DAVID CROCKETT IN CONGRESS

The Rise and Fall of the Poor Man's Friend

JAMES R. BOYLSTON
AND
ALLEN J. WIENER

With Collected Correspondence, Selected Speeches and Circulars

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bright sky press

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INTRODUCTION

In the mythology of America, the legend of Davy Crockett looms large. As a pioneer, Indian fighter, congressman, and martyr of the Alamo, Crockett's remarkable life has been the subject of biographies, novels, comic books, plays, songs, movies, and television shows. The image of the coonskin-capped, buckskin-clad hero swinging his rifle like a Louisville Slugger atop the Alamo is iconic; to most folks, Davy Crockett really is the King of the Wild Frontier.

While Crockett certainly was a pioneer and hardscrabble farmer, a soldier under Andrew Jackson in the Creek War, and a hero who gave his life in the fight for Texas independence, he was also an inveterate entrepreneur and a career politician with a talent for hardball campaigning. More Will Rogers than Daniel Boone, more broadcloth than buckskin, David Crockett began his political career as a justice of the peace and magistrate, and served two terms in the Tennessee State Legislature before being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives for three terms, one of them nonconsecutive. Always popular in his district, Crockett nevertheless was a hard-fighting campaigner, as he faced the formidable political machine of Andrew Jackson in virtually every engagement.

While the one-dimensional image of the mythological Davy Crockett is predominant in the public mind, the historical personage on whom this image was based has not been completely forgotten. Attempts to separate the "real" David Crockett of history from the "Davy" of legend began in earnest with James Atkins Shackford's doctoral dissertation in 1948, which provided the research for *David Crockett, the Man and the Legend,* Shackford's landmark 1956 biography of Crockett, published posthumously and edited by Shackford's brother, John B. Shackford. Virtually every David Crockett biography written since then has leaned heavily on Shackford's study. So impressive was the depth of his research that most subsequent Crockett biographers accepted Shackford's theories and conclusions uncritically, and the Shackford interpretation of Crockett has become as pervasive in the historical sector as is the mythological "Davy" to the general public.

Though the debt owed to Shackford's research is indisputable, some of his conclusions about Crockett are questionable. In fact, what may be considered the primary thrust of Shackford's vision of Crockett, that his public image was largely a construct of an anti-Jacksonian Whig conspiracy, merits much closer examination.

William C. Davis, author of the fine triple biography *Three Roads to the Alamo: The Lives and Fortunes of David Crockett, James Bowie, and William Barret Travis,* took Shackford's conspiracy theory to task, but embraced some of his conclusions regarding Crockett, especially Crockett's alleged political naiveté. However, Davis gave Crockett far more credit for political astuteness and purpose than did Shackford. Mark Derr's Crockett biography, *The Frontiersman,* also provided evidence to refute Shackford's image of Crockett, as did Thomas E. Scruggs in "Davy Crockett and the Thieves of Jericho," an essay for the *Journal of the Early Republic,* but for the most part, Shackford's theories have been taken at face value and repeated ad nauseam.

Scholars have sought to separate the real Crockett from the legendary figure mainly by focusing on how the fictional "Davy" arose and what forms he has taken. Walter Blair's "Six Davy Crocketts," from the July 1940 *Southwest Review,* is one of the most often quoted sources taking this approach, and Michael Lofaro's anthology, *Davy Crockett: The Man, The Legend, The Legacy, 1786–1836,* continued and expanded upon this direction of study. However, the real David can best be resurrected through his own words and a careful review of the political issues that were most important to him. Though the importance of Crockett's 1834 autobiography, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee,* cannot be overstated in attempting to "get inside" the David of history, Crockett's letters, speeches, and political circulars provide a unique, long-ignored approach to discovering the real man.

The purpose of this book is to retrieve the real Crockett through a careful review of those documents and to correct inaccurate views of him in earlier works. Crockett was a masterful campaigner among his frontier neighbors, an amusing jokester, storyteller and speaker. His jokes and stump speeches helped him win elections, but once in office, he proved himself an astute politician and parliamentarian. Crockett understood the issues under discussion and how his colleagues stood on them; thus, he was able to maneuver effectively

among them, sometimes gaining victories for himself.

Crockett's most important political objective was to secure for his poorer constituents legal title to the land they had worked and improved. He never achieved that goal, but his exhaustive efforts to do so illustrate Crockett's devotion to the people who elected him and his insistence on serving them rather than his political party or its leaders. Throughout his career he remained an advocate for the poor, whom he viewed as constantly pushed aside or ignored by wealthier, more influential interests.

Crockett's initial support for Andrew Jackson deteriorated quickly as he found himself at odds with the Jacksonians on many matters, including the land issue, Jackson's brutal Indian removal policy, and his war on the Second Bank of the United States. Most Crockett scholarship has portrayed his increasing opposition to Jackson as either an irrational obsession or merely cynical politics by anti-Jackson operatives, who simply used Crockett as a viable Jackson rival in Old Hickory's own state. But Crockett was far more politically aware than such a theory suggests, and that view of him ignores his genuine opposition to many of Jackson's policies and what Crockett saw as Jackson's expansion of executive power, which he viewed as a threat to the political system and to the Union.

His compassion for the Cherokee and other eastern tribes was genuine and continued long after the battle over removal had ended. He saw cruelty and injustice toward a helpless people in Jackson's Indian policy, similar to the unfairness he saw in the government's lack of concern for the poor.

Crockett's alliance with members of the embryonic Whig Party and eastern business interests may seem anomalous for an uneducated man from the backwoods and defender of the poor, but he found himself increasingly politically isolated in Tennessee. Jackson's forces and the wealthier landed gentry controlled the government and had little interest in the needs of their poorer cousins on the frontier, and Crockett was forced to recruit allies where he could find them, regardless of their political affiliation or regional interests. He often found himself in agreement with eastern factions on some issues, including Jackson's war on the Bank. While Jackson hated banks and paper money, and the Bank was guilty of corrupt practices, Crockett knew that the poor depended on easy credit in order to survive. Similarly, along with the Whigs, Crockett supported internal improvements that could benefit frontier economies, but which Jackson opposed.

Crockett made no secret of his views and openly expressed them verbally and in writing. Rather than a simple-minded pawn in the hands of more adept politicians, he was a staunch activist for his agenda and allied himself with those who shared his views. The older political parties that emerged from the Revolution were fading, and new affiliations were only beginning to materialize. Jacksonians were coalescing into the new Democratic Party, while the remnants of the National Republicans were drifting into a loose coalition of anti-Jackson forces. Many members of Congress, including one time Jackson supporters like Crockett, eventually listed their affiliation simply as "Anti-Jacksonian." These forces would merge into the new Whig Party in 1834 and Crockett would be allied with the Whigs during his final term in Congress, although he never formally became a Whig. He resisted affiliating himself too closely with any faction and believed that party loyalty should never be placed above principle or duty to his constituents. Crockett came to view strict party discipline as a threat to democracy that distanced elected officials from those they represented. In fact, although party cohesion was growing, discipline over members was never a sure thing for any faction, and what has been portrayed as Crockett's stubborn independence can be seen instead as political maneuvering to gain support for his views from politicians outside of his own state. Crockett believed that his political jockeying in Washington would not hurt him at home if his constituents remained assured that he was earnestly working on their behalf.

