

Thomas Davis, the father of my mother Elizabeth Davis
Pontyge was born in Chester, England on
the son of an Iron keeper whose wife was born
Fatherine Latham. Thomas learned the trade of a
Carpenter and when years old married Elizabeth
Benmion the daughter of John Benmion and
of Hawarden, Wales. I have a volume of The
Manchester Conference of 1789, inscribed John Benmion
No 22, Moor Flintshire which I presume to have been
his.

Soon after his marriage in the Established Church
at Hawarden at the age of 21, he took his young
wife to Liverpool and there worked at his trade. There
several children were born to them, my mother Elizabeth
in April 8, 1844. The other children died and in 1848
he sailed with his wife and little daughter for
New Orleans in the United States, following an older
brother Edward who had sailed in Fairfield, Iowa.
The voyage took six weeks during which a fire broke
out on board and was extinguished with difficulty.

On reaching the United States he changed the
family name from the Welsh spelling Davies to
Davis. His brother Edward retained the Welsh form.

Upon landing in New Orleans he found that
Cholera was raging and he hastily prepared to
take his wife and little daughter up the Mississippi,
I assume by boat to St. Louis and then overland to
Fairfield. After about a year near his farmer brother
Edward during which period his son Frederick
Henry was born, he decided to push on further west,

Perhaps the record may still be seen in the parish register.

Reaching Council Bluffs Iowa on the Missouri River he again paused find many opportunities to build houses in the frontier community! At that time there was no bridge over the Missouri but in the summer of 1853 (my mother then being nine years old) he and a party of forward looking pioneers crossed the river by ferry and held a picnic, memorable in the life of my mother, on the site of the present Omaha High School which in a few months was called Capitol Hill. As a consequence of this outing, the City of Omaha was platted and the following summer Thomas Davis moved his family to the new town which became the Capital of the Territory of Nebraska. My grandfather built for himself the third house in the settlement on a block of ground located at Ninth and Howard Streets. Here his sons Latham and Charles were born, and here on May the tenth 1864 my mother Elizabeth Davis was married to Herman Kountze of Osanaburg, Ohio who had first visited Omaha in 1854 and returned for permanent residence in 1856.

Thomas Davis was a man of great industry, imagination and enterprise and soon took advantage of the opportunities offered by the rapidly opening territory. He took up land under the homestead act, brought down lumber from the upper reaches of the Missouri, contracted for and built many houses among them the Herndon House and soon owned a saw mill and a flouring mill. He was a member of the first Nebraska legislature and was highly respected in the growing town of Omaha for his integrity, intelligence and kindness.

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When my mother was a girl of twelve, The Herndon House was opened with a ball. My grandmother being unable to attend because of her family cares, Grandfather took his daughter Elizabeth and she had the joy of dancing every dance.

In 1868 Thomas Davis was greatly surprised by a letter from a boyhood friend, Edward Pinker, who had come from Chester to Indianapolis where he had established an iron foundry. He represented that his business was in a most flourishing condition that life in the older community offered many more comforts and advantages than the newer far west, and urged him to sell out in Nebraska and become his partner in the Indianapolis foundry business. In 1864 when my mother was married, grandfather had given her a block of land on Eighth and Howard Streets adjoining his own home. Here by 1868 there were two young grand children and grandmother was reluctant to leave Elizabeth's family and all the Omaha friends she had made to say nothing of the large square comfortable brick house which had been the Thomas Davis home for several years.

However grandfather at last decided to make the move and in 1869 they, - his wife and three sons Frederick H, Latham and Charles Edward - made the journey by steam boat down the Missouri to St. Joseph, Missouri and from there by railroad train to Indianapolis.

All was not so rosy in the new business as he soon discovered; the panic of 1872 was soon upon them. The foundry made stationary steam engines which were sold on long time paper, many of them as far away as Texas. Collections were slow, the

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hours long in the stuffy quarters of a foundry; but
grandfather worked faithfully on.

