



NEWS from the *David Davis Mansion Foundation*

Fall 2025



[Visit us online!](#)

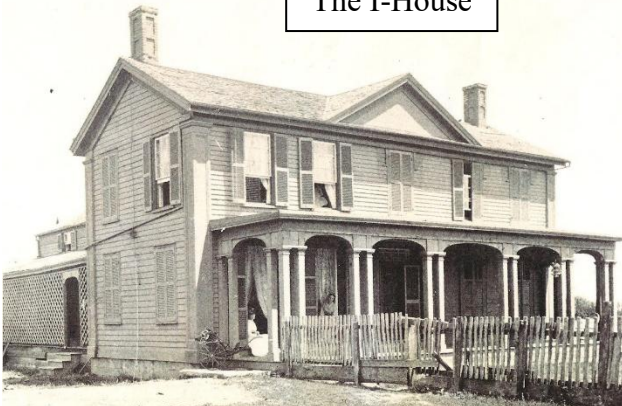
Voices from the Past: Movin' On Up for The Davis Family

By: DDMF Researcher Pat Schley

Anyone who has built a new home knows how the last few months are taken up with all the final little details of construction and with myriad decisions regarding the purchase of any furniture and carpeting needed. It was no different for the Davises during the summer of 1872. They were spending the last approximately 2 months living in the old I-house, their home for nearly 22 years, before their new house was ready to furnish and finally move into.

As you read this article, remember that they will be moving from this...

The I-House



...to this:

The Mansion



In July, Sarah Davis traveled back East to order much of their furniture and carpets at the A.T. Stewart store in New York City. She was accompanied by her brother-in-law, Daniel Williams, her husband, and possibly her sister, Lucy Rockwell:

“Stores such as Stewart’s afforded female consumers an outlet for socialization and self-determination outside the home, albeit one that revolved around the conspicuous consumption of fancy goods.”

<https://visualizingnyc.org/essays/palaces-of-consumption-a-t-stewart-and-the-dry-goods-emporium/>

Her decision to patronize a store in New York City instead of shopping at local retailers had caused some awkward moments at home. Sarah wrote to her husband that William Fitzwilliam, who owned the local Fitzwilliam & Sons carpet store, “...said he hoped to furnish carpets for our new house. I replied he must have had a good trade in carpets this year- It was direct certainly but what better could I say when I was to go to New York for the carpets.”

-- Bloomington, January 10, 1872: Sarah Walker Davis to David Davis

By the end of July, their purchases were beginning to arrive, along with a box of pictures that her sister, Fanny Walker [Mrs. Daniel Rogers] Williams and her husband had bought for them:

“Our carpets have arrived-as also a box I think with your gift of pictures. Shall get a man on Monday I hope to put down carpets. No furniture yet here. My good man thinks best not to move at present – but if we keep well we shall gradually work in. The Screens look nicely at the windows, and I think will answer the purpose for which they are intended. The carriage road across the yard is finished.”

-- Bloomington, July 27, 1872: Sarah Walker Davis to David Davis

In late July, they also received a housewarming gift that was a remembrance of their early days in Bloomington and of dear old friends:

“The heirs of your old friend & partner, Wells Colton [i], who have received so many inestimable favors at your hands, desire to place in your new home some token of their kind & grateful regard. By their direction therefore, I have ordered to be sent to you by Express from New York a mantel-clock with side pieces [the Indian and canoe clock with side bud vases] & three engravings [the gilt-framed water scene chromolithograph and the 2

engravings of Landseers], all of which, if agreeable to your own & Mrs. Davis's taste, we shall be glad to have placed in your library. There, as your eye may rest often upon them, we trust they will.

Less than 2 weeks later, the gifts had arrived and the Judge wrote to Rev. Chapin with his thanks:

"Mrs. Davis and I cannot find words to express our grateful appreciation of the beautiful presents which yourself and the heirs of Mr. Colton, were kind enough to send us. They arrived safely, & will always be valued as a memento of your & their friendship... They arrived safely, & will always remind us of our departed friend, and be valued by us as a memento of the friendship of his family [original letter ends here]"

-- Bloomington, August 6, 1872: David Davis to Aaron Lucius Chapin

Before mid-August, all of the NYC purchases had arrived and some had even been put in place in the new house. Sarah took time out to write to her brother-in-law, Daniel, to tell him that:

"Every thing that we ordered has come and the chamber sets are in their places. All came in good order. All the family are much pleased with every thing and we have gained a reputation for good taste. I am not disappointed in any thing which I think remarkable in buying so many articles. The Furniture was packed well...I found on putting the chairs in the parlor, that there were not enough for the size of the room and have sent to have two "window chairs" made, and sent with a hat rack + the pattern for the Rack I have not yet decided on - but shall in a short time. There was no carpeting sent for the halls although I selected it - and Mr. Davis wrote yesterday to A.T. Stewart & Co - (you see I did not forget the Co) this time. I was so fortunate as to get a good upholsterer to put down my carpets. They are much admired by my good man and my girls and suit the walls exactly. I wish you could see them. I have to alter some carpets for the back chambers - but shall not try to move till the weather is cooler - "

-- Bloomington, August 10, 1872: Sarah Walker Davis to Daniel Rogers Williams

By late August, Sarah Davis wrote to her sister, Fanny Williams, that she is now thinking that they may be able to begin to move into their new house by the first week in September. Various things have delayed their move, mainly the hot weather that August brought with it:

"I am trying to think it for the best - tho I intended having two carpets taken up and attired for the back chambers in the new house so that we might get in next week if the weather was cool. It has been very "heated" weather here - and I could not think of making any extra effort - and will not do so next week unless this cool change lasts..."

