

Converse Hall at the University of Vermont
Name of Property

Chittenden County, VT
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION: education-related housing

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION: education-related housing

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late Victorian: Renaissance Revival (Chateausque)

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: CEMENT

Walls: STONE/Marble

Roof: STONE/slate

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Converse Hall is located at 75 Colchester Avenue in Burlington, Chittenden County, Vermont at the eastern edge of the University of Vermont (UVM) Main Campus. It sits on an elevated knoll adjacent to UVM classroom buildings and the University of Vermont Medical Center campus. Erected in the Chateausque style, Converse Hall consists of three interconnected wings facing an open courtyard. The building remains largely unaltered since its construction and is the oldest continuously used dormitory at UVM. The high-style building presents several character-defining features: its overall plan and massing; stone walls; black slate roof; dormers; parapet gables with finials; castellated entrance pavilions; fenestration and door openings; and pressed tin ceilings. It is constructed of rock-faced blue Rutland marble quarried in West Rutland, Vermont.¹ The sills, window caps, and chimneys are of the same marble. Converse Hall retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The setting around Converse Hall has changed dramatically since 1895, and what was once an isolated location on the edge of the campus is now developed with educational and medical buildings dating from the mid- to late 20th century. Such development, however, is to be expected on a university campus and does not detract from Converse Hall's historic and architectural significance. Indeed, such development was anticipated when the building was completed, as noted in a June 23, 1896, article in the *Burlington Free Press*: “[Converse Hall] marks the

¹ “Commencement Notes,” *The Burlington Free Press and Times*, 25 June 1896, p. 6.

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eastern line of what, in time to come, as the University buildings multiply, will be the college quadrangle.”² This development was planned with Converse Hall one of seventeen buildings added to the University campus during a construction phase that began with the redesign of the Old Mill in 1881.³

Narrative Description

Setting

Converse Hall is located within the UVM Main Campus and is adjacent to a mix of modern buildings, open space, and parking lots. A paved sidewalk encircles the building, and a low stone retaining wall follows the inner edge of the sidewalk at the rear and sides. The UVM Medical Center building, located immediately northeast of Converse Hall, has a low, one-story limestone-faced section with a curved wall that follows the sidewalk. In deference to the architectural significance of Converse Hall, the UVM Medical Center building and other construction projects in the surrounding area have been designed to minimize their physical and visual effects on Converse Hall. There are parking lots to the west and north, and another campus building to the south. Converse Hall was largely isolated from the time of its construction until the mid-twentieth century.

Exterior

Converse Hall rises 4½ stories and is symmetrical in plan with a front-facing U-shaped footprint opening to the west. It has a brick foundation (not visible above grade), load-bearing exterior walls constructed of masonry and faced with rusticated marble quarried in Rutland, Vermont. The steeply pitched cross-gabled roofs are clad with black slate and terminate at curvilinear stepped parapets. The roof also features gabled wall dormers, stone chimneys, and individual and paired window openings that are regularly spaced. The building faces west towards the core of the UVM Main Campus and the three blocks of the “U” form a courtyard. Each block is connected to the adjacent block at its corner. The center block (known as the “East Block”) is oriented north-south and measures 76 feet long and 36 feet wide. The outer blocks (known as the “North Block” and the “South Block”) and north are oriented east-west and measure 70 feet long and 36 feet wide. On the courtyard side, the elevation of the East Block is seven bays wide and the North and South Blocks are each six bays wide. The west elevations of the North and South Blocks are two bays wide. Apart from the west elevation of the East Block, which has a three-bay-wide cross-gabled projection, each side elevation has a four-bay-wide cross-gabled projection. These shallow wall projections are centered on each side elevation.

The courtyard façade of the East Block has a centered entryway pavilion, while the courtyard facades of the North and South Blocks have an entryway pavilion in the second bay of the façade

² “Converse Hall,” *The Burlington Free Press and Times*, 23 June 1896, p. 6.

³ “University of Vermont: A Glance at the Institution’s Improvements and Prosperity,” *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, 15 August 1895, p. 5.

