

Jefferson Davis Monument State Park

By Jerry Long
c.2025



Jefferson Davis Monument, Fairview, Todd County, KY, on US 68 and KY 80, ten miles east of Hopkinsville, KY

Towering over a 20-acre state park, this imposing monument was dedicated by the people of the South as a tribute to Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America, who was born on this site in 1809. The shrine symbolizes the South's veneration of the integrity and ideals of Jefferson Davis and his contribution to the cause of the Confederacy.

At a 1907 reunion in Glasgow, Ky. of the famous Confederate Orphans Brigade, former Confederate general Simon Bolivar Buckner proposed a plan for a Jefferson Davis monument to be erected at his birthplace in Fairview. A group started the Jefferson Davis Home Association and raised money for the monument. By April 1909, the Association paid \$7,052 for seven tracts of land containing twenty acres. Within the next eight years \$150,000 had been accumulated for a monument.

Construction began in 1917. The approximate cost was \$200,000, most of which was raised by public subscription through the efforts of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. It was completed and dedicated 7 June 1924. To mark the occasion of its completion, the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross from the top of the monument.

This 351-foot tower is the fifth tallest monument in the United States. The monument is the tallest unreinforced concrete structure in the world. The monument has a base of 35 feet by 35 feet with 10-foot thick walls at the lower level, tapering to two feet at the top. The observation windows at the top of monument offer visitors a breathtaking view of the surrounding countryside. Originally the observation room could only be reached by climbing stairs which went around the interior of the monument; an elevator was installed in 1929. The Jefferson Davis Monument State Shrine became a part of the Kentucky State Park System on 7 June 1927. Open from May 1 to October 31. There is a souvenir shop picnic areas, and a playground are located in the park. The monument was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973

Near the monument is a replica of Davis' birthplace, the log home of Captain Samuel Davis, Revolutionary officer and father of Jefferson Davis. This home was unique in its day because of its glass windows, the first in the community. One room of the house was turned into a "wayfarers rest," to supplement the family's income.

JEFFERSON DAVIS

Jefferson Davis was born at Fairview, in Christian County, Kentucky on 3 June 1808, less than 100 miles away from Abraham Lincoln's birthsite. The Davis family moved to Mississippi shortly after Jefferson's birth.

Young Davis was sent to Kentucky in 1821 to be educated by the Dominican Order near Springfield. He then entered Transylvania College at Lexington and received an appointment to West Point Military Academy in 1824.

After graduating from West Point, Jefferson Davis had an illustrious military career in the Indian and Mexican Wars. In 1835 he married Miss Knox Taylor, daughter of Colonel Zachary Taylor. He then became a successful cotton planter in Mississippi.

Davis, as an active member of the Democratic Party, entered politics, and served in the United States Senate. He became Secretary of War during the administration of President Franklin Pierce.

When the controversy between the North and South reached open hostilities, Jefferson Davis was elected President of the Confederacy by acclamation. He served as Confederate President in Richmond, Virginia from 1861 to 1865. At the close of the war, Davis was captured in Georgia and imprisoned for two years.

The remaining years of his life were spent at "Beauvoir," his plantation near Biloxi, Mississippi, where he published "Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government." Davis died in New Orleans in 1889, after a short illness.



Entrance to the monument and base relief of Jefferson Davis



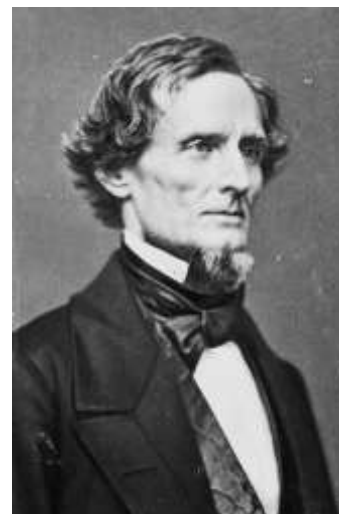
Jefferson Davis State Historic Site & Museum – photo by Jud McCranie



Aerial view and entrance to the Jefferson Davis Monument State Park



Plaque Inscription: JEFFERSON DAVIS - President of The Confederate States of America, June 3, 1808-Dec. 6, 1889. "The past is dead; let it bury its dead, its hopes and its aspirations; before you lies the future - a future full of golden promise; a future of expanding national glory, before which all the world shall stand amazed. Let me beseech you to lay aside all rancor, all bitter sectional feeling, and to take your places in the ranks of those who will bring a consummation devoutly to be wished - a reunited country." From speech made by Jefferson Davis at Mississippi City, Mississippi, in 1888. "Clarus et vir fortissimus".



