

Delburg Cotton Mill House



1. Name and location of the property:

The Delburg Cotton Mill House
303 Delburg Street
Davidson, North Carolina

2. Name and address of the present owner of the property:

Prosser D. Carnegie
PO Box 363
Davidson, NC 28036

3. Representative photographs of the property:

This report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. Map depicting the location of the property:



Please note: this map depicts numerous mill houses along Delburg Street that have since been demolished.

5. Current deed book reference to the property:

The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 05247 on page 680. The tax parcel number of the property is 00326203.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property:

This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property.

7. A brief architectural description of the property:

This report contains a brief architectural description of the property.

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

Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Delburg Cotton Mill House possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

- 1) The Delburg Cotton Mill House at 303 Delburg Street is an important artifact of Davidson's industrial history, and of the once largely working-class west side of Davidson.
- 2) The Delburg Cotton Mill House is also important in understanding the history of the well-preserved Delburg Cotton Mill, and its quickly disappearing mill village.
- 3) The Delburg Mill House is an artifact of the significant social divide that once existed between the mill workers and the other white residents of Davidson.

9. Ad Valorem tax appraisal:

The current assessed value of the property is \$93,800.

10. Portion of property recommended for designation:

The interior and exterior of the house and the approximately .10 acres of land associated with the tax parcel.

11. Date of Preparation of this Report:

December 5, 2014

Prepared by:

Stewart Gray, Preservation Planner, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission

The Delburg Cotton Mill House

The Delburg Cotton Mill was not the first cotton mill in Davidson. The Linden Cotton Mill was built in Davidson in 1890 on the west side of the railroad. The town embraced industrialization in the last years of the 19th century and during the early years of the 20th. The mills and other industrial plants built in Davidson drastically changed the town's landscape, and the introduction of a non-agricultural blue-collar workforce significantly changed the social dynamics of the community. However, as the 20th century progressed, the prominence and importance of industry in Davidson decreased.

Some of the artifacts of Davidson's historic industrialization, including the town's two cotton mills have survived. However, much from that period has been lost, and the town's recent and unprecedented institutional, non-industrial commercial, and residential growth has overshadowed and threatened the built environment associated with the town's industrial past. The "mill village" character of the west side of Davidson is quickly eroding. Many mill houses have been lost, and arguably all of the surviving mill houses are endangered. The Delburg Cotton Mill House at 303 Delburg Street is an important artifact of Davidson's industrial history and of the once largely working-class west side of Davidson. The Delburg Cotton Mill House is also important in understanding the history of the well-preserved Delburg Cotton Mill and its quickly disappearing mill village. The Delburg Mill House is also an artifact that represents the social divide that once existed between the mill workers and the other white residents of the town.

Industrialization and the Development of an Industrial Landscape in Davidson

In 1890 the Linden Manufacturing Company was incorporated, and a cotton mill was built in Davidson on the west side of the railroad directly across the tracks from the commercial district along Main Street. The company's board of directors was local, two professors and four Davidson businessmen.¹ A small collection of mill housing developed around the mill on Eden Street and what was then known as Linden Street (now Depot Street). ² This was not a traditional mill village, but more an ad hoc collection of various types of small frame houses. And it appears that initially the mill workers were not isolated to the west side of town. An 1891 article in the Davidson College Magazine indicated that the mill opening resulted in no vacant houses in the town. ³

At first it appears that the town embraced industrial development. In 1891 this article appeared in the *Davidson Monthly*:

Our cotton mills are still booming. The local editor was very much surprised to see so great a progress when he visited the mills a few days ago. There are two thousand and eight hundred spindles running all the time, and the president informs us that more are to be added shortly. The machinery is of the very best material and has all the latest improvements. An automatic fire extinguisher will be put in during the next few days. They already have electric lights in full running order. These mills are quite an addition to Davidson.⁴

Perhaps reflecting a spirit of industrialization that was found throughout the South in the late 19th century, Davidson businessmen, and townspeople in general, saw the mill as a „tangible sign of progress.”⁵ Another significant industrial development occurred in 1899 with the opening of the Davidson Cotton Oil Mill:

One has but to visit the new oil mill situated on the southern extremity of the town to realize the progressive spirit which rules at Davidson. Here one sees the workings of complete machinery and all the modern equipments of an oil mill, while the products guarantee success. The people cannot be too highly commended for this enterprise. ⁶

Other industries that followed the cotton mill included a flour mill, sawmill, roller mill, fertilizer plant, and an ice plant, all located in the west side of town. In addition, at the beginning of the 20th century, around 2,000 bales of cotton were bought and sold in town. This process involved wagons loaded with 1,500 pounds of raw cotton traveling down Main Street and Concord Road, and the ginning of the 500 pound bales at a ginnery near the cotton oil plant along South Main Street. At its peak early in the 20th century, the industrial presence (its buildings, structures, workers, and activities) in Davidson may have rivaled the Davidson College for prominence.

