

Landmark Designation Report for the



Davidson Baptist Chapel 307 Armour Street Davidson, North Carolina

Prepared by:
Susan V. Mayer, Principal
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July 2025

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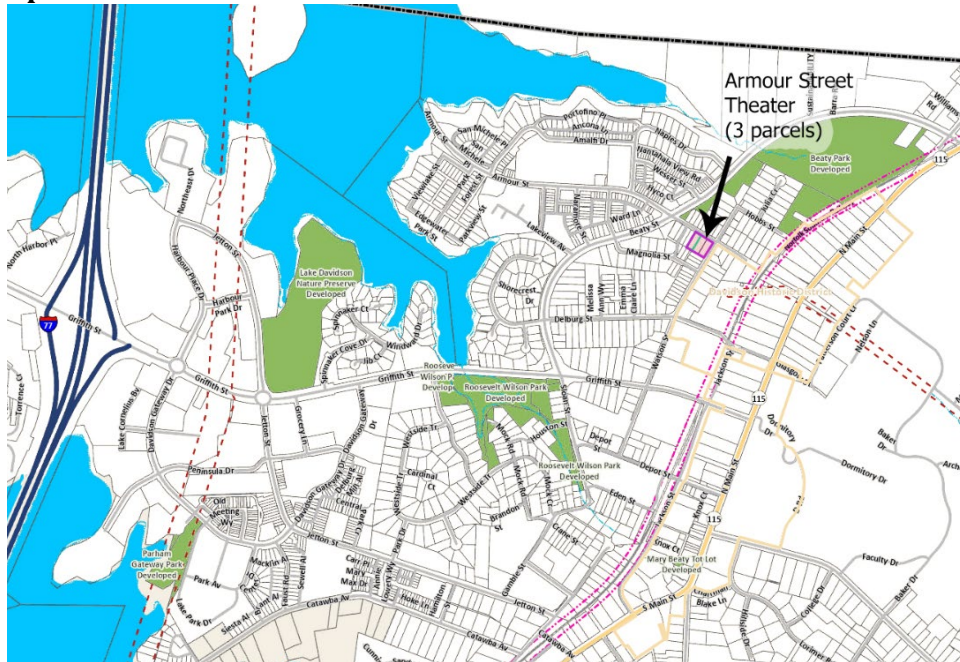
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General Information

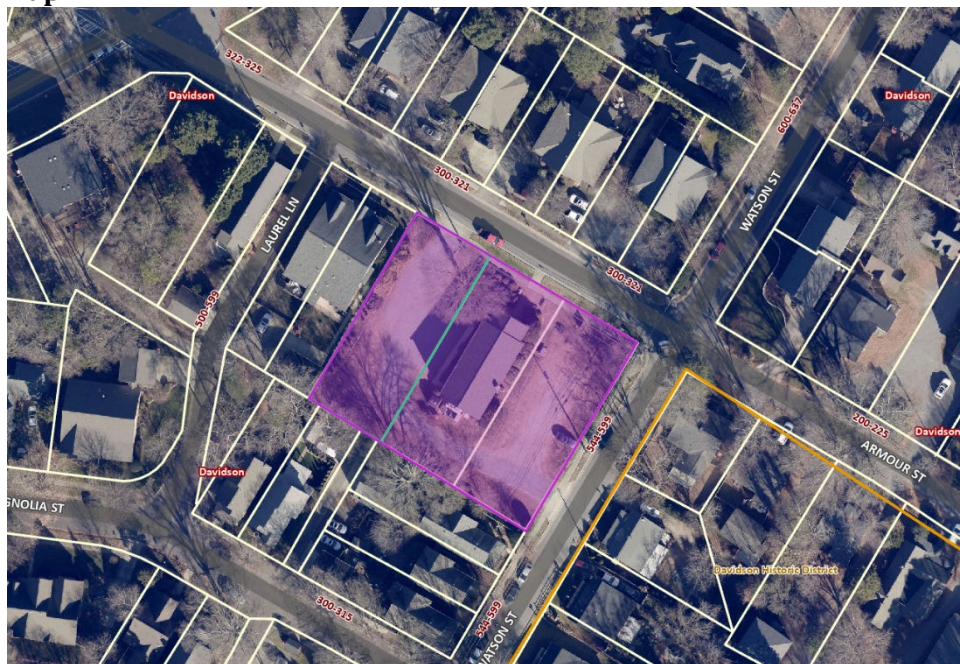
Historic Names of Property:	Davidson Baptist Chapel
Address of Property:	307 Armour Street, Davidson, North Carolina 28036
PIN:	00327507, 00327565, 00327511
Deed Book & Page:	Mecklenburg County Deed Book 23276, Page 743
Amount of Land/Acreage to be Designated:	0.618 acres
Ad Valorem Tax Value:	The 2025 Real Estate Assessed Value of parcels 00327507, 00327565, and 00327511 which include the Davidson Baptist Chapel is \$813,300.
Recommendation for Designation:	Exterior designation of the Davidson Baptist Chapel and all the property within Mecklenburg County parcels 00327507, 00327565, and 00327511.
Name/Address of Current Property Owner:	Town of Davidson 216 South Main Street Davidson, NC 28036

