



NEWS from the *David Davis Mansion Foundation*

Spring 2025



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Assuring Sarah's Garden into the Future

Visitors to Sarah's Garden marvel at the gorgeous blooms in the restored 1872 garden. Over time, our Master Gardeners and community volunteers who tend the garden have expressed concern about the performance of certain plants and areas of the garden. That concern and the search for solutions launched a unique partnership with Illinois State University College of Agriculture.

ISU will assess the garden in 2025 with specific recommendations for the 2026 growing season. Leading the assessment are Professor of Horticulture Dr. David Kopsell and Professor of Soil Science Dr. Rob Rhykerd along with students in an ISU soils class. Master Gardeners Anna Lee Fenger, Kay Henrichs, and Jaci Dixon initiated the partnership with ISU, providing historical reports to the researchers and monitoring the progress of the research.

In late March, the 18 ISU students (*pictured at right*) visited the garden to complete a grid-approach to soil sampling which will be analyzed to assess soil pH, fertility, chemical composition and other variables. As the project continues, attention will be given to irrigation sources, garden maintenance, use of soil amendments, and other practices.

Stay tuned for results on this unique partnership. It is a hands-on learning experience for ISU students, a research opportunity for faculty, and a valuable blueprint for our Master Gardeners and community volunteers to use in ensuring the beauty and viability of the 1872 Sarah's Garden well into the future.

Sarah's Garden is open to visitors during mansion events or at the end of mansion tours, or stop Wednesday to Friday mornings when garden volunteers are working.



Mark Your Calendars

Check our website calendar [HERE](#) and our Facebook page [HERE](#) for details on these and other events.

Upcoming Events at the David Davis Mansion

May 17

Family Day at the Mansion

June 1

Champagne British Car Show

June 7

New Volunteer Informational Meeting

June 14

A Saturday Stroll in Sarah's Garden

July 11-12

Glorious Garden Festival

August 2

Antique Auto Show

September 6

Cruise-In at the Mansion

October 8

Talk by Raymond McKoski, author of *David Davis: Abraham Lincoln's Favorite Judge*

October 25

Evening Behind the Scenes Tour

2025 Glorious Garden Festival

Photos of Sarah's Garden blooms by Pat Schley and Ron Frazier

Summer festival season is upon us!

Join us on Friday, July 11th (1-7pm) and Saturday, July 12th (9am-3pm) to celebrate Sarah's Garden's 150-year legacy while raising money for the David Davis Mansion Foundation.



Back in 1875, this garden was just a couple of years old when Sarah wrote to her sister about the "Upper Garden" saying,

"There is a wealth of flowers in the garden – now - and I should like you to bury your nose in a basket of my Heliotrope. The asters too are very pretty, and you would enjoy a variety of colors - and some very double."

-- Sarah Davis to her sister, August 30, 1875.



The 2025 Glorious Garden Festival will highlight the "wealth of flowers" that still exist today in Sarah's Garden and host activities for all ages, including the Festival's Garden Walk, free activities at the David Davis Mansion, and over 20 vendors on the grounds.

The Garden Walk

Tickets are required for the Festival's Garden Walk, showcasing 10 stunning private gardens. Children 12 and under can attend for free. Admission grants access to all 10 gardens and includes a fun scavenger hunt at each location.

- **Advance Garden Walk Tickets** - Purchase at participating garden centers starting June 15: \$20 for adults, \$10 for ages 13-17, free for children under 12.



- **Discounted Tickets** - David Davis Mansion Foundation members can get 2 tickets for \$15 each by emailing programming@daviddavismansion.org.
- **Day of Event** - Buy on the day of the Garden Walk at the David Davis Mansion grounds for \$22, \$12 for ages 13-17, free for children under 12.

Advance Ticket Locations:

- AB Hatchery & Garden Center
- Casey's Garden Shop & Florist
- Crossroads Fair Trade Goods & Gifts
- The Garlic Press
- Growing Grounds Lawn & Garden Center
- Kickapoo TeaRoom and Boutique
- Wendell Niepagen Greenhouses & Garden Center
- Online at daviddavismansion.org by clicking [HERE](#)



Free Activities

Festivities also include free events taking place at the mansion and on the lawn on Friday and Saturday:

- **Garden Fair** – Enjoy live music and browse local vendors offering garden-inspired art, plants, and unique treasures. Refreshments will be available for purchase.
- **Story Walk & Kids' Activities** – Take a Story Walk through Sarah's Garden and explore community partner tables featuring art and garden-themed activities for children.
- **Guided Tours** – Discover the beauty of Sarah Davis's heirloom garden and explore the historic David Davis Mansion on a guided tour.
- **Clover Lawn Museum Shop** – Shop for special gifts, garden art, books, and heirloom seeds from Sarah's Garden.

