Assessor’s Number       USGS Quad       Area(s)       Form Number
UMASS No. 626       Williamsburg       n/a       

Town: Amherst
Place: (neighborhood or village) University of Massachusetts
Address: 650 East Pleasant St.
Historic Name: Dakin House
Uses: Present: Academic
       Original: private residence
Date of Construction: 1949
Source: UMASS Facilities Records
Style/Form: English Cottage
Architect/Builder: unknown
Exterior Material:
       Foundation: concrete
       Wall/Trim: brick
       Roof: slate
Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
       Carriage House (UMASS No. 649),
       Garage (UMASS No. 650)
Major Alterations (with dates):
       Rehabilitation for academic and office use (date unknown)

Condition: good to fair
Moved: no | x | yes | Date __________
Acreage: 1,348 acres 2008 historic structure survey area
Setting: The Dakin House and associated structures are located at the boundary between a wooded site and an open meadow. The structures are accessed via a gravel road passing through the property’s wooded frontage along East Pleasant.

Follow Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey Manual instructions for completing this form.
ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

The Dakin House, Carriage House, and Garage are on the Amherst campus of the University of Massachusetts. The three structures comprise the Dakin family estate that was donated to the University and currently used as an academic research facility. The estate exists along the west side of East Pleasant Street to the north of Tillson Farm Road.

The Dakin House is an approximately 5,000 square foot former private residence. The English Cottage Style house has a C-shaped plan including one 2-story block, and two 1-story wings that form an entrance courtyard. The main block is approximately 5 bays wide by 2 bays deep with a gable roof. The wings are perpendicular to the main block and each 1 bay wide but vary in length and width. Both their gables intersect the east slope of main block gable. Between the two wings is a large brick chimney.

Two building entrances occur at the east elevation. One is at the south wing and has a small gabled porch. The second entrance is a small vestibule that projects into the courtyard from the intersection of the main block and north wing. Both entrances have single wood doors with glazed upper panels.

The running-bond brick pattern is used throughout all elevations and has a whitewashed finish. Windows are primarily double-unit metal casements with either 3 or 4 divided panes. A 3-sided bay window and a picture window both occur on the west elevation. Additionally, the west slope of the main roof has 3 dormers with double-unit casement windows and one dormer with 3 single-unit casement windows. Two additional dormers with single-unit casement windows flank the chimney on the east elevation. All dormers are faced with wood siding. The remaining windows of the house have flat brick arches and brick sills.

The house has a slate shingle roof with metal gutters and downspouts. At the south elevation of the main block, a second floor door is accessed via a metal balcony and stair. This gable end also encloses an unscreened porch.

The house landscape is defined by formal gardens and a crushed stone parking area, to the south by deciduous trees over mown lawn, to the west by garden beds and deciduous trees over mown lawn and to the north by mown lawn with one evergreen tree. A granite curb separates the crushed stone parking area from the formal gardens at the main entrance to house on the east side. The gardens consist of symmetrical clipped boxwood hedges bordering brick and crushed stone walks and a central pool. At the rear of the house, a flagstone terrace is supported by a dry-laid stone retaining wall with garden beds at its base. The retaining wall runs the entire length of the west side of the house and extends to the north, dying into the topography. The planting beds at the base of the retaining wall are bordered by granite cobblestones and the garden includes a portrait bust sculpture on pedestal.

The Carriage House and Garage are located southeast of the house. The Carriage House is an approximately 3,000 square foot, 1-1/2 story rectangular structure with a gabled slate roof. The north elevation is defined by two garage door bays and the east and west elevations have 5 window bays. Two attic windows and a board-and-batten door occur at the north gable. The building is masonry with a white stucco exterior finish. Windows are metal casement and the garage doors are wood paneled. All have stucco sills and headers. The center of the roof includes a square, pyramidal roof attic vent with a weather vane. The Garage is an approximately 400 square foot, 1-bay wood frame structure with wood siding and a gabled wood shingle roof. The garage bay has a distinct arched opening.

