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## WILLIAM POPE DUVAL: AN EXTRAORDINARY FOLKLORIST

by FRANK L. SNYDER

WILLIAM POPE DUVAL, who served four terms as territorial governor of Florida, was a natural storyteller.<sup>1</sup> His tales were crafted and fabricated with so much skill that his listeners believed every word as the absolute truth. DuVal never hesitated to shade the truth or to embellish his stories so that they became fictionalized accounts bordering on the fringes of reality. He wove a web of drama as he spoke and completely captured the attention of his audience. The stations in life they, the members of his audience, occupied did not matter—raw frontiersmen, uneducated workingmen, intellectuals, literary geniuses, or sophisticated former royalty.

Governor DuVal was a jovial and convivial companion, fond of good eating and drinking. His home was the social center of Tallahassee where he welcomed guests, friends, and political adversaries alike.<sup>2</sup> Many of the stories told at social gatherings there became legendary. Ralph Waldo Emerson described Governor DuVal, in terms of Tallahassee society, as “the button on which all things are hung.” At the time, the infant settlement’s social scene could boast the presence of only eight women. It was a rugged frontier society, described by the poet as conform-

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1. William Pope DuVal was born in 1784 in Virginia; migrated to Kentucky in 1800; became a member of the Bardstown bar in 1804; served as a captain in the Kentucky Mounted Rangers in the War of 1812; was elected a member of the United States House of Representatives in the 13th Congress; was appointed territorial judge of East Florida in 1821; and subsequently the following year, after Andrew Jackson resigned as the governor of the Floridas, became territorial governor by appointment of President James Monroe. Upon the expiration of his first term as governor, he was reappointed for two additional terms by President John Quincy Adams. President Andrew Jackson appointed Governor DuVal to his last term of office.
2. Ellen Call Long, *Florida Breezes; or, Florida, New and Old* (Jacksonville, 1883; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1962), 109-16.

ing to “club law and little else” and populated by “public officers, land speculators, and desperadoes.”<sup>3</sup>

Governor DuVal’s social charms included an ability to entertain his guests in song and story— a talent for which he had developed an earlier reputation in Kentucky. He had a melodious tenor voice, and his drinking companions and friends enjoyed his singing of ballads and popular songs. DuVal’s talent as a raconteur captivated his family as well. His son, John Crittenden DuVal, left an account of his father’s storytelling that he experienced while traveling on a stage coach with him.

Governor DuVal had but few equals in the art of story telling. . . . [He] even could tell a “twice told tale,” in such a way as to rivet the attention of his audience more by the manner than anything humorous in the story itself. I fully appreciate[d] his talent for “story telling,” when some years ago I traveled with him from Tallahassee to Richmond, Virginia. It was before the days of Rail Roads, when most of traveling was in Stage Coaches. Whenever one stopped, if it was only for a change of horses, the Governor would invariably get out and in a few minutes, every man, woman and child on the premises, would be gathered about him listening eagerly to his yarns, and when the driver “blew his horn,” they would follow him to the stage, and gaze after him when it drove off, as much to say, “Well! Who in the Devil are you anyhow?” On one occasion I remember that the horn blew just as the Governor was in the middle of an interesting yarn. The crowd followed him to the Stage, and actually compelled the driver to hold on until his story was finished, when they gave a “hurra” and we went off with a grand flourish.<sup>4</sup>

The biographer of Ben Hardin, who practiced law with DuVal in Kentucky before the governor settled in Florida, wrote a similar account.

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3. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson with Annotations*, 10 vols., ed. by Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (Boston, 1909-1914), II, 161.
  4. Call Papers, box 4, 1801-1911, Addenda, 267-69, Florida Historical Society Library, University of South Florida, Tampa.

Governor DuVal was, as already intimated, a fascinating and fluent talker. One informant relates that whenever or wherever he stopped, on the street or elsewhere, a crowd gathered to listen. During his residence in Florida he was accustomed to send to his old Nelson [County, Kentucky] friends graphic accounts of his residence in the land of flowers, and of the Indian hostilities then pending. Another venerable gentleman thus speaks of him: "I knew Governor DuVal and saw him frequently at Hartford. I never knew a more charming conversationalist. It is impossible to exaggerate his powers in this respect. If he emerged from his lodgings the public seemed to have its eye upon him. The moment he paused an admiring company would gather around. He did all the talking, and his hearers never wearied."<sup>5</sup>

DuVal was born into an aristocratic Virginian family. His father, Major William DuVal, was a Revolutionary soldier, practicing attorney, active politician in Richmond, and friend of Thomas Jefferson and George Wythe. William Pope DuVal bridged the gap between the common man and his aristocratic upbringing. In fact, many of Governor DuVal's stories emphasize his frontier life and belong to the genre of American folklore popularized by the yarns of Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett.

