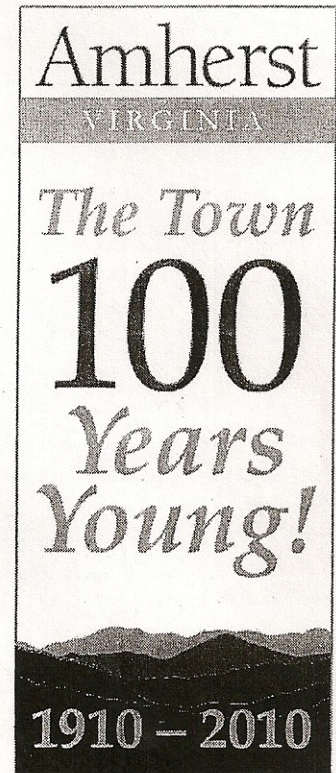


## A Walking Tour of History on Main Street



Saturday,  
June 12, 2010

Amherst, Virginia

There was little to call attention to the town of Amherst before 1808. When the county of Amherst was divided into two counties—Amherst and Nelson—in 1807, the remaining part of Amherst had to seek a new location for its courthouse. The new courthouse was built on land purchased from the Coleman estate. In the deed it was called “The Oaks.” The community that grew up around the courthouse was called Amherst Court House and in 1910 it was incorporated as the town of Amherst.

1. A large home with spacious double porches stood on this spot in the 1800’s. Various known as the Robertson or Dr. Henry Landon Davies House, the structure was located on the narrow dirt road used by the Lynchburg stage coaches and which became Main Street. The house was later used as a hotel and was demolished in 1964. A bank, the Lynchburg National Bank and Trust, was built on the site.

2. There were no churches in Amherst in 1847 when five Episcopalians met at Dr. Henry Landon Davies’ home across the street and decided to build one on this spot. The land was donated by Elijah Fletcher, whose Sweet Briar Plantation would later become Sweet Briar College in 1906. Hickman Meredith was the builder and had the bricks

for the structure made on the property. The church’s basement once housed the town’s “library” and dancing lessons were given in the Parish Hall.

3. Early records indicate that this home belonged to the Cabell family in 1810 and later to the Gregory family. It is now owned by Ascension Episcopal Church.

4. The Rucker House was built in the late 1800s. Juanita Rucker Brown and her husband Watt Brown raised their family there and also opened the house to visitors as a “tourist home.” During the 1970s, area school teachers lived and boarded there. The building was later used by Phyllis Braxton Brown as a dress shop. The popular “Vintage on Main” shop opened on the site in 2006.

5. Built in 1932, this brick building was one of Amherst’s post offices until 1941, when it became Amherst Tire Rebuilders, owned and operated by J. Wilson Gregory. It was sold to the George E. Jones Construction Company which enlarged it. Tom Hall continues to run the construction company which is headquartered at the site. Amherst Physical Therapy shares the building.

6. A venerable hotel, c.1869, variously known as the Lafayette, the Daniel, the Central and finally the Woods Hotel sat at the

end of South Main Street. The hotel and a nearby building known as the Ware family home were demolished when the small shopping center in downtown Amherst was opened in the 1950’s by Milton and Ruby Drummond.



The Drummonds opened their first grocery store outside the town limits in 1933. Some ten years later they opened a Ben Franklin and a grocery store on South Main Street. In the mid-fifties they constructed a new grocery bearing their name on the old hotel site and moved the Ben Franklin store into the new area. Those buildings are still in use and now house a printing firm, a sporting goods store and a gym and exercise center. Their former South Main Street store is now occupied by Burch and Ogden.

7. Mrs. Ella Jones owned the Mays Grocery Store which was later demolished. It was replaced by Pete Hudson’s Barber Shop. Ritchie’s Barber Shop and the Rucker Insurance Co. now occupy the site.

8. The building that houses Travelers Restaurant was built in 1930 by Judge Edward Meeks. It housed Joe Whitten's barber shop and Ye Traveler's Coffee Shop, first managed by Mrs. Effie Wills. The shop was operated from 1930 to 1960 and was frequented by teenagers after school and students from Sweet Briar College. The building housed several businesses over the years including a bicycle shop.

9. In 1923 J.R. Goodwin built a large brick building at the corner of Main and Depot Street, which is now known as Second Street. Over the years, Goodwin's Store has housed many businesses, including Dayton Storey's garage, a florist and an Army-Navy surplus outlet. The building is now the Episcopal Thrift Shop, staffed by community volunteers.



10. The Allen building, c. 1880, was located next to Goodwin's Store on the corner of South Main and East Court Streets. It variously housed a jewelry store, a garage, a beer garden, a restaurant and a law office. The building was purchased by the

town and demolished in 1978. The town mini-park was created in the vacant area with help from the Village Garden Club which still provides landscaping and planting in the area.

