Young Sam Houston. J. Wood painted this miniature in 1826, when Houston was a United States Congressman from Tennessee. Courtesy San Jacinto Museum of History.

Sam Houston and the Jacksonian Frontier Personality

Thomas H. Kreneck

What were the springs of action in his mind, who dare undertake to tell?

From Houston's obituary by E. H. Cushing,
Houston *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, July 29, 1863

The salient features of Sam Houston's life reflect an energetic and seemingly enigmatic individual who was prominently active from Washington, D.C., to the farthest reaches of the western frontier. Born in 1793, he left his family in Tennessee as an adolescent to live for several years among the Cherokees. He joined the regular army during the War of 1812 where he met Andrew Jackson. As Jackson's protégé, Houston rose politically from western Indian subagent to United States Congressman by 1823. He became Governor of Tennessee in 1827, only to resign after a year, apparently over an unhappy marriage. He then fled to dwell among the Cherokees in Arkansas. At that point his public career seemed at an end.

In early December 1832, however, Houston crossed into Texas from Indian Territory. His move into that discontented Mexican province proved to be the most momentous of his life. Almost from the time he appeared in the Anglo-Texan settlements, Houston became embroiled in their politics of rebellion. When discontent took the form of open warfare in 1835-1836, he played a key role in Texan separation from Mexico. After its successful revolt, Texas

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remained an independent nation for a decade. Sam Houston was its dominant political figure. He was twice president of the Republic, between October 1836 and December 1838, and from December 1841 to December 1844. While out of the executive's office between his first and second terms, he led the Congressional opposition to President Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar. After his second tenure as president, Houston served as chief advisor to his successor and last chief executive of the Republic, Anson Jones. Upon completion of annexation, Houston became United States Senator from Texas, occupying that position from February 1846 to March 1859. In 1859, Houston was removed from the Senate by the Texas legislature because of his Unionist sentiments. He returned to his state and served as governor until he was removed in 1860 because of his opposition to secession. He died three years later in July 1863, at seventy years of age.

These details are easily documented and have been fully chronicled through the publication of dozens of biographies and lengthy biographical sketches. While Houston's career is familiar to serious students of Texas history, there has been scant attempt to reveal his inner emotional or mental life in a systematic way. His biographers have been reluctant to deal with what E. H. Cushing referred to as the "springs of action in his mind."

This essay is intended to provide such an examination—to delineate as clearly as possible the various inner feelings which shaped and comprised Houston's personality, ideology, and motive forces. By no means an effort at a definitive treatment, this profile, drawn from the voluminous amount of primary and secondary Sam Houston materials, will suggest a conceptual framework, a point of departure, for finding coherence in his actions.

Houston's resiliency amid the vicissitudes of his career, and his amazing success, not only fascinated many of his contemporaries, but also tempt the biographer to deal with Houston as a wholly unusual and enigmatic character, obscuring the representative nature of his personality. Alexis de Tocqueville met Sam Houston during his travels in the United States. Houston impressed him as the universal American in perpetual motion and clearly served as one example for Tocqueville's composite of the American character when the perceptive Frenchman observed:

> In the United States a man builds a house to spend his latter years in it, and he sells it before the roof is on: he plants a garden and lets it just as the trees are coming into bearing: he brings a field into tillage and leaves other men to gather the crops: he embraces a profession and gives it up: he settles in a place, which he soon afterwards leaves, to carry his changeable longings elsewhere. If his private affairs leave him any leisure, he instantly plunges into the vortex of politics: and if at the end of a year of unremitting labor he finds he has a few days' vacation, his eager curiosity whirls him over the vast extent of the United States, and he will travel fifteen hundred miles in a few days, to shake off his happiness. Death at length overtakes him, but it is before he is weary of his bootless chase of that complete felicity which is forever on the wing.[1]

Despite his singular achievements, Sam Houston embodied the frontier Jacksonian personality: that individual who characterized the population of the Texas Republic and who so definitely marked Texas then and forever after. By the time Houston came to Texas in late 1832 his basic nature was firmly established, as a man driven by complex, conflicting inner desires into a state of constant anxiety and activity common to his contemporaries.

To gain a clear portrait of Sam Houston, one must begin with a consideration of his youth. Evidence on his earliest years is scarce; however, available documentation and situational analysis strongly suggest that his first sixteen years comprised, as Tocqueville commented, a "stormy and restless" period.[2] Those years were marked by the emergence of personal instability during the alteration of his extended kinship and demise of his immediate family. These early years were further marked by his acceptance of a band of Cherokee Indians as a surrogate family in what appears to have been an adolescent quest for stability.

A central experience of Sam Houston's youth was his several-year sojourn among the Western Cherokees, a time which Houston characterized in his 1846 authorized biography as "the moulding period of Life." Houston ran away from his family on the Tennessee frontier during the winter of 1809, around the age of fifteen. From that time until early 1812, he made at least three extended visits with the Cherokees under the leadership of Chief Oolooteka (or Ahuludegi) at the confluence of the Tennessee and Hiwasee Rivers. He felt warmly received by Oolooteka and his people and adopted many of their ways. In his authorized biography Houston remarked that in all his life there was "nothing half so sweet to remember as this sojourn made among the untutored children of the forest."[3]

The course of Houston's existence prior to 1809 seems to have dictated this temporary abandonment of white civilization for that of the red man. Sam Houston generally avoided remarks about his life before his stay with the

[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York, 1961), 2:162.

[2] George Wilson Pierson, *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America* (New York, 1938), 610.

[3] C. Edwards Lester, *Sam Houston and His Republic* (New York, 1846), 12-13; Marquis James, *The Raven: A Biography of Sam Houston* (New York, 1975), 21-26; A. W. Terrell, "Recollections of General Sam Houston," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 16 (October 1912):132-133; Frederick Webb Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico* (Washington, 1907), 633.

Cherokees, especially his adolescence, an omission which could well have been motivated to some extent by a desire to suppress a portion of the memory of these first fifteen years. Situationally, it appears that between his birth in 1793 and his initial visit to the Indians the youngster was caught up in another central experience—the trauma of family disintegration brought about by the uprooting nature of the westward movement and by personal difficulties with members of his immediate family. During these earliest years Houston was involved in, and a victim of, the transition from what might be termed colonial to nineteenth-century, middle-class family conditions, something common to many of his contemporaries who would come to the Texas Republic.

Sam Houston spent his childhood in a colonial-type family situation. He was born on March 2, 1793, at Timber Ridge, Rockbridge County, on the western side of the Virginia Blue Ridge Mountains. While not in the Virginia Tidewater elite, the Houstons and his mother's family, the Paxtons, were of Scotch-Irish immigrant ancestry. Samuel Houston and Elizabeth Paxton had inherited a sizeable amount of acreage in this northwestern portion of Virginia where they settled at the time of their marriage.

During Sam's first few years, his family possessed a relatively secure financial position, with his father a respected veteran of the American Revolution and a militia brigade inspector. The elder Houston apparently held the admiration of his fellow citizens although he was a rather reserved individual with more interest in the military than in farming.[4]

An archetypal soldier-planter-gentleman, the father carried on a gracious way of life that exceeded his income. He accrued debts that would cause family hardship when Sam was around eleven or twelve. The inherited money and property supported the family and the Major's ventures until around 1806. By that year, however, he faced bankruptcy. Young Sam probably had no way of knowing this stringent financial situation was developing since he later reflected that they "had been in comfortable circumstances, chiefly through the exertions" of his father. Indeed, Major Houston was greatly admired by his son.[5]

During his childhood Sam Houston was also surrounded by a large kinship grouping which included the extended Paxton and Houston clans as well as a large immediate family. By the time he was eight years old he was one of nine

[4]James, 9-16; Lester, *Houston and His Republic*, 8-9; Rev. Sam'l Rutherford Houston, comp., *Brief Biographical Accounts of Many Members of the Houston Family, Accompanied by a Genealogical Table* (Cincinnati, 1882), 23 (hereafter cited as *Brief Biographical Accounts*).