Maps

Location Map



Boundary Map



Not to Scale
Source: Polaris, Mecklenburg County GIS (2025)

Abstract

Statement of Significance

The Davidson Baptist Chapel is significant as an extant representation of the class divide which once characterized the town. Davidson was divided by the railroad both physically and socioeconomically. The eastern section was connected with Davidson College and home to the town's upper- and middle-class residents as well as the business district. The western section developed in the early twentieth century around cotton mills and the associated mill villages. Generally self-contained, western Davidson remained working class well into the twentieth century. With the 1960s construction of Lake Norman, which flooded the portion of Mecklenburg County west of the town, increased development and adaptive reuse of the mill properties from the 1980s onward have resulted in the loss of many of the buildings that represented this important aspect of Davidson's history.

Integrity Statement

Location	High	The Davidson Baptist Chapel has a high integrity of location. Its location at the corner of Armour Street and Watson Street is the original site of construction.
Design	High	The Davidson Baptist Chapel has a high integrity of design. The building retains its original mass of sanctuary and entry bay. Only the rear/south elevation has had changes with the installation of an HVAC system with exterior ductwork and infill of windows with brick.
Setting	Medium-High	The Davidson Baptist Chapel has medium-high integrity of setting. It is located at the north edge of the former Delburg Mill village. The neighborhood has undergone much infill construction in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century, which detracts from its integrity, but the building and site retain their residential character.
Materials	Medium	The Davidson Baptist Chapel has medium integrity of materials. Original twelve-over-sixteen wood sash windows in the former sanctuary are extant. While aluminum wraps many of the wood materials on the exterior, wood German siding remains extant on the sanctuary gable. Doors have been replaced as have windows at the basement.
Workmanship	High	The Davidson Baptist Chapel has high integrity of workmanship. It is especially reflective of the popularity of brick veneer construction in the mid-century period.

Feeling	High	The Davidson Baptist Chapel retains a high degree of integrity of feeling, as it is readily identifiable as a building that once housed a church.
Association	High	The Davidson Baptist Chapel has high integrity of association. It served as the Baptist mission, later church, for the white residents of Davidson during and after segregation. Located in the western side of town, which was home to cotton mills and other industry, Davidson Baptist Chapel stood in contrast to the upper- and middle-class congregants of the dominant Presbyterian church and its associated Davidson College.

Chain of Title

Grantor	Grantee	Date	Deed Book/Page	Notes
Davidson Community Players, a North Carolina non profit corporation	Town of Davidson, a North Carolina municipal corporation	January 15, 2008	23276/743	Parcels 00327507, 00327511, 00327565, and 00327566
GROVECO, L.L.C., a North Carolina limited liability corporation	Davidson Community Players, a North Carolina non profit corporation	January 15, 2008	23276/738	Parcels 00327507, 00327511, 00327565, and 00327566
Heritage Church of Davidson, Inc., a North Carolina non-profit corporation	GROVECO, L.L.C., a North Carolina limited liability corporation	February 27, 2006	20066/980	Parcels 00327507 and 00327511
Baptist Metropolina Ministries Board, a North Carolina non-profit corporation	Heritage Church of Davidson, Inc., a North Carolina non-profit corporation	May 30, 2002	13675/87	Parcel 00327507
Trustees of First Baptist Church of Davidson	Baptist Metropolina Ministries Board, a N.C. non-profit corporation	April 15, 2002	13494/440	Parcel 00327507
Mecklenburg Baptist Association Board, Inc.	Trustees of First Baptist Church of Davidson	November 22, 1977	4009/134	Tracts 1 and 2
Ada Rogers and husband, George R. Rogers, et. al.	Mecklenburg Baptist Association Board, Inc.	April 5, 1947	1256/523	Tracts 1 and 2
R. M. Armour (unmarried)	Robt. H. Rafferty	June 30, 1911	290/6	Lots 1 and 2, Block B of Armour Heights (Map Book 230, Page 52)
Source: Mecklenburg County Registrar of Deeds				