Crockett emerges as a strongly independent figure at odds with powerful Jacksonian forces, which repeatedly sought to unseat him in favor of someone more pliable. His three election victories and two narrow defeats attest to his personal popularity among his own people and the degree of anti-Jackson sentiment in the western part of Tennessee. Crockett's popularity is also a tribute to his loyalty to the people who elected him. His defeats can be largely attributed to the strenuous efforts of the Jacksonians, who spared no expense in their attempts to blacken his name among his constituents. They seemed to fear that any Crockett success would cement him as a fixture in Tennessee politics indefinitely, creating a long-term headache for them,

especially as they sought to reelect Jackson, and later elect his handpicked successor, Martin Van Buren, to the presidency and maintain discipline among their congressional delegation.

The search for the real Crockett, often lost behind a haze of movie and other fictional images, reveals an independent spirit who rebelled against injustice and government cronyism. He spoke for the poor, a class from which he had barely emerged through determined effort, despite chronic debt and a lack of education. He was an egalitarian who bristled at the idea of class privilege and held the Lockean belief that people had a right to land they had worked and fed with the sweat of their brow. His roots endeared him to his neighbors and won him elections, and he sought to work for his supporters. In opposing Indian removal, Crockett was, for once, out of step with his constituents, but he made no secret of his views and defended his actions as a matter of conscience, which, he said, outweighed other loyalties. Where others have seen self-defeating stubbornness and pride, a more careful look at the record reveals a man who simply would not compromise his core beliefs or stray from his objectives. As his motto suggests, when he was sure he was right, he really did go ahead.

Crockett's final campaign for reelection ended in defeat, and though he was outspoken about his disgust with the government and Van Buren's impending presidency, he looked to his own future with optimism. His 1834 autobiography had been a bestseller and contributed immeasurably to his already growing celebrity. A promotional tour of the northeast was a huge success, and Crockett, always comfortable as the center of attention, enjoyed the limelight. Two more books were published under his name and, although neither achieved the success of the *Narrative,* he remained hopeful of continuing his career as an author.

Texas too, had been on his mind for some time. A land of seemingly limitless opportunity for someone with Crockett's tenacity, Texas offered a chance for recreation, recuperation, rehabilitation, and a respite from the taxing political environment in the United States. Relocating to Texas also enabled Crockett to make good on his promise of refusing to live under a Van Buren administration.

When David Crockett died in the Alamo, his legendary alter ego took on new life and very quickly transcended the man. Although "Davy" is a beloved American legend, the real David was a more complex, interesting, and admirable figure. A careful reading of Crockett's own words can restore him and give back to America an even larger hero than the legendary man in buckskins.

The first part of this book consists of a set of chapters that can be read independently, but which are interrelated and form a chronological account of Crockett's years in office, the issues he dealt with, and his political campaigns. The chapters are largely based on his own words, contained in his letters, circulars, and speeches, including those he delivered on the House floor, and those of his contemporaries. The letters and other documents, which are annotated, form the second and third sections of the book and can be read independently. We have included every extant letter and circular of Crockett's and a selection of his speeches. In a few cases, we have also included letters to Crockett, to lend better context to his own correspondence, and a few third-party letters that lend context to the issues he faced. Although there are many other documents that bear Crockett's signature, such as receipts, transmittal notes, and various legal documents, they are not included. Taken together, the book provides an up-to-date analysis of Crockett's political career, while presenting most of the primary documents on which that analysis is based.

A note on the text: All quotations from Crockett's letters and our transcriptions of the letters retain his original spelling and lack of punctuation. Letters of his that appeared in newspapers, his circulars, and printed speeches were enhanced by editors and others before their original publication, but reflect his position on issues, as evidenced by his actions and personal correspondence. We have presented these quoted materials as originally published, including archaic spelling and punctuation that were in use at the time.

DEDICATIONS

For Sandy—my anchor and my compass.
James R. Boylston

For my mother, to whom family was all.
Allen J. Wiener

Part I

— DAVID CROCKETT IN CONGRESS —

Chapter 1

"I Will Not Set Silently"
The Early Years

David Crockett, the newly elected representative from the Western District of Tennessee, arrived in Washington City on December 7, 1827, to begin his first term in the U.S. Congress. His trip to the capitol city had been a stressful journey, and he counted himself lucky to be alive. His wife Elizabeth and son John Wesley accompanied him as far as Swannanoa, North Carolina, where they planned to spend some time visiting Elizabeth's relatives, but Crockett was stricken with an illness shortly after arriving. Most likely it was a recurrence of the malaria that had plagued him since his service in the Creek Indian War, and Crockett spent four weeks bedridden and suffering before regaining enough strength to continue his travels.[1] *Elizabeth and John did not join him, but instead returned to Tennessee with three slaves given to them by Elizabeth's father, Robert Patton. Elizabeth may have been anxious to put the slaves to work on one of the small business enterprises she and her husband were continually attempting to launch in order to put their ever increasing debts to rest.*

It had only been five years since the couple had seen their family business ruined when a flood destroyed the grist mill the Crocketts had constructed on the banks of the river near their homestead. Hoping to profit from a small industrial complex, they also had built a powder mill and a distillery, but the loss of the grist mill rendered the distillery useless, and the Crocketts found themselves with little cash on hand and three thousand dollars in the hole. Not one for hand wringing, the ever pragmatic Elizabeth simply stated that they would pay their outstanding debts one way or another and start over as soon as they were able. Crockett remarked that he "thought it better to keep a good conscience with an empty purse, than to get a good opinion of myself with a full one."[2] He would never really experience the weight of a full purse, as financial troubles would plague him throughout his career, but his entrepreneurial spirit remained undiminished to the end.

Once Crockett was back on the road to Washington, his troubles continued. Traveling by stage, he stayed at taverns along the route, and at one inn he was bilked by the owner, a man named Briceland. Crockett claimed that he and six other men with whom he was traveling were charged for lodging at the tavern, though none of them "ever saw a bed in his house." Incensed, Crockett argued with Briceland and promised to take his business elsewhere in the future. Likely, Crockett was on a tight budget and was watching his expenses closely.[3]

Once in Washington, his health continued to deteriorate. Tall, robust, and ruddy by nature,[4] but now pale and underweight, he was put under a doctor's care and diagnosed with pleurisy. Settling into

rooms at Mrs. Ball's Boarding House on Pennsylvania Avenue, he underwent the prescribed treatment of bloodletting and, after losing two quarts of blood at one session, Crockett began to fear that death was imminent.[5] Slowly, however, he regained his strength and eventually began to familiarize himself with the city and get to know some of his peers.

