

This article is protected by copyright, East Tennessee Historical Society. It is available online for study, scholarship, and research use only.

Suggested Citation:

Folmsbee, Stanley J. and Anna Grace Catron. "The Early Career of David Crockett." *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 28 (1956): 58-85.

THE EARLY CAREER OF DAVID CROCKETT

By STANLEY J. FOLMSBEE AND ANNA GRACE CATRON

Anyone writing about the early life of the "King of the Wild Frontier" is very largely dependent upon Crockett's own autobiographical account, originally published in 1834 under the title, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, of the State of Tennessee*, but more familiarly known as the *Autobiography*.¹ By checking it, where possible, against known historical facts, the writers have come to the conclusion that in its entirety it is a remarkably accurate work, and this view has been confirmed by the author of the most recent and most reliable biography of Crockett, James Atkins Shackford.²

One controversy which still persists concerns David's ancestry. According to the *Autobiography*, his father was "John Crockett, and he was of Irish descent. He was either born in Ireland or on a passage from that country to America. . . ."³ Still unexplained is the earlier origin of the family before it settled in Ireland. What has been the most generally accepted view is that an early ancestor was Antoine de Crocketagne, a French Huguenot who fled first to England and then to Ireland in the seventeenth century.⁴ The opposing and more acceptable theory is that the Crocketts came from a well-established Scotch family of that name, and that David's forebears had lived only a relatively

¹*The Autobiography of David Crockett*, with an introduction by Hamlin Garland (New York, 1923). This so-called "Scribner edition" includes a reprinting "with a very few obvious misprints corrected" of the original work, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, of the State of Tennessee*, as published in 1834, together with condensed versions of *An Account of Col. Crockett's Tour of the North and Down East* (Philadelphia, 1835) and the largely spurious work, *Col. Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas* (Philadelphia, 1836).

²*David Crockett: the Man and the Legend* (Chapel Hill, 1956). Mr. Shackford's conclusion (pp. 270-71) is: "When one compares the authentic records about Crockett with the *Autobiographical* account of them, he finds only two sorts of discrepancies: first, a few additions, and slight seemingly deliberate alterations which I have attributed to the fact that David was still in politics and intended the *Autobiography* partially as campaign literature; and second, errors not in fact but in the accuracy of dating fact, attributable obviously to its having been written entirely from memory. However, the rest of it is so meticulously accurate, as established by parallel surviving records, as to prove quite conclusively that in content the work is all David's own." He has also shown very conclusively that the man who actually wrote the *Autobiography* was a friend named Thomas Chilton, who used information "furnished him by David orally or by notes." *Ibid.*, 264-73.

³Page 19. He also said his father lived in Pennsylvania during his early years.

⁴Mrs. A. A. Campbell, "David Crockett, the Go-Ahead Man," *Confederate Veteran* (Nashville), XXVIII (Mar., 1920), 104; Janie P. C. French and Zella Armstrong, *The Crockett Family and Connecting Lines* (Vol. V of an open series, *Notable Southern Families*, Bristol, 1928), 1-9, 203-04. See also Shackford, *David Crockett*, 293 (n.1).

short period
David Crockett
eighteenth century

Whether
the example
Pennsylvania
Shenandoah
August 13
to his appointment
1771 the
Tryon (later
a 250-acre
family had
by 1776.
re-naming
on July 5,
which resulted
the next year
and William
upper East
Carter's Valley
instead of
Among the
Further
in Carter's
superior
of Johnson

⁵Robert
Some confirm
American History
describing the
Scotch-Irish

⁶This is
June 20, 19
Robert—John
later than 1

⁷Quoted
(Charlotte,
father lived
Lincoln until

⁸J. G.
(ed.), "Two
East Tennessee

CROCKETT

CATRON

ing of the Wild
n autobiograph-
le, *A Narrative*
essee, but more
where possible,
to the conclusion
and this view has
d most reliable

David's ancestry.
n Crockett, and
or on a passage
ed is the earlier
as been the most
as Antoine de
and and then to
more acceptable
d Scotch family
only a relatively

by Hamlin Garland
inting "with a very
f the Life of David
n condensed versions
East (Philadelphia,
Adventures in Texas

6). Mr. Shackford's
ords about Crockett
ts of discrepancies:
ch I have attributed
ography partially as
racy of dating fact,
mory. However, the
iving records, as to
He has also shown
was a friend named
orally or by notes."

his early years.
Confederate Veteran
d Zella Armstrong,
s, *Notable Southern*
Crockett, 293 (n.1).

short period of time in Ireland before his grandfather, also named David Crockett, migrated to Pennsylvania in the middle of the eighteenth century.⁵

Whether Scotch-Irish in origin or not, grandfather David followed the example of many others of that nationality and moved from Pennsylvania to the back country of Virginia. That he settled in the Shenandoah Valley is shown by the fact that his son Robert was born August 13, 1755, at the site of the present Berryville, Virginia, according to his application for a Revolutionary War pension filed in 1833.⁶ By 1771 the Crocketts had moved to North Carolina. Deed records of Tryon (later Lincoln) County indicate that David Crockett purchased a 250-acre tract on the south side of Catawba River in that year.⁷ The family had moved across the mountains to the Holston Valley, however, by 1776. The members of the famous Watauga Association, after re-naming their government the Washington District, sent a petition on July 5, 1776, to North Carolina asking for annexation—the petition which resulted in the creation of Washington County by North Carolina the next year. Included among the signers of that petition were David and William Crockett. On November 6, 1777, the settlers living in upper East Tennessee, north and west of the Holston River (including Carter's Valley), who were considered at that time to be in Virginia instead of North Carolina, sent a petition to the Virginia government. Among the signers were John, William, and David (twice) Crockett.⁸

Further evidence of the residence of several families of Crocketts in Carter's Valley may be found in an original bill in a suit filed in the superior court of Washington District, Tennessee, in 1800 in the case of Johnson and Shropshire *vs.* Ingram and Mitchell, and also in various

⁵Robert M. Torrence, *Colonel "Davy" Crockett* (Washington, D. C., 1956), 1-3. Some confirmation of this view may be found in Dr. S. H. Stout, "David Crockett," *American Historical Magazine* (Nashville, 1896-1904), VII (1902), 3-21. Dr. Stout, describing the occasion of his first seeing David Crockett in 1829, said he was "of Scotch-Irish descent, and of the clan of Crocketts of the old country."

⁶This application is described in Prentiss Price, Rogersville, Tenn., to S. J. Folmsbee, June 20, 1956. Mr. Price believes that there were at least three brothers older than Robert—John, William, and David, Jr.—which would indicate that John was born not later than 1749.

⁷Quoted in William L. Sherrill, *The Annals of Lincoln County, North Carolina* (Charlotte, 1937), 15. This confirms David's *Autobiography* (p. 20) statement that his father lived in Lincoln County, N. C., although technically it did not receive the name Lincoln until 1779, after the Crocketts had moved to the Tennessee country.

⁸J. G. M. Ramsey, *Annals of Tennessee* (Philadelphia, 1853), 138; Prentiss Price (ed.), "Two Petitions to Virginia of the North of the Holston Men, 1776, 1777," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* (Knoxville), No. 21 (1949), 103-10.

entries of land holdings in the Rogersville neighborhood.⁹ These indicate that in addition to the residence of David Crockett (Davy's grandfather) at the site of Rogersville, there were also separate establishments before November, 1777, of his sons John, William, and Joseph. John Crockett's cabin was located about three miles below the site of Rogersville. This may explain why he escaped death when his parents were killed in the Indian raid mentioned in the *Autobiography*.¹⁰

It is evident from the above that John Crockett probably was married before, or very soon after, moving to the Tennessee country. The date is unknown; but according to Davy's memory, his mother, Rebecca Hawkins, was "born in the state of Maryland, between York [Pennsylvania] and Baltimore," and had a brother named Joseph. Many writers claim that this Rebecca was a sister of Sarah Hawkins, who married John Sevier, but the evidence is by no means conclusive.¹¹ It is possible that her birthplace was Old Joppa, located in Maryland between Baltimore and York, as the names of Joseph and Rebecca Hawkins appear in church records of that town.¹² Several men by the name of Hawkins signed the north of the Holston petition of 1777 mentioned above; and in 1781 John Crockett signed a security bond for Ruth and Aaron Hawkins, administrators of the estate of Nathan Hawkins. This leads to the speculation that Rebecca, John Crockett's wife, may have been the daughter of Nathan and Ruth Hawkins.¹³

John Crockett, as well as his brother Robert, participated in some

⁹Quoted in Price to Folmsbee, June 20, 1956, *loc. cit.* The papers filed in the 1800 suit include a deposition signed by the same Robert Crockett, Cumberland County, Ky., whose pension application is mentioned above, thus proving that he was Davy's uncle.

¹⁰Page 20: "By the Creeks, . . . in their own house, and on the very spot of ground where Rogersville, in Hawkins county, now stands." The raid must have occurred before August 19, 1778, for on that date William and Robert Crockett were made administrators of David's estate. Prentiss Price, above, citing Washington County Court Minutes. The raid may have been by the Chickamauga Indians instead of the Creeks. S. C. Williams, *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War* (Nashville, 1944), 62.

¹¹*Autobiography*, 23. The chief authority for this Crockett-Sevier relationship, which is accepted by Shackford (p. 293, n. 1) as well as by earlier writers, is French and Armstrong, *The Crockett Family*, 328-29; but a leading genealogist of the Sevier and Hawkins families, the late Mary Hoss Headman, a descendant, insisted that Sarah Hawkins' sister Rebecca married Colonel Richard Campbell and that the wives of John Crockett and John Sevier were not related. Mary Hoss Headman to E. A. Wright, Morristown, Tenn., Sept. 15, 1955 (copy in possession of S. J. Folmsbee). French and Armstrong claim that Colonel Campbell married Sarah's sister Jane, but there is no Jane on Mrs. Headman's list of Sarah's brothers and sisters.

