

Mary Zimmerman

MSGP 4070

Professor Davis Witherow

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### Acquisition Proposal

The Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum, located in Downtown Colorado Springs, is committed to building lasting connections to the Pikes Peak region by sharing cultural history through educational programs, original exhibits, and the stewardship of collections. Meaningful acquisitions to the collection must be consistent with collection policies set forth by the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum (CSPM) staff and the Museum Advisory Board. These established standards include abiding by the 1970 UNESCO Convention, and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. Below is all found provenance for evaluating the inclusion of five dining chairs believed to have once belonged to Jefferson Davis, who served as The President of the Confederate States from 1861 to 1865, to the collection.

To assess the condition and research of the set, one chair is currently on loan (IL.2022.100) from owner, Kate Brady. This chair was found to be the only example retaining the original crewel embroidery cushion, as the other four chairs in the set look to have been reupholstered in a green suede fabric with gold braid trim. IL.2002.100 is a handmade chair containing several different furniture styles. Categorizing this chair in relation to the ornate carvings, dark wood, heavy fabrics, and curved lines places it among the Victorian Era

approximately 1840 through 1910. Notably, the cherry wood frame has intricate marquetry inlay in a Dutch floral design along both sides of the curved backrest, this pattern continues to the apron, and down the front legs with a contrasting lighter wood. The seat itself is floral crewel embroidery of a heavy wool thread in several colors. While the backrest of the chair does not particularly fit any one style of design from the Victorian era, the curved lines of the backrest are characteristic of the design style. The backrest contains two large ovular cutouts with six small ovular cutouts in the middle that are unique from each other. Notably, each chair in the set has varying oval cutouts and floral marquetry pattern, making each distinctive. The front marquetry legs of the chair are cabriole, characteristically associated with Queen Anne, Victorian and Chippendale styles while the back legs are unadorned. There is no maker's mark visible on the bottom of the chair as it is covered in worn brown batten that looks to have been replaced before due to the visible nail holes not aligned with the current cover. Leah Davis Witherow, the CSPM curator, conducted an on-site evaluation of the set and established all chairs are in similar condition to the loaned chair, which hold minor physical damage contained to the batten on the underside of the apron.

Provided oral history from Ms. Brady states that this set was purchased by her grandparents, Ellenor and Jon Brady, who lived in Kansas City but often visited Colorado to fish. The wealthy couple eventually built a cabin in Cascade, Colorado between 1920 and 1930. Ellenor and Jon Brady often collected antiques with interesting stories and purchased this set from Ross Auction House in Colorado Springs between the 1940's to the 1960's. When Ellenor Brady died, the chairs were passed to her daughter, Ms. Brady's Aunt, who gave them to her brother, Ms. Brady's father, leading to Kate Brady assuming possession of the dining chair set.

The impression of the history of the set was said to have originally belonged to Varina and Jefferson Davis, who passed the set onto their second daughter, Margret Davis (later married last name Davis-Hayes, married 1876), when she moved to Colorado Springs in 1885 from Memphis Tennessee with her husband Joel Addison Hayes, Jr.

Research on the provenance of the chair set was able to establish a connection between Ellenor and Jon Brady, from a family photo album loaned to the CSPM. Upon research of the dining chair set once belonging to the Davis family, a family lineage connection was made to Colorado Springs region when Joel Addison Hayes, his wife Margaret Davis Hayes, and their children arrived in Colorado Springs in 1885 from Memphis Tennessee. Margaret Davis and Joel Addison Hayes Jr. had four children, Varina, Jefferson, Lucy, and William. William went on to own a ranch outside of Pueblo Colorado and still has descendants in the area. Lucy married a sheep rancher on the Western Slope and has recorded living descendants. The young Jefferson Davis Hayes legally changed his last name in 1895 to Hayes Davis to further the blood line of the Davis lineage, as Varina and Jefferson Davis had no surviving sons. Jefferson stayed in the Colorado Springs area along with Varina, who married Gerald Berton Webb M.D. Doctor Webb, an Englishman who came to Colorado Springs in 1895 with his then sick first wife Jenny, searching for a cure for her tuberculosis. Dr. Webb is a noted addition to the CSPM collection for his tuberculosis care from his home at 1222 North Cascade Ave in Colorado Springs. After his first wife's death he later married Varina and they had four children together, Varina, Leila, Robine, and Joel. It is known that Joel (died 1989) was born at the family home at 1222 North Cascade as he was interviewed by the Gazette Telegraph on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1985. He spoke of his family's lineage and their connection to Jefferson Davis and the Colorado Springs region. At the