Mrs. Ball's was located across the street from Brown's Indian Queen Hotel, one of Washington City's most prestigious hostelries, and just down the street from Capitol Hill. At the rooming house, Crockett shared meals and accommodations with nine other congressmen, including Nathaniel Claiborne[6] of Virginia; three Kentuckians; representatives from Alabama, North Carolina, and Connecticut; and two members from New York. During the second session of Crockett's first congressional term, Thomas Chilton, a representative from Kentucky who would figure prominently in Crockett's future, moved into Mrs. Ball's as well. The men ate at a common table, and some probably shared beds, a common practice at the time. Crockett apparently found the situation agreeable, as he boarded at Ball's during every session of Congress save his last, when he moved across the street to Brown's Hotel.[7]

Crockett served during the Golden Age of Congress, where he rubbed shoulders with oratorical giants like Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, Thomas Hart Benton, and John C. Calhoun. Along with fellow Tennessean James K. Polk, Crockett's contemporaries in the first session of the Twentieth Congress included Senators and future Presidents William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, Martin Van Buren, and Congressman James Buchanan. Crockett was suitably impressed with the fast company and wrote that he was "getting along very well with the great men of the nation."[8] He began his first term in the House of Representatives with some campaign debt, a taste for alcohol, a fondness for the gaming tables, and a solid reputation for independence in the service of his constituents.[9] Crockett had already been in public service for over ten years, and the freshman congressman was an old hand at politics and running for elected office.

In 1816, Crockett was a thirty-year-old war veteran and head of a fairly large household. He had recently remarried after the death of his first wife Mary (Polly) Finley, and his blended family now consisted of five children, three from Polly (John Wesley, William, and Margaret) and two stepchildren, George and Margaret Ann, from his new wife Elizabeth, who had lost her husband in the Creek War. Later that year they would add to the family another son, Robert Patton.[10] Though the marriage may have been largely one of convenience,[11] he and Elizabeth were certainly fond of one another, and Elizabeth provided financial, managerial, and moral support for his business and political ventures throughout their long relationship.

Success in business and politics seemed the best avenues to social advancement, and Crockett was determined to better himself. Affable, honest, and renowned as a skillful bear hunter, he possessed natural leadership abilities that had begun to emerge during the Creek War when his men elected him sergeant and later lieutenant, signifying the confidence they had in him.[12] After building a small homestead in Lawrence County, Tennessee, in 1817 Crockett served as a magistrate and justice of the peace, and the following year as a town commissioner.[13]

Though he wrote and spoke often about his lack of formal education, what Crockett missed in schooling he more than made up for with street smarts and common sense, and he was known for fairness and honesty. These were the traits upon which he built his reputation and his political career. He boasted that as a magistrate his decisions were never appealed,[14] and his rapid rise in local office is a testament to his character. During this period Crockett was elected a colonel of the militia. The circumstances surrounding this election give some insight into his early, freewheeling campaign style.

Captain Matthews, a candidate for the post of colonel (actually, lieutenant colonel), encouraged Crockett to run for the rank of major of the regiment. After voicing some reluctance, Crockett nevertheless agreed to seek the position and naturally assumed that Matthews would endorse his candidacy. Upon attending a campaign frolic sponsored by the captain, Crockett found that Matthews' son was

opposing him for the position of major. Taking the captain aside, Crockett confronted him about this change in events. Matthews offered the patronizing comment that his son was hesitant to run against Crockett and was concerned about his chance of victory. Crockett replied that his son needn't worry, he'd decided to seek the position of colonel instead, and straightaway took to the stump, soundly defeating the elder Matthews in the election.[15] Crockett's jump in rank from lieutenant to lieutenant colonel was a big one, and he would carry the title "colonel," a real rank, not an honorary salutation, for the remainder of his life.

His success in achieving public office increased his political ambition, and in 1821 he decided to run for the General Assembly, the lower house of the state legislature. His candidacy, like that of William Carroll, a former merchant and respected war veteran with no political bona fides who was running for governor, represented the rising tide of popular democracy that was sweeping the South and West. Crockett hit the campaign trail at a time that was made for him. He resigned as town commissioner in order to begin electioneering and, after driving some horses to the Patton's home in Swannanoa, a task that took three months, took to the stump.

Crockett identified with Carroll and supported his progressive platform of regulating the banking industry and reforming the harsh state penal code. He also echoed Carroll's call for a state constitutional convention in order to address the underrepresentation of the growing western districts of the state in the U.S. Congress and the state legislature, and to establish a more equitable and progressive property tax structure. All of these propositions would bring relief to Crockett's primary constituency: subsistence-level farmers, local merchants, and small-scale, middle-class planters. The financial instability that had brought on the Panic of 1819 worked in Carroll's favor, as voters, feeling intense economic stress, increasingly gravitated toward a change candidate sympathetic to debtors.

Crockett's support of Carroll put him firmly in league with a Tennessee political faction led by Andrew Erwin,[16] and opposed by the conservative banker and speculator John Overton,[17] whose powerful political machine backed Edward Ward for governor. Ward, a wealthy, well educated native Virginian with an aristocratic bearing, had served as speaker of the state Senate from 1815 to 1819, and was generally seen as a friend of the banks and an advocate for the rich.[18] Despite an endorsement from Andrew Jackson, the popular native son and hero of the War of 1812, Ward lost the election to Carroll in a landslide. It would not be the last time that Crockett would find himself opposed to Jackson.

On the campaign trail, Crockett joined the locals in barbecues, squirrel hunts, and dances, and cast himself as a man of the people, which he certainly was, pretending ignorance of the law and formal politics in his speeches.[19] Though unlettered, Crockett's record as a magistrate illustrated that he was familiar with statutes, depositions, and the rules of order, and knew how to conduct himself in government. Although he had taken pains to educate himself and had even worked in exchange for lessons in the "three Rs," he hid that side of his character on the stump.[20] His exaggerated backwoods demeanor and self-deprecating humor provided a stark contrast to the usual verbose, stuffed-shirt, politician that his audience had come to identify with the ruling class.

In this new Age of the Common Man, Crockett was the perfect choice to represent frontier settlers. Up until then, government had been dominated by eastern elites and wealthy southern planters, who chose candidates from their own class, while ordinary citizens, especially the poor, had little influence. Westward expansion created new districts that demanded representation in the legislature, and citizens became empowered, seeking candidates who lived among them and understood their world.

Crockett's competitors underestimated him at their peril. He had the rare ability of connecting with voters on a personal level, remembering names and faces and asking after wives and children.[21] While his early stump speeches were short on content and long on anecdote, they were effective. He was careful to avoid taking definitive stands on controversial issues, lest he offend one side or the other, as in a dispute over where to locate the Hickman County seat,[22] but he endeared himself to the voters, and they came to believe that he could be trusted to represent them and their interests. His

campaign delivery included scathing satire directed at his competitors (more often than not playing the poor against the wealthy), exaggerated stories about bear hunting, a healthy dose of "aw shucks" self-directed humor, and speeches that generally ended with an offer to treat the crowd at a nearby liquor stand. The audience identified with this backwoods raconteur, and after Crockett spoke, his opponents were likely to find themselves staring down from the stump into a very sparse assembly.[23] From this broad caricature in the early campaigns, another character would emerge that would grow into a fictional, larger-than-life figure, and eventually become the legendary "Davy" Crockett.

With homespun wit counterbalanced by a serious populist message, and an unfailing desire to legislate for his constituents, his electioneering style paid off, and he won a seat in the legislature by a two-to-one margin in August of 1821. Crockett simply knew what kind of people he would represent better than his opponents did.

