

Davidson Historical Society

The Davidson Historical Society (hereafter referred to as DHS) was created in May, 1991 by local residents with a strong interest in history and a desire to preserve the unique stories and places in this rapidly growing region. Our purpose is simply stated, “to promote an understanding and appreciation of the history of Davidson, NC and the surrounding area.” In the twenty year history of the DHS we have accomplished this goal in many ways and will continue to find new ways to fulfill this purpose.

The DHS’ largest function through the years has been offering educational programs four to six times per year. These programs have been in the form of lectures, tours of historic properties, walking tours, etc. The lectures include varied topics such as Davidson During World War II, What’s Under Lake Norman?, Women of the South, Characters and Caricatures of Olde Davidson, and Fire! – a panel discussion of the numerous fires that have shaped the life and landscape of our town. Our tours have included visits to historic homes such as Cedar Grove, Rufus Reid’s Mt. Mourne and the Davidson College President’s home; tours of historic area churches such as Hopewell Presbyterian, Centre Presbyterian and Back Creek Church; and walking tours of both the town and the Davidson College campus. The vast majority of our programs are offered free and open to the public. Our tours of private homes are usually open only to our current members.

In addition to our regular schedule of programs, the DHS has implemented several projects to meet our goal of educating the public on local history. Since the fall of 2003, the DHS has published a newsletter twice a year. In addition to providing a list of upcoming DHS programs, the newsletter offers articles on historical topics of local interest, ideas for exploring local historical sites on your own and fun tidbits from history in the form of reproduced ads from old newspapers and magazines. In 1999, the DHS published “Historic Town of Davidson Walking Tour” by Dr. Rupert T. Barber, Jr. This walking tour encompasses much of the town historic district and is still distributed and used today. Dr. Barber included details of existing and past buildings and businesses.

Another method for keeping history alive has been offering magnets and ornaments for sale. For several years, the DHS made an annual magnet from local photographs and offered them for sale at a modest price. Beginning in 2008, the DHS began designing pewter ornaments of local landmarks. Both the magnets and the ornaments provide historical information and, in addition, create a modest fundraising stream for the DHS.

In addition to these ongoing projects, the DHS has accomplished many one-time projects through the years. The DHS curated displays of historic items during the town's Christmas in Davidson festival for several years. Displays included vintage clothing, vintage toys, nutcrackers, Christmas decorations, crèches, and quilts. Other projects include: installation of granite markers in the Main Street business district in 1999-2000, installation of historical markers on homes in 2006, creation and publication of two "Details of Downtown Davidson" brochures in 2005 & 2008 and donation of books on Davidson history to the local public elementary school.

The DHS is also committed to community partnerships. The DHS has worked with the town of Davidson in developing Beaver Dam Historic Park. We provided input on the Beaver Dam Advisory Committee, donated money for signage at the park and helped host an Open House when the park opened in October, 2001.

The DHS partnered with the Davidson Community Players to produce a staged reading of "Shoot, Damn You, Shoot!", a look at the Revolutionary War in the Carolinas through the eyes of contemporaries. It was presented in May 2000 and again in May 2002.

The DHS commitment to both education and community partnerships shows clearly in our programs with local schools. The DHS has conducted many walking tours for school children from both public and private schools, hosted a field trip for DHS members and Woodlawn School students to Landsford Canal State Park, and provided a community mentor for an oral history project at Community School of Davidson.

The DHS has also recognized the contributions of local historians. We commissioned Jane Ellithorpe watercolors of local, historic homes in memory of Mary Beaty and Chalmers Davidson. These watercolors hang in the town's public library. Benches on the library porch recognize the contributions of Lou Glasgow and Ken Brotherton.

In April 2012, the DHS published *One Town, Many Voices: A History of Davidson, North Carolina*, in conjunction with the 175 anniversary of the college and town. Written by Jan Blodgett, Davidson College archivist, and Ralph Levering, Vail Professor of History at Davidson College, the book summarizes the 175 year history of Davidson, including the college and the town histories. It is the first history of Davidson to be published in over 30 years, and reflects more fully the town's diversity and vitality. The book incorporates the experiences and voices of the town, black and white, mill and college, school children and business owners. The authors generously donated their manuscript to the DHS, who published the book with funds they raised from the community. The proceeds from the book will be reinvested in the town of Davidson for programs, publications and projects promoting the history of the area.

As the DHS completes two decades as part of the Davidson community, we have much to be proud of yet much work to do. To continue our work in promoting the history of our area, the DHS will need to be creative and add to our traditional methods. Some of our goals for the future include publishing an updated edition of "Historic Town of Davidson Walking Tour" and securing a location for DHS office, storage and display space.