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The Second Street 600s From Elite Homes to Shopping Corridor

At the end of World War II, the 600 block of Second St. contained only four main buildings. These were houses that Davis history people sometimes term “mansions” since they were larger than many residences in Davis, were situated on several lots, and were the abodes of prominent residents. Slowly, after WWII three of the four were relocated or razed. The fourth is still there but its existence has been and remains problematic.



4.1. Second Street 600s looking west, c. 1910. For the same reason photographers made post cards looking north up G St. from Second, they also made cards of the view above, which looks west from F Street into the Second Street 600s. Second and G looking north captured the “business district” while Second and F was a “fine residence street.” The Weber and Anderson “mansions” are partially visible on the right. (Hattie Weber Museum of Davis.)



4.2. The 1882 Second and F streets Luft home photographed in its current location, 221 J Street, 2003. In addition to operating Davis' blacksmith shop just behind their home on F Street, in the decades before WWII the Lufts also owned and operated a movie theater called the Varsity across the street at the southeast corner of Second and F. (Roland-Nawi Associates.)



4.3. Looking west along the south side of the Second St. 600s, 1953. The Luft home was moved to 223 J St. in the early 1950s to make way for a new Bank of America office. So, in only a few years in the early 1950s, the Luft property on Second Street goes from a modest home on a large lot to sidewalk-abutting commercial storefronts. (John Weber Brinley.)



4.4. Looking west along the south side of the Second Street 600s c. 2006. This image shows the same view as image 4.3, just above, only half-a-century later. The Bank of America has long since moved to much larger quarters with its own parking lot in the E St. 300s. The building it inhabited here has been remodeled many times and has housed an ever-changing parade of small businesses. (Valerie Vann.)



4.5. The Varsity Theater Under Construction, 1949. In the late 1940s, the Luft's sold the original Varsity Theater at Second and F to Westside Valley Theaters and also sold that company land west of their house on which Westside then built a new, "state-of-the-art" movie house with the same name. On the left we see the Luft home still in place and the new theater under construction. At this same time, the original Varsity was demolished. (Phil Brady.)



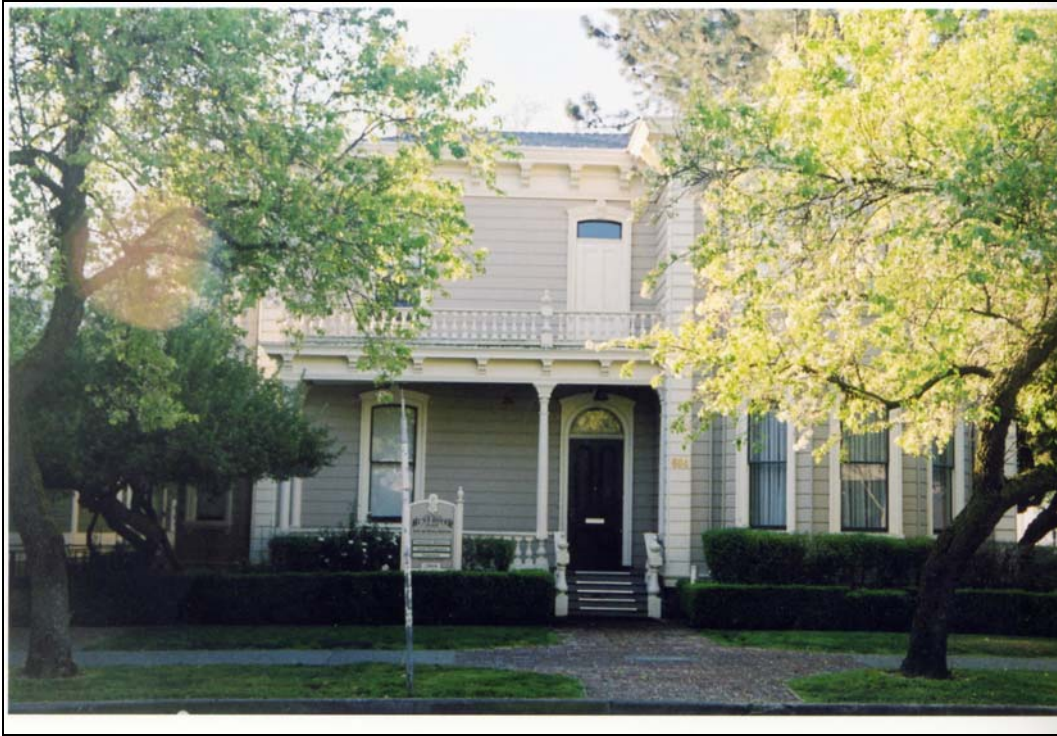
4.6. The Varsity Theater, 1951. Opened in 1950, the Varsity was wonderfully “Streamline Moderne,” a style many of its creators regarded as more industrial design than architecture. This style represented a trend away from movie houses as ornate “palaces” and toward conceiving them as “abstract geometric sculptural masses and spaces” that were starkly commercial. In that spirit they were “asymmetrical . . . [and] rectangular” in key ways (VV ref p. 3). (Eastman B-7596, UCD Special Collections.)



