

OLIVER PERRY DAVIS - "OPEDEE" AND HIS WABASH & ERIE CANAL CONNECTIONS By Charles Davis

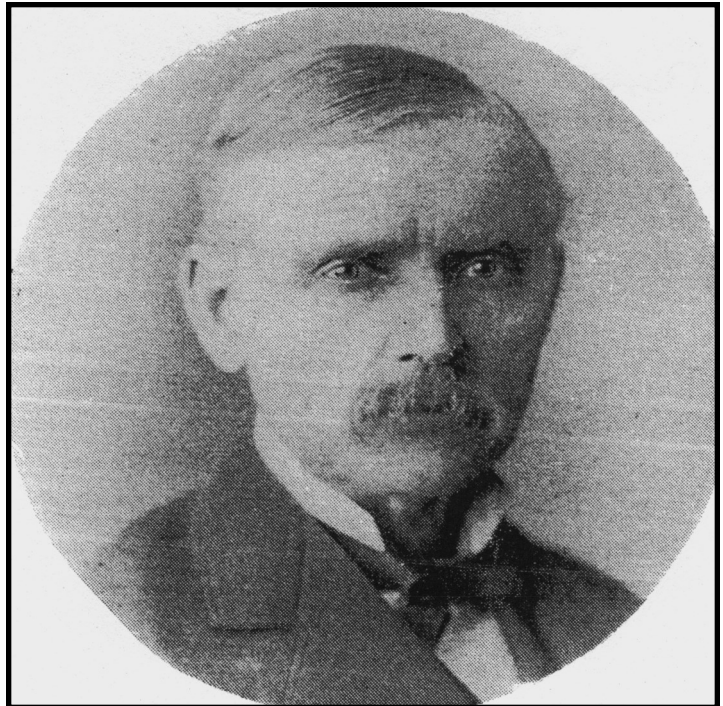
Hon. Oliver Perry Davis, from whose initials the village and railroad station of Opedee took its name, accumulated and owned up to 1300 acres of land. It was located about four miles south of Newport, Indiana, and was known as the "O.P.D. Farm."

Oliver was born in Warner, New Hampshire on November 7, 1814 to Gideon and Hannah Davis. At the age of 15, he left his native state and headed west to seek his fortune. He traveled westward across New York state at the time when the Erie Canal was being finished and traveled on it for a portion of his journey, the rest being made by coach, steamboat and train. In New York he rode behind the first locomotive built in the state. While in Rochester, New York, he was employed as superintendent of a paper mill and book bindery. He crossed over into Ohio and became acquainted with a dentist who taught him rudimentary dentistry. Oliver then moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana and then went on to Logansport and Delphi, Indiana as a traveling dentist with his powered drill strapped to his back. In 1838 he arrived in Greencastle, Indiana to practice his profession. There he was persuaded by the famous Ned McGaughey to study law. Afterwards he became a law partner of McGaughey. In 1840, Oliver settled in Newport, the county seat of Vermillion county, Indiana, and practiced law.

He also began following the occupations of agriculturist and tradesman. His first purchase of land in Parke county was September 18, 1844 from John Linebarger. Deed Record 9/10 It was five acres, on the east side of the Wabash River called Wimsetts Ford. The deed says "Ferry on Said land, free use of Ferry for John and John Jr. Linebarger, also Andrew Linebarger and sons."

