

**The Filson Historical Society**

**S.E. Davis Co. (Louisville, Ky.)  
Records, 1936-2019**

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**Size of Collection:**

1 cu. ft. and 1 ovsz. boxed volume

**Locator number:**

Mss. BB D265

**S.E. Davis Co. (Louisville, Ky.)  
Records, 1936-2019**

**Historical Note**

S.E. Davis Co., Inc. was a pawn shop in downtown Louisville, Kentucky, operated by multiple generations of a Jewish family from its opening in 1936 until its closure in 2017. According to family notes, the store began at 103 West Market Street in 1936, moved to 101 West Market Street around 1950, and was remodeled to occupy 101-103 West Market Street in 1963. The Davis family owned the buildings and ran a rooming house with fifteen rooms in the upper levels above the store until the late 1960s. S.E. Davis Co. specialized in the sale of jewelry (gold and silver), hunting rifles, sportsman guns, and musical instruments and equipment. In 1997, the store moved to 209 South First Street between Market and Jefferson Streets, where it remained until it closed in 2017.

The store was established in 1936 by Simmond "Simmy" Epstein Davis (1916-1991) and Faye Perelmutter Davis (1917-2013), who were married in August of that year. Faye was one of five children born to parents Max and Miriam Perelmutter of Louisville. Faye's siblings were Belle, Morris, Sammy, and Sol. Max died when Faye was two years old. Simmy's parents were Freda (born Zlate Segalowicz) and Henry Davis (born Henmoch Razz), Jewish Russian immigrants who settled first in Bardstown, Kentucky, and then in Louisville. Henry was a peddler and grocer who began accruing items that customers traded with him for food.

Simmy and Faye Davis had three children: Melvin "Mel" Davis (b. 1937), Diane Davis Mayer (b. 1941), and Miriam "Mimi" Davis Grossman (1946-2021). Simmy and Faye were longtime members of Keneseth Israel Synagogue. Simmy served as secretary-treasurer of the Louisville Pawnbrokers Association and was a Mason, a Shriner, and a member of Keneseth Israel Men's Club and B'nai B'rith. Faye Davis, known by family and friends as "Bubby Faye," worked by her husband's side at S.E. Davis Co. She served as president of the Keneseth Israel Sisterhood.

Mel Davis began working at S.E. Davis Co. as a young man. He became an avid trap shooter and a member of local sports hunting associations. Mel met his future wife Shellia Juan Bloch (b. 1939 in Eustis, Florida) at Camp Bel Aire, a Jewish summer camp in Tennessee where they were both working on the staff. Shellia grew up in Leesburg in central Florida with her sister Ninion and her mother Berte Rita Bloch. Berte was a single mother who with her brother owned the general store in Leesburg. Shellia was a dancer like her mother and attended the National Music Camp for a few summers in the 1950s. She first attended college at University of Michigan and transferred to University of Louisville after marrying Mel in 1959. She taught fourth grade after college.

Mel and Shellia took over S.E. Davis Co. when Simmy retired in 1975, and they ran the store until it closed in 2017. They had three children: Cheryl Davis (b. 1964), Jeff Davis (b. 1967), and Deborah Davis Perlstein (b. 1971). Jeff worked at the store with Mel and Shellia.

Due to the efforts of Cheryl Davis, the original building for S.E. Davis Co. at 101 West Market Street was historically preserved. Cheryl wrote the following about her grandparents, parents, and S.E. Davis Co.:

“At the passing of Faye P. Davis, my Bubby, and the community's Bubby Faye, and as my parents, Shellia and Melvin Davis moved from 1522 Sylvan Ct. their home for 40 years to The Forum, I came upon records, photos, and memorabilia reflecting the story of our family's arrival in Louisville, membership at Keneseth Israel on Jacobs St. and now Taylorsville Rd. and their tremendous and compassionate contribution to civic life at S.E. Davis Co., Inc. Bubby Faye was recognized as such by everyone at Keneseth Israel, as she shared candies in her purse with children after Saturday Shabbos services and whispered how special they were. She meant it, sincere in her embrace of Jewish community members, young and old, through KI Sisterhood and other Jewish organizations and with our neighbors and friends, working as a ‘reader’ with elementary school children with limited resources and support at home and working every Christmas with the Wayside Mission to serve food and distribute gifts.

S.E. Davis, namesake for the business he and Faye founded in 1936, was known at Simmy, gone too soon at age 75 in 1991, mentor and supporter to my father, Mel Davis, whom Faye transferred ownership after Simmy's death. Mel, a graduate of University of Louisville, was an attentive student at Uof L and in the business, growing and learning over the years from his father, building meaningful relationships with the community always, from before the City-Country merger to Metro Police, so many dedicated officers that protected ‘the store’ and after until the store's close. The history is one I remember as a teenager working at the store thrilled each time I could ring up a sale, thanking the customer and using that grand old cash register from so many ages ago. It was big and gold and majestic, like an honor to tap its keys and place bills in their place.”

