



2023 Nomination Form

Application deadline: Friday, February 24 by 5 p.m.

DELIVER TO: City Hall, 101 N. Main St., Winston-Salem,
Marketing & Communications Department, Suite 336

OR MAIL TO: City of Winston-Salem,
Marketing & Communications
Department
P.O. Box 2511
Winston-Salem, NC 27102

Nominee's Stage Name: Paxton Davis Given Name: James Paxton Davis, Jr.

Address at Time of Death: Fincastle, ~~Virginia~~ State: VA

Dates of Residency: 5/7/1925 to: 1951 (ex: 2000-2010)

Category: Music Visual Arts Dance Motion Pictures
 Theater Television Writing Radio

Criteria:

- The nominee(s) exhibited sustained excellence in his or her field for at least five years.
- The nominee(s) made distinguished contributions to the community and civic-oriented participation.
- The nominee(s) is deceased (must provide copy of death certificate or obituary).
- The nominee(s) was a resident of Winston-Salem for at least five years.
- The nominee(s) made a significant contribution to the arts or entertainment industry in one or more of the following areas: music, dance, theater, writing, visual arts, motion pictures, television, or radio.

A "significant" contribution would be iconic in terms of renown and the impact on the artistic disciplines or popular culture.

Application to include:

- Attach nominee's performance/accomplishment biography which must include at least 5 years of accomplishments in the arts, culture, or entertainment field.
- Attach a list of nominee's civic/community involvement.
- Attach a copy of nominee's death certificate or obituary.

Sponsor Name: Anne D. Rigby
Address: 1821 Runnymede Rd.
City: Winston-Salem State: NC Zip Code: 27104

Email: arnedrigby@aol.com

Phone: Home: 336-722-5861 Cell: 336-761-1438

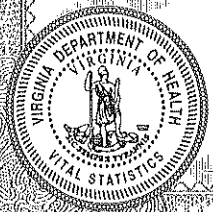
Signature: Anne D. Rigby Date: 2/10/2023

VERIFY PRESENCE OF WATERMARK HOLD TO LIGHT TO VIEW

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH - DIVISION OF VITAL RECORDS

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA - CERTIFICATE OF DEATH DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH - DIVISION OF VITAL RECORDS - RICHMOND

Form with fields for decedent (James Paxton Davis, Jr.), date of death (May 7, 1994), place of death (Roanoke Memorial Hospital), residence (Pincastle, Virginia), and cause of death (Acute Coronary Arteriosclerosis).



This is to certify that this is a true and correct reproduction or abstract of the official record filed with the Virginia Department Of Health, Richmond, Virginia

DATE ISSUED September 28, 2022

Do not accept unless on security paper with the seal of Virginia Department of Health, Vital Statistics in the lower left hand corner. Section 32.1-272, Code of Virginia, as amended.

Signature of Janet M. Rainey, State Registrar

Paxton Davis
1925-1994

Winston-Salem native Paxton Davis was an accomplished journalist, newspaper columnist, book author and college professor. His achievements and his body of work are fully deserving of being remembered through induction into the Winston-Salem Arts, Cultural and Entertainment Memorial Walk of Fame.

Paxton Davis (James Paxton Davis, Jr.) was born on May 7, 1925, in Winston-Salem's City Hospital. He was the son of Paxton and Emily Davis. His father was the superintendent of Transfer and Storage for the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. Both parents were active in the civic and political life of Winston-Salem.

Davis attended Wiley Elementary School and was a 1942 graduate of R. J. Reynolds High School. He attended the Virginia Military Institute for one year before being drafted into the Army during World War II. He spent the war years in Burma as a lab technician with the U.S. Typhus Commission. Upon being discharged at the end of the war, Davis attended The Johns Hopkins University and graduated in 1949 with a degree in English.

After college Davis worked as a reporter for the *Winston-Salem Journal* from 1949 until 1951, followed by two years reporting for the *Richmond Times Dispatch*. In 1953 he joined the faculty of Washington and Lee University in the Department of Journalism, where he taught until 1976. He was chairman of the department from 1968 to 1974. During his years at W&L Davis published four books of fiction. He also edited the book page of *The Roanoke Times* and wrote editorials for the *Winston-Salem Journal* for two summers. He retired to Fincastle, Va.

