

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Blake, Chairman, House

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street & number 318 Chairman Blake Lane N/A  not for publication

city or town Davidson N/A  vicinity

state North Carolina code NC county Mecklenburg code 119 Zip code 28036

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally,  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey Crow SHPO 6/30/04  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Chairman Blake House  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg Co., NC  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Greek Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick  
walls Weatherboard  
roof Asphalt  
other Wood  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**  
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark 'x' in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

ca. 1860

Significant Dates

ca. 1860

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Chairman Blake House  
Name of Property

Mecklenburg Co., NC  
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property less than 1

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 | 1 | 7 | | 5 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 6 | 0 | | 3 | 9 | 2 | 8 | 0 | 5 | 0 |  
Zone Easting Northing  
2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |  
Zone Easting Northing  
4 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Laura A. W. Phillips, Architectural Historian

organization N/A date August 20, 2003

street & number 637 N. Spring Street telephone 336/727-1968

City or town Winston-Salem state NC Zip code 36606

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Craig S. and Patricia B. Hevey

street & number PA 4818, P. O. Box 13866 telephone 011-34-91-715-2898

City or town Philadelphia state PA Zip code 19101

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Chairman Blake House  
Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

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### DESCRIPTION

#### Summary and Setting

The Chairman Blake House is a one-and-a-half-story frame Greek Revival-style dwelling built ca. 1860. It is located on the southeast side of Chairman Blake Lane, a newly constructed curved street between Main Street and Lorimer Road in the center of Davidson, North Carolina. Chairman Blake Lane is in a mixed-use area of town. The south side of the street is residential and backs up to a residential neighborhood, but the north side is commercial, with a new commercial building on the northeast corner of South Main Street and Chairman Blake Lane (facing South Main Street) and a landscaped parking lot behind the commercial building and directly across Chairman Blake Lane from the Chairman Blake House. Farther north is the public library on the east side of South Main Street and commercial buildings on the west side of South Main Street. Facing northwest, the house stands one block south of the Davidson College campus. Two lots totaling less than an acre combine to form the present site of the Chairman Blake House. The house is positioned near the eastern boundary of the property with a lawn stretching westward from it. Its small front yard is close to the sidewalk and Chairman Blake Lane. A large oak tree is located near the southwest corner of the house, and scattered trees border the south and southwest edges of the property.

#### Exterior

The five-bay-wide, double-pile house with one-story rear ell rests on a new brick foundation built to appear like brick piers with slightly recessed brick infill with metal ventilators. Weatherboarded walls rise to a steep, side-gable, asphalt-shingle roof, whose pedimented gable ends are also sheathed with weatherboards. The roof has a boxed and molded cornice, beneath which a wide frieze board encircles the house. Four interior brick chimneys, at least partially rebuilt, pierce the roof. Two, which have lost most of their stacks, are found on the front and rear slopes of the main roof at the southwest gable end. The third is positioned immediately behind the main roof ridge near the northeast gable end, and the fourth—again with a shortened stack—rises near the center of the rear ell just northeast of the roof ridge. The house has three dormers—two on the front and one on the rear—whose pedimented gables are flush-sheathed with wood. Symmetrically placed windows are six-over-six, double-hung sash with plain surrounds. Most retain their workable wood louvered shutters and shutter hardware.

The Chairman Blake House has two porches, each currently accessed by temporary wood steps. Projecting from the center three bays of the facade is the house's primary porch, chastely classical with a pedimented gable and four square Tuscan posts echoed by two Tuscan pilasters against the front wall. A

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balustrade with heavily turned balusters connects the porch posts and pilasters. The porch has a board-and-batten ceiling and shelters the center-bay entrance to the house. The unusual front door, with four vertically oriented octagonal panels, is bordered by sidelights and a transom.

At the rear of the house, an engaged porch runs along the west side of the rear ell. Now screened, the ell porch has slender Tuscan posts—similar to those of the front porch but with different moldings—joined by a plain balustrade. Like the front porch, the ell porch has a board-and-batten ceiling. Two doors open from the ell porch to the interior of the house. One, bordered by sidelights, opens to the center stair hall. The other leads to the north room of the ell.

### Interior

The interior of the Blake House (see floor plans) has a center-hall plan typical of the Greek Revival style. The hall is divided into a front entrance hall and a rear stair hall, the two separated by a wall with a louvered door. The stair rises from south to north along the east wall of the hall. It features a bulbous newel, a molded handrail, rectangular-in-section balusters, and a classical support post halfway up the stair that rises to the first-floor ceiling.