On September 17, 1821, the first session of the Fourteenth General Assembly convened in Murfreesboro,[24] and Crockett was put on the Committee of Propositions and Grievances. Foremost among his concerns, however, was the issue of land ownership. Many of his constituents did not hold legal title to their land, although they had staked out homesteads and improved their plots. As mere occupants, or squatters, their existence was precarious. The issue was complicated by the fact that eastern Tennessee had been ceded to the United States by North Carolina, which had issued to its Revolutionary War veterans land warrants that Tennessee was required to honor, many of which wound up in the hands of land speculators. Few occupants in Crockett's district could afford the speculator's inflated price for a warrant, which would provide them legal title to their land. Speculators, then, were able to use the warrants to displace occupants who had improved the plots and increased the property values, and sell the claims to the highest bidder. Crockett would spend his entire career in government attempting to rectify this situation.

His votes in his first term showed his determination to give voice to the concerns of the poor farmers like himself who made up a large part of his constituency. He introduced legislation that would reform the way land-grant surveys were issued, to prevent a small number of wealthier buyers from obtaining the best plots. This eventually became law. He voted to eliminate heavy penalties on overdue property taxes, which fell disproportionately on the poor.[25] He voted against a bill authorizing courts to hire out insolvent defendants to work off costs charged against them in criminal trials, and voted against a number of petitions for divorce, including one from former Governor Joseph McMinn.[26] He continued to support bills that offered relief for the poor and underprivileged, including legislation that provided help for widows and orphans, and voted against repealing a law that allowed the redemption of slaves from bondage. He cast a vote for the relief of Mathias, a free black man. Crockett generally considered individual requests for relief on a case by case basis, taking into account the needs of the individual and the merits of each request. He consistently favored broad relief measures designed to help his constituents as a whole.

Crockett argued against legislation that prohibited gaming, an activity for which he had a particular fondness. In an 1831 letter to the editor of the Southern Statesman, a critic of Crockett writing under the pseudonym "Junius Brutus" recalled that during Crockett's tenure in the state legislature he had "lost a part and sometimes the whole of his wages at the gaming table, and sometimes had to borrow money to bring him home, and some of that money is not paid yet."[27] Crockett's gambling seems indefensible in light of his constant debt and his obligations to his family, but author Robert Morgan, in his biography of Daniel Boone, attempted to explain the problem. "Debtors, like gamblers, live in an uneasy state of hope and despair but try to dwell on hope. The qualities that made Boone such a legendary man of the frontier also contributed to the mire of debt he never seemed to struggle out of, for by the time he paid off one debt he had already acquired others. His hopefulness, his curiosity, his forward looking faith in himself and others, his confidence in his destiny—characteristics that made him a successful hunter and explorer and leader—seemed to cripple him when it came to business."[28] The same might be said of Crockett.

Despite being a newcomer to state government, Crockett was assertive and showed no reluctance to debate, though his rough-around-the-edges demeanor and tenuous grasp of proper grammar surely caused eyes to roll on occasion. After he made a statement in session that likely showcased his colorful vernacular, James C. Mitchell[29] rose and, in reply, referred to Crockett as the "Gentleman from the Cane." Crockett was insulted and angered at this epithet, which was tantamount to calling him a hick from the sticks. He called Mitchell aside after the session and demanded satisfaction. Mitchell demurred, and claimed that he had meant no disrespect. Crockett cooled off and accepted Mitchell's apology, but some time later, after a confrontation with another member of the legislature, Mitchell lost a ruffle from the front of his shirt. Crockett found it on the ground, pinned it to his own homespun cotton shirt, and strutted into the session, taking a seat next to Mitchell. The members of the house found the burlesque hilarious, and roared their approval. Crockett appropriated the "Gentleman from the Cane" sobriquet as well, turning a liability into an asset, and now saw the stereotype as a political device that would work in his favor.[30]

It was during this first session that Crockett's mill was destroyed and he was forced to request a leave of absence to travel home and see to his business. Upon his return to the legislature, he voted twice to table resolutions calling for a state constitutional convention, although he supported the idea of a convention. Since he had voted for the resolution in September, on the surface this seems like a political flip-flop on the issue, but it was an astute move on Crockett's part. He favored postponing the resolution until Governor Carroll could call a second session to address the issue, which proponents of the convention thought would provide a more favorable setting for passing the bill. They were, however, mistaken and the opposition carried the day. Crockett's vote illustrates an understanding of the political maneuvering that was sometimes necessary to get things done, and shows that he knew how to "play the game" as well as the next fellow.

Crockett also cast his vote in favor of a bill that encouraged the building of iron works in the state. This support of manufacturing interests was an early indicator of a pro-business stance he would resume later in his career.

His experience as a justice of the peace served him well when a motion was made to overturn a prohibition on justices of the peace receiving fees for their services. Crockett argued that allowing the practice encouraged corruption, and he couched his remarks in familiar populist rhetoric. He said that since militiamen or men who worked on roads were not paid for their services, and that magistrates were exempt from both of these jobs, that was compensation enough. He then took a more personal shot at those who asked for compensation, claiming, "I know many of these gentry, who would rather serve forty years as a justice of the peace, than to serve one six month's tour of duty fighting the battles of their country. The dull pursuits of civil life is much more congenial to the taste of some of these gentlemen than wild war's deadly blasts." He went on to state that "there is no evil so great in society—among the poor people—as the management and intrigue of meddling justices and dirty constables." Crockett's position carried the day, and the bill was rejected. Of the remainder of his first term in the legislature, Crockett simply stated that he served out his time, likely preparing for his run for reelection.[31]

In 1823, Crockett ran against Dr. William Butler, and it was during this contest that he put a keener edge on the electioneering skills he had begun to hone in 1821. He said that Butler was "the most talented man I ever run against for any office,"[32] but he quickly developed a campaign strategy to take him on. Butler was married to Andrew Jackson's niece, and was wealthy and well-connected. On the stump, Crockett played up Butler's wealth, depicting him as out of touch with the populace. He ridiculed Butler's lifestyle, pointing out that the carpets in Butler's home were made of material finer than any worn by the wives and daughters of the common people.[33]

Crockett continued to utilize his "Gentleman from the Cane" persona, and told Butler at one stump meeting, "I have just crept out of the cane to see what discoveries I could make among the white folks." It was during this conversation that Crockett came up with a tall tale that has been misrepresented

as fact ever since; he told Butler that he planned on campaigning while wearing a hunting shirt with two oversized pockets, one holding a liquor bottle and one a twist of tobacco. When he met a potential supporter, he'd offer him a drink and, if the man spit out his chaw to imbibe, Crockett would offer him another plug of tobacco, thus leaving him no worse off than when they first met. Drawing on his prodigious reputation as a hunter, he also mentioned that despite Butler's financial superiority, he thought he could finance his own campaign by selling wolf pelts for bounties. By all accounts, the campaign was good-natured, and when Crockett was victorious, Butler harbored no ill will. Crockett might not have been so lucky where Andrew Jackson was concerned. Standing up to Old Hickory or one of his allies was a risky proposition.[34]

During his second term, Crockett continued to push legislation that would enable his constituents to own the land they occupied and improved, opposing measures that would require cash-only sales and raise the price of land to as much as $2.00 per acre, while favoring a measure to allow widows to keep their land. Most of these measures were adopted. He also tried to frustrate the efforts of speculators, who sought to buy up the parcels for cash and resell them at higher prices to the occupants.[35] Crockett became distrustful of the legislature as he watched the passage of most of these measures, which worked against the interests of the poor. He typically found himself at odds with James Polk and Felix Grundy,[36] who would soon be numbered among Andrew Jackson's staunchest supporters.

