

Historic Uptown Lexington North Carolina

A Heritage Tour



A Brief History

Lexington, North Carolina is a furniture and textile center and is also known for its famous

"Lexington Style" barbecue. Located in the heart of the Piedmont, it is 21 miles south of Winston Salem and 32 miles west of Greensboro in one of the most beautiful counties in the state.

Tradition has it that Lexington got its name when express riders carrying the news of the American colonists' victory at the Battle of Lexington, Massachusetts rode through what is now Lexington, NC in 1775. The heretofore unnamed village had been home to settlers who began arriving about 1750. Newcomers to this backwater area of the state found it to be heavily wooded and exceptionally well watered by Abbotts Creek and the Yadkin River 10 miles west. The Native Americans in the area, the Sauras, had left the area by 1700, although various other tribes moved through on the "Trading Path" along the Yadkin.

In 1822, the N.C. General Assembly created a new county from Rowan County. Davidson County was named for General William Lee Davidson, a hero of the Revolution who was killed in the Battle of Cowan's Ford. After a dispute about the exact location of the new county seat, Lexington was chosen and by 1824 a new brick courthouse was constructed in the middle of the town square, around which 25 acres owned by prominent businessmen were sold to the county for \$.50 an acre. Thus began uptown Lexington!

Compactness and intactness characterize the Uptown Lexington Historic District - it is a five block

area of commercial construction with almost no "missing" or destroyed structures within it. Although many buildings have undergone street level facade changes, most of the second floor facades remain unaltered.

The district is comprised of brick detailed with various classical architectural elements executed in granite, wood, metal, terracotta and brick. By 1858 a second courthouse whose scale and design were considered quite ambitious for such a small community had been built. Hotels, newspaper offices, livery stables, and a wide variety of stores and offices were built of wood in close proximity to the courthouse on the square, providing quite a contrast between wooden storefronts and Corinthian columns!

By 1885 the first of the brick structures appeared just south of the courthouse and during the next few decades all the original wooden buildings were overbuilt with the brick structures which exist today. Records indicate that in a few instances, current buildings dating back as early as 1900 may be the third or even fourth structure to occupy the site.

About This Tour

A walk through Historic Uptown Lexington is a uniquely enjoyable experience. Take it all in - the historic surroundings, our community's heritage, the special treasures found throughout our shops, our historical and art museums, and the friendliness of our residents. The tour will begin at the square and will take approximately 1 hour if you walk at a leisurely pace.





Walking Tour Sites

1. Courthouse Square - 1824

The Courthouse Square, originally known as Washington Square, was established in 1824 as the center of the new county seat of Davidson County. It was laid out where the main streets, then known as Davis Street and Steele Street (Main Street), and Cameron Street and Stanley Street (Center Street), came together. The original Davidson County Courthouse, ca. 1824, was a brick structure designed by William Nichols and stood in what is now the intersection of Main and Center Streets. No drawings of this building exist and it was torn down when the new courthouse was built in 1858. A jail, whipping post, and stocks were built near-by. Around 1910, the square was defined into four quadrants surrounding the intersection of Main Street and Center Streets and remains today as a unique traffic pattern in uptown Lexington.

2. Old Davidson County Courthouse - 1858

2 South Main Street.

One of the most architecturally significant courthouses in the state, this stucco over brick temple-form building of Greek Revival/Italianate Revival design is the oldest building in the Uptown Lexington Historical District and provides the cornerstone of the Uptown Lexington historic district. The building was originally constructed at a cost of \$20,000 and was used as a courthouse until 1958. The building is now used as the Davidson County Historical Museum and in 1971 was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

3. The Raper Building - ca. 1907

SW Corner of W. Center Street and Court Square

The Raper Building was constructed according to plans prepared by Knoxville mail order architect George F. Barber and was used by attorney Emery E. Raper. It continues to be used by attorneys and is characterized as the first brick building built along Lexington's Lawyers' row.

4. Lawyers' Row - ca. 1920's

8-12 Court Square

Originally divided into three sixteen-foot lots, these buildings were built over a period of several years during the 1920's by three attorneys. The simple 1920's appearance is characterized by slightly recessed entrances, one-over-one sash windows and bands of patterned brickwork.

HISTORICAL FACT: In 1917 the worst problem in Lexington was the mud on Main Street. It was so bad in the winter months that stepping stones were placed across Main Street in order to help residents cross the road.