The Glorious Garden Festival is a fundraising event benefiting the David Davis Mansion Foundation, which helps support the mansion's preservation efforts and educational programs.



Voices from the Past: The Civil War Begins - 1861

By: DDMF Researcher Pat Schley

In the spring of 1861, no one realized that an event that took place on April 12th, 1861, would lead to a war that would irretrievably change the world as they had known it up until then. Fort Sumter had been lost and though most folks thought that the war would quickly be over, as one battle eventually led to another, that hope quickly faded. The correspondence between Sarah Davis and her husband, David Davis, clearly shows their apprehension at the way the war was going:

“The news of the taking of Fort Sumpter [sic] has created great excitement. I regret that the Fort was not evacuated – as we should have been saved the disgrace of losing it – and I do not believe the Union can be kept together. The fact our people of the South and North do not love each other – and we shall not love each other better after stirring up the worst feelings of our natures...”

-- Bloomington, April 18, 1861, Sarah W. Davis to her younger sister, Frances [Fanny] M. Walker Williams.

“I feel that my engaging in politics is not to your taste & that I assure you it is not to my mine – My connections with politics, dating from the Chicago Convention, [where he acted as Abraham Lincoln’s campaign manager for the 1860 US presidential election] was under peculiar circumstances, & I am sorry [sic] enough now, that I had the prominence that was given me – And I feel this way, not from any disappointment that has attached to me, but on account of the dreadful condition in which our beloved country now is – The dispatches of today show that there has been another riot in St Louis – All history shows that Civil Wars are bloody & revengeful. Hate distinguishes Civil Wars over others- Is it not melancholy, that 100 years has not elapsed, since this Gov^t threw off the British Yoke – What is 100 years in the life time of a nation...”

-- Danville, Illinois, May 13, 1861, Judge David Davis to his wife, Sarah Davis, from where he was ending his spring circuit of Illinois.

David Davis was invited to be a member of the 1861 Board of Visitors to West Point Military Academy, which was to consist of 17 men, according to a list published in the Richmond Times Dispatch, May 1861 [1]. This board was tasked to inquire into the state of morale and discipline, curriculum, instruction, physical equipment [2], fiscal affairs, academic methods, and other matters relating to the Academy that the Board chose to consider. According to the Report of the Board of Visitors 1861, “[The board of visitors] assembled at the Military Academy, on the 10th day of June, and organized by the appointment of a president and secretary...Each day between the hours of 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., for several successive days, was devoted to the examination of the various classes remaining at the institution, on the subjects which formed their courses of instruction.”

-- Report of the Board of Visitors of Military Academy, submitted to the Secretary of War and signed by A.H. Bowman, Col. of Engineers and Sup’t Military Academy; West Point Academy archive

At this time, West Point was in a quandary which had begun when their graduating class of 1861 heard that the midshipmen at Annapolis were going to be allowed to graduate early in order to go to war. Not to be outdone by the Naval cadets, the West Point class of 1861 petitioned their congressmen and wrote as a group to the Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, stating that they, like their Annapolis peers, wanted to graduate early in order to go to war. Cameron agreed, and on May 6, 1861, without having any sort of formal graduation ceremony, the West Point class of 1861 left for Washington DC, where they would serve by training volunteers.

When David Davis arrived at the Academy, it was being petitioned by the new “first class”, the June 1861 class, who also wanted to graduate early and serve in the war. Interestingly, one of the members of the June class was George Armstrong Custer.

By the time he had completed his work with the Board, the June class of 1861 had also left the school to serve in Washington DC as drill masters for the volunteers there.

