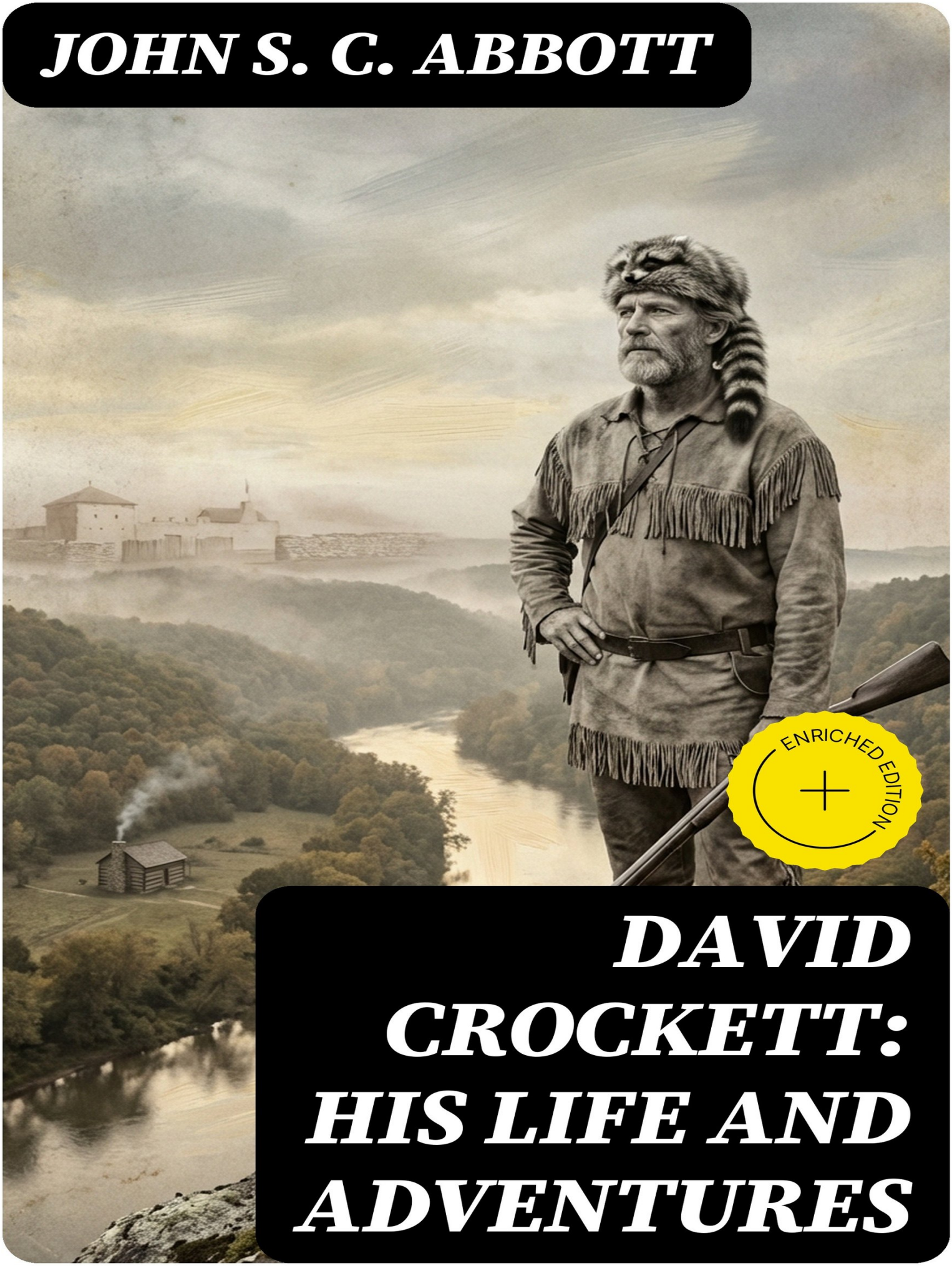
JOHN S. C. ABBOTT



DAVID CROCKETT: HIS LIFE AND ADVENTURES

John S. C. Abbott

David Crockett: His Life and Adventures

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Tyler Ashford

EAN 8596547169741

Edited and published by DigiCat, 2022

Table of Contents

Introduction

Table of Contents

Between the resolute facts of a frontier life and the swiftly growing legend that surrounds them, this book traces the hard passage where a single person’s deeds become a nation’s story and a nation’s story reshapes the person in return, pressing readers to consider how endurance, ambition, and public attention turn a backwoods hunter into a symbol claimed by communities, parties, and generations, while reminding us that the myth, however stirring, is never the full measure of the human being who supplied its first rough outline with sweat, risk, and a voice that carried beyond the timbered edge of settlement.

