

# The S. W. & C. S. Davis General Store



*This report was written on October 1, 1980*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the S. W. & C. S. Davis General Store is located on N.C. Highway 115 opposite from its intersection with Reams Rd. in the Croft community in northern Mecklenburg County.

**2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner and occupant of the property:** The present owner of the property is:

S. W. D. Associates  
Box 12999  
Charlotte, N.C. 28205

Telephone: None listed

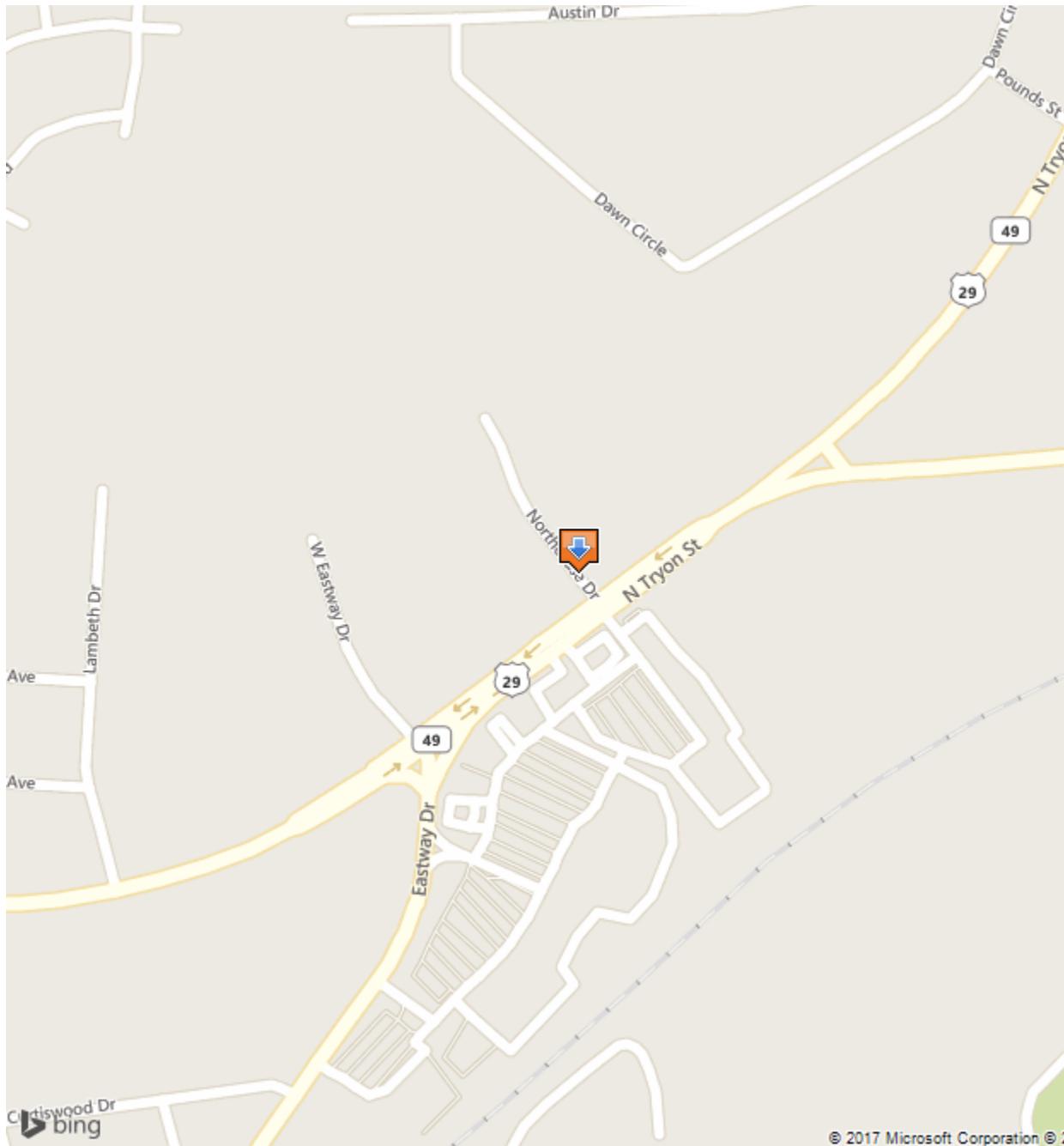
The present occupant of the property is:

S. W. & C. S. Davis General Store  
N.C. Highway 115  
Charlotte, N.C. 28213

Telephone: (704) 596-2021

**3. Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.

**4. A map depicting the location of the property:** This report contains a map which depicts the location of the property.