On the first floor, the center hall was originally flanked on either side by a pair of rooms of equal size. The west-side rooms—forming double parlors separated by massive, paneled, sliding pocket doors—remain intact, as does the front room on the east side of the hall. The rear room on the east side has been subdivided into a hall, a bathroom, and a laundry room, and its fireplace has been enclosed. Two rooms of unequal size make up the rear ell. The northernmost room is the largest, while the smaller rear room currently serves as the kitchen.

On the first story, floors are covered with narrow-width oak flooring, probably a late-nineteenth or early-twentieth-century replacement of the original flooring, which likely was composed of wider, random-width boards. On the second story, random-width floor boards have been covered with carpet. Walls and ceilings throughout the house are, for the most part, plastered. The first-floor rooms of the main body of the house have picture molding running above the level of the doors and windows. The larger of the ell rooms does not have picture molding, but it does have a plain chair rail. A baseboard with a molded cap encircles the first-floor rooms. The four-panel doors and windows on the first floor have substantial molded surrounds, and beneath the windows are paneled aprons. Four original wood mantels remain in situ—in the west-side parlors, the east front room, and the north room of the ell. They are simple, but well-detailed and proportioned, Greek Revival-style post-and-lintel mantels.

The upper half story contains a central stair hall, two bedrooms on the west side, and one bedroom and two bathrooms on the east side. The bedrooms have partially sloped ceilings and dormer windows. A door from the bathroom off the center hall opens to the attic over the rear ell. It is an

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expansive, unfinished space, but is floored. Two mantels—both Greek Revival-style post-and-lintel but one smaller than the other—that are currently stored in the attic were removed post-1979 from their original locations on the now-covered fireplaces of the east rear room of the first floor and the southwest room of the second floor.

### Change and Integrity

Several changes, in addition to those already discussed, have affected the appearance of the Chairman Blake House since its construction. The most significant of these was the move of the house from its original lot to its present site in 2000. The house was first located on South Main Street, set back from the street and facing west/northwest. Located in the first block south of the Davidson College campus, it faced the town's small shopping district on the opposite side of Main Street. When new commercial development threatened the house, it was moved to its present site approximately 150 feet to the southeast.

Documentary photographs from ca. 1889, ca. 1895, and ca. 1898 reveal several relatively subtle changes to the house. During that period the front porch columns were octagonal in shape, a much less common version of classical Tuscan styling than the current square posts. The porch balustrade was plain, with square- or rectangular-in-section balusters rather than the heavily turned balusters of today. In the ca. 1889 photograph, the wooden front steps are bordered by balustrades like those on the porch, but in the ca. 1898 photograph, the side balustrades have been removed. When the porch and front steps were changed is not known, though it is likely that the changes took place in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The period photographs also show that the house had a pier foundation (stone or stuccoed brick?) with lattice infill and shutters on the upper-story windows as well as on those of the first story.

Changes to the rear ell include the removal of a small, one-room-with-porch rear extension, construction date unknown, which was removed when the house was moved. The door leading from the kitchen to the ell extension remains. Physical evidence suggests that at one time the window opening to the ell porch from the kitchen may have been a door.

Although these changes may seem numerous, their effect on the overall appearance of the Chairman Blake House has been minimal. The house—on both exterior and interior—continues to strongly convey the characteristics of a mid-nineteenth-century Greek Revival-style dwelling. Even though the house has been moved, its new location and orientation remain close to the original, and the house maintains the strong visual relationship with the Davidson College campus that it has always had. In excellent condition, the well-preserved Chairman Blake House possesses integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

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Chairman Blake House  
Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

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### SIGNIFICANCE

#### Summary

The ca. 1860 Chairman Blake House is locally significant in Davidson, North Carolina because it is a rare surviving dwelling from the mid-nineteenth century in this small Piedmont town and because it is the most pronounced and least altered example of the Greek Revival style among Davidson's domestic architecture. The Chairman Blake House was a faculty residence at Davidson College, a Presbyterian school of higher learning for young men founded in 1837 and the reason for the town's existence. The home of various faculty members for more than a century, the house gained its name from Professor John Rennie Blake (1825-1900), who is believed locally to have occupied the house throughout his tenure at Davidson College, 1861-1885. Blake, who taught natural philosophy and astronomy, is largely credited with the survival of Davidson College immediately after the Civil War, when his strong determination and commitment convinced the trustees to move forward with the college when they had been debating its closure for lack of funds. After Blake's retirement in 1885, the college continued to rent the house, mostly to faculty but also to some non-faculty, throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and through most of the twentieth. The design of the one-and-a-half-story, weatherboarded frame house embodies many of the distinctive characteristics of the Greek Revival style, including symmetry of design, a pedimented side-gable roof with boxed and molded eaves, a pedimented front porch with classical posts, a front door with sidelights and transom, a center-hall plan, a simple but graceful stair, a double parlor separated by sliding pocket doors, and chaste post-and-lintel mantels. Because of its architectural significance, the Chairman Blake House fulfills Criterion C for listing in the National Register. The period of significance is ca. 1860, the date of construction of the house.