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projection. These one-story pavilions serve as the primary entry points to the building and are eighteen feet in height with rusticated stone bases under ashlar stone walls and crenellated parapets. Secondary entrances to the first story are on centered the outer elevation of each block and accessed by poured concrete steps with metal tube railings. There is a basement entryway in the right bay of the projection on the south elevation of the South Block.

The most distinguishing feature of the building are the 12 decorative, Flemish-style, curvilinear, stepped parapets with spring blocks and peaks terminating in finials, at each gable end and cross-gable. On both sides of the North and South Blocks a single wall dormer with ogee-arch parapets terminating in finials flanks each side of the projecting center bay. On both sides of the East Block two such wall dormers flank the projecting center bay. The open-eave overhanging roofs project from each side of the wall dormers. The upper attic story is marked by regularly-spaced small, narrow roof dormers with steep pyramidal roofs. There are two low, rectangular chimneys at each of the three principal roof ridges. At the juncture of the blocks, the end gables of the center block extend into double-arch arcades that meet the end gables of the adjacent blocks.

Other architectural details include molded stone label lintels and molded door jambs at each courtyard entryway, and stone window lintels and sills. "Converse Hall" is engraved above the lintel of the East Block entryway, and all three courtyard entryway parapets have carved seals over carved ribbons with mottos. The East Block entryway has the Converse family coat of arms over the phrase "In Deo, Solo, Confido" ("In God Only I Trust"); the entryway to the South Block has the State of Vermont seal over the phrase "Freedom, and Unity, Vermont;" and the entryway to the North Block has the University of Vermont seal over the phrase "Sicillum, Universitatis, Viridis Montis" ("Seal of the University, Green Mountains"). Chateausque-style features of the building include its monumental size, rusticated stone walls, stepped parapet gable ends, arched wall dormers, attic dormers, finials, arched roof connectors, castellated entrance pavilions, and label lintels and molded door jambs.

The building has aluminum-framed doors and one-over-one aluminum windows that date to 1975. The courtyard entryways have double-leaf glazed doors under large single-pane transoms, and the secondary entryways have single-leaf glazed doors. Paired windows separated by aluminum mullions are found in the west gable end walls of the north and south blocks and in the bays flanking the wall projections on the west and east elevations of the center block. The rest of the elevations have single window openings. The entryways originally had wood doors with three vertical panels and were surmounted by wood transom windows, and the original windows were one-over-one wood units. The replacement of the doors and windows has been the only major alterations of the exterior of the building, and the building is well-maintained and in very good condition.

Interior

The first, second, third and fourth story floor plans include longitudinal hallways in each block that terminate at angled doorways leading to the rooms at each end of the blocks. There are switchback staircases off each courtyard entryway, and switchback staircases opposite these

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staircases on the other side of the hallways. Single dormitory rooms line the hallways, and the end rooms contain two single rooms and one double room. There is a full, finished basement with dormitory rooms and recreational spaces in the North and South Blocks, and utilitarian spaces such as a laundry room, mechanical room, kitchen and offices in the basement of the East Block. The finished attic has gathering/study spaces. Each hallway on every floor contains a modern bathroom.

Although the original floor plan is mostly intact, most of the original interior finishes have been covered or replaced. This includes replacement tiled entryway vestibules, replacement staircases with vinyl or rubber treads and plain wooden stockade railings, wall-to-wall carpeting, a mix of plaster and gypsum board walls, gypsum board ceilings, metal door casings, tiled bathrooms, and hollow-core veneer doors. The only visible original interior finishes are the pressed tin ceilings left exposed in many of the dormitory rooms on the third and fourth floors. Despite the alterations, the interior of the building retains its historic feel due to the retention of the original floor plan, angled doorways at the ends of the hallways, and high ceilings.

The original floor plan included a full finished basement. The East Block had utility rooms, a kitchen, a living room, and three bathrooms. Half of the North Block was occupied by a gymnasium, and the rest of the block had bathrooms. The South Block had a large two-room Common Room with an inglenook in one of the rooms, as well as utility rooms and bathrooms. There was a total of seven bathrooms in the basement with a variety of arrangements; three contained two tubs and one sink, three contained three water closets and two urinals, and one contained one of each fixture.

