



The Petticoat Affair: Manners, Sex, and Mutiny in Andrew Jackson's White House

John F. Marszalek

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This account of the Eaton Affair describes the story of how Peggy O'Neale Eaton, the wife of President Andrew Jackson's secretary of war, was branded a loose woman and snubbed by Washington society. The president's defence of her honour fuelled intense speculation and a scandal began.

The Petticoat Affair: Manners, Sex, and Mutiny in Andrew Jackson's White House Details

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Author : John F. Marszalek

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From Reader Review *The Petticoat Affair: Manners, Sex, and Mutiny in Andrew Jackson's White House* for online ebook

Kevin Larose says

A good account of the issue that consumed much of Andrew Jackson's first term.

Jim says

Enjoyed this quite a bit. Nothing new or earth shattering particularly, but a unique way to focus on Jackson's administration, and on the role gender played during the period!

Judy says

President Andrew Jackson's first administration was a difficult one marked by such controversial topics as Indian removal, the rechartering of the Bank of the United States, a tariff crisis, and nullification. But also occupying much of Jackson's attention in his first administration was a social scandal involving Margaret "Peggy" Eaton, the wife of Jackson's Secretary of War. Because of Jackson's life experiences and because Jackson viewed women as defenseless, he was always quick to defend the honor of women. So when Peggy Eaton, who was viewed as a loose woman by Washington society--she was outspoken and opinionated, her first husband died under questionable circumstances, and she worked in the tavern that her innkeeper family ran--was snubbed by the wives of most government officials, Jackson quickly rose to her defense. Peggy viewed the situation as being the result of envy and jealousy, but President Jackson felt it was a conspiracy aimed at casting judgment on his choice Cabinet officials and as an attempt to cripple his administration. Before the scandal was over, Jackson's entire Cabinet resigned, challenges to duels were issued, the presidential hopes of John C. Calhoun were destroyed, and Martin van Buren's political star was in the ascendency. An enjoyable read demonstrating that the contemporary scandals embroiling politics and political figures are just the latest in a long line.

Brooke says

It was interesting to read about the societal norms of early America. President Jackson's involvement in such a public and nonpolitical topic is one rarely seen since in history. Eaton was a woman who did not live by the proper rules of society and is remembered to this day as a social revolutionary, whether she intended it or not.

Lynne Burns says

The Petticoat Affair gave me new insight to Andrew Jackson's administration, as I was not familiar with this cast of players. What a character Margaret Eaton must have been! It was a tale of a women's honor, political ambition, and society in the early to mid 1800s. As John F. Marszalek noted, Margaret Eaton was a woman

who "just did not fit in."

At a time when President Jackson should have had the Nation's issues in mind, instead he chose his battles in the Eaton Affair.

Nathan says

The word "affair" printed in red, the catchy subtitle and the busty figure of the cover all hint of a racier story than Marszalek actually tells.

Anyone familiar with the historical record knows how the Eaton scandal played out, so I won't rehash it, or ruin the story for those who don't know. But I will say that Marszalek makes a bigger deal of it than I thought it deserved. Not that the book is a complete waste of time; Marszalek takes the obvious yet useful tack of casting this one scandal as a case study of social attitudes and gender roles in Jacksonian America. But this perspective, strong as I thought it was, is not Marszalek's main thesis, and the rest of his book seemed weak and noncommittal in comparison. He doesn't actually have much of a thesis at all. He merely recounts the historical record, which might be useful on its own terms if one hasn't read some more thorough accounts (Remini's, for one).

No matter. Marszalek is a little monotonous, but accessible enough and succinct enough to make his book bearable. A footnote to a deeper study, but inoffensive and convenient.

Carrie says

This book gives the reader a good understanding of the historical facts, with the ability of telling a story keeps you reading. So many times a Historical Book will lose the read due to its dryness, John Marszalek wrote in a way that kept me turning the page.

Suzanne says

I was a bit disappointed with this book. I expected it to have more in-depth analysis of the events of this so-called saga. However, it turned out to be a dry listing of the events with little to no commentary on them. As a reader, I felt as if the primary sources were cited to me rather than discussed. I feel I did not learn anything more about the political drama surrounding Margaret Eaton than I did during a college history course.

Although, having known little about Margaret Eaton's life post-Eaton's secretarial post, I did find it interesting to learn about her life in Spain, her third marriage, and what became of her in her later years.

Deirdre says

Before reading this book, I was familiar with the basics of the Peggy Eaton affair, but I had never read all the nitty gritty details. It was fascinating. It was also a bit depressing since it reminded me of middle school

lunch table drama.

Overall, the author did an excellent job showing how Jackson's personality caused the affair to have lasting political impact. (That said, saying it was the MAIN reason for the split with Calhoun is ridiculous.) I would recommend.

Pancha says

A strangely appropriate follow up to *History of White People* in that both Jackson and Margaret Eaton were Irish and therefor not good enough for DC elites.