In retirement Davis wrote a weekly column for *The Roanoke Times*. One of those columns, a tale of his boyhood weekly football games with friends in Winston-Salem, was picked up by the op-ed page of *The New York Times*. As it circulated the country, it became apparent that Davis's column reminded hundreds of readers of their own childhoods. From this, he wrote "Being a Boy," published in 1988 by John F. Blair, Publisher in Winston-Salem. This was followed by two more volumes: "A Boy's War," published in 1990 about his war years, and "A Boy No More," published in 1992 about his post-war experiences. Davis was researching another non-fiction book set in Winston-Salem, about Z. Smith Reynolds' mysterious death in Reynolda House, when he passed away in 1994.

In all, Davis wrote 10 books: "Two Soldiers" (1956), "The Battle of New Market" (1963), "One of the Dark Places" (1965) "The Seasons of Heroes" (1967), "A Flag at the Pole" (1976), "Ned" (1978), "Three Days" (1980), "Being a Boy" (1988), "A Boy's War" (1990) and "A Boy No More" (1992)

Davis's excellence as a writer was acknowledged professionally. On the strength of his first book, "Two Soldiers," he received a fellowship to the Breadloaf Writers Conference at the Virginia Center for Creative Arts. He was a visiting scholar at Cambridge University in 1973, a fellow at the Virginia Center of Creative Arts in 1983 and a fellow at the McDowell Colony in 1989. He served on the board of the Virginia State Library from 1986 to 1990.

ORAL HISTORY

ON BEING PAXTON DAVIS

By Sherry Roberts

Since 1976, writer Paxton Davis has written one column a week that appears on Friday in the *Roanoke Times & World News* and "makes everybody mad." It is, in his opinion, a wonderful job. But then, the son of his parents *would* think that.

His mother was one of the outspoken McDowells of Virginia, known for their lively interest in war, politics, and public life. His father was the first Paxton Davis, a Virginian also, equally opinionated, but not as quickly enflamed. At the Davis dinner table, everyone was drawn into the conversation. Children were expected to form and express opinions. It was these parents and that environment — encouraging eight-year-olds to straighten out the world, the New Deal, and taxes between sips of milk — that created a farsighted and thoughtful journalist.

It is memories of such dinners, of life with such unforgettable parents during such unforgettable times, that Davis has written of in *Being a Boy*, his eighth and latest book. John F. Blair, Publisher, in Winston-Salem will publish the book, a collection of skillful essays recounting growing up in the affluent Buena Vista neighborhood in Winston-Salem during the Depression.

Davis is self-deprecating and charming and soft-spoken. He thinks before he answers and says I-don't-know when he doesn't know. He speaks as if he is figuring things out as he goes along and is delighted

with the discoveries he is making. It is not difficult to hear the young voice in *Being a Boy* and imagine it coming once from this 63-year-old man with the bald head, gray beard, intent blue eyes, and wry sense of humor. He looks at life with the kind of amiable introspection of a gentleman of the South, born of Southern parentage and customs.

The city was run
to their taste and the county
was run to their taste.
Fortunately, they
had very good taste.

When Davis was ten, his mother predicted he would be a journalist. But what did she know? He had other plans. "I loved the idea of being a doctor. It was a very romantic image. My father wanted to be a doctor, but I don't think that had much to do with it.

"I always loved science. My first job was in a medical research laboratory at Bowman Gray School of Medicine. I started washing glassware as everyone does. I was never anything but a helper, of course, but I saw what science was like for the first time outside a classroom in high school and loved it. I loved the way it smelled, loved the people."

