

Survey and Research Report on Falls Store, Davidson N.C.



1. Name and location of the property: The property known as Falls Store is located at 300 Mock Road, Davidson, NC 28036.

2. Name, address, and telephone number of the current owner of the property:

JAMES EDWARD RAEFORD SR.

DAISY LEE RAEFORD

PO Box 571

Davidson, NC 28036

(704) 892-8912

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

4. A map depicting the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference To The Property. The most recent deed information for this property is found in Mecklenburg County Deed Reference Book # 15254, pg. 63. The tax parcel number for the property is 00323406.

6. **A Brief Historical Essay On The Property.** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by William Jeffers.

7. **A Brief Physical Description Of The Property.** This report contains a brief physical description of the property prepared by William Jeffers.

8. **Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5.**

a. **Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance.** The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission judges that Falls Store possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

a. The Falls Store is one of the few surviving commercial structures associated with an African American community in northern Mecklenburg County that dates from the period of Jim Crow segregation.

b. The Falls Store is an important artifact for understanding the development of Davidson, NC. Davidson contains a well preserved historically African American neighborhood centered around Mock Circle in the west side of the town. The Falls store is one of the few commercial buildings that has survived in the neighborhood.

b. **Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:** The Commission judges that the physical description included in this report demonstrates that the property known as Falls Store meets this criterion.

9. **Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a designated “historic landmark”. The current appraised value of Falls Store is . The property is zoned R 1.

10. This report finds that the exterior of Falls Store should be included in any landmark designation of the property.

Date of preparation of this report:

March 1, 2010

Prepared by:

William Jeffers

Contextual Essay

The town of Davidson, N.C. in Mecklenburg County is arguably the only small town in the county that does not owe its existence primarily to the agrarian enterprise of farming or to the expansion of rail transportation. Instead, the unique origins of this town are directly related to the pursuit of higher education. In 1837, Davidson College, founded by the Presbyterian Church, opened in northern Mecklenburg County. This institution would form the nexus for the area and exert a major influence over its built environment. The first businesses in what would become the town of Davidson were originally built on land that was leased by the school.^[1] The college would initially serve two functions; an educational institution as well as the local governmental authority.

After the Civil War and Reconstruction, the village incorporated in 1879 and chose “Davidson College” as its municipal moniker. However, in 1891, the town shortened this name to Davidson.”^[2] By the twentieth century, the school still played a central role in the town’s development “not just as the largest business but also providing the first water and electricity systems to the town.”^[3]

African American history in Davidson is almost as old as the town itself. While there is some evidence of African Americans in the area

prior to the Civil War, it is at the turn of the century where more documentation on the establishment of the African American community in Davidson exists. While some African Americans were able to establish businesses in the area, the majority of the population (by the early twentieth century) worked either at Davidson College or at the Carolina Asbestos Company (formerly the Davidson Cotton Mill). And while many in the community remember the past as amicable between black and white, history shows that was not necessarily the case.

As Grey Timberlake in her study *Trapped by Tradition: Davidson's African American Community from 1930 to 1970* comments, "Segregation in Davidson was typical of Southern Towns."^[4] The railroad tracks divided Davidson into two separate and unequal areas. On the east side of town stood Davidson College, Main Street, and the majority of the white population who dwelled in large, one and two story substantial homes and boarding houses. However behind Main Street, across the railroad tracks, the west side of town was a different story entirely. Here was the poor side of Davidson, and disparities between the two, especially in the areas of housing and education were more than obvious if anyone living in east Davidson cared to look. Originally the area was a mix of black and white because these people worked in the nearby mills. However, Jim Crow segregation and the trend towards more industrial development in the area caused a transition to a more predominantly African-American demographic. Most of the homes in this area were viewed as overcrowded and lacking in indoor plumbing. Many of these residents rented their homes from more well-to-do whites in Davidson but by the

1950's, "the 'stacks,' 'shoeboxes,' or 'shotgun houses,' were so run down that occupants rarely even tried to improve them."⁶¹

While overt acts of racism in the town were few, there was a strong sense of paternalism which underscored the separation and segregation of the races. Even the school publication, the *Davidsonian*, reinforced this unequal arrangement in the way it described the mannerisms and speech of its black population. One example is seen in an article in the September 19, 1934 edition of the paper describing a young porter named Hurdle, who worked at the school carrying student luggage to the dormitories:

