

# Local automobile and Detroit historian dies from coronavirus

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Michael W.R. Davis, author of 18 history books mostly about Detroit and automobiles, died on April 11 of complications due to the novel coronavirus.

He was 88.

Davis leaves behind a legacy of leadership in historical organizations and an insatiable curiosity for research.

"A renaissance person with a journalist's pen, with Mike's passing we lose a recorder for the local memory bank," said Mark Patrick, former coordinator of special collections for the Detroit Public Library, on Facebook. "Mike Davis always lent his intellectual heft to not only the National Automotive History Collection (NAHC) but also the Burton Historical Collection.

"Mike brought an intellectual curiosity and an ability to drive consensus. He is noted for stimulating important collection development contributions to the NAHC such as the Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association archive, Automotive Hall of Fame Archive and the famous Northmore and McGuire Photo Archive."

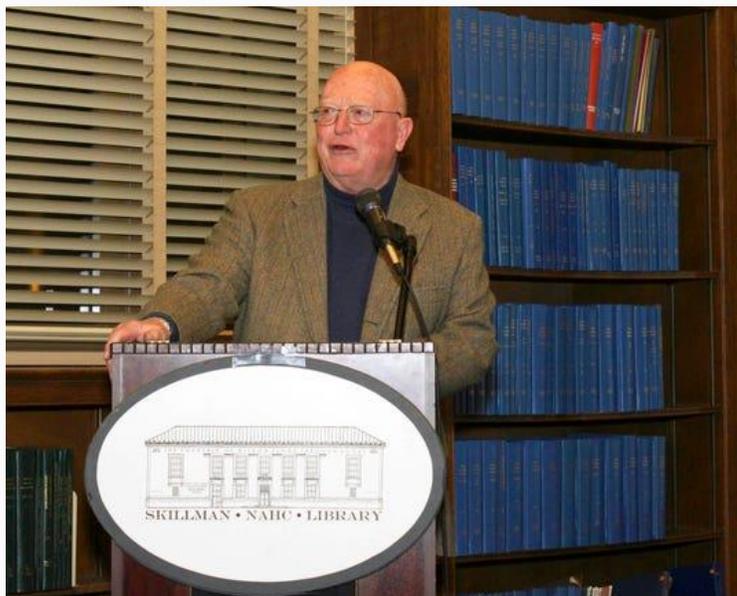


**Michael W.R. Davis, 88, author of 18 history books mostly about Detroit and automobiles died from coronavirus April 11.** (Photo: Betsy Davis, handout)

Before illnesses, he lived in Royal Oak with his wife of 30 years, Karen Schwarz Davis. He is predeceased by his first wife, Mary Kay Davis. He instituted an annual scholarship in his first wife's name at the now defunct Writer's Conference at Oakland University. He is survived by his wife Karen; daughters Penny Davis (Eric Koppenhafer) and Betsy Davis; and son J. Mattison Davis, MD (Chanley Martin); stepdaughter Laura Crandall; granddaughter Morgan Davis, and many nieces and nephews.

Born in Buffalo, he grew up in Louisville as the son of a newspaper editor and columnist and a Red Cross nurse. He graduated with a degree in history from Yale University. He later earned his masters in historic preservation at Eastern Michigan University and worked toward a Ph.D. in history at Wayne State University.

He was assistant bureau chief of Business Week in Detroit and contributed to numerous magazines and newspapers. In college he flew airplanes. In late life he loved driving Model T's around the Piquette Plant's parking lot.



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His numerous books include the topics of Ford Motor Company's fleet of cargo ships, Detroit's Arsenal of Democracy, Willow Run, St. Clair River, and photographic histories of General Motors, two books on Chevrolet, one on Mustang and books on Ford and Chrysler, all for Arcadia Publishing. His last book was a collection of his mother's letters as a World War I nurse called *Forsaken Angels: In Their Own Words*. He had five more books in varied stages of development.

Davis spent 27 years as an executive in public relations and marketing for Ford and helped arrange the acquisition of presidential limousines to the Henry Ford.

For the Detroit Public Library, he initiated the Collectible Car of the Future, an annual award for the best designed new car with lasting appeal.

Memorial and interment will take place at a later date at Christ Church Cranbrook, where Davis was an active member. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions can be made to the Gleaners Food Bank in Detroit.