Originally located on the east side of South Main Street a block south of Davidson College, the Chairman Blake House eventually became surrounded by commercial development. Finally, with no more use for the house itself but with the ever-present need for more capital, Davidson College sold the property to a developer. In October 2000 the Chairman Blake House was moved approximately 150 feet to the southeast, where it now faces the newly created Chairman Blake Lane. The house is being renovated and will soon return to its original use as a private residence. The Chairman Blake House meets Criteria Consideration B, because although it has been moved from its original site, its significance rests primarily with its architectural value. Additionally, its present site is only around 150 feet from its original site, the orientation of the house is nearly the same as it was originally, and the house still maintains important site lines to both South Main Street and Davidson College, with which it was originally associated.

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Chairman Blake House  
Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

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### Historical Background

Located on the northern border of Mecklenburg County in piedmont North Carolina, the small town of Davidson grew up around Davidson College, which was established in 1837. For years no more than a village, the town was incorporated in 1879 as Davidson College, leaving no question as to its roots. In 1891 the town's name was changed to Davidson (Powell, 135).

Founded by North Carolina's Concord Presbytery as an institution of higher learning for young men, Davidson College was named for General William Lee Davidson, a local Revolutionary War hero. Davidson's son, William Lee Davidson II, provided land for the campus (Gillespie, 1; *Catalog* 2001-2002, p. 5).

The few buildings erected at Davidson College between 1836 and 1839 were relatively modest structures built from a modest budget. In 1849 and 1850, two temple-form buildings—Eumenean Hall and Philanthropic Hall, respectively—were built for the college's two debating societies, but these were eclipsed by the erection in 1858-1860 of Chambers Hall (burned in 1921). When wealthy Salisbury merchant and cotton planter Maxwell Chambers died in 1856, he left Davidson College \$258,000, making it the richest college south of Princeton. The Board of Trustees soon commissioned prominent New York architect Alexander Jackson Davis, the nation's leading college designer at the time, to develop a campus plan. Davis's plan called for a 600-foot quadrangle with two great temple-form pavilions to be surrounded by villas in an ideal landscape.

. . . the old Chapel would be left alone as a solitary monument of that quaint architecture which adorned these academic groves in earlier days. The 'old campus' being thus obliterated and every obstruction removed, the eye of fancy was delighted with the vision of comfortable residences for the Faculty and graceful halls for other purposes rising around the 'new campus' in the tasteful proportions of the most modern architecture (*Semi-Centenary Addresses*, 132).

Only one side of the quadrangle, Chambers Hall, a monumental classical pavilion with attached wings, was erected before the Civil War halted construction (Bishir and Southern, 528; Bishir, 244-245; *Semi-Centenary Addresses*, 131). Also halted were the college's grandiose plans that would have demolished almost all of the older buildings on campus.

Davidson College provided housing for its faculty through at least the early twentieth century. The Chairman Blake House served throughout most of its history as one of these houses. However, college records from the nineteenth century are not specific about which faculty members lived where. In addition, college land records from the period are often unclear or non-existent. In 1879 Professor

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John Rennie Blake made a survey of the college's land holdings and had the land lying along the south side of the campus divided into lots (Beaty, *History of Davidson College*, 280). Unfortunately, this survey no longer exists. The 1895 *Catalog of Officers and Students of Davidson College* devotes a page (facing page 8) to photographs of five houses labeled collectively as "Professors Houses" without any individual labeling. Although in the group picture it bears no identification, one of these photographs is of the house now commonly known as the Chairman Blake House. It was not until 1913-1914 that individual houses owned by the college were listed by name in the records (Treasurer's Report 1913-1914). Although no documentary evidence has been found that clearly links Blake with the house bearing his name, circumstantial evidence points to that, and local tradition claims that this was Blake's house throughout his tenure at Davidson College, 1861-1885.