-- Bloomington, August 29, 1872: Sarah Walker Davis to Frances Mary Walker

However, the need to be into the house and reasonably settled as soon as possible was due to more than just construction delays. Early in the summer, their 25-year-old niece, Frances Mary "Fanny" Walker [iii] had become engaged to 30-year-old dry goods retailer Henry Villee Pierpont [iv]. They had been planning to marry later in the year, but had just moved up the date of their wedding:



Three of the housewarming gifts mentioned in the correspondence above, given to David and Sarah Davis from the heirs of the judge's former law partner, Wells Colton: A French mantel clock featuring a Native American woman fishing while sitting in a canoe by the French sculptor Duchoiselle (top), and two prints of paintings by English artist Sir Edwin Henry Landseer (bottom), featuring cattle and deer. You can see the clock in the sitting room and the prints in the dining room on your next visit to the mansion.



“Fanny now thinks of being married before the middle of October – and we shall have to hurry to be ready for that event [as the wedding would be held at the Davis home]... Fanny expects to go to Chicago the second week in September, and stay...two weeks. She has some purchases to make – and has engaged a dress maker for the last week of September – and [for] as much longer as she wishes...[Fanny] is strengthening herself with Iron.



-- Bloomington, August 29, 1872: Sarah Walker Davis to Frances Walker Williams

The next 2 quotes are from an incomplete and undated letter [v] which indicates that Sallie Davis [vi] has gone to Chicago, perhaps accompanying the bride, and is having a few items of clothing made, perhaps for the wedding:

“I have had [a] letter from Sallie – She was well and just beginning her visit^[vii] Said Roxana wished her to be getting four things and have them fitted – ... I have written her to exercise her taste and Judgment, and do what she wishes as it will be a help to me – ...”

-- Bloomington, September 1872: Sarah Walker Davis to David Davis

Could you sense Sarah’s tension in her last few words *“as it will be a help to me”*? While the Davises had begun moving into the mansion, the building itself was not completely finished. The service end of the house was still being worked on and meal preparation was rather primitive, to say the least:



“Mr Samson^[viii] has had the doors oiled, and they look well – the back bath room floor, the upper back hall and the floor of the china closet, are painted, also kitchen pantry floor – the kitchen has had one coat of oil on the floor and is to have another tomorrow if it is ready for it – I hope some time this fall to have the back hall floor oiled – Black Wm^[ix] has cleaned and whitewashed the wash room- pump room – whitewashed – and Willie Fitzgerald^[x] has cleaned it – The cellar walls to the room we use for milk have been whitened and the windows and floor scrubbed – and now nothing remains to be done in that room but to paint the pine table where the milk stands – This will prevent the milk when spilled from penetrating the soft wood and have a tendency to sweeten the air of the room – We now cook below, and the servants eat there – I take my meals as usual above – and the dining room looks quite [finished?] with the small table full of various dishes – as we use this for a cupboard while the pantry is drying – The refrigerator is on the west porch – and we have the dining room dishes washed in the stove room – one of the kitchen tables being there for that purpose – Excuse my being so minute in giving particulars – as I am quite pleased with the arrangements – and wish you to fancy us as we are –...”

-- September/October 1872: Sarah Walker Davis to David Davis

Thanks to the Daily Pantagraph, we do know that Fanny Walker’s wedding to Mr. Pierpont came off as planned on Thursday, October 10, 1872, and that it was by all accounts, a brilliant success, not only for the bridal couple, but for the new Davis mansion, as well:

“A Brilliant Wedding.

The evening of October 10th, 1872, will long be remembered by the many people who were present at the residence of Hon. David Davis to witness the marriage of Miss Fannie [sic] M. Walker, the niece of Mrs. Davis, and Mr. H. V. Pierpont, of the well-known dry goods house of Kirkendall, Pierpont & Co. of this city. Judge Davis and family have only recently moved into their new house, which is one of the most spacious, as well as the most handsomely finished and furnished private

residences in the city. The wedding was indeed a brilliant opening of the new house.

...The ceremony was performed shortly after nine o’clock, by Rev. John Maclean, of the First Presbyterian Church. The bride and groom were attended by Miss Sallie Davis, Miss Corilla Weed, Mr. Charles Lawrence, and Mr. Alfred Ollis, who acted as bridesmaids and gentlemen, respectively...