¹²Torrence, *Colonel "Davy" Crockett*, 3-4. There is also a tradition in the family of E. A. Wright, Morristown, that his great grandfather, Nathan Hawkins of Greene County, was a cousin of Davy Crockett.

¹³Price to Folmsbee, June 20, 1956, *loc. cit.*

of the
he four
death
Limest
nessee,
his par

At
engage
separat
Crocke
fore, t
Tennes
Since th
was co
Carolin

TH
County
this m
moved
"contai
the Ma
Works
Althou
ber 4,
to ope
Abinge
miles
this sit
Perkins
Holston

14P
Soldiers
15A
Crockett,
For info
Reynolds
lution M
"Davy"
believed
16S
273.

of the campaigns of the Revolution; according to the *Autobiography*, he fought at the Battle of King's Mountain.¹⁴ Some time after the death of his parents, John moved with his family to the mouth of Limestone Creek, near the present Limestone, Greene County, Tennessee, and it was here that David Crockett was born, the fifth son of his parents, on August 17, 1786.¹⁵

At the time of David's birth, the East Tennessee country was engaged in a revolt against North Carolina, attempting to establish a separate state of Franklin under the leadership of John Sevier. John Crockett seems to have been identified with the Franklinites.¹⁶ Therefore, there is some point to the claim recently advanced by some Tennesseans that David Crockett was born in the state of Franklin. Since that state later collapsed, however, and North Carolina's authority was confirmed, it is technically true that David was born in North Carolina.

The family next moved to a place on Cove Creek in Greene County, where David's father built a mill with Thomas Galbraith. After this mill was destroyed by a flood, probably in 1794, the Crocketts moved to a tract of land described in Jefferson County records as "containing three hundred acres lying and being on the South side of the Main Holston Road and within a few miles of Perkinses Iron Works on Mossy Creek . . .," which John Crockett had bought in 1792. Although this property was sold under the sheriff's hammer on November 4, 1795, Shackford believes the Crocketts were allowed to continue to operate a tavern on that site on the road between Knoxville and Abingdon, Virginia. He claims that the tavern was ten or twelve miles north of Dandridge, near the present Jefferson City, and this site is confirmed by the fact that contemporary travelers described Perkins' iron works as being on Mossy Creek, four miles from the Holston River. David Crockett's memory merely placed the tavern of his

¹⁴Page 20. Both received payments for military service. Penelope J. Allen, *Tennessee Soldiers in the Revolution* (Bristol, 1935), 18.

¹⁵*Autobiography*, 21; Shackford, *David Crockett*, 6; Austin P. Foster, "David Crockett," *Tennessee Historical Magazine* (Nashville, 1915-1937), IX (Oct., 1925), 166. For information concerning a marker erected by the DAR on this site, see Louise W. Reynolds, "The Pioneer Crockett Family of Tennessee," *Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine* (Washington, D. C.), LV (April, 1921), 186-91. As a result of the "Davy" Crockett fad in 1955, efforts were begun to restore the cabin in which it was believed David was born. *Knoxville Journal*, June 13, 1955.

¹⁶Samuel C. Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin* (Johnson City, 1924), 273.

boyhood days on "the road from Abbingdon [*sic*] to Knoxville," and the people of Morristown, largely on the basis of recollections of old settlers, are convinced that it was located in the Morningside section of that city. A nearby ridge has long been known as Crockett's Ridge.¹⁷ It is probable, since John Crockett lost title to the Mossy Creek land, that he later moved to the Morristown site and operated there the tavern which David mentioned in his *Autobiography*.

Teamsters frequently stopped at the tavern, and at the age of twelve David hired out to a Dutch teamster by the name of Jacob Siler en route to Rockville, Virginia.¹⁸ His employer seems to have appreciated the young lad as a responsible, trustworthy helper, and rewarded him with extra cash. But David soon grew homesick, escaped from his master, and braved a perilous journey of four hundred miles to return to his wilderness home in East Tennessee.

Although David was very happy to be at home again, unfortunate circumstances soon made a prodigal of him. His father started him to school, but becoming a truant after four days, David left home to avoid being punished by his father and the schoolmaster, Benjamin Kitchen. Young Crockett spent the next several months in the service of a number of employers, one of whom was a teamster with whom he went to Baltimore. While in this city he visited the wharf, became interested in the ships and sailors; and had his employer not prevented, perhaps David would have taken a voyage to London and no doubt his life would have been quite different. Because this employer was very cruel and unreasonable, David broke away from him and spent the next

¹⁷Shackford, *David Crockett*, 6-7, 294 (n. 13, 14), citing North Carolina and Jefferson County deed records; Samuel C. Williams, "Early Iron Works in the Tennessee Country," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* (Nashville), VI (Mar., 1947), 43-44; *Autobiography*, 24. The claims for the Morristown site have been made by the Goodspeed Publishing Company, *History of Tennessee*, East Tennessee edition (Nashville, 1887), 868, and Cora Davis Brooks, *History of Morristown, 1787-1936* (typewritten transcript by Historical Records Survey, University of Tennessee Library), 10. Morristown is in that part of the former Jefferson County which became Hamblen County in 1870. This site for the Crockett tavern was marked by the Sons of the American Revolution and more recently by the Tennessee Historical Commission. In 1949 there was uncovered by an excavation the remains of an old well lined with hand-hewn cedar at the exact spot where an old resident had claimed the well of the Crockett tavern was supposed to be. *Morristown Daily Gazette and Mail*, July 21, 1949. Plans for the restoration of the tavern at that site are now under way. To add to the confusion, the claim has been advanced in Dandridge that the Crockett tavern was located eight miles east of that town. Maxine Mathews, "Old Inns of East Tennessee," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 2 (1930), 31.

¹⁸Except where otherwise indicated, the following account of David's boyhood is based on the *Autobiography*, 24-49.

three ye
and for

Da
maturity
improvi
a neigh
the nei
Kenned
employ
Crocket
another

Al
Quaker
clothing
fell in
engaged
respons
woman
taught
months
might
read in
arithme

W
David
no tim
County
Marga
and de
outdoor
and m
Polly
girl's

19M
County
at the ti
a wall i
20J
marriage
of twelv

Knoxville," and
collections of old
ingside section of
Crockett's Ridge.¹⁷
ssy Creek land,
rated there the

at the age of
e of Jacob Siler
to have appre-
r, and rewarded
scaped from his
miles to return

ain, unfortunate
started him to
t home to avoid
njamin Kitchen.
ervice of a num-
hom he went to
me interested in
vented, perhaps
o doubt his life
was very cruel
spent the next

North Carolina and
cks in the Tennessee
(1947), 43-44; *Auto-*
by the Goodspeed
(Nashville, 1887),
ypewritten transcript
Morristown is in
ounty in 1870. This
can Revolution and
e was uncovered by
ar at the exact spot
was supposed to be.
e restoration of the
the claim has been
miles east of that
Tennessee Historical

David's boyhood is

three years working for a number of employers at different occupations and for low wages before returning to his tavern home.

David's experiences had given him an exceptional measure of maturity as shown by the manner in which he responded to his improvident father's need for financial aid. He worked six months for a neighbor to pay off a note of thirty-six dollars which his father owed the neighbor. David then engaged his services to a Quaker, John Kennedy, who lived fifteen miles from the Crockett home. His new employer also presented him with a note for forty dollars which John Crockett owed him. So David worked a second six months to cancel another note for his father.

After paying off his father's note, David continued to work for Quaker Kennedy to obtain funds with which to buy badly-needed clothing. This additional service introduced David to romance, for he fell in love with Kennedy's niece, only to learn regretfully that she was engaged to another. David felt that his lack of education was perhaps responsible for his not being able to attract the interest of this young woman. Determined to get an education, he arranged to go to a school taught in the neighborhood by a married son of his employer. For six months he worked for the schoolmaster two days a week so that he might attend school four days a week. During this time he learned to read in a primer, to write his name, and to do some very elementary arithmetic.

With six months of schooling and being nineteen years of age, David decided that he needed to marry and establish a home. So he lost no time in falling in love a second time. The records of Jefferson County show that on October 21, 1805, he obtained a license to marry Margaret Elder, but she broke the engagement.¹⁹ Although disappointed and deceived, David, being invested with youth, vigor, the call of outdoor life, and a gay spirit, was able to cast off a gloomy countenance and mood and he soon fell in love with a beautiful Scotch-Irish girl, Polly Finley, whom he married in 1806, despite the opposition of the girl's mother.²⁰

¹⁹Marriage License and Bond Book, 1792-1840, Jefferson County, Tenn. (Jefferson County Courthouse, Dandridge), 53. David in his *Autobiography* said he was eighteen at the time, but he was mistaken by one year. The returned license hangs in a frame on a wall in the clerk's office in the Jefferson County Courthouse.

²⁰The marriage is recorded in Jefferson County as of August 16, 1806, and also a marriage bond: "Davy Crockett, with Thomas Doggett, security, binds himself in a bond of twelve hundred and fifty dollars to Gov. John Sevier, Aug. 1, 1806 to marry Polly

For a few years Polly and David lived on a rented farm near her father's home, but they were not able to accumulate much fortune. So, after his family was increased by two sons—John Wesley, born on July 10, 1807, and William, born in 1809, David decided to seek more fertile land farther west beyond the Cumberland Mountains. After a long and tiresome journey in the fall of 1811, the Crocketts reached a beautiful spot near the headwaters of Mulberry Creek, a branch of Elk River, in what is now Moore County, Tennessee.²¹

The forests surrounding Crockett's new frontier home were full of deer and smaller game, much to the liking of David, who was by nature an ardent hunter. But even plenty of wild game did not long entice David Crockett, and in two years time his restless nature required another move. This time he moved his family to Franklin County, Tennessee, and settled on Bean Creek about ten miles below the present town of Winchester. This was Crockett's home, which he called "Kentuck," until after the War of 1812.²²

When Crockett heard in September, 1813, that hostile Creek Indians had attacked Fort Mims in the vicinity of Mobile, Alabama, his anger was aroused, and according to his *Autobiography*, he was the second or third man in the county to volunteer. The term of service was ninety days. At Winchester, Captain Francis Jones organized a company which Crockett joined, and later under reorganization of this unit, he served as a private in the Second Regiment of Volunteer Mounted

Finlay." Its signature by David shows his ability to write his name at that time. Variations in spelling of names was customary during that period. The *Autobiography* (p. 49) says Polly's mother was Irish, but the Finley family was Scotch (or Scotch-Irish) in origin. Torrence, *Colonel "Davy" Crockett*, 5-6. William Finley, Polly's father, accompanied Daniel Boone on his explorations of the West, and it has been said he was descended from MacBeth, King of Scotland. Amelia Williams, "A Critical Study of the Siege of the Alamo and of the Personnel of its Defenders," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* (Austin, Tex.), XXXVII (Oct., 1933), 106.