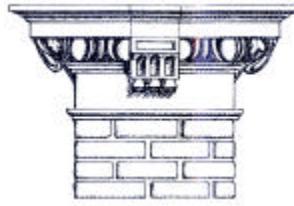
5. Commercial Building - Built by 1885

16 South Main Street

In one of the oldest commercial blocks in Lexington, this Italianate influenced structure features red brick walls with contrasting granite corner posts and round-arched window lintels and sills. Best remembered as Lexington Drugstore, many in Lexington still recall Dr. Redwine writing prescriptions in his second floor office for an ice cream cone from the drugstore for his young patients.

6. Commercial Building - 1885-1890
22 S. Main Street

The facade features an impressive three-bay arched window divided by Ionic columns and outlined with granite. The storefront is bordered with granite corner posts replicated from neighboring properties and a classical wooden cornice. The leaded glass transom, visible under the awning, is one of the few historical transoms currently uncovered in uptown Lexington.



8. Commercial Building - 1914
120 South Main Street

Originally built as The Princess Theatre, this facility had a seating capacity of 372. It boasted a six piece orchestra and was considered the most up-to-date and best equipped theatre in the state in 1914. The first floor was later used as a hardware store, first Conrad's, then Farmer's, however, it is best known as the location of the photography studio of H. Lee Waters, housed on the 2nd floor for more than 70 years. The building features arched windows and a brickwork panel on the upper facade.

HISTORICAL FACT: Lexington's most prominent commercial structures were built on Main Street. The buildings are typically two - three stories in height, and smaller one - two story simpler structures are "stair-stepped" back down the side streets. The finest example of this is the south side of East First Avenue. Stand in front of 22 South Main Street and look east to see the stair steps.

7. (Former) March Hotel - ca. 1910
100 - 108 S. Main Street

The most architecturally significant privately owned building in the district, this Renaissance Revival structure features a series of arches on the First Avenue elevation, Ionic pilasters, and classical details and moldings. (Note the First Avenue arched doorway that was recently uncovered during the renovation.) One entered the hotel lobby under a one story central portico which has been removed. Hotel rooms were located on the second and third floors, and the newsstand and dining room were adjacent to the lobby. The Bank of Lexington, various shops, the Union Bus Station, and the Police Station have all occupied parts of the building over time.



9. Commercial Building - Built between 1907 and 1913

16 - 18 West Second Avenue

These three, one-story storefronts were created for the Coca-Cola bottling works. The simple features of the building include a unifying brick corbelled cornice (projecting brickwork across the top) and the original arched windows seen on #16.

10 - Earnhardt Building - Built between 1923 and 1929

27 - 31 West Second Avenue

This building was built by John W. Earnhardt to replace a cotton gin that once operated on this site. In the 1930's, the Davidson County Public Library was located in #31.

11. Buchanan - Siceloff Building - 1927
200 - 202 South Main Street

Old photographs show that this multi-colored brick building was originally built with only the first seven bays running south from the corner of South Main Street and West Second Avenue. (One bay = one window). Around 1930, the final seven bays were added. Although the facade has been altered, it retains its patterned brick-work and decorative ariel balconies. It was originally built for and best known as the location of Rayless Department Store and Efirm's Department Store.



12. Old United States Post Office - 1912
220 South Main Street

One of the most architecturally prominent buildings in uptown Lexington, the former Post Office serves as a solid southern anchor for the Uptown Lexington Historic District. James Knox Taylor was the supervising architect for this neoclassical revival stone building. Six large Tuscan columns form a portico on the facade. The ground lobby is still intact and boasts many classical features. From the mid 1960's until 1986, the building was used by the Davidson County Public Library. It is now occupied by Arts United for Davidson County.

HISTORICAL FACT: On January 1, 1926, a tragic fire truck accident occurred on South Main Street in front of the former Post Office and three Lexington firemen were killed. The call was thought to have been a false alarm.