In 1823 Crockett struck another blow at Jackson and the Overton alliance. When John Williams[37] was up for reelection as senator from Tennessee, Jackson ran against him. Crockett backed Williams, further alienating Jackson and the Overton men. Though Williams was defeated, Crockett later defended his support as "the best vote I ever gave," and claimed that it proved early on that he was an independent thinker and not a weak-willed Jackson crony.[38]

Throughout his second term, Crockett continued to advocate legislation that protected the poor, including voting in September of 1823 for a bill that would abolish imprisonment for debt, which passed on the first reading. He again voted against hearing petitions for divorce, saying that he was opposed to "all divorces in general," and thought that it was a poor use of the legislature's time to consider divorce complaints. He also introduced a bill that would give traveling entertainers licenses that were recognized statewide rather than require them to apply for permits in individual counties.[39]

Crockett sided with James Polk in supporting a bill that would pay trial jurors for their services. Felix Grundy supported an amendment to the bill, proposed by Representative Williams, which would have included paying road workers for their services, and claimed that road workers "had as hard a time as those who lounged about a court-house and heard lawyers speak, where they could derive some information." Grundy mentioned that he really opposed the entire measure and thought the expense incurred would result in the insolvency of some counties. Crockett argued against the amendment, adding a bit of humor and a dig at Grundy and other legal professionals in the process. He said that men who worked on the public roads benefited from their own labors and weren't inconvenienced, since the jobs were close to home and scheduled in advance. Trial jurors, however, were tapped for that job while visiting the courthouse on other business and were expected to sit with no prior notification. They not only had to put their personal affairs on hold or face heavy fines, but were also subjected to "hearing lawyers talk, and there was not much ease or information in listening to some of them."[40] Crockett further commented that he thought the amendment was proposed only to destroy Polk's original bill. He supported the bill, but opposed the amendment. The amendment failed.

On October 30, Crockett spoke against a bill to "preserve the purity of elections" that would have prohibited candidates from treating voters to drinks at campaign events. Since this bill would seriously cramp Crockett's electioneering method and could not really be enforced, he opposed the measure, stating plainly that "he could get along as well with this bill as without it." If treating was banned, he could always get a friend to treat, thus serving the same purpose, and "he was in favor of letting every man treat as he pleased." Others disingenuously argued that the treating at these events was social

drinking and not intended to influence the voters either way, but Crockett cut right to the chase: candidates treated to get votes. It has been suggested that this bill was intended as a referendum on the relatively new style of electioneering of which Crockett was a practitioner: taking to the stump to get the votes of the commoners in a manner that political elites thought was beneath them and denigrating to the political system. This freewheeling campaigning was a departure from the old aristocratic pattern of the office seeking the man and elites choosing the candidates in private. Proponents of that old style found the new practice of overtly seeking an office crass and distasteful. The electorate, however, ate it up. They'd much rather get lubricated and listen to demagoguery and anecdote than suffer through boring oration from the upper class.[41]

In September of 1824, Crockett sponsored additional legislation that attempted to protect his constituents from dishonest warrants held by land speculators, and proposed a bill that would improve the navigation of waters in the Western District, as easier access would reduce prices of goods in the west.[42] During the same session he introduced a bill to establish a chancery court in the Western District, and proposed "a bill to deal out justice more equally," which advocated an increased apportionment of funds to his district due to the increase in population. He explained that "the people being new settlers generally had use for a little money until they could get fairly underway." All measures passed on the first reading.[43]

By the time Crockett completed his second term in October of 1824, he had an established track record as a consistent champion of the people in his district. He issued a circular to his constituents dated October 25, 1824, in which he delineated his accomplishments in the last session and urged his supporters to vote for Andrew Jackson for president. Crockett managed quite a balancing act in his home state. Although he had voted against Jackson for the Senate and continued to be affiliated with the Erwin group, Crockett, always attuned to the sentiments of his constituents, claimed to be a Jackson man. Despite his differences with Jackson and the Overton men, Crockett still found much to admire in Old Hickory, a westerner who stood in opposition to the eastern intelligentsia who had dominated national politics since the Revolution. Although Jackson was from an economic sector far removed from Crockett's own lower-middle-class status, there was much about the man to which Crockett could relate. He and Jackson relied largely on personal popularity to carry them to political victory.[44] Both were self-made men who rose from poverty and hardship and aspired to positions on the national stage. Both achieved acclaim during their military service; Jackson's defeat of the British at New Orleans in the War of 1812 had earned him the gratitude of the nation and, while Crockett's military accomplishments were comparatively minor, his militia service accounted for much of his initial popularity and served as a springboard for his political aspirations.[45] Both men claimed a kinship with the common man that resonated with the people, and, to the electorate, Crockett's support of Jackson wasn't much of a disconnect: they too had a tendency to vote for the man rather than identify with any particular ideology.

Crockett no doubt expected that Jackson's bid would have long coattails, as he also used the circular to announce his own candidacy for the U.S. Congress in the forthcoming election. His opponent was the incumbent Adam Alexander, an established politician with a distinct monetary advantage over the financially strapped Crockett, who had returned to his home in Gibson County and was scratching out a living hunting and trying to make a success of the family farm. Alexander was experiencing a wave of unpopularity in the district because of a vote in favor of the 1824 tariff law, and Crockett thought he could ride the issue to victory, but he miscalculated. Alexander not only had deep pockets but, more importantly, the backing of the Overton alliance. John Overton was still looking for some payback for Crockett's support of John Williams over Jackson for senator and, writing under the pseudonym "Aristides," Overton penned a series of attack articles that were published in the Jackson Gazette in July of 1825. Overton accused Crockett of negligence or incompetence in allowing an East Tennessee militia brigade to be attached to the Western District rather than raising a brigade locally,

and argued that Crockett had voted to change the time the county and circuit courts would sit without notifying the citizens. Crockett's supporters blamed the militia issue on a clerical error, but Overton's accusations had traction. The Overton editorials, Crockett's under-financed campaign, and a rise in cotton prices which undercut his argument against Alexander's support of the tariff, all contributed to his loss in the 1825 election, and the relentless assaults in the press were a harbinger of what he would experience from the Overton alliance in future elections.

Crockett's hopes for an 1824 Jackson presidency were also dashed. Among the many people Andrew Jackson despised, he reserved a special hatred for Henry Clay, whose name had been inscribed on Jackson's enemies list since he had criticized Jackson for his 1818 invasion of Florida. But Clay earned Jackson's eternal enmity in 1824, when Jackson lost his first bid for the presidency to John Quincy Adams. After a campaign season that featured a crowded field of candidates, including Clay, the election of the president was thrown into the U.S. House of Representatives when none of the candidates received a majority of electoral votes. When the House awarded the presidency to Adams, Jackson, who had won the popular vote, accused Clay, then serving as house speaker, of using his influence to convince the House to back Adams in return for Adams' naming him secretary of state. Jackson and his supporters thereafter referred to this incident as the "corrupt bargain" that had cheated Old Hickory of the presidency, despite the will of the people.