The opening of the Delburg Cotton Mill in 1907, and its expansion in 1917, represented the apex of the industrial development of Davidson. The 1917 addition greatly increased the size of the Delburg Cotton Mill and the industrial capacity and workforce of the town as a whole. An article in the September 1917 *Davidsonian* states that the expansion doubled the size of the mill and required 100 new employees or “operators.” A 1930 article from the *Davidsonian* estimated the entire mill village population at 300, so the addition in 1917 of 100 new workers would have been dramatic.

COTTON MILL BUILDS NEW ADDITION TO PLANT

The new addition to the Delberg Cotton Mill is fast nearing completion. It comprises a building sixty-five by seventy-six feet, two stories high. A part of the machinery is now en route and will be installed as soon as it arrives. It is hoped to have everything in readiness for operation by January 1. The new addition is in the spinning department and will about double the capacity of the mill, necessitating the employment of more than one hundred new operators.

1917 article from the Davidsonian (Davidson College Archives)

Evidence of the 1917 expansion of the Delburg Cotton Mill can be found in the orderly development of a mill village along Delburg and Watson Streets. The 1915 Sanborn Insurance Company Map for Davidson shows no houses immediately around the 1907 section of the Delburg Cotton Mill. Watson Street does not appear to exist, and Delburg Street is shown as Delburg Alley, and does not extend to the west of the rail line. Tax records indicate that from 1916 to 1921 small, three-bay-wide, side-gabled, frame mill houses were erected close to the mill along the newly established Delburg and Watson streets. It is easy to assume that these houses were built to accommodate the additional workers who were required by the mill expansion. The Delburg Cotton Mill House, located at 303 Delburg Street, is the best preserved example of this generation of mill houses and is located just 60 feet from the 1917 Delburg Mill addition. Farther west on Delburg Street hipped-roof houses replace the closer in side-gabled mill houses, perhaps representing a later mill village expansion.

An aerial photograph of the west side of Davidson shows the expanded Delburg Cotton Mill (upper left-hand corner), with orderly and evenly spaced, small, frame houses extending west along Delburg Street and north along Watson Street, typical of a mill village. With two cotton

mills, a cotton seed oil plant, and various other industrial operations in place, the build-out of the Delburg Cotton Mill village solidified the blue-collar/industrial character of the west side of Davidson.



The above photograph is an aerial view of Davidson taken soon after World War II. In the foreground is the African-American Mock Circle Neighborhood. In the upper-left corner is the Delburg Cotton Mill (by that time re-named the Davidson Cotton Mill). Delburg Street extends from the mill to the left edge of the photograph. Watson Street intersects with Delburg Street at the rear of the mill and extends to the top of the photograph. (Davidson College Archives)

Social Effects of Industrialization

The increased industrialization of Davidson encouraged a social division between the white mill workers and the other white (mostly middle-class) residents in Davidson.⁷ While this phenomenon was widespread throughout the sections of the Piedmont where industrialization was taking place, in Davidson the changes were especially vivid.

Throughout the 19th century Davidson remained small. And despite the fact that ancient Greek and advanced mathematics were being taught at the college, the place had a distinctly rural atmosphere, surrounded as it was by very little but agricultural land.



Aerial view of Davidson, looking to the northeast, ca. 1930 (Davidson College Archives)

In late-19th century Davidson, like most other rural communities in North Carolina, whites were jumbled together. Regardless of wealth or social rank they generally worked together, lived near each other, and worshiped together. The introduction of the mills and other manufacturing plants into Davidson changed that order.

...as mill populations increased, social divisions between middle-class and working-class whites grew. In Davidson there were separate recreation programs and a separate chapel for the mill families. And while there was never a separate mill school, the town continued to offer only four months of free schooling with additional months offered for a fee, thereby creating a two-tiered system that disadvantaged the mill children.⁸

While many southern towns may have had a class division between mill workers and a merchant class, Davidson also had the distinction of having a “town and gown” split. With a significant number of citizens who worked for Davidson College, and who possessed an advanced education, the cultural, social, and economic differences among the town’s elites and the mill workers were quite distinct. A note in the January, 1892 issue of the Davidson Monthly gives some insight into this separation:

Dr. Munroe gave the factory children a Christmas tree at his residence. It was quite a success, and thereby Dr. has made a warm spot for himself in the hearts of the factory hands. If all employers would treat their laborers so, how much

brighter would be thousands of homes in our land, and the great chasm between capitalists and laborers would be bridged over. 9

By 1920, Davidson was a socially and geographically segregated town. Mill workers were housed to the west of the railroad tracks, around the Delburg Mill on Delburg, Watson, Griffith, and Armour Streets, and around the Linden Mill on Depot, Sloan, and Eden Streets. Other whites (including college faculty, merchants, builders, boarding house operators) generally lived east of the tracks. Blacks lived along Brady's Alley to the east of the tracks, and to the west of the mill housing around Mock Circle.

