

# 4

## G Street

### *Commerce on the Eastern Edge*

**B**efore World War II, a large number of trains ran through Davis every day and this had two effects on property adjacent to the tracks: noise annoyance if one lived there and attractiveness as sites for railroad sidings and loading. The first condition retarded residential construction next to the tracks and the second prompted commerce along the tracks.

With the decline of the railroads after World War II, G Street became more attractive for homes and less attractive as a site for commerce using railroad sidings, which were abandoned and even covered over. Other kinds of commerce then began on G Street.

#### **G Street in the Late 1930s**

The photograph reproduced in Fig. 4.1 conveys the relative bareness of G even into the late-1930s, when the picture was taken. The large, long structure to the right in Fig. 4.1 is a grain



**4.1.** Corner of Fifth and G looking north along G in the late 1930s. The house in the middle of the picture is 536 G, at the southeast corner of G and Sixth. The Plant grain storage shed is on the right. (Courtesy Clarence Barry)

### **G Street Residences, Residents, Rentals**

Here is how G Street compares to the other five lettered streets in terms of the population and housing statistics reported for the Old North as a whole in Ch. 1.

**1. RESIDENCES.** Compared to the other streets, G Street has:

- 1) fewer residential units,
- 2) fewer signature homes (the period homes that give the Old North its special appearance, discussed in Ch. 1), and
- 3) fewer lot-dominant (visually prominent) structures.

The substantial portion of the land used commercially explains these lower numbers. Even so, G Street does have 21 signature homes, which are 14% of the Old North total and ranks G next to last among streets.

**2. TINY/HIDDEN ABODES.** However, G Street has a relatively high percentage of all the tiny and/or hidden abodes—22%, ranking it second to E Street which has 38% (13 for G versus 23 for E).

**3. RESIDENTS.** G Street has a relatively small percentage of the total Old North population (71 of 609 people or 12%), again ranking it next to last (just above B Street).

**4. RESIDENTS IN SIGNATURE HOMES.** A high percentage of this smaller population—89%—live in a signature home or in ancillary abodes (63 of 71). This ranks G second among streets and above the Old North average of 63%.

**5. OWNER-OCCUPIED SIGNATURE HOMES.** G Street ranks second among streets in the percent of all its residential units that are owner-occupied signature homes—34% as compared to 24% in the Old North as a whole and to 18% on F and C, 20% on E, 29% on D, and 78% on B.

**6. OWNER-OCCUPIED VERSUS RENTAL SIGNATURE HOMES.** Narrowing the focus to owner-occupancy of only signature homes rather than all residential units: 48% of G Street signature homes are owner-occupied, ranking it third among streets.

This generalization is important enough to state in the reverse as a way to signal its significance: *52% of G Street signature homes are rentals, ranking it fourth among streets.*

**7. ABSENTEE LANDLORDS OF SIGNATURE HOMES.** 10% of landlords of G Street rental signature homes do not live in Davis, which ranks it sixth or lowest among streets on this characteristic.

Overall, G Street is among the “smaller” of the six streets in several senses, including population size and number of residences.

processing and storage shed fronting the railroad track. There is a rail siding between the building and the track. That business closed

in 1945 and the building was removed shortly thereafter, making way for Hibbert Lumber.

Of historical interest, pre-World War II grain commerce was organized on the principle of “bagging,” that is, of packaging grain in bags that humans could move and stack by hand. Grain silos, bulk railroad containers, and trucks rapidly made bagging obsolete.

### **500 G Street: Hibbert Lumber Company**

A venerable Davis institution at the northeast corner of Fifth and G (Fig. 4.2), the Hibbert Lumber Company celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1997. It began as and remains a family-owned and operated business.



**4.2.** The Hibbert Lumber Company building in the late 1950s. There is no stop light or even stop sign at Fifth and G. Fifth Street ends at the railroad, just beyond the right edge of this photograph. (Courtesy Becky Hibbert)

### **G Street 1930s Homes**

The five homes at 506, 512, 516, 522, and 526 G were constructed in the late 1930s.