Crockett's identification of himself as a Jackson man was somewhat incongruous in light of his continued affiliation with the Andrew Erwin faction in Tennessee. While he certainly related to the Jackson party's anti-aristocratic rhetoric, Crockett's economic status was far below that of the eastern and middle Tennessee contingency Jackson represented. Though Crockett and many of his constituents were slaveholders, they generally owned fewer than ten slaves, and were considered middle- to lower-middle-class farmers. Jackson however, was a member of the landed gentry; a large-scale planter with considerable land holdings who owned over a hundred slaves to work his plantation.[46] Though Jackson paid lip service to the poor and middle classes, his policies were not always in their best interests, and Crockett had differences with the Jacksonian ideology. Although he criticized the recklessness of independent state banks, many of which were run by land speculators, Crockett recognized the necessity of credit to enable the small farmer to be competitive in the market and in purchasing land. Jackson, on the other hand, favored a hard currency policy that gave the advantage to wealthier investors who had readily available cash. Crockett worked tirelessly to ensure that small businesses and farmers got a fair shake in the marketplace. Crockett's addresses on the stump and in print had pounded home the idea that the poor needed protection from the wealthy, and that he, a poor man himself, would be their most reliable defender.

Crockett wasted no time nursing his wounds after his loss, and instead jumped into an entrepreneurial enterprise in 1826 that was perhaps more ill-advised than his premature run for Congress. He tried his hand at a business that manufactured barrel staves, likely using his slaves for the labor, and loaded the cargo onto two flatboats for transport downriver to New Orleans for sale. Crockett's experience as a boatman was limited to some canoeing during his hunting trips, and the pilot he hired was woefully inadequate as well. Shortly after casting off he found his venture in deep trouble. Once his boats were on the powerful Mississippi River, pilot and crew completely lost confidence in their abilities, and the vessels began to drift uncontrollably. The neophyte crew decided to lash both craft together in an effort to gain some semblance of control, but that only made matters worse. Observers in other boats and on the shore attempted to shout instructions to the panicked crew, but they were unable to land the overloaded boats, which were caught in the river's current. They drifted until finally hitting a snag in the middle of the river, where both boats began to take on water and break apart. Thirty thousand barrel staves dumped into the roiling river, but Crockett was more concerned with his immediate survival than his lost investment. Trapped below deck in one of the sinking craft, he was pulled to safety through a porthole, and spent a long night clinging to the debris with the other deck hands

until a passing boat picked up the shipwrecked crew the next morning and carried them to Memphis. The calamity would, however, prove to be a lucky break for Crockett.[47]

Marcus Winchester, a successful local merchant, took pity on the bedraggled party and outfitted them with new clothes and enough pocket money to get them home. Winchester was a progressive thinker who, as a slaveholder, paid his slaves for their services so they might one day purchase their emancipation. He was also a frequent advocate for local widows seeking assistance with their estates, and was held in high regard in Memphis and said to be "above cast and prejudice."[48] Winchester was well-connected politically and, after spending some time talking with Crockett, encouraged him to try again for the Ninth District congressional seat and offered to finance his campaign anonymously.[49]

In September, Crockett announced his candidacy in the Jackson Gazette, taking a swing at the current administration in Washington City and his rival, the incumbent Tennessee representative Adam Alexander, writing, "I am opposed to this man from the Yankee states called John Q. Adams; I am opposed to the conduct of the Kentucky orator, H. Clay; I am greatly opposed to our present Representative's vote on the Tariff. If I should be your choice, Fellow Citizens, there is one thing that I will promise—that I will not set silently, and permit the interest of my district to be neglected, while I have got a tongue to speak and a head to direct it. . . . I am the rich man's safe guard, and poor man's friend."[50]

Crockett thought Alexander was vulnerable because cotton prices had dropped again since his reelection, and calculated that he could use that to his advantage. He also hoped to benefit from a third party, William Arnold, entering the race, as it was expected he would drain votes away from Alexander rather than Crockett. A fourth candidate, John Cooke, tried to compete for a while as well, and launched accusations of insobriety and philandering against Crockett. When Crockett countered by upping the ante and leveling even more outrageous lies against his opponent, Cooke called him out on the stump for his prevarications. Crockett owned up to the slander, but defended his actions by claiming he'd only responded to Cooke in kind; that they were both lying, but at least he'd admitted it and certainly that made him the more trustworthy of the two. The electorate, charmed by Crockett, bought his explanation, and Cooke was so incensed he dropped out of the race.[51]

On the hustings, Crockett resumed his standard practice of treating, but made a point of mentioning, with tongue firmly in cheek, that he supplied the booze to be sociable, "not to get elected, of course—for that would be against the law."[52] Aside from the usual crowd-pleasing anecdotes and hijinks, Crockett's stump speeches became more issue oriented. He relied heavily on anti-Adams rhetoric and incorporated the perceived injustice of Clay's "corrupt bargain" into his oratory, hoping to score some points with incensed Jackson supporters. More importantly, he continued to voice his identification with the poorest people of society and promised to protect them and advocate their common cause. Land ownership remained his central issue, and he promised, given the chance, to deliver legal ownership to those occupants who had worked so hard to better themselves by putting their blood and sweat into improving their little homesteads.

After the drubbing he had taken in the press from Overton/Aristides during his failed run for Congress in 1825, Crockett was more media savvy this time around and in September issued another circular, hitting hard at Alexander's support of the tariff and taking a general anti-protectionist stance. He articulated his opposition to the Adams presidency and stoked the flames of regional loyalty by reminding readers that their interests were being undermined by those of the "Yankees" in power. He also took the opportunity to champion Jackson's war record and personal integrity, and wrote, in conclusion, "I go for him; I do not pretend to be a great politician; you have my ideas in a plain homespun manner."[53]

When Crockett's opposition published pseudonymous editorials in the Jackson Gazette, he was quick to respond, both in print and in personal appearances. In a letter to the editor of the Gazette in December of 1826, Crockett wrote, "I am the Dave Crockett who volunteered and shouldered his knapsack and gun, and served twelve months under the immortal Old Hickory, in endeavoring to put down the enemies of our country, who spared neither age nor sex; I am the same Dave Crockett who

had the honor of representing in the legislature of this state, in 1821 and '22, the people of Lawrence and Hickman counties, and that their rights were strictly attended to and they [were] pleased, I must believe, as I have heard no complaints; I am the same Dave Crockett who had the honor and pleasure of representing the counties of Madison, Henderson, Perry, Humphreys, Carroll, Gibson, Haywood, Tipton, and Dyer, in the years 1823 and '24, in the legislature of this state, and who stood firm and unshaken, upon the political watch tower of his country's rights—I call upon the people of this District to examine the journals and judge for themselves; I am the self same Dave Crockett who has had, and now has the daring impudence to oppose the immaculate Adam R. Alexander, or anybody else, for a seat in the next Congress of the United States."[54]

Crockett's references to himself as "Dave" may indicate either a transitional stage in the development of the "Davy" persona, or may be a phonetic spelling of Davy (this is the only example of him referring to himself thusly), and the cadence of the address is certainly similar to the braggadocio style of the riverboat men he must have heard during his barrel staves adventure on the Mississippi and incorporated into his oratory. On the stump, he was also claiming the ability to "whip his weight in wildcats, jump up higher, fall down lower, and drink more liquors than any man in the state,"[55] to the delight of most of his audience.

