

# I

## Guides to History

Each of the three chapters of Part I provides a different but complementary angle of vision on Old North history.

First, although we may intuitively perceive the Old North as “different,” exactly *how* is it different? To what features would we point in explaining its distinctiveness? I try to answer this question in **Ch. 1**.

Second, one critical form of understanding anything is to know the larger context in which it is born, develops, and exists. For the Old North, this larger context is the City of Davis. Accordingly, I trace Old North-relevant aspects of Davis history in **Ch. 2** and relate these to the neighborhood.

Third, the Old North is described in the “historical present” in Ch. 1—as a set of features existing at this time. This is useful, but it neglects changes over time. What sorts of things happened and at what pace in Old North history? This is the topic of **Ch. 3**.

# 1

## Old North Features

### *A Traditional Neighborhood*

Even at a glance it is easy to see that Old North Davis is different from most neighborhoods—especially from other neighborhoods in Davis. But it is less easy to say exactly *how* it is different.

Let me therefore begin our tour with a description of features that, in composite, make up the distinctive pattern of the *traditional neighborhood*, of which the Old North is an increasingly scarce instance.

The contrast that prompts us to “see” traditional neighborhoods is the suburban style, post-1945 neighborhood. Therefore, what follows is both an explicit and implicit comparison of the Old North to the prototypical suburban enclave.

There are about two dozen Old North features that make it a traditional neighborhood and that are often points of contrast with its historical successor and nemesis, the suburban tract. I say about two dozen because the list is not completely pure. A few items describe the Old North more than they do traditional neighborhoods in the abstract. Because these departures are clear, I trust they are not confusing.

For the sake of orderliness I sort these features into four categories:

- I. the area taken *globally* or as a whole.
- II. the streets or “*streetscapes*” within the Old North.
- III. *yard and lot* features.
- IV. *building* features.

In drawing up this list I have been guided by previous efforts to compare neighborhoods and to profile different patterns of them (e. g., Kunstler 1996). Indeed, in researching the literature on traditional neighborhoods I have once again appreciated how hard it is to see the obvious. Even though I have lived in Old North Davis more than two decades, I am able here to report how it is different importantly because I have read analyses of

neighborhoods rather than because of my personal experience. As aptly sloganized, “without *conception*, there is no *perception*.” (Nonetheless, those writings have had to pass the test of my personal experience.)

Throughout this chapter and at the beginning of each chapter in Part II, I report several kinds of population counts on the Old North—the number of residential units, number of residents, percentage rental versus owner-occupied, and the like. Let me explain the sources of these counts.

Setting up a file folder on each Old North property, in late 1996 and early 1997 I used public records to build a fact-picture of each parcel. The information included ownership from tax rolls, voter registration, and reverse street directory names. From the sidewalk, I photographed each property and residential unit.

I then developed the counts and percentages reported. Like all counting, categorization and estimation were required and both these activities are subject to error—or they are at least contentious. The numbers I report ought therefore to be regarded as approximations rather than exact enumerations.

## I. Global Features

“Global features” are characteristics of the Old North taken as a unit and are distinct from characteristics of smaller units within it such as streets, yards, and houses.

**1. STREET GRID.** The contrast between the traditional and the suburban begins with the first lines a developer or planner puts to paper: the arrangement of streets. The prototypical suburban street is the “cul de sac,” “dead worm pod,” or “spaghetti street.” A set of these pods are connected by arterials (also known as “collector” streets) that commonly end up congested because large numbers of people are forced to drive on a small number of roads.

The Old North and other traditional neighborhoods were constructed on the contrasting principle of the grid, or mesh (Fig. O.2 and the back cover of this book). This principle encourages the diffusion of travel rather than its collection on a few main roads. This was, indeed, the principle used in Davis and in much United States planning before World War II, but was largely abandoned in the 1950s (Garvin 1998).

**2. MIXED PRICES, TYPES, AGES OF HOUSING.** Having been built slowly, one structure at a time, over some four decades (the 1910s through the 1940s), Old North homes exhibit a variety of influences, including the architectural fashions of different decades and the economic resources (or lack thereof) of their owner-builders and landlord entrepreneurs.

These and other factors result in a neighborhood that provides housing for people of an unusually wide range of economic situations, especially when compared to the economic stratification of American suburbs.

For the most affluent, there are a dozen or so larger homes that, in the 1990s, sold in the mid-\$200,000s. For the slightly less affluent, a few dozen medium-size houses have marketed in the high \$100,000s.

Perhaps the largest portion of housing, though, caters to less affluent renters, including working adults with stable occupations. But the largest category of residents is graduate and undergraduate students at the University of California, Davis, which is only a few blocks away. For them, the Old North is a true mecca in offering a variety of rental opportunities. Most obvious but least interesting are the several apartment houses that dot the area and form an almost solid line along the north side of Seventh Street.

Let me attach some numbers to these generalizations. There are 281 residential units in the Old North and just over 600 people live in these units, an average of about two people per unit. This average obscures the fact, though, that there are a considerable number of single-person households along with many multiple student apartments.

These 281 residential units divide into two categories: signature homes (pre-1950s homes; more about these in the next section) versus all other residences, a category including, most importantly, apartment building units.

q There are 146 signature homes (52% of the total of 281 residential units) and 135 other residences (48% of the total).

The distinction between signature homes and other residences is importantly one of diversity in housing types, ranging from larger homes on one side to tiny apartments and cottages on the other.

One form of this diversity is a special category of residence I describe later in this chapter as the “tiny and/or hidden abode”—a miscellany of small cottages and other odd structures that are easily missed by the viewer. By my count there are 60 of these, virtually all rentals.

Rental versus owner-occupied is obviously a key dimension of diversity. Using Yolo County Assessor records, the 281 residential units divide into:

q 210 rentals, 75% of the total units, and 71 owner-occupied, 25% of all units.

The vast bulk of the rentals is to students, primarily in apartment buildings, but also in many of the signature homes.

In the current phrase, the Old North has much “affordable housing.” Indeed, in this neighborhood the problem of housing the less affluent continues to be addressed in the way some people argue it was approached before the coming of the suburbs: inter-mixed housing of quite varied sizes, character, quality, and cost. The Old North is in this sense a rare surviving example of how the question of housing everyone may have been handled historically in the United States (Kunstler 1996).

**3. PRE-WORLD WAR II SIGNATURE HOMES.** Despite residential variety and other features of diversity, what most clearly makes the Old North *the* Old North is the prominence of housing stock constructed before the 1950s and mainly in the four decades of the 1910s, '20s, '30s, and '40s. There are 146 of these signature homes.

By “signature” I mean that these 146 homes provide the context—the *ambiance*—of the area. In good part they create the Old North. Were they absent, we would think of the locality in entirely different terms. I hasten to add that I write in good part they create rather than simply create because they are a necessary but not sufficient feature. To them, we must add a great many of the other aspects I am enumerating.

**a. Construction Decades.** Classified by decade of construction, the 146 distribute, in percentage, in this way:

<b>Before 1910</b>	<b>1910s</b>	<b>1920s</b>	<b>1930s</b>	<b>1940s</b>	<b>After 1950</b>
2%	18%	14%	42%	17%	7%

These percentages suggest that the Old North is importantly a creation of the 1930s. However, about a third date from before that decade and about a quarter come later.

(A methodological caution is required here. Years or even decades of construction are not certain for some homes and, advised by others, I have guessed the construction decade for a fair number. Further, I tended to place uncertain cases in the 1930s, which artificially increases the number for that decade.)

**b. Lot-dominant Structures.** While signature homes are half of all the living quarters, they constitute a much higher proportion of all the lot-dominant structures in the area.

By lot-dominant structures I mean the central building that presents itself to viewers on the street. Virtually all lots/addresses have a single lot-dominant structure even though they may also have other and smaller residential buildings, and even though, in

the case of apartment houses, a single lot-dominant structure may contain a dozen or more residences.

The Old North has 182 lot-dominant structures, considerably fewer than the total of 281 residential units. Pertinent here:

- q All 146 of the signature homes are lot-dominant structures and they are 80% of the total 182 lot-dominant structures.

Therefore, while signature homes are only about half of Old North living units, they have a physical presence considerably beyond that—and in the range of 80%.

Further, the percent of the total Old North population living in signature homes or associated abodes exceeds the 52% of dwelling units they provide.

- q Of an estimated total Old North population of 609 people, 385 or 63% live in signature homes or associated tiny /hidden abodes.

So, these homes, in combination with their secondary units, are not simply a dominant physical presence, they house a clear majority of the population.

**c. Owner-occupancy Versus Rentals.** The 146 signature homes are more often renter- than owner-occupied. Specifically:

- q 46% of signature homes are owner-occupied; and 54% are renter-occupied (67 and 79, respectively). (In the United States, 66% of homes are owner-occupied, Inman, 1998, reports.)

There is wide street-to-street variation in percent of owner-occupancy—ranging from 32% to 88%. I report the position of each street in its own chapter in Part II. (In the Epilogue, I reflect on some possible meanings of these statistics.)

**d. Local Versus Absentee Landlords.** One important variation in rental arrangements is the degree to which the landlord is physically close by and thus more likely to oversee her/his property versus geographically distant and consequently less able to monitor rental happenings.

Using Yolo County Assessor listings of the addresses of owners of rented signature homes, I classified landlord addresses as Davis and therefore local versus out-of-town or absentee.

- q 53 or 67% of signature home landlords are local, 26 or 33% of signature home landlords are absentee,

As with owner versus renter occupancy, there is wide street-to-street variation, ranging from 25% to 100% absentee landlords. (The ranking of each street is given in its respective Part II chapter.)

Because of the central role of signature homes, they are featured in Part II chapters and they are also central to Ch. 3.

**4. MIXED USE.** Even though it is dominated by residential structures, a variety of other uses are also seen in the Old North.

G Street is zoned as a northern “spike” extension of the Downtown business area. As such, much of the street features diverse retail and other commercial enterprises. On G Street in the 1990s, one could count more than a dozen different kinds of businesses, including at least one each of several familiar forms of retailing: grocery, restaurant, dry cleaner, laundromat, automobile gas and repair, take-out pizza, book store, insurance agent, lumber and hardware, infant goods. Less common business included a bookkeeping service, a chiropractor, and a martial arts studio.

Beyond G Street, a number of residents have from time to time operated city-licensed as well as unlicensed businesses out of their homes. Perhaps most colorful of the city-registered businesses has been the spiritualist reader at 509 Fifth Street.

On the non-commercial side, the area has two churches (Catholic and Christian Science) and a day care center for children. The headquarters of the Davis area school district is housed in buildings in the B and Fifth block that used to be the Davis junior high school.

**5. MODERATE URBAN DENSITY.** The very notion of a neighborhood requires density—a reasonably large number of people and housing units in physical proximity. Density is frequently measured as people or housing units per square mile. Here are the measures for the Old North:

q **People per square mile:** ~7,000 (~.125 square miles, 609 people, calculation rounded). By comparison, the United States has about 75 people per square mile; United States metropolitan areas, 4,500; Los Angeles-Orange County, 5-6,000; Chicago, 15,000; District of Columbia, 8,700.

q **Housing Units per square mile:** ~3,500 (~.125 square miles, 281 housing units, calculation rounded). By comparison, the United States has about 30 housing units per square mile.

These measures suggest that Old North density is urban in character, but moderately so.

**6. RELATIVELY SMALL LOTS.** The land speculators who laid out the original 1868 grid of Davis created lots that were 50 by 120 feet. This same size was used in laying out the southern tier of Old North blocks in 1871 and the northern tier “Bowers Addition” in 1913 (with an allowance for the alleys).

This lot size is small by the suburban standards that emerged after World War II. Such smaller lots have several kinds of significance: a decrease in the rate in which farmland must be sacrificed to housing; a decrease in the distance between travel destinations thus encouraging pedestrian and other “soft path” modes of travel; efficient utilization of housing plots per se.

**7. PEDESTRIAN SCALE GEOGRAPHY.** Among neo-traditional town planners much is made of the principle of the one-quarter mile radius from a given point as the maximum distance of the routine human walk. Some translate this distance into time, declaring it should take no more than 10 minutes to traverse a neighborhood from edge to edge. Beyond such a distance or time, people are inclined not to make trips or to employ other means of transport. For neo-traditional planners, the implication is that neighborhoods should be no more than about a half-a-mile square if they are to remain scaled to pedestrians.

The Old North is nicely pedestrian in scale because it is about one-third of a mile east-west and one-quarter of a mile north-south. Both distances are easily strolled in only a few minutes. In addition, many more important destinations are within pedestrian distance just beyond Old North borders.

**8. ALLEYS.** As I will explain in Ch. 3, the northern strip of Old North blocks— those between Sixth and Seventh streets (the 600 blocks in address terms)— were laid out some 45 years after the southern strip of six blocks between Fifth and Sixth Streets (the 500 blocks in address terms).

Among other differences, the 600 blocks have alleys, but the 500 ones do not (except for the G-F block).

James Kunstler (1996, 129) exuberantly proclaims alleys to be “one of the greatest devices in American urban design” and I concur, at least with regard to Old North alleys. They function to provide tuck-away openings for small houses and other structures, openings for garages away from the street, locations for garbage containers, and routes for overhead utility lines away from the street.

