United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Davis-Whitehead-Harriss House

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 600 West Nash Street

city, town Wilson

state North Carolina code 037 county Wilson code 195

3. Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Present Use</th>
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<td>commercial</td>
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<tr>
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<td>industrial</td>
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4. Owner of Property

name Mr. and Mrs. Douglas W. Stewart

street & number 600 West Nash Street

city, town Wilson

state North Carolina 27893

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Wilson County Courthouse

street & number Nash Street

city, town Wilson

state North Carolina

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Ohno, Kate, Wilson, North Carolina: Historic Buildings Inventory

date 1980

depository for survey records Survey and Planning Branch, Division of Archives and History

city, town Raleigh

state N.C. 27611
The Davis-Whitehead-Harriss Home, one of Wilson's oldest residences, stands in a spacious wooded lot at the corner of West Nash Street and Whitehead Avenue. The two-story, frame house was built in 1858 and remodeled to its present robust Italianate form in 1872. Nash Street, the address of Wilson's turn of the century elite, has suffered the loss of many of its nineteenth century showplaces as the street's character has evolved from residential to commercial. The Davis-Whitehead-Harriss House is one of the few surviving Victorian Nash Street residences. The 1858 portion was designed by Oswald Lipscomb, Wilson's most prominent builder of the late nineteenth century.

The T-plan house displays little evidence of its antebellum construction date. The trim is uniformly Italianate in character. The exterior brick chimneys are perhaps original, as most Victorian houses in Wilson have interior chimneys.

The main, gable-roofed block is three bays wide and one deep. Single-shouldered, brick chimneys with stuccoed stacks appear on the north and south elevations and at the gable end of the rear ell. A recessed, pointed arch ornaments the stacks. A bracketed cornice separates the stack from the shaft. The frieze board is flat-paneled and decorated with rondelles and paired scroll brackets.

The main (west) facade features a central, projecting entrance pavilion surmounted by a cross gable. The main double door entrance is contained in the center bay and is set in a segmental arched surround. Each leaf of the door is composed of two panels. The tall, arched top panels are glazed, while the square lower ones are defined by deep moldings and filled with applied rondelles. With the exception of the double second floor center window, the main facade bays are filled with six-over-six sash windows.

A one-story, hipped-roof porch spans the main facade. It is carried on square, chamfered posts and ornamented with ornate brackets. Each porch post is studded with a rondelle on each face, and a simple molded cap serves as a base for the brackets which spring from each side of the post. Bulbous, turned balusters enclose the porch. The simply molded cornice of the porch roof forms a gable over the main entrance with a corresponding barrel vaulted ceiling beneath.

The same porch treatment appears on the south elevation of the rear ell which faces Whitehead Avenue. It is two bays wide, one deep, and a one-story, frame addition projects from the east end.

The house's impact is mainly derived from its bold ornament which creates a robust, plastic effect and from its exotic and ancient trees which buffer the property from the surrounding commercial development.

The interior of the house is also in a good state of preservation. The house originally followed a central hall plan, which has been slightly modified by renovations carried out during the tenure of the Harriss family. The central hall is still present in the front of the house inside the main entrance. A lovely curved staircase ascends from the hall and boasts a mahogany rail and plain balusters. A plaster medallion with an elaborate chandelier hangs at the bottom of the stairs. Doors on either side of the stair hall lead to the two formal parlors.
The parlor on the north side of the house still retains its original chandelier, laden with prisms, and an unusual cast iron mantel with a stone shelf, now covered with paint. The south parlor suffered from a leak and has lost its original plaster medallion and ceiling fixture, but it has retained a fanciful wooden mantel with an acorn motif, a typical feature of mid-nineteenth century mantels in the county.

On the second floor the two bedrooms correspond with the two parlors below except the woodwork is plainer and there are no ceiling medallions. A side hall connects the earliest part of the house with the additions made ca. 1872. On the second floor these additions are limited to a large bedroom on the east side of the house with an exterior chimney in the east wall. The mantel and woodwork in this room are consistent with the other rooms on this floor. A side stair descends to the first floor hall on the south side of the building near the entrance to the side porch. The late nineteenth century additions to the first floor at the rear of the house are two rooms deep on the south side of the house and one room deep on the north side. On the south side, a family parlor corresponding to the east bedroom on the second floor has access from a door on the side hall. The room runs the length of the side porch and was altered in the late 1940s by the addition of a wall of bookshelves on the north wall. A door which once led to the rear section of the central hall now leads to a closet. A door on the east wall of this room leads to the only downstairs bedroom in the house. This room, unlike the family parlor, has a more complex molded mantel with a three-part panel that has been patched or made of metal. Two doors lead off this room to the far rear of the house. These doors lead to two small rooms that were added in the early twentieth century. On the north side of the house a handsome dining room is located at the rear of the earliest section. A built-in cupboard in the east wall was probably the only addition to this room. A large kitchen wing juts out from the house on the north side of the house. According to the earliest Sanborn maps, this addition was present by 1913, but the character of the room is that of a late 1940s kitchen. The wide windows and built-in corner cupboards were probably added ca. 1948 when Herbert Harriss, Jr., and his wife moved into the house. The Sanborn maps also show that the remaining rooms, on the rear of the house, now a laundry room and bath, were originally open porches which were probably closed in between 1922 and 1930. Although the bathrooms and kitchen were modernized during the late 1940s, the feeling of the interior of the house is still overwhelmingly that of a late nineteenth century dwelling.