Historical marker: "Jefferson Davis Birthplace – Here the only President of the Confederate States of America was born June 3, 1808, the son of Samuel and Jane Cook Davis. The family moved to Mississippi during his infancy." Erected by Kentucky Department of Highways. (Marker Number 57). On right picture of Jefferson Davis.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 8 June 1924, pp.1A & 4A:

KENTUCKY UNVEILS TRIBUTE TO MEMORY OF JEFFERSON DAVIS

Stars and Bars Fly At Top of Giant Obelisk;
"President of Southland Equal To Lincoln In
Goodness of Heart," Says Speaker.

Fairview, Ky., June 7. (AP) – A gigantic concrete shaft towering 351 feet into the air was dedicated to memory of Jefferson Davis, president of the confederacy three score years ago, and presented to the state of Kentucky here this afternoon.

The obelisk, with a confederate flag flying high above the copper cap which crowns it, was closed to public inspection today because the interior has not yet been finished. Thousands of visitors, however, tramped about the twenty acres surrounding the Davis homestead inspecting the exterior of the huge monument from every possible angle.

The Stars and Stripes and the Stars and Bars decked the sides of the obelisk, waving softly in a gentle breeze. An occasional low hanging fleecy cloud seemed to touch the pinnacle. Many persons prominently connected with the forces of the North and South during the civil war traveled overland from Hopkinsville to the homestead near here for the occasion.

Bands played airs of the past and an occasional popular melody. The only diversion until the hour of the ceremonies was a general search for shade.

"Acted Part Well."

"Today witnesses the culmination of all loving tributes in the dedication of a memorial which represents the mature thought of a steadfast and loyal people," said Dr. Dunbar Rowland, representing Mississippi in his address on "Jefferson Davis, constitutionalist." Davis, he added, was the equal of Abraham Lincoln in the "goodness of his heart, and superior in culture and training for statesmanship." The Confederacy's president, Dr. Rowland said, "acted his part well, established a government complete in all its functions and upheld the principles of his government with courage and devotion."

Col. Robert J. McBride, of Louisville, representing the Jefferson Davis home association, presented the monument to the state. "The failure of the confederacy has more or less obscured the splendid qualities that belonged to this great man, who, to the thoughtless would, was only a rebel," Governor W. J. Fields said in accepting the gift in behalf of the state.

"Did Not Desire War."

"Had the confederacy been established, his name would have been second only to that of Washington," the Kentucky executive continued. "Mr. Davis in common with the confederate leaders, desired a peaceful separation from the federal government. They did not desire war, but the problems and the difficulties confronting them admitted no other solution. Undoubtedly Jefferson Davis committed grave errors in his administration, but they were solely errors of judgment. Alike with his honor, his patriotism is unpeached and unimpeachable. The confederacy failed with him, but it could not have succeeded with any other."

Kentuckians united with the nation in erecting the Lincoln memorial, Governor Fields pointed out, and "likewise united with Southland in the erection of the Davis memorial." Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, the executive referred to as native Kentuckians, "the one the president of the federal government and the other the president of the confederate government during the war between the states."

Major Jefferson Hayes Davis, U. S A., grandson of the Southern president, was given a long ovation when he was presented to the visitors by General W. B. Haldeman, Louisville, commander in chief of the United Confederate veterans.

Ten Thousand Present.

"Kentucky, my own, my native land, God grant that your sons may ever rise to illustrate the fame of their fathers," was the prayer voiced by Jefferson Davis on his last visit to the state which gave him birth.

How completely the sons and daughters of Kentucky and of all the South, answered for him that prayer was testified by an attendance of a crowd estimated at 10,000 present for today's exercises and by the eloquent tributes paid to him.