After the marriage ceremony was completed, about half an hour was spent in receiving the congratulations of the guests to the newlywedded, --after which an elegant supper was served...

Francis “Fanny” Walker and Henry Pierpont were married when Henry was 30 and Fanny was just shy of 26. These photos are undated, but we believe they were taken later in their lives, rather than near the time of their marriage.

Mr. and Mrs. Pierpont left the city last night by the Chicago & Alton Railway for an absence of about three weeks, during which time they will visit in Chicago and in the principal cities of the East.”

-- The Daily Pantagraph, Friday, October 11, 1872, p. 4, col. 3

[i] Wells Colton (1812-1849), law partner of David Davis; son of Rhodolphus & Love Wells Colton; died on May 26, 1849, from injuries suffered in the Great St. Louis Fire on the night of May 17-18, 1849.

[ii] Rev. Aaron Lucius Chapin (1817-1892), 1st president of Beloit College, Beloit WI (1849-1886). He was the husband of Martha Colton Chapin (1816-1859), a younger sister of Wells Colton. See endnote #1 above.

[iii] Frances Mary “Fanny” Walker (1847-1932), daughter of George and Harriet Hull Walker. She lived with her maternal grandparents until the spring of 1863, when she came to Illinois to live with her paternal aunt, Sarah Woodruff Davis, and her family. [iv] Mr. Pierpont was co-owner of Kirkendall, Pierpont & Co., a Bloomington dry goods store.

[v] Context clues in the letter clearly indicate that this letter was likely written some time before the 3rd week of September.

[vi] Sarah Worthington Davis (1852-1934), 2nd daughter and only surviving daughter of David & Sarah W. Davis.

[vii] Sallie Davis may have been visiting the Lucius & Rachel Colton Fisher family in Chicago IL. They were preparing for the October 1872 marriage of Henry Villee Pierpont and Frances Mary ‘Fanny’ Walker. Fanny Walker was Sarah Davis’ niece who lived came to live with them in 1864.

[viii] Stephen Sampson (1825-1896). His obituary describes him as: “Mr. Stephen Sampson, the well-known painter...”

[ix] William Wells (1810-?) was an African-American day laborer and whitewasher who had occasionally worked for the Davis family for years. He and his brother, Henry Wells, had been enslaved in Kentucky but were freed upon entering Illinois in 1835, when they came to Bloomington with Dr. John Flournoy Henry. William Wells is listed on the 1870 US Census as being 60 years old and working as a whitewasher. For more information about the Wells brothers and photos of their manumission documents, see <https://mchistory.org/digital-exhibits/making-a-home/the-great-rush/william-and-henry-wells>

[x] William “Willie” Fitzgerald (1852-1922), Irish hired man.

A Gift for Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello

Gardeners love plant exchanges to add to their personal gardens. Sarah’s Garden at the David Davis Mansion State Historic Site has been a recipient of and also a giver of significant historical plants.

During the 2001 planning to restore Sarah’s Garden to its original 1872 design, Horticultural Historian Steve McDaniel found the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historical Plants at Monticello, Virginia, to be an heirloom source of 3 plants documented through letters and/or receipts to be among Sarah Davis’s favorites.

Among the 3 plants obtained from Monticello in 2001 were scarlet geraniums, an annual that Sarah Davis loved and routinely purchased locally during her time. Also obtained in 2001 from Monticello were dianthus, often called pinks, a perennial documented by letters to be among Sarah’s favorites. The third was a ‘Musk Clusters’ rose, which today blooms proudly in Sarah’s Garden through last frost but is no longer available from Monticello or commercially from any source. In a September 14, 1859 letter to her sister Fanny, Sarah Davis cites “My musk cluster rose has been and still is blooming freely”.

In recent discussions, Sarah’s Garden volunteer Donna Thiel learned that the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historical Plants would love to have a start of one of the “originals” from our 1872 garden, the Harison’s Yellow Rose. This tall, old rose shrub has one early summer flush of small, sweetly scented blooms and is said to have been among plants pioneers heading west took with them from home. Rooted stems of the Harison’s Yellow Rose are in transit from Sarah’s Garden to Monticello, Virginia, completing yet another plant exchange between our beloved 1872 Sarah’s Garden and the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historical Plants.



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

October 8

An Evening with Raymond McKoski, author of *David Davis: Abraham Lincoln's Favorite Judge*

October 25

Evening Behind the Scenes Tour

November 1

Mystery at the Mansion

November 29:

Christmas Barn Sale

November 29:

Christmas Open House: Clover Lawn Museum Shop

December 11

Annual Christmas Party: Members and Volunteers

December 13

Christmas at the Mansions

December 19-20

A Gilded Age Christmas...with Santa!

Upcoming Fall Events

Before we know it the grounds of the David Davis Mansion will be covered in snow and we'll be inviting visitors to celebrate the holidays with us at our much-loved holiday events. But before then, we hope you will attend one of our many fun fall programs!