In 1925 a two-story frame carriage house was built at the back of the property. Facing Whitehead Avenue, it has been converted to an apartment and storage area.
8. Significance

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Specific dates ca. 1858

Builder/Architect Attributed to Oswald Lipscomb

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph).

The core of the Davis-Whitehead-Harriss House was built ca. 1858 for James Davis, one of Wilson's pioneer merchants. Davis sold his suburban home to Captain H. G. Whitehead (1838-1887), a prominent planter, in 1872. The Whitehead family occupied the house until 1887, and in 1891 one of Wilson's leading merchants, W. J. Harriss, purchased the property. Harriss and his family occupied the house until the late 1970s. Local tradition maintains that the Davis house was designed and constructed by Oswald Lipscomb, a local builder responsible for several of the more prestigious homes of the period, and that he later enlarged and remodeled the house for the Whiteheads, thus giving it its final form and robust appearance. The Davis-Whitehead-Harriss House is one of the oldest houses in Wilson and the last remaining Italianate style house on Nash Street, formerly Wilson's finest residential street.

Criteria Assessment:

A. Associated with the antebellum development of the town of Wilson and the increasing prosperity of the area following Reconstruction.

B. Associated with the lives of two of Wilson's leading merchants, James Davis and W. J. Harriss and one of Wilson County's most prominent planters, Captain H. G. Whitehead.

C. Embodies distinctive characteristics of regional domestic Italianate architecture, notably the designs of local builder Oswald Lipscomb and the products of local millwork firms.

D. Is likely to yield information concerning urban residential life and land use in Wilson during the last half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.
The original owner of the Davis-Whitehead-Harriss House was James W. Davis, one of Wilson's leading mid-nineteenth century merchants. Davis was a descendant of James Davis, the first newspaper publisher and public printer in North Carolina. 1

Davis was born in 1832. 2 Local tradition maintains that James W. Davis's father noted the mercantile opportunities available in the town of Wilson when passing through in 1852. 3 Davis is said to have sent his sons, James W. and Thomas Crowder Davis, to manage a general merchandise store at the corner of Tarboro and Nash streets shortly thereafter. 4 The business was probably established in the mid-1850s, for although both brothers were listed as paying individual taxes in Wilson in 1854, it was not until 1855 that the firm "Davis & Brother" was included in the tax list. 5 The firm was listed as "Gay & Davis" in 1856 and as "Davis & Barnes" in 1858. 6 In the latter year the firm owned one lot in town and its property was valued at $2,000. 7 The Davis brothers' business prospered in the booming economic climate of the 1850s, and they both gained positions of respect in the community. In 1855, when Wilson County was created, Thomas Davis was appointed as the first clerk of the Superior Court. 8 James, on the other hand, was more interested in scholarly pursuits and religion. Josephus Daniels, who grew up in Wilson, remembered Davis in this way:

As a boy I learned much from the most reserved man in Wilson, James W. Davis, who had the best library in town. Until his eyesight compelled retirement he was a merchant and book-keeper. But these were side issues, which he followed to gain bread and butter. His interests were in books and in man and in religion. He had the gentlest spirit, the most self-effacing manner, and yet in any company his Christian philosophy was invited and respected. Religious faith was irradiated in his life, particularly when near-blindness denied him the solace of reading . . . The strength of his mind and the meekness of his spirit gave him a place of quiet leadership in a town in which too few loved learning for its own sake . . . Things did not interest him. In the world of getting he had no part. In a world of giving his rich resources.
Drygoods and Grocers." In 1881 Davis was an organizer of Wilson's first graded school and he was elected town commissioner in 1886, 1888 and 1889. In the 1880s his business interests became more involved with machinery and less with general merchandise and by 1884 his firm was called "Davis and Company, Machinery." By 1896 his son became associated with the firm and the name changed once again to "J. W. Davis & Son, Machinery." The business became increasingly the responsibility of Davis's son due to Davis's poor health. In 1908 Davis died at the age of 76, and was buried in Maplewood Cemetery in Wilson.