The first, second, third and fourth floors were originally almost identical in plan, as they are today. The East Block had four two-room suites, each with a large study room flanked by single residence hall rooms. The study rooms at each end of the block had back-to-back fireplaces. All of the fireplaces have been removed, but the locations of the fireplaces are discernible due to the chimney projections into the rooms. The North and South Blocks originally had five single rooms and one double room off the hallway, and pairs of study rooms at the ends, which had shared walls with back-to-back fireplaces. The third story's center block had a center bathroom opposite the staircase, and the other stories had a dormitory room in this space. The study rooms have been converted into a double residence hall room and two single residence hall rooms that are divided by a modern partition. There was originally only one staircase at each block that was accessed via its entrance pavilion; the 1975 staircases were added within the walls of a single residence hall room. The third-floor bathrooms each contained one bathtub, two water closets, and one sink. The modern bathrooms are in these locations as well as in two former single rooms in the center block.

The modern finishes date to a 1974-1975 comprehensive interior renovation of the building, and there is more recent carpeting in some areas. The original walls were left mostly intact; partitions were added during the renovation to create more rooms but very few original walls have been altered. The 1975 staircases and bathrooms were created within existing single rooms.

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Many of Converse Hall's original interior details are depicted on the 1894 blueprints and are shown in historic photographs of the building. The intact interiors of UVM's 1890 Converse Cottages, which are located at 475 and 481 Main Street at the south end of the UVM green on the south side of Main Street, were designed by the same architecture firm as Converse Hall (Wilson Brothers & Company) and may provide clues to the original interior features of Converse Hall. Some of the notable features of the "Converse Cottages" include their richly carved staircases, paneled wainscoting, heavily molded door and window casings, molded archways, and paneled doors.

Structural Design

The structural design of Converse Hall incorporates a hybrid system consisting of an iron internal framework and load bearing exterior masonry walls. The iron frame is supported below-grade by spread footings constructed of brick, and the iron beams and columns are riveted together. They support the concrete floor system on each level of the building. The ends of the floor beams are embedded in and supported by the exterior masonry walls, which are faced with marble.⁴

⁴ Wilson Brother & Co., *Dormitory – University of Vermont, Details of Iron Work, Drawing No. 22257*. Architectural plans held by the Silver Special Collections Library, University of Vermont.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education

Architecture

Period of Significance

1895

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Wilson Bros. & Co., Philadelphia, PA

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Converse Hall on the campus of the University of Vermont is significant as an excellent example of the Chateausque style and stands as one of the many important buildings gifted to the University of Vermont (UVM) by philanthropic alumni in the late nineteenth century. Built in 1895 with funds from university trustee John Heman Converse, Converse Hall was one of the first dormitories erected by UVM and its construction came at a time when the University's student population began to grow significantly and educators began to reconsider the roll of dormitory life in education.⁵ Since its construction Converse Hall has been in constant use, housing thousands of university students and standing as an important visual landmark on the UVM campus. Converse Hall is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Education; when completed, the dormitory immediately became an important addition to the University of Vermont's campus, providing students housing near their classrooms and helping to foster a sense of campus unity among the students. Converse Hall is also locally significant under Criterion C in Architecture as a representative example of the Chateausque style of architecture as designed by Wilson Brothers & Company, one of Philadelphia's most prominent architecture and engineering firms. Chateausque is a high style architectural form not commonly found in Vermont. Reminiscent of the monumental sixteenth century chateaus of France, Chateausque buildings were commonly erected in the 1880s and 1890s by America's millionaire class. After its construction Converse Hall was universally praised by local figures for its architectural details and the positive effect it had on the appearance of UVM's campus. The period of significance for Converse Hall is 1895 coinciding with the building's construction; though the dormitory has been renovated several times since its construction it has maintained its integrity and remains an important part of the University of Vermont's main campus in Burlington.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The University of Vermont

In 1791 the Vermont General Assembly chartered the University of Vermont upon the promotion of the establishment of a state college by politician and militia general Ira Allen. The university opened in 1800 and in 1804 the first class of four students graduated. There was a slow but steady growth in enrollment from then on, apart from those periods that encompassed the War of 1812 and the Civil War.