David Crockett: His Life and Adventures is a nineteenth-century American biographical narrative by John S. C. Abbott, set amid the expanding United States and the rough margins of settlement that pushed from the southern backcountry toward the West. Abbott, known for accessible lives of notable figures, situates Crockett within cabins, camps, and courthouse greens where local reputation meets wider political notice. Written in the idiom of its century, the book positions its subject not merely as an adventurer but as a participant in the civic life of a young republic, linking personal episodes to the broader rhythms of national growth.

Abbott’s premise is straightforward and engaging: follow Crockett from a hardscrabble youth into the arenas where influence travels farther than a rifle’s report, and observe

how character is forged in labor, danger, and public scrutiny. The reading experience blends clear narrative with explanatory commentary, moving chronologically through episodes that highlight both practical skill and moral decision-making. The style is measured and instructive without losing momentum, attentive to incident while mindful of context. The tone remains respectful yet curious, inviting readers to weigh a famous name against the everyday pressures and choices that made it matter.

Several themes animate the narrative with lasting force. Abbott emphasizes self-reliance tested by community obligations, the contest between experience and formal learning, and the friction between plain-spoken authenticity and the spectacle of public life. He traces how reputation is built by action, enlarged by storytelling, and recruited by politics, while suggesting that integrity must be guarded when applause and opposition arrive together. The book attends to poverty and perseverance, to domestic responsibilities alongside public duties, and to the restless movement of families and fortunes as they seek opportunity on new ground.

As biography and social history, the work opens a window onto frontier households, seasonal labor, hunting economies, and the informal codes that governed neighbors, quarrels, and elections. It records the material difficulties of travel and survival, the hopes that drew settlers onward, and the improvisations by which local leaders gained influence. Readers will also encounter attitudes typical of the period, including those directed toward Indigenous peoples and class hierarchies, which call

for critical attention today. In this light, the book is both a narrative of a life and an artifact of the era that shaped and interpreted that life.

For contemporary readers, the biography remains pertinent as a study in how public images are constructed and contested. It speaks to ongoing debates about authenticity, regional identity, and the uses of story in democratic politics. It shows how charisma and plain speech can become political capital, how media of any age amplify selected traits, and how communities project their own needs onto notable figures. At the same time, it offers a reminder that national myths often emerge from ordinary hardships, making the book a resource for thinking about leadership, representation, and the ethical claims of fame.

Approached on these terms, Abbott’s account offers momentum without haste, reflection without pedantry, and a portrait that respects both the man and the milieu that elevated him. Without revealing outcomes beyond the basic arc of a rise from obscurity to public notice, the book’s opening chapters linger on formative work, family strains, and early reputations, then widen to the responsibilities and tests of broader service. In balancing action with analysis, it invites readers to keep questioning where memory ends and myth begins, and why that boundary remains a decisive feature of American storytelling.

Synopsis

Table of Contents

John S. C. Abbott's David Crockett: His Life and Adventures presents a brisk nineteenth-century biography of the famous American frontiersman, structured as an instructive, chronological narrative. Writing for a broad, often youthful readership, Abbott combines incidents from frontier life with moral reflection, depicting Crockett as a figure shaped by hardship, practicality, and public spirit. The book situates his story amid westward settlement, emphasizing perseverance, self-reliance, and civic ambition. Abbott's approach blends documented episodes with popular anecdotes to trace a life moving from obscurity to national notice, while maintaining a tone that favors character lessons and accessible storytelling over exhaustive archival analysis.

Abbott begins with Crockett's difficult boyhood on the hardscrabble frontier, where scarcity, debt, and constant labor limited schooling and pressed children into adult responsibilities. He recounts the youth's early ventures as a drover and hired hand, the acquisition of woodcraft and marksmanship, and the unstable migrations of a family seeking subsistence at the edge of settlement. The portrait stresses temperate habits learned through necessity, respect for parental authority tempered by independence, and practical ingenuity in the face of danger. These formative chapters frame Crockett's identity as a self-taught

backwoodsman whose reputation rests as much on resilience as on physical prowess.