Davis sold his suburban home on Nash Road to Howell Gray Whitehead in 1872. Whitehead was born on March 4, 1838 in Pitt County. He earned the rank of captain and was later called "Captain" Whitehead because of his service in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. Whitehead was commissioned as first lieutenant of Company E of the Fifty-fifth North Carolina Regiment in Heth's Division, Davis' Brigade. Whitehead was promoted to the rank of captain prior to the Battle of Gettysburg where he was wounded by a bomb fragment. He was imprisoned on Johnson's Island for the remainder of the war. Upon returning home Whitehead married Mary Jane Bynum, daughter of Robert Bynum Esq., of Pitt County. The young couple moved to the White Oak area of Wilson County (in the vicinity of present day Saratoga in the eastern part of the county) in 1871 and in 1872 moved to Wilson.

According to local tradition the Whitehead family enlarged and remodeled Davis's house and the effects of this work are still visible today through the basically Italianate finish. Although no documentary evidence has survived to support oral tradition, Wilson builder Oswald Lipscomb is said to have designed and constructed the house for Davis and remodeled it for the Whiteheads.

Oswald Lipscomb was born in Virginia and is said to have moved to Wilson in 1849 as a young man. The design of a number of Wilson's finest Victorian residences is attributed to Lipscomb, but the only documented structure to his credit is the original Wilson County Court House and Jail, built ca. 1856-1859. Lipscomb advertised in 1872 as a "housebuilder" and in 1877-1878 as a contractor and builder, and by 1884 he was operating a planing mill.

Whitehead continued to direct his farming interests from his townhouse and in the 1880 census he is listed as a farmer. Whitehead's house property appears on the oldest surviving map of Wilson, made in 1882 by Jacob Chace of Philadelphia. He, along with his brother-in-law, Frank W. Barnes, and Wilson's "merchant prince," Alpheus Branch, the founder of Branch Banking and Trust Company, built a hall over Dempsey Bullock's store on the corner of Tarboro and Barnes streets which housed many of the social gatherings and traveling entertainments in Wilson in the last part of the nineteenth century. The hall's name, "Mamona," was made up of the first two letters of the Christian names of the wives of the three founders: Mattie Barnes, Mollie Whitehead, and Nannie Branch.

The Whiteheads reared their five children, Robert, Lucy, Howell, Jr., William and James in the big house on Nash Street. Of these Howell G. Whitehead, Jr., was probably...
the most prominent. H. G. Whitehead, Jr., was chiefly known for his association with the tobacco trade; he was a principal in the firm of Wells-Whitehead Tobacco Company which operated the first cigarette factory in Wilson\(^39\) and he was a director of Branch Banking and Trust Company.\(^40\) 

H. G. Whitehead, Sr., was plagued by poor health in the 1880s and he traveled to a number of health resorts seeking a cure. Finally, in November, 1887, he died\(^43\) leaving his house to his widow and his minor children, Lucy, Robert and William. His obituary, published in the local paper, gives some idea of his character: "Capt. Whitehead was a man of property and influence in the county. He was a man of kind heart, whose words were always to cheer encouraging those with whom he mingled. His powers of conversation were unusually bright--we have talked with few men who could so deeply entertain and interest as could Captain Whitehead."\(^44\) 

Captain Whitehead's widow after his death married W. S. Anderson, a prominent local doctor, but she died of consumption only two years after her first husband.\(^45\) Captain Whitehead's brother-in-law, Frank W. Barnes, became the guardian of his minor children after Mary Jane Whitehead Anderson's death and in April, 1891, Barnes conveyed the house property to Fannie S. Harris, wife of W. J. Harriss.\(^46\) 

William J. Harriss, like Captain Whitehead, was a relative newcomer to Wilson. Born on September 6, 1839, in Charlotte County, Virginia, Harriss was raised as the son of a wealthy planter. He was educated locally and in 1859 he moved to Henderson, North Carolina, where he founded a mercantile business. In 1861 he enlisted in the Confederate Army and he served as adjutant of the Fifty-fourth North Carolina Regiment throughout the war. Harriss lost his leg at the evacuation of Petersburg and at the end of the war he moved to Wilson, where he established a large general supply store. Harriss was one of the organizers of the Wilson Cotton Mill and held interests in two tobacco warehouses as well as the First National Bank. Interested in bettering the educational opportunities in Wilson, Harriss also served on the board of trustees of the Wilson Graded School. Harriss married Fannie S. Sheppard of Suffolk, Virginia in 1868 and the marriage produced six children: William S., Charles T., Annie R., Bessie B., Herbert H. and James B. Harriss.\(^47\) 