²¹In his *Autobiography* (p. 50), David said he lived at that place "in the years 1809 and possibly '10," before moving to Franklin County, but again his memory played him false regarding chronology. Jefferson County records show that he served on a jury, September 11, 1811, in Dandridge. Jefferson County Court Minute Book, No. 5 (type-written transcript by Historical Records Survey, University of Tennessee Library), 191 (original pagination). David's Mulberry Creek home was in Lincoln County while he lived there, but the site became a part of Moore County when that county was created in 1871. It is about one mile and a half from the county line, northeast of Fayetteville. Shackford, *David Crockett*, 295 (n. 23, 24), citing a surveyor's entry book in Tennessee State Archives. According to Judge John Morrison and Colonel Bob. Hamsley, *The Real David Crockett* (Lawrenceburg, 1955), 9-10, the site is about three miles northeast of Lynchburg (the Tennessee Historical Commission recently erected a highway marker designating this approximate location), and they speculate that David may have used in his distillery water from the same spring which later made the name "Jack Daniels" famous.

²²*Ibid.*, 18, 295 (n. 2); *Autobiography*, 49-51.

Riflen
Andre
comm
were
sessio
Creek
comm

early
prepa
reque
Tenn
Gibso
he wa
a sco
next
Coffe

penel
for t
was
The
of or
that
of D
After
prear
miles
place

of G

2
ington
1813,
enlist
2
Jackso
Tenn
2
appro
67-68
1817

Riflemen commanded by Colonel Newton Cannon.²³ Major General Andrew Jackson and Colonel (later Brigadier General) John Coffee commanded, respectively, the infantry and cavalry divisions which were organized, as authorized by the legislature convened in a special session in late September by Governor Willie Blount, to drive the Creeks out of the Alabama country. Thus Coffee was Crockett's commanding officer.²⁴

While Coffee's forces remained at Camp Batey near Huntsville, early in October, waiting for the arrival of other volunteers and making preparations to invade Creek territory, Major John H. Gibson came to request some trustworthy volunteers to accompany him across the Tennessee River for the purpose of scouting in the Creek country. Gibson was referred to Captain Jones, who selected Crockett, because he was good with the rifle, and gave Crockett the privilege of selecting a scouting companion. Crockett chose George Russell, and early the next morning Major Gibson set out with twelve mounted scouts from Coffee's camp.²⁵

Having crossed the Tennessee River at Ditto's Landing, they penetrated into the Creek territory about seven miles before camping for the night. Here John Haynes, a well-known Indian trader who was familiar with the Creek country, agreed to join them as a guide. The next morning the scouts separated with Major Gibson in charge of one group and Crockett in charge of the other. It was understood that Gibson was to stop at the house of a friendly Creek by the name of Dick Brown, and Crockett was to go to the house of Dick's father. After obtaining all possible information, Gibson and Crockett, as prearranged, were to meet at the junction of two roads about fifteen miles distant. When Crockett and his scouts reported to the appointed place that night, Major Gibson had not returned.

The next day Crockett, although concerned about the possible fate of Gibson and his scouts, pushed ahead several miles with his scouting

²³*Ibid.*, 51-52; Records of the Adjutant General's Office (National Archives, Washington, D. C.), Group 94. For one term of service, September 24, 1813, to December 29, 1813, Crockett received \$65.99. David, in the *Autobiography*, erred in saying the term of enlistment was sixty days.

²⁴Shackford, *David Crockett*, 296 (n. 5); Augustus C. Buell, *History of Andrew Jackson*, 2 vols. (New York, 1904), I, 295; Edward Scott (ed.), *Laws of The State of Tennessee*, . . . 2 vols. (Knoxville, 1821), II, 103-04.

²⁵The account of this expedition is based largely on *Autobiography*, 52-57; but for approximate dates, see S. P. Waldo, *Memoirs of Andrew Jackson*, . . . (Hartford, 1820), 67-68; and John Reid and John H. Eaton, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* . . . (Philadelphia, 1817), 36-37.

mates to the house of a white man by the name of Radcliff, who had married a Creek woman and lived just inside the boundary of the Creek Nation. Radcliff informed Crockett that the painted warriors had stopped at his house that morning. After dinner, since the night was clear and the moon "about the full," Crockett and his men hurried off to the camp of some friendly Creeks about eight miles away. These Indians were fearful that the "Red Sticks," as the hostile faction of the Creek warriors was called, would suddenly arrive and punish them for entertaining the Americans. Guards were stationed to prevent such a surprise visit. Late that night Crockett was informed by an Indian runner that the "Red Sticks" had been crossing the Coosa River all day at Ten Islands and were moving forward to give General Jackson battle. Crockett felt that he should get this information to Colonel Coffee and the main army at Camp Batey, more than sixty miles distant, as quickly as possible. Taking advantage of the moonlit night, David and his companions hastened back to camp, arriving about ten o'clock the next morning. Their information, which seemed very important to Crockett, was ignored by Coffee. Major Gibson returned the next day and made the same report. Colonel Coffee believed Gibson because, as Crockett explained, he was an officer instead of a mere soldier.²⁶ He became very much alarmed, and sent a message to General Jackson at Fayetteville about the situation at Ten Islands, requesting that he and his troops join him as soon as possible. By a forced march Jackson and his men arrived the next day.

Jackson dispatched Coffee with a force of 800 men along Crockett's previous route to explore the Black Warrior River region. Supplies of the army were very meager and, according to Crockett, Coffee permitted him to hunt as they marched in order that he might supply the army with meat. When they reached Radcliff's they learned this half-breed's secret. He had been the one who had sent the Indian runner into camp with a false report in order to frighten the scouts back to Camp Batey.²⁷

Some time later Crockett participated in the Battle of Tallushatchee, in which the Americans under the leadership of the recently-

²⁶Shackford thinks this incident was one reason for Crockett's hatred of the "brass," evidenced by his effort while in Congress to have West Point abolished. Shackford, also, by checking contemporary almanacs, discovered that there actually was a nearly full moon on the night, according to his calculations, Crockett returned to camp, October 6-7, 1813. *David Crockett*, 21-23.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 23; *Autobiography*, 58-60.

promoted General Coffee, retaliated successfully for the Fort Mims Massacre. Concerning the battle, Crockett remarked: "We shot them like dogs; and then set the house on fire, and burned it with the forty-six warriors in it." He also told of how the soldiers returned the next morning and found some potatoes in the cellar of the same house. Because they were all "hungry as wolves," they ate them even though "the oil of the Indians we had burned the day before had run down on them, and they looked like they had been stewed with fat meat."²⁸ The next major battle was near the friendly Creek town of Talladega, where Jackson's infantry and Coffee's mounted riflemen scored another victory, relieving it from a siege of the Red Sticks. Again, Crockett's account supplements the official report. He described vividly how a part of the besieging force of Creeks managed to escape "through a part of our line, which was made up of drafted militia, which broke ranks, and they passed." Jackson, in his first report, November 11, 1813, to Governor Blount, paid glowing tribute to the courage of all his troops; but in a corrected report two days later, he admitted, "had there been no departure from the original order of battle, not an Indian could have escaped."²⁹

For several weeks after the Battle at Talladega Jackson, encamped at Fort Strother, made no effort to open an offensive campaign against the Creeks because of lack of cooperation of East Tennessee troops under General Cocke and mutiny among his own men. This mutinous disposition was due in the first place to the scarcity of provisions plus a general desire to go home. Jackson's infantry was made up of two groups, state militia and United States volunteers. He was therefore able to use on one day the volunteers to keep the militia in line, and on the next day the militia to keep the volunteers from going home. At about the same time, General Coffee's mounted volunteers, which included David Crockett, were allowed to return to the settlements to "recruit their horses," get winter clothing, and then to rendezvous at Huntsville on December 8.³⁰

In his discussion of this part of the Creek War, David Crockett appears to have been guilty of the one major distortion of fact which characterizes the *Autobiography* as published in 1834. Failing to men-

²⁸*Ibid.*, 61-62. Cf. Coffee's official report to Jackson, Nov. 4, 1813, Waldo, *Memoirs of Andrew Jackson*, 72-75.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 79-84.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 85-96; Reid and Eaton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 52-65, 90.

tion that he was one of the group of cavalry permitted to leave temporarily, he wrote that he and other volunteers defied Jackson's orders and went home despite the armed guard the General had lined up to prevent it. He also gave as a major reason for the desertion the claim that the enlistment period of sixty days had long since expired, whereas the War Department records (already cited) show that the enlistment was for ninety days, and that he actually served and was paid for that period of time and a few days more.³¹ Professor Shackford is of the opinion that David fabricated his participation in a mutiny in defiance of Jackson because of his current (1834) hatred of Old Hickory, who was then engaged in a bitter effort to drive Crockett out of Congress.³²

Actually, David's account of his mutinous activity may not have been a complete fabrication. A short time later, under what were slightly different circumstances, he probably was guilty of what Jackson considered outright desertion. In an effort to put his alleged desertion at Ft. Strother in a better light, Crockett continued his fabrication. He said that when the deserters reached Huntsville they met a regiment of reinforcements, "sixty day volunteers," on their way to join Jackson. He continued:

We got home pretty safely, and in a short time we had procured fresh horses and a supply of clothing better suited to the season; and then we returned to Fort Deposit [*sic*], where our officers held a sort of "*national convention*" on the subject of a message they had received from General Jackson,—demanding that on our return we should serve out *six months*. . . . I knowed if I went back home I couldn't rest, for I felt it my duty to be out; and when out was, somehow or other, always delighted to be in the very thickest of the danger. A few of us, therefore, determined to push on and join the army. The number I do not recollect, but it was very small.³³

The fabrications are obvious. Deserters would not have returned voluntarily to Fort Deposit. Coffee's cavalry returned because they had left with permission to "recruit horses" more than a month before their three-month tour of duty had expired, and with the pledge that they would return and complete the campaign. After they had rendezvoused

³¹*Autobiography*, 64-65. See also note 23, above.

