

As the Volunteers prepared to go ashore, a few officers were assigned to go into town to obtain wagons to haul the equipment. Troops remaining on the flatboats were left to study the landing area that they had long heard about—the notorious “Natchez Under-the-Hill.” Even before the town of Natchez had been built on the bluff, the Under-the-Hill district sprang up to cater to frontier boatmen and relieve them of their hard-earned wages through every vice known to appeal to them.

Under-the-Hill itself was not much to see, though. The wooden shacks built on stilts over streets of raw river mud looked as rough and impermanent as the games and other diversions that went on inside. Some stilts had given way during the 1811 earthquake and a chunk of the hillside had collapsed. Under-the-Hill gave Natchez the reputation of being so wicked that when the great earthquake struck, even a newspaper in the worldly New Orleans pointed its finger at the more sinful Natchez as the cause of the vengeance of God.

Despite the rough appearance of the buildings, music, shouts from games of chance, and fights offered excitement to young men far from home. Adding to the allure, topless women who greeted newly arriving boatmen from the upper-story windows of the bawdy houses were the first women the men had seen in weeks. Some Volunteers had likely seen such establishments, even if from a distance, but never so many crowded together in one place and none that felt free to elevate their vices to such a level. Young farm boys received a sudden education in the ways of the world.

Natchez Landing proprietors had honed their marketing, and Jackson’s soldiers were just the latest boatmen to arrive at their doors with pent-up energy and money to spend. After the infantry had been surrounded by uninhabited river banks for weeks, Natchez Under-the-Hill began working its temptations on four officers, who later were arrested by a patrol in one of its brothels. In just two days, it would become necessary to issue an order that all men outside camp without permission were to be rounded up.

As the men disembarked from the flotilla, Reverend Blackman no doubt recalled stories of Sodom and Gomorrah and warned the men about even casting their eyes on the evils of the place. If spiritual warnings were not enough, soldiers traded rumors that some houses built with rear walls hugging the bluff contained secret rooms tunneled into the hillside. Those establishments used the allures of fleshly pleasures to trick young men to enter their realm, then robbed them of even the shirts off their backs, killed them, and dumped their bodies through trap doors underneath. Young boys would be tempted to stay awake looking for dropping corpses. Older teens kept watch for more tempting sights.

Despite—or perhaps because of—these temptations, General Jackson warned his men to be on their best behavior as they entered Natchez. Subordinates were instructed to reinforce the order. The first impression the men would present to the city was crucial to the image Jackson projected of his ability to command.

Colonel Benton complied. He had observed the refinement of the city on the hill and he pictured the image his soldiers would create as they marched through on parade. The men had just spent a day washing their uniforms, and now they also had to clean up their behavior. Some of the younger soldiers had taken up all the bad habits of the older men to prove their manliness. The

officers had banned gambling but swearing had become a second language. Benton issued an order declaring that swearing was both ungentlemanly and unchristian, and it would reflect badly on the good reputation the men had already earned. Swearing was to be punishable. One of Reverend Blackman's first sermons to the infantry had been on the evils of swearing. He could assume that his sermon was bearing fruit.

To make certain there was no infraction of the General's order, Hynes also issued an order just prior to going ashore to tell the men that they were to pass through a "well polished" area. It was not just Natchez townspeople who would take notice. Like the publisher of the Nashville *Clarion* the same day, Hynes reminded the men that the Nation relied upon its citizen militia, "The eyes of the American nation is upon us. We are the forlorn hope of the militia of the union. On us depends the lost reputation of the bulwark and defense of a free people a well- organized militia."

It was important that the people who relied upon citizen troops for their defense know that Volunteers were respectable. Hynes wanted to hear only polite language and if the soldiers had forgotten how to speak in that manner, they should remain silent. Even if the men did not care how Natchez viewed them, the Natchez Trace created close connections between Natchez and Tennessee, and friends at home would soon know how they had performed.

The order seemed unnecessary to the lower ranks. From the cursing that Volunteers overheard at Under-the-Hill, if the sole purpose of Hynes's order was to impress onlookers, there was little reason to watch their language.

The Volunteers disembarked and proceeded up the steep climb of Silver Street. Rambunctious sounds and pungent odors from Under-the-Hill faded 200 feet up as the soldiers paused at the top of the Natchez bluff to form a line for a military parade through the town. The bluff also provided a commanding view of the river upstream from where they had arrived. The Volunteer infantry could congratulate themselves on their first victory. The mighty Mississippi River had not defeated them.

As Tennessee Volunteers began their march down the main street, they found that citizens were well-polished as promised.

Buildings that remained from Spanish occupation gave the soldiers the impression that they had entered a different world. Ladies wore perfumes and dressed more like earlier French settlers than women back in Tennessee. Scents of food cooking in the taverns drifted through the streets and mixed with Creole spices hanging from shop porches. Doors opened, and people filled balconies and galleries to see the Volunteers from Tennessee in lines longer than Natchez had ever witnessed.

One man stood out. There at the lead was the Andrew Jackson many Natchez townspeople had seen as a younger man at the race tracks and in taverns, but now impressively uniformed with all the accoutrements of an army. He commanded a procession of 1,400 infantry soldiers as their major general. It was a moment of personal triumph and transformation, the culmination of years of political work. Like his rival Wilkinson, Jackson now entered Natchez with the appearance of a conqueror, empowered by military command.