Beyond these utilitarian features, the alleys of the Old North have an additional and almost spiritual character, some would say. Five of the six are gravel-surfaced rather than paved and a great variety of vegetation grows along their edges. These and other facets give them a rustic or rural quality. They are a stroller’s delight in which one is transported to the (somewhat mythical) small towns of the 1930s and 1940s (Fig. 1.1).

In 1991, city officials proposed paving these six alleys, thus extending the hard surface policy long ago applied to alleys in the adjacent Downtown. They met with a fusillade of resistance both

from Old North residents and citizens throughout the city. The paving plan was cut back so that only the one alley most affected by auto-oriented business was paved (the one between G and F streets in the 500 block).

1.1. View of an Old North alley, 1996.



**9. UNITY WITHOUT MASTER PLANNING.** The Old North does not exhibit a unified architectural style in the manner of New York City streets of brownstones or London avenues of Victorian crescents.

Great architectural variety is evident, but visitors and residents alike sense a level of design unity despite the diversity. This perception may arise from the fact that the majority of the visually dominant structures were constructed in only three decades: the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

Over those three decades, rooflines and other aspects of these houses differed—which makes them pleasingly varied—but they were nonetheless built on roughly the same small scale. As such, the great variety of their features convey variations on themes rather than jarring juxtapositions of unrelated types.

As a set, the signature homes also contrast with houses built in later decades. They exhibit similarity without an imposed master plan in the manner typical of suburbs. Instead, they are the outcome of an unspoken design culture of a sort, albeit one assisted by Bowers Addition building covenants and, after city incorporation, zoning codes

**10. LIMITED NEIGHBORHOOD CONSCIOUSNESS.** The features I have described so far tend to the physical. Of course, there is another side, that of the social or psychological. Specifically, there are such elusive matters as the degree to which one finds neighborhood consciousness in an area and the degree to which a district's residents can and do act together on topics of neighborhood concern.

My impression is that neighborhood consciousness and capacity for collective action are relatively limited in the Old North.

For example, I know of no neighborhood association or even a concerted effort to form one. The most we see are occasional and brief mobilizations of some residents around specific issues. These have included a mid-1980s petition of a dozen 500 block E Street residents to have an additional street light installed on that block (successful); several small groups before the city council in the mid-1980s protesting the closing of the Safeway market at Sixth and G streets (unsuccessful); and (most spectacularly) protests against a city plan to pave the Old North alleys (mostly successful).

Collective actions on the celebratory or commemorative sides likewise happen but are limited, as in establishing the Lyda Williams Memorial Garden (described in Ch. 6, "617 E Street").

But to say that the Old North is low on both consciousness and collective action is merely to say it is lower on the total scale of possibilities, not that it is atypical. For in fact, *most* neighborhoods tend to be limited in both these respects (Kunstler 1996, Ch. 4).

Nonetheless, my assessment is that residents perceive the Old North as a *special place* even if most still do not (yet) see it as a corporate entity in which they are active participants. That perception, of course, rests on the reality that it *is*, physically, a special place. And it is on that reality that a broader neighborhood consciousness and capacity for collective action might well be mounted.

None of the above should be construed as suggesting that Old North residents are atomized and do not have relations with one another. In fact, the opposite is true. My point, instead, is that the content of these relations do not significantly involve the Old North as a unit or object of consciousness and action. One tracer of this deficit—if that it be—is the fact that there has been no public and shared *name* for the area among residents. (The term "Old North" is of recent vintage.)

## II. Streetscape Features

In between thinking about a neighborhood macroscopically or as a whole and thinking about it microscopically in terms of lots, houses and such, there is an intermediate or mesoscopic level of perception: the streetscape. To think "streetscape" is to look down a street and ask, "What are central features of this space?" Here are some Old North streetscape features, most of which are also the classic streetscape characteristics of traditional neighborhoods.

**11. CURBS AND PLANTING STRIPS.** A hallmark of the suburban tract is the rolled or "bermed" (instead of square-cut) curb, together with the absence of publicly-owned planting strips for city-owned trees. The Old North is in clear contrast with its

step-up curbs (though with recent corner curb-cuts) and planting strips between the sidewalks and the street.

In addition, in the 600 tier of Old North blocks, there are only a few non-corner “curb cuts”—driveway openings cut through curbs, thus allowing front yard driveways. This relative absence is due to the fact that the 600 blocks are in Bowers Addition, which was laid out with alley-opening garages.

The relative absence of front driveways, combined with remarkably uniform house set-backs from the sidewalks, creates a streetscape of unusual openness and softness. Also, the cement and other hard surfaces associated with driveways in the 500 blocks are less prominent in the 600 blocks.

(However, more than a dozen curb-cuts have been added in the 600 blocks in recent decades. Each one of them, sadly, degrades the traditional neighborhood form.)

**12. CITY-OWNED, STREET-LINING AND ARBORING TREES.** Traditional neighborhoods develop towering and bowing arbors over their streets, as in the Old North. The effect is reminiscent of what Kunstler (1993, 141) terms a “magnificent green-roofed arcade.”

Planting trees in a *line* bordering the street helps provide a “dignified formality and a uniformity of structure . . .” The trees tend to behave “architecturally . . . to form columns at uniform intervals along the sidewalks and a leafy roof above as their branches arch . . . over the street” (Kunstler 1993, 142). Indeed, this street-arching and arboring effect is one of the most frequently mentioned “nice” features of the Old North.

To replace a planting strip with a sidewalk is to inhibit the possibility of trees lining the street. Indeed, there are no city-owned street trees in many suburban neighborhoods. Where there are, residents are often free to plant them anyplace in their front yards.

**13. CITY-MAINTAINED STREET TREES.** While strictly speaking a “global” feature of the neighborhood, it is appropriate here to point out that Old North city-owned trees are also city-maintained. This means routine and special-need pruning and attention to tree diseases. It ensures that the trees are reasonably tended regardless of the whims of individual owners and renters. (City maintenance is not perfect, though, and in places the neighborhood arbor suffers from city neglect.)

**14. ABUNDANT LANDSCAPING.** Although the street trees are perhaps the most conspicuous plants in the Old North and certainly a signal feature of it, residents are not slouches when it comes to plantings on individual properties. Every streetscape features an abundance of diverse greenery, a feature likely fostered

by the fact that until the late 1990s the City of Davis did not meter water use and did not charge according to consumption. But whatever the reasons, over many decades residents were assiduous planters of greenery. These plantings have grown large and, combined with the street trees, they imbue the entire neighborhood with softness and freshness.

Indeed, some of the privately planted trees have attracted the attention of tree enthusiasts and earned the status of official Davis *Landmark* or *Worth Saving* trees. A fair number of these are in the Old North and I call attention to several of them in the chapters on each street. (All are listed in Planning Department, City of Davis, 1974b, 146-170.)

**15. ADEQUATE SIDEWALKS.** Traditional neighborhood design assumes that many people will walk from one point to another in and through the area. Therefore, adequately wide, smooth, and otherwise unobstructed sidewalks are needed. And this is what we find in the Old North—albeit the walks could be wider and smoother.

The contrast is with suburban designs that feature no sidewalks at all or walks that are quite narrow and right next to the road.

**16. HOUSE NOT GARAGE PROMINENCE.** Although many people do not see it until it is pointed out, one of the most striking Old North streetscape features is the almost complete absence of large, looming garage doors on the street. There are, certainly, a few garages situated in front yards, but all of these were built after World War II or even after 1950.

As mentioned above, garages in the 600 block are located in the alleys, where their presence and diversity provide points of interest. In the 500 block, without alleys, one observes a variety of devices for artfully positioning garages behind the main house. (Indeed, several garages sit in the very far back corner of their lots, with zero lot line clearance on the back two sides of them.)

This treatment of garages contrasts strongly with the prototypical suburban street, on which “the information most readily available to you is that “cars live here—or, in the case of double-garages, that ‘cars are shacking up here’ ” (Andres Duany quoted in L. Lofland 1998, 201).

**17. WIDE STREETS AND SET-BACK HOUSES.** In long term perspective, some aspects of traditional neighborhoods may not be all that positive. Such is the case for two Old North streetscape features: (1) relatively wide streets and (2) houses that are, for the most part, set well back from the street.

The width of Old North streets is simply an extension of the width used in laying out the original grid of 1868. This is, officially,

50 feet (although measurements I have made here and there are a couple of feet narrower). This width may work well in commercial areas, but its use in neighborhoods might be questioned. (From property line to property line—which then includes the planting strips and sidewalks—the width is 80 feet.)

Likewise, Old North homes sit, in large part, some 25 feet back from the edge of the sidewalk (which is also the property line).

In combination, these two features create large vacant spaces and a sense of open streets. My supposition is that, seeing this expanse, people driving through the area infer that these are streets on which one can speed up—and they do. Fortunately, the street trees and curb parking somewhat off-set the street-width and house-setback features.

These two features also mean that the Old North is relatively weak in what neo-traditional planners call “street walls” and the “big outdoor rooms” that arboring street trees create. Street walls come into being when homes or other structures are arranged in a relatively uniform line that is close to a street. Set-backs and single story buildings inhibit this sense, as we see in the Old North.

**18. CURB PARKING.** The over-openness is also mitigated by parking along both sides of all Old North streets. This is a practice that is also encouraged by many neo-traditional planners because it separates auto traffic and pedestrians.

**19. PUBLIC SPACE EMBELLISHMENTS.** Neo-traditional planners have been especially interested in the degree to which neighborhoods have public places in which people can easily and leisurely congregate. Oft-mentioned forms of such places are parks, coffee houses, town squares, and libraries. The Old North is not rich in this form of amenity, but it is also not bereft. Such areas include the Lyda Williams Memorial Garden at 617 E Street, the public areas of the Davis Food Co-op on G Street, and the Civic Center Park on the west side of B Street. (Many more facilities are available in the Downtown immediately to the south.)

**20. SUBURBAN INCURSIONS.** Even though the Old North remains signally a pre-World War II neighborhood, it has not escaped suburban-type incursions. Most conspicuous of these is the shopping center at the northeast corner of G and Sixth. Built in 1960s and very early 1970s, it features *the* hallmark of the suburban era: A parking lot between the stores and the street. One saving aspect in this case, though, is that it is relatively small. Other incursions are scattered through the area and include large garage doors or car ports on the streets and buildings with flat roofs.

### III. Yard and Lot Features

Between the street and individual buildings as units are matters of yard and lot arrangements.

**21. OPEN YARDS.** Arguably a streetscape feature, let me nonetheless treat the “openness” or “closedness” of yards more microscopically. Pre-World War II Old North residents seemed to have preferred either no fences on their properties or, at most, low picket fences. The most prominent pattern may have been to have no fences in the front and low picket fences separating yards in the back.

The no-fences-in-the-front pattern has continued to a fair degree right into the 1990s. But it is clearly fading and an increasing number of high front yard bushes or equivalent barriers and fences are in evidence. The trend to six-foot or higher solid fences is even clearer in back yards and is easy to observe in the alleys, where low picket fences alternate with six-foot redwood “walls.”

There is clearly a cultural trend afoot in this shift from no or low, permeable fences to high, solid ones. When I moved into an Old North house in 1974, a friend who had grown up in a small town observed the white and low picket fence enclosing my back yard and urged me to “resist the urge to fence it in”—meaning the urge to build a high and solid fence. Not immune to culture drift, I only partially heeded his urging.

Where there is to be a fence, the case for a low rather than high one is that a low fence serves to define space but still allows communication across it. As Kunstler (1993, 250) puts it, a classic picket fence allows “a person on the street to see through the fence and yet still be informed that the private yard beyond it . . . is a separate place from the public street.” Happily, in the Old North a number of fences of this type still survive (Fig. 1.2).

1.2. Traditional picket fence (on Sixth between C and D, 1997).



**22. YARD DECORATIONS.** Too small and scattered to rise to the level of streetscape features are the various relatively small items with which people adorn or decorate their yards.

**First**, and perhaps the most common of such decorations are plants in diverse containers. Not content with plants in the

ground, many Old Northers virtually litter their establishments with plants in mobile pots.

**Second**, there is outdoor furniture, which is seen most commonly on porches but also on lawns.

**Third**, there are idiosyncratic and even strange personal decorations, such as the wooden statue of a gold miner elf peering from beneath a tree at the left front of 523 E Street. Other such personal items include plastic pink flamingoes planted in the lawn of a sophisticated upper-middle class professional and an Amish anti-hex symbol over the front door of the home of a secular academic couple.

**Fourth**, there are old-fashioned small town, self-made yard amenities, such as a true, old-fashioned swing hung from a tree branch (Fig. 1.3).

Yard decoration is a slippery topic because of the question of when these become trash and a public nuisance. One person's aesthetically pleasing battered couch on the front porch and junk car on blocks in the driveway is another person's reason to complain to authorities about visual blight or health threats. (I return to this topic in the Epilogue.)

1.3. Example of classic yard furniture, 1997.



As mentioned, the Old North also has a commercial “spike” district, which raises the question of whether merchants engage in the ancient practice of decorating the streets with their goods. True to historical marketplace practice, several merchants—but far from all of them—engage in this street-enlivening activity. On G Street, the automobile service station regularly exhibits car tires and the hardware and lumber merchant displays such items as wheelbarrows. Merchants further north on G are less active,

although one clothing store has bedecked its front yard with goods (Fig. 1.4).