Historical Background

Written by Nick Linville and Susan V. Mayer

The Davidson Baptist Chapel is representative of the historic divide between “town and gown”—the eastern section of Davidson connected with Davidson College, and the western portion that developed in the early twentieth century around cotton mills—which was extant well past the construction of the chapel from 1957 to 1960. The distinctions between these two sections of Davidson have all but disappeared from the modern town as development pressure on the western section has steadily developed.

Baptists in Mecklenburg County

Historically settled by Scotch-Irish immigrants, Mecklenburg County was largely Presbyterian in its religious leanings. In June 1833 efforts began to form a Baptist congregation in Charlotte with short-lived success. A second effort in 1855 resulted in the founding of Beulah Baptist Church, later First Baptist Church. The church joined the Brown Creek Baptist Association, whose churches were largely in Anson and Union counties.¹ In north Mecklenburg, Baptists assembled in the Hopewell community southeast of Davidson to form Hopewell Baptist Church in 1879. However, much like early efforts in Charlotte, the church disbanded in the 1890s but reformed in 1914.²

As Davidson College, a historically Presbyterian institution, formed the historical core of the town, many of its residents were Presbyterian. In the decades after Emancipation, Black residents established their own congregations, Davidson Presbyterian Church (1870s) and Reeves Temple A.M.E. Zion Church (1897). Gethsemane Baptist Church was established in 1905 by Black Baptists and held its first service in a house on Depot Street. They soon built a new church on Potts Street on land donated by Jimmie Lee Sloan. As churches were typically segregated, white Baptists in Davidson traveled three miles into rural Mecklenburg to attend Hopewell Baptist.³ The mill villages around Delburg and Linden Mills were served by a non-denominational church founded in 1890 by mill operator Dr. J. P. Munroe. A rotation of pastors of various denominations as well as students at Davidson College conducted Sunday School classes and worship services through 1950.⁴

Class in Davidson

The Norfolk Southern railroad tracks quite literally divide the town of Davidson into two historically distinct sections—the eastern portion containing Davidson College, the business district, and large, stately homes along North Main Street and Concord Road, and the western portion with the blue-collar Delburg and Linden mill villages and Black community of Mock Hill. This divide is evident in

¹ Rev. T. J. Taylor, “Early Baptist Efforts in Charlotte,” *North Carolina Baptist Historical Papers*, July 1899 (Henderson, NC: North Carolina Baptist Society), 169-181; 15.

² *Hopewell Baptist Church, 1879-1979: A Centennial History* (Davidson, NC: Hopewell Baptist Church, 1979), 5-6.

³ Jan Blodgett and Ralph B. Levering, *One Town, Many Voices: A History of Davidson, North Carolina* (Davidson: Historical Society, 2012), 70-74, 102-103; “Our History,” Gethsemane Baptist Church of Lake Norman, https://www.gbclakenorman.org/site/page.asp?id=32&t=our_history, accessed May 16, 2025.

⁴ Stewart Gray, Survey and Research Report on the Unity Church Cabin/Lingle Hut (1932), Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission (2007).

Mary D. Beaty's seminal 1979 history of the town, which focuses on the College, the Main Street corridor, and east side of the railroad tracks. A successor book by Jan Blodgett and Ralph B. Levering brings western Davidson into the historical discussion, centering its context within the "town-gown" divide between working-class Davidsonians and those more affluent or college-affiliated residents.