As Abbott follows Crockett into young adulthood, the narrative shifts to courtship, marriage, and the establishment of a household carved from wilderness conditions. Domestic aspirations coexist with a relentless need to hunt, trade, and manage debts, producing episodes of dangerous travel and improvised leadership. Abbott underscores the precariousness of frontier livelihoods, where floods, illness, and crop failures threaten ruin, and where reputation is built through reliability as a neighbor and guide. Service in local militia companies and community endeavors marks Crockett's gradual enlargement from family provider to regional figure, with growing confidence born of repeated trials successfully withstood.

Military campaigns during the Creek War introduce larger theaters of action and the burdens of service. Abbott recounts enlistment with Tennessee volunteers, arduous marches, shortages, and the discipline imposed by command structures associated with Andrew Jackson. The emphasis remains on endurance, comradeship, and the uneasy intersection of settlement expansion with conflicts involving Native nations. Without technical battle analysis, the narrative presents scenes of vigilant camps, scouting parties, and the strain placed on families left behind. Crockett's standing grows through steadiness under pressure rather than dramatic heroics, and the experience further equips him for responsibilities that will soon extend beyond the rifle and the trail.

Public life follows, first in local offices and the state legislature, then on the national stage. Abbott depicts a representative who speaks plainly for frontier constituents, attentive to land access, taxation, and the limits of centralized authority. The narrative highlights Crockett's independence within an era dominated by party loyalty, noting disagreements with Jacksonian policies without dwelling on procedural detail. Anecdotes of homespun speeches and backwoods wit serve to illustrate a political identity built on candor rather than polish. Electoral reverses reveal the volatility of popular favor and the costs of dissent, sharpening questions about conscience, practicality, and the obligations of office.

After setbacks at the ballot box, Abbott traces Crockett's efforts to sustain his public profile through travel and the circulation of his own life story, which further popularized his image. Dissatisfied with prospects at home and drawn by opportunities beyond the settled states, he resolves to venture to Texas during its struggle for independence. The narrative adopts a measured pace, following preparations, farewells, and the overland journey that reunites him with a rougher kind of duty. Abbott presents this decision as consistent with longstanding motives: enterprise, service, and curiosity, while reserving fuller dramatization for the climactic chapters that place character under ultimate strain.

Throughout, Abbott frames Crockett as a test case for the meanings of American self-making: how far grit, humor, and local loyalty can carry a person through shifting frontiers of war, politics, and migration. The book's closing movement

underscores the cost of ideals pursued to their limits, yet keeps the focus on the qualities that animated a life widely retold. Without adjudicating every legend, Abbott furnishes a cohesive portrait whose didactic tone reflects its era and intended audience. The result endures as an accessible gateway to a durable national myth, inviting reflection on opportunity, conscience, and the narratives by which communities remember.

Historical Context

Table of Contents

John S. C. Abbott, a Congregational minister and prolific popular historian, published David Crockett: His Life and Adventures in the 1870s during the United States' Reconstruction era. Writing from New York's vibrant postbellum publishing world, he contributed to a flourishing market for accessible biographies that blended narrative vigor with moral instruction. Abbott drew on printed sources such as Crockett's 1834 autobiography and popular frontier sketches available by the mid-nineteenth century. His volume belonged to a series that celebrated American pioneers, situating the frontiersman within a national saga of expansion and citizenship. The book's intended general readership shaped its clear prose, emblematic character sketches, and emphasis on instructive episodes.

Born in 1786 in Greene County on the Appalachian frontier, Crockett's youth unfolded in a region shaped by recent Revolution, contested sovereignty, and fragile institutions. The abortive State of Franklin (1784-1789) reflected settlers' ambitions before Tennessee's statehood in 1796 under the federal Constitution. Subsistence farms, hunting economies, and county courts structured daily life, while local militias offered both defense and status. Treaties such as the Treaty of Holston (1791) sought to regulate relations between the United States and Cherokee nations, yet clashes persisted. Roads like the Wilderness Road and

Natchez Trace facilitated migration, trade, and military movement that framed Crockett's early experiences.

