

**William Osborne Davis (1837-1911)** was the son of a Quaker farmer from Chester County, Pennsylvania and began his career as a teacher and on again, off again farmer. He may well have remained on that career path had it not been for longtime friend of the family and fellow Pennsylvanian Jesse Fell who requested Davis to join him in Bloomington, Illinois in 1858 to teach school in what would become the Town of Normal. Davis's connection to Fell, his future father-in-law, played a large part in his life. It was Fell, who in 1868, asked Davis to join him in the newspaper business when Fell reacquired ownership of Bloomington's first newspaper, *The Daily Pantagraph*. Davis knew absolutely nothing about the newspaper business. To those that knew he was the son of a Pennsylvanian farmer, it seemed a remote possibility that Davis would become a prominent newspaper publisher. But Davis was a quick study. This, combined with his profound sense of judgement and business savvy enabled him<sup>1</sup> over the course of his 43 years as owner and publisher of *The Daily Pantagraph*, to turn what had simply been a respectable weekly country and struggling daily newspaper, into one of the largest, most valuable, and respectable community newspapers of its kind in Illinois for decades to come.<sup>2</sup>

William Osborne Davis (W.O as he was known to most) was born on August 5, 1837 on a farm near Birmingham in Chester County, Pennsylvania. He was the eldest son and one of nine children born to Hibbard and Elizabeth (Osborne) Davis.<sup>3</sup> The Davis family was of English descent and were Quakers by faith. They settled in this area of Chester County around 1690. John Davis, the earliest known member of the Davis family in the United States, purchased a 700 acre tract of land and began farming. This original tract of land had been broken up through successive generations and 166 of those acres had descended to Davis's father, Hibbard, who was a prosperous farmer in his own right.<sup>4</sup>

W.O. Davis was educated in public and private schools during his youth. He worked on the family farm in the summer months and attended school during the winter months. However, while Davis was an active child, it was said that he had a delicate and nervous nature so his parents shielded him from the heavier work on the farm. Additionally, Davis developed a fondness for reading books early on which was fueled because the nearby town of Birmingham had a very good library. Because of his delicate nature his parents allowed him to indulge in his passion for reading and to express his creativity.<sup>5</sup>

At the age of fourteen Davis was sent to school during the winter months at Pine Grove Academy which was a short distance from his home. The next winter he attended Jonathan Gause's seminary school for young men and boys. The school was ranked highly by locals and Gause was deemed a very successful teacher. According to Davis's unpublished autobiography, this school was located in Marshalton, five miles from his family's farm.<sup>6</sup> Other accounts locate the school in West Chester under the name of Greenwood Dell School.<sup>7</sup> The following winter he attended Mr. Aaron's school in Norristown, PA. It was there that the established

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<sup>1</sup> Hasbrouck, Jacob L. *History of McLean County Illinois in Two Volumes, Vol. II* (Topeka-Indianapolis: Historical Publishing Company, 1924) 1182.

<sup>2</sup> "Western Whig Started Here in 1846," *The Daily Pantagraph*, March 13, 1928

<sup>3</sup> Sinclair, Harold and William O. Davis. "The Autobiography of William Osborne Davis," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984) Vol. 39, No. 3, September 1946.* 345

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 346-347

<sup>5</sup> Hasbrouck, 1180

<sup>6</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 347

<sup>7</sup> Plummer, Mark and Michael Maher, ed. "A Newcomer Observes the Climax of the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas Campaign," *Illinois Historical Journal*, Volume 81, No. 3, Autumn 1988, 182

himself as a “diligent and apt” pupil.<sup>8</sup> He also attended school in Charlotteville, NY.<sup>9</sup> He continued to work on his family’s farm every summer in between.

At the age of nineteen, Davis began teaching school near Marshalton, Pennsylvania and was moderately successful in his new chosen career. The following year he returned to Gause’s seminary school and taught there. It was while he was attending the Claverack Institute in New York in preparation to enter Union College in New York that Davis received an invitation to move west and engage in teaching school in Bloomington, Illinois in 1858. This invitation came from an old friend of the family, Jesse Fell.<sup>10</sup>

Jesse Fell was also a native of Chester County, Pennsylvania, his family having arrived from England and settled there in 1705. Like Davis, Fell was also a Quaker and the son of a farmer. The Fell and Davis families had been acquainted since at least 1818 when Aaron Davis, W.O.’s grandfather, rented a house from Jesse Fell Sr., Fell’s father, for \$20 per year.<sup>11</sup> W.O. Davis also attended school with Jesse Fell Jr.’s oldest son, Henry Clay Fell (whom Davis called Harry) at Jonathan Gause’s seminary school.<sup>12</sup> Having arrived in 1833, Fell was already well established in Bloomington when he invited Davis to join him in 1858.

Davis recalled that the “attractiveness of the New West overcame” his desire to attend college. Davis accepted Fell’s invitation to teach in a small school that was to be conducted in Fell’s home in what was then called North Bloomington (now the Town of Normal).<sup>13</sup> Davis arrived in Bloomington in late August 1858. According to Davis the journey to his new home was “tedious.” He recalled that the trains at the time were slow, “no sleeping cars, just ordinary day coach cars being very plain and constructed for transient travel.” The route he traveled took him through Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania then Cleveland and Toledo, Ohio. He then traveled by boat over Lake Erie to Detroit, Michigan at night. From there he crossed through central Michigan to Battle Creek, Michigan and finally to Chicago, Illinois. From Chicago he came via the five-year old Chicago and Mississippi Railroad (later named the Chicago and Alton Railroad) to his final destination of Bloomington.<sup>14</sup> Upon his arrival in Bloomington he settled into Fell’s home and school opened a few weeks after his arrival.

When the school opened, Davis had 20 students which included several of Fell’s own children. In a letter dated November, 1858 Davis wrote to his friend and former classmate Eugene Gause that his school was progressing nicely. Davis stated that he had a good history class and a “tolerable grammar class.” By the end of the winter term of six months, the students were “getting along to the apparent satisfaction” of the directors of the school and the patrons (most likely meaning the parents) and “got through the winter without any disagreeable conflicts.”<sup>15</sup> Davis closed the letter to his friend by saying that he was indebted to Fell’s oldest son Henry who had “worked hard to get me a school out here.”<sup>16</sup> Davis’ work as a teacher also afforded him the opportunity to meet his future wife, Eliza Fell, one of Jesse Fell’s daughters.