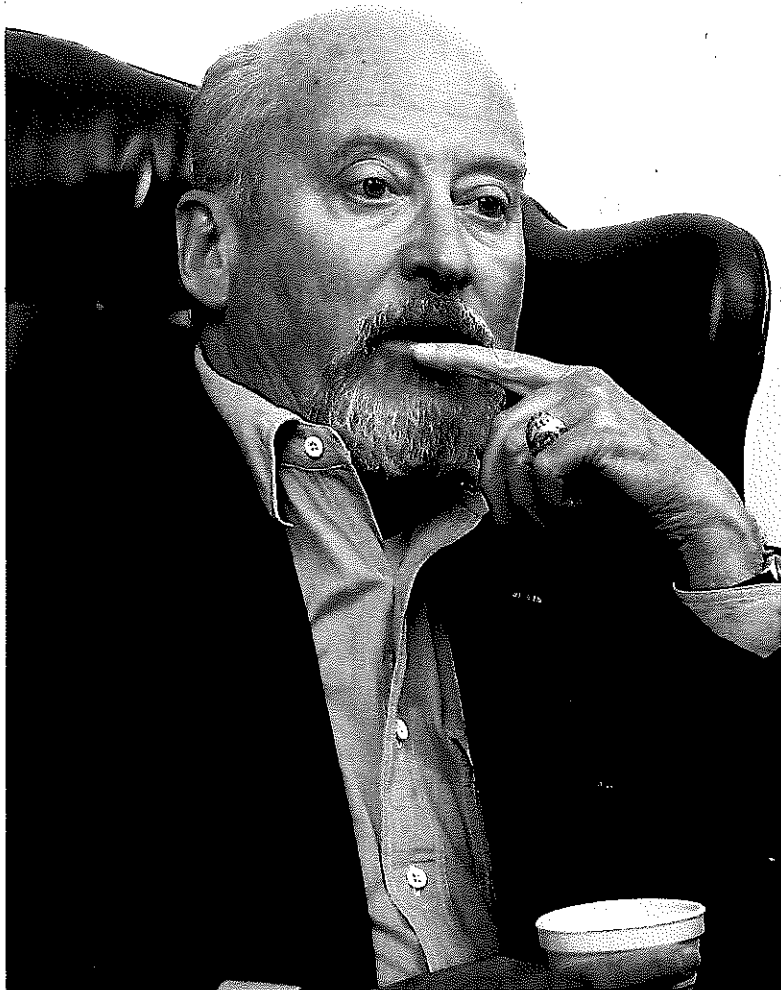
The desire to be a doctor "evaporated" suddenly in the middle of his first year at the family alma mater, Virginia Military Institute in Lexing-

ton, and never returned, although he was trained as a medic in World War II. In addition to that training, he spent two years in the war as a combat soldier in Burma.

When he returned to the states, Davis attended Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Majoring in English and minoring in philosophy, he graduated in 1949. Two days after graduation he started work as a reporter for the *Winston-Salem Journal*. He had no particular beat. "Newspapermen in those days were not specialists. You were expected to write twenty stories a day and take obits."

He worked at other papers, the *Richmond Times Dispatch* and the defunct *Winston-Salem Sentinel*. Then in 1953 he was hired at Washington & Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, to whittle sharp, hard-nosed journalists out of energetic young writers. He stayed twenty-three years at Washington & Lee, leaving in 1976 as a professor of journalism with only a bachelor's degree, much to the disgust of his Ph.D friends. He published four books, all fiction, while at Washington & Lee and continued to work part-time as a newspaperman, writing editorials for two summers at the Winston-Salem paper and editing the book page of the Roanoke paper (from 1961-81).

After leaving the university, he wrote three other fiction books. All his fiction has been based on historical characters and episodes such as the adventures of Lawrence of Ara-



Jan G. Hensley

Paxton Davis: "Winston-Salem had a head start on many modern cities. It had a strong leadership, which turned out to be wise leadership."

bia, the race for the South Pole, and the tragedy of the Civil War. Then came *Being a Boy*. This was something different. It was autobiographical nonfiction.

It was spurred by one of his columns which was reprinted by the *New York Times*. The response was voluminous. Apparently others also had kinder memories of the Depression era than what the textbooks preserved.

The Depression in *Being a Boy* was a "sweet, safe, innocent time," Davis says, "and, unfortunately, America has lost its innocence and so have

I and so has everybody else. We've lost it and we go on losing it."

Davis is the first to admit "my perspective is not what many people remember." It is a middle class memory made in a mighty and, what seemed then, almost invincible town.

"It was said in Winston-Salem in those days that the Depression was not going to affect tobacco, because people are going to go on smoking, perhaps smoking even more. That's a cruel thing to say, but Winston-Salem was supported by cigarettes and it did not suffer the same [as

many other towns]."

The other factor was that his memories were of Buena Vista, an affluent neighborhood near Reynolda, the estate of tobacco king R. J. Reynolds. The young Davis played football, toiled over science experiments, and formed private detective agencies to rout the country of criminals with the sons of doctors and Reynolds executives. His father was one of those executives, an expert on the newfangled trucks introduced by World War I. The veteran and truck man headed the transfer and storage division at Reynolds Tobacco and

was responsible for converting its traditional horse-drawn drays to modern automotive transportation.

