

# DAVIDSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

Spring 2015

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## Slavery And Religion in Mecklenburg County

Being located in a southern state, the institution of slavery will always be a focus of local history for Davidson and the rest of Mecklenburg County. Although there were no sprawling plantations like in Mississippi and Alabama, Mecklenburg County did have a significant enslaved population before the Civil War whose experiences were affected by many aspects of the region, especially strong influence of Christianity.

Davidson College never owned slaves, but a few of Davidson's presidents brought their own slaves to the town during their term. Davidson's third President, Dr. Drury Lacy, who was a Presbyterian minister, owned six slaves according to the 1860 census. Students were encouraged to avoid association with blacks that lived in the area in order to minimize conflict. This encouragement was not always successful, however. In fact, there was one instance in 1854 when two students were suspended from school for a semester because they were caught "accosting" two town slaves.

The institution of slavery in a region that was so heavily influenced by Christianity caused an important dilemma for slave owners. In Mecklenburg County, many of these slave owners were also Presbyterian ministers. The high levels of the Presbyterian Church, which was based in Pennsylvania, generally disapproved of the



JOHN BROWN.  
PURITAN HERO, CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHER, MARTYR  
FOR THE SLAVES.

*Photo Courtesy of P. Thomas Stanford in [The Tragedy of the Negro in America: a Condensed History of the Enslavement, Sufferings, Emancipation, Present Condition and Progress of the Negro Race in the United States of America.](#) 1897.*



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# DHS Events

*Programs are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.*

## The American Revolution as Occurred in the Carolinas

Sunday, September 20, 2015 at 4:00 pm  
Davidson Town Hall  
216 South Main Street, Davidson

Did you know that more battles occurred within 100 miles of Charlotte during the eight-year period of the Revolutionary War than all the rest of the thirteen colonies combined?

Local historian Tom Phlegar will take us through the war as it occurred in the Carolina backcountry, beginning with the British strategy leading to the campaign in the South and the events that took place over the next eighteen months. A detailed description of the Battle of Charlotte as well as places such as Ramsour's Mill, Kings Mountain, Cowpens, Cowan's Ford, Guilford Courthouse and others will be included along with pictures of the areas discussed and how they look today. What is passed by, sometimes on a daily basis, often is the location of a very significant occurrence. More important, is the examination of the people and personalities involved on both sides.

Tom Phlegar is past-president and a current member of Mecklenburg chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), President of Charlotte Folk Society and a docent at Charlotte Museum of History. He received his education at VMI and Duquesne University, retired from Calgon Corporation and is a retired Colonel for the US Army and Army Reserves after serving 30 years. He has lived in Charlotte for over 40 years.



Depiction of the Battle of Cowpens. Painting by William Ranney. 1845

## Slaves and Englishman: Human Bondage in the Early Modern Atlantic World

October - TBD

Join us as author, historian, and Professor at Davidson College Michael Guasco gives a presentation on his new book, *Slaves and Englishmen: Human Bondage in the Early Modern Atlantic World*. His book describes how slavery shaped the way Englishmen and Anglo-Americans thought about and interacted with the world in the years before plantation slavery became commonplace in England's American colonies.

### Tour of the Justice House – members only

#### Tour of the Z. K. Justice House

Sunday, November 8, 4:00 pm  
519 South Street, Davidson

**This program is for current DHS members only.**  
**Not yet a 2015 member? Joining is easy!**  
**Join online at <http://davidsonhistorical-society.org/JoinUs.asp>**  
**or you may join prior to the start of this tour, just plan to arrive early.**  
**We appreciate your support!**

This distinctive Queen Anne home was built circa 1907 by Dr. Zoro Knox Justice. Dr. Justice was a local medical doctor and dentist, opening the first dental office in Davidson in 1904. He also served as a town commissioner from 1910-12, and in 1917 was elected by the town council as the town Health Officer to combat the scarlet fever epidemic.

Owners Martin and Susan McCoy will discuss the home's history and their recent renovation.

