

# Davidson Historical Society

Fall 2006

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## Our Purpose

*The Davidson Historical Society promotes an understanding and appreciation of the history of Davidson, North Carolina*

## The Growth of Davidson

Davidson is unique among the small towns of Mecklenburg County. People point to its colorful residents, its small-town charm, and the eye-catching mix of architectural styles Davidson has been able to maintain as reasons for this distinctive flavor. Another explanation for the particular character of the town is rooted in its pattern of growth, unlike that of any other town in Mecklenburg County. While Matthews, Pineville, Huntersville and Cornelius began as railroad turnouts or mill towns, the Town of Davidson owes its existence to Davidson College.

Davidson College was established in 1835 by Presbyterians wanting to provide higher education to Presbyterian residents of the western piedmont. The College opened in 1837 on land sold to its founders by the descendants of William Lee Davidson, who died during the Revolutionary War at the battle of Cowan's Ford. Some of the original buildings of the early



campus are still standing, including the President's House, Oak Row and Elm Row.

The growing college population necessitated housing for the faculty. Much of the initial residential development along North Main Street and Concord Road was faculty housing. Students

at the college mostly ate off campus beginning in the 1850s, leading to a proliferation of boarding houses in the Town. Local women could earn a good living by providing students at the college with hot meals.

It was not long before merchants began offering their services to the faculty and student population at the college and a retail core began to develop along Main Street, including the Helper Hotel. Today's downtown district, constrained by growth in all four directions, looks very similar to the commercial core of 1920.

The reactivation of the railroad in 1874 (after being destroyed during the Civil War) heralded changes leading to the diversification of the town's economy and Davidson began to develop into an industrial center for the surrounding rural areas. Linden Mill was established in

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# Events Calendar 2006-2007

Programs are at 4 p.m. at Davidson Town Hall unless otherwise noted.

**Sunday, September 17, 2006**

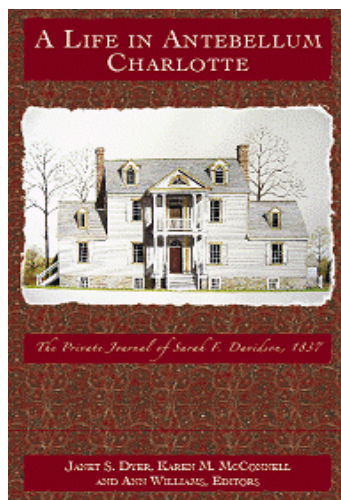
## The Private Journal of Sarah Frew Davidson

Janet Dyer, Karen McConnell and Ann Williams, editors of the book, [A Life in Antebellum Charlotte: The Private Journal](#)

[of Sarah Frew Davidson](#) will share

the fascinating story of Sarah Frew Davidson, mistress of one of Mecklenburg County's largest plantations, The Grove.

In 1837, Sarah Frew Davidson began keeping a private journal recording the events of her daily life for the purpose of self-examination and reflection. Dyer, McConnell and Williams along with a team of Rosedale historians, meticulously transcribed the original hand-written journal. These day-to-day events reveal much about the realities of Sarah's life as well as an understanding into the complexities of



**Sunday, November 19, 2006**

## Rural Hill Plantation

Bob Deaton of the Catawba Valley Scottish Society will give a presentation on the former plantation of John Davidson. We will hear about the unique private-public partnership that is bringing Rural Hill to life

**Sunday, January 21, 2007**

## Architecture 101

Greek Revival, Federal, Georgian-Federal, Colonial Revival, Victorian... have you ever wondered what these architectural terms mean? How can you tell one style of architecture from another? John Rogers of the Charlotte Historic District Commission will discuss the styles of architecture found in the greater Charlotte

**Sunday, March 18, 2007**

## The History of Ada Jenkins

Come learn about Ada Jenkins—the school, the community center and the woman herself. DHS will host a panel discussion about the many lives touched by

*(Continued from page 1)*

1890, followed by the Delburg Mill in 1908. With the establishment of these and other enterprises came the growth of parts of Davidson that were not connected to Davidson College. A thriving mill village was built for employees at the Delburg Cotton Mill along Delburg Street and Watson Street. An African-American community developed in the vicinity of Mock Road and Eden Street in the early twentieth century and continues to thrive today.

