



Davis Heritage Buildings How Many To Start With? How Many Left?

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Preservation-minded Davisites often say that because Davis had little history to start with, we need to take special care to preserve the small amount left.

Reflecting on this assertion, I have asked myself, What exactly does it mean to say that Davis had “little” history and that a “small” amount of it is left? How would one determine what is “little,” “small,” or some other amount? Just how much history *did* Davis have and how much *is* left?

The “how much” of history means many things, of course, especially the *significance* of persons, events, buildings, and the like, and not merely their quantity.

Even so, the sheer quantity of things is always relevant and it seems to me that one important way to think about “how much” is in terms of the most obvious and looming thing history literally puts in front of us: physical structures on the land.

- (1) How many of these structures were there in Davis historically?
- (2) How many of them do we still see today?

While not a perfect measure of “how much,” these two numbers can provide a reasonable place to start. Making this assumption, I have counted the buildings that made up a large part of Davis in 1945 and the number of these buildings remaining in 2000.

NUMBER OF BUILDINGS IN DAVIS IN 1945

Historians of Davis agree that classic or historic small town Davis reached its zenith in the mid and late 1940s. Virtually everything we consider “historical” or “historic” in Davis was built before 1950 and, mostly, by 1945. Therefore, the built environment of these years can be used as a measure of the amount of Davis history at its maximum.

For the purpose of helping to set fire insurance rates, in 1945 the Sanborn Map Company up-dated its enumeration of structures within and close to the Davis city limits. At the scale of fifty feet to the inch, the Davis map covers twelve 18 by 24 inch sheets of paper. The central feature of this mapping is a drawing of the footprint of every structure close to or within the area bounded by A and L on the west and east and First and Seventh on the south and north. The centerfold (pages 10 and 11) is a reduced and composited version of the map.