

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Dutch Reformed Church

Other Name/Site Number: Reformed Dutch Church, American Reformed Church



2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 132 Grand Street Not for publication:

City/Town: Newburgh Vicinity:

State: New York County: Orange Code: 071 Zip Code: 12550



3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private:\_\_\_
Public-Local: X
Public-State:\_\_\_
Public-Federal:\_\_\_

Category of Property

Building(s): X
District:
Site:
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing Noncontributing
1 \_\_\_ buildings
\_\_\_ \_\_\_ sites
\_\_\_ \_\_\_ structures
\_\_\_ \_\_\_ objects
1 \_\_\_ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

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**4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Certifying Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Commenting or Other Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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**5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain):

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

*Historic:* Religion *Sub:* Religious Facility  
*Current:* Vacant/Not in Use *Sub:* N/A

**7. DESCRIPTION**

*Architectural Classification:*

Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century Greek Revival

*Materials*

Foundation: Stone  
Walls: Stone  
Roof: Synthetic  
Other: Stucco, Wood, Brick, Concrete, Glass, Metal

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*Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.*

## Overview

The Dutch Reformed Church, located in the eastern portion of the city of Newburgh, Orange County, New York, rests immediately north of the city library on the east side of Grand Street, between Third and Catharine Streets. The imposing, temple-fronted Greek Revival building, constructed primarily of stucco-covered rubble, is one story in height and oriented with its façade facing south on a prominent rise above the Hudson River. The church measures fifty feet in width by one hundred sixteen feet, six inches in length, and rises fifty feet to the peak of the pediment. A monumental Ionic order portico highlights the facade. The interior is given over to a striking sanctuary space, with a deeply coffered ceiling and handsome gallery. The church originally carried a ribbed dome surmounted by a lantern, which rose two hundred thirty feet in height above the level of the river. Once commanding an unobstructed panorama of the river, the view shed is now compromised by invasive foliage and modern intrusions. The building rests within the boundaries of the East End Historic District, included on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985; it was previously listed individually in 1970. Although vacant since the early 1970s, the Dutch Reformed Church continues to maintain a powerful presence, indicative of the design skill of its architect, Alexander Jackson Davis.

Documentation regarding the design and construction of the Newburgh church is excellent. Davis designed the Dutch Reformed Church in July 1835,<sup>1</sup> and the cornerstone was laid, following ceremonies, in October of that year; Russell Warren, with whom Davis maintained a brief partnership in the mid-1830s, was the superintendent during the early months of construction. Writing in 1835 an account later published in the *Newburgh Gazette*,<sup>2</sup> the architect described the forthcoming building and its setting. "The edifice," Davis wrote,

occupies a commanding situation...Owing to the immediate and rapid descent of the ground east of the site...the full effect of its architecture may be seen while passing the town, and the gigantic portico, and lofty dome...will henceforth serve as a conspicuous and characteristic landmark, indicative of the taste, discrimination, and sense of classical beauty, of the inhabitants of Newburgh.<sup>3</sup>

The only significant changes made to the church occurred well over one hundred years ago. Sometime prior to 1845, the dome was removed, as apparently the building was unable to carry its weight effectively. Between 1867-68, low transepts were added and the church received an addition of twenty feet to the north end of the sanctuary, under the direction of George Harney. These additions were done with great sensitivity to the church's original design. The building survives largely intact, notwithstanding damage caused by continued neglect and deterioration. Bold in conception, scale, and design, the former church conveys a strong sense of Davis' assured hand and creative vision.

## Setting

The city of Newburgh is located along the west bank of the Hudson River, sixty-one miles north of New York City and eighty-four miles south of Albany. Overlooking a broad expanse of the river's course, the city stands on an uneven ridge, separating the Hudson from the Walkill Valley and Shawangunk ridge to the west. Newburgh is situated at the northern entrance to the Hudson Highlands, a fifteen-mile stretch where the river

<sup>1</sup> Davis, Day Book, 1827-53, 172. Alexander Jackson Davis Collection, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>2</sup> "A Description of the Dutch Reformed Church, now erecting in Newburgh," *Newburgh Gazette*, 7 November 1835.

<sup>3</sup> In a letter dated 14 October 1835, Reverend William Cruickshank requested of the architect "an architectural description of the building." Box 1, Davis Collection, NYPL.

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cuts through the Appalachian mountains, between Peekskill and Newburgh Bay. Across the river, to the east, is Beacon, in Dutchess County.

The Dutch Reformed Church is situated approximately one hundred and thirty feet above the level of the river, within the historic city core, three blocks north of the main east-west axis of Broadway. The building rests on the east side of a flat, grassy parcel, interspersed with deciduous trees and shrubbery. The ground gives way gradually on the eastern edge of the proposed boundary, sloping gently down toward the river. Large slabs of bluestone lead from the western boundary of the property to the entrance porch. A circular drive, probably dating to the early twentieth century, at one time provided access from Grand Street. The sweeping views of Newburgh Bay that the building once commanded are now partially obscured by the Newburgh Free Library, lying to the immediate south of the church. A section of Third Street, which originally formed the southern boundary of the church's property, was removed with the construction of the library. The building is bounded on the north by two residential properties, including the William Roe house, a frame Federal style residence of 1835.

Between 1851 and 1852, a frame parsonage was erected on the Third Street side of the property,<sup>4</sup> immediately south east of the church's façade elevation. The rectangular, gable-ended building, which received an addition in 1870, was lost with the construction of the library. A photograph of the church parcel, dated circa 1890, shows the church and parsonage enclosed on the Grand and Third Street sides by a wood fence. Embellished with a number of Picturesque details, including bargeboards and a Gothic Revival bay window, the parsonage appears a curious complement next to the classicism of the church's Ionic portico.

Situated within close proximity to the nominated property are two other noteworthy nineteenth century resources. Southwest of the church, on the corner of Third and Grand Street, is the former Orange County Courthouse, completed in 1842, and designed by Thornton MacNess Niven in the Greek Revival style. This temple-fronted Doric order building rests on a small parcel that was conceived of as a public park and may have been designed by Andrew Jackson Downing. Further south on Grand St, between Second and Campbell Streets, is St. George's Episcopal Church, a fine Federal style edifice constructed in 1816, with Greek Revival modifications attributed to Calvin Pollard. Throughout the nineteenth century, the dignified lines of the Dutch Reformed Church proved the focal point of this concentration of distinguished buildings.

## Exterior

The Dutch Reformed Church is constructed of load bearing masonry and rests on a massive granite foundation. Rectangular in shape, the building is covered with a low-pitched gable roof, and intersected on the north side by the east-west axis of the transept addition. The walls of the primary story, which rest above a raised basement, are two and one-half feet thick and built of uncoursed, mortared rubble. The basement walls are three feet thick, also built of rubble, and are faced with granite laid in random ashlar and are capped by a watertable. The walls rise impressively to the height of the cornice and support the roof frame. Stucco covers the walls of the primary story. Most of the church's refined exterior details were crafted from wood, including the columns, capitals, entablature, and cornice; Davis provided full size drawings for most of these.<sup>5</sup> The column bases and antae caps were carved from sandstone. Light wells, six feet in width and constructed with brick retaining walls, line the east and west elevations at basement level. Originally clad in tin, the roof is currently covered with a membrane

<sup>4</sup> "American Reformed Church, Newburgh, New York: A Brief History Prepared for the Seventy Fifth Anniversary Celebration, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, and 27<sup>th</sup>, 1910" (Newburgh: Newburgh Journal Publications, 1910), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Davis, "Specifications of the Carpenter's Work and Materials for a Church to be built at Newburgh," Box 2, #28, Davis Collection, NYPL.

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surface. It is pierced on the west side by two brick chimneys. There were originally enclosed copper gutters, now removed, and only the downspouts remain. Strikingly simple and austere, the church exhibits the bilateral symmetry, harmony of form and proportion, and restrained ornamentation characteristic of the Greek Revival aesthetic.

The south-facing façade is punctuated by a single bay and covered by a monumental pedimented portico. A composition bold in both scale and effect, it features a dramatic entrance that rises thirty feet in height and is fourteen feet in width; it is recessed approximately one foot from the plane of the façade. The lower portion of the doorway is currently covered in plywood with a utilitarian opening.

Above this temporary entry, the original entrance remains as designed by Davis. The upper twenty-one feet of this bay consists of six large, square shaped wood panels, designed to match pocket doors below with a similar decorative treatment. These sliding doors, consisting of two panels apiece, opened into recesses in the wall; they appear to have been removed early in the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to past documentation, which suggested these doors remain within their pockets, it is clear from a visual inspection of the building that this is not the case. The upper panels, displaying faded green and brown hues, have recessed square centers and are embellished with eight iron studs each. Flanking the entrance on the east and west corners of the façade are massive projecting antae, crowned with red sandstone caps. The stucco, once painted an ochre hue as per the architect's specifications, is currently grayish-blue in color; it was scored at the time of construction to give the effect of ashlar masonry. A simple raised molding runs around the inside ceiling of the portico below the architrave, and at the frieze and cornice lines. Two lintels, or crossbeams, of plaster and lath construction run from the interior columns to the façade, on a line with the frieze.

The Ionic order portico is carried by four thirty-two foot-high fluted wood columns, resting on red sandstone bases. The columns are gently tapered eight inches over their length, from four feet four inches to three feet eight inches, creating classically correct entasis. Above the egg and dart necking wood blocks have replaced the finely crafted capitals and abaci, which are currently in storage within the church. The carpenter was not responsible for the Ionic capitals; Davis indicated that they would be "furnished by the superintendent."<sup>7</sup> The column bases, twenty-seven inches in height, were carved in two horizontal parts of four sections each, and originally painted to match the wood and stucco. A deep wood entablature, sheathed with thin horizontal flushboard, continues from the portico around the entire building; it is treated as a broad, largely unadorned plane in typical Greek Revival fashion. Davis, in his specifications for the entablature, called for "all the mouldings...to be scrupulously attended to...without the least alteration."<sup>8</sup> The tympanum is covered with horizontal flushboard, consistent with that covering the entablature. Particle board has temporarily replaced the original raking cornice. The well-proportioned and balanced façade, carefully designed by Davis from specific Greek sources, lends the church an air of dignity and refinement characteristic of the finest buildings of the period.

