



The design and rehabilitation work done on Oak Row contributes to the College and broader community by directly confronting traumatic history that has historically divided communities, inviting intellectual discussion and introspection, and encouraging connection with place and time.

Originally, the 1000 SF structure circa 1837 was 4 dormitories. Lord Aeck Sargent worked with Eisterhold Associates, Uzun & Case and TLC Engineering Solutions to transform the historic structure into a new exhibit space that honors the enslaved members of Davidson's community who built and maintained the campus. The very bricks that form the walls of Oak Row were formed by hand by the enslaved and required the utmost architectural care and respect during the rehabilitation work.

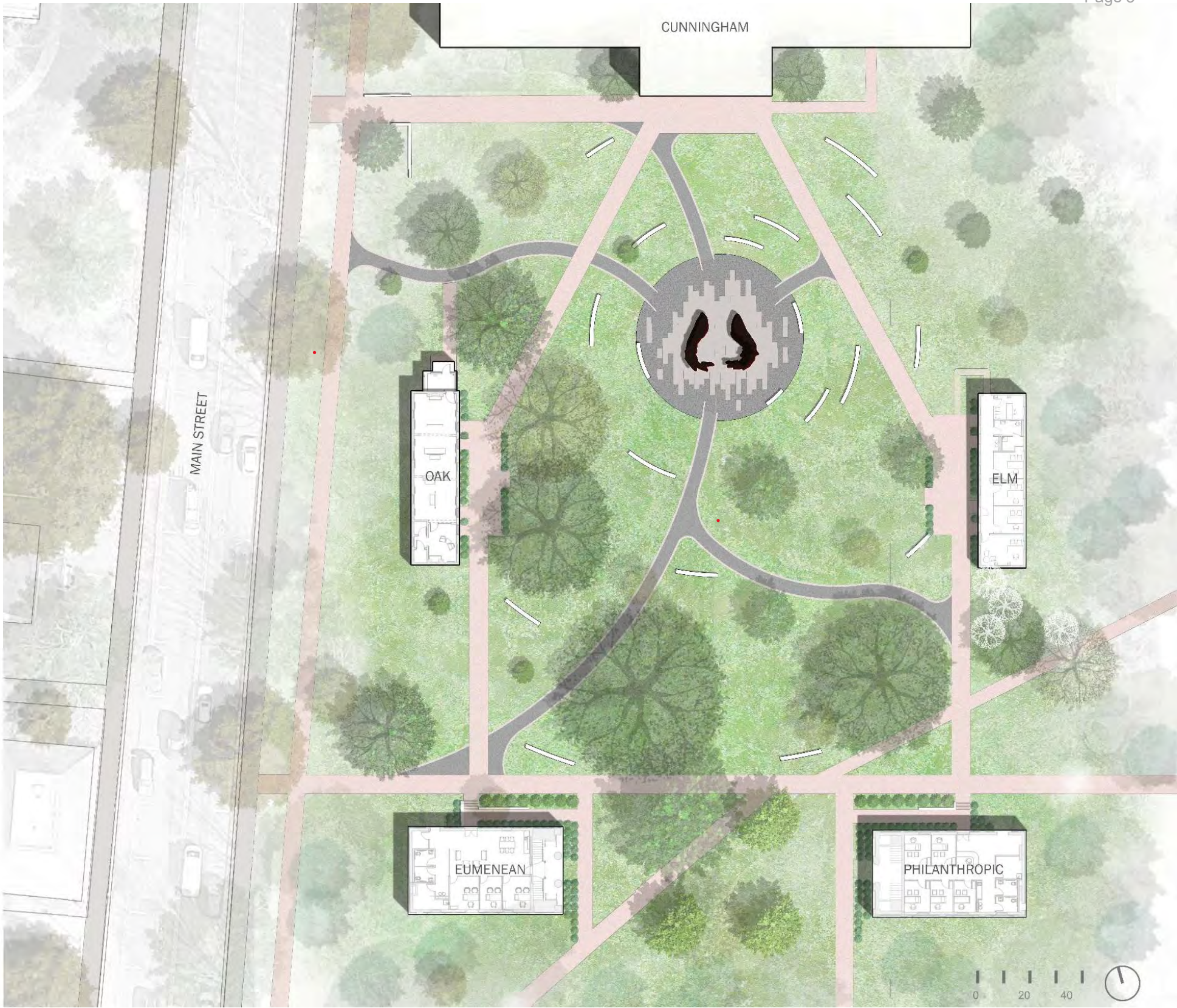
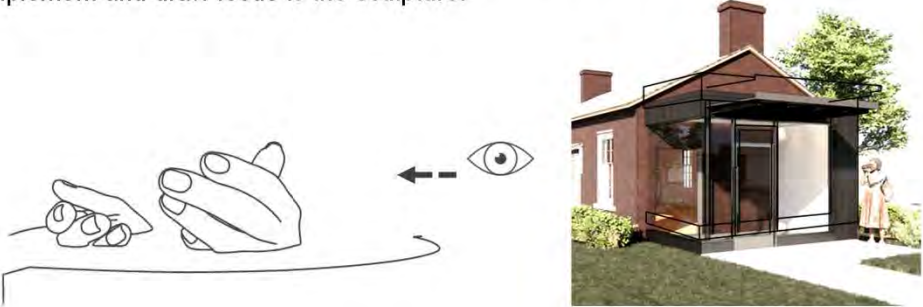


