

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED FEB 22 1979

APR 2 1979

DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Mears Hall

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Grinnell College campus

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Grinnell

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

STATE

Iowa

VICINITY OF

CODE

COUNTY
Poweshiek

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

___DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

___STRUCTURE

___SITE

___OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

___PUBLIC

PRIVATE

___BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

___IN PROCESS

___BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

OCCUPIED

___UNOCCUPIED

___WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

YES: RESTRICTED

___YES: UNRESTRICTED

___NO

PRESENT USE

___AGRICULTURE

___COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

___ENTERTAINMENT

___GOVERNMENT

___INDUSTRIAL

___MILITARY

___MUSEUM

___PARK

___PRIVATE RESIDENCE

___RELIGIOUS

___SCIENTIFIC

___TRANSPORTATION

___OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Board of Trustees, Grinnell College

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Grinnell

VICINITY OF

STATE

Iowa 50112

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Poweshiek County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Grinnell

STATE

Iowa

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

___FEDERAL ___STATE ___COUNTY ___LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR
 DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Mears Hall was built in 1888 as an example of the late Victorian "cottage" form. It is 2½ stories high, with a frame structural system; most of the exterior surface is covered with a brick veneer. The building is characterized by the interplay of brick and wood surfaces (shingling, clapboards). In 1903, a long, two-story addition was made to the north side.

The original cottage is roughly square in plan, with a steeply-pitched, truncated hipped roof. The west (main) facade is dominated by an immense, two-story protruding bay, roofed with a truncated "gambrel" gable. The facade of this bay is symmetrical, with two widely-spaced two-story shallow bay windows (those of the first story topped with slightly flaring pentroofs). Above these, in the attic story, are four smaller windows, the outer two round-arched, the inner pair tall and quite narrow beneath flat, broad, lintels.

The main entrance is at the southwest corner of the building, and is approached through a porch, which originally extended around the entire south side of the building. On the second floor above the porch the wall is sheathed in wood, divided in the Stick Style manner into areas of vertical boarding, horizontal clapboards and imbricated shingles. Here there is also a recessed porch, on the second floor, above which is a large triple-windowed gabled dormer sheathed with shingles.

Due to the removal of the porch sometime in the 1920's the south facade of the house is not now as the architect intended it. It features a gabled bay which projects slightly from the wall of the building and contains, on the first floor, a polygonal bay window and, on the attic floor, a recessed porch sheltered by a wide semicircular brick arch. The rear wall of the porch is sheathed with alternating rows of imbricated and square shingles. The remaining windows in the south facade are either single with round-arched heads or triple with segmentally arched heads. The roof of this side has a double-windowed, gabled dormer with a sunburst motif in the tympanum.

The east side of the cottage has two triangular gable ends, but most of the original facade is obscured by an enclosed walkway which connects the cottage to a building on the east.

The north addition (1903) is about 45 feet long and 35 feet wide. It is four bays long, each bay containing a pair of double hung sash windows finished with a flush stone lintel. There are four dormers, with imbricated shingling in the gable ends above paired windows. On the east and west sides of this addition, the bay nearest the cottage proper is occupied by an entrance with a pair of narrow windows above. An attempt to integrate the addition with the original cottage is seen in the size, shape and shingling of the roof dormers and in the north gable end, which forms a truncated "gambrel" like that of the west bay of the cottage.

Several elements of the original cottage exterior are now gone. They include: two tall corbelled brick chimneys; the porch on the south side; much of the original detail of the remaining porches on the west side; finials on dormers and gable ends. Perhaps most sorely felt is the loss of proportion effected by the addition. The large bay on the west side does not dominate the composition as noticeably as it originally did.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1888 BUILDER/ARCHITECT attrib. Stephen C. Earle, Worcester Mass

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Mears Hall is significant for its role in the history of higher education for women in Iowa, and significant architecturally for the borrowing of domestic forms and their adaptation to the purpose of dormitory living.

Grinnell College admitted its first female student in 1857, the second institution west of the Mississippi to do so, and awarded its first bachelor's degree to a woman in 1867. Erection of Mears Cottage was given impetus by several developments which occurred in the 1880's. Female enrollment on the campus was on the increase, and the destruction caused by a tornado in 1882 had created the need for rebuilding much of the campus.

In the spring of 1885, the trustees of the college approved the construction of a living facility for women based on the "cottage" idea. Their decision set a precedent. The practice then current among colleges in the midwest was to have students room in town, and the first dormitories were just then being built. South Hall, on the Cornell College campus (Mt. Vernon, Iowa) built in 1873, is believed to be the oldest dormitory building in Iowa. The decision to build a cottage, a structure intimate and domestic in appearance, represented a rejection of the institutional character of these early dormitories (and, indeed, of dormitories in general).

