

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED DEC 9 1976
DATE ENTERED AUG 29 1977

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON

** DAVIS MEMORIAL

LOCATION

Mt. Hope Cemetery, SW 1/4, NE 1/4, Sec. 28, T 2 S, R 17 E, one-half mile east of Hiawatha

CITY, TOWN

Hiawatha

X VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

No. 2, Martha Keys

STATE

Kansas

CODE

20

COUNTY

Brown

CODE

013

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- X OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- X PRIVATE
- BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

- YES: RESTRICTED
- X YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- X OTHER Memorial

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

John M. Davis (deceased)

STREET & NUMBER

unknown

CITY, TOWN

unknown

STATE

VICINITY OF

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Register of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Brown County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Hiawatha

STATE

Kansas

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic Sites Survey

DATE

1973

FEDERAL X STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Kansas State Historical Society

CITY, TOWN

Topeka

STATE

Kansas

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Davis Memorial is at the south end of Mt. Hope Cemetery, which is filled with many large, impressive tombstones. The memorial is a collection of sculpture portraying the various stages of John M. and Sarah E. Davis' lives together. A massive polished Vermont granite canopy, which reportedly weighs 105,000 pounds and is supported by six granite pillars, shelters the tombs and most of the statues.

The two seated groupings to the south are the first figures visible to the visitor. These figures are the only ones not located under the granite canopy which shelters the rest of the monument. The grouping to the west has been carved of unpolished Vermont granite and portrays a figure of John Davis as he looked after his wife's death, seated next to a chair labeled "The Vacant Chair." All other figures in the monument have been carved of Carrara marble. The group to the east depicts both Sarah and John Davis shortly after they had moved into Hiawatha, sitting on the front porch of their home. These statues of John Davis depict him without his left hand which he lost in a farming accident. Between these two groups stands a large polished granite urn.

Two seated statues in Carrara marble on the west side of the monument represent the Davises as a young couple. This is the only statue of John Davis without a beard.

The remaining statues are grouped around the two burial vaults. Two statues each of both John and Sarah Davis at different stages of their lives stand and face each other across the two granite slabs which mark their graves. Another statue of John Davis kneels with a bowed head at the foot of Sarah's grave, while an angel with a wreath kneels at his grave.

The entire memorial is surrounded by a granite fence with inset panels of pink grained marble set in a white stone frame. The railing of the enclosure has been accented with pink marble urns and delicately carved slabs. There is a granite urn at each corner of the monument.

The monument appears much the same as it did at John Davis' death, although its tremendous weight is causing settling problems. The marble statues were originally highly polished, but a cleaning solution which Davis used on the figures removed all of the glaze.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1931

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Davis Memorial in Mount Hope Cemetery near Hiawatha was erected in the 1930's by John M. Davis to perpetuate the memory of his wife Sarah. Almost from the beginning the memorial attracted large crowds of visitors, and it has become one of the better known memorials in the United States.

John M. Davis, an orphan, came to Kansas in 1879 from Kentucky. He secured work as a farm hand and a year later married one of his employer's daughters. The marriage was over the objections of her family. Davis and his wife worked hard, spent little and had a local reputation for being tight or stingy. Davis eventually acquired two of the best quarter-sections of farm ground in the county and amassed a considerable fortune before the loss of a hand in an accident in 1908 forced him to give up active farming operations. In 1916 the Davises moved to Hiawatha where they lived quietly and unobtrusively until Sarah's death December 3, 1930.

There was much talk among the townspeople about the Davis wealth and what they thought he might, or should, do with it after his wife's death. The Davises had no children; he was an orphan and had no relatives; her family had treated him unkindly and he certainly wouldn't leave his money to them. Soon after his wife's death people began asking him to endow colleges or to build a hospital, park or swimming pool or to support certain charities. Davis didn't care for that and decided he couldn't please everyone so would only try to please himself.

When his plans for the memorial became known in 1931, there was much criticism of him in the community and considerable resentment. Davis apparently had no definite plan when he started on the memorial. He simply made arrangements with Horace England, owner of the local monument company, to have two marble statues of himself and his wife carved in Carrara, Italy. Photographs sent to the craftsmen resulted in amazing likenesses, and Davis liked the first two so well that he ordered an eventual total of eleven. All but one were of Carrara marble; it was of Vermont granite. The statues, six of himself, four of his wife and one of a kneeling angel, depicted the couple at various stages of their married life and him mourning her death. The last statue in the sequence showed him seated beside an empty chair with the inscription "The Vacant Chair." The statues were apparently all in place by 1933. A canopy of granite had earlier been placed over the burial vaults. Low walls were added in 1935 to protect the statues from the curious. Davis refused to say how much the memorial cost; estimates ran as high as \$750,000, but the usual guess was \$200,000 to \$250,000. Apparently the only person beside Davis who knew the cost was Horace England and he never said.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Cemetery Is Attraction Now for Many Visitors," Topeka Capital, February 1, 1938.

"Davis Builds \$200,000 Memorial to His Wife," Topeka Capital, July 23, 1932.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A

1	5
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2	8	4	7	7	0
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4	4	1	3	8	5	0
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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B

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--	--	--	--	--	--

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Richard Pankratz, Director, Historic Sites Survey
Cornelia Wyma, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION Kansas State Historical Society

STREET & NUMBER 120 West Tenth

CITY OR TOWN Topeka

DATE October 15, 1976

TELEPHONE 913-296-3251

STATE Kansas 66612

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE X

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Nyle H. Miller

TITLE Executive Director, Kansas State Historical Society

DATE December 1, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST *Charles H. ...*
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 8/29/77
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
DATE 8-25-77

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Davis was reportedly the "most hated man in Hiawatha." If he were, it never bothered him since other people's opinions were of no concern. At times people vented their feelings in acts of vandalism against the memorial. Much of his time was spent at the cemetery, cleaning the statues, or just looking.

In 1937, when Davis was told by doctors that he had less than six months to live, he proceeded to give away his last \$55,000 to the few people who had been kind to him. However, Davis fooled the doctors and lived ten more years, practically penniless and for the last few years in the Brown County Home where he died at age 92 in April, 1947.

The Davis Memorial is significant for the artistic quality of the statuary. It is a truly unique memorial; nothing quite like it exists anywhere else in Kansas. It has been an attraction for tourists and other visitors since the mid-1930's. The closeness of the statuary groupings presents an interesting space and time sequence. The memorial is also distinguished by the delicacy of the carvings and the extremely life-like representations of John and Sarah Davis.

9.

"Davis Memorial Has Meaning to Tourists," Hiawatha Daily World, June 6, 1975.

"Fortune Spent on Memorial, Now Unkempt," Topeka Daily Capital, April 11, 1973.

"A Fortune to Perpetuate Own Memory," Topeka Daily Capital, June 26, 1938.

"Guard on Kansas Memorial," Kansas City Times, June 1, 1935.

Hiawatha Daily World, April 26, 1947.

"Hiawatha Farmer Spent Reported \$750,000 in Construction of Unique Memorial to Wife," To the Stars (Kansas Industrial Development Commission), v. 1, no. 1, (November, 1945), p. 5.

"Kansan Spends Fortune on Wife's Tombstone," Omaha World-Herald, July 31, 1932.

Kansas: A Guide to the Sunflower State, American Guide Series (New York, Viking Press, 1939), p. 312.

"A Town Debates an Eccentricity," Kansas City Star, October 5, 1958.

"The True Story of the Davis Memorial," Farm Directory, Brown County, Kansas (Hiawatha, Kansas, Henry J. Weltmer, 1949), pp. 64, 65.