The exact date of construction of the Chairman Blake House is not known. On August 7, 1858, Davidson College's Board of Trustees "resolved to sell to Prof. J. A. Leland a lot located on our southern line adjoining the lands of James Johnston on which Prof. Leland has built." The original location of the Chairman Blake House fits this general description. However, the Board of Trustees retained what amounted to a right of first refusal. In their resolution, the board added the condition that if Leland sold the lot back to the Board of Trustees, the lot would be estimated at \$200, but if he sold it to anyone else, it would be valued at \$300. The following month (September 23, 1858), the trustees resolved that the "house lately occupied by Prof. Leland be leased to J. M. Scofield for one year for \$160." An added note said that Leland was occupying a room leased from the college (Board of Trustees Record Book 1858-1860).

South Carolinian John Adams Leland came to Davidson College in 1854 to teach natural philosophy and astronomy (Shaw, 93). Leland's tenure at Davidson lasted only six years. In late 1859 and 1860 ill feelings were rampant among the members of the faculty, and Leland apparently was in the thick of the trouble. At the July 1860 meeting of the Board of Trustees, Leland submitted his resignation, which the trustees immediately accepted (Beaty, *History of Davidson College*, 98-99). On September 20, 1860, shortly after Leland resigned his professorship, the college bought Leland's "lot and appurtenances" for \$4,000 (Board of Trustees Record Book 1858-1860). To add to the difficulty of clearly understanding the transactions between Leland and the college, the grantor/grantee index of deeds in the Mecklenburg County Courthouse lists no transactions between Davidson College and Leland, or for that matter, any deeds at all associated with either Leland or John Rennie Blake.

Although Leland may have built the Chairman Blake House around 1858, other records suggest that Leland's house may have been a different structure from the house in which Blake lived. On July 19, 1864, the records of the Board of Trustees note that rent was received for the Leland House of \$229.17. Immediately following this, the records state that Professor J. R. Blake was paid a salary of \$1500. In 1863 the trustees had resolved that professors would be paid \$1,500 in salary along with the

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use of a residence. If a professor owned his home or chose to board, he would receive an additional \$250 (Board of Trustees Record Book 1861-1875). These records give the impression that the college provided Blake with a residence and that that residence was different from the Leland House. Although the origin of the Chairman Blake House remains somewhat of a mystery, later records make clear that Davidson College owned the house for years and used it primarily for faculty housing. Additionally, local tradition maintains that the house was Blake's residence during his tenure at Davidson College.

When J. A. Leland resigned in 1860 as professor of natural philosophy and astronomy, the Board of Trustees filled his position for the 1860-61 school year with the temporary appointment of William N. Dickey, who had just graduated from Davidson College (Beaty, *History of Davidson College*, 111). Dickey remained the year, and in July 1861, the Board of Trustees appointed John Rennie Blake to take over the professorship of natural philosophy and astronomy. Blake remained at Davidson College twenty-four years, until 1885, by far the longest tenure of any professor to that time (Board of Trustees Record Book 1861-1875; Beaty, *History of Davidson College*, 111).

John Rennie Blake (1825-1900) was a native of Greenwood, South Carolina. He graduated second in his class at the University of Georgia and then went on to study at Harvard's Lawrence Scientific School. Before coming to Davidson College, he taught at the LaGrange Synodical College in Tennessee (Shaw, 134). Blake arrived at the college at a time of upheaval. With the onset of the Civil War, many students left to join the Southern cause. While the class of 1860 had forty-six members, there were only eleven graduates in the class of 1866. When the trustees debated closing the college for lack of money immediately after the Civil War, Blake urged that the college remain open. Blake's determination in the face of extreme adversity is largely credited for the survival of Davidson College at that time. Faculty were paid by the private note of the college treasurer, to be redeemed at a later time. Blake, himself, worked to keep the college in good repair, stopping leaks, mending windows, and handling any other necessary work, because there was no money to cover these expenses. During his tenure, Blake taught in every academic department, as needed. Other roles that Blake filled during his years at the college were bursar, clerk of the faculty, librarian, and treasurer of the fund for the candidates for the ministry. Under his supervision, the campus walks were laid out, lawns were sown in grass, and over 200 trees were planted (*Semi-Centenary Addresses*, 153-154).

The highpoint of Blake's career at Davidson College was the period from 1871 to 1877, during which he served as chairman of the faculty and presiding officer of the college. During the late 1860s, the faculty at Davidson became increasingly influential in the affairs of the college and in initiating policy changes. One of the faculty's recommendations was that a chairmanship system, like that in use at the University of Virginia, be substituted for the traditional presidency, with the chairman being chosen from among the faculty. It was thought by many that the chairmanship system was an effective way for a small faculty to share the responsibility of the college's administration. Others, Blake among

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them, were concerned that the faculty chairman would be less well suited than a president to present the interests of the college to the outside world. After the death of President George Wilson McPhail in 1871, the Board of Trustees agreed to try the chairmanship system, and on December 8, 1871, John Rennie Blake was named Chairman, having been "forced to yield by the urgent and unanimous appeals of his colleagues." Thus began the Chairmanship Administration, unique in the history of Davidson College (*Semi-Centenary Addresses*, 147-148; Beaty, *History of Davidson College*, 121-123).