"Hey mistuh, lemme ca'y yo' trunk up to the dormitories." "Although the object of their pleas is very much doubtful of the ability of such a small coon to "tote" such a large trunk, he invariable (sic) either gives in to amusement, or hardboiled, tells Hurdle to clear out. For little Hurdle, known to every old Davidson man, is sure to be among the foremost of the crowd. His lower lip sticks out in advance to warn you that he too totes trunks with abandon and skill."⁶¹

While statements like the one above would be considered racist today, in the 1930's such statements were the norm rather than the exception to the rule as further research shows this was hardly the only instance in the *Davidsonian* where racist language was employed when describing the town's African-American population. According to Timberlake, local African American residents were torn on how to counteract such injustice. If they protested, they could anger the college, which was one of their primary employers, and suffer repercussions. And many an anonymous interviewee in Timberlake's

study attested to the fact that “one could not complain outwardly, because ‘you can’t bite the hand that feeds you.’”^[7]

Timberlake also contends that “the most significant aspect of segregation was the sub-standard education at the schools that Davidson’s black children had to accept for years.”^[8] The Davidson Colored School emphasized vocational training over academic instruction with the assumption that many, if not all, of the children attending would wind up working in a factory or as janitorial or cooking staff for the college. This unequal arrangement would foster incorrect and ignorant assumptions about the educational abilities of African Americans in Davidson that would transcend generations. A prime example of this is seen in the United States Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which mandated integration. Many whites in the town opposed the move generally arguing, “. . . that the presence of black teachers and students would retard progress in the classroom.”^[9]

Jim Crow’s reach in Davidson extended to Main Street as well. All of the businesses were white owned and for white customers and “wherever the paths of blacks and whites crossed, blacks were expected to remain separate.”^[10] Until the 1950’s, Cole’s Café on Main Street would not allow blacks into the restaurant. “With the undermining of Jim Crow laws by the mid-1950’s, the owners designated one side for blacks. However,” as Timberlake highlights, “blacks and whites had to enter through separate doors. While whites could sit comfortably enjoying their sandwiches, blacks had to stand.”^[11] The movie theater in

Davidson also initially excluded African-Americans but began to allow them in during the mid-1950's. "Even then, black movie goers had to sit on the floor,"^[12] As a result of this, the local African-Americans of Davidson began to remove themselves from mainstream Davidson life. Timberlake argues the reason for this was, "many (black) parents would not allow their children to enter the town's restaurants or movie theater and humiliate themselves by giving in to segregation."^[13] They chose, instead, to invest their social capital into their own separate communities.

African Americans in Davidson concentrated themselves in three particular areas. The first area was known as "Brady Alley" or more simply as, "the Alley." In the twentieth century, the neighborhood was, "home to factory workers and domestics as well as to community leaders, such as Ralph Johnson, a minister and owner of several rental properties in the neighborhood, and Ada Jenkins, a principal of the Davidson Colored School (Now known as the Ada Jenkins Community Center), which is situated in the southwestern edge of the neighborhood."^[14] Located beside Brady Alley, and constructed partially in response to a Brady Alley fire which threatened white owned Main Street, was the neighborhood of Mock Hill, centered on Mock Circle and Mock Road. Also, another small African American community called Shearer Town, named after Davidson College President John B. Shearer, exists just north of the town limits.

Right next to the Davidson Colored School, in the Mock Hill neighborhood of Davidson stands Falls Store. This simple cinder block

structure was constructed by Mr. Webb Shinn during World War II and replaced an older wood structure.^[15] The building was constructed for Ms. Edna Falls (2/22/1892 – 10/24/1979)^[16], who purchased the property in 1917 from T.E. Lothery^[17]. Ms. Falls was known as an “outspoken” and well remembered figure in the local African-American community.^[18] She, like many others in the neighborhood, worked at Davidson College where she cooked and prepared meals for the members of the Kappa Alpha and Kappa Sigma Fraternities.^[19] This, however, was not her only means of income, for she also ran a boarding house in Brady Alley which catered to some of the teachers of the Davidson Colored School.^[20] In addition to this, she also found time to operate the small store in Mock Hill.