4.7. The Varsity Theater, 2003. Toward the 1980s, the Varsity became uneconomic for showing motion pictures, went dark for some years, and was leased by the City of Davis in the early 1990s. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of renovation later and after many failed attempts to make the building pay for itself, the City purchased the property and leased it for use as an “art film” venue. (City of Davis Department of Community Development.)



4.8. The Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer Mansion, c. 1910. William Dresbach built this two-story Stick-Italianate home at the southeast corner of Second and E in 1875. Davis was founded in 1868, an action in which Dresbach played a key part and from which he got wealthy. Therefore, this structure has been in Davis virtually from the act of turning open farmland into town plots. Dresbach lived in this house only a few years, however, before moving to San Francisco to become a major player in high-stake international grain markets, a skill he had learned dealing in grain while a merchant in Davis. (Yolo County Historical Museum.)



4.9. The Dresbach-Hunt-Boyer Mansion, 2003. Several families lived in this house after Dresbach. The death of the last resident member of the Boyer family led to a 1976 valiant but failing effort to incorporate the building into a new city hall on this site. The building was “saved” in 1978 in an innovative scheme in which the land on which it stood was split leaving the house intact in exchange for constructing an internal courtyard shopping center named “Mansion Square” behind it. After serving as a commercial structure for a time, the City purchased the building in 1994 and has used it for offices. (Roland-Nawi Associates.)



4.10. The 1905 Second & F Anderson-Hamel Home relocated at Sixth & F, c. 1995. Technically termed a “Queen Anne cottage,” it was built by John B. Anderson, a Canadian who came to Davis in 1893, started the Davisville Cash Store, built the Anderson Bank Building at Second and G, and served as Davis’ first mayor after city incorporation in 1917. (John Lofland.)



4.11. North side, Second Street 600s looking west, 1951. Clay Quessenberry moved the Anderson-Hamel home to make way for a new building for his pharmacy (on the left) and a Foster Freeze stand (on the right). Moreover, on the far left, Mr. Queensbury has rented space to the United States Postal Service for the Davis post office. (Eastman B-7595, UCD Special Collections.)



4.12. East-looking view of the north-side Second St. 600s, 1957. Susanville, California photographer Jarvie Eastman shot this photo for the purpose of making a postcard, which means he saw this view as a saleable “typical Davis” image. It seems, indeed, a bustling Fifties street scene. Notice that the sky is filled with overhead electric and telephone wires, a feature that will soon disappear. (Eastman B-9152 UCD Special Collections.)



FEW TEARS SHED — Foster's Freeze at the corner of Second and F Streets, for 17 years a favorite place for a quick sandwich and the number one spot in Davis for girl watching was demolished early today. Clay Quessenberry, owner of the property will erect a modern two story building on the site. Shown operating the bulldozer is Roy Nielsen of Nielsen's Demolition Contractors of Sacramento. — Enterprise Photo

4.13. Demolishing the Foster's Freeze at the northwest corner of Second and F, 1967. Apparently attracted by a "higher-better use" of his corner, Mr. Quessenberry demolished and replaced the Foster's Freeze. Davis' older baby boomers—especially Davis Enterprise columnist Bob Dunning—still relate fond memories of this establishment. It is likely among the most mourned bygone businesses of the great many of them in Davis history. (*Davis Enterprise*, July 24, 1967.)



4.14. The commercial building replacing the Foster's Freeze, c. 1970. This image was made into a color postcard widely available in Davis in the 1970s and later. That fact suggests that at least some people viewed this north side of the Second Street 600s as very much what the new Davis was about. (John Lofland.)



4.15. The Weber mansion at the northeast corner of Second and F, c. 1930. The George Augustus Weber family built this home c. 1880. Mr. Weber was a prosperous property owner and also owned and operated the Yolo Saloon and Billiard Parlor at Second and G Streets from virtually the founding of Davis until his death in 1914. The family of his daughter, Gertrude Weber Brinley, and her sister, Harriet Elisa Weber, lived in the home into the 1960s. Mr. Weber's grandson, John Weber Brinley, inherited the building, demolished it in 1963, and replaced with the structure we see in the next image. (John Weber Brinley.)



4.16. The Brinley Building under construction, 1963. While not easily readable in this reproduction, the black sign on two white posts at the corner in front of this structure reads “BUSINESS DISTRICT.” An arrow under these words points to the right. This is to say, as late as 1963 the idea that a few blocks on G Street was the business center/downtown was still active at least in the sense that a sign that said so was still tolerated. The building behind that sign, though, told of a rapidly changing reality. (John Weber Brinley.)



4.17. The Second Street 600s looking east, c. 1970. The building under construction in the previous image is now complete and, to the left, bears the name “The Brinley Building.” With the notable exception of the Terminal Hotel on the far eastern side of Second Street, the range of structures seen in this view have not changed substantially to this day. However, the overhead power lines are gone and the trees are much bigger. (Hattie Weber Museum of Davis.)