1.4. Street display of merchandise, 1996.



**23. SURPRISE PASSAGES AND HIDDEN ABODES.** One important reason to single out and to dwell on “yards and lots” as a distinctive level or unit of perception is that it encourages us to look for more than the most obvious house or other initially evident structure.

Thusly sensitized about the Old North, we discover a great variety of inconspicuous passages that lead to many unusual and tiny and/or hidden abodes.

q There are 60 of these in the Old North—a surprising 17% of the total 281 residential units.

I will not spoil your explorations by revealing all of them—although the street chapters report the total for each street. As a starter, Fig. 1.5 provides clues to one location.

#### IV. Building Features

Individual buildings represent the most microscopic level at which to look at the Old North *qua* neighborhood. Let me first address some salient features of signature homes and then I will speak of buildings more generally.

1.5. Entrance to a  
"hidden abode,"  
1997.



#### 24. CAREFUL EMBELLISHMENT OF SIGNATURE HOMES.

When I first read the 1980 *Survey of Historical Resources* of Davis (HEC, 1980) I was surprised to discover that several Old North homes I thought of as sad and decaying slum rentals were described in glowing architectural terms and with a real appreciation for their decorative detail and embellishments. What I saw as dumps, the surveyors saw as historical gems.

Puzzled, I have looked at these houses once again with the survey write-ups in hand. While I still think many are egregiously neglected, I can also now see the true care and elaboration that went into the planning and construction of these structures. Despite decay, if one looks carefully and is guided by the individual descriptions given in Part II of this guide, one discovers that a great many pre-World War II homes were conceived and constructed with an eye for aesthetic detail and embellishment that we no longer see in most new homes (and remember that builders of Old North homes were ordinary people building ordinary homes, as I will elaborate in Ch. 3).

When such signature homes are also well-maintained and not remodeled out of character, they are really quite wonderful examples of a house craftsmanship no longer practiced in America.

**25. BUILT WITH CARE AND TO LAST.** Many Old North signature homes were also built as *the* family home. The house was not a disposable commodity or a temporary starter home from which one would move up. As an individually contracted undertaking, it was built with great care and to last a long time. Such attitudes help explain the careful exterior embellishments.

(And, many if not most of the care and longevity features are not visible from the street. Instead, current residents observe them in the course of living in these homes, as in beautiful paneling, solid wood doors, high ceilings, and arched hallways.)

**26. PORCHES AND ZONES OF TRANSITION.** Old North signature homes are unusual in the high proportion that have real porches. By a real porch I mean one that is more than a “dweeby” few square feet stuck on the front of the structure. Instead, it may run the entire width of the house or is otherwise a significant and architecturally integral feature of the structure. In addition, many of these porches meet the “six foot rule,” which is that to be of any use a porch should be at least six feet deep (a depth that suburban and even many neo-traditional porches commonly do not attain).

Real porches are important “devices of transition” between the public and the private and help to create layers of space that shift from public on the street to private inside the house. The contrast here is the suburban dwelling which features a quite abrupt change from public to private by confronting one with a wall—that is, with a garage door.

**27. APPEALING WINDOWS.** In *Home from Nowhere*, James Kunstler suggests that until quite recently house windows tended to be vertical rather than horizontal, that is, taller than they were wide. One of the reasons for this was construction technology, but another, claims Kunstler, is that vertical windows encourage projection of the standing human onto buildings and this is appealing.

When construction technology made horizontal windows possible and widespread, such windows thwarted projection of the standing human and diverted that impulse into projections of humans as sleeping, having sex, or dead. The upshot is that structures with vertical windows are perceived as much more beautiful and uplifting than those with horizontal windows, Kunstler and others claim.

Irrespective of the reasons, Kunstler’s line of observation cues us to the fact that many of the signature homes of the Old North feature conspicuous vertical windows. These homes are among those perceived to be the most attractive.

Moreover, the signature homes of the Old North have a great many windows, making natural light much more available than in the prototypical suburban home. One striking thing about a number of these homes is the careful arrangement in which every room (except the baths) has a window in at least two walls combined with a door in a third wall. Only one wall of any room (save the baths) is a solid wall. Indeed, a number of living rooms in these homes have windows in *three* walls and a large hallway

entrance in the fourth wall—a complete sweep of openness. By contrast, the typical suburban home often has windows in only one wall of any room.

**28. DIVERSE, TINY ABODES.** While the Old North has many ordinary or smaller size homes, one of its truly distinctive features is the large number of quite small or even tiny abodes that are nonetheless attractive homes. A few of them are pre-World War II signature homes, but most are not. Some, indeed, are relatively recent garage (or other structure) conversions. One of my favorites is also an example of “abode creep.” Located at 619 Fifth Street, this now-home was a garage in the 1950s and by enclosure of overhangs has slowly crept into being a genuine house (Fig. 5.1).

### **The Old North As a Traditional Neighborhood**

This fairly elaborate set of features forms a profile of the Old North as an example of the classic, traditional American neighborhood. The nuclear family form that completed the picture in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s is no longer prominent, of course. Nonetheless, at the level of *physical form*, the Old North persists as an essentially intact example of town design before the advent of the suburban pattern that has come to dominate the American landscape.

As such, it is a living, three-dimensional and full-scale model of some important alternative possibilities for neighborhood constructions. The list above in this chapter is, strictly construed, simply descriptive, a depiction of “what is” in the Old North. But, it is also easily viewed as prescriptive, as offering some ways in which people should do neighborhoods.

Despite its basically intact survival and its usefulness as a model, the Old North is not perfect and has its own, time-borne troubles that I will address in the Epilogue. But such troubles ought not unduly distract us from the many things to celebrate. As an example of a traditional neighborhood, the Old North contains an enormous number of quite interesting features and the above list is also a list of fun and fascinating matters. These features make up a setting that is visually attractive and charming, an environment that invites you into the unexpected, the whimsical and, in Edward Ralph’s phrase many “happy accidents of juxtaposition” (L. Lofland 1998, 201).



So, equipped with this list, you are almost ready to use the six walking guide chapters to venture into the Old North.

But: before doing so, you will probably appreciate the area more if you at least skim the next two chapters.

- The first of these two, **Ch. 2**, provides an historical overview of the City of Davis and of the Old North within it. This history—these 14 decades of events—provides a context for understanding the Old North.
- The other one, **Ch. 3**, reports key events in Old North history so that you can understand the historical place of specific homes you observe.

## 2

### Davis History

#### *Context of the Old North*

Davis history is usefully thought of as composed of 14 decades—from the 1860s through the 1990s—that divide into three decade-clusters.

The first cluster or period is five decades long, the second is four, and the third is also five. As pure numbers, the central image is therefore 5-4-5.

This may be an easy image in terms of which to visualize Davis' history, but is it true? Well, let us look at major facts and key concepts that sum up those facts.

I begin with key concepts.

In ordinary language and in everyday life we commonly distinguish among human settlements in terms of their size and complexity, using words like village, town, and city. We understand that towns are larger and more complicated economically and socially than villages and that cities are more so than towns in these and other respects.

This progression of size and complexity is the central feature of Davis history and I think the labels village, town and city accurately capture, in sequence, the first five, the middle four, and the last five decades. Thus:

Village					Town				City				
60s	70s	80s	90s	00s	10s	20s	30s	40s	50s	60	70s	80s	90s

Here are major features of Davis in each of these three periods.

#### **I. Raw, Stalled Village: 1860s-1900s (Five Decades)**

The Davis population figures shown in Fig. 2.2 begin in the late 1860s with the rapid congregation of approximately 500 people at the new Davisville. But there is then little growth over the next four decades—a population increase of some 350 in all (or on the order of 10 people added a year) (column 3).

What is tracked in the trajectory of these numbers is the coming of a railroad boomtown that flashes up rapidly and stabilizes.

Davisville's growth leveled because the railroad speculators who created it in the first place were continuing to build tracks in many directions. Its temporary advantage as a rail point for agricultural products and commerce diminished as numerous other towns came "on line" and provided more convenient and competing points for distant farmers to load goods on trains and to do other business. Davisville therefore stabilized as a small, local site for agricultural storage, processing, and shipping (Larkey 1969,61).

Davis was not large enough for anyone to draw a bird's eye panorama of it in those early years (something we do have for Woodland), but an artist did render its "villagescape" as a background detail in an 1879 lithograph of the P. S. Chiles farm included in the DePue *Illustrated Atlas and History of Yolo County* (1879). I have excerpted and enhanced this villagescape in Fig. 2.1.



2.1. Artist's rendering of the 1879 Davis "villagescape." This view looks west from a vantage point a few hundred yards east and above the P. S. Chiles home, which was near the current Export Science Center. (Excerpt from Plate 39, "Farm and Residence of P. S. Chiles, 1 1/2 Miles East of Davisville, Yolo Co. CAL." by C. Wyttenbach in DePue 1879.)

At its peak, Village-Davis consisted of about 200 structures, but only a handful of them remain because of several large fires in this period, a major fire in the early town period

Decade o	1 Davis popula- tion at start of decade*	2 Decade increase in popula- tion	3 Average yearly increase in popula- tion (rounded)	4 Farm/ UC Davis enroll- ment at start of decade**	5 Decade increase in Farm/ UC Davis enroll- ment	6 Average yearly increase in enroll- ment (rounded)
1860s	0	500	50			
70s	500	100	10			
80s	600	100	10			
90s	700	0	0			
1900s	700	150	15	0	125	12
10s	850	190	20	125	175	17
20s	1,040	203	20	300	200	20
30s	1,243	429	50	500	700	70
40s	1,672	1,882	200	1,200	500	50
50s	3,554	5,356	500	1,700	1,100	100
60s	8,910	14,578	1,500	2,800	9,800	980
70s	23,488	13,152	1,300	12,600	4,500	450
80s	36,640	9,569	1,000	17,000	5,000	500
90s	46,200	11,591	1,200	22,000	3,000	300

2.2. Davis populations and UC Davis enrollments over 14 decades.  
(The asterisk notes "\*" and "\*" are at the end of this chapter.)

(1916), and extensive demolition of old structures in the early city period (the 1950s).

Here are a few historical notes about Village-Davis that give us a sense of it as a place and its relation to its larger surroundings.

- The 1908 “Official Map of the County of Yolo . . . Compiled by P. N. Ashley, County Surveyor . . .” has detailed and elaborate street-map insets for Woodland and Winters, but none for Davis or any other place in Yolo County. Davisville is a mere shaded rectangle (Ashley 1909). This means that Mr. Ashley thought Davis was not large enough to justify an inset.

- By the turn of the century Woodland had a city directory with resident street addresses, but Davis did not until much later: 1970 [Polk] and 1976 [Polk]. Villages (and even small towns) do not need directories of addresses; there are so few people that one can keep track of them by memory.

- In 1905, the surveyors for the U. S. Geological Survey plotted (by my count) 177 buildings when it mapped Davisville. This map is reproduced in Fig. 2.3, and is a visual representation of the sparseness of Davis even as its village period comes to a close.

2.3. Village-Davis: 1905 structures. (Excerpt from U. S. Geological Survey, California Swingle Quadrangle, 1905)



The brief boom and long decades of plateau means that Davis people were, by and large, of relatively limited economic means—although not impoverished. Native Davisite and local

historian Mary Ellen Dolcini has observed:

Davisville was never a rich town. Woodland was. One has only to drive through Woodland today to see the many fine old Victorian mansions still in use, several beautifully restored. This was in part because Woodland was the county seat. Davis was never like that (Dolcini 1996, 156).

This relative lack of wealth contributed to Davisville’s lack of civic amenities. There were no paved streets. Where there were sidewalks at all, they were wood. There was no municipal water or

sewer system; outhouses and private wells were the rule. Perhaps bespeaking the class level or simply the times, about a dozen saloons lined G Street (Dolcini 1996, 156). In other words, this was not a village with the quaintness sometimes associated with the term, as in "English country village." Instead, it appears to have been a fairly raw or even primitive frontier settlement, an assessment also clearly expressed in the older histories, such as DePue (1879, 76-80) and Russell (1940, 213-15).

Davis' village plateau and limited possibilities for change were in no small measure cemented by the ironic ease of getting on the train and shopping in what is today called "Old Sacramento."

The railroad was the link out of town. Sacramento was the center of commerce and shopping and it was an easy and convenient ride by train. Horse-drawn cars met the trains at the Sacramento Depot (Dolcini 1996, 156).

Dread "revenue leak" is, apparently, almost as old as Davis itself.

Village-Davis might well have gone the way of a number of other Sacramento Valley settlements that were driven into shabby stagnation or oblivion by changes in transportation and commerce (e.g., Williams, Elmira, Yolo, Knight's Landing).

But such was not to be the future of Davis. Instead, a plan to promote California agriculture decisively altered its trajectory.

## **II. Striving Town: 1910s-1940s (Four Decades)**

In the later 19th century elites across the nation saw the economic gains that could result from mechanizing agricultural operations and systematically studying other ways to increase foodstuff production. The "land-grant" university was a major national strategy in an effort to apply scientific methods and engineering techniques to farming.