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<sup>8</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 347

<sup>9</sup> Bateman, Newton, Paul Selby, Ezra Prince, and John Burnham, ed. *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of McLean County, Volume II*. (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Co., 1908) 999

<sup>10</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 348

<sup>11</sup> Plummer and Maher, 182.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 348

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 349

<sup>16</sup> Plummer and Maher, 190

In May, 1859 Davis's father and his uncle Reynard Way came west on a prospecting tour. According to Davis, when his father and uncle reached Bloomington they were "pleased with what they saw." His father purchased 230 acres of land three and a half miles north of Bloomington on Main Street for W.O. and his brother James (who was still back in Pennsylvania).<sup>17</sup>

In addition to working as a school teacher for a short time in Bloomington, like most young Illinois pioneers of his generation Davis tried his hand at a variety of occupations before settling on a career as a newspaperman. In addition to teaching school during his first winter in Bloomington, Davis became partners with Thomas Junk in a tanning business. Davis invested \$600<sup>18</sup> in the tannery that employed a new method of "quick tanning." This business venture proved unsuccessful and Fell later bailed him out in exchanged for a number of lots from the property which Davis's father had bought for him.<sup>19</sup>

Davis resumed teaching during the winter of 1859-1860 but a district school was not held. Instead, Davis gave Fell's daughters private instruction in the library of Fell's home. Davis recalled that "not much success was attained in the winter due to heavy snow falls, with good sleighing for a couple months and the sleighing parties practically broke up the school."<sup>20</sup>

By the spring of 1860, gold fever had gripped the nation. Gold had been discovered in late 1858 along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains in the area known as Pike's Peak. At the time, Pike's Peak was located in the territories of western Kansas and southwestern Nebraska (what is today the state of Colorado). News about the discovery of gold spread quickly across the country and tens of thousands of emigrants flocked to the region with the hope of striking it rich. Davis and 15 other men from McLean County decided to join the other "Pike's Peakers"<sup>21</sup> (as these emigrants were sometimes referred to) who were pouring into the western territories with the hope of making a fortune. This was not the first expedition from McLean County to the Pike's Peak area. A previous expedition had left Bloomington in March of 1859 but had returned by the end of August that same year empty handed.<sup>22</sup> Many of the men who made up the earlier expedition participated in this second expedition with the hope that this time they would find gold.<sup>23</sup>

Four parties compiled the group that began the journey west to Pike's Peak. In Davis's party was Edward J. Lewis, (who was editor for the *Weekly Pantagraph*) E.E. Lewis, and his future brother-in-law Henry Fell. Also accompanying Davis on the journey was Thomas Fell, one of Jesse Fell's brothers. Each party had a tent and the wagons were loaded with provisions and mining tools. Davis and his party set out for St. Louis on March 1, 1860.<sup>24</sup> Upon their

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<sup>17</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 350

<sup>18</sup> \$600 in 2014 would be the equivalent of \$17,142 in 2014; "Consumer Price Index," <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2015.pdf>, Date Accessed September 7, 2015

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid; Burnham, John H, George P. Davis, and Ezra M. Prince. *Transactions of the McLean County Historical Society, Volume II: School Record of McLean County with other papers*. (Bloomington, Illinois: Pantagraph Printing and Stationary Co., 1903) 93

<sup>21</sup> Gehling, Richard. "The Pike's Peak Gold Rush," <https://sites.google.com/site/pikespeakgoldrush/>, Date Accessed September 7, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Lewis, Edward J. "Across the Plains to the Rocky Mountains in 1860," *The Daily Pantagraph*, August 2, 1902

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

arrival in St. Louis, they purchased additional supplies and left by steamboat for Nebraska City on March 7.<sup>25</sup> Davis recalled that the five-day journey on the Missouri River to Independence, Missouri was long because the river was low and full of snags.<sup>26</sup> When they reached Independence, they bought seven mules (five of which cost \$105 each and two that cost \$75 each)<sup>27</sup> and then took them over land to Nebraska City. They left Nebraska City on March 21 and followed the Laramie Trail to Ft. Kearney on the Platte River, arriving on April 1. According to Davis, his wagon did about 25 miles per day. Edward J. Lewis and Henry Fell did all the cooking while E.E. Lewis and Davis drove their team. They had a good tent and a sheet iron stove for the journey. On April 17, Davis's party made it to Denver without incident and all members of the party were in good health.<sup>28</sup>

When they arrived in Denver they saw numerous tents, log cabins, and many temporary shelters for some 3,000 people. They camped there over night and continued their journey to the town of Golden City which was 12 miles away. A rain storm kept them from entering the mountains for two days. They followed Clear Creek to Georgetown, also known as Gregory Diggins, which was their destination. Upon their arrival they found many miners engaged in prospecting, working surface claims, and a good deal of snow and cold weather.<sup>29</sup> For Davis and other members of the party that did not already have claims, there were few opportunities for them to purchase claims. Those that were claimless "found more or less employment at wages in various occupations" including carpentry and road making.<sup>30</sup>

The party found that purchasing additional supplies was going to be expensive. A 100-pound sack of flour that had cost \$3 in St. Louis was \$25 per sack near the mines. That was one example of the inflated cost of supplies since they were so far from "the States."<sup>31</sup> There was also no food for the mules in the mountains. The group decided to sell their surplus stock of groceries and send members of their party back to "the States" for additional supplies at a more reasonable price. Thomas Fell and Davis volunteered to make the journey back to St. Louis and left on April 30 with a four mule team for a load of groceries. While Fell and Davis made the journey back, (which was for the most part uneventful aside from a blizzard they encountered at Fremont's Orchard on the Platte River) the rest of the group continued prospecting, having moved on to California Gulch (later known as Leadville).<sup>32</sup>

According to Davis, California Gulch contained a few hundred miners, some log cabins with dirt roofs, and for a mile or more up the Gulch there were rich claims. Prospectors were arriving daily and all the surrounding area was staked off and being investigated.<sup>33</sup> However, Edward Lewis, who was at California Gulch while Fell and Davis were on their way to St. Louis for supplies, reported that in reality there were "only a few claims that yielded good returns to

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<sup>25</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 351

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; Lewis, "Across the Plains to the Rocky Mountains in 1860"

<sup>27</sup> In 2014, these figures would be \$3,000 and \$2,142 respectively; "Consumer Price Index,"

<http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2015.pdf>, Date Accessed September 7, 2015

<sup>28</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 351-352

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 352

<sup>30</sup> Lewis, "Across the Plains to the Rocky Mountains in 1860"

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 352

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 353

their possessors...the expected rich discoveries over the range were not made. Prospectors were generally unsuccessful," which included the expedition from Bloomington.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout his adventure Davis wrote letters to family and friends back in Bloomington and Pennsylvania. Recipients of his letters included Jesse Fell and his family, in particular Fell's oldest daughter Eliza whom Davis was courting by this time. One letter which Davis wrote to Fell's wife Hester, was sent from Big Sandy Creek in Nebraska Territory. Davis informed Mrs. Fell that the unpredictable weather was affecting his health somewhat and that he had been suffering from a cold for several days. He also told her about how they had met "a company of Georgians" the night before who had just come back from the mountains "telling a very pitiful story about the mines." He closed his letter by asking her if she would write to her son and his friend Henry and extend his apologies for not having a chance to write him lately.<sup>35</sup>

