

# Unraveling Tall Tales

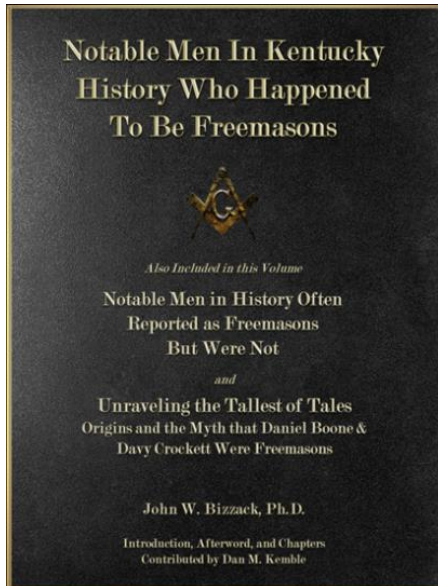
A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Investigation  
Into the Disputable Masonic Claims that  
Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett Were Freemasons



John W. Bizzack, Ph.D.

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# UNRAVELING TALL TALES

## A 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY INVESTIGATION INTO THE DISPUTABLE MASONIC CLAIMS THAT DANIEL BOONE AND DAVY CROCKET WERE FREEMASONS

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### PREFACE

In matters of history, a casual concern for accuracy has staggering rippling effects. Unless proven otherwise, often what is continuously reported is taken to be true if nothing arises to question or prove it is not true. Such is the case of the long-standing, accepted belief that two prominent figures in American history, Daniel Boone, and Davy Crockett, were Freemasons.

In the Masonic world, this belief is fueled by several deductive blunders: both names continuously appear on lists of "Famous Masons" published in multiple books (and today, the Internet); faulty recollections; hearsay; guesswork, passing as valid research; a plaque on a battlefield; a drawing of an apron; the attendance of Masons at a funeral, to name a just few. This has led many to subscribe to seriously flawed information, evidence-troubled assumptions, confirmation bias with a rippling effect over

the past 124 years caused by the casual concern for accuracy.

When it comes to Boone and Crockett, the idea of them being members of the fraternity has so strongly appealed to Masons that evidence to the contrary is regularly ignored. However, when the flimsy evidence, however, used to make the repeated claims is examined in context, coupled with a balanced, in-depth look at how such declarations originally came into existence, the whole idea begins to crumble.

This essay is an excerpt from Part III of *Notable Men in Kentucky Who Happened to be Freemasons*<sup>1</sup> and prepared as such for The Rubicon Masonic Society, Lexington, Kentucky, and the William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, Kentucky.

This 21<sup>st</sup> Century investigation into the controversial and inaccurate belief that Boone and Crockett were Freemasons unravels the twisted and poorly researched stories repeatedly used to make those claims, and for the first time, provide an in-depth

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<sup>1</sup> The title of the book reflect the premise of the work in that the historical figures in the book are *notable* in Kentucky history - not famous for being Freemasons. The only exception is Past Grand

Master of Kentucky, Rob Morris, whose notability and fame is based solely on his being a Freemason.



examination of what led to such long-held, deeply embedded beliefs.

## OVERVIEW

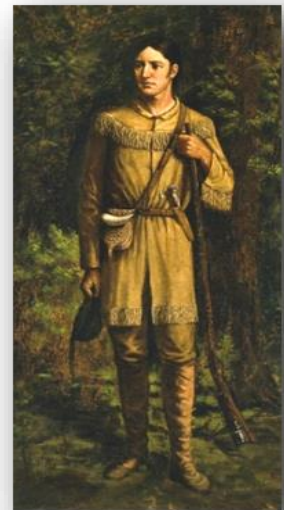
The names Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett appear on “Famous Masons” lists with such consistency that generations of Masons have come to defend the listings without regard to the fragile and unreliable speculation on which the claims are based.



Daniel Boone

Because the notion is so deeply entrenched, this section delves deeply into the claims to unravel the misguided narrative on which they were based and carried forward.

The belief Boone was a Freemason stems mostly from his 1845 reinterment in Frankfort, Kentucky where Freemasons, along with a reported count of 25,000 other people, attended the ceremony. The belief Crockett was a Freemason can easily be traced as first emerging in a 1926 letter. That letter cited an 1897 report in a Masonic publication about an exhibition in Tennessee that did occur, however, the claim that a Masonic apron alleged to have belonged to Crockett was on display at that exhibition, did not occur.



Davy Crockett

Examining the claims of their Masonic membership requires a judicious framework in which their backgrounds and life events are placed in context with the claims. When studied in such context, it becomes evident the evidence on which the claims are based is seriously troubled and unconvincing.

Books, dime novels, pamphlets, plays, films, historical markers, and songs about Boone and Crockett were popular in their lifetimes. There is a national forest named after Boone as well as counties and roadways. Crockett has towns, schools and roads named after him as well. The Sons of Daniel Boone, a youth program created by Daniel Carter Beard in 1905, was based on the American frontiersman. Beard later merged the group into the Boy Scouts of America. At one time there was a Masonic lodge in Kentucky, Lodge No. 454 named Daniel Boone Lodge. In San Antonio, Texas, Davy Crockett Masonic Lodge No. 1225 has operated since 1925.

Television invigorated interest and again popularized Crockett because of the 1955-1956 Walt Disney series, *Davy Crockett*, leading to fan clubs around the nation as well as the coonskin cap craze. From 1964-1970, the memory of Boone was refreshed by the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Television series. While elements of history can be found in both series, fictional story lines and accounts commercializing the lives of both men governed the productions. Actor Fess Parker, a six-foot six-inch Texan, portrayed both Crockett and Boone in this series, which may be one reason many confuse the two men.

According to historian, John L. Smith, Jr., Boone dictated his autobiography in 1809 to his grandson, John Boone Calloway. Because of the Louisiana Purchase, Boone needed homesteading proof in drafting his land grant request petitions to Congress, just as a veteran would dictate battle memories to substantiate his pension requests. In 1814 Calloway had the autobiography with him when his canoe tipped over in the Missouri River. The entire manuscript quickly flowed down river, lost forever.<sup>2</sup>

Crockett, however, did write and publish an autobiography. Well over five-hundred publications ranging from children's books to well-researched biographies by respected historians may be found along with detailed genealogies for both men.

The epic reputations of Boone and Crockett — whether evidence-based or from the extraordinary fictional accounts — are often viewed as sacrosanct by many in states where the men lived.

The importance of the cultural folklore surrounding these men and the entertainment provided by the adventures of their lives with all the colorful nuances commonly bestowed cannot be denied. They were indeed two among many men of their times whose conduct, character, deeds, and connection to historic events were destined to capture and fuel imaginations and interest.



We know, contrary to folklore and legend, Boone did not “discover” Kentucky and was far from the first explorer to set foot in that territory. We also know Crockett was not “half-horse and half-alligator and did not “ride lightning from the sky.”

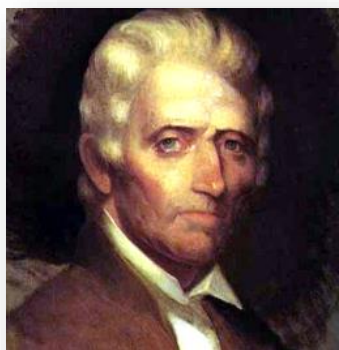
Nonetheless, for nearly a century many have had no problem embracing the notion that both men were Freemasons based on flimsy information masquerading as fact.



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<sup>2</sup> John L. Smith Jr., *Daniel Boone: Facts vs. Hearsay*, Journal of the American Revolution, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2016/05/daniel-boone-facts-vs-hearsay>, accessed October 2018.

## CONTEXT: Background on Daniel Boone



Born near Reading, Pennsylvania in 1734, Boone died in Missouri in 1820. Crockett was born in Green County, Tennessee in 1786 and died in Texas in 1836. Boone was 52 years old when Crockett was born, and Crockett was 34 years old when Boone died. There is no account of them having met, but Boone's name was very well-known during Crockett's lifetime. He had become a symbol of America's ideal self, a touchstone of poetry and national identity.<sup>3</sup> Crockett's reputation, while known in areas of Tennessee and among the military during the Creek Wars in 1813-1814 did not appear on the national stage until his election to Congress in 1827, when he was 41 years old. By then Boone had been dead for seven years.

Both men are often portrayed, and popularly envisioned, as wearing buckskin clothing and coonskin caps, carrying Kentucky long rifles, dispatching bears, exploring the wilderness, skirmishing with Native Americans and carried the title "Colonel." However, Boone believed coonskin caps uncouth, heavy, and uncomfortable and preferred a beaver felt hat and Crockett's coonskin cap did not appear until 1831, when the headgear was popularized in a play in which Crockett was the main character.

Boone, during his lifetime, had been accused of treason, fraud, and hypocrisy, and was once court-martialed, only to be exonerated and then given a promotion by the very men who sat in judgment at his court martial.<sup>4</sup> There is no known record of this happening at any court martial before or since. His surveying skills were never found to be consistently accurate. He lost multiple businesses and carried a consistent financial debt most of his adult life, though by the end he had paid back all he owed. Despite the ups and downs of Boone's real life, a close look discloses a humble and authentic moral character that can indeed be documented.

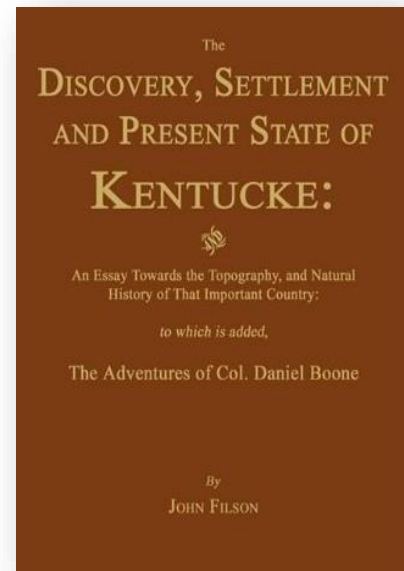
Boone served in the Revolutionary War. He was elected to the Virginia General Assembly and fought in the Indian Wars in Kentucky. He later served as sheriff of then Fayette County, Kentucky. He volunteered for service in the War of 1812 but was 78 years old at the time and was turned down.

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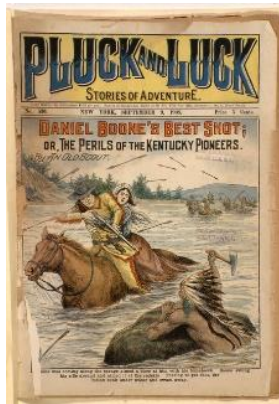
<sup>3</sup> Robert Morgan, *Boone: A Life*, Chapel Hill: Chapel Hill, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> *IBID.*

In 1784, on Boone's 50th birthday, historian and Freemason, John Filson published *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke*, a book which included a chronicle of Boone's adventures. Filson's book was translated into French and German and made Boone famous in America and Europe. Based on interviews with Boone, Filson's work contained a mostly factual account of Boone's adventures from the exploration of Kentucky through the American Revolution. However, because the real Boone was a man of few words, Filson invented florid, philosophical dialogue for him. Subsequent editors cut some of these passages and replaced them with more plausible — but still spurious — quotes.<sup>5</sup>



The book contained one specific section about life on the frontier, which Filson related to Eastern readers in first-person accounts.



Filson's account of the rescue of Boone's daughter from Indians is believed to have inspired similar events in James Fenimore Cooper's 1826 book *Last of the Mohicans*, as well as the frontier heroes later depicted in Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*. Crockett's biography in 1834 and Timothy Flint's 1833 biography of Boone inspired additional tales of colorful frontier characters drawn from this tradition of popular fictional dime novels that were published throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Boone, who was more literate than some accounts portray, is quoted as saying "nothing embitters my old age more than the circulation of absurd stories... Many heroic actions and chivalrous adventures are related of me which exist only in the regions of fancy. With me the world has taken great liberties, and yet I have been but a common man."<sup>7</sup>



<sup>5</sup> John Mack Faragher, *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer*, New York: Holt, 1992.

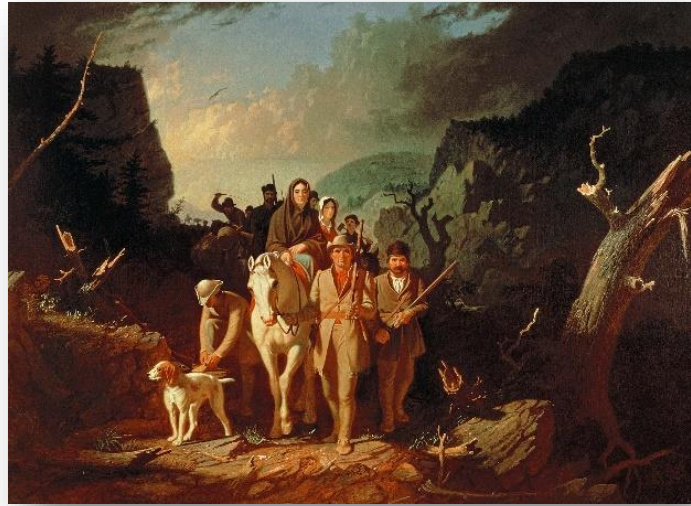
<sup>6</sup> Thomas E. Scruggs, *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee*, in *American History Through Literature*, eds. Janet Gabler-Hover and Robert Sattelmeyer (Bedford, Massachusetts: Gale Cengage, 2006), accessed March 2011, <http://www.enotes.com/american-history-literature-cc>.

<sup>7</sup> Faragher, *Daniel Boone*.



Interestingly, Filson, who became a Freemason at Christen Lodge No. 84 in Wilmington, Delaware, never mentioned or referred to Boone in any of his writings as being a brother Mason.

J. Winston Coleman, a highly respected Kentucky historian, was a member of Lexington Lodge No. 1. Coleman began researching, collecting and writing Kentucky history in 1932 and became renowned for his work in state and local history. He authored over one-hundred and fifty pamphlets and articles on various Kentucky topics and more than twenty books. Coleman donated his impressive collection of papers, research and photographs to Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky.



George Caleb Bingham's famous 1851-52 painting of Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers Through the Cumberland Gap

One of the many topics Coleman extensively researched and wrote about was Freemasonry in Kentucky. Coleman's pamphlet, *The History of Lexington Lodge No. 1*, published in 1951 stands as the most accurate history of that lodge beginning at the time of its charter in 1788. He also researched and published *Masonry in the Bluegrass, Being an Authentic Account of Masonry in Lexington and Fayette County, Kentucky 1788 – 1933*. There are no references or notations about Daniel Boone being a Mason in any of Coleman's writing. He meticulously detailed information about other historic figures who were Masons in the Lexington and Central Kentucky area. Since Coleman was an active Mason as well, it is preposterous to believe had he discovered evidence of Boone's affiliation he would have failed to mention it.

In his 1968, *Historic Kentucky*, Coleman dedicates a page to the Rob Morris House in Oldham County, Kentucky. He elaborates on the home as an historic shrine to Morris, noting him as an author, poet and historical figure in American Freemasonry who served as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky in 1858-1859 and was later crowned the Poet Laureate of Freemasonry. Another full page in this book is devoted to the Masonic University in Oldham County, Kentucky, which was erected in 1841. Coleman notes that Rob Morris taught at the university prior to the Civil War.

On the opposite page about the Masonic University appears another full page titled, *Daniel Boone's Monument* providing considerable details about Boone and the account of his body being reinterred in Frankfort, Kentucky in 1845. There is no mention of Boone as a Freemason.

In 1799, Boone and his wife, Rebecca, moved for the last time from Kentucky to Missouri. He settled in St. Charles County, which is today part of the St. Louis metropolitan area. He lived there, exploring the surrounding woodlands when he could, until his death in 1820.

### CONTEXT: Background on Davy Crockett

Crockett's military combat experience came from his involvement in the Creek Wars in 1813-1814. In the fall of 1816, Crockett moved his family to what would become Lawrence County, Tennessee, where he served as justice of the peace and commissioner for the town of Lawrenceburg, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel-commandant in the local militia. He was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1827-1831. He was defeated in 1831 but re-elected in 1833 serving until his last defeat in 1835. His good nature and backwoods sense of humor made him a well-liked figure in Tennessee and later in Washington, D.C.



