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DAVID CROCKETT IN TEXAS

By STANLEY J. FOLMSBEE AND ANNA GRACE CATRON

(Concluding "The Early Career of David Crockett,"
Publications No. 28, and "David Crockett: Congressman,"
Publications No. 29)

On November 1, 1835, less than three months after he had been defeated by Adam Huntsman in his campaign for re-election to Congress, David Crockett left his home in West Tennessee and began his journey to Texas. At any rate, such was his declared intention as expressed in a letter written the day before to his brother-in-law George Patton of North Carolina:

I have Concluded to drop you a line[.] the whole Connection is well and I am on the eve of Starting to the Texes—on to morrow morning myself Abner Burgin and Lindsay K Tinkle & our Nephew William Patton from the Lowar Country[;] this will make our Company[.] we will go through Arkinsaw and I want to explore the Texes well before I return[.]¹

This letter not only names David's companions at the beginning of the journey but also provides a hint as to his chief aim in going to Texas. As he had done several times before, he was out to explore new country, preparatory to moving his family to a new location farther removed from progressing civilization. For him this was not merely the reaction of a typical, restless frontiersman. He had recently received a serious political setback, and it is probable that he was planning to start his political life anew, as well as hoping to improve his economic well-being, on the Texas frontier. At the time he made his original decision in August to go to Texas, the rebellion of that province against the Mexican republic had not yet begun, but a month before he departed on November 1, hostilities had opened in a rather irregular manner on October 2. As he moved toward Texas Crockett was only one of a

¹ Quoted in James Atkins Shackford, *David Crockett: the Man and the Legend* (Chapel Hill, 1956), 210. Burgin was another of David's brothers-in-law; and Lindsey Tinkle a friend and neighbor. The nephew was the son of the deceased James Patton (brother of David's wife Elizabeth) who had recently come up from Mississippi because of a lawsuit involving an effort of two of the heirs to break the will of Robert Patton, David's father-in-law. *Ibid.*, 206-10.

great number of American volunteers who were to have a larger part in the early stages of the war than Texans themselves.²

Crockett's first stop was at Memphis, where he was entertained royally by his friends, including his former benefactor, Marcus B. Winchester. Also in the group was a future historian of Memphis, James D. Davis, who described the affair as a night-long tour of liquor dispensaries, characterized by brawling which David seems to have attempted to restrain. But he also made a number of speeches. In one of them he referred to his recent unsuccessful canvass, saying: "I told the voters that if they would elect me I would serve them to the best of my ability; but if they did not, they might go to h--l, and I would go to Texas. I am on my way now." As he crossed the Mississippi on a ferry boat, he was described as wearing "that same veritable coon-skin cap and hunting shirt." His only equipment was his "ever faithful rifle," and his "shot-pouch and powder-horn."³

The journey from Memphis to San Antonio de Bexar is described in a highly entertaining manner, but with complete unreliability, in *Col. Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas* (Philadelphia, 1836), allegedly based on a "diary" supposedly kept by David and found in the Alamo after its fall by a Charles T. Beale. Although accepted and used by several of Crockett's biographers, this work is almost entirely pure fiction, as has been shown very conclusively by Professor James A. Shackford in his recent work, *David Crockett: the Man and the Legend*. According to the Shackford version, the Philadelphia publishers, Carey and Hart, conceived the idea, after learning of Crockett's death in the Alamo, that a book about his adventures in Texas would not only capitalize on the sudden stimulation of national interest but also help them dispose of the considerable number of copies of their book about his "Tour to the North" which they still had on hand. Accordingly they asked Richard Penn Smith, the playwright, to prepare such a

² William C. Binkley, *The Texas Revolution* (Baton Rouge, La., 1952), 71, 96-97. See also Amelia Williams, "A Critical Study of the Siege of the Alamo and of the Personnel of its Defenders," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* (Austin), XXXVI (Apr. 1933), 251-87, XXXVII (July, 1933-Apr., 1934), 1-44, 79-115, 157-84, 237-312. Hereafter cited Williams, "Critical Study."

³ James D. Davis, *The History of the City of Memphis* (Memphis, 1873), 139-46. *Niles' Weekly Register* also recorded his departure from Memphis with his rifle and coon-skin cap. Shackford, *David Crockett*, 213. The rifle was the real "Betsy" of his hunting exploits and not the "pretty Betsy," as he called it, presented to him in Philadelphia in 1834. That gift rifle is now owned by a descendant, Mrs. A. Sidney Holderness, Philadelphia, Pa. *Ibid.*, 309 (n. 19).

volume; to make it appear to be David's own work they manufactured the myth of the "diary" and the Beale manuscript based upon it. Actually, these were nonexistent, and Smith used as the basis for the first two chapters of *Exploits* two letters which Crockett had written to Carey and Hart before he left Tennessee, and for the remainder of the volume he depended on his own imagination and such works about Texas as were available. Although the work was actually published by Carey and Hart, it carried as a cover-up the fictional names of P. K. and P. G. Collins on the title page as the publishers.⁴

Thus the delightful stories about the strange characters who allegedly became Crockett's companions—the gambler Thimbliger, the bee-hunter, the pirate, and the Indian—must be relegated to the realm of fiction,⁵ and we must turn to the scarce but more authentic sources of information concerning the journey. Two brief references were made in *Niles' Weekly Register*. On December 5 it reported, more prophetically than it realized: "Col. Crockett has proceeded to Texas—to end his days there. A supper was given him at Little Rock, Arkansas"; and on December 26: "The emigration to Arkansas is very great. . . . Col. Crockett has left Little Rock, with his followers, for Texas. Many others had the same destination."⁶

The journey to Little Rock had been made by boat—down the Mississippi and up the Arkansas. But then the party struck out overland and probably reached the Red River at Fulton, Arkansas. Between there and the Texas border they passed through a small town called Lost Prairie, where Crockett, short of funds, traded his watch to Isaac N. Jones for \$30.00. A short time after Crockett's death in the Alamo, Jones sent the watch to David's widow with a letter explaining the circumstances. During the preceding winter Crockett and several other

⁴ *Ibid.*, 273-81. The venture, despite its fictional character, appears to have been quite profitable.

⁵ John M. Myers, *The Alamo* (New York, 1948), 148, who suspected the work to be apocryphal, comments, "Yet if fiction, it is fiction of a rare sort, and it is a pity that Richard Penn Smith didn't give up adapting French plays and use a great deal more of his talents on that branch of literature." Also probably fictional is the story that at Helena, Arkansas, Crockett's boat was boarded by a group of bankers, soldiers, and speculators who subscribed eighty or ninety thousand dollars as a "Crockett's fund" to be entrusted to David Crockett and several Texan leaders, including Bowie, Travis, and Fannin, already on the battlefield, to aid in recruiting an army to march into Texas "and there await orders to join such forces as may be present to cooperate with the United States army. . . ." Edward S. Ellis, *The Life of Colonel David Crockett* (Philadelphia, 1884), 202-203; Charles F. Allen, *David Crockett: Scout* (Philadelphia, 1911), 271-72. The United States army was not likely to be officially connected with the Texas rebellion.

⁶ *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore), XLIX (1835-36), 225, 281.

