

# 8

## C Street

### *An Intact Enclave*

Like D Street, C displays strong contrasts, but of a different sort. Here the visually most striking feature is the counterpoint between the block-long backside of the public school administration headquarters in the 500 block and the virtually intact 1920s-like enclave in the 600 block. In just a few steps we go from 1950s neo-modern presence to Old North essence.

#### **The Harby/School District Block: C to B Between Fifth and Sixth**

Two of the 12 main blocks that make up the Old North have never been subdivided into multiple “lot” ownership. One of them is on G Street, the block on which The Davis Food Cooperative, Inc. stands. The other is here on C, bounded by C and B streets on the east and west and Fifth and Sixth streets on the south and north.

Like the other five blocks to the east of this block in the southern tier, the “on paper” plan envisioned subdivision of this block into lots following the Downtown pattern.

As can be seen, the other blocks were, to varying degrees, subdivided into individual lots for ownership and development. But multiple-ownership of lots never happened in this block. The several reasons for this include a small Davis population combined with the availability of more attractively located lots that made subdivision economically unattractive in the era when it would have been easiest to do—the period before the 1920s.

This block comes with the standard “things used to be cheap” economic tidbits: the block changed hands for \$1,000 in 1876. It sold again, for \$3,000, in 1886 (Larkey 1969, 57).

James A. Harby, a banker, became the owner around the

### **C Street Residences, Residents, Rentals**

Employing the same scheme of aspects used for the other five streets, these are the population and housing statistics of C Street.

**1. RESIDENCES.** We find that C Street ranks:

1) second among streets in number of residential units (62 of 281, or 22%),  
 2) fourth in percentage of signature homes (25 of 146 or 17%), and,  
 3) third in percentage of lot-dominant structures (32 of 182, or 18%).  
 C shares with E the features of (1) a dead-end at Seventh which created additional space for the construction of (2) apartment buildings erected in the 1960s. These features elevate both the residential units and the population of C and E.

**2. TINY/HIDDEN ABODES.** C Street has 12% (7 of 60) of all the Old North tiny and/or hidden abodes, which ranks it fourth among streets, but near F with 18% and G with 22%.

**3. RESIDENTS.** In line with its relatively larger percentage of residences, C ranks second in residents, with 148 of all 609 Old North inhabitants, which is 24%.

**4. RESIDENTS IN SIGNATURE HOMES.** C Street ranks last among streets in the percent of its residents who live in a signature home or in an ancillary abode on the same property (60 of 148, which is 41%).

This rank reflects two facts about C Street. One, the western side of the south faceblock has no residences, reducing the possible number of signature homes. Two, apartment complexes at the intersection of C and Seventh streets inflate the non-signature home population.

**5. OWNER-OCCUPIED SIGNATURE HOMES AND ALL RESIDENCES.**

Along with F and E, C is at the bottom of the rankings on the percentage of all its residential units that are owner-occupied signature homes (11 of 62, or 18%, with F also at 18% and E at 20%).

**6. OWNER-OCCUPIED VERSUS RENTAL SIGNATURE HOMES.** Focusing only on C Street signature homes, 44% of them are owner-occupied (11 of 25), which ranks C fourth among streets.

As I have done for the other streets, let us appreciate the meaning of this finding by stating it in the reverse: *C ranks third in the percentage of its signature homes that are rentals (56%).*

**7. ABSENTEE LANDLORDS OF RENTAL SIGNATURE HOMES.** Looking at only rental signature homes and putting B Street to the side, C ranks with F in having the highest percentage of landlords who give out-of-Davis addresses on their county tax roll listing (6 of 16 or 43%).

turn of the century and held it until 1922. Although it was worth much more, in the “interest of civic improvement,” he sold it for \$2,000 to “twenty local citizens who each contributed \$100 so that a high school could be built in Davis” (Larkey 1972b).

Ironically, the school district decided to build the high school on a larger piece of ground, in the next block to the west, and the Harby Block remained vacant until the Davis Intermediate School was constructed on it in 1949.