Click on the map to browse

**5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The most recent deed on this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3673 at Page 125. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 027-201-01.

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:**

General stores were the economic and social centerpieces of rural communities throughout Mecklenburg County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unquestionably, the best preserved store of this type in Mecklenburg County is the S. W. & C. S. Davis General Store in Croft, a small settlement on the railroad between Charlotte and Huntersville. Indeed, one is justified in calling it a unique element in the local built environment. Silas Winslow Davis (1873-1925), a native of northern Mecklenburg, and his brother, Charles Spencer Davis, erected the building in 1908. <sup>1</sup>

In keeping with the patterns of life in rural North Carolina in the early years of this century, Saturday was the busiest day in Croft. Farmers would bring their cotton for ginning and for shipment on the railroad to markets near and far away. During the week, a boxcar filled with large bags of items such as sugar, flour and fertilizer would have arrived on the siding in front of the Davis Brothers General Store. The farmers would load their wagons directly from the boxcar. Meanwhile their wives and children would go inside the store, where they would find a vast array of goods and merchandise, including fabrics of many sorts, overalls, ribbons, lace, pins and needles. <sup>2</sup> The post office was also in the store for many years. <sup>3</sup> The Davis Brothers sold wagons, harnesses, shovels, rakes, hoes and other general farm supplies. Groceries were available. One could buy canned fruits and vegetables, chewing tobacco, cigars, snuff and coffee. <sup>4</sup>

Until the 1920's, all of the goods in the Davis Brothers General Store were delivered by rail. <sup>5</sup> Before 1894, when the Southern Railroad was formed, the track through Craft was owned by the Atlantic, Tennessee & Ohio Railroad (A. T. & O.).<sup>6</sup> The initial railroad in Mecklenburg County was the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad, which commenced operations on October 28, 1852, and which connected Charlotte with Columbia, SC, and Charleston, SC. <sup>7</sup> Even more important to the development of Mecklenburg County was the construction of the North Carolina Railroad from Goldsboro via Raleigh, Greensboro and Salisbury to Charlotte, a distance of 223 miles. <sup>8</sup> The first train traveled the entire route on January 31, 1856. "We now have a railroad connection with Raleigh, Petersburg, Richmond, and with all the cities of the North, on to the lines of Canada," the *Western Democrat* proclaimed. <sup>9</sup> Also during the 1850s, the State of North Carolina built the Western North Carolina, beginning at Salisbury and extending westward through Statesville and initially terminating at Morganton. <sup>10</sup> It was obvious that a railroad between Charlotte and Statesville held

significant promise for investors, because it would provide a shorter route for moving goods from South Carolina to Western North Carolina and back. Accordingly, the citizens of Charlotte and Statesville approved bonds to finance the construction of the A. T. & O., which linked the two communities. The Atlantic, Tennessee & Ohio Railroad reached from Charlotte to Davidson, N.C., in 1861 and to Statesville in March 1863. Soon thereafter, the tracks were removed to provide rails for a line erected between Greensboro, N.C., and Danville, Va., during the Civil War. The A. T. & O. was reconstructed after the Civil War and re-opened in its entirety in June 1871.<sup>11</sup>

The Atlantic, Tennessee & Ohio Railroad became the spine, so to speak, along which commercial and industrial development occurred in northern Mecklenburg County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, communities such as Huntersville and Cornelius grew up around textile mills that were built beside the A. T. & O.<sup>12</sup> By 1896, a post office had been established at Croft, where S. W. and C. S. Davis would build their general store twelve years later. Silas Winslow Davis was an enterprising and resourceful man. He operated two other stores along the A. T. & O., one in Huntersville and another between Croft and Charlotte. Only the building at Croft, however, survives.<sup>13</sup> S. W. Davis died on January 9, 1925.<sup>14</sup> His son, Silas Washington Davis, took over management of the general store after the death of C. S. Davis in 1945.<sup>15</sup> Locally known as "Wash" Davis, Silas Washington Davis has turned over the running of the establishment to his son, Silas Washington Davis, Jr.