³²*David Crockett*, 27-28, 296-97 (n. 12, 13). Shackford also calls attention to the way in which David's account is "worked into an elaborate figure comparing Jackson's highhandedness on that occasion with that of his removal of the deposits from the U. S. Bank. . . ." He confuses somewhat, however, the several episodes of mutiny with which Jackson had to deal during the Creek War.

³³*Autobiography*, 65-66.

at Huntsville
met not
there w
a year
Jackson
Their y
that ye
Creek c
who ha
been in
for a six
six mon
had refu
enlisted
as much
the inf
hold the
handful
discharg

Da
statemen
National
His reje
not a su
his polit
earlier r
poses. In
home at
expired,
and ther
volunte
paign ag
tion, he
accounts
in which
home. T

³⁴Rei
vols. (Ne

ected to leave tem-
d Jackson's orders
l had lined up to
desertion the claim
g since expired,
d) show that the
y served and was
ofessor Shackford
tion in a mutiny
) hatred of Old
drive Crockett out

ity may not have
what were slightly
that Jackson con-
eged desertion at
s fabrication. He
y met a regiment
eir way to join

e had procured
ne season; and
officers held a
usage they had
our return we
t back home I
when out was,
thickest of the
a and join the
all.³³

ot have returned
because they had
onth before their
pledge that they
ad rendezvoused

calls attention to the
comparing Jackson's
posits from the U. S.
f mutiny with which

at Huntsville on December 8 and marched toward Fort Deposit, they met not reinforcements but retiring infantry on their way home. First, there was the group of United States volunteers who had enlisted for a year in December, 1812, gone on the Natchez expedition with Jackson, returned home, and then were re-recruited for the Creek War. Their year of service had expired and Jackson's effort to deduct from that year the period of time between the Natchez expedition and the Creek campaign had proved unsuccessful. Next were the state militia who had enlisted for three months under the state law but who had been inducted into federal service under a congressional act providing for a six months tour of duty. Jackson had attempted to hold them for six months but had been forced to release them when Governor Blount had refused to back him up. Coffee's mounted volunteers, who had also enlisted for three months at about the same time, insisted that they had as much right to go home at the expiration of their terms of service as the infantry. Jackson, writing from Fort Strother to Coffee, tried to hold them to their promise to serve out the campaign; but all but a handful riotously insisted upon the privilege of going home and were discharged.³⁴

David was not one of that handful, his own autobiographical statement to the contrary notwithstanding, for his war record in the National Archives shows that he was discharged on December 29, 1813. His rejection of Jackson's entreaty from afar to remain in service was not a sufficiently direct defiance of the General to be of much use in his political campaign; so it appears that he concocted the story of an earlier mutiny at Fort Strother in Jackson's presence for political purposes. In order to make it appear less reprehensible than departure for home at that time would have been, before his term of service had expired, he reduced his term of enlistment from ninety to sixty days; and then he imagined himself a member of the small group of Coffee's volunteers who agreed late in December, 1813, to serve out the campaign against the Indians. Having gone so far in his practice of deception, he had to go on. Therefore, he included in his *Autobiography* accounts of two small engagements in January, 1814, with the Creeks in which he actually did not participate, because he had already gone home. To explain his absence at the time of the important Battle of

³⁴Reid and Eaton, *Life of Jackson*, 90-98; P. M. Hamer, *Tennessee: A History*, 4 vols. (New York, 1933), I, 225-27.

Tohopeka (Horseshoe Bend), March 28, 1814, at which the Creeks were finally crushed, he gave himself a furlough for the period of that engagement.³⁵

Crockett actually did return to service on September 28, 1814. After negotiating a peace treaty with the Indians following his victory at Tohopeka, Jackson asked Blount for a new group of Tennessee volunteers to drive the British from Pensacola, since they were planning to incite and equip some hostile Creeks who had refused to accept Jackson's treaty. When Crockett learned that Jackson was planning an expedition against the British, he was determined to return to war although his wife entreated him to remain at home. This time he entered service as a noncommissioned officer, as third sergeant in Captain John Cowan's company in "Major" William Russell's separate battalion of scouts.³⁶ Covering the last part of the journey on foot, because of lack of forage for the horses, this company arrived too late at Pensacola to participate in the capture of this city.

The remainder of Crockett's service with Russell's company consisted in scouting for hostile Creeks who had not surrendered, and in foraging for food and provisions for the army. He scouted and hunted along the Escambia, Coosa, and Tallapoosa rivers, and retraced points of the battleground in Alabama between Fort Williams and Fort Strother. Thus, while Jackson and the main army went on to Mobile, New Orleans, and glory, Crockett was relegated to the backwash of the war, without the opportunity to engage in any significant battles. The chief problem his company faced was the struggle to avoid starvation. Dissatisfied, Crockett, according to the *Autobiography*, returned home; and when he received orders to scout for Indians on the Black Warrior and Cahawba rivers, since he had remaining only thirty days to serve in the army, he gave his month's pay to a young man who agreed to go in his place. This may well be another falsification, for his honorable discharge, dated March 27, 1814, states that he had performed "a tour

³⁵*Autobiography*, 66-68. Shackford is of the opinion that his accounts of the small battles of Emuckfau and Enotachopco creeks were based on histories of the Creek War already in print by 1834 such as those by Major John Reid (and Eaton) and S. P. Waldo. He obtained from the Adjutant General's Office, October 30, 1947, verification of the fact that David did not return to the army again, after his release on December 29, 1813, until September 28, 1814. *David Crockett*, 28. The imaginary furlough probably was due to the realization by Crockett and his amanuensis that it would not be safe for him to claim participation in the important Battle of Tohopeka when he actually was not there.

³⁶*Autobiography*, 69, fails modestly to mention this noncommissioned rank. But see Shackford, *David Crockett*, 29-30, citing payroll and muster records. During the campaign Russell finally did achieve the rank of major.

of duty

As
it is no
nant in
later, p
with th
he mar
in the
farm,
The n
Alabar
a like
have b
fact, h
with M
as soon

In
a treat
southw
another
of Sho
county
probab
created
as one

C
also a
Lawre
for the

37/
the rank
Knoxvil
of his h

385

397

407

417

torical F
Autobio
law at a
We kep
... is

cations
which the Creeks
the period of that

September 28, 1814.
Following his victory
up of Tennessee
e they were plan-
e refused to accept
was planning an
to return to war
ne. This time he
third sergeant in
Russell's separate
journey on foot,
y arrived too late

ll's company con-
rrendered, and in
outed and hunted
and retraced points
illiams and Fort
ent on to Mobile,
e backwash of the
icant battles. The
avoid starvation.
y, returned home;
he Black Warrior
irty days to serve
who agreed to go
for his honorable
performed "a tour

accounts of the small
ies of the Creek War
ton) and S. P. Waldo.
47, verification of the
on December 29, 1813,
ugh probably was due
ot be safe for him to
actually was not there.
issioned rank. But see
During the campaign

of duty of six months" with "valor, under the most trying hardships."³⁷

A little more than a year after he returned from the war, although it is not mentioned in the *Autobiography*, David was elected a lieutenant in the Franklin County militia on May 21, 1815. A short while later, probably the summer of 1815, Polly Crockett died, leaving David with three small children to care for. In the spring or summer of 1816 he married a widow, Elizabeth Patton, whose husband had been killed in the Creek War. She was a woman of good family who owned a good farm, and this marriage considerably improved his status in life.³⁸ The next fall, in the company of some neighbors, he explored the Alabama country, recently acquired from the Creek Indians, looking for a likely place to settle. He suffered a severe attack of what appears to have been malaria, however, and was fortunate to get home alive. In fact, he was reported dead. Concerning this report, he commented with Mark Twainish humor, "I know'd this was a whopper of a lie, as soon as I heard it."³⁹

Instead of moving to the Alabama country, he took advantage of a treaty of 1816 with the Chickasaws by which the Indian title to the southwest corner of Middle Tennessee was extinguished. After another tour of exploration he chose as a place of settlement the head of Shoal Creek near the site of Lawrenceburg, which was to be the county seat of Lawrence County. He moved his family to this place probably in September, 1817, about a month before the county was created and about two months before he was named by the legislature as one of its justices of the peace.⁴⁰

Crockett not only served as magistrate of this county, but was also a lieutenant-colonel of the militia, a town commissioner of Lawrenceburg, a court referee, and one of the first road commissioners for this backwoods county.⁴¹ He admitted in his *Autobiography* that

³⁷*Ibid.*, 29-32; *Autobiography*, 69-83; photostatic copy of Crockett's discharge, with the rank of fourth sergeant, signed by General Coffee, in possession of E. E. Patton, Knoxville, Tenn. Also, Professor Shackford could find no mention in the official records of his hiring a substitute and doubts the reliability of that part of David's account.

³⁸Shackford, *David Crockett*, 33-35; *Autobiography*, 84-85.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 85-88.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 88-89; Hamer, *Tennessee*, I, 248; Shackford, *David Crockett*, 37-38.

