

# DAVIDSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

Fall 2013

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*The DHS wishes you a  
very happy holiday  
season*



## *A Home Made out of History*

It's easy to let the past slip away if we do not put effort into preserving it. After all, history is one of the most important factors in establishing identity. For Cornelius native James E. "Jack" Conard Jr. history is a lifestyle. Jack has compiled the largest known collection of photographs and historical items from the Cornelius and Davidson area, unequalled by any other known private collection. His house, built around 1903, looks like a time capsule from the early 1900s. The old hardwood floors are worn smooth and thin in the places where residents most often walked. Almost

every surface is covered with countless photographs and artifacts, portraying the fledgling town of Cornelius as it developed across the span of more than a century. Some of Jack's earliest pictures date back to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and portray common occurrences like a ferry on the Catawba River and local landmarks like the Cornelius cotton mill.



*Ferry Crossing the Catawba River, circa 1900*

Jack can trace his ancestry from this area back to before the Civil War. His grandmother's grandmother, Nancy Lenora Hall was born in 1844. In 1865, at the age of 21 she first met her future lover. She was washing clothes at the Virgin Springs in Cornelius when a Confederate soldier startled her. According to family lore, the two young people became lovers and Lenora had a son, Houston Thomas Hall. Tragically,

*(Continued on page 3)*

# DHS Events

All programs are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.  
Please note dates, times and locations for each event.

## The Railroad and the Development of Davidson, Charlotte, and Mecklenburg Co Sunday, January 26, 2014 at 4:00 pm Brickhouse Tavern, 209 Delburg Street, Davidson

Please join the Davidson Historical Society for an afternoon of history and refreshments at the Brickhouse Tavern, located in the refurbished, 120-year-old Davidson Cotton Mill.



*Train Wreck in Davidson, 1914*  
Photo courtesy of the Walter H. Johnson Collection,  
Davidson College Archives

Walter R. Turner, historian at the North Carolina Transportation Museum, will present "Trains Running Through Charlotte." This popular presentation will reveal how the Charlotte region, including Davidson, has benefited from a strong rail presence—regarding the textile industry, railroad stations and passenger service, and the prospects for future rail growth. Turner will also share the details of the 1914 fatal train wreck in Davidson. January marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this tragic event, allegedly caused by a 9-year-old child's prank.

Turner is author of *Paving Tobacco Road, A Century of Progress by the North Carolina Department of Transportation*, and other books. His articles for *North Carolina Historical Review* include the subjects of the Piedmont Airlines/US Airways hub at the Charlotte airport and how North Carolina bus companies became part of Trailways and Greyhound (current October 2013 issue).

## Murder on South Street Sunday, February 16, 2014 at 3:00 pm Summit Coffee (upstairs) 128 South Main Street, Davidson

On the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, hear the story of the 1914 murder that shocked Mecklenburg County in a special encore presentation of this popular program.

In February 1914, citizens throughout Mecklenburg County were shocked at news of a murder on South Street in Davidson. Monroe Jetton, the town druggist, was accused of shooting his friend, Dr. W.H. Wooten, "in a fit of jealousy" over the doctor's alleged relationship with Mr. Jetton's wife, or, as news accounts later described her, his "bride of one year." The "distressing affair" was front-page news in the *Charlotte Observer* and the subject of whispering in town for decades. DavidsonNews.net editor David Boraks been researching the case and will tell the story and talk about buildings in town connected to the case, all of which remain.

## Environmental History of Lake Norman Sunday, April 6, 2014 at 4:00 pm Alvarez College Union, Davidson College

In 2014 and 2015, Senior Environmental Studies majors at Davidson College will be researching the environmental history of Lake Norman, under the direction of professors Brad Johnson and Dave Martin. This project is linked with the Davidson College Archives "Under Lake Norman" project and is generously funded by a grant from Duke Energy. The inaugural class of this interdisciplinary major will present their research.

## Historic Home Tour - Members Only Spring 2014

Please join us for a special members only tour of an historic Davidson home. More details to come!



## Davidson Town Day May 3, 2014

Stop by the DHS table to see our newest historic photo display and to get the latest information on our programs and activities.

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the soldier abandoned Lenora and she was forced to raise Houston as a single mother. She never married. Houston Hall moved to the house where Jack now lives in 1905, a year after his wife, Julia Nance Hall, died. He settled in with his mother and two of his three children, Edna and Ralph. His third child lived with his wife's parents. Edna was 5 and Ralph was 3. They were both raised by their grandmother Lenora, who lived at the house until her death in 1926. Houston remarried again in 1912 to Sallie Nance Hall, Houston's first wife's first cousin! Jack's Uncle Ralph Hall lived at the house for 82 years, and upon his death in 1987 he left the house to Jack's mother, Sarah Hall Robbins Conard. Jack treasures all the old artifacts and pictures that he painstakingly collected over the years, though his favorites are the two quilts his Grandmother Edna Hall Robbins, Houston's daughter, made by hand when she was 88.



