

## The Sloan House

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It was in the month of June, 1988, when David Beam and his brother ran out of the house terrified of a creeping noise coming from the second floor of the house. The eight year old David and his brother had just walked to check the inside of the house their father had just purchased. The noise turned out to be nothing but a figment of David's imagination. Soon after, David and his two other brothers would come to enjoy, the 13 foot high ceiling, the double stairway; one in the back and one in the front of the house, and the many other features the house boasted.<sup>1</sup> The house that David and his family moved into in 1988 was built in 1870. It was built by Frank J. Knox and was inhabited by many of the notable families of Davidson Town, North Carolina. Throughout the years, the Sloan House, as people in the town of Davidson still refer to it, had been acquired by different owners. Its physical structure from the inside and outside had been altered many times. Nevertheless, today, the house remains as one of the oldest structures still standing along South Main Street.

Located on 260 South Main Street, in the town of Davidson, North Carolina, The Sloan house, along with the rest of the houses, the streets, and even the whole town of Davidson owe their existence to Davidson College. For one to imagine the town without the presence of David College is simply impossible. This is because the town of Davidson before the inception of Davidson College was merely populated by farmers and planters who were scattered on a land

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with David Beam, April, 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

between the Yadkin and Catawba rivers. A great portion of these farmlands were owned by Major William Lee Davidson II, the son of General Davidson.<sup>2</sup> The only supporting elements that existed nearby were churches. These local farmers had no community in the architectural sense. They led a self-sufficient life style. All of this would soon change when, in 1835, a group of church members from Concord Presbytery, headed by Rev. Robert Hall Morison decided to establish a school to train their kids into becoming virtuous and industrious.<sup>3</sup> In 1837, Davidson College was founded on a land sold at a price lower than its actual worth by William Davidson. To insure greater accessibility, the founding members were instructed to choose an area between the two larger towns of Charlotte and Statesville. The group chose the area between the Yadkin and Catawba rivers because of its high altitude. Water from this area drains in the  Yadkin River; to the east, and Catawba River; to the West. This natural way of water drainage meant that the land is dryer and therefore, more suitable for farming. Additionally, a dry land promotes healthier climate as it would be less likely for one to contract diseases associated with humidity, malaria is an example. Lastly, the founding members chose the location to be in the center between Chapel Hill and western North Carolina, as no colleges existed west of Chapel Hill.<sup>4</sup> Right after the committee was able to purchase the land from William Lee Davidson, they began erecting buildings for the college. The first structure to be erected was the Chapel. Right after, nine other buildings were completed, all belonging to Davidson College. In the mid 1850s, most of the buildings that existed in the town of Davidson belonged to either the college or to faculty members of the college. Only few other houses and stores existed for some of the

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<sup>2</sup> Christina Wright and Dr. Dan Morrill, *Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Tours: Driving and Walking*, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Preservation Fund, INC, 1994, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Cornelia R. Shaw, *Davidson College*, Fleming H. Revell Press, New York, 1923, p 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

families that were linked directly or indirectly through business, or had their sons as students in the college. Therefore, one can safely ascertain that these early 1830s College buildings were the first formation of architectural structures to be built in the town of Davidson.

Main Street; to the west of Davidson College was the first street built in Davidson. Together with Concord Road; to the south, which was built in the 1890s, the two roads would eventually mark the south-western perimeters of the college. Soon after the establishment of Davidson College, the growth of Davidson began to take effect apart from the college. Families started building houses along these roads either for residence or for business, related to the college. On Main Street, Thomas W. Sparrow built a private Davidson boarding house in 1840. In 1848, Lewis Dinkins built a Helper Hotel, the Inn; as it is known today. This neatly designed brick stone building functioned as a store and an inn.<sup>5</sup> In the 1840s, there were only 4 houses built on Main Street.

Davidson in the mid eighteen hundreds did not witness the same growth pace as in the 1830s and 40s. This was mainly due to the Civil War where many students of Davidson College had left to join the war. Also, amidst the war climate, funds to the school were severely interrupted.<sup>6</sup> This is evident from the number of houses that existed on Main Street. Only four more houses were added to Main Street during the mid eighteen hundreds. One of these four houses built in the 1850s was John Rennie Blake House. It was built south of the existing other

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<sup>5</sup> Mary D. Beaty, A History of the Davidson College Presbyterian Church, Davidson College Presbyterian Church, Davidson, NC, p.12.