An Evening with Raymond J. McKoski, Author of *David Davis: Abraham Lincoln's Favorite Judge*

Wednesday, October 8: 7pm



*** DAVID ***
DAVIS
ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S
FAVORITE JUDGE

RAYMOND J. MCKOSKI

Books will be available for purchase before and during the event.

A reception and book signing will take place after the talk. Advanced registration is required, and can be found by clicking [HERE](#).

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.

Evening Behind the Scenes Tour

Saturday, October 25: 7-9pm



Have you ever wondered, "What's up that staircase?" or "What do they keep behind those STAFF ONLY doors?" Have you always wanted to explore the attic or the basement of the David Davis Mansion? Would you really like to know how something specific works inside the mansion? Do you wish you could learn more about the house than is explained during a

standard tour? If so, this special behind-the-scenes experience is for you.

Don't miss this unique opportunity to see the mansion like never before! Tickets for this special experience are \$25/each in advance, limited to 20 people, and may be purchased online [HERE](#).

Visit Us at the 2025 Chamber of Commerce Non-Profit Showcase!

Thursday, October 16: 8-10am



The Nonprofit Showcase, held this year at the Parke Regency Hotel & Conference Center in Bloomington, is open to the public! This is your opportunity to hear first-hand about the crucial work our local non-profit organizations do every day here in McLean County. Hear their mission, feel their passion, and get involved. Stop by the David Davis Mansion table and say hello!

**Mystery at the Mansion:
A Masquerade Ball & Murder Mystery Night**

Saturday, November 1: 7pm AND 8:30pm



Back for a fourth year with an all-new mystery!

Join us for a night of cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, live music, fabulous fashions...and a game of intrigue!

Attendees are highly encouraged to wear stunning formal costumes and accessories and beautiful masks of any style. Have fun dressing from any era, as long as your mask coordinates! Don't be afraid to bring on the glitz with feathers, sequins, beads, fur, and more!

Our WhoDunIt actors and mansion staff will be dressed for the occasion, and we hope you will join us! A photo booth with fun props and accessories will be available to capture your look. Be sure to dress your best, because we'll award a prize for the Best Costume!

Enjoy an evening stroll through the mansion while sipping a drink, mingling with friends, and playing a live Clue-inspired murder mystery challenge. You'll be accompanied by live music on our 150-year-old piano throughout the night.

Using a provided game card, you'll hunt down suspects throughout the mansion and attempt to ask all the right questions to find out...WhoDunIt? Put your investigative talents to the test and see if you can be the first to solve the mystery and be declared the evening's Super Sleuth.

This is an event geared towards adults, but we absolutely welcome older, mature teenagers to attend and enjoy the fun!

Tickets sales for this event opened on September 15 (and are still available!) are \$50 each (and include food and drink) and may be purchased [HERE](#).

Need a formal dress for this occasion? We recommend [Kara and Kaylee's Closet](#), a local nonprofit dress donation program, created in honor of the creator's daughter, which loans gorgeous dresses for free in exchange for volunteer work and random acts of kindness.

Christmas Barn Sale and Christmas Open House: Clover Lawn Museum Shop

Saturday, November 29: 9am-3pm

Enjoy an opportunity to purchase gently used and vintage Christmas decorations and a few treasures from the David Davis Mansion which are being retired from our holiday collection!

Did you attend this event in 2021 or 2023? This time around, there is EVEN MORE holiday decor!

What to expect:

- Evergreen garland, wreaths, swags, and tabletop trees
- Glass, wood, fabric, and ceramic decor featuring Santa, snowmen, nutcrackers, elves, angels, reindeer, and more
- Christmas tree ornaments
- Holiday tablewear, including china, glass, linens, and candles
- Festive pillows, quilts, throws, tree skirts, and rugs

...and more!

This event will take place in the barn of the David Davis Mansion, which is at the back of the property, and will be clearly marked.

Sales are cash or check only, and all proceeds support the education and preservation mission of the David Davis Mansion Foundation.

While you're at the mansion, be sure to stop into the Clover Lawn Museum Shop, which will be holding its annual Christmas Open House. The shop will be newly decorated for the holidays, with beautiful merchandise to celebrate the season and fantastic gifts for everyone on your list. There will also be refreshments!



You can enter the gift shop from the back of the mansion, at a door which will be clearly marked.

Do you have items to donate to the 2026 sale? Stay tuned for more information about upcoming donation days, which will take place in January of 2026.

Read more about our upcoming Christmas events on the David Davis Mansion website [HERE](#), as well as in the next issue of our newsletter.

Celebrate the Holidays with the David Davis Mansion!



Decorating the Mansion

Our hardworking committee will begin the process of making the David Davis Mansion beautiful for Christmas during the 2nd and 3rd week of November! Would you like to help? Contact our Director of Public Engagement at programming@daviddavismansion.org for more information.

