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WHERE'S THE MOUNTAINTOP

Julius Sigler

I grew up believing in heroes....Babe Ruth, Red Grange, George Washington, Abe Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, Colin Kelly, and General Patton were some of the persons who achieved mythical proportion in my young world. These were the greats....legendary figures in whom myth freely mixed with reality. By the time I graduated from college, the nation was entering a period of unparalleled anti-establishment attitudes. Not only were historians sullyng my heroes with their versions of "truth," students were rallying against parents, against God, who was rumored to be dead, against the President, and even against the behavioral truths I had chosen to adopt. My most recently adopted hero, President Kennedy, had been assassinated. Even superheroes such as Batman, Superman, and Plastic Man began to be fraught with human frailties. The age of the "anti-hero" was thrust upon us. Instead of Superman, we adopted the "Great American Hero;" instead of Roy Rogers, we watched Clint Eastwood; and instead of the Mick, we were fascinated with Bo Belinski, with "the Bird," and with the "Spaceman."

I believe that people, even mature and jaded people, need heroes, and my purpose tonight is to resurrect, as it were, one of the real heroes of my youth. The subject of my paper is as real today as he was 200 years ago; his life as good an example for the 21st century as it was for the 19th. I will look briefly at the facts of his life, then at some of the fiction, and finally will try to bind the two together. Most of what you will hear is derived from the subject himself, from the writings of one William Cody, and from new scholarship,

particularly by Michael Lofaro.

Where's the Mountaintop? is the question most frequently asked by visitors to the Greene County, Tennessee, birthplace of David Crockett. Walt Disney notwithstanding, David Crockett was not "born on a mountaintop in Tennessee, greenest state in the land of the free." He was, in fact, born to John and Rebecca Hawkins Crockett on August 17, 1786. David's father was an Irishman, and his mother was from Maryland. With five brothers and three sisters, David grew up in typical frontier fashion -- trying to eke out a living from the land. Eventually his father opened a tavern on the road from Knoxville to Abingdon. At the age of 12, David was hired by his father to one Jacob Siler, to help drive a herd of cattle to Rockbridge County in Virginia. Accounts vary, one claiming that Mr. Siler treated him kindly, and others claiming that he detained David by force when the job was completed. Either way, he ran away and joined a teamster who was returning to Knoxville. Crockett's account mentions traveling through Lynchburg on this trip. In 1799, he was sent to a country school, but after a few days, he fought and whipped a fellow student. Fearing a beating from the schoolmaster, he then played hooky for a week until his absence was reported to his father. He literally ran away from home to escape the beating offered by his father.

Working at various jobs, the young boy traveled to North Carolina, to Baltimore, and then back to Montgomery Court House in Virginia. Homesick, he finally returned home after an absence of about three years. He was fifteen years old and, by his own account, did not know a single letter of the alphabet. His family welcomed him home and after several months, his father proposed that if David would work off a debt owed by his father, he

would be set free. David accepted and worked for six months to discharge a debt of \$76. He then worked for another six months to discharge a second debt owed by his father to another neighbor. Shortly after, he fell in love, and took out a license to marry one Margaret Elder. The wedding day had been fixed, but at the last minute, she decided to marry another. Young Crockett was not even invited to the wedding. Presumably embarrassed by his lack of formal education which he firmly believed to have been at least partially responsible for this unhappy turn of events, he agreed to work two days a week for a Quaker schoolmaster in return for instruction during the other four. During six months of this arrangement, he learned to read and to write and even "to cypher some in the first three rules of figures."

His enthusiasm for matrimony did not wane, and his next courtship was more successful. He met Polly Finley, a young Irish lass, at a reaping and after an evening of community dancing, she invited him to call on her. Her mother favored another suitor, and discouraged his courtship. Participating in a wolf hunt, as wolves were quite common in East Tennessee, David became separated from the main party and accidentally encountered young Polly who was out looking for stray horses. One thing led to another and the two of them were married by a Justice of the Peace on August 14, 1806. Five years later, David, Polly, and two sons left East Tennessee to settle on the Elk River in Lincoln County. Two years later, the family moved again, settling on Bean's Creek in Franklin County, Tennessee, near the Alabama line.

