

= John Davis (Massachusetts governor) =

John Davis (January 13 , 1787 ? April 19 , 1854) was an American lawyer , businessman and politician from Massachusetts . He spent 25 years in public service , serving in both houses of the United States Congress and for three non @-@ consecutive years as Governor of Massachusetts . Because of his reputation for personal integrity he was known as " Honest John " Davis .

Born in Northborough , Massachusetts , Davis attended Yale College before studying law in Worcester , Massachusetts , where he established a successful law practice . He spent 10 years (1824 ? 34) in the United States House of Representatives as a National Republican (later Whig) , where he supported protectionist tariff legislation . He won election as Governor of Massachusetts in a three @-@ way race in 1833 that was decided by the state legislature . After two terms he was elected to the United States Senate , where he served most of one term , resigning early in 1841 after he was once again elected governor .

His second term as governor was undistinguished , but he split with fellow Whig Daniel Webster over a variety of issues , and lost the 1843 election to Democrat Marcus Morton . He was reelected to the Senate in 1845 , where he served until 1851 . He opposed the Mexican @-@ American War , and worked to prevent the extension of slavery to the territories , although he did not take a hard line on the matter , voting for most of the provisions of the Compromise of 1850 . He retired from public service in 1853 , and died the next year .

= = Early life = =

John Davis was born in Northborough , Massachusetts to Deacon Isaac Davis and Anna (Brigham) Davis . He attended local schools and then Leicester Academy before attending Yale College . He graduated in 1812 , and then studied law with Worcester lawyer Francis Blake , gaining admission to the bar three years later .

He was elected a member of the American Antiquarian Society in 1821 .

= = Lawyer and Congressman = =

Davis first practiced law in Spencer , Massachusetts , but soon returned to Worcester , where he eventually took over Blake 's practice . He was briefly in partnership with Levi Lincoln , Jr. before the latter was appointed to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in 1824 . Davis also entered politics in 1824 , winning election to the United States Congress . He represented Massachusetts from 1825 to 1833 in the House of Representatives in the 19th , 20th , 21st , 22nd and 23rd Congresses . He supported John Quincy Adams in his successful bid for the presidency , and favored conservative fiscal policies . In keeping with the state 's (and Worcester 's) increasingly industrial character , he favored protectionist tariff legislation ; his speeches in support of the Tariff of 1828 were widely reprinted . He opposed the policies of President Andrew Jackson , and was politically aligned with Henry Clay , although he was against Clay 's proposed compromise tariff of 1833 .

= = Governor and Senator = =

In 1833 Davis was encouraged by National Republican Party leaders to run for Governor of Massachusetts , against former President John Quincy Adams , who was running on the Anti @-@ Masonic ticket , and Democrat Marcus Morton . His political support came from textile interests and a faction of the National Republicans (later Whigs) led by Abbott Lawrence , as well as outgoing Governor Levi Lincoln , Jr . In the election Davis gained a plurality of votes , but not the majority that was then required . As a result , the state legislature decided the election , choosing Davis when Adams withdrew , preferring him over Morton . The Whig @-@ controlled legislature did nothing to reward the Anti @-@ Masons for Adams ' move , breaking up any chance that the two parties would form a working relationship . Davis was reelected in 1834 , aided by a general dislike in

Massachusetts for President Jackson 's attacks on the Second Bank of the United States . During these two terms , Davis made no particular initiatives of his own , continuing Lincoln 's business @-@ friendly fiscal and economic policies . The state continued to grow economically , expanding its transportation infrastructure and industry .

Senator Nathaniel Silsbee , whose term ended in 1835 , decided not to run for reelection . Davis was approached by Whig leader Daniel Webster about running for the seat in December 1834 , as part of a bid to oppose Adams , who had announced his interest in the seat . The idea was that Davis , a strong candidate , would be positioned against Adams (a long @-@ standing rival of Webster who was again running as an Anti @-@ Mason) in the vote , which would be made by the state legislature , while Edward Everett would have the opportunity to run for governor when Davis vacated that seat . The state house and senate deadlocked on the two choices until a speech by Adams in Congress arguing in favor of Jackson 's foreign policies alarmed enough senators to change their votes in favor of Davis . The deadlock was not resolved until February 1835 ; Davis , who had been reelected governor , resigned that post to assume the Senate seat . Everett went on to win the governor 's seat in the next election . (Adams ' son Charles Francis believed that Webster and Everett conspired to achieve this end , but there is no evidentiary support for the idea .) Webster , in exchange for his advocacy on behalf of Davis , expected Davis ' faction in the Whig Party to support him in a future bid for the presidency .

Davis ' term in the Senate was unexceptional , except for the notably hard line he took on the question of the nation 's northeastern boundary . This dispute with the United Kingdom concerned the boundary between Maine and the British (now Canadian) province of New Brunswick , and had only been partially resolved after the 1794 Jay Treaty . In the 1830s both sides pushed development into the disputed area , leading to petty conflicts (and by 1839 the possibility of war) . Massachusetts , which Maine had been a part of prior to 1820 , maintained a property interest in some of the disputed land ; Davis took a hard line on the matter , insisting that the United States should not surrender any of the territory it claimed .

In 1836 Davis sat on a special committee formed to consider legislative responses to a flood of allegedly inflammatory abolitionist materials being sent into southern slave states from northern anti @-@ slavery organizations . Davis , the only northerner on the committee , opposed any sort of legislation , and the committee was unable to reach a consensus . When John C. Calhoun introduced legislation criminalizing the mailing of such materials , Davis spoke out against it , pointing out that it would effectively act as an unconstitutional gag on people seeking to speak out against slavery . The bill was rendered moot by administrative actions in the United States Post Office .