The complex is accessed by a crushed stone drive that leads west from North Pleasant Street to a parking area to the east of the Dakin House. Dense mixed evergreen and deciduous forest separates the complex from East Pleasant Street on the east and south sides. Cultivated land is located to the west and north of the complex. The Garage is located on the north side of the access drive and bordered to the north by deciduous forest. The Carriage House is located at the western end of the access drive and is bordered to the south by mixed evergreen and deciduous forest, to the west by an un-mown field, to the east by scrub growth, to the south by mixed evergreen and deciduous forest, and to the north by a crushed stone parking area associated with the Dakin House.
HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Overview
The University of Massachusetts, Amherst was chartered as the Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1863 but did not accept its first class until 1867. As one of two land grant universities in Massachusetts, the university's original mission was agricultural education. Its mission, however, evolved within the first 20 years in response to the changing needs of the United States. While agriculture remains, even today, a mainstay of the University's mission, the University now also supports engineering, science, education, and liberal arts colleges and departments.

A full historical narrative of the University of Massachusetts from its founding to 1958 is contained in the survey report. This narrative was prepared in 2009 by Carol S. Weed, Senior Archaeologist with Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. Shown below are selected highlights from the text of the full historical narrative, along with additional information pertinent to the specific building that is described in this Massachusetts Historical Commission Building Form.

1863-1867: Administration and Initial Campus Layout
As the educational mission evolved in the years after 1863, so did the university’s approach to its facilities and its landscape. There was no accepted plan for the layout of the college, despite the preparation of various plan proposals in the 1860s, including separate proposals from the country’s preeminent landscape planners, Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted, who had formerly worked together on the winning design for New York City’s Central Park. Neither Vaux’s plan, nor Olmsted’s plan to create a campus around a central green, were accepted by the University Trustees.

1867-1916: The Early Growth
In the absence of a coordinated plan, the Trustees put existing buildings that were acquired with the campus land into service as agricultural laboratories. Campus development for several decades after 1863 was sporadic and focused on the construction of individual buildings to meet specific functional needs of the fledgling university. It was not until after 1900, during a period of rapid student population growth and resultant new building construction, that the University Trustees again sought proposals for comprehensive campus planning.

In 1912, a professional landscaping publication reported that Warren H. Manning, formerly affiliated with the Olmsted firm, had spent over four years preparing a comprehensive plan for the University Trustees. The Trustees had considered it imperative for the college to plan harmonious development that would conserve the beauty of campus grounds while meeting the needs of a growing student population whose expanding range of activities was unprecedented.

Manning’s plan designated three distinct sections of the campus, the Upland, Midland and Lowland Sections. Each section was intended to be the locus of specific functions, with clusters of purpose-built structures to serve those functions. For example, one section would be designated for faculty, women’s and horticultural facilities. A second section would contain administration, research, science and student life (dormitory, dining hall, and sports) facilities. The third section would be dedicated to poultry, farming and sewage disposal facilities.

Although Manning’s Upland, Midland, and Lowland sections are not fully realized, it is apparent that discipline specific groupings were developed. Building clusters, especially those related to agriculture, administration, and the hard and earth sciences (physics, chemistry, and geology) continued to expand through the present day.

1916-1931: World War I and the Transition Years
Long range building programs were developed beginning with Landscape Gardening Professor F.A. Waugh’s 1919 plan. Like Manning’s 1911 plan, Waugh’s 1919 work emphasized building groups in order to maintain the proper balance between buildings, cultivated fields, meadows and lawns, forests and trees. By World War I and continuing through the 1920s, University records frequently refer to the inadequacy of the physical plant; the lack of class room space; the lack of properly ventilated and lighted spaces; and the danger of having to cancel classes because of a lack of appropriate facilities. Expansion of the campus through acquisition of additional land was considered essential if the University were to construct new and better facilities to address these deficiencies and excel as an institution of higher education.
The 1920s, however, had the fewest buildings constructed of any decade in the campus history to that point. The slow pace of building is largely attributed to the annual funding levels that were appropriated by the Massachusetts Legislature during the decade.

