

Overlooked Orleans

JUDGE NOAH DAVIS: New York State Supreme Court Justice, noted Albion attorney and politician presided over several noteworthy cases in his career, including 'Boss' Tweed trial

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Taken sometime in the early 1880s, this image shows five of Albion's most prominent and well respected citizens. Heavily engaged in commercial interests and local politics, we would consider these men as the "movers and shakers" of their time.

Seated center is the Hon. Noah Davis, one of the most notable attorneys and politicians from Orleans County. Born Sept. 10, 1818 to Noah and Freelove Davis in New Hampshire, Noah was brought to Orleans County at a very young age and received his early education in the public schools of this area. After studying at the Genesee Wesleyan Seminary at Lima, N.Y., Davis studied law for a brief time in Lewiston before his admittance to the bar in 1841. Several years of practicing law at Gainesville and Buffalo concluded his endeavors in that region and he soon returned to Albion.

Following his return to Orleans County, Davis initiated a partnership with Sanford E. Church in 1844 starting a highly respected firm that would exist for nearly 14 years. The end of this enterprise concluded when Davis received an appointment from Gov. John King to the 8th District New York Supreme Court bench in 1857. Resigning that position in 1868, Davis served a shortened term as a U.S. Representative during the 41st Congress before resigning that post to accept a position as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York on July 20, 1870.

The appointment of Noah Davis as New York State Supreme Court Justice in 1872 led to his resignation from the post provided to him by President Grant and started perhaps the most illustrious 14 years of his legal career. Almost immediately after taking the bench, the case of Edward Stokes was brought before him; Stokes was accused of murdering the well-known financier Jim Fisk. Davis delivered a stay of ex-



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Standing, from left, are: Charles Henry Moore and Julius Heath Royce; seated, from left, are: Joseph Mason Cornell, Judge Noah Davis and Norman Spafford Field.

ecution of Stokes' sentence of death, allowing for an eventual third trial that would find Stokes guilty of manslaughter, not murder.

Even more noteworthy was the case of William "Boss" Tweed, a case that represented a culmination in the battle against the Tammany Hall political machine in New York City. Through a series of court cases, Tweed's first trial ended with a hung jury and the second resulted in convictions on 204 counts, leading Davis to quip, "...more counts than in a German principality..." The court affixed a \$12,750 fine and sentenced Tweed to 12 years in prison. Finding that Davis operated beyond the reach of his power in determining the sentence, it was reduced to one year and Tweed was released following the completion of his sentence. Shortly after, New York filed a civil suit attempting to recover over \$6 million in embezzled funds, leading Davis

to assign bail at \$3 million, an unprecedented amount that Tweed was unable to pay.

Davis was considered a strong but impulsive man who was often criticized by members of the bar, even though so many applauded his efforts in bringing about an end to the Tammany Hall machine. At the conclusion of his term, Judge Davis practiced privately in New York City. Davis was an intimate friend of President Grant for many years, serving as his personal attorney before his election to the White House. Grant's chair and desk were two of his most prized possessions, which he kept in his office at New York City.

In his later career, Davis took an interest in medico-legal questions and became a student of forensic medicine, serving as an officer of the Medico-Legal Society. Judge Noah Davis died on March 30, 1902 and his body was returned to Albion for interment at Mt. Albion Cemetery.