The rarity of snow in Davis prompted people to take pictures of it, which is what Clarence Barry did on the 500 block of G Street on March 20, 1942, a scene shown in Fig. 4.3. Notice the “new development” quality conveyed by the landscaping.

### **536 G Street**

The southeast corner of Sixth and G is the third place the house at 536 G has been located (Fig. 4.4). It was built in 1916 at the confluence of Putah Creek and the Canal, three miles southeast of Davis, for newlyweds of the pioneer Plant-Dolcini family.



4.3. Snow on G Street, March 20, 1942, showing, from the left, 516, 512, and 506 G. The grain shed is visible in the left of this photo, behind 516 G. (Courtesy Clarence Barry)

The raging waters of Putah Creek, which flooded the road to Davis, made winter visits to town extremely hazardous and daily trips to school impossible. Therefore, in 1924, the house was moved to June Acres Stock Farm, four miles east of Davis.

Its third and last move, to its present location, came in 1938. Additions and improvements accompanied each move.

It has served continuously as the Dolcini family home since 1916.

4.4. 536 G Street, at the southeast corner of G and Sixth.



### **Bowers Corner: Northwest Sixth and G**

In one sense, the current neighborhood began at the northwest corner of Sixth and G streets on January 22, 1913. That Wednesday morning, workmen began laying sidewalk along G and along Sixth. With that act, farm land turned into town land.

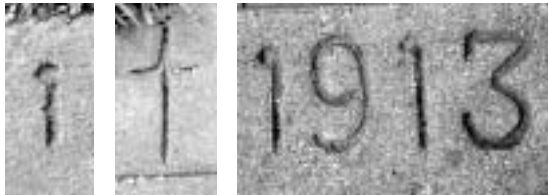
As described in Ch. 3, the same sidewalk is there today. Arrows marking the property lines and numbers identifying the lots were pressed into the wet cement and these are, in very high percentage, still there to see. For example, the first lot at the corner

in Fig. 4.5 is “lot 1, block 1” of Bowers Addition and the “1” is quite clear in the cement (Fig. 4.6).

**4.5.** 1997 view of Bowers Corner from G looking along Sixth toward B.



**4.6.** The lot number and property line arrow at 603 G and the year at 623-25 G.



### **Historic Events at Bowers Corner**

By the mid-1940s, the corner of Sixth and G had become a starting point for parades into and through the Downtown. The end of World War II was a major occasion for such parading (Fig. 4.7).

### **Commerce North of Sixth Street**

The block formed by Sixth, Sweet Briar (formerly Cemetery Road), G, and the railroad has been used for a variety of commercial purposes over the decades.

In the 1930s, a produce-packing shed stood by the tracks just north of Sixth Street, complete with its own railroad siding. (Its roof is visible just behind 536 G in Fig. 4.1). The Shell Oil Company had a small storage facility at the north end of the block.

By the middle 1940s, the businesses occupying both these locations had changed. In the north, along Sweet Briar, there was a honey extracting operation on the old oil storage site. Somewhat later, two small rental cottages occupied the northwest corner of the block (Whitcombe 1955, 121-122). In the south, along Sixth Street, the Davis Ice and Fuel Company operated by Richard Barlow, a well-known Davis figure, replaced the produce packing shed, which had been removed (Roberts 1996a; Fig. 4.8).

## Davis Joins In Victory Celebration

**Excitement Prevails When  
News of Surrender Comes.  
Stores Close; Parade Wed.**

Wednesday saw every place in the community shut tight and only those who must, labored throughout the day.

In the evening at six o'clock a parade gathered at the corner of 6th and G streets. It was composed of any and everything to give vent to the joy of victory. Headed by Chief of Police Gattrell it followed a course down G Street to Second, west on Second to C Street then north to Fourth and back to G where it disbanded.

Prominent in the parade were riders of the Circle "D" Horsemen's club. Mayor C. A. Covell in a "ten gallon" hat sat astride a white horse named "Hirohito." The fire department—sirens sounding a deafening roar and as the cortege progressed, it gathered in length and strength. Enthusiastic residents joined in the line with the horns sounding.

