

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

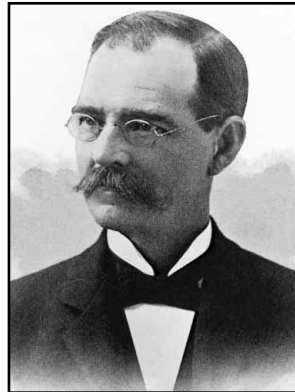
A series of tributes to hometown heroes who have made a difference.

Sydney B. Davis

A native of Parke County, Sydney Brian Davis was a prominent member of the Terre Haute bar for more than 60 years and a tireless advocate for needy children.

Born July 22, 1842, Syd was the son of Eli and Nancy (McGinnis) Davis, well known farmers in Green Township. As a youth he was committed to the family farm eight months each year, allowing little time to attend school. However, in 1858, he enrolled at Waveland Collegiate Institute in Waveland, Ind., earning a degree in 1862.

Immediately following graduation, Davis founded a retail drug store in Waveland and edited a weekly newspaper. He also studied law, gaining admission to the Montgomery County bar at Crawfordsville on Dec. 10, 1867. Meanwhile, on May 17, 1867, he wed Mary C. Fullenwider. The couple eventually raised four children.



In October 1869 Sydney relocated to Terre Haute where younger brother Sandford already was engaged in a law practice. One of his prominent early clients was Andrew Conant, owner of the Magnetic Artesian Bath House. When Sandford temporarily moved south due to his frail health, Stephen Marion Reynolds, who settled in Vigo County during the "Terre Haute Oil Craze of 1889," became his partner. Syd's son, George M., earned a mechanical engineering degree from Rose Polytechnic Institute at age 20 in 1888 and, after securing a law degree from the University of Michigan, joined his father's practice to specialize in corporate and patent law. The firm of Davis, Reynolds & Davis was among the first tenants in the Grand Opera House when it opened in 1897, the year Sandford C. Davis died. Syd's oldest son William became a physician, serving as surgeon with the 159th Indiana Regiment during the Spanish-American War before moving to Detroit. For two decades the family resided at 315 N. Seventh St. Mary Davis died of tuberculosis on Oct. 16, 1907, and Davis moved with daughters May and Grace to 634 Sycamore St.

Devoted to safeguarding underprivileged children, Davis was a founding member of Terre Haute's Society of Organizing Charities, a predecessor of the Community Chest and the United Fund, as well as the Florence Crittenden Home for Unwed Mothers. He drafted legislation creating the Indiana Board of Children's Guardians, successfully introduced before the state legislature by Col. William E. McLean. Davis was appointed to the State Board of Charities by Indiana Gov. Winfield T. Durbin and the Indiana Metropolitan Police Board by Gov. James A. Mount. A member of the Coates College for Women board of managers, he was also a charter member of the Terre Haute Literary Society. At the time of his death on Dec. 9, 1929, at age 87, Davis was president of the Vigo County Board of Children's Guardians.

Son George continued to practice law on the third floor of the Opera House Block after his father's death and raised a family at 1210 S. Seventh St. He died at age 83 on March 16, 1952. The daughters of Sydney and Mary Davis remained in the home on Sycamore St. for several years before moving in with their older brother. May Davis died May 29, 1947, at age 77. Grace E. Davis, assistant librarian at the Emeline Fairbanks Memorial Library for many years, died at age 89 on Dec. 8, 1962.



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