As Hamlin Garland, an early Crockett historian wrote in 1923, "... even his historians must admit that his [Crockett] career in Washington was picturesque rather than important. With sturdy loyalty to his beloved Tennessee, he voted for "internal improvements" and fought Jackson's [Andrew Jackson] machine with relentless zeal, but he was only an amusing "original" after all, a hero rather than a legislator. While not precisely a joke, he was considered a privileged member because of his romantic career, and only his stories of coons, bears, and redskins were reported. He was the "Buffalo Bill" of his time."<sup>8</sup>

In April 1831, a play titled *The Lion of the West*, with main character Colonel Nimrod Wildfire, opened in New York City. The play was written by James Kirke Paulding and featured a main character clearly patterned on Crockett's backwoodsman reputation. Playing to standing ovations, the play instantly captured the imagination of the audiences and the public who later read its reviews.

Colonel Wildfire of Kentucky claimed to be "half horse, half alligator [and] a touch of the airth-quake." As the script goes, Nimrod said, "I have the prettiest sister, fastest horse, and ugliest dog in the deestricht. I can tote a steamboat up the Mississippi and over the Allegheny mountains. My father could whip the best man in old Kaintuck, and I can whip my father!"<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Hamlin Garland, *The Autobiography of David Crockett*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1923.

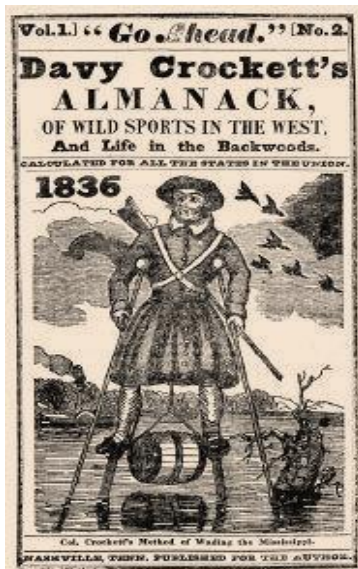
<sup>9</sup> James Kirk Paulding, *Nimrod's Wildfire Tall Talk*, 1833, Anthology of Southwestern Humor, accessed December 2010, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/sw/paulding.html>.



Image of Crockett as portrayed in stage plays about his life.

The bluster and common-sense philosophy of Colonel Wildfire were clearly a caricature of Crockett, and reportedly the congressman was not amused when he heard about the play. However, once the public warmly embraced Nimrod Wildfire as a portrayal of an “American hero” and after Crockett attended a performance himself, his opinion changed. Biographers believe it was due to Crockett’s attendance at this play, that caused him to begin to recognize the uniqueness of his reputation when he met his own myth. Soon, Crockett reportedly adopted the wearing of a coonskin cap and appeared frequently in buckskin clothing, just as Colonel Wildfire had on stage. There is no portrait or account of Crockett wearing a coonskin cap before 1835.<sup>10</sup>

While serving a Tennessee Congressman, Crockett split politically with President Andrew Jackson on several issues, including the sale of vacant (un-owned) lands, which was a major concern of Crockett’s constituents in West Tennessee. With the growth of Crockett’s popularity, he was put forward by some members of the opposition Whig Party as a possible presidential candidate to oppose Martin Van Buren, Jackson’s hand-picked successor, in 1836. During this time, the legend of Davy Crockett accelerated. Crockett promoted himself as a simple but honest man who was an outstanding hunter and marksman.<sup>11</sup>



In 1833, a new book, *The Life and Adventures of Colonel David Crockett of West Tennessee* and later republished as *Sketches and Eccentricities of Colonel David Crockett of West Tennessee*, was published anonymously but was written by either Matthew St. Clair Clarke or James Strange French. Both names are found in historical references.<sup>12,13</sup> Like Paulding’s play, this book established Crockett as a legendary frontiersman and promoted the caricature more than the true man.

Historians agree that Crockett must have provided information to the author and argue that Crockett later found problems with the work as he began to realize he needed to appear more politically educated if he was going to be a candidate for higher office. In response, he wrote his

<sup>10</sup> Paul Andrew Hutton, *Crockett*, Texas Monthly 14, no.11, 1986.

<sup>11</sup> James Atkins Shackford, *Davy Crockett: The Man and the Legend*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1956.

<sup>12</sup> Encyclopedia.com: Encyclopedia of World Biography, *Davy Crockett*, 2004, accessed December 2010, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3404701582.html>.

<sup>13</sup> David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee*, 1834 [facsimile], contribs. James A. Shackford and Stanley J. Folmsbee, Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1973.



autobiography in 1834, *A Narrative Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee, Written by Himself*. The debate continues today about Crockett's book and its version of his life, although it is most commonly believed to be more accurate than previous biographies.



Thomas Chilton

Thomas Chilton, a congressman from Kentucky, roomed at a boarding house with Crockett in Washington, D.C. They became good friends and political allies. Both were defeated in re-election bids in 1835.

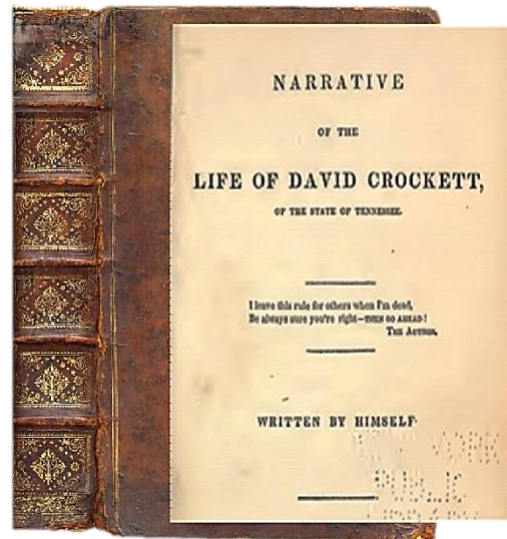
Crockett ended up going to Texas and Chilton, an attorney, returned to Kentucky and became a Baptist minister. He later moved to Alabama where his brother, William Parish Chilton was an attorney and served as

Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Alabama in 1869.<sup>14</sup> No record is found to show Thomas Chilton was a Freemason. Chilton ended up living in Montgomery, Texas, about 180 miles from the Alamo, where he ministered until his death in 1854. He was survived by his wife and six children, one of which was Lysias B. Chilton, whose son, Horace Chilton, became a U.S. Senator from Texas – the first native born Texan to serve in Congress.<sup>15</sup>

Although disputed by historians for years, Thomas Chilton was Crockett's ghost writer for his 1834 biography.<sup>16</sup>

The argument for Chilton's involvement centers on reports that the manuscript, when presented for publishing, was in Chilton's handwriting, and that peculiarities of spelling and grammar found in Crockett's surviving letters to his family, friends, and constituents were not found in the manuscript.<sup>17</sup>

Crockett, however, maintained that Chilton had only helped edit his work, and the fact that the language used is indeed found in some of Crockett's letters and speeches before Congress make it more likely that Crockett did, at the minimum, "talk the book," to Chilton as ghost-writer.<sup>18</sup>



<sup>14</sup> Jerry Underwood, Secretary, Grand Lodge of Alabama, correspondence between Underwood and author, March 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Sharon Elain Hannum, *Thomas Chilton: Lawyer, Politician, Preacher*, *Filson Club Historical Quarterly* 38, 1964.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Saxton and David Roediger, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America*, Verso, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Lofaro, *Davy Crockett: The Man, the Legend, the Legacy, 1786-1986*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985.

<sup>18</sup> Hamlin Garland, in the Introduction of *The Autobiography of David Crockett*, writes, "In Crockett's autobiography the reader will find the picture of such a man, a blunt, bold, prosaic account of a life, epic in its sweep. That he wrote it as it stands is doubtful, but that he talked it is unquestionable. The internal evidence is unmistakably genuine. Other so-called lives of Crockett are spurious, but the Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, of the State of Tennessee, copyrighted by the hunter himself in 1834, bears every evidence of being substantially his own expression. No one else could have permitted such a singular mixture of naive boasting and homely humor. "The whole book is my own," he declares, "every sentiment and sentence"; and



Evidence that Chilton did more than merely edit Crockett's book was unearthed during research by Crockett biographer, James Atkins Shackford. Two letters in Crockett's hand in which the circumstances were revealed of a Crockett-Chilton agreement. Crockett wrote to his son, John, on January 10, 1834 informing him that one-hundred and ten pages of the book were completed and "Mr. Chilton" was correcting it as he wrote. The second was to "Messrs Cary & Hart," his publishers. That letter dated February 23, 1834 informed his publisher that the "Hon. Tos Chilton of Kentucky is intitled to one equal half of the sixty-two and a half per cent of the entire profits of the work." At the end of the letter, we find, "The manuscript of the Book is in his [Chilton's] handwriting though the entire Substance of it is truly my own. The aid which I needed was to Classify the matter, but the Style was not altered."<sup>19</sup>

It has been suggested that Chilton did more than merely transcribe accounts Crockett provided. The Crockett- Chilton collaboration falls into the category we know today as a "campaign autobiography" – the kind of book seekers of high political office publish prior to announcing their candidacy for a particular office. In fact, Crockett's book may be the first campaign autobiography ever written.<sup>20</sup>

In the Preface to his book, Crockett expresses offense to the way he was characterized in the biography written in 1833 and explains that his autobiography will provide a "more accurate" picture of himself.<sup>21</sup> Crockett wrote,

I know that obscure as I am, my name is making a considerable deal of fuss  
IN THE WORLD. I CAN'T TELL WHY IT IS AND IN WHAT IT IS TO END.  
GO WHERE I WILL, EVERYBODY SEEMS ANXIOUS TO GET A PEEP AT  
ME...

HE GOES ON IN THE PREFACE TO SAY,

THERE MUST THEREFORE BE SOMETHING IN ME, OR ABOUT ME, THAT  
ATTRACTS ATTENTION, WHICH IS EVEN MYSTERIOUS TO MYSELF. I  
CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT, AND THEREFORE PUT ALL THE FACTS DOWN,  
LEAVING THE READER FREE TO TAKE HIS CHOICE OF THEM.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY JUST HAPPENED TO BE PUBLISHED PRIOR TO HIS RE-ELECTION  
CAMPAIGN FOR A THIRD TERM IN CONGRESS. THE BOOK RELEASE WAS ACCOMPANIED  
BY A SPEAKING TOUR, PROMPTED SEEMINGLY BY SUGGESTION THAT HE MIGHT  
CONSIDER HIMSELF A VIABLE CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY, "A FACT WHICH HE

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this is the fact, although, as he admits, some little change was made here and there in the spelling and grammar." (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1923).

<sup>19</sup> James Atkins Shackford, *The Author of David Crockett's Autobiography*. The Boston Public Library Quarterly, October 1951.

<sup>20</sup> Henry W. Pool, ed., *American Masculinities*, The Moschovitis Group, New York, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee*, 1834, Reprint, Empire Books, 2011.

TOOK MIGHTILY TO HEART.”<sup>22</sup> THEREAFTER HE WAS NEVER WEARY OF ALLUDING TO HIMSELF AS AN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE TO VAN BUREN, "THE LITTLE DUTCHMAN."

HE ASSERTS THAT THE AUTHOR OF THE 1833 BOOK ABOUT HIS LIFE (WRITTEN BY MATTHEW ST. CLAIR CLARKE OR JAMES STRANGE FRENCH (WHOM HE NEVER NAMES) CREATED A "GREAT INJUSTICE." <sup>23</sup> CROCKETT'S STATEMENT SOUNDS A GREAT DEAL LIKE BOONE'S AVOWAL ABOUT HIS CELEBRITY, AS NOTED IN JOHN MACK FARAGHER'S 1992 BOOK, *DANIEL BOONE: THE LIFE AND LEGEND OF AN AMERICAN PIONEER*. CROCKETT'S BOUT OF MODESTY, HOWEVER, IS SOMEWHAT SUSPECT SINCE HE MENTIONS HIS INTEREST IN THE PRESIDENCY SEVERAL TIMES IN HIS BOOK. HOWEVER, THERE ARE ALSO STORIES ABOUT "GRINNING" RACCOONS OUT OF A TREE, STARING DOWN BEARS INTO SUBMISSION, OR BEING "HALF HORSE AND HALF ALLIGATOR."

FOLLOWING HIS SPEAKING AND BOOK TOUR, CROCKETT WAS DEFEATED IN HIS RE-ELECTION BID FOR THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BY 252 VOTES. HE NEVER HELD ELECTED OFFICE AGAIN. SURPRISED AT HIS ELECTION DEFEAT, HE RETURNED TO HIS HOME IN TENNESSEE AND WITHIN A FEW MONTHS HEADED FOR TEXAS.

SOME BELIEVE THAT IF CROCKETT WAS A FREEMASON, HE WOULD HAVE REFERENCED OR NOTED SO IN HIS BOOK. THE POINT IS WELL TAKEN, BUT ONE MUST REMEMBER THAT WHEN THE BOOK WAS PUBLISHED, ANTI-MASONIC SENTIMENT IN THE NATION WAS STILL SIMMERING.<sup>24</sup> IF HE WAS A FREEMASON, IT MAY NOT HAVE BEEN POLITICALLY ADVANTAGEOUS TO INCLUDE SUCH AFFILIATION IN A BOOK THAT APPEARS TO BE WRITTEN, AT LEAST IN PART, FOR POLITICAL REASONS. OTHERS MIGHT SUGGEST THAT IF HE WAS A FREEMASON, THE OMISSION OF HIS AFFILIATION OR REFERENCE TO THE FRATERNITY MIGHT ALSO HINT THAT HE PLACED LESS OF AN IMPORTANCE ON MEMBERSHIP.

### **LOOKING FOR PROOF OF BOONE'S MASONIC AFFILIATION**

Conspicuously absent from the many writings during and immediately following the lives of Boone and Crockett is any mention of either man being a Freemason. There is no known record of either man being initiated. It is known through historical accounts that Boone was associated with many men who are confirmed to have been Freemasons, as was Crockett. The behavior of both men corresponded with the principles and tenets of Masonry; however, that characteristic cannot alone be accepted as a standard of proof that any man is a member of the fraternity.

Boone lived in Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Missouri, and traveled in Maryland and other vicinities where Masonic lodges were chartered at the time. His father, Squire Boone,

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> See Stephen DaFoe, *Morgan, The Scandal That Shook Freemasonry*, Cornerstone, 2014.

largely because of a so-called Masonic symbol on his gravestone, is written about as if he was a Freemason based on that alone.

In 1782, six years before the charter of Lexington Lodge No. 25, Boone was appointed by the governor of Virginia as sheriff of Fayette County (Lexington) and the County Lieutenant, which was at the time, the highest appointed position in the county. Prior to these high-profile appointments, Boone's settlement, Boonesborough, between Lexington and present-day Richmond, Kentucky was a major settlement in the territory. Boone fought at the Battle of Blue Licks, Kentucky in August 1782. In John Filson's 1784 book, *The Discovery, Settlement, and Present State of Kentucky*, in which Boone was the prominent feature, he was made a famous character throughout early America. Regardless, there is no mention of Boone in the records of Lexington Lodge No. 25, much less of him being involved with other notable men of the time in the chartering of the lodge or the other first four Masonic lodges in Kentucky.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, virtually every well-known man in Kentucky who happened to be a Freemason is noted in the records of the Lexington Lodge.

When Crockett's era is examined, the Anti-Masonic Movement that rampaged across America prior to and during Crockett's terms in Congress cannot be ignored.

President Andrew Jackson, a prominent Mason, faced an Anti-Masonic political party established in part to oust from elected office those who were Masons and to draw away support for Masons who were seeking office. This fact may have influenced Crockett's decision not to mention Masonry in his autobiography, since the book is believed to have been written with at least a partial motive of redefining Crockett as a viable candidate for higher political office. Chilton, who helped Crockett with the book, was a Baptist and at the time there was public opposition to Masonry by the Baptist Church.<sup>26</sup> There is no account of Chilton himself being opposed to Masonry, but his father, a well-known Baptist minister in Kentucky, was part of the chorus of Anti-Masons of the time. No other publications about Crockett during the period note any relationship to Freemasonry.

