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Walter S. Davis

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Dr. Walter S. Davis 1943-1968

Dr. Walter Strother Davis (Aug 9, 1905- October 17, 1979) was born in Canton, Madison County, Mississippi to Walter Morgan Davis and Annie Bell (Anderson) Davis¹. He attended public schools in Canton and Tougaloo, Mississippi. His secondary schooling was at Canton Street High School in Canton and in the high school department of Alcorn A&M College in Alcorn, Mississippi². He originally played football for the Tigers in the late 1920s, helping the Tigers to several winning seasons.

In 1931, he received his Bachelor of Science degree from Tennessee A and I State College and a Master of Science degree from Cornell University in 1933. He returned to his alma mater in 1933 and became head coach of the TSU football team until 1936, the same year he married Ivanetta Hughes. As coach, he led the Tigers to 17 wins, 7 losses and mm4 tied games. This ranks him eighth at Tennessee State in total wins and fifth at Tennessee State in winning percentage.

Dr. Davis received his PhD. from Cornell in 1941, and in September 1943 he became the second president of Tennessee A and I State College after President William J. Hale, who retired with 30 years of service. Before his own retirement in 1968, Dr. Davis led the institution through an era of tremendous growth in areas as multifaced as academics, facilities, and worldwide recognition.

During his tenure, Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College achieved university status in 1951 and the Tennessee Board of Education elevated the university to a full-fledged land-grant university in 1957. In 1958, the university was fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. More than 15,000 college degrees were awarded by Tennessee State during this period; furthermore, the campus student body grew by 1,100 students to 6,000 when Davis was in office³.

In honor of his accomplishments, TSU dedicated the Walter S. Davis Home Economics Building in 1969 (later renamed after the fourth TSU President, Dr. Frederick S. Humphries in 1997).

¹ 1910 United States Federal Census, ancestry.com

² The Tennessean, October 19, 1979, www.newspapers.com

³ The Tennessean, October 19, 1979, www.newspapers.com

That same year, the Administration “A” Building (erected in 1933 and previously renovated/enlarged in 1967) was renamed the Walter S. Davis Humanities Building, housing the Department of Languages, Literature and Philosophy and the Center for Administrative Computer Services.

Under Dr. Davis's leadership 24 new buildings were constructed on the campus and it was during his tenure that athletes from Tennessee State University commanded the attention of the nation and the world by winning national championships and titles in football, basketball, and swimming along with Olympic medals in track and field.

Dr. Davis was not only a coach and president but also a civic/community role model. His memberships included the Boy Scouts of America, the Agora Assembly, Chi Boule of Signa Pi, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, the Elks, the Free and Accepted Masons, the YMCA, and the Chamber of Commerce⁴.

Over his lifetime, he received several honors/awards: Educator of the Year, Mason of the Year and Administrator of the Year. Davis was also recognized by the State Board of Education for outstanding contributions and dedicated service to higher education within Tennessee, and posthumously inducted into the Tennessee State University's Sports Hall of Fame in 1983.

Dr. Davis died on October 17, 1979 and was interred at Greenwood Cemetery, Nashville. Former TSU First Lady Ivanetta (Hughes) Davis survived her husband until her death in 2013 at the age of 100, and their son Dr. Ivan Davis continued the family TSU tradition as medical director of university health services.

⁴ The Tennessean, October 19, 1979, www.newspapers.com





References

Find a Grave, database, and images (<https://www.findagrave.com>: accessed 02 June 2020), memorial page for Dr Walter Strother Davis (9 Aug 1905–Oct 1979), Find a Grave Memorial no. 104034630, citing Greenwood Cemetery, Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee, USA ; Maintained by Syd Gardner (contributor 47902230) .

Walter S. Davis, retrieved from:

http://library3.tnstate.edu/library/Centennial/documents/Walter_Davis.pdf

Further Reading

Mitchell, Reavis, "Tennessee State University at the Centennial (1912-2012)" (1997). Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture. 53.

<https://digitalscholarship.tnstate.edu/conference-on-african-american-history-and-culture/53>