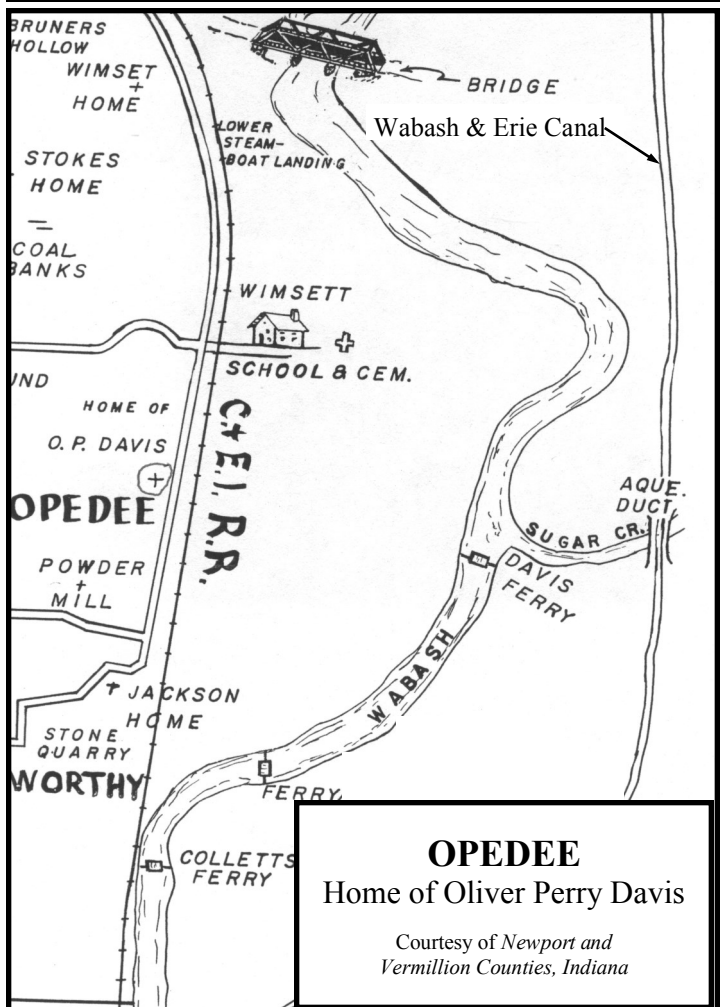
Then in 1845 Oliver purchased forty acres of bottom land described as the northwest fractional quarter of section twelve, in Vermillion township. This land was the site of the Wimsett Ferry. Now he owned all of the Ferry, which he used extensively for many years. Oliver built his house at the Ferry landing and lived there until 1866 when he built a new one along the O.P.D. road at the foot of the bluffs.

After he bought the ferry, he soon started shipping corn and pork to New Orleans by flat boat and made several trips there himself going by steamer. He was a prolific writer and beginning with a letter written home from New Orleans on December 30, 1846, over a hundred letters written by him from various places to his family survived and