While no lodge records in any state, territory or from military lodges are known to survive proving Boone or Crockett were initiated as Masons that does not prove they were not made Masons *somewhere*. Regardless, the absence of records alone does not offer a levelheaded reason to ignore the fact that neither man is ever mentioned in reliable books, writings, news accounts or even anecdotes of the time, as being associated with Masonry. This is especially significant, since the Masonic affiliations of other men of much lesser status and celebrity were frequently documented.

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<sup>25</sup> *Summarization of the History of Lexington Lodge No. 1 from 1778-2018, Showing the Spirit of the Work in Lexington for the Past 230 Years*, published by Lexington Lodge No. 1, Compiled by the Preservation Committee and John W. Bizzack, Master. December 2018.

<sup>26</sup> *Early History of the Long Run Association in Kentucky, Part 2, 1818-1880*, in *A History of Kentucky Baptists*, Baptist History, 1886.

## ATTEMPTS TO DECLARE BOONE A FREEMASON

Daniel Boone could just as easily be claimed as a Pennsylvanian, Virginian, North Carolinian, or Missourian as a Kentuckian. Boone's life is certainly well documented – much better documented than his membership in Masonry. When and where then did the story of his supposed membership in the fraternity begin?

The extent of the known writings promoting the current-day impression that Boone was a Freemason comes from Robert Ray Morgan's otherwise outstanding 2007 book, *Boone: A Biography*. He writes:

During Daniel's youth, Squire Boone [his father] appears to have drifted away from the Quaker way of life and may even have become a Freemason. While working as a teamster in Virginia it is thought that Daniel Boone may have attended meetings at the Fredericksburg Freemason Lodge. Daniel Boone joined Washington's militia force as a teamster in support of Braddock's campaign. It is believed that Boone joined the Freemasons at this time. Boone escaped Braddock's defeat and returned on foot to the Yadkin.<sup>27</sup>



Morgan references Freemasonry nine separate times. Those passages are not as well-researched as the rest of Morgan's book. His references to Boone's Masonic status are wisely described as "likely" or "possibly." There exist no specific references to documents or accounts of Boone's membership other than his reference to Nathan Boone's comment about his father's funeral.<sup>28</sup>

Lyman Draper (of the Wisconsin Historical Society) interviewed and collected manuscripts of famous people in the 1800s. He never got around to writing or finishing his books, he just collected an unbelievable amount of notes and manuscripts.<sup>29</sup> Draper's manuscript collection today is famous and contains five hundred volumes. His notes on Daniel Boone take up nearly thirty-three volumes. In the 1840s, Draper started his extremely detailed book, *The Life of*

Nathan Boone

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<sup>27</sup> Wandering Lizard History, biographical notes on Daniel Boone, accessed November 2010, <http://www.inn-california.com/articles/biographic/danielboone.html>. This site, which has appeared as a source or reference on Boone, includes the following caveat: "Cristalen believes all information to be correct but assumes no legal responsibility for its accuracy."

<sup>28</sup> In correspondence with John W. Bizzack, on February 27, 2011, Ray Morgan stated that he did not recall having any proof that Boone was initiated into Freemasonry and that he did not examine the connection with Boone and the Craft until late in his research. He noted that he based his assumption that Boone was a Freemason on comments made by Boone's son, Nathan in an 1851 interview.

<sup>29</sup> John L. Smith, Jr. *Daniel Boone: Facts vs. Hearsay*.



*Daniel Boone*, even though Boone had died in 1820. By 1856 and after eight hundred pages, Draper shelved the book.<sup>30</sup>

Regardless, Draper's research is important to Boone biographers because in 1851 he spent three weeks in Missouri with Boone's youngest son, Nathan Boone and his sister, Olive Van Bibber Boone. While there, he took three-hundred pages of notes. Although Boone's surviving son and wife might be considered good secondary sourcing, the interview was conducted as if every detail they offered were fact.<sup>31</sup>

Neal Hammon's 1999 work as editor of *My Father, Daniel Boone: The Draper Interviews with Nathan Boone* contains oral historian, Draper's interview with Nathan Boone. The oral interview occurred twenty-one years after the death of Daniel Boone in Defiance, Missouri, and some sixty to eighty years after many of the events they spoke of, so the information is suspect. Robert Morgan quotes Hammon's work noting that Draper's interview reports Nathan Boone saying:

*Father's body was conveyed to Flanders Callaway's home at Charette, [Missouri] and there the funeral took place. There were no military or Masonic honors, the latter of which he was a member, as there were then but very few in that region of the country.*<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Neal O. Hammon, ed., *My Father, Daniel Boone: The Draper Interviews with Nathan Boone*, Lexington, Kentucky, University Press of Kentucky, 1999.

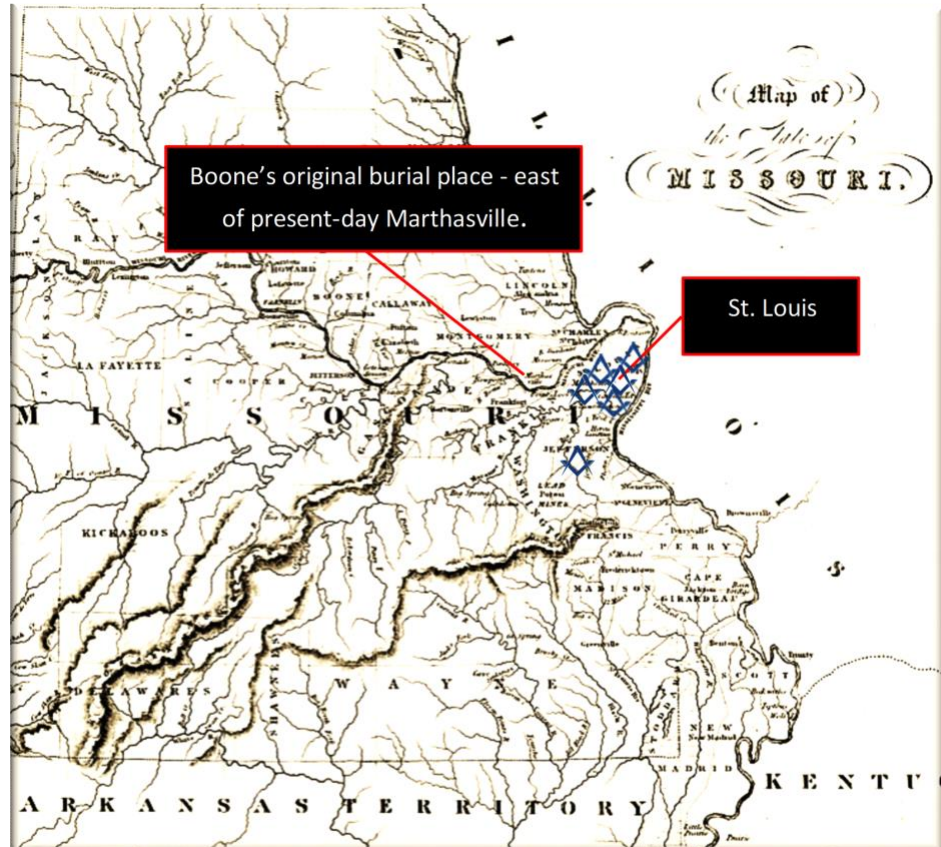
The history of the Grand Lodge of Missouri reflects that Boone resided in the Missouri Territory before and after Missouri became a state. Before his death in 1820, a total of six regularly chartered lodges operated in the area Nathaniel Boone referred to as “the region.” Nathan Boone’s claim that there were “very few” lodges in the “region” is incorrect. There were six lodges.<sup>33</sup>

Nathan Boone was perceptive and assiduous in trying to correct the historical record when speaking with Lyman Draper; however, certain aspects of Draper’s report beg perspective, context, and balance.

It should be considered, with no disparagement intended toward to Nathan Boone, that within the two-hundred pages of oral historian, Lyman Draper’s book of the interview with Nathan, phrases like, “that is possible,” “I’ve often heard,” “I do not remember,” “I have no recollection,” and “probably” are sprinkled throughout the work.

Nathan Boone, by all accounts, was an able guide and an efficient militia officer. He served in two wars, was a successful surveyor making his own mark in Missouri and Oklahoma history. Draper’s work and Boone’s recollections are an invaluable source of information about Daniel Boone, but considering all other circumstances surrounding the question of Daniel Boone being a Freemason, Nathan’s one remark is simply not enough evidence on which to solely base the belief.

Walton Rippon, an English writer, published “Modern Operatives and their Claims” in *The Builder Magazine*, Volume 12, Number 2, February 1926. According to the Lake Harriet Lodge No. 214, Minneapolis, the paper states: “From the fact that in 1845 there was a turnout of Masons in full regalia who participated in the ceremonies attending the re-interment of his [Boone’s] remains at Frankfort [and] that the Grand Lodge of Kentucky later contributed \$50 toward the



<sup>33</sup> Robert J. Wheeler, *History, St. Louis Missouri Lodge No. 1*, <http://stlmasons.org/history>, accessed January 30, 2013.

erection of a monument in that city, conclusions might be drawn that he [Boone] most probably was a member of the Craft.”

It should be noted that “Masons in full regalia participated in the ceremonies” is not conclusive evidence a Masonic funeral took place, nor does the report that the Grand Lodge of Kentucky’s contribution of fifty dollars toward the erection of a monument prove Boone was a Mason. A similar circumstance regarding services following the death of Zachery Taylor (who was believed to be a Mason) took place in 1845.

The above is all the known source accounts that attempt to connect Boone to Freemasonry. There are of course blogs, chat rooms and other cut-and-paste “contributions,” to the alleged connection, but those are unreliable, and most reference one of the above sources, which further lessens credibility.

There is no known record from any Masonic lodge in Kentucky, near or where Boone lived and held public elected office that confirms he was a visitor or a Mason. There exist no known records from Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, or Missouri proving a visitation or membership. Boone was indeed acquainted with men who were known Masons. It is possible he was initiated in a military lodge, even a British military lodge, during the period in which he served in the French and Indian Wars, but again, no records are available.<sup>34</sup> If he had been initiated in one of the military lodges or elsewhere prior to the publication of John Filson’s book in 1784, which was the first descriptive account and a narrative of Boone’s life, why was Boone’s membership not mentioned? This is especially puzzling since Filson was a Freemason.

Based on symbols carved on his tombstone, Boone’s father, Squire Boone, is often accepted and recognized as a Mason. It was common at the time for sons whose fathers were Masons to also become Masons, which suggests to some that Daniel Boone followed in his father’s Masonic footsteps. If one uses the argument that Boone was a Mason because his father was a Mason, the fact that no known record exists proving Daniel Boone’s son, Nathan, was a Mason, seriously troubles that notion.

Claiming alleged “Masonic” symbols on Squire Boone’s gravestone to prove he was a Freemasonry is questionable and far from conclusive. The original gravestone for Squire Boone was in the ground. Vandals had chipped pieces off the stone, so the city of Mocksville, North Carolina, put the stone in a vault until a brick monument could be built to display what was left of the stone.<sup>35</sup>

When that gravestone is closely examined one might choose to perceive the letter “A” (visible seven times in the wording on the stone), has characteristics similar to that of a Masonic square

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<sup>34</sup> Clarence R. Martin, *Traveling Military Lodges, Their History. Do Present Day Conditions Warrant a Continuance of the Practice?* Conference of Grand Masters of Masons in the United States, Washington, D.C. February 23,24, 1943.

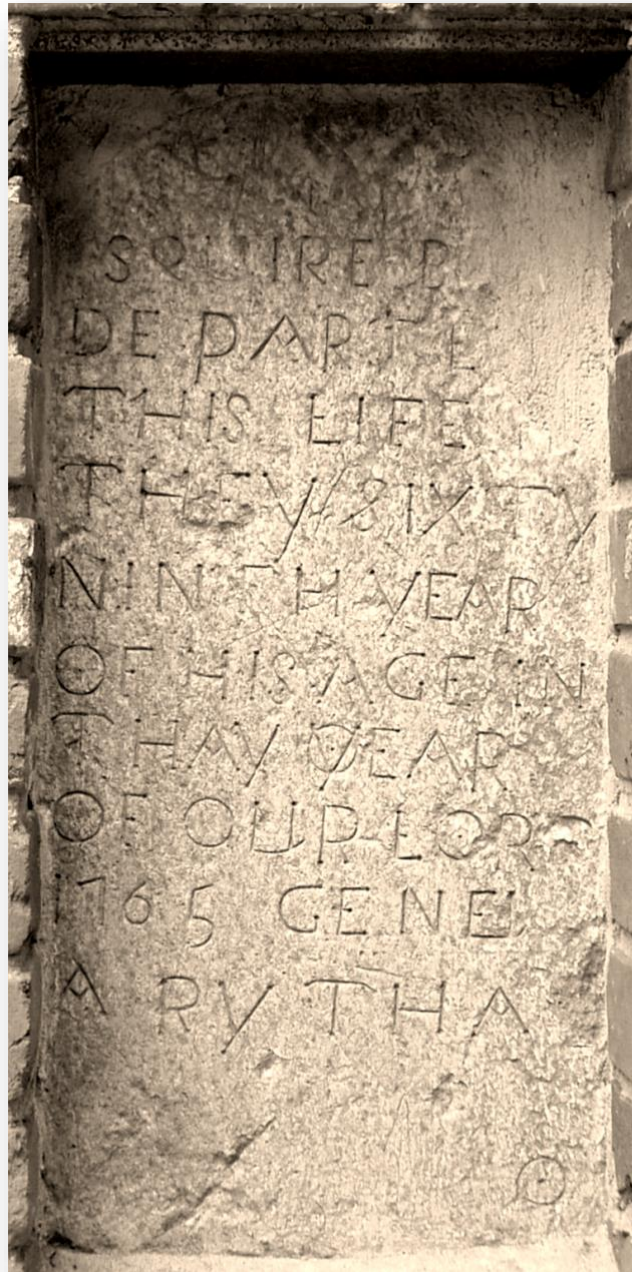
<sup>35</sup> U.S. Genealogy Web Archives, North Carolina, Davie County, North Carolina, Squire and Sarah Boone, <http://www.usgwarchives.net/nc/davie/boone/boone01.htm>, accessed January 2013.

and compasses. A closer look reveals the letter “A” is merely the letter “A” and not a Masonic symbol

In the lower right-hand corner of the stone there appears a circle and inside that circle is a point. The symbol of the point within the circle is easily recognized by Masons as a symbol used in the fraternity. Like many Masonic symbols, however, the exact origin of the point in a circle is unknown. In carvings from Ancient Egypt the Alpha and Omega symbols represent God, often as a circle with a point between them. In the Quaker faith, in order to communicate with each other and with God, Quakers often sit in a circle. This allows people to see and be aware of each other, but no single person is raised in status above the others.<sup>36</sup> Squire Boone was a Quaker, but there is no corroborating evidence the circle on his stone has anything more to do with his Quaker faith than it does with him being a Freemason.

Freemasons did participate in Daniel Boone’s re-interment on August 20, 1845 when his body was moved from Missouri to Frankfort, Kentucky, however, that is not proof he was a Freemason. After all, lodges from around the country participated in or held Masonic services and called Zachery Taylor “brother” during his funeral, but we know Taylor was not a Freemason.

Colonel John Johnson, a Boone pallbearer narrated his observations of the Boone’s reinternment in an article printed in the *Tri-Weekly Yeoman*, on August 31, 1876. In that article, he notes: “The



Squire Boone’s Gravestone in Mocksville, North Carolina

<sup>36</sup> Hans Weening, *Meeting the Spirit - An Introduction to Quaker Beliefs and Practices*, 1995, [quaker.org/legacy/charlestonwv/meeting-the-spirit.html](http://quaker.org/legacy/charlestonwv/meeting-the-spirit.html), accessed, June 2015.