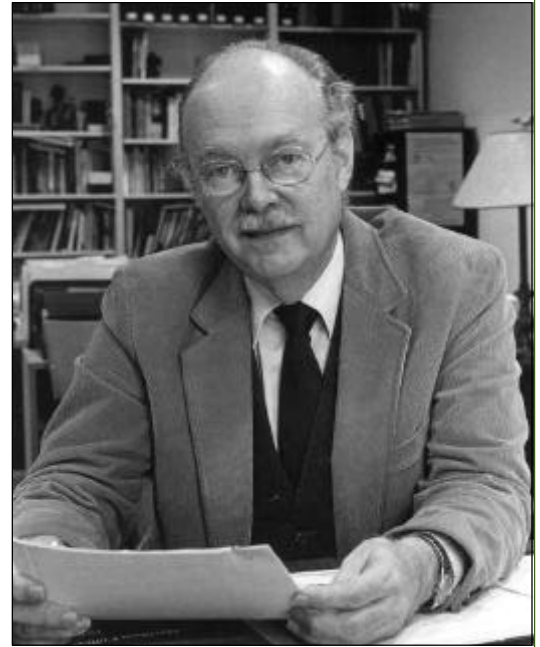
The need for housing for the growing Davidson College faculty resulted in more residential development. The Lorimer-Woodland-Thompson Street sector was developed after the first quarter of the twentieth century. The middle of the twentieth century saw the advent of modern styles of architecture in Davidson, like the homes on Hillside Road. These houses, built by Davidson College according to the desires of the faculty members who would live in them, were the products of a progressive theory of design and embodied new ideals of residential architecture.

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**Rupert Barber** was a cornerstone of the Davidson Historical Society for the past fifteen years. He was a long-time board member and served as president for two terms.

A professor at Davidson College, Rupert combined his love of the theatre, history, and Davidson to bring history alive. He produced historical dramas including "Shoot, Damn You, Shoot!: the Revolutionary War in the Carolinas through the Eyes of Contemporaries", presented by DHS in May 2000 and brought back by popular demand in May 2002.

Preserving the history of downtown Davidson was very important to Rupert. For many years he conducted walking tours of the town for people of all ages. He later took the time to research and publish "Historic Town of Davidson Walking Tour" that continues to be popular with visitors and area resi-



*Rupert T. Barber, Jr.  
1932 - 2006*

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There are prominent reminders of the history of Davidson scattered throughout town. There are also other less well-known but equally important pieces of history we risk losing to the forces of time and nature. By taking steps to preserve the town's historic structures, we are providing for the preservation of the shared history of the town's residents, past, present, and future.

## ***Historic Preservation Glossary***

**National Register for Historic Places**—Overseen by the US Department of the Interior, the "National Register" is a listing of recognized historic buildings, landmarks, districts and landscapes from across the country. These sites become listed following a strenuous application process managed through the State Historic Preservation Office. There are no regulations for sites or structures on the National Register prohibiting alteration or demolition. There are three sites in Davidson individually listed on the National Register: Beaver Dam, and Eumenean and Philanthropic Hall (Davidson College).

**National Register Historic District**—A National Register Historic District includes multiple structures or properties listed together, exhibiting an important historic or architectural theme. The Town of Davidson Planning Department is currently working on an application to nominate a National Register Historic District including hundreds of properties. There are

no National Historic Districts already established within the Town's limits.

**Local Historic Districts**—North Carolina state law permits counties and municipalities to establish local historic districts. Any modification or demolition to a building(s) or sites within a local district is regulated by a local preservation commission. The Town of Davidson has a local historic district including most of the downtown and Main Street. The Design Review Board acts as the Town's historic preservation commission and approves applications for modification to structures in the local district.

**Local Historic Landmark**—Local historic landmarks are listed separate from any national or state registry and are usually of the highest historic significance. The Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission recommends the designation of local historic landmarks, reviews proposed design

# D · H · S

## ***A Note from the President...***

Last September, we kicked off our program year by unveiling the first DHS historical home plaque on the Withers' house on south Main. Since then, thirty additional plaques have been installed along north and south Main Street, including twelve on Davidson College buildings. Look for them on your next walk or drive along Main Street. Our thanks go to Gary Steber for installing most of the plaques.

What else has the DHS been doing in the last year? Docents led new and improved walking tours of the town. We also presented four great programs. A highlight of the past year was our Town Day History Hunt. Both adults and children participated in the hunt for historical trivia about downtown Davidson. One child and one adult were chosen in a random drawing of the correct entries. Emma Ratchford won a Ben & Jerry's ice cream cake donated by Ben & Jerry's. In the adult category, Chip Fesperman won a basket of prizes supplied by many local merchants.

What is coming up for this year? As usual, we will present four new programs (see page 2 for the descriptions). Our plaques have been so popular that we will expand to other areas of town, starting with Concord Road. Our new website is under



Brenda  
Barger



### **Davidson Historical Society**

Post Office Box 144  
Davidson, NC 28036

*We don't just talk about Davidson's past...  
We are working to preserve it.*

### **The Davidson Historical Society**

was founded in the late 1980's by a group of concerned citizens led by Taylor and Irene Blackwell. Over the years DHS has presented programs by outstanding local and regional personalities on varying topics, toured historically