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gentlemen had ridden up to his house and asked accommodations for the night. He could not accommodate them, but he arranged to get them quarters in a neighbor's dwelling. Crockett spent the next day with him, at which time the exchange of the watch for cash was made.⁷

After exploring the Red River country the Crockett party turned to the southwest and soon passed through Clarksville, now the county seat of Red River County, Texas. Near there they were warned by Mrs. James Clark, who rode after them and overtook them about five miles west of the town, to turn eastward and avoid the Comanche country because those Indians were on the warpath. While on a hunting trip under the guidance of another Texas pioneer, Henry Stout, they met James Clark himself, who gave them the same advice.⁸ It is probable, however, that Crockett disregarded these warnings and went on down through the interior of Texas to Nacogdoches, where he took an oath of allegiance to the Texas provisional government, and then turned eastward to San Augustine.⁹

It is possible, however, that as one careful student of the subject, Constance Rourke, believes, after reaching an impenetrable woods known as Jarnegan's Thicket, he decided to heed the warnings and returned to Fulton, on the Red River. From there, according to Miss Rourke, he took passage on a steamboat to Natchitoches, Louisiana, and in company with other volunteers then rode across the Texas border to Nacogdoches by way of San Augustine. After signing the oath at Nacogdoches, which Miss Rourke believes occurred on January 5, he returned to San Augustine and on January 9 wrote the last letter from his pen which is known to have survived.¹⁰

Addressed from "Saint Agusteen Texas" to "My Dear Sone & daughter [Margaret and Wiley Flowers, Crockett's P.O., Gibson County, Tennessee], 9th January 1836," it began:

This is the first I have had an opertunity to write to you with convenience[.] I am now blessed with excellent health and am in high

⁷ The letter was published in *ibid.*, Aug. 27, 1836, L, 432-33, from the Jackson, Tenn., *Truth Teller*. According to Shackford (p. 214) the watch is now owned by Mrs. A. Sidney Holderness, a descendant of David's. David also received Jones' watch as a part of the transaction.

⁸ [Claude V. Hall], "Early Days in Red River County," *Bulletin* (Nacogdoches) No. 38 (Jan., 1932), of the Stephen F. Austin State Teachers College, 59-60. See also, Shackford, *David Crockett*, 215.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Constance Rourke, *Davy Crockett* (New York, 1934), 168-74. Unfortunately, this work is not documented; and the date of the oath-signing on a reconstructed muster roll in the Texas Archives, as will be shown later, is January 14.

spirits although I have had many difficulties to encounter[.] I have got through Safe and have been received by everybody with the open ceremony of friendship[.] I am hailed with a hearty welcome to this country[.] A dinner and a party of ladies have honored me with an invitation to participate both at Nacogdoches and at this place[.] The Cannon was fired here on my arrival and I must say as to what I have seen of Texas it is the garden spot of the world the best land and the best prospects for health I ever saw and I do believe it is a fortune to any man to come here[.] there is a world of country here to settle[.]

Revealing his own plans of settlement, he continued:

It is not required here to pay down for your League of land[.] every man is entitled to his head right of 4000-428 [4,428] acres—they may make the money to pay for it on the land. I expect in all probability [probability] to settle on the Border [Bois d'Arc Creek?] or Chactaw Bro- [Choctaw Bayou?]¹¹ of Red River that I have no doubt is the richest country in the world[.] Good land and plenty of timber and the best springs & good mill streams good range clear water—and every appearance of good health and game plenty—It is in the pass where the Buffalo passes North to South and back twice a year—and bees and honey plenty—I have a great hope of getting the agency to settle that country and I would be glad to see every friend I have settled there[.] It would be a fortune to them all.

Thus is confirmed the hint in his letter of October 31 that his main purpose in going to Texas was to find a place to settle. That his volunteering for military service was the result of a later decision and was not without its political overtones is indicated by the following:

I have taken the oath of government and have enrolled my name as a volunteer for Six [?] months and will set out for the Rio Grand in a few days with the volunteers from the United States[.] But all volunteers is entitled to a vote for a member to the convention or to be voted for and I have but little doubt of being elected a member to form a constitution for this province[.] I am rejoiced at my fate. I had rather be in my present situation than to be elected to a seat in congress for life[.] I am in hopes of making a fortune yet for myself and family had as my prospects has been[.]

He closed with parental advice:

I have not wrote to William [his second oldest son] but have requested John [John Wesley, his eldest son] to direct him what to do[.] I hope you will show him this letter and also Brother John as it is not convenient at this time for me to write to them[.] I hope you will all do the best you can and I will do the same. Do not be uneasy about me I am among friends—I must close with great respects[.] Your affectionate father[.] Farewell. David Crockett to Wily & Margaret Flowers¹²

¹¹ The identifications in brackets are from *ibid.*, 167, 175.

¹² The original of this letter is owned by W. D. Pate, Martin, Tenn. It is quoted in its entirety but with inaccuracies by Miss Rourke (pp. 174-76); by Shackford (pp. 214, 216); by Emma Inman Williams, *Historic Madison: The Story of Jackson and Madison*

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The man before whom David took the oath of allegiance, Colonel John Forbes, two years later contributed to a Texas newspaper an interesting account of the event. When Crockett and several companions came to volunteer, Colonel Forbes wrote out an oath in a form which Crockett refused to accept because it required allegiance not only to the provisional government of Texas, but also to "any future government that may be hereafter declared." David insisted upon the insertion of the word "republican" between future and government, because he feared that some later government might be despotic. Forbes stated that the original document, with the word "republican" interlined, had recently been deposited in the office of the Texas secretary of war.¹³

That original record was destroyed when the Texas capitol was burned in 1855, but Colonel Forbes kept a "true copy" which he submitted years later to the Texas Archives, along with a reconstructed roll of those volunteers who took the oath of allegiance before him in January, 1836. That copy of the oath includes the word republican. The nineteenth and twenty-second names on the list of those signing, according to Shackford, are those of David Crockett and his nephew, William Patton; but the list does not include the names of the other two of David's original companions, Abner Burgin and Lindsey Tinkle, who presumably returned home instead of joining the Texas army.¹⁴

The date given on this reconstructed muster roll is January 14, 1836, but that must be inaccurate; David had already written on January 9 that he had signed the oath. According to Amelia Williams, one of the most careful investigators of the Alamo story, this muster roll, which is in the General Land Office of Texas, "gives three separate lists which contain, altogether, the names of more than a hundred volunteers who took the oath of allegiance before John Forbes at Nacogdoches on January 14, 1836."¹⁵ It seems unlikely that all of these men signed on the same day; the process may have been spread

County, Tennessee (Jackson, 1946), 427-28 (which appears to have been followed by Shackford); and by Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVII, 110. Photostatic copies of the original are in the University of Tennessee Library and in the possession of Ira N. Chiles, Knoxville.

¹³ *Niles' Weekly Register*, June 23, 1838, LIV, 258, from *Texas Telegraph*.

¹⁴ Shackford, *David Crockett*, 216-19. It is possible that Shackford confused the nephew's name with William H. Patton, another Tennessean who later became Houston's aide, whose name was on Forbes' muster roll. Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker (eds.), *The Writings of Sam Houston*, 8 vols. (Austin, 1938-48), 340n. According to Rourke (p. 152), the nephew was in Texas while Crockett was there, but at that time was "not traveling with Crockett."

¹⁵ Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVII, 166.

out over a period of two weeks or more. Therefore, it is possible that Miss Rourke's date of January 5 for David's signing may be approximately correct.