General Haldeman, as master of ceremonies, opened the program by presenting Miss Jessica Smith, of North Carolina, daughter of R. Smith, designer of the first Confederate flag. General Haldeman in his introductory remarks paid tribute to the women of the South.

"See what has been accomplished by the women of the South," he commanded, pointing toward the shaft.

To Mark Highways.

"We have only started honoring the president of the confederacy," declared Mrs. J. P. Higgins, St. Louis, treasurer-general of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. She said that with the monument completed steps would be taken to mark all highways leading to the Davis Shrine.

"Jefferson Davis has been vindicated," asserted Mrs. Ray W. McKinney, of Paducah, past president-general of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

Other speakers on the program included Mrs. Roy Livingston Scuyler, of New York; past president-general of the United Daughters of the Confederacy; Miss Mildred Rutherford, Athens, Ga., historian; Mrs. Harry McCarthy, Nicholasville and Captain Hugh C. Duffy, Cynthia.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 4 June 1978, pp.1A & 8A:

**Klan convention
sparsely attended**

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

FAIRVIEW, Ky. – They stood at military attention on a green hillside at the shrine of the Confederacy's only president on his 170th birthday Saturday paying "tribute to a patriot who pledged his life, his fortune and his sacred honor to his God, his race and his country."

It was colorful – the men in their robes of green, red, black, purple, tan and white with the flags of the Confederacy, United States and Christianity in the foreground.

But they numbered only 18, outnumbered 3-1 by the press and police who had both come expecting trouble.

For a century the very name of their organization – Confederation of Independent Orders-Invisible Empire Knights of the Ku Klux Klan – had struck terror in the hearts of thousands across America.

This was their national convention. Twenty-three states "from California to Maine, from Texas to Minnesota" were to be represented at the convention in nearby Hopkinsville, but only 18 robed and hooded Klansmen gathered for their only public ceremony.

Imperial Wizard William L. Chaney of Greenwood, Ind., who retired from national Klan leadership this weekend after nearly a decade in various offices, told the small gathering he felt "like a general without a command."

The ceremony began with the "Star-Spangled Banner," followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and prayer by Imperial Klud (chaplain) Dr. Marvin L. Miller of Columbus, Ohio. The playing of Dixie was reserved for the ceremony of laying a wreath in the design of the Confederate battle flag as near as possible to the 351- foot obelisk marking Jefferson Davis' birthplace.

The structure is currently being repaired and the area around it is roped off to keep the public from being injured in construction accidents.

At the end of the brief ceremony, Imperial Emperor Robert E. Scoggin of Spartansburg, S.C., the highest-ranking Klansman in the organization, played "America" on the tape deck and told the crowd, "I hope all of you cry like I do."

The nearest thing to a confrontation came when a man identifying himself only as the Klokard (third-ranking officer) of the Paducah Klan challenged the authenticity of the group.

He said he was the only Klansman from Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri or Tennessee present because the group there was not legitimate.

He said he is affiliated with a Klan branch headed by David Duke of Shreveport, La.

"Anyone, can go to a fabric shop, buy material and make themselves an imperial wizard," he told the news media.

The rival Klansman said the 125 members of the Paducah organization work in high schools, help in reverse discrimination cases and "even have programs that would help minority groups, believe it or not."

He added, "As far as getting our knuckles dirty punching people in the nose, we don't do that. If it can't be done in the courts, it won't be done. We don't go around shooting up trailers. We don't firebomb national directors of the NAACP."

There are, he said, at least six different Klan organizations in the United States. Each claims to be the largest.

After an exchange of words with one of the conventioning Klansmen in which the Paducah man noticed a Nazi tattoo on the other's arm, the Paducah man said, "I don't argue with inferiors," and left.

Chaney said the branches of the Klan are like different denominations in Christianity. "They might have different organizational structure and different tactics but they all have the same goals."

Those goals, he said, haven't changed in the past century. That includes preserving "racial integrity" and "Christian principles."

Klan rules have changed in the past few years to once again allow Catholics to join. Criteria for membership today include being a white native-born Christian gentile of good moral character and at least 18 years old, Chaney said.