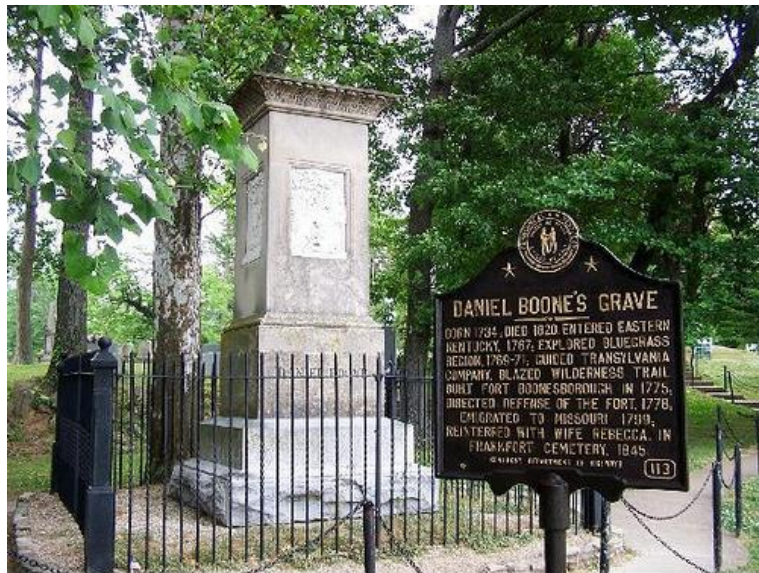


Military, Freemasons, and Odd Fellows were out in their appropriate uniform, and in large numbers.”<sup>37</sup>

Johnson’s reference to the Odd Fellows creates a new element that might be added to the guesswork employed by some historians and others about Boone’s affiliation in fraternal organizations. The Odd Fellows were founded in North America in April 1819, in Baltimore, Maryland.<sup>38</sup> Although they attended his reinternment, Odd Fellows did not claim Boone was a member of their fraternity.<sup>39</sup>

So, why were the Odd Fellows in attendance at Boone’s reinternment? The reason is the same as why the military, ranking federal and state politicians, and supposedly twenty-five-thousand people were present along with Freemasons: the importance and historic nature of the reinternment, and out of respect for Boone.

Famed statesman, attorney general, United States senator and former governor, John Jordan Crittenden, who delivered the oratory, was a Freemason. There was no mention in his speech that day or in his later writings of Boone, as “Brother.” Richard M. Johnson, the ninth vice-president was a Freemason and Boone pallbearer. There is no record of his referring to Boone as a brother in any of his remarks or later writings.



The presence of Freemasons at Boone’s funeral is not evidence of Boone’s alleged membership in the fraternity.

Nathan Boone saying, “there were no military or Masonic honors, the latter of which he was a member,” is not proof either. The statement may illustrate that Nathan may have *believed* his father was a member of the fraternity. He may have assumed his father was a Mason simply because he frequented the company of Masons, or because Squire Boone, his grandfather was supposedly a Mason, or he may have inadvertently embellished his father’s legacy.

<sup>37</sup> Col. John Johnson, *Tri-Weekly Yeoman, A Short History of Franklin County, Kentucky*, August 31, 1876, and Kouns, genealogy site, <http://www.miles-shute-kouns->

<sup>38</sup> The Sovereign Grand Lodge Independent Order of Odd Fellows, <http://www.ioof.org/jurisdictions/kentucky.html>, accessed, March 1, 2012

<sup>39</sup> The first Odd Fellow Lodge in Kentucky was established in 1834. <https://www.state-journal.com/2017/03/23/odd-fellows-lodge-177th-birthday-brings-hope-to-historic-order>, accessed December 2018. The fraternal order came first came to Missouri in 1835, Odd Fellows Home, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/odd-fellows-home>, accessed December 2018. Boone died in 1820.

Daniel Boone did not write his memoirs and the earliest authors who wrote about him did not mention Boone being a Freemason. Those who knew him personally and who were quoted about his life experiences and personality never referred to him as a Mason, even though some of them were Masons themselves. There is no known contemporary documents, letters, speeches, or other eye-witness accounts that refer to Boone as a Freemason.

Boone was in Kentucky in 1778 when Lexington Lodge No. 25, now Lexington Lodge No. 1, was first chartered by the Grand Lodge of Virginia. He was associated with the first officers and members of the lodge and lived close enough to that lodge to visit had he been affiliated. Many early members lived farther from lodge than Boone. Because of his celebrity at the time, it is illogical to accept that Boone was a member or visited Lexington Lodge or any emerging lodges in the area at the time with no reference or notation in Masonic records then or later.

Boone left Kentucky in 1799 and migrated to Missouri. No evidence has been discovered that he became a Mason in Missouri or attended one of the early lodges charted in that territory.

The writings and valid history of Boone's exploits and life certainly suggest he conducted himself in ways compatible with Masonic values. However, the issue of whether Boone was a member of the Craft remains undocumented and unproven.

### **LOOKING FOR PROOF OF CROCKETT'S MASONIC AFFILIATION**

Stephen F. Austin considered the "Father of Texas," Sam Houston, the first President of Texas, William Travis, who commanded forces at the Alamo, and Jim Bowie too were Freemasons. Also, easily confirmed were some of the heroic defenders of the Alamo, like Ben Milam, (who led a group of three hundred Texans and forced Mexican soldiers to surrender at San Antonio de Bexar the year before), and Almaron Dickinson (whose wife survived the battle and wore her husband's Masonic apron over her and her child as she marched by Santa Anna's troops). Jim Burnham, who left the Alamo to seek reinforcement and then returned, knowing he was coming back to his death, was a Mason. Crockett, like Boone, is known to have associated with Freemasons, however, there exist no known record prior to 1897 in which Crockett is reported as or referred to as a Mason.



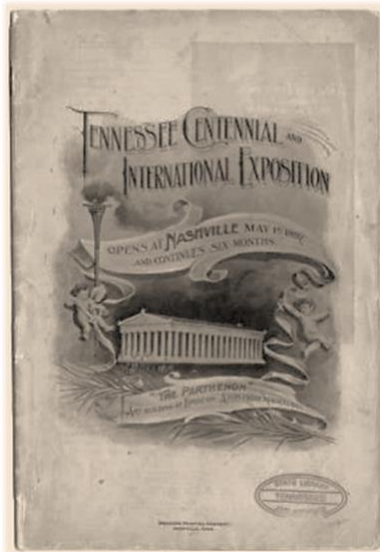
**Davy Crockett**

The claim that he was began with a story in 1897 about a Masonic apron allegedly on exhibit at a state celebration – an apron that

supposedly belonged to Crockett. That story was never confirmed as true. Today, we know there was no Masonic apron on exhibit at that celebration.<sup>40</sup>

Thirty-seven years later, in 1934, another uncorroborated tale emerged about an apron purportedly belonging to Crockett. This intricate account, although fraught with discrepancies and contradictions, gave rise to the widespread mistaken belief Davy Crockett was a member of the fraternity, based exclusively on that story.

### Attempts to Claim Crockett a Freemasonry: The Mystery of Crockett's Alleged Apron



1897 Tennessee Centennial Program

In 1897 Tennessee held a six-month celebration to mark the one-hundredth anniversary of statehood. The Tennessee Centennial Exposition was held in Nashville from May 1 until October 30, 1897. A total of 1,786,714 people attended the six-month celebration.<sup>41</sup>

President William McKinley officially opened the Centennial Exposition in Nashville. While the president would not visit the Exposition until the next month, organizers of the event arranged for him to press an electric button in the White House that sparked equipment at the fair's Machinery Building. Thus, began a half-year of joyous opportunity for the state's citizens to commemorate the past hundred years of Tennessee's achievements and history.<sup>42</sup> McKinley was a Freemason.<sup>43</sup>



1897 Tennessee Centennial Souvenir Book

A Masonic apron, supposedly belonging to Crockett, was reportedly on exhibit at that celebration. According to a September 4, 1897 issue of *The Missouri Freemason Magazine*, the apron was loaned to the Tennessee Historical Society by E.M. Taylor of Paducah, Kentucky. Although a trivial error, reporting Taylor as a resident of Paducah, Kentucky was to become the first of many

<sup>40</sup> Tennessee Centennial Exposition, <http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/Centennial>, Accessed, December 2018.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Scottish Rite Museum and Library, *President William McKinley: Fraternity Man and "Idol of Ohio,"* [https://nationalheritagemuseum.typepad.com/library\\_and\\_archives/william-mckinley](https://nationalheritagemuseum.typepad.com/library_and_archives/william-mckinley), accessed December 2018.

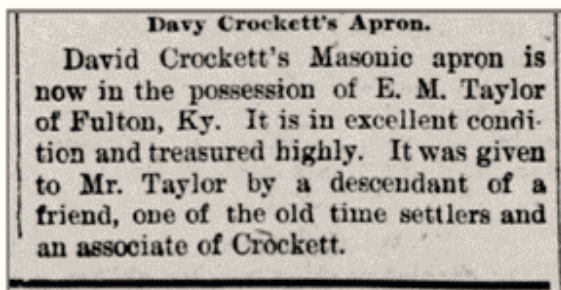


incorrect assertions connected to that apron for the next 100 years. Taylor was from Fulton, Kentucky.<sup>44</sup>

Confirmed first in 2013, then again in 2018, no copy of the *Missouri Freemason Magazine* is found in the archives of the Grand Lodge of Missouri or its Lodge of Research where copies or other editions is archived.<sup>45</sup> A copy of that magazine is not needed to corroborate that such a story appeared in print in that period.



## HOW THE FABLE STARTED



The identical sentences appearing in five newspapers following the appearance of a report in the *Tennessean* newspaper about a Masonic apron supposedly belonging to Davy Crockett displayed at the Tennessee Centennial Exhibition. Image is from the first report appearing in Lincoln *Nebraska Evening Call*, September 29, 1896.

The true genesis of the claim that Davy Crockett was a Freemason is based on a Masonic apron that supposedly belonged to him that was on display at the 1897 Tennessee Centennial. The tale was ignited by an article appearing in the *Tennessean* newspaper on Saturday, May 12, 1897.

The article reports on one specific Centennial building referred to as the Hallway Exhibit Building. In that building the article tell us that displayed were items from the railway, agriculture, plants and waterfalls, tobacco, and "Relics of Other Days," described as "a collection that will capture the hearts

<sup>44</sup> William E. Bidwell, *Legislative History and Capitol Souvenir of Kentucky: Portraits and Sketches of Senators, Representatives and Officials and Attaches of the Various State Departments*, Pala Press, 2015.

<sup>45</sup> Steve Harrison, Past Master and Editor, *Missouri Freemason Magazine*, confirmed on February 17, 2013 in correspondence with the author, that a copy of the *Missouri Freemason*, weekly issue, Volume 1, No. 32, September 4, 1897, Page 1, is not in the magazine archives at the Grand Lodge of Missouri. In December 2018, the author was assisted by Samuel Thomas, Grand Lodge of Missouri researcher, John Hess, Past Grand Master and Curator at the Missouri Lodge of Research, and the current editor of the magazine and Past Grand Master, Dave Haywood for another search for the 1897 issue. On December 14, 2018, Thomas reported the search found no magazines dated in the 1890s. The magazines in the archives following that decade did not mention of the Tennessee Centennial Exhibition in 1897.



of archeologists.” In that section about relics, is a paragraph about “war relics”, which included “a flag from Civil War Fort Donelson, a sword belonging to Champ Ferguson, “a notorious Confederate guerrilla during the American Civil War”, and “among other relics shown” was, “Davy Crockett’s Masonic apron.” The exhibits in that building were created by G. A. Cleveland, a Centennial grounds-building and exhibit designer and coordinator and not the Tennessee Historical Society. All items reported in that article were indeed on display, except for “Davy Crockett’s Masonic apron.” The official inventory of the Centennial does not record that a Masonic apron on display anywhere at the Centennial.<sup>46</sup>

By September 29, 1896, five months following the article in the *Tennessean*, the same three sentences appeared in five other newspapers in America that contributed to a growing belief that Crockett was a Freemason based on the report of that apron at the exhibition.<sup>47</sup> The *Missouri Freemason Magazine* article advancing the Crockett claim is noted as appearing in the September 4, 1897 edition, which is a full year *after* the three sentences appear in five different American newspapers. Clearly, the *Missouri Freemason Magazine* was only parroting what was already in print.

Interestingly, although never mentioned in known Masonic publications or reports that accompanied the claims of a Crockett apron, the University of Tennessee has in their archives a list of exhibits sponsored by the University at the Centennial event. According to the listings, “a replica of the Alamo, where Davy Crockett and other Tennesseans died” was reproduced for the Centennial. The size and where the replica was on display is not noted. There is no mention of a Masonic apron on display or another mention of Davy Crockett.<sup>48</sup>

Because all the information about this claim points to a story told by Ida Taylor (the widow of the E.M Taylor named in the three-sentence report) to the Secretary of Davy Crockett Lodge No. 1225, in San Antonio, Texas, in 1934, it follows that the Taylors are the source of the reports. The question, however, of who wrote and first spread those three specific sentences, remains a mystery. That mystery created consequences and a traceable sequence of events leading from them. When that sequence is factually unraveled and examined with balance and context, we see that all who have and continue to assert Crockett was a Freemason based on these events, have subscribed to seriously flawed information, evidence-troubled assumptions, and confirmation bias.

## THE UNRAVELING OF THE TALE

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<sup>46</sup> Neal O'Steen, *The Centennial Exposition in Nashville Celebrated the Volunteer State's First Century*. University of Tennessee's part of the exhibit piqued public interest, university of Tennessee account of the Centennial, <http://pr.utk.edu/alumnus/winter96/centenn.html>, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040703063755/http://pr.utk.edu/alumnus/winter96/centenn.html>, accessed December 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Lincoln Evening Call, Lincoln, Nebraska, September 29, 1826, p.3, Marion Star, Marion, Ohio, October 1, 1896, p. 3, Buffalo Evening News, Buffalo, New York, October 1, 1896, p.5, Leavenworth Times, Leavenworth, Kansas, October 3, 1896, p.4, Daily Express, Beatrice, Nebraska, November 12, 1896, p.3, research subscription to 11,2000 newspapers from 1700-2000, Newspapers. Com.

<sup>48</sup> O'Steen.

In 1899 Masonic scholar and author, Robert Freke Gould, published, *Military Lodges: The Apron and the Sword or Freemasonry Under Arms Being an Account of Lodges in Regiments and Ships of War and of Famous Soldiers and Sailors of All Countries Who Have Belonged to the Society*. Gould's 290-page book mentioned Crockett in the same section as he noted the names of two confirmed Freemasons.

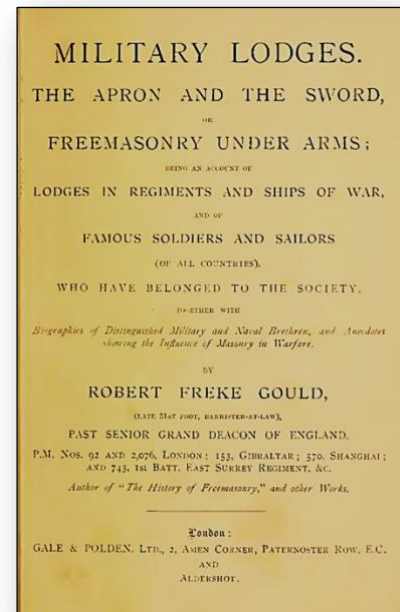
Gould wrote:

Generals Stephen Austin, the liberator of Texas, and "Sam" Houston, the recognized hero of the Texan War of Independence, were Freemasons; also, Colonel David Crockett, backwoodsman, and Member of Congress, who fought on the same side, and after a hard siege surrendered to General Santa Anna, by whose order he was put to death with the other survivors in 1836.<sup>49</sup>

The way Gould parses his words in that passage makes it appear he is not making the claim that Crockett was a Mason but was at the Alamo with men who were. The book includes the subtitle "Famous Soldiers and Sailors Who Have Belonged to the Society." The book was published after the issues of three-sentence reports in 1896 about an apron supposedly belonging to Crockett. Regardless, noting Crockett in the company of men who were confirmed as Freemasons cannot be considered the kind of "proof" that supports the claim that Crockett was a Mason.

In 1934 the secretary of Davy Crockett Lodge No. 1225, in follow up to correspondence he received from the Grand Master of Texas, contacted the widow of E.M. Taylor, who supposedly loaned the alleged Crockett apron to the Tennessee Centennial Exposition for exhibit in 1897. She willingly offered a story that captured the imagination of those who examined her tale at the time.