Prince Achilles Murat, the son of Napoleon's brilliant cavalry leader, Joachim Murat, provided a description of Governor DuVal in a letter written to a European friend.

What would you say if you saw a man wearing a tattered straw hat, deerskin trousers, blue stockings, shoes covered with mud, riding a raw-boned horse, arriving to consult another man dressed in much the same way about a treaty with the Indians?

One account based upon the letter added,

"As it was invariably too late for the Governor to return fifteen miles to the Executive 'Mansion'— also made of

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5. Lucius P. Little, *Ben Hardin: His Times and Contemporaries, with Selections from His Speeches* (Louisville, 1887), 193.

logs— DuVal curled up in a blanket on the floor, Indian fashion, and went to sleep. The Chief Executive was an ‘excellent man’; he had the ‘prettiest daughter and the best applejack in the whole countryside’.<sup>6</sup>

Murat was a favorite friend of DuVal’s, and they shared many a meal and bottle together. Murat fascinated the governor who, in turn, enjoyed the company of the prince and found him a source of anecdotal material. On one occasion, DuVal, while visiting Murat, asked the prince if he had found much game lately. “No,” answered Murat, “I not much understan’ the hunt— bote my people sometime kill ze big bird— how you call heem— fly so,” imitating with his arms the slow wheeling motion of a turkey buzzard. “Turkey Buzzard, I reckon,” answered the governor. “Yaas, Turkey Boozard. I roast heem, I fry heem, I stew heem, bote by Gar, soir, he ees not good.”<sup>7</sup>

Often in the early territorial period there were times when food was a precious commodity. Fortunately Florida abounded with game, and pioneers were able to supplement their food supply by trading with the Indians and hunting. A contemporary of DuVal’s recorded this humorous incident as an example of the governor’s storytelling ability.

As Prince Murat was a genuine off shoot of Royalty, and one of the first settlers in middle Florida, where he was well known for his accentricities [ *sic* ] and peculiarities, I will venture to relate the following account given by Governor DuVal of a “State Dinner” to which he was invited by the Prince. . . .

At one time not long after the first settlement at Tallahassee, when supplies ran very low and it was very difficult to get anything to eat, and when one morning I was trying to solve the problem, a negro man rode up to my “quarters” and handed me a note. It proved to be an invitation from the Prince, requesting the pleasure of my company to dinner that day, at his Plantation sixteen miles away.

I was well aware of the Prince’s indiscriminate taste in regard to eatables, consequently I had some doubts as to

6. A. J. Hanna, *A Prince in Their Midst* (Norman, OK, 1947), 112.

7. Ellen Call Long, “Sketches of Well-Known Floridians,” mss. in Call Papers.

the character of the dinner to which I was invited, but I was very hungry, so I accepted the invitation, mounted my horse at once and started for the Prince's plantation, to get my dinner. I was welcomed by the Prince, with the genial self-satisfied air of a host who knows he has a good dinner prepared for his guests, and in a little while to my great satisfaction (for my appetite was sharpened by my ride), dinner was announced. The Prince led the way to the dining room, and on entering it, I saw a table handsomely laid out with silver and gold plate, and in the center of it three covered dishes. Seated, the Prince proceeded to uncover one of these dishes, which disclosed to view a large owl baked, with his head on, from which the big round eyes were staring without a sign of speculation in them.

"Let me help you, Governair, to a piece of ze fowl; what part you will take, eh?"

"Any part" I replied, "except the head— I don't fancy the stony stare of those big eyes."

"All right" (with a grand flourish of the carving knife and fork) "den I geef you my favorite piece," and the Prince made an attempt to sever a leg from the carcass, but the tough hide and legatures [ sic ] defied the steel and after many fruitless efforts he was compelled to admit that he was worsted, and shoved the dish to one side, saying apologetically, "He was not quite ripe, bote in a few days ze gout and den hees leg come quick."

The next dish the Prince uncovered was filled with fried frog stools.

"You like a ze musherroom?"

"Well! I can't say, as I have never eaten any, but I will try a few anyhow," I replied, so he scooped a half dozen into a plate, which he handed to me; but I found them as lively and active as india rubber balls, so that they bounced out of my plate before I succeeded in gigging one of them with my fork.