After the oath-taking sixteen or seventeen of the signers, according to a reminiscence published in 1841, secured horses, organized a company of "mounted volunteers" under Colonel David Crockett, and proceeded to San Antonio by way of Washington on the Brazos.¹⁶ Confirmation is supplied by seven requisitions on the provisional government of Texas for board for "Tennessee Mounted Volunteers" and signed by David Crockett and others while resting at Washington or between there and San Antonio. These requisitions indicate that there were eighteen or more men in the company.¹⁷ From these and other sources Miss Williams compiled a list of sixteen names of men she believes entered the Alamo early in February with Crockett or followed a few days later. Eleven of the group, including Crockett, she identified as Tennesseans, three as Kentuckians, one each from Virginia and Pennsylvania, and one as from "Kentucky-Tennessee." They were all ranked in the fort as privates, but Crockett and Joseph G. Washington bore "courtesy" titles as colonel, and William B. Harrison was listed as one of the captains in the fortress.¹⁸

When Crockett entered the Alamo early in February the provisional government of the rebellious province of Texas was in a state of utmost confusion, as had been the case ever since its inception. This government had been set up by a general "Consultation" which had convened November 1, 1835, and had adopted on November 7 a declaration of causes of taking up arms instead of a declaration of independence. The conservative majority was still hopeful that several Mexican provinces could be induced to rise in a general revolution with the aim of overthrowing President Santa Anna and re-establishing the constitution of 1824. The provisional government erected by the Consultation was

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 165, citing "A Volunteer of 1836" to Mr. Teulon, Mar. 22, 1841, *Austin City Gazette*. Miss Williams identifies the volunteer as A. L. Harrison, who became ill on the way and failed to reach the Alamo.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 165-66, citing Comptroller Military Service Records, Texas State Library. One signed by Crockett at Washington is dated January 23, 1836.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 167-68. Her list does not include the name of William Patton. There is evidence that some of the company, including David's cousin John Harris, "straggled" by the way to locate their headright land, and arrived a few days late. This fits in with the testimony of John Sutherland that Crockett entered the Alamo in company with twelve other men. *Ibid.*, 166; Dr. John Sutherland, *The Fall of the Alamo* (San Antonio, 1936), 11.

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composed of a governor, a council, made up of one member of each municipality, and a lieutenant governor who was to preside over the council. There was, however, a failure to differentiate clearly between the executive and legislative functions. The Consultation elected Henry Smith governor, James W. Robinson lieutenant governor, and Sam Houston major-general of the regular army.

Unfortunately this regular army existed only on paper—it was still to be recruited—and the volunteer army in the field was to be outside the control of the provisional government except for "advisory communications." Houston, with the support of Governor Smith, insisted that the volunteers, then engaged in besieging the Mexicans under General Martin Perfecto de Cos at San Antonio de Bexar, be withdrawn and furloughed home, and that chief attention be devoted to raising a regular army. The council, however, voted to encourage the volunteers to maintain the siege. In December the volunteers refused to obey a decision of their officers to raise the siege, organized a frontal assault, and succeeded in taking San Antonio and capturing General Cos on December 11. They released Cos, however, and permitted him to withdraw his army from Texas. Most of the volunteers, believing that the war was over, now went home; and the contingent left at San Antonio (as frequently called Bexar) was made up largely of non-Texan volunteers recently arrived from the United States. They elected Frank W. Johnson as their commander and announced that they would not take orders from any officers of the regular army, including General Houston, whom Governor Smith had instructed to take charge at San Antonio.¹⁹

The disputes between Smith and the council over every conceivable subject continued and came to a climax over the question of sending an expedition to attack the Mexican town of Matamoros near the mouth of the Rio Grande. The council, ignoring Houston entirely, authorized Colonels Francis W. Johnson and James W. Fannin, Jr., to proceed with such an expedition after the opportune time for it had passed. Colonel James C. Neill, left in command at Bexar, reported to the governor and council, January 6, that Johnson and Colonel James Grant (the real originator of the plan) had completely stripped the place of both troops and supplies for that expedition at a time when it

¹⁹ Binkley, *Texas Revolution*, 74-89; Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVI, 251-56.

was learned that a thousand Mexican troops were approaching. Governor Smith erupted in a violent denunciation of the council members and adjourned the council until March 1. The angry council responded by suspending Smith from his office and subjecting him to impeachment. It recognized Robinson as acting-governor, but Smith refused to give up his position. Thus when a new invasion of Texas by Santa Anna impended, the government was in a state of confusion, and the constitutional convention called by the council was not to meet until March 1. In the meantime the Matamoros expedition was broken up and the Alamo besieged.²⁰

Under the circumstances, the question has often been raised as to whether it would not have been good military policy to have evacuated San Antonio de Bexar before it was too late, rather than to have attempted a hopeless defense. In support of this argument is the claim that General Houston actually ordered its evacuation. On January 17, after hearing from Colonel Neill that he had only eighty effective men under his command and that Bexar was in a practically defenseless state, he wrote Governor Smith:

. . . Colonel [James] Bowie will leave here [Goliad] in a few hours for Bexar with a detachment of from thirty to fifty men. Capt. [William H.] Patton's Company, it is believed, are now there. I have ordered the fortifications in the town of Bexar to be demolished, and, if you should think well of it, I will remove all the cannon and other munitions of war to Gonzales and Copano, blow up the Alamo and abandon the place, as it will be impossible to keep up the Station with volunteers, the sooner I can be authorized the better it will be for the country.²¹

This letter, it will be observed, does not say that Houston had definitely ordered an evacuation. That move was to await further instructions from Smith, which apparently never arrived as the Governor was too busy with his fight with the council to write. Although Houston did not know it, Colonel Johnson before his departure had already ordered the destruction of the fortifications in the city of Bexar and the moving of the cannon into the Alamo.²² As late as January 30, Houston wrote

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 256-65; Binkley, *Texas Revolution*, 89-94; J. C. Neill to Governor and Council, Jan. 6, 1936, William C. Binkley (ed.), *Official Correspondence of the Texan Revolution, 1835-1836*, 2 vols. (New York, 1936), 272-75; Zoe Allison, "Notes on the Journal of the Proceedings of the General Council of the Republic of Texas Held at San Felipe de Austin November 14, 1835-March 11, 1836," *Bulletin* No. 38 of the S. F. Austin State Teachers College, 84-88.

²¹ Williams and Barker (eds.), *Writings*, I, 339. The letter from Neill to Houston, Jan. 14, is printed in Binkley (ed.), *Correspondence*, I, 294-95.

²² Johnson to the General Council, Jan. 3, 1836, *ibid.*, 267-68.

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Smith describing his efforts to increase the garrison at Goliad because, as he explained it, "Should Bexar remain a military post, Goliad must be maintained, or the former will be cut off from all supplies arriving by sea at the port of Copano."²³

It is true that Houston years later in a speech delivered in 1845 stated that he had "ordered Colonel Travis to blow up the fortress at San Antonio and retreat."²⁴ It should be noted, however, that Colonel W. B. Travis did not assume command at San Antonio, under orders from Governor Smith, until February 11.²⁵ By that time Sam Houston was on a furlough from his army command and engaged in Indian negotiations.²⁶ It is certain that what he had in mind in 1845 was his rather equivocal orders to Neill by way of Bowie of January 17. This is made clear by his still later defense of his actions in the United States Senate in 1859, in which he said that on January 17 he had ordered Neill to blow up the Alamo and fall back to Gonzales, but that neither Neill nor Travis, his successor in command, had obeyed that order since it was secretly superceded by the council. As pointed out by the editors of the *Writings of Sam Houston*, however, the chaos in the Texas government was so great that the execution of the order was left largely to the discretion of Bowie and Neill; and the only contemporary reaction to the order which they could find was an official report by Neill that sufficient oxen and mules could not be secured to transfer the cannon and other munitions to Gonzales. Also, he and Bowie had decided before Travis arrived that San Antonio was the "key to the situation in Texas" and must be maintained. It will also be recalled that Houston's authority over volunteers was very nebulous. When he resumed command, March 4, under the more definite authority conferred by the constitutional convention, it was already too late to save the Alamo.²⁷

²³ Williams and Barker (eds.), *Writings*, I, 345.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, VI, 7.

²⁵ Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVI, 274.

²⁶ Llerena Friend, *Sam Houston: The Great Designer* (Austin, 1954), 66.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 67. Williams and Barker (eds.), *Writings*, VII, 306, 335 (n. 4). Neill reported to the governor and council on January 23, however, that a priest in Bexar had told Bowie that Santa Anna's plan was to attack Copano and La Bahia (Goliad) first and send only a few hundred cavalry to attack Bexar, and that "If teams could be obtained here by any means to remove the Cannon and Public Property I would immediately destroy the fortifications and abandon the place, taking the men under my command here, to join the Commander in Chief [Houston] at Copano. . . ." Binkley (ed.), *Correspondence*, I, 328.