The first campus building was constructed in 1806 on the east side of what is now the University Green. Named The College Building, this large Federal style building housed classrooms,

⁵ "An Auspicious Opening," *Burlington Free Press*, September 26, 1895, 6.

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libraries, offices, a chapel, and student quarters.⁶ The College Building burned down in 1824, and in 1825, three brick buildings in close proximity to each other were constructed in its place. North and South College were erected as dormitories, and four years later Middle College, which housed the university chapel, lecture rooms, and library was placed between the dormitories.⁷ These buildings were joined together in 1846, creating what is known as “Old Mill,” a multi-purpose building which remains standing. Other early building constructed for the university include the 1829 Medical College building, today know as Pomeroy Hall.

In 1862 the Federal government passed Morrill Land Grant Act which provided land to fund the creation of land grant universities whose specific purpose was to provide for the agricultural and mechanical education of America’s citizens. Three years later, in 1865 the University of Vermont was designated Vermont’s land grant college and became known as the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College.⁸ This led to an increase in the variety of courses offered and encouraged a wider range of students to enroll at the university.

UVM’s greatest period of expansion coincided with the growth of Burlington itself, which by the 1870s had become a critical lumber port, linking the vast forests of Ontario and Quebec with marketplaces in New York City and Boston. Thousands of people came to the city looking for work and dense neighborhoods were built by the rapidly growing middle class.⁹ The growing population and growing wealth of Burlington encouraged more individuals to attend college. The university grew, and with the city expanding professors could be more readily encouraged to live and work in Vermont.

While Burlington expanded, UVM experienced new leadership in the form of Matthew Buckham who served as president from 1871 until his death in 1910, the longest term in the school’s history. Buckham presided over significant changes at the university; in addition to the growing enrollment, between 1871 and 1910 the curriculum expanded to include more agricultural and engineering courses, women were granted admission for the first time, and a number of critical buildings were erected largely with funding provided by philanthropic alumni.¹⁰ The building boom overseen by Buckham lasted from 1881 to 1907 and is largely responsible for the present shape of the UVM Campus. Building’s erected under Buckham’s tenure include the 1884 Medical College building which burned in 1903, Billings Library (1885), which was designed by prominent architect Henry Hobson Richardson; Commons Hall (1885) a dining hall replaced in 1930 by the Robert Hull Fleming Museum, three houses for professors presently known as the Converse Cottages at 475 and 481 Main Street and Mansfield House at 2 Colchester Avenue (1890), Perkins Hall (1891), Converse Hall (1895), Williams Science Hall (1896), the Justin

⁶ Mary Jo Llewellyn and Thomas Visser, “Old Mill,” *The University of Vermont Campus Treasures*, Electronic Document: <http://www.uvm.edu/campus/oldmill/oldmillhistory.html>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “The New College,” *Vermont Journal*, November 11, 1865, 4.

⁹ Britta Tonn, Kaitlin O’Shea and Nicole Benjamin-Ma, “The University Green Historic District,” Vermont Division For Historic Preservation Inventory/Nomination Form, section 8 page 33.

¹⁰ Universitas Viridis Montis, 1791-1991: An exhibition of documents and artifacts telling the story of the University of Vermont. (Can’t get citation info need to go to Library)

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Morrill Drill Hall gymnasium now the Royall Tyler Theater (1901), Dewey Hall (1905) and Morrill Hall (1907). Most of these newly constructed buildings utilized high style architecture and their appearance reflected the growing status of the university and its wealthy alumni.

