

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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JUDGE NOAH DAVIS 1818 - 1902

"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 —

Hon. 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, New Hampshire Sept. 10, 1818. In 1825 he came with his family to Albion, N.Y. where his father ran a general store for a short time before it burned. Noah's 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 his leisure time was spent in the County Clerk's Office copying under the tutelage of Hon. Sanford E. Church. Later he went to Lewiston and studied law. Upon his admission to the bar he first practiced in Buffalo. In 1844 he returned to Albion and formed a law partnership with his older friend Sanford E. Church which continued for thirteen years. Hon. Noah Davis was first made a Supreme Court Justice on April 3, 1857 for the Western District of New York.

Judge Davis was elected on the Republican ticket to Congress in 1869 but resigned in 1870 when he was appointed United States District Attorney by President Grant. He and his family then moved from Albion to New York City. Their home on South Main Street in Albion was then purchased by the Hon. E. Kirke Hart who greatly enlarged it. This house, was however, razed in 1942.

Shortly after Hon. Noah 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, 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 crimes and sentenced by Judge Noah Davis to twelve years in the penitentiary and to pay a fine of \$12,300. It was indeed, one of the most sensation 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 the IOOF Lodge No. 58. He remained active in the practice of law until infirmities prevented it and always believed that life was too short for untruth and make-believe.