Access to the church is gained via two flights of concrete steps with iron handrails, one on the west side of the porch and another which corresponds with the primary entrance, centered on the south side. The latter flight is flanked on either side by two bays that once lit the basement level. These are currently boarded up. A flight of stairs below the east side of the portico leads to the basement. The current concrete porch replaced the original

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<sup>6</sup> Mrs. M. S. Purdy, wife of the Reverend Seymour Purdy, is cited in HABS documentation as claiming that sometime after 1909 the great sliding doors were removed and the present door configuration installed. Davis' specifications originally called for "the outside door...to open in two folds..." This he later revised, adding that the doors would consist of "two panels sliding into the wall." Davis, "Specifications," 3.

<sup>7</sup> Davis, "Specifications," 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

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in 1910. Davis' specifications called for a timber-framed porch reached by five steps, each rising ten inches in height; the floor was to be laid with Southern hard pine.<sup>9</sup> Standing on the porch, the visitor is confronted with the truly monumental proportions of the portico and entrance.

The east and west elevations are similar in design, punctuated by four bays each. The main story was lit on either side by four elongated, slightly recessed windows, approximately thirty feet in height, which rest on split granite sills. The original windows have been removed and they are currently boarded up. Small plastic panels above the wood boards allow some light to penetrate the interior. The designer's specifications called for paired, double hung wood sash with box frames and weights, each window containing "seventy lights of Boston crown glass, thirteen by twenty-two inches."<sup>10</sup> Continuing from the portico around the side elevations above the window bays is the broad entablature, the moldings of which have, along with the cornice, been removed and put in storage. Evident are the nailing boards set within the upper courses of the stone walls, to which the sheathing is affixed. Fenestration on the basement level corresponds with the bays of the main story. Four bays with brick facing punctuate the basement in the east light well.

The west well has three window openings in addition to an entrance reached by a flight of bluestone stairs. Paired wood doors with a five-light transom provide access to the basement. The basement windows, like those above them, are boarded up. Undergrowth now completely veils the light wells on both elevations. The tall window openings echo the strong vertical lines of the columns, antae, and entrance, and help unite the composition.

The original dome that Davis designed appears to have been removed some time between 1842 and March 1845. The architect originally specified that it would be ribbed, resting "upon a circular course...which last rests upon an octagonal base."<sup>11</sup> "The roof of the dome," he continued, "and lanthorn [sic], to be well boarded...and covered with zinc or tin put on in the most approved manner..." A wood cut dating to 1842 shows the church viewed from the east, surmounted by a low dome with lantern. A lithograph of Newburgh by E. Whitefield, dated 1846,<sup>12</sup> depicts the city viewed from the east side of the Hudson River. The Dutch Reformed Church appears toward the right of the composition without its dome. An account published in 1910 stated that the dome was removed "because its weight opened the roof and eaves and kept the interior of the church constantly out of repair."<sup>13</sup>

Between 1867-68 the church received the addition of the east and west transepts, and was expanded by twenty feet on the north end of the sanctuary. These alterations were designed by Newburgh architect George Harney<sup>14</sup> and executed with remarkable sensitivity towards Davis' original design. The gable-roofed projections are constructed of stucco covered brick and rise approximately two-thirds the height of the main body of the church. They have elongated windows on their south elevation, surmounted by blind panels, proportionately equal to the fenestration on the east and west elevations of the main body of the building. Centered single windows pierce the east and west faces of the projections. As with the rest of the building, windows are fully boarded. Pilasters with sandstone caps define the corners of the transepts and carry wood entablatures around the three sides of the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>12</sup> This lithograph, according to an advertisement in the 30 October 1845 *Newburgh Gazette*, was "taken last March, from the East bank of the River, by Mr. E. Whitefield."

<sup>13</sup> "American Reformed Church," 5.

<sup>14</sup> Harney (1840-1924), born in Massachusetts, opened an office in Newburgh in 1863 and there designed St. Margaret's Church and the Lincoln Home and Hospital; he later moved on to practice in New York City. Henry Withey and Elise Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1970), 265.

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projections. The fully-pedimented gables are constructed of wood with flushboard tympanums. The moderately-pitched roofs are clad with metal. The west transept has an additional entry vestibule projecting from the center of the west elevation. It is flat roofed with a shallow frieze and is framed by pilasters. The paired doors are paneled and accessed by three stone steps. The east transept at one time also featured an entrance.

The north elevation is extremely austere in composition. It features a fully-pedimented gable with flushboard tympanum, surmounting the wood entablature. Below the architrave at the corners of this elevation there are red sandstone caps; it is possible that Harney salvaged them from the original north elevation and reused them without articulating the antae. The wood cornice on the main body of the church has been removed; particleboard covers the original raking cornice. Two small openings, which once lit the basement, pierce the foundation toward the center of the elevation; they are currently boarded. The transepts are recessed about five inches from this elevation.

**Interior**

Access to the interior of the Dutch Reformed Church is gained via the dramatic south façade entrance, which leads into a low-ceilinged, rectangular vestibule. The plywood covering masks the current door configuration. Two sets of paired, paneled wood doors, each nine feet in height and nearly three feet in width, lead from the porch into the vestibule. Each door consists of six recessed panels with simple moldings; they remain in relatively good condition. Both pairs are crowned by five light rectangular transoms. The vestibule is a small, rectangular space, with a wood booth in the northeast corner. Paired doors on east and west sides led from the vestibule to the gallery stairs and the sanctuary; they have since been removed and only the transom frames remain. The original pine floors are now covered with a linoleum-like material. Walls and ceiling are plaster. A classically inspired stenciled anthemion pattern is still discernible at breast-height on the walls.

Two flights of open stringer wood stairs on the extreme south wall of the sanctuary provide access to the gallery above, the west flight headed by a wood door at gallery level, now removed. Balusters have also been removed and only the newel posts remain. Beneath the east stair a closed stair descends to the basement. Resting between the gallery stairs and the main body of the sanctuary are two cast iron radiators and a breast high paneled divider.

The main body of the sanctuary contrasts a severe, segmentally-arched ceiling with a delicately-crafted gallery. Two aisles run the length of the rectangular worship area to the raised dais, with twenty rows of pews between. This center row is approximately eighteen feet in length, separated by a paneled partition in the center. Two additional rows of twenty-two pews each, approximately nine feet in length, begin at the center aisles and terminate at the building's walls. The pews are fashioned from pine with mahogany coping, complete with paneled backs, partitions, and bookshelves, as specified by Davis. Running the length of the original eighty-foot long space is a handsome horseshoe-shaped gallery that curves gently inward toward the original north end of the church. Dynamic in design, it moves gracefully through the open space. The gallery projects nine feet from the wall, and is carried by nine unfluted Doric colonettes, originally painted in imitation of bronze; they are now white, as is the gallery. The face of the gallery is highlighted by elaborate moldings and a leaf-and-dart course. It was executed from full-size drawings provided by Davis at the request of the carpenter and remains in outstanding condition. Holes in the lower portion of the gallery front indicate the previous placement of gas fixtures. Modern electric lights are now mounted under the galleries.

Centered along the south wall of the gallery there is a large square recess where the organ was originally situated; it echoes the proportions of the outside entrance. Two paneled wood doors, now removed, originally



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flanked this niche. Painted within the recess is the Reformed Dutch Church coat of arms with the inscription Eendracht macht macht- "In unity there is strength." The opening on the east side of the niche accesses an extremely steep flight of wood stairs that lead to the building's attic. The gallery pews are two rows deep with paneled partitions, with a passage between the back row and the wall.

The arched plaster ceiling, hung from the roof frame, springs from the stucco cornice overhead. The ceiling is articulated by five rows of coffers, four-foot square and one foot deep; the dimensions of the coffers in the addition are slightly different. Three holes punctuate the center row and indicate the previous placement of vents. The height of the sanctuary, as specified by the architect, is thirty-seven feet from aisle floor to top of cornice. The walls are plaster with beaded panel wainscot below sill level. Walls were last painted with a green hue, the ceiling sky blue; below an older peach color is evident. Stenciled Greek key and anthemion patterns are still discernible within the coffers, the cornice, around the windows, and along the top of the wainscot. The original sanctuary was terminated on the north end by monumental pilasters, met by the curved front of the gallery. Davis' description and an interior cross section of the church indicate that the pulpit was designed "without molding or panel, but rich in imitation gold, marble, and bronze," and rested on a raised wood platform.<sup>15</sup> The pew platforms originally rose four inches above the aisle floor;<sup>16</sup> the aisle floors were raised at an unknown time. The tongue and grooved Southern hard pine boards, which ran north to south, are visible through the current linoleum sheathing.

Alterations to the building made in 1867-68 are represented by the area north of the terminus of the gallery. As with the exterior, Harney showed great respect and sensitivity in integrating the additions into the original design. A raised wood platform now rests within the space of the addition. It is accessed by two flights of wood stairs corresponding with the center aisles and an additional flight on the west side; a set of stairs below the west side leads into the basement. The center of the north wall projects outward into the sanctuary space and is framed by large pilasters. An elliptically-shaped arch with plaster molding and keystone frames a large niche within the center of this projection. It is believed that a trompe-l'oeil painting, once obscured by the organ and now covered by a coat of paint, exists within this niche. The lower portion of the north wall is painted black, indicating the most recent use of the platform as a stage. The form of the niche on the north wall is repeated in the arched openings that correspond with the transepts. The head of these arches are comprised of wood fans, with rectilinear wood panels, three across and four deep, below. The eastern transept is, like the western transept, a large high-ceilinged space. The former is currently enclosed with plywood. A shoulder-height paneled wood partition with four and one-half foot doors separates the east transept from the sanctuary. The west transept leads into the smaller entry vestibule. Following modifications, the sanctuary space measured one hundred feet in length by eighty-two feet in width at the transept. The church reopened in April 1868, with a seating capacity of one thousand.

The steep attic access stair is situated in a narrow passageway between the south wall of the gallery and the inside wall of the facade. Visible on the latter is a large timber lintel and stone relieving arch which distribute the weight of the masonry above the large center entrance bay. The stair accesses a wood plank catwalk running the course of the attic space from south to north; a small stair halfway down the walk leads up to the roof and once accessed the dome and lantern. The plaster and lath construction of the coffers and lintels on the ceiling of the portico is clearly evident. The roof of the church is supported by a system of twelve large king-post timber trusses of mortise and tenon construction; Davis noted that "the contractor [would] furnish all the iron straps and bolts for securing the truss rafters and brace beams in roof and dome."<sup>17</sup> Two smaller trusses with a

<sup>15</sup> "A Description," *Newburgh Gazette*; "D. Church, Newburgh," drawing with wash attributed to Davis by Jane Davies. Drawing #196, A.J. Davis Collection, Map and Print Room, New York Historical Society.

