

## **PRESIDENT JAMES K. POLK**

James Knox Polk, son of Samuel Polk, and grandson of Ezekiel Polk, was born on the 2nd of November, 1793 about eleven miles south of Charlotte, on the Camden road, on a plantation which, at his father's removal to Tennessee in 1806, became the property of Nathan Orr, and finally that of the late James Hennigan, Esq. The house in which James K. Polk was born, stood about two hundred yards south of the present crossing place of Little Sugar Creek, and about one hundred yards to the right of the public road in passing from Charlotte. The lingering signs of the old family mansion are still visible; and the plow, in this centennial year, runs smoothly over its site, presenting a more vigorous growth of the great Southern staple, cotton, than the adjoining lands. The plantation was a part of the valuable lands owned by Ezekiel Polk in the "Providence" settlement, and near the present flourishing village of "Pineville."

The family mansion, around which "Jimmy Polk" sported with his younger brothers and sisters, and wended their way in frolicsome mood to a neighboring school, was an humble building, made by joining two hewn log houses together, with a passage between, in the common style of the first settlers. In 1851 Mr. Hennigan, the last owner of the property, moved one half of the building, apparently the better portion; but with a badly decayed roof, to his barn-yard, and near his handsome residence on the rising ground south-east of its original location, and re-covered it, where it may be seen at the present time.

Samuel Polk, the father of James K. Polk, married Jane, a daughter of James Knox, a soldier of the Revolution, who lived at a place about midway between the residences of the late Rev. John Williamson and Benjamin Wilson Davidson, Esq., youngest son of Major John Davidson. He had ten children, of whom James K. was the eldest, and who early displayed quick, intuitive powers. He received the principal part of his education in North Carolina, and graduated in 1818 at the State University, with the highest honors of his class. While at college, he laid the foundations of his future fame and usefulness.

It is said he never missed a single recitation, or avoided a single duty during the whole course of his collegiate term. After graduating, he returned to Tennessee, his father's adopted state, commenced the study of law in the office of the Hon. Felix Grundy, and was admitted to the bar in 1820. In 1823, he entered the stormy sea of politics, in which he was destined to achieve a brilliant career. In 1825, he was elected to Congress, and in 1835, was made Speaker of the House of Representatives, which honorable position he held for five sessions. After serving fourteen years, with distinguished ability and impartiality, he declined a re-election. During this long and laborious service, he was never known to be absent, for a single day, from the House.

In 1839, after an animated contest, he was elected Governor of Tennessee. In May, 1844, he was nominated as a candidate for the Presidency of the United States. His majority in the Electoral College over Henry Clay for this high office was sixty-five votes. The great labor he performed at a

period of unexampled danger to the republic, and of difficulties with foreign nations, operated seriously upon his debilitated system, and hastened his end.

In May, 1844, in accepting the nomination, he declared in advance, that, if elected, he would only serve one term. And in a letter addressed to the Convention, through Dr. J.G.M. Ramsey, of Knoxville, he re-iterated his determination, and voluntarily declined, when many of his friends deemed his name the only available means of success. His precarious and constantly declining state of health, forcibly admonished him of his early departure from the scenes of earth. He calmly met his approaching end, and died at Nashville, on the 15th of June, 1849, in the forty-fourth year of his age.

When the mists of party and prejudice shall have subsided, and the dispassionate verdict of posterity be given, the services of James K. Polk will be acknowledged as unsurpassed in the annals of our nation; and his noble and disinterested example of only serving one term, will be regarded by all pure-minded occupants of the Presidential Chair, as worthy of imitation.

Mecklenburg county is proud of her son!

In the old "Polk Graveyard," nine miles from Charlotte, is the tombstone of Mrs. Maria Polk, a grand-aunt of President Polk, containing a lengthy eulogy, in poetry and prose, of this good woman.

The first sentence, "Virtus non exemptio a morte"[H] is neatly executed on a semicircle, extending over the prostrate figure of a departed female saint, sculptured with considerable skill on the soapstone slab, but now scarcely visible on account of the over-spreading moss and lichen. Immediately beneath the sainted figure is the expression, Formosa etsi mortua.[I] From the lengthy eulogy, the following extracts are taken:

"Here, unalarmed at death's last stroke,  
Lies in this tomb, Maria Polk;  
A tender mother, virtuous wife.  
Resigned in every scene of life.

\* \* \* \* \*

"To heavenly courts she did repair;  
May those she loved all meet her there.

"Supported by the hope of a happy death, and a glorious resurrection to eternal life, she bore a tedious and painful illness with a truly Christian fortitude. The last exercise of her feeble mind was employed in singing the 63rd of the second book of Dr. Watt's Hymns, in which, anticipating the blessed society above, she exchanged the earthly for the heavenly melody."

She died on the 29th of November, 1791, in the forty-fifth year of her age.

Source: Sketches of Western North Carolina, Historical and Biographical  
by Author: C. L. Hunter