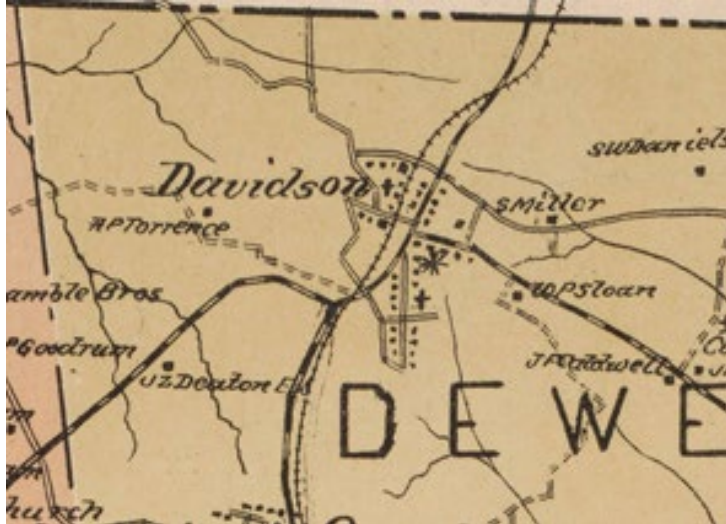


Figure 1 The 1911 map of Mecklenburg County shows the lack of roads heading west from Davidson, indicative of the slow development of the western section of the town.

The primary reason for this divide between east and west was infrastructure. When trustees established Davidson College in 1835, they chose donated land along the Great Road between Charlotte and Statesville. From this point, the Concord Road ran east to Rocky River and Cabarrus County, and it was along these thruways that homes and businesses grew. The railroad came to the village by 1861, though the tracks were destroyed during the Civil War and not rebuilt until 1871. The railroad tracks may have impeded development on the west side of town as most growth occurred around the college and the north-south

road between Charlotte and Statesville. When the Linden and Delburg cotton mills were built around the turn of the twentieth century, they were sited on the rural land west of the railroad tracks. Local resident R. M. Armour platted a single-family subdivision north of the mills in 1909, though Delburg Cotton Mill purchased most lots to expand its mill village in 1910.⁵

Until the opening of the cotton mills, white residents of Davidson lived adjacent regardless of class and occupation. But as the mill villages took shape, these social divisions increased. Recreation programs and schools were separate, as the town did not have a public school until 1911. Davidson College expanded its water and sewer lines to serve Main Street and nearby residences in the early 1900s. However, the mill villages and Mock Hill did not receive utility services until much later. Mill houses were connected to the electric grid starting in 1931. Black barber Ralph Johnson petitioned the town commissioners to install a water line and fire hydrant in the area in 1935, but the motion was tabled for a year. As noted in the *Gazette* in 1950, when the former Delburg mill houses were being sold to individual owners, "Plans are to connect these homes with water and sewer lines and to install a kitchen sink and additional facilities in each home."⁶

⁵ Mary D. Beaty, *Davidson: A History of the Town from 1835 until 1937* (Davidson: Briarpatch Press, 1979), 20; Susan V. Mayer, "Landmark Designation Report: Armour Street Mill House, 225 Armour Street, Davidson, North Carolina," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission (September 2024), 10–14.

⁶ "Houses Bought for Improvement, Resale," *Gazette*, November 16, 1950, in Blodgett and Levering, 160.

Religion also had a tinge of class distinction in Davidson. The Unity Church was established as an interdenominational ministry to the mill village in 1932, a reorganization of the chapel that had served western Davidson since 1890. The church also drew congregants from local residents who had no ties to Davidson College. While many attended Davidson College Presbyterian Church, they found class divides still existed on Sunday mornings. Aileen Cantrell, who managed the local Western Auto store with her husband, noted that “nobody” would speak to her at the college church because of her lack of connection to the institution.⁷ As Blodgett and Levering noted, white churches in Davidson tended to reflect the social and economic standing of its congregants—upper-class and college connections at the Presbyterian church, merchants and business owners at the Methodist church, middle class at the Episcopal church, and working class at the west Davidson churches.⁸



Figure 2 In 1951, the only road heading west from Davidson was Armour Street which curved north into Iredell County. Griffith Street was opened in 1956 to access the new US-21 bypass. The location of Davidson Baptist Chapel is marked by the green star. Mecklenburg County Time Machine, Mecklenburg County GIS, <https://timemachine.mcmap.org/#35.50600054851916/-80.84890097379686/19/1686413485000>, accessed July 1, 2025.

