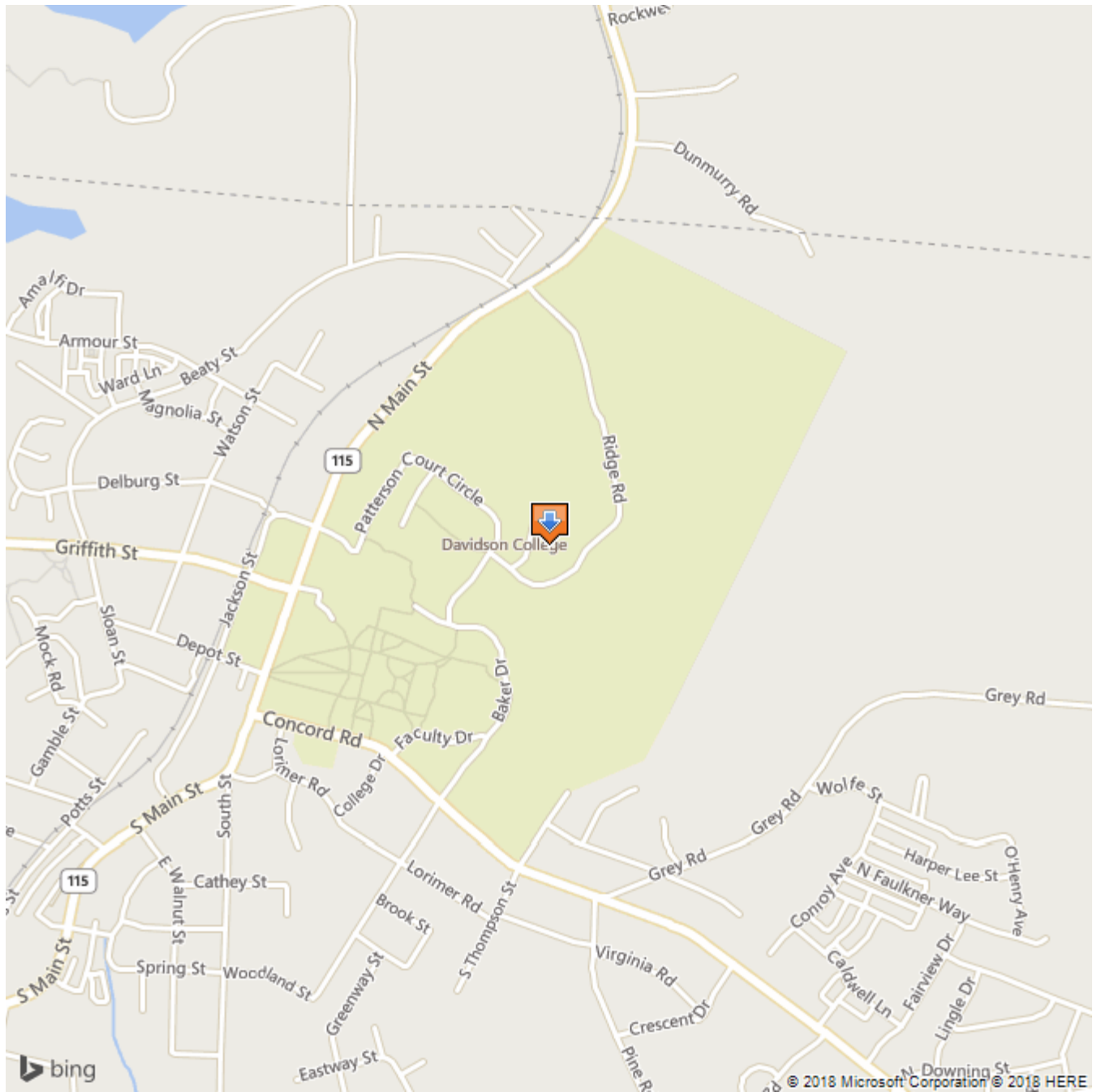


Davidson College: Eumenean Hall

*From the Nomination Form for the National Register of Historic Places, Dec. 8, 1971*





Eumenean Hall, like its counterpart, Philanthropic Hall, is a two-story temple-form brick structure three bays wide and three bays long with the second level expressed as a piano nobile. Dominating the main (southeast) facade is a tetrastyle Doric portico. The brick walls of the front and side are laid in common bond, while the rear, facing the road, is in Flemish.