In May of 1827, he struck at Alexander directly in an open letter published in the Gazette, questioning his support of the Tennessee land bill's provisions to use funds raised in the sale of the public lands to finance colleges rather than common schools. He drove his message home in the press, and again utilized the overt language of class warfare to get his point across. "Very few of our citizens, even those who are well to do in the world, can afford to pay two or three hundred dollars a year, (besides all the necessary expenditures incidental to the distance) to send their sons to these Colleges. I am not opposed to liberal education; on the contrary, I wish most sincerely that we were all able to give our sons College educations. But as matters now stand, my maxim is let the rich men educate their own sons with their own means, without imposing directly or indirectly any part of the burthen by public donations out of the common stock, be they in land or money, upon the poor yeomanry of our country, who are the last bone and sinew of the great body politick: its support in peace and its safeguard in war: unless the poor themselves can stand an equal chance for an equal participation in the measure."[56]

In June, Crockett, stumping in McNairy County, attacked his opponent in his usual manner, but also began to complain about the press. He was particularly bothered by the unsigned editorials and letters that opposed him, and was openly critical of the editorial policies of the Jackson Gazette. The editors responded by reminding him, "When men become candidates for office, the people of this country will enquire into their merits, and speak and act freely about them; and so long as we conduct a public journal we will be their organ, notwithstanding we may be traduced by many or few; whether candidates for office or their undertrappers."[57] Sometimes Crockett could dish it out better than he could take it.

Adam Alexander and William Arnold hammered each other on the campaign trail and tried to ignore Crockett, probably hoping to render him insignificant. It proved to be a failed strategy. At one gathering, Arnold's speech was interrupted by the racket generated by a nearby flock of guinea fowl. Crockett jumped up and claimed that the birds were calling out for him, crying, "Crockett, Crockett, Crockett." Arnold seemed, Crockett wrote, "mighty bad plagued. But he got more plagued than this at the polls in August."[58] He certainly did. Crockett handily defeated Alexander and Arnold by a plurality of 2,223 votes.[59] He borrowed another hundred dollars from Winchester for travel expenses and packed his bags, ready to take "Davy" onto the national stage.

Not everyone was enamored with Crockett's alter ego. Some constituents found "Davy" too outrageous and over-the-top for their taste. Henry Clay was warned about Crockett's imminent arrival by his son-in-law James Erwin, who told him, "Col. Crockett is perhaps the most illiterate Man, that you have ever met in congress Hall he is not only illiterate but he is rough & uncouth, talks much & loudly, and is by far, more in his proper place, when hunting a Bear, in a Cane Brake, than he will be in the

Capital, yet he is a man worth attending to, he is independent and fearless & has a popularity at home that is unaccountable. . . ." Despite the caveat, Erwin and his faction still valued Crockett's allegiance and encouraged Clay to agree to Crockett's request for a meeting upon his arrival in Washington. Erwin told Clay, "He is the only man that I now know in Tennessee that Could openly oppose Genl. Jackson in his District & be elected to Congress."[60]

Another Tennessean wrote to North Carolina Governor William Graham, "Our Representation in the next Congress will be characterized by dullness, imprudence and blackguardism."[61] Clearly, not everyone was a fan of the Gentleman from the Cane, and though Crockett had ridden the character to victory, he would soon find that "Davy" was indeed a ring-tailed roarer, half-horse, half-alligator, who would prove to be extremely hard to manage.[62]

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[1] Crockett to James Blackburn, February 5, 1828, Tennessee Historical Society, Tennessee State Library and Archives (hereinafter, TSLA).

[2] David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee,* ed. James A. Shackford and Stanley J. Folmsbee (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 144–45.

[3] Crockett to *Telegraph and Intelligencer,* December 12, 1829, published in *Boston Patriot,* December 17, 1829. Crockett explained that the men were forced to leave the premises early due to a storm but were nevertheless charged in full for their stay, and complained that Briceland had taken advantage of him on several occasions.

[4] For a thorough analysis of Crockett's height, see Thomas E. Scruggs, "The Physical Stature of David Crockett: A Re-analysis of the Historical Record," *Journal of South Texas* 9, no. 1, (Spring 1996): 1–29.

[5] Crockett to Blackburn, February 5, 1828.

[6] Nathaniel Claiborne was a six-term congressman from Virginia who, like Crockett, ran as a Jacksonian but eventually left the Jackson ranks. He was the author of *Notes on the War in the South* (Richmond: William Ramsay, 1819), a history of the War of 1812, and may have provided some encouragement or minor input during the composition of Crockett's *Narrative.*

[7] Perry M. Goldman and James S. Young, eds., *United States Congressional Directories: 1789–1840* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 277.

[8] Crockett to Blackburn, February 5, 1828.

[9] Crockett's chronic debt is well documented. For more information on his gambling and drinking, see *(Jackson) Southern Statesman,* July 9, 1831, and Crockett to Jacob Dixon, April 11, 1834, Christie's Auction Catalog, June 17, 2003. The *New York Sunday Morning News,* December 6, 1835, cited in Gary Zaboly, "Crockett Goes To Texas: A Newspaper Chronology," *Journal of the Alamo Battlefield Association* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1995): 10, also cast aspersions on Crockett for his alleged gambling habit, and stated, "If there be, however, such a thing as a faro-bank to be found in Texas, we fear Davy will forget all his prudential maxims." During his 1834 tour of the northeast, Crockett was reported to have lost $160 to a pickpocket in Philadelphia, and was quoted in the *(Portsmouth) New Hampshire Gazette* (quoting the original report in the *(Washington) National Intelligencer,* May 20, 1834, as having said, "Gentlemen, this is not the heaviest loss I have met with. Not long since I was coaxed to go to the Faro table in Washington, and (would you believe it?) I lost $1500!" Other newspapers picked up the report, prompting a response from Crockett. "I did, when I first came to Congress, several years ago" he wrote, "indulge in betting against that game, (Faro) and it is the only game I ever did bet at, and I am ashamed that I ever saw that played: for I do not know any other game in the world. Indeed, I cannot say that I ever *knew* that game, for it has injured me, but not to the extent stated in the Commercial Intelligencer for the best of all reasons, that I never had fifteen hundred dollars at one time in my life. Nor did I ever lose the sixth part of that sum in one night." Crockett to Editor, *National Intelligencer,* cited in *New Bedford Mercury,* May 30, 1834.

[10] James Atkins Shackford, *David Crockett: The Man and the Legend,* John B. Shackford, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), 34. The Crocketts continued to add to their family. In 1818, Elizabeth gave birth to Rebecca Elvira, and in 1821 to Matilda.

[11] Crockett, *Narrative of the Life,* 127.

[12] An extended examination of Crockett's Creek War service is beyond the scope of this book; the reader is referred to the Shackford-Folmsbee edition of Crockett's *Narrative,* cited above. Crockett tends to amplify and, in some instances, misstate his activities during the war, and the annotations by the editors provide a necessary corrective to Crockett's original text.

[13] Ibid., 133–34.

[14] Ibid., 135.

[15] Ibid., 137–38.

