

## The Post-Gubernatorial Career of Jonathan M. Davis

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JONATHAN M. DAVIS presents an intriguing picture of a Kansas politician during the first half of this century. He served in the early 20th century as a state representative and senator. His political star reached its height in 1922 when he became governor of the state of Kansas, the third Democrat to win the office. At the 1924 Democratic national convention he was, for a time, viewed as a possible nominee for President of the United States. Returning from the strenuous activity of the national party convention in New York, he soon lost in his bid for reelection as governor. From the time of this defeat in 1924, Jonathan Davis never again won an elective office.<sup>1</sup>

Davis, however, did not simply fade away gracefully from the political realm. As a lame-duck governor he provoked a storm of controversy by dismissing the chancellor of the University of Kansas, Ernest H. Lindley. He then achieved a certain amount of notoriety by being arrested just prior to his successor's inauguration. Facing charges of conspiracy to solicit bribes in regard to the granting of pardons and paroles, he, his son, and his administration's banking commissioner endured three related trials and were acquitted in each.<sup>2</sup>

From the time of his defeat for reelection in 1924, Davis was a candidate for elective office in eight subsequent election years; indeed, his name failed to appear on a ballot in only one election year, 1934, until his death in 1943. The fact that he never again was elected, but did create a certain amount of intraparty strife, suggests that his might be a useful case in the investigation of the decline of a political leader. Not for him the ignominy of simply disappearing from the scene; he remained active, vocal, sometimes surprisingly influential and, most of all, *political*.

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1. For the political career of Davis through his administration as governor see: Roger W. Corley, "Jonathan M. Davis, Farmer in the State House" (unpublished M. A. thesis, Dept. of History, Political Science, and Philosophy, Kansas State University, 1962).

2. For more on the Davis trials and his entire post-gubernatorial career see: John R. Finger, "Jonathan M. Davis, 1923-1942: A Kansas Democrat's Political Demise," (unpublished M. A. thesis, Dept. of History, University of Kansas, 1964).

If one counts his primary campaigns of 1926 and 1942, Davis sought office in 10 more opposed elections. These included: The general election of 1926, when he was the Democratic gubernatorial candidate opposite Ben Paulen; 1928, when he was unopposed in the Democratic primary for his district's state representative, and then withdrew before the general election; 1930, when he was unopposed in the Democratic primary for the long-term United States senate seat and then faced Arthur Capper in the general election; 1932, when he was an independent candidate for state senator; 1936, when he opposed Walter A. Huxman for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination; 1938, when he was an independent candidate for governor; 1940, when he again sought his district's Democratic nomination for state senator; and 1942, when the venerable politician was the Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor. Of these 10 opposed elections, Davis was victorious only twice, in the Democratic primaries of 1926 and 1942.

Late at night on April 3, 1926, after 32 hours of deliberation and some 20 ballots, a Shawnee county jury returned a verdict of "not guilty" in a conspiracy charge against Jonathan M. Davis and his son, Russell. After three related trials, more than a year of anxiety had ended for the former governor. Davis told the press that he would not seek from the voters any vindication for the trials. He would stay on his farm in Bourbon county unless the farmers of the state wanted him to run as governor again on a program of tax reduction.<sup>3</sup> Nine days later, however, Davis stated in Parsons that he could find no way to avoid running for office. He cited the major issues in the coming elections as the restoration of the bank guaranty law and a return to the corporation values which had been set during his own administration.<sup>4</sup> At the party convention held in Wichita in late May, the resolutions committee refused to come out strongly in support of the past Davis administration and there were evidences of strong anti-Davis feelings.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, Davis had his name filed as a candidate for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in June and was opposed in the primaries by Donald Muir, the latter being supported by party leaders Jouett Shouse and Dudley Doolittle.<sup>6</sup> In the primary elections of August 3, Muir and Davis were deadlocked in a tight race and for several days the outcome was uncertain; the former governor, however, finally won by the narrow margin of 31,431 to 30,804.<sup>7</sup>

3. Kansas City (Mo.) Star, April 5, 1926.

4. Topeka Daily Capital, April 13, 1926.

5. *Ibid.*, May 29, 1926; Kansas City (Mo.) Star, May 30, 1926.

6. Topeka Daily Capital, April 23, 1926.

7. *Twenty-Fifth Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1925-1926*, p. 31.