13. First Presbyterian Church - ca. 1827
15 West Third Avenue

Joseph Conrad, one of the most noted early 19th century builders in Lexington, was placed in charge of erecting the First Presbyterian Church. The original building has been heavily altered, however the original late 19th century tower and vestibule still stands. It rises in three stages to a pyramidal roof accented by small gables on each side and is one of the most distinctive architectural features in Lexington. **Note—The church is not open for public touring.*

14. Koontz - Buchanan House - ca 1827
409 South State Street *Private Residence*

The character of this home is similar to many of the older homes in Lexington, however the green tile roof which contrasts against the red brick walls are particularly distinctive features. This property is under protective covenants through Preservation North Carolina. The next two properties are also

under protective covenants to form a large tract of easement protected property that affords mutual protection and protection for the surrounding neighborhood.

15. Lloyd Rainey Hunt House - ca. 1927
417 South State Street *Private Residence*

Lloyd and Lillian Kale Hunt obtained the services of architect Joseph T. Levesque of Winston-Salem to design this British vernacular influenced home. The undulating brick courses, stone highlights and half timber framing are dominant architectural features which relay a cottage-like atmosphere. As already noted, this property is under protective covenants through Preservation North Carolina.

16. Dr. William Rainey Holt House - ca. 1834
408 South Main Street *Private Residence*

This Greek Revival town house known as The Homestead, is characterized by Palladian details, including windows and sidelights, from Philadelphia architect Asher Benjamin's pattern book. It is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is under protective covenants through Preservation North Carolina. #14, #15, and #16 are also noted for the retention of residential property that abuts the commercial core which is important for the viability of uptown Lexington.

17. Davidson County Library
602 South Main Street

An excellent collection of local historical information and genealogical records on microfilm and in books can be found in the local history room.

18. Grace Episcopal Church - ca. 1901
419 South Main Street

This is the most prominent Gothic Revival Style church in Davidson County. Gothic arched windows, and a pyramidal roofed bell tower are dominate architectural features. The east window, designed by Louis C. Tiffany in the Resurrection design, won first prize for design at the 1890 Paris Exposition. It was given as memorial to William Edwin Holt, Dr. William Rainey Holt's grandson. ** Note - The church is not open for public touring.*

19. Old Carolina Theatre - ca. 1935
217 South Main Street

A prominent Lexingtonian, J. Tilden Hedrick, built the Old Carolina Theatre in 1935 for both movies and stage shows. On December 5, 1945, a fire destroyed the theatre and several surrounding buildings estimated as a \$350,000 loss. A group of concerned citizens renovated the theatre and renamed it the Edward C. Smith Civic Center. Although the exterior of the building is of modern design and construction, the Old Carolina Theatre stage has been restored and is retained as the most important architectural feature of the building.
**Note The Civic Center is not open for public touring.*

20. Hedrick Building - ca. 1948
211 - 215 South Main Street

This structure was built to replace a building destroyed in the 1945 fire mentioned above. The building features spandrel glass, sometimes called by the manufacturers name, Carrara glass, (the burgundy and peach colored panels.) Popular during the 1930's and 1940's, the glass was used to "modernize" a building and came in a variety of colors. This building originally featured the glass clad, however often the material was used to modernize the storefront of an older structure. A good example of this is the next building, the Varner building. Eparle's Dress Shop was one of the original tenants in this building.

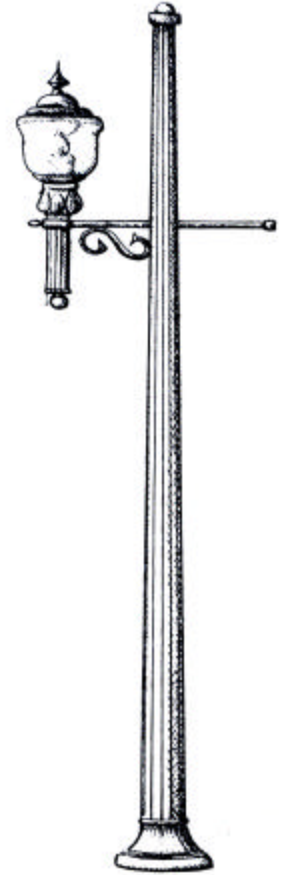
21. Varner Building - Built between 1913 and 1923
103 - 107 South Main Street

The Varner building features ornamental cornices and a stone string course where the building name is placed. Originally the south half of the building was a movie theatre; however, the most prominent occupant was the Dispatch Publishing Company, publisher of the Lexington newspaper. The basement of the building extended under the sidewalk and glass blocks were used to form a translucent sidewalk that provided light into the basement which was used as the newspaper press-room.



