

FAREWELL TO COLLEAGUES — On the morning of Jan. 21, 1861, Jefferson Davis, senator from the just-seceded state of Mississippi, rose in the crowded senate chamber for his last appearance. Dressed in his customary black suit, white shirt and black tie, Davis spoke of his approval of slavery and secession, but without bitterness bade farewell to his colleagues. In a few days he would return to his Mississippi plantation and thereafter take up duties as President of the Confederacy. This original drawing, by staff artist Edwin Kaufman, shows Davis during his speech. (UPI Telephoto)

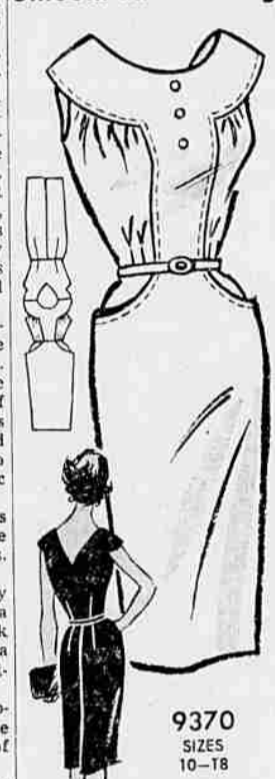
Davis Resigns From Senate

By MERTON T. AKERS
UPI Correspondent

In Washington, at 7 a.m. on Jan. 21, 1861, Mrs. Jefferson Davis sent a servant to the Senate to hold her seat. This was the day when her husband was bidding farewell to his colleagues and what had been until this very moment, his country.

Even at that early hour the Davis household retainer found a fashionable crowd around the Senate doors — women in crinolines and flowered bonnets and men in the clawhammer coats of the time.

Smooth and Curving



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by Marian Martin

Davis, senator from the just-seceded state of Mississippi, had been ill for a week and his doctor had told him to stay in bed. Neither he nor his young wife, Varina Howell Davis, had slept all night.

But by 9 a.m. Davis pushed his way through the thronged chamber to his seat. Mrs. Davis had supplanted the servant. Every square foot of the Senate was packed. As many members as could squeeze in lined the walls to see the show. The diplomatic gallery was filled.

"Bright faces of the ladies were assembled together like a mosaic of flowers," Mrs. Davis recorded. "Mrs. Davis wore his customary suit of black broadcloth, a starched white shirt and black satin vest. His necktie was a black silk handkerchief knotted like a stock."

"Every eye was turned upon him," Mrs. Davis wrote with fierce pride, "fearful of missing one word."

"He glanced over the Senate with the reluctant look the dying cast on those upon whom they gaze for the last time. His voice was at first faltering, but soon it rang out melodiously clear like a silver trumpet, to the extreme verge of the assembly. . . . Unshed tears were in it. . . . His manner suggested that of one who parts from his family, because even death were better than estrangement."

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for his last time. Jefferson's words in the Declaration of Independence — "created equal" — meant "men of the political community," Davis said. . . . they have no reference to the slave."

Without bitterness, anger or defiance, Davis closed: ". . . In the presence of my God, I wish you well; and such, I am sure, is the feeling of the people whom I represent toward those whom you represent. . . . it only remains for me to bid you a final farewell."

And then the tall, angularly erect statesman walked out of the chamber into what most of his colleagues expected to be obscurity. Mrs. Davis saw tears in the eyes of many.

The nation he had quit had been good to Jefferson Davis — it had educated him at West Point, proclaimed him a hero of the Mexican War and honored him by raising him to the secretaryship of war.

The Confederacy would do even more. Instead of consigning him to obscurity, it would make him its president and heap upon him the task of forging a nation and waging a war at the same time. Too much for mortal man, it turned out.

That night was another sleepless one. Varina heard him pacing back and forth night long and whispering: "May God have us in His holy keeping, and grant before it is too late that peaceful councils may prevail."

He was not one of those impetuous Southerners who thought war, if it came, would be short and glorious. More likely long and bloody.

Four Others Resign
Four other Southern senators left that day, too. But history remembers little of the farewells of David L. Yulee of Florida and Stephen R. Mallory of Florida, (although Mallory would go on to be secretary of the navy under Davis and the only cabinet member to last the four full years of war) and Sens. Clement C. Clay and Benjamin Fitzpatrick of Alabama.

All expressed in valetudinary speeches some degree of the bitterness which Davis had left unsaid in his renunciation.

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"The want of a policy, the obstinate adherence to unimportant things, have brought us to a condition where I close my eyes, because I cannot see anything that encourages me to hope. . . . God will judge between you and us, at whose door lies the responsibility."

In a few days the Davis family went South to Briarfield, their Mississippi plantation south of Vicksburg, where Mrs. Davis hoped her husband could recuperate.

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