Yet, largely on the basis of these statements of Houston's of 1845 and 1859, together with another excerpt from the 1845 speech, Professor Shackford, writing his in most other respects admirable biography of David Crockett, came to a very questionable conclusion. In Houston's other statement of 1845, after pointing out that Colonel Fannin, who was massacred with his garrison at Goliad shortly after the fall of the Alamo, could have saved himself and his men if he had followed Houston's order to retreat which was dispatched as soon as the news of the Alamo disaster arrived, Houston continued:

Travis, Fannin, Crockett, Bowie, were all brave and gallant spirits; they never, while living employed falsehood and slander to carry a point or injure a character; their acts were open and bold; their policy of warfare was to divide, advance and conquer. My policy was to concentrate, retreat and conquer, . . .²⁸

Shackford's conclusion is that the alleged insubordination of those men was due to the strong anti-Houston sentiment on the part of anti-Jacksonian volunteers from the United States because they considered Houston to be a close friend of Jackson's. When Crockett arrived, burning with hatred against Old Hickory, he greatly stimulated, thinks Shackford, that anti-Houston feeling and contributed to the tendency toward insubordination with its disastrous results.²⁹

There are several factors which cast doubt upon this highly speculative conclusion. In the first place, the anti-Houston feeling can be explained largely on the ground of personal jealousy and rivalry without any reference to Jackson. Fannin's bitterness, as an example, was due chiefly to Houston's denunciation of the Matamoros expedition which he was to lead as a "piratical or predatory war."³⁰ The disagreements between Governor Smith, supported by Houston, and the council were to a large extent due to factional differences as to the purpose of the revolution. Smith and Houston were ardent advocates of a declaration of independence, whereas a majority of the council held to the illusory hope that an uprising of Mexican liberals against Santa

²⁸ Williams and Barker (eds.), *Writings*, VI, 8. The speeches were delivered in reply to the charges being made against Houston that he had deliberately allowed those national heroes to be destroyed at the Alamo and Goliad.

²⁹ Shackford, *David Crockett*, 223-25. Constance Rourke, *Davy Crockett*, 206, suggests the same possibility. It is true, of course, that Houston was considered a protege of Jackson's; but other factors were more important in leading some Texans to reject his leadership, especially before San Jacinto.

³⁰ Houston to Henry Smith, Jan. 30, 1836, Williams and Barker (eds.), *Writings*, I, 344-55.

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Anna would make possible the restoration of the constitution of 1824 and make unnecessary any separation from Mexico. The Matamoros expedition was involved in this difference, for its chief instigator, James Grant, was definitely opposed to Texan independence and he was reported by Colonel Neill as engaged in underhanded activity designed to create opposition to Houston among the garrison at Bexar. That garrison, however, was overwhelmingly in favor of Texan independence and held an indignation meeting when Governor Smith was suspended from office by the council.⁸¹

Most damaging to the Shackford thesis is the fact that the decision to hold Bexar at all costs was made by Colonels Neill and Bowie and concurred in by Travis before Crockett arrived; and it was made not on the basis of any opposition to Houston but because of their belief that Bexar was the "key" to the defense of Texas. Bowie arrived at San Antonio on January 19 and on February 2 wrote to Governor Smith:

We are labouring night and day, laying up provisions for a siege, encouraging our men, and calling on the Government for relief. . . . The salvation of Texas depends in great measure in keeping Bejar [Bexar] out of the hands of the enemy. It serves as a frontier picquet guard and if it were in the possession of Santa Anna there is no strong hold from which to repel him in his march towards the Sabine. . . . Col. Neill and Myself have come to the solemn resolution that we will rather die in these ditches than give it up to the enemy.

Colonel Travis, reluctantly accepting the assignment from Governor Smith, arrived that day or the next, and there is not one word in his dispatches about any thought of evacuation. As expressed by Miss Williams,

. . . it seems clear that the deep-seated belief that "Bexar was the key to Texas" and should it fall into the enemy's hands the colonists would be at his mercy, was the real reason the Commander-in-Chief's orders were not obeyed. The place, moreover, seemed to cast some sort of spell over the Texan leaders. However indifferent or reluctant a man might be before going to Bexar, once there, he was soon writing to the Governor, the Council, the Commander-in-Chief—anybody that had any authority to give aid, saying, "Bexar is the key to the situation, public safety demands our lives rather than surrender it into the hands of the enemy."⁸²

⁸¹ Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVI, 251-72; Neill to Houston, Jan. 14, 1836, Binkley (ed.), *Correspondence*, 294-95. Zoe Allison, "Notes," *loc. cit.*, cited by Shackford (p. 313), makes no mention of any anti-Jackson feeling and gives the impression that the major cause of difficulty between the council and the governor was the disagreement over the question of independence.

⁸² Bowie to Smith, Feb. 2, 1836; Travis to Smith, Feb. 13, 1836, Binkley (ed.), *Correspondence*, I, 381-83, 419-20; Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVI, 272-78.

The date of Crockett's arrival at Bexar cannot be determined exactly, but it was probably February 7 or 8, since according to the memory of one witness he came in "with twelve others, direct from Tennessee" and "in a few days—less than a week after Travis arrived."³³ On February 11 Green B. Jameson, the chief engineer wrote: "We are now one hundred and fifty strong[.] Col Crockett and Col Travis both here & Col Bowie in command of the volunteer forces. Col Neill left to day for home on account of an express from his family informing him of their ill health."³⁴

Following the departure of Colonel Neill an unseemly quarrel arose between Travis and Bowie over their rights of command, and there is evidence that Crockett became indirectly involved. Before leaving, Neill appointed Travis to serve as commanding officer during his absence; but since it was feared that the volunteers would not wish to serve under an officer of the regular army, as was Travis, the volunteers, who constituted about half of the garrison, were permitted to hold an election to choose a commanding officer for their group. They elected Bowie unanimously. Bowie thereupon claimed that as colonel he outranked Lieutenant Colonel Travis and attempted to assume command of the entire garrison. On February 13 Travis reported to Governor Smith that since his election Bowie

has been roaring drunk all the Time; has assumed all command—& is proceeding in a most disorderly & irregular manner—interfering with private property, releasing prisoners sentenced by court martial & by civil court & turning every thing topsy turvey—

Among the prisoners set free was one D. H. Barre, a private of the regular army who had been convicted by court martial of mutiny. In a second letter of the same date Travis transmitted to Smith the sentence of the court martial, other pertinent documents, "enclosed impartial statements" (presumably the letters of J. J. Baugh and Amos Pollard), and also "the statement of Col. D. Crockett relative to the release of s'd Barre."³⁵ The next day the disagreement appears to have been resolved, with the understanding that Bowie should command the volunteers of the garrison and Travis the regulars and the volunteer

³³ *Ibid.*, 279, citing "Dr. John Sutherland's Account of the Fall of the Alamo," ed. by James T. DeShields, *Dallas News*, Feb. 5, 1911. See also Officers at Bexar to Convention (no date), Binkley (ed.), *Correspondence*, 393-95 (n. 1), which shows also that two delegates to the convention had been elected before Crockett arrived.

³⁴ Jameson to Henry Smith, Feb. 11, 1836, *ibid.*, I, 409-10.

³⁵ The two Travis letters and those of Baugh and Pollard are printed in *ibid.*, 419-24, but Crockett's statement is not.