On August 30, 1813, the Creek War began, when a large group of Creek Indians stealthily entered Fort Mims, near the junction of the Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers, and

killed 36 of the 37 men, women, and children who were inside the fort at the time of the attack. Crockett was among the first to volunteer for the militia which was formed within two weeks of the massacre. The decision to enlist was not particularly easy, as his wife and children were to be left more or less defenseless, as were the families of the other volunteers. Nonetheless, he did enlist, and was assigned to serve as a scout under a Major Gibson, who objected to his youthful appearance. He carried out his assignments, including hunting, with skill and nerve. As part of the command of Andrew Jackson, he participated in the massacre of the Indian town of Tallusahatchie, which was done in retribution for the Ft. Mims attack. In early December, Jackson's forces surrounded a large number of Creeks who were trying to induce a group of Cherokees inside Fort Talladega to join them. The Cherokees refused and the Creeks were trapped between the outer walls of the fort and the advancing volunteers. More than 400 Indians were killed. By this time, the 90-day enlistment period had long since expired, and with starvation a real possibility, the volunteers proposed to go home. General Jackson ordered that they would serve six months, regardless of the enlistment term, and further denied any furlough, even going to the extreme of posting a company of artillery on the bridge which they would have to cross in order to leave, with orders to fire on the volunteers if they tried to leave. The Tennesseans were not intimidated and, with muskets at the ready, about 800 of them headed for the bridge. The artillery did not fire and Jackson was furious. These were "the damnest volunteers he'd ever seen. They would volunteer to go and fight and then at their own pleasure would volunteer to go home again in spite of the devil."

But these men were not shirkers; after a brief time at home, they voluntarily returned

for reenlistment. Crockett enlisted for another six months. He arrived shortly after Jackson took the city of Pensacola and spent most of his hitch trying to pry the Indians, who were being trained and supplied by the British, from the depths of the swamps in Georgia and Florida.

He returned home as a fourth sergeant, and finds that he is again a father. But the loneliness and harsh environment had taken their toll on Polly and she died a few months later. In May of 1816, he was elected a lieutenant in the 32nd Militia Regiment of Franklin County and, by the end of the summer, he had further enlarged his family by marrying the widow Elizabeth Patton, who had two children of her own. Later that fall, he left the family to explore Alabama, again thinking of resettling. Reaching Muscle Shoals, he was afflicted with malaria and nearly died. One who had traveled with him returned home with to report that he had seen David buried. One can only imagine the surprise of his wife who thought she was seeing a ghost when he returned.

Within the next year, the Crockett family had indeed moved to Lawrence County, Tennessee, near the head of Shoal Creek. Crockett was soon named Magistrate, or Justice of the Peace and, according to most accounts, filled the office with satisfaction if not with dignity. Crockett held court in one room of his double cabin. When one settler made a complaint against another, Crockett would send his constable to bring in the offender, issuing summons in the form of what he called "verbal writings."

If the constable did not have sufficient muscle to bring the offender in, then Crockett would do so. In fact, wherever he was, there the court was also. It did not matter to him whether the guilty party paid a fine or submitted to a thrashing. In Crockett's words, "At first,

whenever I told my constable, says I - "Catch that fellow and bring him up for trial," -- away he went, and the fellow must come, dead or alive; for this we considered a good warrant, though it was only in verbal writing. But after I was appointed by the assembly, they told me my warrants must be in real writing, and signed; and that I must keep a book, and write my proceedings in it. This was a hard business on me, for I could just barely write my own name; but to do this and write the warrants too, was at least a huckleberry over my persimmon. I had a pretty well informed constable, however, and he aided me very much in this business. Indeed, I had so much confidence in him, that I told him, when he should happen to be out anywhere, and see that a warrant was necessary, and would have a good effect, he needn't take the trouble to come all the way to me to get one, but he could just fill out one; and then on the trial I could correct the whole business if he had committed any error." Six months later, he was elected town commissioner of Lawrenceburg and shortly after was elected Colonel in the 57th Militia Regiment.

Crockett's political career began in 1821, when he sought and won election to the state legislature as the representative of Lawrence and Hickman Counties. Again, in his own words, he relates his first political debate.