It seems that this internal chaos went mostly unnoticed by the Board of Visitors, at least according to Davis’ letter home to Sarah:

“I am very poor, as you know, in powers of description otherwise I w^d like to describe this place to you – Imagine a small plateau of ground of 300 acres – one hundred feet above the level of the river, with mountains in the

back ground & in front the north – river surrounded by inaccessible hills, with Newburgh in the distance & you have West Point – Every thing [sic] is perfectly cleanly – The soil is gravelly – The public buildings chiefly of stone – The professors houses are all along the edges of the Bluffs chiefly brick or stone – old fashioned & square – with fine yards & gardens & Elm or maple trees large enough to shade the whole road –

The ruins of Fort Putnam built on the heights above us, & which was built during the Revolutionary War, adds interest – I went with two gentlemen about 8 oclck last night – to visit the ruins – The ascent is pretty steep - a mere bridle path the only road, but I got along pretty well – The view is the grandest I ever saw, except from the top of Laurel Hill, on the top of the Allegheny mountains –

The Board of visitors not full – I will in another letter describe them to you - = There are but few Ladies here - & “of the worlds people” hardly any = Flush times & hard times change hotels, & pleasure resorts always – The discipline of this School & the proficiency of the cadets is really astonishing – At no college in the United States, are all the branches of learning taught as well as here.

In looking through the gallery of paintings you would be astonished at the skill displayed in the drawings. Each Cadet has to paint a piece, before he graduates, good or bad - Some of the Professors I like very much, particularly the professor of Spanish – At one of the officers rooms, he played on the violin with great skill, as far as I could Judge The Professor of French, sung the Marseilles Hymn [The national anthem of France] – He told me [that in] the time of Charles 10th [King of France, 1824-1830] he heard it sung by 50,000 men on the fields of battle=His singing of it (even to me) was wonderful...”

But despite its bucolic setting, West Point had begun to feel the pain of war:

“The officer Lieutenant Greble [John Trout Greble (1834-June 10, 1861)], who was killed at Great Bethel [Virginia] – just left this point & his wife & two children live here – his wife being the daughter of [a professor here] – wailings & heartrendings before long must go up from the whole Land – What have not the evil passions of men done in all ages of the World?”

-- West Point, NY, June 13, 1861, David Davis to his wife, Sarah Davis

When the Board of Visitors adjourned for the weekend, David Davis went to New York City to take care of some business there and to visit friends. His next letter to Sarah, on June 16th, makes it clear that he is eager to end his time at West Point and to head to Massachusetts to meet his wife and, after staying a few days, to return home with her to Bloomington for the summer:

“I was very impatient to get a letter from you & left West Point yesterday, without getting one – I get very restless & am very unhappy when I dont hear from you – I have a great deal to tell you when I see you - of things that I dont like to trust on paper, concerning Washington –... The Board of Visitors adjourned now from Sat morning, until tomorrow morning – ... I went this morning to hear Rev Henry Ward Beecher – He did not preach as well as usual, I reckon – He exhibits eccentricity as well as genius in the Pulpit – ... We went to the Battery [located at the southern tip of [Manhattan Island](#) in [New York City](#), facing [New York Harbor](#)] & saw the Privateer Schooner [An armed ship that was privately owned and manned, commissioned by government to fight or harass enemy ships.]... Friday [the 14th], the Board of Visitors went in row boats across the river to Cold Spring to witness experiments in Rifled Cannon – ...which experiments were not very successful [Adding rifling to a gun tube made it more difficult and expensive to manufacture and increased the length of the tube, but it increased the range and accuracy of the piece.] – A portion of us – being the Company in one row boat – went below about one mile, & went up to ^{Genl} Arnolds headquarters in the Revolution [Col. Beverley Robinson's house, opposite West Point, which was occupied by American Revolutionary War turncoat Benedict Arnold as his headquarters. It was destroyed by fire in 1892.] A portion of the Chain stretched across the river in opposite West Point to prevent the passage of British vessels up the North river was shown to us...”
<https://www.historynet.com/west-point-chain/>

-- Astor House NY, June 16, 1861, David Davis to his wife, Sarah Davis

His wife *did* write him a long letter with a sort of an apology two days later, on the 18th, although it is clear that she has not read his latest letter:

“Was I very naughty for not writing you a long letter last week?... Col Williams [Sarah Davis' brother-in-law's father] has just called = I read him your description of West Point which was very good – I can fancy just how the place looks – You have had a pleasant time I know –“

Sarah also tells him that her late cousin's husband is going to try to obtain a contract with the government to use the fabric he manufactures:

"JZ Goodrich [John Zacheus Goodrich, widower of Sarah Davis' cousin] I saw yesterday -He is on his way to Washington - to try to get an order from Government for his cloth to make drawers [underwear bottoms] for the Soldiers..."