<sup>16</sup> Davis, "Specifications," 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

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perpendicular alignment flank the truss supporting the portico roof; these three trusses replaced the originals in 1981, at which time iron plates were installed to reinforce the remaining trusses. A thorough inspection of the roof revealed no structural evidence of the dome, therefore it is likely that the entire roof was rebuilt following the failure of the dome.

There is a basement beneath the entire length of the building, including the portico. It clears eleven feet in height, provided by an eight foot below grade excavation. The light wells, prior to being overgrown with underbrush, allowed sufficient light to penetrate this lower floor. Access from the interior is provided from the stair in the southeast corner of the vestibule, in addition to a flight situated below the west side of the stage. Exterior access is gained via the west light well entrance and the flight below the east side of the portico. The main space is in the north end and is lit by five large windows. A single window on the west elevation retains its original four over eight double hung wood sash, minus glass. A small stage is centered along the north end, reached by wood stairs on the southwest side near the stair from the transept. The walls and ceiling were once plastered. The wood flooring has been removed and what remains is rock and wet earth; the original Doric order colonettes have been temporarily replaced with sturdy wood braces. South of the main room are the kitchen, to the east, and the original Sunday school room, to the west. Behind these rooms, under the portico, are restrooms and the oil tanks, the latter installed with the central furnace in 1948. The basement suffers from an advanced state of decay due to extensive water damage that continues to threaten the foundation.

## 8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

*Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:*

Nationally:  Statewide:  Locally:

*Applicable National Register Criteria:* A  B  C  D

*Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):* A  B  C  D  E  F  G

*NHL Criteria:* CRITERION 4, Exception 1

*NHL Theme(s):* Expressing Cultural Values: architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design.

*Areas of Significance:* Architecture

*Period(s) of Significance:* 1835- circa 1845.

*Significant Dates:* 1835-37, circa 1845.

*Cultural Affiliation:*

Architect/Builder: Davis, Alexander Jackson, architect; Warren, Russell, superintendent, early stages of construction; Niven, Thornton MacNess, stonecutter; Whitmarsh, Alvah, carpenter; Gerard and Halsey, stonemasons; Hill and Ball, tanners; Farrington and Lander, superintendence after Warren.

*Historic Contexts:* Greek Revival Architecture

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*State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.*

**Introduction**

The Dutch Reformed Church is nationally significant as an outstanding, largely intact Greek Revival style church designed by Alexander Jackson Davis, one of the style's foremost practitioners. Begun in 1835 and completed in 1837, it is the last extant Greek Revival style church directly attributable to Davis that retains design integrity consistent with the architect's original intentions.<sup>18</sup> It remains perhaps the finest and most extensively documented example from a dwindling body of ecclesiastical work associated with one of the premier architects active in nineteenth century America.

The building is distinguished by an exceptionally bold and skillfully designed composition, featuring a monumental pedimented Ionic portico and dramatically scaled entrance. Sited in imposing fashion on a bluff overlooking the approach up the Hudson River from the Highlands, the church commanded the attention of all northbound river traffic, at a time when this waterway lay at the very heart of the nation's economic expansion and cultural consciousness. The Dutch Reformed Church is a potent reminder of the early part of Davis' career, a time when his gifted hand contributed significantly to the emergence of the Greek Revival style in the United States. It is a dignified statement of the architect's virtuosity and vision, a nationally significant cultural landmark recalling the early history of the American republic.

The Greek Revival emerged as the dominant American architectural style during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, tempered by a fervent nationalism and the needs of an increasingly self-conscious democracy. Struggling to assert itself at home and abroad, the young republic consciously emulated the cultural achievements of ancient Greece with an enthusiasm that lent form to native expression. A resurgent interest in classical culture captivated the American imagination, influenced by the eighteenth century archeological excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii, and intensified by sympathy for Greece in her revolt against the Ottoman Empire. During the great age of Jacksonian expansion and prosperity, the 'free classicism'<sup>19</sup> of the Greek Revival permeated the farthest reaches of the republic, uniting the national architectural landscape. Manifested in high style and vernacular examples alike, the influence of the style pervaded all levels of American building, and lasted nearly four decades.

It was a period of remarkable innovation and imaginative design, a time when the American architect struggled for professional recognition and a greater range of creative freedom and expression. Among the talented designers figuring prominently in the success of the Greek Revival, the contribution of Alexander Jackson Davis looms large. His association with Ithiel Town represented the first significant architectural partnership in the nation, a collaboration widely recognized for its broad impact on the Greek Revival throughout the nation. Davis emerged as an extremely capable designer, the assured drafting hand behind many of the firm's largest and most distinguished commissions. Daring and versatile, he was blessed with a restless imagination. Unlike

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<sup>18</sup> Jane Davies, "Works and Projects," in *Alexander Jackson Davis, 1803-1892*, ed. Amelia Peck (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1992), 105. This comprehensive list of the architect's work was compiled by noted Davis historian Jane Davies, based on information in Davis' Day Books and Journal, in addition to drawings, letters, and other materials. Of six churches designed by Davis in the Greek Revival style between 1829 and 1835, only two remain, the Dutch Reformed Church and the First Presbyterian Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina (1831). The Fayetteville church has been heavily altered. The attribution for a seventh church, the Second Presbyterian Church in Madison, Indiana (1834) remains uncertain.

<sup>19</sup> Roger Kennedy, *Greek Revival America* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1989), 19. Kennedy uses the term 'free classicism,' in describing the stylistic vocabulary of the Greek Revival as "very seldom Greek and almost never scrupulously exact in its use of antique models."

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many of his contemporaries, Davis approached his work from the standpoint of an artist, developing designs with remarkable sensitivity toward visual effect and setting. His influence had a lasting impact on the development of the architectural profession and the culmination of the classical revival, to which he contributed numerous outstanding designs.

### **Development of the Greek Revival**

The great classical revival in American architecture that culminated during the 1830s and 1840s with the Greek Revival owed its success in large measure to developments in Europe during the preceding century. Throughout England and the Continent during the eighteenth century, the cultural achievements of ancient Rome and Greece were studied and celebrated with a renewed vigor, to an extent unknown since the Italian Renaissance.

Excavations made under the auspices of Kings Charles III of Spain at Herculaneum beginning in 1738, and a decade later at Pompeii, provided a new impetus for the examination of classical forms and a reinterpretation of antiquity by contemporary European intellectuals. The Prussian-born scholar Johann Joachim Winckelmann, an early interpreter of antique artifacts and art historian, elevated the material culture of classical civilization to a position of prominence in contemporary thought. By the second half of the eighteenth century, English publications including Stuart and Revett's *The Antiquities of Athens*, Robert Adam's *Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro in Dalmatia* (1764), and Thomas Major's *Ruins of Paestum* (1768), provided the first accurate reproductions of classical architecture and contributed to the broadening influence of the classical aesthetic and the growing body of knowledge concerning specific ancient sources. Neoclassicism found expression in the architecture of Adam and Soane in England and Ledoux in France, and arrived in nascent form on the new continent in the English style guides to which the American builder was greatly indebted.

The America of the early to mid-nineteenth century proved fertile ground for the development of classical forms into a full-blown national style. In the decade following the War of 1812, the republic, aroused by nationalism generated by the conflict, produced the first significant expressions of national pride. The 1820s and 1830s proved a period of intense cultural activity in the country, as a new urge to American life and a strong nationalist impulse found outlet in the creative energies of any number of native traditions. The landscape painting movement pioneered by Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, and Thomas Doughty, among others, signified the first widespread attempt to capture the native spirit within the framework of a broad cultural context. In depicting images of the American landscape these painters were involved not only with the creation of art, but with the "iconography of nationalism."<sup>20</sup> In literature the work of James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, and Ralph Waldo Emerson laid the foundation for a uniquely American tradition, one which blossomed fully during the 1850s in the work of Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, and Thoreau. The novels of Cooper represented an exercise in national definition, a conscious effort to chronicle the current native condition and the distinctive character of American life. In architecture a similar native yearning found expression in the late 1820s and 1830s, expanding on the earlier achievements of Thomas Jefferson's Virginia State Capitol and Benjamin Henry Latrobe's Bank of Pennsylvania,<sup>21</sup> and shaped by the nation's continued fascination with classical antiquity. Just as Cole and Cooper established the validity of their profession's status during the period, so too did the American architect. The American creative mind had been stirred, inspired by the conditions of the native experience, and sought shape and definition for the first expressions of national greatness.

<sup>20</sup> Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape Painting, 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 15.

<sup>21</sup> The Virginia State Capitol, 1785-88, designed by Jefferson in association with C.L. Clerisseau, was the first temple-fronted building erected in America, based on the design of the Roman temple Maison Carree at Nimes, which Jefferson visited while in France. The Bank of Pennsylvania, 1798-1800, was the first American building to employ a pure Grecian order, the Ionic, possibly quoted from Stuart and Revett's *The Antiquities of Athens*.

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The republic that searched deeply for a cultural identity changed rapidly and at a tremendous pace in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. An unprecedented period of geographic expansion, initiated by the purchase of Louisiana in 1803 during the administration of Thomas Jefferson, more than doubled the territory of the nation and strengthened her position on the continent. The first stirrings of industry in the textile mills of New England signaled the onset of the industrial age on the new continent and the modest beginnings of national economic greatness. With the renewal of hostilities in Europe, American shipping interests consumed a greater percentage of the mercantile trade, placing the republic in a precarious political position between Great Britain and France. Transgressions by British navy against native mercantile interests, and the aggressive posture of those who sought continued westward expansion and the destruction of British interests in North America, led ultimately to the War of 1812. Following three years of largely unsuccessful military campaigns, Andrew Jackson captured a stunning victory over British forces at New Orleans in 1815, infusing a spirit of optimism and confidence to a nation mired in self-doubt and disunity.

Nationalism thrived in the wake of the conflict, transcending the sectionalism that had increasingly burdened national unity, while the republic turned its attention increasingly toward domestic concerns. The war helped free the fertile lands west of the Appalachians from British and Native American control, previously hindering expansion, leading to a boom in westward migration. Although Jefferson's embargo of 1807 and the war crippled the thriving maritime trade, it provided the impetus for the growth of the native manufacturing plant and the development of a self-sufficient market economy. Internal improvements in the form of turnpikes and canals connected the various regions of the nation, creating a vast commercial network that made possible the dramatic economic expansion of the 1820s and 1830s. Between 1790 and 1820 the population rose from approximately four million to upwards of ten million,<sup>22</sup> with a corresponding increase in native-born Americans. The great growth of the city and the interrelated rise of industry was underway.

