



Davidson Historical Society

August 2004

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Our Purpose

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

The Belles of the Catawba

James Latta was a Scot who came to America from Ireland in 1785. He became a successful merchant and planter. In 1800, he built the Federal style home on the Catawba River that is now known as Latta Plantation.

James and his second wife, Jane Knox Latta, had three daughters, Betsy, Polly and Nancy. Rich, attractive, cultured and naturally quite popular, they were often called “the Belles of the Catawba.” Their father intended that they marry well. Educated at Salem Academy, the daughters did indeed marry prominent local landowners and became mistresses of some of the most distinguished homes in the area.

Nancy Angelina Latta, the youngest daughter, was born in 1804. In 1828, she married Rufus Reid. Rufus was the manager of the very successful Catawba Springs, a fashionable Lincoln County mineral springs resort owned by his parents. According to family members, Nancy and Rufus lived at Catawba Springs, at least at the start of their marriage, although Rufus did purchase land in Iredell in 1828. (He would later build “Mt. Mourne.”)

Nancy and Rufus had three daughters. Nancy’s death in 1833, at 29 years of age, was caused by the “flux” (now known as dysentery).

Polly was the middle daughter of James and Jane Latta. Born in 1799, she was named Mary but was soon called Polly. She was evidently popular and courted



Oak Lawn

by more than one young man. In 1821, she married James G. Torrance of “Cedar Grove.” However, the current day “Cedar Grove” is not where Polly lived. It was not built until after her death. She lived in another brick house, possibly of similar style, which was also known as “Cedar Grove.” Prior to that, during the first part of her marriage, it is believed she lived in the Torrance store. Polly and James had two children, before her death in 1824.

Betsy was born in 1797 and was James and Jane’s oldest child. In 1818, Betsy married Benjamin William Davidson, the youngest son of Major John Davidson, one of the signers of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. The beautiful home “Oak Lawn”, which still stands in the midst of the “Cedarfield” subdivision on McCoy Road in Huntersville, is said to have been a wedding present from Major John.

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Events Calendar 2004-2005

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



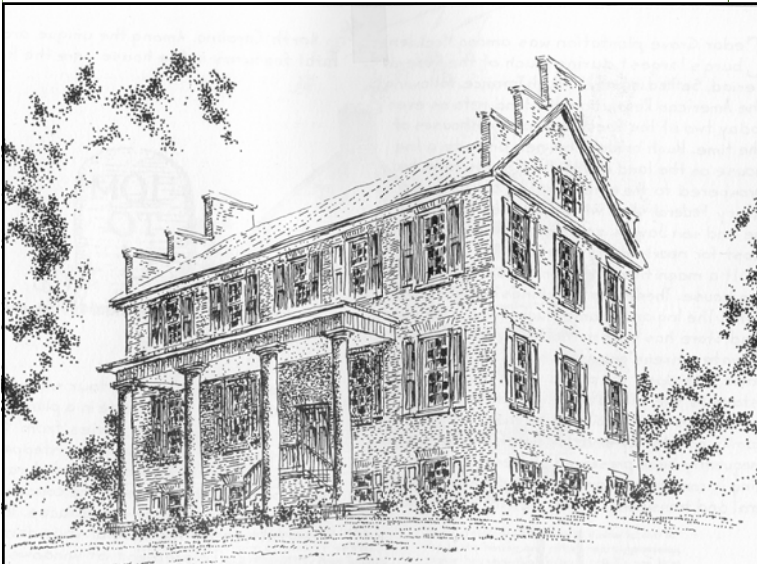
Sunday, September 19, 2004

The Vanishing Landscape-- What We Can Do to Preserve What We Have

Dr. Dan Morrill is a native Charlottean and a Professor of History at UNCC since 1963. He has been the Consulting Director of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historical Landmarks Commission for 30 years.