[5]James, 12-15; Lester, *Houston and His Republic*, 10.

children. In descending order of age, the siblings included Paxton, Robert, James, John, Sam, William, Isabella, Mary, and Eliza. There were no traumatic events as a result of family deaths, as all were at least present during the first dozen years of Sam's life. As an adult, when Houston spoke of his Virginia background, he did so in gentle, nostalgic terms reflecting a sense of security, comfort, and contentment with the years he spent there as a child.[6]

In 1805, however, young Sam's near-idyllic world began to change as Major Houston's fortunes sharply declined. Though little is known about the exact nature of his problems, apparently the Major's chronic absenteeism and poor management practices adversely affected the Timber Ridge plantation. He sold slaves and various pieces of land to maintain his family's standard of living and satisfy a mounting number of creditors. But by 1806, all efforts to avert insolvency failed and he decided to sell his remaining Timber Ridge acreage and move west to the Tennessee frontier, then a part of North Carolina. The Major subsequently negotiated for a grant of land in present East Tennessee near where a number of Houston clan members had already settled. He then readied his brood for the move. The family's trip, however, was abruptly postponed in September 1806, when the elder Houston, then in his fifties, unexpectedly died.[7]

Upon the death of Houston's father in the fall, his mother, Elizabeth Paxton Houston, assumed the role of both parents. Evidence suggests that Elizabeth was a dominant mother even before the loss of her husband. Her son Sam would later characterize her as "nerved with stern fortitude . . . ," and, at the time of the Major's death, "distinguished for a full, rather tall, and matronly form."[8] Sam Houston never directly mentioned his mother in soft, "feminine" terms, but in terms which connoted strength.

After her husband's death, Elizabeth decided to proceed with the move to the frontier, which, for a widow with numerous children, does suggest a powerful personality. In mid 1807, after disposing of the last of their ancestral properties, they made the trek across the Allegheny Mountains to the Blount County area, thus severing their ties with the region where Sam had spent his first fourteen years. Their new 420-acre land claim lay twelve miles west of Maryville on a small tributary of Baker's Creek. It was extremely raw country which had yet to be wrested totally from the Indians and elements—a new,

[6]*Brief Biographical Accounts*, 24; "Opposing the Kansas-Nebraska Bill," February 14-15, 1854, in *The Writings of Sam Houston*, ed. Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker (Austin, 1970), 5:491 (hereafter cited as *Writings*).

[7]James, 14-15; Blount County (Tennessee) Court Minutes, 1794-1804 Book No. I (microfilm, Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research, Houston Public Library).

[8]James, 12, 17-18; Lester, *Houston and His Republic*, 9.

different milieu from the more settled, colonial Timber Ridge area.[9]

Once the family settled in Blount County, young Sam Houston did not successfully accommodate to his new surroundings. Although the facts are sketchy and the exact series of events is impossible to establish conclusively, his lack of accommodation could well have been influenced by a qualitative decline in the condition of his immediate family. First of all, his father's death as well as the severing of ties with a comfortable existence in Virginia almost simultaneously were profoundly important events for a youth of fourteen. Apparently, too, as the family was ending its residence in Rockbridge County, James and John, the third and fourth sons respectively, had emerged as the leading males of the household. Paxton and Robert, the two oldest and likeliest choices for such family positions, did not assume those roles. This situation may somewhat be explained in light of what soon happened to the two eldest. A short time after reaching Blount County Paxton succumbed to consumption, an illness that may have slowly removed a sickly scion from his rightful position in the family. Paxton never married. Within a few years, after serving in the military, Robert abruptly removed himself from the scene completely. As one family historian notes, "with his own hand he terminated his life."[10] Whether or not Robert was disposed toward or even capable of shouldering the burden of familial responsibilities is certainly open to question. He too was unmarried. James and John, along with Elizabeth Paxton Houston, were designated as executors of the Major's estate. Sometime after the family settled in their new home, Sam's younger sister Isabella also died. Indeed, the period immediately before, during, and soon after the trip west seems to have signaled the dissolution, or at least a significant readjustment, of Houston's immediate family. He underwent several significant losses which would profoundly disturb an adolescent. For that matter, this scattering of the family eventually included James and John as they later moved from Blount County to Nashville and Memphis respectively where they married and resided.[11]

After or during these early traumas, young Sam would repudiate, at least temporarily, the remainder of his family and the entire white way of life. His rejection would be represented by his first 1809 flight to the Cherokees.

Soon after the Houstons arrived in Blount County, Sam was enrolled in a

[9]Lester, *Houston and His Republic*, 10; James, 17-18; Inez Burns, *History of Blount County, Tennessee* (Maryville, Tennessee, 1957), 29-30.

[10]Lester, *Houston and His Republic*, 10-11; James, 19; *Brief Biographical Accounts*, 24-25.

[11]Blount County (Tennessee) Court Records, 1808-1811 (microfilm, Clayton Library), 15; *Brief Biographical Accounts*, 25; Mrs. Inez Burns, telephone interview with author, September 6, 1984.

local academy where, characteristically for a troubled adolescent, he began to have problems which he soon resolved by leaving school. But the events which precipitated his running away from home came when James, John, and his mother tried to involve him in two business enterprises: a plantation and a general store in Maryville. Establishing a 420-acre farm where none had existed before was a difficult task that Sam did not relish. His mother and two brothers found Sam's performance on the plantation so lacking that they put him to work in the store. Although little is known regarding his relationship with his two immediately older brothers, Houston explained through his authorized biographer that he felt under "a sort of fraternal tyranny." This tyranny "exercised over him some severe restraints." When the family "compelled him to go into a merchant's store, and stand behind the counter" he ran away.[12] He could not accept the "restraints" of the store any more than those of the farm or school. These demands on his behavior proved enough to trigger his rejection of his new familial conditions.

Sam Houston's inability to cope with his new situation seems to have had a lasting effect on his relationship with his immediate family. Thereafter he apparently distanced himself from his siblings. Even when he became successful in Tennessee politics there is no evidence that he ever assisted his older brothers in any fashion. Although Houston warmly communicated in later life with several of his cousins, especially John H. Houston and Robert H. McEwen, one is struck by the dearth of direct communication with his siblings. James and John lived in Nashville and Memphis at the height of their younger brother's popularity; yet, of the thousands of extant Sam Houston documents there seems to be no direct mention of their existence except in reference to his unhappy adolescent years.[13]

There is more evidence of a relationship between Sam and his younger siblings, William, Mary, and Eliza. He and his brother Will apparently had some contact during their mature years, but this can be gleaned only from fleeting references. Again, there seems to be no extant correspondence between Sam and William.[14]

It was for Mary and Eliza, his "dear Sisters," that Houston displayed lasting

[12]Lester, *Houston and His Republic*, 11-12.

[13]Houston to John H. Houston, June 24, 1829, *Writings*, 2:12; Houston to Robert H. McEwen, September 7, 1836, *ibid.*, 2:25; *Brief Biographical Accounts*, 25-34; Robert H. McEwen to Houston, December 13, 1836, Sam Houston Hearne Collection, Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas, Austin.

[14]Mr. Haralsen to Houston, June 25, 1830, Andrew Jackson Houston Collection, Archives Division, Texas State Library, Austin; unidentified correspondent to Houston, August 20, 1836, *ibid.*

affection as he matured. Not only did he visit them in Tennessee, but Eliza and her family moved to Texas.[15] Houston's relationship with Mary, however, would involve the element of emotional tragedy that had seemed to plague the siblings since their first days in Blount County. She remained in East Tennessee and was Sam's favorite. Tragically, she became the victim of an unhappy second marriage and had a mental breakdown, a condition not without precedent in the family, considering Robert's suicide. According to a Houston family historian, Mary's "reason succumbed and she died in an insane asylum."[16]

Although any conclusions in this regard must remain tentative due to the impossibility of reconstructing the details, Houston seems to have had a far less than ideal relationship with his own siblings, especially when compared to the close relations he maintained with the family of his wife, Margaret Lea, after 1840. The researcher is left with the feeling that Sam Houston, a man of deep emotion, perceived himself as "different" and apart from his immediate family, and this separateness or distancing can be dated at least from the move to Blount County and his repudiation of the "tyranny" of his older brothers at a vulnerable time in his early development.

