

Davy Crockett

Today is the birthday of a Tennessee legend. Davy Crockett, the celebrated hero, warrior and backwoods statesman, was born on August 17, 1786, in a small cabin on the banks of the romantic Nolichucky River, near the mouth of Limestone Creek, which today lies about 3½ miles off U.S. Highway 11-East near Limestone, Tennessee. He was the fifth of nine children and the fifth son born to John and Rebecca Hawkins Crockett.

The name, Davy Crockett, has come to stand for the spirit of the American frontier and the move westward. As a young man, he was a crafty Indian fighter (who had great respect for the Indians and their courage, and as a congressman, fought for their rights) and hunter. When he was only 49 years old, he died a hero's death at the Alamo, helping Texas win independence from Mexico. For many years, he was nationally known as a political representative of the frontier.

His family's roots were deeply imbedded in the formation and development of the new nation. Crockett's grandfather, also named Davy Crockett, left the settled lands of North Carolina and crossed the mountains into present-day East Tennessee in search of fresh territory to settle. While his older sons were away with the Revolutionary Army at the Battle of King's Mountain in 1777, the grandfather and his wife were two of a dozen or so settlers living near present-day Rogersville who were massacred by the Creek and Cherokee Indians.

The Davy Crockett Birthplace Association and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation provide details of this interesting life. As a youngster, Crockett spent four days at the school of Benjamin Kitchen, but had a fight with a boy at school and left home to escape a "licking" from his father. He got a job helping to drive cattle in Virginia, worked for farmers, wagoners and a hatmaker. After 2½ years, he returned home, now 15 years old and nearly six feet tall. In those days, a boy either worked for his father or turned over his pay if he worked for others. Upon promise of his freedom from this obligation, Crockett worked a year for men to whom his father owed money. After working off these debts of his father, he continued with his last employer. He often borrowed his employer's rifle and soon became an expert marksman. From his wages, he bought new clothes, a horse and a rifle of his own, and began taking part in local shooting contests. At these competitions, the prizes often were quarters of beef. A contestant would pay 25 cents for a single shot at the target and the best shot won the quarter of beef. Crockett's skill was such that, more than once, he won all four quarters of beef.

(more)

The son of Crockett's employer conducted a nearby school, and Crockett attended for six months – four days a week in school and working two days a week. Except for the four days he had been in school when he was 12, that was all the formal education Crockett ever had.

Crockett served as a commander of a battalion in the Creek Indian War in 1813-14, was a member of the Tennessee legislature, 1821-22, and again, 1823-24. He was elected to the United States Congress 1827-29, 1829-31 and 1833-35

In March 1836, Crockett was among 187 men who for 13 days withstood the Mexican army of the despot, Santa Anna. When the battle was done, all 187 brave Americans, including Crockett, lay dead on the ground. But also killed in the battle were more than 2,000 Mexicans who died at their hands. On April 21, 1836, a little more than a month later, another Tennessean, Sam Houston, a former governor, led the Army of Texas in a stunning victory over Santa Anna's forces at the Battle of San Jacinto. Their battle cry was "Remember the Alamo!" A panel on the side of the monument at San Jacinto today underscores the importance of that military conquest: "Measured by its results, San Jacinto was one of the most decisive battles of the world. The freedom of Texas from Mexico won here led to annexation and to the Mexican War, resulting in the acquisition by the United States of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, California, Utah and parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas and Oklahoma. Almost one-third of the present area of the American nation, nearly a million square miles of territory, changed sovereignty."

Crockett's motto, which is good instruction for us today, was "Be always sure you are right, then go ahead." Crockett's life also proves that while education is desirable and we should all seek to take advantage of it, life can be meaningful and fulfilling if we discover the skills God has given us and strive to develop them to the uttermost, applying common sense along the way.

--Beecher Hunter