

John Crockett, a Poor Man and the Father of a Legend

We all know that David Crocket was born down on the Limestone Creek, and his birthplace is a popular location for locals and tourists. Few people know anything about his father, John, and we would like to introduce you to him. John was a very interesting man, as well!

It is believed that John was born circa 1753, probably in Pennsylvania and he was of Irish descent. By the time he married Rebecca Hawkins around 1776, he had moved into the northeast Tennessee area. Rebecca was a local girl—she and John Sevier's first wife, Sarah Hawkins were sisters. That meant that James Sevier, the long-time Washington County Court Clerk, and David Crockett were first cousins!

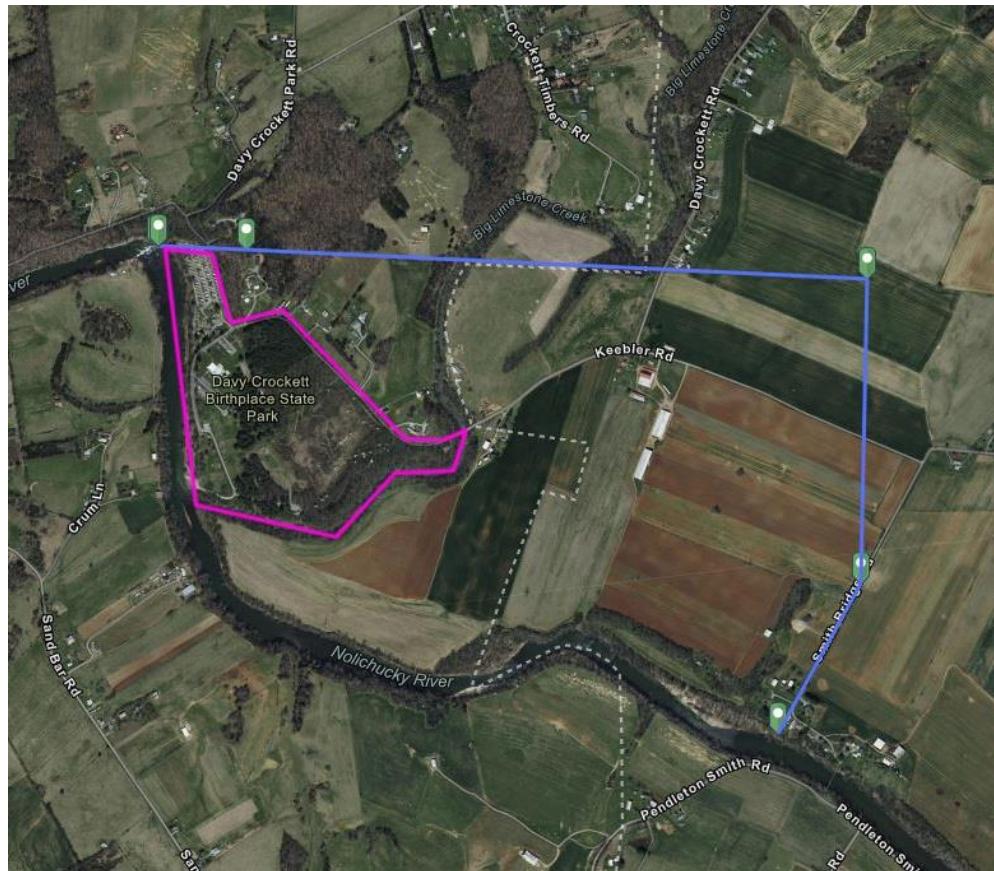
David gives an insight into his father in his book, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett*. David had not been told many details about his father's early life, but he knew that John had fought in the Revolutionary War. Military records prove this to be true, showing that John enlisted from Lincoln County, North Carolina and eventually served under Isaac Shelby. John also fought at the Battle of Kings Mountain and his name is recorded as being in the North Carolina 1st Regiment.

84. *Men Enlisted for Capt. Robert Moore from Caswell County*
Robert Moore (Capt.)

