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

Machmer Hall is an approximately 73,000 square foot academic building on the Amherst campus of the University of Massachusetts. The building is located within the central campus and was originally designed to house the mathematics department.

The building has a c-shaped plan including a three-story central block and two two-story wings, all with basement. The building was originally sited facing the historic North College building with its primary façade as the south elevation. The flanking wings form a rear courtyard at the north, which originally faced the campus ravine prior to its infill for the parking structure.

The modern classroom building was constructed with a steel and concrete frame with interior partitions of structural-glazed tile. The three classroom blocks are each organized by double-loaded corridors. The rectilinear volumes of the building have flat roofs, continuous coping, and unadorned facades finished with common-bond brick veneer. The façade is unified through the spacing and composition of windows within a continuous frame of limestone window heads and sills. Windows are large double-hung 1/1 aluminum sash.

Two prominent entrance vestibules are located at the east and west ends of the south elevation. They are positioned at the joint of each wing feature double-height atriums with storefront glass walls and projecting, polished granite surrounds. Each vestibule has three pairs of tempered glass doors with aluminum frames.

The building entrances occur at a raised terrace elevation that is accessed via two exterior stairs. A large semi-circular stone staircase at the east is framed by brick retaining walls and originally provided linkage to the Olmsted Drive. The stair is now divided by metal handrails and leads to a small paved area for service vehicles. Two original exterior flagpoles are also prominent features of the south elevation.

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 [sic] 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.

**Machmer Hall**

Machmer Hall was constructed at the northern terminus of the Lincoln Road axis in 1957. The building was sited adjacent to the 19th-century North College building which survived for a few years before ultimate demolition. The location mirrored the Student Union across Olmsted Drive, which was sited to provide convenient access to both the male and female residential complexes. Although designed by separate architects, both buildings employed similar architectural details and contributed towards defining the central campus academic conference.

Following the completion of Hasbrouck Hall in 1950, the University adopted a modern approach to the design of all new academic buildings. Although there were virtually no distinctions in the building’s construction technology from other projects of the period (concrete and steel frame) the exterior form was a clear departure from the Georgian Revival style influencing the dormitory construction. Such a distinction was not uncommon to this period of post-WWII campus architecture, when academic facilities often embraced the symbolic connotations of modern design, while residential construction adopted the historic.

The southern end of the Lincoln Road axis was later terminated by the construction of Whitmore Hall in 1967. Historically, Lincoln Avenue was tree-lined and featured some open lots interspersed with athletic fields. New construction near Machmer Hall has changed the scale of the surrounding landscape. New construction includes Du Bois Library (1972) to southeast, Thompson Hall to the west (1968), and the Parking Garage to north (1970). Vegetation historically associated with the building, including trees over lawn and evergreen shrubs at the eastern entrance steps, remains intact.

Machmer Hall was named for William Lawson Machmer (1899-1953), who held one of the longest tenures of any administrator in the history of the University of Massachusetts. Machmer served under five presidents across 42 years, helping to guide the university through an economic depression, two world wars, and three name changes. During his years as Dean, Machmer witnessed the growth of the university from fewer than 500 students to almost 3,800, and helped guide its transformation from a small agricultural college into Massachusetts State College (1931) and finally into the University of Massachusetts (1947).


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”.
Figure 1 Campus map detail with surveyed building shaded in black.
Figure 2 2005 orthophotograph of Machmer Hall (center) and surrounding landscape, north is up (MassGIS).
Figure 3 View of Machmer Hall during construction.
Records group 150, No. 0004766, Special Collections and Archives, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst.
Figure 4 View of Machmer Hall entrance (south) elevation. Records group 150, No. 0004759, Special Collections and Archives, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst.
Figure 5 View of Machmer Hall entrance (south) elevation. Records group 150, No. 0004760, Special Collections and Archives, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst.
Figure 6  View of Machmer Hall entrance (south) elevation.  
Records group 150, No. 0004761, Special Collections and Archives,  
W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst.
Figure 7  View of Machmer Hall entrance (south) elevation.
Records group 150, No. 0004763, Special Collections and Archives,
W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst.
Figure 8 View of Machmer Hall entrance (south) elevation. Records group 150, No. 0004765, Special Collections and Archives, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst.
Figure 9  Machmer Hall south east corner, 2009.
Figure 10  Machmer Hall south elevation, 2009.
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: Rita Walsh and Walter Maros, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.

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

First established in 1863 under the provisions of the Federal Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act, the University of Massachusetts Amherst retains a significant collection of buildings dating from its first period of operation as the Massachusetts Agricultural College (1863-1931). These include, but are not limited to: substantial brick and masonry classroom, laboratory, research and administrative buildings dating to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, barns and stables related to its function as an agricultural college, pre-existing wood frame buildings (including two 18th century buildings [117, 118]) incorporated into campus functions, the power plant [107], the Chancellor’s House [124], and the Old Chapel [126] and Memorial Hall [112], historic centerpieces of the campus. The historic buildings from the “Mass Aggie” period for the most part are concentrated in three areas: (1) an arc that extends west to east between the Mullins Center and the Northeast Residential Area, including the Grinnell barn complex [109, 110, 111], Blaisdell [108], the power plant [107], Flint [104], Stockbridge [105], Draper [103], Goessmann [106], and West [114] and East [113] Experiment Stations; (2) a smaller grouping that includes, Wilder [115], the University Club buildings [117, 118], Clark [116] and Fernald [119]; (3) and the group of South College [128], Old Chapel [126] and Memorial Hall [112] at the center of the campus. Other individual buildings [including 120, 124, 125] also survive outside these areas. Although the campus has expanded significantly in and around the Massachusetts Agricultural College core, both individual buildings and groups of buildings that still convey their relationship to each other as part of the Agricultural College are campus plan, are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under criteria A and C at the state level.

The University of Massachusetts Amherst also retains a significant collection of buildings dating from 1931-1958, which is a period characterized by the expansion of the school’s mission and physical plant that began in the 1930s with its name change to Massachusetts State College. At this time, the Trustees made a concerted effort to modernize and increase campus facilities, through the post-World War II mid-20th century period when there was unprecedented growth in the size of the university student population and a concurrent growth in specialized academic research and degree work.

The recommended University of Massachusetts Amherst historic district meets Criterion A for its association with the ongoing mission of this state university to meet the educational requirements of a rapidly changing world. From the inception of the University in 1863 as the Massachusetts Agricultural College, through the current day, the Trustees have sought to provide educational programming and facilities that would enable students to advance the practice of agriculture and a steadily increasing host of other fields, meet the needs of a rapidly-industrializing world, and succeed in leading a post-industrial information and technology-based economy.

The historic district also meets Criterion C for its stock of buildings and landscape features whose forms and functions reflect the evolving and expanding mission of the University in the 95 years between its 1863 founding and 1959 (1959 being the 50 year cut-off for National Register consideration). A number of architects, landscape architects and planners of local, regional and/or national prominence were involved in the design of the individual buildings and the overall plan of the current University of Massachusetts Amherst campus. The aggregate efforts of these design professionals produced a distinctive public university campus landscape, primarily of the mid-19th to mid-20th century, which is unique in Massachusetts.

Despite the loss of certain buildings and landscape features up to the present time in 2009 and incremental physical changes seen in new window, door and roofing replacements, as well as siding replacements in a small number of buildings, the district retains integrity of location, setting, design, feeling, association, workmanship, and materials.