The family lived at first in a rented brick
on Meridian Street two blocks south of the Union
Station, and next to the attractive home of Austin
Brown with whose family they were soon on the friendli-
est terms. In about 1875 they were living in a brick
house further north on Meridian Street across from
University Park next door to the Hasselmanns and the
Fawcetts. In 1883 they lived in a brick house on
Pennsylvania Street the second door north of Walnut
and across from the Blind Asylum; and in 1884 he
bought a very handsome brick house on Pennsylvania
Street two doors north of Vermont across from the
Second Presbyterian Church. On the death of my
grandmother in 1890 he sold the house; he then
moved to Omaha and lived with his son-in-law
Herman Foubzer. A few months earlier he had sold
the Pinker Davis Foundry to younger associates
in the business for about four hundred thousand
dollars all of which he had made by his own
efforts, as on the death of his friend Edward Pinker
about a year after coming to Indianapolis, he
had bought out the Pinker interests in the business.

Thomas Davis was eager to secure all possible
advantages for his children. He was himself a man
of great independence of thought; an assiduous
reader especially on historical, religious and philo-
sophical subjects. He and grandmother had stray-
ed from the Church of England into the Non Conform-
ist fold before coming to America. He was greatly
influenced by the works and life of William Ellery

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Channing and was a great reader of his sermons and public papers, a three volume edition of these having an honored place on his book shelf. His favorite of all writers was Thomas Babington Macaulay, a four volume copy of The History of England being his constant delight. During the two years that I spent in his house 1882-3 - preparing for entrance into Vassar College, he read and reread this work, quoted from it, chuckled over it - and as soon as he had finished a reading of it, began again. When the edition fell into my hands the binding was greatly worn. I had the set rebound as an intimate memento of the man I greatly loved and I hope that one of my grand children will cherish it as I do.

In his early life in the United States and all through the Civil War, Thomas Davis belonged to the Whig or Republican party. But the political corruption during the second administration of President Grant caused him to become a Democrat and so he continued until his death.

He was possibly influenced by his Democratic friends Vice President Hendricks and W^m Jacquelin Halliday to join St Paul's Episcopal Church which undoubtedly appealed also to his boyhood Church of England convictions and here he was vestry man and warden many years, intimately associating himself with Dr Jencks, the pastor of the Church and with Bishop Tucker backers.

His daughter Elizabeth always attended the Sunday School of Trinity Episcopal Church in

Omaha was confirmed there by Bishop Talbot and was a boarder for a year in the Church school for girls founded by Bishop Talbot. In this school she roomed with Bishop Talbot's adopted daughter. It is a coincidence that Bishop Talbot became Bishop of Indiana.

Frederick Henry Davis, the oldest son of Thomas Davis was sent East to school at Cheshire Conn there to prepare for Trinity College, but at nineteen he was eager to launch into business, refused to go into his father's foundry and was sent to Omaha to live with his sister Elizabeth Fountze's household and to learn the banking business under her husband, Herman Fountze. At an early age he became cashier and then President of the First National Bank, founded in 1856 by Augustus and Herman Fountze. He has taken a large and valuable part in building up the City of Omaha.

The second son Latham, named for his grand mother Katherine Latham of Chester, England also refused to go into the foundry. After attending the Indianapolis Public schools he was sent to Eastman Business College at Poughkeepsie N. Y. of extraordinary fine literary taste and attainments, he at an early age memorized a large part of the English classics and a remarkable part of Shakespeare. He spent years of his life studying the Elizabethans and trying to prove by Cryptograms and formulas that Robert Earl of Essex wrote all the Shakespearean plays and

That the key to the mystery lies in the sonnets. 7

Thomas Davis was thoroughly Welsh in physique short, sturdy sandy haired bright blue eyed, pink and white complexion, clean cut regular features, mild of manner, the soul of kindness, a lover of good talk but rather silent himself. He had a great reverence for the scientific spirit, always subscribed to scientific periodicals, introduced me to Darwin, was thrilled by Darwin's voyages in pursuit of the origin of species and had Engravings of Huxley and Faraday hung in his library.

He was profoundly kind and gentle to children and one of the joys of my childhood were the ice cream sodas bought at Beckers on Washington Street during summer evening drives. Even more stirring and memorable were our excursions together to the theatre every Friday night seeing Booth Barrett Hojesta and every Shakespearean production of my two years in his household to say nothing of the Hoyt farces. He was doubtful of the propriety of novel reading aside from Dickens and almost forbade my absorption in George Eliot, but pressed the essays of Emerson and Thoreau into my hands. He was a pound lovable man to whom I owe much.

Eugenie F. Nicholson

Dear Uncle Fred, Please return and add all you can.

Lovingly Gene