Beginning in the 1820s, and thoroughly popularized by the end of the 1830s, the Greek Revival attained its position as the dominant national style, apparent in the new buildings being erected in Boston, Washington, Philadelphia, New York, New Orleans, and Charleston. It was a period in which the American architect was faced with an increasingly broad range of building types, challenged, as it were, by the needs of an expanding democracy.

The Greek Revival, once initiated, spread rapidly across the face of the country, in the form of town halls, churches, courthouses, state capitols, and private residences. Two decades passed between the completion of Latrobe's Bank of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, 1798-1800, and the first widespread acceptance of Greek forms in native building. Perhaps, as argued by Talbot Hamlin, it required the Greek Rebellion of the 1820s to "set men's minds aflame with the idea of the beauty and the grandeur that was ancient Greece."<sup>23</sup> The 1820s and 1830s witnessed the maturity of any number of talented architects capable of interpreting the restrained rational vocabulary of classicism, men like Robert Mills, William Strickland, and Davis. Their talents were engaged in designing the monumental civic buildings essential to the function of democratic government, the expressions of national greatness that lent themselves readily to romantic associations with antiquity. Minard Lafever and John Haviland, in the tradition popularized by Asher Benjamin's *The Country Builder's Assistant*, made available to the rural carpenter-builder style guides that facilitated the remarkable adaptation of Greek Revival forms to the vernacular.<sup>24</sup> The face of the nation was being shaped, and its architectural vocabulary was

<sup>22</sup> William Lerner, ed., *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1975). Population statistics for this and subsequent references have been gleaned from the tables in Chapter A, Part 1.

<sup>23</sup> Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America: Being An Account of Important Trends in American Architecture and American Life Prior to the War Between the States* (New York: Dover Publications, 1942, repr. 1964), 36.

<sup>24</sup> Dell Upton, "Pattern Books and Professionalism: Aspects in the Transformation of Domestic Architecture in America, 1800-1860,"

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decidedly Grecian.

The success of the Greek Revival was nurtured by the prevailing economic forces at work contemporary with its development, emerging as an expression of the prosperity and exuberance characteristic of the period. During the early to mid-1830s the nation was galvanized under the unifying force of economic expansion, as the potential of the previous decade was fully realized. Sustained economic growth led to a nationwide boom, one that reached its height at the mid-point of the decade, followed by the depression of 1837-43. By 1830 the population of the nation approached thirteen million, with the balance between the growing industrial centers and agricultural interests still maintained. Settlement west of the Appalachians continued with vigor, as the great promise of the American continent was exploited. The Greek Revival was carried with the tide of settlement, along the Mohawk and Susquehanna rivers, The Erie Canal, and the Ohio River, into the mid-West and the Great Lakes region, buoyed by the optimism and confidence of a nation grasping the true potential of its greatness.

During this remarkable age of American exuberance and confidence, Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) emerged as the defining personality. The American heart remained loyal to the victor of Horseshoe Bend and New Orleans, electing Jackson to the presidency in 1828. It was, in the words of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., a “favorable atmosphere for new idols,” and although his actual politics were vague, he was carried into office on the appeal of his status as a national hero.<sup>25</sup> In Jackson the great myth of frontier culture found full expression, and his ascendancy to office signaled the arrival of mass-politics and a new era of popular democracy. There was a marked sense of national unity during the Jacksonian period, a time when it seemed as though the great promise of the American political experiment would transcend sectional rifts. Jackson helped consolidate the power of the national government and in so doing contributed greatly to the rising collective consciousness of the nation. The culmination of the Greek Revival and its widespread acceptance as a broadly pervasive national style mirrored closely an age defined by Andrew Jackson. It was a period of opportunity, economic vitality, and above all national self-confidence, a time when potential was achieved and new horizons proposed. The architecture of the Greek Revival embraced the unique conditions of the contemporary experience, unifying the Republic under the mantle of national classicism expressed by rural carpenter and professional architect alike.

Admiration for classical Greece was enhanced in the decade of the 1820s during Greek Revolt against the Ottoman Empire, which stirred American passions by recalling their own struggle against English colonialism. Allegations of atrocities by the Turks in their attempts to quell the rebellion were widely publicized, and the issue of intervention on behalf of the revolutionaries received considerable national attention. Pro-Hellenic enthusiasts collected money to support the revolt and urged American support for the cause of freedom. The English poet Lord Byron, an important chronicler of the revolution, fell during the conflict, further enhancing the romantic imagery of the distant struggle. A widespread fascination with Greek culture engaged the national consciousness and found its most developed expression in the architectural vocabulary of American designers during the 1830s and 1840s. Throughout the republic classical place names and proper names found their way onto towns and cities, expressive of the deep associationalism that Americans felt towards ancient Greece. In a surging era of national self-definition, a strong symbolic bond emerged, linking America with the achievements of ancient Greek democracy.

Throughout the country the influence of the Greek Revival penetrated deeply, woven into the fabric of new construction and in some areas wedded with earlier regional sensibilities. The books of Lafever, Haviland, and the later publications of Asher Benjamin, among others, provided the aspiring mason-builder and carpenter-

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*Winterthur Portfolio* 19, nos. 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 1984). An excellent discussion of the development of the architectural profession and the corresponding rise in the influence of builder's handbooks and style guides.

<sup>25</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1953), 36-43.

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architect the designs from which they could build in the popular vein. Throughout the country and especially in newly settled areas where construction was, for the most part, free from older traditions, the Greek Revival emerged as the dominant style. Temple fronted houses and those with fully pedimented front facing gables gained widespread popularity during the 1830s and 1840s as the preferred form for domestic architecture. In urban areas the style lent itself readily to row housing, with buildings featuring austere facades and doorways enriched with Grecian detail. In the south the temple fronted plantation house appeared in an especially grand and ostentatious form, and remains the preeminent architectural symbol of the antebellum economics of cotton and slavery. The saturation of Greek forms throughout the republic resulted from the widespread use of builders guides and handbooks, which helped standardize forms to some extent geographically, and the settlement of new areas by those familiar with Greek examples elsewhere. In some areas, particularly New England, the traditions of Robert Adam and William Pain persisted as the preferred vocabulary of the local builder, and hesitancy to commit to Greek forms in their purest was not uncommon.<sup>26</sup> Tradition was often hard to abandon.

### **Biographical Overview and Early Career of Alexander Jackson Davis**

Few architects active at the mid-point of the nineteenth-century influenced the American scene as profoundly as Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892). Gifted with an innate sense of design and what Jane Davies termed an “expansive imagination,”<sup>27</sup> Davis balanced the boldness of his creative vision with technical skill and an artistic sensibility new to the contemporary American architectural field. His early partnership with Ithiel Town in the 1830s coincided with the emergence of the Greek Revival style in New York and saw Davis’ transformation from precocious student to leading designer. The firm of Town and Davis (1829-35, 1842-43)<sup>28</sup> contributed significantly to the changing architectural landscape of the nation and championed the use of Greek Revival forms for civic and ecclesiastical architecture. Later Davis moved increasingly away from classically inspired models, and, working in association with Andrew Jackson Downing, helped popularize the Picturesque aesthetic. Unable to translate his romantic designs into illustrations suitable for publication, Downing turned to his friend Davis’ skilled hand for renderings to augment his highly influential books. Davis became a leading proponent of Gothic design, responsible, in association with Town, for the design of Glen Ellen (1832-33) and later his own domestic masterpiece, Lyndhurst (1838, 1865-67), developing a fluid command of the pictorial and compositional principles of the Picturesque.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the course of a career that spanned seven decades, Davis showed a willingness to experiment with new styles and influences, his sketches often revealing “a most eager, creative, and inventive mind.”<sup>30</sup> Fittingly, he often referred to himself as an ‘architectural composer,’ on his business card and in the New York City Directory.

Born in July 1803, Davis spent portions of his youth in New Jersey and central New York. Working as a typesetter in Alexandria, Virginia in 1818 with his half brother Samuel, editor of the *Alexandria Gazette*, Davis honed the technical skill that later would become a trademark of his practice. During his career he showed unequalled ability as a draftsman, executing with clarity buildings inspired by his far-ranging imagination. Davis enjoyed a remarkable command of drawing and watercolor, enabling the accurate transition of idea into design. Returning to New York City in 1823, he began establishing a name for himself professionally on account of his

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<sup>26</sup> Hamlin, *Greek Revival*, 163.

<sup>27</sup> Davies, “Alexander Jackson Davis, Creative American Architect,” in *Davis*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> The firm of Town and Davis included James Dakin between May 1832 and November 1833. Dakin had first apprenticed under Davis in the office in 1829 and with his acceptance as full partner in 1832 the firm was renamed Town, Davis, and Dakin. Arthur Scully, Jr., *James Dakin, Architect* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1973), chapter 1. The definitive work on the Town and Davis Office remains Roger Hale Newton’s *Town and Davis: Architects, Pioneers in American Revivalist Architecture, 1812-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).

<sup>29</sup> Frederick Koeper and Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 183.

<sup>30</sup> Hamlin, *Greek Revival*, 157.

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highly accurate architectural renderings and city views, and gained drafting experience in the office of Josiah Brady. Around this time Davis began familiarizing himself with the volumes on architecture in Ithiel Town's library, a remarkable array of books with estimates ranging upwards of ten thousand volumes, and a print collection numbering between twenty and twenty five thousand.<sup>31</sup> Particularly influential were Stuart and Revett's volumes *The Antiquities of Athens*,<sup>32</sup> which provided the first detailed studies of Athenian architecture. Both Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Henry Latrobe, early innovators in the classical revival, were known to own copies. Of the work Davis wrote, "1828 March 15 First study of Stuart's Athens, from which I date professional practice."<sup>33</sup> These volumes would have a profound effect on the young architect, influencing many of his Greek Revival style designs, including the Dutch Reformed Church.