After William J. Harriss's death the house was occupied by his wife, Fannie, and his son Charles.\(^49\) Charles T. Harriss was the manager of the Wilson News Bureau and assistant manager of the Wilson Insurance and Realty Company in the early years of the twentieth century\(^50\) and by 1922 he was employed by Raines & Harriss, insurance agents.\(^51\) After the death of Fannie Harriss in 1938,\(^52\) the house was occupied by James B. Harriss and his wife Diana.\(^53\) Herbert H. Harriss, Sr., inherited the property in 1938,\(^54\) but it was not until 1947 that his son, Herbert Harriss, Jr., took possession of the house. Herbert Harriss, Jr., was the manager of Smith [Tobacco] Warehouse in Wilson during this period and a planter.\(^56\) Harriss and his wife occupied the house until shortly before it was sold to the present owners, Douglas W. and June Stewart, in 1979.\(^57\) Mr. and Mrs. Stewart are in the process of restoring the house and gardens.
The house of course is closely related to the surrounding environment. Archeological remains, such as trash pits, wells, and structural remains, which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the structure. Information concerning use patterns, social standing and mobility, as well as structural details are often only evident in the archeological record. Therefore, archeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the structure. At this time no investigation has been done to discover these remains, but it is probable that they exist, and this should be considered in any development of the property.


"Minutes of City Council: Wilson, North Carolina 1850-1885," unpublished manuscript available at the Wilson County Public Library, hereinafter cited as "Wilson Minutes."

"Wilson Minutes."

"Wilson Minutes."

Wilson County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions.

Josephus Daniels, Tar Heel Editor (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 164-165, hereinafter cited as Daniels, Tar Heel Editor.


17 "Wilson Minutes," 1885-1892.

18 Branson's Directory, 1884, 1887, and 1890.


20 Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 165.


22 Wilson Advance (Wilson), November 17, 1887.


24 Wilson Advance (Wilson), November 17, 1887.

25 Wilson Advance (Wilson), November 17, 1887.

26 Wilson Advance (Wilson), November 17, 1887.

27 Wilson Advance (Wilson), November 17, 1887.

28 Wilson Advance (Wilson), November 17, 1887.


32 Wilson County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions.

33 Branson's Directory, 1872, 1877-78.

34 Branson's Directory, 1884.


36 Gray's New Map of Wilson, Jacob Chace of Philadelphia, 1882.


38 Research Report on house by Robert C. Bainbridge.
North Carolina Yearbook & Business Directory (Raleigh: A. Nixon, 1902.)


Wilson Advance (Wilson), November 17, 1887.

Wilson Advance (Wilson), November 17, 1887.


Wilson Advance (Wilson), November 17, 1887.

Wilson Advance (Wilson), October 17, 1889. See also "Record of Maplewood Cemetery," unpublished manuscript available at Wilson County Public Library.


Wilson Directory, 1941.

J. B. Harriss to H. H. Harriss, Sr., May 28, 1938, Administrators Book VIII, 220, Wilson County.


Herbert H. Harriss, Jr., to Douglas W. and June R. Stewart, July 31, 1979, Book MCLXXIX, 587.
9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property  _approx. 1 acre_

Quadrangle name  Wilson  

UMT References

A  | 118 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 7 | 9 | G  | 118 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 7 | 9

Easting  | 8 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 7 | 9 | 0 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 7 | 9 | 0

Northing

Verbal boundary description and justification

The property included in this nomination is shown on Wilson County Tax Map 79 as Lot# 3 on Block# 6. This is the large residential lot on which the house and carriage house are located.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title  Kate Ohno, Architectural Historian

Mary Ann Lee Blackburn, Architectural Historian

Survey & Planning Branch

organization  Archeology & Historic Preservation Section

Division of Archives & History

street & number  109 East Jones Street

telephone  (919) 733-6545

city or town  Raleigh

state  North Carolina 27611

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

   _ national  _ state  _ local_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89–665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature  William S. Padgett

title  State Historic Preservation Officer

date  April 28, 1982

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

State of the National Register  On

No of Registration  11383540

GPO 938 835

Cyclopedia of Eminent and Representative Men of the Carolinas, Madison, Wis.: Brant & Fuller, 1892.


Gray's New Map of Wilson, 1882, Jacob Chace, Philadelphia.

"Minutes of the Wilson City Council 1850-1885," unpublished manuscript in the Wilson County Public Library.


Wilson Advance (Wilson) November 17, 1887.