Davidson Baptist Chapel

As the Baptist faith grew along with the general population of Mecklenburg County in the postwar years, the Mecklenburg Baptist Association initiated missions in underserved communities with the

⁷ Blodgett and Levering, 166.

⁸ Blodgett and Levering, 168.

hope that they would become fully organized churches. Davidson, where the Presbyterian church had been strong since the antebellum period, was an area ripe for spreading the Baptist faith, particularly as the population of the town expanded.⁹ The Association purchased the parcel in 1947 against the backdrop of an expanding Baptist Church. The Baptist faith has had a representation in Mecklenburg County since the eighteenth century. In 1826 the Baptist congregations of Mecklenburg and neighboring counties formed the Catawba River Association. By the late nineteenth century, that association, part of the broader Southern Baptist Convention, consolidated into the Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Association until it became the Mecklenburg Baptist Association in the first half of the twentieth century. The Association represented all of the Baptist churches, old and new, in the county and also supported leadership, community programs, and development.



Figure 3 Rev. Clyde H. Jackson was the first pastor of Davidson Baptist Chapel. From larryham_1, <https://www.ancestry.com>.

The Association purchased two lots (the Davidson Baptist Chapel parcel) as well as other lots in Armour Heights via the 1947 deed, perhaps in order to have options for a future site. One of the properties included a house that hosted the mission until a new chapel was built later.¹⁰ This house may be one of the buildings (non-extant) visible in the 1951 aerial photograph to the east of the future site of the chapel. Cornelius Baptist Church sponsored the initial Davidson mission, known as the Davidson Baptist Chapel.¹¹ By 1954, Huntersville Baptist Church sponsored the mission. That summer, Clyde Henry Jackson, a recently ordained graduate of Wingate College and Wake Forest University as well as a World War II veteran, became pastor.¹²

Annual minutes of the Mecklenburg Baptist Association Board from the late 1950s mention an effort to raise a new building for the Davidson mission. The minutes from the 1958 meeting note that the Association and the Baptists in Davidson, who were under the leadership of Rev. Edward Wells, were actively working toward a new chapel because “it was absolutely necessary that they [i.e., the Davidson mission] get out of an old frame building that was a discredit to the Baptist work.” The Association contributed \$2,238 to the construction of a new building. Minutes from the following year noted, “We are not through at

⁹ Gethsemane Baptist Church, founded in the early 1900s, was perhaps the largest Baptist congregation in Davidson in the mid-twentieth century.

¹⁰ Mecklenburg Baptist Association, *Sixty-Second Annual Session*, October 23–24, 1947, Mecklenburg Baptist Association, North Carolina, 20.

¹¹ Historic aerial photographs available from 1948 and 1950 do not show a building on the parcel. Similarly, historic newspapers and Association minutes do not specify the exact location of the initial Davidson mission.

¹² “Clyde Jackson to be Ordained,” *The Charlotte Observer* June 19, 1954, 26; Obituary of Clyde Henry Jackson, *The Charlotte Observer* June 18, 1997, 59.

Davidson,” as the building’s electrical and heating reached completion.¹³ The minutes from 1960 are the last to mention the building effort, and thus it appears the new chapel reached completion and opened that year.¹⁴



Figure 4 This 1961 USGS aerial photograph of the Davidson Baptist Chapel shows its location at the northern edge of Davidson. There would be little development in this section until the 1990s.

The brick chapel stood prominently at the corner of Armour Street and Watson Street, an area that was on the outskirts of downtown Davidson at the time. The chapel was the first and largest of only three buildings on Armour Street as one turned west from Watson. Most of the land to the north and the west was undeveloped.¹⁵

As Davidson continued to grow in the 1960s, the mission attracted new congregants. Rev. George Frank Vinson (1928–2010), who went by Frank, was a fixture at the mission and in the later history of the site.¹⁶ A native of Lancaster, South Carolina, he received degrees from North Greenville Junior College, Wingate College, and Southwestern Theological Seminary in Texas. Rev. Vinson worked in many churches in South Carolina before becoming pastor at the Davidson Baptist Chapel in 1966. Under Vinson’s pastorate, the mission evolved to the point that, in 1970, the Association recognized it as a church, and it became known as First Baptist Church of Davidson.¹⁷