In February 1829 Davis entered into practice with Ithiel Town (1784-1844), whose professional association with Martin Thompson had recently dissolved. Town, credited by Hamlin as possessing a "powerful personality," was a founding member of the National Academy of Design, a "great job getter...a scholar and an idealist."<sup>34</sup> Davis' reputation had grown rapidly, his drawings the basis for engravings in many prominent city publications, and the older architect readily accepted the talented young draftsman into partnership. Davis brought with him the creative energy, skill and enthusiasm for classical forms that greatly influenced the direction of the partnership. During the 1830s, a decade characterized as "essentially the era of the triumph of the Greek Revival in New York,"<sup>35</sup> the firm of Town and Davis emerged as a leading interpreter of the style. Unlike other eastern cities, where the Greek Revival had firmly established itself during the 1820s, the architectural landscape of New York City had remained dominated by the conservative late Colonial traditions popularized by John McComb, Jr. (1763-1853). New York architects like Town, Davis, and Thompson sought to unseat these influences, and turned increasingly to the purer classical sensibilities of Grecian antiquity.

These were critical years in Alexander Jackson Davis' career, a period in which his drafting and design skills were given room to expand and flourish. Town's frequent absences from the office, due in large part to his patented design of the lattice truss for covered bridges, provided the young architect the opportunity to take on a larger share of the firm's commissions. Designs for churches, row houses, civic buildings, domestic residences, banks, warehouses, and collegiate structures were explored by Davis in a highly imaginative and innovative fashion. The Town and Davis offices were responsible some of the nation's finest Greek Revival style buildings erected during the 1830s, including the United States Custom House, New York (1833-42), the Indiana and North Carolina State Capitols (1831-35 and 1833-40, respectively), and the French Protestant Church, New York (1831-34). Davis' talented hand and that of his student, James Dakin, provided the refined interior details for Seth Geer's imposing New York City row, La Grange Terrace, 1830-33, known popularly as 'Colonnade Row.'<sup>36</sup> The nine building row, with its colossal two-story colonnade comprised of twenty-eight Corinthian columns, represented one of the earliest and truly monumental expressions of the Greek Revival style in the city.

Nowhere, perhaps, is the impact of the Town and Davis partnership better read than in the firm's designs for state capitols and government buildings erected during the optimistic era of Andrew Jackson. Here the Greek

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<sup>31</sup> Lydia Sigourney, "Residence of Ithiel Town, Esq.," *Ladies Companion* 10 (January 1839): 123-26.

<sup>32</sup> James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens*, 4 vols. (London: John Haberkon, 1762-1816, repr. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968). Supplementary volume issued in 1830.

<sup>33</sup> Davis, *Day Book*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Hamlin, *Greek Revival*, 138. Town, according to Hamlin, "realized and accepted his real part in the great Classic Revival movement in America- that of being an inspiration, a counselor, a sort of public-relations counsel, and also... a magnificent patron as well."

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

<sup>36</sup> It remains unclear who the actual architect of 'Colonnade Row' was; some architectural historians, including Hamlin, have inferred that Davis was in fact its designer. Kennedy believes the design might be the work of Charles Reichardt. Surviving documentation indicates the architect as Robert Hingham of Albany. The attribution of Seth Geer, the builder, is unlikely. Davis and Dakin are known to have contributed interior designs.



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Revival occurred with the strongest symbolic, romantic, and historic implications, expressive of the overriding confidence of an emerging democracy seeking form for its political achievements. Although Town and Davis weren't the first to design state houses in the nascent Greek Revival style, their work is largely credited for its widespread acceptance for governmental applications. The Connecticut Statehouse at New Haven, constructed between 1827-31 to designs largely by Town, was highly influential, and followed soon thereafter by designs, in Davis hand, for the Indiana and North Carolina State Capitols. With its strict interpretation of the Grecian Doric order, the innovative New Haven building carried with it a sense of monumentality then unknown in statehouse construction, and became an extremely marketable scheme that proved the basis for other civic commissions by the firm.<sup>37</sup>

For the Indianapolis capitol, the firm experimented for the first time with the temple form and dome combination, a scheme repeated on other civic commissions and utilized by Davis for the design of the French Protestant and Dutch Reformed Church. Davis served as a design consultant on the Ohio capitol at Columbus, in an attempt to unify the proposals of Henry Walters, Martin Thompson, and Thomas Cole. The Columbus building captured the Greek Revival aesthetic at its purest- expressively bold, grand in scale, the embodiment of simplicity and permanence. It ranks among the finest of the public buildings erected during the era, and its final design undoubtedly owes a certain debt to Davis.<sup>38</sup> The designs for the United States Custom House, although the victim of modifications dictated by Treasury Department officials which greatly disappointed Davis, readily displayed his ability to synthesize a specific archeological source, the Parthenon, into an otherwise innovative and practical design.

Contemporary with the emergence and success of the Greek Revival in New York during the 1830s was the advancement of the architectural profession itself. The tradition of the local carpenter-builder that had dominated American building in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries found itself for the first time seriously challenged by the evolving role of the architect. Among the many important contributions made to the architectural landscape by Town and Davis, none can surpass the impact their affiliation had on the future of the profession in the United States.

Davis and Town were among a core group of architects that made significant strides in elevating the architect to a position similar to that held by other professionals. Both men were well connected to the prominent artistic figures of the day, Town a co-founder of the National Academy of Design, and Davis an intimate of Thomas Cole with affiliations to the American Institute of Arts. The two men found themselves "accepted members of the cultural aristocracy," according to Hamlin, and their offices "symbolized, as they forwarded, the first acceptance in New York of the architect as an artist and professional man."<sup>39</sup> In 1836 William Strickland, later architect of the Tennessee State Capitol (1845-59), and his pupil Thomas Walter, in association with Davis, founded the American Institution of Architects, a short-lived yet important professional association that included many of the nation's prominent architects.<sup>40</sup> Following the example set forth by Jefferson and Latrobe, the American architectural profession struggled to establish itself in the first half of the nineteenth century, seeking increased recognition and a greater range of creative freedom and personal expression.

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<sup>37</sup> Henry-Russell Hitchcock and William Searle, *Temples of Democracy: The State Capitols of the United States* (New York: Harcourt Bruce and Jovanovich, 1976), 84.

<sup>38</sup> William H. Pierson, Jr., *American Buildings and Their Architects: The Colonial and Neoclassical Styles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 420.

<sup>39</sup> Hamlin, *Greek Revival*, 140.

<sup>40</sup> The roll call for the Institution included many of the prominent architects of the day. Original members included Davis, Strickland, Walter, John Haviland and Issiah Rogers; later members included Town, Lafever, Asher Benjamin, Alexander Parris, and Ammi Young.

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In August 1835, Davis entered into a brief partnership with Russell Warren (1783-1860), following his professional break from Town the previous spring. Warren was born in Tiverton, Rhode Island, in 1783, the son of Gamaliel Warren and a Mayflower descendant.<sup>41</sup> He arrived in Bristol in 1800, apparently with an established reputation as a designer and engineer of considerable skill.<sup>42</sup> Early in his career Warren designed in the late Colonial, or Federal vein, but turned increasingly to Greek forms during the 1820s. According to Hamlin, the widespread success of the Greek Revival in Rhode Island was basically the work of two men, Warren and James Bucklin.<sup>43</sup> In association with Bucklin, Warren designed the Providence Arcade, completed in 1828. With its bold granite Ionic colonnade and deep entablature, the Arcade represented one of the styles earliest manifestations in the state, and signaled Warren's importance as a regional progenitor of the new classical idiom. Warren is similarly credited with designing the Zion Episcopal Church, one of Newport's earliest Greek Revival buildings, completed in 1834. Other Greek Revival commissions in Newport included the Levi Gale house, circa 1834, and the William Vernon House, circa 1835.<sup>44</sup> Around this time Warren left behind his Rhode Island practice and moved to New York.

Warren was twenty years Davis' senior, and, as an experienced carpenter-builder, architect, and bridge engineer, possessed the knowledge of building fundamentals and experience that undoubtedly led to his association with the younger designer. Davis first became familiar with Warren's work during a trip to Providence in 1828, viewing and sketching two of the latter's buildings, the Arcade and the Westminster Congregational Church. Records indicate that Davis and Warren, whose partnership lasted until the middle of 1836, collaborated on a small number of projects, of which only the Dutch Reformed Church and the Gothic Revival First Congregational Church, New Bedford, Massachusetts (1835-38) are extant.<sup>45</sup>

### **Historical Overview of the Settlement and Development of Newburgh**

The city today known as Newburgh was first settled in the winter of 1708-09 by a group of fifty-three Palatine refugees from the war-ravaged Rhine Valley in Germany. Sponsored by the English Government, the settlement had been established with the intention of producing naval stores, including tar, pitch, turpentine, and rosin. The party, led by Lutheran Reverend Joshua Kocherthal, received from the English in 1719 a patent in excess of two thousand acres, entitled the "Palatine Parish by the Quassick," named for the stream that forms the southern boundary of the city. During the 1730s the initial German settlement grew with the arrival of new settlers, including those with Scotch-English, Dutch, and French Huguenot origins, coinciding with a decline in the Lutheran congregation. Many of the original settlers were migrating to fertile valleys further west.<sup>46</sup>

The situation worsened for the German settlers in the 1740s, as religious antagonisms continued to divide the growing settlement. By 1743 the increased influence of the Scotch-English settlers had led to the re-christening of the city as "Newburgh." Confrontations between the Lutherans and English ministers in 1744 and 1747 signaled the end for the Quassick Lutheran church. Corresponding with the dramatic decline of Palatine influence was a period of commercial expansion initiated by the efforts of Alexander Colden, son of

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<sup>41</sup> Antoinette Downing and Vincent Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 117.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Hamlin, *Greek Revival*, 181.

<sup>44</sup> Downing, *Newport*, 118-119.

<sup>45</sup> Davies, "Works," 108.

<sup>46</sup> Portions of this section are indebted to National Register documentation for the East End Historic District, prepared by Mark Peckham and Neil Larson, August 1985. Field Services Bureau, Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Waterford, New York.

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Cadwallader Colden. The younger Colden, recognizing the tremendous economic potential of a river landing, petitioned Governor George Clarke for water rights and the privilege of operating a ferry from Newburgh across the river, gaining approval soon after. In 1751 Colden and others again petitioned Clarke, this time requesting permission to rent the former Palatine glebe land to support a minister and a schoolmaster. In 1752, under direction of the governor, the attorney general prepared a patent conveying the land to the Church of England, with Colden and Richard Albertson as trustees. Thus ended the early period of Palatine German influence.

By the mid-eighteenth century the settlement had developed as a prominent river landing on the banks of the Hudson River, roughly mid-way between New York City and Albany. Shipbuilding, the production of ships stores and lumber, and a small but significant river trade all contributed to the rise of the Newburgh waterfront; a ferry connected the hamlet with the east shore of the river. Numerous mills were established in the vicinity of the settlement, particularly along the Quassick Creek.