⁴¹Lawrence County Court Minutes, I, 1818-1823 (typewritten transcripts by Historical Records Survey, in University of Tennessee Library), *passim*. The statement in the *Autobiography* (pages 88-89): "We remained here some two or three years, without any law at all; and . . . found it necessary to set up a temporary government of our own. . . . We kept this up till our Legislature added us to the white settlements in Giles county; . . ." is a great exaggeration and the result of faulty recollection. Lawrence County was

these duties seriously taxed his limited educational background. He claimed that he "relied on natural born sense" rather than on any knowledge of law, and also that he improved his handwriting. Crockett also succeeded in defeating Captain Clint Matthews for colonel of the militia of Lawrence County, when the Captain tried to trick him into running against his son for major. This gave him more prestige and he was asked to become a candidate for the legislature to represent Lawrence and Hickman counties. While canvassing, he admitted that he had never read a newspaper and knew nothing about government. But he rapidly developed his talents as a stump speaker, and his humorous anecdotes and treats of liquor won for him a decisive victory.⁴²

When the first session of the Fourteenth General Assembly convened at Murfreesboro on September 17, 1821, Crockett was placed on the Committee of Propositions and Grievances. The only resolution of importance which he submitted at this session was one opposing the practice of a number of surveyors south and west of the Congressional Reservation Line of making more than one entry on the same warrant or certificate other than the entries made by the occupants. Accordingly, the legislature passed an act forbidding any surveyor to make more than one entry on the same warrant with the penalty for infraction of the law removal from office, payment of a fine ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000, and imprisonment for a term of not less than one year. Thus, Crockett began his legislative career as a defender of the interests of "squatters" south and west of the Congressional Reservation Line in the region of West Tennessee and southwestern Middle Tennessee which had been originally reserved in 1806 for the United States, but which had been opened to North Carolina civil and military land warrants in 1818.⁴³ He was to continue this battle as his chief aim as a legislator throughout his career.

organized early in 1818; and there is no evidence that there was ever any jurisdiction there from Giles County. See also Shackford, *David Crockett*, 37-38.

⁴²*Autobiography*, 89-94. In this work he probably exaggerated his ignorance for political reasons, as when he "admitted" that he had no idea what the judiciary was when James K. Polk told him that the judiciary would be radically changed at the next session of the legislature. *Ibid.*, 95; Shackford, *David Crockett*, 45.

⁴³*Tennessee House Journal*, 1821, pp. 4, 34, 84-85; *Tennessee Acts*, 1821, p. 38. For an interesting discussion of how the squatters were frequently driven off the lands they were occupying by holders of North Carolina warrants, see Shackford, *David Crockett*, 48-49. The West Tennessee portion of the Congressional Reservation had been acquired from the Chickasaws by the famous Jackson Purchase of 1818. *Ibid.*, 299 (n. 1).

Among the lines of p a bill which to pay costs "suppress the to ex-Governor cations. He to democrati question until Governor W

It was endeavors th cane." A rep Mitchell) us and when D tory intention Crockett got attached to l him a round Mitchell. Th class.⁴⁵

Before the Crockett distillery on spring Croc decided to l Fork of the became Gibb to this new ture, as wel of judgment

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 50 of the McMinn Messages of th

⁴⁵Shackford Crockett of W writer of this Crockett's iden

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 50 passim.

background. He
her than on any
writing. Crockett
for colonel of the
to trick him into
more prestige and
ture to represent
he admitted that
out government.
speaker, and his
him a decisive

al Assembly con-
ckett was placed
e only resolution
one opposing the
he Congressional
the same warrant
nts. Accordingly,
r to make more
for infraction of
ing from \$1,000
n one year. Thus,
the interests of
ervation Line in
iddle Tennessee
nited States, but
d military land
his chief aim as

ever any jurisdiction

ed his ignorance for
e judiciary was when
d at the next session

e Acts, 1821, p. 38.
driven off the lands
Ford, *David Crockett*,
n had been acquired
299 (n. 1).

Among the votes which he cast were several which also indicated the lines of policy he was going to follow consistently. He voted against a bill which would have authorized courts to hire out insolvent persons to pay costs levied against them in criminal cases, against a bill to "suppress the vice of gaming," and against the granting of a divorce to ex-Governor Joseph McMinn, as well as several other divorce applications. He also voted for the calling of a constitutional convention to democratize Tennessee's constitution, but agreed to postpone the question until the special session of the legislature which it was expected Governor William Carroll would call for that purpose.⁴⁴

It was also during this first session of Crockett's legislative endeavors that he acquired the nickname, "the gentleman from the cane." A representative referred to as "Mr. M—" (presumably James C. Mitchell) used the phrase in a slighting manner referring to Crockett, and when David demanded satisfaction he denied having any derogatory intention. The next day, after Mitchell had made a speech, Crockett got up with a cambric ruffle of the same cut Mitchell affected attached to his own coarse shirt. The legislators got the point and gave him a round of applause, to the discomfiture of the more aristocratic Mitchell. Thus, Crockett increased his popularity among the poorer class.⁴⁵

Before the legislature adjourned, a financial misfortune visited the Crockett family back home. His large grist mill, powder mill, and distillery on Shoal Creek were swept away by a flood. The following spring Crockett started for the West in search of a new home. He decided to build a cabin about 150 miles distant on the Rutherford Fork of the Obion River in what was then Carroll County, but which became Gibson County in 1823. But before he could move his family to this new location, he had to attend an extra session of the legislature, as well as to make arrangements for the settlement of a number of judgments against him.⁴⁶

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 50-52; *House Journal*, 1821, pp. 74, 157, 263, 393-400. For brief discussions of the McMinn divorce and constitutional convention issues, see Robert H. White (ed.), *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee*, Vol. II, 1821-1835 (Nashville, 1952), 21-26.

⁴⁵Shackford, *David Crockett*, 52-53, citing *Life and Adventures of Colonel David Crockett of West Tennessee* (Cincinnati, 1833). For Shackford's identification of the writer of this work as Mathew St. Clair Clarke and his speculations as to the extent of Crockett's identification with its production, see *ibid.*, 253-64.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 50-56; *Autobiography*, 95-107; Lawrence County Court Minutes, I, 420-508, *passim*.

During this special session Crockett was considerably more active than he had been during the regular session, having learned more about legislative procedure. He introduced two bills which were enacted into law. One extended the boundaries of Hickman and Lawrence counties and the other moved the office of the surveyor of the seventh district to Lawrenceburg. The petitions he presented from the citizens and county court of Hickman County to retain the seat of government at the town of Vernon were also successful.⁴⁷ Although one of the reasons for the calling of the special session by Governor Carroll was to provide for an extension of time for the filing and adjudication of North Carolina land warrants, Crockett joined in an unsuccessful effort of the house to prevent such an extension; when the senate insisted on its nonconcurrence, Crockett and a majority of the house finally approved the measure. Since the depression following the panic of 1819 had not yet ended, he introduced several bills for relief of various and sundry individuals, including one Mathias, "a free man of color." He continued his support of the movement for a constitutional convention, but the bill failed to receive the necessary two-thirds vote. Finally, one of his speeches to the assembly, against the practice of fee-grabbing, was reported in the Nashville press.⁴⁸

After the adjournment of the legislature, Crockett resumed his hunting in the Reelfoot Lake region, which is still called the "hunters' and fishermen's Paradise," and he recounted some of his thrilling experiences in the *Autobiography*. In 1823 Crockett was again a candidate for the legislature. But this was a more difficult race than that of 1821, for his opponent was Dr. William E. Butler, a nephew of the wife of General Jackson and one of the wealthiest, most public-spirited, aristocratic, and hospitable men of Jackson, Tennessee. Although Crockett lacked talents possessed by Dr. Butler, he had some native ability for acquiring votes. According to his account, he had a special hunting shirt which he wore when campaigning. It was made of buckskin, unusually large, and had two pockets. In one pocket he carried tobacco and in the other whiskey. When he met a prospective voter,

⁴⁷*House Journal*, 1822, pp. 34, 37, 82, 88, 107; *Acts*, 1822, pp. 83, 160, 117-18. See also Jerome D. Spence and David L. Spence, *A History of Hickman County, Tennessee* (Nashville, 1900), 387-89.

⁴⁸White (ed.), *Messages*, II, 29; *House Journal*, 1822, pp. 35, 42, 56, 114, 167, *et passim*; Shackford, *David Crockett*, 57-58, citing *National Banner and Nashville Whig*, Aug. 14, 1822.

he wo
would
dispos
a man
vote f

L
appare
electio
Butler
of the
fine c
when
the ca
on tru
lives,
camp
let hi
speak
Crock
many
witho

and i
Septe
phrey
Crock
whic
gress
affair

One
presi
lead

29-30
Chest
385-8
Crock

erably more active
 earned more about
 were enacted into
 Lawrence counties
 the seventh district
 the citizens and
 of government at
 one of the reasons
 arroll was to pro-
 dication of North
 essful effort of the
 te insisted on its
 e finally approved
 c of 1819 had not
 arious and sundry
 color." He con-
 tional convention,
 vote. Finally, one
 e of fee-grabbing,

ckett resumed his
 lled the "hunters"
 e of his thrilling
 was again a candi-
 race than that of
 a nephew of the
 ost public-spirited,
 nessee. Although
 had some native
 he had a special
 was made of buck-
 pocket he carried
 prospective voter,

pp. 83, 160, 117-18.
 of Hickman County,

35, 42, 56, 114, 167,
 r and Nashville Whig,

he would treat him first with whiskey. But before leaving him, he would hand him a twist of tobacco to replace the "chaw" he had disposed of when he took the drink. Crockett reasoned that if he left a man in a good humor, in as good shape as he found him, he would vote for him on election day.⁴⁹

During the campaign Crockett canvassed in Jackson, because it was apparent that Butler would be very strong in his home town. While electioneering in this town, Crockett was invited to dinner at the Butler home. The story is told that when Crockett entered the parlor of the Butler home, he leaped to his chair to avoid stepping on the fine carpet, kept his feet on the rounds of the chair, and leaped again when leaving the parlor. He then denounced his opponent throughout the campaign for having such a fine carpet that "every day he *walks* on truck finer than any gowns your wives or your daughters, in all their lives, ever wore!" Another story reveals Crockett's clever tricks in campaigning. On one speaking occasion he persuaded Dr. Butler to let him speak first. In those days it was the custom for opponents to speak to the same crowd on the same afternoon. Mischievously, Crockett took the stump and since he had heard Dr. Butler's speech many times before, gave it verbatim. Thus his opponent was left without a speech.⁵⁰

Crockett's methods paid off with a victory in the August election, and in the Fifteenth General Assembly, which met at Murfreesboro on September 16, 1823, he represented a district of five counties: Humphreys, Perry, Henderson, Carroll, and Madison. Early in the session Crockett was selected to serve on three standing committees, one of which was that on Vacant Lands Lying North and East of the Congressional Reservation Line, and also on special committees on military affairs and on the organization of new counties.⁵¹

Two groups were opposing each other in the state at that time. One was led by John Overton, wealthy judge, land speculator, bank president, and law partner of Andrew Jackson. In the legislature the leader of the Overton group was Felix Grundy, while the spokesman

⁴⁹Autobiography, 101-10.