Sam's adolescent rejection, which precipitated his movement to the Indians, was revealing in another way. His youthful actions may well have centered around a temporary rejection of his mother. Available evidence suggests such unsettling feelings. Biographers have never doubted the existence of an ideal relationship between Sam Houston and Elizabeth Paxton Houston; however, Sam seldom mentioned his mother in his writings or public pronouncements either during her lifetime or after her death. Significantly, there seems to be no extant correspondence between Houston and his mother. As in the case of his siblings, there is no evidence that Sam and Elizabeth ever exchanged letters. When he did allude to her or to the direct maternal influence on him, he ordinarily did so in either negative or ambivalent terms. Even his usual silence about his mother, coming as it did from an individual who was not only a prodigious letter-writer, but a speaker who utilized all the colloquial expressions, was a silence that may hint at the vestiges of a troubled child-parent relation. Unlike his father, Sam Houston's mother lived until he became an adult. She died in 1831, when he was

[15]Houston to Anna Raguet, July 22, 1839, in *Ever Thine Truly: Love Letters From Sam Houston to Anna Raguet*, ed. Shannon Irion and Jenkins Garrett (Austin, 1975), 121; William Seale, *Sam Houston's Wife: A Biography of Margaret Lea Houston* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1970), 116, 120.

[16]Seale, 151; *Brief Biographical Accounts*, 35-36; Houston to Ashbel Smith, July 21, 1848, *Writings*, 5:57.

thirty-eight. Documentation regarding many of these years of Houston's life is available; thus, there ought to be more existing material concerning his immediate feelings toward that important parent.

The 1846 authorized biography is clearly laudatory toward Elizabeth Paxton as a frontier "heroine." In it, Houston never suggests that she assisted his brothers in their "tyranny." On the other hand, neither does the book state that she shielded him from their "tyranny." Indeed, just the opposite was likely the case. Given the strong-willed nature of a woman able to move herself with nine children, several of whom may have been sickly, to the rough Tennessee frontier, she was not someone who coddled a young, healthy son. It must be remembered that the 1846 volume was written partly as a public campaign biography some fifteen years after Elizabeth's death—time enough for any negative feelings to subside naturally and be sorted through consciously by the adult Sam Houston. Moreover, in the 1840s, a man seeking election simply would not denigrate family, especially motherhood. Politically, he would actually have been better served had he gone on to portray his mother as his defender against the "fraternal tyranny." Houston's silence on that particular topic may therefore implicate her in what he perceived his brothers had done to him. As a widow and woman in the American West she was a major element in the family and plantation unit. She had every reason to be one of those family members who made him "better acquainted than ever with what is called hard work."[17] Houston was put to work with the rest of the family on the farm and Elizabeth Paxton was a central figure in running that enterprise. Moreover, she was in the unenviable position of the surviving parent upon whom a fanciful adolescent could thrust his anger at the loss of his father. Elizabeth Paxton was a likely figure for him to reject when he repudiated their new way of life in Blount County.

As a public person Sam Houston used many of the colloquial expressions and rhetorical devices of his times in his political speeches. In his pronouncements, either paraphrased or recorded verbatim, Houston's favorite themes are lessons learned from the founding fathers and the great influence Andrew Jackson had on his life. One will look in vain, however, for allusions to the virtues and goodness of his mother. He apparently never delivered a eulogy to his mother, or even alluded to her positive maternal influence on him. This strange silence came from a man whose mother lived until he was thirty-eight, and during a period when references to the goodness and virtue of motherhood, as the essential feature of a "true woman," were in vogue. Between the 1820s

[17]Lester, *Houston and His Republic*, 9-12; Llerena B. Friend, *Sam Houston: The Great Designer* (Austin, 1969), 30.

and 1860, as congressman, governor of two states, president of the Texas Republic, and United States senator, he had ample opportunity to utilize such expressions concerning his own mother if he were so inclined.

Houston's October 1827 inaugural address as governor of Tennessee provides one of the earliest examples of this downplay of maternal influence. When he delivered this speech his mother was still alive. He noted that he was an immigrant to Tennessee, his "adopted country:"

> At an early age I came within her limits, unattended by those adventitious aids, so necessary in pointing out the path of usefulness, [yet] her citizens have magnanimously upheld me.[18]

He made no mention of a helpful, supportive mother; in his speech it was his "adopted" Tennessee that had extended the helping hand.

Houston likewise omitted references to his mother after her death. On at least one occasion, he even hinted that he had been motherless; as he put it, when he was fourteen he was "an orphan lad."[19]

Houston appears to have been regimented psychologically to not mention his mother in a positive manner even when it would have benefited him to do so. In speeches, he would refer to binding affections for his wife, children, military service, companions, and, broadly, for his "kindred."[20] He seems, however, always to exclude siblings and mother. Houston never lacked the ability to employ whatever rhetorical devices he needed for persuasion of his audiences. His failure to mention publicly something as basic as the positive influence of his mother may well have been a deliberate or, at least, a subconscious denial.

On the one occasion during political debate when Houston alluded to motherhood's influence upon him, he did so in distressful terms, and in a manner which reflected memories of an unpleasant adolescence around his immediate family. During his intense, emotional opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Bill of 1854, Houston expressed dismay at Southern attacks upon his stance. In his response to vociferous verbal assaults from the *Richmond Inquirer* he could well have been speaking on two levels. He stated that although he was from the "Old Dominion" where from the "summits" of "her mountains" he had his first pleasant memories of childhood, he had "never piqued [him]self upon [his] origins. I have never received any marks of sympathy, favor, or admiration from the State. I shall never ask for them,

[18]"Inaugural Address as Tennessee Governor," October 1, 1827, *Writings*, 4:9-10.
[19]"Against an Increase of the Regular Army," February 11, 1858, *ibid.*, 6:496.
[20]"Speech Delivered at a Know-Nothing Mass Barbeque at Austin," November 23, 1855, *ibid.*, 6:223.

although I have always endeavored to deserve them."[21] He expressed the opinion that his origins had never overtly assisted him. Although Houston stated further that "I have never ceased to feel proud that it was upon her soil that I walked in childhood," he added an important qualification: "For her virtues I will laud her; in her misfortunes I will pity her. I will not raise a parricidal hand against my mother."[22]

If on one level he was speaking about mother Virginia's treatment of the slavery question and himself, a native son, perhaps on another level, unconsciously, he was expressing a lasting ambivalence toward his mother and their relationship. In this rhetoric he granted that "mother" had her virtues; however, he also felt that pitiable "misfortunes" had come between them. Mother was blameworthy for not extending the parental "sympathy" he had always "endeavored" to receive; indeed, she deserved to be chastized. But he held his rage in check as he would not "raise a parricidal hand" against her.

Houston concluded this peculiar speech with a remark that well could be seen as an accusation against his siblings. Regarding the men from Virginia who opposed his stand on Kansas-Nebraska he noted, "*Some* of her children, though, have no doubt been spoiled, sir." "*Some*" of mother Virginia's children, it seems, had been, in Houston's mind, more favored than he who had "never received any marks of sympathy, favor, or admiration."[23] Such words could well have been reminiscent of the feelings he had held as a fourteen-year-old vis-à-vis Elizabeth Paxton and his brothers after misfortunes had befallen his family.

In 1865, Houston's widow, Margaret, authorized the Reverend William Carey Crane to write his biography and provided data for the finished product. Crane's *Life and Select Literary Remains of Sam Houston of Texas* offers another example of evidence of the mother-rejection thesis through an "interesting incident in the religious life of . . . Houston" furnished by the Reverend George W. Baines of Salado, Texas. According to Baines, Houston's personal minister, when the hero of San Jacinto finally decided that he desperately wanted to be baptized and receive communion, he used his mother as a partial scapegoat for his past feelings of religious doubt. During a discussion on religion prior to his complete conversion in 1854, Houston told Baines that he could "never take the communion elements, because, while he thinks he is a Christian, yet he may be mistaken." If in error, "then by

[21]"Opposing the Kansas-Nebraska Bill," February 14-15, 1854, *ibid.*, 5:490-491.
[22]*Ibid.*, 5:491.
[23]*Ibid.*

eating and drinking unworthily his damnation would be sealed." Baines queried him regarding how he acquired such a belief. Houston replied that he formed this "conviction" as "a boy" and implicated his mother directly in his hesitancy: "When I was quite young I went with my mother to the Presbyterian church, of which she was a member. It was a communion season, and the great Dr. [Gideon] Blackburn preached." On that day, according to Houston, Blackburn, an active minister in the East Tennessee region, instilled in him his fear of unworthily taking the sacrament. Baines quieted Houston's lingering fears, but in the old hero's mind it seemed that it had been Elizabeth Paxton and her church which had stood in the way of salvation since the time of his youth. She was connected with negative experiences, doubt, and unhappiness.[24]

