

Judge Andrew Jackson in Jonesborough

Russell Bean was not distinguished alone because he was the first white child born within the limits of what became the present day State of Tennessee: he was said to have been the most perfect specimen of manhood in the whole country, without equal for strength, activity and physical endurance, and absolutely devoid of fear. He was a genius also: he was a gunsmith by trade, and it was said that he could make more implements of war and other things of utility with fewer tools, than any other man ever known in that day and country. He went to Connecticut, soon after he reached manhood, and brought back with him to the western world a supply of what were then modern tools with which he established a kind of manufactory of arms, too.

Bean had a flat-bottomed boat build under his direction, and with a cargo of arms of his manufacture, consisting of rifles, pistols, dirks, etc., he went alone down the Nolichucky River to the Tennessee, thence to the Ohio, and down the Mississippi to New Orleans, where he remained for about two years, engaged in foot races, horse racing, cock-fighting and other sports of the times in that great city. On returning to Jonesborough, he found his wife – who was a daughter of Colonel Charles Roberson, and who had borne him several children – nursing an infant. Her seducer, it was said, was a merchant of the town named Allen. Bean left the house without a word, got drunk, came back, took the baby out of the cradle, and **deliberately cut off both its ears close up to the head**, saying that “he had marked it so that it would not get mixed up with his children.”

Bean was arrested and, court being in session, he was tried and convicted of this act of inhuman cruelty, and sentenced in addition to other punishment, to be branded in the palm of the hand. This was done; whereupon he immediately **bit out of his hand** the part containing the brand and spat it out on the ground. He was also imprisoned, but soon escaped from jail, and was allowed to remain at large, for the reason that the officers were afraid of him. His wife soon got a divorce from him; but he was determined to kill Allen, and it was known that on several occasions he had secretly watched for him. Failing to get a chance at Allen, who was really in hiding. Bean sought a difficulty with Allen’s brother, whom he assaulted and beat unmercifully. For this he was indicted; but up to the time that court met with Jackson on the bench, the officers had not been able to arrest him, or at all events they had not arrested him.

The officers reported to Judge Jackson that **they could not take Bean**; that he was out at his cabin, on the south side of the town, armed, sitting

constantly, when at home, in the door, with his rifle by his side and his pistols in his lap, defying arrest and threatening to kill the first man who approached his house. Such was the report made in open court to Judge Jackson who immediately ordered: "Summon every man in the court house, and bring Bean in here dead or alive." Thereupon the Sheriff with a grim humor which does him infinite credit, responded, "**Then I summon your honor first!**" Jackson at once left the bench exclaiming, "By the Eternal, I will bring him in!"

Judge Andrew Jackson, followed at a respectful distance by a small crowd, proceeded to Russell Bean's cabin. When Jackson got within shooting distance, Bean arose and called out, "**I'll surrender to you Jackson, but you alone,**" and laid down his arms. Bean when asked later why he went into custody with the Judge responded to the effect that you could see it in his eyes that Jackson would not hesitate to kill a man. Jackson took Bean to the courtroom and fined him heavily.

Such was life on the remote western frontier in the late 1700's and it was said that Russell Bean was a man of fine appearance and engaging manners. He was "well read" for that era and could have been a leader but for some "**infirmities and peculiarities.**"

For the record Judge Andrew Jackson in 1789 was 22 years old.

Primary Source: John Allison, *Dropped Stitches in Tennessee History*, 1897.

John Allison in the Preface to his volume wrote:

I was born and brought up in Jonesborough in Washington County, Tennessee, and resided there until 1889. My mother, when I was a mere boy, first interested me and taught me about the pioneers and early history of my native state. Following up much learned from her, I frequently visited old gentlemen and aged ladies in Eastern Tennessee and a few in North Carolina, and conversed with them about the "old times" and their early lives, and from them obtained much information not to be gotten in any other way. By a formal order of the County Court of Washington County, made many years ago, I was given custody and possession of the very earliest court records made at Jonesborough (records from 1788 up to 1800) and had possession of them for two or three years.

I made, as best I could, original investigation as to facts plainly suggested by the proceedings of the courts, as to the men who constituted the court, their lives, character, etc. Where information obtained involved a conflicting date, I have given the one that seemed most probably the correct one.