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cavalry. But this agreement was merely a truce and grave differences between the two continued, even after the Mexican siege had begun.³⁶

What Crockett did after his arrival at San Antonio is difficult to determine because of the scarcity of authentic sources. As previously mentioned, Professor Shackford has shown that the alleged "diary" supposedly picked up on the battlefield and used as the basis of the *Exploits in Texas* volume was the figment of Richard Penn Smith's imagination and completely unreliable. It is of course probable, as some have suggested, that he was popular with all the men and entranced them with his speeches, jokes, and tall tales. Dr. John Sutherland, who left one of the best first-hand memoirs of the Alamo, gives the impression that Crockett enlivened the tedious hours with his irrepressible humor. According to this observant eyewitness, Crockett on his arrival was called on for a speech. He "mounted a goods- box" and amidst prolonged applause "related in his own peculiar style some of those jolly anecdotes with which he often regaled his friends and which he, only, could tell with appropriate grace."³⁷ According to another account, a fandango, or fancy dress ball, was held in celebration of his arrival.³⁸ One of the survivors, Mrs. Almeron Dickinson³⁹ reported that he "was a performer on the violin, and often during the siege took it up and played his favorite tunes," Also, she "heard him say several times during the siege: 'I think we had better march out and die in the open air. I don't like to be hemmed up.'"⁴⁰

The siege, during which Crockett and the others were "hemmed up," began on February 23. Before that date the garrison had occupied the city of San Antonio. Refusing to believe the rumors that a Mexican army was approaching, the restless troops were not susceptible to discipline. They spent much of their time eating, sleeping, drinking, and chasing señoritas. They refused to drill and only the officers could be

³⁶ Travis and Bowie to Smith, Feb. 14, 1836, *ibid.*, 425; Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVI, 285. J. M. Myers, *The Alamo*, 128-30, points out that Travis' view of Bowie's actions was colored by his anger of the moment and that there may have been some point to Bowie's policy of trying to curry favor with the Mexicans in Bexar by freeing some of that nationality from jail. See also Lon Tinkle, *13 Days to Glory* (New York, 1958), 83-88.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 123-24; Rourke, *Davy Crockett*, 207; Sutherland, *Fall of Alamo*, 11. Crockett said he had come without any selfish motive whatever to aid the Texans in their "noble cause."

³⁸ Tinkle, *13 Days*, 240.

³⁹ According to Shackford and also Miss Williams, this name should be spelled Dickerson; but Walter Lord, on the basis of the spelling on the marriage certificate and land records, insists that Dickinson is the correct form. Lord to S. J. Folmsbee, June 16, Oct. 14, 1958.

⁴⁰ Quoted in J. M. Morphis, *History of Texas* (New York, 1874), 174-75.

induced to work on the fortifications. Scouting service was very poor, since all the horses were kept at a ranch five or six miles out of town.⁴¹ Consequently, the garrison was surprised by the sudden arrival of the Mexican army on the heights overlooking the city on the night of February 22. Having been apprised of that fact about noon the next day, Colonel Travis ordered the concentration of the Texan forces within the Alamo. Belatedly, energetic measures were taken to improve the defenses of that mission-fortress, planting the cannon and bringing in supplies. Dr. John Sutherland and John M. Smith were sent on a mission to Gonzales to ask for aid. According to Dr. Sutherland, Crockett, standing by, said to Colonel Travis: "Colonel, here am I. Assign me a position, and I and my twelve boys will try to defend it." Travis then assigned Crockett and his "boys" to defend the picket wall extending from the barracks on the south to the corner of the church.⁴²

The Alamo, about one-half mile east of the city, was originally constructed for a mission rather than a fortress. It was built in the Franciscan pattern and included a large rectangular court, or plaza, about three acres in extent, framed by stone walls three feet thick and from nine to twelve feet high. In the place of walls some parts of the boundary were made up of buildings. A large section of the western front consisted of a series of low buildings which were used as barracks. The opposite, or eastern front included the largest building of the Alamo, the two-story (in part) convent, called in 1836 the main barracks. It was nearly two hundred feet long and had soldiers' quarters and the armory on the first floor and a hospital on the second. The southern edge of the plaza included the main entrance, a ten-foot-wide *porte-cochère* which divided the southern or "low" barracks into two sections, one of which was used as the prison. The church, or chapel, was located about fifty feet east of the southern end of the plaza and was in a very poor state of repair. Its roof, which had caved in as early as 1762, had never been replaced; but its high and strong walls made it the strongest section for defense. It was connected from its northwest corner by a twelve-foot-high stone wall to the southern end of the main

⁴¹ Tinkle, *13 Days*, 15; Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVI, 285-87.

⁴² *Ibid.*, XXXVII, 12-13; Sutherland, *Fall of Alamo*, 20. Earlier Crockett was offered a higher command by Travis but rejected it, preferring to fight in the ranks and lead only the men who had come with him to Bexar. *Ibid.*, 11.

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barracks. The old wall between the southwest corner of the church and the end of the south barracks had long since been destroyed and was replaced by a picket fence supported by an earthen embankment. It was to this vulnerable point in the defenses of the Alamo that David Crockett and his "Tennessee boys" were assigned. Eighteen or more cannon were mounted: three 12-pounders on a scaffold in the church, four 4-pounders on the south stockade or picket wall defended by Crockett, two above the *porte-cochère*, an 18-pounder at the southwest corner of the plaza, two 8-pounders in the center of the west barrier, another 8-pounder at the northwest corner of the plaza, and two or three on the north wall, one of which was to protect a breach which was partially made by Santa Anna's artillery. Since there were no bastions, these cannon had to be mounted on piles of earth, leaving the artillerymen seriously exposed. There were only a few loopholes in the buildings and none in the walls; consequently, the riflemen were also dangerously exposed to gunfire. Therefore, the Alamo could scarcely be called a fort. Its walls were not thick enough to withstand a prolonged bombardment, and it was seriously vulnerable to assault by escalade.⁴³

On February 23 Santa Anna occupied the city of San Antonio and raised a red flag over the San Fernando church as a signal that no quarter would be given. Travis replied with a shot from the 18-pounder; but at the same time the Mexicans sounded a parley and raised a white flag. Bowie, without consulting Travis, sent Jameson out under a white flag to see if a parley actually was desired and what terms of surrender would be offered. Santa Anna denied displaying any white flag and told Jameson the garrison could be considered only as rebellious foreigners and nothing less than unconditional surrender could be accepted without any guarantee that lives would be spared. By his request for a parley Bowie revived the old dispute with Travis over command; but the next day Bowie was stricken with typhoid-pneumonia, possibly complicated by tuberculosis, and thereafter Travis was in sole command of the fortress. Naturally, no further consideration was given to the idea of surrender.⁴⁴

⁴³ For descriptions of the Alamo see R. M. Potter, "The Fall of the Alamo," *Magazine of American History* (New York, 1877-1893), II (Jan., 1878), 1-21; Myers, *The Alamo*, 178-83; Tinkle, *13 Days*, 42-44, sketch on end papers; Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVII, 17-19.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-17, 27; Tinkle, *13 Days*, 60-62, 89-90. Tinkle says that Crockett was

On the 25th the Mexicans attempted to plant some cannon near the entrance to the fort but were prevented by the defenders' cannon and rifle fire which caused a great number of casualties. Travis in his report said, "The Hon. David Crockett was seen at all points, animating the men to do their duty." That night under cover of some old straw and wooden houses in the neighborhood the Mexicans succeeded in planting their batteries; but later that night a sortie from the fort destroyed those houses and left the batteries seriously exposed. Apparently, it was the accurate rifle fire of Crockett and his "boys" which made possible the success of that venture without the loss of a single Texan.⁴⁵

As the days passed the Mexican investment of the fort tightened, the bombardment became more intense, and the Mexican army received reinforcements. On the other hand, the numerous appeals for aid sent out by Travis were largely fruitless. On March 1 thirty-two men from Gonzales succeeded in getting into the fort; but two days later the courier James Bonham brought the distressing news that Colonel Fannin had started out from Goliad with 400 men but had turned back because of difficulties on the way and because of a decision on the part of the officers to leave the Alamo to its fate and concentrate on making Goliad more defensible. Travis sent one last pathetic appeal for help to the Texas convention which had convened on March 1 at Washington on the Brazos.⁴⁶ Then, according to an account which in recent years has acquired a greater degree of respectability than was previously accorded it, he called his men together to explain to them the desperate nature of the situation.