Finally one got jammed in the crevice of the rough pine table, and while in that helpless condition I managed to impale it with my fork and conveyed it quickly to my mouth. The miserable fungus tasted well enough, but that it crackled between my teeth like a caoutchouc, and the more I chewed it the bigger it got, until at last I could

neither swallow it nor spit it out; and finally I was compelled to prize it out of my mouth by inserting my forefinger behind it, from which it flew like a wad out of a pop gun, and stuck to the wall on the opposite side of the room. All this time the Prince had been struggling himself with a fried frog stool, but he too finally gave up, saying "Ze Musheroom like ze fowl" (without the "f") "was not yet ripe—bettair lucke, next time."

Uncovering the third dish, he said "It contains le piece de resistance" and I thought it would have been appropriate to have applied this to the fowl and also to the mushroom.

I was trembling in my boots for fear the last chance for dinner would prove no better than the first, but as Murat lifted the cover, a most appetizing odor saluted us, and I was hopeful.

The Prince confessed to have been "marking" a large herd of cattle and hogs, and the stew before us was composed of the "over bits" and "undercrops" that had been cut from their ears. On that dish I made a most satisfactory dinner.<sup>8</sup>

Washington Irving was introduced to DuVal by a member of Congress from Kentucky. The writer became enamored of the governor's tales and, in 1833, traveled to Philadelphia to meet with him.<sup>9</sup> There, Irving recorded several of DuVal's stories and, seven years later, published three of them.<sup>10</sup> Irving wrote a fourth story, currently unpublished, covering DuVal's experiences as a captain in the Kentucky mounted volunteers

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8. Ibid.

9. William P. DuVal and Charles Anderson Wickliffe, a United States representative from Kentucky, related to Irving some of DuVal's stories. Mattingly Spaulding, *Biography of a Kentucky Town: An Historical, Cultural and Literary Study of Bardstown* (Baltimore, 1942), 72; Pierre M. Irving, *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving*, 3 vols. (New York, 1857), II, 265. Philadelphia is mentioned as the location of their meeting and the year 1833 is provided by Stanley T. Williams, *The Life of Washington Irving*, 2 vols. (New York, 1935), II, 324.

10. Irving's first publication of "The Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood" was in *Knickerbocker* 16 (August 1840), 152-65, and (September 1840), 258-66. See also Irving, "The Seminoles," *Knickerbocker* 16 (October 1840), 339-47; William R. Langfeld and Philip C. Blackburn, *Washington Irving, A Bibliography* (New York, 1933), 57-58.

on the Indian frontier during the War of 1812.<sup>11</sup> He gave DuVal credit for the stories with a footnote documenting his source of material and acknowledged DuVal as the “real personage” represented in the story as Ralph Ringwood.<sup>12</sup>

The first and longest story Irving used based upon DuVal’s yarns was titled, “The Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood. Noted down from His Conversations: by Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.” In Irving’s account DuVal became disenchanted with his father in Virginia. His uncle punished DuVal severely for a boyhood prank that unnerved a kitchen servant in his father’s household. Young DuVal, about sixteen years of age, proposed to go to Kentucky to become a hunter. His father agreed but denied him a horse or a servant, although he gave him a purse of money. DuVal started walking and, after many adventures, arrived in Kentucky. There he became a hunter, sharing his solitary life with various frontiersmen who taught him how to survive in the wilderness. After several years DuVal realized hunting had an uncertain future. He turned reluctantly to the study of law and had a romantic experience with the girl he eventually married. He became one of the state’s successful practicing attorneys.<sup>13</sup>

This story became a legend in its time and remains one today— if one uses the definition of a legend to be “a story or narrative, set in the recent or historical past, that is believed to be true by those by whom and to whom it is communicated.”<sup>14</sup> Biographers and historians read the story of Ringwood and used it as a biographical sketch of DuVal’s early beginnings without questioning its authenticity.<sup>15</sup> Some literary critics, however,

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11. Washington Irving’s autograph, “Relief of Fort Harrison,” HM 31501, 1-66, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
  12. In 1824 while in England, Washington Irving at dinner one evening heard a story of an “old curmudgeon of the name of Tunk who lived at Ringwood.” Stanley T. Williams suggests this village’s name was used in Irving’s later sketch, “The Experiences of Ralph Ringwood.” Stanley T. Williams, ed., *Journal of Washington Irving (1823-1824)* (Cambridge, MA, 1931; reprint ed., New York, 1968), 201.
  13. Irving, “Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood,” 152-65, 258-66.
  14. Robert A. Georges, “The General Concept of Legend,” in Wayland D. Hand, ed., *American Folk Legend: A Symposium* (Berkeley, 1971), 5.
  15. Among the biographers and historians who have accepted as factual Irving’s heroic legend concerning Governor DuVal’s Kentucky immigration are: Charles Linman, *Biographical Annals of Civil Government of the United States* (Washington, DC, 1876), 130; Roland H. Rerick, *Memoirs of Florida*, 2 vols. (Atlanta, 1902), I, 148; Caroline Mays Brevard, *A History of Florida*:



have questioned the validity of Irving's statement that he had "given some anecdotes of his [DuVal's] early and eccentric career, in, as nearly as I can recollect, the very words in which he related them."<sup>16</sup>