-- Stockbridge MA, June 18, 1861 Sarah Davis to her husband, David Davis

That is the last news that we have from this separation, one of many that kept the Davises apart during their 40-year marriage. The Davises made it safely back to their Bloomington home, the old I-house which sat approximately where the David Davis Mansion is today, where the Judge was finally able to relax and have some time to rest before beginning his fall circuit in September.



Left: A c.1860 photo of the I-house which preceded the David Davis Mansion. That is probably Sarah Davis sitting in the 2nd floor window. The 1 ½ story house to the left is the original Jesse Fell home with the addition of a half-story and the 2-story addition, which dates to about 1852.

On an exceptionally hot, early August day, Sarah Davis wrote to her sister, Fanny Williams, in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. It is a wonderful, 8-page-long letter filled with news and opinion, and a wonderful description of how the Davis family beat the sweltering central Illinois heat:

"Surely the Mercury is not as high as it is here or you would have to take time to fan yourself - We are almost melted - Mercury about 100 - and flies active - perspiration starting out at every pore - Monday last the heated term set in -... George [their son, 19 yr. old George Perrin] and Sarah [Sarah Davis Walker, David Davis' cousin] are going to a party to night [sic] - It is now Seven o'clock - Mr Davis [the Judge] lies on the Porch floor, and Sallie [their daughter, Sarah Worthington Davis, age 9] and I sit on the door step - She is reading Rose Clark [by Fanny Fern, 1856] - No air stirring - but the flies will soon go to bed..."

The war was still raging and despite its distance from the Davis family and from Sarah Davis' family in Berkshire Co., Massachusetts, the effects of it were being felt:

"...One lady here has lost a brother and cousin in the Secession [Confederate] army - Their death was caused by a mistake among their own people - Some have friends in both armies - I look on Civil war as one of the greatest evils that can befall a nation...Mr Davis received a letter from Lieut Governor Boyd of Connecticut - requesting him to write to Mr Lincoln and enquire after Rev - Hiram Eddy [Hiram Eddy was the husband of Sarah Davis' cousin, Frances Charlotte Adam Eddy] who has not been seen since the fight at Bull's Run on the 21st of July - and it is feared he is killed or taken prisoner by the Rebels - Mr Davis will write at once - I do earnestly hope our worst fears may not be realized -... Please write me if you hear any thing [sic] of Mr Eddy - I

feel very great sympathy for Cousin Fanny... I earnestly hope a speedy stop may be put to the war –for I doubt whether it will result in any good to the Union Party – These are my sentiments tho [sic] I do not say so to my friends here – I wonder what our Cousin ... thinks now – You know he said it was nothing to conquer the South...”

-- Bloomington, Illinois, August 2, 1861, Sarah Davis to her younger sister, Frances Mary [Fannie] Walker Williams

As autumn approached, the hope of it being a quick war was already dashed, and folks were beginning to settle in for the long haul.

[1] 1. John J. Crittenden, 2. Andrew Johnson, 3. Edward D. Bell, 4. John M.M. Botts, 5. David Davis, 6. David Cooper, 7. John Woodruff, 8. James Shane Alban, 9. Frederick P. Stanton, 10. Alexander Cummings, 11. Thomas J. McKean, 12. Richard Tilghman, 13. James G. Blaine, 14. Herman Haupt, 15. Professor Charles Davies, 16. Gen. H.B. Carrington, and 17. Brig. Gen. John Garland.

Of the 17 men tapped to serve on the board, it seems from David Davis' letter dated West Point NY, June 13, 1861, that not all of these men actually served on the board. According to the final report of the 1860 Board of Visitors, only 10 men: Messrs. Davies, Haupt, Alban, Bush, Blaine, Clark, Cooper, Cummings, Davis, and Woodruff actually showed up to serve.

[2] An interesting thing that I learned while writing this article is the role that West Point played in establishing the blackboard as standard education equipment! “The blackboard’s ultimate origins are unclear but in North America one institution, the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, played a particularly important role in establishing the device within classrooms. The blackboard’s use at West Point in the first years of the nineteenth century garnered the novel tool notice and by the Civil War, the blackboard’s place had been firmly established ... as part of the physical and intellectual architecture of the classroom.” [History of Education Quarterly](https://doi.org/10.1111/hoecq.12093) , [Volume 55](https://doi.org/10.1111/hoecq.12093) , [Issue 1](https://doi.org/10.1111/hoecq.12093) , February 2015 , pp. 82 - 108 <https://doi.org/10.1111/hoecq.12093>