⁵⁰J. G. Cisco, "Madison County," *American Historical Magazine*, VIII (Jan., 1903), 29-30; H. S. Turner, "Andrew Jackson and David Crockett: Reminiscences of Colonel Chester," *Magazine of American History* (New York, 1878-1893), XXVII (May, 1892), 385-87; Emma Inman Williams, *Historic Madison* (Jackson, Tenn., 1946), 50-51.

⁵¹Autobiography, 10; *House Journal*, 1823, pp. 4, 17-18, 23, 36; Shackford, *David Crockett*, 66.

of the opposing group, composed mainly of farmers and merchants, was James K. Polk.

The legislature of 1823 had to deal with the disposition of lands belonging to the state, a problem which was magnified by its relationship to public education. A law of 1806 gave the United States title to the land south and west of the Congressional Reservation Line, which included all of West Tennessee and the southwest corner of Middle Tennessee. Tennessee acquired ownership of the remaining land, but was required to satisfy all land claims under North Carolina's laws of 1782-1783. As indicated above, these claims were so numerous that practically all of the good land in the state was required to satisfy them, even including the Congressional Reservation, which was made available for that purpose in 1818. Only the region south of the French Broad River in East Tennessee was unavailable for the location of these North Carolina warrants.⁵²

Tennesseans' patience was exhausted when the legislature of North Carolina gave to her state university all land grants to soldiers unclaimed by her veterans of the Revolution, and the University of North Carolina presented these warrants for acceptance. In 1822 Felix Grundy had succeeded by a trick in getting some of the claims accepted, on condition that some of the warrants be given to two Tennessee colleges. When the trustees of the University of North Carolina presented additional warrants to the Tennessee legislature in 1823, Crockett and Polk objected. Polk argued that the lands in the Western District (Congressional Reservation) should be reserved for a fund to support education, assuming that Congress could be induced to cede the remaining lands to the state. Crockett, coming from the ranks of the poor people and interested in the rise of the common man, demanded that the squatters occupying lands in this district be given priority in securing the land on which they were living. By a close vote Crockett, Polk, and their supporters succeeded in thwarting temporarily the plans of the University of North Carolina trustees. They were not successful, however, in their efforts to prevent the granting of an extension of time during which other holders of North Carolina warrants could locate their lands in the former Congressional Reserve;

⁵²Charles G. Sellers, Jr., "James K. Polk's Political Apprenticeship," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 25 (1953), 37-40, 43-44; Stanley J. Folmsbee, *Sectionalism and Internal Improvements in Tennessee, 1796-1845* (Knoxville, 1939), 21-22.

but they
land on v

Ano
1823 cor
included
acquired
considere
the price
preferenc
amendme
another l
Crockett
the gradu
ing again
was adop
negative.
money, p
had not,
Kelly's a
sections o
Crockett
1823, the
These vo
did not f
legislator

A th
concerned
the Comp
100,000
academie
dollar an
and succ

⁵³Selle
Nashville
275. The
presumably
remaining
Crockett, 7

⁵⁴Selle
pp. 32, 38-
Acts, 1823,

but they won for the occupants pre-emption rights in purchasing the land on which they were living and which they had improved.⁵³

Another land controversy which came before the legislature in 1823 concerned the sale of land in the Hiwassee District, which included the territory between the Little Tennessee and Hiwassee rivers, acquired from the Cherokee Indians in 1819. When the legislature considered a "graduation" system providing for a gradual reduction in the price of land ranging from \$1.50 to 121/2 cents per acre, with preference given to squatters during each period, three significant amendments were submitted, one by Polk, one by Felix Grundy, and another by Thomas Kelly. On each of these amendments Polk and Crockett cast opposing votes. Polk's amendment to fix the top price in the graduation scale at \$2.00 instead of \$1.50 lost, with Crockett voting against it. Grundy's amendment to sell the Hiwassee lands for cash was adopted, with Polk voting in the affirmative and Crockett in the negative. Crockett explained that "if the sale was made for ready money, poor people would get but very little if any of the land." He had not, he said, "come here to legislate for ready-money men." Kelly's amendment to allow widows of the district to keep the quarter sections on which they were living was rejected by a close vote, with Crockett voting for it and Polk voting against it. On November 15, 1823, the original bill and graduation system were enacted into law.⁵⁴ These votes show clearly that Crockett had a mind of his own and did not follow blindly the persuasive leadership of the more-learned legislator from Columbia, James K. Polk.

A third land controversy in which education was again involved concerned land sales in the area south of the French Broad River. By the Compact of 1806 Tennessee was required to set aside two tracts of 100,000 acres each in this section for the support of colleges and academies, but squatters in this region had pre-emption rights at one dollar an acre. These people had been unwilling to pay even this price and successive legislatures had indulged them, allowing them to buy

⁵³Sellers, "Polk's Political Apprenticeship," *loc. cit.*, 43-46; *Acts*, 1823, pp. 42-45; *Nashville Whig*, Sept. 29, 1823; *House Journal*, 1823, pp. 50, 57, 89-90, 148-49, 157, 275. The legislature also adopted a memorial, prepared by Polk and which Crockett presumably supported, asking Congress to cede to Tennessee for educational purposes all remaining land in the Congressional Reservation. *Ibid.*, 325-29; Shackford, *David Crockett*, 70.

⁵⁴Sellers, "Polk's Political Apprenticeship," *loc. cit.*, 46-47; *House Journal*, 1823, pp. 32, 38-39, 43, 45, 136-37, 141, 191-92, 223, 242-43; *Nashville Whig*, Sept. 29, 1823: *Acts*, 1823, pp. 25-27.

their lands on credit and then regularly postponing the collection of the principal and interest when due. Finally, the legislature, in 1823, passed an act providing further "relief" for the squatters by postponing for a short time the collection of interest due on their unpaid installments and remitting one third of the whole debt and interest; but the law also stipulated that any future default in meeting installments when due would result in foreclosure and public sale with the colleges and academies receiving the proceeds. Crockett voted in favor of the bill; but his colleague, Polk, voted against it.⁵⁵ In view of the hardships on the squatters which resulted from the numerous foreclosure suits which were filed, it is difficult to explain Crockett's vote. Possibly, he was more interested in West Tennessee squatters than those of East Tennessee. More likely, he was influenced by the fact that the squatters south of the French Broad had obligated themselves to pay one dollar an acre for the lands they were occupying; and one of Crockett's most immutable beliefs, as evidenced by numerous incidents in his career, was his insistence that whenever anyone had voluntarily assumed an obligation, he should be required to live up to it.

It was during this session of 1823 that a permanent fund was created for the support of common schools, and Crockett, as a member of the Committee on Vacant Lands lying North and East of the Congressional Reservation Line, must have been personally identified with this legislation, although it appears that he was absent when the votes were taken. Earlier that year Congress had removed the restriction in the Compact of 1806 which prevented Tennessee from selling land at less than the minimum price under the national land system. This action not only made it possible for Tennessee to introduce the graduation system for the Hiwassee District, as mentioned above, but also to arrange to sell for what it would bring the waste land not taken up by North Carolina warrant holders north and east of the Congressional Reservation Line. The legislature provided for the sale of this land for 12½ cents per acre and set aside the proceeds as the beginning of a permanent common school fund. The law also gave the occupants the first choice in obtaining the land, and it probably was this aspect of the legislation in which Crockett was most interested. As was to be the

⁵⁵Stanley J. Folmsbee, "Blount College and East Tennessee College, 1794-1840 . . .," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 17 (1945), 31; *Acts*, 1823, pp. 33-39; *House Journal*, 1823, pp. 188-89.

case
comm
on c
prote

legisl
denia
durin
the l
Whe
the h
resol
voted
whic
the h
1823
tion,
argu
cour
defra
ings
ecute
brou
defe
this

Grun
Mos
1819
silver
a bi
paym

Hous
Sept.
of G
Over
Shack
pp. 1

the collection of
 legislature, in 1823,
 ers by postponing
 their unpaid install-
 ment interest; but the
 setting installments
 with the colleges
 and in favor of the
 of the hardships
 foreclosure suits
 vote. Possibly, he
 can those of East
 that the squatters
 to pay one dollar
 of Crockett's most
 nts in his career,
 arily assumed an

manent fund was
 Crockett, as a member
 East of the Con-
 ly identified with
 it when the votes
 the restriction in
 m selling land at
 system. This action
 e the graduation
 ove, but also to
 and not taken up
 the Congressional
 e of this land for
 e beginning of a
 the occupants the
 as this aspect of
 As was to be the

age, 1794-1840 . . . ,"
Acts, 1823, pp. 33-39;

case throughout his political career, he favored the establishment of common schools and the use of land revenue for their support, but only on condition that the interests of the squatters were adequately protected.⁵⁶