When she first opened the store, Ms. Falls sold simple conveniences. Mrs. Daisy Raeford (09/22/1941) recalls that, “snacks, cookies, cakes, potato chips, etc.” were the main selections at Ms. Falls store.^[21] This was because the majority of her clientele were neighborhood children. To that end, Ms. Falls operating hours varied, but generally, she opened the store early in the morning and then closed it down after school began. She then re-opened the store around 2 P.M. so as to be ready for the children when they were let out of school. This method ensured that she would get that target demographic on the way to school as well as on the way home. Also, since adults in the neighborhood came home later than the children, she would close the store for the day around 7 or 7:30 P.M. after everyone was home and usually in for the evening.

While many in Mock Hill and Brady Alley remember the selection at Ms. Falls' store, others remember the home baked treats she served up there too. Mr. Joe Mclean (02/18/1930) remembers that the sweet treats were so good he, "used to go by there and buy cinnamon buns."^[22] Ron Raeford (02/05/1962) recalled with nostalgia how he, "used to ask for a honey bun from Ms. Falls during recess from school."^[23] So many kids liked the wares offered at the store that Ms. Falls was compelled to institute a "one-at-a-time" policy to keep the children from overwhelming her whilst searching for something sweet!^[24]

Neighborhood children, however, were not her only clients. As mentioned earlier she kept her store open to catch potential customers as they came home from work too. In order to meet the demands of her adult clientele, Ms. Falls, "started selling groceries like chicken, bread, milk, etc."^[25] These new additions would ensure that her store would appeal to different age groups thereby reaching a wider market for her wares.

Another aspect of Ms. Falls' store that made it popular with the local residents was its location. Situated on Mock Circle near the Davidson Colored School, the building was situated in the middle of Brady Alley and Mock Hill. Most residents had to pass it whether on their way to work or school. This central location would make the store a focal point for both neighborhoods; a kind of local landmark, which the residents could use to orient themselves within the rest of the neighborhood.

Sometime in the late 1950's/early 1960's, Ms. Falls rented the building out to a tenant named Nora Bell Torrence. Ms. Torrence, as Daisy Raeford recalls, "pretty much sold the same things (as Ms. Falls), but she started selling fish and chicken dinners."^[26]

After Ms. Torrence, the building was sold to Talmadge and Cecelia Conner ^[27]. Talmadge Conner actually grew up in the house (still extant) beside the store.^[28] The Conner's let their oldest son Michael run the store and he ran it as a convenience store and continued to sell basically the same things that Ms. Falls and Ms. Torrence had sold. However, the Conner's relied less on home baked goods and opted for prepackaged pastries, pies, cinnamon buns, etc. As Cecelia Conner remembers, "we mostly bought what we sold."^[29] In addition to the traditional fare, Michael also installed an ice cream cabinet, a "showcase" which was used to market various candies and sweets, and introduced Coca Cola as new products.^[30] For a time, the building also housed a flower shop when the Conner's daughter Castella took over operation of the store.

In 2004, the building was sold to James ^[31] and Daisy Raeford^[32] who returned the building to its original use. The Raeford's also added a small grill which enabled them to offer breakfast and lunch sandwiches in addition to the snacks and treats traditionally sold there.^[33] Currently, there are plans to open a barbeque take-out restaurant in the building.

As Grey Timberlake concludes, "while North Carolina African-Americans experienced less persecution than those in the Deep South,

segregation and racism prevailed.”^[34] While this persecution Timberlake mentions could turn hostile, for the most part, it was delivered upon the Davidson African-American community in the form of paternalism. As a result, many local African-Americans removed themselves from mainstream Davidson society and focused inward on their own community. The Falls Store stands as a symbol of this sense of African-American community in Davidson during the twentieth century. It also stands as a testament to the neighborhood it serves. From its central location between Mock Hill and Brady Alley this small building occupies a prominent position in the social history of this community. As Cecelia Conner remembered, the building served as a major convenience for the neighborhood’s residents because it was the only place where one could get simple staples or even the occasional meal because, “all the other stores were uptown.”^[35] Daisy Raeford was quick to point out, since the building stood in the middle of two major African-American Davidson neighborhoods, between home, work and school, it was always “a good place to meet.”^[36] The building not only stood at the intersection of these communities, it also exerted a powerful and positive influence on their residents. As Ken Norton put it, “It’s a landmark place.”^[37] To be sure, the building is well known and loved throughout the neighborhood: The testimonies of local residents cited throughout this essay only confirm that fact. And because of this, Ms. Falls little store has endeared itself to multiple generations of Davidson residents some of which have never known a time when the building wasn’t there. As the world around Davidson and Brady Alley continues to evolve and change, it is in places like Falls Store where one can get a

continual snapshot of this community, and by proxy, a small town African-American community, both yesterday and today.

