

Collection #
M 1547
OM 0797

**OLIVER P. DAVIS FAMILY
COLLECTION, 1846-1979**

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Processed by

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	One manuscript box, one half-sized box of photographs, one oversized folder, one bound volume, one folder of artifacts, one negative.
COLLECTION DATES:	1846-1979 (Bulk: 1846-1910)
PROVENANCE:	Kenneth L. Turchi, Indianapolis Ind., 2018
RESTRICTIONS:	None
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ALTERNATE FORMATS:	
RELATED HOLDINGS:	Thomas A. Hendricks Papers (SC0737)
ACCESSION NUMBER:	2018.0172
NOTES:	Photostats of the correspondence portion of this collection (1846-1899) were donated to the Indiana State Library in 1965.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Oliver Perry Davis was a successful farmer and lawyer who served as an Indiana state senator from the 1860s to 1880s. He was so prominent that the community around his farm became known as Opedee, a spelled-out initialism.

He was born in Warner, New Hampshire in 1814, and named after Commodore Oliver Perry after that Naval officer's successful Lake Erie campaign during the War of 1812. His parents, Gideon and Hannah [Bean] Davis, were poor farmers.

At age 16, Davis set out westward to seek his fortune. After a stint at a book bindery in Toronto, he reached Fort Wayne, Indiana, where he practiced dentistry. In 1838 he went to Greencastle, Indiana, where he met a lawyer named Edward W. McGaughey. He studied law under McGaughey for two years before moving to Newport, Indiana to open his own law office.

In 1845 he made his first land purchase in the Newport area, which included the landing of the Wimsett Ferry. Davis began farming the land and operating the ferry. He continued buying land in the area and made a fortune shipping corn and pork to New Orleans by flatboat. Davis profited off the high prices for corn which New Orleans brokers shipped overseas during the Great Famine in Ireland.

As a wealthy farmer, Davis was elected a delegate to the Indiana Constitutional Convention in 1850 as a Democrat. Then in 1863 and 1865 he was elected to the state senate as a Republican. In 1879 and 1881 he served in the senate as a member of the Greenback Party, a populist and anti-monopolist precursor to the Progressive Movement.

Oliver P. Davis married Eliza Oldridge in 1847, and four children survived to adulthood: Oliver Perry, Jr. (1847-1873), Alice (1851-1938), Mary G. "Mollie" (1855-1926), and Edward E. (1858-1927). These children were born at the house at the ferry landing. But in 1860 Eliza died. Davis himself was often away from home on business trips. After a brief failed marriage to another woman, the children and Davis' nephew Charles Ward were sent to live with Eliza's sister Polly Griffiths near Perrysville. Eventually Oliver, Jr. was sent to boarding school at New London, Connecticut and Alice to St. Mary-of-the-Woods in Terre Haute.

When the railroad came to Newport in 1870, the tracks passed near Davis' house. Since he was such a big shipper of grain, the road made his farm a flag stop, even for passenger trains, and named it Opedee after his initials. A community eventually developed around the stop, including a stone quarry, powder mill, and boarding house.

Davis died in 1892, and his estate was divided amongst his children and nephew.

Alice Davis had a colorful personality and some unusual habits for a woman of the time, like smoking cigars. She was an aspiring poet in a style similar to her contemporary, James Whitcomb Riley. In 1875 she married a Civil War veteran and conductor on the train, Simon V. Odekirk of New York. After their marriage Odekirk left the railroad to work as superintendent of the Davis farm, but he died after an accident in 1884.

In 1891 Alice remarried, this time to another poet, Canadian expatriate Albert Greenwood. The couple moved to Hillsboro Bridge, New Hampshire, where they wrote and printed their poetry. Both regularly had poetry published in newspapers. Alice wrote under the name

Alice D. O. Greenwood. In 1899 she published a book of poetry she called "Husks and Nubbins." The two came back to Indiana in their later years, living in Rockville. Albert died in 1929, Alice in 1938.

Sources:

Biographical Directory of the Indiana General Assembly (Indiana Historical Bureau : Indianapolis), 1980

Harold O'Donnell, *Newport and Vermillion Township, The First 100 Years; 1824-1924* (Harold O'Donnell : Cayuga, Ind.), 1969.

Kenneth L. Turchi, "Forum," *Indianapolis Star*, 18 Feb. 1978

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains correspondence of Oliver P. Davis and his family, family photographs, documents, and writings by Alice D. O. Greenwood and Albert Greenwood. The material was evidently collected and saved by Mary G. [Davis] Munson's son, Ezra "Ray" Munson in the 1960s. In the late 1990s, his daughters, one of whom was a retired librarian, rearranged and foldered the material. In the 1970s, much of the correspondence included here was transcribed and published by Harold O'Donnell in a book called *Down the Road to Opedee*. The title was borrowed from a poem by Alice D. O. Greenwood, which was in turn appropriated from Kipling's "On the Road to Mandalay."

The correspondence from 1846 to 1861 includes letters written by Davis to his wife Eliza during his travels to Indianapolis and New Orleans; three letters from Edward W. McGaughey. The correspondence from 1864 to 1868 consists of letters Davis sent to his son Oliver P. Davis, Jr. while he was at school in New London, New Hampshire, sisters Alice and Mary, cousins, and friends. The remaining letters range from 1874 to 1899 and include correspondence to Alice Davis and her husband, Albert Greenwood, and a 14 August 1885 letter from William H. English to O. P. Davis about a reunion of the 1850 Indiana Constitutional Convention members.

Writings by Alice D. O. Greenwood and Albert Greenwood are typed and undated. Their scrapbooks likewise contain few dates. They contain clippings of poetry authored by themselves and by others they admired that had been published in newspapers. Albert Greenwood's scrapbook also contains typescript poems and other writings, as well as a photograph of four unidentified women.

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