

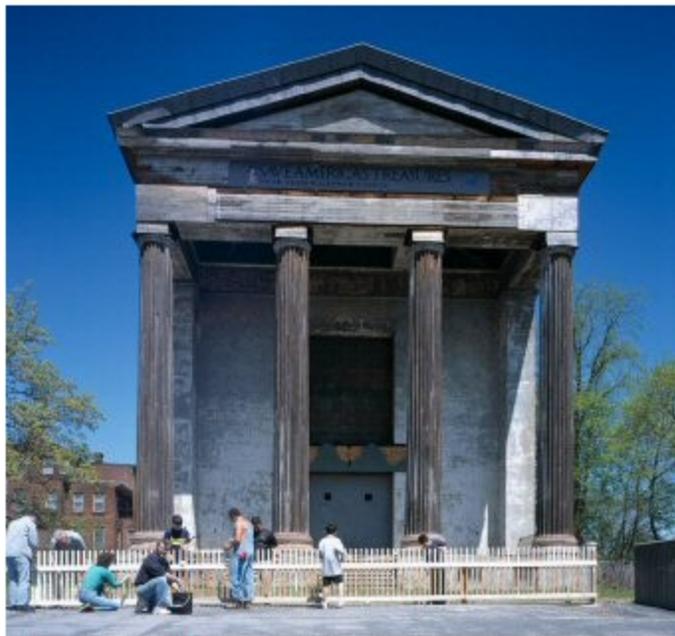
NEWBURGH PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

RESTORATION COMMITTEE

[Building](#)[History](#)[Restoration](#)[Events](#)[Support](#)[Committee](#)

[Newburgh Preservation Association](#) is our nonprofit parent organization. [Join or contribute now.](#)



"Tom Sawyer" Party — Volunteers painting the fence in front of the DRC on April 24 (photo M. Gabor). [More](#)

The former Dutch Reformed Church in Newburgh, New York, is an outstanding Greek Revival building designed in 1835 by Alexander Jackson Davis.

The monumental structure borrows proportions, siting, and details from classical Greek precedents. Intended as a symbol of the community's enlightened taste, it commanded

2004 Events

Sunday
May 2
1:00 pm

[Buy Tickets](#)



2nd Annual [Queen's Day Concert](#) for the DRC restoration, with the amazing **Time for Three**. [BUY TICKETS ONLINE](#)
DRC Open House follows

Sunday
Jun 13

Dutch Reformed Church "Open House"
Visit the historic landmark from 12 to 4 pm

Saturday
June 26

DRC "Open House" 12-4 (in conjunction with the River Art Walk on the waterfront)

Saturday
July 24

DRC "Open House" 12-4 Celebrate architect A.J. Davis' 201st birthday!

Sat Aug 28

DRC "Open House" 12-4

Sat Sept 25

DRC "Open House" 12-4

Sat Oct 30

DRC "Open House" 12-4

Sunday
Dec. 12

DRC "Open House" 12-4 (part of the Historical Society's annual Candlelight Tour)

Subscribe to NPA News

Enter your email to receive periodic emails about the NPA and the restoration of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Explore this website to learn more about the building's

NEWBURGH PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

RESTORATION COMMITTEE

[Building](#) [History](#) [Restoration](#) [Events](#) [Support](#) [Committee](#)



Building

Exterior



[The DRC in 1967 \(Bayley\)](#)

Facing south, the exterior of the Dutch Reformed Church is dominated by the columnar porch, which extends outward, matching the full width and height of the main block behind it.

Resting on a 5-foot podium, four Ionic columns, 37 feet high, support a classically correct entablature and pediment. As Davis explained, the proportions and details were carefully copied from ancient Greek temples, such as the 4th-century B.C. "Temple at Illissos," which Davis knew from Stuart & Revett's *Antiquities of Athens* (1762-1816).

