FORM B – BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Photograph

Topographic or Assessor's Map

Assessor’s Number  USGS Quad  Area(s)  Form Number
UMASS No. 33  Williamsburg  n/a  

Town:  Amherst
Place: (neighborhood or village) University of Massachusetts
Address:  171 Infirmary Way
Historic Name:  Wheeler House
Uses:  Present: dormitory
       Original: “Dormitory #15”
Date of Construction:  1958
Source:  construction documents
       UMASS Facilities Office
Style/Form:  Art Deco elements
Architect/Builder:  Louis Warren Ross
Exterior Material:
       Foundation: concrete
       Wall/Trim:  brick with limestone beltcourses
       Roof:  flat, built-up
Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:  none

Major Alterations (with dates):  none recorded

Condition:  good
Moved:  no | X | yes |  Date __________
Acreage:  1,348 acres 2008 historic structure survey area

Setting:  The building is located at the base of Clark Hill. The south edge of the property fronts Clark Hill Road and connects to a linear car park. The perimeter landscape of the building is additionally defined by graded terraces and slopes allowing for narrow lawn panels and pedestrian circulation.

Recorded by:  Jon Buono
Organization:  EYP/ Architecture & Engineering
Date (month / year):  August 2008

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

Wheeler House is an approximately 35,000 square-foot student residence hall on the Amherst campus of the University of Massachusetts. The building is one of nine structures that comprise the Central Residential Area. All nine buildings were designed and constructed between 1940 and 1963, and sited according to a Beaux-Arts formal plan.

Seven of these buildings (Butterfield, Brooks, Van Meter, Greenough, Chadbourne, Brooks, and New Africa) were uniformly designed in Georgian Revival style. Wheeler and Brett, which are both sited at the bottom of the hill and constructed last, are less ornate structures and have subtle Art-Deco details. All buildings continue to serve as dormitories in 2008.

The main planning axis of the Central Residential Area is perpendicular to the ridgeline of Clark Hill and extends northeast to southwest. The axis is defined by the center of Van Meter and Baker Houses, with the remaining dormitories sited to the north and south. The bilateral symmetry and duplication of building footprints and appearance only deviates with the location of Butterfield House and the design of Brett House. The spatial relationship of the planning axis is visually reinforced by the central block and cupola of Van Meter House. The steep grade of the overall site was graded to create narrow terraces between the individual structures.

The rectangular building is 4 stories tall with a basement level exposed by a decrease in grade at the west elevation. The structure is generally 15 bays wide by 3 bays deep. The top level of the building is setback to include 11 bays and the tiered composition is reinforced by flat roofs. The basement and foundation are finished with architectural concrete, while the upper stories have common-bond brick veneer with continuous limestone belt courses at the top of the first and second levels.

The façade is defined by a window pattern of primarily double-hung sash accentuated by circular windows at the east elevation to distinguish the entrance bays. The north and south ends of the long elevations are given prominence by a slight wall projection of the far-most 3 bays to express their cubic form. These flanking projections divide the long elevations into three blocks. On the west elevation, basement level building entrances occur at the central bay of each of the three blocks. Each is accentuated with a raised limestone door surround which extends to a window surround at the upper floor. The associated windows also feature decorative wrought-iron railings. These details also occur at the entrance elevations at the first floor on the east elevation. At this elevation the doors are further accentuated with glass transoms.

The Wheeler House site is located on the west side of Infirmary Way opposite the Mills House (New Africa House) with views of the campus to the west. A bituminous concrete parking area with granite curbing is located to the east of the building and bordered by a bituminous concrete sidewalk that connects to concrete steps with handrails leading into the building. A bituminous concrete walk through mown lawn along the west side of the building connects to Thatcher Way. The landscape features regularly spaced, mature deciduous trees planted over lawn along Infirmary Way. Foundation planting around the building includes deciduous shrubs, evergreen shrubs, and perennials. Structures on the site include a concrete retaining wall and concrete block planters. Site furnishings near the building include wooden benches, bike racks, and a stockade fence.

**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.

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.

**Wheeler House**

The Clark Hill development grew to be known as the Central Residential Area. The first building of this complex was Butterfield House which was constructed in 1940 to the design of architect Louis Warren Ross, who was a member of the College’s class of 1917. Ross remains the most prolific architect of the campus and was responsible for the design of more than twenty structures, including nearly all the dormitories constructed between 1935 and 1963. This body of work established the Georgian Revival style as a dominant tradition for the residential quadrangles of the campus. However, Ross’s later work for the school also includes the 1956 Student Union, which was designed in a more contemporary modern style.