At Davidson College's Semi-Centenary Celebration on June 13, 1887, only two years after John Rennie Blake retired, Alexander R. Banks delivered an address on Blake's administration in which he enumerated important changes that occurred at the college during the years 1871-1877. Tuition fees were greatly increased in order to retain an "able and efficient" faculty. Rigid entrance examinations were enforced in order to secure a high standard of scholarship among the students. To help prepare some students for the level of work undertaken at Davidson College, the college established a pre-freshman class to supplement the work of the academies, where necessary. To enlarge the patronage of the college and to remove the provincial character of the school, its government was extended to include not only the Presbyteries of North Carolina, but also those of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. A financial agent was sent into the field to increase the permanent fund of the college and to bring its merits before the public. A more efficient executive committee system was organized. The curriculum of the college was extended and liberalized by the introduction of elective studies and alternative courses, thereby offering students a more diversified and practical training. Another important feature of Blake's administration was the government of the students by the students. In addition, unlike some earlier times, Blake's administration was noted as an era of good will, mutual confidence, and cordial co-operation throughout all the departments of the college. Perhaps the crowning virtue of Blake's tenure as Chairman was the tact and skill by which he succeeded in making his faculty a unit, thereby imparting to it more efficiency and power. During Blake's administration, every important measure that was put forth received the unanimous support of the faculty and then successfully gained the approval of the Board of Trustees (*Semi-Centenary Addresses*, 149-152).

In 1876 the Board of Trustees decided to re-institute the presidency at Davidson College for the very reason that Blake, himself, had expressed concerns in 1871—the belief that a president could more effectively represent the college to the outside world. Although Blake had an admirable record as an administrative officer, he was not eligible for the presidency, because the college's constitution at that time required that the president be a Presbyterian minister. Although Blake was a devout Presbyterian, he was an educator, not a minister. Consequently, in 1877 the trustees chose Professor Andrew D. Hepburn as Davidson's new president. Two years later they named Blake vice-president, an office he held from 1879 to 1884, while at the same time continuing his role as professor. In 1885 Blake resigned his teaching position, citing urgent domestic and private obligations. He returned to Greenwood, South

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Carolina to spend the last years of his life (Shaw, 135, 147-148; Beaty, *History of Davidson College*, 124, 144).

After Blake's departure, the Greek Revival house on South Main Street was occupied by Professor William Daniel Vinson and his young family until his untimely death in 1897 at the age of forty-eight. Vinson, an honors graduate of Washington and Lee University who had been teaching at Austin College in Sherman, Texas, came to Davidson College to teach mathematics. During his fourteen years at the college he also taught on occasion science, classical languages, German, and French. Vinson was responsible for maintaining the strength and popularity of the mathematics curriculum, and in the year of his death, the students voted him their most popular and intellectual professor. Two photographs survive that show the Vinsons in front of their house, one dating from 1889 and the other—with only Vinson's wife and two children—from around 1897. An additional photograph, without the Vinsons, appears in the Davidson College Catalog for 1895. After Professor Vinson's death, Mrs. Vinson had a house built on North Main Street for herself and her two children (Shaw, 153-155; Beaty, *History of Davidson College* 173; Beaty, *Davidson: A History of the Town*, 71-72, 91; *Catalog* 1895, facing p. 8 ).

When the Vinsons vacated the Chairman Blake House, the college rented it for several years to non-faculty families, first to Mrs. D. D. McBride and then, for several years just after the turn of the twentieth century, to the Reverend William Black, whose sons were students at the college. Around 1908 and for several years thereafter, two unmarried faculty members, John Leighton Douglas and Mark E. Sentelle, occupied the house. Douglas had been hired by the college to teach mathematics, replacing Professor Vinson, and Sentelle taught religion for forty-one years and was dean of students (Beaty, *Davidson: A History of the Town*, 96; Beaty, *History of Davidson College*, 174; Shaw, 170, 177-178).

In 1920 it became clear that the college would have to build more faculty residences or risk losing faculty members. The college soon built six new houses, but at the same time began encouraging professors to build or buy their own houses. Many of the faculty acted on the college's suggestion, and suddenly Davidson College was left with more houses (eighteen) than it could fill. Thus, in subsequent years, up until at least 1980, Davidson College rented the Chairman Blake House to both faculty and non-faculty (Beaty, *History of Davidson College*, 281-282; Beaty, *Davidson: A History of the Town*, 96).