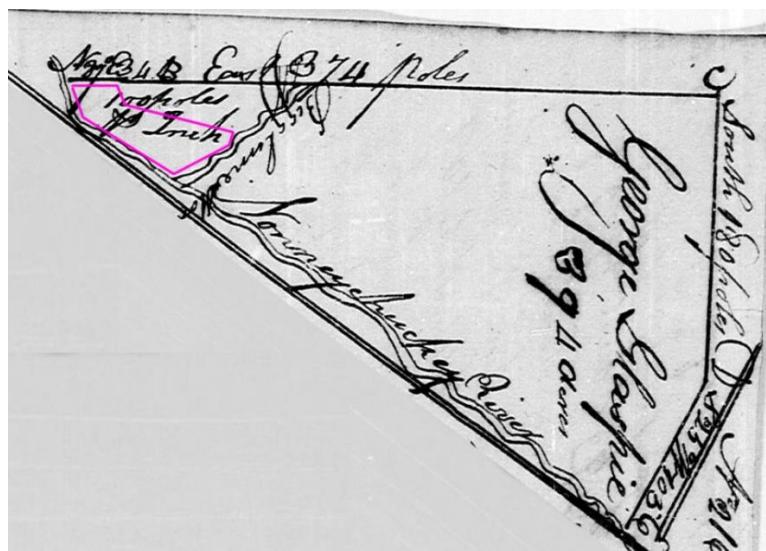
| 1. | Benjamin jeans | 1 | Thomas Richardson | 33 | John Tyrell | 67 |
|----|-----------------|---|-------------------|----|-------------------------|----|
| | Samuel Ettis | 2 | Jama Gibson | 34 | Nathan jeans | 68 |
| | Thomas Roaston | 3 | John Graham | 35 | Jacob Stalwell | 69 |
| | James Barton | 4 | Aquiller Davis | 36 | Geo Hudson | 70 |
| | Aara Wright | 5 | Johnson Webb | 37 | Nicholas Wilson | 71 |
| | Will McInturk | 6 | Joseph Gately | 38 | John Crochet | 72 |
| | James Sandford | 7 | John Poiger | 39 | W ^r Randolph | 73 |
| | Thomas Lantrell | 8 | John Farmer | 40 | W ^r Hall | 74 |

John Crocket is recorded on this portion of the list as number 72.

After the war, John and Rebecca settled in the modern-day Washington and Greene Counties in Tennessee where John received a land grant for his service during the Revolutionary War. Quoting the book, *David Crockett, The Man and the Legend*, by James Atkins Shackford, "John...settled in Washington County, North Carolina, within a large land plot sometimes known as Brown's Purchase, bought from the Indians by Colonel Jacob Brown of South Carolina for as much merchandise as a single pack-horse could carry." Deed book A, page 122 reads, "In consideration of the sum of one thousand pounds in hand paid Virginia money **in goods** for the use of the Nation by the said Jacob Brown..." This may very well be the same deed mentioned in Shackford's book!



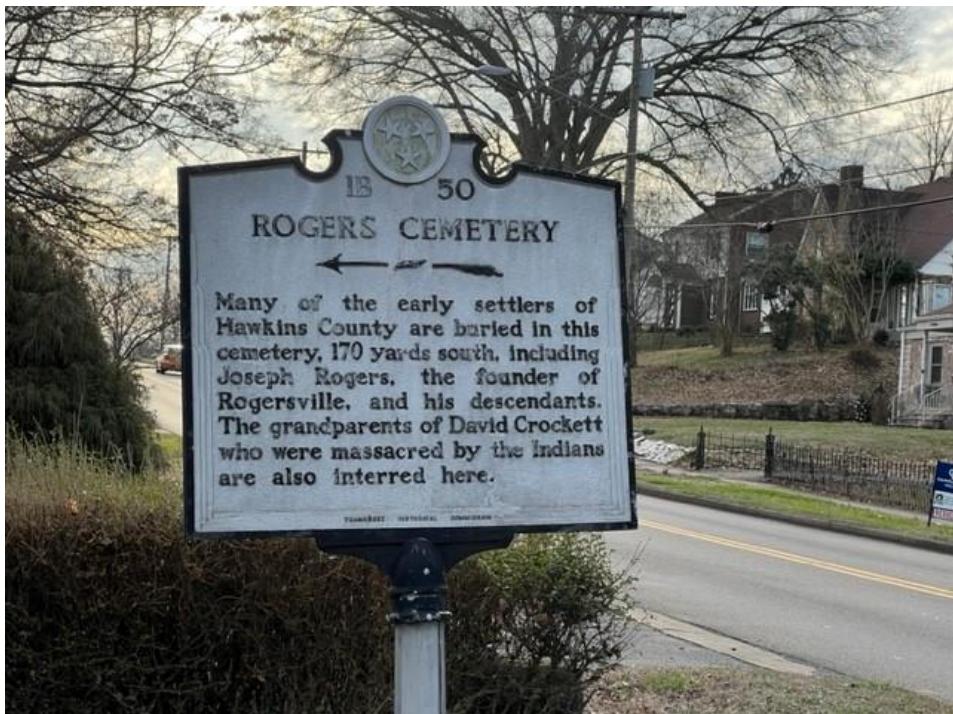
North Carolina Land Grant # 98 given to George Gillespie (blue border). John Crockett's property in Washington County is marked in pink. The bottom border of the property is not marked, as it follows the Nolichucky River.