Structural Updates in Sarah's Garden

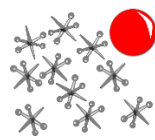


The Davis Mansion Foundation would like to thank the Laborers' International Union of North America Local 362 and their Secretary/Treasurer Gil Brockway for their outstanding work on replacing the boards in Sarah's Garden. The last time the whole garden was done was over 20 years ago. Needless to say, it has deteriorated over time. We'd been patching it as best as possible for a decade, but it was time to do a full upgrade. Doug Meyers has spearheaded the project along with Ross Manuel, Larry Mertis, and John Penn, and we are getting close to the grand unveiling. Keep an eye on Facebook for photos of the fellows and the completed work!

Visit the Mansion Gift Shop!

Find something special for yourself or someone you love at the Clover Lawn Museum Shop!

Did you know we carry a wide variety of items for children?



Games: jacks, pick-up sticks, tiddlywinks, card games, dice games, string games

Crafts: coloring books, paper dolls, stickers, beginning crochet and knitting kits

Toys: yo-yo's, thaumatropes, jacob's ladders, train whistles, puzzles, stuffed bears, soft dolls



Books: Many titles appropriate for 6th grade and up!

Help your kids and grandkids keep their hands and brains busy with classic activities that don't require screen time.

Think ahead for summer birthdays:

The Clover Lawn Museum shop carries scarves, jewelry, aprons, teapots, cups, and infusers, books, home décor, and more great gift items for everyone. Stop by Wednesday-Friday from 9am-3:30pm to browse.

In the History Books

- The David Davis Mansion welcomed a few **field trips** and **group tours** this winter and spring! Here is a list of who has come to visit us:
 - Bethel Lutheran School: Morton (2nd grade)
 - Bloomington Area Career Center
 - Homeschool groups (multi-age)
 - Peoria Academy (middle school)
 - Heyworth Elementary (4th grade)
 - Illinois Retired Teachers Association
 - Bradley University: Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
 - Epiphany Elementary (4th grade)
 - Hudson Elementary (3rd grade)
- A great crowd attended **Abraham Lincoln's Birthday Celebration** on Saturday, February 8! Families enjoyed cake, lemonade, and Lincoln-themed crafts in the visitor's center and the stories and humor of Abe Lincoln and Sarah Davis in the mansion parlor, played by the amazing Randy Duncan and Jen Maloy.
- On Tuesday, March 18 David Davis Mansion Foundation board members Barb Ely and Matt Hany gave a **presentation** about David and Sarah Davis and the David Davis Mansion to Barb's women's fellowship group at Second Presbyterian Church in Bloomington. The ladies present learned a lot about the history of the Davis family and asked some excellent questions. A good time was had by all! If you are part of a local group that would like to have a similar presentation or discussion, feel free to contact our foundation through the David Davis Mansion Facebook page, calling the visitors center at (309) 828-1084, or emailing us [HERE](#).
- Our **Spring Festival** on Saturday, April 12 looked a little bit different this year, but was still a big hit with our visitors! So many egg hunts were being hosted across Bloomington-Normal this season, so we elected to cancel ours and focus instead on taking photos of families with our fantastic Easter bunny in the Parlor and offering fun, interactive Spring stories in the Pink Chintz room. The kids were excited to pick a few pieces of candy from the bunny's basket to take with them. Everyone had lots of fun and it seemed that no one really missed the eggs after all!
- 15 visitors had a great time on the **Behind the Scenes Tour** on Saturday, April 15. In preparation for our Site Manager Jeff Saulsbery's retirement in about 2 years, a couple of mansion docents tagged along to learn the ropes. Future tours may not be *exactly* the same, but we're sure they will still be great! Did you miss the spring Behind the Scenes Tour? We'll be offering another one on Saturday, October 25 from 7-9pm. Online registration will open [HERE](#) on September 15.



In the History Books (continued)

- Our second annual **Family Day at the Mansion** (pictured on this page) was held on Saturday, May 17. It was a great time! We welcomed approximately 175 people to the mansion for approximately 10 activities throughout the property. These included a scavenger hunt, a dulcimer demonstration, vintage table games (pick-up sticks and tiddledywinks), and a kitchen gadget guessing game inside the mansion... 19th century dress-up in the barn... Sarah's Garden tours, a butterfly art project, and a planting activity on the east lawn... and badminton, croquet, and cookies and lemonade on the front lawn. The weather was absolutely beautiful and it was wonderful to see visitors of all ages having fun at the mansion while learning new things!