Sunday, November 21, 2004

Cedar Grove Tour *Special Members-only program*



*Drawing of Cedar Grove by Jack Orr Boyte
Used with permission*

Tour Cedar Grove with Belle Banks. Built in 1831 by James Galbraith Torrance for his third wife, Margaret, it is the loftiest and most imposing of the large plantation houses built in Mecklenburg County and the only one still standing today. It has been home to Torrances ever since. Belle's late husband, Dick Banks, was a Torrance.
Meet at 3:30 at Davidson Town Hall to carpool.

Sunday, January 16, 2005

New South Voices —

Robin Brabham, Head of Special Collections at J. Murrey Atkins Library, UNC Charlotte, will discuss the University's oral history program which began in the late 1960s with one interviewer and an open reel recorder. Today, students, interns and community members record interviews on cassette and minidisk adding to the collection of over 1,000 recordings. A grant project, begun in 2001, has made it possible to provide access to many of these interviews through New South Voices, a Web-accessible database. Robin will demonstrate New South Voices and discuss how it is being used for teaching, learning and research on campus and in the greater community. Included in New South Voices are interesting interviews with the following North Mecklenburg folks: Belle Banks, Legette Blythe, Chalmers Davidson and more.

Sunday, March 20, 2005

Fort Dobbs - Past, Present & Future

Named for Royal Governor Arthur Dobbs, Fort Dobbs was built in 1756 to protect settlers of the Carolina Piedmont. It is the only North Carolina state historic site associated with the French and Indian War.

Beth Carter, Fort Dobbs Site Manager will share the unique story about this important part of North Carolina's colonial history and discuss plans for the future of the site.

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Benjamin died in 1829 at the age of 42, leaving Betsy with six boys all under the age of 11. Betsy had been a widow for five years when Rufus Reid, her younger sister Nancy's widower asked her to marry him. At this time, the Presbyterian Church frowned upon a brother-in-law and a sister-in-law marrying. Betsy's pastor at Hopewell Church, the Rev. John Williamson, refused to marry them. He did, however, attend the ceremony (he did not want to upset the wealthy widow), but a magistrate officiated.

In 1836, Rufus built their "Mt Mourne" plantation home in the Centre Church community in Iredell County. (DHS

toured this home in March 2002.) Betsy and Rufus had one daughter. Betsy died in 1838, when an abscess in her throat ruptured during childbirth of what would have been their second child, leaving the child stillborn.



*Major Rufus Reid's "Mt. Mourne"
Built for his second wife Betsy Latta Davidson Reid*

Nancy, Polly, and Betsy and their parents are buried in the family gravesite at Hopewell Presbyterian Church in Huntersville.

This article was edited from material on the website of Historic Latta Plantation. Used with permission.

For more information, see www.lattaplantation.org

A Note from the President...

Great news! The new signs for the Beaver Dam Historic Park will arrive in late August or early September. Your supporting memberships have paid for this. There will be a sign near the road and also a sign at the house with historical information. Watch for them as you drive by.

I think the Executive Board has lined up an interesting and varied program for this season. In September Dr. Dan Morrill, Professor of History at UNCC and Consulting Director of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historical Landmarks Commission, will bring slides and discuss properties in our area which are worthy of preservation. In November we will have a tour of Cedar Grove, with history and anecdotes presented by the delightful Belle Banks who has lived in the house for many years and is related by marriage to the Torrance family which built it. This program is free for members, but non-members will be charged a small fee.

In the new year (is it really going to be 2005!?) there will be a program about Fort Dobbs, the site of a French and Indian War fort not too far up the road, and another one about oral histories. There will be more about these later.

With your supporting memberships we will continue to make North Mecklenburg and the nearby areas aware of the history of the region.

See you at the meetings!

Rupert T. Barber



D·H·S

A page from history...

This advertisement appeared in the Davidson College yearbook, Quips and Cranks, 1897. Shared by the Davidson College Archives.

WOOTEN & WHITE
DRUGGISTS
DAVIDSON, N. C.
A COMPLETE AND SELECTED STOCK OF
Pure Drugs and Chemicals
None but Qualified Assistants Allowed to
Dispense Prescriptions.
**Lamps, Lamp Fixtures, Stationery and Students'
Supplies Generally, a Specialty.**
A Full Line of Toilet and Household Articles
at Reasonable Prices.



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