Chaney said some members of the Klan are afraid to wear their robes in public because of harassment from other segments of the community. But, he said, the Klan hasn't received as much political harassment since the death of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

"We have somewhat more political freedom in this country today," 1 he said.

Asked about Klan activities in high schools, Chaney said the junior order "all but went out of existence several years ago but has now been revived in some areas such as New York and Oklahoma."

Although the Klan is still the strongest in the Old South (Scoggin says Spartansburg, S.C., still has public "cross lightings" every Saturday and Sunday), it is now worldwide, the leaders said.

Chaney, a Somerset, Ky., native now living in Greenwood, Ind., said Indiana is the strongest Klan state north of the Mason-Dixon line. The fastest growing state is California "because of the Mexican problem." South Carolina is the strongest state in the country. And New York is the strongest state in the Northeast.

In addition to its strong stand in favor of white supremacy, the Klan also is opposed to liberalism in religion and what it sees as a weakening in foreign policy. The Panama Canal and amnesty for Vietnam draft evaders were listed as two examples of the latter.

The canal, Chaney said, "should never have been surrendered as long as the American flag flies."

Chaney also says he thinks the Klan needs to take a close look at tactics used by the labor movement in the 1930s to improve its current position.

The best he could say for recent Klan progress is "we feel like we fought a delaying action in preserving our racial identity."

Scoggin, a Klansman for "25 years and two weeks today," said his organization is the only "legitimate" Klan. The others are all homemade outfits," he said.

He says he sees more influential people seeking membership in the Klan today than he has since 1922 when his father joined the organization.

He personally helped organize Klans in Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, England and Canada, he said. Rhodesia and South Africa have had Klans since 1964, he added.

Legitimate Klansmen don't burn crosses on people's lawns and run, Scoggin said. In fact, they don't "burn" crosses at all.

Crosses, he said, are "lighted, not burned." The practice dates back to Scotland in 1320 as a symbol of Christianity, Scoggin said. "But it's about to bite the dust in this country now."

The image of the Klan in the news and entertainment media isn't as bad today as it was a few years ago, he said. In fact, the Klan was using the news media (in accounts like this one) to recruit new members, he said.

Chaney blamed "the Jewish segment of society" for the Klan's bad image in the movies and television dramas. "The Jewish segment of society more or less controls the movie industry," he said. "It's understandable they would be opposed to an organization that takes a strong stand for Christianity."

Saturday night the Klansmen met in a secret spot in Hopkinsville for supper and viewing the 1915 movie "Birth of a Nation," about the only movie that presented the Klan in a favorable light.

This morning they'll elect a new imperial wizard and 10 other officers for the next year.

But the tiny group of Klansmen who gathered at the Davis shrine Saturday, although they ranged in age from their 20s to 80, was perhaps best symbolized by the eldest member there.

He said the day was his 80th birthday and he had been a Klansman since 1926. But true to his oath of secrecy, he would not tell his name or even the state in which he lived.

Literature another Klansman handed out declared that the "Ku Klux Klan Rides Again." But Saturday it was barely walking.



Robert E. Scoggin of Spartansburg, S.C., holds American, Confederate and Christian flags. Scoggin is imperial emperor of the Ku Klux Klan.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 2 June 1985, pp.1C & 3C:

Davis monument rises in the South

Obelisk honors man who became
president of Confederate States

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

For a few hours this afternoon, the Old South of myth and memory will rise again from the ashes of time at the birthplace of Jefferson Finis Davis, the first and only president of the Confederate States of America.

On the lawn of the 20-acre Jefferson Davis Monument State Shrine Park at Fairview at 2 p.m., 20 modern Southern belles will gather with parasols and hoop skirts to compete in the annual Miss Confederate pageant.

The strains of “Dixie” will ride briefly on the summer breeze along the Todd-Christian county line and the assembled throngs of spectators will salute two flags – the Stars and Stripes and the Stars and Bars.

Then the United Daughters of the Confederacy will lay a wreath in memory of Davis, who was born a few feet away 177 years ago Monday.