Come Volunteer with Us!

Special events like this one require a lot of volunteer support to help with activity tables and making visitors feel welcome, and we could use your help! We also use volunteers to lead daily tours at the mansion Wednesday-Saturday from 9am-3:30pm. If you love history and interacting with people, maybe volunteering at the mansion is for you! Come learn more at our **Volunteer Information Meeting** on Saturday, June 7 at 8:30am!



The Chess Game at the Mansion

By: Melanie R. Serez, Winter 2024 Graduate Intern

With special thanks to Adrienne Huffman (my project supervisor and Director of Public Engagement), Pat Schley (Mansion Historian), Dr. Marcia Young (former Executive Director), Jeff Saulsbery (Site Manager), and Greg Koos (Director of the McLean County Museum of History). Thank you for all your time and help!



This antique oleograph, by French artist Louis Auguste Georges Loustaunau (1846-1898) and printer Alfred Legras (dates unknown), is a bit of a mystery piece within the David Davis (1815-1886) Mansion. While not the first oleograph that the mansion holds in its possession, this print of a genre painting (a style of art that depicts everyday life) stands apart due to having little to no record of how it was obtained. What is known, however, is a patchwork of information that any historian, art lover, or mystery enthusiast would find intriguing.

To start, the artwork is known by two titles: "Partita Di Scacchi" (which is French for "Chess Game") and "Domestic Comforts" (a less suitable, yet more commonly found moniker within art auction sites and collections). There is scarce information regarding the art piece's origins and creators,

however, there are a few things we know for certain: The work was first painted by A. Loustaunau circa 1880 and later printed by the publisher A. Legras circa 1885. History notes little about the printer A. Legras (other than his shop located at 66, Rue de Bondy Paris¹⁻²), but his name can be seen on many prints housed by the British Museum³. Most of his work consisted of chromolithographs and oleographs, which were created using metal sheets or stones to print images. Oleographs⁴, in particular, were made by hand-pressing multiple layers of ink atop each other using individual stones or metal sheets. Each layer in the process allowed for more color and detail to be added, which resulted in a beautiful print resembling the unique textures of an oil painting.

In the 19th century, oleographs were popular because of these intricate details, but more importantly, the method (a reflection of the Industrialization of the time) greatly contributed to its affordability. The frame in which the Davis family's "Partita Di Scacchi" resides, on the other hand, reflects the wealthy Gilded Age aesthetic, with its intricate flower pattern and gilt (gold-leaf) finish. These points showcase the owner's good taste and love of nature, which was expected from Upper Middle-Class decor. Since the work was printed in 1885, Sarah Davis (1814-1879) could not have been the person to purchase the piece, rather it was likely either David or George P. Davis (1842-1917) who obtained the artwork.

Regardless, the family selected a worthy piece to set within the house as a conversation starter. While the artist, Loustaunau is not well-known in the United States, his impressive artworks used to grace Paris salons (art exhibitions) winning him awards, including the Cross of the Legion of Honor⁵ (the highest reward for French citizens for merit) at the Exposition Universelle of 1889 (the Paris World's Fair)⁶. Overall, he is best known for his military and genre pieces⁷, of which the "Partita Di Scacchi" presents both.

As one may guess from its title, the "Partita Di Scacchi" depicts a game of chess, yet there is more significance to this piece than a simple game. To be more precise, the print illustrates a French couple comfortably playing a game of chess on a patio during a bright summer's day. To the right, a lady sits relaxed (legs uncrossed), having played the winning move. To the left, a wounded French soldier sits with his leg resting on a cushion. His expression is a mixture of bemusement and frustration at the loss as he places his hand to cup the side of his face. His eyes are locked on the chess board while others are seen strolling or horseback riding in the distance. The scene is both serene and meaningful as the artist depicts a still of life and nature, while also subtly portraying deeper political and social themes.

What most individuals will not notice at first glance is how profound the themes of war and loss are within this design. The most obvious example is the wounded French soldier and the loss of the chess game. One can tell that the man is a soldier simply by examining his clothing; His attire consists of a red Kapi (typical French troop headwear) and red trousers streaked with a standard blue stripe. This uniform design is best

known for being worn during Napoleon III's generation⁸, which likely means that this man was injured sometime during the Franco-Prussian War (a conflict between Prussia and France during 1870-1871)⁹. If so, the man's injury (further symbolized by the walking cane leaning against the table), alludes to the sacrifices that French soldiers made during the harsh battles. Despite France's efforts, the country eventually lost the Franco-Prussian War (hence the lost chess game) and agreed to a peace treaty⁹. The serene atmosphere of the painting exhibits the return to everyday life that the treaty produced, yet it also illustrates how people were still recovering from the defeat. The black dog lying beside the soldier also reveals the soldier's enduring loyalty to his country¹⁰.