In his campaign against the reelection of his Republican opponent, Ben Paulen, Davis hammered at the issue of tax reduction, the need for a compulsory guaranty banking law, and the evil political influence of large corporations.<sup>8</sup> Davis' use of executive clemency rapidly became a focal point for Republican attacks and the specter of criminals buying their way out of prison was emphasized. The *Topeka Daily Capital* remarked acidly that only the state's convicts had anything to gain if Davis should become governor.<sup>9</sup> In the November general election, Paulen's victory immediately became obvious and the Republican swelled his count to 321,540, while Davis polled only 179,308.<sup>10</sup>

The reasons for Davis' defeat were many. In the first place, he lacked the support of his own party's leadership, despite token displays to the contrary. The only Democrats who really appeared to be for him were the grass-roots elements who more often would be found in rural areas. In addition, the Democratic program lacked any real verve and was similar to that of the Republicans. The *Capital* was probably fair in its assessment of the Democratic platform as one "to get rid of Jonathan Davis, instead of to elect him."<sup>11</sup> More significantly, it was a year of general prosperity, and people could find no outstanding basis for popular protest. Davis and his recent trials formed a basis of controversy, while Paulen had had a quiet administration and possessed powerful party and newspaper support.

Jonathan M. Davis remained a prominent party member in Kansas after his defeat in 1926, but he retired to the large farm he had always owned and operated in southeastern Kansas. The life of the farmer was one the former governor knew well, and for much of the remainder of his life, between travel and campaigns, he worked the soil.

By June, 1928, Davis had reemerged in the political milieu. He announced that he was circulating petitions in his behalf for a run at the Democratic nomination for representative to the legislature from the 19th district (Bourbon county). The *Fort Scott Tribune-Monitor* stated, without elaboration, that Davis perhaps had had his sights set on state senator, but that he had been nudged out of that race.<sup>12</sup>

Davis remained unopposed for the Democratic nomination and

8. *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 30, 31, 1926.

9. *Ibid.*, October 12, 1926.

10. *Twenty-Fifth Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1925-1926*, p. 67.

11. *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 2, 1926.

12. *Fort Scott Tribune-Monitor*, June 12, 1928.

consequently conducted no campaign at all prior to the primary. The Republican incumbent, J. M. Stapleton, had served in the legislature for a number of years and also remained unopposed in the primary. After the August elections both men of course were candidates in the general election, although Stapleton received about three times as many votes as Davis in the primaries.<sup>13</sup>

On August 25, to the surprise of everyone, Jonathan Davis announced that he was withdrawing from his race for representative. The official statement of withdrawal was handed to the county clerk by Martin Miller, chairman of the county Democratic central committee. Davis said that he was working hard on his farm and could find no time for an active campaign, and that the situation would be worsened if he were elected to the office and had to go to Topeka. In his statement the former governor professed a belief that the next year would see a Democratic President in the White House.<sup>14</sup>

Despite this statement, it is possible that Davis saw 1928 as a Republican year, and felt that a defeat in a comparatively minor race would do irreparable harm to any future political aspirations he might have. The possibility of defeat, had he remained in the contest against Stapleton, is born out by the fact that Bourbon county in 1928 gave 75.9 percent of its vote to Hoover<sup>15</sup> and 65.4 percent to Clyde Reed,<sup>16</sup> the Republican gubernatorial candidate. On the other hand, Bourbon county was not so heavily Republican that it did not reelect one of only three Democrats in the Kansas senate, Harry Warren of Fort Scott.<sup>17</sup> In any case, Davis' political future would have been in jeopardy against Representative Stapleton.

By 1930 the changing condition of the nation's economy and the doleful plight of the farmers brought about a full slate of avowed and proposed Democratic candidates for Kansas offices. Jonathan Davis was much in evidence at various party meetings during the year, as were other Democratic leaders. Perhaps the significant thing about 1930 was the increase in younger men in the party leadership and the burgeoning role being played by ex-servicemen of World War I, all of which forecast an impending shift in the Democratic power structure.

The Democrats held their 1930 biennial convention in Wichita

13. *Ibid.*, August 13, 1928; *Twenty-sixth Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1927-1928*, p. 62.

14. *Fort Scott Tribune-Monitor*, August 28, 1928.

15. June G. Cahn and Charles A. Sullivan, *Kansas Votes, National Elections, 1850-1950* (Lawrence, 1957), p. 38.

16. Clarence J. Hein and Charles A. Sullivan, *Kansas Votes, Gubernatorial Elections, 1850-1950* (Lawrence, 1958), p. 64.

17. *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 8, 1928.

during June. The main interest of the party faithful was focused on the prospective primary battle between Harry Woodring and Noah Bowman for the gubernatorial nomination. For some of the other spots on the election slate the Democrats resorted to their time-honored custom of drafting likely candidates. Almost inconspicuously, Nellie Cline, of Larned, was drafted to oppose Sen. Arthur Capper for the long term in the United States senate.<sup>18</sup> No draftees were necessary, however, for filling the spot opposite Henry J. Allen for the short-term senate seat. Allen had been appointed to fill Charles Curtis' post when the latter had become Hoover's vice-president, and was known to have made many enemies during his short time in office.