The walls are constructed of mortared, load-bearing rubble masonry, originally stuccoed and scored to resemble masonry. The columns and capitals are of wood, painted to resemble stone.

Davis aimed for simplicity, dignity, and austere elegance in the exterior design - as shown in the way the entablature (bands above the columns) continue uninterrupted back along the sides, unifying the whole.

A noteworthy trademark of Davis' Greek Revival designs is the treatment of the windows as tall, continuous openings from the ground floor almost to the ceiling.

The exterior we see today reflects two significant changes to Davis' original design:

- The rooftop originally carried an exterior dome (quite unlike any actual Greek temple). Perhaps due to faulty construction, it was removed five years after construction (1843).
- In 1867-68, the sanctuary was extended northward by 20 feet, with lower transepts on either side.



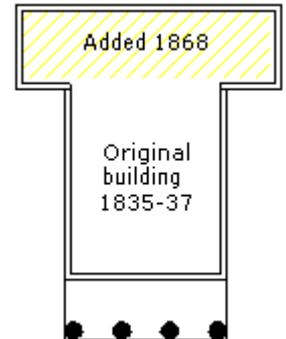
Temple at Illissos, Stewart & Revett, *Antiquities* (1762)



In 1842, a dome.



In 1846, no dome!



NEWBURGH PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

RESTORATION COMMITTEE

[Building](#)

[History](#)

[Restoration](#)

[Events](#)

[Support](#)

[Committee](#)

Building

Interior



[DRC interior 1967](#)



bronzse lamp from the DRC



[Interior to north \(1967\)](#)

Visitors to the Dutch Reformed Church are immediately impressed by the sheer volume of the interior space, spanned by a segmental barrel vault. The space is roughly a double cube: 50 feet wide, 50 feet to the height of the dome, and 100 feet long (now 120 feet after the 1868 addition).

The vault, punctuated by deep square coffers, owes more to Roman than Greek sources, but its height and simplicity create a bold, audacious space. In November 2002, restoration architects John Mesick and Jeff Baker discovered, using laser surveying equipment, that the center of ceiling's radius lies directly on the floor line.

A horseshoe-shaped gallery runs around three sides of the sanctuary, decorated by simple fascia (bands) with Greek moldings copied from 5th-century Erechtheion on the Acropolis in Athens.

Photographs cannot adequately convey the quality of the interior space, but the "large image" links on this page are worth the wait!

Davis's decorative approach was understated: broad, simple flat surfaces, punctuated occasionally by subtle detailing. This austere look, essential to the Greek Revival style, fit perfectly with the restrained decor traditional in Dutch Calvinist churches.

The window treatments reflect an approach invented by Davis: a single light stretches all the way from sill height almost to the top of the high walls — unifying the surface aesthetically while flooding the interior in light.

Visitors can still appreciate the purity of the original space, despite the boarded-up windows and the unfortunate covering of the front "stage" area in black paint during the building's brief use as a theater in the 1970s.



[DRC interior today](#)



[Pews and windows \(1970\)](#)



NEWBURGH PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

RESTORATION COMMITTEE

[Building](#) [History](#) [Restoration](#) [Events](#) [Support](#) [Committee](#)

Building

Significance

There are plenty of old buildings in the eastern United States - in fact, there are hundreds of 19th-century buildings in the small city of Newburgh. You might well ask, "What is so special about the former Dutch Reformed Church that it deserves restoration?" We believe this building has major significance for three reasons - aesthetic, historical, and symbolic.

[Dutch Reformed Church: 'A conspicuous and characteristic landmark'](#)

*Times Herald-Record,
August 7, 2004*

Aesthetic Quality

Quite simply, the former DRC is a beautiful work of architecture. The monumental exterior, scrupulously modeled on ancient Greek sources, stands like a beacon overlooking the majestic Hudson River. With columns over 30 feet tall, the structure aspires to a grandeur quite "over the top" for the modest community it served.