Today, in visits to his hometown, Davis is astonished at how well Winston-Salem has been preserved, and even more surprised at his willingness to give the city's great families credit for the futuristic thinking that made it possible.

"It is astonishing to me that physically the city is so recognizable. It has redeemed much of its beauty and harmony where so many cities have become junkyards. Politically, it is very different from what it was when I was boy. It is not run by the oligarchy that the Reynolds, Gray, Hanes connections were able to impose. It's not a company town anymore."

But once it was, Davis says. "Much of this power was benevolently exerted, I have to say, and seems even more benevolent in retrospect. I think Winston-Salem's amenities, its culture, and much of its development — preserving trees and streets — is owing to the foresight of the wealthy people who said how things were going to be done. The city was run to their taste and the county was run to their taste. Fortunately, they had very good taste."

Thanks to the forceful, strong personalities of men such as Will Reynolds, Jim Hanes, James A. Gray, and Bowman Gray, Davis says, "Winston-Salem had a head start on many modern cities. It had a strong leadership, especially in the twenties and thirties, which were the times

of growth, which turned out to be pretty wise leadership. And it is my impression that the tradition of leadership has been fairly well handed down, that the well-to-do descendants have done a great deal for the cultural life of Winston-Salem."

The cynical old newspaperman with the baby gentle eyes shakes his head. "I'm surprised to hear myself

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would be H.L. Mencken.
I like to
attack sacred cows.*

saying that. I did not like them myself back when I was younger and didn't understand how well they saw ahead. I'm surprised that, in retrospect, they look as good as they do. But then I was a feisty young man. I didn't like power from any source, was suspicious of it. My mother was strong-willed, very liberal, and very suspicious of entrenched power. I think I got it from her."

Paxton Davis remembers the America of the Depression years with fondness and wonders how its descendant would fare in another economic collapse. Suppose the tremor of last October's stock market meltdown was just that, a tremor,

a warning? How would America survive another crash? Davis is dubious.

"The America that collapsed in 1939 has vanished. It was a farm country. Industrial collapse was certainly the keystone in the whole structure, but we were a people of a farming nation, we were much more self-reliant. A man could fix his own plumbing [if he had to]. The management class scarcely existed.

"I remember men who worked for my father at Reynolds. They picked him up and gave him a ride to work every day. They all had little farms outside Winston-Salem in the country. They had pigs and cows and grew their own vegetables. They were always bringing him food. I think that class of people has virtually vanished in our time. How are people who have lived by computers going to be able to survive the absence of many amenities they have taken for granted? I don't know how they are going to cope with the need for self-sufficiency."

Unlike Davis, many people were emotionally scarred by the Depression. He tells of friends, a writer who had a horror of day-old bread (which he was forced to ask for in the grocery as a child because it was cheaper) and a professor who refuses to accept hand-me-down clothing for his children. He remembers sitting in an English tent in Burma with a handful of midwestern boys. They were mostly illiterate, and had few teeth (the army had to pull many to maintain the health of its troops), yet they could do anything with

their hands. Their grim experiences during the Depression had forged them into extraordinarily self-sufficient men.

"They had a practical sort of yeoman's wisdom that I don't see anywhere today. I knew a guy in the army who earned \$10 a week during the Depression as a golf pro. He lived mostly by playing cards with the well-to-do golfers. I don't know any people like this anymore. Do you? Everybody I know is a CPA, a lawyer, a teacher, not many are resourceful in physical endeavors."

Even doctors lived simpler lives back then, Davis says. "The doctors that I grew up with down the street — and I must have had half of them in Winston-Salem within a block from me — didn't live the way doctors live now. They lived much more simply, kept longer hours, made house calls. They were not an economic class of their own as they have become."

Davis sighs. "Simplicity is what I do remember. But maybe that is the way old people remember their childhood anyway."

You could say Davis has been writing *Being a Boy* for sixty years, but it took him only a year to get it down on paper. He likes to note that he is supported by his second wife, Peggy, who is district director for Congressman Jim Olin of Virginia. He has three children, she has five, between them there are eight grandchildren. They share a cat named Hodge.

They live in a clapboard-covered log cabin that was occupied by Davis's uncle in the 1930s in Fincastle, Virginia. "It is a 200-year-old house about the size of your desk — I'm not kidding." His schedule is simple: "I write in the morning, read in the afternoon, and listen to public radio and drink in the evening. Most writers drink in the evening, I better add that."

