

JAMES GORDON FRIERSON AND EMMA GWYNNE DAVIS

At age thirty-one, on November 12, 1868, **James Gordon Frierson (1837–1884)**, a Civil War veteran, married twenty-one-year-old **Emma Gwynne Davis (1847–1899)** in Cleburne, Arkansas.

James Gordon Frierson was born in Maury County, Tennessee, the fourth of eleven children (four boys and seven girls). With his family and a large contingent of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, he moved in 1841 to the town of College Hill, Mississippi, in Lafayette County, near Oxford.

As a youngster, James Gordon Frierson received a religious and classical early education¹ at a church-sponsored school called North Mississippi College and at a prep school called the College Hill Male Academy. At age seventeen, he entered the University of Mississippi² at Oxford as a sophomore. He transferred for his senior year to La Grange College³ in Tennessee, where he graduated first in his class in 1858, at age twenty.

James Gordon Frierson was a twenty-three-year-old second-year student at the University of Mississippi Law School⁴ when he joined the Confederate Army in April 1861. During the war, he fought with two different regiments in the Western Theater, mostly in Kentucky and Tennessee. His first tour of Confederate service⁵ with the 15th Mississippi Infantry Regiment ended shortly after the Battle of Fishing Creek (also known as the Battle of Mill Springs) in Kentucky on January 19, 1862. After that battle, he wrote a letter to his mother. In February 1862, he was discharged from the army for “*General debility caused by repeated attacks of Typhoid Fever.*”

James Gordon Frierson had a first cousin, Charles Currin Frierson (1838–1897), who was his close friend, classmate, and Confederate brother-in-arms in the early years of the Civil War.⁶

James Gordon Frierson re-enlisted in April 1862 with the 30th Mississippi Infantry Regiment and began his second period of Confederate service⁷ during the Siege of Corinth between April 29–May 30, 1862. He was on the



*James Gordon Frierson,
Neville's great-grandfather.*

Confederacy's ill-fated march into Kentucky, at the Battle of Perryville (October 8, 1862), and at the three-day Battle of Murfreesboro (called the Battle of Stones River or the Second Battle of Murfreesboro in the North). On February 1, 1863, one month after the Battle of Murfreesboro (December 31, 1862–January 2, 1863), James Gordon Frierson was elected a second lieutenant. He then led his company for the next ten months but was never elected its captain.⁸ James Gordon Frierson was at the Battle of Chickamauga (September 18–20, 1863) in northwest Georgia, near Chattanooga, Tennessee. He was captured by Federal forces on November 24, 1863, at the Battle of Lookout Mountain and was imprisoned at Johnson's Island⁹ on Lake Erie in Ohio until June 1865.

After the war, James Gordon Frierson learned that the members of his law school class of 1861 had been granted their law degrees by the University of Mississippi. In January 1866, with his brother-in-law, Major Martin Linn Clardy (1844–1914), he established an Oxford, Mississippi, law firm.¹⁰ The firm was not successful, so in late 1866, they moved to northeastern Arkansas, where James Gordon lived in four communities over the next seventeen years.¹¹

In 1870, at around age thirty-three, James Gordon Frierson, a “rebel” Democrat, was one of only four white Southerners elected to the Arkansas State Senate.¹² He was the president of the Arkansas State Senate in 1874 and presided over the Senate during the end of the Reconstruction Period in Arkansas.

In September 1882, about eighteen months before he died, James Gordon Frierson was elected circuit judge for the Second Judicial Circuit, which comprised eight counties in northeastern Arkansas.¹³ Although he served for less than two years, he is known for all time as Judge Frierson. In 1883 Judge James Gordon Frierson purchased a two-acre parcel of land in Jonesboro and built a house to which his family moved in November of that year. The home, known as the Frierson House,¹⁴ still stands today.

Judge James Gordon Frierson’s abbreviated but impactful life came to an end on March 8, 1884, when he died of pneumonia at age forty-six.

*Emma Gwynne Davis Frierson,
Neville’s great-grandmother.*





Emma Gwynne Davis was the oldest of the ten children of **Dr. Newlin Addison Davis (1821–1876)** and **Eliza Murray Drake (1826–1888)**. At age eighteen, in June 1865, she left Ozark, Missouri, with her mother and siblings to live in the South with her father, who had fought in the Civil War with the Confederacy.

Emma Gwynne Davis's family was living in Cleburne, Cross County, Arkansas, in 1868, when she met a young lawyer who had recently moved from Mississippi to Cross County. They married and had four children, the youngest of whom was Neville's grandfather **Charles Davis Frierson Sr. (1877–1947)**.

After Judge James Gordon Frierson died, his thirty-seven-year-old widow converted their Jonesboro home into a private subscription school, which for a time was the only school in Jonesboro.¹⁵ During Emma Gwynne Davis Frierson's fifteen years of widowhood, she was a dedicated teacher, driven to support and educate her children.¹⁶

Emma Gwynne Davis Frierson died on August 9, 1899, at age fifty-two. Her obituaries described her as a cultured woman and a "*woman of great intellectual endowment.*"¹⁷