Sources:

Ancestry.com

Davis family history and business notes [print-out in the finding aid folder of the physical collection]

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**Scope and Content Note**

This collection documents the operations of the S.E. Davis pawn shop business in Louisville, Kentucky. The store was owned and managed by several generations of the Davis family, who were members of the local Jewish community. S.E. Davis Company was established in 1936 by Simmond "Simmy" Epstein Davis (1916-1991) and Faye Perelmuter Davis (1917-2013). Their son Melvin "Mel" Davis (b. 1937) and his wife Shellia Bloch Davis (b. 1939) took over when Simmy retired in 1975. Melvin and Shellia's son Jeff later joined the business and worked at the store as manager until its closure in 2017. Materials include account ledgers, miscellaneous business and property records, newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements, and some personal family papers.

Folders 1-5 and oversized volume 12 consist of account books documenting different types of transactions relating to pawn brokerage, sales, family and business finances, and the boardinghouse run by the Davis family above the store. The earliest ledger from 1936-1942 lists dates and amounts of pawn shop loans, sales, and interest (folder 1). A sales notebook from 1944-1945 lists daily items sold at retail, net price, and interest (folder 2). A ledger from 1957-1961 records cash, expenses, and bank deposits, and it references "turkey for farm," hogs, and bacon (folder 3). A ledger from 1961 with "Rooming House 1961" written on the front tracks the names of renters and the amounts they paid, as well as payouts for boardinghouse expenses (folder 3). An oversized ledger from 1957-1958 lists the dates, descriptions of the pawn shop customers and their address, the items taken in pawn, dollar amounts, and transaction numbers (folder 12). A ledger from 1961-1966 lists numerical receipt numbers, customer names, the items taken in pawn, payments, and the dates items were either redeemed or placed in stock (folder 4). An ammunition sales ledger from 1972-1980 lists dates, customer names, their address and identification number, birthdate or age, and amount and type of ammunition (folder 5).

Folders 6-9 and roll 11 consist of miscellaneous records documenting S.E. Davis Co. from 1967 through 2019, including articles of incorporation, deeds, information about the buildings at 101 West Market Street, magazine and newspaper articles, marketing material, advertisements, branded business items, business cards, postcard, and Better Business Bureau (BBB) reports.

Folder 10 holds miscellaneous personal papers of Davis family members from 1937 through 2013, including newspaper and newsletter articles, a paper and senior thesis written by Melvin Davis while he was an undergraduate at University of Louisville, an obituary for Simmy Davis from 1991, several letters written to the Davis family, Shellia Davis's Life Member of Hadassah certificate, poems written by Faye Davis on her 85<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> birthdays, and her funeral program.

Related collections:

Davis family photograph collection [023PC21]



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**Folder List**

Box 1

Folder 1: Account ledger, 1936-1942

Folder 2: Account notebook, 1944-1945

Folder 3: Account and rooming house ledgers, 1957-1961

Folder 4: Pawn ledger, 1961-1966

Folder 5: Ammunition sales ledger, 1972-1980

Folder 6: Articles of incorporation and building and property records, 1967-2019

Folder 7: Marketing material, advertisements, and clippings, ca. 1980-2000

Folder 8: Business cards and branded items, ca. 1980-2016

Folder 9: Certificates and Better Business Bureau (BBB) reports, ca. 1997-2015

Folder 10: Davis family personal papers, 1937-2013

Roll 11: Oversized laminated *Courier-Journal* article, 2013

Box 2 (ovsz.)

Volume 12 (ovsz.): Pawn ledger, 1957-1958

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**Subject Headings**

Account books – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Advertising – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Ammunition – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Anshei Sfard (Louisville, Ky.)  
Boardinghouses – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Business enterprises – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Business records – Kentucky – Louisville.  
College students – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Consumer goods – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Davis, Faye Perelmutter, 1917-2013.  
Davis, Melvin S., 1937-  
Davis, Shellia J., 1939-  
Davis, Simmond Epstein, 1916-1991.  
Family-owned business enterprises – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Firearms – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Jewelry stores – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Jewish businesspeople – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Jewish families – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Loans – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Marketing – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Musical instruments – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Pawnbrokers – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Police – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Ration books – Kentucky – Louisville.  
Recessions – United States.  
Small business marketing – Kentucky – Louisville.  
University of Louisville.