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Secretary of the Commonwealth

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**OLD CHAPEL, AMHERST, APPROVED FOR NOMINATION TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER
OF HISTORIC PLACES**

Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin is pleased to announce that the Massachusetts Historical Commission approved the Old Chapel in Amherst for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places at its December 10, 2014, meeting. The nomination will be submitted to the National Register of Historic Places at the National Park Service in Washington, DC, for final consideration and designation.

“The Massachusetts Historical Commission is dedicated to preserving the Commonwealth’s rich historic, architectural, archaeological, and cultural resources,” Secretary Galvin said. “Inclusion of the Old Chapel in the National Register will help to preserve an iconic building that has been cherished by UMass Amherst students and alumni for more than a century.”

The Old Chapel, a richly detailed, stone structure with a distinctive square, four-story corner belltower, stands on a low ridge in the center of the UMass Amherst campus. The building features in the university’s publications and posters, as well as on gifts and class rings, and has long been an iconic image representing the institution. In 1884, the school, then called the Massachusetts Agricultural College, received a \$25,000 grant from the State Legislature for construction of this building to house a natural history collection, a library and reading room, and a chapel for lectures and religious services. Prominent Worcester architect Stephen Earle designed the granite and Longmeadow sandstone building in the Richardsonian Romanesque style.

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The belltower contains a 32-bell carillon, which at one time was manually played and could provide campuswide music upon request, as well as a large school bell, affectionately nicknamed “Old Aggie,” that was placed there in 1892.

From the time of construction, the upstairs chapel space also accommodated lecture classes, commencements, and other collegiate events. Stockbridge Hall, constructed in 1915, replaced the auditorium function of Old Chapel’s upstairs space, and the library moved from the building’s first floor to the Goodell Library in 1934. By 1947, the Old Chapel had become a classroom building for social science departments, and eventually became headquarters for the music department and marching band. The Old Chapel was closed to the public in 1996 due to deterioration of the tower. A thorough rehabilitation project stabilized the tower and restored the exterior masonry.

While the Old Chapel remains vacant, the advocacy group Preserve UMass and the current UMass administration support reuse and restoration of the building. The Old Chapel will be UMass Amherst’s first National Register-listed property on its campus.

The Old Chapel is one of 6 historic resources around the Commonwealth approved for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places by the Massachusetts Historical Commission at this meeting.

Secretary Galvin serves as Chairman of the 17-member board, which meets regularly and considers historic resources eligible for the National Register four times a year.

The National Register is the nation’s official listing of significant historic resources. In Massachusetts, there are over 70,000 properties listed in the National Register. The Massachusetts Historical Commission has been administering the National Register of Historic Places program in Massachusetts since 1966.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission is the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer and the State Archaeologist. It was established in 1963 to identify, evaluate, and protect important historical and archaeological assets of the Commonwealth. Visit our website to learn more about the Commission’s programs (www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc).

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