So most evenings you'll find him sitting in the yard sipping a Scotch and "listening to 'All Things Considered' like everybody and getting mad at the world and Ronald Reagan." He also watches MacNeil/Lehrer and the network news "because CBS is going to destroy George Bush if they possible can and I want to watch it happen."

He's a news hound, reads newspapers and clips them. Some of that information later turns up in one of his 600-word columns on Friday morning. Of course, he thinks each week the column will never happen. "Every Monday morning I get up and think 'I don't think I've got it this week.'" But he always does. He's a professional and, as he likes to say, he's developed "certain professional habits that whether you've got anything to say or not you can write two pages.

"I am one of the few people I know who writes and doesn't feel it is unpleasant. Most of my friends really say they suffer and I don't know whether to believe them or not."

Davis attacks, in his writing, cap-

ital punishment ("Do you know Virginia executes more people than any other state in the United States?"), handguns, women drivers, and, of course, the President. "I recite Ronald Reagan's shortcomings, which you can do every week."

"If I had a hero," Davis says, "it would be H.L. Mencken. I like to attack sacred cows, like the evangelists on television, although they've become too easy. All these things are things that make people mad."

And he does rile people. In letters to the editor, he is called a lout, a knave, a communist, a radical. And then there are the letters no one signs, the ugly missives, the threats of death and dismemberment.

Davis finds a way to lay even this at Ronald Reagan's door. "I blame Ronald Reagan for encouraging this kind of polarization in the country. Violence has always been a part of American life, but it doesn't seem [during his administration] to have improved at all. I'm a conservative, but I come out as a left winger in the present equation of things."

But Davis's purpose is not solely to see how far he can raise the local blood pressure. There is, in everything he says and writes, an underlying concern for honor and justice. He explains, "I heard in church, of all places, that one of the highest attributes of a civilized person is a concern for justice."

Paxton Davis's mother, that easily excitable, often indignant McDowell from Virginia, would be proud. □

THE ROANOKE TIMES

Roanoke Times
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DATE: SUNDAY, May 29, 1994 TAG: 9405290107
SECTION: VIRGINIA PAGE: C1 EDITION: METRO
SOURCE: LISA APPLIGATE STAFF WRITER
DATELINE: LENGTH: Medium

WRITER PAXTON DAVIS DIES

Journalist, novelist and educator Paxton Davis died Friday of heart disease. He was 69.

Davis had been with the Roanoke Times & World-News since 1961, when he began spending summers away from his professorial duties at Washington and Lee University to edit the book page.

In 1976 he focused much of his energy on writing columns for the editorial page. Addressing topics such as bad drivers and President Ronald Reagan, Davis provoked readers.

"By far, he received the most mail and generated the most heat from readers," Editorial Page Editor Alan Sorensen said Saturday.

But those readers who said they couldn't stand Davis' column faithfully read it week after week, Sorensen said.

"Whether one agrees with Paxie's views or not . . . his concepts are clearly and forcefully stated," Roanoke resident Ted Powers wrote in 1985.

Powers' letter to the editor went on to say "his columns have impelled me to re-examine some closely-held dogma and watch it disintegrate under the inexorable force of Paxton's twin-barreled weapon of logic and language."

Davis began his writing career as a reporter at the Winston-Salem Journal in 1949. He also reported for the Twin City Sentinel and the Richmond Times-Dispatch before he began teaching journalism at W&L.

Davis went on to become chairman of the journalism department from 1968 through 1974.

In 1956, he published his first novel, "Two Soldiers." Nine books followed, with the last book, "A Boy No More," published in 1992.

Some of his novels, such as "Three Days," explored various battles and characters from the Civil War. "Being a Boy," an autobiographical memoir of his youth in Winston-Salem, N.C., was published in 1988.

Although Davis grew up in North Carolina, he has a long line of ancestors from Virginia. His great-great grandfather was Rockbridge County native James Paxton, a major in the War of 1812 and commandant of the state arsenal at Lexington.

Davis began college at Virginia Military Institute in 1942. But a year later, he began a three-year tour of duty with the Army in China, Burma and India.