Conversely, the dead leaves scattered around the patio and the horseback riding in the background are less obvious examples of war and status. The leaves represent loss and death, though they are also perhaps a sign of the changing times¹⁰. Similarly, the Greek urn sitting on the patio reflects the power and prestige that the French military respected and had hoped to display on the battlefield¹⁰. Unfortunately, their efforts to claim victory did not come to fruition. Nonetheless, France's efforts are still shown through the artwork's display of horseback riding.

The dynamic horsemanship in the artwork's background looks to be individuals playing a game of carrousel. The game (originally called Carosella in Italian and Garosello in Spanish) meant "little war" and was played with a perfumed ball to improve horsemanship and dexterity¹¹. The activity was adopted as military training but was also seen as aristocratic entertainment to display glory and power¹¹. The most notable event (for reference) was the magnificent La Grand Carrousel of 1662 hosted in Paris by King Louis XIV¹². The La Grand Carrousel was a festive spectacle and competition that celebrated the King's rule and France as a prosperous country¹².

Loustaunau thus reflected France's old successes within his work which was perhaps a comment on the country's wealth existing in the past. The reality of life after losing the Franco-Prussian War was, after all, one of financial labor (since the country had to pay for the cost of occupation). It is not surprising then, why the Davis family would choose to obtain this art piece for its collection. The craftsmanship is clear, the symbolism is deep, and the piece could spark hours of discussion revolving around topics like nature, the Civil War, art, Europe, and everyday life. Most importantly though, the oleograph and its frame capture the Davis family's refined taste in intellectual and sophisticated work.

Take a closer look at this work of art on your next visit to the David Davis Mansion. It can be found in the Parlor Chamber, on the second floor.

Sources:

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Enjoy the Benefits of Foundation Membership

In January the Board of Directors of the David Davis Mansion Foundation (DDMF) held their 2025 planning meeting. During that meeting, we finalized our annual budget, discussed plans for the year, and reviewed all the great events that will happen in 2025.

We look forward to seeing you throughout the year at our car shows, the Glorious Garden Festival, Christmas at the Mansions, and our other great events.



We also set a goal to try and increase our foundation membership in 2025. If you are already a DDMF member, we thank you for your continuing support. If you are not a DDMF member, we would like to invite you to join our foundation.

Benefits of membership include:

- 20% discount on most purchases in the gift shop
- Invitations to members-only events
- Early registration/discounts on special programs
- An opportunity to support this wonderful site, which hopes to preserve our local, state, and national history for generations to come.

You can join our loyal group of supporters through our website's membership page [HERE](#), via mail at 1000 Monroe Drive Bloomington, IL 61701, or by calling us at (309) 828-1084.

New Donation

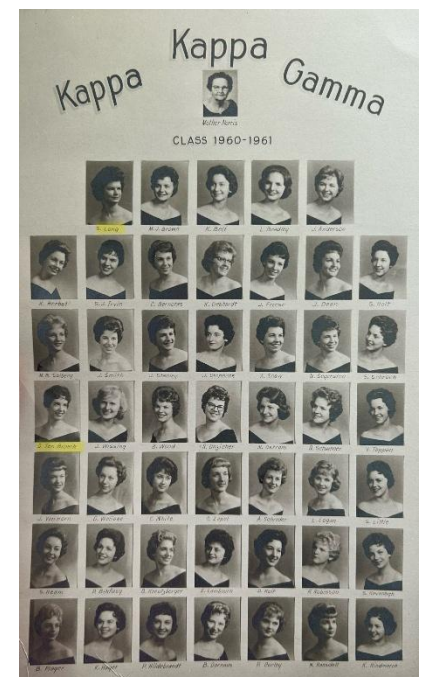


This print of the mansion, which was created in 1961 by Illinois Wesleyan University fine arts student Dawn Ten Broeck, was donated to the David Davis Mansion Foundation on April 2 by fellow student, friend, and Kappa Kappa Gamma member Sara Ellen Anderson (left).