This religious doubt harkens back to Houston's disquieted adolescence in another way. Apparently, his eldest brother Paxton, near the time of his death in Blount County, had expressed concerns centering around "religious difficulties" to relatives. Elizabeth Paxton had taken him to church as well.[25]

Sam Houston's unwillingness to make positive mention of his mother was even evident in communication with his own children. In August 1850, he wrote his oldest son Sam Jr. on the merits of being considerate of his mother Margaret. At this time, the youth lived away from home and Margaret, chronically ill, complained to her husband about the boy neglecting her. Apparently, Sam Jr. had negligent writing habits. In response, Houston tried to stimulate the youth to be conscious of Margaret's emotional needs. In this most suggestive letter Sam Houston lauded motherhood and Margaret in particular. He urged his son to love his mother always:

> [T]he greatest of all earthly friends . . . is the Mother to the son . . . . The father may be a great friend to the Son, but he can never know and feel the cares of a Mother for her sleeping infant, or her helpless child. Should you live to be a man . . . you will then understand, how much a son owes to his Parents, and particularly to his Mother![26]

The next, necessary corollary for Houston the parent and son to include in this paragraph was comment upon how much his own mother had meant to him. Such a personal lesson would have served well in his admonition to Sam Jr. But he ended the paragraph abruptly and said nothing more. He concluded this important letter with his customary silence regarding his own mother. It was clearly a letter designed for Margaret's benefit alone. As a mature adult Houston could extol the virtues of motherhood in general, and perhaps, since he himself had grown "to be a man," he had come to appreciate positive qualities in Elizabeth Paxton. But the emotional distance which he had put between himself and the older members of his immediate family so long ago still lingered.

[24]Reverend William Carey Crane, *Life and Select Literary Remains of Sam Houston of Texas* (Philadelphia, 1884), 244-245.

[25]*Brief Biographical Accounts*, 24-25.

[26]Houston to Sam Houston, Jr., August 23, 1850, Margaret Bell Houston Collection, Sam Houston Memorial Museum, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

Concurrently, however, with these ambivalent feelings toward his mother, Sam Houston seems to have harbored glorified memories of his father, mixed with feelings of sorrow. On those few occasions when Houston mentioned his father, he seemed to connect Major Houston with things in his milieu that he considered great and good, but woeful. In one of his only oratorical mentions of father in 1857, then-Senator Houston stated revealingly that the "first manifestation of grief and sorrow ever made upon my mind, or that impressed my heart with sensibility, was the crepe that I saw worn upon my father's arm, doing honor to the memory of [George] Washington, after his decease." But those feelings were also mingled with glory and affection. He went on in that speech to say that "from that time I revered [Washington] as one of the greatest and best men." He was "hardly less than a demi-god."[27]

By the winter of 1809, young Sam Houston was experiencing the trauma of familial transition as a victim of the American westward movement. He had undergone the transition from a colonial-type family structure to that of the nineteenth-century middle-class model including a disintegration of his traditional, extended family, the decline of old wealth, and the uprooting experiences of migration. The death of his father, multiple difficulties with siblings, and the emergence of a dominant mother and older brothers truly marked the destruction of Sam's Timber Ridge world by the time he was fifteen or sixteen.

These experiences seem to have fostered a personal instability in Houston which conditioned his thoughts and actions for the rest of his life. It was an instability which may well have been shared by his sister Mary and brother Robert considering their aberrant behavior. Regardless, it is within the context of the loss of childhood security and the rise of his personal instability that one can understand Sam's 1809-1812 sojourn among the Cherokees.

All evidence suggests that the adolescent Houston embraced the Indians and their ways in a quest for individual stability. The characteristics of the Cherokee village of some three hundred souls among whom Houston resided proved extremely attractive to a youth fleeing an unsettling milieu. In these

[27]"Arguments Against the United States Accepting as a Donation the Home of Andrew Jackson," March 2, 1857, *Writings*, 6:438.

years, Oolooteka's band were people whose life-style was sedentary, stable, communitarian, and who clung to strong kinship ties. Much like contemporary white society, they were agricultural, relatively prosperous, and lived in fixed villages comprised of sturdy, impressive houses made of hewn lumber. Certainly, young Houston accepted the band as a surrogate family with Oolooteka as a surrogate father, thus replacing, to some extent, what he felt he had lost in Tennessee. This new primary group exercised over the adolescent enough pleasurable restraints to be meaningful while freeing him from the perceived "tyranny" of his condition in Maryville. The Indians apparently adopted him and placed few demands upon him during this crucial period of his development. This new situation so impressed Houston that for the remainder of his life he was a vehement defender of Native American rights, especially the rights of those resettled to the Indian Territory which later became Arkansas and Oklahoma.[28]

Chief Oolooteka, whom Houston specifically referred to as his adopted "father," apparently recognized the needs of this wayward youth and provided him with the type of sanctuary he required. The chief, as was the custom, gave Houston an Indian name. He called him "Kalanu" which Houston and his first biographer spelled "Colonneh." This word directly translates as "Raven;" however, in the second edition of Houston's authorized biography it is also curiously translated as "Rover." By 1809 young Sam Houston was indeed "roving . . . among the Cherokees" as a restless, unstable adolescent in search of an orderly existence—an individual with a deep-seated personal conflict. The Raven or the Rover may have characterized an unstable personality seeking a secure milieu.[29]

His basic, restless, rejecting instability manifested itself when Houston would return on occasion to white society across the Tennessee River. Though he spent the majority of his time with the Cherokees until he reached eighteen years of age, Houston evidently made two visits to Maryville, both of which underscored his inability to conform to that from which he had fled. During the first return, Houston and a companion were arrested in mid-1810 and fined for what amounted to intoxication and disorderly conduct during the assembly of the local militia. His second visit, in late 1811, ended abruptly after another confrontation with his two elder brothers over his responsibilities

[28]Jack Gregory and Rennard Strickland, *Sam Houston with the Cherokees, 1829-1833* (Austin and London, 1979), 8-9, 11-13, 31, 59; Lester, *Houston and His Republic*, 12.

[29]Houston to the Editor of the Arkansas *Gazette*, December 8, 1830, *Writings*, 1:182-184; Hodge, 1:645; Lester, *Houston and His Republic*, 34; C. Edwards Lester, *The Life of Sam Houston: The Only Authentic Memoir of Him Ever Published* (New York, 1855), 50; Gregory and Strickland, 8.

to his family.[30]

Although in late 1811 Houston was an adopted member of the Cherokees and rather removed from involvement with white society, by 1815 this situation had radically changed. He had parted with the Indians and was actively reinvolved in white society; he would, by 1819, begin a political career in Tennessee that would culminate in his being elected governor in 1827. This 1815-1827 period in Houston's life, an almost total reversal of his 1809-1812 sojourn among the Indians, can be readily explained in terms of his emerging personal conflict.

By the mid-1820s, Sam Houston had found a new source of personal stability within Anglo-American society. As a result of his participation in the War of 1812, Houston met Andrew Jackson and within a few years became his political protégé. For Houston, Andrew Jackson and the United States became those needed points of stability in his life—Houston attached himself to Jackson emotionally and politically while at the same time he developed an ardent nationalism and a desire for success within white American society. These newly-developed characteristics stood side by side with his long-standing personal instabilities.

Houston enlisted in the American war effort in March 1813, when he joined the regular Thirty-Ninth Regiment in which a contingent of Oolooteka's warriors served as scouts. Within a few months Private Houston became an ensign, a rank equivalent to a third lieutenant. Houston's relationship with Jackson began as a direct result of the crucial Battle of Tohopeka (Horseshoe Bend) in March 1814. During that hotly-contested, all-day battle in what is now Alabama against the Creek Indian allies of the British, Sam Houston was "sorely wounded" in the thigh and arm by an arrow and rifle balls. Apparently, he collapsed from shock and loss of blood, and was carried back to camp where his companions feared for his life.[31]

This action made a deep impression on the young ensign. Only semi-conscious for several days, as he recovered over a six month period, Houston seems to have experienced a sense of "rebirth." In his mind, it was a rebirth which came as much from the new relationship that he had formed with his commanding general as from his own physical recovery. Old Hickory had taken note of his bravery during the battle, and as Houston's 1846 biography notes, it "secured for him the lasting regard of General Jackson whose sympathies followed him through all his fortunes." In one of his earliest extant documents, in 1816, Houston underscored the importance of the battle

[30]James, 22-23.

