

## **GREATER JEFFERSONTOWN**

### **HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER**

June 2015

Vol. 13 Number 3

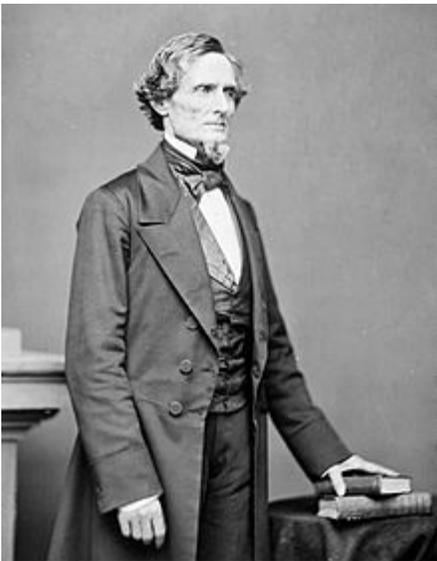
#### **Meeting Day/Date Change**

##### **June 2015 Meeting - At the Conrad-Seaton House – What a Crock!**

The June meeting will be **Monday, June 15, 2015**, and will be hosted by **Corn Island Archaeology at the Conrad-Seaton House**. Anne Bader will be telling us about old crocks and other pottery by potters from this region. Anne is putting together a book about crocks and potters from the area in her spare time. The meeting time will still be 7:00 P.M.

##### **April Meeting**

Mel Arnold presented “Jefferson Davis – Advocate for Union.” Not many realize that the President of the Confederate States of America was a strong advocate of the Union.



If you ask people just who Jefferson Davis was, if they know of him, most will tell you he was President of the Confederacy and some will be able to add he was a bigoted slave owner. But he was much more than that. Some will know he was a Kentuckian. He was influenced by the experiences of his father, Samuel Emery Davis an Augusta, Georgia, land-owning farmer, and Jefferson’s brothers, all of whom fought in the Revolutionary War. His father was a cavalryman who was thrilled with the idea of a strong union of the states and with all the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights. As a result of his war service Samuel Davis was awarded a land grant in what was then Lincoln County

Jefferson was born on June 3, 1808, near what is now Fairview in Todd County, the last of ten Davis children – five boys and five girls. His middle name is Finis, final in Latin. The Davis family wanted no more children. The Davis home and a monolith similar to the Washington Monument are located there. And eight months and a hundred or so miles to the northeast in Kentucky another child was born – Abraham Lincoln.

Samuel was not an educated man but he left three things with his children, the value of education, hard work, and love of the Union. Joseph, the eldest son, was twenty three and was under the tutelage of a Kentucky lawyer when Jefferson was born. Joseph moved to Vicksburg, Mississippi to practice law and became the second greatest influence in Jefferson's life. Joseph created a huge plantation and made a fortune growing cotton. He also created the largest library in Mississippi which was housed in a separate building on the plantation. He willed the library to the state on his death.

Samuel moved his family down to Mississippi to better grow cotton. He was looking for a better school for Jefferson and found Saint Joseph Academy back in Washington County, Kentucky. There was concern, the Davises were not Catholic and Jefferson was younger than the other boys there. He excelled and easily made friends and gained the respect of all his classmates. After a year at St. Joseph Academy Jefferson moved to Transylvania College in Lexington where he studied the Humanities and again excelled and made friends.

In later years, Congressman Joseph F. Jones of Iowa wrote Jefferson's widow. "In October of 1821 I made acquaintance of Jefferson at Transylvania and at that time all the faculty and his fellow students considered Jefferson to be a first scholar, ahead of all his classes, and the bravest and handsomest of all the college boys."

Unfortunately one of Samuel's sons-in-law came into some financial difficulty and Samuel cosigned a mortgage so the son-in-law could continue farming. The son-in-law went into bankruptcy and Samuel lost everything. Jefferson's mother, Jane, had died before all this, so Samuel went to live with the eldest son Joseph. Despondent, Samuel soon died.

Joseph took over directing Jefferson's education. He decided a humanities education was not useful for making a living. Joseph had become very influential in politics in Mississippi and Washington, he had written the Mississippi Constitution, and he gained an appointment for Jefferson to West Point. Jefferson was not that excited but agreed to go.