In 1855, fifteen years after its first publication, the Ringwood story was reissued. The previous year, DuVal had died in Washington, DC, and Irving corrected his footnote to attribute his source as "the late Governor DuVal of Florida."<sup>17</sup> Although Irving had the opportunity to make other changes in his documentation, he continued to assert that the story was in the "very words" of the governor "as nearly as I can recollect." Irving did provide further light on the origin of the material. "They certainly afford strong temptations to embellishments of fiction," he wrote, "but I thought them so strikingly characteristic of the individual and of the scenes and society into which his peculiar humors carried him, that I preferred giving them in their original simplicity."<sup>18</sup> Washington Irving, a master storyteller of renown, recognized in William Pope DuVal a kindred soul and a skillful craftsman of the folklore of his day.

The Ringwood story already had been embellished, modified, and amplified by DuVal before Irving first heard it. The governor had spent thirty years elaborating and developing several different versions of his early migration to Kentucky from Virginia. Each of his versions was plausible and reminiscent of popular frontier heroic folklore about such notables as John Smith, George Washington, Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, and

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*From the Treaty of 1763 to Our Own Times*, 2 vols. (Deland, 1924), I, 73; W. T. Cash, "William Pope Duval," *Tallahassee Historical Society Annual* (February 1934), 9-13; *Biographical Directory of the American Congress: 1774-1961* (Washington, DC, 1961), 839; *Pensacola Gazette*, May 13, 1848.

16. Washington Irving, *The Complete Tales of Washington Irving*, edited by Charles Neider (New York, 1975), 732. Neider footnotes Irving's footnote: "We can take with a large grain of salt Irving's disclaimer of fictionalizing here. He would have had to have a phonographic memory to support his assertion that he has produced the very words in which Duval related his experiences. I have removed the awkward quotation marks from the original version. They were not always characteristic of his method.—C.N."
17. Washington Irving, *Wolfert's Roost*, ed. by Roberta Rosenberg (Boston, 1979), 157.
18. Rosenberg states, "The events and situations described in 'Ralph Ringwood' are unembellished because Irving found them, 'so strikingly characteristic of the individual, and of the scenes and society into which his peculiar humors carried him.'" *Ibid.*, xxxii-xxxiii.

James Bowie. DuVal's stories were also in the style of fictional folklore such as Irving's Rip Van Winkle; John Chapman, known as Johnny Appleseed; James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo (or Leather-Stocking or Hawkeye); Herman Melville's Billy Budd and Captain Ahab; and James K. Paulding's stories of the American frontier.

DuVal's son, John Crittenden DuVal, a survivor of the Goliad Massacre, provided yet another account of the governor's migration to Kentucky from Virginia.<sup>19</sup> Colonel DuVal recounted:

I do not remember now whether or not W. Irving in his "Sketch Book" makes any mention of the Governor's abrupt departure from the paternal mansion, and the causes [that] led to it. I will therefore relate the incident, just as I have heard the Governor tell it himself. As I have said, his Father was a very wealthy man for those times, and with his other possessions was the owner of a large number of slaves, but it seems his "boys" were not materially benefited by this for in carrying out his peculiar ideas of "training" he required them to perform the most menial tasks, and as much bodily labor as any negro on the premises.

The Governor could not see the rationale of this, and consequently a coolness grew up between the "Governor" and his Father which finally resulted in open rebellion on the part of the former.

One very cold day when the family, as well as some of the neighbors, were all collected around the fire in the sitting room, the "old man" ordered the "Governor," in a very preemptory manner to go to the woodpile and bring in a "back log" although at that very moment there were three or four strapping negro fellows lounging about the house doing nothing. The Governor rose, as if he intended obeying the order— but his heart was filled with shame and mortification at being compelled to perform such a menial task before visitors and by the time he reached the

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19. William Corner, "John Crittenden DuVal: The Last Survivor of the Goliad Massacre," *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 1 (1898), 47-67; Bardstown (Kentucky) *Herald*, May 12, 1836.

