



Grave of Kenneth R. Davis.

Photo courtesy of Karen R. Source: *Find a Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/112970067/kenneth-r-davis>

## Davis, Kenneth R. (1921–2008)

### DENNIS PETTIBONE

Dennis Pettibone, Ph.D. (University of California, Riverside), is professor emeritus of history at Southern Adventist University. He and his first wife, Carol Jean Nelson Pettibone (now deceased) have two grown daughters. He is now married to the former Rebecca Aufderhar. His published writings include *A Century of Challenge: the Story of Southern College* and the second half of *His Story in Our Time*.

Kenneth R Davis was a pastor, and an academy dormitory dean, principal, and Bible teacher; at Southern Missionary College (now Southern Adventist University) he was a testing and counseling director, teacher, dormitory dean, and dean of students. He was affectionately referred to as K.R.

### Early Life

Davis was born on March 4, 1921 in Green Bay Wisconsin. His parents were Evan Raymond Davis (1892-1961) and Elise Molly Bohm Davis (1894-1969).<sup>1</sup> He received a bachelor's degree from Emanuel Missionary College (now Andrews University) and a master's degree from the Seventh-day Adventists Theological Seminary. Later he would receive a second master's degree from Boston University. He married Marilyn Jeanne Rey, generally known as Jeanne, on September 24, 1944.<sup>2</sup>

## Denominational Employment

He entered denominational employment in 1944 as a pastor in the Wisconsin Conference and then as boys' dean at Wisconsin Academy. In 1949 he became boys' dean at Forest Lake Academy, where he transitioned to Bible teacher in 1951. From 1953 to 1957, while continuing to teach Bible at Forest Lake, he also served as pastor for the academy church. After a year as principal of Mount Pisgah Academy, Davis joined the faculty of Southern Missionary College (SMC) as dean of men. From 1962 to 1966 he held both this position and that of SMC's dean of students.<sup>3</sup>

As a dean, according to his daughter Peggy Elkins, "he had a low-key way of gaining respect from his boys." One of those "boys," remembered, "K. R. was always cool and calm. He always handled students with a high degree of professionalism and care." As Davis himself put it, "My success as a dean was built on my relationship with my men."<sup>4</sup>

In the summer of 1966, Davis moved to South Lancaster, Massachusetts to become dean of men at Atlantic Union College (AUC). During the four years he was at AUC, he received a master's degree in counseling from Boston University. Then he returned to SMC, this time as director of counseling and testing,<sup>5</sup> a position that he held from September 1, 1970 until June 30, 1986.<sup>6</sup> During this time his additional duties included spending 8 to 10 weeks each summer recruiting, assigning employment to students, and – his favorite responsibility – sponsoring the Student Association.<sup>7</sup> He also taught religion classes such as "Life and Teachings of Jesus" and "Daniel and Revelation." He also taught "Introduction to Photography."<sup>8</sup>

The Southern Missionary College Board voted in 1973 to issue a commendation letter for "work beyond the call of duty," including carpentry projects such as building the shelter in the Student Park, sets for various student programs, and saunas for the dormitories. After he retired in 1986, he continued to do this type of work for the university.<sup>9</sup>

## The Retirement Years

Peggy Elkins, his daughter, aptly stated about her father, "He never retired."<sup>10</sup> Labeled "assistant to the president," Davis continued advising the Student Association, making recruiting trips, advising deliberative bodies, and serving as an on-campus handyman. One month before his final illness, he told a student, "As long as I can work, I'm gonna work here." John Williams, the late dean of Southern's School of Visual Art and Design, said that Davis "had a ministry of presence – just being here and being a godly man."<sup>11</sup>

In November 2007, after living in Collegedale for 67 years, Davis was hospitalized with pneumonia. He passed away in the hospital on January 16, 2008. He was survived by his brother, E. Robert Davis of Green Bay, Wisconsin, two daughters, Mariellen Davis of South Lynn, Michigan and Peggy Elkins of Collegedale Tennessee, and six grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. His wife, Jeanne Davis, who had served three of Southern's

presidents as executive secretary, had passed away in 2001.<sup>12</sup>

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## SOURCES

Kenneth R. Davis service record. Southern Adventist University archives, Collegedale, Tennessee.

[www.chattanooga.com/2008/1/16/120189/Davis-Kenneth-R..aspx](http://www.chattanooga.com/2008/1/16/120189/Davis-Kenneth-R..aspx)

Pettibone, Dennis. *Century of Challenge: The Story of Southern College, 1892-1992*. Collegedale TN: *The College Press, 1992*.

*Southern Columns*, Spring 2008.

*Southern Tidings*, March 2008.

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## NOTES

1. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/1120970067/kenneth-r-davis>. Accessed June 11, 2021.
2. Peggy Janelle Elkins, emails to the author, June 15, 2021.
3. Kenneth R. Davis service record, provided to Peggy Janelle Elkins, daughter of K. R. Davis by Amy Steele, Benefits and Compensation Manager, Southern Adventist University.
4. Kirsten Houmann, "K. R. Davis: One Man, Many Hats," *Southern Columns*, Spring 2008, 26-28.
5. Dennis Pettibone, *A Century of Challenge: The Story of Southern College, 1892-1992* (Collegedale TN: The College Press, 1992), 213.
6. Kenneth R. Davis service record.
7. Pettibone, 213.
8. Houmann, 28.
9. *Ibid.*, 26-28.
10. Peggy Elkins, interview with the author, June 9, 2021.
11. Lori Fatcher, "Southern Legend Passes," *Southern Tidings*, March 2008, 22; Houmann, 27, 29.
12. *Ibid.*; [www.chattanooga.com/2008/1/16/120189/Davis-Kenneth-R..aspx](http://www.chattanooga.com/2008/1/16/120189/Davis-Kenneth-R..aspx), accessed June 11, 2021; "Obituaries," *Southern Tidings*, October, 2008,32; Pettibone, 213.

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