By the time Fell and Davis returned with supplies from St. Louis between July 7 and 10, the Bloomington emigrants were ready to pull up stakes and head for home. A few days after Fell and Davis's return, the party began to sell their remaining supplies along with the new supplies that had just come from St. Louis for any dollar amount they could get. They also sold one team of mules and traded another team of mules and wagon for a light spring wagon and a pair of horses for the long trip back to Bloomington. The parties all left at different times, some sooner than others. Davis's party, which consisted of Edward J. Lewis, Linus Graves, and Lewis's nephew Enoch, arrived in Denver on July 30 where they stayed for a few weeks. On August 20, the group began their leisurely trip back to Bloomington and experienced fine weather. They finally made it back to Bloomington on September 28, 1860 "poorer in pocket by the cost of their outfit (saying nothing of what they each may have earned at home during the seven months they were gone), but rich in experience, adventure"<sup>36</sup> and "knowledge of the frontier, observation in general was of great value to young men."<sup>37</sup>

Following his return from the failed gold expedition, Davis returned to Chester County to visit his family and to fetch his brother James and sister Mary. His intention was to bring them back to Bloomington to work with him on the farm that his father had purchased for him and his brother to share. Upon their return to Bloomington in March 1861, Davis and his siblings commenced work on their farm.<sup>38</sup>

Davis's agricultural pursuits were interrupted by the coming of the United States Civil War. In the summer of 1862 a call for volunteers by Illinois Governor Richard Yates to go to Springfield was issued with the purpose of guarding several hundred Confederate prisoners who had been captured in battle. Somewhere between 200 and 300 men from Bloomington answered the call, including Davis. They served guard duty at Camp Butler in Springfield for several weeks.<sup>39</sup>

That same year President Abraham Lincoln appointed Jesse Fell a paymaster with the rank of major in the Union Army. When Davis returned from guard duty in Springfield, Fell chose him as his clerk and the two men reported for duty in Louisville, Kentucky on July 19,

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<sup>34</sup> Lewis, "Across the Plains to the Rocky Mountains in 1860"

<sup>35</sup> Sinclair, Harold. *The Daily Pantagraph 1846-1946*. (Bloomington, Illinois: Evergreen Communications, Inc., 1976) 90-91

<sup>36</sup> Ibid; "Death Comes to W.O. Davis," *The Weekly Pantagraph*, May 23, 1911

<sup>37</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 354-355

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 355

<sup>39</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 355; Sinclair, 110

1862.<sup>40</sup> Neither man had any experience doing this type of work.<sup>41</sup> Because of that, Fell exchanged clerks with Major William Smith. Smith's brother Rodney had experience as a clerk which would be beneficial to Fell. Davis became Major Smith's clerk which afforded him the opportunity to learn the duties of his new position.<sup>42</sup>

For the next year and a half, Fell and Davis traversed the Midwest and upper South performing their duties. Davis and Major Smith first went to Indianapolis where they distributed advanced pay to a new regiment. Following this, five regiments of troops from Michigan who had recently been sworn in were paid out two months in advance. Next, they reported to Portland, Ohio and Gallipolis where they were to pay four regiments from eastern Tennessee who had been chased from home across the state of Kentucky and driven half-starved into Ohio with no money and very few supplies or equipment. Davis and Major Smith were then ordered to Memphis, Tennessee where they paid some troops on the Mobile and Ohio Railway. Finally, they were ordered to Murfreesboro, Tennessee where Davis and Major Smith worked with several other paymasters to pay a large body of troops stationed there. Their headquarters was the village bank while their work was being completed. One of Davis's responsibilities while stationed there was to guard the money chests which meant he and a guard slept in the village bank where the chests were kept. According to Davis, this irregular way of living affected his health greatly. It caused him to break down entirely and resign his position to go back home to Bloomington.<sup>43</sup>

It was not long after his return home that Davis and Eliza Fell were united in marriage. On June 17, 1863 in the home of the bride's father Jesse Fell, the couple was married by Reverend H.R. Price of the Unitarian Church.<sup>44</sup> Like Fell, Davis was no longer a practicing Quaker and had become a member of the Unitarian Church. Only a few close relatives were present for the ceremony. The ceremony was performed early in the day and followed by a wedding breakfast.<sup>45</sup>

The couple then departed on the Illinois Central Railroad bound for Washington D.C. where they would start their new life. Davis had recently been appointed a clerk with new department of Internal Revenue (today that IRS). Joseph Lewis, brother of Edward J. Lewis, had recently been appointed the commissioner of Internal Revenue in Washington. Joseph Lewis told his friend and associate Jesse Fell that he would appoint anyone whom Fell named as a clerk in this department. Without hesitation Fell named Davis. Before Davis arrived in Washington, D.C. he stopped in West Chester where he left his new bride with his family for one month while he entered upon his new duties. After securing a modest five-room house on Ninth Street (a few doors from the Patent Office) by the end of July, he sent for Eliza to join him. However, Davis's health did not withstand the confinement of office work and by the end of March 1864, he and Eliza returned to his farm in Bloomington.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Morehouse, Frances Milton. *The Life of Jesse Fell*. (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1916) 68

<sup>41</sup> Sinclair, 136

<sup>42</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 355

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> "Davis-Fell," *The Weekly Pantagraph*, June 17, 1863

<sup>45</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 356

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 357

Davis engaged in farming for several more years and was fairly successful at it. Shortly after his return to Bloomington in 1864, he bought out his brother's portion of the farm.<sup>47</sup> But because of the strenuous nature of farming and his continued frailty of health, Davis wanted to get out of the farming business. While he recognized that "farming was one of America's basic industries" and an honorable and noble profession, it was not for him.<sup>48</sup>

In 1868 Davis began a new occupation that would change the course of his life and one that lasted until his dying day. His father-in-law Jesse Fell was interested in starting a new newspaper in the recently founded Town of Normal. According to Davis's unpublished autobiography, Fell wished to establish an "educational journal" in connection with the teacher's college, Illinois State Normal University (today Illinois State University).

Fell already had several years' worth of experience owning and operating a newspaper. Fell was the co-founder of Bloomington's first newspaper, *The Bloomington Observer and McLean County Advocate*, which began publishing on a weekly basis on January 14, 1837. This first foray into the newspaper business only lasted 18 months before Fell ceased publication of it. Bloomington was left without a newspaper until 1845 when R.B. Mitchell revived the newspaper and renamed it the *McLean County Register*. This too failed after a short time and was bought by C.P. Merriman the next year. Merriman changed the name of the paper to *The Whig* and ran it until 1849. He then sold the paper to R.H. Johnson and I.N. Underwood and it became *The Weekly Western Whig*. By November 1851, Fell was back in the newspaper business, partnering with Merriman, and together they purchased *The Weekly Western Whig*. They changed the name to *The Intelligencer*, though they carried over the sequence of numbers from *The Weekly Western Whig*. After another year, Fell wanted out of the newspaper business again and sold his share of the newspaper to Merriman.<sup>49</sup> On December 1, 1853 Merriman changed the name of the newspaper to its final (and most recognized) iteration, *The Weekly Pantagraph*, which meant "to write all things."<sup>50</sup> It was reported that Merriman claimed that he took the name from an instrument called "the pantograph" which was a mechanical device used for copying drawings.<sup>51</sup> By February 23, 1857 a daily edition of the newspaper was added. The struggling newspaper was sold yet again on December 1, 1855 to William Foote who had been a foreman of the office. By 1860, A.J. Merriman and F.J. Briggs were owners of the paper. A little over a year later, C.L. Steele and E.S. Carpenter bought Merriman's share of the paper and began operating it with Briggs. Steele, Carpenter, and Briggs continued to operate *The Daily and the Weekly Pantagraph* until October 24, 1867 when they sold ownership of the paper to John Scibird and Orin Waters.<sup>52</sup>

