



# Davidson Historical Society

Fall 2009

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## *History of the Davidson School*

The building at 251 South Street that currently serves as the Davidson IB School was built in 1948. This building originally served grades 1-12 as the Davidson School, and was built to replace the 1893 Davidson Academy building, which burned down on July 15, 1946 during an electrical storm. The school gymnasium, built in 1937, was not damaged in the fire.

In October 1946, a delegation from Davidson urged the Mecklenburg County Board of Education to build a new building on the same site, open the new school building by 1947, purchase more land for the new building, and be sure that the new building would be large enough to accommodate the present and future needs. The Board responded by directing the school superintendent to hire

architect Louis Asbury for the project, to pursue the purchase of adjoining land, and to seek Federal Works Administration (FWA) funds for the cost of the architect. The project did not proceed quickly.



## Our Purpose

*The DHS promotes an understanding and appreciation of the history of Davidson, North Carolina and its surrounding area.*

An adjoining lot containing the home of J. M. Potts was sought to expand the school site. In January 1947, the Board of Education had authorized spending up to \$10,000 for the property, but after long negotiations, no agreement could be reached. In March 1947, the Board approved a contract with Asbury that paid the architect 6% of the construction costs for designing the building, supervising construction, and representing the Board of Education's interest. Gaining the additional land continued to be problematic, and in April the Board directed Asbury to move ahead with plans for just the existing school property. In May,

*(Continued on page 2)*

**Changes are coming to the DHS! The board voted to change our program and membership schedule from an academic (Sept—May) to a calendar (Jan—Dec) year. Our Winter newsletter, published in January, will list programs for the 2010 year. We hope to broaden our membership by expanding our offerings. Memberships are now renewable in January. If you are currently a member, your membership will continue through December. If you join this fall, your membership is valid through December 2010.**

## Events Calendar Fall 2009

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

Programs are free and open to the public.

### Sunday, September 20, 2009

#### Genealogy - How to Make a Family Tree

Jane Johnson, Information Specialist at The Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County, will share resources and techniques that can be used to piece together a family's history and make a family tree. DHS is pleased to partner with DavidsonReads to present this program. This year's book is *The Color of Water* by James McBride.

### Sunday, November 15, 2009

#### Davidson in the 20th Century - The Roaring Twenties through World War II

Jan Blodgett, Davidson College Archivist, and Ralph Levering, the Vail Professor of History at Davidson, will present this program. How did Davidson survive the Depression? What are the stories of Davidson's "Greatest Generation?" Come get the answers as we preview a few of the chapters from their future book on the history of Davidson!

*Davidson School... (Continued from page 1)*

frustration with the slow pace of the project was demonstrated when a large delegation from the town requested the "immediate erection of a 'fire proof' building." Negotiations with Mr. Potts continued until June 1947, when Mr. Potts agreed to sell his lot for \$7,980 and move his house to a nearby parcel. With all of the impediments cleared, the Board of Education met in special session on July 8, 1947, nearly one year after the 1893 Davidson Academy building had burned, to approve spending \$245,690 on the new building.

Asbury designed an L-shaped, two-story, 32,000 square-foot building for the Davidson School. Asbury's design surely addressed the citizens' desire for a fireproof building. Solid masonry walls supported steel trusses, and concrete floors replaced the oiled wooden floors of the old building. In terms of public education buildings, the new Davidson School was a showplace. Little non-military building of any type was constructed during World War II, and the contrast in style and construction between the new school building and the school's gymnasium, built just one decade earlier, was dramatic. Whereas the gymnasium featured a restrained classically influenced style that had been employed in institutional buildings for at least half a century, the new building featured a Modernist design that highlighted simple functional lines and industrially produced building materials, most especially the large prominent ribbons of aluminum windows across the façade and rear elevation. Functionally the new building offered large classrooms well lit with natural sunlight and rows of modern fluorescent lighting, wide halls and stairwells,

*(Continued on page 5)*

## Photos from our trip to Landsford Canal State Park



*The group listens to a presentation by the Park Rangers*

On June 5, 2009, the Davidson Historical Society hosted a field trip to Landsford Canal State Park in South Carolina for about forty people. The park is the site of the famous Rocky Shoals Spider lily and home to the remnants of a canal built in the 1820's. It was a rainy start to the day as our charter bus transported DHS members and friends as well as the eighth grade class from Woodlawn School. The rain stopped just as we were ready to start our walk.