By the late twentieth century, South Main Street between Concord Road and South Street had become primarily commercial in character. The west side of the street had been this way since the early years of the town, but by late century the east side of the street, where the Chairman Blake House stood, had joined it in purpose. In October 2000 Davidson College, under an apparent agreement with Harris Teeter, moved the Blake House to another lot it owned that was approximately 150 feet to the south—the present location of the house—to make way for the construction of a Harris Teeter grocery store (*Charlotte Observer*, October 1, 2000; *Davidson Gazette*, October 11, 2000). However, the grocery

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store was never built, and the Trustees of Davidson College retained ownership of both the old site and the new site of the Chairman Blake House. In September 2002 the trustees sold the property, along with several surrounding lots, to the Davidson Town Center. This entity immediately transferred the property to L. C. Stephens and Company, who erected a two-story, brick, multi-use commercial building on the original site of the Chairman Blake House (Deed Book 14133, pp. 410, 434; Plat Book 34, p. 460). In December 2002 the house, on its new site facing the newly created Chairman Blake Lane but still maintaining site lines to both South Main Street and Davidson College, was purchased by Craig S. and Patricia B. Hevey, who also purchased the lot adjacent to the house to the southwest (Deed Book 14540, pp. 108, 128, 226). They plan to sensitively renovate the house for use as their family home.

### Architecture Context

The Chairman Blake House is a rare surviving dwelling from the mid-nineteenth century in Davidson, North Carolina. It is the most pronounced and least altered example of the Greek Revival style among Davidson's domestic architecture.

The Greek Revival style gained broad popularity in North Carolina from the 1830s through the 1850s. The special associations that ancient Greece evoked for both American democracy and the slave-owning South provided the style with powerful and universal appeal. It fit comfortably into both classically derived and traditional forms (Bishir, 163).

Among the more than twenty colleges established in North Carolina between 1830 and 1860, including Davidson College, the Greek Revival style became highly popular because it embodied the classical curriculum, lent an air of authority and venerability, and summoned forth the spirit of democracy and the broadening of higher education. Temple-form buildings were especially favored for the housing of Greek-named debating societies run by students. Two prime examples are the Eumenean and Philanthropic halls at Davidson College, built in 1849 and 1850 and still standing (Bishir, 191). Another building at Davidson College expressed the power of classicism for collegiate buildings. Chambers Hall was built in 1858-1860 according the design of noted New York architect Alexander Jackson Davis. Part of an immense quadrangle planned by Davis, Chambers Hall was the only section built before the Civil War called a halt to construction. It had a central temple-form pavilion with a monumental classical portico and three-story attached side wings. Chambers Hall burned in 1921 (Bishir, 244-245).

It was into this milieu of Greek Revival collegiate buildings that the Chairman Blake House, a Davidson College faculty residence, was built ca. 1860. Its use of the Greek Revival was not surprising, given its association with the college and its date of construction. The design of the Chairman Blake House exhibits many characteristic elements of Greek Revival domestic architecture. Among these

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elements are symmetry of design, a pedimented-gable roof with boxed and molded eaves, a pedimented central portico with classical posts, a front door with a broad transom and sidelights, a center-hall plan, two adjoining parlors linked by sliding pocket doors, wide moldings, and chaste post-and-lintel mantels.

Other houses were built in Davidson from the 1840s through the 1860s, but most of these have been demolished. Of the few that survive, only the Chairman Blake House and the Grey House at the northwest corner of North Main and Griffith streets still reflect much of their original appearances. The two-story, brick Grey House, believed to have been built as a store-residence ca. 1850, was acquired by Davidson College ca. 1859 for use as a faculty residence. In the 1970s it was converted to a women's dormitory, and in 1991 it was remodeled as the Admissions Office for the college. It retains its low hipped roof and doors with sidelights and transoms (Physical Evolution of Davidson College). The two-story, brick, 1848 Helper Hotel on the west side of North Main Street just north of Depot Street also retains much of its mid-nineteenth-century appearance with its white stuccoed pilasters and two-tier porch across the facade with its slender classical posts. However, it was not a single-family dwelling. Unquestionably, the ca. 1860 Chairman Blake House remains the strongest domestic expression of the Greek Revival style in the town of Davidson.

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Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

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### GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

#### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is defined as Mecklenburg County Tax Parcels 00701326 and 00701327.

#### Verbal Boundary Justification

The nominated property consists of the Chairman Blake House and its current associated parcels that provide an appropriate setting.