A drawing of the property, taken from Deed Book A, page 197.

Choosing northeast Tennessee as their home was “under dangerous circumstances, both to himself and his family, as the county was full of Indians, who were at that time very troublesome.”¹ John’s parents were both murdered in their home in Rogersville (Hawkins County) by the Chickamauga Cherokee in a raid led by Dragging Canoe. John’s brother, Joseph Crockett was wounded in the arm. Another of

John's brothers, James was deaf and unable to speak. He was captured by the Creeks and remained with them for over 17 years. When he was discovered, he was purchased from the Creeks and returned to his relatives. John and his other brothers were away from home when the attack happened.



Tennessee State Historical Marker, located at the intersection of West Main Street and South Rogan Road, Rogersville, Tennessee.



The Rogers Cemetery, South Rogan Road, Rogersville, Tennessee.



Here Lie

*David Crockett and his wife
Grandparents of Davy Crockett
Who were massacred near this spot*

By Indians in 1777

*Division of History State of Tennessee
1927*

NOTE- This marker incorrectly states that the family is buried in this cemetery, but it is widely believed they were buried on their farm nearby.

John and his wife, Rebecca had nine children and at the time of David's birth, they were living "at the mouth of Lime Stone, on the Nolachucky river..."

The Nolachucky River was a source of entertainment for the Crockett brothers, who once found themselves in danger. Five of the Crockett boys, including David, and an older boy named Campbell were playing on the river's edge. The boys (excluding David, much to his chagrin) climbed into John's canoe and took it out on the water. Campbell was attempting to paddle the boat; he had likely never even seen a water craft, or had any idea how to guide it. Any of the other boys could have paddled the boat to safety, but Campbell wouldn't give up the paddle. Just a short distance below them was a waterfall and the boys were heading straight toward it. A neighbor farmer saw them and started to run, throwing off clothing as he went. When he reached the canoe, the draw from the falls was very strong, but he was able to bring the canoe and boys to the safety of the riverbank. Not long after this incident, John moved his family from the Nolachucky River area to Greene County, "about ten miles above Greenville."

John next moved the family to the mouth of Cove Creek, where he and Thomas Galbreath undertook to build a mill together. "They went on very well with their work until it was nigh done when there came the second epistle to Noah's fresh and away went their mill, shot lock and barrel." David recalled that the water rose into their house and John had to get them out to keep them from drowning.

The family next moved to Jefferson County where John opened a tavern. It was small and John was poor, so the accommodations were mostly for the waggoners who travelled the road. This undertaking was unsuccessful, and the property was eventually sold on the courthouse steps. John also attempted to be a land speculator, but he failed.

The Washington County Archives has three court cases that mention John Crockett:

- 1783: Robert Crocket vs. John Crocket damages in the amount of five hundred thousand pounds, current money. The document is very faded and difficult to read, but one section clearly states, "...John Crocket have refused to be taken by the Sheriff __?__ by force of arms did keep him off." We can only speculate as to who Robert Crocket might be. John had a brother named Robert, but it is not known if he was the plaintiff in this lawsuit.

"We therefore Command you to attach the estate of said John Crockett or so much thereof Repleviable or security given as will be of value sufficient to satisfy the said damages and costs." Apparently, John had a bit of fight in him! This document is signed by John Sevier, County Clerk.

- 1789: John Crockett vs. Alexander Campbell, debt of twenty-eight pounds
- 1802: Superior Court: Hudson Johnson and Joel Shropshire vs. Richard Mitchell and Thomas Ingram. The third document bears only a mention of John Crockett, specifically, only the site of his "cabben."

John served Greene County in many capacities including serving as a juror, acting as a magistrate and a petty court official. He had some education, as he could sign his name. He lived and died a poor man, though.

There is some conflicting information concerning Rebecca, John's wife's death. There is a memorial marker in Gibson County for Rebecca that states she died "around 1834." Many other sources place her death closer to 1832. I believe this date to be more accurate. She was buried at the site of their cabin in Gibson County, but the memorial marker is in the town of Rutherford.

The last time there is documentation of John is the final document making David administrator of his father's estate in Gibson County, Tennessee on September 15, 1834. His burial place is unknown, but it is likely that he was also buried on their property in Gibson County.

By: Donna Cox Briggs
February 16, 2023

Sources:

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