

Jeff Davis Comes to the Kingdom

Antebellum Architecture in Fulton

Fulton's rich heritage housing stock manifests early 19th century origins as well as noteworthy Victorian and post-Victorian architectural designs. Some remaining antebellum homes reflect early "Little Dixie" settlers' roots in the upper South; these Greek Revival style houses have Civil War tales to tell as well:



Robnett-Payne House

Robnett-Payne House, 5th and N. Bluff Sts. (1857-1858). Originally located west of Westminster College, this two-story white clapboard home with added lacework porch has been moved and painstakingly restored. According to the great-grandson of original owner James Robnett, during the July 17, 1861, running fight extending to Overton Run on the outskirts of Fulton, spent bullets passed through clothes on a line near the house. Also, perhaps in 1864, the widower and his children sheltered an early-hours visitor seeking refuge from Union troops — teenaged guerrilla Jesse James, who with a compatriot had stolen federal ammunition.



Jesse James



George Willing Home

Dr. George M. Willing Home, 211 Jefferson St. (ca. 1850). This two-story structure featuring magnificent red brick work was built on the end-chimney "I" plan with a central hall. Kentucky-born Willing operated a general store here by 1854. A known Confederate sympathizer, when Fulton was occupied by Union troops he was arrested and imprisoned in Jefferson City, where according to lore his wife, Mary, rode on horseback accompanied by *Story continued on right panel.*

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Fulton Heritage Trust, Inc. promotes historic preservation in Fulton and Callaway County.

Missouri's CIVIL WAR

When former Confederate president Jefferson Davis accepted an invitation to speak at the Callaway County agricultural fair ten years after the Civil War, he knew that he would be coming to a community with many Southern sympathizers and former Confederates.

He arrived in Fulton by train on the afternoon of Sept. 10, 1875, after an address at DeSoto, Missouri. He was welcomed here at this gracious Italianate home of Missouri's attorney general, John A. Hockaday. In a spirit of fellowship and reconciliation, Davis was honored with a reception and sumptuous dinner including both Southern and former Union political leaders.

Davis came to speak on behalf of an English venture, the Mississippi Valley Association, seeking to foster agricultural trade with, and perhaps emigration to, this farming region. While Davis accepted three offers from Missouri, an Illinois invitation was withdrawn due to threats. Much of the North continued to harbor resentment toward the "arch traitor" Davis.

However, "[i]n many respects the train ride from St. Charles to the capital of the 'Kingdom of Callaway' was one long triumphal procession into the heart of Little Dixie," with enthusiastic welcomes at Montgomery City and Mexico, wrote historian William E. Parrish.

Fatigue forced the ailing Davis, accompanied by his son Jeff Jr., to forego a grand tour of the fair, but after the evening's dinner here, a crowd gathered on the front lawn with a local band to serenade him. Davis responded briefly but graciously. Missouri's newly elected U.S. senator,

former Confederate general Francis M. Cockrell, also spoke.

When the next day Davis' carriage arrived for his speech at the fairground — now Westminster College's Priest Field — he was greeted by the roar of an estimated 10,000 – 12,000 people. The Fulton Telegraph offered: "There is no man living whom our people were more anxious to meet, representing as he does the cause that had enlisted their warmest sympathies, and in defense of which they had lost and suffered so much."

In his address Davis extolled the economic sense of agriculture as well as urged developing local manufacture as an alternative to exporting natural resources. He endorsed the "joint interest" of the upper and lower Mississippi valleys in expanding exchange and export of commodities through shared river transport.

Davis was visibly moved by his reception and the warmth of locals he met after his address. During his speech he made a point of observing that in Callaway County the people were "King," and while he had been a Jeffersonian "republican" all his life, "if I ever move to a kingdom it shall be to the Kingdom of Callaway." Frequently interrupted by applause, now he was roundly cheered.

Sharing the platform was Missouri Governor Charles Hardin, with whom Davis would debark later by train to enjoy the hospitality of the Governor's Mansion in Jefferson City before traveling to his final appearance in Kansas City. Hardin rose at the end of Davis' address to speak some words on his behalf, but stood aside while Davis acknowledged a thunderous ovation and the band struck up "Dixie."



Born in Kentucky, Jefferson Davis was educated at Transylvania University and the U.S. Military Academy. As a young officer, he was posted to Jefferson Barracks (St. Louis), where he escorted Chief Black Hawk after his capture in 1832. Davis served with distinction as a colonel of volunteers in the Mexican War (where he was wounded). A Mississippi planter, he also served as a U.S. Congressman, Senator and Secretary of War.

From 1861–1865 he was the first and only president of the Confederate States of America. Demonized in the North as a traitor, after the Civil War he was imprisoned at Fortress Monroe for two years before being released on bond. In 1868 a charge of treason was dropped, but he refused to take a loyalty oath because he believed he had done nothing wrong or illegal. His full citizenship was posthumously restored by Congress in 1978.

a slave and successfully appealed for her husband's release by a Union officer because both men were Masons. Fearing re-arrest, Willing barely missed local Federals while hiding in a cornfield before escaping to St. Louis on a borrowed mule.



Nesbit Mansion

Judge Thomas B. Nesbit Mansion, 530 Old Jefferson City Road (ca. 1840). Little is known about its construction, but this two-story red-brick home with two-story portico is a fine example of some "Southern mansions" in Nesbit's native Kentucky.

Thirty-nine years of age at war's onset, Nesbit successfully walked the line as a Union man in a strongly Southern county, elected circuit court clerk and recorder in 1860, remaining the latter until 1867. This household witnessed passage of the first Union troops to occupy Fulton, U.S. Reserve Corps (German Home Guards) soldiers, after the fight at Overton's Run.

Sources: William E. Parrish, "Jefferson Davis Comes to Missouri," Missouri Historical Review, LVII:4 (July 1963): 344-356. David Payne, "Missouri Family Album," House and Garden, April 1941, pp. 49, 92-94. History of Callaway County, National Historical Company, St. Louis, 1884, pp. 446-459.

Photo of Jesse James used with permission of the University of Oklahoma.