**8.1.** September, 1946 aerial view from the southeast of the Harby Block. The building on the left is the Davis High School Gymnasium, which fronts on B Street. Fifth Street terminates at B, across the street from the gym. The home plate of the city's baseball diamond is in the lower left of the Harby Block. (Excerpt from Eastman Collection photo 4705, Courtesy UC Davis Special Collections)

During the 1930s and 1940s, it was used as the city baseball field (Fig. 8.1) and people continued to call it the “Harby Block.”

Three months before and all during World War II, Davis (along with communities across the country) had a Ground Observer Corps whose job was reporting on all planes passing over the town. A “specially constructed tower” for this task was erected on the Harby Block and a volunteer force of some 250 “men, women and teenagers manned the post twenty-four hours a day” (Larkey 1969, 133).

### **Events at the School Administration Parking Lot**

The school administration parking lot that fronts Fifth between C and B streets is a locale for non-profit groups to conduct fundraising activities, especially flea market-type events. An example of an ad for one of these events is shown in Fig. 8.2.

**8.2.** Advertisement for an event in the school administration parking lot at Fifth and C streets.



Two circumstances prompt such uses of this parking lot. One, the lot is quite visible because it is situated on Fifth, which is one of only two streets that run the entire east-west span of the city. The traffic is particularly heavy on Saturdays, when many people come into the area to go to the Davis Farmers' Market, just to the south on C.

Two, the school district is non-commercial and non-profit, which constrains what it can allow on its land, but which fits with supporting other non-profit groups.

#### **411-15 Fifth Street: Newman Chapel<sup>†</sup>**

Dedicated in 1931, the chapel at the northeast corner of Fifth and C streets (Fig. 8.3) was the St. James Catholic Church of Davis until the congregation grew too large and relocated to B and Fourteenth streets in 1964. This building was subsequently turned over to student ministry and is so used today.

The historical surveyors characterize this structure as a “one story brick Romanesque Revival Church [which] has its entry in the street-facing gable end” (HEC, 201).

The main facade organization is symmetrical with a rounded stained glass window centered high in the gable over the recessed, compound arches of the entry. Flanking the entry are pairs of small arched windows. The symmetry of the composition is broken by a hip-roofed bell tower to one side (ARG, 283).

The surveyors were impressed that this church is quite small, but through “sophisticated manipulation of scale,” its architects have created an illusion of “visual massiveness beyond its actual size” and “an unusually forceful effect for a building of such modest scale” (HEC, 201).

One of the key devices contributing to this illusion is the “tiny scale of the wall openings.” That is, the front-facing windows are uncharacteristically small, prompting a false perception of mass (HEC, 202).

The 1996 surveyors noted that the “building is in good condition. However, a large crack in the front facade has been inappropriately patched” (ARG, 283).

This structure does not appear to have a C Street address. Instead, maps and directories show its location as a “dog leg” lot off the three-lot parcel fronting Fifth Street with the address 411-415 Fifth Street. Counting the church on the dog-leg lot, 411-15 Fifth consists of four lots all owned by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Sacramento.

**8.3** 411-15 Fifth Street, the Newman Chapel as it appeared in the mid-1930s when it was the St. James Catholic Church. (Courtesy Reverend Andrew Coffey)



### **514 C Street: Newman Catholic Student Community<sup>†</sup>**

Constructed perhaps 10 years after the church—in about 1940—514 C was initially the rectory for the church next door, later a residence for nuns, and then its current use, the offices of the Newman Catholic Student Community (Fig. 8.4).

Architects attempted to relate “to the adjacent church [in] its brick construction and red tile roof. Stylistically, however, it is

closer to the Spanish Colonial Revival than to the Romanesque imagery of this next door neighbor” (HEC, 203).

“The wall surface is animated by a pattern of darker bricks [and] there is a recessed entry with a heavy metal lintel” (HEC, 203).

**8.4. 514 C**  
Street:  
Newman  
Catholic  
Student  
Community.



### **The Unusually Intact 600 Block of C Street**

In addition to describing dozens of individual houses and other structures as the main part of their 1980 *Cultural Resources Inventory*, HEC developed a list of what they felt were culturally important “districts, preservation areas and groupings . . . that contribute importantly to the character and visual quality of the city” (HEC, 36).