You can see Dawn and Sara pictured in their sorority composite photo (right) during the 1960-61 academic year.

We are so thankful for her generosity! Come see the print in our visitor's center: Wednesday-Saturday from 9am-3:30pm.

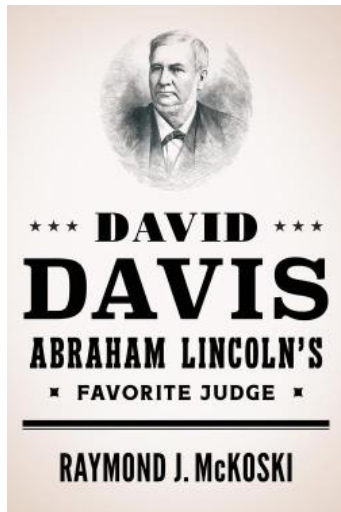
Do you have a piece of David Davis Mansion history which you would like to donate? Give us a call at (309) 828-1084 for details.



Abraham Lincoln's Favorite Judge

Author Raymond McKoski will be speaking about his new book, *David Davis: Abraham Lincoln's Favorite Judge* at the David Davis Mansion on Wednesday, October 8 at 7pm. Books will be available for purchase before and during the event. More information to follow.

A reception and book signing will take place after the talk. Advanced registration will be required, and a link to sign up online will be available in the next newsletter.



About the Book

One of Abraham Lincoln's staunchest and most effective allies, Judge David Davis masterminded the floor fight that gave Lincoln the presidential nomination at the 1860 Republican National Convention. This history-changing event emerged from a long friendship between the two men. It also altered the course of Davis's career, as Lincoln named him to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1862.

Raymond J. McKoski offers a biography of Davis's public life, his impact on the presidency and judiciary, and his personal, professional, and political relationships with Lincoln. Davis lent his vast network of connections, organizational and leadership abilities, and personal persuasiveness to help Lincoln's political rise. When Davis became a judge, he honed an ability to hear each case with complete impartiality, a practice that endeared him to Lincoln but one day put him at odds with the president over important Civil War-era rulings. McKoski details these cases while providing an in-depth account of Davis's role in Lincoln's two unsuccessful campaigns for U.S. Senate and the fateful run for the presidency.

Refer a Mansion Intern

The David Davis Mansion recruits a new group of interns three times a year during the fall, spring and summer semesters. If you know an undergraduate or graduate student who is interested in history, public speaking, museum studies, or research, refer them [HERE](#) for more information on our program!

The David Davis Mansion Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

President: Kathe Conley

Executive Director: Sheri Brownfield

Director of Public Engagement:
Adrienne Huffman



Future Author Talks

The David Davis Mansion has welcomed some great authors over the last couple of years to talk about their work and writing process.

2022:

Marcia Young, *The David Davis Mansion, 1872-2022: 150 Years at Clover Lawn*

Greg Koos, *Freedom, Land, and Community: A History of McLean County Illinois, 1730-1900*

2023:

David Finnigan, *Thousand-Year Statehouse*
Ed Achorn, *The Lincoln Miracle*

Do you have an author that you would like to see visit the David Davis Mansion for a future talk? Send your ideas to programming@daviddavismansion.org.

Experience a New Kind of Tour



Looking for a new way to explore McLean County history and the David Davis Mansion? Don't forget about the *Looking for Lincoln Audio Tour!*

The tour includes 18 different stops in the Bloomington-Normal area, including the David Davis Mansion, takes approximately 2 hours, and can be found online [HERE](#). Put down your windows, enjoy the breeze, and listen to it on your phone while driving the route throughout town.

The David Davis Mansion also has an online tour experience called *Views of the Past* which includes 4 stops around the David Davis Mansion property. As you walk the mansion grounds, simply scan the QR codes and view the mansion from a new perspective through archival photos taken from the same view, but during a different time in history.

New at Christmas at the Mansions 2025

This year [Broadview Mansion](#) will be joining forces with the David Davis Mansion and Ewing Manor as our **2025 Bonus Home** at Christmas at the Mansions! This means that your event ticket will grant you entrance to all three historic houses, decked out for the holidays! We hope you will plan on attending this wonderful night of festive celebration on Saturday, December 13 from 2-7pm!



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www.daviddavismansion.org

Hours: Wednesday - Saturday: 9am - 3:30pm

I do the very best I know how—the very best I can; and I mean to keep on doing so until the end. – Abraham Lincoln