The interior is even more impressive, with a soaring, sparsely decorated space - roughly a double cube - that provokes gasps of astonishment in most first-time visitors. The size, proportions, light and decor combine to create an immediate sense that this is a special place.

"Few extant Greek Revival buildings in America can rival the Dutch Reformed Church in its distinguished pedigree, bold design, and striking siting." - *Landmark application.*



Historical Significance

The former Dutch Reformed Church is historical significant on several counts. It is an outstanding example of the Greek Revival style, which came to symbolize American aspirations in the early 19th century. It is also the last extant example of the work of A. J. Davis that largely preserves his artistic vision, according to architectural historian William Krattinger. The DRC is **"the greatest surviving ecclesiastical commission of America's greatest architect of the era"** according to J. Winthrop Aldrich, former Deputy Commissioner of Historic Preservation, New York State.

In 2001 the DRC was designated a National Historic Landmark - the highest recognition possible for a historic structure.

Symbolic Value

Finally, the former DRC has symbolic value. When asked to describe his intentions, architect Davis declared: **"The ediface ... will henceforth serve as a conspicuous and characteristic landmark, indicative of the taste, discrimination, and sense of classical beauty, of the inhabitants of Newburgh."**

Davis understood that flattery never hurt while the backers were seeking funding! But his statement was true enough - the building captured the view of passing steamers, and it remained an object of civic pride for years.

The building's neglect and decay since 1967 have made it a symbol of the city's decline. Now, with city fortunes finally rising again, the restoration of this "jewel in the crown" will make the A. J. Davis temple once again symbolic in a positive sense.



NEWBURGH PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

RESTORATION COMMITTEE



[Building](#) [History](#) [Restoration](#) [Events](#) [Support](#) [Committee](#)

History

Tastemakers

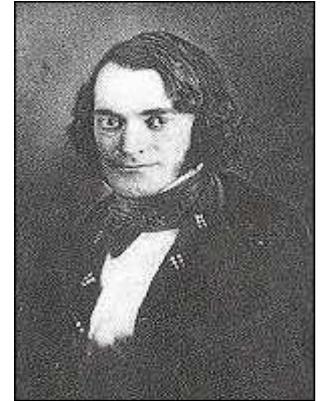
Not long after completing the Dutch Reformed Church, A.J. Davis became one of the "tastemakers" of mid-19th-century house and garden aesthetics, centered around **Andrew Jackson Downing** (1815-52) of Newburgh.

Changing quickly from Greek Revival to the picturesque style, Davis provided roughly half the illustrations for Downing's books "[Cottage Residences](#)" (1842) and "[Architecture of Country Houses](#)" (1850).

Through such books and journals, Downing's writings transformed American ideals about the design of small, detached dwellings in harmony with natural surroundings. Not an architect himself, Downing enlisted architects like Davis to give visual expression his vision of the "picturesque" aesthetic.



Alexander Jackson Davis



Andrew Jackson Downing
[John Thorn on Downing](#)



Calvert Vaux

Downing had enormous influence: he was asked to redesign the Mall in Washington DC, and it was Downing who suggested the scale and placement of Central Park in New York City.

To help cope with his activities, Downing convinced a young British architect, [Calvert Vaux](#), to move from London to Newburgh in 1850 to join his practice. Two years later, another London architect, [Frederick Withers](#), made the same journey.

Tragically, however, at the young age of 37, Andrew Jackson Downing died by drowning in the Hudson River while helping others in a steamboat accident in July, 1852.



Frederick Withers



Frederick Law Olmsted

Vaux took over the practice for five years but then moved to New York, where he shortly joined with [Frederick Law Olmsted](#) to design Central Park. Withers remained in Newburgh, leaving behind a distinguished body of churches, commercial buildings and houses.

Davis had just started designing houses for another Downing project, one of the earliest planned garden suburbs at Llewellyn Park, New Jersey. He later moved into one of his Downing-inspired houses and remained there for the rest of his life.

