Forebears, Family, and Photography:
Generations of Hermitage Family Photographs

The viability of photographs as material culture proves to be exceptionally valuable in creating historic interpretive plans. They often serve as supplementary evidence to written records as well as provide context to subjects and events. Although the earliest forms of photography were not widely used until after Andrew Jackson’s death, the photographs of families housed in the Hermitage artifact collection are wonderful examples of how technology and history collide to produce long-lasting memories.

Andrew Jackson, Jr.
Daguerreotype, in brass metal case with textile lining

Although our current collection does not contain daguerreotypes or photographs of President Jackson, he was the second President to be photographed.
Until the mid-1800s, the histories of family lineages were often documented through the commissioning of portrait paintings. These paintings functioned as early iconographic evidence of life in early American society. At the Hermitage, multiple generations of the Jackson family were captured in oil paintings. Many of these remarkable pieces were created by the artist, Ralph W. Earl.

*The Jackson family portraits, c.1830, oil on canvas, created by Ralph W. Earl*
*From right to left: President Andrew Jackson, Rachel Jackson, Andrew Jackson Jr., Sarah Yorke Jackson*

*The Jackson family portraits, oil on canvas, created by Ralph W. Earl*
*From right to left: Rachel Jackson Lawrence, c.1835 Andrew Jackson Jr., c.1820*
Although President Jackson and his wife Rachel, didn’t have any children of their own, they opened their home to many children of their friends and family. A guest of Jackson once wrote in a letter that he remembered going to see Jackson on business and he remembers the General with a small child on each knee. This was quite a change from the hard military leader the world knew him to be.

With the development of the first photographic processes in the 1840s, the children of the Hermitage would have been one of the first generations to experience the transition of the primary method image documentation change from painted portraits to photography.

Colonel Andrew Jackson, III

Left: Ambrotype, in copper and wood case
Right: Black and white positive photographic print on paper mounted to a cardboard mat
From an early age, President Jackson understood the importance of family. Losing his family as a child took a heavy toll on him which resulted in his efforts to create strong family bonds. Although seen by many as the outspoken, fiery politician, his home life at the Hermitage was truly a reflection of his passion for maintaining kinship networks. These connections continue to be visible in the collection of Hermitage photographs of several families that span multiple generations.
Carrie Lawrence Bradfield, daughter of Rachel Jackson Lawrence in her wedding gown, 1892. This veil and gown was worn by her grandmother, Sara Yorke Jackson, in her 1831 wedding to Andrew Jackson Jr.

Rachel Jackson Lawrence laying in bed with granddaughter Sue Ray Symmes McCutcheon standing wearing a dark dress with a light lace collar, granddaughter Marian Symmes Candler seated, and great granddaughter Marian Candler Ward seated on her mother’s lap.
While stories of the Jackson family are well documented, it is equally as important to remember the stories of the enslaved African Americans who lived on this land for nearly sixty years and made significant contributions to The Hermitage plantation and the Jackson family. These individuals were recorded in a registry and listed by family groups as Jackson preferred to keep families together as units. A number of the enslaved households held as many as three generations of families.

After emancipation, there was a mass effort to document the accounts of those who were formally enslaved in oral history interviews and photography. Many of the photographs are the only records we have of these families and their connection to the Hermitage site.

_Enslaved woman and her two great-grandchildren on the Hermitage property._
_The photo was taken in near the doorway of one of the brick structures in the Hermitage Field Quarter._
_Stereograph print, black and white_
Hannah and Aaron Jackson, c. 1865
Cabinet card, photograph mounted on cardboard

Right: Alfred and his son, Augustus Bradley, c. 1900
Left: Augustus Bradley in cabin with daughter and granddaughter. Picture taken on the day of Alfred’s funeral, 1901
With nearly 2,000 images in the Hermitage collection, the interpretation throughout the site is able to move beyond the mansion and beautiful landscapes. We are able to tell a more inclusive history of various members of the Jackson family and other families who lived and worked on the Hermitage property for several generations.

*Ambrotype and tintypes of the daughters of Thomas Treanor, an early resident of Tulip Grove.*
Children of the Buntin family, former residents of Tulip Grove
From right to left: Charles, Horatio, Rachel, and Billy (William), c. 1918

Rachel Craighead Buntin in wedding gown with attendants at Tulip Grove, 1930
Black and white photographic print on thick paper
Reverend E.D. Finney and his children, Willie and Bob, c. 1866
Albumen print mounted on cardboard

Reverend John Horn and his wife and two daughters sitting in the pews of the Hermitage Church, c. 1964.
Black and white, glossy photographic print