The S. W. & C. S. Davis General Store faces an uncertain future. In 1974, the store and approximately two hundred and seventeen acres were sold to S.W.D. Associates, a group of investors. The property is zoned for industrial use.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, one of the alternate routes for a proposed connector between Harris Blvd. and Interstate 77 passes through the property.<sup>17</sup> These threats may become insurmountable. If so, the citizens of Charlotte-Mecklenburg will lose an irreplaceable cultural resource, because nowhere else in this County can one obtain a feeling for the commercial and social intercourse which surrounded a general store in rural Mecklenburg in the early 1900s like one can at the S. W. & C. S. Davis General Store in Croft. A reporter for the *Charlotte News* spoke to this point when he visited the store in October 1967. "Go inside," he proclaimed. "Suddenly, you're standing in the middle of 1908." <sup>18</sup> His observations are still true.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *The Charlotte News* (January 10, 1925), p. 7. *The Charlotte Observer* (January 10, 1925), p. 7. *The Mecklenburg Gazette* (August 3, 1977), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *The Mecklenburg Gazette* (August 3, 1977), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Interview of Silas Washington Davis, Jr., by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (September 1980).

<sup>4</sup> *The Mecklenburg Gazette* (August 3, 1977), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Homer W. Keever, *Iredell: Piedmont County* (Published for the Iredell County Bicentennial Commission by Brady Printing Company, 1976) pp. 220-225. Hereafter cited as Keever. Mary D. Beaty, *Davidson: A History of the Town from 1835 until 1937* (Briarpatch Press, Davidson, N.C., 1979) p. 20. Hereafter cited as Beaty.

<sup>7</sup> *North Carolina Whig* (November 3, 1852), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Lawrence S. Barden, Dr. James W. Clay, Mr. Owen J. Furuseth, Dr. Dan L. Morrill and Dr. Nelson S. Nunnally, "Socio-Economic Overview Of The Uwharrie National Forest and Environs." (An Environmental Impact Statement prepared for the United States Forest Service), p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> *Western Democrat* (February 5, 1856), p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> James W. Clay, Douglas M. Orr, Jr., and Alfred W. Stuart, eds., *North Carolina Atlas* (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975) p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Keever. Beaty.

<sup>12</sup> Huntersville was chartered in March 1877. Cornelius was established in 1893.

<sup>13</sup> Levi Bronson, ed., *North Carolina Business Directory 1896* (Levi Bronson, Office Publisher, Raleigh, N.C., 1896) vol. VIII, p. 410.

<sup>14</sup> Interview of Silas Washington Davis, Jr., by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (September 1980). *The Charlotte News*(January 10, 1925), p. 7. *The Charlotte Observer* (January 10, 1925).

<sup>15</sup> Interview of Silas Washington Davis, Jr., by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (September 1980).

<sup>16</sup> Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office. Mecklenburg County Deed Book 3661, Page 123.

<sup>17</sup> Road Project 8.2724501, U-609.

<sup>18</sup> *The Charlotte News* (October 7, 1967), Sec. B., p. 1.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Mary Alice Hinson, architectural historian.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-399.4:**

**a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as the S. W. & C. S. Davis General Store does possess special historic significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the fact that the store is the only extant example of a turn-of-the-century general store in rural Mecklenburg which has experienced minimal alterations.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:** The Commission judges that the architectural description included herein demonstrates that the property known as the S. W. & C. S. Davis General Store meets this criterion.

**9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply annually for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes "historic property." The current Ad Valorem appraisal on the S. W. & C. S. Davis General Store is \$11,225. The building is included in a tract of 217.36 acres. The current Ad Valorem appraisal on the land is \$127,370. The most recent property tax bill on the entire property was \$1,218.08.

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## Bibliography

Dr. Lawrence S. Barden, Dr. James W. Clay, Mr. Owen J. Furuseth, Dr. Dan L. Morrill and Dr. Nelson S. Nunnally, "Socio-Economic Overview Of The Uwharrie National Forest And Environs." (An Environmental Impact Statement prepared for the United States Forest Service).

Mary D. Beaty, *Davidson: A History Of the Town from 1835 until 1937* (Briarpatch Press, Davidson, N.C., 1979).