Early nineteenth-century westward expansion, fueled by federal land policy and private speculation, molded the world in which Crockett came of age. Preemption practices and land offices enabled settlers to claim and improve tracts, yet debt, fluctuating commodity prices, and periodic panics pressed smallholders. The Market Revolution integrated frontier households into wider networks via river systems and overland routes to New Orleans and the Atlantic seaboard. County institutions, including juries, sheriffs, and justices of the peace, mediated disputes and taxation. These structures and pressures appear throughout Crockett's life as he moved within Tennessee, hunted for income, entered local leadership, and confronted the vulnerabilities of frontier families.

Regional warfare during the War of 1812 and the concurrent Creek War (1813-1814) mobilized Tennessee's militia under commanders including Andrew Jackson and John Coffee. Frontier marksmen, scouts, and packhorsemen were essential to campaigns into present-day Alabama, culminating in battles such as Horseshoe Bend that reshaped Creek sovereignty and opened vast lands to American settlement. Service in these campaigns provided social capital and political pathways for many Tennesseans. Descriptions of militia structures, including musters, ranks, and enlistment cycles, ground the narrative's accounts of duty and hardship. Crockett's participation, later recounted in his autobiography, informs Abbott's portrait of character, endurance, and the costs of expansionary conflict.

After the war, expanding white male suffrage and Jacksonian democratic politics reconfigured Tennessee and the national arena. Crockett rose through local offices into the Tennessee legislature (elected in 1821 and 1823) and then to the U.S. House of Representatives, serving in 1827-1831 and 1833-1835. Patronage networks, partisan newspapers, and mass rallies marked the age, even as frontier rhetoric prized independence from elite control. Crockett published A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett (1834) to assert his own version of events amid competing portrayals. Abbott's account emphasizes this political apprenticeship within Congress's committees, floor debates, and district obligations of constituent service.

The struggle over Indian policy defined Crockett's congressional identity. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 authorized treaties leading to the displacement of southeastern nations, including Cherokee and Chickasaw communities with deep ties to Tennessee and neighboring states. Crockett publicly opposed the measure and other Jackson administration initiatives, setting him at odds with dominant party forces. Court decisions such as Worcester v. Georgia (1832) complicated federal-state relations, though enforcement lagged. Electoral reversals followed, reflecting the costs of dissent in a patronage-driven system. Abbott presents this resistance as a test of conscience within the institutional framework of antebellum lawmaking and party discipline.

American migration into Mexican Texas, encouraged by empresario contracts and then destabilized by political centralization under Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, produced

the Texas Revolution (1835-1836). Volunteers from across the United States joined local settlers in the conflict. After losing his 1835 reelection bid, Crockett traveled west and entered this theater. The siege and fall of the Alamo in 1836, in which Crockett died, quickly entered national memory through newspapers, memoirs, and commemorations. Abbott treats the Texas campaign within broader currents of republican revolt, militia culture, and the porous boundaries between state politics and transnational frontier warfare.

Appearing in the Reconstruction era, Abbott's biography participates in nineteenth-century nation-building narratives that celebrated expansion, self-making, and civic virtue. It draws on Crockett's own words and the tall-tale tradition that had already amplified his image in widely circulated Crockett almanacs and popular sketches. The volume reflects contemporary attitudes toward frontier conquest, even as it credits personal integrity and independence in public life, notably Crockett's breaks with party orthodoxy. By presenting institutional contexts, militia service, legislative work, and electoral struggle, it offers readers a moralized, accessible lens on early national and Jacksonian transformations, while also revealing how postbellum Americans curated the memory of the frontier.

David Crockett: His Life and Adventures

Main Table of Contents

ILLUSTRATED.

PREFACE.

Table of Contents

David Crockett certainly was not a model man[1q]. But he was a representative man[2q]. He was conspicuously one of a very numerous class, still existing, and which has heretofore exerted a very powerful influence over this republic. As such, his wild and wondrous life is worthy of the study of every patriot. Of this class, their modes of life and habits of thought, the majority of our citizens know as little as they do of the manners and customs of the Comanche Indians[1].

No man can make his name known to the forty millions of this great and busy republic who has not something very remarkable in his character or his career. But there is probably not an adult American, in all these widespread States, who has not heard of David Crockett. His life is a veritable romance, with the additional charm of unquestionable truth[3q]. It opens to the reader scenes in the lives of the lowly, and a state of semi-civilization, of which but few of them can have the faintest idea.