The high performing student of St. Joseph Academy and Transylvania College became the bad boy of West Point. The curriculum was limited to military strategy and engineering, nothing he was interested in, and the discipline and regulations was strict, and he soon was in all kinds of trouble.

Captain Ethan Hitchcock, the West Point disciplinarian soon realized that Cadet Davis was trouble and he sets his sights on Cadet Davis never graduating. Some of the reasons Cadet Davis received demerits were:

Spitting in public, visiting other rooms during study time, dirty uniforms, inappropriate dress, class absences, messy room, missing chapel, talking during the dining period, even firing his rifle out of his dorm window.

He had three very serious infractions! One occurred following a bivouac. The cadets were called back to school after three days of torrential rain and after taking roll, three cadets were missing - one being Jeff Davis. Captain Hitchcock led a search and found the boys at Benny's Haven, the local tavern. They were all arrested and taken back to West Point for court martial.

By rule, the boys were not allowed any representation, they had to defend themselves. They all claimed that they had been out in the terrible weather for three days and were searching for dry shelter and warmth and just happened to come upon the tavern. Davis added to his argument that they were only drinking stout, a type of ale which was allowed by regulation. Disallowed by regulation was any spirituous drink or wine. Lo and behold Davis was acquitted and the other two cadets were expelled! Captain Hitchcock was very unhappy.

Jefferson's second serious infraction also included Benny's Haven. He and another cadet stole off one evening to the tavern. Supposedly, the other cadet was a fellow named Edgar Allen Poe, who was disgruntled to be at West Point. A customer came in and told the boys that Captain Hitchcock was coming down the road. The boys slipped out the back door and headed back to their quarters through the woods in the dark. West Point is situated on the bluffs above the Hudson River. Davis slipped off a bluff, fell some forty feet, was seriously injured, and ended up in the hospital for three months. For whatever reason, maybe they thought Davis had suffered enough, or whatever, Hitchcock was again not able to expel Davis.

The third incident is in most history accounts of Davis. It is referred to as the Eggnog Riot of Christmas 1826. Apparently the cadets weren't allowed to go home over Christmas and they decided to make grog. Davis started the process and after a while went back to his quarters. Others stayed, started drinking and getting rowdy. Soon someone came to Davis's room saying Captain Hitchcock was on his way to see what all the noise was about. Davis and others ran down to warn the partyers to get out, but Hitchcock had beaten him there. Hitchcock declared that anyone not in the room when he arrived was to leave – Davis was one of those. The other nineteen in the room when Hitchcock arrived were court martialed and expelled. That led to a graduating class for that year of only thirty two cadets. Jefferson Davis rank in that class was twenty third.

Even though West Point was a drudgery for Davis, his brother Joseph would not let him quit. Even though he hated the experience it served him well after graduation. He made friends for life, even some from the North, he learned military tactics and strategy that served him well for advancement, and it steeled his mind and personality, giving him the ability to make decisions later in adverse circumstances.

His first assignment following graduation was to Fort Crawford in the Wisconsin Territory in early 1829. He also spent time at Fort Winnebago in the northern part of the territory. In 1832 Davis was granted his first furlough and returned to Mississippi. When he returned to Fort Crawford, which was under the command of Col. Zachary Taylor, the Black Hawk War was under way.

In 1804 in St. Louis, future president William Henry Harrison negotiated a treaty with two representatives of the Sauk nation and the US government believed it had secured the right to open all Sauk lands east of the Mississippi to settlement for just \$2,500. Sauk chiefs back home in Illinois and Wisconsin, however, believed that the two negotiators had never possessed the authority to speak for the whole nation, so the treaty was invalid and the continued to live on the lands. In 1828 the government began surveying the land to open to settlers and advised the Sauks to move to the lands west of the Mississippi. Most did. However, a group of about 1,000 led by Black Hawk, returned to their village of Saukenuk after their winter hunt in the west in 1829 to find white squatters on their land waiting for it to be opened. Lead mining in the eastern region of Illinois had also bought many settlers in.