Ida Taylor may have fully believed the story she conveyed; however, the tale does not stand the light of principled scrutiny. Accepting her evidence-troubled yarn as the sole source of evidence on which to claim Crockett was a Freemason was an over-assumption then and remains woefully insufficient to support such an assertion today. Notwithstanding six major discrepancies plaguing the apron story, the convoluted tale and subsequent events surrounding it is what set in motion the world-wide notion that Crockett was a Freemason.



<sup>49</sup> Gould, although listing many men as members of military lodges in his book, made no mention of Daniel Boone in connection to a military lodge or a Freemason.

The core of the information Taylor offered came to the attention of the grand lodge twenty-one months before the dedication of the April 1936 dedication of a Masonic memorial at the San Jacinto battlefield in Texas. The timing could not have been better. Based on Ida Taylor's story, the grand lodge commissioned a bronze plaque for display at the battlefield. The title on the plaque reads, "Pioneer Masons." Forty-eight names emblazon the plaque. One of the names is David Crockett.

On page twenty-eight of the May 1936 issue of *The Texas Grand Lodge Magazine*, one-month after the battlefield plaque was unveiled, an article titled, *Davy Crockett's Masonic Apron* appears. A black and white drawing of the apron Ida Taylor claimed to be Crockett's takes up most of the top half of the page. Understandably, the headline-styled title of the article appearing in a respected Masonic publication can easily be perceived as a formal announcement or official proclamation that Crockett was a Freemason – at least as construed by the Grand Lodge of Texas.

Fifty-years later, in 1986, *The Texas Masons: The Fraternity of Ancient Free & Accepted Masons in the History of Texas* was published. The author, Texas Mason Pierre G. 'Pete' Normand, recounted the 1936 article and merely told the story of what was reported in 1936.

Fifty-four years later, in the 2008 Spring Issue, No. 44, of *Freemasonry Today*, the Official Journal of the United Grand Lodge of England, a story appeared noting:

The inspirational leader of the defenders [of the Alamo] was another Mason, Davy Crockett, whose Masonic credentials are proved by a Masonic apron made for him by a Mrs. Massie of Washington, D.C.

Declaring the apron as proof of Crockett's 'Masonic credentials' in that 2008 publication is not surprising because in 2008 no one had ever examined the accuracy of the initial story about the apron, much less scrutinized the misrepresentation of facts that unfolded in 1936 and credibility of the primary source. The entire sentence merely passes on the 1936 Masonic supposition that Crockett was a Freemason as if acceptable standards of proof have verified the assumption. Multiple hundreds of links on the Internet continue to pass-on the pass-on. The tale is so engrained in Masonic lore and the assertion repeated so many times since 1936, the claim rarely, if ever, merits a formal reference, source, citation, or footnote today. To that extent, the claim has reached mythic proportions without a determinable basis of fact or natural explanation.

## THE FACTS BEHIND THE APRON STORY

The story appearing in the *Texas Freemason Magazine* in 1936 is cited and repeated so often the details of the story-behind-the-story have been completely ignored. The backstory of that article is a textbook case study of confirmation bias - the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and then accept information in a way that confirms one's preexisting beliefs, hopes or hypotheses.

The Grand Lodge of Texas website quotes the following excerpt from Normand's 1986 book, *The Fraternity of Ancient Free & Accepted Masons in the History of Texas*.<sup>50</sup>

Proof that Crockett was a Mason is based mainly on the survival of his Masonic Apron, made for him by Mrs. A.C. Massie of Washington, D.C., during his tenure in Congress. Before leaving for Texas, he entrusted the apron to the sheriff of Weakley County, Tennessee, and it was inherited and preserved by the sheriff's nephew, E.M. Taylor of Paducah, Kentucky. The lodge at Weakley County, near the Crockett home, burned during the Civil War destroying all the lodge records.<sup>51</sup>

Normand's excerpt is a summary account of the 1936 *Texas Grand Lodge Magazine* article and unquestionably a correct representation of what that article reported. So, in that respect, the information Normand reported is correct. What Ida Taylor, the primary source of that information, is cited in the 1936 article, was hardly verified, much less correct, and Taylor may not have even known her tale was full of holes and easily discredited.

First, the sheriff of Weakley Country in 1835 was Peleg Terrell.<sup>52</sup> He was not related to E.M. Taylor. Second, E.M. Taylor lived in Fulton, Kentucky, not Paducah. Furthermore, the "lodge at Weakley County, near Crockett's home," did not burn during the Civil War.



Artist rendering of photograph provided by Ida Taylor. Courtesy of the Grand Lodge of Texas Library and Museum.

<sup>50</sup> Pete Normand, *The Fraternity of Ancient Free & Accepted Masons in the History of Texas* 1986 ( Book may be ordered from Brazos Valley Masonic Library).

<sup>51</sup> Pete Normand, *David Crockett - "King of the Wilderness,"* Grand Lodge of Texas, <https://grandlodgeoftexas.org/david-crockett-king-wilderness>, accessed December 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Charles W. Crawford, Virginia C. Vaughan, Tennessee County Series, Weakly County, Memphis State University Press, 1983.



These two evidence-troubled statements cast further shadows of doubt on the veracity of the A.C. Massie apron claim as well, launching a healthy dose of well-founded skepticism about all the events surrounding and leading to the 1936 story. When examined in balance and context, the logical result is a greater the lack of confidence in the entire claim.

The 1936 article cited in Normand's 1986 book brought back into view for the first time in fifty years, the root of the Crockett claim. He relates the story of how Harry L. Trail, the Secretary of Davy Crockett Lodge No. 1225, chartered in 1925 in San Antonio, pursued the story that led to Ida Taylor. He reportedly wrote a "great number of letters" in his attempts to track down a Masonic apron supposedly belonging to Crockett. One letter was sent to Ida Taylor. There is no record of the other letters Trail reportedly wrote.<sup>53</sup>

What prompted Trail to pursue more information about Crockett's supposed Masonic affiliation apparently started when he received a letter from the Grand Master of Texas who asked him for?

28 Texas Grand Lodge Magazine

## DAVID CROCKETT'S MASONIC APRON

**SECRETARY Harry L. Trail of Davy Crockett Lodge No. 1225, San Antonio, has recently presented to the Library a picture of Davy Crockett's Royal Arch apron. The only information the Grand Lodge of Texas had concerning Crockett as a Mason was the statement in Gould's *Military Lodges* that Crockett was a Mason. Secretary Trail undertook to find out where and when Crockett became a Mason, and in this Sherlock Holmes investigation he has written a great number of letters. The one printed below eventually brought the picture of the apron. Secretary Trail is still searching for additional information as to Crockett's Masonic connections.**

**DAVY CROCKETT LODGE NO. 1225, A. F. & A. M.**  
8050 Broadway, Alamo Heights  
San Antonio, Texas  
July 5, 1934.

Mrs. Ida Taylor,  
Fulton, Ky.  
Dear Madam:

This Lodge is in receipt of a letter from the M. W. Grand Lodge of Texas requesting information as to the Masonic history of the illustrious Davy Crockett which they desire to use in preparation of Texas Masonry's Centennial. We have studied all historical publications available and have been unable to obtain the desired information to date; however, we will quote a clipping that was furnished by the M. W. Grand Lodge of Arkansas:

"DAVY CROCKETT'S MASONIC APRON STILL PRESERVED  
"To the Editor of the (Arkansas) Gazette:  
"Reading in your paper some of the relics of the past, induced me to write to you. Mrs. Ida Taylor of Fulton, Ky., has a Royal Arch apron that was given to David Crockett when he represented West Tennessee in Congress. When he left Tennessee to go to Texas he left this apron with the Sheriff of Weakley County until he called for it. He fell in the Battle of the Alamo. This apron has been handed down and is now in possession of the above party."  
(Signed) A. W. MORRIS, Fulton, Ky."

We are very anxious to obtain copies of any documentary evidence showing the Masonic history of the illustrious David Crockett for use in preparation of the above mentioned publication, also for the records of this Lodge, which was named after him. This could, I believe, be easily accomplished if you could



AN ARTIST'S RESTORATION FROM A DIM PHOTOGRAPH. SYMBOLS AND OTHER DETAILS TOO BLURRED OR TOO INDISTINCT TO DISTINGUISH UNDER A READING GLASS WERE OMITTED.

DAVY CROCKETT'S MASONIC APRON

arrange to furnish photostatic copies of the apron and any other documents that you may know to exist, such as dates of initiations, the Lodge in which he was raised or any letter, clipping, or publication, or any historical reference.

Any expense that you may incur in obtaining this data can be billed to this Lodge and you will be reimbursed immediately.

Thanking you in advance for any assistance that you may be in a position to render in this good cause, we remain

Sincerely yours,  
(Signed) HARRY L. TRAIL, Secretary.

Mrs. Taylor's reply contains some interesting history relative to Crockett's apron and evidence of its being a Royal Arch apron:

Fulton, Ky., July 30, 1934.

Mr. Harry L. Trail,  
San Antonio, Texas.  
Dear Sir:

In reply to your letter of July 5th, regarding Davy Crockett history, I shall tell you of his Masonic apron—only—which came to my husband, E. M. Taylor, through an old uncle-in-law, whose father was a close friend of Davie's.

When Davy was leaving Tennessee for his faraway new home in Texas, the apron was a parting gift to his friend.

The apron is hand-made of white satin, hand-painted in colors appropriate to Royal Arch Degrees, the border is of pleated red satin ribbon and the whole apron is in fine condition. It is considered a beautiful as well as a valuable old relic. It was made and given away by a Mrs. A. C. Massie, in Washington, D. C., while serving as Congresswoman from Tennessee.

29 May—Nineteen Thirty-six

The name Mrs. A. C. Massie is faintly written in ink on the underside of the flap.  
The apron was on exhibition during the Nashville Centennial, as a favor to the Tennessee Historical Society.

During the Civil War, in Dresden, Weakley County, Tenn., (Davy Crockett's old home), the Court House and the Masonic Lodge were destroyed by fire; not a record of any description was saved; however, both his Masonry and the apron are authentic, still there is no authentication at present.

I am having a picture of the apron made for you. It will be my pleasure to furnish names and other information that I may find available, if you care to have it.

Sorry to have kept you waiting for a reply but have just returned to my home after several weeks absence.

Very truly yours,  
(Signed) MRS. IDA TAYLOR.

In June, 1935, Wm. L. Boyden, 33°, Librarian, Supreme Council, S. J., cited an item in the *Missouri Freemason*, weekly issue, Volume 1, No. 32, September 4, 1897, Page 1, to the effect that Crockett's apron was in the possession of E. M. Taylor of Paducah, Kentucky. This 1897 item is important, as it carries the story at least that far back. The item carried no further information.

Librarian Boyden also has in his files a letter dated December 4, 1926, from Arthur B. Hayes, an attorney in Washington, D. C., as follows:

"I have just talked with you regarding the Masonic affiliation of David Crockett. My correspondent states that there is in his family a Royal Arch Masonic apron, and that in the papers he has found a statement that David Crockett was a member of Congress beginning 1828 and that the apron was a gift to him from a Mrs. C. A. Massie of Washington. The spelling of the name he is not certain about. It is not known who Mr. Hayes' correspondent was."

### Masonry At Work In Other Lands

Jugo-Slavia

Masonry in Jugo-Slavia is represented by a Grand Lodge that was founded in 1919 which is composed of 25 Lodges with 850 members. Public opinion of the Catholic religion in parts of Slovenia and less in Croatia, is frankly hostile to Freemasonry. In other regions, it is indifferent, but with a certain amount of curiosity.

Roumania

Freemasonry in Roumania was for a long time divided into two rival groups: the Grand Lodge and the Grand Orient. These two bodies have recently formed a federation leaving to each Lodge its own traditions and rites.

Bulgaria

Bulgarian Freemasonry, since 1918, has not

had to struggle, in the true sense of the word, against an unfavorable opinion. From time to time there have appeared certain pamphlets, extracts from foreign Anti-Masonic literature, but they remained without result.

Greece

Public opinion in Greece is not yet enlightened to surmount a sentiment of distrust against a society considered as occult. The synod of the orthodox Greek clergy enjoined all its members, under pain of disciplinary measures, not to frequent the lodges.

The Supreme Council and the Grand Orient have constituted a special commission that will reply to the sectarianism of the Synod.

Two beautiful temples have been erected in Athens and at Salonica. The Fraternity in Greece bears for the uninitiated the official name of the Masonic Establishment.

### Are You A Mason?

Perhaps you have been tested with signs and words and grips  
And praises won as answers fell from practised lips;  
But I would test you further—if you be weak or strong—  
Are you a Mason, Brother, or do you just belong?

When sunshine falls around you, or clouds the sunshine hide,  
Do clouds or sunshine alter your faith in God to guide?  
And do you strive to praise Him with service as with song?  
Are you a Mason, Brother, or do you just belong?

Has life for you a purpose from which you would not swerve,  
Your fellow man to cherish, your fellow man to serve?  
To lift him with a vision, plant in his heart a song?  
Are you a Mason, Brother, or do you just belong?

Do you apply the plumb line to test a fellow's worth,  
Or do you measure greatness by station, rank or birth?  
Does clan or creed e'er sway you in choosing right from wrong?  
Are you a Mason, Brother, or do you just belong?

Ere long you'll face Life's evening and view with pride or shame  
The record of your journey, the way by chance you came;  
And he who keeps the record no soul has ever wronged,  
He'll write: "You were a Mason," or that "You just belonged."  
T. Q. ELLIS.

There are three copies extant of the first Masonic book published in the United States, Benjamin Franklin's edition of "Anderson's Constitutions," printed in 1730. They are in the library of the House of the Temple, Washington, D. C., the Iowa Masonic Library, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and the Masonic Library in Philadelphia.

Pages 28 and 29 of the May 1936 Edition of *Texas Freemason Magazine*.  
Courtesy of the Grand Lodge of Texas Library and Museum.

<sup>53</sup> Telephone conversation with Barbara Mechell, who was at the time, Curator of the Grand Lodge of Texas Library on January 17, 2013.

information about the history of Davy Crockett's membership in the fraternity. The Grand Lodge was, at the time, preparing for the Texas Masonry's Centennial, which was planned for April 1936, and wished to use information Trail might provide about the "Masonic history" of Crockett.<sup>54</sup> This situation suggests there was at least a whisper at the time of his possible membership based on the 1897 *Missouri Freemason Magazine* report and/or the misreading of what Gould wrote in his 1899 book about Crockett being in the company of Freemasons who defended the Alamo.

Since Trail was secretary of the Davy Crockett Lodge, it follows that the grand master would send such an inquiry to him.

The 1936 article does not make it clear how Trail came into possession of a newspaper clipping from the Grand Master of Arkansas about the apron, however, it follows that the clipping accompanied the letter from the Texas Grand Master to Trail.

The newspaper clipping to which Trail refers appears in the 1936 article.

***DAVY CROCKETT'S MASONIC APRON STILL PRESERVED***

*To the editor of the (Arkansas) Gazette:*

Reading in your paper some of the relics of the past, induced me to write to you. Mrs. Ida Taylor of Fulton Kentucky has a Royal Arch apron that was given to Davy Crockett when he represented West Tennessee in Congress. When he left Tennessee to go to Texas, he left this apron with the Sheriff of Weakley County until he called for it. He fell in the Battle of the Alamo. This apron has been handed down and is now in possession of the above party. (Signed) A.W. Morris, Fulton Kentucky.

Trail wrote a letter to Taylor on July 5, 1934 in which he quoted the clipping and briefly explained that the note was provided by the Grand Master of Arkansas. He also noted in the letter a reference to efforts to find information about Crockett's membership:

We have studied all historical publications available and have been unable to obtain the desired information to date.

Trail requested of Taylor "photostatic" copies of the apron and any other documents she might have to show dates of initiation, the Lodge in which Crockett was raised, or any letters, clippings, or other publications. He assured Taylor that the lodge would reimburse her for any expenses in providing the materials.

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<sup>54</sup> The Grand Lodge of Texas Magazine, *Davy Crockett's Masonic Apron*, May 1936.

