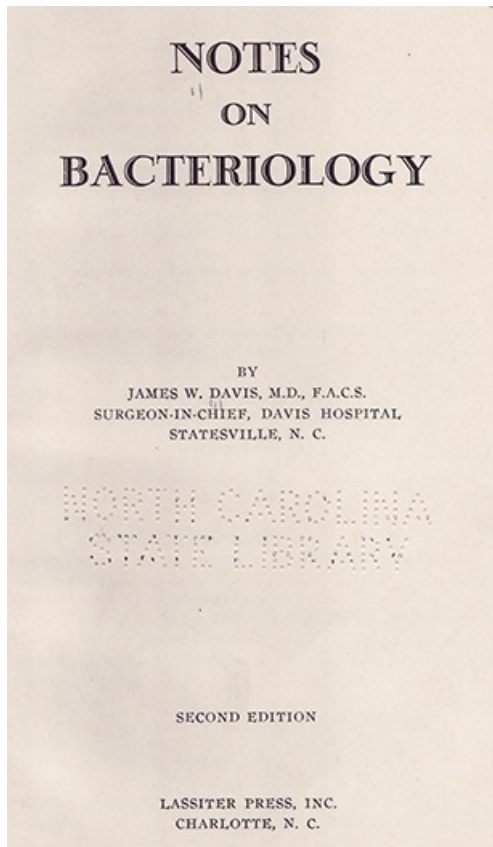


Davis, James Wagner ^[1]

Davis, James Wagner

by Steve Wood, 1986

8 June 1886–31 May 1955



Title page of *Notes on Bacteriology*, a textbook for nurses written by Dr. James Wagner Davis. Image from the N.C. Government & Heritage Library.

James Wagner Davis, physician, was born in Statesville, the son of Lawson Davis of [Wilkes County](#) ^[2] and Delia Josephine Wagner Davis of Statesville. He studied in the public schools of Statesville until 1904, when he went to Oak Ridge Institute near Greensboro. He was graduated from [The University of North Carolina Medical School](#) ^[3] at Chapel Hill in 1908 and the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in 1913. He did his internship at Robert Packer Hospital in Sayre, Pa.

During [World War I](#) ^[4] Davis served with the American Expeditionary Forces in France and Germany. While in Germany in June 1919, he was sent on a highly confidential mission into Russia to confer with Lenin and Trotsky. He retired from the army as a colonel. Upon returning from the war in 1919 he opened [Davis Hospital in Statesville](#) ^[5]. Here Davis became widely acclaimed for his surgical technique; he also pioneered in adapting scientific and technical developments for medicine. The doors of his facility were open to rich and poor alike, and scores of people were never billed for the services they received. It was the first hospital in North Carolina to use air conditioning in its operating rooms and to establish blood donor services and blood banks; it was one of the first hospitals in the United States to use glucose solution intravenously in postoperative treatment. Under his direction and that of Miss Elizabeth Hill, the Davis Hospital School of Nursing was opened in 1920 and became one of the outstanding schools of nursing in the state.

Davis took an active interest in political, civic, and religious affairs. He served as treasurer of the North Carolina Republican Committee; and, although he never ran for public office, he campaigned publicly for Republican candidates throughout the state. He was a staunch opponent of what he felt was an encroaching socialized medicine in the United States. He was a leader in the founding of WSIC radio station in Statesville and of the Davis Memorial Baptist Church in Wilkes County. Davis continued to perform surgery even during his last two years, when he battled against intestinal cancer which eventually took his life. He died in the hospital that he had erected on the grounds of his birthplace. He was married to Nancy Smith of [Guilford County](#) ^[6], and they were the parents of a son, John L.

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