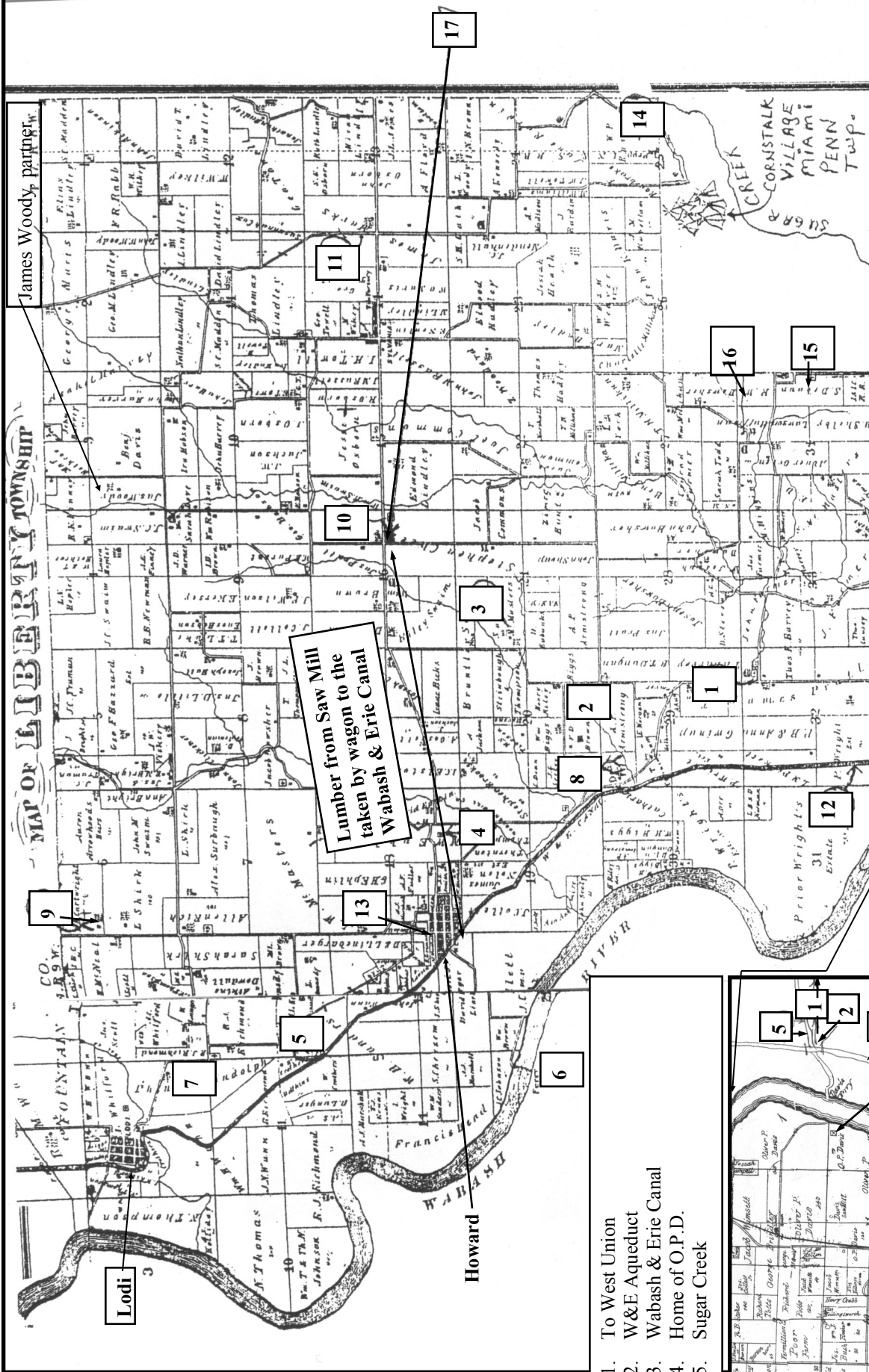
OLIVER PERRY DAVIS

Courtesy of *Husk and Nubbins* by Alice Davis Greenwood
Find-A-Grave #67607468



OPEDEE
Home of Oliver Perry Davis

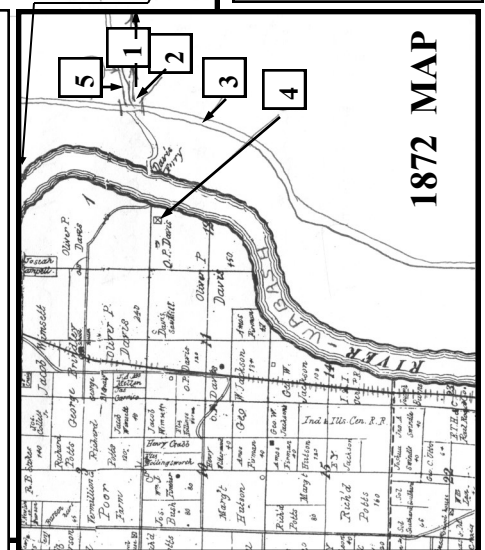
Courtesy of *Newport and Vermillion Counties, Indiana*



1874 MAP OF LIBERTY TOWNSHIP, PARKE COUNTY, INDIANA

1. Harvey School and Cemetery, 2. Wm. H. Biggs' Home, 3. Sam. McMaster's Home, 4. Ephlin Cemetery and School, 5. Miami Burial Ground with Chief, 6. Filson Ferry, 7. Miller Cemetery, 8. Miami Village on Staggs Farm, Shirk Farm, Indian Village and Shirk Cemetery, 10. Sixteen Church, School and Cemetery, 11. Marks' "Fairview Farm," 12. Wabash & Erie Canal and the Miami Trace from Ft. Harrison to Lafayette, 13. Howard, 14. Hugh Russell's Home and Cemetery, 15. DeBaun Cemetery, now listed in Penn Twp., 16. Lawson Huffman's Home, 17. O.P.D.'s Saw Mill