"A public document I had never seen, nor did I know there were such things; and how to begin I couldn't tell. I made many apologies, and tried to get off, for I know'd too, that I wa'n't able to shuffle and cut with him. He was there, and knowing my ignorance as well as I did myself, he also urged me to make a speech. The truth is, he thought my being a candidate was a mere matter of sport; and didn't think for a moment, that he was in any danger from an ignorant backwoods bear

hunter. But I found I couldn't get off, and so I determined just to go ahead, and leave it to chance what I should say. I got up and told the people, I reckoned they know'd what I come for, but if not, I could tell them. I had come for their votes, and if they didn't watch mighty close, I'd get them too. But the worst of all was, that I couldn't tell them any thing about government. I tried to speak about something, and I cared very little what, until I choaked up as bad as if my mouth had been jam'd an cram'd chock full of dry mush. There the people stood, listening all the while, with their eyes, mouths, and ears all open, to catch every word I would speak.

At last I told them I was like a fellow I had heard of not long before. He was beating on the head of an empty barrel near the roadside, when a traveler, who was passing along, asked him what he was doing that for? The fellow replied, that there was some cider in that barrel a few days before, and he was trying to see if there was any then, but if there was he couldn't get at it. I told them that there had been a little bit of a speech in me a while ago, but I believed I couldn't get it out. They all roared out in a mighty laugh, and I told some other anecdotes, equally amusing to them, and believing I had them in a first rate way, I quit and got down, thanking the people for their attention. But I took care to remark that I was as dry as a powder horn, and that I thought it was time for us all to wet our whistles a little; and so I put off to the liquor stand, and was followed by the greater part of the crowd.

I felt certain this was necessary, for I knowed my competitor could open government matters to them as easy as he pleased. He had, however, mighty few left to hear him, as I continued with the crowd, now and then taking a horn, and telling

good humoured stories, till he was done speaking."

From the first, Crockett was intensely interested in public land policy, especially as it regarded settlement of the West. During this term, he suffered financial disaster, when a large grist mill, in which he had invested everything, was washed away by a flood, leaving him heavily in debt. As he had in his youth, he hired himself out to work off the debts, and then again moved his family west. It was during this period of his life that his reputation as a hunter spread far beyond the confines of western Tennessee. His autobiography includes many recollections of bear hunts, as well as an account of a remarkable winter trip to his brother's house to get a supply of gunpowder. The trip involved six miles of travel through snow and across two rivers which he literally had to swim across in bitterly cold weather.

He was elected to a second term in the state legislature and, after serving one year, he resigned to run for the U.S. Congress. He was defeated, despite his electioneering as described by Crockett himself....

"[My opponent] now discovered who I was, and cried out, "D—n it, Crockett, is that you?" "Be sure it is," said I, "but I don't want it understood that I have come electioneering. I have just crept out of the cane, to see what discoveries I could make . . . " I told him that when I set out electioneering, I would go prepared to put every

man on as good a footing when I left him as I found him on. I would therefore have me a large buckskin hunting-shirt made, with a couple of pockets holding about a peck each; and that in one I would carry a great big twist of tobacco, and in the other my bottle of liquor; for I knowed when I met a man and offered him a dram, he would throw out his quid of tobacco to take one, and after he had taken his horn, I would out with my twist, and give him another chew. And in this way he would not be worse off than when I found him; and I would be sure to leave him in a first rate good humor. He said I could beat him electioneering all bollow. I told him I would give him better evidence of that before August, notwithstanding he had many advantages over me, and particularly in the way of money; but I told him I would go on the products of the country; that I had industrious children, and the best of coon-dogs; and they would hunt every night till midnight to support my election; and when the coon fur wasn't good, I would myself go a wolfing, and shoot down a wolf and skin his head and his scalp would be good to me for three dollars, in our State treasury money; and in this way I would get along on the big string. He stood like he was both amused and astonished, and the whole crowd was in a roar of laughter. From this place I returned home, leaving the people in a first-rate way, and I was sure I would do a good business among them. At any rate, I was determined to stand up to my lick-log, salt or no salt."

He lost by only two votes.

