SM-37-2

St. Mary's College Historic District; Margaret Brent Hall

Architectural Survey File

This is the architectural survey file for this MIHP record. The survey file is organized reverse-chronological (that is, with the latest material on top). It contains all MIHP inventory forms, National Register nomination forms, determinations of eligibility (DOE) forms, and accompanying documentation such as photographs and maps.

Users should be aware that additional undigitized material about this property may be found in on-site architectural reports, copies of HABS/HAER or other documentation, drawings, and the “vertical files” at the MHT Library in Crownsville. The vertical files may include newspaper clippings, field notes, draft versions of forms and architectural reports, photographs, maps, and drawings. Researchers who need a thorough understanding of this property should plan to visit the MHT Library as part of their research project; look at the MHT web site (mht.maryland.gov) for details about how to make an appointment.

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Last Updated: 09-12-2018
Margaret Brent Hall is a two-and-one-half-story Georgian Colonial Revival building with a large central block flanked on each end by a one-and-one-half-story, side-gabled wing. It is constructed of common-bond red brick, with brick window sills and flush brick lintels formed of rows of vertical stretchers. The wood trim is painted white. The slate roof drains to lead-coated copper, half-round hanging gutters. Round downspouts lead water runoff to underground drains. A massive brick end chimney rises from the northwest end of the main block. The windows are all original wood sash, and include both single and tripartite fenestration. The tripartite windows are composed of central eight-over-eight double-hung sash windows with flanking six-over-six double-hung sash side windows. The single windows have six-over-six double-hung sash. The windows are fitted with exterior vinyl storm windows.

The primary façade looks southwest and uphill toward the Anne Arundel Hall parking lot. The main block is seven bays wide on this elevation, and has a central entrance sheltered by a one-story flat-roofed entry porch. The fenestration on this side of the main
block consists of single windows. The Classical Revival porch features round Doric-style wood corner columns and dentil molding on the entablature, and shelters a twelve-light, one-panel original door. The porch opens to a brick terrace with low walls, and the yard in front is paved with more brick. The side elevations of the main block have no openings other than vertical louvered attic gable vents. The rear façade of the main block is four bays wide, with three aligned sets of tripartite windows on each floor and an off-center door. The six-panel door has lights in its top panels and is sheltered by a simple, gabled wood entry porch with plain narrow wood corner piers and concrete steps. A bronze tablet to the right of the door denotes the building’s 1951 construction and eventual dedication in 1954. The side wings of the building are one bay long in front and back, with tripartite windows, and three bays deep on the ends, with a center infilled entrance door space flanked by single windows. These entrances have simple gabled entry porches. Each of these entrance porches was modified c. 1960 to function as a window instead. Single windows matching the original windows elsewhere on the building were installed in the top of the door space, and a rectangular wooden infill panel was placed in the void underneath. The end entrance porches were modified into balconies with the installation of a third balustrade rail across the front, but the presence of a concrete step below one porch denotes its onetime use as an entrance.

History:
St. Mary’s College of Maryland was founded in 1840 as a "Monument School" in honor of Maryland’s founders, who had established the first colony at St. Mary’s City in 1634. The school, which was originally named St. Mary’s Female Seminary, opened in 1844 on a seven-acre parcel of land next to Trinity Church. This land was purchased from William and Mary Parish of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. The Seminary was unusual for being a public women’s boarding school offering a high-quality liberal arts education comparable to that offered by private seminaries, and its remote location in southern Maryland made its survival a struggle for many years.

In the early 20th century, the Seminary upgraded its curriculum to that of a high school, and in 1926 included a junior college division as well. The institution was renamed St. Mary’s Female Seminary-Junior College. In 1935, it was reorganized to include only the last two years of high school plus a two-year junior college program, giving students the option of two- or four-year courses. It was accredited as a four-year high school-junior college in 1940 by the Maryland State Department of Higher Education. St. Mary’s remained a small single-sex institution but its future as a post-secondary school remained precarious and an overly critical state commission report in 1947 even recommended its closure.