While Democrats were anxiously viewing the ballot opposite Allen, the position against the powerful Capper remained open, since the draftee, Miss Cline, failed to file. Jonathan M. Davis, however, already had decided to take a chance against the formidable Senator Capper, and on June 20 he filed his intention of running for the Democratic nomination for United States senator, opposite the Kansas publisher. He filed just before the noon deadline and caught almost everyone by surprise.<sup>19</sup> Davis found himself the *de facto* Democratic candidate and promised that he would do considerable campaigning after the primary. Senator Capper, seeking election for the third time, also was unopposed in the primary.

The candidacy for a United States senate seat represented an attempt by Davis to ride to office on a possible protest vote against Capper. Davis felt strongly about farm problems and this alone could well have induced him to file, regardless of whom he faced. He had decided against competing for Allen's short-term seat, since such a race would have involved a tough Democratic primary contest. Davis' support in the 1926 primaries had barely held up against Muir, and he had no reason to expect greater support in 1930. With the plight of the farmer in mind, and his natural animosity towards inequitable taxation, he campaigned against Capper's voting record on farm policies and tariffs, and proposed a solution to the shortage of circulating money.<sup>20</sup> Despite the fact that the Democrats made general gains in 1930, Davis' waning influ-

18. *Ibid.*, June 17, 1930.

19. *Ibid.*, June 21, 1930; Kansas City (Mo.) *Star*, June 20, 1930; New York *Times*, June 21, 1930.

20. Democratic campaign literature, *The Answer to the Question: What Is It All About?* (1930), pp. 18, 19; Topeka Daily *Capital*, August 20, 1930.



Jonathan M. Davis  
(1871-1943)

Davis was the third Democrat to serve as governor of the state of Kansas, 1923-1925. He became an almost perennial candidate for public office until his death, but was never again elected.

ence and Capper's popularity led to an easy victory for the Republican and a plurality of more than 132,000 votes.<sup>21</sup>

In that same election, most attention was focused on the tight, three-way race for governor between Harry Woodring, Frank Hauke, and the independent, Dr. John R. Brinkley. With Woodring's eventual victory and the previous ascension of Guy T. Helvering as chairman of the Democratic state central committee, many saw the end of strong party influence by Davis and his supporters.<sup>22</sup> Helvering's selection as chairman was seen as a victory for the Shouse-Doolittle wing of the party. The divergency between Woodring and Davis soon became wider after the former's inauguration; by September, 1931, Davis was writing the newspapers in support of reductions in both expenditures and taxation, and calling on Woodring to summon a special session of the legislature to provide for a revaluation of real estate.<sup>23</sup> The governor rebuked a Davis-led delegation which had gone to Topeka in support of a special session. *Publicity*, a weekly political newspaper published in Wichita by E. J. Garner, an old-time independent Democrat, bitterly attacked Woodring for this action and took Davis' side. At a Kansas taxpayers' meeting in Topeka on December 2, Jonathan Davis again demanded the calling of a special session, and the delegates clamored for reduction of state expenses and a corresponding cut in taxes. Davis advocated paying taxes under protest and undertaking some court action.<sup>24</sup>

The Democratic intraparty squabbling became more widespread, and in 1932 Donald Muir came out as a primary candidate against Woodring. Jonathan Davis meanwhile had remarried (his first wife died in 1926), and, after returning from a California honeymoon, he again attacked the governor on the matter of taxes.<sup>25</sup> In June Davis filed as an independent for state senator from the Eighth district. Harry Warren, the incumbent, was a Democrat, and M. M. Swope made it a three-way contest by filing as a Republican candidate.<sup>26</sup> A Pittsburg paper was quoted as saying that Davis had left the party, and rumors held that the former governor was friendly with Brinkley, who had again announced his independent candidacy for governor. Although Harry Warren was popular, the

21. *Twenty-Seventh Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1929-1930*, p. 89.

22. *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 25, 1930.

23. *Bronson Pilot*, September 11, 1931.

24. *Publicity*, Wichita, December 3, 1931.

25. *Ibid.*, March 17, 1932.