1. To West Union
2. W&E Aqueduct
3. Wabash & Erie Canal
4. Home of O.P.D.
5. Sugar Creek



1872 MAP

Oliver Perry Davis' Family

<u>Name</u>	<u>Birth/Place</u>	<u>Death</u>	<u>Burial/Place</u>	<u>Marriage/Place</u>
Gideon Davis	1747		1823	
m. Ruth Cheney	1745			
Gideon Davis	11-30-1785	Merim, NH		7-04-1810 Ereter, NH
m. Hannah Bean B.				7-04-1810 Ereter, NH
Oliver Perry Davis Sr.	11-07-1814	Warner, NH	9-25-1892	Mem. Chapel Cem. Verm. Co IN 4-24-1847
m1. Eliza Oldridge	11-08-1821		10-15-1860	" " " " " " 4-24-1847
<u>Oliver P. Davis Jr.</u>	5-31-1847		10-25-1873	" " " " " "
<u>Alice D. Davis</u>	1-00-1851		1938	Wimsett Cem. Vermillion Co. IN
m1. Capt. Simon V. Oldekirk	2-07-1838	Salem, NY	5-28-1884	
m2. Albert Greenwood	1842	Canada	1929	Wimsett Cem. Vermillion Co, In ?
<u>Harriet Davis</u>	5-04-1854		7-06-1854	Mem. Chapel Cem. Vermillion Co IN
<u>Mary Gertrude Davis</u>	9-00-1855		1928	
m. Frank Hall Munson	10-10-1853	Ohio	3-02-1916	Rockville, IN
<u>Edward E. Davis</u>	1-00-1858	Bloomington, IN	1927	12-25-1883 Edgar Co IL
m. Laura C. Kizer	9-00-1865		6-15-1929	12-25-1883 " "
m2. Emily Collett Montgomery	12-22-1822		8-05-1886	Thomas Cem. Verm. Co IN
m1. Dr. W. G. Montgomery	1811	Ohio	10-18-1854	IN 6-04-1850 Verm. Co. IN
Mary Montgomery	1852			
Florence Montgomery	4-00-1854		1910	
m. Charles W. Ward	1847		1910	1-12-1870 Verm. Co. IN
m2. Oliver Perry Davis Sr.				10-20-1861 div. 1863
<u>Josephus Collett Davis</u>	8-00-1862	Verm. Co. IN	2-01-1922	Highland Lawn Cem. Terre Haute, IN 1861
m. Melinda Marie Hendrich				1-25-1905 Vigo Co. IN
Mary Florence Davis	11-00-1915		8-00-1992	
m. Cox				

were preserved by Oliver's grandson, Ray Munson.

Oliver married Eliza Oldridge in 1847. As far as I, Charles Davis, know there were five children born to them: Oliver P. Davis, Jr., Alice D. Davis, Harriet Davis (died in infancy), Mary Gertrude Davis, and Edward E. Davis.

Alanson Church bought the northwest quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 16 Township 17 Range 8 west from Joseph R. Kennedy except for one acre where the school stood on June 6, 1849. D. R. 11/282 Mr. Church, Oliver Perry Davis and James Woody became partners and built a steam saw mill on this land. It was located at the southeast corner of the cross roads. According to history, the saw mill was "no doubt the first steam mill in the county." Lumber cut from there was wagoned to the town of Howard, Indiana, and loaded onto canal boats at the "Widewaters" of the Wabash & Erie Canal, and then shipped to various places. John Woody owned the canal boat "Clipper." Mr. Church was its Commander and used it for shipping. The "Clipper" was registered by Mr. Woody on April 22, 1854. They also dealt with shipping corn by canal. They successfully operated the mill for several years. The mill was shut down in 1875 by its final owner, William Sale.

When the Indiana Constitution was to be rewritten in 1851, Oliver was elected a delegate. This began a political career, which resulted in Oliver serving four terms as State Senator from Parke and Vermillion Counties, being elected in 1863, 1865, 1875 and 1881.