One California form of this pursuit was the 1905 state government decision to establish a "University Farm for the use of the College of Agriculture of the University of California" (legislative act quoted in HEC, 19). Citizen proponents of potential sites were asked to develop proposals and several dozen plans came forth from locales up and down the Central Valley.

Descriptions of the Village-Davis effort to win the competition read eerily like efforts of present-day cities to bring industry to town: A package of "freebies" and breaks was assembled (complete with alleged secret deals) (Larkey 1969, 92ff, 124 ). These lures, combined with the virtues of its location per se (e.g., good land, easy train travel between Davis and the University of California at Berkeley, of which the University Farm

was to be a unit), won the competition for Davis, thus laying the foundation for transforming a village into a town.

Officially dedicated in 1907, the University Farm offered the first regular classes to 28 students in January, 1909. For clarity's sake and because it reasonably fits the data, I use 1910 as the marker year for the start of the four decade town phase.

Over the four decades of the 1910s through the 1940s, the University Farm brought to Davis an increasing number of new *educated* people who, equally as important, brought *money*. The four rows of shaded cells in Fig. 2.2 show relatively pronounced decade-by-decade rises in both Davis citizens and University Farm students, columns 2 and 5, which translate into the yearly average increases shown in columns 3 and 6.

In starkest terms, citizen and student numbers rise in this fashion in the town period:

	Davis	"The Farm"
1910	850	125
1950	3,554	1,700

By contemporary ideas of population size, even the 1950 numbers of Davis citizens and students are tiny. No serious town or university today would attempt to do much with a mere 3,500 citizens or 1,700 students.

But the American era and ethos were far different then. With rather small populations over most of the four decades (Fig. 2.2), the Town-Davis and the University Farm had a truly impressive array of achievements.

For want of space and its less immediate relevance to the Old North I will not report the amazingly productive and creative record of the University Farm in the town period.<sup>1</sup> Instead, I focus on the main features of the Davis town decades that abide into the present and that make up much that *is* Davis in our images of it. I dwell on what citizens did in that period that importantly frame the image of Davis in our mind's eye.

Without the work of these four town decades (and the preservation of their results) Davis would be merely another nondescript freeway strip. Indeed, over most of its 8.6 square miles, Davis *is* a "geography of nowhere"—a scatter of features that could be anyplace and are therefore no place (Kunstler 1993).

A sense of this alternative possibility is provided by contemplating sad Goleta, California (which apparently had no town period) in relation to UC Santa Barbara. Goleta is only a nondescript service area to that campus. Without the vigor of the town period, Davis would likely play the same role and be the same physically. Perhaps it would even be nick-named the Goleta of the Valley (rather than the facetious "Carmel by the causeway").

Statistics of Davis housing construction by decade are helpful in appreciating the central Davis-identity role of the four-decade town period. Less than 5 percent of Davis housing units were built before 1950 (904 out of 18,282 in the 1990 census) (Design, Community & Environment 1996, 159, Table 11).

Adding these units to the few dozen non-residential buildings built before 1950, we see that a good part of the distinctiveness, romance, or appeal (or whatever term one prefers) of Davis is carried by a very small percent—perhaps 5%— of its structures.

Let me now enumerate and very briefly elaborate on the main achievements in each of these four town decades. In a way, this is a whirlwind tour of major Davis history icons, but I also include more mundane, significant changes, such as the sewer system.

**THE 1910S: THE TOWN PERIOD BEGINS.** In 1910, the pace of change was clearly quickening and the ethos of optimism and enthusiasm for growth and civic improvement was enlarging.

Here are some milestones on the road to full “township.”

- **1911 (1): Three-Mile Alcohol Ban Imposed.** The Davis branch of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) had long campaigned to make Davis “dry,” but had lost two votes of the electorate, one in 1874 and another in 1907 (Larkey 1968, 119).

The newly established University Farm, though, provided a new frame for WCTU alcohol animus: tender young students must be protected from Demon Rum. But rather than risk another losing vote with the locals, they turned to the state Legislature and got a one-mile and then a three-mile ban on the sale of alcohol. In a stroke, Davis went from a raw drinking village to a straight-laced town. (With only slight relaxations for beer sales and restaurant service, this ban was not lifted by the Legislature until 1979.)

- **1911 (2): Public Library Building Established.** Although for the use of the public, the first Davis library building was created by the private initiative and fundraising of a club named “The Davis Bachelor Girls.” They purchased land and built a structure in the 100 block of F Street, later deeding the building to the Yolo County library system.

- **1912: Bowers Addition and Bowers Acres Begin.** With partners, in 1912 and 1913, one C. W. Bowers, a flamboyant draft-horse trader and Davis resident, acquired and subdivided land and began two developments just to the north of the existing town grid. These were the first significant development initiatives in Davis in a great many years and William H. Scott, editor of *The Davis Enterprise*, waxed enthusiastic about them on the front pages

of many, many issues of his paper in 1912 and 1913, heralding both as early events in a coming economic boom in Davis.

The Bowers Addition and Acres were major events in the social layering of the Old North, the central object of our attention in this guide. I therefore report more about each of these developments in the next chapter, the history of the Old North.

- **1913 (1): New Railroad Station.** As part of a grand scheme for promoting immigration to California (and thus the use of railroads), the Southern Pacific Railroad Company replaced the original 1868 Victorian style Davis station with a Mission Revival structure. This was seen locally as a key improvement in travel facilities, especially for people at the University Farm, then in its 5th year of offering regular classes.

- **1913 (2): Campaign to Clarify the Town Layout.** Late in 1913, citizens petitioned the county Board of Supervisors to re-survey Davis in order to clarify the location of property lines, “thereby encouraging the laying of concrete sidewalks and erection of buildings” (DE, 10-24-14, 12-20-13).

*The Davis Enterprise* reported that “nearly all the original stakes . . . have either rotted or been destroyed,” thus requiring a new survey (DE, 12-20-13). What is telling about this statement is that the pace of activity was so slow that even though nearly all of the original stakes were gone, a noticeable number were still there—45 years after first laying out the streets and lots!

Further, the petition asked that the north-south street names be changed from an assortment of trees to letters of the alphabet beginning with A at the University Farm. In itself, this is not a noteworthy request. What makes it interesting is *Davis Enterprise* Editor Scott’s comment on street-finding and signage:

[Alphabetical names] would certainly be a great improvement as under that system streets could readily be located in that manner whereas nobody knows the street names of the town at present, particularly owing to the fact that there are no street designation markings (DE, 12-20-13).

- **1916 (1): Davis Arch Built.** Using privately-raised funds, a ladies auxiliary of the new Chamber of Commerce called the Women’s Improvement Club orchestrated construction of a welcoming arch facing the train station at Second and G streets. Although apparently popular, it was taken down in 1922 because it obstructed a burgeoning new form of traffic: the automobile. Early drivers were apparently less skilled than today and kept running into it, making it very expensive to maintain, Larkey reports (1969, 125). (The arch is now a Davis icon and a painting of it adorns the building facing the parking lot in front of Davis

Lumber at midblock on the east side of G Street between Second and Third.)

- **1916 (2): Yolo Causeway Opens.** The opening of an elevated roadway between Davis and Sacramento in 1916 made automobile commuting practical because one no longer had to be concerned about winter flooding of ground-level roads. As the train service began to decline under competition with autos, Davis-Sacramento auto commuting became evermore attractive.

- **1917 (1): Incorporation as a City.** From the start in 1868 up to 1917, Davis was a named place but had no government as such within its commonsense boundaries. A form of judicial township under the county Board of Supervisors provided what little municipal activity there was. After earlier failure at the polls owing to fears of exorbitant new taxes, a new incorporation effort succeeded in March of 1917 by a vote of 317 to 87. One key argument for incorporation was the need for town-based fire protection because much of the downtown had been destroyed by fire only a year earlier.

- **1917 (2): Richards Boulevard Underpass Constructed.** A state highway routed through one's town and over a railroad creates crossing conflicts for which underpasses and overpasses are solutions. In this case, an underpass—called the “subway”—was constructed.

- **1918: First Fire Truck Acquired.**

- **1919: Municipal Water System Begins.** A \$75,000 bond issue financed the first city water system, taking over from two existing, private water systems that covered only small areas (Larkey 1969, 72).

These and other changes did not transform Davis into a full-blown town in the teen years, but it was now very much on the way.

**THE 1920S: FLURRY OF CIVIC IMPROVEMENTS.** The 1920s would appear to have been the Golden Age of at least the town phase of Davis history—and perhaps in some ways the Golden Age of all Davis history.

In it: (1) the technical systems that make city life possible and comfortable were started or expanded (e.g. a sewer system); and, (2) many if not most of the now iconic private and public buildings were constructed.

Here are some highlights of this golden decade.

- **1921 (1): Sewer System Installed.** Started in March, 1921, residents were required to connect to the sewer system by January, 1922 (Larkey 1969,72).

- **1921 (2): Garbage Collection Begins.**

- **1922: Davis Cemetery District Incorporated.**

- **1923 (1): First Plan for the Future of Davis Proposed.**
- **1923 (2): City-financed Street Paving Starts.** The first street paving was simply crushed rock spread on the bare dirt (Larkey 1969,72).
- **1924 (1): First City Planning Commission Established.**
- **1924 (2): College Park Subdivision Begins.** In local sentiment, housing in Davis locales such as Bowers Addition and the Old North of which it was part were not adequate for University Farm faculty. "From all reports . . . [early] homes in the Bowers Addition left much to be desired in the way of convenience and aesthetic qualities, although they are all still occupied today" (Larkey 1972a).

More upscale, dignified and stately homes were wanted, especially for faculty recruitment. The "tiny" lots and modest houses dating from the village era or even the early town years in Bowers Addition and Acres were too down-scale. College Park was thus born of such classist sentiments (and, note, established *outside* the city limits, thereby becoming Davis' first major leapfrogging and tax-avoiding development).

- **1926 (1): First Zoning Ordinance Adopted.**

Interestingly, it is only well into the second decade of the town period that a zoning ordinance was adopted. Now for the first time, "certain areas within the city limits have been restricted to single family dwellings. Other zones . . . are limited to dwellings of any kind . . . Business areas and industrial locations are also set apart in the plan" (DE, 11-20-25, p. 1). In its final report on the proposed zoning ordinance, the City Planning Commission urged adoption for a long list of reasons, including that "it will insure the permanence of character of districts once established, . . . encourage the maintenance of homes and home neighborhoods [and prevent] . . . the scattering and intrusion of inappropriate and destructive use of buildings, which deteriorate and decrease property values" (City Planning Commission 1925, 2-3).

- **1926 (2): Davis Community Church Constructed (412 C Street).** This is Davis' only Spanish Colonial style structure and specialists in these matters consider it "one of the best architectural achievements of the 1920s" in Davis (HRMC, nd).

- **1926 (3): The Brinley Block Constructed (714-726 Second Street).** The Brinley Block building at the southwest corner of Second and G Streets is classic commercial block architecture, one mark of which is the use of patterns in and of bricks to achieve ornamentation. On quick and superficial viewing, the building's facade seems plain and without interest. But, inspected more closely, the intricacy of the facade is clear and lovely.

• **1927 (1): Davis High School Built.** The incremental and multidimensional manner in which Davis was slowly becoming a town is suggested by the fact that, “prior to 1924, all Davis pupils wishing to attend high school enrolled in Woodland, Dixon, or other school districts” (Larkey 1969, 87). But befitting a town-in-the-making, a campaign to establish a Davis high school was afoot in 1924 and the first high school class scheduled to graduate in 1928. A district was formed, a city block adjacent to the Old North was bought, and the stately building at 23 Russell Boulevard was completed and dedicated in 1927. (The high school was relocated to Fourteenth Street in 1960. In 1979, the building was acquired by the city and converted to its present use as the Davis City Hall.)

Even from this incomplete list of important undertakings, we can see that Davisites were really quite busy in the 1920s and in this decade alone created a large portion of the structures that we now think of as quintessentially Davis.

**THE 1930S: DEPRESSION SLOWDOWN.** As with the rest of the United States, the Depression slowed public and private development. But this does not mean all development stopped. Davis was, to a degree, counter-cyclical to the rest of the country.

Notice in Fig. 2.2 that the decade population growth of 429 is more than twice the 1920s figure and that University Farm enrollment expanded by 200 over the decade.

Moreover, there is some suggestion that considerable home construction was going on in Davis despite the times. In the Old North in particular, almost half (42%) of the 146 signature structures were built in the 1930s.

And there were some notable town-making milestones.

• **1934: First Police Car Purchased.**

• **1935: Central Park, the First City Park.** In 1935, the two-acre block adjacent to the Old North bounded by B and C streets on the east and west and Fourth and Fifth streets on the north and south was acquired and named Central Park. (This was the *first* city park and it comes quite late in Davis history—in the eighth decade after founding.)

• **1938 (1): Home Delivery of Mail Begins, April 1.** Two postmen were able to cover the entire city twice a day (Larkey 1969, 54).

• **1938 (2): City Hall and Fire Station Completed (226 F Street).** At the request of the City Council, the local Grand Lodge of the Free and Accepted Masons conducted special ceremonies in laying the building’s granite cornerstone. A record of that day’s events were sealed into it (Larkey 1969, 71, 118-119).