HEC’s list begins with the largest unit, that of the *district* and they identify the Downtown, and University Avenue as possible such areas. College Park is suggested as a possible district or a smaller *preservation area*.

On the smallest scale are *groupings*, which are “block faces of buildings throughout the city whose consistency of style and character are environmentally important” (HEC, 37).

Among those HEC identified in the survey year of 1979 were the 200 block of Third Street, the 500 block of Third Street, and the 600 block of C Street. Here is what they write about the 600 Block of C:

Another streetface whose character derives largely from landscaping qualities and the similar scale and character of its component structures is the 600 block of C Street. The buildings are somewhat later in date than clusters previously mentioned, but together with the mature trees,

consistent setbacks and residential scale, create a sense of time and place evocative of past eras and lifestyles (HEC, 37).

Remarkably, this characterization of the 600 block of C Street remains accurate and the block is virtually unchanged.

This “intactness” sense is all the more remarkable because the block contained a large and “out-of-character” construction shed—at 632 C—up to the 1960s. (It is shown in Fig. 8.5 and on the 1921 Sanborn map reproduced in Fig. 3.10).



**8.5.** Aerial view of the 600 block of C Street, 1960. A. R. Pedder's construction shed is prominent in the middle of the block, at what is today 632 C, the site of a “double-diamond” duplex built in 1962. (Excerpt from Davis Joint Union High School 1960 yearbook inside cover aerial photograph)

### Romantic Media Imagery of C Street

Davis' main medium of print communication, *The Davis Enterprise*, seemed smitten with the “romantic character” of C Street in same period as the HEC cultural resource survey. In a feature article titled “Historic Tree-lined Davis Streets” published on August 1, 1980, the caption of a full-page (almost 13-inch wide) photograph of what was labeled C Street informed us that:

A walk down the shaded C Street sidewalks is an ideal way to soak in Davis history, or just a cool breeze from the many trees.

There is a slight problem in that the photograph is actually of homes in the 600 block of D Street, but that error is irrelevant to appreciating the photo as *romantic imagery* of C Street. For that purpose, D Street is just as good as C Street. (The photo in question appears in Fig. 8.6.)



**8.6.** Romantic Imagery of C Street. Photograph of the 600 block of D Street published in *The Davis Enterprise*, August 1, 1980 as a photograph of C Street. (Courtesy *The Davis Enterprise*)

Ironically, while the 600 block of C Street is in some sense quintessentially Old North, individual homes of the block did not attract the cultural resource affection of either the 1979 or 1996 surveyors.

In the “historic homes derby” (if there be such a thing), C Street has been a flat loser with zero such houses. In contrast, G and B streets have three each, E Street six, F Street seven, and D Street nine. (However, C Street does much better in terms of historical structures per se. It has three, all of which are described in this chapter.)

### **603 C Street**

The home at the northwest corner of Sixth and C streets—603 C Street (Fig. 8.7)—may not have historic cultural significance, but it is certainly an exotic design.

The first view of this house is puzzling. Situated “kitty-cornered” on two lots, it raises the questions, which side is the front and where is the center of the house?

On closer inspection, though, it becomes less strange. The front entrance of the house is on C Street—and the address is therefore quite correctly 603 C Street. From the vantage point of C Street, we can see that the back of the house fronts Sixth Street.

Also looking from C Street, we can appreciate that the structure running back toward the alley on the right of the house is an attached apartment off the main house.

Neighborhood lore holds that 603 C was constructed by a carpenter on the University Farm campus. He had extra, rental income in mind, thus, the seemingly attached but actually separate rental unit “on the back.”



**8.7. 603 C Street.**



**Early Bungalows in the 600 Block**

The 1921 Sanborn map reproduced in Fig. 3.10 shows only three homes in the 600 block of C Street in that year: 612, 618 and 645. In addition, the bungalow at 619 was apparently moved there from Fourth and C streets in the early 1920s in order make way for the Community Church. All four are therefore very early *and* are remarkably similar in style, which makes them exceptionally significant as contributors to the streetscape.