1931-1941: Great Depression, New Deal
The change in campus orientation wrought by the expansion of the school’s mission began in the 1930s with its name change to Massachusetts State College. With that program expansion there was a concerted effort to modernize and expand the campus facilities. The campus population had grown steadily during the 1920s.

In 1933, the campus was hosting about 1,200 students in its graduate and undergraduate sections. By 1935, there were 1,300 students enrolled representing a 53 percent increase in five years and of 80 percent in ten years, prompting the University to limit the freshman class to 300 students due to the inadequacy of facilities and staff to care for a greater number. This student population was putting extreme pressure on basic resources such as the library.

Despite the growing student population and an identified need for additional and improved campus facilities in the 1920s and 1930s, the onset of the Great Depression with its wide-ranging consequences effectively restricted funding to the bare minimum needed to operate. By late 1933, the funding outlook had improved through the economic stimulus initiatives of the Federal Government, and National Recovery Act funds were available for the construction of a library, a new administration building, and other unspecified buildings for the University.

As part of the University’s planning effort to select a site for the new library, the Campus Planning Committee charged with this work issued a final report in late 1933, which contained five recommendations for campus development: 1) That the general organization and building program on the campus be planned so as not to interfere with the sightliness and beauty of the present central open space, 2) That buildings of such a general service nature (library, dining hall, etc.) that they affect the entire student body be located in the first zone immediately adjacent to the central open space, 3) That buildings dealing with services more specialized (agriculture, home economics, etc.), and therefore affecting only certain groups of students, occupy the second zone, 4) That buildings used by students, but not directly contributing to organized instruction (dormitories), occupy the third zone and 5) That buildings dealing with problems of general maintenance and physical service (heating plant, carpenter shop, horse barn, etc.) occupy the outer, or fourth zone.

The committee went on to note that with these five recommendations in mind, they would site newly proposed buildings according to the defined zones. These zones were basically the ones that Professor Waugh had recommended in his 1907 and 1919 planning reports and Manning had proposed in his 1911 plan. The zones or sections were designed to focus significant elements of the college’s mission to its physical core which was defined as the broad, central bench with its hallmark pond. Everything that supported these core elements were dispatched to outer zones.

By 1933, the University of Massachusetts, then known as the Massachusetts State College, was facing a severe shortage in student housing. Between 1929 and 1933 at the onset of the Great Depression, student enrollment had grown by more than 40 percent, from 862 to 1,220 students, quite unlike periods during earlier depressions when student enrollment had declined. No new dormitories for men had been added to the campus since 1868 and the one campus dormitory for women, Abigail Adams House, was completely filled, which prompted the College to stop enrolling additional women in 1932.

In response to this housing shortage, the College began construction of a dormitory complex at the southeast corner of North Pleasant Street and Eastman Lane, which ultimately consisted of ten neo-Georgian buildings now known as the Northeast Residential Area. The first building of this complex was Thatcher House, which was constructed in 1935 to the design of architect Louis Warren Ross, who was a member of the College’s class of 1917. Ross’s later works for the school include the Student Union, which was constructed in 1956. Ross also designed Johnson House in 1959, which was the last structure of the quadrangle to be completed.

Despite documents entitled “Final Report of the Campus Planning Committee,” the group operated in one form or another as the primary planning unit on campus for the next 15 years, until 1948. The committee continued to focus on where buildings and facilities would be best sited relative to the campus missions.
Dakin Estate
The Dakin estate is located at the northeast edge of the UMASS campus and was originally the private home of Winthrop “Toby” and Janet Dakin. Mrs. Dakin survived Mr. Dakin by twelve years, and in her 1994 will, left the property to the University of Massachusetts. The house and grounds now serve as the University of Massachusetts Center for Renaissance Studies.

Winthrop S. Dakin (1906-1982) moved to Amherst in 1909 as a boy of three. He studied at private schools, Princeton, and Harvard University where he earned a degree in law. Toby, as he was usually called, had a law office in Northampton. He met Janet Wilder (1910-1994) while she was teaching zoology at Mount Holyoke College just before World War II.