His new home on the Obion River provided trees from which he could make barrel staves. Again, he invested heavily in the construction of two flat boats, by means of which

he intended to float the staves to market in New Orleans. But he was nearly killed and was again bankrupt when both boats were wrecked on the Mississippi. Upon returning home, he was again encouraged to seek election to the Congress. In 1827, Crockett defeated General William Arnold and Colonel Adam Alexander to win his first seat in the House of Representatives. Andrew Jackson was elected President in 1828. It is safe to say that Crockett was not the greatest congressman Washington has ever seen, but he was honest and direct. He split bitterly with President Jackson on several issues, particularly the Indian Removal Bill. Although he easily won a second term, his open opposition to the popular president cost him a third term. However he ran and was again elected two years later. During the first year of this term (1834), he published his autobiography, A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of Tennessee. Near the end of this term, with some slim aspirations of a presidential nomination on the Whig party ticket, Crockett enjoyed a triumphant three-week tour of major cities in the East, from Baltimore to Philadelphia to New York to Boston to Cincinnati to Louisville. Huge throngs turned out to see, hear, and even to touch him. But he did not win a presidential nomination and, in fact, did not win reelection to a fourth term.

He was overwhelmed by his defeat and bitterly charged Jackson with purchasing votes against him. An enemy of Jackson before, he was now vengeful in his hatred and did not stop short of charging the President with using the government's money in buying up votes, at the rate of twenty-five dollars each, against him. He declared, too, that the judges were bought up, and took their places at the polls with pockets filled with Huntsman tickets, which were counted in the result after the polls were closed.

Crockett concluded his tirade against Jackson and his enemies as follows:--

"As my country no longer requires my services, I have made up my mind to go to Texas. My life has been one of danger, toil, and privation, but these difficulties I had to encounter at a time when I considered it nothing more than right good sport to surmount them; but now I start anew upon my own hook, and God only grant that it may be strong enough to support the weight that may be hung upon it. I have a new row to hoe, a long and rough one, but come what will I'll go ahead. I am done with politics and you may all go to hell, and I'll go to Texas."

But though these were his public utterances, and the last he made to his constituents, he could not forego the application of a poetic balm to his deeply wounded feelings, and accordingly composed the following lines, which he sent to the Nashville *Banner* for publication. It is rather bad poetry, but splendid sentiment:--

Farewell to the mountains whose mazes to me
Were more beautiful far than Eden could be;
No fruit was forbidden, but nature had sprcad
Her bountiful board, aud her children were fed.
The hills were our garner--our herds wildly grew,
And Nature was shepherd and husbandman too,
I felt like a monarch, yet thought like a man,
As I thanked the Great Giver, and worshiped his plan.

The home I forsake where my offspring arose;

The graves I forsake where my children repose.
The home I redeemed from the savage and wild:
The home I have loved as a father his child;
The corn that I planted, the fields that I cleared,
The flocks that I raised, and the cabin I reared;
The wife of my bosom--Farewell to ye all!
In the land of the stranger I rise or I fall.

Farewell to my country!--I fought for thee well,
When the savage rushed forth like the demons from hell.
In peace or in war I have stood by thy side--
My country, for thee I have lived--would have died!
But I am cast off--my career now is run
And I wander abroad like the prodigal son--
Where the wild savage roves, and the broad prairies spread,
The fallen--despised--will again go ahead!

In November of 1835, Crockett left for Texas, along with three companions. On March 6, 1836, he died in the defense of the Alamo.

So much for David Crockett, pioneer, legislator, martyr at the Alamo. Now, let's talk about Davy Crockett, the legendary frontiersman, hunter, and folk hero. The legend, which began well before Crockett died at the Alamo, has at least two major strands, which I will try to unwind. The first thread is the written word. David Crockett owned a copy of Ben

Franklin's famous Autobiography, and even signed his name in it. Richard Boyd Hauck argues that Crockett read the book and understood how Franklin had shaped his own public image through a narrative "written by himself." Franklin was the definitive "self-made man." Both men were image-conscious, developing, enlarging, and in fact controlling public perceptions of themselves. Both lived lives which Americans epitomize and copy; both were paradigms of the American individualist whom de Toqueville so greatly admired. Each replicates the quintessential American success story -- the rise from humble beginnings to greatness. Both men coined aphorisms, and both fully understood that controlling the description of events is tantamount to controlling the events. Both were basically honest and trustworthy public servants who were dedicated to the public welfare. Legend has it that when Franklin was sent to France to solicit support for the Revolution, he consciously dressed in buckskins -- as he thought the French would expect him to look like a backwoodsman. Was this the **real** Franklin? Does it matter? Crockett's autobiography, mentioned above, shows the same kind of imagination which one encounters in Franklin's. It provides insight into the man, how he thought and what he believed, what he considered important and what he considered funny, how he told stories. The comic legend that is Davy Crockett shines in these pages in the carefully developed prose which mirrors backwoods speech. You've already heard some of these lines. He admits to liking whiskey, that he would rather hunt than work, and he admits to participating in atrocities during the Creek War. He even admits to creating his own image—recall the description of his electioneering style... Hauck tells us that Crockett was a common man who developed an uncommon style. That he died heroically at the Alamo is less important than the fact that he lived well as a storyteller and

comedian.