Travis admitted that he had been deceived and had deceived the troops as to the prospects of relief. "Surrounded by an army that could almost eat us for breakfast," they had no hope of help, "for no force that we could reasonably have expected could cut its way through the strong ranks of those Mexicans." Surrender was impossible in view of the Mexicans' clear indication that they would give no quarter, and it was impossible for the small garrison to cut its way through the enemy's

responsible for the first casualty among the Mexicans, which gave them respect for the Texans' marksmanship, *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 118-20; Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVII, 28-29, 28n.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 30-31; Tinkle, *13 Days*, 159-60, 169-76. This convention adopted a declaration of independence on March 2, and two days later named Houston as commander-in-chief of all Texas forces.

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ranks. Remaining in the fort and fighting to the last moment, they would all be slain, for Santa Anna was "determined to storm the fort and take it, even at the greatest cost of the lives of his own men." Therefore, he said, "let us band together as brothers, and vow to die together"; and when the Mexicans at last should storm the fort, "let us kill them as they come! Kill them as they scale our walls! Kill them as they leap within! . . . and continue to kill them as long as one of us shall remain alive!" But Travis was willing to "leave every man to his own choice." Anyone who wished to try to escape was at "liberty to do so." He then drew his sword and "with its point traced a line upon the ground," and asked everyone who was "determined to stay here and die with me to come across this line." With one exception every soldier crossed the line. Even the prostrate Bowie asked to have his bed moved across it. The one exception was a French mercenary named Louis (Moses) Rose, who had retreated with Napoleon from Moscow. To the contemptuous Bowie he declared, "I am not prepared to die, and shall not do so if I can avoid it." Crockett's comment was, "You may as well conclude to die with us, old man, for escape is impossible." In this opinion Crockett turned out to be wrong, for Rose scaled the wall and managed to escape. He recounted his story to his friend W. P. Zuber, who eventually published it in the *Texas Almanac* in 1873.⁴⁷

On the night of March 5 Santa Anna, despite objections raised by his officers, decided that the fort should be taken by assault. The next morning at 4 o'clock the attack began, the Mexican troops in four columns attacking the fort on all four sides. The first two assaults were beaten back with terrific losses on the part of the Mexicans. The calmest man among the defenders, according to one of the Mexicans, was the one in buckskin who wore a peculiar cap. Captain Rafael Soldana described him as standing up to reload his gun with great composure, paying no attention to the enemy fire.⁴⁸ The third attack finally was concentrated on the north wall of the plaza, which had

⁴⁷ Morphis, *History of Texas*, 179-87; Tinkle, *13 Days*, 179-85. Miss Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVII, 31n, could find no record of any Moses Rose as a member of the Alamo garrison, but since the time of her research Rose has been identified and evidence of his having been in the Alamo discovered. In a number of cases in Texas courts "relative to the disposal of property of men who had died in the Alamo, Rose's testimony was accepted as that of a man who had seen them in the fort not long before they were killed." Myers, *The Alamo*, 13.

⁴⁸ Tinkle, *13 Days*, 206. At the same time, however, he was pouring scorn on the Mexicans in a loud voice.

been partially breached by the earlier bombardment. This attack was eventually successful and the Mexicans were able to scale the walls and gain control of the plaza. The outnumbered Texans found cover in the buildings around the plaza and in the church; but the Mexicans seized the cannon on the walls and used them to batter down the doors. The defenders were eventually dispatched in hand-to-hand combat. Many of the bodies were mutilated, some by being tossed on the bayonets of the Mexicans. According to some accounts a few of the defenders were discovered hiding under mattresses—the number varying from five to seven—and were taken before Santa Anna, who ordered them to be immediately killed. The bodies of the slain Texans, totalling 182 or 183, were placed on a funeral pyre and burned. The only survivors were non-combatants, mostly Mexican women and children, but included were Mrs. Dickinson (the wife of an officer of the garrison) and her child and two Negro servants, Joe and Sam, of Travis and Bowie, respectively.⁴⁹

There are several conflicting accounts of the manner in which David Crockett met his death. As mentioned above, Professor Shackford has established the spurious nature of the volume published in 1836, *Col. Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas*. In the preface of that work its real author, Richard Penn Smith, included a description of Crockett's death based on contemporary accounts supplemented by his own imagination. In this version David was one of six who surrendered, not after being pulled out from under a mattress but out in the open behind a barricade. General Castrillon spared them because he was "moved by a soldier's admiration for a brave enemy." But when Santa Anna "flew into a violent rage" at Castrillon, and his officers "plunged their swords into the bosoms of their defenseless prisoners,"

Colonel Crockett, seeing the act of treachery, instantly sprang like a tiger at the ruffian chief, but before he could reach him a dozen swords were sheathed in his indomitable heart; and he fell, and died without a groan, a frown on his brow, and a smile of scorn and defiance on his lips.⁵⁰

Although this highly colored account attained considerable acceptance in later years, it is generally believed to have been chiefly the

⁴⁹ Good accounts of the taking of the Alamo may be found in *ibid.*, 191-227; Myers, *The Alamo*, 209-25; and Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVII, 34-44.

⁵⁰ This part of the preface is quoted in Hamlin Garland's "Introduction" to the Scribner edition of David Crockett's *Autobiography* (New York, 1923), 9-10. Although Constance Rourke accepts the spurious "diary" in *Exploits* as probably genuine, she rejects Smith's version of Crockett's death as completely imaginary. *Davy Crockett*, 219-20.

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product of playwright Smith's imagination. But Shackford's own version of Crockett's death is also unsatisfactory, based almost entirely on the testimony of an alleged witness who probably was not there, a "Madame Candelaria" who gave a very questionable interview to William Corner in 1888. As given by Corner in a work published three years later:

. . . the old Senora said he [Crockett] was one of the first to fall; that he advanced from the Church building towards the wall or rampart running from the end of the stockade, slowly and with great deliberation, without arms, when suddenly a volley was fired by the Mexicans causing him to fall forward on his face, dead.⁵¹

Professor Shackford probably was intrigued by the idea that the great Hero might have died "unarmed, undramatically, alone."⁵² One of the many facts which reveals the unreliability of this account is that at the beginning of the slaughter of the garrison the Mexicans were in no position to fire any volleys against the defenders of the south stockade as they were in the process of scaling the north wall many yards distant. Those who attacked the south wall could not have fired into the interior before they had killed many of the defenders stationed on top of that stockade. Moreover, a careful student of the Alamo recently wrote one of the authors: "We Alamo fans argue about almost everything, except our virtually unanimous opinion that Madame Candelaria wasn't there. That Corner interview . . . has a very wooden ring when studied as a whole."⁵³

It is probably true that Crockett died behind the south wall which he and his "Tennesseans" had been charged to defend. But the preponderance of the evidence indicates that he died fighting valiantly; and there is a possibility that he was in command of the garrison for a short time before his death. According to the account of Jesse B. Badgett, a member of the Texas convention, published in the *Arkansas Advocate*, April 15, 1836, J. J. Baugh assumed command after the death of Travis; but in a short time he was killed, and then "the command devolved upon Crockett, who likewise soon fell, fighting desperately."⁵⁴ The place has been rather definitely fixed by the testimony of Mrs. Dickinson, who was led out of the church by a Mexican officer, and although shot at and wounded, was spared. "As we passed through

⁵¹ Quoted in Shackford, *David Crockett*, 231.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 232.

⁵³ Lord to Folmsbee, June 16, 1958, *loc. cit.* Mr. Lord's study of the Alamo will be published soon.

