

Researching Davis Buildings

John Lofland

523 E Street, Davis, CA, 95616, 530-758-5258, jflofland@ucdavis.edu

People interested in the history of a particular building in Davis might find relevant information in one or more of the following sources.

1. If you are the owner of a building, you can look at the assessor file on it kept by the Yolo County Assessor in Woodland (office building to the left--as you face it-- of the county Court House). 60, 70, and 80. And they are available for the 1900 decades of 00, 10, 20, and 30. Correlated with other data, building occupancy can sometimes be inferred.
2. In that same building, the land on which your building stands has a deed history in the Office of the Recorder. This tells little about the structure, but the maps are good and the land valuation is a clue as to what is on it. It is difficult, however, for a lay person to use these records. One needs technical mastery of the language and system. As an alternative, you can hire a title company to do the work for you. With good results, I have myself used the Fidelity National Title Company, which has a Woodland office.
12. Edwin McBride of Davis Lumber kept a book titled "Homes Completed in Davis from 1911 to 1938." There is a copy of this list at the Hattie Weber Museum of Davis.
3. The Yolo County Archives, on Buckeye in Woodland, has additional (and older) title records, the Larkey Collection, and other resources.
13. As part of my research for *Old North Davis*, in 1995 I set up a file on every Old North property and I have accumulated varying amounts of public information on each since then.
4. The microfiche files behind the public counter in the building department in the Davis City Hall sometimes have records of permits to do work on your building.
14. Curiously, there are Davis street directories for only two years, 1970 and 1976. Published by Polk there are copies in Shields.
5. If there has been recent activity regarding permits or such at your building, the Davis planners might have a separate file in the hands of the planner assigned the case.
14. The Yolo County Archives has a set of voter registration volumes that provide names by address and occupation over several decades.
6. City staff assigned to the Historical Resources Management Commission is charge of the files on each building in Davis ever enumerated in one of the "cultural/historical" resource surveys. These are public and you can ask to look at any particular file.
15. The Yolo County Archives and some collectors have a number of older telephone books that provide names associated with addresses. Since the number of people in Davis before WWII, especially, was not large, it is not hard to scan the entire list looking for who lived at a particular address.
7. In 1933, the City did an inventory for tax assessment purposes that shows year of construction, a footprint, and the valuation. The originals are in a thick black binder located in the UCD Department of Special Collections.
15. There are a number of additional sources. Some are published and some are unpublished. Quite importantly, some are human beings who might have memories that can be helpful regarding particular buildings.
8. Also in the UCD Department of Special Collections, there are building and "urban survey" record sheets on each Davis property covering roughly the years 1946-60.
9. The Shields Special Collections Department has an extensive collection of aerial photos of the City prior to World War II. Using Photoshop, detailed searchings and enlargings are possible.
10. The Sanborn Map Company conducted perhaps twelve mappings of Davis between 1881 and 1955. Some copies of some of these maps are available at Public Works, Shields, and the Hattie Weber. When all else fails, these can help identify a period of construction. They can also reveal "footprint" changes.
11. The detailed data sheets of the U. S. Census of Davis and the Davis-area are available for the years 1800s decades of 50,

Last revised: November, 2005.