11. Courthouse Square is to the right. The first courthouse was built in 1809, torn down in 1872 and replaced by the current structure. There have been many additions to the building over the years with a new section completed in 1997. A large Methodist Church was built on land adjacent to the Courthouse in 1888. The congregation moved to a new site in the 1960's and the church building was sold to the county, became a court building and was demolished in 1990. William Ward Hill sold buggies, wagons and harnesses on a vacant lot near the corner of Main and Court Street. This business backed up to the old Bank of Amherst which sat on the corner.

12. When originally opened, this building housed Wood's grocery store on the first floor and Wood's Hall on the second floor. Social events such as the 1938 President's Birthday Ball were held in Wood's Hall. Later, a Western Auto store operated by John Boone was located in the building.

13. Yale Burch and Bill Ogden open an appliance store in the Sandidge building in 1960. Previously, the Ben Franklin store was located in the building. It was opened in 1943 by Ruby and Milton Drummond.

14. A pharmacy was located next to Burch and Odgen for ninety-three years. The pharmacy changed owners and names several time throughout that period. The last owner and pharmacist was M. Blair Robertson. The store closed in 2005.

15. The Watts Building sits on the corner of South Main Street and West Court Street. Mantiply's store was originally located in the section of the building nearest West Court Street. In 1945, Drummond's grocery store opened in the right side of the structure. From 1938 to 1951, J. C. Camden operated a shoe repair business in the left portion of the building. Other businesses have since occupied the space including Beidler Realty.

16. The Bank of Amherst was organized in 1883 and originally occupied a spot on the west side of South Main Street. In 1905 a new brick bank building was built on the corner of East Court. Some 30 years later the bank was sold and became a "Nickel to Dollar" store. Watch maker Robert Bethel purchased it to use as a clock and jewelry repair business, living with his family above the store.

17. Hill Hardware began in 1910 and was purchased by W. W. Hill of Lynchburg in 1914. Active in the Lynchburg business community and in Amherst church and political circles, Mr. Hill was president of the Hill Hardware

Corporation at the time of his death in January 1931.

18. The Town of Amherst municipal building was built in 1920 for the Farmer's Bank of Amherst. J.K. Thomas was the bricklayer. In 1933, Farmer's Bank of Amherst and the Bank of Amherst (located across South Main Street) merged to become Farmers and Bank of Amherst. Later the bank merged with Lynchburg National Bank and Trust Company. In 1965 the bank moved to its new location opposite Ascension Episcopal Church. The old building was given to the Town of Amherst to use as the municipal building.

19. The Masons built this building in 1942 for the Post Office and Clinton Lodge. The Post Office occupied the lower level of the building until 1963. The Masons still use the second floor of the building. The lower level now houses the Town of Amherst Police Department and a hair salon.

20. A filling station owned by Walker Gregory opened in the 1930s between Hill Hardware and the old G. & H. Motor Company owned by Joe Goodwin and O.V. Hanger. The site later became home to Babcock Motor Company, Amherst Welding & Radiator shop, the East Motor Company, Buddy Schirmacker's Laundry and Frank Turner's accounting offices. When Mr. Turner retired, Bill

and Walter Turner purchased the building and have used it for storage both for the hardware business and for Hill House.

21. Next to the storage building stands a two story brick structure, c.1910, which housed L.V. Parr's funeral home and the R.S. Cunningham radio store which sold victrolas and records. Sam Massie rented the building in 1954 and later purchased it for the Massie Insurance Agency Inc. which he still owns. The Massie building is adjacent to the structure which became home to the town's first emergency medical responders, the Amherst Life Saving Crew. Today Hill House, a popular furniture and gift shop, occupies the space.

22. The large structure across from the Amherst County Historical Museum was built as a Post Office in the 1960's. It functioned until 2002 when a new postal building was constructed across the street on the corner of Main Street and Hanger Road. The building now houses the offices of Doug Thompson Accounting.

23. The home of Rad Cox, who owned a hardware store at the corner of South Main and West Court streets occupied the site of the Chiropractic and Wellness Center and the Bank of the James. The Bank of the James building was constructed in the late 1960s to house the Farmers & Merchants Bank. Charlie Vail, an Amherst architect, designed the building. The building was renovated and reopened in 2008.

24. The Kearfott-Wood house was built for Mr. Kearfott, a local pharmacist, in 1907. In 1922 the house was sold to Wade Wood, a local grocer. The Wood family lived in the house until the 1960s when the last resident Wood family member passed away. In 1990 the Amherst County Museum and Historical Society bought and renovated the home. It now serves as the home of the Amherst County Museum and Historical Society.



The three photographs are of community projects of the town's Village Garden Club. The *Drummond's* photograph shows Main and Second streets. The *Goodwin's* photograph shows today's minipark, and the photograph above shows the traffic circle and Main Street and Route 60.

Many thanks to the Board of the Amherst County Museum for permission to draw heavily from their centennial publication, The Town of Amherst: Celebrating 100 Years. This product could not have been possible without their research. Thanks also to those business owners who provided additional information about their own locations. To learn more about the town's homes and businesses, consider the purchase of the complete edition of The Town of Amherst: Celebrating 100 Years, available at the Amherst County Museum (number 24 on the map).