

D.W. Davis

Donald Watson Davis became the first Member of Parliament representing the Territory of Alberta in Ottawa.

An American with a keen eye for opportunity, Davis first traded whisky at Fort Whoop-Up (near present day Lethbridge, Alberta). He was scornful of rumours about the coming mounted police force, but when they arrived, he was quick to change his stripes. Davis's marriage to an influential Kainai woman, Miska ki posapawahahka, enhanced his success as a trader. Interested in profit, Davis worked for I.G. Baker & Co., supplying the Mounties with beef and provisions. He even helped build the police fort. When Treaty 7 was signed in 1877, he set up trade at Blackfoot Crossing where the Treaty was signed. By the time he closed, Davis had taken in half the treaty money that was given out.

When Ottawa granted the Territory of Alberta an elected representative, Davis became a naturalized citizen, married a white woman and ran for the Conservative Party nomination. By this time a pillar of the community, Davis was determined to win and campaigned with both whisky and words.

A consummate chameleon, he was a perfect politician.

Businessman and Fort Builder

After the whisky trade ended, D.W. Davis moved quickly to establish a livelihood as a merchant and businessman.



D.W. Davis, Fort Macleod, Alberta
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His new employer, I.G. Baker & Company, sent Davis to Fort Macleod and Fort Calgary to help build the North-West Mounted Police forts and nearby I.G. Baker stores. Government, First Nations, miners, and local settlers all shopped at I.G. Bakers. By 1877, Davis managed the Fort Calgary store. A year later he became manager of I.G Baker's Canadian Division and moved the firm's headquarters to Fort Macleod.

Davis envisioned Fort Macleod as a modern settlement and commerce centre in southern Alberta. He backed his vision with his money and time, leading community efforts to build a hospital, public school, and trade board.

Davis knew the people of the area and the issues that moved them. He was a regular around "Taylor's Table" – a gathering place at the Macleod Hotel where men like Davis met to discuss business and politics. The former whisky trader was poised to begin his next career – politician.

Politician

In March of 1887, the Territory of Alberta elected D.W. Davis as its first Member of Parliament.

Davis' biggest supporters were ranchers and businessmen. He served them well – promoting Alberta as ranching country and protecting big ranch interests, such as leases. He lobbied for improved roads and bridges for the territory, as well as encouraging the federal government to invest in the West.

In a House of Commons debate Davis prophesied, "...we need [public money] to develop our great country, and whatever is expanded on us now is in a sense only borrowed money, for in a few years we will be able to pay it back to the Dominion Treasury one hundred-fold."

In Parliament, Davis sat with the federal Conservative Party but often approached his work with a liberal western attitude. His efforts over two terms made a difference in Alberta's business landscape, yet he did not run for a third term. Instead, Davis opted for a new frontier, accepting a government appointment in the Yukon.

Born: November 23, 1845 – Died: June 4, 1906

Additional Resources

- **Alberta on Record**
<https://albertaonrecord.ca/davis-d-w-davis-rider>



Our Collections

Glenbow Museum

<https://www.glenbow.org>

Glenbow Western Research Centre | Glenbow Library and Archives

<https://libguides.ucalgary.ca/glenbowlibraryandarchives>

Glenbow Library and Archives | Digital Collection

<https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R340826N9XM?WS=PackagePres&Flat=1>

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