Please check the DHS Events page on our website to stay current on our upcoming programs!  
<http://www.davidsonhistoricalsociety.org/Events.asp>

babarity that accompanied slavery, especially the separation of families. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church stated in 1818 that slavery is "a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature."

Statements like this seemed to cause a divide between Presbyterians from northern states and Presbyterians from southern states. In 1862, the Confederate States of America had their own General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in which they stated that, "nearly all presbyteries make special mention of the fact that religious instruction is faithfully imparted to colored people." Furthermore, southern slaveholders would shape religious instruction to help entrench the institution of slavery. For example, Peter Randolph, an emancipated slave, recalled in his autobiography that his slave owner would hire ministers to teach the slave that "it is the devil...who tells you to try and be free. If you run away you will be turned out of God's church until you repent, return, and ask God and your master's pardon."

Despite this, there was some opposition by slaveholders to giving slaves any form of religious instruction. One slave account recalled that there was once a white woman who offered a Sabbath School for slaves in which they would learn to read the Bible. However, slave owners in the area saw this as an "incendiary Movement" for slaves and they used patrols to stop the Sabbath School from continuing. The slave owners that did not support religious education for their slaves would typically encourage slaves to go into the woods and "gamble, fight, get drunk, and break the Sabbath," usually at the amusement of the owner.

Even though some masters did not allow their slaves to go to church or pray publicly, slaves still embraced Christianity and practiced it secretly as a form of protest and source of satisfaction. In the slave narrative of Octavia Albert Rogers, she remembers how the slaves would hold prayer meetings without their master knowing and how they would sing into a big tub of water so the sound would not carry and alert the master. These prayer meetings were the happiest times for the slaves, according to Rogers.

The experiences of slaves with regards to Christianity varied significantly depending on the slave owner and their particular feelings towards the religious education of slaves, although regardless of how the master felt about religious education of slaves, many slaves adopted Christian beliefs and would go out of their way to celebrate their faith, even if it meant possible punishment by masters. The intersection of slavery and religion also became a significant topic of consideration for the hierarchy of the Presbyterian Church, which was regionally divided as to whether or not Church doctrine allowed for the justification of slavery. In almost every instance the experience of slavery was affected in some way by Christianity.



ERRING THE WANDERER IN THE RIGHT WAY.



Photo Courtesy of Carter Godwin Woodson in *The History of the Negro Church*. 1921

**For more information and to see more photos on slavery in Mecklenburg County, please visit the University of North Carolina's online database *Documenting the American South* at [docsouth.unc.edu](http://docsouth.unc.edu).**

## A Note from the President

Davidson Historical Society board members take our work seriously. We understand the importance of place and knowing how communities are formed and shaped. Every town has a unique story to tell, a story that influences attitudes and actions, even, or especially when it isn't acknowledged. We plan programs and events to share Davidson's past and how the past lives on today. We also know that too much of a local focus can be limiting and insular.

To provide some balance, we mix in programs, like our May program with Dr. Tracey Hucks that link our story to broader historical events –and we dig deeper, asking questions about what parts of our town history remain undiscovered or under-documented. Our upcoming programs will look at the American Revolution, slavery, and tours of local sites. What else would you like to know more about? Email [DavidsonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com](mailto:DavidsonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com), leave us a voicemail at 704-892-6022, or come to a program and talk with board members. Let's learn our history together.

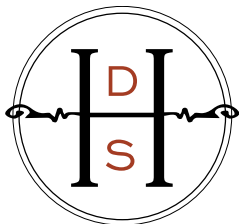
### Want to be more involved with DHS?

We are seeking volunteers to serve on committees and to help with individual projects. Please complete the contact information on the enclosed Membership and Volunteer form or email us at [DavidsonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com](mailto:DavidsonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com)

Sincerely,



Jan Blodgett



**DAVIDSON  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**

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[www.davidsonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.davidsonhistoricalsociety.org)

### The Davidson Historical Society

was founded in 1991 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 significant sites in the area, and financed projects which promote the history of the area.