• **1930s: WPA Streets and Sidewalks Installed.** In an odd kind of way the Depression was good for Davis (as well as for

many other places) in that it fostered a political climate in which entities such as the Works Projects Administration (WPA) were created. The WPA financed numerous public works projects, including an important portion of the streets and sidewalks of Davis.

**THE 1940S: MAJOR POPULATION GROWTH.** World War II revived the economy of Davis but the 1940s did not lead to construction of large public or private structures or city-wide innovations such as those I enumerated above.

But, something else quite major and more elusive was going on. From 1940 to 1950 the population increased an unprecedented 1,882. This is more than 4 times the increase in the 1930s (429) and vastly more than preceding decades (Fig. 2.2, column 2).

Part of this increase was generated by the continuing increase of University Farm enrollment. But this cannot explain all of it because, as we see in Fig. 2.2, the enrollment increase (500) is much less than proportionate to Davis growth in the 1940s.

It is possible, though, that University Farm expansion had now passed a critical mass threshold that was triggering rapid growth in the town and other factors may have been at work as well.

Whatever the reasons, in the last decade of the town period, people were moving to Davis in unprecedented numbers—too many too fast, in fact, to be handled by the substantial house construction effort of the period.

In the 1940s, Davis came of age as a classic small town. It had enough population, development, and diversity to be interesting, but was not yet all that large. It was (and is) the stuff of Americana nostalgia.

Smallness, note, is a key feature. Consider this report by Betsy Truffini about her and her husband Joe's construction, in 1944, of an automobile service station at the corner of Fourth and G streets (the site of the current Jack in the Box and now a very downtown location):

While they were building, Sam Brinley [a major Davis developer, as in the Brinley Block building] . . . walked by their corner and warned them that they'd lose their shirts building so far from town. But Brinley's prediction was wrong and the station thrived (Oxley 1995, 53).

In addition, at this time the Truffinis lived in what Betsy described as a "home on the outskirts of town." Where was that? At Eighth and G streets.

In Fig. 2.4 I have reproduced an aerial photograph of Davis taken in September, 1946 as another way in which to convey

a sense of Davis as a moment of Americana. From the particular height and angle of this photograph, a number of Town-Davis features are displayed especially well. For example: One can actually see most of the town, it is still graspable in scale; there is a clear and real downtown positioned boldly in the foreground; an abundance of trees form a town canopy. Given a few moments of close study, I am certain you will identify numerous other such features.

### III. Exploding City: 1950s-1990s (Five Decades)

The central story of the city period of Davis history jumps off the page in the population numbers shown in Fig. 2.2. The story is, of course: *population explosion*. The numbers in the village and town periods are trivial compared to those in the five decades of the city period. Fig. 2.5 shows the stripped down, most essential statistics that tell this story.

The meanings of the immense jump in growth from the town to the city periods are helpfully understood by asking, "How much effort and how many resources are required to accommodate seven to 70 new people to a community in a year (village and town periods) versus accommodating 1,000 or more per year (city period)?"

So conceived, we begin to see why Davis housing (and its built environment in general) suddenly became "cookie cutter" and mass produced in character after 1950. This was the easiest and perhaps the only feasible way to supply shelter to a mushrooming market. Historic Environment Consultants comment on this radical change:

As the 1940s drew to a close, so did the easy pace and small town lifestyle . . . . The days of small scale development, with its numbered lot subdivision and almost individually designed and constructed houses, were over. The booming, big scale development of the next decade with its mass-produced design image was about to hit Davis (HEC 1980, 22).

And so it did. Fig. O.1, on page 4, provides a visual summary of these large changes.



2.4. September, 1946 aerial photograph of Davis, Calif.

Periods in Davis history	Population increase in each period	Average population increase per decade	Average population increase per year
Village (five decades)	350	70	7
Town (four decades)	2,700	700	70
City (five decades)	55,000	11,000	1,100

2.5.. The City-Davis population explosion. (Calculated from population figures in Fig. 2.2.)

Because it helps to explain the survival of the Old North and the Downtown area as well, let me briefly elaborate on how downtown-killing—the usual accompaniment of explosive growth—was avoided. That is: *Davis is an unusual exception to the very common pattern of killing one’s downtown (and adjacent neighborhoods like the Old North) with peripheral shopping malls.*

At the outset of the city period, in the decade of the 1950s, it looked as if Davis might, in fact, go the typical “kill-the-downtown-hell-bent-for-growth” route. In the mid-1960s, city planning documents happily put forth such population projections as 75,000 by 1980 (Larkey 1969, 126). The actual 1980 population would be 36,640.

As late as 1969, a general plan amendment called for 90,000 by 1990; the actual 1990 population was 46,200 (Design, Community & Environment 1996, 27).

The Davis Core Area Specific Plan adopted in 1961 and in effect for some years had the classic ingredients that have killed many another downtown: Several large new municipal buildings, a huge “Third Street Parade,” numerous multi-story parking lots, and several large commercial structures.

The plan also envisioned demolition of *every then-existing home* in the southern half of the Old North (Sixth Street being the northern boundary of the plan). In their place were an assortment of what some urban planners view as dead area parking lots and useless open spaces surrounding large commercial, office, and residential structures (Livingston and Blayney, 1961, 19 and 20, “Core Area Development Plan: 1985, Land Use and Traffic Ways” and “Three Dimensional Design”).

Signaling the mindset of the time, a California Legislature resolution “commending the citizens of Davis . . . for a far-sighted downtown revitalization program conducted through the efforts

of local businessmen and property owners . . ." was taken as an example of Davis gaining prestige (Larkey 1969, 137).

But, this plan and its mindset were soon to be rejected by the electorate. A new generation of political leaders questioned this future. They ran against "mindless growth" and triumphed at the polls in what some Davisites term the "Revolution of 1972."

A citizen activist of the early 1970s describes the electric moment of the City Council's change of membership:

They began the meeting with a table full of business-looking men, all clean shaven, wearing suits and ties, and . . . [three were] replaced by Dick [Holdstock] and Joan [Poulos] and Bob [Black] . . . The men were bearded, one had long hair and both wore short-sleeve shirts, and there was a woman. For me it was a visual representation of the change . . . and it was very potent and very charging (Mickey Barlow, quoted in Moreno 1981, 1-2).

Thus began about a decade of the progressive municipal legislation for which Davis became well known in some quarters: Abolition of the fast growth general plan and adoption of a policy to grow as slowly as possible under the law, a range of environmentally sensitive ordinances, prohibition of large peripheral shopping centers, and cultivation of Downtown retail and Core Area mixed use (Lofland and Lofland 1987 compile sources that describe these changes).

Like the first Davis golden era of the 1920s, this second golden era of the 1970s was rather brief. A variety of factors soon sent the city government and the civic life of the larger community into retreat.

On the economic side, in the late 1970s Proposition 13 radically increased the difficulty of financing local government with property taxes. In addition, the state government began shifting tax revenues away from local governments, a practice continuing into the 1990s. Operating together, these factors forced local governments, including Davis, to cope with declining revenues and to seek new modes of financing. These changes further combined with a decline in trust in government and public spending in what was then the era of President Ronald Reagan. (Shrag 1998 provides a blow-by-blow account of these larger changes.)

By the mid-1980s, credible political leadership of progressive and environmental leanings was in shorter supply and the Davis electorate itself shifted somewhat to the right. The watershed event in this shift was the 1987 power play by a development corporation named Ramco Enterprises that forced city annexation of several hundred acres on the city's eastern

border, together with permission for numerous developments (Winn and Kupfer 1997).

As Fig. 2.2 shows clearly, in the 1980s and 1990s growth perked merrily along at rates only slightly less than during the 1960s and 1970s. This happened under city governments more sympathetic to development and less apt to put forth programs of progressive change and environmental protection.

City Council members of the 1980s and 1990s were not, though, resurgent members of the suit-and-tie white male business class that had dominated the town era. Instead, and as a by-product of Davis' at-large election scheme, a potpourri of political mavericks of right and left tendencies won council seats.

While diverse, council majorities tilted to the right, but these leaders continued to be somewhat constrained and channeled by the legal and ethical legacies of the 1970s: support for a viable downtown and slow growth, and a ban on peripheral shopping centers.

But by the middle 1990s, the larger sense of Davis as a politically and socially optimistic place—charting its own anti-sprawl course and mounting innovative programs—had all but died. Beleaguered by hostile pro-development and anti-tax forces, the notion of Davis as a progressive city became something of a joke. The job at hand was not to launch a new ship on shining seas, but to keep the swamped dinghy from sinking. Perhaps the final symbolic blow was Davis failing even to be mentioned in a 1997 magazine report ranking the “Top 10” plus 40 additional progressive or “culturally advanced” towns and cities of America (Utne Reader Editors 1997).



Now that we know something of the larger historical context in which the Old North began and developed, let us look at its layered and accretional history.

#### **Notes to Figs. 2.2 and 2.4**

\* Several technical aspects of the Davis population figures require explanation.

1. Prior to 1868, the Jerome Davis farm, the site of what would become Davisville, seems to have contained no more than a few buildings and people. Therefore, the 500 or so present in 1870 represent a rapid boomtown swell at the end of the decade. The average of 50 persons a year over the decade of the 1860s is therefore misleading but unavoidable.

2. I have not been able to find United States Census figures for Davis prior to 1920 and there may not be any because that agency did not report figures for every small place in those decades. The figures for the first six decades are the consensus of the standard historical sources and my interpolations for decades not estimated (e.g. 850 for 1910 is my interpolation of the 1900 and 1920 figures).

3. The decade increase calculation for the 1990s uses the 1996 Design, Community & Environment (1996) projection of 57,800 for the year 2000.

4. Davis population figures are drawn from various City of Davis planning documents. Those documents do not always agree with one another and I have sometimes had to select among contradictory reports.

5. Because the two categories overlap, the Davis population and UC Davis enrollment figures are not additive.

\*\* There are several technical notes on UC Davis enrollment figures.

1. The UC Davis enrollment figures for 1910, '20 and '30 are smoothed and estimated averages for rather jagged ups and downs over that 30 years, missing data, and perhaps even terms with no students. This means the decade figures sum up the order-of-magnitude trend rather than represent the exact number of students in that year.

2. The UC Davis 1990s decade increase calculation uses the 1996 Design, Community & Environment (1996) projection of 25,000 students in the year 2000.

3. As a general comment, even the most presumably official sources on UC Davis enrollments sometimes do not agree. I have therefore had to select among contradictory reports with an eye to representing the order-of-magnitude trend.

\*\*\* The photograph reproduced in Fig. 2.4 is one of several aerial views of Davis and the area taken by Eastman Studios in 1946 and 1952. This one is Eastman B-4705 and is used here courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Shields Library, UC Davis.

### **Note to Text**

1. I also leave aside questions of the moral merits of UC professors as key players in the invention of what may turn out to be an ecologically disastrous agricultural paradigm and technology. But whatever the morality and eventual consequences, they tinkered cleverly and grandly. (On this "engineering of abundance," see Bainer, 1975.)

# 3

## Old North History

### *Beginning and Development*

Two historical facts are paramount in understanding the history of the Old North.

**First**, the area was created in and as part of the town period of Davis history rather than of the village or city periods (the three periods explained in the previous chapter). There was no “North” before about 1910, the start of the Davis town period. Instead, the land north of Fifth Street was agricultural or largely unused with only a small scatter of structures.

**Second**, the Old North developed in a slow, layered and accretional manner over the four decades of the 1910s, '20s, '30s, and '40s. As a consequence, it exhibits a diversity of architectural styles. Its housing stock is the result of myriad individual decisions made at different times—a far cry from the fully planned and rapidly built development of the post-war era.

With these two historical facts in mind, let us look at (I) how the neighborhood came into existence—its three forming events—and (II) the three main periods of its history—its three layers of architecture and development.

#### **I. Beginning: Three Forming Events**

Not only are Old North houses not a product of a master plan, even the sheer geographical area is not the result of any overarching scheme.

Instead, what we can now perceive as a neighborhood bounded by Fifth and Seventh and B and the railroad is the outcome of three different plans mounted at different times in adjacent locales.

The dates of these three Old North forming events are 1871, late 1912, and middle 1913. Here is what happened at each of these times.

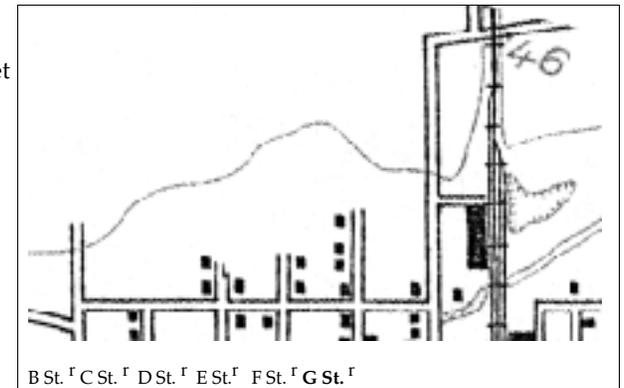
**1. THE SIX SOUTHERN TIER BLOCKS.** The first of the three plans appears to have been enacted in 1871, when the original

eight-by-four block Davisville grid of 1868 was extended slightly on the northern and eastern sides. The eastern edge of the grid was extended by two tiers of blocks from J to L Street. At the same time, an additional 10-block long tier was added north of Fifth Street from the new L Street edge to B Street. Six of these blocks between the railroad and B Street were in what would become the Old North.