Through the last quarter of the twentieth century, First Baptist Church remained under the pastorate of Rev. Vinson. In 1977 the Mecklenburg Baptist Association deeded the parcel to a group of church trustees. The church continued to serve its community as a place for weddings, funerals, worship, and other activities, as is evidenced in historical newspaper articles. While the building remained its same size through the years, the church and its members enhanced the interior in 1982 when the Jarman family commissioned a mural of the River Jordan entitled *River of Descension*. The artist was

¹³ Mecklenburg Baptist Association, *Seventy-Fourth Annual Session*, October 22–23, 1959, Mecklenburg Baptist Association, North Carolina, 28; Mecklenburg Baptist Association, *Seventy-Fourth Annual Session*, October 22–23, 1959, Mecklenburg Baptist Association, North Carolina, 32.

¹⁴ Mecklenburg Baptist Association, *Seventy-Fifth Annual Session*, October 20–21, 1960, Mecklenburg Baptist Association, North Carolina, 45–48.

¹⁵ Information on the ca.1960 setting is derived from the 1961 USGS aerial photograph.

¹⁶ Vinson replaced Rev. Wells who resigned in 1961.

¹⁷ Mecklenburg Baptist Association, *Eighty-Fifth Session*, October 22–23, 1970, Mecklenburg Baptist Association, North Carolina, 24.

Alice Mae Favro of Matthews, who had completed similar murals across the state.¹⁸ Through the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, small churches like First Baptist Church struggled to survive as church attendance and affiliation across the American religious landscape declined, and also as larger, regional churches offered more programs and modern facilities. First Baptist appears to have closed its doors in the early 2000s.

Armour Street Theater

Amidst changes in the Baptist church, the Trustees of First Baptist Church of Davidson transferred ownership of the Armour Street building and parcel to the Association, which had rebranded as Baptist Metrolina Ministries, in 2002. Several months later, an entity called Heritage Church of Davidson purchased the property. About four years later, usage of the building as a church appears to have ended as real estate investment entity Groveco LLC purchased the property.

In 2008 the Davidson Community Players (DCP), working with the Town of Davidson, acquired the former First Baptist Church property. Drama teacher, director, and actor Constance Welsh founded the organization in 1965. In its early years, DCP performed two plays a year at Davidson College that featured students and town residents. DCP achieved non-profit status in the 1980s, enabling them to expand their activities through the 1990s when they produced 23 different plays. As of recent years, DCP stages several adult productions each year, including both plays and musicals, and maintains a strong lineup of performances featuring teens and children. The organization is widely regarded for its theater education efforts in the region, offering programs at venues such as the Armour Street Theatre, Cain Center for the Arts, and the Duke Family Performance Hall.¹⁹ Through its continued use by Davidson residents, the history of the building continues.

¹⁸ Pat Johnson, "Mural a Real 'Labor of Love,'" *The Mecklenburg Gazette*, January 13, 1983, A37. North Carolina Baptist Church and Association Files. Special Collections and Archives, Wake Forest University.

¹⁹ "History," Davidson Community Players webpage, electronic document, <https://www.davidsoncommunityplayers.org/history>, accessed May 12, 2025.

Architectural Description

Written by Susan V. Mayer, Principal



The Davidson Baptist Chapel is located on three parcels at the southwest corner of Armour Street and Watson Street. A gravel parking lot wraps the building on the east, south, and west sides. The building, which faces north and is sited near Armour Street, is in the middle parcel. The east parcel is grassy with the gravel parking lot near the building and curb cut at Watson Street. The west parcel has the gravel parking lot with curb cut at Armour Street. The site slopes from east to west, allowing for a walkout basement at the rear portion of the building. A concrete sidewalk runs along Watson Street and Armour Street.



A concrete walkway with curb cut leads from Armour Street to the sidewalk. A brick walkway leads from the sidewalk to the steps, and east of the walkway has pavers. A mature oak tree is northwest of the building immediately adjacent to the accessible ramp.