“woodpile” he had made up his mind to desert the paternal mansion, and instead of shouldering the back log he kept straight on and never made a permanent halt until he got to Kentucky where he began life as a ranger and a hunter. Many years afterwards, when he had become a successful lawyer the “Governor” determined to pay his Father a visit. At that time (which was long before the advent of Rail Roads and Steam boats) nearly all travelling was done on horseback and after many days, the Governor dismounted at his father’s gate. Just inside it was the well remembered “woodpile” and as he passed it he shouldered a large “back log” and proceeded to the house. His father and family were sitting around the fire pretty much as they were when he left for Kentucky, without a word of greeting he passed between them, deposited the log on the fire and, turning, said, “There is the ‘back log’ you sent me for.”

“Yes, I see,” said the old man, “and a precious time you have taken to bring it.”<sup>20</sup>

John Crittenden DuVal, a storyteller and author in his own right, may have embellished this legend.<sup>21</sup> Governor DuVal liked people, enjoyed entertaining, and wanted to be the center of attention. He told his stories with the relish of an accomplished storyteller who sometimes considered facts to be superfluous. These legends, Irving’s or John C. DuVal’s, are accepted by most authorities—biographers and historians—as being factual accounts of Governor DuVal’s early beginnings in spite of their being in the romantic, heroic style that characterized the legends of the American frontier. The historical facts are as bizarre as his several recorded legends and were disclosed in an interesting fashion.

Several years ago, in Bardstown, Kentucky, the building housing the nineteenth-century records of Nelson County’s

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20. John Crittenden DuVal was called “The Father of Texas Literature” by the late Professor J. Frank Dobie, a renowned Texas folklorist of the University of Texas. Call Papers, box 4, 1801-1911, Addenda, 345-47; John C. DuVal, *The Adventures of Big Foot Wallace*, edited by Mabel Major and Rebecca W. Smith (Lincoln, NE, 1966), xxx; John Q. Anderson, *John C. Duval: First Texas Man of Letters* (Austin, 1967), 1.
21. John Crittenden DuVal, *The Adventures of Big Foot Wallace: The Texas Ranger and Hunter* (Philadelphia, 1871); John Crittenden DuVal, *Early Times in Texas or the Adventures of Jack Dobell* (Austin, 1892).

clerk of court caught fire. During the later cleaning up process, laborers shoveled partially burnt records out of a second floor window into a dump truck parked in the street. The husband of a prominent city councilwoman and local historical society member happened to pass by. He asked the workers how they intended to dispose of the debris. "We are going to take the load to the land fill," they replied. "Don't do that," he responded, "just take it out to my farm." The man and his wife then sorted out all the salvageable records and dried the watersoaked and charred pieces. Later the wife, with the help of assistants from the local historical society and the county clerk's office, boxed the records and classified a major portion of them.<sup>22</sup> The actual account of William Pope DuVal's early beginnings and his migration from Kentucky to Virginia in the summer of 1800 at sixteen years of age was found by good fortune among those records.<sup>23</sup>

As revealed by the salvaged documents, William's older brother Samuel had migrated to Kentucky prior to the nineteenth century to join relatives who had secured Revolutionary War land grants. Samuel returned to Richmond, Virginia, to obtain financing for a frontier store. His father, who also held Kentucky lands, was the source to whom he turned. An indenture executed between the two men on May 4, 1800, contained the following provisions:

William DuVal lent his son, Samuel Pope DuVal, £700 [about \$3,150] in bond as well as provided security for Samuel in the amount of four thousand dollars. Samuel, provided a mortgage to his father upon 200 acres of land in Kentucky, one house and two city lots in Danville, Kentucky, houses and lots in Town of Harrodsburg, and mortgaged the slaves named, Jacob, Seipis, Cuffee, Isabel, Sally, Betty, Milly, Patty, Iliad, Monah, and a child of

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22. Dixie Hibbs and her husband retrieved and salvaged the burnt Chancery records. They presently are stored in the Nelson County Clerk's Office, Bardstown, Kentucky. Interview with Mary Ellen Moore; Nelson County Historical Society, Bardstown, May 1988.
23. *John Cowan v. William Duvall, heir-at-law of Samuel P. Duval, desc., and William P. Duvall v. William Duvall, heir-at-large of Samuel P. Duval, desc.*, January 1805, Nelson County Circuit Court, Burnt Chancery Cases (hereinafter cited as Chancery Cases).