He completed his bachelor's degree in 1949 at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

Davis was on the board of the Virginia State Library from 1986 to 1990. He also was a visiting scholar at Cambridge University in 1973 and an honorary member of the Virginia Writer's Club.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. Tuesday at the Fincastle Presbyterian Church.

by CNB

Paxton Davis

Edit Profile

Add photo

educator, journalist, novelist



View map

Paxton Davis, American Novelist, journalist, educator. Board of directors Virginia State Library., 1986-1990. Served with Army of the United States, 1943-1946, China, Burma, India Theatre of Operations. Member Phi Beta Kappa, Omicron Delta Kappa.

Born

March 7, 1925
Winston-Salem, North Carolina,
United States

Died

March 27, 1994 (aged 68)

Nationality

American

Background

Davis, Paxton was born on May 7, 1925 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, United States. Son of James Paxton and Emily (McDowell) Davis.

Education

Student, Virginia Military Institute, 1942-1943; AB, Johns Hopkins University, 1949.

Career

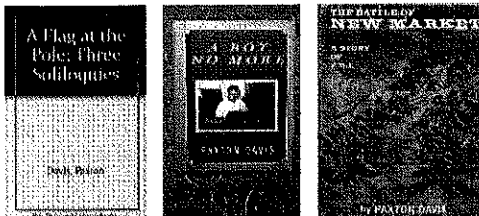
Reporter, Winston-Salem Journal, 1949-1951; Reporter, Richmond (Virginia) Times-Dispatch, 1951-1952; Reporter, Twin City Sentinel, Winston-Salem, 1952-1953; faculty, Washington and Lee University, 1953-1976; professor journalism, Washington and Lee University, 1963-1976; department chairman, Washington and Lee University, 1968-1974. Visiting scholar Cambridge U., 1973. Fellow Bread Loaf Writers Conference, Va.Ctr. for the Creative Arts, 1983, MacDowell Colony, 1989.

Adjunct professor.Roanoke College, 1980.

Achievements

Paxton Davis has been listed as a noteworthy Novelist, journalist, educator by Marquis Who's Who.

Works



More photos

book

A Flag at the Pole: Three Soliloquies (A fictional account told in the first person by Ernest

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All works

Membership

Board of directors Virginia State Library., 1986-1990. Served with Army of the United States, 1943-1946, China, Burma, India Theatre of Operations. Member Phi Beta Kappa, Omicron Delta Kappa.

Connections

Married Wylma Elizabeth Pooser, June 6, 1951 (divorced 1971). Children: Elizabeth Keith, Anne Beckley, James Paxton III. Married Peggy Painter Camper, July 21, 1973.

Father: James Paxton Davis

Mother: Emily (McDowell) Davis

Spouse: Wylma Elizabeth Pooser

Spouse: Peggy Painter Camper

child: Elizabeth Keith Davis

child: James Paxton III Davis

child: Anne Beckley Davis

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Finding Aids

Davis, James Paxton, Jr.

 Person

Dates

Existence: 1925-1994

A.B., Johns Hopkins, 1949. Assistant professor of journalism, W&L, 1953; associate professor, W&L, 1958; professor, W&L, 1963-76. Author: *Two Soldiers*, 1956, etc. See *Who's Who*, 1980-1981. Davis began college at Virginia Military Institute in 1942. A year later, he began a three year tour of duty with the Army of China, Burma, and India. He completed his bachelor's degree in 1949 at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Davis was on the board of the Virginia State Library from 1986 to 1990. He also was a visiting scholar at Cambridge University in 1973 and an honorary member of the Virginia Writer's Club. (Citation: *Roanoke Times* and *World News*, Obituary of Paxton Davis, Writer)

Found in 2 Collections and/or Records:

Davis, Paxton, 1994-06-01

 File – Box: 3, Folder: 31

Dates: 1994-06-01

Found in: Washington and Lee University, James G. Leyburn Library Special Collections and Archives / WLU-Coll-0668, Washington and Lee University and Regional Virginia History Research Collection / Biography

Photograph of Paxton Davis

 Collection Identifier: WLU-Coll-PP-0112

Content Description A photograph of author and W&L Journalism professor Paxton Davis (James Paxton Davis, Jr.). The photograph was retouched for reproduction in the *Washington and Lee Alumni* magazine.

Dates: Majority of material found within Date of the photograph

Found in: Washington and Lee University, James G. Leyburn Library Special Collections and Archives / Photograph of Paxton Davis

Additional filters:

Type

Archival Record 1

Collection 1