

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Learning Lagniappe: Educator Extras Jefferson Davis Estate Papers

http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/jeffdavis/

In June 2004, the official court records of the Jefferson Davis estate were transferred to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History for permanent retention. Jefferson Davis (1808-1889) was the only president of the Confederate States of America. He spent most of his life in Mississippi and lived his final eleven years in Harrison County on the Gulf Coast.

Subjects that can be addressed within this Digital Archive:

Jefferson Davis, judicial system, formal writing, and legal documents.

Suggested Classroom Activities:

- Choose one of the handwritten documents and have students transcribe the whole document or a portion of it. They can write the transcription in everyday handwriting or in cursive.
- Have students write one informal letter and one formal letter.

For more lessons and activities based on the Digital Archives and other collections visit the Classroom Materials page on our website at
<http://mdah.state.ms.us/new/learn/classroom-materials/lesson-plans-and-teaching-units/>

Navigating the Jefferson Davis Estate Papers

To access Jefferson Davis' entire will and probate file, follow this link: http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/jeffdavis/

There are two ways to access the scans:

1. Go to the link above. Click on "Here in Forty-Eight Scans" in the second paragraph. Then, click on the individual thumbnails to view the scans.
- Or**
2. Click on "Searched by Category", "Personal Name", or "Search Collection" in the second paragraph. Chose the search parameters based on document type or individual's name. Press "submit query." Then, click on the individual thumbnails to view the scans.

To find more information about the scan and the document, click on "descriptive information" at the bottom of the page.

Teacher Discussion Guide on Reverse

Teacher Discussion Guide

Use the images from the MDAH Digital Archive entitled “The Jefferson Davis Estate Papers” (found at http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/jeffdavis/) to lead your class in a discussion. Analyze and interpret the following images in the online collection.

1. Click on “Here in Forty-Eight Scans” and then click on the second thumbnail from the left on the top row. Read the will’s introduction and the first two sections.
 - a. Who wrote the will and why?

Jefferson Davis wrote the will because he believed that death was near. He recognized that while he was sound of mind he was “of such advanced age, as to suggest a near approach of death.”
 - b. In the first two sections of the will, what did Jefferson Davis leave behind for Varina Davis and for Mary Routh Ellis?

David left Varina Davis, his wife, all his personal belongings, including his library, furniture, correspondence, and the Brierfield plantation in Warren County, Mississippi. Davis left Mary Routh Ellis his “right, title, and interest in and to Elliston Plantation in Tensas Parish, Louisiana.” Her father originally resided at Elliston.
2. Go back to the thumbnails and click on the second to last scan on the third row. Read the Letter of Executorship.
 - a. Who was assigned to execute Jefferson Davis’ will?

J. Addison Hayes, Jr., Davis’ son-in-law, and J. U. Payne, a good friend of Davis, were executors of the will. The court did not make this decision. Davis specifically stated in his will that Hayes and Payne would carry out the will upon his death.
 - b. According to the document, what steps did the men take to execute the will?

First, they had to create an inventory of Davis’ estate and then appraise the items in the inventory. Once finished, both the inventory and appraisal had to be taken back to court. The men would then be able to pay any debts that Davis owed upon his death and pay the legacies mentioned within the will. When that was settled, the men could carry out the will according to its “true intent and meaning.” Finally, the men had to give an account of their actions to the court.
3. Go back to the thumbnails and click on the last scan on the sixth row. Read the letter to F. S. Hewes. Who wrote the letter, and what was the purpose of it?

J. U. Payne wrote the letter to F. S. Hewes. Payne asked Hewes, who was a clerk with the chancery court that handled Davis’ will, to send him the fees that were charged to Davis’ estate. According to the letter, the executors had recently been discharged, meaning that the will had been fully carried out. Now, it was time to settle any remaining fees associated with the estate.
4. After reading the excerpt from the will, the letter of executorship, and the letter to F. S. Hewes, what is the will’s and letter of executorship’s tone or writing style? How is it different from the tone or writing style of the letter to F. S. Hewes? Why are the tones different?

Since they are legal documents, the will and letter of executorship have formal tones. Both were used to carry out legal proceedings, which are very formal and structured, and they needed to mirror the formality. Also, everything is spelled out in both documents, which can contribute to the formal tone. This prevents there from being any gray areas while the will is being carried out. While the letter to Hewes still carries a semi-formal tone, it is much more informal compared to the other two documents. It is simple and matter-of-fact. Since it was not written in a formal setting, he could get away with using a more conversational tone.