26. *Fort Scott Tribune-Monitor*, June 20, 1932; *Bronson Pilot*, June 24, 1932.

paper pointed out that Davis might take enough votes from him to elect Swope.<sup>27</sup>

In August, however, Governor Woodring coasted to an easy victory over Muir, while Alf Landon won the Republican nomination. Jonathan Davis now began to reconsider his independent candidacy. In an August story from Topeka, he and Mrs. Davis, who was vice-chairman of the Bourbon County Women's Democratic Committee,<sup>28</sup> were reported as conferring with Woodring. When the meeting ended, Davis appeared uncertain about his candidacy, and stated he did not know how his name happened to get on the ticket.<sup>29</sup> Mrs. Davis, who was president of the Bourbon County Woodring-for-Governor Club, was more explicit, assured the reporter that her husband would not be on the ballot in November, and stated, "Jonathan just likes to kid the newspapermen about what he's going to do."<sup>30</sup>

Davis remained undecided although his wife was busily involved in various Democratic party activities (she even wrote to Woodring that she was "working hard" for him).<sup>31</sup> Davis once spoke when she was host to a Democratic Women's Club meeting, and explained to the 150 women that his name was on the ballot because friends had passed a petition for his independent candidacy.<sup>32</sup>

On October 4 Davis ended any speculation as to his withdrawal by announcing he was running for state senator, and as an independent.<sup>33</sup> This prompted the Fort Scott *Tribune-Monitor* to conclude that Davis was "master of his own household—and a courageous man."<sup>34</sup> Davis' prepared statement attributed his decision to two things: First, a sense of loyalty to his friends, and a feeling that he could help them; second, the belief that the foremost concern of the state, reduction of expenses and taxes, had no relation whatever to party affiliation.<sup>35</sup> In speeches during the next few weeks, Davis attacked the Woodring administration,<sup>36</sup> supported Brinkley for governor,<sup>37</sup> and said the whole campaign could be summed up in two sentences: "Taxes are too high. The expenses of government must come down."<sup>38</sup> When the final returns were in,

27. As quoted in Fort Scott *Tribune-Monitor*, June 23, 1932.

28. Fort Scott *Tribune-Monitor*, August 4, 1932.

29. *Ibid.*, August 10, 1932; Topeka *Daily Capital*, August 9, 1932.

30. Fort Scott *Tribune-Monitor*, August 10, 1932.

31. Davis to Woodring, September 10, 1932, "Governor's Correspondence," archives division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

32. Fort Scott *Tribune-Monitor*, September 27, 1932.

33. *Ibid.*, October 4, 1932.

34. *Ibid.*, October 5, 1932.

35. *Ibid.*, October 8, 1932; *Bronson Pilot*, October 14, 1932.

36. Fort Scott *Tribune-Monitor*, October 28, 1932.

37. *Ibid.*, October 31, 1932; *Publicity*, Wichita, November 3, 1932.

38. Fort Scott *Tribune-Monitor*, October 28, 1932.

Harry Warren was reelected by a wide margin, and Davis even trailed Swope.

It seems clear that Davis had been a purposeful candidate only in the sense that he was vocal and had a message he wished to tell the voters and taxpayers. His intensive campaigning and speech-making were not directed towards the office he ostensibly was seeking or against his opponent. One may question his actual desire to hold office, since he long had been uncertain about running. He does seem to have been a reluctant candidate and, once on the ballot, interested only in pointing out what he believed were failings in the Democratic administration and hierarchy. On the other hand, he may have believed his vigorous denunciation of the party candidates would lead to the election of the independent candidate, Brinkley. If Brinkley were elected, Davis undoubtedly would have been in line for a political "plum." In all likelihood, however, his support of Brinkley was incidental to his real purpose.

The years immediately following 1932 were times of change for the Kansas Democratic party. Younger men and ideas were being infused into the party and women were beginning to take a more active role. Frank McDonald, elected president of the Young Democrats in 1932, said that the members had little to do with Jonathan Davis and the other "old-timers" during this period.<sup>39</sup> Davis himself was usually at his farm, although he attended some political gatherings. In March, 1935, he spoke at a meeting of the Bronson Good Will Club and presented his findings relative to a proposed local dam. He described how such a dam would offer potential water power for rural electrification, serve as a base for a highway bridge, constitute a flood control measure, and facilitate a game preserve.<sup>40</sup> It is interesting to notice how a progressive "old-time" Democrat's work for rural electrification measures was closely in accord with the trend of Rooseveltian policies. In a Wichita interview in December, 1935, the former governor expressed himself decisively on national matters when he stated that the New Deal was certainly far better than the "old deal," despite what the Republicans thought about it.<sup>41</sup>

Davis, however, was still much concerned with the state of the Kansas Democratic party, and in a letter to *Publicity* of February 7, 1936, voiced his fears. Davis believed that the so-called Democratic

39. Telephone conversation with Frank McDonald, March 25, 1964.

40. *Bronson Pilot*, March 22, 1935.