Come enjoy the spirit of the season at one of the following events:

Daily Christmas Tours

During the month of December our regular daily tours become Christmas Tours! Come visit us Wednesday-Saturday from 9am-3:30pm, with tours beginning at ten minutes past the top of each hour. Note: We will be closed this year on Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day.

Christmas Open House: Foundation Members and Volunteers Wednesday, December 10: 4:30-6pm

Consider this your invitation to join us for a special preview of the David Davis Mansion's beautiful Christmas décor and an opportunity to catch up with friends! There will be music and refreshments, and the Clover Lawn Museum Shop will also be open to use your 20% member discount.

Not a member yet? You can become one by visiting us [HERE](#) today!

Christmas at the Mansions Saturday, December 13: 2-7pm

Experience a special self-guided tour of the David Davis Mansion, Ewing Manor, and this year's **bonus home**, Broadview Mansion, decorated in period Christmas finery! Take in the architecture, the historic holiday postcard settings, and hosts dressed in period costumes as you walk back in time to the late 1800s and early 1900s. Music and other surprises will complement your tour!

Advance tickets are \$15 each, cash or check, and can be purchased November 1 through December 11 at the following Bloomington-Normal, IL locations: AB Hatchery and Garden Center, Casey's Garden Shop, and Hy-Vee Market, or online for \$16 each by clicking [HERE](#). Please note that advanced tickets may NOT be purchased at the David Davis Mansion, Ewing Manor, or Broadview Mansion.

Same day tickets will be \$20 each, cash or check, and available only at the front door of the David Davis

Mansion, Ewing Manor, or Broadview Mansion during the hours of the event. Tickets are available only until sold out and are non-refundable.

What's New in 2025?

David Davis Mansion: In 2024, the mansion unveiled a gleaming all-gold tree in the front hall which highlighted the opulence of the era, a nature themed tree and display in the dining room, and an all-floral tree which was inspired by the rich botanical variety and lush color of Sarah Davis' historic 1872 heirloom garden. This year, those trees have been expanded, and are even more beautiful! We will also have two new Christmas trees on the second floor: one with a fantastic Twelve Days of Christmas theme, and a second which pays homage to the Davis family's seamstress, Mrs. Lake, decorated with wonderful antique sewing notions.

Ewing Manor: "Passions and Fortunes" is the theme for this year's decorations, with each room representing the businesses or passions of the Ewing and Buck families. Businesses include the Zeno Gum Factory, Wrigley Chewing Gum, the Manufactured Ice Company, and the Davis Ewing Concrete Company. Also featured will be the passions of Hazle Buck Ewing, who was a suffragist, a supporter of the Miller Park Zoo who started the Ewing Zoo Foundation and was a noted conservationist, donating land to the City of Bloomington for the Ewing Parks and 178 acres at Funks Grove to be left as natural prairies. Every room will be decorated to depict one of these passions or fortunes.

A Gilded Age Christmas...with Santa! Friday, Dec. 19 & Saturday, Dec. 20: 6-8pm

Another great opportunity to walk through the David Davis Mansion at night, enjoying decorations, costumed hosts, and Christmas music! This event will also feature visits with a Victorian Santa, and you are welcome to take all the photos you wish with your own camera. This would be a great chance for your kids/grandkids to tell Kris Kringle what they'd like to have for Christmas, take a nice family photo, or even just capture a magical moment with your children.

Tickets are \$10 per adult at the front door of the mansion (kids are free!) on the night of the event, cash or check only. We hope you will join us for this family friendly program!



In the History Books

- The David Davis Mansion welcomed a few **field trips** and **group tours** this summer! Here is a list of who has come to visit us:
 - Excite Bus Tours
 - McLean County Museum of History Futures in History Day Camp
 - Packards of Chicago Car Club
 - Scribbles Learning Center
 - Faith Lutheran Childcare
 - Illinois State University College of Business
- Our summer car show series, which included the **Champagne British Car Show** on June 2nd, the **Antique Auto Show** on August 2nd, and the **Cruise-In at the Mansion** on September 6th has come to a close. We were excited to see car collectors, enthusiasts, and their families at the mansion, viewing all of the beautiful vehicles, enjoying live music and excellent food, and taking tours of the mansion and Sarah's Garden. An extra special treat was a performance of the **33rd Illinois Volunteer Regiment Band Concert** after the September event!
- On August 14 there was a **recognition ceremony for members of Laborers Local 362** (pictured at right) who recently completed a needed upgrade in Sarah's Garden at the David Davis Mansion. The union members recently volunteered their time to replace all the border walls for the raised beds in Sarah's Garden. Bloomington Mayor Dan Brady, Site Superintendent Jeff Saulsbery, members of the Bloomington Beautification Committee, Master Gardener volunteers, and board members from the David Davis Mansion Foundation were all present to recognize and thank the union members. The foundation board is extremely grateful for the volunteer labor and expertise that eases the burden on the foundation. Thank you to Sarah's Garden Committee for helping arrange the event and for providing cool refreshments and delicious treats on a warm summer day. But most of all, thank you to Laborers Local 362 for helping to preserve Sarah's Garden for the next several decades for the enjoyment of future visitors