Plans for the cottage could not be actualized until 1888; when the Rev. J.M. Chamberlaine donated land adjoining the campus on the east for a building site, and Edward A Goodnow of Worcester, Mass., well-known in the late 19th century as a reformer and promoter of higher education for women, made a substantial contribution to the building fund. Goodnow's bequest was effected through the Rev. D.O. Mears, also of Worcester, who was the husband of Mary Grinnell Mears, for whom the cottage was named. Mary Grinnell Mears was an early graduate of the college and a daughter of the founder of the college and town of Grinnell.

Construction was underway in 1888 and on January 1, 1889, thirty young women, under the direction of a housemother, moved in. Each was provided with a room which contained ample closet space, a water closet, medicine cabinet, dresser, study table with attached shelves, chairs, rug and cot. The building had a modern furnace and in 1893 Professor Frank Almy of the Physics Department installed electric lights, the first on the campus.

The addition made in 1903 (designed by Charles D. Marvin of New York City) increased the capacity of the building considerably and by 1915 Mears became part of a much larger women's quadrangle (it was physically connected to the other components of the quadrangle on its east side) located on this section of the campus. The building of the quadrangle represented the intention of the college administration during the early decades of this century to isolate women within the larger college community and to develop a separate but affiliated school for women, a trend which was later discontinued.

see continuation sheet

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Jordan, David C. "From 1884 to present: Mears history explored," The Scarlet and Black, Grinnell College, November 17, 1978.
 Letter, David Mears to J.M. Chamberlain, October 28, 1884. Grinnell College Archives.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one (structure only)

QUADRANGLE NAME Des Moines, Iowa

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:250,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 15 523500 4621600

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Mears Hall is located in the southeast corner of the Grinnell College campus

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

S.J. Klingensmith, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Division of Historic Preservation

DATE

January 1979

STREET & NUMBER

26 East Market Street

TELEPHONE

319/353-6949

CITY OR TOWN

Iowa City

STATE

Iowa 52240

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Adrian D. Anderson

TITLE Director, Division of Historic Preservation

DATE

2/8/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Charles Ober

DATE

9-2-77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

William H. Abrahamson

3-30-79

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

Later, the first floor of the college was remodelled to accommodate the office of director of food services and a women's library. In 1972-73, the cottage was opened to male students, and in recent years it has housed approximately 55 students, nearly equally divided between the sexes.

The design of Mears Hall has been attributed to Stephen C. Earle of Worcester, Mass., who designed Goodnow Hall several years earlier. In designing Mears, the architect was presented with the problem of accommodating a large number of persons, each with essentially identical requirements, while keeping the character of the building intimate and domestic. This implied attempting to achieve the appearance of a single-family dwelling with the individualized room uses associated with this building type. The thought of the time translated this latter requirement into the asymmetry and irregularity of the Second Empire villa or the Queen Anne "cottage" styles, with their variety of projections, roof forms, and window shapes.

The architect has taken the square, hipped-roofed Queen Anne house, shown by pattern-book publishers such as Comstock (see for example, Modern Architectural Designs and Details, 1881, Plates 41 and 42) and Palliser (Palliser's New Cottage Homes, 1887, Plates 14, 44, or 51), and although he has not complicated the basic cube of the structure with projections and other irregularities to the extent normally achieved in this house type, he has certainly succeeded in creating a domestic appearance. It is in fact only the large, truncated gable bay on the west side that, with its repetition of bay windows, suggests that the purpose of the building might be other than a family dwelling.

The architect has been scrupulous in avoiding repetition of detail in like architectural elements. Window shapes, for example, vary between square headed, round-arched and segmental, and in very pointed fashion, the roof dormers are each treated differently. The section of clapboard and shingled wall on the west side and the shingled rear wall of the recessed attic porch on the south side are curious features. They make the building seem less solid and substantial, and thus, perhaps, more domestic, and can be seen as an admission of the constructional facts of the building, that its brick walls are only a thin veneer over a frail wooden frame.

The building is not without a certain ungainly quality. The west gable bay seems awkwardly integrated with the whole, an effect which is not lessened by the truncation of the main roof. The architect perhaps felt that, even in a style in which high hipped roofs rising to a peak or ridge were the norm and in which the roof was often allowed to occupy half the total height of a building's elevation, the enormous height of his roof, if allowed to rise to a peak, would have been a visual impropriety.

See continuation sheet

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The future of Mears Hall is uncertain. The cottage will no longer be occupied by students after the spring semester of 1979, and the administration is presently considering plans for the building which range from demolition to rehabilitating the building to house the psychology department.