**8.8.** Four 1910s bungalows in the 600 block of C Street: 612 C (top left), 618 C (top right), 619 C (bottom left), and 645 C (bottom right).

These bungalows are four of the eight “little bungalows” that Bowers Addition developer A. R. Pedder constructed in Davis in the late 1910s and early 1920s (Sherwin 1986; Ch. 3, above).

**Social Life on C Street**

At any given time, Old North streets, and blocks on each street, vary in the degree to which residents socialize among themselves *qua* residents. As well, streets and blocks vary over *time* in this way—the degree of resident socializing waxing or waning from decade to decade.

C Street residents have likely been among the more active of block-level socializers, a possibility suggested by Fig. 8.9.



**8.9.** Gathering on C Street, Memorial Day, 1987 (and the first birthday party of Theodore Dingemans, front row, first from the left). (Courtesy Dennis Dingemans)

**Tree Canopy Trauma**

According to a city parks official with whom I spoke, in January, 1997, the driver of a large, long truck got lost and came up the Old North's C Street looking for a way out of the city. On C headed north, he turned right onto Seventh. In order to avoid cars parked on the north side of Seventh, he cut the corner short and snapped off the mature city street tree growing in the planting space directly at the corner.

The photograph in Fig. 8.10 was taken just after city crews had removed the fallen tree but not the stump. Sawdust still litters the site.

**8.10.** Stump of the tree snapped off by a large truck turning right onto Seventh from C Street, 1997.



An incident such as this reminds us of the fragility of the Old North canopy of trees. This fragility was underscored in the El Niño winter of 1997-98, in which two large Old North street trees were downed by storms (at 504 F and 620 B).

### **405 Seventh Street: The Barn<sup>†</sup>**

HEC surveyors were apparently charmed by the idea that a real barn from the Davis agricultural past could have survived in the town right down to the HEC survey year of 1979.

They listed the barn at the rear of 405 Seventh Street as a “cultural resource” and the 1996 surveyors repeated the compliment and kept it in the inventory.

Because of the overgrown landscaping, the barn is virtually invisible except in the winter from the vacant lot just north of 425 Seventh Street (around the corner).

However, we do have a good picture of it because of the enterprise of Old North resident and photographer Norman Riley. Taken in the 1980s from the roof of the adjacent apartment house, his photograph, reproduced in Fig. 8.11, also shows the landmark tree described just below.

The HEC surveyors describe the barn as a “surviving agricultural building relating to early Davis” and a “surviving contact with the agricultural origins of the area” and they estimate it was constructed in 1900 (HEC, 175-176). Reports of laying out Bowers Addition and Acres in 1913 suggest that both tracts consisted of completely open land. Therefore, a 1900 construction date seems too early, although late 1910s construction is possible.

Once used as a residence but now an art studio, it is “an example of adaptive reuse” (ARG, 122).

**8.11.** The historical resource barn and landmark Valley Oak at 405 Seventh Street, 1980s. (Courtesy Norman Riley)



### **Landmark Valley Oak, 405 Seventh Street**

While we are standing on D Street peering through the bushes at the historical barn, let us lift our gaze slightly in order to appreciate the magnificent Valley Oak that towers over the north end of the barn.

This is one of several *Davis Landmark Trees* in the Old North (Core Area Specific Plan Task Force 1994, 66-70).

### **The C and Seventh Vicinity in the 1920s**

In previous chapters, Vansell family pictures have given us 1920s streetscape views of portions of G, F, and D. Another of their photographs shows us the vicinity of C and Seventh streets (Fig. 8.12).

In the background of Fig. 8.12 are the water tower (left) and construction shed (right) built by A. R. Pedder. In addition, the scarcity of homes in the Seventh and C vicinity is noteworthy.



**8.12.** A group of children poses, mid-1920s, on Seventh Street with the water tower and construction shed built by A. R. Pedder in the background. (Courtesy Jane Zakarian)



The 600 block of C Street, then, has a more-than-ordinary number of the physical features people have in mind when they speak of “classic small town Davis.”

Of no small import, this little enclave both persists and is protected by the fact that C Street *ends* at Seventh and is thus not beset by high volumes of automobile traffic.