On paper anyway, there was then a Sixth Street (called Fifth in the numbering of the time). I say “on paper” because land surveys as opposed to planning maps from that era show no more than slight extensions of the lettered streets above Fifth Street. Sixth Street was a planning idea rather than a reality.

In Fig. 3.1, “The Old North Area in 1905,” is a portion of the earliest known survey map of Davis. As can be seen, G Street runs north and turns to become Cemetery Road (now called Sweet Briar) and crosses the railroad. But F, E, D and B simply peter out above Fifth and there is no C Street at all.

3.1. The Old North area in 1905. Fifth Street runs horizontally across the map and ends at G Street. (Excerpt from Fig. 2.3)



Notice that the makers of this map, the U. S. Geological Survey, show 12 structures in the Old North area, two of which are likely commercial (the two by the railroad). Of the 12, only one has survived to this day: the Italianate Victorian on the corner of Fifth and D streets (503 Fifth Street). (Details on it are given in Ch. 7, “D Street.”)

Property tax map books from the early 1900s show these six blocks subdivided in the same manner as the blocks of the original grid; namely, 50-by-120-foot lots, 16 to a block, with 80-foot streets. However, most entire blocks were owned by a single person and only a few lots (mostly in the D-E block) had individual owners.

**2. FIVE NORTHERN TIER BLOCKS: BOWERS ADDITION, LATE 1912.** Land north of these six blocks along Fifth Street was undeveloped and in large parcels. Enter a group of four investors, the lead figure among whom was C. W. Bowers, a prominent Davis resident who dealt in draft horses and other agricultural matters.

Charles William Bowers—or Will, as he was called—is among the more colorful entrepreneurial figures of Davis history (J. Lofland 1997). His granddaughter, Margaret Sweeley, who I interviewed in 1997, characterized him as a charismatic combination of Buffalo Bill and Dwight Eisenhower.

On the Buffalo Bill side, he had a “wild west” kind of flamboyance and loved to be in the public spotlight. He always wore a suit and dress fedora (Fig. 3.2), even when he was training and competing with large teams of draft horses, an activity he loved and at which he was a California State Fair champion competitor all his adult life, even through his 60s. Indeed, big horses, not real estate, were his passion and the Addition and Acres were his only land ventures.

On the Eisenhower side, he inspired trust in people. He could make strangers he had just met feel they had known him all their lives.

He might well have been a champion big horse competitor into his 70s and 80s. But, at age 70, after winning the State Fair heavyweight horse-pulling contest Sunday morning September 12, 1937, he was killed in the afternoon in an accident with a six-horse team of huge, young Percherons he was driving in a competition.

In October, 1912, Bowers’ group purchased 280 acres of land north of Davisville and named it “The Davis Homes Tract,” signaling the announced purpose of subdividing for residences (DE, 10-19-12).

Soon after this purchase, the group announced plans to subdivide the portion along the north of Sixth Street into a five-block east-west tier beginning at G Street and ending at B. Each of the blocks would be divided into 20 lots each, making a total of 100 new homesites. A map of these appears at the bottom of Fig. 3.3.

3.2. Portrait photograph of C. W. (Charles William) Bowers in his mid-40s, taken in the 1910s, on the eve of forming Bowers Addition. He is shown here in his trademark attire, a formal suit, dress fedora hat, and diamond ring. According to his granddaughter, Margaret Sweeley, it is no accident that the hat and ring are visible in this portrait. (Courtesy Margaret Sweeley)

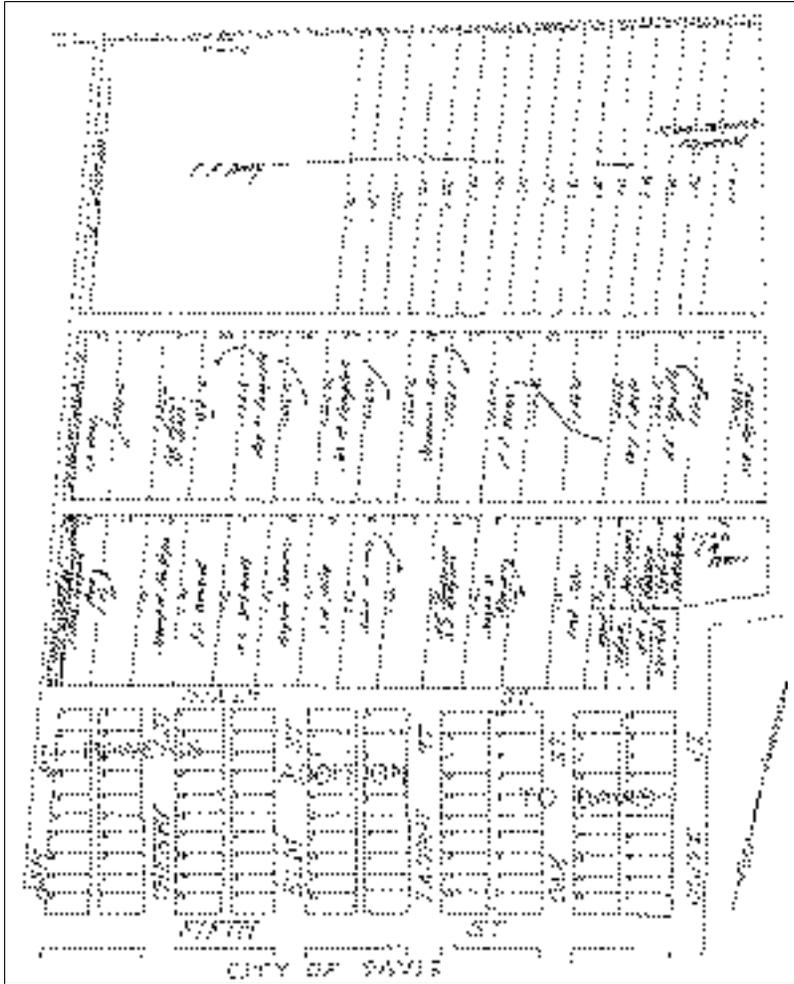


The operating agent of this scheme was one A. R. Pedder, head of a Concord-based firm that had already developed tracts in several Bay Area towns (and would also soon develop in other Valley towns, including Winters and Dixon).

Unlike most blocks in the original grid of the southern six blocks created in 1871, those in Bowers Addition featured alleys, and did so within the same overall block width of 240 feet used in blocks with no alleys. The 15 foot alley thus reduced each lot to 112 $\frac{1}{2}$  feet deep.

Further, while the 1868 and 1871 blocks were eight lots tall (that is, south to north) the five blocks comprising Bowers Addition were all 10 lots tall. Consequently, these new faceblocks were 100 feet longer than existing faceblocks.

The then editor and owner of *The Davis Enterprise*, William Henry Scott, was a big fan of Bowers, his Addition and Pedder, or at least he wrote often and enthusiastically about all three in his once-a-week newspaper. As a result, we have a fair amount of



3.3. Late 1910s map of Bowers Addition (below Sixth—now Seventh—Street) and Bowers Acres (above Sixth—now Seventh—Street). Notice that the street names are those of the original plat. (Courtesy Davis Department of Public Works)

coverage of them over the 10 months of 1913 in which Bowers Addition was put in place.

Because Editor Scott's reports are so revealing of the times, let me relate the advent of this Addition as told by him in his newspaper. I divide these reports into (a) the chronology of events and (b) promotional themes.

**A. Chronology.** Pedder's scheme of subdivision development was not unlike many today: land is acquired and graded, blocks are laid out, streets and sidewalks are installed, utilities are brought to the lots, and other amenities are provided.

It was *unlike* many if not most developments after World War II, though, in that Pedder did not systematically market a small variety of houses that he built on all the lots. Instead, you were on your own after you bought your land (although Pedder did construct a number of houses in the Addition and elsewhere in Davis).

Because of the difficult economics of home construction in this period, people often bought lots with the intention of construction eventually or simply on speculation. As a consequence, although all 100 of the Bowers lots had sold by July of 1913, and, according to Editor Scott, there was a serious shortage of housing in Davis, actual building on the Addition's lots took place slowly over several decades.

Here is Editor Scott writing about the Bowers Addition during the 10 months of January through October, 1913.

- **January 18.** *Enterprise* headline: "Great Step Forward For a New and Larger Davis." Editor Scott asserts that the new Addition is almost as important as the plans of the new dean at the University Farm for extensive new construction.

- **January 25.** *Enterprise* headline: "Bowers Sub-division Has Awakened Civic Spirit." "In exactly four days after the sub-division was opened one-fifth of the lots were taken . . . Contractor Vance commenced laying sidewalks on . . . [G Street] on Wednesday morning . . . The walk will be first built completely around the lots so as to give a person desiring to look over the tract opportunity to do so. The cross streets will come next."

- **February 1.** *Enterprise* headline: "Subdivision Work is Progressing." "During the week all of the fences on . . . [Sixth] street have been taken down and John Coonrod commenced moving the wagon and other parts of vehicles from his place on . . . [C Street]."

"By arrangement with Supervisor Russell, Mr. Pedder will grade all the streets north from [Fifth] to the subdivision. This will remove all the fences in the path of the tractor engine and make the town continue out to . . . [Seventh] Street, which is the farther border of the subdivision."

The above descriptions comprise much of what we know about events in the Old North area prior to the advent of the Bowers Addition and, as such, are highly significant.

From them we can surmise that because fences were being cleared away "north from [Fifth] to the subdivision" people must have built fences in the north-south public streets between Fifth and Sixth Streets. Only with these removals and the street grading does the Old North area become town-like.

Therefore, in the sense of a single, homogeneously graded area from Fifth to Seventh streets between B and G streets, the Old North began the last week of January, 1913.

- **February 15.** *Enterprise* headline: "Bowers Sub-Division is Now Center of Interest." "It is strange what a little sidewalk and improvements will do. During the past week the Bowers Addition has caused many of the old timers to sit up and take notice and . . . the whole town is more or less interested in what is being done to the north of us.

"Every day sees the walks promenaded by persons desiring to take a short stroll and at the same time a comfortable one. The week has seen the small stretch around the first block extended the whole length of the Addition and by the middle of next week one will be able to enjoy a stroll from [G to B] Streets on a cement walk, something which has never been possible in the past."

Five blocks of cement sidewalk seems clearly to have been a novelty to Davisites, who were more accustomed to boardwalks or no sidewalks at all.

- **March 8.** *Enterprise* headline: "Sub-Division Attractive Place." "Contractor Jensen put the last spike in the [redwood rail] curbing on Friday thus completing this difficult task.

"The ornamental trees are now out and have been given a thorough wetting and have been mulched with straw manure to hold the moisture, insuring a good start."

- **March 22.** An incorporation campaign failed in a December, 1911 vote of 92 to 103 and the issue was still very much alive in early 1913. The Bowers Addition was an issue in this debate because incorporation opponents claimed that it would not pay its own way. Should Davis become an incorporated place, the Addition would impose an objectionable tax burden on everyone.

Editor Scott was vigorously pro-incorporation and in the March 22 issue of the *Enterprise* editorially defended Pedder and his company, saying they would do everything they had promised, which would mean no tax burden from the subdivision.

In six weeks they have laid twelve blocks of walks, 800 feet of curbing, have planted trees, graded streets, and have erected a tank house. A double action centrifugal pump which will revolve at 1700 revolutions is also ordered.

Hence is there any room to doubt his statement when he says other things will be looked out for, such as electric light poles, etc. . . .

They have accomplished in a matter of fact and unostentatious way what seemingly Davis could find no way of accomplishing for the past half a century, among other things an ideal residential district with an up to date water system.

• **October 25.** There are few further *Enterprise* stories on the Addition for several months and then on October 25 a headline: "Pedder Finally Finishes Here." Editor Scott laments that some people seem not properly to appreciate the "value to the town" of what Pedder has now completed. He then enumerates features of the Addition, saying "all this has been done and more."

To-wit: grade all the streets and crush-rock them, redwood curbing, plant ornamental shade trees, two in front of every lot and lay concrete sidewalks through the subdivision complete . . . [In addition,] he has installed a water system, sold water bonds to all the lot owners and is extending the water system to all who desire to build and thus far not charged a cent for the use of the water.

I surmise that Editor Scott is in this (and previous) editorials so defensive in part because only about half a dozen houses had been started in the five blocks. The degree to which the developer would help maintain all the vacant lots and public space was now a question.

Responsive to such concerns, Scott reports Pedder's promises to help keep the trees tended and his plan to help in the construction of houses in the tract by offering "ten bungalows" of an affordably modest design. Moreover, said Scott, Pedder's promises can be trusted because he continues to help his previous subdivisions. "At Concord he put on [sic] several subdivisions and to this day is still giving them some attention."

\* \* \*

So, the most action-packed part of the Bowers Addition chronology ended in October, 1913. This was obviously, though, only the start of the story.

The problem then became that of *keeping up* all those vacant lots on what used to be mere open farm land. Thus, under the headline "Will Dress Up Subdivision," the January 24, 1914 *Enterprise* reported that in a letter to each lot owner Mr. Pedder had offered to regrade the streets in the spring if owners would sign an "honor roll" pledge to "keep their lots and the parkings between the sidewalk and curb free from weeds."