View from the northeast corner of the site facing the newly created vestibule entry addition on the historic Oak Row at Davidson College. The addition works with topography to create an accessible entry while preserving the historic entrances along the eastern elevation. It also opens the interior of the building to view from the exterior, allowing the contents of the exhibit to be visible and inviting visitors to enter.

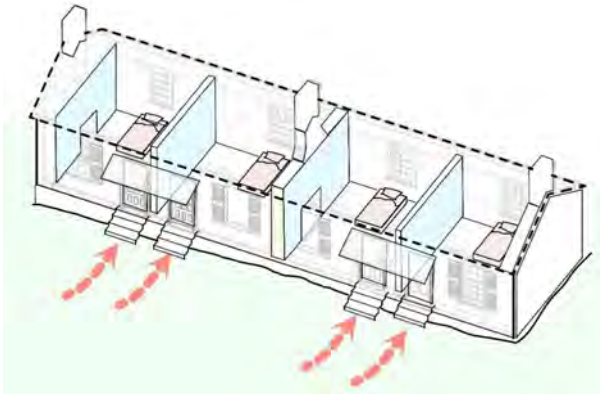


# CONTEXT

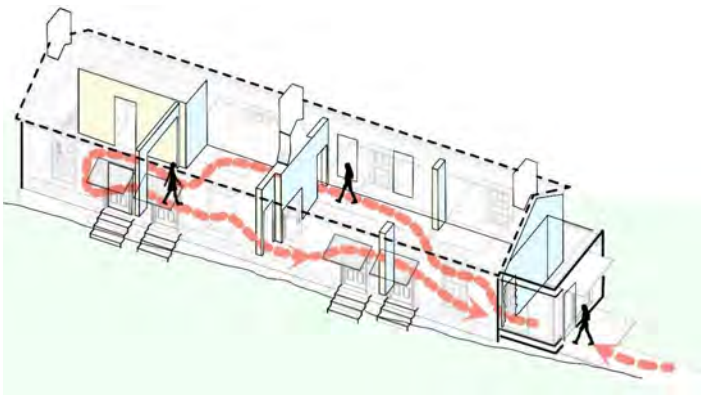
Oak Row is part of Davidson's historic quad and is located immediately across from the recently completed Hank Willis Thomas *With These Hands* sculpture. Both the sculpture and work on Oak Row were done to honor the enslaved members of the Davidson community who built and maintained the campus. The vestibule was designed to complement and draw focus to the sculpture.



# TRANSFORMATION



Originally, the 1000 SF building was 4 individual dormitory rooms, each accessed from the exterior via steps.



To maintain the historic façade, while providing a new accessible entry, the decision was made to add a new vestibule to the north elevation. The chosen location works with the existing topography to eliminate the need for a ramp. New openings in the interior walls allow continuous circulation throughout the floor plan.





# HISTORY

The Oak Row dormitory, and Elm Row across the lawn from it, are the last remaining original structures constructed when the College was founded in 1837. There were originally 2 of these dormitory buildings one each side of the original quad. Records indicate the following uses of Oak Row during its existence.

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>1837 – 1916</b> | <b>Student dormitory</b>                         |
| 1916 – 1928        | Fraternity meeting rooms.                        |
| 1928 – 1950        | Offices of student publications and organization |
| 1950 – 1969        | Music department Office                          |
| 1969 – 1993        | Art Dept classroom, Music Dept Practice Room     |
| 1993 – ????        | Music Dept Practice Rooms                        |
| ???? – 2025        | Unused classroom (south), IT workroom (north)    |
| 2025 – ????        | Exhibit  |



Over the years, non-original veneers and ornamentation had been added, obscuring the integrity of the original structure. Restoring the character of the interior to its original state was one of the goals of the rehabilitation work.