4.7. The end of World War II parade forms-up at Sixth and G streets. (DE, 8-7-45)

In 1947, Barlow also established a nursery at the northeast corner of Sixth and G, in front of his ice and fuel business. It and the couple to whom he later sold it are shown in Fig. 4.9.

4.8. Pearl and Richard Barlow in front of their Union Ice Company building, middle 1940s. A fuel storage building is behind the ice house and next to the railroad.



(Courtesy Mickey Barlow)

**4.9.** Barlow's Adobe Garden Shop and Nursery and its proprietors, Betty and Dick Fawcett, at Sixth and G, 1952. 607 and 613 G are visible in the left-hand background. (Courtesy Mickey Barlow)



In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Pacific Coast Aggregates operated an aggregate processing plant on the north end of the block. Much of its output is reported to have gone into the new junior high school built on the Old North block bounded by Fifth, B, Sixth and C (the “Hanley Block,” described in Ch. 8).

Historically, this entire G Street block was held by a single owner, even though that owner has changed over time. For a period, Southern Pacific Railroad owned it.

In the later 1950s, the ownership changed and all the then existing businesses were removed. The Safeway grocery chain acquired the southern part of the block and constructed a grocery that opened in 1960.

Shortly after this, the northern portion of the block was developed separately as the strip of shops one sees there now. The resulting complex, with its shared parking lot, anchoring supermarket, and block of contiguous storefronts was, in some planning views, a textbook example of the “planned neighborhood shopping center.”

In the 1970s, a small Texaco gas station operated at the southeast corner of G and Sweet Briar. After it ceased business, the building briefly housed a fish store. Later in the decade, all the buildings north of the shopping center were cleared.

Pursuing a corporate policy of ever larger stores, Safeway closed its G Street store in 1980. Empty for a time, the company

leased the building as an internally subdivided “Public Market” containing several small shop spaces, including a limited-size (non-competing) grocery store.

This venture failed within a year and the building was closed until it was leased to Davis Food Cooperative, Inc. in 1984. The Co-op operated the building in the multi-tenant “Public Market” configuration for a time, but then consolidated it into only two spaces, an enlarged Co-op grocery and a section subleased to the Davis Community Clinic, a medical facility for low-income people.

In the 1990s the Co-op purchased the building from Safeway and the clinic acquired its own facility and moved out. These changes opened the way to restoring the entire structure to the grocery store it once had been (Fig. 4.10). This remodeling was celebrated in an October, 1997 “Grand Reopening.”



**4.10.** 1997 street view of The Davis Food Cooperative, Inc. building.

The remodeled design has been controversial in several ways. Co-op leaders have explained it as, among other things, an effort to establish a landmark structure in the Old North part of Davis.

Many residents think, though, that this landmark is not particularly in tune with the character of the area. Indeed, some regard the building as an assault on the aesthetic of the neighborhood, which is, of course, one of the purposes of post modern deconstructionist architecture, the label the architect applies to the remodel (McGinn, DE, 6-7-98).

Various elements of the design are said by the architect to carry cooperative movement as well as post modern meanings (an intriguing mix, certainly). Too detailed to go into here, a brochure explaining the intricate symbolism of the building’s design has been available at the information desk in the store (Ogrydziak Architects 1997).

The Davis Food Co-op is not simply a grocery store. It is also a social movement or a way of life. These movement/lifestyle aspects are not only imbedded in the building’s architecture, but also



in the accouterments of its parking lot. Most visibly, the outdoor clock near the corner of Sixth and G celebrates what Co-op officials believe to have been, in 1997, 100 years of cooperative movement activity in Davis.

Continuing the tradition of starting parades at Sixth and G, the Co-op parking lot hosts the start of the annual Holiday Children's Parade (Fig. 4.11).

4.11. Excerpts from a 1997 Davis Downtown Business Association flier promoting the annual Children's Parade. This is one of several events starting at or taking place in the Co-op parking lot at Sixth and G.