⁵⁴ Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVII, 43-44n, 176.

the enclosed ground in front of the church," she later reported, "I saw heaps of dead and dying. . . . I recognized Col. Crockett lying dead and mutilated between the church and the two story barrack building, and even remember seeing his peculiar cap lying by his side."⁵⁵ Two Negro witnesses, Santa Anna's cook, Ben, and Travis's servant, Joe, and others were reported to have said that Crockett's body was surrounded by Mexican corpses, the number varying in the reports from sixteen to twenty-four. According to Ben, David's knife was buried up to the hilt in the bosom of a Mexican who was found lying across his body.⁵⁶

The reliability of these last reports may be questioned, but the consensus of the contemporary newspaper accounts also gives the impression that he died a hero's death. On March 24, 1836, the *Telegraph*, and *Texas Register* (San Felipe de Austin) stated:

The end of David Crockett of Tennessee, the great hunter of the west, was as glorious as his career through life had been useful. He and his companions were found surrounded by piles of assailants, whom they had immolated on the altar of Texas liberties. The countenance of Crockett, was unchanged: he had in death that freshness of hue, which his exercise of pursuing the beasts of the forest and the prairie had imparted to him. Texas places him, exultingly, amongst the martyrs in her cause.⁵⁷

On April 14, 1836, the *Columbia* (Tennessee) *Observer*⁵⁸ reprinted from other papers several accounts of the fall of the Alamo. Although these reports contain numerous conflicts as to details, there is considerable agreement regarding Crockett. One of the chief sources of information for most of these stories was the comments of George C. Childress, former editor of the *Nashville Banner*. He claimed to have been present at Washington on the Brazos when Joe, the Negro servant of Colonel Travis, told his story of the Alamo disaster to the Texan authorities. Childress was one of two representatives sent by Texas to

⁵⁵ Morphis, *History of Texas*, 176-77. Cf. the somewhat undependable account of Francis Antonio Ruiz, who claimed to have been present when Crockett's body was pointed out to Santa Anna: "to the west [of where Travis fell] and in a small fort opposite the city." Quoted in Williams, "Critical Study," XXXVII, 39-40, citing, *Texas Almanac*, 1860. He may have been confused as to directions and was referring to the inner court or small area between the church and the low barracks, considering it the small fort as distinguished from the large area or plaza.

⁵⁶ Tinkle, *13 Days*, 214.

⁵⁷ A photostatic copy of this issue, generously contributed to the authors by Walter Lord, New York, N. Y., is in the University of Tennessee Library.

⁵⁸ This issue of the *Columbia Observer* is owned by Arthur N. Lawson, Knoxville. Photostatic copies are in the Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, and the University of Tennessee and Lawson McGhee Libraries, Knoxville.

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Washington, D. C., following the declaration of independence of March 2, to appeal for United States recognition.⁵⁹ At a meeting in Natchez, Mississippi, on March 31, he was reported to have said that "The gallant Crockett to the last, . . . continued to 'go ahead'—when he fell the corpses of the enemy were literally, piled up around him." The *Memphis Enquirer*, on the basis of the Childress report and other information, said: "Col. Crockett is also among the fallen! it is said he fought with heroic desperation to the last, and was one of the last that perished almost burying himself with his slain."⁶⁰ Also reprinted by the *Observer*, from the Jackson, Tennessee, *Truth Teller*, was a letter from Calvin Henderson, Esq. to Joseph W. Chalmers of Jackson, dated Washington, Texas, March 16, 1836. By that letter the Jackson community, which had formerly been represented by Crockett in Congress, was told that David's "bravery . . . his example animated every body," and that he had "certainly [dispatched?] 25 of the enemy during the siege."⁶¹

On July 9, 1836, David's son, John Wesley Crockett, who was later to represent his father's old district in Congress, wrote his Uncle George Patton of North Carolina:

You have doubtless seen the account of my father's fall at the Alamo in Texas. He is gone from among us, and is no more to be seen in the walks of men, but in his death like Sampson [Samson], he slew more of his enemies than in all his life. [For] Even his most bitter enemies here, I believe, have buried all animosity, and joined the general lamentation over his untimely end.⁶²

The reminiscence of Dr. S. H. Stout supports this last conclusion. He remembered "seeing adult men and women shed tears on account of the death of David Crockett" when the news of the Alamo reached Nashville.⁶³

⁵⁹ *Memphis Enquirer* (extra), in *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.* Also reprinted in the *Observer* was the story in the New Orleans *True American* based on the statements made by the passengers of the *Comanche* steamer, "8 days from Texas." It included: "We regret to say that Col. David Crockett and companion, Mr. Berton and Col. Bonham [Bonham], of S.C. were among the number slain." As reprinted in *Niles' Register*, April 16, the name of Crockett's companion was given as "Jesse Benton." Quoted in Shackford, *David Crockett*, 235. Actually, according to the *Memphis* paper quoted above, Childress left Jesse Benton, the brother of Thomas H., at Washington, Texas. The lists of the victims at the Alamo do not include any Berton or Benton. James Bonham, of course, was killed in the Alamo, but he was not a member of Crockett's group.

⁶² Quoted in Shackford, *David Crockett*, 237. The bracketed "For" is Shackford's.

⁶³ S. H. Stout, "David Crockett," *American Historical Magazine* (Nashville, 1896-1904), VII (Jan., 1902), 12.

It was mentioned above that some time in 1836 Isaac N. Jones of Prairie Falls, Arkansas, sent David's widow the watch which Crockett had traded to him while on the way to Texas. In his letter Jones wrote:

His [Crockett's] military career was short. But though I deeply resent his death, I cannot restrain my American smile at the recollection of the fact that he died as a United States soldier should die, covered with his slain enemy, and, even in death presenting to them in his clenched hands, the weapons of their destruction.

We hope that the day is not far distant when his adopted country will be freed from a savage enemy, and afford to yourself and children, a home, rendered in every way comfortable, by the liberal donations of her government.⁶⁴

This hope did materialize, and in 1854 David's widow and some of the children migrated from Tennessee to Texas.⁶⁵

Although years later a Tennessean, Colonel Robert Chester, expressed the opinion, "The fight at the Alamo was a blunder. What did a man shut himself up in a fort, and allow Santa Anna to surround him for? It was downright folly," it must be admitted that the sacrifice made by Crockett and the others contributed immeasurably to the attainment of Texan independence. According to one Texas historian, they performed one of the most successful delaying actions in American military history. By engaging Santa Anna's army for two weeks they had made it possible for General Houston to collect his forces on the San Jacinto River; and the battle cry, "Remember the Alamo," inspired his soldiers to annihilate the Mexican army on April 21, 1836, and obtain from Santa Anna a treaty recognizing Texan independence. Moreover, the massacre at the Alamo brought to a sudden end the apathy of the Texan people which had contributed to the disaster; and the revulsion of feeling throughout the United States sent hordes of Americans into Texas to help Houston win his victory.⁶⁶

Four years later there was published in London a history: *Texas, Its Rise, Progress, and Prospects*, by an Englishman, William Kennedy, who happened to be in Texas at the time of its revolution. He included a perspicacious analysis of David Crockett which as a near contemporary appraisal, made before the legendary "Davy" reached the propo-

⁶⁴ Quoted in Shackford, *David Crockett*, 236.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ H. S. Turner, "Andrew Jackson and David Crockett," *Magazine of American History*, XXVII (May, 1892), 387; Jim Dan Hill, *The Texas Navy* (Chicago, 1937), 47; Shackford, *David Crockett*, 227; Tinkle, *13 Days*, 228; Myers, *The Alamo*, 229, 233.

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tions he eventually was to attain, deserves to be rescued from scarce and out-of-print books and made more available to the modern reader:

Among the slain there was one who, surrounded by a heap of the fallen enemy, displayed even in death the freshness of the hunter's aspect, and whose eccentricities, real or reputed, have familiarized England with his name—David Crockett, of Tennessee, a character such as could only have been produced and perfected within the limits of his own country.