After all, humor, especially in the face of constant danger and real adversity, is a real virtue. As a trait, it is consistently found in American legends.

Although other books about Crockett were written, some even during his lifetime, the second important part of the written legend was engendered by the Crockett Almanacs -- which were published yearly between 1835 and 1856. Although copyrighted by "Davy Crockett" and later in the name of his heirs, none of these almanacs seems to have been in any way connected with Crockett.

Although Crockett is the main character in the collection of stories offered, it is clear that the episodes are purely imaginary, an attempt to portray to the public at large a humorous, but coarse and cynical, view of the wilderness life. Crockett by and large is not portrayed sympathetically. But the almanacs were a huge success, and for many Americans, the profane, somewhat bawdy, racist, "half-horse, half-alligator," teller of outrageous tales who was portrayed in these annual publications was, in fact, Davy Crockett. These tall tales, which ranged from fighting huge catfish in the Mississippi River to riding a lightning bolt to grinning down bears, as well as less admirable exploits involving mistreatment of Indians and Negroes, created a portion of the Crockett legend. The following "speech" taken from the Almanacs will suffice to demonstrate.

"After the great fuss the public have made about an individual of my humble pretensions, and the mighty deal of attention and good cheer which I have received in all sections of the country, where I have been ahead, my heart has swelled as big as a Bison's, with pure gratitude. To repay all this, I mean to amuse them with some of

my adventures with the wild varmints and colts of the West, and with adventures of the backwoodsmen generally. Owing to the partiality of my fellow citizens, I have been made a Congressman, and am from home (at Washington) half the year; but should any of my readers find me at home on the Big Clover Creek, Tennessee, they shall be treated with a good racoon pie, and bush eels (i.e. rattlesnakes) fried in butter--which are dishes my wife cooks to perfection. They shall have the softest white oak log to sit on, and the best bearskin to sleep on, which my house affords. I will take them out on a coon hunt, show 'em how to tree a catamount, and take a blizzard at a bear. They can take a walk in my crabapple orchard, and see the alligator pear trees. And as a plain matter-of-fact, I *will* convince them that I can run faster,--jump higher,--squat lower,--dive deeper,-- stay longer under,--and come out drier, than any man in the whole country.

A second major thread of the Crockett legend begins with an incredibly popular 18th century play, called *The Lion of the West*, about a backwoods character named Nimrod Wildfire, which was first staged in 1831 and which Crockett saw in 1833. The play parodied with a broad brush Crockett's backwoods manner and the hero was clearly based on a mandate to "add or invent a few ludicrous scenes of Col. Crockett at Washington." The play was wildly successful and ran for years, boosting Crockett's popularity enormously and enhancing his reputation as what we might today call a "good old boy." In 1872, a second play, entitled Davy Crockett; or Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead began a 24-year run in this country and in England, which only ended with the death of the actor who played Davy. In 1909, a silent film, Davy Crockett - In Hearts United began a string of at least

twelve motion pictures in which the Tennessean is a major character. This string culminated in 1954 and 55, with the television broadcast of "Davy Crockett, Indian Fighter," starring Fess Parker and Buddy Ebsen. All of you remember the Crockett craze, during which the theme song became the most popular song in the nation and every baby-boomer wanted a coonskin cap. Kids played "Crockett" in back yards across the nation. The Crockett played by Fess Parker was funny, but he was also brave, wise, and in general too good to be true. In 1960, John Wayne produced, directed, and even starred in the last of the Crockett films to date, The Alamo. Wayne's Crockett was historically more accurate than Disney's. Both share two glaring inaccuracies, one of which was the nature of Crockett's death at the Alamo. More about that in a minute. The second was Crockett's height. Both Wayne and Parker are tall, broad-shouldered men; their height reenforced the perception of the Crockett of legend as a tall man, but in fact David Crockett was only 5' 9" tall, with his boots on. One interesting scene in the John Wayne movie takes place between Colonel Travis, played by Laurence Harvey, and Crockett. Travis accuses Crockett of making it all up; his clothes are a stereotype, his speech is put on, and he has come to the Alamo to enhance his reputation. Crockett does not deny any of these charges, but instead says "Don't tell my Tennesseans that -- they think they came to hunt and get drunk." Then Crockett says that he came to Texas to do what is right.