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## *Holiday Celebrations in Downtown Davis*

### *Children's Parade*

*Thursday, December 4*

*6:00 p.m. (Line-up starts at 5:50 p.m.)*

*Location: Starts at 620 G Street (Davis Food Co-op)*

Children are invited to join in the annual Children's Parade. Davis Food Co-op will be providing candles to carry (non-burning alternatives will be provided for younger children, while supplies last). Children will be joined by the Cal Aggie Band, McGruff The Crime Dog, Santa Claus, The Madrigal Choir, and more! The Children's Parade will be followed by the official community tree lighting and the annual downtown Holiday Open House.

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## **The East 600 Block of G: The Old North Center**

Traditionally, the east 600 block of G did not have a place or shopping center name. Only in the late 1990s, when new shopping centers became an issue in Davis, did city planners dub this block the "Coop Center" (*sic*) as a way to identify it in planning charts showing all 10 of the existing or proposed "shopping center zoning districts" (Interview with City of Davis planner, March 27, 1998).

That name, though, is only a planning convenience and not an official name or the result of any public or democratic process of review. Should there be such a process, my preference would be to name this shopping area after its neighborhood and therefore to call it the Old North Center.

## **Bungalows on G Street**

G street has 19% (6 of 32) of all the surviving Old North bungalows, with four on G Street—at 607, 617, 627, and 631—and two on Seventh—at 717 and 721.

### 613 G Street†

613 G is the first in a series of multi-apartment structures on the west side of the 600 block of G, but you have to look carefully to see that they *are* multi-apartment buildings.

This 1930s Colonial Revival cottage at 613 G has two 1960-70s constructed apartments appended to the back of it—although these are virtually invisible from G Street (and not visible in Fig. 4.12).

Indeed, the 1996 ARG surveyors appear to have missed the rear apartments because they did not include them in their description of this structure as a cultural resource.

These surveyors do mention, though, that the house has been “converted to commercial use” (an insurance office and the Davis bureau of the *Sacramento Bee*) (ARG, 323).

The cultural resource features of the house include its “projecting porch supported by two classically stylized columns.” It is the porch that “gives the house Colonial Revival characteristics” (ARG, 323).

4.12. 613 G Street.



### 631 G Street†

ARG historical surveyors remarked that the “small, one story bungalow” at 631 G (Fig. 4.13) “contributes to the overall character of the neighborhood” by virtue of its “prominent attic dormer” and “a recessed porch [that] is accessed via several steps” (ARG, 325-326).

**4.13.** 631 G Street.



Likely constructed in the 1920s, “the house has a gable roof running parallel to the street . . . [and] is sheathed in horizontal wood siding” (ARG, 325).

**635 G Street†**

Like 631 G, ARG surveyors were impressed that 635 G “contributes to the overall character of the neighborhood.” They describe it as a “small, one story house” which has a “projecting front porch,” a “gable roof [that] runs parallel to the street” and “six over one double hung windows” (ARG, 327) (Fig. 4.14).

**4.14.** 635 G Street.



635 G is testimony to the adroitness of the developer’s design in that the ARG surveyors apparently again did not notice that this building is actually part of a two-lot complex of apartments encompassing the adjoining lot, 641 G Street. In all, there are five living units plus the corporate office of the developer in the street-facing unit of 635 G Street.

This design at 635-641 G Street continues the muted high-density phenomenon along the west side of G Street (see 613 G Street).

### **721 Seventh Street**

In the early 20th century, palm trees were popular among Davisites. In Fig. 4.15 we see that in the middle 1920s, several young specimens grew in the front yard of the home on the northwest corner of G and Seventh (721 Seventh Street).

But, as one can see from looking at that corner now, the palms are gone—and few remain in the Davis landscape.

**4.15.** Palm trees in the front yard of 721 Seventh Street, mid-1920s. G Street, with the railroad behind it, is in the background. (Courtesy Jane Zakarian)



Because G Street is proximate to the railroad tracks and is now a northern “spike” extension of the Davis Core Area commercial zone, it has a number of obvious contrasts with the other five north-south streets of the Old North. As we move west, the streetscape changes quite considerably.