[16] Andrew Erwin was a merchant and native Virginian who had moved to North Carolina, where he helped establish Asheville, before relocating to Tennessee. Erwin's animosity toward Andrew Jackson dated at least from 1806, when Jackson killed Charles Dickinson, Erwin's son-in-law, in a duel. Andrew Jackson, *Memoirs of General Andrew Jackson,* (Auburn, New York: James C. Derby & Co., 1845), 157. In 1811, Erwin brought suit against Jackson in a land dispute and in 1819 he published a protest alleging Jackson and his friend John Eaton were involved in illegal land speculation. This charge nearly resulted in a duel between Eaton and Erwin.

Erwin had hoped to be appointed West Tennessee district marshal, but Jackson, determined to get even, charged Erwin with slave trading and took his complaint to President James Monroe in order to stop the appointment. Attorney General William Wirt investigated the charges, and eventually Erwin was found culpable. Thomas P. Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932), 262–64; Andrew Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson,* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 140–43.

In 1828, during Jackson's second presidential campaign, Erwin leveled the same charge at Jackson and published a pamphlet with the provocative title "Gen. Jackson's Negro Speculations, and His Traffic in Human Flesh, Examined and Established by Positive Proof" (Nashville: n.s., 1828), Miscellaneous Pamphlet Collection, Library of Congress. In the publication, Erwin and officials of the Bank of Nashville (including bank president Boyd McNairy) produced bank ledgers showing that Jackson and two business partners had purchased and sold slaves in 1811. Jackson claimed that he had not been an active partner in the enterprise, just the financial guarantor. A heated and lengthy public exchange followed, during which Erwin publicized Jackson's 1806 involvement with Aaron Burr and did his best to tie Jackson to an obscure Burr conspiracy allegedly designed to remove western states and the Louisiana Territory from the Union (*Baltimore Patriot,* August 29, 1828).

The bad blood between Jackson and Erwin continued for the rest of their lives.

[17] John Overton was a native Virginian who came to Nashville circa 1789. He was a roommate of Andrew Jackson's, and the two men subsequently became business partners and political allies. A prominent banker, land speculator, lawyer, and one of the wealthiest men in Tennessee, he served on the Tennessee Supreme Court from 1804 to 1816, and was one of the founders of Memphis. From 1803 to 1806, Overton helped negotiate a settlement with North Carolina regarding the cession of lands in the Western District of Tennessee, and agreed to recognize warrants issued by North Carolina to Revolutionary War veterans redeemable for land in the Western District. Overton formed an alliance within the state that was instrumental in Jackson's political ascendancy. Philip R. Langsdon, *Tennessee: A Political History* (Franklin, Tennessee: Hillsboro Press, 2000), 21; *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* online, http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net

[18] Robert E. Corlew, *Tennessee: A Short History,* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 162.

[19] Crockett, *Narrative of the Life,* 140–42.

[20] Ibid., 49.

[21] James Strange French, *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett of West Tennessee* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833), 57.

[22] Crockett, *Narrative of the Life,* 139–40.

[23] Ibid., 143.

[24] Spelled Murfreesborough in Crockett's time, later changed to the current spelling.

[25] Stanley J. Folmsbee and Anna Grace Catron, "The Early Career of David Crockett," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications,* no. 28 (1956): 72–73.

[26] Joseph McMinn was a Revolutionary War veteran and governor of Tennessee from 1815 to 1821. McMinn's third marriage, to Nancy Williams, was troubled. Mrs. McMinn accused the governor of abandoning her family for long periods of time while he lived with Indians, and she subsequently left him. McMinn filed for divorce, and his wife was represented in the case by Felix Grundy. The Tennessee House of Representatives voted against granting the divorce, but the couple remained separated. Langsdon, *Tennessee,* 50–51.

[27] *(Jackson) Southern Statesman,* July 9, 1831.

[28] Robert Morgan, *Boone: A Biography* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2007), 79.

[29] James C. Mitchell went on to serve as a Jacksonian in the U.S. House of Representatives in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Congresses, and later ran unsuccessfully for governor of Mississippi as a Whig. Biographical Directory of the United States Congress online, http://bioguide.congress.gov.

[30] French, *Sketches and Eccentricities,* 57–59.

[31] Crockett, *Narrative of the Life,* 155.

[32] Ibid., 167–68.

[33] Ibid., note, 166.

[34] Ibid., 168–69.

[35] *Nashville Whig,* September 29, 1823.

[36] Felix Grundy moved to Tennessee in 1807 from Kentucky, where he had served as chief justice of the Kentucky Supreme Court. Grundy represented Tennessee in the U.S. Congress from 1811 to 1814 and served in the Tennessee State Legislature from 1814 to 1819 and as a U.S. senator from 1829 to 1838. He was appointed U.S. attorney general by President Martin Van Buren in 1838, and served one year before resigning and returning to the Senate. He was reelected in 1839 and served until his death in 1840. Langsdon, *Tennessee,* 82.

[37] John Williams served in the U.S. Senate from 1813 to 1823. The Overton alliance, hoping eventually to elect Andrew Jackson president, realized that Jackson needed a high-profile spot in the political arena prior to making a bid for the nation's highest office. The group initially considered running Jackson against William Carroll for governor, a risky proposition considering Carroll's popularity. Were Jackson to lose, his chances for the presidency could have been dashed, so the Overton alliance targeted Williams' Senate seat instead. (Langsdon, *Tennessee,* 62–63.)

[38] Crockett, *Narrative of the Life,* 171–72.

[39] *Nashville Whig,* September 22, 1823.

[40] Ibid., October 6, 1823.

[41] Guy S. Miles, "David Crockett Evolves, 1821–1824," *American Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1956): 56–57.

[42] *Nashville Whig,* September 27, 1824.

[43] Ibid.

[44] For an interesting contemporary analysis of voter's preferences in the Jacksonian era, see Francis J. Grund, *Aristocracy in America,* (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington St., 1839), 239–41.

[45] French, *Sketches and Eccentricities,* 55.

[46] Joseph John Arpad, "David Crockett: An Original Legendary Eccentricity and Early American Character," Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1969, 156.

[47] Crockett, *Narrative of the Life,* 195–200.

[48] James D. Davis, *History of the City of Memphis,* (Memphis: Hite, Crumpton, & Kelly, 1873), 70–71.

[49] Ibid., 150.

[50] Crockett to Republican voters of the Ninth Congressional District, *Jackson Gazette,* September 16, 1826.

[51] Davis, *History of the City of Memphis,* 150–51.

[52] Crockett, *Narrative of the Life,* 165.

[53] September 29, 1826 circular, printed in *Jackson Gazette,* October 7, 1826.

[54] Crockett to Editor, *Jackson Gazette,* December 23, 1826.

[55] Arpad, "David Crockett," 43.

[56] Crockett to Adam Alexander, *Jackson Gazette,* May 5, 1827.

[57] *Jackson Gazette,* June 23, 1827.

[58] Crockett, *Narrative of the Life,* 204–205.

[59] Ibid., note, 202.

[60] James Erwin to Henry Clay, September 30, 1827, *The Papers of Henry Clay, Vol. 6, Secretary of State 1827,* Mary W. M. Hargreaves and James F. Hopkins, eds. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1981), 1098.

[61] Arpad, "David Crockett," 34.