On July 30, 1934 Taylor replied to Trail's letter. She wrote:

Dear Sir: In reply to your letter of July 5<sup>th</sup> regarding Davy Crockett history, I shall tell you of his Masonic apron – only – which came to my husband, E.M. Taylor, through an old uncle-in-law, whose father was a close friend of Davie's. When Davy was leaving Tennessee for his faraway new home in Texas, the apron was a parting gift to his friend. The apron is hand-made of white satin, hand-painted in colors appropriate to the Royal Arch Degrees, the border of pleated red satin ribbon and the whole apron is in fine condition. It is considered a beautiful as well as valuable old relic. It was made and given to him by Mrs. A.C. Massie, in Washington, D.C., while serving as Congressman from Tennessee. The name A.C. Massie is daintily written in ink on the underside of the flap. The apron was on exhibition during the Nashville Centennial as a favor to the Tennessee Historical Society. During the Civil War, in Dresden, Weakley County, Tenn., (Davy Crockett's old home), the Court House and the Masonic Lodge were destroyed by fire; not a record of any description was saved; however, his Masonry and the apron are authentic. I am having a picture of the apron made for you. It will be my pleasure to furnish names and other information that I may find available, if you care to have it. Sorry to have kept you waiting for a reply but have just returned to my home after several weeks of absence.

(Signed) Very Truly Yours,  
Mrs. Ida Taylor

Taylor, as promised, sent a photograph to Secretary Trail. As noted in the 1836 story, "An artist's restoration" was made from a "dim photograph." Symbols and other details too blurred or too indistinct under a reading glass were omitted."<sup>55</sup> Today, only that artist rendering exists. The apron itself was never been seen by anyone at the Grand Lodge of Texas at the time.<sup>56</sup> Since Ida Taylor's death, the whereabouts of the actual apron is not known.

The drawing has been displayed at the Grand Lodge of Texas, but its provenance lacks sufficient credibility to stand as primary evidence that Crockett was a Freemason.

Ida Payne Taylor, originally from Missouri, was twenty-five years younger than her husband, Edmund McCage "Mike" Taylor, who was born in Graves County, Kentucky in 1847. His father, William, according to his gravestone, was a Freemason.<sup>57</sup> Taylor married Ida in January 1896. At

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<sup>55</sup> Barbara Mechell's communication and discussion with author, January 17, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Find a Grave, William Taylor, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/73175546#view-photo=45255349>, accessed October 2018.

the time of Ida Taylor's letter to Secretary Trail, E.M. Taylor had been dead for ten years.<sup>58</sup> He was a well-known businessman and worked for an insurance company in Fulton, Kentucky. He held offices of City Councilman for fourteen years and was also Mayor of Fulton. He served as State Senator from 1908-1910.<sup>59</sup> Ida Payne Taylor died on July 24, 1953 at age eighty-one.<sup>60</sup> There is no record of children of the marriage.<sup>61,62</sup>



E.M. Taylor, Fulton, Kentucky

An in-depth investigation of Ida Taylor's claims in her letter identifies several inaccuracies that legitimately question the credibility of her story.

- She claims the Weakley County Courthouse and the Dresden Masonic Lodge burned during the Civil War, noting "not a record of any description was saved," thus implying Dresden Lodge is where Crockett was a member or at least attended meetings, yet no lodge in existence at that time can provide corroboration of her story.
- The courthouse in Weakley County, Tennessee was indeed destroyed by fire, but not until 1948 – eighty-five years after Ida Taylor's claim that it had been "destroyed by fire." In 2013 Thomas L. Moore, whose historical knowledge of Dresden is extensive, was the City Judge for Dresden.<sup>63</sup> In fact, his office in 2013 was in the Weakley County Courthouse. He knows of no fire that ever-destroyed records or the entire courthouse during the Civil War. Furthermore, the original Weakley County Courthouse was built in 1827, but being too small for the purpose, a larger courthouse was constructed in 1854.<sup>64</sup>
- Thomas Wayne Spencer, Secretary of Dresden Lodge No. 90 in 2013, was unaware of any history of the lodge in Dresden ever burning and records being destroyed. Regardless, Dresden Lodge No. 90 was not even chartered until 1839, three years after Crockett was killed at the Alamo.<sup>65</sup>
- In 1827 and 1828, Masonic Lodge No. 61 was also in Dresden. That lodge had thirty-three members. Crockett's name was not among the members. The lodge

<sup>58</sup> Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Office of Vital Statistics, Certificate 13922, State volume: 28 Office volume: 25, Frankfort, Kentucky, and Year: 1910; Census Place: Leitchfield, Fulton, Kentucky; Roll: T624\_477; Page: 10A; Enumeration District: 0057; FHL microfilm: 1374490.

<sup>59</sup> Frank Kavanaugh, *Official Manual for us by Courts, State and County Officials and General Assembly of Kentucky*, Frankfort Printing Company, 1910.

<sup>60</sup> Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Office of Vital Statistics, Certificate: 12033, State volume: 2, Frankfort, Kentucky, Kentucky Death Records.

<sup>61</sup> Fulton County Kentucky, Office of the County Clerk, 1910 Census, Fulton, Fulton County, Kentucky, [www.countyclerk.netcounterclerk.asp?state=kentucky&county=fulton](http://www.countyclerk.netcounterclerk.asp?state=kentucky&county=fulton). Accessed March 2011.

<sup>62</sup> Fulton County Kentucky, Office of the County Clerk, Roll T625, Enumeration District 67, [www.countyclerk.netcounterclerk.asp?state=kentucky&county=fulton](http://www.countyclerk.netcounterclerk.asp?state=kentucky&county=fulton).

<sup>63</sup> Thomas L. Moore, telephone conversation with the author, October 25, 2011.

<sup>64</sup> *Weakley County Sketches Past and Present*, Greenfield Book Section 2.cwk, Rootsweb.ancestry.com, accessed, February 12, 2013.

<sup>65</sup> Walter Seifert, "Grand Historian," Grand Lodge of Tennessee, correspondence with author, April 4, 2011.



surrendered their Charter in 1830. So, obviously that lodge could not have been the one to which Ida Taylor referred as burning or records having been destroyed during the Civil War.<sup>66</sup> Neither Secretary Spencer nor Judge Moore could offer any reason that Masonic records would ever have been stored inside the Weakley County Courthouse. A total of five chartered Masonic lodges existed in Weakley County during the Civil War: Palmerville No. 121, chartered in 1847; Washington Lodge No. 159, chartered in 1849; Mount Pella Lodge (number unreported) chartered in 1849; Dukedom Lodge No. 169, chartered in 1849; and Dresden Lodge No. 90, chartered in 1839. The Grand Lodge of Tennessee Historian, Walter Seifert, finds no record of any of those five lodges burning during the Civil War or of their records being destroyed.

Ida Taylor's claim about the courthouse in Weakley County and the local lodge burning during the Civil War is clearly wrong and seriously mars the accuracy of the story. Of course, she could merely have been repeating what her husband may have told her, but then the same blemish applies to his account knowledge of the apron.

Curiously, further inquiry determines that A.W. Morris, who actually started the entire story about this apron by writing the short note appearing in the *Arkansas Gazette* – the same note that was ultimately forwarded to the attention of Secretary Trail in Texas, was a Freemason. Morris was a Past Master and Royal Arch Mason. In fact, he was an active member of the Grand Council of Royal Arch Masons.<sup>67</sup> He was a noted businessman in Fulton – “a dealer in hats and furnishings.”<sup>68</sup>

As members of the Royal Arch and living in the same small town of Fulton, Kentucky, it is safe to accept that Morris and Taylor knew each other, and likely knew each other well beyond their Masonic relationship since Taylor was a city councilman for fourteen years, a popular mayor, and a state senator.<sup>69</sup>

A.W. Morris's communication, however, does not claim he ever saw the apron, so Ida Taylor's account and description of this apron are hers alone. It follows that Ida Taylor, being married to a Royal Arch Mason, would be familiar with the colors and designs of Royal Arch apron such as the one she described in her letter to Secretary Trail.

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<sup>66</sup> Walter Seifert, “Grand Historian,” Grand Lodge of Tennessee, correspondence with author, April 4, 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Proceedings of the Grand Council of Royal Arch Masonry and Select Masters of Kentucky, October 14, 1901, Googlebooks.com, Accessed February 13, 2013.

<sup>68</sup> The American Hatter, News of the Retailers, February 1916, [https://books.google.com/books?id=A\\_VYAAAAAJ&pg=PA147&lpg=PA147&dq=%22A.W.+Morris,+fulton+KY%22&source=bl&ots=TKnivHEcNR&sig=Tas5whjRZ2W6N6TGZgiUi9IDrrg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewi4ksmeg5bfAhWKTt8KHT-iDJsQ6AEwAHoECAEQAQ#v=onepage&q=%22A.W.%20Morris%2C%20&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=A_VYAAAAAJ&pg=PA147&lpg=PA147&dq=%22A.W.+Morris,+fulton+KY%22&source=bl&ots=TKnivHEcNR&sig=Tas5whjRZ2W6N6TGZgiUi9IDrrg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewi4ksmeg5bfAhWKTt8KHT-iDJsQ6AEwAHoECAEQAQ#v=onepage&q=%22A.W.%20Morris%2C%20&f=false), accessed October 2018.

<sup>69</sup> William E. Bidwell, *Legislative History and Capitol Souvenir of Kentucky: Portraits and Sketches of Senators, Representatives and Officials and Attaches of the Various State Departments*, 1911, reprint, Ulan Press, 2012.

Interesting too was Morris's claim that Crockett left the apron with the sheriff of Weakley County, Tennessee when he left for Texas. As previously noted, Peleg Terrell was the sheriff at that time in Weakly County.<sup>70</sup>

Ida Taylor makes no mention of Terrell or a sheriff in her account. She claims her husband's "old uncle-in-law" passed the apron to her husband and the uncle-in-law got it from his father who she said was "a close friend of Davie's." Neither E.M. Taylors "old uncle-in-law," nor the father of his "uncle-in-law" was Peleg Taylor.

This inconsistency suggests that Morris either did not remember the story correctly or that Ida Taylor was incorrect in her recall. A third option is the whole matter was simply convoluted family lore.

Extensive genealogical records today tell us that Sheriff Peleg Terrell was not E.M. Taylor's "uncle-in-law" and there is no record of him being a Mason either.

So, who was E.M. Taylor's "old uncle in law" and who was the father of that "uncle-in-law" Taylor claims as the close friend of Crockett's?

- E.M. Taylor's mother was Ann Rebecca Roberts.<sup>71</sup> Her sister, Jane America Roberts, married Daniel Walthall Roberts (no relation) in 1837 in Weakley County, Tennessee. Daniel Walthall Roberts is E.M. Taylor's "uncle-in-law."
- Daniel Walthall Roberts's father was William C "Big Billy" Roberts Sr. who died at age seventy-three in 1838, in Dukedom, Tennessee (about ten miles east of Fulton, Kentucky where E.M. Taylor resided).<sup>72</sup> William C "Big Billy" Roberts, Sr., is the person Ida Taylor claims was a "close friend of Davie's." Crockett's home when he left for Texas was in Rutherford, Tennessee - about thirty-five miles from Roberts's home.



Jane America Roberts and  
Daniel Walthall Roberts  
Circa 1870

William C. "Big Billy" Roberts had nine children from two marriages. His last will and testament recorded on January 20, 1838 tells us something. First, his will makes no mention of an apron of any design. The name, Davy, does appear in the will, but the Davy he refers to is the name of one of the slaves he leaves to wife. His will distributes what appears to be considerable tracts of land to and some money to eight of his children, leaving his son, Daniel Walthall Roberts, completely out of the will with no explanation.<sup>73</sup> This circumstance creates two questions. Why did William C. "Big Billy" Roberts leave his son out of his will, and in doing so, is it likely, if he were a close friend of Crockett's as claimed by Ida Taylor, that he would pass an apron that supposedly

<sup>70</sup> Records from the Weakley County, Tennessee Sheriff's Office, Sheriff Mike Wilson, Dresden Tennessee

<sup>71</sup> William Pleas Taylor, Find a Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/98253441>, Accessed October 2018.

<sup>72</sup> Jones Trace, Genealogy Data Base, Daniel Walthall Roberts, <http://www.jonestrace.com/gen10/getperson.php?personID=1761&tree=marilyjones>, accessed, October 2018.

<sup>73</sup> William C. Roberts, Last Will and Testament, Jones Trace Genealogy Data Base, <http://www.jonestrace.com/gen10/getperson.php?personID=1757&tree=marilyjones>, accessed, October 2018.

belonged to Crockett to the son he left out of will? There is no record of Daniel Walthall Roberts suggesting or confirming either he or his father were Freemasons.<sup>74</sup>

Additional irregularities emerge in Ida Taylor's story when closer examined.

- She writes in her 1934 letter, "The name "A.C. Massie is daintily written in ink on the underside of the flap," and claims Mrs. Massie gave Crockett the apron during the years he served in Congress. This leads to the question of why Mrs. Massie gave Crockett a Royal Arch Apron; an apron reserved for members of Royal Arch Masonry, unless Crockett was thought to be a Royal Arch Mason. Federal Census and voter registration records for decades of 1830 and 1840 do not reflect A.C. Massie's name in the District of Columbia, the surrounding states, or Tennessee.
- She further writes in her 1934 letter, "The apron was on exhibition during the Nashville Centennial as a favor to the Tennessee Historical Society." However, in February of 2013, Ann Toplovich, Executive Director of the Tennessee Historical Society in Nashville, Tennessee re-examined the records of the exhibits at the Centennial at the request of the author. There is no record of a Masonic apron reportedly linked to Davy Crockett that was on loan to the Tennessee Historical Society or an exhibit of such an item.<sup>75</sup>

(As previously mentioned, *The Tennessean*, reported on May 12, 1897, about the one Centennial building, referred to as the Hallway Exhibit Building displaying items from the "railway, agriculture, plants and waterfalls, and tobacco." One section is titled, "Relics of Other Days" describing "a collection that will capture the hearts of archeologists." Under that heading there is a paragraph about "war relics," which included a flag from Civil War Fort Donelson, a sword belonging to Champ Ferguson, and "among other relics shown" was, "Davy Crockett's Masonic apron." That exhibit was not through the Tennessee Historical Society, but exclusively created by G. A. Cleveland, a Centennial ground- building and exhibit designer and coordinator.)

There is no record to answer the question why Secretary Trail did not re-contact Ida Taylor and ask for a better photograph of the apron she described. Perhaps he did, and the records no longer exist.

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<sup>74</sup> While there is no record of Daniel Walthall Roberts as a Freemason, his gravestone bears an interesting image that suggests membership in the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF). Two shaking hands (grasping each other in a handshake) is a symbol of the IOOF as a sign of Friendship representing one the tenets of the fraternity. No records are found confirming IOOF membership. Daniel Walthall Roberts, Find a Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/13519284/daniel-walthall-roberts#view-photo=161454348>, accessed October 2018.

<sup>75</sup> The Tennessee Centennial Exhibition website now allows browsing of the complete collection of exhibits. In addition, the site offers a search feature of the collection. The Tennessee Virtual Archive, as of December 2018, does not contain any references to a Masonic apron, the word Freemasonry, or the name of David or Davy Crockett at the exhibit. <http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/search/collection/Centennial/searchterm/crockett/field/all/mode/exact/conn/and/order/nosort>, accessed December 2018.

The Taylors had no children. There is no known record that tells us what happened to or the whereabouts of the apron following Ida Taylor's death in 1953.

There remain other issues unexplained in this twisting story first told in 1936.

In the May 1936 article in the *Texas Freemason Magazine* where the Ida Taylor story first appears, we are told that as early as 1926, the tale of the apron was made known to the Librarian of the Supreme Council, A.A.S.R., William L. Boyden. The article reads:

In June 1935, Wm. L. Boyden, 33<sup>rd</sup> Degree, Librarian, Supreme Council, S.J, cited an item in the Missouri Freemason, weekly issue, Volume 1, No. 32, September 4, 1897, Page 1, to the effect that Crockett's apron was in the possession of E.M. Taylor of Paducah, Kentucky. This 1887 item is important, as it carries the story at least that far back. The item carried no further information.

Librarian Boyden also has in his files a letter dated December 4, 1926, from Arthur B. Hayes, an attorney in Washington, D.C. as follows: "I have just talked to you regarding the Masonic affiliation of David Crockett. My correspondent states that there is in his family a Royal Arch Mason apron, and that in the papers he has found a statement that David Crockett was a member of Congress beginning 1826 and that the apron was gift to him from a Mrs. C.A. Massie of Washington. The spelling of the name he is not certain about." It is not known who Mr. Hayes's correspondent was.