At the height of the Crockett craze, the revisionists began to get into the act. Several reasonably accurate historical accounts of the life of David Crockett were available and, as you have seen, the facts do not necessarily support the legend. Editorials began to appear, even in such magazines as Harper's, decrying the "brainwashing" of American youth.

Writing in Harper's, John Fischer declared that American youth were "worshipping a Crockett who never was -- a myth as phony as the Russian legend about kind Papa Stalin." He was a "juvenile delinquent" who became a "poor farmer, indolent and shiftless" and an even worse soldier. He was never "King of anything, except the Tennessee Tall Tales and Bourbon Sampler's Association." It was a "simonized, Disneyfied version of history." The Alamo, Fischer went on to declare, was "the worst military blooper in American history, short of Pearl Harbor." And Fisher was not alone...the editorial staff of the Indianapolis Times formed the "Anti-Davy Crockett Society of Indiana, inviting readers to join by tearing up any available picture of Davy and mailing it to San Antonio to be included with other Crockett memorabilia in the Alamo. They further incited the public by editorially claiming that Crockett was one of "six skulking prisoners caught and put to death afterwards by Santa Anna. Was nothing sacred? Within two weeks, responding to hordes of coonskin-capped youth picketing the office, the Times had a change of heart. They even wired John Fisher for help, but the reply from Harper's was "Can't find Fisher, presume he's gone coon hunting." The Club was renamed the Davy Crockett Fans of America, and once again, justice triumphed.

Now what about the Alamo? William Cody provides a copy of a news dispatch to the Red River Herald, which reports the fall of the Alamo, and concludes..."Col. James Bowie and David Crockett are among the slain -- the first was murdered in his bed, in which he had been confined by illness-- the latter fell fighting like a tiger." This is consistent with the narrative version provided by Cody, although many versions of the story argued that Crockett survived the battle and was taken prisoner. In fact, some of the almanacs claimed

that he was still alive and confined as a slave in a Mexican gold mine. In 1975, a definitive translation of the diary of Jose Enrique de la Pena, an officer on Santa Anna's staff, was published. The diary devoted a single page to the execution of Crockett, who along with several others had been captured by Santa Anna. The diary confirmed long-standing reports by various Mexican eye-witnesses that Crockett had been captured and executed upon orders from Santa Anna.

Again, the press entered the fray, and sensational headlines asked "Has the King of the Wild Frontier been relieved of his Coonskin Crown?" "Them's Fightin' Words, Davy's Legend Smudged" trumpeted the Corpus Christ Times... "Any Texan worth his lizard skin cowboy boots and Willie Nelson albums knows better than to smear the legend of Davy." The President of the Texas State Historical Society, Dan Kilgore, delivered a carefully researched speech, which concluded that the preponderance of the historical evidence supported the de la Pena version. He was accused of being a "mealy-mouthed intellectual." Others labeled his speech as a "commie plot to trash our heroes." Carmine Perry, who edited the diary, received hate mail and nasty phone calls. She said "People don't believe his account because they don't want to believe it. We prefer to live by legend." And so we do. We find comfort in our heroes, especially when they react to danger and calamity with calm assurance. But the question remains. Why would we expect Crockett to be suicidal in fighting rather than surrendering, and at the same time, abhor other acts of self-sacrifice, such as the Japanese Kamikaze pilots of World War II, or the self-immolation of Bhuddists monks in the early days of the Viet Nam War? After all, would't it been more in character for the Davy of myth to have tried to "grin 'em down?"