With the coming of the American Revolution, the small river hamlet gained a position of great strategic significance, especially during the English occupation of New York City. The ferry proved a critical link between the New England Colonies to the east and the middle Atlantic colonies south and west. Docks, storehouses, and barracks were erected in 1777 to facilitate and protect communications and the transport of military goods and personnel across the river. The population of the village swelled with the arrival of refugees from New York City and the continued quartering of troops in and around the settlement. By 1782 the main body of the Continental Army was encamped in the upper Highlands vicinity, with Washington making his headquarters in the Jonathan Hasbrouck house. Although the hamlet survived the war largely unscathed, the effect of the English blockade of New York City had temporarily crippled the local shipbuilding and shipping trades.

The rise of Newburgh as a commercial hub of statewide distinction commenced in 1801 with the incorporation of the Newburgh-Cochecton Turnpike Company, which constructed a road linking Newburgh and the Hudson River with the upper reaches of the Delaware River. Prior to the completion of the Erie Canal, this road was one of the primary links to the interior of the country and a favored route of westward bound settlers from the lower New England states. Later extended as far as the western reaches of New York and augmented by the completion of other routes, the turnpike provided Newburgh with a stimulus for increased growth. Although the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 and the Delaware and Hudson Canal in 1828 significantly diminished the importance of Newburgh as a center of inland trade, the village continued to experience significant growth and economic diversification.

Contemporaneous with this economic growth and prosperity in the 1830s came a cultural and intellectual awakening that manifested itself in the river hamlet with the establishment of the Library Association and the Newburgh Lyceum. The construction of a number of important public buildings, most notably the Dutch Reformed Church, likewise signaled this awakening. After lamenting the previous “spirit of money getting,” the editor of the *Newburgh Gazette*, writing in 1837, made note of a “manifest change.” He continued:

Let our population do as much for the cause of learning during the coming as they have during the past year, and the scholar and the man of leisure will say with pride of feeling as our merchants now say, “I am a citizen of Newburgh.”<sup>47</sup>

Dubbed Newburgh’s “Age of Architecture” by Thornton MacNess Niven biographer Arthur Channing Downs,

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<sup>47</sup> *Newburgh Telegraph*, 9 February 1837.

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Jr., this period witnessed the sudden appearance of architect-designed buildings.<sup>48</sup> Work designed by Davis and Warren, Niven, and the New York City builder-architect Calvin Pollard (1797-1850), beginning in 1835, provided the first prominent expressions of the Greek Revival style in Newburgh. Andrew Jackson Downing emerged soon after as the preeminent tastemaker of the picturesque aesthetic, and, working in association with talented men like Davis, Calvert Vaux, and Frederick Withers, helped transform the river hamlet into a flourishing center of architectural activity.

### **Davis, Newburgh, and the Dutch Reformed Church**

Alexander Jackson Davis had longstanding ties to the Newburgh region. His maternal great-grandfather, James Jackson, settled in New Windsor in 1750. His mother, Julia Jackson Davis, came from Florida, a small town to the west. Davis is known to have visited a favorite aunt in Florida, disembarking at Newburgh from river steamers, and proceeding overland by foot, or, in subsequent years, by carriage.<sup>49</sup> Later, during his eleven-year association with Andrew Jackson Downing, Davis visited his friend and informal partner at Highland Gardens on numerous occasions. In addition to the Dutch Reformed Church, Davis designed several residences in Newburgh, including a Greek Revival design drawn with Warren on a house for Christopher Reeve, a member of the church's building committee and local dock owner. Throughout his career Davis showed a fondness for the varied landscapes of the Hudson Valley, designing work for clients in numerous locales. The picturesque allure of the region, which often drew comparisons to the Rhine valley,<sup>50</sup> lent itself readily to Davis' romantic designs and sensitivity to setting and location.

In the early nineteenth century, Newburgh residents wishing to worship with Reformed Protestant Dutch congregations had to travel outside of the hamlet to do so, across the river to Fishkill, or inland, to Montgomery, New Paltz, or New Hurley.<sup>51</sup> An increase in the number of residents of Dutch descent from adjoining earlier-settled regions led to attempts to establish a Dutch Church in Newburgh, and in October 1834 the Reverend William Cruickshank arrived, having been sent from New York City to facilitate its organization. Soon thereafter notices appeared in the local newspapers seeking suitable lots for the new edifice. An account published in the local paper in February 1835 proclaimed the formation of the church, "agreeably to the arrangements made [with] the Classis of Orange," and the ordination of elders and deacons.<sup>52</sup> The ordination service, conducted in the Associate Reformed Church, was performed by the Reverend Lee of Montgomery, while the sermon was preached by the Reverend Vanderveer of New Hurley.<sup>53</sup>

Due to what were described as Cruickshank's "indefatigable exertions,"<sup>54</sup> ten thousand dollars was raised for the new building, from the new congregation as well as his New York constituency; services were held in the interim at the Associate Reformed Church and the Academy Building. Cruickshank, installed as the reverend of the new congregation that year, was responsible, in conjunction with the building committee, for the selection of the architect. There remains no indication to determine how Davis was selected; one can only surmise that

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<sup>48</sup> Arthur Channing Downs, Jr., *The Architecture and Life of the Honorary Thornton MacNess Niven* (Goshen, NY: Orange County Community of Museums and Galleries, 1972), 19. Niven ranks among Newburgh's most accomplished nineteenth century architects and was an important regional interpreter of the Greek Revival style. He is credited with designing Newburgh's first Gothic Revival building, The Theological Seminary of the Associate Reformed Synod of New York, 1837-39, and earlier served as the stonecutter for the Dutch Reformed Church.

<sup>49</sup> Davies, "Dutch Reformed Church, Newburgh." Unpublished typescript. City Engineer's Office, City Hall, Newburgh.

<sup>50</sup> Frances F. Dunwell, *The Hudson River Highlands* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 41.

<sup>51</sup> *125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Dutch Reformed Church, 1836-1960* (Newburgh: Siegfried Press, 1960), 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Newburgh Gazette*, 14 February 1835.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>54</sup> E.M. Ruttenber, *History of the Town of Newburgh* (Newburgh: E.M. Ruttenber and Co., 1859), 220.

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Cruikshank was familiar with Davis either by reputation, or on account of one of the church designs built in association with Town.<sup>55</sup>

Davis corresponded with Reverend Cruickshank and Christopher Reeve at least twice during 1835.<sup>56</sup> Entries in Davis' Day Book indicate the designs for the church were drawn in July of that year at the cost of one hundred dollars; additional drawings were made for Warren in August. In October, the month in which the cornerstone was laid, Cruickshank contacted the architect and requested of him a cut of the French Protestant Church, and asked also for an architectural description of the new building. These, he indicated, would be forwarded, along with an account of the cornerstone ceremonies, to the *Christian Intelligencer*. The description, published in the *Newburgh Gazette* in 1835, was preceded by an account of the laying of the cornerstone:

Having arrived at the elevated and commanding site of the new edifice, near the centre of town, the exercises were commenced by the Rev. Wm. Cruickshank, who read a brief history of the church... The corner stone was then laid by Gen. Issac Betknap, a patriot of the Revolution, and one of the elders of the church. Having fixed and settled the stone in its place, he raised his venerable hands to heaven, and in language which brought tears to many eyes, and produced the deepest sensations in every heart, besought the blessing of the Triune god to rest upon them, their children, and their children's children, to the latest generation.<sup>57</sup>

Davis, in his surviving specifications for the church, indicated Warren as the superintendent of construction, and stated that work would "be subject to his inspection, for the best interests of the church."<sup>58</sup> Warren, experienced in the carpenter-builder tradition, was responsible for choosing the builders and masons for the work. Thornton MacNess Niven, a local stonecutter and later an architect of regional note, was selected to prepare the capital bases and antae caps. Both Warren and Niven were in Charleston, South Carolina in the 1820s and the possibility remains that the two may have known one another.<sup>59</sup> Following the completion of the Dutch Reformed Church and the dramatic impact it had on local tastes, Niven designed the Orange County Court House, Newburgh, 1841-42, directly across from Davis and Warren's building. Both the form of the lantern and the door configuration of the courthouse reflect the influence of Davis' design. Niven additionally designed Greek Revival style courthouses in Goshen and Monticello, New York. Little is known about the remaining builders. The carpenter, Alvah Whitmarsh, was a native of Brooklyn; the stonemasons, Gerard and Halsey, were local, as were the tanners, Hill and Ball.

It is unknown whether or not Davis was in any way involved with the selection of the site. The first advertisement in the local papers seeking a lot for the proposed church appeared in January 1835,<sup>60</sup> and the earliest documented correspondence between Davis and the building committee dates from July of that year. Davis and Warren appear to have met with Reeve and visited the site in late July or early August.<sup>61</sup> In any event, the architect capitalized on the setting, orienting the building with its towering facade facing a broad expanse of the river in striking Acropolis-like fashion. Like the Ionic temple on the Illisus that the designer so admired, the Dutch Reformed Church commanded "a very beautiful and extensive prospect."<sup>62</sup> Davis, a

<sup>55</sup> Hamlin cited both the West Presbyterian Church on Carmine Street, 1831-32, and the "exquisite" Eglise du Saint Esprit as "especially important in their broad influence." *Greek Revival*, 151.

<sup>56</sup> Letter to Davis from Christopher Reeve, 29 July; Letter to Davis from Cruickshank, 14 October. Box 1, Davis Collection, NYPL.

<sup>57</sup> *Newburgh Gazette*, 7 November 1835.

<sup>58</sup> Davis, "Specifications," 8.

<sup>59</sup> Downs, Jr., *Niven*, 13.

<sup>60</sup> *Newburgh Gazette*, 24 January 1835.

<sup>61</sup> Letter to Davis from Reeve.

<sup>62</sup> Stuart and Revett, *Antiquities* 1, "Of the Ionic Temple on the Illisus," Chapter 2, 8.

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designer gifted with the instincts of an artist and a remarkable aesthetic sensitivity, created a dramatic composition harmonizing building with location. Crowning the republic's most vital waterway at the peak of its first significant period of expansion and cultural exploration, the allusion is unmistakable. The siting is in many ways comparable to that of Strickland's Tennessee State Capitol in Nashville, situated prominently at the crest of a hill in similarly commanding fashion, and the designs for Girard College in Philadelphia by Thomas Walter. In all of these examples the designers were particularly sensitive in situating the temple form in isolation within the landscape, creating highly evocative and conspicuous references to Grecian antiquity. An 1842 woodcut of Newburgh reveals the "commanding situation" to which Davis referred, the church rising well above the rooftops of the surrounding hamlet.