22. Moffitt Building - ca 1920's
101 South Main Street

This building features dark red patterned brickwork with contrasting classical detailing (panels, medallions, and cornice) in white terra cotta. A variety of shops and professional offices have occupied the building through the years, however it is best known as the location of Fred Thompson's Mens Clothing Store. A side stairwell, which is now closed, served as the entrance to a basement level barber shop. Glass blocks providing light into the space were used here like they were at the Varner Building.



23. Smith-Thompson Block - ca. 1900
23 South Main Street

Outstanding features of this building include decorative paneled and corbelled brickwork, one-over-one sash windows with granite sills and lintels, a corner ariel balcony, and a broad, four part arched window which is outlined in granite and filled with decorative leaded glass. For years this building was used as a community gathering spot, first Thompson's Drugstore, then as People's Drugstore.

24. Commercial Building - Built by 1885
17 - 21 South Main Street

Along with 16 -18 South Main Street (across the street), this is one the oldest pairs of buildings in uptown Lexington. Although the facade has been altered through the years, it originally featured Italianate style round-arched doors and windows. A metal first-story cornice still remains on #21. The second story row of round arched windows and a decorative brick corbelled cornice are prominent Italianate features.

25. The Confederate Monument

The southeast quadrant of the square

At the turn of the century the courthouse square was used as a camping lot by farmers who came to town in covered wagons. During the 19th century the public well on the southeast quadrant provided water for both people and their livestock. September 14, 1905 the Robert E. Lee Chapter for the Daughters of the Confederacy erected the Confederate monument in the middle of the intersection of Main Street and Center Street to commemorate Davidson County's Confederate dead. Forty-five years later it was moved to its present location in order to improve the flow of traffic.

26. The Development Building - ca. 1906

1-11 South Main Street, 1st E Center Street

The Davidson County Development Company erected this building in 1906. It was the major commercial undertaking in Lexington at that time. The large three story, nine bay-wide building features round-arched openings on the first floor and raised brick arches over the arched third-story windows. The National Bank of Lexington and a grocery store were among the first to occupy the building, however, it has had a variety of retail, service, professional, and residential uses throughout the years.

27. Commercial Building - Built between 1907 and 1913

Southwest Corner of East Center Street and Marble Alley

In 1913 this was the site of the "carriage repository" but in 1923 it was identified on the Sanborn Insurance Maps as a garage for forty cars and an auto repair shop. At least through the 1940's the building was associated with the automobile and trucking businesses. For years it was used by a mail order business. There are large, arched vehicular openings on the first story which are currently closed in.

28. (Former) Marble Works - Front half built between 1890 and 1896, rear half built between 1913 and 1923

12 East Center Street

Marble cutting took place here in the early years and it was from this business that Marble Alley, which runs along the east side of the building, got its name. By the mid-1920's the marble works no longer occupied the building, and a series of bakeries were located here. The most noted was the United Bakery Co. which at one time made 10,000 loaves of bread a week. The smell of the bakeries is what Lexington residents remember best about this building.

29. Northeast Quadrant of the Square

This square historically was used as a gathering spot for community events, including the gathering of military troops. Three small stone monuments with bronze plaques commemorate Davidson County's veterans. The monument to the north honors those that served in WWI. The center monuments honor those from WWII and the Korean Conflict. The south end monument honors the Vietnam War veterans.

HISTORICAL FACT: In 1917 the City Speed limit was 10 miles per hour - for horses!

30. Commercial Building - Built between 1902 & 1907

9 North Main Street

Originally built as an archway used by carriages traveling between Marble Alley and Main Street, this building was probably built to fill in the narrow space left after the earlier construction of the contiguous buildings to the north and south. Later the first story shop front was filled in and the building was used as a cafe for years.



31. Commercial Building - ca. 1890
11 - 15 North Main Street

For sixty years the building was occupied by a department store in the south storefront, a furniture store in the middle section and a hardware store in the north storefront. J.F. Ward Co. was the department store that was located in that building from 1890 until 1997, when it moved to West Second Avenue and then eventually closed. 15 North Main is the only storefront still intact. It features a wooden paneled bulkhead and a deeply recessed entrance.