Opening Comments: John Elterich, Master Gardener

Recognition Ceremony for Laborers Local 362

On behalf of the Master Gardeners who work throughout the seasons to keep Sarah Davis' Garden blooming and beautiful, welcome! We are here in what is called The Starburst Garden, designed by Ira Merchant, who was then Bloomington's City Surveyor and a civil engineer by training. He proposed the starburst design with 7 defined areas surrounded by raised wooden borders. Sarah found it too fancy for her tastes, writing to her husband in November of 1871 (and I quote):

"Mr. Merchant drew a plan for the flower garden but I think it too elaborate, and has too many walks to suit your taste or mine. So I dare not follow it."

Fortunately, Sarah overcame her objections to this design and placed the garden close to the house, where it could be enjoyed from different perspectives. She began to transplant her most beloved plants and flowering shrubs into the raised beds, which soil was enriched by horse manure from the stables.

The garden you see here is likely among the first professionally designed gardens in Bloomington; and notably, today's version is not a re-creation but is a restoration based on family records. There are 17 plants identified as originals. We are deeply grateful to the highly skilled volunteers from Laborers Local 362 who so willingly answered the call to save the deteriorating wooden borders of these historical raised beds. Their work honors the original intent of the designer and Sarah Davis herself, and all who work in the garden and on this historic site are deeply grateful to them. Local 362, your commitment to our community and the expertise you share with us is extraordinary and we are very grateful. Thank you!



In the History Books

The 2025 Glorious Garden Festival

The 2025 Glorious Garden Festival on July 11-12 was a huge success!

The mansion grounds were buzzing with excitement over the course of the two-day event. Approximately 500 individuals toured Sarah's Garden with many more taking advantage of the vendor booths, food truck, and self-guided tours of the mansion while local musicians provided a lovely soundtrack. The vibrant array of blooms in Sarah's Garden delighted attendees of all ages, with many guests pausing to photograph their favorite flowers, with the mansion providing a stunning backdrop. Friendly volunteers guided visitors along the paths, sharing stories about plant species, and the garden's rich history. The event fostered a strong sense of community, leaving guests inspired and eager for next year's celebration.

Outside the mansion grounds, approximately 500-600 people toured 10 private gardens during the Garden Walk, each selected for their varied designs and features, including greenhouses, pools, koi ponds, and outdoor dining spaces. Garden owners appreciated their involvement with the event and enjoyed connecting with garden lovers and members of the community. Additionally, two garden owners volunteered to join the 2026 Glorious Garden Festival Committee.

Looking ahead, 2026 will be the 30th anniversary of the Glorious Garden Festival! The Glorious Garden Festival Committee welcomes suggestions of gardens for inclusion in the 2026 event and beyond. Email your suggestions to smplyschulz@gmail.com.

Our sincere thanks to:

- the local businesses who partnered in the event as Corporate Sponsors, Supporting Sponsors, and Advertisers, and Vendors
- those who generously shared their private gardens for this year's walk
- the amazing Glorious Garden Festival volunteers who served on the committee, welcomed people at the private gardens, shared the mansion and Sarah's Garden with visitors, and helped on the mansion lawn during the event

Proceeds from this event provides private support for the David Davis Mansion State Historic Site, its educational programming, and its preservation initiatives. Learn more about what the Glorious Garden Festival funds [HERE](#).

Mark your calendars for next year's event: Friday and Saturday, July 11 and 12, 2026.



The Vases that Reveal America's Story: Identity, Industry, and Indigenous Design

By: Molly Newmister, Graduate Intern



The David Davis Mansion offers a compelling lens through which to examine the evolution of American identity and art culture during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. This transformation culminated in the creation and acquisition of two Indigenous-inspired vases circa 1900-1910, presumably purchased by George Perrin Davis or his wife, Ella. These vases embody the complex interplay between cultural fascination and fetishization, revealing how art both shaped and reflected American identity. By examining these pieces in their social and historical context,



we gain insight into the ways art, culture, and consumption intersected during a pivotal period of national growth and transformation.

America experienced a dramatic cultural turnover in the Gilded Age (1865-1897) and Progressive Era (1897-1920). While this young America had declared political freedom from Britain over a hundred years prior, it had not yet established a distinct cultural freedom free from the claws of European influence, and sought

to form a new identity that was purely American. Frederick Jackson Turner, in his essay, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, called the rapid extension of the Western frontier “the distinguishing feature of American life” (Turner, 1920, p. 4). Turner posited that as the American frontiersman “fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails,” he makes “a new product that is American” (Turner, 1920, p. 4), thus pivoting away from European influence into a crucible of Americanization. But, American identity, rooted in this growth, garnered anxieties as the mythic West— a place perceived as a haven where white Anglo-Saxons could escape the changing nation— dwindled, and— after the 1890 census— effectively ‘closed’ (Turner, 1920, p. 1).