Clashes between the groups ensued until the fall of 1829 when the Sauks left for their winter hunt. This went on for two years until 1831 when the U.S. decided to drive the Sauks back across the Mississippi once and for all. In May 1832 an Illinois militia backed up by government troops attacked the group that had now grown to about 1500, mostly women and children. Black Hawk's warriors fought the troops from where the Rock River joins the Mississippi in Illinois, north through Wisconsin up past Ft. Crawford until at the Battle of Bad Axe (River) in August. Black Hawk's band were caught in a cross fire between a gun boat on the river and the troops. Most of the Indians were cut down, many shot while trying to swim across the Mississippi. Only about 150 survived – Black Hawk was one.

Col. Taylor gave the assignment of escorting Black Hawk to prison to Lt. Jefferson Davis. Davis made a great effort to shield Black Hawk from harm and curiosity seekers. In his autobiography Black Hawk wrote that Davis had treated him with much kindness and empathy for the leader's situation as a prisoner.

Davis, for his part, returned the compliment, saying that if there was any hero in the war it was Black Hawk because he was trying to do something for his people.

The Black Hawk War is remembered as the conflict that gave Abraham Lincoln his only military service. He had joined the Illinois militia and had been elected to be the captain of his company. Lincoln was not in any of the battles during the short war.

While at Fort Crawford Davis fell in love with his commanding officer's daughter, Sarah Knox Taylor. She was referred to as Knox at the fort. She got her middle name from the renamed Fort Vincennes which George Rogers Clark had captured and renamed Fort Knox after George Washington's Secretary of War, Henry Knox. Zachary Taylor had commanded Ft. Knox 1811 – 1814.

When Davis asked for Sarah's hand in marriage Taylor refused. The Taylors had another daughter who had married into the military and was out west in the middle of nowhere and he didn't want Sarah to live the difficult life as a wife on a frontier army post. Davis' own experiences led him to agree with Taylor. To deter the marriage Col. Taylor had Jefferson transferred, but the couple continued to write one another. Davis took leave and returned to Mississippi to consult his brother, Joseph, and they both began to question the value of an Army career. Davis hesitated to leave, but his desire for Sarah overcame this, and he resigned his commission. He had made no mention to Taylor of his intention to resign. Against his former commander's wishes, on June 17, 1835, he married Sarah in Louisville, Kentucky. His resignation became effective June 30.

Mel was curious where in Louisville they were married and he found the site. Zachary Taylor's sister lived on Rebel Road that runs between Brownsboro and Zorn, just north of the intersection of Hillcrest and Zorn with Brownsboro Road. There is a historical marker on Brownsboro at Rebel.

Joseph Davis' huge plantation called Hurricane was near Vicksburg. He also owned almost 2,000 more acres along the Mississippi River he called Brierfield because that's what covered it. He gave the use of that land to Jefferson and Sarah, who developed Brierfield Plantation there, but Joseph retained the ownership of the land.

In August 1835, Jefferson and Sarah traveled south to his sister Anna's home in Louisiana she called Locust Grove. They wanted to spend the hot summer months in the countryside and away from the flat river land, for their health, but both of them contracted either malaria or yellow fever. After less than three months of marriage, Sarah died at the age of 21 on September 15, 1835. Davis also fell severely ill and his family feared for his life. In the month following Sarah's death, he slowly improved, although he remained weak.

Later in the year Jefferson sailed down to Havana, Cuba to continue his convalescence. He was accompanied by the only slave he owned, James Pemberton, said to have been given to him when Davis was very young. The story goes that the two of them would work the land together during and at night would smoke cigars, have drinks, and discuss what to do next. Pemberton stayed with Davis his entire life. When Davis died his wife granted Pemberton his freedom according to Davis' wishes, but Pemberton refused to leave and stayed with her until she died.

Davis stayed reclusive for a few years following Sarah's death, spending his time developing his plantation and studying history and government. As the plantation grew so did the number of slaves he owned. He made Pemberton the overseer of all the slaves working the fields. By 1860 Jefferson owned 113 slaves according to records.

By 1840 he became involved in politics in the Democratic Party and was chosen to be a delegate to the party state convention. He later ran for the Mississippi House of Representatives and lost, then selected as a presidential elector and campaigned for James Polk.

