



SINCE 1841

# WOODLAND

HISTORIC CEMETERY & ARBORETUM



## James Davis

James Davis was born March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1787 at Fort Harmar (now part of Marietta, Ohio); one of the first Black men born in the newly created Northwest Territory.

Growing up in the “vast and almost unbroken wilderness” of western Ohio, James Davis became an expert hunter at an early age; a “pursuit which he loved most dearly”.

It is said that during his lifetime he hunted “upwards of sixty” bears—the largest of which



measured more than nine feet in length and whose pelt was for a time preserved by a Cincinnati Museum<sup>[1]</sup>.

He was also a musician, well known among Dayton society for his skill as a violinist.

In addition to his other talents, Mr. Davis also worked as a barber.

The day before the battle of Tippecanoe, November 6, 1811, he shaved General William Henry Harrison while sitting upon a log<sup>[2]</sup>.

## The Northwest Territory

Established in 1787, the Northwest Territory included all the land west of Pennsylvania, northwest of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi River below the Great Lakes, including what would later become known as the Boundary Waters between the United States and Canada.



Woodland Cemetery's founder, John Van Cleve, would have been particularly excited to learn this bit of barbering trivia.

An ardent Whig, Van Cleve was so invested in Harrison's 1840 run for president that he contributed songs, illustrations, and cartoons to a political newspaper called "the Log Cabin".

**Left:** William Henry Harrison ca. 1813 by Rembrandt Peale – Courtesy of the [National Portrait Gallery](#).

Around 1815, James began his career on the Underground Railroad; originally by helping a few fugitive slaves from Kentucky find their way across Ohio to Canada.

Later on, as the Underground Railroad network in Ohio expanded, James Davis worked alongside Woodland notables like Charity Broady, Dr. Hibbard Jewett, and Major Luther Bruen at Dayton's First Wesleyan Methodist Church to collect food, clothing and money to help fugitive slaves continue their journey north.

**Right:** The First Wesleyan Church - built in 1842, First Wesleyan became the epicenter for the Underground Railroad and later served as Dayton's first school for Black children. Photo courtesy [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#).



Another of Mr. Davis' concerns was protecting Ohio's free African Americans from being kidnapped into slavery. To this end, James Davis founded the American Sons of Protection at First Wesleyan in February of 1849, serving as the organization's first president.

A short article from The Dayton Herald in 1889 simply described the American Sons of Protection as "a benevolent institution instituted several years ago by colored citizens here." The group met once a month and an executive board met every two weeks.

Much like other fraternal organizations of the time, members who became ill or disabled were paid benefits—up to \$3 per week, and at the time of death, the member's family would receive \$40 for burial expenses.

Beginning in 1859, the American Sons of Protection purchased several lots at Woodland Cemetery for use by its members.

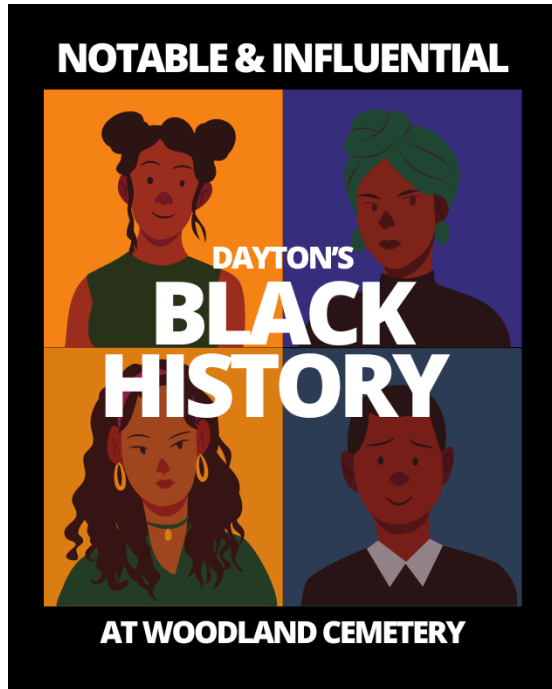
In 1908, the group voted to provide “provisions and supplies for the unemployed of the city irrespective of color.” And in 1911, the group, with 50 members, celebrated their 62nd anniversary. Sick members were given \$5 a week and \$105 for funeral expenses were paid.

James Davis died on January 17, 1862 at the age of 74. He is laid to rest in the American Sons of Protection lot in section 80, lot 969. For unknown reasons, his grave is unmarked.

[1] *the Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1/26/1862

[2] [Underground Railroad History](#) By: Henry Robert Burke (2004)

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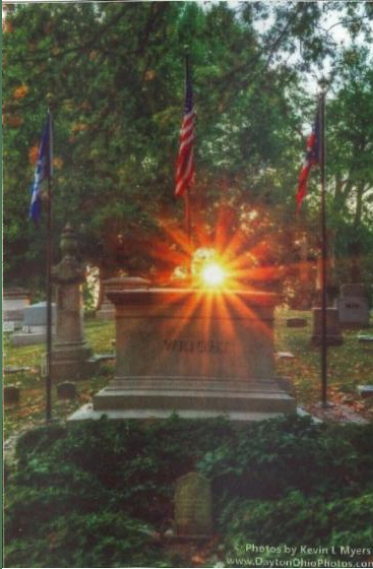
If you need help finding where someone is buried, need directions to a particular area, or have questions about pre-planning or funeral services, Woodland's Staff is here to assist you!

### Tours & More:

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Register for a guided tour: visit the Woodland Cemetery website! Learn about fascinating Daytonians resting peacefully in one of America's oldest rural garden cemeteries!

Or check out our virtual tours! (if you really don't want to go outside)



Photos by Kevin L Myers  
www.DaytonOhioPhotos.com



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## Woodland Cemetery and Arboretum

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