### PHOTOGRAPHS

The following information for #1-5 applies to all nomination photographs with the exception that photographs A, F, and G were shot in July 2003.

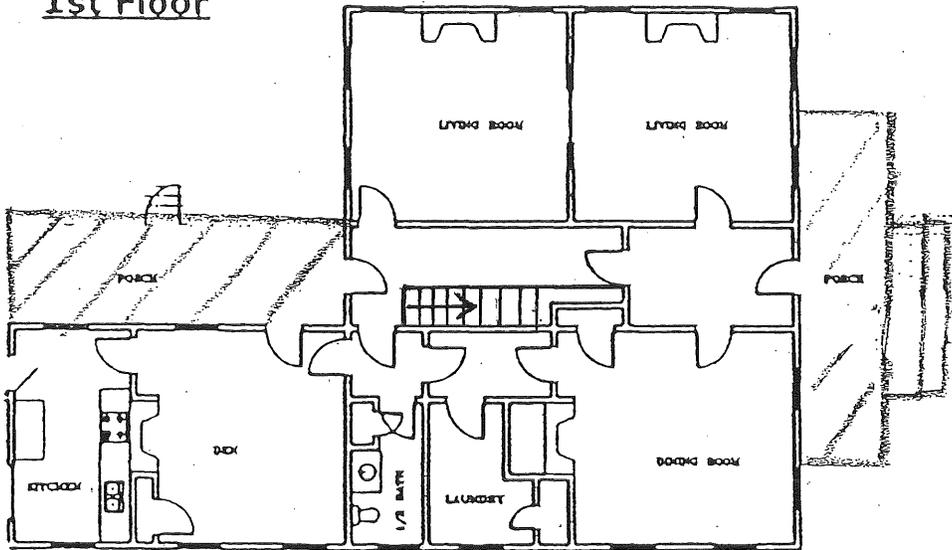
- 1) Chairman Blake House
- 2) Davidson, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina
- 3) Laura A. W. Phillips
- 4) April 2003
- 5) State Historic Preservation Office
- 6-7) A: Overall, view to SW  
B: E and S elevations, view to NW  
C: S and W elevations, view to NE  
D: W elevation, view to E  
E: Roof and dormer detail, view to SE  
F: Setting on Chairman Blake Lane, view to SE  
G: Setting, view from Main Street to SE  
H: Double parlors, W side of house, view to NW  
I: NE room, view to SW  
J: Stair, view to NE

# Chairman Blake House

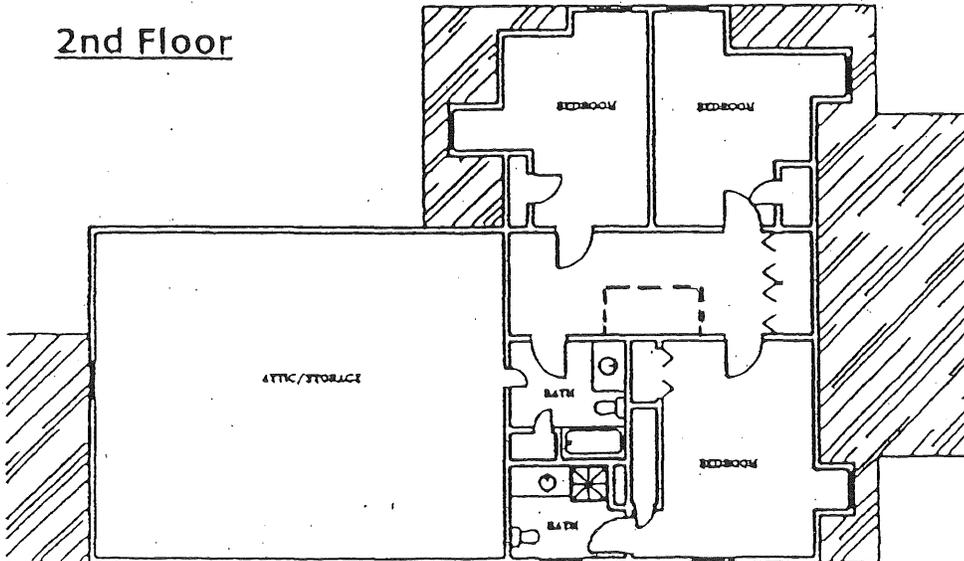
318 Chairman Blake Lane  
Davidson, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