While serving in the Senate , Davis appeared before the United States Supreme Court in 1837 , representing the defendants in *Charles River Bridge v. Warren Bridge* . The plaintiffs were proprietors of the Charles River Bridge , a toll bridge constructed between Boston and Charlestown in 1786 , and the defendants were proprietors of a competing bridge to which the state had issued a charter in 1828 . The plaintiffs argued that the defendant 's charter infringed on their charter , in which they claimed the state granted them an exclusive right to control the crossing . Davis and cocounsel Simon Greenleaf argued that the rights granted to the Charles River proprietors had to be interpreted narrowly , and that the state had not granted them an exclusive right . The court found for the defendants , with Chief Justice Roger B. Taney 's decision echoing the defendant 's reasoning . The Charles River Bridge charter would be acquired by the state in 1841 , during Davis ' next term as governor .

During the early years of his political career Davis was on good terms with Daniel Webster , who was highly influential in party politics both at the state and national levels , and to whom he looked up . However , in the late 1830s Davis and other Massachusetts Whigs (notably Abbott Lawrence) came to believe that Webster lacked broad @-@ based national support to successfully contend with Henry Clay and William Henry Harrison after his weak showing in the 1836 Whig convention . This introduced a rift between Webster and Davis that deepened in 1838 when the two split on western land policies . The split between Davis and Webster became permanent after Webster harshly criticized Lawrence in an 1842 speech celebrating his successful negotiation of the Webster

@-@ Ashburton Treaty with Great Britain , which resolved (among other matters) the northeast boundary .

= = Governor and Senator , again = =

Not long after Marcus Morton won the 1839 gubernatorial election , Whig leadership prevailed on Davis to run again for governor . In the 1840 election Davis rode the coattails of Harrison 's landslide presidential victory into office . Harrison 's death in April 1841 reenergized the Democrats , who attacked Davis in that year 's election . They charged that protectionist tariffs he supported taxed the poor , and that his opposition to western land policies was hypocritical because he also speculated in those lands . Davis won a narrow majority over Morton , and was reelected in 1841 . This period in office , like his first term as governor , also did not contain any new programs or initiatives , but was overshadowed by the ongoing negotiations between Daniel Webster (now Secretary of State) and Lord Ashburton over the boundary issue . Davis and Webster had contentious disagreements over the negotiations , although Webster was finally able to convince Davis to accept the final agreement . The matter deepened the division between the two men , who stopped speaking to each other .

In 1842 the anti @-@ slavery Liberty Party had risen to sufficient prominence in the state that neither Morton nor Davis was able to secure a majority . The state senate , which had a Democratic majority , elected Morton . Davis ' showing in the election was undoubtedly harmed by his ongoing feud with Webster , who refused to campaign on his behalf .

Davis was considered as a potential vice presidential nominee in the 1844 Whig Party convention . He was nominated by the state Whig convention over Webster 's opposition , but Webster worked to ensure he was not chosen at the national convention . Webster forces successfully got Webster elected to the Senate in early 1845 , despite opposition from the Lawrence @-@ Davis faction . Davis was himself elected to the Senate again later in 1845 to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Isaac C. Bates , and was elected to a full term in 1847 . He opposed the annexation of Texas on the grounds that it would expand slaveholding territory , but was not willing to split the party over the issue of slavery . Davis was one of only two senators who voted against the Mexican @-@ American War .

Davis was opposed to slavery and its extension into the territories , but he voted for most of the provisions of the Compromise of 1850 , including the bill on Texas borders , shocking some anti @-@ compromise Whigs . He regularly voted in favor of the Wilmot Proviso , a measure to ban slavery from territories won in the Mexican war which was frequently attached to legislation in the late 1840s but was never adopted . In one notable debate , Davis used procedural measures to delay vote on an amendment to remove it from a military appropriations bill , hoping to force a vote without time to conference on differences between the House and Senate versions before Congress adjourned . However , due to a difference in the clocks in the respective chambers , the House adjourned before he finished speaking , scuttling the bill . Salmon P. Chase wrote of the episode , " Ten political lives of ten John Davises , spent in the best direction , could not compensate for this half @-@ hour 's mischief " , and Polk noted that if the loss of the bill delayed the end of the Mexican war , Davis would " deserve the execrations of the country . " Scholarship is divided on whether Davis ' claimed strategy would really have worked .

Davis ' weak stance on slavery began to cause a decrease in his popularity as abolitionist sentiment in the state gained ground during the 1840s . He also refused to support Webster in his 1852 presidential bid , campaigning on behalf of Winfield Scott . He declined renomination for election in 1852 , and retired from public life .

In his later years Davis was associated with the American Antiquarian Society , where he served as president for many years . He died in Worcester on April 19 , 1854 , and was interred in the Worcester Rural Cemetery . He was known as " Honest John " Davis , because of an impeccable reputation for personal integrity .

= = Personal life and business = =

In 1844 , Davis and his nephew Isaac were among the founders of the State Mutual Life Assurance Company of Worcester , one of only five life insurance companies in the country . Davis served as its president until his death , after which his nephew took over .

Davis married Eliza Bancroft in 1822 . She was the daughter of Worcester minister Aaron Bancroft and sister to historian and statesman George Bancroft . They had five children , including diplomat John Chandler Bancroft Davis , general Hasbrouck Davis , and Congressman Horace Davis ; their descendants include Assemblyman Gherardi Davis (1858 ? 1941) , Henry Cabot Lodge , Jr . John Davis Long , the grandson of a cousin , and who was named in his honor , also served as Governor of Massachusetts .