Converse Hall

Built amid the University's construction boom of the late nineteenth century, Converse Hall was the gift of UVM alumni and trustee John Heman Converse. Born in Burlington and a member of the class of 1861, Converse made his fortune working for the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Philadelphia.¹¹ In 1885 John Converse was appointed trustee to the University of Vermont and following this he donated extensively to the university, funding the construction of the Converse Cottages and Mansfield House in 1890. Soon after, Converse funded the construction of a new dormitory, Converse Hall, which was built between 1893-1894 and opened in 1895.¹²

President Buckham announced plans to erect Converse Hall at the commencement ceremony for the class of 1892 and work started the next year.¹³ Converse Hall was deliberately sited near the Mary Fletcher Hospital (now the UVM Medical Center), a location which commanded attractive views of the College Green, Green Mountains and Adirondack Mountains.¹⁴ The Wilson Brothers & Company of Philadelphia architecture firm designed Converse Hall in the Chateausque style, a high style architectural form which was in vogue in the late nineteenth century. When it was completed the building cost \$125,000 and contained eighty-nine bedrooms, forty-eight sitting rooms, and a suite of six rooms in the basement to be occupied by the janitor.¹⁵ An article in the September 10, 1895, edition of the *Burlington Free Press* noted that the building was ready for the fall semester, and called the residence hall "A Veritable Palace," and "one of the handsomest and best furnished college dormitory buildings to be seen on the American continent...An inspection of the building makes one wish he were to begin his college career again amid such beautiful surroundings."¹⁶ Converse Hall was furnished by the John Wanamaker store, Philadelphia's most prominent department store.¹⁷ The study rooms were furnished with tables, bookcases, sofas and chairs, and the bedrooms included washstands. The tables, bookcases chairs, dressers and washstands were all oak construction, and the couches were upholstered with dark green leather.¹⁸ Students were not allowed to paste or nail pictures into the walls, keep dogs, use horns or other noisy instruments, throw or kick balls in the building, or play musical instruments except between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m. on Saturdays and weekdays between 5:00 and 8:00 p.m.¹⁹ After its completion, all male students who wished to occupy the dormitories were required to live in Converse Hall unless they demonstrated a specific

¹¹ "Sudden Death of John Converse," *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, May 10, 1910. 12.

¹² "Commencement Day," *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, June 26, 1885, 14.

¹³ "End of Commencement," *Burlington Free Press*, July 7, 1892, 10.

¹⁴ "Two Splendid Structures," *Burlington Free Press*, October 10, 1894, 6.

¹⁵ "City News," *Burlington Free Press*, June 20, 1895, 6.

¹⁶ "A Veritable Palace," *Burlington Free Press*, September 10, 1895, 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

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need to live in one of the older dormitories.²⁰ The university took this opportunity to extensively remodel the old dormitories but reaffirmed to students the belief that Converse Hall offered quarters which “on the grounds of comfort, health, and orderly habits are well adapted to student life.”²¹ Students at the University of Vermont felt similarly about Converse Hall, writing in the 1897 *Ariel* yearbook that the construction of Converse Hall was an improvement to the social life of college and provided students an opportunity “to enjoy the comforts and cultivate the amenities of a more orderly social life than has commonly prevailed in College dormitories.”²² In the decades which followed Converse Hall became an important center of student life at UVM.

Once students moved into Converse Hall, they quickly organized clubs and other group activities. The Converse Hall Club formed in 1900 and its members worked to organize an orchestra and gather funds to subscribe to magazines and rent a piano.²³ Soon afterwards, the residents of Converse Hall and Old Mill organized baseball and football teams which competed against each other in leagues that also included student organizations from other parts of the University.²⁴ These organized activities helped build a college spirit at UVM and fostered friendships among the young men who lived in Converse Hall.

Converse Hall has been used continually used as a dormitory since its construction, the only exceptions being during the World Wars. During World War I the United States Signal Corps took over Converse Hall, converting the dormitory into a barracks. Starting in September of 1917, 112 soldiers lived in Converse Hall and were trained in radio operation on UVM’s campus.²⁵ These soldiers remained on campus for the duration of the war. When America entered World War II, Converse Hall was again used to house soldiers undergoing training at UVM.²⁶ Starting in 1942 men entering the army flying service trained in Burlington, learning a variety of skills including basic flying and more advanced glider flying tactics.²⁷ As it had after World War I, following the end of World War II Converse Hall returned to being a dormitory.