Fell made a trip back East to West Chester and recruited an acquaintance of his, James P. Taylor, to join him in the new business venture. Taylor agreed and brought with him to Bloomington new printing equipment worth about \$10,000<sup>53</sup> (which would be worth

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Sinclair, 136

<sup>49</sup> Sinclair, 26-47

<sup>50</sup> Duis, Dr. E. *The Good Old Times in McLean County, Illinois*. (Second edition, McKnight and McKnight Publishing Company, 1968) 33

<sup>51</sup> "The Western Whig, Started Here in 1846, Became Pantagraph Few Years Later—Merriman Publisher," *The Daily Pantagraph*, March 13, 1928

<sup>52</sup> Lewis, Edward J. "History of the The Daily Pantagraph," (Prepared for the McLean County Historical Society, 1901) 3 and 5

<sup>53</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 357

approximately \$170,000 in 2014<sup>54</sup>). This equipment included a new steam powered printing press which was likely the most modern piece of equipment in the area.<sup>55</sup> Fell and Taylor were already in the process of setting up the newspaper when they learned of the sudden sale of Bloomington's newspaper, *The Daily Pantagraph*. Taylor and Fell immediately stopped all their work toward setting up a new newspaper and jumped at the chance to purchase *The Daily Pantagraph* from Scribird and Waters. Fell approached Davis and asked him to join them in co-ownership and management of this business venture, to which Davis said yes.

The trio bought the newspaper for \$15,000 and took over operations on August 6, 1868 (renaming the business as The Daily Pantagraph Company). This combined with the new printing equipment (furnished by Taylor) brought their total investment in the newspaper to \$25,000 (which would be worth approximately \$424,000 in 2014).<sup>56</sup> This was the largest amount that had ever been invested in any newspaper in Bloomington at that time.<sup>57</sup> They also had to find a new home for their business as the location on the second and third floors at 210 N. Center Street (today the current location of CVS Pharmacy) were inadequate for Taylor's newer and heavier printing equipment. Fell and Davis found a new location at 109-111 West Monroe Street utilizing the first floor and the basement for the newspaper. All of the mechanical equipment went into the basement with the business and editorial offices on the first floor.<sup>58</sup>

Operations of the business were divided into three parts: Fell managed editorial matters, Taylor took care of the equipment and mechanical issues, and Davis handled business matters. Fell and Taylor must have had a good deal of confidence in Davis's capabilities since he knew absolutely nothing about the printing business or running a newspaper. While Davis's previous experience as a teacher, Army paymaster's clerk, and clerk for the IRS may have been some help to him, none of his previous experiences would have prepared him for this. But, Davis was a very intelligent man and a quicker study too.<sup>59</sup> He learned his new job so well that he would come to be considered among the most successful newspaper publishers in the state and established *The Daily Pantagraph* as a news entity.<sup>60</sup>

When Davis started at *The Daily Pantagraph*, it was a considered a respectable country weekly newspaper, with a struggling daily department.<sup>61</sup> Subscription to *The Weekly* was about 800 per week (with subscribers paying \$2.00 per year) with even less subscribing to *The Daily* coming in right around 600 (with subscribers paying \$.20 per week).<sup>62</sup> When this is compared to the combined population of Bloomington and Normal, which was around 15,000 at the time, the

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<sup>54</sup> "Consumer Price Index,"

<http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2015.pdf>, Date Accessed, September 10, 2015

<sup>55</sup> Sinclair, 136

<sup>56</sup> "Consumer Price Index,"

<http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2015.pdf>, Date Accessed September 11, 2015

<sup>57</sup> Sinclair, 137

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 138

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 139

<sup>60</sup> Burnham, Davis, Prince, *Vol. II*, 220

<sup>61</sup> "The Westen Whig, Started Here in 1846, Became Pantagraph Few Years Later—Merriman Publisher."

<sup>62</sup> In 2014, these subscription rates would be about \$34.00 and \$3.40 respectively; "Consumer Price Index,"

<http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2015.pdf>, Date Accessed, September 11, 2015

subscription rates are not very impressive.<sup>63</sup> Almost immediately Fell, Taylor, and Davis began making improvements to the paper with the hope that circulation would increase. Layout was improved in both the weekly and the daily editions. The variety of articles was expanded to include: a new Farm, Home and Garden department, serial fiction stories, and items that would be of interest to the average literate farm family.<sup>64</sup> In the weekly edition, which largely went to rural subscribers, national and international news was rewritten and condensed from the daily, a weekly news letter from Chicago was added, and letters of news and gossip from towns around McLean County were also included.<sup>65</sup>

Shortly after Davis joined Fell and Taylor at *The Daily Pantagraph*, Davis sold his farm in Normal and planned to move to Bloomington to be closer to the newspaper. During the winter of 1868, Davis and his family remained in Normal living with the Fells until the weather improved in the spring which would allow them to complete the move. Davis and his family moved into a house located at 404 E. Douglas Street in Bloomington.<sup>66</sup>

While these men were working hard to improve the quality of their newspaper, a new newspaper began to be published in town. Former owners of *The Daily Pantagraph*, Scibird and Waters, almost immediately began publishing their own Republican newspaper called *The Leader*. The first weekly edition of the paper was printed on November 15, 1868, a little over three months after Fell, Taylor, and Davis took over *The Daily Pantagraph*.<sup>67</sup> According to Davis, after he, Fell, and Taylor purchased *The Daily Pantagraph*, they were under the impression that they had also acquired “what had long been the official Republican organ of the county,” a sort of gentlemen’s agreement that Scibird and Waters would not enter the newspaper business again. To further add insult to injury, Scibird and Waters located their Republican paper in the previous location of *The Daily Pantagraph* at 210 N. Center Street (dubbing their newspaper the official county Republican organ) and enticed many of the experienced Pantagraph staff members to quit their jobs and join them at the *Leader*.<sup>68</sup> In February of the next year *The Leader* added even more pressure by beginning to publish a daily edition. To make things even harder on *The Daily Pantagraph*, a daily edition of *The Leader* was first published in the mornings, the same time of day that *The Daily Pantagraph* was published. The next year however, they moved publication of the daily edition to the evening.<sup>69</sup>

There had always been competition between local newspapers (typically Republican versus Democrat) but this was more direct and creating a rivalry between the two Republican papers. While this was said to have infuriated Fell (because in his opinion Scibird and Waters had broken this unwritten agreement), this made Davis more determined to make *The Daily Pantagraph* a better newspaper than *The Leader*, which he referred to as “the afternoon

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<sup>63</sup> “Population Figures for 1870 Bloomington, Normal, and McLean County,” compiled by Bill Kemp, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives

<sup>64</sup> Sinclair, 138

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Sinclair and Davis, 357; *Bloomington City Directories 1870-1873*

<sup>67</sup> *History of McLean County, Illinois*. (Chicago: William LeBaron and Jr. and Co., 1879) 294

<sup>68</sup> Sinclair, 140

<sup>69</sup> Scott, Frank W. *Collections of the Illinois Historical Library Volume VI, Biographical Series Volume I: Newspapers and Periodicals of Illinois 1814-1879*. (Springfield: Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library, 1910) 29-30; Sinclair, 141

affliction.”<sup>70</sup> *The Leader* proved to be stiff competition during Davis’s early years as owner while he worked to build up his newspaper.