<sup>6</sup> Cornelia R. Shaw, p.105.

houses. This house still exists today and serves as a faculty house.<sup>7</sup> Another house on Main Street was the Gray House. It was built by James P. Henderson in 1855. Thomson and Sam Thomson's houses make up the rest of the four houses that were built on Main Street during the mid eighteenth hundreds. However, it would not take too long before Davidson College and its town would begin to experience growth in business and social life.

During the late 1860s and early 1870s, Davidson College welcomed seven additional faculty members. Unlike the other faculty members who never considered settling permanently in Davidson, these new faculty members were there to stay. This perhaps serves as a sign to the prospering climate the town of Davidson was experiencing. Also, during this period of time, the railroad track finally made its way from Charlotte to Davidson. This was a cause of rejoice for students and college trustees. To the trustees, it meant more support for the college. To the students, it brought a great delight as they were no longer isolated. They could travel and connect with cities such as Charlotte.<sup>8</sup> Railways tied the towns not only to each other and Southern seaports but also to Northern markets and sources of building materials and finished goods. "We are no longer shut out of the rest of creation" sang the *Davidson Monthly* upon the reconstruction of the A.T. and O. Railroad.<sup>9</sup> By 1894 this railway was part of the extensive Southern Railroad system which had direct connections to the North. Along with the revival of Davidson College came a score of new houses and stores on Main Street. One of these houses

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<sup>7</sup> Mary D. Beaty, *Davidson: A history of the Town from 1835 Until 1937*, Briarpatch Press, Davidson, North Carolina, 1979, p.26.

<sup>8</sup> Mary B. Beaty, *A History of Davidson College*, Briarpatch Press, Davidson, North Carolina, 1988, p. 135.

<sup>9</sup> David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields to Skyscrapers: Southern Region and City* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 86-90.

that are still standing today is Miss Hattie Thompson's. This two story house was built in a Mecklenburg tradition style.

## **The Sloan House**

During this time of steady growth in Davidson, the Sloan house was erected. The house was built by Frank J. Knox in 1870. Mr. Knox family was one of the first families to live in the town of Davidson. He can be accredited, along with other town notables in founding the Davidson College Presbyterian Church. In her book *Davidson College*, Cornelia Shaw described Mr. Knox as an honored member of the community. He was made deacon of the college Church in 1885.<sup>10</sup> In the mid 1880s, the Knox family was listed as one 23 non-faculty families who were members of the church. Like other families who first lived in the town of Davidson, the Knox family relied on the college for its business. Frank J. Knox along with his neighbor Archie Brown opened the town's most popular early general store, Knox and Brown. The building in which the Knox and Brown Store operated was built in 1874, but not until 1899 did it become the Knox and Brown Store. It was Davidson's most important store for the first fifteen years of the century, but as the M. H. Goodrum and Co. Store grew in importance, Knox and Brown declined. Eventually Goodrum's store prevailed and the Knox and Brown had to finally shut down for good in 1922.<sup>11</sup>

The Sloan house which was built by Frank J. Knox was smaller than its today's size. The front porch and second floor balcony did not exist at the time when the house was built. Additionally, the back section; about one-third of the house did not exist either. Lastly, it had

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<sup>10</sup> Cornelia Shaw, p.215.

<sup>11</sup> Davidson College Manuscript Collection, The Brown Family Papers, Box1, Folder 1.

two chimneys, one on each side of the house; as opposed to one today. The siding of the house was, probably made of metal white siding.<sup>12</sup> With this in mind, the house might have followed the Southern Georgian style for a middle class family. The low hitched gable above the front of the house, its squared frame, and the panels on each side of the front door can strongly testify to its Southern Georgian Style. The house was the farthest on South Main Street and until the 1920s; the house remained the farthest house on South Main Street.