The whole man, physical and mental, was of frontier growth. His playthings from infancy were the axe and the rifle. Few among his youthful companions displayed more activity and strength; none aimed his piece with a steadier hand or truer eye. In the metaphorical eulogy of the western woodsmen, he was more than "a horse,"—he was "a steamboat." During the war of 1812, David took up arms for his country, and fought bravely, though no admirer of parade or drill. After the war, he turned to industrial pursuits, and was a successful hunter and thriving planter. Hospitality kept cheerful watch at his door, and the wayfarer was ever welcome to a plentiful meal, and a glass of "old Monongahela."

The ambition to be politically distinguished, which prevails wherever free institutions are established, is, perhaps, a more active passion in new states than in old. Crockett did not escape the general mania for public life. His conscience told him that he was an honest man, and rumor and the newspapers strangely lied if there were many of the same stamp in the great house at Washington. Reforms were wanting—there was no question of that—but means were essential to an end, and sound reforms demanded clean-handed legislators. David felt that he had a call. He had mastered the "varmint" of the woods—"coon," bear, and panther—and why should he not "use up" the prowlers that preyed upon the commonwealth? The great Tennessee hunter determined to "run for Congress."

The stump of a tree is frequently the rostrum of a western orator; hence the name of "stump speeches" has been given in the States to those morsels of eloquence which are seasoned and sauced exclusively for the popular palate. Possessed of robust health and powerful lungs, backed by never-faltering perseverance, Crockett was a giant on the stump. If poor in classical lore, he was affluent in the figures and phrasology of life in the West. After a long and arduous struggle, he was chosen a member of Congress for Tennessee.

His career as a patriotic legislator disappointed his hopes, and fell far short of his electioneering promises. When he entered Congress he imagined that his prowess as a hunter and a wrestler would inspire his opponents with awe, and enable him to shoulder the state wagon out of the ruts by a few prompt and dexterous heaves; but he found difficulties at Washington which he never contemplated when an aspirant for representative honors. The first thing, he said, that "bothered" him were the Congressional rules and orders, and "what those rascally things were made for he could not reckon, for they did no good." If he happened to damage these rules and orders, and then got in a "fair track," his tongue did not wag so glibly as it used

to do on the stump, and he frequently found himself short of breath and his knees weak when he attempted to harangue the House. He could not understand this, but he found it was so day after day. He often looked round to see if there was any man bigger and stronger than himself to produce this quaking, for, until then, none but a stronger man than himself could shake his nerve. His visions of reform, one after another, vanished, for he could not make the members listen to his reasoning. He began to suspect that he had different work to do than when he used to go "a gunning." Often as he might hit a political wild cat, the "crittur" held out, as if it had nine times the nine lives attributed to grimalkin.

Many an odd saying and grotesque story was fathered on "Colonel Crockett," whose raciness of speech and manners was, however, spoiled by mixing in political society.⁶⁷ He lost the wild originality of the frontier, without acquiring the polish or sprightliness of city life. Still, Washington had its attractions, and he was anxious to retain his place in the legislature; but he must have his own way, and would not submit to be trammelled; the consequence of which was that his constituents chose a more pliable candidate.⁶⁸ This was a heavy blow to David, who had been for years a "lion," and to whom excitement of some kind was indispensable. Disgusted with politics, and irritated by public ingratitude, military renown acquired fresh attraction in his eyes. At this time Texas had raised the standard of resistance against military usurpation. To the cause of Texan liberty he resolved to devote himself,⁶⁹ and, shouldering his rifle, he started for the Sabine, and arrived at Nacogdoches, accompanied by several volunteers, in the commencement of the war. . . . [There follows the story, already given above, about David's refusal to sign the Texas oath until the word "republican" had been inserted.]

Biography is the handmaid of History, and frequently a more agreeable companion than her mistress; I therefore offer no apology for this brief notice to one of "the heroes of the Alamo." Poor David! thy simple uprightness merited a happier end! Yet, to borrow a phrase of thine own coinage, thou didst "go a-head for the fight!" and thy blood was shed upon a holy altar, and from thy smouldering ashes arose a flame which streamed from the San Antonio to the Mississippi and Ohio, lighting up, in many a generous heart, a fire not to be extinguished, so long as those who dishonored thy manly form continued to tread the soil in which their barbarian vindictiveness denied thee and thy gallant comrades the humble privilege of a soldier's grave!⁷⁰

⁶⁷ His published *Autobiography*, and other writings, however, though largely ghost-written, still bore the impress of Crockett's character and made an important contribution to American literature in the field of indigenous humor, on a par with that of "Sut Lovingood."

⁶⁸ It will be noted that Kennedy makes no reference to the idea that Crockett was used as "tool" by the Whigs. Although that viewpoint has been widely circulated by historians of the "Jacksonian persuasion," the extent of its accuracy may be questioned. One of Crockett's most outstanding characteristics was his independence.

⁶⁹ The question may be raised, as has been indicated above, as to whether Texas liberty was very much in his mind when he made the original decision to go to Texas.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Morphis, *History of Texas*, 189-94.

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Thus ends our story of the David Crockett of history whom we have attempted to separate from the legendary "Davy." The imaginary figure has been publicized out of all proportions in recent years due to the wizardry of Hollywood, and it is time that the real David received more attention.⁷¹ This is particularly true since the reaction to the "fad" of a considerable part of the general public has been to go to the other extreme and conclude that David Crockett was merely an illiterate country bumpkin, a consummate braggart, who made no substantial contribution to history. This is far from true. Although lacking in formal schooling, he acquired a considerable amount of "education" by his own endeavors. He was shrewd and calculating and capitalized on his lack of knowledge to build up his political appeal, as has been done by other clever politicians even in modern times. He was a "stump speaker" of no mean ability, adept at cracking jokes and telling tall tales—exaggerating his notable exploits as a hunter and fighter—to the delight of his rustic hearers and the despair of his opponents.

Both in the state legislature and in Congress he tried earnestly and sincerely to benefit the real interests of his constituents, especially in protecting squatters' rights from the exploitive aims of the speculators. When his fellow Tennesseans refused to support him, he turned to the opposition and was in the vanguard of the revolt against a domineering President Jackson in his own state. He had the fault of being too stubborn and uncompromising, which was a major factor in his ineffectiveness as a congressman. It was his inability to fulfill his promises, as well as Jacksonian opposition, which caused his eventual defeat. He also allowed himself to be placed in a position where he was used by the Whigs to their own advantage. To say that he became their "tool," however, is putting it too strongly. He was much too independent for that. Also, the publicity they gave to his unique character, together with his own publications or pseudo-publications, began the creation of the legendary "Davy" long before he left Congress. By the time he went to Texas he had achieved a great amount of notoriety—his fame had preceded him. To what extent, if at all, his anti-Jackson views led him to oppose Sam Houston is a matter of mere

⁷¹ While Shackford in his *David Crockett* supplied a very helpful corrective, there are numerous deficiencies in this work which became increasingly evident as our own research progressed.

speculation. But it is safe to say that if he had not lost his life in the Alamo, he probably would have achieved his aim of carving out a new political career for himself, as did Houston, on the Texas frontier. As it was, the magic of his name among the victims greatly increased the effectiveness of the slogan "Remember the Alamo" not only in Texas but also throughout much of the United States. David Crockett well deserves remembrance⁷² as a symbol of the frontier, a unique but important figure in Tennessee politics, a contributor of note to American humor, and a significant architect of Texan independence.

⁷² The Crockett "fad," however, was not an unmixed evil. During the one year 1958 action was taken regarding the establishment of two state parks in Crockett's honor—one at his birthplace in Greene County and the other at his home in Lawrenceburg (formally opened in April)—and also a replica of the tavern of his father, John Crockett, at David's boyhood home in Morristown was dedicated.