On February 20, 1871 less than three years after Fell, Taylor, and Davis entered into business together, a notice of dissolution appeared in *The Daily Pantagraph*, informing its readers that the partnership between Fell, Taylor, and Davis has been permanently dissolved. It was reportedly due to the retirement of Fell and Taylor.<sup>71</sup> Davis took over Fell and Taylor’s interests in the paper, thus making him the sole owner and publisher of *The Daily Pantagraph*.<sup>72</sup> Under Davis’s leadership, the newspaper would gradually grow and strengthen over the years. This eventually led to *The Daily Pantagraph* becoming one of the largest and most valuable newspapers in Illinois.<sup>73</sup> His idea was that “if anyone should read no other paper than *The Daily Pantagraph*” that he might have a “fair knowledge of the news of the day, more particularly of the news of Central Illinois.”<sup>74</sup> He also avoided the exploitation of scandals and sensations in the pages of his *Pantagraph*. He felt that printing stories like this was outside the “field of legitimate journalism.” His aim through it all was to give the people “the service due from an honest journal.”<sup>75</sup>

The first few years of Davis’s sole ownership, however, were tough. According to family lore, during those early years Davis was frequently hard pressed financially. So much so that on some Saturday nights Davis had to pawn his pocket watch to meet payroll. But Davis persevered. He dug in and was determined to publish a good paper on sound principals that would outlast the competition.<sup>76</sup>

One of Davis’s first priorities after taking over was to increase subscriptions by employing new methods he developed. One simple tactic he used was a standing invitation to the public to come to *The Daily Pantagraph* offices and watch the steam presses at work, especially on the day an edition of *The Weekly Pantagraph* was being run. He also began subscription campaigns, especially for *The Weekly* which was reportedly his pride and joy. In 1879 Davis ran a 10-12 week campaign for the weekly by offering a free year’s subscription to one of three publications (*The Chicago Inter-Ocean*, *The Chicago Ledger*, or the *Youth’s Weekly*) to anyone who subscribed to *The Weekly Pantagraph* and paid in advance for a year. This subscription drive netted an additional 2,810 paid-in-advance subscriptions!<sup>77</sup> During another subscription campaign in 1887, in addition to offering dual subscriptions to *The Weekly Pantagraph* and another subscription of the subscribers choice, every new subscriber (or old subscriber who pays arrears and for a full year) would receive one of four books upon their payment of their yearly subscription to *The Weekly Pantagraph*, a grand total of \$2.00.<sup>78</sup> His campaigns to increase subscriptions continued steadily through the 1880s.

In addition to the subscription drives, Davis instituted a variety of changes and additions during his 40 years as sole owner and publisher. One major addition to both *The Weekly* and

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 141

<sup>71</sup> “Dissolution,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, February 20, 1871

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 143

<sup>73</sup> “Death comes to W.O. Davis.”

<sup>74</sup> “W.O. Davis,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, May 23, 1911

<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> Sinclair, 152

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 154

<sup>78</sup> “Pantagraph Premium and Clubbing Offers for 1888,” *W.O. Davis Scrapbook*, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

Daily editions of *The Pantagraph* (which actually started under Fell while he was still working at the paper) was a correspondence system in all the towns in McLean County. Davis continued to expand this practice and had correspondents in all towns in McLean County and many towns in surrounding counties throughout Central Illinois. And when the state Legislature was in session, Davis has special correspondents in Springfield to make sure that his subscribers stayed informed.<sup>79</sup> Correspondents in each town were supposed to send *The Daily Pantagraph* letters which reported activities of interest and importance to the public.<sup>80</sup> Davis made sure to keep in regular contact with his correspondents to make sure they followed his explicit guidelines for their submissions.

In a letter dated December 12, 1888 which was sent to all 115 of his correspondents at the time, Davis outlined what he expected from his correspondents and how they should format their submissions. First and foremost, Davis asked his correspondents to make sure their submissions “cut out unimportant items, or those that affect only a few people” since *The Daily Pantagraph* continues to grow and the amount of information it receives continues to increase. He also pointed out that they should never use words like “tonight,” “tomorrow,” or “yesterday” because their submissions might not be printed upon receipt and this would only confuse readers. If something of great importance occurred such as “the death of prominent people or a murder,” correspondents should telegraph *The Daily Pantagraph* at once (at the newspaper’s expense). And they should always remember that if they should be absent from their town for any amount of time, they should find someone to act as correspondent until they returned. Additionally, correspondents should not hesitate to report on news as soon as it happens, even if that means two or three short letters per week as opposed to one longer letter per week.<sup>81</sup>

The rivalry between *The Daily Pantagraph* and *The Leader* continued during this time as well. On March 20, 1882 *The Leader* made an unfriendly charge that *The Daily Pantagraph* had been mortgaged by Davis because he had bought land for speculative purposes. Davis, through *The Daily Pantagraph*, fired back that this claim was “wholly untrue” and asked *The Leader* to present its evidence if any existed.<sup>82</sup>

*The Leader* also claimed that assertion made by *The Daily Pantagraph* that its circulation was bigger than both *The Leader* and another local newspaper *The Bulletin*, was laughable. Again, Davis through *The Daily Pantagraph* fired back that they believed their statement to be true, so much so that they would provide a notarized statement authenticating their average subscriptions per week for both *The Weekly* and *The Daily Pantagraph*. On March 18, 1882 *The Daily Pantagraph* printed a statement from the newspaper’s business manager, Chalmers C. Marquis, which stated the subscription rates for the newspaper (2,168 per week for the *Daily* and 6,248 per week for the *Weekly*), having been notarized on March 18.<sup>83</sup>

*The Leader* also objected to *The Daily Pantagraph*’s claim that it had 19 printers in its job room. In response to this claim, *The Daily Pantagraph* extended an invitation to employees at *The Leader* and anyone else to come at any time to verify this claim for themselves. *The Daily Pantagraph* even went one step further by stating that its records at the McLean County

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<sup>79</sup> Sinclair, 149

<sup>80</sup> Ibid; “Ad for *The Daily Pantagraph*,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, October 26, 1874

<sup>81</sup> Letter from W.O. Davis to *Pantagraph* Correspondents, December 12, 1888, *W.O. Davis Scrapbook*, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives

<sup>82</sup> “Plain Facts,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, March 20, 1882

<sup>83</sup> “State of Illinois, McLean County,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, March 18, 1882

Courthouse were also open to the public for examination.<sup>84</sup> Davis had nothing to hide in the management of his newspaper.

