

# Beauvoir mansion

Politics



The Beauvoir Mansion is located on the Gulf of Mexico in Harrison County, Mississippi between Biloxi and Gulfport. Originally the property consisted of six hundred acres and was the private property of Sarah Anne Ellis Dorsey, a woman who had known Jefferson Davis, the first and only President of the Confederate States of America throughout her life. She also was a classmate of Varinna Davis, Jefferson Davis' wife (Allen xx, 521).

Dorsey originally rented the property to Davis so he would have a place to write his memoirs *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* published in 1881 and *A Short History of the Confederate States of America* shortly before his death. Dorsey later sold Beauvoir to him and also named him as her sole heir, in effect, giving him the property. It was the last residence of Jefferson Davis until his death in 1889 and as the home for his wife for some years after his death (Tinling 187).

The Mississippi Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans bought the property in 1902 and converted it to the Jefferson Davis Memorial for Confederate Soldiers and Sailors (Rosenburg 194). Beauvoir served in this capacity until the mid-1950s when it was recast as the Jefferson Davis Home and Presidential Library. Pratt and Pratt describe it as " a state shrine filled with memorabilia of his life and times (145). The Beauvoir Mansion is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. According to the Registry for a site to be listed it should meet one of the following criteria.

The site must be associated with events that have made a " significant" impact on patterns of history," be associated with a person who are significant to the United States' past, embody a characteristic type of construction, be representative of a building master or have high artistic

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value, or have contributed or is likely to yield significant historical information (National Registry). Clearly Beauvoir Mansion qualifies because of its association with Jefferson Davis, Confederate Veterans of the Civil War and is representative of construction in the South circa in 1852 (Pratt and Pratt 145; Beauvoir).

As the Presidential Library of Davis it contains many of his papers as well as large collection of Civil War equipment and memorabilia. In addition, there is a Confederate Cemetery on the site where many Civil War veterans are buried. What is interesting about the Beauvoir Mansion is the wide variety of people it appeals to. Naturally it appeals to admirers, and detractors for that matter of Jefferson Davis and his important role in the Civil War. United States History students, scholars and professional historian as well.

The Presidential Library provides resources to those working in this area of United States History. However it is not just history buffs that are interested in Beauvoir Mansion. The site holds a prominent place among those people interested in American Architecture and building construction. Chief among the weaknesses of Beauvoir Mansion is the vulnerability of the location in respect to the violent weather associated with hurricanes and tropical storms that are not uncommon in the area. Hurricane Katrina heavily damaged Beauvoir Mansion in 2005.

Devereaux provides detailed information about the damage that includes damage to the Davis house and to the Presidential Library. The Hayes Cottage and the pavilion that served as a hospital for Confederate Veterans were completely destroyed as were the chapel, museum and gift shop. Fortunately much of the damage can be repaired. A four million dollar

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restoration is already underway with an expected reopening date in 2008. Beauvoir Mansion is an interesting historical and architectural site. It provides firsthand information about the Civil War from the point of view of the Confederacy.

This is a valuable perspective that is not normally available to the general public who study the Civil War in schools that features the Union worldview. This view of the Civil War is obviously slanted in favor of the Northern States. The old saw about the winning side writing history is often true. Consequently, the people who lived in the Confederacy are largely forgotten and their leaders ignored because the South lost. It is important to remember that there were two points of view about the Civil War.

Both positions had merit and defects. It is important to understand the insights both sides experienced in any historical event. The Beauvoir Mansion provides a great opportunity for Americans to learn from the past. When the repairs are completed and the Beauvoir Mansion reopens, it will be a site well worth visiting. Works Cited Allen, Felicity. Jefferson Davis: Unconquerable Heart. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999. Ballard, Michael B. Civil War Mississippi: A Guide. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2000.

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