During its lifetime, Converse Hall has been remodeled on multiple occasions and its interior arrangement has been extensively altered. In 1926 middle wing of Converse Hall was plastered while its ceilings were covered with stamped tin and the fireplaces were blocked up.²⁸ In 1938, as part of a WPA program, Converse Hall was again remodeled. A cafeteria was installed in the dormitory’s south wing while many of the rooms and the dormitory’s overall floor plan were

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Henry Wallace Clark ed., *The Ariel* (Burlington: Free Printers Association, 1897), 174.

²³ “University Notes,” *Burlington Free Press* October 31, 1900, 5.

²⁴ University Notes,” *Burlington Free Press*, May 8, 1902, 5.

²⁵ “Signal Corps Men Arrive,” *Burlington Free Press*, September 26, 1917, 8.

²⁶ “Converse Hall Used For Barracks,” *Burlington Free Press*, July 30, 1942, 12.

²⁷ “Army Takes Over Jurisdiction of Advanced Pilot Training Enrollment in Burlington,” *Burlington Free Press* August 3, 1942, 9.

²⁸ “University Buildings Undergo Repairs and Extensive Alterations,” *The Vermont Cynic*, September 28, 1926, 4.

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remodeled by the workers.²⁹ The next significant renovation project at Converse Hall took place from 1974-1975, when all of the windows and doors were replaced and the interior of the building underwent a comprehensive renovation. Alterations included the division of some of the suite and study rooms into new residence rooms, the addition of a second staircase in each block, and the covering or removal of most of the historic finishes and the removal of all of the fireplaces and staircase features. Otherwise, the historic floor plan is intact, and some rooms maintain pressed tin ceilings from the 1926 renovation. The interior of the building retains its 1975 appearance.

The decision to build Converse Hall reflects a growing shift in university life that manifested during the latter parts of the nineteenth century. In the early nineteenth century dormitories were primarily erected by universities whose campuses were in rural settings where alternative lodgings were scarce.³⁰ Where possible, universities left housing up to students, many of whom ultimately boarded in private residences. By the late nineteenth century, the idea of environmental determinism began to play a larger role in educational theory. University leaders began to see housing as part of the collegiate mission, and that bringing students together on campus would ultimately produce more well-rounded graduates.³¹ Students were also in favor of dormitories, arguing that communal living helped foster a college spirit.³² At UVM, students even pushed for all first year students should be mandated to live in Converse Hall.³³ The students argued that dorm life gave young men experience with living communally, placed them at the heart of campus activities in a way living downtown did not allow, discouraged snobbery and clannishness, and helped to foster a unifying spirit.³⁴ These factors likely influenced John Converse's decision to fund the construction of a dormitory. In 1895 the University of Vermont's freshman class numbered seventy-eight students, considered at the time to be a large class, the student body likely could have been absorbed by boarding houses in Burlington.³⁵ Rather than solely a pragmatic response to the growing student population, Converse Hall's construction should be viewed as part of a broader shift in educational values experienced by the university and by universities across the country.

Architectural Analysis

Converse Hall is an excellent example of the Chateausque style of architecture and a rare example of this style in Vermont. The Chateausque style was used in the United States from 1880-1910, primarily in mansions, large institutional buildings, schools, hospitals, and

²⁹ "Men's Dormitory Being Remodeled," *Burlington Free Press*, February 7, 1938, 8.

³⁰ Elyse Martin, "The Evolution of the College Dorm Chronicles how Colleges Became Less White and Male," *Smithsonian Magazine*, February 11, 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/history-college-dorms-180971457/>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University, A History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press 2011), 100.

³³ "Fill the Dorm," *The Vermont Cynic*, April 22, 1908, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ "Bradford Village and Town," *The United Opinion*, November 8, 1895, 1.