The rivalry between *The Daily Pantagraph* and *The Leader* went on for many years. According to an article in *The Daily Bulletin* in 1895 a meeting was called of the heads of the three major newspapers in Bloomington: *The Leader*, *The Bulletin*, and *The Daily Pantagraph*. The meeting was held in Davis's private office and after the session was over, the proprietors emerged, "resolved to be human, and end all war."<sup>85</sup> Four years later, *The Leader* was absorbed by *The Bulletin* in May 1899. In 1927 *The Bulletin* was in turn bought out by *The Daily Pantagraph* thus ending any serious local competition to the newspaper.

*The Daily Pantagraph* had always been an organ for the Republican Party. And Davis, like his newspaper, was decidedly Republican and would remain so for the rest of his life. In the 1850s and 1860s he had been a staunch supporter of the party and of Abraham Lincoln. When Lincoln and Douglas faced each other for election to the U.S. Senate in 1858, Davis along with 3,000 other locals traveled to Springfield (on a 31 car train pulled by 2 engines according to Davis) to hear Lincoln speak at one of the last meetings of the Republican Party before the election in November. Davis had heard Douglas speak in October that year. According to Davis, Douglas had a voice "similar to a jackass" and he brayed for a good number of hours. However Davis was worried that Douglas's supporters were trying to stack votes in McLean County by bringing in illegal voters. Davis noted that a train load of "Irishmen" had appeared in Bloomington as of late and it was his thought that they might be illegal voters. Davis was confident that Lincoln would defeat Douglas and the only way Douglas could win was by using dirty tricks such as illegal voting.<sup>86</sup>

However Davis was not a blind party believer. In later years he felt the Republican Party was becoming "corrupt and befuddled," but he could not see any more virtue in the Democratic cause either.<sup>87</sup> He was conservative in the management of his newspaper and would not allow it to be the organ of any clique within the Republican Party. He also did not allow his paper to be used to serve the political ambition of individuals against the interest of the public or the Republican Party. He devoted his efforts to making *The Daily Pantagraph* a community newspaper first instead of a vehicle of political doctrine.<sup>88</sup> He felt that a newspaper should be a strong influence in politics but if possible, should not itself be in politics. Davis stayed out of politics personally and made sure that his employees did too. While Davis was publisher, no *Pantagraph* employees served in any political offices while they worked there.<sup>89</sup>

A point of pride for Davis was that during his entire 43 year career as owner and publisher of *The Daily Pantagraph*, was that he was able to keep the paper independent. In the late nineteenth century it was common place for political parties, railroads, banks, or other entities to have complete control of a newspaper because they financially backed them. While

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<sup>84</sup> "Plain Facts"

<sup>85</sup> "Memories," *The Daily Bulletin*, March 30, 1919

<sup>86</sup> Plummer and Maher, 186

<sup>87</sup> Sinclair, 172

<sup>88</sup> "A History of The Daily Pantagraph," 4. *The Daily Pantagraph Collection*, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

<sup>89</sup> Sinclair, 172

Davis did have to borrow money from time to time, he wisely made sure that there were no strings attached and he would be able to continue to run his newspaper as he saw fit.<sup>90</sup>

As *The Daily Pantagraph* continued to grow and become more profitable, Davis came to the conclusion that if he was going to be able to continue to grow his paper further, his newspaper would need a bigger home. And not just any home. It was Davis's desire to construct a building that was designed expressly for the sole purpose of housing his newspaper.<sup>91</sup> So in 1875 a new location for *The Daily Pantagraph* was purchased by Davis at the corner of Madison and Washington streets. The building that was to be constructed there would be 22 by 70 feet with two-stories and a basement. On October 30 the building was ready for occupation and the equipment was moved in over the course of the weekend so that the first issue in the new building was published on November 1.<sup>92</sup> Twelve years later, the building was expanded due to *The Daily Pantagraph* and Davis's continued success. A third floor was added and dimensions of all the floors were expanded to 44 by 115 feet in dimension.<sup>93</sup> This location at Madison and Washington streets would remain the home of *The Daily Pantagraph* until 2015.

W.O. and Eliza had three children; only son Hibbard (known as Bert), and daughters Helen and Jessie. Davis was a devoted husband and father. He kept a watchful eye over his children as they were growing up, especially his middle child Helen with whom he had a very close relationship. Both he and Eliza encouraged self-improvement in their children. One way they did this was by constantly correcting their grammatical mistakes in letters their children wrote to them. In W.O.'s opinion, bad spelling was rather humiliating.<sup>94</sup> Davis also made sure his children maintained a proper diet (for example by adding phosphorous from eggs and oysters to it) and frequently asked his children about their bodily functions. If there were any irregularities observed, they should seek medical attention right away. He also constantly reminded his children not to over exert themselves physically. Because of his own fragile health, he was always concerned with the health of his family.<sup>95</sup>

Davis liked material things but despised ostentation, extravagance, and waste. He believed that a man should live in a house that was as large as his family required and helped him live a comfortable and convenient life. Anything more than this was "sheer vanity and waste."<sup>96</sup> He was known to be meticulous in detail right down to how he kept his clothes drawers neat as a pin and his black laced shoes in even rows.<sup>97</sup> He was even particular about where he composed his correspondence. He did not like writing letters at his home. In a letter to his daughter Helen on December 5, 1888, Davis told Helen that he was forced to write at home because of a heavy cold. He felt that "the writing materials did not dwell together in harmony" at his house. He preferred to write in his office because "you will rarely find pens, ink, paper,

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<sup>90</sup> "A History of The Daily Pantagraph," 5

<sup>91</sup> Sinclair, 152

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 153

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 163

<sup>94</sup> Davis, William Osborne and Ives, Elizabeth Stevenson. Letter from W.O. Davis to Helen Davis, November 27, 1892. *The W.O. Davis Letters, 1884-1910*. Typeset copy, 1958, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives

<sup>95</sup> Swartz, Emily. "Helen Davis Stevenson" <http://www.mchistory.org/research/resources/helen-davis-stevenson.php>, Date Accessed September 10, 2015. 1

<sup>96</sup> Sinclair, 168

<sup>97</sup> Baker, Jean. *The Stevensons: The Biography of an American Family*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996) 185-189

and envelopes at any one time. You must depend on a blotted sheet and a pen that has done a good deal of service in something different from writing.”<sup>98</sup>

Davis also pushed his children to travel. He felt it was imperative that his children explore the world “beyond their front porch.”<sup>99</sup> On July 6, 1884 Davis wrote to Eliza (who at the time was in Nebraska with their children visiting family) and expressed his desire that he wanted Helen to get “large benefits in the way of health from her summer trip.”<sup>100</sup> He also sent Helen on two trips to Europe, one in 1888 and one shortly before she got married in 1893.