Built in 1957-1960 as a Baptist chapel, the building is a common front-gabled church with Colonial Revival detailing. It is one-story-on-basement in height. The former sanctuary comprises the primary mass of the building. An entry bay slightly narrower than the primary mass comprises the façade.



The Davidson Baptist Chapel is sheathed in running bond brick veneer with common bond at the basement level on all elevations. It has a front-gabled roof with asphalt shingles. Typical wood sash windows at the main level are twelve-over-sixteen wood sash and appear to be original. At the basement level typical windows are horizontal sliding vinyl replacement windows with four lites on each side. Eaves and cornice boards have aluminum siding wrap. Aerial imagery dating to 1960 shows no evidence of a steeple on the building.



Figure 5 Aerial photographs of the Davidson Baptist Chapel ca. 2007. Meck Scope,
<http://maps.co.mecklenburg.nc.us/meckscope/?lat=35.5061&lon=-80.8488>, accessed May 11, 2025.

Since moving into the building in 2007-2008, the Davidson Community Players have made minimal changes to the exterior. The wood ramp at the entrance was added for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Mechanical systems at rear were installed, with window openings filled with ducts and brick. The two-lite wood door at basement level was replaced with the extant six-panel door. Windows at basement level are vinyl replacement, indicating that they were likely added at or after this time. Brick above the entry shows evidence of alteration. But as Google Street View images from July 2008 show that the façade appeared the same, it is likely that any changes were made earlier.²⁰

²⁰ 307 Armour Street, Google Street View, July 2008, <https://maps.app.goo.gl/XGTBPUwy6m5YGafM6>, accessed May 12, 2025.



The façade of the Davidson Baptist Chapel is comprised of the front-gabled entry, which is one bay wide and one bay deep. The gable has a continuous eave and aluminum siding with louvered vent in the peak. It has brick steps with wrought iron railing and a winding wood ramp approaching the entrance.

The narrow pair of wood six-panel doors have an unusual surround. The pilasters and crosshead have a simple base with decorative trim and moulding applied. The pilasters are narrow with inset panels. The crosshead features wide trim with dentil moulding above. The crosshead base widens from its base, and two ogee broken pediments are at top. Lantern sconces flank the doorway. Brick above the entry shows signs of alterations to the entry. The surround components are wrapped in aluminum except for the dentil moulding and pediments which appear to be wood or wood composite. The trim around the double doors is wood.

The side elevations of the entry have an off-center typical window. A basement window covered with plywood was visible on the west elevation.



The original wood German siding of the gable is visible through missing trim.



The east elevation of the Davidson Baptist Chapel is seven bays wide. Six bays have typical wood sash windows at the main level. The fifth bay is a brick chimney. It interrupts the eave and extends slightly above the roof plane. Vegetation obscures the view of basement fenestration from the streetscape. However, windows generally align with the bays above. The first through fourth bays have typical vinyl replacement windows. The sixth bay has a fixed vinyl replacement window. The seventh bay has no fenestration but has electrical boxes and panels. Windowsills at the basement have brick headers rather than the typical rowlocks found throughout the building.



The rear elevation of the Davidson Baptist Chapel has the most alterations of the building with the ca. 2008 installation of a heating and cooling system. It is two bays wide. The original windows at the main level have been removed, and the ductwork with brick fill below utilizes the west opening. The east window has also been filled with brick. While Google Street View imagery is low quality, it appears that these windows may have been original nine-over-nine wood sash. Ductwork extends up the face to a new opening under the louvered vent in the gable peak. The HVAC system sits on a concrete pad, and the units and ductwork obscure at basement level a typical vinyl replacement window. The six-panel door replaced the likely original two-lite wood door.



The west elevation of the Davidson Baptist Chapel is six bays wide. The main level has typical wood sash windows. The fenestration at basement level generally lines up with the bays above with some exceptions as noted. The first, second, and third bays have typical vinyl replacement windows. The fourth bay, which is located off-center from the bays above, has a six-panel wood door with two sets of brick steps to a concrete landing below grade. The north brick steps with low retaining wall and concrete landing appear original. An original retaining wall at south was partially removed for installation of the south brick steps, low brick retaining wall, and new concrete landing with square drain. Tube steel railing is on the original brick retaining walls.