Jack as a young boy, pictured with his grandmother Edna, mother, and great-grandfather Houston Hall.

Jack now lives in the house by himself, having moved there in the midst of Hurricane Hugo in 1989. His story began on September 2, 1947. Jack was born in the Lowrance Hospital in Mooresville and grew up in Cornelius. He spent the first 12 years of his life here, then moved to Charlotte in 1960. Jack joined the Navy in January of 1966. Upon getting out of the Navy in 1970, he lived in Charlotte for twenty years, though he came to visit his Grandmother Edna very often. He went to UNCC and CPCC, majoring in philosophy. However, Jack quit school prior to receiving a degree and devoted his energies completely to carpentry and tennis, alternating about a month of work with a month of tennis binging.

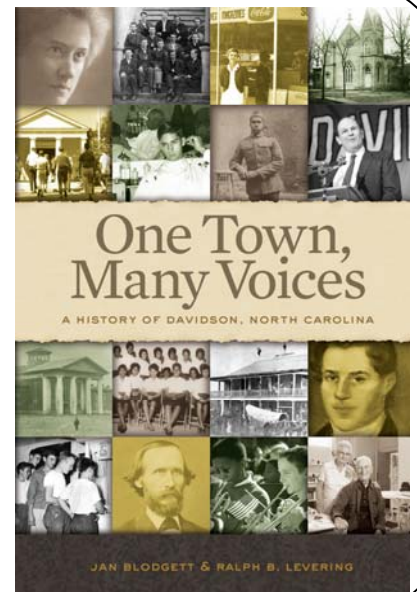
Jack's profound passion for tennis is evident upon first entering his house. One room is almost entirely dedicated to tennis photos, trophies, old wooden tennis rackets, and other memorabilia. He has so many tennis pictures with friends and fellow tennis players, they completely cover the walls and even some of the ceiling! Jack's tennis group in Charlotte is still around after sixty years and now has many members that still practice every weekend.

Jack first became interested in old photographs when his aunt came to visit, bringing treasured pictures of his ancestors. Jack quickly got hooked on preserving memories. He began visiting with other elderly town residents, collecting their photos and memorabilia, and recording their stories and memories on cassette tapes. Jack's walls are lined with shelves of notebooks, all containing photos and memorabilia organized by family surname. Jack's motivation in this pursuit is his promise to these people that they will be remembered. The Jack Conard photo collection has been displayed in multiple exhibitions, including the Cornelius Arts Center, the Smith History Room at Mount Zion Methodist Church, and the Davidson Town Hall.

To see some of the historic photographs from Jack's collection, please visit the DHS website at <http://www.davidsonhistoricalsociety.org>.

**Looking for holiday gifts?  
Pick up copies of  
One Town, Many Voices  
by Jan Blodgett  
and Ralph Levering.**

**Available at  
Main Street Books  
and the  
Davidson College Bookstore**



## *A Note from the President*

A few weeks ago I visited Ms. Danica Alter's 9<sup>th</sup> grade advisory class at the Community School of Davidson to speak about the Davidson Historical Society. It was lunch time and the room was filled with the energy and easy banter of teenagers. Ms. Alter tapped on her desk, and amid the tossing of sandwich wrappings and the swirling of ice cubes, the class came to attention. They have gathered to become informed about, and support, local non-profits. Their plan is to produce an alternative gift fair. This year it will be held on December 13<sup>th</sup> at CSD High School Commons. The fair provides opportunities for people to make charitable donations in lieu of more traditional gifts during Christmas holidays. It's a great opportunity to support the organizations that support our community by feeding, housing, and educating local families or enhancing the quality of life through the arts and the environment. Plan now to go!

Our fall intern, Kseniya Kuprovskaya (Davidson '15), crafted the lead article in this edition about Jack Conard. Kseniya is a great asset for us as a liaison with students at Davidson and in helping to produce this newsletter. Her major is English and she is passionate about writing, history and art. She will work with us through the semester helping to produce our fall newsletter and keep us informed of upcoming events.

Our next event will be at 4 PM on January 26, 2014 at the Brick House to hear historian Walter Turner's fascinating account of trains and streetcars that once moved people through Charlotte and Davidson (and will again?).

We have sold over a thousand copies of "One Town, Many Voices; a history of Davidson, NC" written by Dr. Ralph Levering and Dr. Jan Blodgett. They are still available at Main Street Books and the Davidson College retail store. You can pick up a copy for yourself or a friend today.

Happy Holidays!



Ed Harris



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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.