This plea appears not to have been sufficient, for, the August 22, 1914 *Enterprise* announced "Clean-Up Day in Bowers Addition."

Mr. Pedder kept the tract in good order last year but the weeds have overgrown a large part of the lots, streets, and sidewalks. It would be a shame to neglect this beautiful residence addition. C. W. Bowers requests us to announce next Thursday afternoon as cleanup day at Bowers Addition. He will have two men and a team on the job. Mr. Pedder is here today and declared he would come through with a mean [a land-leveling device] and team to work on the streets. Supervisor Russell says he will do his part on the streets providing lot owners do something.

**B. Promotional Themes.** Starting January 25, 1913, every issue of the *Enterprise* over the next several months carried an advertisement for the Bowers Addition. Often this was the largest ad in the paper, taking the top half of an entire page in an era when such a size was not otherwise seen in the *Enterprise*. Also, Editor Scott's news stories and editorials were unabashed puff pieces for the Addition.

Let us ask: How did the ads and Editor Scott promote the Addition? For what problems in Davis and Davis housing did they claim the Addition offered solutions? Here is my reading of how the ads and Editor Scott answered these questions.

- **Infrastructure.** The ads highlighted that there would be "cement sidewalks, curbs, rocked streets and ornamental trees all free" (DE, 1-12-13). Stress on the existence of such items tells us that people were not accustomed to them, at least not as free with the lot. This was a new kind of value-added, at least in Davis.

Of special note among infrastructure items are the *cement sidewalks*. By all historical accounts, cement sidewalks completely surrounding five contiguous blocks was a major change in Davis and also something of a spectacle, because ads invited people to "come out" of a Sunday and ogle (Fig. 3.4).

3.4. March 13, 1913 *Davis Enterprise* advertisement for Bowers Addition. The phrase “come out” suggests that the Addition was perceived to be distant, even though only a few blocks from the center of town at Second and G streets. Also, the special mention of curbing and sidewalks signals them to be a novelty in Davis.



Even though it gets us ahead of the story it is nonetheless important to report here that almost all those five blocks of sidewalks laid over a period of several weeks starting on Wednesday, January 22, 1913 are still in place and mostly in good shape!

Inquiring minds may well ask: How can you be certain the current sidewalks are the original ones? One way is to inspect the sidewalks themselves because they contain markings that date them to 1913.

*One*, the cement contractor pressed the year “1913” into wet cement in front of at least two lots, 621-623 G and 613 D streets (Fig. 3.5).

*Two*, every lot in each block has an identifying number. Starting at the southeast corner in each of the five blocks, the lots were numbered counter clock wise around the entire block. Thus, 603 G Street, at the northwest corner of G and Sixth streets, is lot 1 (Fig. 3.5) (The lot numbering is also shown in Fig. 3.3.)

These numbers were pressed into the wet cement close to the sidewalk edge and about midway of each lot. The amazing thing is that almost all are still there, meaning that almost all of the original sidewalk is still there.

*Three*, property line arrows were also pressed into the sidewalk at the east-west property lines (Fig. 3.5). A large portion of these remain.

3.5. Sidewalk marks on G Street in Bowers Addition.



- *Affordable Payments.* Pedder’s Mt. Diablo Realty Company was prepared to negotiate amounts and schedules of payments of the lot price of \$250. To feature the phrase “terms

within reach of all" is to signal that not all sellers offered this possibility.

- **Building Restrictions.** As an unincorporated area, there were no municipal restrictions on what or where anyone built. This created uncertainty over what might be built next door and a disincentive to buy a lot, much less to build on it. Hence, the private code of building restrictions or covenant, which the Mt. Diablo Realty Company "inserted in deeds and contracts issued on lots."

Dated to run to January 1, 1930, these covenants included "no barns upon the streets," structure set-backs from property lines, mandatory cesspool or sewer connections, and no dwelling with a value of less than \$1,500, among other provisions (DE, 2-1-13).

In one *Enterprise* puff-piece, Editor Scott reports his interviews with several enthusiastic buyers, one of whom expresses his appreciation for the building restrictions (as well as the infrastructure):

The Bowers tract is the best place in town to build in my opinion, as one need not fear old shacks or barns and everything has been prepared for the home builder (DE, 3-22-13).

Another buyer was reported to believe that "one of the deciding features being the fact that the prospects are so promising for a nice clean residence section with all necessary building restrictions" (DE, 3-22-13). The inescapable implication of this statement is that 1913 Davis did not yet have a "nice clean residence section."

- **Alien Clause.** Right beside the building restrictions, one ad announced the "alien clause" also to be inserted in deeds and contracts. The specifics came after the building restrictions: "And, further, that purchaser [or others] . . . will not lease or assign, or any way transfer the said property to any one of African or Mongolian extraction, and that no one of said extraction shall be allowed to live on said property except as servants of residents thereof" (DE, 2-1-13).

However forward-looking and enlightened Editor Scott might otherwise have been, he nonetheless ended his inaugural, "Great Step Forward" article on the Addition with this unelaborated and matter-of-fact sentence: "To keep the Bowers' addition an exclusive residence tract no lots will be sold to negroes, Chinese, Hindus or Japanese" (DE, 1-18-13).

- **Alleys.** One type of ad focused exclusively on the alley feature of the Addition, detailing "what it means to have an alley in the rear of your lot" (DE, 2-8-13). In order to help convey the

flavor of the times, in Fig. 3.6 I have reproduced the February 8, 1913 *Enterprise* ad telling one “what it means.” (Bear in mind that the original of the ad in Fig. 3.6 filled the top half of a newspaper page.)

3.6. February 8, 1913 *Davis Enterprise* advertisement for Bowers Addition extolling alleys.



- **Water.** Water was not mentioned in the earliest ads, but was introduced as a major topic in late March in the form of a promise of a “double action centrifugal engine . . . , a tank with sufficient capacity to supply all demands . . . [and] water mains [that] will be immediately installed in the streets and alleys” (DE, 3-22-13).

In 1913, residential water was problematic. A private company supplied water to some but not all homes in Davisville. A plan to create a public water company was afoot but its future was uncertain. Moreover, drilling technology made private wells too expensive for most people. Therefore, Pedder and company were apparently prompted to add water to their offerings in order to continue to sell lots.

- **Beat the Price Increase.** In the *Enterprise* ad of May 3, the Addition announced a 10 percent price increase on the lots as of May 15. Therefore, “DO IT NOW!” meaning buy a lot before Thursday next.

Despite (or perhaps because of the price increase), the Addition was, as mentioned, sold out by July.

**3. THE SEVENTH STREET FACEBLOCK: BOWERS ACRES, MIDDLE 1913.** According to Scott’s *Enterprise*, lots in Bowers Addition were selling so well that, by mid 1913, Bowers and his partners decided to subdivide Davis Homes Tract land they owned immediately north of Seventh Street.

This new subdivision, though, was designed to appeal to a more up-scale clientele than Bowers Addition. Rather than a tiny piece of an acre (one-seventh), each of these lots was one acre (or a little more) and the project thus named Bowers Acres! The configurations of these acres and their relation to the Addition are seen in Fig. 3.3.

The up-scale promotional theme is given muted but clear expression in the ad run in the *Enterprise* every week for many months (Fig. 3.7). Editor Scott's initial story on the Acres tells us that Bowers' "purpose is to make of this tract a beautiful residence section that will be attractive to the man who seeks the best of conditions and wants more of the soil on which to commune with nature" (DE, 7-12-13).

As can be seen in Fig. 3.3, these lots had an unusual shape. Most were 100 feet wide east to west and  $435\frac{1}{2}$  feet south to north. Fifteen of them fronted the north side of Seventh Street and ran north to what is today Eighth Street (then called "Road No. 2"). A second tier lay between what we now call Eighth and Ninth streets (then Roads 2 and 1). And, a third tier measuring about 60 by 720 feet lay north of the second tier. In all, there were 50 lots in the three tiers (including a single 10-acre, rectangular plot on the eastern edge of the third tier) (Fig. 3.3).

3.7. Advertisement for Bowers Acres, *The Davis Enterprise*, July 19, 1913. This same ad appeared often in 1913/1914.

**One acre tracts  
For Sale**

There has long been an urgent demand for one acre tracts in Davis, and I have arranged to provide for this class of home builders who desire ground enough for a family orchard, berries, garden truck, together with lawn, etc. Water will be supplied with the cost only of the tiles required to run a big grove of about thirty acres per hour.

This payment down and terms to suit hereof.

This tract for sale adjoins on the north of the Bowers town lot subdivision, and I shall take pride in making of this beautiful "ACRE HOME TRACTS."

**C. W. BOWERS**  
DAVIS - - - CALIFORNIA

The gentleman farmer's dream of berries, orchards and lawns was going to require a great deal of water to become more than a dream. Appreciating this, Bowers arranged to drill a much publicized well for the Acres.

The striking and pumping of water was a newsworthy event and the Woodland photographer J. C. Shinkle came to record the scene on Friday, August 8, 1913 (Fig. 3.8). The exact location is unknown but is likely near to what is now F and Eighth streets.

Editor Scott described these doings in the *Enterprise* of the next day, Saturday, August 9:

[The past four weeks Rowe and Wire sunk a 12 inch well 220 feet] and there seems assured an abundance of water. A pump was started on the well Wednesday evening and has been running day and night ever since . . . Several of the tracts have been flooded already.

The tract is a scene of lively activity with the irrigation pump at work, J. D. Rowe with several teams leveling; Smith and Brewster with a couple of gas tractors making levees and streets. Not the least . . . is . . . that Mr. Doyle has under course of construction a nice dwelling.

Various crops are being planted or being prepared for.

The photograph shown in Fig. 3.8 is dated August 8, which means we see the well during its second full day of pumping and the assembled people are those whom Scott describes.

This photograph is eerie because it so clearly freezes key phases of a momentous technological revolution in human life in which these people are so enthusiastically participating. On the one side or phase, horses remain integral in several ways. In the middle (metaphorically), steam power is still important. But on the other side or phase of the revolution, the gasoline engine and all that it brings has most definitely arrived.

Indeed, one can count the items in each phase of the revolution: 32 horses, 12 wheeled vehicles of several types—human-push, pony and horse drawn, steam and gasoline driven. (There are, as well, 41 human beings.)

Despite frequent *Enterprise* advertisements and Editor Scott's portrayal of a budding "millionaires' row" along Seventh Street, the Acres were not purchased by gentlemen farmers who put up grand and gracious homes surrounded by elegant gardens and innovative agriculture.

Instead, except for a few homes fronting on Seventh, the land was farmed right up to the end of World War II. (This is evident in Fig. 2.4, an aerial photograph of Davis taken in September 1946.)

Nonetheless, the lots *did* sell out within a few months. The owners simply held them for speculation and/or farming.

An ironic note: When the UC Davis student population explosion began in the 1950s, these large, long, empty lots facilitated big student apartment complexes because developers were not slowed down by a need to acquire and amalgamate smaller pieces of property.

Notice, though, that had construction of such large buildings been hampered, there might have been many smaller apartment enclaves rather than the fewer and larger complexes we now see in the strip between Seventh and Ninth Streets. Smaller complexes, while still high density, might have created less atomized and alienated scenes than those prevailing there now.



3-4. Drilling of the Bowers Acus wail, August 8, 1913. (Courtesy Historic Weber Museum)

\* \* \*

These, then, were the three forming events of the new North Davis, a district resulting from a confluence of forces and events rather than from a master scheme.

One amusing signal of this confluence is the misalignment of the two tiers of Old North blocks. Stand near any corner along Sixth Street and sight along the edge of the curbs or sidewalks from the northern to southern blocks (or visa versa). You will see that they do not match. The specifics of the mismatches vary from street to street, but the curbs or sidewalks of the two sets of blocks are typically out of alignment by several feet (e.g., Fig. 3.9). Also, the northern blocks have narrower sidewalks and smaller sidewalk planting strips than the southern blocks. So, even though all Old North blocks are the same width (240 feet), the earliest surveyors did not align them.

3.9. Example of the misalignment of the northern and southern tiers of Old North blocks.



## II. Development: The Three Main Old North Layers

By late 1913, then, a scheme of blocks and residential lots was in place. People built homes on them and construction continued until virtual build out in the early 1950s.

A nice overview of this incremental process is provided by the maps of Old North residences drawn by the Sanborn Map Company in 1921 (the first Sanborn map of the Old North), 1933, 1944, and 1953 (the last Sanborn of Davis). These are shown, much reduced, in the four panels of Fig. 3.10.

Before discussing what these maps show, let me explain their source and character. Before changes in construction and

related technology, fire insurance companies were markets for reliable information on buildings because of their need to decide whether to insure a structure and for how much. The Sanborn Map Company was such a source of information.

For literally thousands of American towns and cities, this company developed very detailed building-by-building maps of quite large scale. In physical reality, each of the four maps shown in Fig. 3.10 consists of two sheets. Each sheet measures some two feet by two feet and the scale is 50 feet to the inch. At this size, the outlines of each structure are quite detailed. (For each of the four maps in Fig. 3.10, reductions of the two sheets were joined at E Street in order to make a single map.)