The Central Residential Area was developed between 1940 and 1959 as a men’s dormitory complex. Buildings in this area included Butterfield House (1940), Greenough House (1946), Chadbourne House (1947), Mills House (New Africa House) (1948), Brooks House (1949), Baker House (1952), Van Meter House (1957), and Wheeler House (1958). The buildings were laid-out in a Beaux-arts style plan with a central axis of symmetry and a distinctive hierarchy of spaces.
Wheeler House was constructed in 1958 on the west side of Infirmary Way, mirroring in scale Mills House (New Africa House). A 1959 campus map shows pedestrian walks providing access to all sides of the building (extant) with vegetation along Clark Hill Road adjacent to the building (no longer extant). Historic images also show sheared evergreen hedges along the eastern façade of the building (no longer extant).

Wheeler House was named for civil engineer William Wheeler (1876-1930) who was a member of the first graduating class of Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1871, and was one of its most prominent alumni of the nineteenth century. In 1876, Wheeler joined MAC President William Smith Clark and two other alumni of the college in helping to found the Sapporo Agricultural College in Japan (now Hokkaido University), succeeding Clark as president of SAP from 1877 to 1879. In later life, he was a successful hydraulic engineer and long-time trustee of MAC (1887-1929).

The integrated design of Wheeler House and the other structures of the hillside Central Residential Area is in the tradition of ambitious campus expansion planning of the inter-war and postwar era. In general, the Central Residential Area complex retains a great deal of its landscape integrity, modified by the addition of parking along Infirmary Way, to the east and west of Butterfield House, along the east of Chancellor’s Way, and to the east of Van Meter House. The Y-shaped intersection formed by Chancellor’s Way and Clark Hill Road was removed by 1955 and rerouted to a spur off of Chancellor’s Way located to the east of Greenough House and Chadbourne House that existed since at least 1943. Removal of this portion of Chancellor’s Way enabled the construction of Van Meter House. Many changes in vegetation patterns are the result of new construction, much of which occurred prior to 1959. The loss of foundation planting at Butterfield House, Chadbourne House, Baker House, and Wheeler House, along with the introduction of new foundation planting at Butterfield House, Greenough House, Chadbourne House, Baker House, and Van Meter House has changed vegetation immediately associated with the buildings.
**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”. 
Figure 1  Campus map detail with surveyed building shaded in black.
Figure 2  2005 orthophotograph of Wheeler House (center, bottom) and surrounding landscape, north is up (MassGIS).
Figure 3 View of Wheeler House east elevation during the early 1960s (undated photo). Records group 150, No. 0003425, Special Collections and Archives, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst.
**Figure 4**  Wheeler House west elevation, 2008.
Figure 5  Wheeler House northwest corner, 2008.
Figure 6  Wheeler House east entrance, 2008.
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.
Significant buildings that were constructed to meet the University’s needs between 1931 and 1958, as well as significant buildings predating 1931 which have no prior Form B on file with the Massachusetts Historical Commission, include (listed in order of construction date): [UMass 58]; Hatch Laboratory, built 1891 [UMass 118]; Clark Hall Greenhouse, built 1907 [UMass 84]; French Hall Greenhouse, built 1908 [UMass 105]; French Hall, built 1909 [UMass 104]; Waiting Station Shelter, built 1911 [UMass 63]; Apiary Laboratory, built 1911 [UMass 74]; Hicks Physical Education Building, built 1931 [UMass 121]; Hicks Physical Education Cage, built 1932 [UMass 122]; Thatcher House, built 1935 [UMass 30]; Research Administration Building, built 1939 [UMass 579]; Lewis House, built 1940 [UMass 28]; Butterfield House, built 1940 [UMass 5]; Greenough House, built 1946 [UMass 24]; Chadbourn House, built 1947 [UMass 6]; Mills House (New Africa House), built 1948 [UMass 29]; Skinner Hall, built 1948 [UMass 128]; Gunness Laboratory, built 1949 [UMass 91]; Brooks House, built 1949 [UMass 4]; Hamlin House, built 1949 [UMass 25]; Knowlton House, built 1949 [UMass 26]; Marston Hall, built 1950 [UMass 92]; Paige Laboratory, built 1947 [UMass 6]; Hasbrouck Laboratory, built 1950 [UMass 124]; Baker House, built 1952 [UMass 3]; Crabtree House, built 1953 [UMass 12]; Leach House, built 1953 [UMass 27]; Worcester Dining Hall, built 1953 [UMass 85]; Arnold House, built 1954 [UMass 2]; Durfee Range, built 1955 [UMass 96]; Van Meter House, built 1957 [UMass 32]; Machmer Hall, built 1957 [UMass 111]; Student Union, built 1957 [UMass 131]; Wheeler House, built 1958 [UMass 33]; and Johnson House, built 1959 [UMass 36].

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.