Another of Crockett's political interests was his opposition to legislative handling of divorce cases. Following his participation in the denial of ex-Governor McMinn's divorce petition in 1821, he supported during the special session of 1822 a resolution of J. C. Mitchell's that the legislature not consider any divorce applications during that session. When the senate failed to concur, he supported another resolution that the house of representatives should not act on any divorce petition. This resolution was rejected; and it is interesting to note that Crockett later voted for one divorce and introduced one divorce petition himself, which was rejected on first reading and the house then moved against the hearing of any more divorce actions during that session. When the 1823 legislature convened, Crockett introduced the anti-divorce resolution, which called forth much argument and discussion. In reply to the argument that poor people could not afford divorce proceedings in the courts, Crockett proposed that in indigent cases, where the problem of defraying the expenses of obtaining a divorce in regular court proceedings was involved, the legislature authorize that such cases be prosecuted in the several districts at public expense rather than being brought before the legislature. Although the divorce resolution was defeated in the senate, no divorce was granted by the legislature during this session.⁵⁷

In addition to their differences on the land questions, the Overton-Grundy and the Polk-Crockett factions also tangled over the bank issue. Most of the banks in the state had been forced during the Panic of 1819 to suspend specie payment, that is, refuse to redeem in gold or silver the banknotes they had issued. The legislature, in 1821, passed a bill, which Crockett supported, requiring them to resume specie payment by April, 1824. When the legislature convened in 1823, the

⁵⁶Sellers, "Polk's Political Apprenticeship," *loc. cit.*, 47-48; *Acts*, 1823, pp. 58-66; *House Journal*, 1823, pp. 277-78, 282-83, 292, 295.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 1822, pp. 12-13, 24, 26, 54, 70; *ibid.*, 1823, pp. 17, 29, 38; *Nashville Whig*, Sept. 22, 1823. Other legislative efforts of Crockett's which succeeded were the creation of Gibson County (which included his own home), the establishment of the town of Overton in Perry County, and the authorization of the building of a jail in Perryville. Shackford, *David Crockett*, 59; *House Journal*, 1823, pp. 199, 206, 312; *Acts*, 1823, pp. 179, 196.

pro-bank faction headed by Grundy immediately began efforts to have that resumption law repealed or modified. They were vigorously opposed by a group headed by Polk and Crockett; but eventually the legislature passed a compromise proposal, drafted by Polk, allowing gradual resumption. However, both Polk and Crockett voted against the measure on final passage. Crockett's view seems to have been that the banking system was "a species of swindling on a large scale." But he was more favorably disposed toward the Bank of the State of Tennessee, usually called Grundy's "loan office," a completely state-owned bank with an agency in each county created to loan money to the hard-pressed people during the depression. He successfully sponsored in 1822 and 1823 resolutions to continue in operation the bank's agencies in the respective counties.⁵⁸

Although in most respects Crockett kept the wishes of his constituents in mind, there were two measures that he introduced which, though they failed to pass, were used against him when he ran for Congress two years later. One was a bill to change the times of meeting of certain courts in West Tennessee, and the other a proposal to add an East Tennessee brigade to the West Tennessee militia. John Overton, writing on behalf of Crockett's opponent in 1825, cited these actions as proof that Crockett had neglected the interests of his constituents. He did not, apparently, mention the fact that Crockett also introduced a bill, for which he cast the only "aye" vote, to repeal all laws authorizing stays of executions on judgment. In view of Crockett's avowed methods of campaigning, it is also of interest to note that he opposed a bill to preserve the "purity of elections" which seems to have included a clause prohibiting the use of liquor in soliciting votes. Comparing the measure with the existing law, Crockett claimed he could get along either way. If "treating" were prohibited he could get friends to do it for him. But he believed that everyone should be allowed to treat as much as he liked. He was one of a small group, however, which attempted to amend the bill so as to prohibit the sale of liquor by retail in connection with any election.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Sellers, "Polk's Political Apprenticeship," *loc. cit.*, 40-42; Charles G. Sellers, Jr., "Banking and Politics in Jackson's Tennessee, 1817-1827," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (Cedar Rapids), XLI (June, 1954), 61-74; Shackford, *David Crockett*, 69; *House Journal*, 1822, pp. 294, 371; *ibid.*, 1823, pp. 229, 312, 321-22, 330.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 140, 211, 47, 153, 213-14; *Knoxville Register*, Nov. 14, 1823; Shackford, *David Crockett*, 69. Crockett's resolution against stays of judgments is an evidence of his personal honesty in financial matters, even though he was frequently unable to pay

1823
session
States
that
woul
Whe
of W
to pr
Sena
deser
for
early
was

He
and
run

Gov
elec
con
cou
of
the

his
70.

mo
ope
me
pol
sib
Jac
ope
Sel

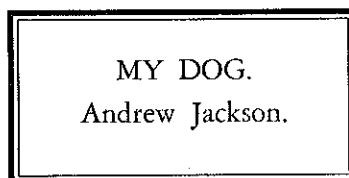
an efforts to have
were vigorously
but eventually the
by Polk, allowing
Crockett voted against
to have been that
large scale." But
the State of Ten-
pletely state-owned
money to the hard-
lly sponsored in
the bank's agencies

ishes of his con-
ntroduced which,
when he ran for
times of meeting
proposal to add an
a. John Overton,
ted these actions
his constituents.
t also introduced
all laws author-
Crockett's avowed
that he opposed
to have included
s. Comparing the
could get along
friends to do it
owed to treat as
however, which
ale of liquor by

Charles G. Sellers, Jr.,
ppi Valley Historical
David Crockett, 69;
330.

14, 1823; Shackford,
is an evidence of
uently unable to pay

The action of Crockett's which most distinguished him during the 1823 session was his vote against Andrew Jackson for senator. At that session Colonel John Williams, a candidate for re-election to the United States Senate, was opposed by the Overton faction because they feared that Williams, who had had some differences with Andrew Jackson, would not favor the nomination of Jackson for president in 1824. When it became evident that neither of the two pro-Jackson opponents of Williams could command enough votes to defeat him, they decided to present the name of Jackson himself as Williams' opponent for the Senate. Jackson defeated Williams by a vote of 35 to 25, with Polk deserting Overton's opponents and voting for Jackson. Crockett voted for Williams, explaining later in his *Autobiography* that even at this early date he wanted to prove to the people that he had convictions and was too independent to wear a collar with "the letters engraved on it":



He also believed that Williams had "honestly discharged his duty" and therefore deserved another term. The vote, however, in the long run proved very costly to Crockett.⁶⁰

An extra session of the Fifteenth General Assembly, called by Governor Carroll to correct a mistake in the act of 1823 regulating the election of electors of president and vice-president of the United States, convened on September 20, 1824, at Murfreesboro. Because of the new counties created in 1823, Crockett now represented ten counties instead of five. Early in the session Crockett presented a bill for improving the navigation of the rivers in the Western District, and on October 16,

his debts on time. In 1827 he had still not paid some notes he had signed in 1823. *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 67-68; *Autobiography*, 111. The dog-collar reference was of course much more applicable to the time of the publication of the *Autobiography* (1834), when David's opposition to Jackson as president was due in large measure to Jackson's dictatorial methods as a party leader, than to 1823, when Jackson had not yet become quite such a political dictator. Nevertheless, Crockett's vote showed his independence, plus the possibility that he was nursing a wounded pride from the time of his relations with Jackson during the war. But he lacked the political acumen of Polk, who stopped his opposition to the Jackson forces short of voting against Jackson for the Senate. See Sellers, "Polk's Political Apprenticeship," *loc. cit.*, 51-52.

1824, such a measure was enacted into law.⁶¹ Crockett introduced a second bill in the interest of internal improvement. He requested an apportionment of the surplus public money that had been acquired from the sale of lots in the town of Jackson in Madison County. This bill, which was passed October 8, provided that this surplus, after a courthouse, prison, stocks, and clerk's offices specified by an act of 1822 had been completed, should be set aside for building a road through the swamp of the Forked Deer River.⁶²

Lafayette, the French hero who had helped the United States win its independence in the Revolutionary War, had arrived in this country for a visit and had come to Tennessee while the legislature was in session. Consequently, resolutions were adopted to pay him honor. Among these measures was a bill presented by Crockett to establish the county of Fayette in honor of the French hero. The following day the general assembly passed an act which authorized that a county, to be called Fayette, be established west of Hardeman County and east of Shelby County.⁶³

Crockett's chief aim during this special session continued to be the protection of the interests of the squatters in West Tennessee. The legislature had scarcely convened before he introduced a resolution that "the register of West Tennessee issue no grants on entries made south and west of the Congressional Reservation Line by warrants which were before laid on lands north and east of said line, and the lands thus vacated entered at 12½ cents per acre," a practice which he considered fraudulent and against the law. He therefore also introduced another resolution for the investigation of the conduct of the West Tennessee register.⁶⁴ The speculators' activity to which he was referring appears to have been roughly as follows. Holders of North Carolina military warrants, given as a bonus for Revolutionary War service, who had located them on poor land on the Cumberland Plateau or Highland Rim before the better lands in the Congressional Reservation had been opened to the satisfaction of North Carolina claims naturally wished they could shift their entries to those better lands in West Tennessee.

⁶¹White (ed.), *Messages*, II, 65-68; *Acts*, 1824, p. 122; *House Journal*, 1824, p. 13. Crockett had opposed a similar bill in 1823, after it had been amended so as to provide for the use of prison labor. *Ibid.*, 1823, pp. 309, 319-20.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 1824, p. 37; *Acts*, 1824, p. 64.

⁶³*House Journal*, 1824, pp. 23-25, 46; *Acts*, 1824, pp. 46-47.

⁶⁴*House Journal*, 1824, pp. 10, 41.

Crockett introduced a bill. He requested an act. It had been acquired from the state of Tennessee. This bill, after a court decision, after an act of 1822 had been passed, a road through the

The United States win the land in this country. The legislature was in session to pay him honor. Crockett to establish the following day the bill that a county, to be in the County and east of

continued to be the land in Tennessee. The legislature passed a resolution that the entries made south of the warrants which were the lands thus which he considered introduced another bill. The West Tennessee bill referring appears in the Carolina military service, who had been in the plateau or Highland reservation had been naturally wished in West Tennessee.

