

The Davis Family Today

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I study dead people. More accurately, I study the lives of people who came before us; the impacts they made and the legacies they left behind. I have spent much of the past six years studying the life of one person in particular – David Paul Davis. My research has taken me all over Florida; from big cities like Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Miami, to lesser-known towns like Palatka, Green Cove Springs, Cocoa Beach and Welaka. All of them, and Tampa, too, were home to Davis and/or his family.

I have sorted through mountains of documents. I have searched through cemeteries, wandered down narrow brick streets and photographed vestiges of Davis' past. In the course of all of this, I have tried to piece together bits of evidence to construct as complete a story of one man's life as I could. Unfortunately, something has always been missing. While I can recite cold facts about the man, I did not have any notion of the person. Who was D. P. Davis? What was his family life like? What happened to his children?

I now know the answer to that last question. I have a rare opportunity, as do all of you, to meet the descendents of D. P. Davis. On Thursday, March 31, Greg Davis, one of D. P. Davis' grandsons, his wife, Nancy, and

their two children will be in Marjory Park for a ceremony in their family's honor. The program will begin at 1:45 and will feature Tampa Mayor Pam Iorio and the dedication of a tree and plaque honoring the Davis family.

This branch of the Davis family hails from northern California, not too far from where D. P.'s sons were raised by their great aunts after his death. The Davis boys, George Riley Davis, II and David P. Davis, Jr. are still alive and both currently reside in northern California. With the help of Nancy Davis, I have learned quite a bit about their father and have had some long-standing questions answered.

One of the biggest questions I had centered on the Davis House on Davis Islands, specifically which one was it? The home at 116 West Davis has long been considered the Davis House, but I have felt for years that the home at 32 Aegean, across from Seaborn Day School (formerly the Davis Properties Administration Building) was really Davis' home. Nancy Davis sent me a photograph, shown here, of the Davis Home. Though it has since been altered, the home at 32 Aegean is clearly the building in the photograph.

Nancy Davis also provided me with a bit of personal information about D. P. Davis. It is obvious in looking at photographs of Davis, when pictured with other people, that he was a diminutive person. Still, I did not

know his exact height. That mystery is now solved, too. D. P. Davis stood five feet, six inches tall. He said as much himself, in the description of a tree in his Jacksonville yard. I still feel he was an inch or two shorter (people are prone to lie about their height) but it does give a good upper limit to work with.

The death of D. P.'s wife, Marjory, is another part of the story that has been clarified. I had been under the impression that Marjory died while giving birth to the couple's second child, D. P. Davis, Jr, in 1922. As it turns out, she died two months later – from complications stemming from the birth. This extra detail, though not exceptionally significant, is important.

Perhaps the most important piece of information that Nancy Davis supplied me with was the fact that both of D. P.'s sons were still alive. She has been very helpful in obtaining copies of photographs and asking them some of my long-held questions. Nancy has also been extremely helpful with the planning of a trip I intend to make to California in mid-March to interview both of the sons. I am excited about the opportunity to speak with them. Despite the fact that both were very young when their father died, they both can provide a unique insight into the Davis story. Plus, George Davis, the older of the two, was on board the *Majestic* when his father went

overboard. The interviews will be recorded, and audio copies and transcripts will eventually be available at the Tampa Bay History Center, USF Library and the public library downtown.

The Davis Islands community will be welcoming the Davis family to the Islands on March 31. Be sure to join the festivities at Marjory Park at 1:45 and meet Greg and Nancy Davis and their children. They are looking forward to their visit with great anticipation – lets make them feel at home on their grandfather's island.