^[1] The Town of Davidson, Town History Timeline, <http://www.ci.davidson.nc.us/index.aspx?NID=129>, (accessed December 3, 2009).

^[2] Ibid.

^[3] Ibid.

^[4] Grey Timberlake, “Trapped by Tradition: Davidson’s African-American Community from 1930-1970” (Honors Thesis, Davidson College, April 1993), p. 27.

^[5]^[5] Timberlake, p. 28.

^[6] Anonymous, “Students Welcomed by Negro’s Usual Appeal,” Davidsonian, September 19, 1934, p.6.

^[7] Timberlake, p. 55.

^[8] Timberlake, p. 8.

^[9] Timberlake, p. 20.

^[10] Timberlake, p. 22.

^[11] Timberlake, p. 21.

^[12] Timberlake, p. 22.

^[13] Timberlake, p. 24.

^[14] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, Survey of African American Buildings and Sites in Mecklenburg County: The African American Presence in the Mecklenburg County Built Environment, 1850-1950, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks

Commission, no date, <http://www.cmhpf.org/surveyafricancontext.htm>, (accessed November 29, 2009).

^[15] Interview with Mr. Joe Mclean by Bill Jeffers (December 5, 2009).

^[16] Death Certificate #1979002782, Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds.

^[17] Mecklenburg County Deed Reference Book # 378, pg. 63.

^[18] Interview with Mr. Kenneth Norton by Bill Jeffers (November 19, 2009).

^[19] Joe Mclean Interview.

^[20] Interview with Mrs. Daisy Lee Raeford by Bill Jeffers (December 2, 2009).

^[21] Ibid.

^[22] Joe Mclean Interview.

^[23] Interview with Mr. Ron Raeford by Bill Jeffers (November 19, 2009).

^[24] Daisy Lee Raeford Interview.

^[25] Ibid.

^[26] Ibid.

^[27] Brenna Boyd, Cecelia Conner, Davidson College, 2005, <http://franklin.davidson.edu/academic/psychology/>

krmulthaup/public/reminiscencef05/boyd/oapwebsite/homepage.htm, (accessed January 21, 2010).

^[28] Interview with Ms. Cecelia Conner by Bill Jeffers (January 25, 2010).

^[29] Ibid.

^[30] Ibid.

^[31] Daisy Lee Raeford Interview.

[\[32\]](#) Mecklenburg County Deed Reference Book # 15254, pg. 63.

[\[33\]](#) Ron Raeford Interview.

[\[34\]](#) Timberlake, p. 61.

[\[35\]](#) Cecelia Conner Interview.

[\[36\]](#) Daisy Lee Raeford Interview.

[\[37\]](#) Kenneth Norton Interview.

Architectural Description

Falls' Store (Aka Raeford's Grill) sits at the intersection of Mock Circle and Mock Road in the Brady Alley Community of Davidson, NC. It is a small cinder block building with an asphalt shingle gable roof with white trim. Its front elevation comprises an offset white door and large window with a five over six window pane pattern set against white trim. There is also a large sign situated over the door and window which reads: "Raeford's Grill 704-655-1293". A long concrete walkway leads from the intersection of Mock Circle and Mock Road to the front elevation of the building. The side elevation facing Mock Circle slopes downward towards the rear of the building and has a window mounted air conditioner as the only ornamentation on this elevation. The rear elevation consists of a small offset door and small window which is covered. There is also a small set of stairs and a railing leading from said door to a small concrete patio which stands next to the building's rear (gravel) parking area. The roof supports two large exhaust vents. Security lights are present at both the front and rear elevations mounted over the doors.