The article abruptly stops following the above two paragraphs.

The way the information from Librarian Boyden appears in the article is confusing. Nevertheless, in context with the situation, it is clear his information is in response to follow up communication or conversation Boyden had with someone who had asked him if he had information about Crockett being a Freemason. Since Secretary Trail was making an inquiry about the topic and the grand lodge was attempting to collecting information for the "Masonic history of the "Illustrious Davy Crockett" for the upcoming "Texas Masonry's Centennial," the response could have been to either.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Trail notes in his July 5, 1934 letter to Ida Hayes, "We have studied all historical publications available and we have been unable to obtain the desired information to date [to verify Crockett's membership in the fraternity]. See original 1936 article.



Interestingly, the letter from Hayes, dated December 4, 1926, was written months before E.M. Taylor's passing and ten years before Secretary Trail would become aware of the apron through Ida Taylor.

Public records confirm that Arthur B. Hayes was an attorney in Washington, D.C. In 1926, He is noted as a Scottish Rite Mason in a *Sunday Star* (October 6, 1912) story about a meeting of the Scottish Rite in D.C. In a November 9, 1913 story in the *Washington Post* he is noted as Judge Arthur B. Hayes announcing his appearance as guest speaker at Aposcostia Lodge No. 21 in D.C.

Hayes notes in his letter the apron was in possession of *his* family, however, no genealogical records connecting Hayes and E.M. Taylor family are found.

Ida Taylor refers to the person who gave the supposed apron to Crockett as "Mrs. A.C. Massie." Hayes notes that person was "Mrs. C.A. Massie" (Boyden notes that Hayes was not certain with the spelling of the name). The 2013 search for combinations of the initials and spelling of both A.C. and C.A. Massie produced no record from the 1820-1850 U.S. Federal Census and Voters Records for Washington, D.C., or surrounding states.

The inconsistencies make Ida Taylor's 1934 claim, the 1897 *Missouri Freemason Magazine* reference to the apron being on exhibited at the Tennessee Celebration, and the Arthur B. Hayes's information unconvincing that a Masonic apron belonging to Davy Crockett was handed down to E.M. Taylor by his "uncle in law."

Was the entire account loosely based on Taylor family lore? Was the Royal Arch apron simply a gift from someone to Crockett, perhaps during his appearances in D.C. or his 1834 book tour promoting his autobiography? After all, Crockett was presented a rifle as a gift in Philadelphia on his 1834 speaking tour.<sup>77</sup> Was A.C. or C.A. Massie a seamstress, Masonic apron designer, wife of a Mason or could the apron have belonged to someone named Massie and somehow came into the possession of Crockett?

If it to be believed that Crockett was made a Freemason in Tennessee, Virginia, Washington D.C. or elsewhere, and later became a Royal Arch Mason, then why have no records or writings ever surfaced to affirm that claim? The absence of evidence, of course, is not evidence itself. Nevertheless, considering Crockett's wide-spread celebrity during his lifetime, it seems very unlikely his affiliation with Freemasonry would have gone unnoticed by so many other Freemasons of the era.

These are valid questions and cast grave doubts on the likelihood that Crockett was ever a Freemason. Using Taylor's story, the newspaper clipping noting a letter from A. W. Morris about

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<sup>77</sup> Crockett was presented a cap lock rifle by John Sanderson on behalf of his congressional supporters in Philadelphia in 1834. He bragged on its beauty in speeches, along with its accompanying leather case, tomahawk, and razor-steel butcher knife. However, when he set out for Texas, he was carrying an old flintlock he reportedly dubbed, "Ol' Betsy." (Lynn M. Chenault, *Ol' Betsy and the Alamo*, [http://americansocietyoffarmscollectors.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/B058\\_Chenault.pdf](http://americansocietyoffarmscollectors.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/B058_Chenault.pdf), accessed, November 2015).

an apron, *The Missouri Freemason Magazine* reference, and the Hayes information in Librarian Boyden's file as the basis on which to declare Davy Crockett a Freemason, is a disservice to the fraternity.

While believing Ida Taylor had a Masonic apron in her possession is easy, believing that it belonged to Davy Crockett is difficult and challenges logic. The so-called provenance used as proof upon which to base the claim he was a Freemason is consistently unconvincing and serves only as an interesting tale.

## FUELING THE FABLE

The story of how Crockett's purported Masonic affiliation came about is certainly enough of a twisting tale without additional misreports, yet yarns and tales like that one seem to spread much faster than a balanced and factual examination of them.

Another interesting tale surfaced in 1976 about another Masonic apron belonging to Crockett. This apron turned up in California and was displayed at the Henry C. Coil Masonic Library and Museum of Freemasonry in San Francisco. It was forty-years later, that a full examination of the story behind that apron emerged.

A book, written by a renowned Masonic scholar nearly 150 years ago, again spurred claims that Crockett was a Freemason after the book was re-released in 2016. Those making the claim based on that book made the amateurish blunder of not closely reading the entry or putting it into context with fact.

## THE SECOND CLAIM OF DAVY CROCKETT'S APRON – THIS TIME IN CALIFORNIA

According to records at the Henry Wilson Coil Library and Museum of Freemasonry in San Francisco, California, Harold V. Grove, on April 1, 1976, presented to Buena Park Lodge No. 357 in Buena Park, California a hand-painted Masonic apron that "belonged" to Davy Crockett. The apron was later made part of the Coil Library collection.

The documentation accompanying the apron created excitement and told the interesting story of how the apron was handed down to Grove by his mother, the daughter of Mary Violet Crockett who was the daughter of Davy Crockett. The



Apron that Harold V. Grove presented to Buena Park Lodge No. 357 in Buena Park, California on April 1, 1976. Image is courtesy of the Henry Coil Museum of Freemasonry, San Francisco, California.

documentation also noted that Grove was made a Mason in 1925 in United Lodge No. 5, Pleasant Hope, Missouri, the town to which Mary Violet Crockett reportedly migrated from Kentucky by oxcart in the 1800s.<sup>78</sup>

This apron, unlike the one described by Ida Taylor in her 1934 letter, is not a photograph or drawing, and unmistakably antique. The hand-painted Masonic images and blue trim are an exceptional example of the Masonic aprons of the period in which Crockett lived. Unlike the apron Taylor described in her 1934 letter, however, this one is not a Royal Arch apron.

The first problem with the story surrounding the apron that Grove presented to the California lodge is the fact that the famous Davy Crockett that was killed at the Alamo *did not* have a daughter named Mary Violet, and certainly not a daughter born in Hickory County, Missouri as was reported in the documentation accompanying the apron in California.

The second problem with the story is that Harold V. Groves' grandmother, Mary Violet Crockett, was not born until 1856. Crockett was killed at the Alamo in 1836.<sup>79</sup>

According to public records Mary Violet Crockett, Groves' grandmother, was born in Hickory County, Missouri, about thirty-five miles from Pleasant Hope which is some seventeen miles from Springfield, Missouri. She married Sebern Sallee, Sr., in November 1878 in Pleasant Hope, Missouri. Sallee was an engineer and later owned and operated a sawmill business. They had six children, Allie, Mayland, Zoe, Louis, Anna, and Albert. Anna and Albert died before 1888. Zoe was Harold Vester Grove's mother. Both were born in Pleasant Hope, Missouri. Harold died in 1983 in Orange County, California, at age 80.<sup>80</sup> Records reflect that Sebern Sallee was a Freemason.<sup>81</sup>

The family records of the Davy Crockett killed at the Alamo document his children, and with the exception of Rebecca and Robert (from his second marriage) all remained in Tennessee. Rebecca, Robert and their mother, Elizabeth, did later move to Texas and lived there until their deaths. Crockett's genealogy, as well as that of his parents and grandparents, is easily researched, so information surrounding his children from both marriages is extensive and found in reliable sources such as family Bibles, court and U.S. census records, obituaries, marriages, and volumes of family records.

There were well over sixty families in Hickory and the surrounding counties of Missouri with the name Crockett in the 1800s, and many had a family member named David, as can be seen in

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<sup>78</sup> Adam G. Kendall, Curator, Henry Wilson Coil Library and Museum of Freemasonry, San Francisco, California, correspondence with author, May 17, 2011.

<sup>79</sup> State of Missouri, Missouri Birth Records, 1851-1910, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, May 2011 and Michael A. Lofaro, *David Crockett*, The Texas State Historical Association, 1997-2002, The Handbook of Texas Online.

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/print/CC/fcr24.html> accessed, June 2013.

<sup>80</sup> State of California Department of Health Services, California Death Index, 1940-1997, Sacramento, CA, 2011.

<sup>81</sup> *History of Hickory, Polk, Cedar, Dade and Braton Counties*, St. Louis, MO: Good Speed, 1889.

numerous historical public records from the time.<sup>82</sup> Mary Violet Crockett, who was born in Hickory County, Missouri, was related to some other David Crockett in Missouri rather than one from Tennessee.

Regardless, there is one additional fact that makes it impossible for Mary Violet Crockett to be the daughter of the Davy Crockett killed at the Alamo. She married in 1778. The Crockett killed at the Alamo was not born until 1786.

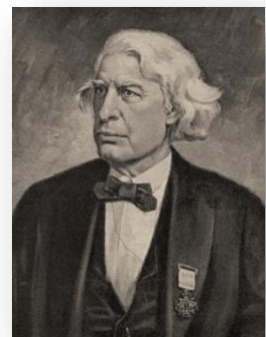
It is not unreasonable to believe that Harold V. Grove *thought* his grandmother was the daughter of the Davy Crockett killed at the Alamo for two reasons. One is that his mother may have even been confused about it. While it may be odd for a granddaughter not to realize who her grandfather was, inaccurate family lore is not unusual. Two, is that *The History of Polk, Cedar, Dade and Barton Counties, Missouri*, published in 1889 by Goodspeed Publishing in Chicago, contains the story that Mary Violet Crockett was the daughter of the Davy Crockett of Tennessee – one of multiple men of that same name. Regardless, we already know Crockett did not have a daughter named Mary Violet and he was not even born when she married, so *The History, of Polk, Cedar, Dade and Barton Counties, Missouri* book is but a source that affirms there were many men named Davy Crockett.

Sebern Sallee was a Freemason. The likelihood is that the apron was his, and then handed down and accompanied with misconstrued family lore.

The report that Mary Violet Crockett was a daughter of the David Crockett who died at the Alamo is false. Therefore, the belief that Crockett was a Freemason based on the story surrounding the apron in the Coil Library and Museum is certainly another interesting tale but completely unfounded.

## THE SO-CALLED ALBERT G. MACKEY CONNECTION

In 1844 Albert G. Mackey abandoned the practice of medicine. For the rest of his life, he wrote on a variety of subjects, but specialized in the study of several languages, the Middle Ages, and Freemasonry. After being connected with several Masonic journals, he established in 1849 *The Southern and Western Masonic Miscellany*, a weekly magazine. He maintained it for three years, mostly by his own expense. He conducted a *Quarterly* from 1858-1860 which he devoted to the same interests. In 1845



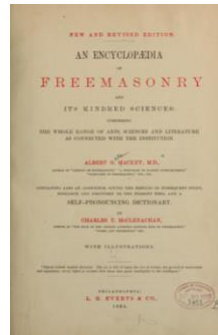
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<sup>82</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, 1009 rolls, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, DC, 1850.

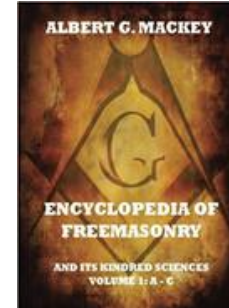
he published his first Masonic book, followed by eight more before his death in 1881.<sup>83</sup>



His largest and most important contribution to Masonic literature is the 1873 *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*. That book has, since 1873, been enlarged and revised by other authors into several volumes.



One such revised reprint is from the publishing company, Jazzybee Verlag. This version was published May 2016 under the title, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry And Its Kindred Sciences*.<sup>84</sup>



A section of this revised work contains names and comments about men who were Freemasons. On page 147 of the 470 pages in this revision, we find the sentence: “Davy Crockett was a Mason [sic] the Texas Grand Lodge Magazine published a photograph of his R.A. Apron [sic] but his affiliation remains unknown.”<sup>85</sup>

Mackey’s body of Masonic literature is often quoted. A consequence of this sentence in a book associated with Mackey, especially with many Masons today, suggests the “Davy Crockett was a Mason” statement is accurate. Of course, we know for sure Mackey did not write that sentence since he had been dead fifty-five years before that photograph referred to was published in the 1936 Texas Grand Lodge Magazine. This entry is part of the many revisions (adds) that appear in subsequent versions of Mackey’s 1873 original work.

Those who have or in the future will claim that Mackey confirmed Davy Crockett was a Mason based on this 2016 revised version of his work are as flawed in their contention as Ida Taylor’s unfounded claim the lodge in Weakley County, Tennessee burned during the Civil War and destroyed all of the records of Crockett’s Masonic affiliation.

## STEEPED AND SHROUDED IN LORE

No records known to exist provide acceptable, much less concrete evidence that Crockett was a Freemason. Today, we are aware of the circumstances and events triggering the assumptions that

<sup>83</sup> One or more of the preceding sentences incorporates text from a publication now in the public domain.

<sup>84</sup> Although over forty various titles are listed on GoodReads for Jazzybee Verlag publishes, Frontlist, a weekly report for acquisition editors and rights managers looking for foreign titles to acquire notes them in their section on The Best Children’s Books from Abroad, <https://frontlist.net/companies/jazzybee-verlag-germany/contacts>, accessed December 2018. Good Reads, [https://www.goodreads.com/author/list/7338514.Jazzybee\\_Verlag](https://www.goodreads.com/author/list/7338514.Jazzybee_Verlag), accessed December 2018. The Jazzybee Verlage website states, “Welcome to Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck! We publish classics of world literature from all areas, including fiction, nonfiction, biographies and many other fields. In addition to electronic books, so-called eBooks for all types of electronic readers, which are suitable for the reproduction of these files, we also produce classic print books.” <http://jazzybee-verlag.de/>, accessed December 2018.

<sup>85</sup> *Encyclopedia Of Freemasonry And Its Kindred Sciences, Volume 1: A-C*, Jazzybee Verlag, publisher, Germany, May 21, 2016.

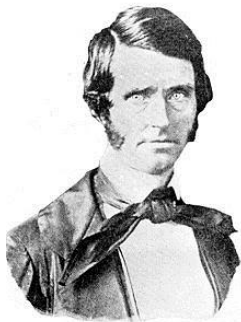


he was. We also see the consequences of proliferating the idea that Crockett was a Freemason primarily through emotional reasoning, family lore, and tendency to accept only what supports that which we may wish to believe.

Regardless, the hopeful cling to speculative theories.

We can accept that Ida Taylor *believed* the provenance she shared with Secretary Trail in 1934 was an accurate account of her understanding about the apron. It is clear, however, that what she believed and shared, no matter how she came about the information, was incorrect.

Regardless, an alternative and sensible explanation of how Ida Taylor was correct in one way, but wrong in another exists - an explanation that has escaped previous inquiry.



John Wesley Crockett

John Wesley Crockett (1807–1852), Davy Crockett's son from his first marriage, became an attorney, newspaper editor, and was elected to several local public offices in Tennessee. He was elected in 1837, and served through 1841, representing Tennessee's twelfth district in the United States House of Representatives. The twelfth district was the same district from which his father was elected to Congress.<sup>86</sup>

John Crockett held numerous local and state offices after serving two terms in Congress. He was appointed in 1841 by the Tennessee General Assembly to serve as attorney general of the ninth district of Tennessee – a position he held until 1843, when he moved to New Orleans, Louisiana and became a commission merchant. There, he became a newspaper editor, publishing *The National* in 1848 and creating another publication, *The Crescent* around 1847.

