

# JUDGE NOAH DAVIS, 1818-1902

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*"When a firm, decisive spirit is recognized it is curious to see how the space clears around a man and leaves him room and freedom."*

— John Foster

**T**he Honorable Noah Davis stood first among Orleans County's self-made men becoming a legend in his own time.

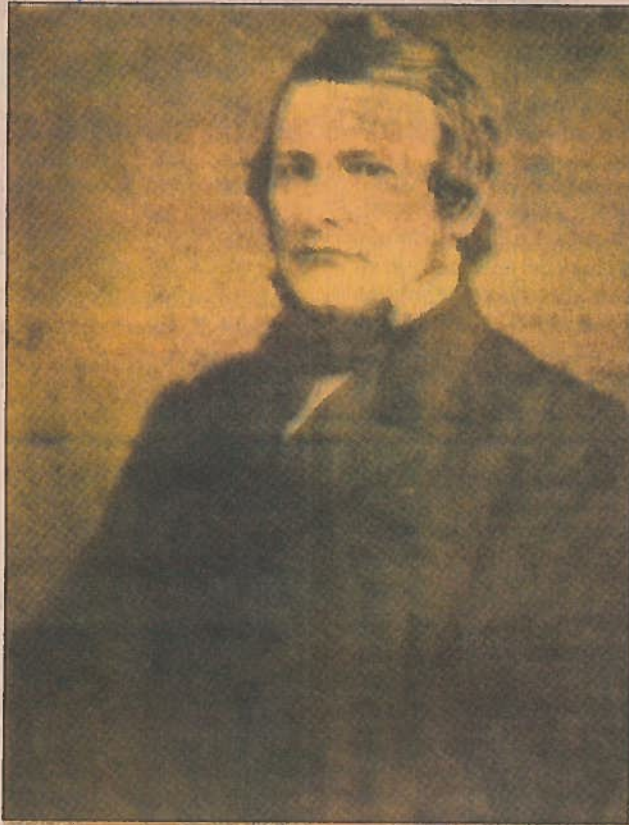
He was the son of Freelove and Noah Davis Sr., born in Haverhill, N.H., on Sept. 10, 1818.

In 1825 he came with his family to Albion, where his father ran a general store for a short time before it burned.

Davis' parents were very poor, and his early life was a strenuous struggle against many disadvantages. He was, however, able to procure an education at the old Gaines Academy.

It is said he walked barefoot every morning from Albion to Gaines in his quest for higher learning. While attending the academy he was able to earn a modest living by doing any work that he could find.

Most of Davis' leisure time was spent in the County Clerk's office copying under the tutelage of The Honorable Sanford E. Church. Later he went to Lewiston to study law. Upon his admission to the bar he first practiced in Buffalo. In 1844, Davis returned



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## Noah Davis

to Albion and formed a law partnership with his older friend Church. The partnership continued for 13 years.

Davis was first made a Supreme Court justice on April 3, 1857, for the Western District of New York.

Judge Davis was elected to Congress on the Republican ticket in 1869, but resigned in 1870 when he was appointed U. S. District Attorney by President Ulysses S. Grant. Davis and his family then moved to New York City. The Davis home on South Main Street in Albion was then

purchased by the Honorable E. Kirke Hart, who greatly enlarged it. The house was razed in 1942.

Shortly after Davis moved to New York, he was elected a justice of the Supreme Court, a position he held until mandatory retirement. He presided at the trial of the notorious William M. Tweed. It was his firmness and magnificent charge to the jury that won him wide fame as a judge.

William Tweed was a politician and leader of the so-called Tweed Ring in New York City. He was first deputy street commissioner and later

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commissioner of the department of public works. Through this position Tweed was able to initiate, it was believed, the combination known as the Tammany Ring or Tweed Ring. This group elected its candidate for mayor in 1865 and governor in 1868.

Schemes of city improvement involving heavy speculation were contrived. In 1871, the New York Times exposed the corruption and Tweed was indicted for forgery and grand larceny. He was convicted of the crime and Judge Noah Davis sentenced him to 12 years in the penitentiary and to pay a fine of \$12,300. It was, indeed, one of the most sensational court cases of the later part of the 19th century. Incidentally, "Boss" Tweed died in Ludlow Jail in 1878.

Judge Davis' decisions were masterpieces of cogent, lucid reasoning from the facts up to justice. He kept his mind fresh by maintaining his early friendships and interests in Albion, where he had been active in IOOF Lodge No. 58.

Davis remained active in the practice of law until infirmities prevented it, and he always believed that life was too short for untruth and make-believe.