The designation and preservation of the Delburg Cotton Mill House would help to demonstrate the historic cultural and economic separation of mill workers in Davidson.

Decline of the Significance of Industry in Davidson

Unlike the neighboring northern Mecklenburg towns of Cornelius and Huntersville, Davidson pre-dates the railroad, which arrived in the town in 1861. The Town of Davidson owes its existence to the establishment of Davidson College in 1837. Thus, Davidson was never a typical Piedmont mill town. Cotton milling and other industries that followed greatly influenced the development of the town, but the identity of the town was primarily linked to the college. While the neighboring towns of Cornelius and Mooresville, which largely developed because of cotton milling, were considered "mill towns." Davidson, despite significant industrial development around the beginning of the 20th century, was always a "college town."

Several factors contributed to the diminution of the prominence of industry in Davidson. Davidson College embarked on an aggressive building campaign in the 1920s. And in 1924, industrialist James Buchanan Duke established the Duke Endowment with Davidson College receiving a five percent share. This insured continual financial support for the college leading to a progression of material and academic improvements. While always dominant, the steady physical and workforce expansion of Davidson College assured the college would remain the focal point of the town. 10

At the same time that the college was growing, the mills of Davidson were facing hardships. Davidson was never a major cotton milling center, and as the 20th century progressed, larger, more modern milling operations developed in Gastonia, Kannapolis, and Mooresville. In 1923 the Linden Mill and the Delburg Cotton mill were merged, and the president, J. P. Munroe, was negotiating to sell the company.

"...conditions in the mill business are such with labor conditions uncertain, money commanding high rates of interest, cotton constantly fluctuating in price, yarn buyers comparatively scarce and hard to please, that considering all these things, I myself am willing and anxious to sell at some price even though that price be considerably below par." 11

The mills were soon sold to Martin Cannon, of Cannon Mills. Cannon closed the Linden Mill and turned it into a warehouse, and the Delburg Mill was renamed the Davidson Cotton Mill. The mill struggled through the Great Depression and then rebounded during World War II. After the war, the Davidson Cotton Mill was considered old and outdated.¹² The mill closed suddenly in April 1947. The news made the front page of the local newspaper. The owner stated that the mill needed repairs. 13 In contrast to the boosterish rhetoric that accompanied the introduction of cotton mills to Davidson, the end of the mills elicited little more than a whimper. Two weeks after the mill closed, the local newspaper reported on workers signing up for unemployment compensation. In the same article, the reporter interviewed local merchants about the effect of the closing. The merchants responded that "they could not tell any difference."¹⁴

Architectural Context of the Delburg Cotton Mill House

In 2013 the 300 block of Delburg Street retained a high degree of integrity. Of the twenty-five houses on the block, twenty were side-gabled or hipped-roof mill houses with a good degree of integrity. Significant development is occurring on the block. Since 2013, six of the thirteen mill houses with good integrity on the south side of the street have been demolished, with additional houses (347 and 376 Delburg) slated for demolition. The houses are being replaced with new residential development.



Above: 309 Delburg St., 2013 Below: 309-13 Delburg St., 2014





Above: 313 Delburg St., 2013 Below: 309-13 Delburg St., 2014





Above: 329 Delburg St., 2013 Below: 329 Delburg St., 2014





Above: 333 Delburg St., 2013 Below: 333 Delburg St., 2014





Above: 361 Delburg St., 2013 Below: 361 Delburg St., 2014





Above: 369 Delburg St., 2013 Below: 369 Delburg St., 2014



With the substantial loss of integrity for the 300 block of Delburg Street to what was until recently an intact mill village setting, the significance of the Delburg Cotton Mill House located at 303 Delburg has greatly increased. With its unique location adjacent to the mill, the Delburg Cotton Mill House still conveys the historic relationship of the mill to the mill houses.



The Delburg Cotton Mill House, with the mill in the background

Architectural Description



The Delburg Cotton Mill House at 303 Delburg Street is a one-story, frame, side-gabled house, typical of early-20th century Piedmont mill housing. The house faces north and sits on an irregularly shaped .10 corner lot. The house fronts on Delburg Street and is located approximately 21 feet from the pavement. The east side of the house faces Watson Street. Until recently, Delburg Street was populated by a fairly intact collection of one-story side-gabled and hipped-roof mill houses. Many of these houses have been demolished. The neighboring house to the west of the Delburg Cotton Mill House is a new two-story frame house. To the east, across Watson Street, is the two-story, brick Delburg Cotton Mill/Davidson Cotton Mill. A large water oak is located in the front yard.