41. *Wichita Eagle*, December 16, 1935.

leaders, by using "smoke-filled" hotel room tactics, would draft a candidate for governor without the people's will being known. The former governor called for a state-wide conference prior to the primary filing time, to be preceded by mass conventions for the selection of delegates and the adoption of principles in the precincts, townships, and counties.<sup>42</sup> In a similar news release in March, Davis closed by saying that he only had the good of the party at heart and merely wished for the reelection of President Roosevelt and the entire Democratic ticket.<sup>43</sup>

Jonathan Davis evidently was invigorated by his four-year absence from the campaign trails, for he quickly ended speculation as to his candidacy by announcing on April 8 that he would seek the Democratic nomination for governor on a platform embodying the Townsend pension plan.<sup>44</sup> Other planks in his sweeping platform included: Support for President Roosevelt's reelection; support for the Frazier-Lemke farm loan bill; reduction of government expenses; repeal of the intangible tax law; taxation of corporate and public service properties on the same basis of values claimed in the fixing of service charges; support of the public's right to regulate public service charges, including salaries paid, in conformance with the public's ability to pay; a return to congress of its constitutional right to issue money and regulate its value; and the prohibition of beer having an alcoholic content of more than one-half of one percent.<sup>45</sup> The former governor said of the Townsend plan, "I see in this plan the best hopes of the ending of unemployment and of the depression," and advocated its financing by a tax on business transactions.<sup>46</sup>

The Townsend Plan was developed in the mid-1930's by Dr. Francis E. Townsend, a California physician. Advocating the retirement of elderly citizens and payment of pensions to them, Townsend believed his plan would increase employment opportunities for younger people, provide more circulating money, and help relieve the depression. For a while the plan attracted widespread support, but its popularity was eventually undercut by the social security act and an improving national economy. Throughout 1936 Davis was one of the strongest defenders of the plan in Kansas and spoke often in its behalf.<sup>47</sup>

42. *Publicity*, Wichita, February 20, 1936.

43. *Ibid.*, March 19, 1936.

44. *Ibid.*, April 9, 1936; *Topeka State Journal*, April 8, 1936.

45. *Ibid.*, *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 9, 1936; *Branson Pilot*, April 10, 1936.

46. *Topeka State Journal*, April 8, 1936.

47. For a highly critical and concise view of the Townsend plan, see National Industrial Conference Board Studies, No. 219, *The Townsend Scheme* (New York, 1936).

At the state party convention in Wichita in late April, Davis remained the only announced gubernatorial candidate. W. G. Clugston, however, noted that Davis' early announcement of candidacy might have kept Lynn Broderick from entering the race.<sup>48</sup> Several other possibilities were mentioned as potential Woodring-Helvering candidates to oppose Davis, but the meeting progressed fairly smoothly and outward appearances of harmony were maintained.<sup>49</sup> It was not until a month later, May 29, that Walter A. Huxman announced he would enter the gubernatorial primary race against Davis.<sup>50</sup>

Despite a hard-hitting campaign, strong support by Garner's *Publicity*, and last-minute personal appearances with Dr. Townsend himself,<sup>51</sup> Davis found himself at a disadvantage. The cool, urbane Huxman would not be pressured into making campaign commitments, and was immeasurably benefitted by the workings of the party machinery. The Democratic leaders were oriented toward the national administration and were the dispensers of patronage from Washington. They had built a formidable political machine which included patronage leverage, a strong state organization, and a thorough utilization of the Young Democrats. It counted little that Davis' avowed policies, in some instances, were more liberal or progressive and more closely in line with Rooseveltian ideals than were those of the younger Kansas leaders. The Woodring-Helvering group naturally remained more closely associated with the national administration in the public's view. Another possible factor against Davis in the minds of party faithful was his support of Brinkley against Woodring in 1932, and his own independent candidacy for state senator. A great advantage was with Huxman, and in the August elections he handily defeated Davis 91,108 votes to 62,596.<sup>52</sup>

The Kansas Democratic party which arose after Huxman's victory over his Republican opponent, Will West, was a far different organization than the individualistic Davis had known. The Washington Day Kansas Democratic Club was changed from an informal once-a-year proposition into a year-round party machine, which was incorporated and put on a business basis.<sup>53</sup> At the state committee meeting in Topeka on February 22, 1937, it was decided to organize the Kansas Jackson Club, which would be an appendage of the

48. W. G. Clugston-Walter A. Huxman interview, April 2, 1964.

49. Topeka Daily Capital, April 28, 29, 1936.

50. *Ibid.*, May 30, 1936.

51. *Ibid.*, August 3, 1936.

52. *Thirtieth Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1935-1936*, p. 47.