With the frontier's closure and the West's accompanying decline, American identity entered a period of redefinition, shifting inward—yet paradoxically, also outward—toward the imagined “primitive” associated with Indigenous culture. In this cultural vacuum, Primitivism emerged at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries as both an aesthetic movement and a conceptual framework through which artists and intellectuals attempted to reconstruct a sense of authenticity. It sought to oppose industrialization in “the form of a positive discrimination in favor of so-called ‘primitive’ subjects and techniques” (Perry et al., 1993, p. 3). A component of the larger Modernist movement, Primitivism opposed the forces of Western urbanization inflicted by the First and Second Industrial Revolutions in America. By appropriating and romanticizing Indigenous cultures, Primitivism reflected America's shifting identity— no longer defined by the conquest of land, but by the aesthetic and ideological conquest of the “other.”

‘The noble savage,’ a central concept of Primitivist philosophy, is a direct fetishization of Indigenous culture. Fetishization as a concept has its roots in religious philosophy. In his 1760 work, *Du culte dieux fétiches* (‘On the Worship of Fetish Gods’), Charles de Brosses described fetishism as “a forceful reduction of all power to the material realm, creating the fetish as a tangible object that can be addressed and manipulated through a variety of actions” (Green, 2019). This act imports, superimposes, and absorbs that which it represents into itself, “erasing all traces of the represented.” The integrity of the fetish “depends on the fact that socioeconomic relations of production and distribution are erased from awareness” (Green, 2019), ensuring that the signifying function— what the fetish is representing— is no longer consciously recognized.

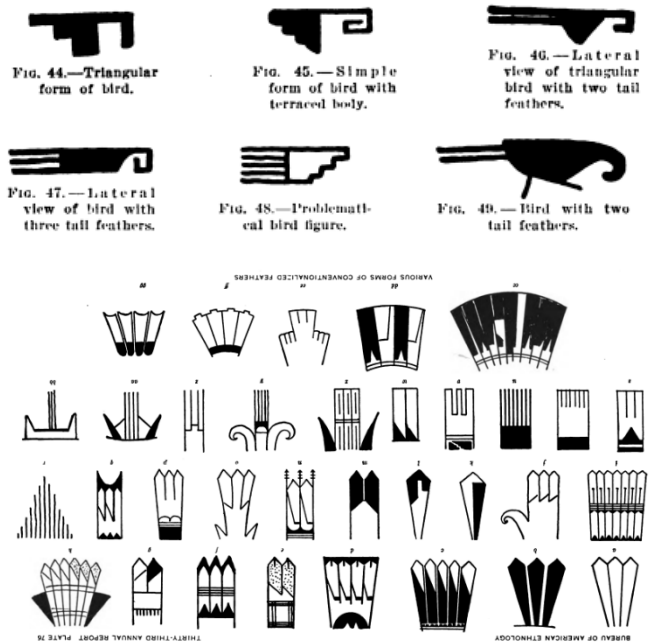
Primitivism and the “noble savage” trace back to Enlightenment-era philosophers such as Jean-Jaques Rousseau, who popularized these theories (Sarig, 2023, p. 2). The contradictory concept of noble savagery juxtaposes Romantic notions pitting the “pure” and “noble” Indian against the



“savagery” that “justifies (and perhaps requires) a campaign to eliminate [them]” (Deloria, 1998, p. 4). By viewing Indigenous art through a fetishized lens, primitivist works reduce dynamic, living cultures to static and unchanging representations, obscuring their complexity and evolution and thus pitting a static, revivalist ideal against a living, breathing culture.

Large-scale pottery manufacturers became instrumental in translating Indigenous-inspired aesthetics into mass-market commodities at the turn of the twentieth century. Among them were the Ohio-based Weller Pottery Company and its Souevo line, and the Bohemian firm Wilhelm Schiller and Son (present-day Czech Republic) and its SantaFe line, whose wares—still preserved in the David Davis Mansion—illustrate how industrial design participated in the broader Primitivist appropriation of Indigenous culture. The first vessel (*previous page, upper left*), produced by Weller, stands 8½ by 6¾ inches and is made of terracotta, an earthenware clay typically sourced from regional clay deposits. The vessel was slip-cast, a process in which liquified clay—slip—is poured into a mold, as evidenced by the vertical seams along each side. Its base is die-stamped “WELLER,” a mark used by the company from the late nineteenth century until 1925 (Kenefick, 2001). Painted in an off-white matte finish, the polychrome vessel is decorated with black painted designs of scalloped designs of scalloped arcs just below the rim, a repeating wing-like pattern, and checkerboard elements.