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*Charlotte News.*

*Charlotte Observer.* James W. Clay, Douglas M. Orr, Jr. and Alfred W. Stuart, eds., *North Carolina Atlas* (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975).

Interview of Silas Washington Davis, Jr., by Dr. Dan L. Morrill (September 1980).

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*The Mecklenburg Gazette.*

*North Carolina Whig.*

Records of the Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds Office.

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office.

Vital Statistics of Mecklenburg County.

*Western Democrat.*

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** October 1 , 1980.

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission  
3500 Shamrock Dr.  
Charlotte, N.C. 28215

Telephone: (704) 332-2726

### *Architectural Description*

*Mary Alice Dixon Hinson*  
*29 September 1980*

The S. W. & C. S. Davis Company General Store is a remarkably well-preserved example of the vernacular commercial building style indigenous to turn-of-the-century Piedmont North Carolina. The store is built of red brick bearing walls. The brick, made from local clay dug specifically for the Davis Store, is laid in one-to-six **common bond** in an even, sandy-colored mortar. The store proper is a long narrow rectangle, three bays wide and two stories high. Its **flat roof** steps up in three broad stages to the main (west) facade. A one-story warehouse wing, one bay wide, runs the length of the south elevation; the roof of the wing repeats the stepped gradations of the main block.

The Davis Store stands on a hillside clearing several yards east of a railroad track. The main facade of the store runs parallel to the tracks. The side elevations, visible to arriving or departing railroad passengers, advertise the general merchandise available within. The blank brick side walls are functional sign boards.

Both the store proper and the side wing rise from brick cellars whose floors begin about one and a half feet below grade at the rear of the site and tunnel into the side of the hill beneath the west walls. These adjacent storage cellars have periodically served as cattle slaughter rooms and as fatback larders - the cool earth penetrating the porous brick and acting as a natural refrigerator.

All exterior ornamentation is of bricks corbeled, recessed, arched, or otherwise decoratively arranged in counterpoint to the prevailing rectilinearity of the facade. For example, a false pediment, molded into a segmentally-pointed hood, caps the center of

the corbeled sawtooth cornice. Corbeled end blocks, brick variants of the stone bartizan, visually anchor the cornice corners and frame the shaped pediment. The upper level of the facade is pierced by two six-paned plate glass windows set under splayed-arch hoods which, in turn, rise from corbeled bases. The ground level is pierced by twin six-over-six sash, each set into a double course of headers laid as a segmental arch. A single course of headers is recessed at the string course line, bisecting the elevation and strengthening the grid-like geometry against which the curving window surrounds and shaped pediment play. The central double door, beneath a transom, is faced with diagonal boards studded with large round-headed rails. The warehouse wing has a similar single-leaf front entrance as well as a hard-edged corbeled cornice.

The interior is divided into the store proper and the warehouse room. The store is finished with thin beaded ceiling boards, painted plaster walls, and smoothly-planed wooden floors, while in the warehouse the brick bearing walls remain exposed and the floor is laid with roughly finished large boards. Functional differences between public and storage zones are thus clearly expressed.

Floor-to-ceiling shelves line the north and east walls of the store proper. The shelves, like the doors to the outside and between wings, carry cornices built of fillet, torus, and scotia moldings. A screen of rectangular balusters defines the managers office, including mail windows, in the southeastern corner of the main block.

The upper story is an ell-shaped balcony reached by a single run staircase rising west-to-east along the south wall. Since the balcony extends only along the north and east walls, which also have built-in floor-to-ceiling shelves, a large, airy, and well-lit well opens up in the front of the store.

The warehouse wing, a long narrow room, was originally used to store seed and flour. It is entered through a large raised-panel door beside the stairs to the balcony. Attached to the ceiling and walls are open timber cages for the hanging and stacking of bulky merchandise like furniture and farm tools. Quasi-Mission Style chairs still hang from the rafters. Circular saw marks are visible throughout.

The interior also contains objects of interest in the history of technology in Mecklenburg County: a 1922 cash register, still operating; an early Coca-Cola bottle-opener built into the newel post of the stairs; remnants of a box set into the wall which once contained the first telephone in the vicinity of Croft; parts of a primitive fire hydrant attached to the door jamb connecting the store proper with the warehouse; and a fire extinguisher of yet earlier date - a large wooden water bucket hanging on the wall.