In 1845 Davis ran for the U.S. House of Representatives. As before in school, he was an effective speaker, able to present his points without bombastic rhetoric, but with a calm rational and logical presentation. He won the election.

His first speech in Congress concerned the expansion of the country. The US needed to negotiate with England to expand into the Northwest and with Mexico for California and the Southwest; areas then still part of Mexico. And if Mexico didn't want to negotiate then we should consider taking it by force.

In 1846 the Mexican-American War began, and after only nine months in Congress Davis resigned his seat, returned to Mississippi and at the behest of the governor raised a volunteer regiment, the Mississippi Riflemen, and was given the rank of Colonel under the command of Gen. Zachary Taylor. His regiment was the first military unit to be fully armed with percussion rifles. That happened because President Polk promised Davis if he would stay in Congress until after a particular vote, Polk would see to it that Davis' regiment would all get the new percussion rifles instead of the smooth bore musket that most of the military used at the time.

Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott were the two main generals in the Mexican War. It was known that Scott was an active, vocal supporter of the Whig, and the Whigs knew that if the Mexican War was a success a general officer from the war would be a popular presidential candidate. What was not general knowledge was that Zachary Taylor was also a Whig, but wasn't vocal about it.

As the war progressed, half of Taylor's force was given over to Scott's command for an attack on Mexico City.

Mexican General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna let the larger force pass him by with only mild resistance, with the plan of wiping out Taylor's smaller force then fighting Scott's larger force when it came back from Mexico City.

Santa Anna went after Taylor's smaller, but well trained and determined force. At the Battle of Monterrey, Davis' Mississippians along with a Tennessee militia fought street to street battles and Davis led a successful charge on one of the city's forts. The units were then moved on to the Battle of Buena Vista where Davis fought bravely and was severely wounded in the foot and leg; a wound that would give him trouble the rest of his life. The Mississippians repulsed a much larger force. Taylor commenting on Davis' bravery and initiative said, "My daughter, sir, was a better judge of men than I was."

Before the Mexican-American War, 35-year-old Jefferson Davis met eighteen year-old Varina Howell at his brother, Joseph's Christmas party. They married over the objections of Varina's parents concern about the age difference and Davis' politics. They had six children with only three living to adulthood.

The result of the Mexican War was an almost 50% increase in the land size of the United States. The area that comprises the states of California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Colorado and New Mexico were added.

Following the Mexican War President Polk offered to make Davis a brigadier general in command of a brigade of militia, but he refused. Governor Brown of Mississippi did appoint Davis to take the place of U. S. Senator Jesse Speight, who had died in 1847. Davis served the rest of that term and was elected to another full six-year term to the Senate.

Davis had not completed one year of service as senator when he resigned to run for the governorship of Mississippi on the issue of the Compromise of 1850, which he opposed. He was defeated, due mostly to not being able to campaign due to poor health. Davis was plagued with poor health for most of his life. He experienced repeated bouts of malaria, was troubled with Mexican War battle wounds, he suffered from a chronic eye infection that caused him to be almost blind in one eye, he also had a facial neuralgia, a nerve disorder that causes severe pain in the face and has been called one of the most painful known ailments you could endure. But you would never know that if you had heard him speak.

In 1852 he received a favorite son nomination as a Democratic candidate for President. He didn't win but he received votes from southern and northern states because of his strong support for states' rights. Franklin Pierce won the Democratic vote for President and Davis campaigned for Pierce all through the South. Pierce won the presidential election and appointed Davis as his Secretary of War.

Nine years before he would be President of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis is the United States Secretary of War – and a very strong Secretary of War. He realized right off that the railroad transportation was inadequate to support a defense of the country so he authorized the Pacific Railroad Survey to determine the best possibilities for a transcontinental railroad system. He promoted the Gadsden Purchase to buy land from Mexico along the southern border of Arizona to make a southern railroad route easier. Davis realized the size of the army was too small and successfully lobbied Congress to add 4,000 more men and raise the military pay scale; he wrote the first training manual and arranged to send officers to Europe to learn new training methods. Davis pushed for and succeeded in getting the Secretary of War to have authority over the military, an idea that Gen. Winfield Scott, then the ranking officer vehemently opposed. He introduced the rifle as the general weapon in the army. Davis was building and strengthening the army that in five years he would be fighting.