Davis indicated that the design was "composed from the two acknowledged best examples of Athenian architecture: the detail from the temple on the Illisus and the general proportion from the tetrastyle portico of the Triune temple of the Erectheus, Minerva Polias, and Pandrosus..."<sup>63</sup> The overall effect of the Ionic temple on the Illisus, with forms "extremely simple, but withal so elegant, and the whole so well executed,"<sup>64</sup> appears to be what Davis was striving for in the Newburgh design. The refined details and austere dignity of this temple, "doubtless...reckoned among those Works of Antiquity which best deserve our attention,"<sup>65</sup> was considered by Davis and others as perhaps the finest example of the Ionic order and furnished the design spirit for the Dutch Reformed Church. Davis' contemporary Minard Lafever also recognized the chaste beauty of this Ionic model. "The simplicity and greatness of its parts," Lafever wrote in *The Young Builder's General Instructor*, "their perfect arrangement, the beautiful turning of the volutes, and the graceful curves of the hem hanging between them, renders this one of the most beautiful and bold examples of this order."<sup>66</sup> The First Reformed Dutch Church in Brooklyn, 1835-35, the only known Greek Revival style church designed by Lafaver,<sup>67</sup> also depended largely on the design vocabulary of the temple on the Illisus.

A comparison between current and historic photographs of the Dutch Reformed Church in Newburgh and engravings in volumes one and two of Stuart and Revett reveals the specific plates from which Davis worked. The columns, capitals, egg and dart necking, column bases, entablature, and raking cornice, were quoted from the temple on the Illisus, illustrated in volume one, chapter two, Plates VI and VII, figure five. The dimensions of the antae and their caps were quoted from Plates V and VIII, figure one. The stenciled anthemion patterns, still discernible on the walls of the interior, were quoted from Plate VIII, figure three. The general proportion to which the architect referred is illustrated in the second volume of Stuart and Revett, chapter two, Plate VII, which offers an engraving of the portico elevation of the Minerva Polias.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, the leaf and dart molding of the gallery fascia is likely derived from the detail of the architrave molding of the Minerva Polias, illustrated on Plate VIII. Through *The Antiquities of Athens*, four volumes of historical sketches and detailed, archeological quality engravings of Grecian landmarks, the first available in the United States,<sup>69</sup> Davis gained his first exposure to the architectural forms of antiquity. He maintained that the study of Greek forms would "inspire just and elevated thoughts" and "deter us from the infatuated admiration of frivolous ornaments and...lead to unity and simplicity in our designs."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> "A Description," *Newburgh Gazette*. Davis also indicated that the lantern surmounting the dome would be patterned after the Choragic monument of Lysicrates at Athens, a late-fourth century example of the Corinthian order quoted often by American architects of the Greek Revival style. A prominent example is the lantern of William Strickland's Philadelphia Exchange Building, 1836.

<sup>64</sup> Stuart and Revett, *Antiquities* 1, "Temple on the Illisus," 7.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

<sup>66</sup> Minard Lafever, *The Young Builder's General Instructor* (Newark: Tuttle and Company, 1829), 32.

<sup>67</sup> Jacob Landy, *The Architecture of Minard Lafever* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 54.

<sup>68</sup> Stuart and Revett, *Antiquities* 2, "Of the Temples of Erectheus, Minerva Polias, and Pandrosus," Chapter 2.

<sup>69</sup> Hamlin, *Greek Revival*, Appendix A.

<sup>70</sup> Davis, "Scrapbook on Grecian Architecture," Davis Collection, NYPL.

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Yet, as was often Davis' habit for Greek Revival style designs, he mixed freely the classicism of ancient Greece with other sources. Many of Town and Davis' most memorable projects-- the United States Customs House, the French Protestant Church, and the Indiana state capitol-- displayed this tendency. The combination of pedimented Greek porticos with Roman dome became a standard for the firm's civic designs, and, as noted by Hamlin, was often criticized.<sup>71</sup> In this amalgam of classical forms so characteristic of Davis' early work lies the essence of 'free classicism' and Greek Revival design. Davis appears to have subscribed to the philosophy that ancient models were to be studied, contemplated, and absorbed; from their lesson a uniquely native style, classical in detail and spirit, could emerge.

Davis additionally cited the Eglise du Saint Esprit, The French Protestant Church in New York City designed in 1831 while in partnership with Ithiel Town, as a model for the exterior of the Newburgh church. The French Protestant Church was widely acclaimed in its day as one of New York City's finest examples of Greek Revival style architecture. The edifice, constructed between 1831 and 1834, was situated on the corner of Franklin and Church Streets, replacing the congregation's church on Pine Street, erected in 1704. A period account published in the *New-York Mirror*, complete with an engraving from a Davis rendering, described the new church:

The form is that of a Greek prostyle temple, with a tetrastyle Ionic portico, deeply recessed, having two columns in the pronaos, forming a double range... The breadth of the front is fifty feet; the height, including steps, is also fifty feet, and the length is one hundred feet... Eight richly ornamented Ionic columns, similar to those of the Erectheion, in the Acropolis of Athens, support a semi-circular arched ceiling. The dome is hemispherical, and rests upon the ceiling... and the whole is panelled [sic] with the Ionic and Lesbian cymatium, eight inches deep, with egg, dart, and leaf enrichment. The exterior of the dome is crowned with a lantern, of the exact size and shape of the monument of Lysicrates, at Athens. The portico is composed from the best examples of Athenian architecture... The front, equally remarkable for simplicity, magnitude, and elegance, is upon Franklin street...<sup>72</sup>

The Eglise du Saint Esprit was constructed of "the best specimen yet furnished" of Sing-sing marble, and built under the superintendence of James Wells. "Original in its proportion," it featured a number of innovative features, including the portico with double-ranged columns, claimed to be the only one of its type in existence, "the fine ancient examples having perished:

and the architect informs us (we know not whether extravagantly) that "the art itself has continued prostrate since the time of Alexander; Rome and England failing in classical architecture, and France and Italy being meretricious."<sup>73</sup>

The interior, with its cruciform floor plan, the arrangement of columns, and the form of the ceiling, was similarly praised for its originality. It proved problematic, however, as the columns obstructed the view of the congregation; they were removed, it appears, shortly after the completion of the building, an episode chronicled in a letter to Davis from James Dakin.<sup>74</sup> The following issue of the *Mirror* ran a cut of the interior, and the

<sup>71</sup> Hamlin, *Greek Revival*, 324. The design of both the Custom House and the Indiana State Capitol were criticized in an editorial published in the April 1835 issue of *The American Monthly Magazine*, among other places.

<sup>72</sup> "L'Eglise Du Saint Esprit, The Church of the French Protestants," *New-York Mirror* 12, no. 22 (29 November 1834), 1.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> In a letter from James Dakin dated 13 March 1833, Dakin informed the architect "that they were going [to] take down the interior

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subsequent issue a description of the church's organ and additional comments regarding the interior.<sup>75</sup> Two of these comments likely affected the Newburgh design. The French Protestant Church lacked a vestibule; the massive doors opened immediately into the sanctuary and as noted proved a distraction when opened by those arriving late. The design of the Dutch Reformed Church addressed this concern. It was also noted that the interior of the French Protestant Church "after a time [became] somewhat unpleasant from the prevalence of white...that cold, trying hue," which may account for the use of a warmer hue for the Newburgh church.

The French Protestant church ranked among Davis' most original, successful, and highly influential early designs. It is extremely likely that Reverend Cruickshank was aware of the French Protestant Church and sought for his congregation a similar edifice. Working, apparently, with considerably less means, he sought from Davis a comparable design, constructed in stucco-covered stone meant to replicate the effect of marble, with a dome not corresponding to the interior space. The result was a building similar to the popular New York example, executed with local materials, and lacking the remarkable interior that had proved troublesome. The dome of the Eglise du Saint Esprit burned in 1839, never to be replaced, and the church itself was demolished in the mid-1860s.

A letter dated April 1836 from Alvah Whitmarsh requested of Davis additional drawings of the fascias on the gallery front, the carpenter fearing he "might not get them exactly as...intended."<sup>76</sup> After lamenting that he might be forced to charge the church additionally for work not represented in his contract and the specifications, Whitmarsh added an appeal regarding the dome. "Don't get anything in the cornice of the lantern that is bad to work if you can help it," the carpenter stated, "it being all circular. Just send me the drawings...in the letter box aboard any boat bound for Newburgh."

Davis' partnership with Russell Warren dissolved in August 1836, at which time his superintendence of the project ended. Davis may have been dissatisfied with Warren's extended periods of absence from their New York City office, apparently not always on business associated with the partnership. It has also been suggested that Davis may have viewed Warren as a financial liability.<sup>77</sup> The final stages of construction were overseen by Daniel Farrington and Benjamin Lander of Newburgh,<sup>78</sup> who, according to Downs, Jr., trained Thornton Niven's brother James, by trade a painter, glazier, and gilder.<sup>79</sup> Davis visited Christopher Reeve in Newburgh the same month in which the association with Warren broke off, at which time the selection of Farrington and Lander may have been decided upon.<sup>80</sup> An entry in Davis' Day Book indicates that he "went to Newburgh to attend to [the] Ref'd Dutch church" in late April 1837, his last recorded visit to the building site.

In later years while compiling lists of his work, Davis commented on the Dutch Reformed Church that it had been "spoiled by Warren."<sup>81</sup> Warren appears to have been responsible for the interior vaulting,<sup>82</sup> yet it remains unclear what specific qualms Davis had with Warren and the construction of the church; the comment probably stemmed from the failure of the dome. In any event the parting of the two architects appears amicable as Davis

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columns of the French Church on account of their obstructing the vision..." Box 1, Davis Collection, NYPL.

<sup>75</sup> *New York Mirror* 12, no. 23, (6 December 1834); *Mirror* 12, no. 24, (13 December 1834).

<sup>76</sup> Letter to Davis from Alvah Whitmarsh, 16 April 1836, Box 1, Davis Collection, NYPL.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Alexander, "The Architecture of Russell Warren" (MA thesis, New York University, 1952), 105. Incomplete transcript in the City Engineer's Office, City Hall, Newburgh.