Oliver's wife, Eliza, died in 1860. His life was never again the same. In 1861 he finally married Emily Collett Montgomery, a widowed sister of Stephen S. Collett of Newport, Indiana. She had two daughters of her own, Mary aged nine and Florence aged seven. The following year they had a son born to them, Josephus Collett Davis. Things did not go well for this marriage. Emily divorced Oliver and moved to Newport with the infant Josephus. Josephus grew up to be an attorney in Terre Haute, Indiana.

Through Oliver's influence, the Evansville, Terre Haute and Chicago Railroad was built right in front of his house in 1870. Because Oliver was a big shipper of grain and had a large warehouse, the railroad made it a flag stop and named it Opeedee.

A railroad conductor and ex-Civil War Captain named Simon V. Oldekirk, married Oliver's daughter, Alice. Simon had served in Company K, 4 N.Y. Infantry. Simon quit the railroad and became the superintendent of the Davis farm. He was hurt nine years later in a run-away

accident and died of his injuries.

On September 19, 1892 Oliver began ill and was very frail. Dr. Swafford of Terre Haute was called to counsel with Dr. Hall. Oliver Perry Davis died on September 25, 1892. He was laid to rest in the Memorial Chapel Cemetery, Newport, Vermillion County, Indiana.

Oliver's 1300 acre farm was divided among his four living children. His personal property was valued between 10 - 12 thousand dollars, but his estate was in debt by \$32,000. His executors, Judge Jump, Joe Collett, and C. W. Ward, hired James Chipps to superintend the farm. Chipps thought that with careful management the debt could be erased in 6 years.

Oliver's partner, James Woody, was a Quaker, who migrated to Parke county in 1827. He lived on the SW¹/₄ of section 3 in Liberty township about 2½ miles northeast of



DAVIS
OLIVER P. DAVIS SR.
NOV. 7, 1814 - SEPT. 25, 1892
ELIZA DAVIS
NOV. 8, 1821 - OCT. 15, 1860
ELIZA DAVIS NO. 27, 1848 - FEB. 15, 1854
HARRIET DAVIS MAY 4 - JULY 6, 1854
OLIVER P. DAVIS JR. MAY 31, 1847 - OCT. 25, 1873

Memorial Chapel Cemetery
Vermillion County, Indiana

the saw mill by road. He was born February 23, 1810 in Orange county, North Carolina and died on November 29, 1893. He married Margaret Hall in Parke county on July 10, 1829. His occupation was a farmer. His wife, Margaret, was born on December 8, 1808 in North Carolina and died on September 2, 1898. Both are buried in the Rush Creek cemetery, Liberty township. They had a son, Lot F. Woody, who was born on April 16, 1848. Lot married Sarah Jane Osborn.

Oliver's other partner, Alanson Church, was born in 1820 in North Carolina and died in 1884. He married Louisa Commons on June 7, 1846 in Parke county, Indiana. Louisa was born in 1827 and died in 1903. After Alanson and partners sold out the steam mill, he and his family moved to Drummer Ford, Illinois. Their children were Jasper, Joel, John, Louisa, Mary, Whitney and Jacob. Jacob returned to Parke county, married and died there. Alanson and his wife were buried in the Silveyville cemetery at Solano county, California.

Sources:

Alice and Albert Greenwood, Wimsett. Cem.
Ancestry.com — Simon Veder Oldekirk
Beckwith. *History of Parke County, Indiana*. J. H. Beadle. 1880.
Computer research, Find-A-Grave by Mary Jane Davis
Deeds in Parke county court house, recorder's office
1874-1908-1916 Plat and Isaac Straus Memorial, Parke County
Find-A-Grave
#25759410 Joseph C. Davis
#67607468 O.P. Davis, Memorial Chapel Cemetery
Newport *Hoosier State*
September 21, 1892
September 28, 1892
October 19, 1892
Obituary of Oliver P. Davis
O'Donnell. *Newport Vermillion County, Indiana*. 1969.
Parke and Vermillion Counties, Indiana. Bowen and Company, 1913.