Ninety miles east and eight months later, a boy was born in another Kentucky cabin whose name and life would be forever linked with Davis'. Abraham Lincoln and Davis, presidents of rival nations, were both Kentuckians whose families moved on while they were children – Lincoln to Indiana and Davis to Mississippi.

Historians still debate what would have happened had the Davises moved north and the Lincolns moved south.

As it turned out, Davis became a hero of the Black Hawk and Mexican wars, a successful Mississippi planter, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Secretary of War and president of the Confederate States of America.

When the Civil War ended, he was imprisoned by the U.S. Army for two years, and blamed by many Southerners for the loss of their cause.

As time passed however, Davis and Robert E. Lee became the twin symbols of the Confederacy, rising to the realm of myth. Davis' death in 1889 provided the impetus for the organization of Confederate veteran organizations across the South.

The Confederate statue on the courthouse lawn in Owensboro has its origins in a meeting of old soldiers to commemorate Davis' death.

But Lucy Birkhead, superintendent of the Davis shrine, says that thousands of those who stop at the shrine each summer don't know who Davis was. And many of those who have forgotten Davis are Southerners, she said.

In Fairview (population 150), nobody has to ask who Davis was. The town's most famous son is immortalized in concrete – one million, five hundred thousand tons of concrete, to be exact.

Driving east from Hopkinsville on U.S. 68, motorists are startled by the sight of what appears to be the Washington Monument rising suddenly out of the trees, corn fields and tobacco patches on the right.

Mrs. Birkhead, a former Owensboroan, has been park superintendent at the shrine for five years. "People just can't believe something like this is out here," she said.

The Jeff Davis obelisk stands 351 feet tall. It's listed in the record books as the tallest concrete-cast monument in the world and the fourth tallest monument of any type, Mrs. Birkhead said.

The only taller monuments, she said, are the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, the Washington Monument and the San Jacinto Monument in Texas.

Last summer, almost 12,000 people took the one-minute ride up the elevator to the top of the 61-year-old Jeff Davis monument.

There used to be a museum of Davis memorabilia in the tiny room at the top, but the Occupational Safety and Health Administration deemed it a fire hazard, Mrs. Birkhead said. Those artifacts are now on loan to the Pennyrile Museum in Hopkinsville, she said.

Connie Everett, a tour guide, said there used to be coin-operated telescopes set in the three windows at the top of the monument through which the wind whips constantly. They were removed during renovations in the '70s. "We hope to get them back this summer," she said.



Karmen McIntosh, a park employee from Elkton, looks out over the town of Fairview from the top of the Jefferson Davis Monument.

The guest book in the 20-foot-square room at the foot of the monument shows visitors from Germany, Puerto Rico, Canada, New York, Dallas and dozens of other places a world away from the tranquility of Fairview.

"We get a lot of traffic from all over the country, all over the world," Mrs. Birkhead said. "The interstates slowed down our traffic for awhile, but people are tired of interstates. They want to see America again."

The Davis shrine is definitely a piece of America.

In 1907, the Jefferson Davis Memorial Association was formed by veterans of Army of the Confederacy and their relatives. For 10 years, they worked to scrape together \$200,000 – a fortune in those years.

On June 17, 1917, the first bucket of concrete was poured. Then for seven years, with three interruptions, the steam shovels roared, hoisting buckets of concrete to men on scaffolds high and ever higher above the flat lawns of Fairview.

On June 1, 1924, a worker set the bronze cap on top of the monolith, although some die-hards in the community reportedly wanted to keep building forever.

"Apparently there was another monument somewhere that was 350 feet tall and they wanted to top it," Mrs. Birkhead said in explanation of the 351-foot height.

The monument is 35-feet by 35-feet at the base, set 19 feet below the ground. The walls range in thickness from 2 to 8.5 feet.

On several occasions, it has been the site of Ku Klux Klan rallies.

Next door to the shrine is the redbrick Bethel Baptist Church, built in 1886 on the site of the four-room cabin where Davis was born.

Davis made his last trip to Todd County in 1886 to attend the dedication of the church and present a silver communion set in his mother's memory.

Now tourists come from across the country to stare at a monument erected three generations ago to the memory of a man now fading into obscurity even in his native South.



