

**NOTICE OF THE LIFE AND  
CHARACTER OF HON. JOHN  
DAVIS, READ BEFORE THE  
AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN  
SOCIETY**

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Notice of the Life and Character of Hon. John Davis, read Before the American Antiquarian Society by Thomas Kinnicutt

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**THOMAS KINNICUTT**

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NOTICE

OF

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

HON. JOHN DAVIS,

READ BEFORE THE

AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY,

AT THE MEETING HELD IN BOSTON

ON THE 26TH OF APRIL, 1854.

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BY HON. THOMAS KINNICUTT,

OF WORCESTER.

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BOSTON:

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1854.

THE following notice of the life and character of the Hon. JOHN DAVIS formed a part of the Report of the Council of the AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY, made to a meeting of the Society held in Boston on the 26th of April, 1854; and is published in this form by direction of the Society.



## NOTICE.

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WITHIN a few days, death has again invaded our ranks. The President of this Society, the Hon. JOHN DAVIS, died at his residence in Worcester, on Wednesday, the nineteenth instant.

It would be departing from the custom of the Council, as well as doing injustice to their own feelings and the character of the deceased, if they were to close this report without a tribute to his memory.

For the last quarter of a century, the name of John Davis has been intimately associated with the councils of his native State or with those of the Union. During that period, he has borne a part in public affairs which will identify him with the history of his times, and give to him a position among the wise and patriotic statesmen of his country. Of such a one, when enrolled among our members, and holding as he did the position of our presiding officer, it is, though a sad, yet not an ungrateful duty to inscribe a brief



notice upon the pages of our records, and thus to testify to our successors and to posterity the estimate which we entertain of his services and his character.

John Davis was born on the thirteenth day of January, 1787, in the town of Northborough, in the county of Worcester. Of a parentage neither affluent nor poor, it was his good fortune to feel the necessity of that personal effort and persevering industry which lie at the foundation of all success in life. Like most of the distinguished men of New England, his early training was upon his paternal farm and in the common schools of his native town, where he acquired that hardihood of physical constitution, which, in after years, bore him through many an hour of suffering from acute disease, and, with the rudiments of education, those traits of character which contributed essentially to his success in the rough contests of his subsequent career.

After the usual preparation, a part of which was made at Leicester Academy, he entered the Freshman class of Yale College in the year 1808, and graduated in course with honor in 1812.

Having selected the law for his profession, he entered upon its study in the office of the Hon. Francis Blake of Worcester, who then stood unrivalled at the Bar of that county, and was admitted as an attorney in 1815. Just ten years from that time, in December, 1825, he took his seat in the Congress of

the United States, as the representative of the Worcester South District. In that position he continued eight years, until January, 1834, when, having been elected Governor of the Commonwealth, he entered upon the duties of that office, in the discharge of which he continued until March, 1835, when he took his seat in the Senate of the United States, to which he had been elected by the Legislature then in session. He remained a member of the Senate until January, 1841, when he reassumed the office of Governor of the State, having been elected in the autumn of 1840, and continued to discharge its duties until January, 1843, when, having been defeated in the previous Gubernatorial canvas, he remained in private life until March, 1845. In that year, upon the death of the Hon. Isaac C. Bates, then a Senator from Massachusetts, he was elected his successor by the Legislature, and continued to represent the State until the 4th of March, 1853, when, upon the expiration of his term, he finally retired to private life.

It will be seen by these dates, that he was eight years and a fraction of a year a representative in Congress, three years and a fraction Governor of the Commonwealth, and nearly fourteen years a member of the Senate of the United States; making twenty-five years, or more than half of his entire manhood, spent in the public service.

The success of Mr. Davis in his profession was remarkable. He has been known to say, that his dif-

confidence was so great in early life, that, for years after he had acquired some reputation at the Bar, he never rose to address the court or jury without embarrassment; yet, at the end of ten years after his admission to practice, upon the elevation of Governor Lincoln to the Bench, he was the acknowledged head of his profession in a county of wide extent, and always distinguished for the ability of its Bar. As an advocate, he had few superiors in Massachusetts. Others there were more eloquent, possessed of more genius, capable of producing more thrilling effect by impassioned declamation and beautiful imagery; but there were few, if any, possessed of more power to convince or persuade a New England jury. His imagination was always subordinate to his judgment; perhaps he had too little of the former faculty. He seldom indulged in declamation. His strength lay in the clearness of his statement, in logical arrangement, in a facility of grouping the evidence bearing upon a given point, in a sagacity that never failed him in the selection of the topics and illustrations suited to the tribunal he addressed, with which his mind was stored by extensive reading and wide observation; and, added to this, a sincerity of manner so perfect that it could not be counterfeit. It is not strange, that, with such endowments, he should be successful with a jury composed of men distinguished, as most New England juries are, for their common sense, earnest to discover the truth, and suspicious of all attempts