These four maps, plus the 1905 map in Fig. 3.1, provide a record of decades in which structures were built.

Counting the structures shown in each of these five maps and rounding the totals results in the pace of build-out shown in Fig. 3.11. It is a relatively even pace over the three main decades with a slow-down as opportunities to build constrict.

While it is possible to divide Old North history into many periods or layers, let me here describe only what strike me as the main three of these. Actually, these might be thought of as two main layers per se with a third and sad overlay coming after them.

*The major historical distinction is between the decades of the 1910s and 1920s on the one side (which are architecturally distinguished by the bungalow) and the 1930s and 1940s, on the other side (marked architecturally by several revival styles of cottages). Trailing these two periods or layers is a third tack-on and tacky period of the 1950s and later, a layer architecturally marked by unattractive apartment houses (cf. Duchscherer and Keister 1995, 35).*

**1. THE 1910S AND 1920S LAYER.** The defining architectural style of the first layer of Old North architecture is the bungalow. Hallmarks of this style include “graceful wide roof overhangs,” and “horizontal massing and low silhouette” (Lathe 1997; HEC, 30). There is commonly a structure-wide porch that is designed as part of the house and its roof is supported by thick pillars.

By my count, in the late 1990s there were 32 bungalows in the Old North that had survived from this first period. As one might expect from the radiating pattern of development from Second and G streets, the numbers decline as one moves from east to west: 6 on G, 13 on F, 3 on E, 6 on D, 4 on C, and none on B.

Bungalow homes were built in various sizes and degrees of ornateness and opulence. Bespeaking the relative economic modesty of Davis, none of the many Old North (or even Davis)

bungalows begins to approach the opulence seen in such homes in other California cities (such as in Pasadena, which features an official “Bungalow Heaven Landmark District”) (Duchscherer and Keister 1995, 37).

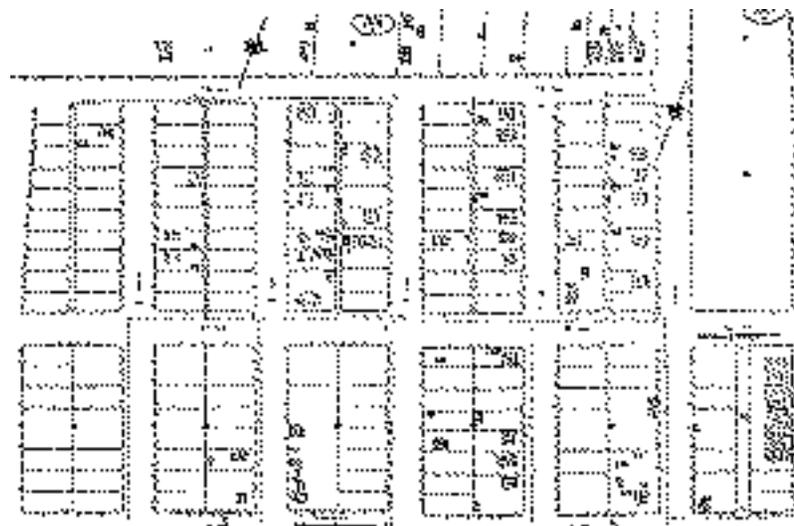
Bungalows of a scale suggesting great “strength and substance” and with more detailing are sometimes called “Craftsman bungalows,” although the line between a mere bungalow and a Craftsman bungalow is vague (Duchscherer and Keister 1995, 38). In the six chapters on streets in Part II, we will see that the historical surveyors of 1979 and 1996 frequently labeled Old North homes “Craftsman bungalows.” This labeling should be regarded with caution because not all architecturally knowledgeable people would agree. I am far from expert in architectural styles, but I think that many bungalows labeled Craftsman in the Old North (and Davis more generally) are not instances of that style (cf. Duchscherer and Keister 1995, 38-68).

In the Old North many of the bungalows were (and are) simpler and exemplify the use of the word as a pejorative reference to cheap housing.

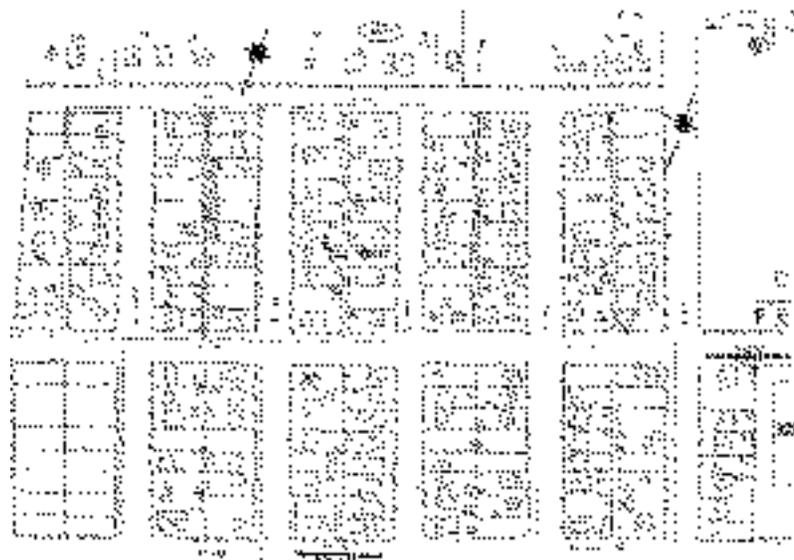
By the 1920s, “bungalow” generally meant a low-cost house with rather severe trim. Even these usually have generous front porches, some distinctive outside trim, and some built-in cabinetry. Almost all retain the light and airy feel that is the essence of the design idea (Lathe 1997).

It is here that Mr. Pedder returns to the scene, making good on his promise to build a number of low-cost bungalows. In the middle to late 1910s he put up eight that still stand, seven of which are in the Old North. Four in the 600 block of C Street are pictured in Ch. 8 (612, 618, 619, 645 C). There is one each on D (630), E (516) and G (617).

These bungalows are about 800 square feet, “simple and modest, . . . squat, [and feature] front porches with pillar or porch supports and low-pitched roofs with exposed rafter tails” (Sherwin, 1986).

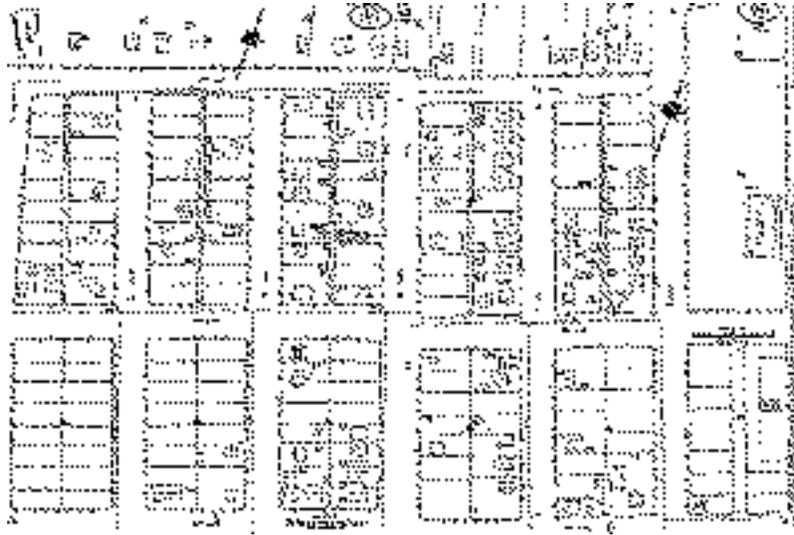


1921



1944

3.10. Sanborn Old North maps, 1921, 1933, 1944, 1953.



1933



1953

Decade	10s	20s	30s	40s
Order-of-magnitude number of new structures per decade:	50	50	50	20
Order-of-magnitude cumulative number of Old North structures:	50	100	150	170

### 3.11. Old North construction by decade (rounded).

Up from this modesty, there are of course many larger bungalows in the Old North, particularly along F Street. The two organizations that have surveyed Davis' historical resources have been particularly impressed with the ones on F and several of them are on the city's inventory of historical resources (HEC, 1980; ARG, 1996). All of those listed in these inventories are pictured and described in the chapters of Part II of this guide.

**2. THE 1930S AND 1940S LAYER.** As we move into the 1930s, the bungalow motif is replaced with various revival styles—architecture that recalls a former pure style or that is reminiscent of it. While Spanish Colonial was a popular revival in other parts of California, no strong versions show up in the Old North. Instead, there are paler “Spanish inspired” versions (e.g. 502 E) and, more commonly, Tudor Revival (e.g. 508 and 639 E) and Colonial Revival (e.g. 528 and 601 D).

Otherwise, homes built in the 1930s and 1940s tended to what specialists label “vernacular.” In the Old North this means plain, mainly stucco-clad cottages, of which there are several on every Old North street.

Oddly, there is only a single instance of a major style often associated with the 1930s, that of Moderne. It is at 537 D Street, the southwestern corner of Sixth and D (and pictured and described in the chapter on D Street).

The 1930s and even much of the 1940s were the prime eras of those famous home-delivery servers the “milk man” and the “ice man”—roles that changes in merchandising and technology would eventually reduce or eliminate.

The Old North has architectural evidence of the milk man in the form of milk bottle slots or boxes for home delivery. At least two of these are easily visible from the sidewalk and are only a few feet from it (Fig. 3.12).

3.12. Wall-installed milk delivery box.



Each milk box has a small door (with no lock) that a milkman could open onto a little chamber in the wall. In it, he (yes, he) could place a quart bottle of milk. The inside wall of the box had a door that the resident could open to take out the milk.

Notice the assumptions about social life built into this physical device. It is only large enough for one quart of milk. This means a small family, frequent deliveries, or both. The slot was not refrigerated, so someone had to be there to fetch the contents quickly. Even though close to or on the street, it had no lock.

Electric refrigerators were not yet in wide use, but iceboxes were and they needed to be replenished by an iceman. Richard Barlow, a well-known Davis citizen, had his ice house on Sixth Street close to the railroad tracks. (This business is described further in the next chapter.)

Among many federal government responses to the economic depression of the 1930s was a vast public works construction program called the Works Projects Administration. The Old North, as well as much of Davis, benefited from this program. The initials "WPA" are evident on many of Old North curbs—meaning that federal funds made them possible. A picture of one of these inscriptions—the one at Sixth and C streets—is shown in Fig. 3.13. I have counted almost a dozen of them on Old North curbs, mostly along Sixth Street. (To understand the need for curbs, recall that those laid by Pedder and company in 1913 were redwood rails. How long they may have lasted is anyone's guess, but they had presumably rotted out by the late 1930s.)

**3. THE 1950S AND LATER LAYER .** As discussed in Ch. 1, there are some 180 lot-dominant structures in the Old North, of

3.13. Works Projects  
Administration curb marker at  
Sixth and C streets.



which about 150 are signature homes built in the two periods or layers just described.

**The Ugly Layer.** This means that there are about 30 other visually prominent structures. These make up the third and last layer and were constructed after about 1950.

The buildings of this third layer are largely rental apartments or duplexes that feature garages or parking lots fronting the street. For the sake of clarity, a picture of one of these structures is given in Fig. 3.14.

The 1953 Sanborn map included in Fig. 3.10 shows that quite a number of these third layer structures replaced older homes along the northern side of Seventh Street.

For whatever reasons, over the 1950s and 1960s Old North residents apparently acquiesced in developer construction of these unattractive and out-of-character buildings. Thankfully, not all that much land was available and buildable property was easily acquired elsewhere in Davis. Therefore, the extent of this kind of damage to the neighborhood has been relatively limited (but not less egregious for this reason).

**Three Street Changes.** While not a layer in the building construction sense, three other changes after 1950 had significant impacts on the neighborhood. These were the extension and accompanying redesign of three streets: Fifth, D and F.

As can be inferred from the aerial photograph of Davis seen in Fig. 2.4, Fifth Street was not a major route. Indeed, it only ran from B Street to the railroad, where it ended.

But, the city planners of the early 1960s reconfigured Russell to hook to Fifth and then extended it across the railroad. This was accomplished in the middle 1960s and also involved widening Fifth to four lanes and banning all parking on it. Thus was created a traffic chasm that physically separates the Old North from the Downtown.

3.14. Third layer, street-hostile duplex.



The two previously dead-end streets of D and F were cut through to the north. D Street's extension connected only to a minor street north of Eighth and traffic on it therefore remained modest. But F Street was transformed into a major arterial all the way north and out of the city.



In concentrating on the rate of build-out and styles of architecture, I have neglected features of the people who lived in the Old North. Let me now redress this imbalance at least a little.

From the start and up through about the 1950s, the Old North was primarily a neighborhood of nuclear families of the classic sort. Although families were not very large, in the aggregate at any given time there were many children on these streets. Thus, long-time E Street residents Kay and Wes Wooden report that in the late 1940s 31 children lived on or in the immediate vicinity of the 500 block of E Street. In the 1980s and 1990s that number varied between zero and five—and mostly closer to zero than to five.

There were two waves of these families that corresponded to the two, two-decade sets of years I have elaborated on above—the 1910s-20s and the 1930s-40s.

But, and as I will return to in the Epilogue, there was no third wave of nuclear families in the 1950s or 1960s—or in subsequent decades. Instead, other family or living group formations became increasingly prominent.