[31]James, 30; Lester, *Houston and His Republic*, 17-23; Friend, 6; Houston to John Rhea, March 11, 1815, *Writings*, 1:2.

in his life by noting that his military rank had been "purchased with my Blood" under the eye of Andrew Jackson.[32]

Sam Houston's lifetime adulation of Jackson cannot be overemphasized; a veneration perhaps best summarized by Ashbel Smith as "filial reverence." Such sentimental expressions date from at least 1816, and become abundant by the 1820s when Houston entered state-level politics. The childless Jackson and his wife Rachel had a disposition to adopt able, loyal young men as surrogate sons, and Houston was constantly in their service as one of these adopted children. As subagent among the Cherokees in 1817, in Nashville local politics by 1818, he was always obedient to Jackson's call. By the time Houston became Congressman in 1823, he reveled in his Jacksonian loyalty. As he told one associate in the mid-1820s, "My firm and undeviating attachment to Genl Jackson has caused me all the enemies I have, and I glory in the firmness of my attachment." Houston worked hard to help secure his mentor's election in the 1824 presidential campaign. Incensed at the outcome, the young Congressman immediately took a leading role in the opposition to the new John Quincy Adams administration. Marquis James, a sympathetic Houston biographer, notes that he almost slavishly did Jackson's bidding during these early years.[33]

Sam Houston's feelings toward Andrew Jackson were not unrequited; biographer Llerena Friend points out that young Houston's chief merit in these congressional years was as a skillful influence on Jackson's quick temper. In 1826, for example, Houston successfully counseled moderation to his mentor when responding to a supposed insult passed by Secretary of the Navy Samuel L. Southard. The closeness between Old Hickory and Houston was also evidenced on Christmas Eve of 1828 when the younger man served as chief pallbearer at Rachel's funeral.[34]

In Houston's mind, Jackson's image as his adopted parent was a mixture of God-the-father and the savior, Jesus Christ. During this early period of his public career, Houston was not a particularly religious individual, rarely using Biblical or religious expressions. But, for Andrew Jackson, he made an

[32]Lester, *Houston and His Republic*, 23; Houston to William Crawford, February 16, 1816, *Writings*, 1:6.

[33]Michael P. Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York, 1975), 156-157, 189-190; Ernest C. Shearer, "The Relations of Sam Houston to Andrew Jackson," *Sul Ross State College Bulletin* 43 (September 1, 1963):121-124; "Ashbel Smith's Opinion of Sam Houston," Unpublished Houston Correspondence (transcripts), vol. 11, Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas, Austin; "Concerning Expected Trouble with Felix Grundy," May 27, 1826, *Writings*, 1:63-64; James, 48.

[34]Friend, 15, 19.

exception. Whether in private correspondence, in conversation, or in public speech, Houston adulated his mentor as a supernatural being. Indeed, Sam Houston always compared Jackson to the founding fathers in deified terms, and spoke of the older man's activities in the War of 1812 with reverence.[35] In 1822, Houston noted privately that for Jackson to gain the executive office would be to usher in the "*rule* of Justice and Truth." He explained on several occasions that his service to Jackson was a "sacred duty," and that Jackson was a "Mount Olympus" of the nation who deserved and received his "grateful homage, and devoted prayers." Although Houston was already nineteen when the two men met, he confided that Andrew Jackson had "witnessed my conduct from Boyhood."[36]

Though Jackson seems to have represented God-the-father, he also served as a messiah figure for Sam Houston in these earliest years. Houston anticipated his hero's elevation to the Presidency as "the great day of deliverance." When Jackson became the chief executive Houston wrote him that "I am rejoiced that you have cleaned the stalls of Washington, as well as others: Get rid of the wolves" so that they "can never destroy the *fold*!" He referred to the President as nothing less than an "earthly REDEEMER!!"[37]

Jackson was the one man whom Sam Houston never maligned or spoke of negatively. Houston had installed what Erik H. Erikson has termed a personal "lasting idol." This could well be seen as a continuation of a pattern first established with Oolooteka during his mid-adolescence.[38]

Moreover, Houston began to develop his devout nationalism as a result of his activity in the War of 1812, and simultaneous to his emerging relationship with Andrew Jackson. All the available documents substantiate a connection between his participation in the war, Jackson, and his embracing the New Nation. According to the 1846 biography, as Houston recovered from his wounds he began to be classifed as a "true friend to his country." His earliest correspondence also links his commitment to the American republic to the fact that he had "fought and bled for [his] country" under Andrew Jackson. With the War of 1812, the nation truly began to mean something to Sam Houston on a visceral level.[39]

[35]Houston to Andrew Jackson, January 5, 1827, *Writings*, 1:70.

[36]Houston to Andrew Jackson, January 13, 1822, and January 13, 1827, *Writings*, 1:13, 71; "On the Publishers of the Laws," February 16, 1827, *ibid.*, 1:104-105; Houston to Andrew Jackson, May 11, 1829, and January 4, 1838, *ibid.*, 1:132, 2:178.

[37]Houston to Andrew Jackson, January 5, 1827, and September 19, 1829, *Writings*, 1:70, 141; Houston to the Arkansas *Gazette*, September 8, 1830, *ibid.*, 1:177.

[38]Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York, 1963), 261.

[39]Lester, *Houston and His Republic*, 38; Houston to Joseph Anderson, March 1, 1815, *Writings*, 1:2-3; Houston to John Rhea of same date, *ibid.*, 1:1.

As Houston became involved in public life after the war, he revealingly spoke of the United States as "the great Republican family." This new arena and source of identity notwithstanding, he did not forsake the Cherokees. Indeed, his first assignment for Andrew Jackson allowed Houston to serve both loyalties. As subagent to the Cherokees from October 1817 to March of the following year, Lieutenant Houston implemented treaty stipulations for their removal westward. He no doubt saw Indian removal as a positive resolution for all concerned. It would, on the one hand, fulfill Jackson's desire for western expansion. But it would also prevent their cultural and physical extinction in the face of the white onslaught.[40]

According to Jack Gregory and Rennard Strickland, Subagent Houston worked mightily so that the removal in which he was involved was not the trail of tears that came in the 1830s. This early Cherokee removal project was well-managed. Houston ensured that Oolooteka and his clan were amply provisioned and armed, and provided with the best transportation available so that little suffering resulted for this small group. Altogether, Sam Houston served his first surrogate family well.[41]

Tellingly, however, the third factor in Houston's becoming subagent in 1817 was his new success orientation. After the War of 1812, not only did he possess the dual Cherokee-white loyalties, but he evidenced a distinct success ethic. In this post-war period, documents reveal Houston as an individual acutely eager for gain, rank, and prestige. As subagent he held his first position through which he could rise in the white world, and all indications are that he was very concerned with promotion and merit, and anxious to gain favor with his superiors.[42]

His activity as Indian agent did assist him in his pursuit of success when he finally moved to Nashville and entered the law profession in 1818. In this respect, Houston was again typical of a number of antebellum politicians in the West who launched their careers by assisting Indian removal. Houston's ability to "handle Indians," albeit humanely, served his career as well as it did the careers of Andrew Jackson or William Henry Harrison.[43]

The important issue here, however, is that as early as the immediate

[40]"Houston's Inaugural Address," October 22, 1836, *Writings*, 1:451; Friend, 8; Houston to Major General Jackson, December 18, 1817, Andrew Jackson Houston Collection.

[41]Gregory and Strickland, 19-20.

[42]Houston to John Rhea, March 1, 1815, *Writings*, 1:1-2; Houston to Joseph Anderson of same date, *ibid.*, 1:2-3; Houston to James Monroe of same date, *ibid.*, 1:3-4; Andrew Jackson to George Graham, January 12, 1817, Unpublished Houston Correspondence, vol. 1.

[43]Ronald N. Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1975), 9-10, 53, 112, 156.

post-War of 1812 period, the future and nature of Sam Houston were firmly established; it was a mold from which he would not break for the rest of his life. He was a staunch nationalist craving personal success. He entered white society closely linked to Andrew Jackson, and helped to promote westward expansion so that Jacksonian America could stand "preeminent amongst the nations of the earth" as the "pinnacle" that was both "desirable and enviable" in the eyes of mankind.[44] His new, interrelated loyalties supplemented his long-standing affections for his surrogate Indian family which he helped to remove. Sam Houston, as subagent and soon as rising politico in Nashville, had reached maturity with a compulsive desire to incorporate two key elements—stability and unbridled mobility—in his life: concurrent desires that would motivate and plague him forever after.