Isabel's Further, Sam agreed to be a guardian of his younger brother, William Pope DuVal, who was under age, pledging to keep as a trustee £100 [about \$450] of his younger's brother's monies and to add surplus as gained to the monies. The mortgage was to stay in force unless Samuel Pope DuVal paid within 12 months the debt incurred with his father and brother.<sup>24</sup>

Samuel used the bond and his father's securities to purchase goods, medicines, and horses in Richmond for the mercantile business he hoped to establish in Kentucky.

William Pope Duval, however, was a restless and rebellious teenager who practiced pranks such as those described by Irving. Furthermore, he was eager to leave home and start upon his career. Contrary to the legendary tales of Irving and John Crittenden DuVal, though, William's father gave him permission to migrate to Kentucky with his older brother. With the assistance of his father and following his advice, William contracted with his brother Samuel. Three weeks after the father and brother made their agreement, the brothers contracted between themselves as follows:

Samuel agrees to lease from his brother, William, a waggon [ sic ], two horses, and the hire of his brother's slaves, Frank, George, and Charlotte for the amount of £120 [about \$540] to be paid upon arrival at Rough Creek, Kentucky, and to provide food, lodging, at no charge until arrival, and to treat them with humanity. This contract between the brothers was witnessed by the father, Major William DuVal.<sup>25</sup>

Upon arrival in Kentucky, however, Samuel sold the horses, wagon, and slaves belonging to William. He also sold £700 (about \$3,150) of the goods his father had given to William for a small amount of cash and the balance in whiskey.<sup>26</sup> Further, Samuel converted a bond owed to his father in the amount of

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24. Ibid.

25. Agreement between William P. Duval and Samuel P. Duval, May 23, 1800, *John Cowan v. William Duvall*, January 1805, Chancery Cases.

26. William P. DuVal ads John Cowan, answer received November 10, 1805, Chancery Cases.

£195 (about \$875) and sold, in May 1801, 400 acres of his father's lands in Beech Fork, Kentucky. The sale was made without the approval of Major DuVal, and the monies (about \$7,988) were converted to Samuel's own use. Major DuVal wrote a letter of reproof to his elder son, requesting the misapplied proceeds of the sale. Samuel responded by begging his father's forgiveness and mortgaging to his father in October 1802 substantial parcels of Kentucky land. A few months later Samuel died with his affairs left in a tangle of confusion.<sup>27</sup>

These historical facts are greatly at odds with the several different legends William Pope DuVal told about his early beginnings and migration to Kentucky from Virginia. The contradictions in the two different stories told by Governor DuVal were not brought to public notice during his lifetime, nor were the facts of his traveling to Kentucky with his older brother ever used to question the governor's veracity. Typical of other politicians of the day DuVal embellished his account for Washington Irving to establish for himself the romantic frontiersman character so admired by the early American public.

DuVal not only told legendary stories but also created stories of mythology— if one defines a myth as “the poignant sacred stories of primitive peoples.”<sup>28</sup> The most famous myth he related stemmed from his responsibilities as Florida's superintendent of Indian Affairs which, by statute, were assigned as part of the functions of the territorial governor. The dual responsibilities placed an unusually heavy work burden upon DuVal. He necessarily was involved both in organizing and administering the territorial government and also in supervising agents appointed to assist in the execution of the government's Indian policy.

The governor's exertions in meeting the dual responsibilities of his office took a toll upon his health, wealth, and welfare. He finally wrote to President John Q. Adams in 1825, asking for a clerk to assist him with his duties. DuVal pointed out to the president the amount of work, the long hours that often required him to be in his office until after midnight, and the

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27. William DuVal ads John Cowan, answer received September 25, 1805, Chancery Cases; Will Book no. 8, 159, Nelson Circuit Court, Nelson County Clerk of Court Office.

28. Albert B. Friedman, “The Usable Myth: The Legends of Modern Mythmakers,” in *American Folk Legend: A Symposium*, ed. by Wayland D. Hand (Berkeley, 1971), 37.

damage to his vision caused by having to write at night under candlelight. On the president's behalf, though, then Secretary of State Henry Clay denied the request.<sup>29</sup>

DuVal also served as one of three commissioners who in 1823 negotiated with the Seminole Indians the Treaty of Moultrie Creek.<sup>30</sup> One of the treaty's provisions was to "pay \$1000 a year for twenty years to maintain a school on the [new Florida] reservation."<sup>31</sup> The Reverend Horatio N. Gray, an Episcopalian missionary, who arrived in Tallahassee in December 1828, heard about the treaty provision and quickly recognized an opportunity to evangelize converts without the burden of cost to the Episcopal church. Early in April 1829 he conversed with Governor DuVal concerning possible missionary work among the Seminoles and inquired particularly into the treaty provision. Gray wrote a letter on April 21, 1829, recounting the discussion.