Energetic new leadership was provided in 1948 by the arrival of Anna May Russell to assume the presidency of St. Mary’s Female Seminary-Junior College. President Russell promptly dropped "Female" from the school’s name and began the difficult task of improving the junior college division and getting the school on track to earn full accreditation from the Commission of Higher Education of the Middle Atlantic States. This would bring the school more in line with national trends in higher education, as well as provide better higher educational opportunities for the swelling postwar population of St. Mary’s County. A more long-term goal of hers was to upgrade the school to a four-year baccalaureate institution, and the initial improvements undertaken to solidify the junior college were viewed as key building blocks that would eventually help the school make this challenging leap in status.

In early 1951, the College made its first major land acquisition since its initial purchase of seven acres in 1844. A parcel of approximately 3.5 acres east of the original campus was purchased from school trustee J. Spence Howard and his wife Jeannette to provide the school with room to expand. At almost the same time, the St. Mary’s Seminary Junior College successfully obtained a $500,000 appropriation from the State of Maryland to construct one or more buildings. Records of the Board of Trustees had mentioned the dire need for a new classroom building as early as 1947. To attain accreditation for the junior college division, the school needed to improve its physical plant with modern academic buildings and attract a more highly qualified faculty. The $500,000 appropriation of 1951 was spent largely to construct a faculty residence, Margaret Brent Hall, and a large classroom.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST REVIEW

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MHT Comments:

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Reviewer, Office of Preservation Services Date

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Reviewer, National Register Program Date

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building, Anne Arundel Hall. In 1959, after some years of enrollment fluctuations, the addition of male commuter students and an evening division, and the acquisition of more land, the junior college division finally gained full accreditation. The high school division was dropped in 1960 and the school was renamed St. Mary’s Junior College.

Within the following decade, under the continued direction of President Russell, the school expanded rapidly into a fully coed four-year baccalaureate college known from 1964 onward as St. Mary’s College of Maryland. Between 1956 and 1969, it acquired 274 additional acres and added numerous buildings in a new area of campus east of Rt. 5. It became coed in the fall of 1965 and converted to a senior college in 1967. In 1992, it was designated Maryland’s Public Honors College, and has retained its distinguished academic reputation to the present time.

Prior to 1951, most faculty members resided in rooms in Calvert Hall, along with the students, and paid room and board. Other local housing alternatives were lacking; married faculty and male professors were forced to live some distance away in Lexington Park. This situation was increasingly a deterrent to attracting highly educated faculty. With the appropriation, the college constructed its first and only faculty residence, Margaret Brent Hall, on its new land in 1951. The large Anne Arundel Hall, a classroom and library building, was added nearby in 1953-1954. The construction of Margaret Brent Hall provided a new, more private housing alternative, which effectively made positions at St. Mary’s more attractive for prospective instructors who were not single women. The building was called the Faculty House initially. It was dedicated as Margaret Brent Hall in 1954, at the same time as Anne Arundel Hall’s completion and dedication. Nothing is known about the designer, but Margaret Brent Hall was built in a Colonial Revival style that complemented the older Calvert Hall and Kent Hall across the street.

It appears that the faculty housing function of Margaret Brent Hall may have been short-lived. As early as 1959, college expansion plans suggested building another faculty apartment house on the school’s new land and converting Margaret Brent Hall to office space, which would free up more student housing space in Calvert Hall. According to trustee records and the school catalog of 1962-64, the first floor of the building was converted from faculty housing to administrative offices in 1962. Reportedly at least one apartment unit on the second floor was used as a residence into the 1980s. From at least 1988 onward, the college’s Business Office has been housed in Margaret Brent Hall, and the building is commonly referred to as "the business office." It was renovated again in 1996. Although the exterior is well preserved, little of the original interior floorplan and finishes remain, aside from the stairs and exterior window/door openings.