The fact is that David Crockett was not a soldier. His Narrative shows that he had been to war and did not like it. He freely admits to paying someone to finish out part of his second enlistment. He did not go to Texas to kill Mexicans and perish in the Alamo; rather he went for a cause, for opportunity, and died looking for that opportunity. As one of the last survivors in that desperate struggle, facing an enemy who outnumbered his forces by nearly 50 to 1, the facts do not detract from his image. Even though he and the other survivors were tortured, they faced death with courage and dignity. This is not a disputed fact.

The great editor Horace Greeley, in an editorial appearing in the same paper as the above dispatch, eulogized Crockett.

"There is one item of the disastrous intelligence from Bexar, which struck us with even more painful interest than was excited by the general disaster. We allude to the death of the intrepid and true-hearted Col. David Crockett, who had enrolled himself under the banner of the Texans from a sentiment of devotion to the cause of liberty, as pure and chivalrous as ever animated the human bosom. Whatever may have been the imputed eccentricities of the frank Tennessean's political career, we believe he left no enemies on earth, and that many a noble heart will heave a sigh at the recollection of his manly virtues, his uncalculating honesty of purpose and independence of character, his simplicity and kindness of heart, and the generous gallantry which impelled him to seek such an untimely, but glorious, death beneath the swords of the Mexican enslavers. May the flowers of the far prairie cluster thickly and brightly above the mouldering ashes."

I like history and revel in uncovering obscure historical facts about persons and places.

But history is only part of reality, and our perceptions govern our actions more strongly than does the truth. What is the truth about Davy Crockett?

I am convinced that he went to Texas to live up to the legend, that at least in this case, Disney was right. He did indeed "follow his legend right into the West." In so doing, he showed future generations of Americans how to bridge the gap between individualism and commitment to community, a gap which de Toqueville feared would ultimately destroy this nation.

This obscure backwoodsman has grown far beyond the admirable reality of his rugged life to become one of only a few transcendent American heroes.

I took my tomahawk in one hand, and my big butcherknife in the other, and ran up within four or five paces of him, at which he let my dog go and fixed his eyes on me. I got back in all sorts of a hurry, for I knowed if he got hold of me he would hug me altogether too close for comfort. I went to my gun and hastily loaded her again, and shot him the third time, which killed him good."

S ~ each of Colonel Crockett in Congre ~

Mr. Speaker:

"Who--Who--Whoop--Bow--Wow--Wow--Yough. I say, Mr. Speaker; I've had a speech in
soak this six months, and it has swelled me like a drowned horse; if I don't deliver it I shall
burst and smash the windows. The gentleman from Massachusetts talks of summing up the
merits of the question, but *I'll* sum up my own. In one word I'm a screamer,

and have got the roughest racking horse, the prettiest sister, the surest rifle and the ugliest dog in the district. I'm a leetle the savagest crittur you ever did see. My father can whip any man in Kentucky, and I can lick my father. I can outspoke any man on this floor, and give him two hours start. I can run faster, dive deeper, stay longer under, and come out drier, than any chap this side the big Swamp. I can outlook a panther and outstare a flash of lightning, tote a steamboat on my back and play at rough and tumble with a lion, with an occasional kick from a zebra. To sum up all in one word--I'm a *horse*. Goliath was a pretty hard colt but I could choke him. I can take the rag off--frighten the old folks--astonish the natives--and beat the Dutch all to smash--make nothing of sleeping under a blanket of snow--and don't mind being frozen more than a roken apple.

"Congress allows lemonade to the members and has it charged under the head of stationary-- I move also that whiskey be allowed under the item of fuel. For bitters I can suck away at a noggin of aquafortis, sweetened with brimstone, stirred with a lightning rod, and skimmed with a hurricane. I've soaked my head and shoulders in Salt River, so much that I'm always comed. I can walk like an ox, run like a fox, swim like an eel, yell like an Indian, fight like a devil, spout like an earthquake, make love like a mad *bull*, and swallow an Injun whole without choking if you butter his head and pin his ears back."

1841.



Tussel with a Bear. See page 9.

**Containing Adventures, Exploits, Sprees
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John Gadsby Chapman's oil portrait of Congressman Crockett painted in 1834. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center Art Collection, The University of Texas at Austin.

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Michael A. Lofaro

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Vol. 2.] "GO AHEAD!!" [No. 3.]

THE CROCKETT ALMANAC 1841.



Tassel with a Bear. See page 9.

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"Tassel with a Bear." Cover page of the 1841 *Almanac*. (American Antiquarian Society.)