I have lately had a conversation with Governor DuVal upon the subject, who informed me that, in a council which they had called for the purpose of debating upon the subject, they declined receiving one, [a missionary] giving as one, among several reasons, that learning had, as far as their observation extended, made those Indians who received it "greater rascals," having enabled them to sign away the lands of the rest without their knowledge or consent. They have also religious scruples about it. They say the Great Spirit intended them for warriors and hunters and give as a proof of that fact a tradition which is current among them.

"The Great Spirit," they say, "first made the black man, but did not like him; He then made the red man; was better pleased with him, but not entirely satisfied; He then made the white man and was very much pleased with him. He then summoned all three in His presence. Near Him were three great boxes, one containing hoes, axes and

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29. William P. DuVal to John Quincy Adams, December 16, 1825, in Clarence E. Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 28 vols. (Washington, DC, 1934-1969), *Florida Territory*, XXIII, 389; Henry Clay to William P. DuVal, January 9, 1826, *ibid.*, 408.
  30. John C. Calhoun to William P. DuVal, August 28, 1822, *Territorial Papers*, XXII, 518; *ibid.*, 747, fn. 54.
  31. John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* (Gainesville, 1967), 47.

other agricultural implements. In another were spears, arrows, tomahawks, etc; and in the third[,] book[s], maps, charts, etc. He called the white man first and bid him choose. He advanced, attentively surveyed each of the boxes, passed by and chose that in which were the books, maps, etc. Then they say the Indian's heart leaped for joy; the red man was next summoned to make his choice. He advanced and, without any hesitation, chose the box containing the war and hunting implements. The other box was, therefore, left for the black man. The destinies of each were thus fixed and it was impossible to change them. They inferred, therefore that learning was for the white man, war and hunting for the Indian and labor for the poor negro."<sup>32</sup>

This myth, as recounted by the Reverend Gray, is strikingly similar to the story published in 1840 by Washington Irving entitled "Origins of the White, the Red, and the Black Man: A Seminole Tradition." Irving attributes his source to Governor DuVal. How much of the myth was told to DuVal by the Seminoles and how much the governor embellished is a matter of conjecture.

Governor DuVal exhibited a sensitivity towards the Indians and considered himself a governor of all the peoples in the Florida Territory. He recognized the distress of the Seminoles and out of his own pocket bought supplies and food for them. After he left office the governor won a lawsuit against the government that allowed him to recoup some of his financial loss.<sup>33</sup> He also repeatedly requested the government to give the Indians better land. The acreage provided them by the treaty was of poor quality, he asserted.<sup>34</sup> One historian made the following assessment of the record of Governor DuVal's administration: "His record for twelve years was one of unselfish devotion to the interests of the people he was chosen to care for, red as well as white, and he seems to have ably met every emergency as it arose. The greatest woes of the young Territory followed the

32. James Jaqueline Daniels, "Historical Sketch of the Church in Florida," *Historical Papers and Journal of Semi-Centennial of the Church*, Appendix B (January 1888), 20-21.

33. Call Papers, box 4, 1801-1911, Addenda, 271.

34. *Territorial Papers*, XXIII, 445.



close of his prudent administration. . . . He knew the Indian, and great evils might have been prevented by the promptness, firmness, fair treatment, and wise display of military strength, which he often took occasion to urge upon the government at Washington."<sup>35</sup>

Beyond his role as creator of legends and myths, DuVal also was thought to be the main character in a play written in 1830 by James Kirke Paulding. The piece was composed for a competition sponsored by James H. Hackett, an actor-producer who offered a prize of \$300 for "an original comedy whereof an American should be the leading character."<sup>36</sup> The play, entitled *The Lion of the West*, was selected as the winner of the competition by a committee of three men including William Cullen Bryant.<sup>37</sup>

Hackett produced the play on April 25, 1831, at the Park Theatre in New York from a script rewritten by John Augustus Stone. This version of *The Lion of the West* ran in Manhattan from the fall of 1831 to the spring of 1833. Then Hackett took the company to London. There an English playwright, William Bayle Bernard, rewrote the play for English audiences and retitled it *The Kentuckian, or a Trip to New York in 1815*. Beginning in March 1833, it ran for several weeks in London, and performances also were given in Edinburgh and Dublin. After Hackett's return to the United States he produced the play for over twenty years, appearing as the leading character, Nimrod Wildfire. American audiences associated Nimrod Wildfire with a characterization of Davy Crockett. Crockett was enamored with the play and, at his request, Hackett performed the role in Washington, DC, with Crockett in a seat of honor.<sup>38</sup>

The association in the public mind of Paulding's character and the living, legendary hero, Davy Crockett created a popular demand for the play. Paulding denied, however, that the role of Nimrod Wildfire was designed with Crockett in mind. He did not disclose, though, if he had any one person in mind as a character type for the part, and the popularity of the play fuel-

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35. Rerick, *Memoirs of Florida*, I, 148.