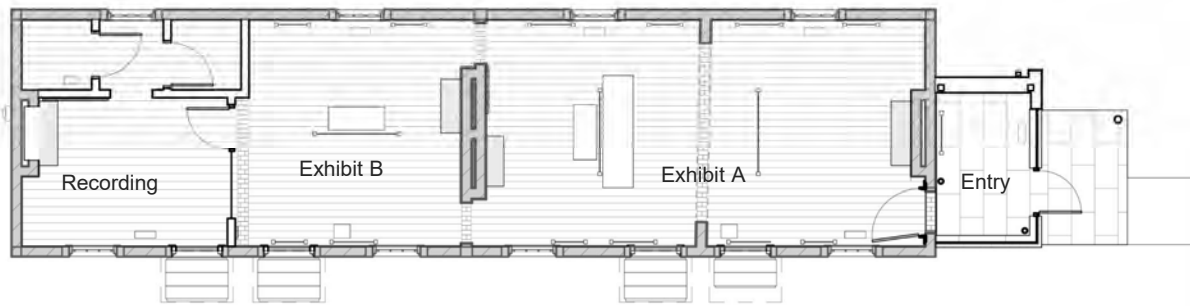
# COMMUNITY



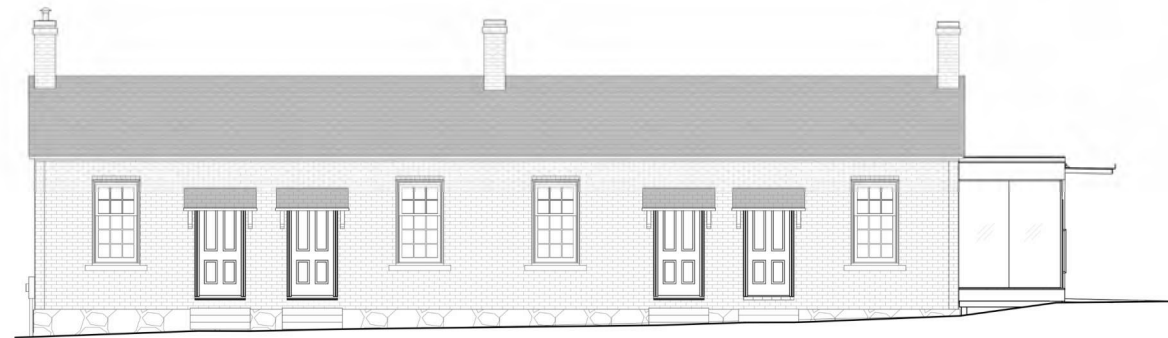
Images from the exhibit opening held on October 27, 2025



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Plan View



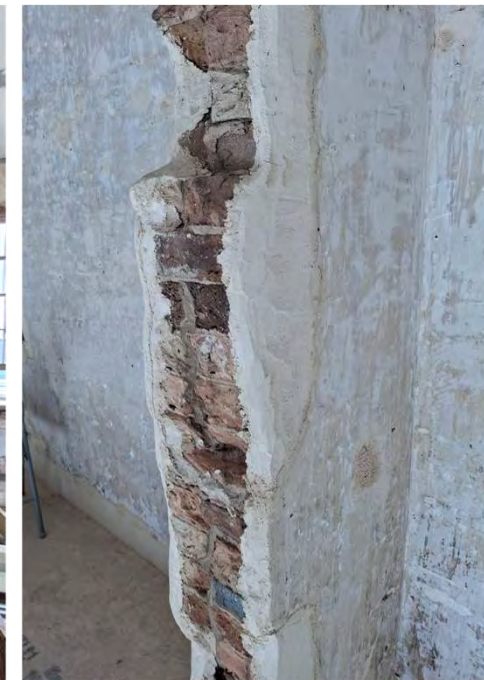
East Elevation



North Elevation

# DISCOVERY

Much of the design was guided by discovery during the demolition phase of construction. A portion of the work was thus not determined by a static set of documents, but rather by the building's own bones that were uncovered and revealed. As the modern-day materials were removed, the original plaster, floors and fireboxes were uncovered and evaluated for their condition and repurposed wherever possible. One of the most exciting discoveries was a doodle drawing on the original plaster walls. This piece was carefully stabilized and preserved in situ, and now plays an important role in the exhibit, connecting visitors to the original inhabitants.





Images of the north elevation and interior during demolition. Floors were removed due to termite damage. New openings were created in the existing brick walls with great care. Fireplaces were opened and restored.



A newly added vestibule serves multiple purposes: allowing selected exhibit items to be visible from the exterior, creating an accessible entry and attracting visitors to enter the building. The design both complements and contrasts the historic structure.



Vestibule bluestone flooring was selected for its tactile solidity and ability to be installed on both the interior and exterior, creating a material continuity that pulls the visitor inward. The structural framing at the vestibule was carefully coordinated to allow the ceiling height and glazing to align with the historic windows on the east elevation.



Reclaimed bricks from demolition were used to repair and stabilize the new openings and uncovered original fireboxes.