House Journal, 1824, p. 13. ended so as to provide

The opportunity to do so presented itself when the Tennessee legislature in 1823, as mentioned above, provided for the disposal of unsold land north and east of the Congressional Reservation Line for 12½ cents an acre. The warrant holders, who usually were speculators, would arrange to have their entries to the poor Middle Tennessee lands cancelled, on condition that they would buy the same land from the state for 12½ cents an acre. They would then use their old soldiers' warrants, which had been returned to them, to enter the same number of acres of land in the new, richer country of West Tennessee. The new lands they selected usually would be occupied by squatters, who had no equally valid title to them and could be forced to give them up. However, under a provision of the law Polk and Crockett had helped to put through in 1823, the speculators were required to allow the squatters the privilege of buying from them any lands on which they were living and had improved. This the speculators proceeded to do, for one or two dollars an acre. As Crockett described it in his speech to the legislature in 1824,

The speculators then pretending to be great friends to the people in saving their land, had gone up one side of the creek and down another, like a *coon*, and pretended to grant the poor people great favors in securing them occupant claims—they gave them a credit of a year and promised to take cows, horses, &c., in payment. But when the year came around, the notes were in the hands of others; the people were sued, cows and horses not being sufficient to pay for securing it. He said again, that warrants obtained in this way, by the removal of entries for the purpose of speculation, should be as counterfeit bank notes in the hands of the person who obtained them, and die on their hands.

Although the Crockett viewpoint was endorsed by a joint select committee headed by the future governor A. V. Brown, the speculators won the right to continue that shady practice; but their majority was reduced to a margin of two votes.⁶⁵

Land claims of the University of North Carolina came up again for consideration during the 1824 session. The University had obtained a court order allowing the claims the legislature had rejected in 1823. Crockett joined Polk and a few other members of the house in an unsuccessful attempt to have that "illegal" proceeding investigated. The University also presented claims for an additional 100,000 acres, offering to divide them, as had been done in 1822 with the earlier

⁶⁵Shackford, *David Crockett*, 71-72, quoting *National Banner and Nashville Whig*, Sept. 27, 1824; *House Journal*, 1824, pp. 98-101, 190-91, 199; *Acts*, 1824, p. 15.

1824, such a measure was enacted into law.⁶¹ Crockett introduced a second bill in the interest of internal improvement. He requested an apportionment of the surplus public money that had been acquired from the sale of lots in the town of Jackson in Madison County. This bill, which was passed October 8, provided that this surplus, after a court-house, prison, stocks, and clerk's offices specified by an act of 1822 had been completed, should be set aside for building a road through the swamp of the Forked Deer River.⁶²

Lafayette, the French hero who had helped the United States win its independence in the Revolutionary War, had arrived in this country for a visit and had come to Tennessee while the legislature was in session. Consequently, resolutions were adopted to pay him honor. Among these measures was a bill presented by Crockett to establish the county of Fayette in honor of the French hero. The following day the general assembly passed an act which authorized that a county, to be called Fayette, be established west of Hardeman County and east of Shelby County.⁶³

Crockett's chief aim during this special session continued to be the protection of the interests of the squatters in West Tennessee. The legislature had scarcely convened before he introduced a resolution that "the register of West Tennessee issue no grants on entries made south and west of the Congressional Reservation Line by warrants which were before laid on lands north and east of said line, and the lands thus vacated entered at 12½ cents per acre," a practice which he considered fraudulent and against the law. He therefore also introduced another resolution for the investigation of the conduct of the West Tennessee register.⁶⁴ The speculators' activity to which he was referring appears to have been roughly as follows. Holders of North Carolina military warrants, given as a bonus for Revolutionary War service, who had located them on poor land on the Cumberland Plateau or Highland Rim before the better lands in the Congressional Reservation had been opened to the satisfaction of North Carolina claims naturally wished they could shift their entries to those better lands in West Tennessee.

⁶¹White (ed.), *Messages*, II, 65-68; *Acts*, 1824, p. 122; *House Journal*, 1824, p. 13. Crockett had opposed a similar bill in 1823, after it had been amended so as to provide for the use of prison labor. *Ibid.*, 1823, pp. 309, 319-20.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 1824, p. 37; *Acts*, 1824, p. 64.

⁶³*House Journal*, 1824, pp. 23-25, 46; *Acts*, 1824, pp. 46-47.

⁶⁴*House Journal*, 1824, pp. 10, 41.

Crockett introduced a bill. He requested an appropriation of \$10,000 to be acquired from the Treasury of the United States. This bill, after a court-martial, after a court-martial, after an act of 1822 had been passed, a road through the

the United States win arrived in this country. The legislature was in session to pay him honor. Crockett to establish the following day the bill that a county, to be called Crockett County and east of

continued to be the Tennessee. The legislature passed a resolution that the entries made south of the warrants which were the lands thus which he considered introduced another bill. The West Tennessee bill referring appears in the North Carolina military service, who had been at the plateau or Highland reservation had been as naturally wished in West Tennessee.

House Journal, 1824, p. 13. amended so as to provide

7.

The opportunity to do so presented itself when the Tennessee legislature in 1823, as mentioned above, provided for the disposal of unsold land north and east of the Congressional Reservation Line for 12½ cents an acre. The warrant holders, who usually were speculators, would arrange to have their entries to the poor Middle Tennessee lands cancelled, on condition that they would buy the same land from the state for 12½ cents an acre. They would then use their old soldiers' warrants, which had been returned to them, to enter the same number of acres of land in the new, richer country of West Tennessee. The new lands they selected usually would be occupied by squatters, who had no equally valid title to them and could be forced to give them up. However, under a provision of the law Polk and Crockett had helped to put through in 1823, the speculators were required to allow the squatters the privilege of buying from them any lands on which they were living and had improved. This the speculators proceeded to do, for one or two dollars an acre. As Crockett described it in his speech to the legislature in 1824,

The speculators then pretending to be great friends to the people in saving their land, had gone up one side of the creek and down another, like a *coon*, and pretended to grant the poor people great favors in securing them occupant claims—they gave them a credit of a year and promised to take cows, horses, &c., in payment. But when the year came around, the notes were in the hands of others; the people were sued, cows and horses not being sufficient to pay for securing it. He said again, that warrants obtained in this way, by the removal of entries for the purpose of speculation, should be as counterfeit bank notes in the hands of the person who obtained them, and die on their hands.

Although the Crockett viewpoint was endorsed by a joint select committee headed by the future governor A. V. Brown, the speculators won the right to continue that shady practice; but their majority was reduced to a margin of two votes.⁶⁵

Land claims of the University of North Carolina came up again for consideration during the 1824 session. The University had obtained a court order allowing the claims the legislature had rejected in 1823. Crockett joined Polk and a few other members of the house in an unsuccessful attempt to have that "illegal" proceeding investigated. The University also presented claims for an additional 100,000 acres, offering to divide them, as had been done in 1822 with the earlier

⁶⁵Shackford, *David Crockett*, 71-72, quoting *National Banner and Nashville Whig*, Sept. 27, 1824; *House Journal*, 1824, pp. 98-101, 190-91, 199; *Acts*, 1824, p. 15.

warrants, with the two Tennessee colleges. Polk and Crockett and the anti-University forces again succeeded in preventing the acceptance of the University's claims, even after it offered to divide its share with the Tennessee common school fund. This victory was temporary, however, for the next legislature, of which neither Polk nor Crockett was a member, accepted the original proposition as presented in 1824, including the division of the lands with the Tennessee colleges but not the common schools.⁶⁶

With the adjournment of the special session, Crockett's career as a state legislator came to an end, but he was soon to embark upon an even more significant career as a member of Congress which is to be considered in a sequel to this study.

Crockett's role as a legislator in the Tennessee assembly is worthy of commendation. He consistently spoke and acted in behalf of the economic, educational, and social progress of his constituency, both in public and private matters, and he won the admiration of his colleagues by his moral courage and patriotism. He was handicapped by the lack of formal education, but he was quick to learn and he acquired on his own initiative much essential knowledge. And as a politician he was able to capitalize on his lack of schooling in the development of his appeal as a representative of the lower class and of the frontier. He was also able to build on his War of 1812 record, his experience in the state militia and in various capacities in county government. His genial disposition, his quick wit, his fund of humorous anecdotes, and his ability as a teller of tall tales made him hard to beat as a stump speaker and contributed to the development of the legendary "Davy" which is so difficult to separate from the real man. Actually, he probably was a man of ordinary height instead of the legendary "six feet four" and his alleged ability to "grin down" a bear was a figment of imagination. Although he was somewhat eccentric in manner, and although he undoubtedly wore a "coon-skin cap" and rough hunting clothes while engaged in replenishing his food supply at home, it is almost certain that as a member of the legislature he adopted a form of attire as nearly as possible like that of his fellow legislators, although not as elegant as that of the more well-to-do.⁶⁷ He was also a party man and

⁶⁶*House Journal*, 1824, pp. 41-43, 92-93, 182; *Acts*, 1825, pp. 37-43; Sellers, "Polk's Political Apprenticeship," *loc. cit.*, 45-46.

⁶⁷Shackford, *David Crockett*, 282-84.

and Crockett and the
g the acceptance of
e its share with the
emporary, however,
or Crockett was a
ed in 1824, includ-
colleges but not the

Crockett's career as a
o embark upon an
ess which is to be

assembly is worthy
t in behalf of the
nstituency, both in
n of his colleagues
trapped by the lack
he acquired on his
politician he was
development of his
f the frontier. He
s experience in the
nment. His genial
dotes, and his abil-
stump speaker and
Davy" which is so
e probably was a
ix feet four" and
nt of imagination.
and although he
ting clothes while
is almost certain
form of attire as
, although not as
a party man and

37-43; Sellers, "Polk's

was inclined to follow the leadership of others who were better acquainted with the issues involved; but in certain matters where he had the knowledge as a result of personal experience, particularly in regard to land questions, he was in a position to exercise leadership, and he defended with stubborn pertinacity his own point of view. It was this spirit of independence, sometimes asserted to the point of recklessness, which was to bring him into conflict with powerful political forces and in the long run was to result in his political undoing. But in the meantime he acquired a reputation for moral courage and audacity which aided him in achieving a remarkable degree of political success.