36. James Kirke Paulding, *The Lion of the West*, revised by John Augustus Stone and William Bernard, ed. by James N. Tidwell, and retitled *The Kentuckian or A Trip to New York* (Stanford, 1954), 8.

37. Amos L. Herold, *James Kirke Paulding: Versatile American* (New York, 1966), 98.

38. Paulding, *The Lion of the West*, 7-9.

led conjecture about the character's model. DuVal fit the likeness of Nimrod Wildfire so well that he often was identified as the model, particularly after the playwright denied a connection between Nimrod and Crockett.<sup>39</sup> The characterization of Wildfire and the image of Governor DuVal are similar. An English critic commented about Wildfire: "His whimsical extravagance of speech arises from a mere exuberance of animal spirits; and his ignorance of the conventional restraints of society he overbalances by a heart that would scorn to do a mean or dishonest action."<sup>40</sup>

William P. DuVal and Davy Crockett both were members of Congress. Wildfire was presented as the same in this bit of dialogue from the play:

- FREEMAN. But before you leave us, you expect to be returned to Congress, Nimrod. What will be your sentiments upon the Tariff question?"
- WILDFIRE. The Tariff? What the cause of this row in south Carolina? Oh, I'm clear for reducing all duties. Only let me gain my election and I'll settle the whole in a single speech.<sup>41</sup>

The "tariff question" deals with the Tariff of 1828, called by Southerners the "tariff of abominations." As a congressman, DuVal coauthored with two of his fellow representatives from Kentucky a twenty-four-page pamphlet written "with a view to our justification for having voted against the passage of the [1813] embargo bill."<sup>42</sup> DuVal's position on the 1813 embargo bill indicates he would have been opposed to the "tariff of abominations" in 1828. Additionally, DuVal accepted and advocated the radical southern political philosophies of his friend John C. Calhoun, who opposed the tariff of 1828.

The play also makes fun of lawyers:

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39. Ibid.

40. Herold, *James Kirke Paulding*, 99.

41. Paulding, *Lion of the West*, 25.

42. Y. Samuel McKee, William P. DuVal, and Thomas Montgomery, *Reflections on the Law of 1813, for laying an Embargo on all Ships and Vessels in The Ports and Harbors of the United States* (n.p., 1814).

- WILDFIRE. Yes, I was chuckle head enough to go down the Mississippi fishing for lawyers one day.
- FREEMAN. Lawyers! I've found them more apt to catch than to be caught.
- WILDFIRE. Why, look here. I call catfish lawyers— 'cause you see they're all head, and they're head all mouth.
- FREEMAN. Well, did they come to your bait, or lawyer-like, were they too deep for you?
- WILDFIRE. Why, I'll tell you. I was fishing for lawyers, and knowing what whappers some um are, I tied my line in a hard knot right around my middle for fear the devils might twitch it out of my hands afore I know's it.
- FREEMAN. A good legal precaution.<sup>43</sup>

Governor DuVal was a member of the bar, but likely would have enjoyed jesting about lawyers.

Whether DuVal and Paulding were acquainted before the play was written is unknown. Paulding was well acquainted with Washington Irving as a result of their English collaboration in the production of *Salmagundi*. The play was written by Paulding, however, before Irving's and DuVal's 1833 meeting in Philadelphia. Nevertheless, some authorities have accepted DuVal as the model for Paulding's Nimrod Wildfire.<sup>44</sup>

Governor DuVal lived in an age when storytelling was the art of conversation. Entertainment in his day did not have the broad range of choices later available, and conversation was an important factor of social intercourse. In the legends of Irving's Ralph Ringwood, John Crittenden DuVal's account of his father's immigration to Kentucky, the anecdotes about Prince Murat, and the Seminole creation myth, the storytelling ability of Governor William Pope DuVal, an extraordinary folklorist, may well be observed.

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43. Paulding, *Lion of the West*, 24.

44. Among the biographers and historians who have accepted DuVal as the model for Paulding's Nimrod are: Rerick, *Memoirs of Florida*, I, 148; Lanman, *Biographical Annals*, 130; *Biographical Directory of the American Congress: 1774-1961*, 839.