David “Davy” Crockett

*Standards: 4.62, 8.59*

*Essential Question: What role did David “Davy” Crockett play in Texas’ independence movement?*

David Crockett was born in Tennessee in 1786. Crockett’s father was not very successful in business and perpetually in debt. As a result, Crockett was hired out at a young age to help with the family finances. After a failed romance with Margaret Elder, Crockett met Mary Finley, known as Polly in 1806. Crockett traded his rifle for a horse to court his sweetheart. He and Polly were married in 1806 and soon had two children. Seeking better fortune, Crockett moved his family to an area around the Duck and Elk rivers in Middle Tennessee in 1811. By 1813, Crockett had moved to Franklin County and was part of the militia that gathered after hearing of the Fort Mims Massacre.

Crockett was present during the battle of Tallushatchee during the Creek Indian War and took part in the slaughter of the town’s inhabitants. He later wrote,” We now shot them like dogs.” It was during Crockett’s service in the Creek War that his often stormy relationship with Andrew Jackson began. Crockett was one of the militia men who demanded to go home in December of 1813 when supplies ran out. Jackson faced down the militia men including Crockett. However, Crockett did return home in late December and missed the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.

The following summer Crockett’s wife Polly died, leaving him with three small children to care for. Crockett soon married the widow Elizabeth Patton. Her husband had died in the Creek War leaving her two children and a successful farm. Crockett moved his family to Lawrence County in 1817. It was there that Crockett began his public career, serving as magistrate, town commissioner and colonel in the militia. In 1821, Crockett was elected to the state legislature. By this time Crockett was already perfecting his public image as the folksy storyteller and frontier politician.

As a legislator, Crockett was very concerned with making land available for the poor. He also wanted to assure that squatters could keep the lands they had improved. The issue of lands for the poor would continue to occupy Crockett when he was elected to Congress in 1827. By 1830, Crockett was openly opposing Jackson’s Indian Removal Act in Congress. It has been suggested that his action was taken more to gain favor with Jackson’s opponents, the Whigs, than out of real concern for Native Americans. Crockett published his autobiography, called *A Narrative Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee* in 1834. He then went on a speaking tour in the Northeast. He used the tour as an opportunity to both entertain crowds and criticize Jackson. Unfortunately for Crockett, Jackson remained popular among his fellow Tennesseans. In 1835, Crocket lost his seat in Congress to a Jackson supporter.

Crockett reportedly responded to his defeat by telling a group of people in Memphis, “You may all go to hell and I will go to Texas.” Crockett had been thinking about going to Texas for some time. He viewed his journey there as a fresh start following his political defeat. However, Crockett did not leave his dislike of Jackson in Tennessee. When Crockett arrived in Texas he aligned himself against Sam Houston who was known to be a strong supporter of Jackson. It was partly for that reason that Crockett decided to join William Travis in defying Houston’s order to abandon the Alamo. Crockett’s decision to defend the Alamo led to his death on March 6, 1836. Though the exact circumstances of Crockett’s death remain unclear, it is clear that Crockett’s legend has only grown since his death. He remains one of Tennessee’s favorite sons.

Sources: Morgan, Robert. *Lions of the West.* Chapel Hill NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2011. Print.

Finger, John. *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. Print.