The second vessel (*previous page, lower right*), manufactured by Wilhelm Schiller and Son, measures 4½ by 7½ inches and is also made from terracotta. The vessel was formed using jiggering and jollying methods, as evidenced by a lateral seam that indicates its two-part construction in which a ball of clay is placed in a rotating plaster mold, while the jigger or jolly is a shaped arm—often called the ‘profile tool’—that shapes the surface of a ware, as the reverse side is formed by the contours of the mold itself (Hansen). The jiggering and jollying methods rose to fame in the 19th century with the invention of steam power during the Industrial Revolution, but truly became mainstream with William Boulton’s 1867 patent of a continuous rope-driven jigger, which was not only more cost-effective but also allowed for multiple wares to be shaped at once (Woodcroft, 1868). The base of the vessel bears the inscriptions “SANTA FE,” “AUSTRIA,” and “WS&S,” along with an emblem of two feathered figures—one on horseback with a spear, the other with a bow and arrow. Its surface features green, black, and rust-red painted designs in a repeating geometric sunburst design of triangular rays and checkered fills, S-shaped scrolls, and cross-hatched sections.



While industrial manufacturers produced these vessels, their decorative designs draw clear inspiration from Indigenous pottery traditions of the American Southwest, particularly those of the ancestral Hopi Pueblo. Polychrome vessels featuring curvilinear designs, concentric, four-way patterns, and sun, checkerboard, and bird motifs are some recurring themes in Pueblo pottery practices reflected in the vessels in question (Fewkes, 1919, p. 228). Such patterns—steeped in symbolic meaning and ritual significance for Indigenous communities—often represented elements of the natural and spiritual world. Among the most influential Indigenous artists of this era was Nampeyo of the Hopi-Tewa (*below, left*), whose traditional methodologies and techniques appealed to tourists’



“desire for an archaic authenticity” (Sarig, 2023, p. 8). Nampeyo’s work, characterized by bold geometric abstraction and the reanimation of ancestral imagery, established a visual vocabulary that was widely emulated and, in turn, appropriated by the American market. In this sense, the vessels function as intermediaries, translating Nampeyo’s and other Indigenous artists’ visual language into the industrially produced, primitivist-infused objects that circulated within American domestic spaces and which signified the greater shifting cultural identity.

The Indigenous-inspired vases housed in the David Davis Mansion embody more than decorative appeal; they reflect the cultural tensions of a nation negotiating its identity at the turn of the twentieth century. Through their industrial manufacture,

appropriated motifs, and placement within an elite domestic space, the vessels reveal how Primitivism translated Indigenous traditions into consumable symbols of authenticity for an anxious modern America. In this way, they stand as artifacts of both fascination and erasure—objects that illuminate how art, industry, and cultural desire converged to shape American identity during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.

References

Deloria, P. J. (1998). *Playing Indian*. Yale University Press.

Fewkes, J. (1919). Designs on prehistoric Hopi pottery (pp. 227–260). Washington Government Printing Office.

Green, R. (2019, July 8). Fetishism and the erasure of identity, part 1. *Religious Theory*.
<https://jcrtheory.org/religioustheory/2019/07/08/fetishism-and-the-erasure-of-identity-part-1-roger-green/>

Hansen, T. (n.d.). Jiggering. Digitalfire. <https://digitalfire.com/glossary/jiggering>

Harrison, C., Frascina, F., & Perry, G. (1993). *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The early twentieth century*. Yale University Press, in association with the Open University.

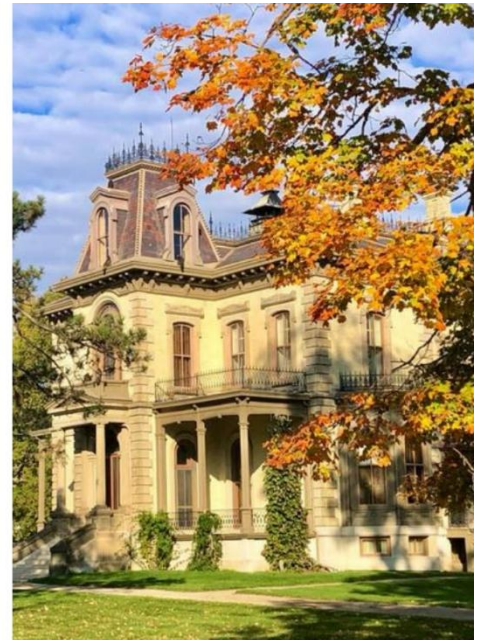
Kenefick, K. (2001, April). Weller Pottery. Wisconsin Pottery Association. <https://wisconsinpottery.org/weller-pottery/>

Sarig, U. (2023, May). *Fetishization & subjugation: Colonized craft in America* (Master's thesis). SUNY Open Access Repository. <https://soar.suny.edu/handle/20.500.12648/11898>

Turner, F. J. (1920). The significance of the frontier in American history. In *The frontier in American history* (pp. 1–38). Henry Holt and Company.

Woodcroft, B. (1868). Chronological index of patents applied for and patents granted, for the year 1867 (p. 227). Order of the Commissioners of Patents.

Clover Lawn in the Autumn



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



**1000 Monroe Drive
Bloomington, Illinois 61701**

Phone: (309) 828-1084

davismansion@yahoo.com

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