



Offbeat Oregon History: David Crockett in Oregon



Nearly everyone knows the story of David Crockett — the Tennessee mountain man and later politician turned folk hero who died at the Alamo in 1836. Most of us just remember the details from the old Fess Parker song and TV miniseries commissioned by Disney in 1955: “Da-veeey, Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier!”

What isn’t remembered much today is that Davy Crockett had a long, colorful posthumous existence as a character in about twenty years of “tall tales” published anonymously in several different “Davy Crockett Almanacs” from the mid-1830s through the runup to the Civil War.

They were two totally different guys, too. The real David Crockett had no use for Andrew Jackson, bitterly opposing him for his Indian policies. The legend, though, introduced himself in the pages of his almanac as “that same David Crockett, fresh from the backwoods, half horse, half alligator, a little touched with the snapping turtle — can wade the Mississippi, leap the Ohio, ride upon a streak of lightning, and slip without a scratch down a honey locust tree — can whip my weight in wildcats — and whip any man opposed to Jackson.”

Several different publishers produced Crockett almanacs, but they were very similar. Each year’s edition featured pages and pages of stories illustrated with woodcuts and written in a pastiche of

Crockett’s storytelling style. They were tall tales, like those of Paul Bunyan and John Henry, only they were about somebody who everyone knew actually had existed. They were extremely popular.

And although David Crockett — the man — probably knew little or nothing about Oregon, Davy Crockett — the legend — had a great deal to say on the subject, starting in the mid-1840s with the “54-40 or Fight” controversy over borders with the British and heating up later in the decade as emigration on the Oregon Trail started in earnest.

In 1950, Oregon poet and folklore historian Verne Bright, while researching a book project on American frontier folklore, found a rich trove of Davy Crockett almanacs, full of tales about Davy in the Beaver State. Bright, a frequent contributor to the Oregon Historical Quarterly, promptly prepared a selection of some of the juiciest morsels for publication.

Here are some of the highlights from what he found:

“I esspose you has heer’d o’ them diggin’s out West, that are called Oregon, and how the British wants to have a joint occupancy of that ‘ere clearin’. It’s a sort of sinivation [insinuation] that we can’t take keer of it alone, and it puts me in mind o’ the joint occupancy of me and a painter

[panther] when we both found ourselves together on the branch of a tree. The place war big enough for us both, but we couldn’t agree to stay there together.

“Thar war once a pesky Yankee pedlar that put up at my house, and had as much bear meat and whiskey in his long guts as he could carry, but he wasn’t satisfied with that, for he wanted to have the joint occupancy of my wife too. So, when I got out of bed early in the morning, he crept along to the disputed territory, and began to turn down the coverlid. My wife heer’d him and made believe she war asleep, but kept won eye open. Jest as he put one leg into bed, she took a cloze line that hung close by, and tied it round his ankle and made him fast by one leg to the bed post, then she got up and opened a hive of bees on him. He danced and roared most beautiful, and I think John Bull will do the same, when he gits among the Yankee bees of Oregon.”

Bright gives no dates on these tidbits, but this one surely dates from 1845 or 1846, during the height of the “54-40 or Fight” controversy; the joint-occupancy system he refers to ended in 1846 with the ratification of the Oregon Treaty, which set the boundary between Oregon and Canada where it stands today, at 49 degrees.

Several of the stories make it very clear that the anonymous writers of Davy Crockett’s adventures were completely unfamiliar with Oregon. One tells the story of his ascent of a “mile-high cliff” with the help and occasional hindrance of his dog, Wolf Hunter; his pet bear, Death Hug; and a huge bull elk he caught and tamed along the way. After Death Hug peeks over the edge and panics, he and the other animals all tumble down the mountain, leaving Davy high and dry on top; so he pulls out a plug of “the Kentucky leaf o’ consolation,” takes a big “chaw,” makes a flume out of frozen tobacco juice, and slides away to safety upon it.

Another story recounts Davy’s battle with the “Great Snake of Oregon,” compared with which the “tarrable antyconda, the boa constrictor, and the eternal long strong an’ never to be felt or caught sea-snake is nothen.”

Later the writer (or one of his colleagues) seems

to be under the impression that Oregon was infested with herds of super-sized bison.

“I have had dealins with several samples of mammoths in my darin’ days and nights of tariffic adventure, sich as mammoth porkers, mammoth [Indians], sarpants, wild cats and cat-fish,” he writes. “But I found a mammoth buffalo the most sassagereous and hydrophobish of any monster critter, that turned out to try human courage or combativeness. Now I don’t fear to own up that when I came across the first and worst of these varmints that I had ever seen, my skin had a leetle touch of the geese-flesh, ‘kase I half thought he war the devil come out to Oregon for the disputed territory, for he skipped, roared, an’ snorted an’ foamed about, as though he war master of the entire track clean up to 54-40; an’ it war only becase I found he had no cloven hoof that I made up my mind he war a buffalo.