53. Topeka Daily Capital, February 22, 1937.

party's state organization. Dues were to be charged at the rate of \$10 per year or \$1 per month.<sup>54</sup> By 1938 the big-business demeanor of the party was nowhere more apparent than in the full-page advertisement taken in the Topeka *Daily Capital* which invited the reader "to celebrate Washington's birthday in Topeka . . . with the Kansas Demo Club, Inc."<sup>55</sup> These changes within the party, particularly the Jackson club, were especially odious to Davis.

In May, 1938, Davis wrote a letter to Huxman, suggesting that a conference of Kansas Democrats be called before June 15, with the idea of establishing certain principles and drafting a platform.<sup>56</sup> Davis believed that the Democrats should commit themselves to the idea that an economy plank would reduce property taxes in Kansas. He also favored the exemption from taxation of homes of up to \$2,500 valuation.<sup>57</sup> Dissatisfied with the response, the old politician made it almost a certainty that he would be a candidate for governor either as an independent or a Democrat. On May 30 he stated that if Walter A. Huxman did not announce for the Democratic nomination before the filing deadline, he anticipated filing himself. If Huxman did file, however, and Davis still saw "no other way to get done the things I think ought to be done for Kansas," then he was preparing for an independent candidacy.<sup>58</sup>

Among the things Davis felt should be done were: A survey of "all governmental functions" with an eye to reducing costs; a re-adjustment of values for the just payment of taxes; free school books; and tax-free homes up to \$2,500 valuation.<sup>59</sup> Davis attacked Huxman by saying that his administration was resorting to unfair fees and licensing and that a new assessment was needed, and he criticized the governor for refusing to call a party convention. Davis then lashed at the social security law (a "refined pauper bill"), and favored in its place a two percent federal transaction tax, superseding other forms of taxation, part of which would provide pensions. He closed by admitting that he had been in communication with the LaFollettes, but had no connection with their proposed third party.<sup>60</sup>

A short time after this announcement, Davis stated that some of his friends were circulating petitions in his behalf. It was reported

54. *Ibid.*, February 23, 1937.

55. *Ibid.*, February 22, 1938.

56. *Publicity*, Wichita, May 26, 1938.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Fort Scott Tribune-Monitor*, May 30, 1938; *Branson Pilot*, June 3, 1938.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*

that a Democratic caucus in Franklin township, Bourbon county, had endorsed his candidacy.<sup>61</sup> The Democratic county leadership was less than enthusiastic, however, and the candidacy ultimately lost Davis the support of his close friend, Martin Miller, who once had been his campaign manager in a gubernatorial race. Miller, a prominent figure in Bourbon county party circles, told his old friend that Huxman had been a good governor and that the party would stick with him against Davis.<sup>62</sup> The former governor, however, was not deterred in his plans, and in a letter of June 6 he added to his charges, attacking Huxman for his support of the Jackson club, which, Davis said, exacted money at the taxpayers' expense from public employees for political purposes.<sup>63</sup>

As the deadline for filing drew nearer, there was speculation as to whether Jonathan Davis would fulfill his promise of filing by petition. It was felt that he would draw some votes away from Huxman, although Davis would have no real chance for election.<sup>64</sup> *Publicity*, now friendly to Huxman, could scarcely conceal its hope that Davis would pull out of the race when editor Garner wrote that "hundreds" of Davis' close friends felt the former governor was making a terrible mistake by entering the race. If Davis had held off until 1940, they would have been behind him all the way.<sup>65</sup> With a flair for the dramatic, Davis kept both parties worrying about his candidacy up to the last possible moment. He finally filed by petition as an independent shortly before the deadline on June 20, and almost immediately the Democratic leadership filed objections against his nomination petitions. The official complaint stated that Davis' petition certificates, bearing some 3,200 names, were not signed by 2,500 qualified Kansas voters, and included several other objections, notably claims of forgery.<sup>66</sup> After lengthy complications and consideration by the state canvassing and contest boards, Davis' place on the November ballot was upheld.<sup>67</sup>

The former governor began a busy campaign of making speeches, called for support from the Republican gubernatorial losers in the August primaries,<sup>68</sup> and wrote political tracts. In a letter to the Kansas City *Star* in late August, Davis corrected the newspaper for having earlier stated that he was running on a \$200 a month

61. Topeka Daily Capital, June 9, 1938.

62. Rudolph Miller interview, March 30, 1964.

63. *Bronson Pilot*, June 10, 1938; *Topeka State Journal*, June 10, 1938.

64. Topeka Daily Capital, June 19, 1938.

65. *Publicity*, Wichita, June 16, 1938.

