

**Tennessee Historical Marker
at Tipton-Haynes Historic Site
Johnson City, Tennessee
Honoring Andre Michaux**

When George Washington was in his first term as President of the US, **André Michaux**, a scientifically trained European botanist, began his travels through the lands that are now the states of Tennessee and Kentucky. The prospect of exploring this region, then known as the “Territory South of the Ohio”, lured the botanist with the promise of discovery of a wealth of new plants unknown to science.

Michaux prudently abbreviated his initial journey in 1789 because of Cherokee hostilities, but returned in 1793, 1795 and 1796. In all, this intrepid botanist would spend about one hundred days exploring Tennessee from Elizabethton to Clarksville. He traveled in canoes, on horseback or by foot. Sometimes he traveled alone, sometimes with small groups. Once, when crossing the wilderness between the Clinch and the Cumberland, he joined a large group accompanied by an armed escort.

During these journeys Michaux’s efforts were rewarded with the discovery of many plants not then known to science. Some of the plants were spectacular. In 1796, during the first year of Tennessee statehood, he discovered the lovely yellowwood tree near Fort Blount on the Cumberland. The botanist immediately carried the news of his discovery to Governor Blount in Knoxville. Through the efforts of the Jackson County Historical Society in Gainesboro the yellowwood became recognized as Tennessee’s bicentennial tree and in 2005 the Society followed with a Tennessee Historical Marker as a memorial to Michaux’s discovery of the yellowwood.

Less than a week after leaving Governor Blount, Michaux arrived once again at the home of Colonel John Tipton on Sinking Creek (modern Johnson City). Colonel Tipton had met Michaux before on the botanist’s journey west in 1795. Both men were acquaintances of Thomas Jefferson, but Michaux was known to be more interested in talking about plants than people. Perhaps we find an echo of their conversation in Michaux’s journal notes about the abundance of flowers and trees that he found blooming in the area around Colonel Tipton’s. Michaux singled out the displays of bloodroot (*Sanguinaria*), spring beauty (*Claytonia*), and trout lilies (*Erythronium*) that had he had been so pleased to find saying that the “mountains were covered” with these flowers.

Today Colonel Tipton’s home stands as the centerpiece of the **Tipton-Haynes State Historic Site** in Johnson City. Moreover, André Michaux’s visits with Colonel Tipton are remembered in style. The last week in March along the site’s nature trail, named appropriately enough the “André Michaux Trail”, thousands of trout Lilies join a modest number of spring beauties, bloodroots and other flowers in a magnificent floral display. This natural wonder is one of the highlights of Tipton-Haynes’s annual “André Michaux Day” which also features birding, a native plant sale and a re-enactment of Michaux’s visit with Colonel Tipton.

In the future André Michaux’s visits with Colonel Tipton and his notes on the display of spring flowers he found in bloom will be remembered with a new Tennessee Historical Marker recently approved by the Tennessee Historical Commission. The Tennessee Native Plant Society has joined with the Biology Department of East Tennessee State University,

Tipton descendants and the André Michaux International Society (AMIS) to sponsor this marker honoring the botanist-explorer.

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