time of the interview Joel mentioned some still living local descendants in Colorado Springs, those being Adele Davis, Varina Stewart and Leila Davidson as his closest relations.

Through inspection of all known addresses, named relatives, CSPM archival research, and internet searches of the various locations Jefferson Davis or his descendants lived before and after the civil war, to include Rosemount Plantation, Beauvoir (post-civil war home), The White House of the Confederacy, The American Civil War Museum, Marshall County Historical Museum, and 1222 North Cascade, no connection was made to link the dining chair set owned by Kate Brady to anyone of the Davis, Hayes Davis, Davis Hayes or Webb families. In addition, many of the chairs mentioned in correspondence, news articles, and seen in photos were of different styles than this set. The American Civil War Museum, and The White House of the Confederacy websites both show dining rooms that have different styled sets than Ms. Brady's.

Another avenue of research on the sale of the chairs from Ross Auction House in Colorado Springs, led to the current owner Jason, contacted on October 7, 2022. He states that the business started in 1921, and was repurchased in 1991, and 2016. However, the records were not digitized until 2019, and only date back to 2011. A search for Jefferson Davis did not bring any results, nor did the sale of the chair set to Ellenor and Jon Brady from the 1940's to the 1960's. He was unable to provide a statement of authenticity.

For consideration in reference to the standards outlined in the current Collections Policy of the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum, if accessioned into collection the legal title for the dining chair set would be obtained without restrictions from Ms. Brady as the set would be a gift of donation. No special care in the Collections Care Policy would need to be performed for the stewardship of these chairs, as they would have a suitable environment with the other

chairs in collections, meaning no additional cost of upkeep other than the standard prevention from agents of deterioration. No considerable conservation of the chairs is needed other than replacement of the batten under the apron. Therefore, the need for conservation efforts will be minimal and performed by existing staff. This replacement or removal could also reveal a maker's mark that would further add to the provenance of the chairs.

Currently the CSPM collection houses over 400 chairs of various styles and sizes. Duplication of dining chairs in collection show both a Victorian Era chair (61-315) and an example of a needle point seat (39-191). However, neither of these chairs has such a fine example of early marquetry work as Ms. Brady's set. Chair IL.2022.100 is undoubtedly handmade and a fine example of workmanship from a carpenter and needleworker.

Accession of the set as a connection to Jefferson Davis could damage public support of the museum due to Jefferson Davis owning many slaves. These chairs could have been produced with slave labor, as it is known Jefferson Davis had at least eleven slaves that he kept and hired out during his lifetime. However, currently The Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum collection contains items relating to Jefferson Davis and the confederacy. Several artifacts of currency from The Confederate States of America (48-82-4), and a letter opener engraved with "V. Jefferson Davis" (2005.0020.0003). In this matter, The Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum may categorize this set, per the collections policy, as a display of sensitive materials, due to the sets undetermined production by possible slave labor.

Presently, loaned item IL.2022.100 and the four partner chairs do not contain provenance that will enhance the collection of The Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum in a

unique or rare way. The set is a fine example of ornately detailed workmanship but lacks a strong tie to the Pikes Peak Region and local cultural history. Suggestions for Ms. Brady, should the set not be approved for accession at the CSPM, would be to contact institutions that have a collections scope of Jefferson Davis such as Beauvoir his post war home, The Rosemont Plantation, The White House of the Confederacy, or an institution with a collections scope pertaining to the artisanship of slave labor. These institutions may be able to offer a strong connection to their collection plans and provide Ms. Brady with the proper care for the conservation of the set of dining chairs she is seeking.

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IL.2022.100  
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