



An American Tour: 65



Mississippi's Jefferson Davis Shrine

The shrine is actually Jefferson Davis's home... Beauvoir was the last home of Jefferson Davis and it was the site of his retirement. The house was built by James Brown, a wealthy plantation owner from Madison County, Mississippi. The house was started in late 1848 and was completed in 1852. The house was built as a summer home for his wife and his (eventually 13) children. It was then called Orange Grove, due to the Satsuma Oranges being grown on the property. Mr. Brown died in 1866 and his widow continued to own the property until 1873 when she was forced to sell the property at public auction to pay and satisfy the taxes due on her husband's estate. Frank Johnson, a land speculator purchased the house for taxes and then sold the house and property three months later.

Sarah Dorsey was the next owner of the property and when she first looked out over the Mississippi Sound from the front porch of the house, she said "Oh my, what a beautiful view - that's what I am going to call this property: Beauvoir! (Which is French for beautiful view or beautiful to look at). From that point on - the property was known as Beauvoir.

In 1877, Jefferson Davis was looking for a quiet retreat to write his books and papers. While inspecting property on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, he paid a courtesy call on Mrs. Dorsey (a family friend). He told her of his plans to try to find a place to write his books and papers. She encouraged him to stay at Beauvoir in one of the two pavilions in front of Beauvoir House to write his books. He agreed to do so only if he paid \$50.00 a month for room and board. After two years, he fell in love with the property and he wanted to buy it. She in turn wanted to sell it to him, so they agreed upon a selling price of \$5,500.00 dollars to be paid in three payments. He made the first payment and six months later, Mrs. Dorsey died. At that time he found out he was her sole heir and he eventually inherited the house along with other property.

Jefferson Davis died in 1889. His daughter, Winnie then inherited the property and when she died in 1898; Varina, Jefferson Davis' widow inherited the property. Mrs. Davis sold the property to the Mississippi Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans with two stipulations. The first was that the property be used for a Confederate Veterans Home for the veterans and or their widows at no charge to them and that was done from 1903 until 1957 when the last three widows were transferred to a private nursing home in Greenwood, Mississippi, when it was no longer practical to keep them at the site. The second stipulation for the sale of the property was that it be used as a memorial to Jefferson Davis and the Confederate Soldier; and that has been done from 1903 until the present time.

[<http://www.beauvoir.org/about/index.html>]