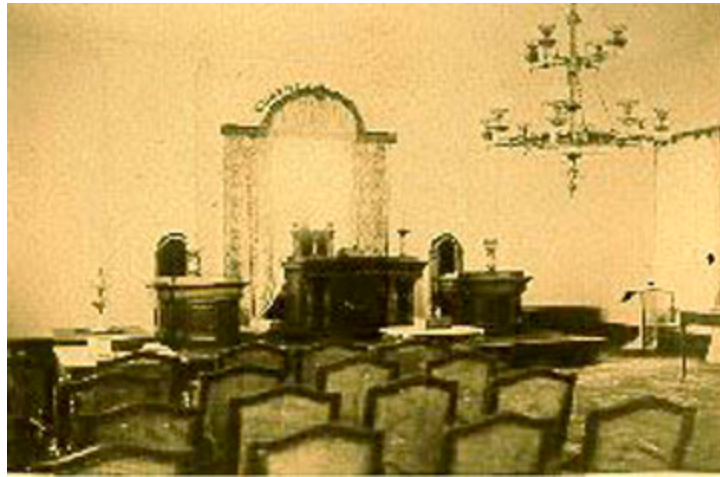
The pediment of the portico is covered with flush siding and supported by four massive columns of stuccoed brick that rise from the stuccoed water table which

continues around the building. The two outer columns are set on heavy square stuccoed piers which rise to the second level while the inner columns are uninterrupted. Corresponding pilaster corner posts complete the facade. A basement screen wall of brick surmounted by a turned balustrade shields the lower sides of the portico, but the portico, unlike that of Philanthropic Hall, is open at both levels at the front. A stair rises on each side in a broken double flight, meeting at an entrance landing at the upper level. The slender grace of the double stair with its molded handrail and thin turned balusters is set off by the contrasting massiveness of the portico columns that support it. The main entrance, Palladian in design, consists of a double door, each leaf containing five flat panels crowned by a fanlight and flanked by five-pane sidelights. A fluted architrave with rounder corner blocks outlines the elements. The secondary entrance, at the basement level, repeats the design of the main one, but a transom occurs instead of the fanlight. Flanking the main door are large windows with nine-over-nine sash, featuring stone sills, wooden lintels, and fine flat arches.

Like Philanthropic Hall, Eumenean Hall has stuccoed pilasters dividing the bays of the sides and supporting a simple wooden cornice. In each pilaster can be seen the head of an iron tie rod that runs through the building between the stories. A simple double door with transom occurs in the central bay at the first level on each side; the remaining bays at both levels are marked by windows like those of the front. The splayed arches above the basement windows consist of a double row of brick stretchers, while a single row forms the arch above the upper windows. The rear is dominated by a fine Palladian window, repeating the elements of the main entrance. At the basement level a window has been filled with brick. Rear interior chimneys with molded caps rise on either side of the ridge of the roof.

The interior of fine main hall, which occupies the whole upper floor, contains fine classical trim. The original plaster cornice and ceiling medallion has been removed, but their replacements maintain the dignity and character of the room. A wide plain baseboard and heavy plaster cornice with a grapevine frieze and rope molding punctuated by acanthus cartouches accentuate the boundaries of the room. The central oval plaster medallion is ornamented with palmetto, tulip, and pea pod motifs. Fluted architraves with rounder corner blocks like those on the exterior Palladian openings surround the large windows and the entrance. The plain chimney breasts project slightly into the chamber on either side of the rear Palladian window. The elevated platform at the rear of the hall contains its original furniture, consisting of a large desk with the emblem of the society, inscribed "Eumenean Hall, 1837," its chair, and two smaller flanking desks with chairs. The Victorian chandelier was a later addition. The entire structure is in excellent condition, having been completely restored in 1956.

The basement, which was remodeled at that time for office use, retains none of its original interior trim.



*Eumenean Society Hall, Interior ca. 1893*

From the earliest days of Davidson College until the turn of the twentieth century, student life and government centered around two debating societies, the Eumenean and Philanthropic Societies.

The Concord Presbytery voted to establish learning in western North Carolina on March 12, 1835; on August 25 the presbytery resolved to purchase two tracts of land in Mecklenburg County from William L. Davidson; and on the following day they voted to name the school Davidson College in honor of Davidson's father, William Davidson, a Revolutionary War hero. The college began exercises March 1, 1837, and by the end of that year a number of buildings had been constructed on the new campus.

The first of the two debating societies to be formed was the Eumenean Society, organized as the Polemic Debating Society on April 14, 1837; it assumed its present name in 1838. The records of the group begin with the thirty-ninth meeting, on November 9, 1838; for several years their meetings were held in "Professor Sparrow's classroom." Both societies, secret and formal in nature, were primarily debating organizations, but they had a much more important influence than their avowed purpose might suggest. Society rules were very strict about the behavior of their members, imposing fines for fighting, swearing, intoxication, and "lying to the faculty." There were "vigilance committees" for reporting offenses. Since nearly all students were members of one society or the other, "student government really dates from the beginning," with regulation of behavior coming from the two societies. It is said that "around the two halls centered college loyalty and affection." That provided

excellent libraries, and from the first commencement until 1913 the societies joined in selecting and paying the expenses of the commencement orator, "known as the Orator before the Literary Society and for years an honorary member of one of them." The chief marshal, an office alternating between the two societies, was the highest office of the student body. He presided at commencement and wore elegant regalia, a fringed and ornamented sash.

