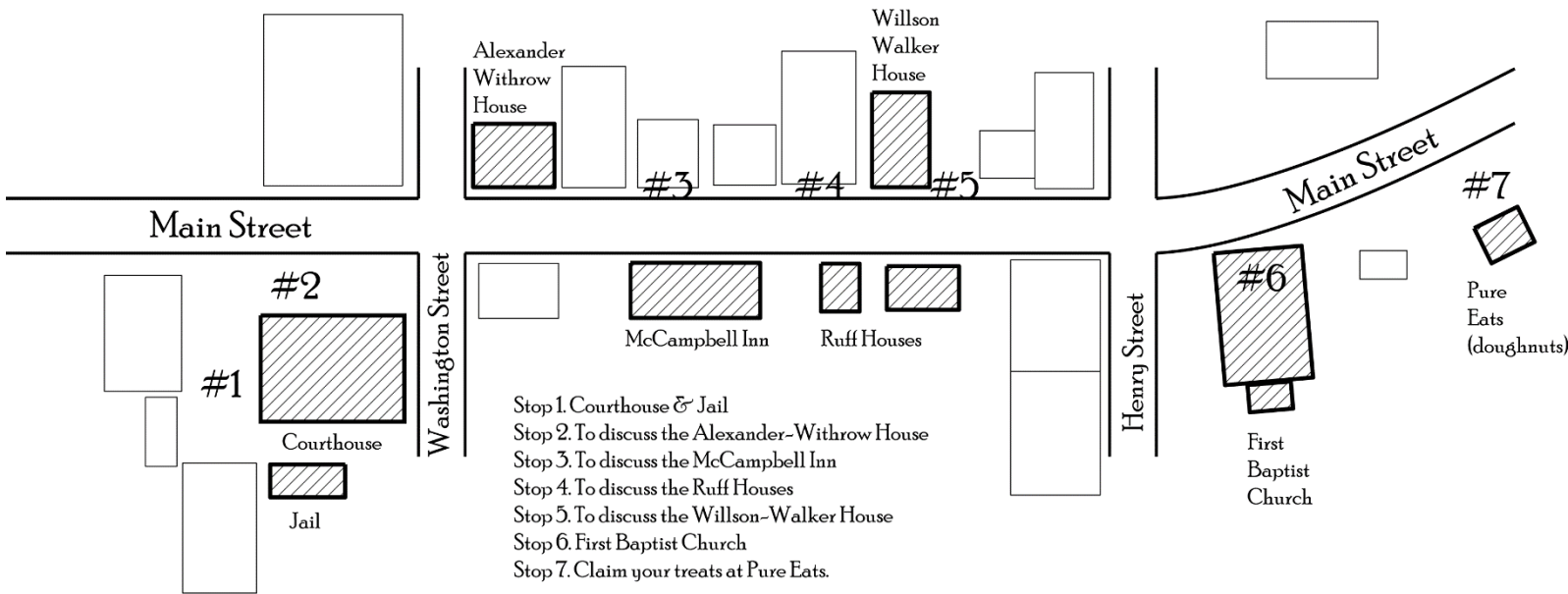
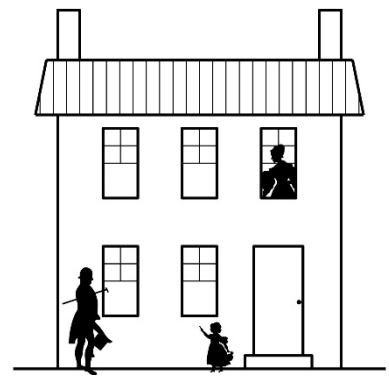


# The Many Stories of Main Street



The Courthouse & Jail:

The Alexander-Withrow House:

The McCampbell Inn:

The Ruff Houses:

The Willson-Walker House:

The First Baptist Church:

## Lexington, Virginia

In October of 1777, when the Commonwealth of Virginia created Rockbridge County, the legislature commanded the justices of the new county to lay out a town, to be called Lexington and to act as the county seat. Lexington's original plan included 36 half-acre lots.

## The Jail and Courthouse

Two town lots were reserved for the "court house and prison." A small wooden building (on the corner of Nelson and Randolph Streets) served as a court house until a brick structure was completed c. 1786 on the current site. This court house was severely damaged in the Great Fire of 1796 (perhaps because its chestnut-shingle roof caught fire). A new brick court house was in place by 1803, but by the 1870s some people complained that it was dirty and "a disgrace to our county." The current courthouse was built in 1897. Similarly, the jail we see today (c. 1840) replaced earlier structures.

## Alexander-Withrow House

William Alexander, an inaugural Trustee of Liberty Hall Academy, purchased Lot 19, on which this building stands, for five pounds in 1792. It is unclear whether the house was finished by the time of the Great Fire (1796). At the time of his death in 1797, Alexander and his family were living on their plantation that's now the front campus of W&L. Captain John Leyburn bought the lot in 1800, insuring the brick house in an unfinished state. Leyburn operated a store in this building until his death in 1831.

## McCampbell Inn

John and Mary McCampbell built the central portion of this building c. 1809. Subsequent owners added the other portions in 1816 and 1857. The third addition was made at the time that the Town of Lexington lowered this section of Main Street; before that time, horses and wagons would often slip or get stuck in the muddy, steep road. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century this building was the Central Hotel, in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century best known for its restaurant, "The Liquid Lunch."

## The Ruff Houses

John M. Ruff began building the larger of these two structures, 23 North Main Street, c. 1811. It served as family residence and hat factory for many decades. He built the other house, 21 North Main Street, c. 1829. John and his (second) wife Henrietta Ruff moved to the county about a decade later. In the 1840s and 50s Jacob M. Ruff - son of John and his first wife Martha (d. 1827) - lived in the smaller house with his family and continued making many kinds of hats.

## Willson-Walker House

Captain William Willson, a merchant and long-time treasurer of Washington College, built the house on this site c. 1820. After his death in 1840, the building went through a number of owners until 1911, when Harry Lee Walker bought it. With partners Clarence and Joseph Wood, Walker operated as butcher and grocer in this location for thirty years. Walker's wife, Eliza Bannister Walker, was a nurse, midwife, and civic leader.

## First Baptist Church

In 1867, many African-Americans withdrew from their local churches to form their own congregation. Originally called Lexington African Baptist Church, this building was completed in 1896 through great community effort: "Some of the church deacons mortgaged their homes to pay for construction. Men worked nights while women held lanterns and bought baskets of food." In 1905 over a thousand people came to a mortgage burning ceremony, celebrating the congregation's having paid off construction costs. Continuing in the 21-st century and "given the history and heritage of First Baptist Church, it shall be our mission to be immersed in spiritual leadership, service, and education."