*More pictures on page 4*

## ***Help Us Preserve Local History***

### **Become a Supporting Member of the Davidson Historical Society!**

Your support will help DHS with its projects and programs that preserve the past.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Check here if you wish to remain anonymous.  
Members may be listed in DHS publications.

*Please note that our Membership year is changing to a calendar year, see page 2 for more details.*

Enclosed is my check for 2010 Supporting Membership in the Davidson Historical Society:

\$25 - Contributor

\$50 - Sustainer

\$100 - Patron



## More Photos from our trip ...



*Would you like to be more involved? We need your help! Check an area where you would like to participate.*

I want to learn more about joining a committee:

- Research & Reference
- Membership
- Program
- Newsletter
- Website

- Conduct walking tours of town. Training provided.
- Write a newsletter article or a press release.
- Send press releases to local media.
- Make displays for our A-frame sign announcing our open meetings.
- Make a suggestion for a future program topic.  
List below or call a Board member.

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Fill out form, enclose check and mail to:

Davidson Historical Society  
PO Box 144  
Davidson, NC 28036

*Davidson School ... (Continued from page 2)*

dedicated offices for the staff, a large auditorium, and a modern cafeteria in the basement. Asbury may have faced some limitations in producing a modernist design due the availability of material. In contrast to the metal ribbon windows, tall traditional triple-hung wooden sash were used on the auditorium. While many Modernist slab doors were used in the design, including some with round porthole windows, many secondary doors were frame-and-panel doors that would have been typical on most early-twentieth-century school buildings. But despite these compromises, the Davidson School represented a definite break with the past, and served as a demonstration of progressive school design.

On September 15, 1948, the Board of Education met in the new Davidson School to inspect and approve the building. The building was approved with the understanding that the plumbing and lighting would be finished, and that some issues involving painting, doors, and drawers would be addressed. The opening of the school was unfortunately delayed due to a polio outbreak. When it finally opened around the first of October, many elements of the school were still not finished including the lighting and the seats for the auditorium. Money for library books was not approved until January 1949. Despite these delays, students enjoyed the new school building. Martha Fulcher Montgomery remembers the new building as modern and luxurious, with high ceilings and nice bathrooms. Edith Cashion remembers the building as "new, modern, and clean."

Alumni remember that the auditorium was used for choral concerts, plays, and weekly assemblies. While the Presbyterian church was being re-built, services were held in the auditorium, including a wedding. The cafeteria was the site of an annual Halloween carnival hosted by the fire department. High school students moved to the new North Mecklenburg High School in Huntersville when it opened in 1951. John M. Alexander Junior High School opened in 1960, and after a few transitional years, the Davidson School became the Davidson Elementary School. In 1994 a new elementary school was built farther south on South Street. The Davidson IB School opened as a magnet middle school in the mid-1990s.

## **Louis Asbury Architect of the Davidson School**

Born in Charlotte in 1877, Louis Asbury was arguably the most important local architect of his time. Educated at Trinity College and M.I.T, Asbury studied architecture in Europe and then returned to Charlotte and became the first North Carolina member of the American Institute of Architects. He



practiced in North Carolina from 1908 until his retirement in 1956. Asbury designed a wide array of buildings including homes, commercial buildings, and government and other institutional buildings. Among his notable surviving designs are the 20-story First National Bank Building (1927), the Mecklenburg County Courthouse (1928), and the Myers Park United Methodist Church (1929).

# D•H•S

## A Note from the President...

Dear Friends,

2009 has been a busy year for DHS! In addition to our regular programs, we hosted a trip to Landsford Canal State Park (see pages 3&4). In April, we led walking tours of downtown Davidson during Art on the Green. In May, we created a "Then and Now" photo display of Davidson circa 1900 for our Town Day booth. This past month, we sponsored the Concert on the Green featuring the Stardusters. Thanks to everyone who helped make these events successful!

The year is not over yet! We have two wonderful programs planned for September and November (see page 2 for details). We hope you will join us. Please note that we are changing our program/membership year. We will have more information on our programs for 2010 in our winter newsletter.

Our second annual holiday ornament will be available this fall. This year's ornament will feature the Helper Hotel (Carolina Inn). If you missed our first ornament which has an image of Beaver Dam, a limited number will be available this year. More information will be coming soon as to where and when both ornaments may be purchased.

Thanks to all of you for your support of DHS. If you have not yet become a member, please consider joining today.



### Davidson Historical Society

Post Office Box 144  
Davidson, NC 28036

704-892-6022

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

*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 significant sites in the area, and financed projects which promote the history of the area.