On November 12, 1842; the members of the Eumenean Society unanimously approved the motion of Mr. A. M. Boger "that we make an attempt to erect a Society Hall." In January a committee from the Philanthropic Society, who also wished to construct a hall, met with the Eumeneans to confer about the design of the two buildings. Despite long rivalry between the two group a spirit of cooperation attended the planning and construction of the halls It was decided that "each Society should act independently, but that the halls should be 'alike in site, material, and magnificence,' and cost \$1,500 apiece." Sites were selected December 14, 1848, and construction began soon afterward. The two halls were designed to complete the open-ended quadrangle plan of the campus. Eumenean on the west and Philanthropic on the east are two-story pavilions with tetrastyle prostyle porticos. Their form as well as their position at the ends of the quadrangle, with one-story dormitory "rows" between them and the axial Chapel, give the campus an arrangement similar to the more elaborate quadrangle at the University of Virginia, designed by Thomas Jefferson.

Eumenean Hall was the first to be dedicated - in November, 1849, with an address by "Mr. McDowell." A paper found in an old bottle, discovered during the 1956 renovations, is dated June 11 of that year. The purpose of the document meet, signed by A. Alexander, is explicit; "Should it stand two hundred Posterity may find this and know who were persons who built and those who had it built." It lists the twenty-five members of the society at the time and mentions that the library had 1,200 volumes and that the cost of erecting the hall was \$2,500. The names of the contractors (Lewis Dinkins and Daniel Alexander), plasterer, and carpenters of the structure are included as well. The document concludes hopefully, "May peace prosperity & liberty always pervade the land of America. May the day always be when the citizen of American [sic] will feel proud to say I am an American."

In 1853 lightning rods, blinds, and "spit boxes" were ordered for Eumenean Hall, and \$1,000 was borrowed to buy furniture, which arrived in July, 1854. In the following year the hall and "'the property appertaining thereto' was transferred" to the two men who had signed the note for the loan. Ten years later, an honorary member, William L. Davidson of Alabama, "saved them by a legacy of a thousand dollars," part of which was used to settle the debt.

The Civil War had a drastic effect upon the life of the college. The Eumeneans met on April 19, 1861, but not again until February 13, 1862. Though their numbers were much reduced, they remained active through February, 1865, and were able to open again in March, 1866. After the war, the subjects for their debates reflected the disturbing events of the Reconstruction period. Some names of honorary members were stricken because of "offensive prominence in the carpet-bagger days," and new honorary members included a number of well known Confederate generals.

On October 4, 1873, Davidson freshman Thomas Woodrow Wilson (president of the United States, 1913-1921) was initiated into the Eumenean Society. As a member of the society, he led debates, delivered an original oration, and read compositions. He was elected corresponding secretary. The dais furniture Wilson is said to have used is still in the hall. The story is told that when President Wilson visited Davidson in 1916, he was requested to make a speech from the balcony of Eumenean Hall. He responded, "I failed in my first speech in this hall and will not attempt to make another."

Toward the end of the nineteenth century and increasingly in the twentieth, the dominance of the debating societies began to wane. The colors of the two societies, pink (Eumenean) and blue (Philanthropic) had traditionally been combined to form the school colors, but in 1895 the students voted to adopt crimson and black as Davidson's official colors. Debating had long been the societies' exclusive territory, but in 1907 Davidson students began taking part in the intercollegiate debating. During the nineteenth century nearly all students had belonged to one of the societies, but by 1920 society members included only thirty-five percent of the students. The societies no longer run student life, but they continue as literary societies, still using their original halls and providing a link with the early years of the college.

The intention of the building committee that Eumenean Hall and Philanthropic Hall, which face one another across the original quadrangle of Davidson College, be "alike in size, material, and magnificence" was realized for the structures correspond in both size and basic configuration. The subtle variations in the treatment of the portico, the main entrance, and the brick bond of the wall surfaces of each hall, as well as the distinction in the interior trim, result in a sophisticated interplay of repetition and variation. The crisp use of the Greek Revival forms as well as the balance achieved between the abstract classical purity of the applied elements and the warmth of the brick surfaces make these buildings one of the few truly architectonic Greek Revival complexes in the state.