In October 1838, the year after John Wesley Crockett was elected to Congress, Trenton Lodge No. 86, in the town of Trenton, Gibson County, Tennessee, received its charter from the Grand Lodge of Tennessee. One of the members of Trenton Lodge No. 86 was John Wesley Crockett.<sup>87</sup>

Trenton is located about ten miles from Rutherford, Tennessee, where Davy Crockett resided until he left for Texas in 1835.<sup>88</sup> Trenton Lodge organized a Chapter of the York Rite. Since records show John Wesley Crockett was active in that small lodge, it follows that he was a Royal Arch Mason as well, which offers an explanation why he might have been the recipient of a Royal Arch apron as a gift – a gift given him in Washington, D.C. - while serving in congress.

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<sup>86</sup> John Wesley Crockett, Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000920>, accessed January 2013, Ancestry.com, a search of "All records" link with search parameters of "Crockett, Tennessee, 1825-1836, accessed, February 2013. 55. John Wesley Crockett, Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000920>, accessed January 2013.

<sup>87</sup> Goodspeed's History of Gibson County, TN Introduction to Gibson County Tennessee, 1887. "Trenton Lodge, No. 86, A. F. & A. M., received its charter October 4, 1838, at which time Nelson I. Hess, Alexander Baber, Jacob T. Smith and several others were members. The lodge was very prosperous for many years, and a chapter, council and commandery were successively organized, all of which have now surrendered their charters. The following is a list of the members of this lodge: Nelson I. Hess, John W. Crockett, John L. Davis, A. S. Currey, A. C. Levy, P. D. McCulloch, S. W. Caldwell, C. N. Worthington, Z. Biggs, J. L. Strickland, J. P. Grigsby, A. T. Gay, W. O. Kelly, R. E. Grizzard, J. C. McDearmon."

<sup>88</sup> Gibson County Tennessee, USA, Observations by D.D. Banna, the WPA and Others, History of Tennessee, The Goodspeed Publishing Company, Nashville, 1887, Reprinted by A Plus Printing Company, Barbara Rebok and Doug Rebok, Tuscon, AZ, 2002. (Goodspeed Publishing, established in 1887, was a publishing company based in Chicago, Illinois and published histories of several states. The general history would take up the first 796 pages, with the county pages following.), and, Goodspeed, Introduction to Gibson County Tennessee, 1887 <http://tn-roots.com/tngibson/GS/gspintro.htm>, accessed January 2013.

In consideration of John Crockett's membership in the fraternity a more sensible explanation of Ida Taylor's claim about the apron emerges. This circumstance makes her account what it is: *an unintentional misunderstanding of circumstances*.

Since John Crockett was in Washington, D.C for five years, *if* we assume the story of Mrs. A.C. Massie giving "Crockett" the Masonic apron in question while he was serving in Congress is true, then it follows that Massie, whoever she was, could have just as easily have given the apron to John Crockett, thus explaining how the rest of the story, although convoluted in the years that followed, simply confused Davy Crockett with his son, John Crockett. Another parallel is found in the fact that Davy Crockett went to Texas following his service to Tennessee. John Crockett went to New Orleans, Louisiana following his. There is no record of his involvement with Freemasonry in Louisiana, so leaving his apron with "a friend" in Tennessee cannot be discounted.

## CONCLUSION

Today, the circumstances and the chronology under which events occurred that shaped the belief Davy Crockett was a Freemason are understandable. Regardless, without more than a series of highly problematic and factually disputable circumstances (capped off with an artist rendering of an apron) as used for nearly eighty-years or more on which to put forth as proof, this claim, based on these circumstances, is categorically and factually unsupported.

The close examination of the story on which his alleged affiliation stems, not only exposes major discrepancies, but subsequently led to the awareness that there were never any previous claims, records or documents suggesting Crockett was a Freemason in the first place.

There is no substitute for corroborated provenance.

It is now clear how the notion of Crockett's so-called membership began. It is also clear how that belief evolved into what is widely accepted as fact.

Although the Grand Lodge of Texas was not convinced Crockett was a Mason, at least prior to 1936, as evidenced by Secretary Trail's 1934 letter to Ida Hayes, by April 1936, they apparently had a change of heart. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it seems they based their acceptance on the belief the 1897 notation in *The Missouri Freemason Magazine* was factual and, coupled with the information shared with Secretary Trail by Ida Taylor in her 1934 letter was proof enough for them at the time.

Trail's 1934 letter to Taylor notes the Grand Lodge was already seeking more information about Crockett in preparation for the Texas Masonry's Centennial, before he wrote that letter. Perhaps, a sense of urgency to include Crockett's name in that celebration as one of the Freemasons who fought for Texas independence, was an enticement and made the temptation to prematurely accept the story irresistible. And accept it, they did.

A "Masonic plaque" was made part of the Texas Masonry's Centennial in April 1936, at the dedication of the Masonic Memorial at the San Jacinto Battlefield in Texas. Crockett is listed as a Freemason without caveat. Each person who sees that plaque bearing Crockett's name, especially Masons, naturally accepts what the Grand Lodge of Texas merely accepted as enough proof.



Since March 1976, another bronze plaque donated by the Grand Lodge of Texas is found at the Alamo in San Antonio. That marker bears a symbol: The Masonic square and compasses. Engraved below the symbol we find the heading: "Honoring These Masons." Below the heading, is a list of names: James Bowie, John Bonham; Almaron Dickinson; William Barrett Travis, and of course, David Crockett.

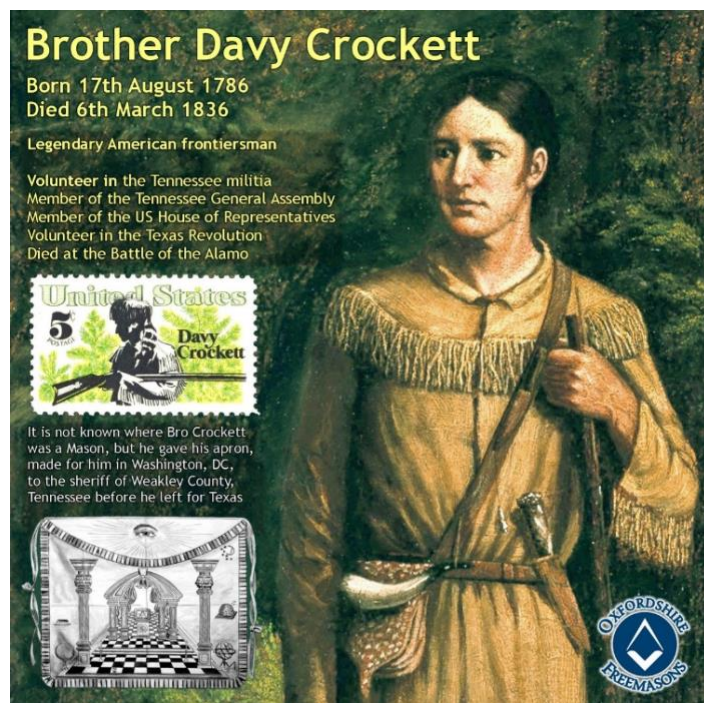
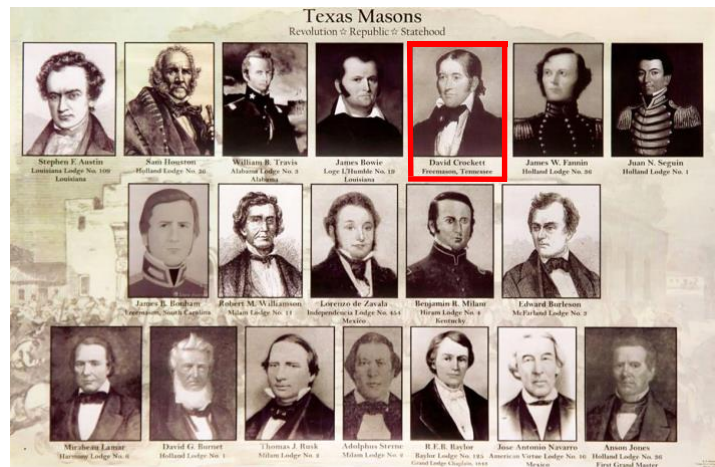


A website called *Dallas Freemasonry* lists nineteen Texas Masons. Crockett's name and image are among them. The summary under his name on the site is brief in comparison to others, and reads, "While serving in the United States House of Representatives, Crockett became a Freemason. He entrusted his Masonic apron to the Weakly Lodge in Tennessee before leaving for

Texas, and it still survives today.”<sup>89</sup>  
 The statement plainly demonstrates how incomplete or erroneous information can masquerade as, and evolve into, the so-called fact.

The proliferation of the Crockett apron story is not confined to the United States. In an August 16, 2018 post, The Oxfordshire Provincial Grand Lodge in Oxfordshire, England, decreed Crockett as a “Brother.” The proclamation appears on the background of a well-known 1889 painting of Crockett. Added to the image is the black and white drawing of the apron allegedly belonging to the frontiersman and now in possession of the Grand Lodge of Texas, as proof.<sup>90</sup> Predictably, the “proof” offered in the caption, is nothing more than a cut-and-paste from one many other cut-and-paste postings about the apron since the story was rekindled in 1986. (the actual apron has never been produced. “An artist’s restoration” was made from a “dim photograph.” “Symbols and other details too blurred or too indistinct under a reading glass were omitted.”<sup>91</sup>)

As of December 2018, a Google Search returns fifty-seven links in the first ten pages claiming Crockett was a Freemason based entirely the reference to the apron and the Texas Grand Lodge website or another “Famous Masons” list link found on the Internet.



<sup>89</sup> Dallas Freemasonry, A List of Famous Freemasons in Texas, <https://dallasfreemasonry.org/famous-texas-freemasons/3083>, accessed, December 7, 2018.

<sup>90</sup> Provincial Grand Lodge in Oxfordshire, The Freemason, accessed December 7, 2018, <https://twitter.com/thefreemason>.

<sup>91</sup> Barbara Mechell's communication and discussion with author, January 17, 2013.

What each of these and all other postings and links are saying when they make such claims is that they accept pass-along information and apparently believe what is passed along is corroborated, thus fact.

What seemingly may be a harmless and unobjectionable pass-along or cut-and-paste says to Masons and non-Masons alike the following:

1. *We must believe* the historical archives and record of inventory of the Tennessee Centennial Celebration where Crockett's apron was reportedly on exhibit in 1897 (according to *The Missouri Freemason Magazine*) are wrong, and Crockett's apron was on display as the magazine reports. (This seems rather improbable since Crockett was then and remains a favorite son of Tennessee making folly the likelihood of anything-Crockett being overlooked and unrecorded for posterity.)
2. *We must believe* the Masonic Lodge in Weakley County, Tennessee (Dresden No. 90) was destroyed by fire during the Civil War and all records of Crockett's affiliation destroyed as Ida Taylor claims. This is contrary to the Secretary of the lodge in 2013 having any history of the lodge burning. (Regardless, it would be impossible to accept Taylor's assertion since the lodge was not chartered until 1839 – three years after Crockett died at the Alamo).
3. *We must believe* a Masonic lodge somewhere in Tennessee with records of Crockett's affiliation was burned during the Civil War - even though the Grand Lodge of Tennessee nor the Grand Lodge Historian, find no record of any Tennessee lodges burning or their records destroyed during the Civil War.
4. *We must believe* that even though Crockett's fame and celebrity during his lifetime made him known from the New England states to Texas, and while he served two-terms in the United States Congress and was lionized after the fall of the Alamo, that no Freemason anywhere in America claimed he ever knew Crockett as a brother Mason either during his lifetime or after his death. (No claim that he was a Freemason is known prior to 1897 – some sixty-one years after the Alamo. His entertaining legend prospered while he was still alive. He emerged as an American Hercules—wading the Mississippi, steering an alligator up Niagara Falls, straddling a streak of lightning. One tall tale had him climbing the Alleghenies to wring the tail off Halley's Comet,<sup>92</sup> yet there is no known reference to him as a Freemason in his lifetime.<sup>93</sup>)
5. *We must believe* that Ida Taylor's claim the apron was made and given to Crockett by "Mrs. A.C. Massie, in Washington, D.C., while serving as

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<sup>92</sup> Paul Andrew, *Davy Crockett, Still King Of The Wild Frontier And A Hell Of A Nice Buy Besides*, Texas Monthly, November, 1986.

<sup>93</sup> An example of lack of reference of Crockett as a Freemason can be found in several history books written following the Civil War focusing on the biography of notable men in America. One particular work, *Herringer's Encyclopedia of American Biography: In-Depth Profiles of Over 1,000 Prominent Americans* is 1,046 pages of biographies, including Davy Crockett. Freemasons were noted no less than seventy times in the book. Crockett was not among those listing. Herringer's work was called the most comprehensive work [biographical] of the century. (Thomas William Herringer's work was published by American Publishers Association, Chicago, 1904). Added note: Daniel Boone was noted in the encyclopedia as well, but not referenced as a Freemason.



Congressman from Tennessee,” stands even though United States Census Records and voter registration records for 1820 and 1830 in Washington, D.C., the surrounding states or Tennessee does not find A.C. Massie or the name C.A. Massie (as reported in 1926 by Arthur B. Hays).<sup>94</sup>

6. *We must believe* that Crockett’s son, John Wesley, who was made a Mason at Trenton Lodge No. 86 in Trenton, Tennessee some two years after Crockett died, stands only as a *mere extraordinary coincidence*. The second part of the *mere coincidence* is that Trenton Lodge, where a Chapter of the York Rite was organized in no way makes it possible to consider that John Wesley Crockett was a Royal Arch Mason or may have had someone give him such an apron when he served in Washington, D.C. and before he left office and moved from Tennessee to Louisiana.

So, whose Masonic apron was it that Ida Taylor presented as Davy Crockett’s?

To answer that question, we must look at what we *can* believe and substantiate about the entire story?

- *We can believe* Ida Taylor’s husband was a Royal Arch Mason because records exist as evidence to prove that.
- *We can believe* he was from area in Tennessee where Davy Crockett once lived because records exist providing evidence.
- *We can believe* he may even have had friends who knew Crockett and his family, but that belief would have to be based on only the fact that he was from that general area.
- *We can believe* someone told the story (maybe even showed the apron) to A.W. Morris who was a Mason and lived in Fulton, Kentucky, since he wrote the *Arkansas Gazette* and conveyed the story - although his story has conflicts with Ida Taylor’s account to Secretary Trail.
- We can believe Ida Taylor seemed to believe all details of what she conveyed to Secretary Trail.
- *We can believe* that uninvestigated information, as evidenced from decades of this wide-spread, unconfirmed tale passed through four generations, that Taylor’s story is simply accepted. However, from the light gleaned when balanced scrutiny to her claim is applied, her story is a contender for, and a qualified example of how, the mind forgets or mis-remembers things and can recall things that did not occur.
- *We can believe*, and certainly the most logical explanation is, that Ida Taylor was mistaken and that it is no *mere coincidence* that John Wesley Crockett’s residence, political path, time in Congress and Washington, D.C., departure for another state following his election defeat could quite easily have been the real story from which a mis-remembered account stems. The major difference

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<sup>94</sup> The 19th Amendment which gave women the right to vote, did not pass until 1920 making voter records for “Mrs. A.C. Massie” impossible to find. The name A.C. Massie was searched.

between Davy Crockett and his son John Wesley, is that John Wesley Crockett was and is a confirmed member of the fraternity based on the existence of factual information.

- The Grand Lodge fell victim to its own mythmaking from the irresistible pull of the Crockett legend.

If those who post *Crockett-was-a-Freemason* claims knew and realized there were serious and definitely legitimate doubts about the interesting story and behind the original claim, perhaps there would be fewer postings. Regrettably, that is not in keeping with the way popular Masonic lore seems to unendingly remain in circulation, endures and often prevails over fact.

Logic dictates that an explanation of anything requiring the least speculation is usually better. The more assumptions made, and speculation involved, the more *unlikely* an explanation.<sup>95</sup> The belief that Crockett was a Freemason based on what is allowed to pass as valid provenance put forth since 1897 requires extensive speculation *and* considerable assumption.

When the facts behind the claim that Davy-Crockett-was-a-Freemason are examined and the speculation and assumption on which it is founded is understood, we are left only with an interesting tale.

As we see today, interesting tales that turn out to have no evidence to support them can carry with them unintended consequences.

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<sup>95</sup> Phil Gibbs, *What is Occam's Razor?* The Physics and Relativity Collection, University of California, 1996.