Editor's note: The Jefferson Davis Memorial, located about 10 miles east of Hopkinsville on U.S. 68, is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. seven days a week from May through September. The elevator ride to the top costs \$1 for adults and 50 cents for children.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 21 June 2020, p.7A (Opinion):

We need to stand together

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

When my son started first grade in 1979, a kid in his class was picking on him.

I asked what the kid looked like.

"Fat" was the only word my son could think of to describe him.

A few months later, after they had become friends, we were out somewhere and my son pointed him out.

The little boy was black.

But "fat" was the only word my son could think of.
I was so hopeful then that we were starting to make progress in solving our long racial nightmare in this country.
But that was one of the many times I've been wrong. I thought we were making progress a couple of weeks ago when blacks and whites got together to declare that Black Lives Matter.
That showed the Owensboro I've grown to love.
And then, we went off on several tangents.
The governor removed the Jefferson Davis statue from the capital rotunda.
It was time.
Things have changed since 1936 when it was erected there.
The statue was moved to the Jefferson Davis State Historic Site in Fairview.
And I'm sure the next question will be why is the state spending \$236,000 a year on a site honoring the president of the Confederacy?
And then, we'll fight over that.
A lot of people seem to want the statue of a Confederate soldier moved from the courthouse lawn after 120 years.
This isn't the first time that's come up.
But conservatives are already up in arms about that on Facebook.
That's creating more division.
And let's face it, this is a conservative community with progressive undertones. I know compromise is frowned on these days.
But I would prefer to see a statue of Josiah Henson, who escaped slavery in Daviess County to become a leading abolitionist in Canada, or a black Union soldier from Daviess County standing beside the Confederate.
I think we could all — well, most of us — appreciate seeing them standing side by side.
It would show that we're different, but, in Owensboro, we stand together.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 24 August 2023, pp.1B & 3B:

Remembering a day when hate was celebrated

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

Hate is such an ugly thing.
And it eats away at the soul.
I saw it in full bloom in June of 1978 when a photographer and I drove down to the Jefferson Davis State Historic Site in Fairview near the Tennessee border.
The Confederation of Independent Orders-Invisible Empire Knights of the Ku Klux Klan was having its national convention in Hopkinsville.
And 18 of them, dressed in green, red, purple, tan and white robes, had made the trip over to Fairview to lay a wreath beside the 351-foot-tall obelisk that was a shrine to the Confederacy's only president.
They stood on a hillside near the shrine paying tribute to the man they said was "a patriot who pledged his life, his fortune and his sacred honor to his God, his race and his country."

Flags of the United States, the Confederacy and Christianity flapped in the wind.

This was the feared Ku Klux Klan but they were mostly just hateful old men believing they were superior to anyone who didn't look like them.

And they were outnumbered 3-1 by the media and the police.

They said people had come to the convention from 23 states — from California to Maine. But only 18 of them were brave enough to gather for their public ceremony.

A man who said he was the Klokard (third-ranking officer) of the Paducah Klan came to challenge the legitimacy of the group.

His group, he said, was the real Klan.

Once upon a time, the Klan had hated Catholics, Jews, African-Americans, liberals and anyone born in another country, except maybe England or Canada.

But these people said the rules had been changed.

Catholics were now welcome to join, they said.

And they were emphatic that they did not burn crosses.

They lighted them, they said.

Illuminated, some said.

That night they met in a secret location in Hopkinsville to watch the 1915 movie "Birth of A Nation."

The only movie that portrayed the Klan in a light that they liked, they said.

One of the robed Klansmen said that day was his 80th birthday.

He had been a member since 1926, he said.

But true to his oath of secrecy, he would not tell us his name or his state.

I still think about him.

Eighty years old and still hating.

What a wasted life.



Statue of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America, was unveiled in the Kentucky State Capitol Rotunda, in Frankfort, Kentucky on 10 December 1936. It was erected

under the auspices of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. It remained there until 13 June 13, 2020. The Historic Properties Advisory Commission voted to move the statue out of the Rotunda to the Jefferson Davis State Historic Site near Fairview, KY.