## Floor Plans

### 1st Floor



### 2nd Floor



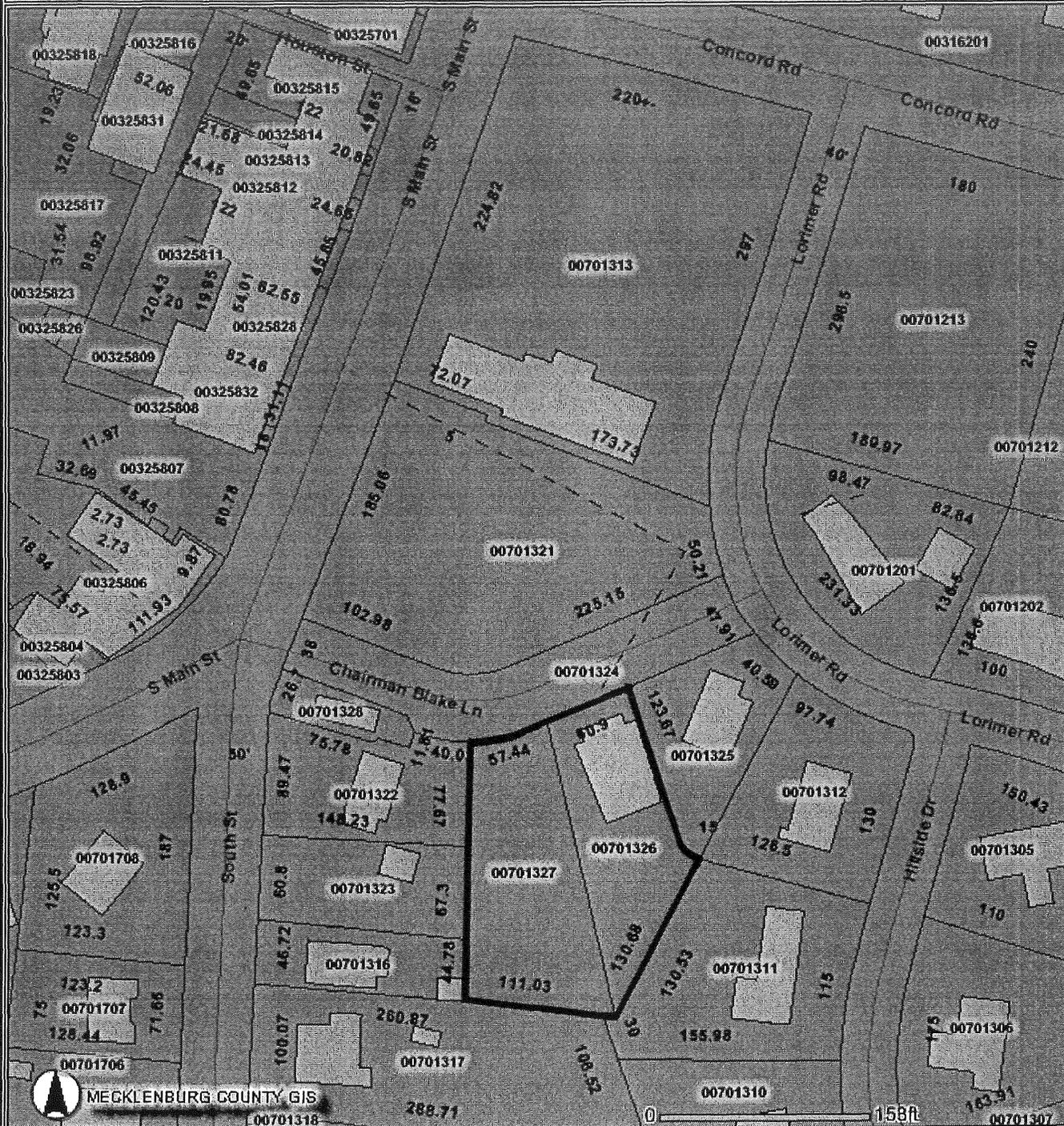


# POLARIS

Property Ownership Land Records Information System

Date Printed: Sun Jul 20 16:53:50 EDT 2003

## Chairman Blake House Property



This map is prepared for the inventory of real property within Mecklenburg County and is compiled from recorded deeds, plats, tax maps, surveys, planimetric maps, and other public records and data. Users of this map are hereby notified that the aforementioned public primary information sources should be consulted for verification. Mecklenburg County and its mapping contractors assume no legal responsibility for the information contained herein.

## Chairman Blake House

318 Chairman Blake Lane

Davidson, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

Tax Parcels 00701326 and 00701327

4855 1/1 SW  
(LAKE NORMAN NORTH)

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

CHAIRMAN BLAKE HOUSE  
MECKLENBURG CO., NC  
CORNELIUS QUAD  
SCALE - 1:24,000  
UTMs - 17/513760/3928050