“I up with old Thunderbolt an’ let go at him; but the bullet only rolled off like tow-balls from a pop gun, an’ the wad set fire to his ten-foot mane; an’ made him more rambustorous, an’ he made right into me with his mouth foaming aquefortis, an’ his eye flashen’ out volcanic eruptions; I dodged and grinned a leetle airthquake humor at him, till the ground begin to shake and reel with the noise; he made another tornado rush into me, when I sprung upward, let him slip halfway back between my lower beams, an’ then sprung right upon his back, an’ seizin’ his tail in my one hand an’ his mane in t’other, while my dog Bullshark took him by the snout, makin’ a good bridle bit, I rode him clar down from the rocky to the Pacific pond, whar I shipped him as a curiosity to China.”

To modern ears, these tall tales of frontier Oregon can get very awkward and embarrassing at times, particularly when Native Americans are discussed. But the rough-hewn, colorful style of these stories, with their made-up words and idiosyncratic spellings and overall attitude of self-sufficiency, went a long way toward forging the cultural identity we recognize and respond to as Westerners today.

And, of course, the “tall tale” has never really gone out of style. Not in Oregon, at any rate.

Dr. Fuhrman: Vitamin D is essential for bone health

About 10 million Americans already have osteoporosis, and 34 million are at risk. Contrary to popular belief, low intake of calcium is not the primary cause of osteoporosis. Americans have some of the highest calcium intakes in the world, but we also have one of the highest hip fracture rates in the world. Calcium taken into the body is either deposited into bone or excreted in urine. The standard American diet — including large amounts of salt, caffeine, sugar,

and animal products — causes much of the calcium that Americans consume to get excreted in their urine. Milk and other dairy products are no exception. The Nurses’ Health Study followed 72,337 women for over 18 years and found that dairy intake did not reduce the risk of osteoporosis-related hip fractures. In contrast, vegetables, beans, fruits, and nuts are rich sources of phytonutrients (including calcium) that do not promote urinary loss of calcium.

Vitamin D also plays a critical role in regulating bone density. Vitamin D enables the absorption of calcium in the intestine and stimulates activity of bone building cells. The most natural way to obtain Vitamin D is through sun exposure, but because of indoor jobs, our climate, and skin cancer risk it is very difficult to achieve optimal levels of Vitamin D safely from the sun. Vitamin D supplementation is the best option.

Since Vitamin D and calcium work together to maintain healthy bone, how much of each are necessary to protect against osteoporosis? Most Americans take inadequate amounts of Vitamin D and excessive amounts of calcium.

Not enough Vitamin D:

Vitamin D supplements of 800-2000 IU were effective in medical studies to protect against osteoporosis-related fractures; however most multivitamins contain only 400 IU, and about 50 percent of Americans have insufficient blood Vitamin D levels. According to a review of the research on the subject, Vitamin D blood levels (measured by a 25(OH)D test) should be range between 36-48 ng/ml in order to achieve maximal health benefits — Vitamin D is not only important for bones, but also for cardiovascular health, mood and cancer prevention — Vitamin D has actions in every cell of the human body. I recommend getting a blood

test and supplementing accordingly to keep Vitamin D levels in the range of 35-50 ng/ml. If you have not had your blood tested, 2000 IU is a reasonable dose to supply your body with adequate Vitamin D.

Too much calcium:

Taking too much calcium is a concern because excess calcium may actually interfere with the bone-protective effects of Vitamin D. In an analysis of several studies, low-dose calcium supplements (500 mg) combined with Vitamin D were found to reduce osteoporosis fracture rates, but high dose calcium supplements (1000 mg or more) combined with Vitamin D did not reduce fracture rates. Furthermore, recent research

has revealed that high-dose calcium supplements may increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. Much of the scientific community agrees that calcium recommendations for Americans have been set too high. The World Health Organization advises an intake of 500 mg, whereas the U.S. Institute of Medicine recommends 1000 mg. Calcium should not be taken in excess, and I recommend limiting supplemental calcium to 400-600 mg. Most of your calcium should be derived from a diet laden with vegetables — a healthful plant-based diet plus vitamin D supplements and exercise is the best strategy for bone health.