Significance/Justification:
Margaret Brent Hall was the first of two major buildings constructed in the early 1950s in the beginning stages of the St. Mary’s Seminary-Junior College expansion. It is located on a parcel that was the school’s first major land acquisition since its founding, and is the only faculty housing ever built on campus. Margaret Brent Hall was the first building erected during the presidency of May Russell and was an integral step in providing amenities that would attract talented faculty and aid the expansion of the school. This private apartment-housing alternative enabled the college to hire a more diverse pool of instructors who needed housing but did not want to live in Calvert Hall with their students. The availability of separate faculty-specific housing meant that the faculty could expand beyond single female professors to include men and married women. The choice of Colonial Revival as the style of Margaret Brent Hall indicated that the Trustees and President of the early 1950s intended for the expanded college to be compatible with the traditional Classical Revival appearance of the original campus, even if the facilities met modern needs.

Renovations included infilling the entrance doors on the ends of the building with windows and paneling, and installing a railing blocking access to the entrance porches on the ends. These changes were done in a highly sympathetic manner and do not detract from the building’s appearance, since the new windows match the original windows elsewhere and the openings still "read" like entrances. The interior of the building appears to have been largely gutted and remodeled as the home of the college’s Business

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST REVIEW

Eligibility recommended _____  Eligibility not recommended _____

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

MHT Comments:

Reviewer, Office of Preservation Services  Date

Reviewer, National Register Program  Date
Office, and its former residential function is no longer apparent from the inside.

Margaret Brent Hall lacks strong architectural significance. It was built in a fairly nondescript early 1950s interpretation of Georgian Colonial Revival style, which was popular for academic and public buildings from the early 1900s into the 1960s, and closely resembles popular garden apartments of the period. Although it retains much of its exterior integrity, it has little distinctive or unique architectural character and is quite typical of its era. Therefore, Margaret Brent Hall does not appear to be individually eligible for the National Register. However, this building was the first of the two 1950s buildings completed as the first major phase of the school's expansion from a struggling high school-junior college into today's honors baccalaureate institution, and visually, it harmonizes with the early-to-mid-twentieth-century Classical Revival character of the original campus.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST REVIEW

Eligibility recommended ______  Eligibility not recommended ______

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

MHT Comments:

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Reviewer, Office of Preservation Services  Date

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Reviewer, National Register Program  Date
New map was created by MKM 6/13/2018 to show the new location of Margaret Brent Hall. The building was moved from its original location (as mapped in the 2007 DOE) to its current location (as shown on this map) in the fall of 2011.
MIHP # SM-37-2

Margaret Brent Hall
St. Mary's College of Maryland
St. Mary's County, MD

Katherine Farnham
Feb. 9, 2007

MD SHPO

Primary facade, view to SE

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Margaret Brent Hall
St. Mary's College of Maryland
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Feb. 9, 2007
MD SHPO
Primary facade, view to NNE
# 2 of 7
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Margaret Brent Hall
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MD SHPO
Oblique view of SE side + rear, looking NW # 3 of 7
Margaret Brent Hall
St. Mary's College of Maryland
St. Mary's County, MD
Katherine Farnham
Feb. 9, 2007
MD SHPO
Full view of rear facade, looking SW
#4 of 7
MARGARET BRENT HALL
1840 - 1951

ST. MARY'S SEMINARY JUNIOR COLLEGE
ERECTED AS A FACULTY RESIDENCE HALL BY THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND

IN TRIBUTE TO
MISTRESS MARGARET BRENT

THIS TOMBSTONE IS PLACED BY THE MARYLAND SOCIETY,
DAUGHTERS OF FOUNDERS AND PATRIOTS OF AMERICA.

MAY 1, 1924.
Margaret Brent Hall
St. Mary's College of Maryland
St. Mary's County, MD
Katherine Farnham
Feb. 9, 2007
MD SHPO
Detail of dedication plaque on rear entrance, to SW
#6 of 7
Margaret Brent Hall
St. Mary's College of Maryland
St. Mary's County, Maryland
Katherine Farnham
Feb. 9, 2007
MD SHPO
First floor hallway, general view to NE
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