66. Kansas City (Mo.) *Star*, June 23, 1938.

67. *Topeka State Journal*, June 27, 1938; Kansas City (Mo.) *Star*, July 8, 1938; *Bronson Pilot*, July 15, 1938.

68. *Bronson Pilot*, August 5, 1938.

pension program.<sup>69</sup> Such an idea no doubt came, Davis said, from his announced support of the Townsend plan, which had contained such a platform. Davis felt, however, that this was a problem for congressmen and senators and that a bill presently in the congress would satisfy him. The \$400 annuity which Davis sought was merely part of his state program, a program that voters could support without losing party affiliation. Indeed, such a program, implemented by himself, would help to weed out the "malevolent influences" presently in the Kansas parties. By smashing the two party machines, Davis felt he would be performing a function similar to one Thomas E. Dewey was undertaking in New York.<sup>70</sup>

By the time the campaign entered November, estimates of Davis' strength varied considerably, but Republicans were now certain that Davis would hurt Huxman, while the Democrats were hoping the Davis total would run below 30,000. When the balloting started, however, it became obvious that Davis' strength had been overestimated. The Republican candidate, Payne Ratner, was piling up a sizable lead over Huxman; both were far ahead of Davis and each even received ten times Davis' number of votes in Bourbon county.<sup>71</sup> The final state totals showed Ratner with 393,989, Huxman with 341,271, and Davis with 15,605. C. Floyd Hester, the Prohibitionist candidate, polled 4,337.<sup>72</sup> Never swaying from his moral conviction, Davis wrote a letter to the *Bronson Pilot* in which he claimed the recent election was a "mandate" from the voters for the incoming administration to do away with the practice of soliciting funds from public employees. He reiterated the need for his campaign program and warned that if the administration failed in this, it was thwarting the aspirations of Kansans.<sup>73</sup>

By temperament, Jonathan M. Davis was a Democratic party man, despite his strong individualistic tendencies. It thus was no great surprise when, in 1940, he filed his declaration of intention to run for the Democratic nomination for state senator.<sup>74</sup> Davis' opponent was the incumbent senator from the Eighth district, Harry Warren, the same Democratic candidate who had defeated Davis for state senator in 1932, and who had previously served as the minority floor leader.

Completely subdued in tone after 1938, Davis in 1940 was a most

69. *Kansas City (Mo.) Star*, August 26, 1938.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Thirty-First Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1937-1938*, p. 124.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

73. *Bronson Pilot*, November 18, 1938.

74. *Ibid.*, May 31, 1940; *Fort Scott Tribune-Monitor*, May 28, 1940.

casual campaigner. After filing, he left for a trip to the Ozarks<sup>75</sup> and, although he advertised in the weekly Bronson newspaper, none of his political advertisements was ever entered in the Fort Scott paper. Two other factors are worthy of notice. First, the tone of the Fort Scott *Tribune-Monitor's* articles was unmistakably pro-Warren. Secondly, Davis was a maverick in the Democratic party. He had bolted the party just two years before (for the second time) and now was asking the Democrats to support him for state senator against their minority floor leader! If Davis were a "serious candidate, he would have had to conduct a campaign of the most strenuous nature. More likely, he merely felt a psychological compulsion to file for some office. W. G. Clugston suggested that apparently Davis could stay "out of the picture for only so long."<sup>76</sup> The formidable Warren won easily in a dull August election, 1,927 to 813,<sup>77</sup> then went on to win over his Republican opposition in November.

Davis gave indications of his interest in making at least one more race for political office at a Bronson Chamber of Commerce meeting in May, 1942. Speaking with his native wit and humor, Davis off-handedly finished a remark with, "And, no telling but you might get a chance to vote for me again."<sup>78</sup> He did not qualify this statement, and events were to show that he had not yet decided upon a suitable office.

Hard-core Davis supporters were not to be denied a candidate for long, however, for on Saturday, June 20, Jonathan M. Davis got up before daylight and set out for Topeka, arriving there later that morning. Noon on this particular day also happened to be the deadline for filing for state office. After briefly considering filing for congressman from the Second district, he finally filed for lieutenant governor. The Republicans had seven candidates filing for that office while the Democrats had J. Donald Coffin, of Council Grove; I. S. Woodward, Wichita; Harry G. Miller, Jr., Kansas City; and Davis.<sup>79</sup> Davis noticed there were a large number of candidates for the office and mentioned that such a situation might cause the votes to be split enough so that one man might have as much chance to win as another. He remarked to a nearby newsman that a Kansas election "wouldn't be legal" if he were not on the ballot.<sup>80</sup>

In the primary election of August 4, it appeared that Jonathan M.

75. *Bronson Pilot*, June 7, 1940.