It has not been my object, in this narrative, to defend Colonel Crockett or to condemn him, but to present his peculiar character exactly as it was. I have therefore been

constrained to insert some things which I would gladly have omitted.

JOHN S. C. ABBOTT.

FAIR HAVEN, CONN.

Parentage and Childhood.

Table of Contents

Youthful Adventures.

Table of Contents

Marriage and Settlement.

Table of Contents

The Soldier Life.

Table of Contents

Indian Warfare.

Table of Contents

The Camp and the Cabin.

Table of Contents

The Justice of Peace and the Legislator.

Table of Contents

Life on the Obion.

Table of Contents

Adventures in the Forest, on the River, and in the City

Table of Contents

Crockett's Tour to the North and the East.

Table of Contents

The Disappointed Politician.—Off for Texas.

Table of Contents

Adventures on the Prairie.

Table of Contents

Conclusion.

Table of Contents

DAVID CROCKETT.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.

Parentage and Childhood.

Table of Contents

The Emigrant.—Crossing the Alleghanies.—The boundless Wilderness.—The Hut on the Holston.—Life's Necessaries.—The Massacre.—Birth of David Crockett.—Peril of the Boys.—Anecdote.—Removal to Greenville; to Cove Creek.—Increased Emigration.—Loss of the Mill.—The Tavern.—Engagement with the Drover.—Adventures in the Wilderness.—Virtual Captivity.—The Escape.—The Return.—The Runaway.—New Adventures.

A little more than a hundred years ago, a poor man, by the name of Crockett, embarked on board an emigrant-ship, in Ireland, for the New World. He was in the humblest station in life. But very little is known respecting his uneventful career excepting its tragical close. His family consisted of a wife and three or four children. Just before he sailed, or on the Atlantic passage, a son was born, to whom he gave the name of John. The family probably landed in Philadelphia, and dwelt somewhere in Pennsylvania, for a year or two, in one of those slab shanties, with which all are familiar as the abodes of the poorest class of Irish emigrants.

After a year or two, Crockett, with his little family, crossed the almost pathless Alleghanies. Father, mother, and children trudged along through the rugged defiles and over the rocky cliffs, on foot. Probably a single pack-horse conveyed their few household goods. The hatchet and the

rifle were the only means of obtaining food, shelter, and even clothing. With the hatchet, in an hour or two, a comfortable camp could be constructed, which would protect them from wind and rain. The camp-fire, cheering the darkness of the night, drying their often wet garments, and warming their chilled limbs with its genial glow, enabled them to enjoy that almost greatest of earthly luxuries, peaceful sleep.

The rifle supplied them with food. The fattest of turkeys and the most tender steaks of venison, roasted upon forked sticks, which they held in their hands over the coals, feasted their voracious appetites. This, to them, was almost sumptuous food. The skin of the deer, by a rapid and simple process of tanning, supplied them with moccasons, and afforded material for the repair of their tattered garments.

We can scarcely comprehend the motive which led this solitary family to push on, league after league, farther and farther from civilization, through the trackless forests. At length they reached the Holston River**[2]**. This stream takes its rise among the western ravines of the Alleghanies, in Southwestern Virginia. Flowing hundreds of miles through one of the most solitary and romantic regions upon the globe, it finally unites with the Clinch River, thus forming the majestic Tennessee.

One hundred years ago, this whole region, west of the Alleghanies, was an unexplored and an unknown wilderness. Its silent rivers, its forests, and its prairies were crowded with game. Countless Indian tribes, whose names even had never been heard east of the Alleghanies, ranged this vast

appears frequently in frontier-era accounts of combat and raids.

8 A rural harvest celebration common in 18th–19th-century Anglo-American communities, combining work (harvest) with social amusements like dancing, courting, and feasting.

9 Refers to Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847), a Scottish Presbyterian minister and social thinker who coined the phrase 'the expulsive power of a new affection' in moral and pastoral writings.

10 A coarse, home-woven fabric made from a linen warp and woolen weft, widely used in colonial and early American clothing and household textiles.

11 A colloquial name for the bottle or jug of whiskey passed around at celebrations; a rural nickname recorded in 19th-century American sources, with uncertain precise origin.

12 A frontier stockade in present-day Alabama where a large massacre occurred on August 30, 1813, when Red Stick Creek warriors attacked settlers; the event helped precipitate the Creek War.