Securely established within the Tennessee political elite, Houston rose rapidly from a lower-level county official to the governorship. He was an able young man with an extremely notable physical presence, who shrewdly courted and gained recognition from others. Though at times impetuous, he was a perceptive individual with an "intimate knowledge of men" that served him well.[45]

Although totally involved in Tennessee society, Governor Houston suddenly resigned his position in April 1829, rejected white civilization, and fled to the Cherokees in the Arkansas Territory. Indeed, these actions would eventually carry him to Texas in 1832. While his separation from his wife of three months seems to have been the precipitating event, his behavior in 1829 was rooted in personal instabilities complicated by the uncertainties of his success-oriented world. The basic antagonism between Houston's dual longing proved fundamentally unsettling so that he rejected white society and once again embraced that of the Cherokees to reestablish personal harmony.

Although little is actually known about the episode, on January 22, 1829, the thirty-six-year-old Governor married an eighteen-year-old Alabamian, Eliza Allen of Gallatin. After a short wedding trip they settled in Nashville where, on January 30, he announced his candidacy for a second term as governor. Within three months, however, he and his young bride suddenly separated; she returned to her parents' plantation; he, without lengthy explanation, resigned his office on April 26, and fled westward to the new territory of Oolooteka and the Cherokees.

This dramatic action testified to the genuineness of Houston's trauma. As

[44]"Speech on the Congress of Panama," February 2, 1826, *Writings*, 1:37.

[45]*Alabama State Review*, September 17, 1845, quoted in *Writings*, 6:14n.

Jackson's protégé, he may well have relinquished a bid for the United States Presidency by his decision. But he was a self-described "ruined man" on his way to exile having been "overwhelmed by sudden calamities."[46]

Houston flatly viewed his flight from Nashville as his "abandonment of society," which amounted to a rejection of the white world and an embracing of the Cherokees, almost exactly comparable to his 1809-1812 adolescent sojourn. The 1846 biography notes that Houston "felt like a weary wanderer returned at last to his father's house" where he immediately went into seclusion. For the first six months of his three-year stay with the Indians, Houston apparently resorted to the whiskey bottle, a weakness which earned him the Cherokee name Ootsetee Ardeetahahee, or "Big Drunk."[47]

Suggestively, one of Sam Houston's favorite words in speech and in writing was "tranquility." In this 1829 move west he sought that condition through "an asylum among the Indians." He had once confided to a close friend that such was the only way to find true "solitude." Among the Indians of the West, Houston had noted, was "the situation in which we can best ascertain our own hearts. There we . . . are taught to make inquiry of ourselves."[48]

Once he had returned to the Cherokees, Houston's actions seemed to underscore a rejection of white civilization and a reembracing of Indian society for personal "tranquility." According to Gregory and Strickland, Houston initially had little contact with whites during this "exile," and stayed almost exclusively with the Cherokee group that was dedicated to reestablishing old traditions while rejecting further amalgamation with white culture. During these first six months, Houston likewise harassed Christian missionaries in the vicinity, indicating resentment of white contact. Houston dressed only in Indian style, received Cherokee citizenship, and, though little is known of this particular relationship, took an Indian wife, and with her established residence in a rather comfortable home, known as Wigwam Neosho.[49]

There appears to have been a close association between Houston's adolescent instabilities, his subsequent success orientation in the Tennessee elite, his reaction to the breakup of his marriage, and his resulting attempts at establishing personal "tranquility" in Arkansas Territory. The very similarity

[46]Houston to Andrew Jackson, September 19, 1829, *Writings*, 1:141; "Houston's Separation From His First Wife," Unpublished Houston Correspondence, vol. 11; *Niles' Weekly Register*, May 16, 1829.

[47]Lester, *Houston and His Republic*, 32, 35; Gregory and Strickland, 72, 81; James, 132.

[48]Houston to Joseph McMinn, March 30, 1823, *Writings*, 1:18; Houston to William Hall, December 7, 1830, *ibid.*, 1:190.

[49]Gregory and Strickland, 29-41, 72, 86-88.

of Houston's sudden response to his 1809 situation and his response to the 1829 crisis underscores a relationship between those specific episodes. Both times he "abandoned" the white world for that of Oolooteka's village.

The 1809 and 1829 episodes were ones in which Houston's familial comforts had been destroyed. In 1809, it had involved his father, mother, and siblings, while in 1829, it involved his new bride. Houston may well have tried to use his new wife to reconstruct some sort of family existence. As a young man prior to 1829, Houston seemed to be unable to have lasting relationships with women as he was involved in a succession of what he later termed as "love scrapes." The exact number and nature of these "love scrapes" is unknown, but there is evidence of their regularity dating from 1817 when he broke off an engagement with an unknown woman for uncertain reasons. Such trouble with male-female relationships was not unprecedented among the Houston siblings, as his brother Robert had apparently committed suicide over a love affair gone sour.[50]

Even the circumstances which precipitated the destruction of his 1829 marriage may have resulted from Houston's reservations about women. Little is known regarding the events surrounding the actual breakup because neither party ever publicly divulged specifics. There is some reason to believe, however, that Sam Houston either doubted his wife's sexual virtue and expressed these doubts during the first several nights of their marriage, or doubted that he was the sole male for whom she held affection. Excluding the stories and rumors which appeared in newspapers after the episode, there is but one extant contemporary document which deals with the motives behind the separation. In the document, a letter written by Houston to Eliza's father, he admits that he accused Eliza of infidelity of either affection or through a premarital act.

The near incoherence of this three paragraph letter to John Allen testifies to how distraught Houston was. He spoke of an "unpleasant & unhappy circumstance" that had "just taken place" between the newlyweds that was connected solely with "feelings or opinions in relation to Eliza" that Houston had once held. These feelings had made him "really unhappy" and they were in regard to "her virtue." It is clear that this "unhappy circumstance" involved accusations he levelled at her regarding her past virtue, and he intimated that these accusations had sprung from his own unsubstantiated personal fears. He made it plain to Allen that the entire affair was

[50]James, 37-38; Houston to R. A. Irion, July 1839, Irion and Garrett, 123; Houston to A. M. Hughes, January 22, 1825, *Writings*, 1:24-25; Houston to John H. Houston, April 20, 1825, *ibid.*, 8:1; *Brief Biographical Accounts*, 25.

"unnecessary" and tried to heal the wounds inflicted by his suspicions and accusations.[51]

In the final paragraph Houston added that not only was her past "virtue" one of his reasons for doubt, infidelity of her present affection was another:

> She was cold to me, & I thought did not love me. She owns that such was one cause of my unhappiness. You can judge how unhappy I was to think I was united to a woman that did not love me. This time is now past, & my future happiness can only exist in the assurance that Eliza & myself can be happy & that Mrs. Allen & you can forget the past,—forgive all & find your lost peace & you may rest assured that nothing on my part shall be wanting to restore it. Let me know what is to be done.[52]

What remained "to be done" was that Eliza returned to her family who did not "forgive all." They accepted none of Houston's assurances that he would strive to restore harmony after the "unnecessary" occurrence. The Allens apparently accepted none of Houston's hasty withdrawals, and were extremely hostile to their estranged son-in-law. While Eliza did not conduct herself as a repentant spouse, she did, on the other hand, show lingering affection and concern for her estranged husband. There is even some indication that she would have been open to a reconciliation by the mid-1830s, thus indicating that their separation had been an immature emotional outburst. By then, however, Houston evidenced no disposition to reconcile.[53]

One can speculate that perhaps Houston's less than ideal adolescent years had influenced his marriage. He apparently did not seek comfort from his mother or siblings after his misfortune, because soon after the affair Sam's younger brother William confided to a cousin that his brother had revealed nothing to him and probably never would. An ambivalence toward Elizabeth Paxton could conceivably have promoted a distrust of other women and a general apprehension that led him to feel that Eliza "was cold to me." He would have been very sincere when he stated that "I thought she did not love me." Harboring such mistrust and suspicion, Houston would have been more likely to accuse her of not being "virtuous." He was a tormented person as he wrote his father-in-law that "You can judge how unhappy I was to think I was united to a woman that did not love me." In his anxiety over feeling unloved, a condition that he could have experienced as a rootless adolescent in 1809, he could have overreacted and lashed out with "unnecessary" accusations against Eliza which he obviously withdrew after serious thought. But mistrust

[51]Houston to John Allen, April 9, 1829, *Writings*, 1:130.