76. W. G. Clugston-Walter A. Huxman interview, April 2, 1964.

77. *Thirty-Second Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1939-1940*, p. 81.

78. *Bronson Pilot*, May 15, 1942.

79. *Topeka Daily Capital*, June 21, 1942.

80. *Ibid.*

Davis was rolling towards a surprisingly easy victory, with an early two-to-one margin over any of his opponents.<sup>81</sup> As late counts came in, however, Davis' seemingly insurmountable lead, which had grown to 7,000, melted before a huge Wyandotte majority polled by the Kansas Citian, Miller. Davis clung to a bare margin of several hundred votes and his lead slowly started to widen again.<sup>82</sup> The old campaigner officially polled 20,065 votes to Miller's 19,077, Woodward's 14,875, and Coffin's 11,630.<sup>83</sup> Thus, Jonathan M. Davis had achieved his first electoral victory since his success against Donald Muir in the primary election for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination of 1926.

Davis' Republican opposition in the general election was Jess C. Denious of Dodge City, who was a veteran newspaperman and political figure. An editorialist for the *Kansas City Times* wrote that the contest between Davis and Denious was "likely to be an old county fair race," and that it was a nostalgic thrill to see Davis' name on the state ticket. The *Times* wrote:

Since 1907, the rotund dirt-farmer has hardly missed an election when he didn't run for something. . . . It is hard to say which Jonathan Davis likes most—fried chicken or a political campaign. A whiff of either will make him snort like a fire horse at the scent of fire. . . .<sup>84</sup>

In the general election of November 3, 1942, Andrew Schoeppel and Arthur Capper led the Republican ticket to a smashing victory and Denious easily defeated Davis. Despite the fact that Denious won by 279,220 votes to 176,280, Davis did at least as well and perhaps a little better than most of the Democratic ticket.<sup>85</sup> Since the figures for Davis closely corresponded with those of the other Democratic candidates, it appears that the Democratic votes largely represented those people who voted straight party tickets, regardless of the reputation or personality of the candidates.

Davis' success in the August primary is of passing interest, but was mostly the result of the vote being split among four Democratic candidates. Davis "sneaked" to victory and his presence on the Democratic ballot had no further significance. The fact that his vote in the general election reflected that of the party ticket indicates that he had become sufficiently noncontroversial to reflect the straight-ticket voters.

Thus ended the political career of Jonathan M. Davis. His

81. *Ibid.*, August 5, 1942.

82. *Ibid.*, August 6, 1942.

83. *Thirty-Third Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1941-1942*, p. 37.

84. *Kansas City (Mo.) Times*, August 6, 1942.

85. *Thirty-Third Biennial Report of the Secretary of State, 1941-1942*, p. 97; *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 4, 1942.

physical health had deteriorated through a strenuous 71 years of life, and he started to fail rapidly. After an illness of some months, the old politician died in a Fort Scott hospital on June 27, 1943. The *Capital* characterized him in an editorial as a man used to defeats, yet an individual who certainly was immune to any accusations of being a quitter. Future elections in Kansas, the paper said, would seem strange for a time without his name on the ballot.<sup>86</sup>

From a general point of view, the 1926 and 1936 elections were probably the most significant of Davis' post-gubernatorial campaigns, since they represented good examples of state intraparty factionalism and strife. Davis' 1932 and 1938 independent candidacies were significant as open manifestations of rebellion by a former party leader and were not so much examples of party factionalism as personal disagreement on the part of one colorful figure. In 1938 Davis lost the remnants of his official Democratic support, and retained only those hard-core enthusiasts who were his personal admirers.

If one should seek a thematic approach to Davis' later political life, it becomes apparent that taxation was his primary concern. The former governor constantly stressed a revaluation of property so the "little man," particularly the farmer, could be relieved of an unfair burden of taxation. He supported practically every measure that favored agriculture and essentially was an enemy of corporate interests. Davis, a farmer himself, perhaps should not be criticized too severely for emphasizing agriculture, but his total lack of appreciation for the problems of industry and the nature of the country's continued expansion was a serious political shortcoming.

His views consisted of paradoxical elements, including, at various times, a demand for increased government services but with less government expenditure and interference; and a freer circulation of money but more austerity in spending. His economic views were perhaps unsophisticated and lacked any actual basis for implementation. He simply proposed that money be spent in a certain way, with little realism as to how it would be collected.

Davis himself was in good measure a populist, a recognizable progressive, quite often a Rooseveltian liberal, and frequently an exasperatingly strait-laced conservative. Yet for all his nuances of thought, he was a man with forthright views, and always a colorful figure.

86. *Topeka Daily Capital*, June 29, 1943.