Davis’s children all married into other prominent McLean County families. Bert married Florence Eddy (granddaughter of Dr. Cyrenius Wakefield) on October 17, 1889.<sup>101</sup> Helen married Lewis Green Stevenson (only son of Vice President of the United States Adlai E. Stevenson I) on November 21, 1893. His youngest daughter Jessie married Louis Merwin (a well-known businessman) on October 27, 1897.<sup>102</sup>

Davis was also very proud of all of his grandchildren, in particular his daughter Helen’s two children, Elizabeth and Adlai E. Stevenson II. Upon receiving news of the birth of Adlai on February 5, 1900, Davis sent his daughter a letter congratulating her on “the successful launching of this little presidential craft.”<sup>103</sup> Helen, Elizabeth, and Adlai II also traveled frequently with Davis to New York, California in the winter, Florida, and to the family vacation home in Charlevoix, Michigan. Because of this, Helen’s children developed a closer bond with Davis than their own father. So much so, that they called Davis “Daddy” and referred to their father Lewis as the much more formal “Father.”<sup>104</sup> Davis maintained a lifelong strong connection to all of his children and grandchildren.

Perhaps the biggest contributing factor to Davis’s success in building up *The Daily Pantagraph* was how he treated his workers and that he consistently chose people who were well suited for “detailed work” and that after training them, kept them for long term employment.<sup>105</sup> In Davis’s opinion, a man should find an occupation and stick to it, so when he hired a person, he hired them for long term. Davis knew that if he had a high employment turn over and was constantly training new hires, that the consistency of his newspaper would suffer. Davis had a knack for picking good men and then giving them his complete confidence. Davis knew that men would come and go over the years, as that happens in any business. But he worked hard to make sure his employees knew that they were of value to him with the hope that they would stay.<sup>106</sup>

Davis treated his employees like a father would his children. He cared about their personal comfort and welfare. And his employees were equally as devoted and loyal to him, which is why so many of his employees stayed for many years.<sup>107</sup> Evidence of this relationship can be found in the yearly holiday banquet (usually held around Christmastime) which Davis threw for his employees and the press of Central Illinois. During one such banquet held at the

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<sup>98</sup> Davis and Ives, Letter from W.O. Davis to Helen Davis, December 5, 1888.

<sup>99</sup> Baker, 191

<sup>100</sup> Davis and Ives, Letter from W.O. Davis to Eliza Davis, July 6, 1884

<sup>101</sup> “Husband and Wife,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, October 18, 1893

<sup>102</sup> “The Merwin-Davis Wedding,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, October 28, 1897

<sup>103</sup> McKeever, Porter. *Adlai Stevenson: His Life and Legacy*. (Quill, 1991) 25

<sup>104</sup> Baker, 202

<sup>105</sup> Hasbrouck, 1181

<sup>106</sup> Sinclair, 142

<sup>107</sup> Hasbrouck, 1181

Maennerchor Hall in Bloomington in 1882, Davis's employees wanted to show their manager and leader their heartfelt appreciation. In addition to being an excellent feast given by Davis, several employees, past and present, and friends of Davis gave speeches in his honor during the evening's festivities. One man in particular, E.F. Baldwin of the *Peoria Journal*, had gotten his start in the newspaper business because of Davis. Baldwin not only thanked Davis for his help, guidance, and saving him from a dismal career in politics (which he recalled that Davis had told him that there was nothing for anyone in politics anyway), but he presented Davis a gold chronometer (pocket watch) on behalf of Davis's employees which came to Davis as a great surprise. Baldwin closed his speech by stating that "Davis taught him that success on a newspaper comes from work inside the office and that the man who wishes the people to read his work must make the paper the people like to read" as Davis had done and continued to do.<sup>108</sup>

In earlier years, when traveling, Davis would maintain daily contact with the officers of his newspaper, in particular his son Bert. He would send letters and telegrams back to Bloomington suggesting items and stories that should be included in the daily and weekly editions of *The Daily Pantagraph*. Davis always had his finger on the pulse of his paper no matter where he was.<sup>109</sup> However, over the years, Davis had created the kind of staff he wanted and for the most part maintained that staff. It became unnecessary for Davis to impress his ideas upon his staff as often. Key men had been in his employment at *The Daily Pantagraph* for so long, that in almost any situation they reacted as Davis himself would have. By 1906 Davis's treasurer and business manager, Marquis, had been there for 29 years and his editor, Joe Bates for 23 years. He also maintained the same pressman, William Bach for over 25 years and the same foreman, Julius Reichel for over 30 years.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, his son Bert, who practically grew up at *The Daily Pantagraph* and at one time or another, had worked in almost every department of the paper, was his deputy.<sup>111</sup>

Davis continued to make more additions and enhancements to *The Daily Pantagraph* over the years to ensure that his newspaper would continue to grow and be successful and leave all competition behind. In the 1880s Davis added a telegraphic department being the first newspaper in town to do this. This helped his newspaper report the news faster and more accurately giving the paper prestige and superiority over all others. After the invention of the telephone, *The Daily Pantagraph* was also the first newspaper in town to add a telephone line.<sup>112</sup> The Daily Pantagraph was the first newspaper in the area to incorporate illustrations, even when the processes to create them "were in a crude state of development." *The Daily Pantagraph* was also the first newspaper in the area to employ a full-time farm editor (which was important to Davis because so many of his subscribers were rural residents). Davis and *The Daily Pantagraph* were the first with every innovation from the rotary press to the linotype machine. And when the Rural Free Delivery came into being in 1903, Davis offered free mailboxes to every farmer in the county with their year paid in advance subscription to *The Daily*

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<sup>108</sup> "The Press Banquet," unknown newspaper, December 25, 1882, *W.O. Davis Scrapbook*, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

<sup>109</sup> Sinclair, 192

<sup>110</sup> Lewis, 13

<sup>111</sup> Sinclair, 215

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 158

*Pantagraph*.<sup>113</sup> Davis and *The Daily Pantagraph* were always on the cutting edge of the newspaper business in the region.