Pierce lost the Democratic nomination for president in 1857 and President Buchanan did not reappoint him, so Davis returned to Mississippi, ran for the Senate and won.

Tensions in the country were worsening in the late 1850s. Many wanted the lands won and purchased from Mexico to be free of slavery; the 1850 Compromise calmed tensions some, but the Dred Scott decision heated them up. Henry Clay is known as the Great Compromiser, who worked to keep the Union together while keeping slavery in the South and maintaining the idea of states' rights, but as the country started to come apart Jefferson Davis had as many bills before Congress trying to keep the Union together as did Clay.

Davis continued giving anti-secessionist speeches urging preservation of the Union. He continually urged other Southern leaders to delay any secession moves because he believed the North would not allow any peaceable right to secession. Following Lincoln's election in 1860, South Carolina seceded on December 20, 1860, and Mississippi followed suit less than a month later in 1861. Davis waited until he received official notification and on the day Davis called "the saddest day of my life", he delivered an impassioned farewell address to the United States Senate, resigned and returned to Mississippi. It is said the only sounds heard as Davis walked out were sobs of those who knew that as this last senator left the union was broken.

The governor of Mississippi made Davis a major general of the Army of Mississippi and at a convention of the Southern states in Alabama nominated him to be president of the Confederacy which Davis easily won and he accepted.

Davis, as Confederate President, offered to pay for several Union forts and land located in the South and to pay the South's portion of the national debt, but Lincoln refused. Some informal discussions did take place with Secretary of State William Seward through Supreme Court Justice John Campbell, an Alabamian who had not yet resigned, but to no avail.

On April 12, 1861, South Carolina fired on Fort Sumter, which was commanded by Robert Anderson, of Soldier's Retreat just off Hurstbourne Parkway and owner of property in Jeffersontown's Square.

As Gen. U. S. Grant was capturing the Confederate capital of Richmond on April 3, 1865, Davis with his Cabinet escaped to Danville, Virginia. Forty hours later Lincoln was sitting in Davis' office. Receiving Gen. Lee's letter of surrender on about April 12, Davis issued his last proclamation as President of the Confederacy and went south to Greensboro, North Carolina.

Many thought Davis had a hand in Lincoln's assassination, which he did not. Davis and his wife were captured May 10 in Irwinville, Georgia. Davis was imprisoned in irons in a cell at Fort Monroe, Virginia. He was not allowed out of his cell, was chained to his bed to restrict his movement, was not allowed any visitors or books, except the Bible, and his guard was changed very loudly every two hours to allow him as little rest as possible. This went on for several months and his health deteriorated rapidly. After intervention by the attending physician and friends, Fort Monroe's commandant, who had imposed all the restrictions was relieved, and Davis was given better quarters and his health began to improve. Varina and his family were finally allowed to visit him. While in prison Davis was indicted for treason, but the indictment was not pursued.

After two years of imprisonment he was released and spent the next two years traveling abroad. A man without a country or means of supporting his family, he was supported by friends. He was released from all liability by President Johnson in December, 1868. He continued to struggle to make a living but he was in some demand as a speaker. Finally, a wealthy widow heard of his problems and offered him the use of her estate and plantation house, Beauvoir, on the Gulf coast in Biloxi. The widow willed the estate to Davis and his family on her death. He lived there for two more years, completing his book, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy*. He died on December 6, 1889, at age 81. The house, Beauvoir, eventually became a retirement home for Confederate veterans. It still stands there and has a Confederate cemetery behind it with the tomb of the Confederate Unknown Soldier.

When Davis died, his funeral was one of the largest ever held in the South, more than 200,000 people passed his bier. He was first buried in New Orleans, but was later reburied in Richmond, Virginia at Varina Davis' wishes. A continuous line, day and night, viewed the train on the trip to Richmond.

Jefferson Davis was considered a great soldier, senator and secretary of war with great vision, but his performance as President of the Confederacy is considered poor. He was a slave owner that believed in the Union and following the war he contributed to the reconciliation of the South and the North, but remained a symbol of Southern pride.

### **Nomination for Officers**

If anyone would like to nominate themselves for President, Vice-President, Secretary, or Treasurer please contact me.

### **Contact Us**

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