



# Pulaski County Memoir

By Lela (Davis) Duncan

I came into this world November 22, 1881, seventeen years after the Civil War at (I think) my Aunt Josie's home about five miles from Lebanon, a little city in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains in southern Missouri. My father, Albert Washington Davis. My mother, Margaret Louella Mitchell.

My father, a Methodist, received his license to preach the day he was 18 years old and was a "circuit rider" in Pulaski County and over a large territory, going on horseback or buggy. Some of the places he preached at--Mossy Springs, Mt. Gibson, Wheeler's Mill--were not towns but just places, where some good settler would have shade, spring water, and room to keep the preacher overnight or as long as he needed to get acquainted with the people of the neighborhood.

After I was born my mother went with him sometimes. I've heard her

say she had sometimes had to stand behind the door to have a little privacy while dressing. At one place where the folks had to make beds on the floor, the tired lady of the house found next morn some of her helpers had used the long white tablecloth she had "done up" nicely for next day's dinner, as a sheet.

I remember the big horse "Jim" and the buggy rides. One day we were going to a wedding of a Baptist minister's daughter, Clara Waymire. As we drove along some of the harness became unbuckled and the staves dropped and Old Jim walked off and left the buggy standing in the road. My parents laughed and got Jim back to the buggy. There was a big crowd at the wedding. Can't remember anything else except sitting at a long table in the yard...people sitting on benches and boxes. A good Baptist minister, John Hicks, went into a box when the board across it slipped and one end went down. Everyone laughed. It was a jolly crowd.

As my father's health was bad he



The Albert Washington Davis family, 1886-87. (Back, left to right)--M. Louella (Mitchell) Davis, La Vega (about a year old), and Albert. (Front, left to right)--Ethel (age 3) and Lela (age 5). Albert was the first minister of the Waynesville Methodist Church. He built what is now the Talbot House in Waynesville in about 1886.

Courtesy of Joyce La Mers, Lela's daughter.

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quit the circuit and was stationed at Waynesville, county seat of Pulaski County, for a year. We lived in the parsonage, where my sister Ethel was born. There were no church buildings. My father preached in the courthouse. My Uncle Sam, a Baptist minister, preached there, too.

I remember going there once. It was the day I was 4 years old. The sidewalks were icy. My father carried me and slipped and fell down. They told me I asked him if he was going to cry. He said "no" so I said "I won't either." The only thing I remember about the service was a prayer. We knelt down in front of our seat. My father would say "Amen" throughout the prayer. He was not preaching that day; it might have been Sunday School. Mama didn't go because she was expecting my brother Vega and modest women didn't go out in public when pregnant.

On March 14, 1886, my brother LaVega was born. We had moved into our new 12 room house, not yet finished, (now known as the Talbot House).



(Back, left to right)--Lela Davis and cousin Clarence Oliver, who later became a physician. (Front, left to right)--La Vega Davis and Ethel Davis. Picture was probably taken about 1904 or 1905. La Vega went by the less formal name of "Vigga." Courtesy of Joyce La Mers.

My father had TB. The family said he had been ill with measles and the pond for the cattle froze so hard he got up and went out and broke the ice. After that he never was well again. He went to St. Augustine, Florida, through the coldest part of the winters of 1884 and 1885. My mother lived in the Hobbs house in the block north of courthouse square. Ethel was a puny baby. She got erysipelas in her eyes, and for months Mama never let her cry, holding her in her arms most of the time, and doctored her eyes. She always said she finally cured them by giving S.S.S. Anyway, Ethel got well and had beautiful brown eyes.

A woman named Mary West

stayed with my mother. On a trip to visit my grandparents whose farm was near a station called Sleeper about five miles north of Lebanon, Mary's foot went through a cattle guard rail. She was a large woman and couldn't get it out. They were so frightened as they thought a train was to come soon.

Mama put me out of the way and made all kinds of threats of what she would do to me if I moved, and she and Mary tugged and worked frantically, finally got Mary loose with a badly skinned leg.

When my father came home they moved into the Briant Hotel and stayed until they moved into our new home. The main carpenter was named Fred (?) Leisman from Dixon and Louie Heimberger, plasterer. The new "hired girl," as they were called, was Frances Booker. We all liked her very much. She stayed several years.

My father gave up preaching after being the pastor of Waynesville Methodist Church a year, and he and his brother Sam, a Baptist preacher, bought a general store. That was his business, but he worked and helped select the place and build the first church (Methodist).

In February 1887 the whole business row burned. Everyone worked furiously to save things from the stores. My father overdid and took to his bed soon after--died February 1888. He and Mama had been married 7 years. In April my brother Earl was born. He lived only 11 days. He and my father are buried in the Bradford cemetery three miles from Waynesville.

Mama turned our big house into a hotel--called it the Pulaski House and kept "boarders." I think the town must have been on a "boom," for her house was soon full of young men with jobs in Waynesville. A few came from the country and went to the public school. A young lawyer and family had moved to town and thought the school seemed to be so much better than usual for a country town. Several had gone into business--merchants, barbers, druggist, carpenters, even a saloon keeper. Waynesville had never had a saloon before.

Grandpa and Grandma Mitchell sold their farm in Laclede County and lived with us. Grandma wasn't well. Her heart was bad but she was good for us children--never scolded us--we played in her room. She talked to us about her experiences which we loved. Grandpa kept our big yard and made a big garden every year.



John Mitchell, the father of M. Louella Davis, owned a farm near Sleeper. He died in 1902 and is buried in the Bradford Cemetery. Courtesy of Joyce La Mers, a great-granddaughter.



Betsy Watt Davis, wife of George Washington Davis of Stoutland and mother of Albert Washington Davis of Waynesville. She was also the mother of Mary Angeline (Davis) Oliver, better known as "Aunt Tuey." Courtesy of Joyce La Mers.

After three years Mama married again--William J. Barrows, a young man who was running a store for Bob Christeson. Bob moved his business to Plato, Texas County, and W. J. B. went there a few months before they were married in August 1891. Mama rented out the hotel and we all went there to live. It was 30 miles from Waynesville. He hired a two seated "hack." We carried big umbrellas to keep the sun and rain off. It was rain that day. We three children thought it a fine trip. It took all day to get there.

(NOTE: Ethel remembered this trip also--it seems the rain made the red hack cushions fade, and the children were all pinked on the bottom.)

We had a time getting used to call-

ing him anything but Mr. Barrows. He had rented a nice little house and made a garden and had a horse named Cora Lee. I was very happy there. Ada and Anna Lynch--the doctor's daughters--were our best friends and playmates. We went to school but seems to me I just played all the time. I was 10 in November after we moved there.

Mrs. Lynch was not well and kept a maid--a middle-aged woman--who cooked a fine dinner every Sunday it seemed and Ada would want Ethel and me to go to their house. The woman would look after the girls, and if we went anywhere she went with us. Sometimes we'd go to the woods, sometimes play in the creek. If we stayed at Lynch's there was a big barn, with a loft of sweet smelling hay to play "hide and seek" in. Dr. Lynch owned most of Plato and the girls were friendly with everyone but I never knew of them visiting.

(The preceding memoir was written probably in the summer of 1968. Lela Duncan died December 18, 1968. This account was submitted by her daughter, Joyce La Mers.)



Roberta Barrows, youngest child of Louella and W. J. Barrows, who moved with the family to Washington, DC, in 1907. She had a glamorous career of working as a secretary at the White House during the Hoover administration and staying until part-way through the Eisenhower years. An interview detailing some of her experiences is on file at the Truman Presidential Library. She died in Washington in 1995, at the age of 95. Courtesy of Joyce La Mers.