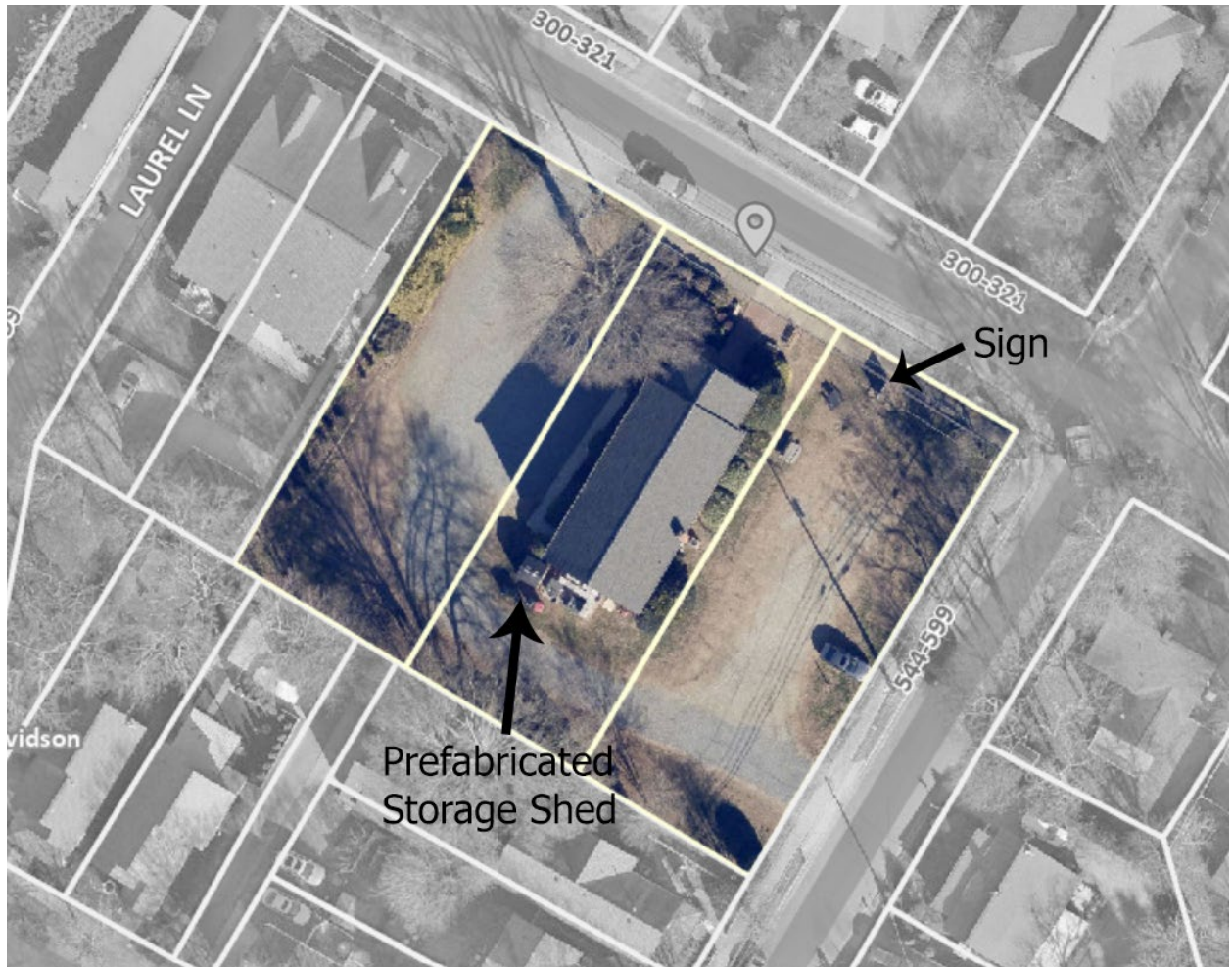
The fifth bay of the west elevation has a six-over-six vinyl replacement window. The seventh bay has a wide six-panel steel door. A concrete sidewalk extends along the elevation to provide access from the Armour Street sidewalk and ramp to the two entrances.



Typical twelve-over-sixteen wood sash window



Two non-contributing resources are located on the site. A prefabricated shed is located at the southwest corner of the building. A lighted acrylic sign with metal frame and brick base is located northeast of the building on Armour Street.



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