The front of the house is dominated by a full width engaged porch. The original porch floor has been replaced with pressure-treated boards supported by a block foundation. Block steps with block cheek walls lead to the porch. The porch roof is engaged with the principal roof, but has a slightly lower pitch. The porch roof is supported by six simple square posts. The porch ceiling is original tongue-and-groove boards. The front elevation fenestration is symmetrical with a replacement door centered between one-over-one windows. The double-hung windows contain replacement one-lite sash. Like the other elevations, the front elevation is covered with weatherboard that terminates at simple corner boards. Centered on the ridge is an internal chimney with a corbelled cap. The chimney has been parged.

It is likely that the house was originally a single-pile (one room deep) building. It appears that the roof was extended to cover additional rooms added to the rear of the house. On the west elevation, the original brick piers are exposed, and are now infilled with block. The principal section of the house is two bays wide. Each bay contains a single double-hung window with replacement single-light sash. An original rectangular louvered vent is located high in gable. The same siding found on the front was used on the side elevations. There is no transition in the siding on the side elevations indicating that the house was expanded to the rear.



The east elevation is similar to the west elevation. The window in the rear bay was replaced with a shorter double-hung window to accommodate kitchen cabinetry. The lower section of the original window opening is patched with short pieces of siding. Unlike the west elevation there is no vent in the gable.



A shallow shed addition was added to the rear of the house and may incorporate portions of a rear porch. The addition is flush with the principal west elevation, and is set back approximately six feet from the principal east elevation. On the west side of the house, the weatherboard siding of the principal section is separated from the German siding of the addition by a vertical board. The west elevation of the addition is pierced with a six-light casement window. The rear of the addition is covered with German siding. A replacement door is roughly centered on the rear of the addition. To the west of the door, the rear elevation is pierced by a pair of six-light casement windows. To the east of the door are two covered window openings. The opening closest to the door is covered with a plywood panel. The second window opening is set low in the wall and is covered with beaded board. The west side of the addition is supported by a continuous block foundation. The east side of the addition features a brick pier at the corner. The siding on the west side of the addition stops at the level of the door threshold. The siding on the east side of the addition extends lower by four courses. The east elevation of the addition is blank and is covered with weatherboard, as is the only exposed section of the rear elevation of the principal section of the house.



The interior of the Delburg Cotton Mill House has retained a good degree of integrity. The fourroom layout of the principal section of the house has been retained, and the interior of the principal four rooms should be included in any landmark designation. The original pine floors appears to have survived in all four rooms. The front two rooms feature tall (approximately 9'6") ceilings. Wallboard has been added over the original ceiling boards. The living room walls are also covered with wallboard. Original window and door trim is in place. Tall original baseboards have been topped with additional moulded trim. The front bedroom has also retained the original beaded-board wall covering. The central chimney services fireboxes in both front rooms. The brick fireplace surrounds and mantles are of recent construction. An original recessed space features recently added louvered doors.



The rear two rooms feature lower ceilings. The rear bedroom features the original beaded-board wall covering, baseboard, and simple window trim. Recent trim has been added to juncture of the walls and ceiling. The ceiling has been covered with wallboard.



The kitchen has retained the original pine flooring. The ceiling is covered with wallboard, and the walls are covered with cabinetry and wallboard. The rear addition of house contains a bathroom and a mudroom/laundry room. The interior features of the rear addition are in poor condition and do not contribute to the significance of the property.

Outbuilding



A small concrete block outbuilding with a gabled roof is located behind the house. The outbuilding dates from the second half of the 20th century, and does not contribute to the historical significance of the property.

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1. Jan Blodgett and Ralph B. Levering, *One Town Many Voices: A History of Davidson, NC* (Davidson: Davidson Historical Society, 2012), 66.
 2. Sanborn Map, Davidson, NC. December 1915.
 3. Davidson College Magazine, vol. VII, no. 1 (October 1891) 28.
 4. "Davidson – Linden Manufacturing Company Begins Operations" Davidson Monthly, November 1891.
 5. Stewart Gray and Dr. Paula M. Stathakis "Survey and Research Report on the Davidson Cotton Mill," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 2004.
 6. Davidson Monthly, January 1900.
 7. Blodgett and Levering, *One Town*, 98.
 8. Blodgett and Levering, *One Town*, 100.
 9. Davidson Monthly, January 1892, 140.
 10. Blodgett and Levering, *One Town*, 100.
 11. Gray and Stathakis "Report on the Davidson Cotton Mill."
 12. Gray and Stathakis "Report on the Davidson Cotton Mill."

- 13 Community, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April 3, 1947) 1.
14 Community, Vol. 1, No. 3 (April 17, 1947) 1.