

Gift: Davis

JEFFERSON DAVIS

One of the most revered heroes in the War Between the States is Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy. Yet few today know of the origin of his surname, and of his varied accomplishments, during a life span of 81 years; nor do many know that his grandfather lived for a brief time near what is now Lynchburg.

The name Davis is Welch in origin. When Christianity was introduced into Wales by missionaries who accompanied the Roman legions, the natives were much intrigued with the story of King David, harpist and singer. He became the special patron of the Welch.

When the Welch were baptised they were required to take a Christian or saint's name. The Welch bards frequently adopted the name of King David, which later evolved into Davy or Davis, with other variations.

Near the end of the seventeenth century John and Susannah Smithson Davis lived in Shropshire, an English county bordering on Wales. John was a considerable landowner.

According to primogeniture the oldest son inherited all of the property, hence four of the younger Davis men decided to try their fortunes in the New World and sailed for Virginia. Samuel, William, Micajah, and Evan settled first in Louisa County, then moved to Bedford County from which later Campbell County was formed. William and Micajah moved to Lynch's Ferry, now Lynchburg, where they became merchants, married and left numerous descendants.

Evan Davis, the youngest of the four brothers, and the grandfather of Jefferson Davis, remained in Virginia only a short time, emigrating to Georgia. He took an active part in the American Revolutionary War. Evan's son, Samuel, moved to Kentucky and became the father of Jefferson Davis,

born June 3, 1808. Shortly thereafter the family moved to the state of Mississippi in a county bordering on Louisiana to the south.

Young Jefferson Davis' schooling was near his home, then he went to Transylvania, University in Kentucky and later to West Point where he was graduated at the age of twenty. He was active in infantry fighting the Pawnees, the Comanches, and other Indian tribes.

Later returning to civilian life, he married Sarah Knox Taylor, the daughter of General Zachary Taylor, who later became the 12th president of the United States. Within three months the young couple fell ill with malaria and his wife died.

Ten years later, in February 1845, he married Varina Howell and that same year he went to Congress. War with Mexico having begun, Jefferson Davis resigned, became a colonel and lead an assault in the battle of Monterey, winning a brilliant victory.

At the battle of Buena Vista, Davis and his regiment probably saved the American army from defeat. He was severely wounded. This action made him widely known as the "hero of Buena Vista".

Back in Mississippi he was appointed a Senator to U.S. Congress and was re-elected for a full term. After having served as Secretary of War in President Franklin Pierce's administration, he again returned to the U.S. Senate.

On January 9, 1861, Mississippi seceded from the Union and twelve days later Davis delivered an impassioned farewell address, resigned, and returned to his home. A few weeks after that he was inaugurated as president of the provisional government of the Confederate states.

For over four years the South fought for its "inherent right to freedom, independence, and self-government". It proved to be a lost cause, and the Appomattox surrender took place April 9, 1865. On May 10th Davis

was captured and imprisoned at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, where he was shackled and for some time had the mental agony of not being permitted to hear from his wife and children.

Davis was accused of a totally unfounded charge, that of being implicated in the assassination of President Lincoln. After two years he was released on bail and went to Canada and Europe in an attempt to regain his health. On returning to the United States he was unsuccessful in his business ventures and retired.

His beautiful home, Beauvoir, near Biloxi, on the Gulf Coast overlooking Mississippi ^{Sound} ~~South~~ was his final residence. Here he wrote his book "The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government". He maintained that the Southern States had rightfully the power to withdraw from the Union into which they had, as sovereign states, voluntarily entered and that a denial of that right was a violation of the letter and spirit of the compact between the states.

On December 6, 1889 he died. His last resting place is in Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, marked by a handsome monument.

Thus ended the career of a Southern gentleman, a man of honor, character and integrity, with an unyielding devotion to the cause of states' rights.

Regarding Jefferson Davis and slavery we with difficulty have to transport ourselves back over a hundred years to the time when Southerners asserted, with perfect truth, that Negroes were barbarians in their native land but were civilized and Christianized through the institution of slavery, and that in their almost helpless condition they were clothed, fed and cared for.

Jefferson Davis was more than kind to his Negroes. His overseer was himself a Negro. Every Negro accused of an offense was tried by a jury of his peers. Occasionally the master, who reserved the right of pardon, had to temper the severity of the Negro jury.

The following is a completely imaginary letter written as coming from Jefferson Davis to his former commander in chief, Robert E. Lee.

Memphis, Tenn.
April 9, 1870

General Robert E. Lee, President,
Washington College
Lexington, Virginia

Dear General Lee:

I have heard reports of the splendid students at your college. May you inculcate in them your fine sense of honor and duty. I well recall your statement that "Duty is the sublimest word in our language."

Recently as I sat musing at my desk, and whether it was a dream or not, I seemed to be transported forward in point of time over a hundred years into the nineteen seventies.

What I saw appalled me.

Some of the Terror from lawlessness of our Reconstruction days had come again to our big cities, with crime rampant.

Criminals through court technicalities received inadequate punishment, thus defeating justice.

Machines which brought pictures into homes and theatres made a mockery of decency and womanhood, corrupting the morals of young and old alike.

A strange judicial obsession for quotas and racial balance deprived citizens of their freedom of choice.

The division of the United States into ten regions, this by presidential decree, degraded the individual states and lessened voter control.

The movement toward world government through membership in a conglomerate of nations, called the United Nations, is a serious hazard to our united country.

An added peril to our national sovereignty is an agreement with an avowed enemy, the Soviet Union, which includes as an objective the achievement of general and complete disarmament.

Among the dangers facing the United States in the nineteen seventies is the government system of executive orders which appear in the Federal Register and have the force of law, especially in view of the all inclusive executive orders for taking what amounts to complete control of communication media, power sources, food resources, forms of transportation, commandeering all civilians to work under federal supervision, take over farms, ranches and timberlands, regulate the money a person can withdraw from banks, and many other restrictions, all of which can be put into effect by the president declaring an emergency, and the president has already done so. Truly executive orders are blueprints for a dictatorship.

My dream of foreknowledge came to an end and I find myself with the problems of the eighteen and seventies.

General Lee, our Confederate cause has been called a lost cause. May it not be that the United States is beginning to be itself a lost cause.

One of the finest movements to combat the dangers of the future will be the organization of men who fought in the War Between the States and their descendants, and likewise the establishment of an organization of the fine women who so nobly did their best for the cause they loved so well.

Very truly, your friend,

Jefferson Davis

Addenda: The United Confederate Veterans was formed in 1889; the United Daughters of the Confederacy was founded in 1894.

A leaflet "Executive Orders, Blueprint for Dictatorship" is available from Liberty Lobby, 300 Independence Ave, S.E. Washington, D.C., 20003,

ten copies for \$1.00. A part of the Sixth article of agreement which appeared in Commanders Digest, Department of Defense, June 15, 1972, "Basic Principles of Mutual Relations between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics", reads as follows: "The USA and the USSR regard as the ultimate objective of their efforts the achievement of general and complete disarmament and the establishment of an effective system of international security in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations". (A copy of this agreement is available from Fred. M. Davis of Lynchburg, Virginia, who prepared the foregoing talk for delivery at the Jefferson Davis meeting of the Old Dominion Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy June 2, 1973.

Fred M. Davis