James L. Sloan Sr., the grandfather of Miss Louise Sloan bought the house in 1880. The purpose was most likely for his residence. The Sloan family was amongst the native families of Davidson. James L. Sloan Sr. was a respected town elder and a land owner. He was on several committees for the college and the local churches. One of which was the Davidson Presbyterian Church. He was also elected Mayor to the city of Davidson several times during the late decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mary D. Beaty mentions in her book *Davidson: A history of the Town from 1835 Until 1937* two other members from the Sloan family who were well known, James L. Sloan Jr; the son of James L. Sloan Sr., and Louise Sloan; his daughter. James L Sloan Jr. lived in the Sloan house while a student at Davidson College. He was married twice. His first wife died of typhoid in 1890. In 1890, James L. Sloan Jr., along with other business partners, founded the first cotton factory in Davidson. It was later called the Linden Manufacturing Company. By 1891, the Linden Cotton Factory was booming. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a second cotton Mill was opened, called Delberg. James L. Sloan Jr. was also a part owner of this second mill. In addition to being part owner of the two mills in Davidson, Sloan Jr. was vice-president of the Bank of Davidson. Sloan Jr. owned some of the stores on Davidson. In 1922, he built two-unit

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with David Beam.

brick buildings, which are still standing today on Main Street.<sup>13</sup> He was, also, Mayor of Davidson for 25 consecutive years, and resigned from the mayorship to accept the postmastership appointment.<sup>14</sup> He died on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1932 at his home in Davidson.

Miss Louise Withers Sloan (1892-1992) was the daughter of James Lee Sloan, Jr. and Ida Withers. She attended Peace College in Raleigh and was one of the early female graduates of Duke. She taught elementary school in Bladen County and later sold real estate and insurance in Davidson, NC. She lived in her family home on Main Street until the 1980s. The house was sold to the town of Davidson. She died in Falls Church, VA in 1992.

The Sloan House was devised to James L. Sloan's wife and after her death was devised to their daughter Mrs. Ella V. Caldwell.<sup>15</sup> In 1916, the house was sold to Gregg Caldwell who in 1924 sold it to the Davidson Mills Corporation.<sup>16</sup> The house was owned by the Davidson Cotton Corporation until March of 1947. It is not known what happened to the house during this time. The Sloan House was then sold to W. F. McCanless. Mr. McCanless was perhaps an investor because he only kept the house in his name for less than four months.<sup>17</sup>

On May 23<sup>rd</sup> of 1947, William A. Cathey bought the house from W. F. McCanless.<sup>18</sup> Soon after, Mr. Cathey, along with his brother in law, Robert Hoyle converted the house into a

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>14</sup> The Davidson College Bulletin, Davidson, NC, August 23, 1932. Davidson College Library, The davidsonian Room.

<sup>15</sup> Deed of Sale from James R. Caldwell and wife, Ellie S. Caldwell, and Harry S. Caldwell to Gregg H. Caldwell, 1916, (filed August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1916), Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Deed book 364, page 76

<sup>16</sup> Deed of Sale from Gregg R. Caldwell and wife to Davidson Mills Corporation, 1924 (Filed September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1924), Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Deed book 547, page 557.

<sup>17</sup> Deed of Sale from Davidson Mills Corporation to W. F. McCanless and wife, March 1947 (Filed March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1947), Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Deed book 1237, page 221.

<sup>18</sup> Deed of Sale from W. F. McCanless and wife to William A. Cathey and wife, May 1947 (Filed May 23<sup>th</sup>, 1947), Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Deed Book 1249, page 383.

funeral home and opened it for business by the end of the same year. According to Edger Stowe Beam, Mr. Cathey and Mr. Hoyle made many alterations to the house in order to make it suitable for a funeral home. From the outside of the house, they added a porch to the front of the house and a balcony on the second floor, above the porch. They also extended the back of the house. The new addition to the house has two gables, one above each room. The room on the second floor, on the back left side of the house, has a flat roof, with no gable. With the new addition to the back of the house, Cathey and Hoyle added a new room for embalming at the center of the back of the house. The left side of the first floor was modified into a large room which would be used as a showing room. A thick black curtain was installed right in the middle of the room to enable them to split the room into two sections in the case they had two showings at the same time. In addition to the funeral business, William A. Cathey used the right side of the first floor as an office for his insurance business.<sup>19</sup> The Cathey family lived on the second floor of the house. The name of the house during this period was changed to the Cathey-Hoyle Funeral Home. Along with the Cavin Funeral Home in Huntersville, the two funeral homes serviced the areas of Davidson, Cornelius, and Huntersville.<sup>20</sup> The Cathey-Hoyle Funeral Home however, had the only ambulance in the whole area. With this ambulance, the funeral home transported patients to the local hospitals, it operated non-stop – day and night. Over the years many Davidson College students, especially those in pre-med studies, lived near the Cathey-Hoyle House assisting Mr. Cathey with the business and learning from him. The