32. Hinkle Block - Built between 1902 & 1907
101-105 North Main Street

The seven-bay facade includes flat-arched windows with granite sills, brick pilasters, a corbelled cornice, and a high parapet, (wall around roof edge), with small polygonal turrets. The corner was originally a bank with a corner entrance. Through the years, the first floor was used for a variety of retail and service businesses. The second floor was originally used as the Masonic Hall and by 1913 the Co. A 3rd Reg. NC Armory met there.

33. Hankins Building - ca. 1902
107 North Main Street

Although the first-story shop front has been modernized, the rest of the 1902 three-bay facade remains intact. It features two-over-two sash arched windows and a heavily corbelled and paneled brick cornice. In the 1920's it was used by the J.A. Hankins dry goods store.

34. Hedrick's Hall - ca. 1902
109 - 111 North Main Street

Similar to the Hankins Building with a matching corbelled and paneled cornice, this 1902 four -bay facade features round-arched windows with granite sills and raised brick arches. For years the building housed a grocery store and furniture store.

35. J.C. Smith Building - Built between 1913 and 1923
100 - 102 North Main Street

During the 1920's it housed the Smith General Merchandise store, a grocery , a funeral home, and the Masonic Hall on the second floor . It is Colonial Revival in design and is three-bays wide and seven-bays deep. Notable features include large round-arched windows with granite sills and raised brick arches. For years the building housed a grocery store and later a furniture store.

36. (Former) Lexington Fire Department
Built between 1913 and 1923
8 West First Street

This building was originally used as Fire House #1; however, by the mid 1930's the Fire Department had out- grown the space and it was used by a machinery and welding shop. The most prominent features of the facade are the two large vehicular entrances.

37. Hege-Harmon Building - ca. 1922
12 -20 North Main Street

The building is said to have been dedicated by Governor Cameron Morrison. The Commercial and Savings bank was located at the south end, and Young' s Theatre, later the Granada Theatre, was located in the middle. The red brick facade features contrasting white terra-cotta trim around the doors and window, decorative courses and a decorative cornice.

HISTORICAL FACT: In the 1930's a child could go to Young's Theatre all day on Saturdays for 10 cents.

38. Northwest Quadrant of the Square - 1824

The monument on the north end was erected in 1918 by the North Carolina Historical Commission and the Davidson County Board of Commissioners, in honor of the settling of Daniel Boone along the Yadkin and the passage of the American Army under General Nathaniel Greene in 1781 in route to Guilford Courthouse. The center monument was erected in 1981 in honor of Captain Benjamin Merrill who died for the cause of the Regulators in 1771. The monument on the south end was erected in 1928 in honor of the incorporation of the City of Lexington in 1828.

39. Commercial Building - Between 1913 and 1919

2 - 10 North Main Street

Architectural features of this building include white terra-cotta molding and a cornice which sharply contrasts with the patterned red brick walls. Conrad & Hinkle Grocery opened in 1919 and continues operating in the same location today. In 1940, Conrad & Hinkle was the first grocery store in North Carolina to install steel lockers and to process meat for individuals.

40. Lexington's City Hall

22 West Center Street

This is the site of the first known business established to sell Lexington style barbecue prepared under tents on an open pit. Barbecue was first prepared for the people that were in town for court and for farmers on Saturdays, and has since grown into an industry that Lexington is widely known for.

41. Former City Barbecue - ca. 1937

South Greensboro Alley

The City Barbecue building, originally called Swicegood's BBQ, stands as a permanent reminder of the early days of barbecue, which centered around the courthouse to feed the increased number of people in town on court days. The multi-colored patterned brickwork building with its original concrete block barbecue pit on the northeast rear corner still remains intact, but is now unoccupied.

Credits

Property descriptions in this publication were primarily derived from the "National Register of Historic Places Nomination" for the Uptown Lexington Historic District, written by Laura Phillips, *Building the Back Country* by Paul Baker Touart; and anniversary and progress editions of "The Dispatch", Lexington's local newspaper.

The properties included in this brochure include contributing properties in the Uptown Lexington Historic District and historical properties located just outside of the district.

Published by

Uptown Lexington, Inc. with assistance from the Davidson County Historical Museum. This project has been funded in part by a gift from the Terence L. Mills Memorial Preservations Services Fund for North and South Carolina and the National Trust for Historic Preservation and a grant from The Lexington Tourism Authority.

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