and children, some in finery and some in rags, for it was the peoples President, and all would see him; the men wall walked...

When the speech was over, and the President made his parting bow, the barrier that had separated the people from him was broken down and they rushed up the steps all eager to shake hands with him. It was with difficulty he made his way through the Capitol and down the hill... Here for a moment he was stopped... After a while a passage was opened, and he mounted his horse... then such a cortege as followed him! Country men, farmers, gentlemen, mounted and dismounted, boys, women and children, black and white...

[Later at the White House] what a scene did we witness! The Majesty of the People had disappeared, and a rabble, a mob, of boys, negros [sic], women, children, scrambling fighting, romping. The President, after having been literally nearly pressed to death and almost suffocated and torn to pieces by the people in their eagerness to shake hands with Old Hickory, had retreated through the back way or south front and had escaped to his lodgings at Gadsby's.

Cut glass and china to the amount of several thousand dollars had been broken in the struggle to get the refreshments, punch and other articles had been carried out in tubs and buckets, but had it been in hogsheads [a large keg of beer or wine] it would have been insufficient... for 20,000 people, for it is said that number were there, tho' I think the number exaggerated.

Ladies fainted, men were seen with bloody noses and such a scene of confusion took place as is impossible to describe, - those who got in could not get out by the door again, but had to scramble out of windows...

Ladies and gentlemen, only had been expected at this Levee, not the people en masse. But it was the People's day, and the People's President and the People would rule."

Smith, Margaret Bayard, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society* (1906); Leish, Kenneth, (ed.) *The American Heritage Pictorial History of the Presidents of the United States*; Seale, William, *The President's House* vol. 1 (1986).