JEFFERSON COLUMBUS DAVIS COLLECTION, 1847–1997

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Cataloging Information

Processed by
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September 1996

Updated by
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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org
COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 manuscript box, 3 oversize folders, 5 photograph folders, 1 oversize photograph folder.

COLLECTION DATES: 1847-1997


RESTRICTIONS: None

COPYRIGHT:

REPRODUCTION RIGHTS: Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained from the Indiana Historical Society.

ALTERNATE FORMATS:


NOTES: A portion of this collection was a gift of Marietta [Finley] Hahn (Mrs. E. Vernon) a great-niece of Jefferson C. Davis. Her mother, Ida [Davis] Finley, a niece of Jefferson C. Davis, was raised by Davis and his wife. This information was provided in 1967 by Frances Morrison Rabb (Mrs. Albert) of Indianapolis, whose father was a nephew of Mrs. Davis, his mother’s maiden name being Athon.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jefferson Columbus Davis was born on a farm near Memphis in Clark County, Indiana, on 2 March 1828. He was the first of eight children born to William Davis, Jr. (1800-1879) and Mary Drummond (1801-1881). He grew up in the Charleston area of Clark County on his father’s farm.

In 1846, Davis began his military career as an enlisted man in the 3rd Indiana Regiment during the Mexican War. Following his participation in the battle of Buena Vista he was appointed Lieutenant of the 1st Artillery. In 1858 he was posted to duty at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, and was serving there on 12 April 1861 when the Confederates started their 34-hour bombardment.

In May he was promoted to captain but left his regular army position to accept command of the 22nd Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment. On 17 August, the 22nd Indiana was sent to seek out the Confederates in the interior of Missouri. The following March, Davis contributed much toward a Union victory at the Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas, while in command of a division. As a result, he was promoted to Brigadier General of U.S. Volunteers in May 1862, the commission backdated to the previous December. Following the war he was appointed Colonel of the 23rd Infantry and served in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, from 1866 to 1879.

Some of the highlights of his career include commanding a division at the Murfreesboro, Chickamauga, Atlantic campaign and a corps on the March-to-the-Sea in the Carolina campaign; and participation in the Modoc War following the murder of General Edward Canby in 1873. His career was marred only by a quarrel in the lobby of the Galt House, Louisville, Kentucky, in September 1862, with General William Nelson. Davis in defending his honor shot and killed Nelson. Though an investigation was conducted, through the efforts of Indiana Governor O. P. Morton, Davis went unpunished and returned to active duty. In 1872 he was elected a Companion of the 1st Class of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion in the United States, and in 1878 he was selected by the President to serve as a member on the Board of Visitors for the annual examinations at the U. S. Naval Academy.

Around 1860 he married Marietta Woodson Athon of Indianapolis, a daughter of Dr. James S. Athon (1811-1875). They had no children, but adopted and raised a niece, Ida Davis. Davis was a career officer in the United States Army (1848-1879) and died while still on active duty, 30 November 1879, in Chicago, Illinois. He is buried in Crown Hill Cemetery, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Sources:
Materials in Collection


SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection, arranged chronologically, 1847–1880, is artificial, and has been created out of a donation from family and several acquisitions from manuscript dealers. The collection relates largely to Davis’ military career and includes correspondence, military appointments, special and general orders, military reports, memoirs, memorials and photographs—two are personal, the remainders reflect his military career. Although there are a few items dating from early in his career, the bulk of the collection relates to his Civil War activities and post Civil War career and death.

Several items in the collection are of significance. These include an annotated copy (Folder 4) of a reprint of General R. E. Lee’s Report of the first day 2d Bull Run, August 29, 1862 (Rebellion Record Frank Moore—sometimes cited as “Putnam’s Rebellion Record” Vol. 9, p. 277). Also in Folder 4 there is a letter, Thos. C. to John, dated 29 September 1862 on Galt House stationary relating details of General Nelson’s death at the hands of Davis. Charles O’Neill of Greens Farms, Connecticut in September 1962 identified the author of this letter as Thomas C. James. The letter provides an interesting perspective of a fellow officer on a controversial event and on the players involved. There is a report written by W.P. Carlin in Folder 5 which protests Davis’ official account of the battle at Stone River, 30 and 31 December 1862. In Folder 8 there is an autograph organization chart of the 14th Army Corps, Brevet Major General J.C. Davis, Commanding, Divisions 1, 2, 3, and Temporary and Brigades 1, 2, 3, and Temporary with list of officers. Autobiographical accounts of Davis’ military career, as well as a printed copy of W.S. Rosecrans’ letter to Horace Greeley concerning Rosecrans’ Campaign and the Battle of Chickamauga are in Folder 9. Folder 11 contains a presentation copy, George H. Thomas to Jeff C. Davis, of Legends of the Army of the Cumberland, Washington, 1869. Following his death in 1879, Mrs. Davis received numerous letters and telegrams of condolence as well as resolutions and general orders in memory of General Davis. Examples of these tributes are found in Folders 15-16 and include resolutions from the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, The Chicago Union Veteran Club, the Mexican Veteran Association of the State of Indiana, and the Military Order of the Loyal Legion in the United States.

Correspondents in this collection include: S. Benton; P.T. Broderick; George Pearson Buell; Edward Canby; William Passmore Carlin; Wm. C. Carroll; Octavus Cohen; Mary D. Crook (Mrs. George); John C. Fremont, Henry W. Halleck; Thomas Henley; T. A. Hendricks; Thomas C. James; A.C. McClurg; Theophilus Wylie Morrison; Lazarus Noble; Galusha A. Pennypacker; George O. Penton; John Pope; W.S. Rosecrans; P.H. Sheridan; W.T. Sherman; Lorenzo Thomas; and R.W. Thompson.
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Correspondence from Davis, 1832, 1872

Stay in Alaska, Clippings, ca. 1867–69

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Research letters from Gordon D. Whitney, re: Davis, 1975–97

Jefferson C. Davis portrait photograph, ca. 1865

Davis Monument, Crown Hill Cemetery, Davis Homestead, Clark County, Indiana, and Clark County, Indiana, n.d.

W.T. Sherman, signed, and Absolom Baird, signed with autograph envelope, n.d.


General Smith’s Headquarters, General Brook’s Headquarters, Ayres Battery accompanying the Vt. Brigade, and foraging expedition going out from Camp Griffin, Virginia, n.d.

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:


2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.

3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.

4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, M0080, OM0362).

5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.