Toby and Janet married in 1941 and moved to Amherst, but they were soon involved in the WWII effort. Toby became Chief of the International Law Branch in the Judge Advocate General’s Office in Washington, D.C. He was assigned to different cities at first, and Janet taught zoology where she could and worked in Civil Defense jobs. The couple did not have children. At the end of their military service, the Dakins returned to Amherst and began construction of their home in 1948 adjacent a 26-acre meadow.

The house was built by William E. Gass, the father of three sons who also worked building fine homes in the Amherst area. Many of Gass’s projects were composed of structures salvaged prior to the flooding of the Swift River Valley for the Quabbin Reservoir in the 1930s and 40s. Gass also worked on the early Historic Deerfield preservation properties.

Janet did not return to teaching zoology, but focused on raising and riding Morgan horses. She became a leader in Morgan Horse organizations and was Vice President of the New England Morgan Horse Association. She wrote monthly columns on the raising of her colt Jeffery Amherst or “Jeffy”, for Morgan Horse magazine columns, which were later published as a book. She began and led a popular 4H Horse Club that still exists in Amherst, and is the longest running one of its kind. She was also instrumental in supporting the construction of the University of Amherst Equine Center with an indoor arena. She worked with other animal lovers to organize a group of friends of stray animals, even hosting tag sales in her barn to establish what is now known as the Janet Dakin Animal Shelter for the region.

Primarily a research facility for scholars and graduate students who make use of the more than 16,000 rare books, manuscripts, and monographs, the Renaissance Center also houses graduate and undergraduate seminar rooms where courses in English, History, Art History, Theater, and Spanish are already taking place.

The meadow is routinely not mowed in early summer to permit the native bobolinks to continue to nest there during their breeding season. With funding from the Amherst Kestrel Trust (founded by the Dakins) the property also maintains a perimeter trail which runs over half a mile around the meadow.
BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES


Lane, Tom. 1959. “University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts”[campus plan].

Manganard, Anthony J. 1947. “University of Massachusetts, Guide Map of the Campus”.

Shurcliff, Shurcliff and Merrill, Landscape Architects and Neils H. Larsen, Architectural Consultant. June 1957. “University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, Master Plan, Prepared for the division of Building Construction”.

Continuation sheet 5
Figure 1 Campus map detail with Dakin House shaded in black.
Figure 2 2005 orthophotograph of Dakin complex and surrounding landscape, north is up (MassGIS).
Figure 3 View of Dakin House east entrance elevation, 2008.
Figure 4 View of Dakin House west and north elevations, 2008.
Figure 5 View of Dakin House west terrace and adjacent meadow, 2008.
Figure 6 Campus map detail with Dakin Garage shaded in black.
Figure 7 View of Dakin Garage west elevation, 2008.
Figure 8 Campus map detail with Dakin Carriage House shaded in black.
Figure 9 View of Dakin Carriage House north elevation, 2008.
Figure 10 View of Dakin Carriage House east elevation, 2008.
National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

☐ Individually eligible    ☐ Eligible only in a historic district
☐ Contributing to a potential historic district    ☐ Potential historic district

Criteria:  ☐ A  ☐ B  ☐ C  ☐ D
Criteria Considerations:  ☐ A  ☐ B  ☐ C  ☐ D  ☐ E  ☐ F  ☐ G

Statement of Significance by Jon Buono, Einhorn Yaffee Prescott, Architecture & Engineering

The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

The Dakin House, Carriage House, and Garage (UMASS No.s 626, 649, 650 respectively) are recommended not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The buildings are not recommended individually eligible as they do not possess individual significance nor do they display any significance in construction or architectural design. The residential structure is not central to the historic development of the institution. Although a large number of buildings on the UMASS campus are recommended eligible as part of a potential historic district, the Dakin House, Carriage House, and Garage are not recommended eligible as a contributing resource to this district as they are physically isolated from this concentration of buildings.