[52]*Ibid.*

[53]James, 67-73; John Campbell to Sam Houston, October 6, 1836, Sam Houston Hearne Collection.

of others was apparently a lifelong characteristic of Sam Houston.[54]

In attempting to form a lasting relationship in 1829 through his marriage to Eliza Allen, Houston may well have been trying to make a clean break from the past of unstable "love scrapes" which in turn may have been extensions of troubled feelings toward his mother. Significantly, he had attempted to make Eliza what he termed the new "earthly object" in his life. When this 1829 attempt ended in failure after three months Houston turned to the Cherokees rather than to the bosom of his natural family. The Indians had once served as a center of personal stability by giving him comfort after an earlier uprooting experience. He likewise would return to having "love scrapes" in which, at least in one case, he "gilted" [sic] the woman. His philandering after 1829 apparently included a few raucous escapades in which, as one alienated associate claimed, he had "disgusting sexual intercourse with all colors, black, white, & yellow."[55] Once again, Sam Houston was the Rover.

Evidence likewise indicates that there was a cause-effect relationship between the tensions of his newly-developed success orientation and his 1829 rejection of white society. The demands of Jacksonian society proved fundamentally unsettling, exacerbated the condition he had developed in his earliest years, and formed part of Houston's motives for fleeing to the Cherokees.

The life-style Sam Houston chose when he entered white Jacksonian society after Horseshoe Bend was one which fostered anxiety. It was an era characterized by societal fluidity, rootlessness, and a universal eagerness to achieve. It was an uncertain milieu where men struggled after illusory goals. Tocqueville observed that Americans at this time manifested a common psychology that fostered bitter competition for power, rank, wealth, and honor.[56]

An overview of Houston's 1817-1829 career clearly charts what Tocqueville termed a "bold pursuit of success." He retained the office of subagent for less than a year, during which he journeyed between Tennessee and the national capital several times. In Nashville by mid-1818, he read law, entered the bar, and maintained a legal practice for barely one year before he entered politics and was elected as a County Attorney General. Actively engaged in military

[54]Houston to John Allen, April 9, 1829, *Writings*, 1:30; "Ashbel Smith's Opinion of Sam Houston," Unpublished Houston Correspondence, vol. 11.

[55]William M. Shepherd to Sam Houston, August 19, 1839, Irion Family Papers, Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington; A. Butler to Houston, December 15, 1845, Unpublished Houston Correspondence, vol. 5.

[56]Tocqueville, 2:304; Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford, 1960), 33-56.

SAM HOUSTON

Frontispiece from Charles Edward Lester's *Life of Sam Houston* (1855). Artist Jacob A. Dallas chose to portray Houston wearing a Cherokee robe over his white man's apparel, symbolizing his allegiance to two cultures. The book contains a number of romanticized scenes of Houston's life, drawn by Dallas and engraved by Nathaniel Orr.

politics as well, he was elected a general in the Tennessee Militia by the fall of 1821. As a member of the Jackson Junta, he was a congressman by 1823, and by 1827 governor of the state: Houston was an ambitious character who rose from obscurity to the state's highest office in eight years. To use Tocqueville's metaphor, Sam Houston built many houses, but he never stayed in any of them long enough to put on the roof.

Although successful in his meteoric rise, the early documents indicate that Houston was mindful of the anxieties inherent in his climb. Always preoccupied with his "advancement" and "fortune," Houston yet understood the fickle nature of such endeavor as well as the intensity of the competition between individuals and factions in the political sphere. As he himself expressed it, there were men such as William Carroll and Daniel Graham in Tennessee politics who were "as ferocious as wolves." In confidential letters to an associate in 1823, Houston lamented that Tennessee political society contained men who, though they "smile at me, and seem kind," were like "the rose" with "a thorn under it." Certain men in Nashville politics even wanted to see Houston dead. Indeed, his Tennessee career was a contentious struggle that would have beset the nerves of any man.[57]

Houston juxtaposed life among the Indians and life in middle class white society during these early years. Among the Indians, Houston felt, one "cou'd meditate with good advantage," while amid the "affairs of men," there was "passion" and "prejudice." It is clear that in 1829 he at least momentarily rejected the Jacksonian way of life for one of tranquility and order with Oolooteka. The Indian "home" that he sought in April 1829 was, in his mind, "far away from [the] civilized life." The terms "house" and "home" were always synonymous in Houston's speech and thought with stability and tranquility, and when he returned to the Cherokees he fled to "his father's house" as "a weary wanderer" from the tensions of white society.[58]

By the beginning of 1830, Houston confided that his Indian refuge had worked its magic because his "soul" felt all the "tranquility" that he had desired.[59] Yet Wigwam Neosho was not enough; even as he wrote those words, Houston admitted to another that:

> When I left the world I had persuaded myself that I would lose all care,

[57]Houston to Joseph McMinn, February 15, 1823, *Writings,* 1:17; Houston to Captain Alexander Campbell, April 25, 1815, *ibid.,* 1:5; Paul H. Bergeron, *Antebellum Politics in Tennessee* (Lexington, 1982), 2-4; Houston to Andrew Jackson, December 6, 1818, Andrew Jackson Houston Collection.

[58]Houston to Joseph McMinn, March 30, 1823, *Writings,* 1:18-19; Lester, *Houston and His Republic,* 32-35.

[59]Houston to John Overton, December 28, 1829, *Writings,* 1:144-145.

> about the passing political events, of the world, as well as those of my own country, but it is not so, for as often as I visit Cant. Gibson, where I can obtain News Papers, I find that my interest is rather increased than diminished. It is hard for an old trooper, to forget the *note* of the Bugle.[60]

In this period, just before he came to Texas, Sam Houston evidenced as clearly as ever an internal conflict between his own personal craving for rooted stability and order on the one hand, and a restless, success-oriented instability on the other. Although he did not at all times elucidate its exact nature, the stability that Houston sought had a rather specific meaning. For him, stability seems to have connoted a sense of rootedness and family-like security. The stability he craved was a secure milieu, a condition of order where he could find "repose" and "tranquility." Simultaneously, however, there was at work in Houston that basic instability of an indefinable nature which had manifested itself in a general longing for certain nebulous goals and in a constant restlessness. His primary instability had been further complicated and intensified by his adoption of an acute desire for success. It seems that such a quest represented a specific manifestation of his general longing. He had become what Alexis de Tocqueville identified as a "nervous American" imbued with an anxious driving quality, a character who believed that he was born "to no common destinies." This urgent, worried chase after indefinite success compounded Houston's adolescent sense of instability and worked to undermine his craving for harmony.

Ensconced in Indian territory yet ready to reemerge into the "affairs of men," Houston's mature life demonstrated and would always demonstrate that in most ways he never completely resolved the instability which he acquired as a youth. A basic conflict persisted between his yearning for order and rootedness and an underlying restlessness that was intensified by his Tocquevillian climb. His vague longings, his attempts to rise in status, and his involvement in the white, male, middle-class competitive arena proved antithetical to his hopes for tranquility and harmony. The constant motif of his personality was that his pursuit of these contradictory desires made for intense anxiety.

The energetic and seemingly enigmatic nature of Sam Houston can be understood when one sees that he possessed what appear to be opposite characteristics. He genuinely craved stability, but also intensely desired mobility. The resulting personal, individual conflict manifested itself throughout Houston's life. By 1832, its development had accounted for his adolescent sojourn with the Cherokees and his pro-Indian sentiments. It

[60]Houston to Andrew Jackson, September 19, 1829, *ibid.*, 1:142.

accounted for his close relationship with Andrew Jackson. Likewise, his two fundamental cravings do much to explain his ardent nationalism, the dissolution of his first marriage in 1829 and his second exile among the Indians.