Despite all of the successes Davis was able to celebrate throughout his long tenure at the helm of *The Daily Pantagraph*, on January 21, 1900, Davis's life change forever. On that day his wife Eliza passed away. This was a devastating blow to Davis as he cared for her deeply. Like her husband, Eliza had always had fragile health and was never a very strong woman. But she had been in good health up until the last few months of her life. In July 1899 Eliza underwent surgery in Chicago, Illinois. After surviving the surgery, Davis took her to their cottage in Charlevoix for several months so she could recuperate. Upon returning to Bloomington in September that year, her health and strength still had not improved. Davis then took her to San Antonio, Texas where it was thought that the warm and mild climate would improve her health. Sadly, this change in climate did nothing to improve her health.<sup>114</sup>

Almost immediately after her death on the morning of the twenty-first, Davis wired his son-in-law Lewis Green Stevenson in Los Angeles, California to break the news of Eliza's passing. Davis reported that "death had released his poor wife from her earthly suffering" and that she had passed away quietly in her sleep with no struggle or pain in the end. He told Lewis that he intended to bring his wife's remains back to Bloomington by train later in the week. He also told Lewis that he did not want to write to his daughter Helen until he heard back from Lewis. At this time Helen was just weeks away from giving birth to her second child, Adlai E. Stevenson II, so Davis did not want to upset her any more than he had to in her delicate condition.<sup>115</sup>

At 3:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 25, Eliza's funeral was held at the Unitarian Church where she and Davis had been long time members. *The Daily Pantagraph* reported that it was a simple and beautiful service. Longtime employees of *The Daily Pantagraph* served as pall bearers and accompanied her body to the cemetery.<sup>116</sup> She was laid to rest at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in the Fell Family plot near her father, mother, and siblings.

From that time on, it appears that Davis lost a great deal of his drive. It was reported that he "suffered a deep personal bereavement in the death of his wife...and since that time devoted himself to his business as more of a method of distraction to occupy his mind"<sup>117</sup> than to keep building up his company. He also began spending more time away from home, especially traveling with his daughter Helen and her two children, Elizabeth and Adlai. Perhaps the death of his wife made Davis see his own mortality in a new light and realize that he needed to prepare his company for his own inevitable death. In 1908 (three years before Davis's death) *The Daily Pantagraph* was incorporated as "The Daily Pantagraph Company." Davis remained the head of the company, serving as president. His son Bert was made vice president and Chalmers Marquis was secretary-treasurer.<sup>118</sup>

On the evening of May 22, 1911 William O. Davis died peacefully at his home at 602 E. Chestnut Street (where he had resided since 1888). The year before his death he suffered a stroke of paralysis from which it was thought he would not recover. But, after spending the

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 185

<sup>114</sup> "Death of Mrs. W.O. Davis," *The Daily Pantagraph*, January 22, 1900

<sup>115</sup> Davis and Ives, Letter from W.O. Davis to Lewis Green Stevenson dated January 21, 1900.

<sup>116</sup> "Funeral of Mrs. W.O. Davis," *The Daily Pantagraph*, January 25, 1900

<sup>117</sup> "Death Comes to W.O. Davis"

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

winter in the mild climate of New Orleans, he recuperated quiet well despite having somewhat restricted use of his limbs. Several months before his death, his health began to fail yet again when he suffered a slight bilious attack<sup>119</sup> which then plagued him for the last few days of his life.<sup>120</sup>

At the time of his death, business at *The Daily Pantagraph* had never been better. During his 43 years as owner and publisher, Davis had raised subscriptions of the *Weekly* and *Daily* to about 14,000 per week. A truly amazing feat considering the combined subscription rates when he took over were only about 1,400 per week. He had truly created a serious and well respected newspaper to which he devoted almost his entire life to.<sup>121</sup>

Tributes to Davis poured in from all over the state following his death. On the same day as his death, at a regular meeting of the Illinois Daily Newspaper Association, a resolution was passed that stated that the state had “lost a useful citizen, his family a loving father, and our profession a valuable member.” The resolution continued on by stating that he was an example “to all publishers on how to do better, nobler, and more conscientious work.”<sup>122</sup> On May 29, the local printers union, Bloomington Typographical Union No. 24, passed a resolution to the man who was a credit to his profession and who employed many of their members. Even though Davis never actually engaged in the mechanical branch of the business, he had long identified with the printing business in Bloomington, “was in close touch with the men who furnished the braun and brain in every department of *The Daily Pantagraph*.” The resolution went on to say that it was a credit to Davis’s career that there were never any disagreements over wages or working conditions in his establishment between members of union and Davis, even though he had to deal with “hundreds of men of varying dispositions.” Davis had a “willingness to give and take in fair and just measure in all relations affecting himself and his fellow-men, he retained the hearty good will of his employees, and their cooperation with him in the building up of the business in which he and they were interested.”<sup>123</sup>

On Thursday May 25, funeral services for Davis were held at the Unitarian Church, where he had been a long time member. The church was completely filled with many of the attendees coming from out of town. Several of his close friends and associates spoke during the service including John Cook, former president of Illinois State Normal University, and Joseph Bates, editor of *The Daily Pantagraph*. As with his wife’s funeral eleven years prior, long time employees of *The Daily Pantagraph* served as pall bearers including Chalmers Marquis and Julius Reichel.<sup>124</sup> Davis was laid to rest in the Fell Family plot next to his wife of 37 years in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

Even many years after Davis’s death, people still fondly remembered him. Former Governor of Illinois, Joseph Fifer, a close personal friend of Davis’s for over 40 years, stated that because of Davis’s counsel and advice, he was able to succeed. Fifer said that Davis was “devotedly attached to the community in which he lived, he gave with a liberal hand to every worthy cause.” Fifer said he never knew anyone who had a warmer sympathy for the weak and

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<sup>119</sup> Bilious attack, or biliousness, is related to various unpleasant symptoms due to excess bile secretion or digestive disturbances such as liver congestion, unstable diet, constipation, migraine, or acidosis.

<sup>120</sup> “Death Comes to W.O. Davis”

<sup>121</sup> Sinclair, 196

<sup>122</sup> “Memorial to W.O. Davis,” *The Weekly Pantagraph*, May 26, 1911

<sup>123</sup> Printer’s Union Honors W.O. Davis,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, May 29, 1911

<sup>124</sup> “Funeral of W.O. Davis,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, May 26, 1911

needy and gave generously to those in need. Of Davis's work with *The Daily Pantagraph*, Fifer said that Davis possessed an executive ability and business judgement of high order. Because of this the newspaper stands as a monument to his profound judgement and business sense.<sup>125</sup>

Eighteen years after his death, Davis's many contributions to the newspaper industry were recognized when he was posthumously inducted into the Journalistic Hall of Fame at the University of Illinois in 1930. Davis was chosen to be among the first eight "pioneers of Illinois journalism" to be inducted. Davis was recognized for not only his work in producing an excellent community newspaper, but for his work that was considered a foundation for newspapers in Illinois and the middle west. His bust was unveiled during a ceremony in November that year for permanent display as a monument to all of his accomplishments and to all that he had done for journalism in his lifetime.<sup>126</sup>

Following Davis's death, his son Bert took over as president of The Daily Pantagraph Company. For the next 69 years *The Daily Pantagraph* continued to be owned and operated by the descendants of William O. Davis. In 1980 *The Daily Pantagraph* was sold to the San Francisco based Chronicle Publishing Company, thus ending 112 years of continuous operation by the Davis family.<sup>127</sup>

By: Candace Summers, 2015

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<sup>125</sup> Hasbrouck, 1182

<sup>126</sup> "William O. Davis and His Work," *The Daily Pantagraph*, November 22, 1930

<sup>127</sup> "A History of The Daily Pantagraph," 5