<sup>78</sup> Eleni Silverman, "Historic American Building Survey: Dutch Reformed Church" (HABS No. NY-6221, May 1970), 3.

<sup>79</sup> Downs, Jr., *Niven*, 51, n. 110.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 22, n. 11b. The author established Davis' presence in Newburgh in August 1836 through an entry in the Davis Day Book, NYPL.

<sup>81</sup> Cited in Alexander, "Warren," 114.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*



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sent Warren a copy of his *Rural Residences* about a year later.<sup>83</sup>

The new church, towering over the river and village on a “beautiful open Square,”<sup>84</sup> was first used for worship on November 13, 1837, with services held in the basement. The official dedication took place on December 7, a “general attendance” having been invited;<sup>85</sup> the sermon was preached by the Reverend DeWitt of New York City. The final cost, twenty thousand dollars, included the lot, materials, construction, and furnishings; local citizens were ask to assist in helping the church carry the burden of debt through donations and the purchase of pews. A local newspaper account championed the remarkable new building:

The church is noble specimen of chaste architecture, the first structure in our village in which the rules of architecture have been at all consulted, and it now stands as an ornament to the village and an honor to its projectors.<sup>86</sup>

The Dutch Reformed church was Newburgh’s first significant Greek Revival building of an ecclesiastical or civic nature.<sup>87</sup> A building of monumental scale and dignified character, its construction proclaimed the triumph of the Greek Revival style in the region, initiating the commission of other similarly styled buildings and undoubtedly influencing innumerable smaller vernacular examples. It likewise symbolized the aspirations of Newburgh, a substantial statement of the village’s prosperity and optimism, erected with a spirit of civic unity. In the broader scope of the national landscape it signaled Davis triumph as one of the style’s most talented practitioners, a refined and mature design representing his early success as a leader in the classical revival. In less than a decade’s time, Davis rose from apprentice to architect of national distinction.

### **National Significance of the Dutch Reformed Church**

It may be Alexander Jackson Davis whose work best embodies the imaginative and innovative design spirit of the mature classical revival period. His Greek Revival work drew freely from the inspiration of numerous sources, bold, daring, and executed with a marked sense of self-confidence. Davis’ sketches from the period indicate a sensitive artist with a vivid imagination, displaying buildings that appear dramatically within their surroundings. His designs often revealed an understanding of setting, taking full advantage of location and natural features when available. He was extremely well versed in the classical architecture of ancient Greece, on account of his own assiduous studies and admiration of Greek classicism, and proved capable of integrating the essence of its example into schemes restrained yet powerfully expressive. Davis, in the words of Francis Kowsky, “popularized the image of architecture...as a symbol of American aspirations,”<sup>88</sup> and emerged as a champion of the Greek Revival style and a highly influential member of the contemporary architectural profession. The Dutch Reformed Church remains an irreplaceable resource from which it is possible to read clearly Davis’ profound understanding of the art of design. A thoroughly pronounced and commanding statement, it captures completely the essence of Davis’ early work, and his place among the elite designers of the Greek Revival.

The Greek Revival proved the period in which the American architect, faced with a broader range of building

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>84</sup> *Newburgh Telegraph*, 23 November 1837.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

<sup>87</sup> Downs, Jr., *Niven*, 24.

<sup>88</sup> Francis Kowsky, “Simplicity and Dignity: The Public and Institutional Buildings of Alexander Jackson Davis,” in *Davis*, 41.

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needs, gained a freer hand in design and an increased sense of personal expression. Rather than being a restrictive force whereby designers were “inhibited or regimented,”<sup>89</sup> the rational vocabulary of the Greek Revival liberated the native architect from the staid tastes of late colonial Neoclassicism and provided a new, bolder range of expressive possibilities. Alexander Jackson Davis was one of those designers who matured professionally during the culmination of the classical revival, comprehending the remarkable responsibilities of the American architect in the great age of Jacksonian nationalism. Buildings were more and more specifically Greek, owing to an increased knowledge of Grecian architecture made available to the designer in publications like Stuart and Revett, although rarely imitated to the point of archeological imitation. For the first time Americans could access the distant monuments of Greece, deep in symbolism and historic and political association, far more compelling than the debased Roman forms of Spalato and Pompeii quoted by Adam and Paine. Within this seemingly constrictive vocabulary, talented designers like Davis, while maintaining the character of specific sources, were capable of creating compositions altogether distinctive and personal. Many of the finest designs of the period, including the French Protestant Church, Eglise du Saint Esprit by Town and Davis, William Strickland’s Merchants Exchange in Philadelphia, 1835, and the plates of Minard Lafever (1797-1854),<sup>90</sup> displayed not only a fluency in classical design vocabulary but likewise an element of creative self-fulfillment responsive to the contemporary American cultural experience.

Davis, working from sources such as Stuart and Revett, made careful studies of Greek buildings in order to thoroughly verse himself in classical design.<sup>91</sup> To him, the forms of Grecian antiquity represented the highest of architectural aspirations, the “models which should be imitated and...standards by which we ought to judge.”<sup>92</sup> “We must ever acknowledge the Greeks of old our masters in style which bears their name,” Davis wrote, “and whose alphabet we adopt: the order, which originated in the East, and was appropriated, perhaps perfected in Greece.”<sup>93</sup> Yet Davis’ far-ranging imagination, even during the culmination of the classical revival to which he was such an essential contributor, could not be wholly confined within the rational doctrine of the Greek Revival. He was at heart an artist and innovator, seeking new influences and forms to lend shape to his constantly evolving architectural ideas. In the same year in which he designed the Dutch Reformed Church, 1835, Davis also designed schemes derived from Egyptian, Gothic, Roman, and Tuscan sources.<sup>94</sup> Davis’ artistically sensitive instincts allowed him to move freely and fluidly between rational and romantic, employing particular styles as called for by building function, client, and means. It is truly remarkable to consider that Davis, during the decade of the 1830s, was simultaneously a leading taste maker of both the restrained classical revival and highly emotional picturesque aesthetics. As a designer he displayed unparalleled versatility in answering the building challenges of an ever expanding and increasingly self-conscious and complex society.

In the Newburgh Dutch Reformed Church the qualities that testify to Davis’ brilliance as a designer are clearly evident. Even by modern standards, the building is impressively scaled, exhibiting a monumentality few Greek Revival buildings can challenge. Davis conceived of the church’s exterior in bold classical terms, along lines rigorously simple and dignified, based on the finest examples of Grecian architecture. His remark that the moldings be “scrupulously attended to...without the least alteration” attests to his desire to capture the refined elegance of the Ionic models from which he worked. In characteristic Greek Revival fashion, the building specifically quoted the Ionic Temple on the Illisus, the Erechtheus, and the Corinthian Monument of Lysicrates, yet also employed vocabulary of Baroque and Roman precedent. The entrance, in which the human scale was

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<sup>89</sup> Hamlin, *Greek Revival*, 57.

<sup>90</sup> In his *Modern Builders Guide*, 1833, and *Beauties of Modern Architecture*, 1835, Lafever provided what amounted to the least classically inspired designs of the entire period. Hamlin, *Greek Revival*, 147.

<sup>91</sup> Kowsky, “Simplicity and Dignity,” 42.

<sup>92</sup> Davis, “Scrapbook on Grecian Architecture.”

<sup>93</sup> Cited in “From Cottages to Castles: The Country House Designs of Alexander Jackson Davis,” in *Davis*, note 13.

<sup>94</sup> Davies, “Works,” 107-108.

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challenged in striking fashion, illustrates Davis comprehension of dramatic effect. On the interior, the delicate gallery with finely detailed fascias remains, a refined signature of Davis' mastery of design. Contrasted with the severe coffered ceiling, it remains a truly noteworthy and enduring statement of both Davis and the Greek Revival aesthetic.

The most salient characteristic of Davis' Dutch Reformed Church, however, is its undiminished ability to convey a powerful sense of time and place as few Greek Revival buildings in America can. The style was, after all, a manifestation of the search for a national cultural identity in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and an expression of the prosperity and optimism of the Jacksonian era. In the 1820s and 1830s, the Hudson River was the very heartland of the American experience, the cultural and economic lifeblood of the young republic. The river brought Thomas Cole north to the Catskills, provided inspiration for Washington Irving's tales, and nourished Andrew Jackson Downing's love for landscape architecture and the Picturesque. The Hudson proved the nation's first great recreation area in the advent of steamboat transportation, carrying those who wished to see for themselves American scenery and the venerated fortifications of the Revolution. Following the completion of the Erie Canal, the river bridged the gap between economic possibility and greatness, and came alive with the traffic of a nation intent on meeting its destiny. Commanding a broad expanse of Newburgh Bay at the northern terminus of the Highlands, the Dutch Reformed Church must have proved an impressive and memorable landmark for those traveling the river, as evidenced by contemporary views of the village. It remains a noble sentinel and touchstone to an earlier, optimistic period in American culture, architecture, and history, sustaining outstanding power of feeling and association.

Few extant Greek Revival buildings in America can rival the Dutch Reformed Church in its distinguished pedigree, bold design, and striking siting. The assured work of two acknowledged leaders of the style, Davis and Russell Warren, it is a building in which Davis' personal involvement and concern is clearly evident, in correspondence, specifications, and surviving drawings. Period accounts in local newspapers attest to the interest and attention with which the church was greeted, "a noble specimen of chaste architecture...an ornament to the village and an honor to its projectors." Davis himself must have viewed it countless times, in his many journeys up the Hudson River to Newburgh and beyond. It is an exceptional example of the Greek Revival style, a building of lasting quality, beauty, and notable distinction, worthy of extraordinary efforts to ensure its preservation.

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*Previous documentation on file (NPS):*

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.  
 Previously Listed in the National Register.  
 Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.  
 Designated a National Historic Landmark.  
 Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #  
 Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

*Primary Location of Additional Data:*

- State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State Agency  
 Federal Agency  
 Local Government  
 University  
 Other (Specify Repository):

Engineering Department, City Hall, Newburgh, New York.

Davis Collection, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library, New York, New York.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA***Acreage of Property:*

<i>UTM References:</i>	<b>Zone</b>	<b>Easting</b>	<b>Northing</b>
	18	582700	4595000

*Verbal Boundary Description:*

The boundary for the nominated property has been drawn in solid black outline on the attached map entitled "Proposed National Historic Landmark boundary for the Dutch Reformed Church, Newburgh, New York."

*Boundary Justification:*

The boundary has been drawn to correspond with the current legal boundary for the property, which in turn reflects the remaining historic acreage associated with the nominated property.

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