In Sam Houston were evidenced fundamental dimensions of the "representative" Jacksonian personality which are best outlined by historian Marvin Meyers. Meyers draws heavily from Tocqueville but develops his portrayal more fully. With few modifications, Meyers could have cited Houston as an example of what he calls the "venturous conservative," a title which synthesizes the apparently antithetical elements of the "typical" Jacksonian. In Tocqueville's words, they were men who "love change" but "dread revolutions." They were individuals in constant motion but whose minds seemed unmovable in their adherence to their old principles. Sam Houston's allegiance to Jacksonian nationalism, even in the darkest period of his second Indian exile, remained steadfast and continual over the course of a lifetime of agitated motion. His politics and world view, firmly developed by the early 1830s, showed little alteration thereafter. Houston, the quintessential Jacksonian—groomed politically by the sage of the Hermitage and committed to equality—was set in his Democratic beliefs.[61]

Yet, Houston personified the other side of the venturous conservative as well. He was a spirit who clutched everything, held nothing fast, and loosened his grasp to pursue new horizons. He was the kind of man who rushed forward "to secure [the] immense booty" that fortune and "a boundless continent" offered. Houston, amid the perceived equality of condition in the American setting, was filled with restlessness and an insatiable, enterprising nature. He was Tocqueville's archetype—an aggressive capitalist dealing in Western lands who sought land not to settle and cultivate so much as to settle, improve, divide, and sell.[62]

Concurrently in Houston's nature, as with the character of every venturous conservative, was the desire to preserve order. He wanted no commotion that would imperil his property or position. In the case of Sam Houston, his wish to perpetuate Andrew Jackson's Republic as the repository of all human happiness best expressed this desire. It represented a psychic security, the protector of property and the individual's freedom to pursue private gain.

Meyers could well be describing Sam Houston when he summarizes that the American of that period "was involved in the continuous re-creation of his social world, the continuous relocation of his place within it," and was an "anxious witness of his own audacity." Such is a fitting commentary on

[61]Meyers, 33-56.

[62]*Ibid.*, 44.

Houston's 1832-1846 career in Texas. The Jacksonian became by turns involved in renewed, frenzied activity and attached to order, property, and always holding firm to the Jacksonian appeal and belief: "to hard money, personal enterprise and credit, rural simplicity, and, broadly, to the pristine values of the Old Republic."[63]

In Jacksonian Democracy Meyers locates two simultaneous tendencies at work and in conflict—a desire to retain the Old Republican yeoman virtues and a yearning for progress and the bringing about of unalterable change in his surroundings. An understanding of Sam Houston not only amplifies Meyers's portrayal with detail, but suggests the more fundamental springs of this duality in Houston's twin longings during adolescence and young adulthood. The resulting inner conflicts between grasping after ill-defined objectives and a craving for order amounted to a condition of neurosis which manifested itself in anxiety and spurred men like Sam Houston to compulsive activity.

Houston's internal conflict motivated his reemergence into active life and carried him to Texas by December 1832. His move to Texas was the culmination of his three year residence among the Cherokees during which, gradually, his desire for success reasserted itself, undermining what personal stability he had found at Wigwam Neosho. It would whirl him across the vast extent of the United States between Indian territory and the major American cities of the East from late 1830 to 1832. Indeed, it was during the latter stages of Houston's agitated emergence into public life that he crossed the path of Alexis de Tocqueville. Tocqueville and his companion, Gustave de Beaumont, encountered Houston in late December 1831 on their trip down the Mississippi River. The eager exile was on his way to Washington, D.C., having left the Indians to plunge himself back "into the vortex of politics." No longer content with the tranquility of inaction, Sam Houston could not remain sedentary. Much like a coiled spring, "everything in his person," Tocqueville noted, "indicates physical and moral energy."[64]

Houston had vainly attempted to become prominent in Indian politics and then futilely endeavored to return to the Tennessee political arena. He likewise contemplated visiting the Oregon country. Finally, he sought Texas as the most proximate region for his renewed desire for public activity. On the eve of his relocation to Texas he had a vision of what he wanted Texas to be. In his mind, Texas would be a place where he would find stability through the extension of Andrew Jackson's Republic as well as a place where his Cherokee

[63]Meyers, 56.
[64]Friend, 28-34; Pierson, 611.

cohorts might ultimately find refuge. On the other hand, Texas would be a place where he hoped personally to rise economically and politically. To a large degree Texas became Sam Houston's panacea. It was, as he described to an associate just prior to his crossing the Red River, "the *land of promise.*" There he would try again to find happiness by fulfilling his twin needs, stability and success.[65]

The lesson of Sam Houston's life was that he was never successful in his "bootless chase of that complete felicity" which had escaped him in Tennessee and in Arkansas. As fundamental as he was in establishing and maintaining the Texas Republic after the separation from Mexico, Sam Houston remained an unsettled personality, representative of the expansive Texan society that emerged after 1836. Perhaps the further irony of Houston's life was that the intrinsically tumultuous nature of his personality was also manifested in the societal nature of the Republic, and this condition in itself helped to perpetuate his constant state of agitation.

Anxiety was to be Houston's lot in Texas in almost all circumstances, largely because of conditions created by men with whom he psychically held so much in common. During the Revolution itself, his correspondence reveals a man in deep despair, not only because his personal endeavors soon set themselves at odds with his yearning for tranquility, but also because of repeated insubordination from impetuous, wayward men such as James Walker Fannin, Dr. James Grant, and William Barrett Travis who headed small commands, as well as the near mutiny among his own officers who all but forced him to engage a seemingly invincible enemy at San Jacinto. The birth of an independent Texas found Sam Houston characteristically admitting that "[n]o language can express my anguish of soul." He was then, as always, a man beset.[66]

Houston's frustrations continued with little respite during the days of the Republic. For ten years he was not able to annex Texas to the United States, which represented a visceral longing. Neither could he introduce his Indian cohorts into Texas for whatever personal satisfaction he could derive from their presence. Indeed, he found it impossible even to protect from his fellow citizens those Indian friends, such as Chief Bowles, who had already settled in

[65]Houston to James Prentiss, May 1, 1832, *Writings*, 1:204; Thomas H. Kreneck, "Sam Houston's Quest for Personal Harmony: An Interpretation" (Ph.D. diss., Bowling Green State University, 1981), 95-107.
[66]Houston to Henry Smith, January 6, 1836, *Writings*, 1:332-333; Houston to James Collinsworth, March 13, 1836, *ibid.*, 1:367-369; Houston to J. W. Fannin, March 11, 1836, *ibid.*, 1:364-365; Houston to Thomas J. Rusk, March 23, 1836, *ibid.*, 1:380-382.

the Lone Star Republic. Regardless of which of the many crises one chooses to examine during Houston's two presidencies, at the root of each trouble spot, Houston realized, was a characteristic that had dogged his life always; that is, that his new region had within its grandiose limits an unsettled, mobile, and grasping population not only full of outright lawless elements but also comprised of "men of enterprise, of daring, of rude and rough character" who "have not the restraints of society upon them." In 1837, he confided most poignantly to Albert Sidney Johnston that at the basis of the difficulties in Texas was the "impetuousity and want of order" in the American character itself. Likewise, in a candid letter in 1843 Houston noted that societal harmony was precluded because "Americans are as little disposed to be controlled by the mere force of law as any people on the face of the globe." Altogether, they made his position in Texas affairs, during this important era, what he described as a "pillow of thorns." One cannot read the original documents of the period of the Republic without being struck by its rancorous nature. Houston quickly discovered that there were unfortunate similarities between his experiences in Tennessee and Texas.[67]

Until his marriage to Margaret Lea in 1840, Sam Houston's response to his condition was excessive drinking. He was a legendary drunkard. His fellow Tocquevillian characters, those transplanted Americans who pursued their own individual illusions to Texas and who contended with the harsh Texas environment and physical sufferings responded in ways that ranged from alcohol, to fits of "melancholia," to violence and suicide. Most of them had undergone experiences of the westward movement between the late eighteenth century and the 1830s not unlike Houston's. Perhaps their own personal turmoil, "springs of action" similar to those of Sam Houston, had carried them to Texas as well.

[67]"A Lecture on Trials and Dangers of Frontier Life," January 28, 1851, *Writings*, 5:278; Houston to General Andrew Jackson, August 11, 1838, *ibid.*, 2:271; Houston to Pierce Butler, March 29, 1843, *ibid.*, 4:178; *Houston Telegraph and Texas Register*, December 12, 1838.