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Edger Stowe Beam, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



funeral home closed in 1972. William A. Cathey died in January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1982. Mrs. Ruth H. Cathey continued to live in the house until moving to a retirement home in Charlotte.<sup>21</sup>

In 1988, Edger Stowe Beam bought the house from his aunt, Ruth H. Cathey.<sup>22</sup> Before buying the Cathey-Hoyle House, Mr. Beam and his family lived in the United Methodist Church, located right next to the funeral home. The new house was a huge relief for Mr. Beam and his family as the new house was much larger than his previous place of residence. On a humorous note, Mr. Beam told stories to members of Davidson United Methodist Church of “a trap door in the wall behind the organ and of unannounced visitors who mistook him for the Methodist preacher.”<sup>23</sup> Right after moving into the new house, Mr. Beam made some changes inside the house to accommodate his family. Some of these changes were adding a new kitchen between the embalming room and the front living room. He also, converted the huge showing room into a play room for his three sons. No other changes were made to the house during his time of residence. David Beam, Ed’s second oldest son still recalls some of the good memories he had while growing up in the house. For example, having a thirteen foot ceiling enabled his family to buy unusually tall Christmas trees. Moreover, David enjoyed having a huge play room and balcony on the second floor.<sup>24</sup>

In 2001, Davidson United Methodist Church bought the Sloan House from the Beam family.<sup>25</sup> The name of the house was changed into DUMC Molly McKay Youth Center. From the

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<sup>21</sup> Davidson Historical Society, <http://davidsonhistoricalsociety.org/Images/Newsletter%20Fall%2003.pdf>, April, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Deed of Sale from Ruth H. Cathey to Edger S. Beam, June 1988 (Filed June 23th, 1988), Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Deed Book 5783, page 446.

<sup>23</sup> Davidson Historical Society, <http://davidsonhistoricalsociety.org/Images/Newsletter%20Fall%2003.pdf>, April, 18.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with David Beam, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Deed of Sale from Edger Stowe Beam to Trustees of Davidson United Methodist Church, November, 15<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Filed November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2001), Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Deed Book 12895, page 309.

outside of the house, the church changed the siding of the house to white vinyl. A new side walk for the handicapped was added on the left side of the house. Additionally, the door and windows of the house were replaced. Lastly, the church added an exterior stairway to the left side of the house. Inside the house, the church added more bathrooms on the first floor of the house. According to Jim Hawk, who was in charge of the renovation, while working within today's building codes, they were able to create new, attractive and versatile spaces while maintaining the historical integrity of the former funeral home.

### **Architectural Style of the House**

The architectural style of the Sloan House favors the Southern Georgian Style. If one is to view the house from across the street, the first thing that can be noticed is the minimal pitched gable above the front of the house. Secondly, the house consists of two floors and framed in a square shape. Thirdly, the white color is noticed, throughout the house' exterior; on the vinyl siding; the windows; and the front door. Most importantly though is having a huge porch which covers the whole front and right side of the house and the balcony that atop the whole front porch of the house. The black metal railings around the balcony and the porch create a neat contrast with the white color of the house. The roof of the house has four gables, in addition to the one gable that tops the front side of the house, there are three other gables, each covers a single room on the back of the house. There is one room on the left side of the back of the house that has a flat roof with no gable. Inside the house, one notices the high ceilings, the crown molding on the walls and the framed square fireplace mantels. The floor of the house inside is pine hardwood, possibly the original flooring of the house.

## List of All the Grantor and Grantees of the Sloan House.

Grantor: Frank J. Knox  
Grantee: James L. Sloan Sr.  
1880

Grantor: James R. Caldwell and wife, Ellie S. Caldwell, and Harry S. Caldwell  
Grantee: Gregg H. Caldwell  
August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1916

Grantor: Gregg R. Caldwell and wife  
Grantee: Davidson Mills Corporation  
September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1924

Grantor: Davidson Mills Corporation  
Grantee: W. F. McCanless and wife,  
March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1947

Grantor: W. F. McCanless and wife  
Grantee: William A. Cathey and wife  
May 23<sup>th</sup>, 1947

Grantor: Ruth H. Cathey

Grantee: Edger S. Beam

June 23<sup>th</sup>, 1988

Grantor: Edger Stowe Beam

Grantee: Trustees of Davidson United Methodist Church

November, 15<sup>th</sup> 2001