13 A treacherous stretch of the Tennessee River in northern Alabama characterized by shallow, rocky rapids (shoals) that historically impeded boats and crossings.

14 An older spelling of the Tombigbee River, a major river in Alabama and Mississippi; 19th-century sources often use variant spellings like 'Tombeckbee.'

15 A U.S. military post in northern Alabama used by Andrew Jackson during the Creek War (circa 1813–1814),

serving as a supply and staging point for operations against Creek (Muscogee) forces.

16 The name Andrew Jackson reportedly gave to an Indian infant he took from a battlefield and raised at the Hermitage; the boy is said in the text to have died of consumption (tuberculosis) at about seventeen.

17 A major river in what is now Alabama that joins the Tallapoosa to form the Alabama River; it was a geographic landmark crossed by Jackson’s troops during the Creek War.

18 A location in eastern Alabama where a Creek fort and a significant engagement (often called the Battle of Talladega) occurred during the Creek War; the name also denotes the modern city and county in Alabama.

19 The site on the Tallapoosa River where Andrew Jackson fought a decisive engagement in the Creek War (the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, March 1814), resulting in heavy losses for the Red Stick Creeks.

20 A port city on the Gulf Coast of Spanish Florida in the early 19th century that became strategically important during the War of 1812 when British forces and later U.S. forces under Jackson occupied or threatened it.

21 A river forming part of the boundary between present-day Alabama and Georgia; it was a notable geographic barrier and objective during Jackson’s campaign in the southern theater of the Creek War.

22 Shoal Creek refers to a frontier stream and settlement in what the text calls Giles County in southern Tennessee; in the early 19th century it was a common place-name for small creeks where pioneers established cabins and farms.

23 'The New Purchase' denotes territory recently bought from the Chickasaw Indians and opened to American settlement in the early 1800s in southern Tennessee; it was the informal name settlers used for that newly acquired land.

24 'Justices of peace' were local magistrates appointed to decide minor civil and criminal disputes on the frontier, often without formal legal education and exercising summary powers for community order.

25 A 'stump speech' is an impromptu political address delivered at local gatherings, originally given from a tree stump or other makeshift platform during 19th-century American campaigns.

26 'Bran-fire' is a dialectal or colloquial rendering of 'brand-new' used in the text to mean completely new or fresh; it reflects frontier speech of the period.

27 The Obion River is a river in west-northwest Tennessee that flows into the Mississippi; in the narrative it is the remote frontier stream by which Crockett built his cabin and hunted.

28 McLemone's Bluff is cited as a small trading-post or river landing on the Obion used by boatmen and traders; it appears to be a local place-name of the period and may not correspond exactly to a well-known modern town.

29 A man described in the narrative as a local physician and political opponent of Crockett; in the chapter he hosts voters in his framed house and competes with Crockett in electioneering.

30 Refers to the protective duties on imported goods that were politically contentious in the 1820s–1830s; tariffs

tended to benefit northeastern manufacturers and were opposed by many Southern and Western farmers.

31 The Obion is a river in northwestern Tennessee that flows into the Mississippi River; here it denotes the stretch of water Crockett's flat-boats traveled before entering the Mississippi.

32 A traditional river-name for a sharp, hazardous bend where currents and drift timber make navigation dangerous; in the narrative it denotes a perilous bend on the Mississippi that endangered Crockett's boats.

33 Natchez is a historic river port city on the Mississippi River in present-day Mississippi, long used as a commercial and transportation hub in the antebellum period.

34 An abbreviation of Legum Doctor (Doctor of Laws), an academic or honorary degree conferred by universities (e.g., Harvard) to recognize distinguished service or scholarship.

35 Refers to the Battle of Bunker Hill (June 1775), an early and famous engagement in the American Revolutionary War near Boston; the battlefield was a patriotic landmark in Crockett's time.

36 In the 1830s–1840s U.S. context, 'filibusters' referred to unauthorized American adventurers who led private military expeditions into foreign territories (not the legislative tactic); here it denotes those who entered Texas to challenge Mexican control.

37 Little Rock is a settlement on the Arkansas River that later became the capital of Arkansas; at the time described it was a small cluster of huts, not yet a developed city.

38 'Betsey' is the personal name given by Crockett to his favored rifle; naming weapons was a common practice and