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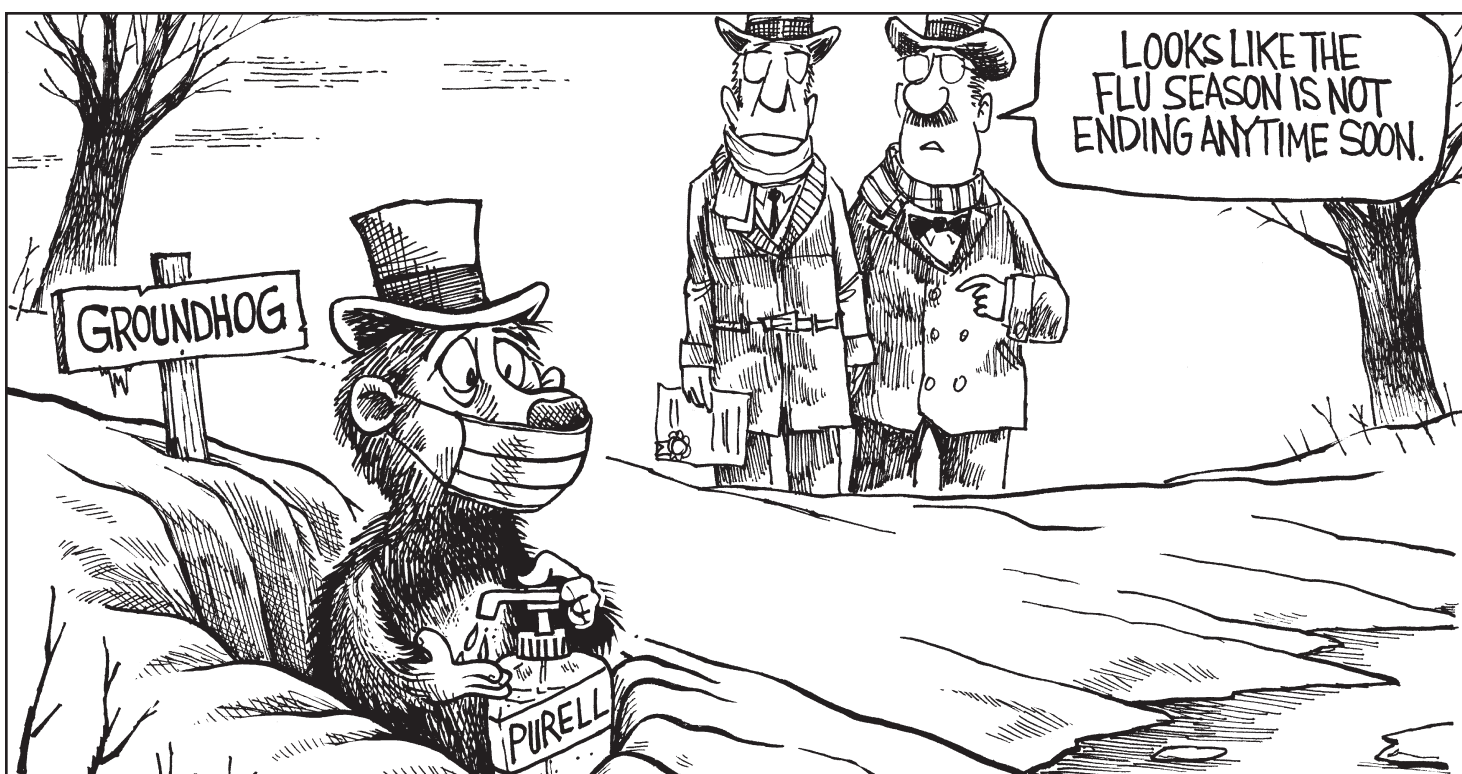
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In order to ensure that your letter will be printed, letters must be under 300 words and submitted by Friday at 5 p.m. Letters must be signed and must include an address, city and phone number or e-mail address for verification purposes. No anonymous letters will be printed. Letters must be of interest to local readers. Personal attacks and name calling in response to letters are uncalled for and unnecessary. To avoid transcription errors, the Sentinel would prefer editorial and news content be sent electronically via email or electronic media. Hand written submissions will be accepted, but we may need to call to verify spelling, which could delay the publishing of the submission. The Sentinel reserves the right not to print letters that may contain libelous content.

IN BRIEF JAN. 31-FEB. 6

The program presentation at the February 10 meeting of the American Association of University Women will be a roundtable discussion on Pay Discrimination/Equity. The meeting will be at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 777 Coburg Rd. in Eugene, and it will be free and open to the public. The program takes place at 10:30 am after a social time at 9:30 and a business meeting at 10 a.m. For more information call Carol at (541) 344-4267.

The Cottage Grove 912 Project will meet on Monday, February 5, 6:30 p.m., at Stacy’s Covered Bridge Restaurant, 401 E Main. There will be training on how to lobby public officials. This meeting is open to the public