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government buildings.³⁶ The style was popularized in 1895 when Richard Morris Hunt designed the Chateausque mansion Biltmore in Asheville, North Carolina for George Vanderbilt. Chateausque buildings emulate the style of sixteenth century French chateaus. The form of these palatial manors was seized upon by the new American gilded class who used Chateausque to express their wealth in a monumental architectural form. As a result of the form's association with the gilded class and its extremely detailed composition, Chateausque buildings are not commonly seen and only a small number are present in Vermont.

Chateausque buildings are almost universally composed of stone and commonly feature steeply pitched hipped roof; busy roof line with many vertical elements including spire, pinnacles, turrets, gables, and shaped chimneys, multiple dormers, and wall dormers extending through the cornice lines.³⁷ The style also employs small attic dormers. Chateausque-style features of Converse Hall include the masonry walls, which are composed of marble laid in irregular courses and feature sizable stone quoins at the corners. The dormitory features a steeply pitched multi-gable roof system with regularly spaced attic dormers. The building's most significant Chateausque features are the castellated parapets which cap the entryways, and wall dormers. The castellated parapets are all capped with decorative pinnacles. Each of the dormitory's entryways feature a detailed stone door surround composed of dressed stone.

Converse Hall is one of only three known buildings of the Chateausque style in Burlington. The others are the 1895 Richardson Building, a commercial structure at the southeast corner of Church and Pearl Streets that was designed by architects Withers and Dickson of New York, and the Burlington Savings Bank (now Citizens Bank) at the northeast corner of St. Paul Street and College Street that was designed by W.R.B. Willcox in 1900. Elsewhere, Le Chateau, which was constructed in 1925 at Middlebury College as a French language residence hall with classrooms, dining hall and offices. utilizes the Chateausque style.

Converse Hall is also significant as it was designed by a prominent Philadelphia architectural and engineering firm, Wilson Brothers & Company. At UVM, this firm designed Converse Hall, Williams Science Hall, and the Converse Cottages. Their other two Vermont buildings are the 1898 Masonic Temple at 1 Church Street in Burlington, and the 1886 Norman Williams Library in Woodstock. As with Converse Hall, all of these buildings employed stone quarried in Vermont and are elaborate examples of Victorian styles. The Williams Science Hall is also a monumental building with elaborate details and has steep roofs and ornate end gables like Converse Hall.

Wilson Brothers & Co. Architectural Firm

The Wilson Brothers & Company architecture firm practiced in Philadelphia from 1876-1902 and was the partnership of civil engineers and brothers Joseph and John Wilson, and Frederick

³⁶ "Chateausque Style 1860-1910," PHMC Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide, <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/chateausque.html>.

³⁷ Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 474.

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Thorn. The partners had all practiced as civil engineers for the Pennsylvania Railroad until the formation of their architectural firm. During its existence the firm designed hundreds of buildings and structures, mostly in the Philadelphia area, such as institutional and commercial buildings (including early examples of skyscrapers), hotels, railroad stations and sheds, industrial buildings, bridges, apartment buildings, and single-family residences. Converse Hall may have been the firm's only college dormitory. Another example of a large residential building by Wilson Brothers & Company is the 1885 Romanesque "Presbyterian Home For Aged Couples And Aged Men," which is also constructed of rusticated stone and, like Converse Hall, has a central block with side blocks, castellated parapets, and steep roofs with multiple dormers.

John Converse likely became familiar with Wilson Brothers & Company during the 1860s while he and the Wilson Brothers all worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Converse later hired the firm to design both his primary residence in Rosemont, Pennsylvania (1882), and his summer cottage at the New Jersey shore. In 1890 Converse hired the firm to design the Converse Cottages and Mansfield House at UVM's campus.

Richard Smith states in his thesis, "The Wilson Brothers & Co. in Vermont: a Social and Architectural History," that the firm's Vermont buildings represent the state's introduction to the late nineteenth century trend for monumental, highly-engineered buildings of dramatic European-influenced designs, and that Converse Hall could be considered comparable in scale and aesthetics to late nineteenth century dormitories at prominent institutions of higher education such as the University of Pennsylvania. He goes on to say that Converse Hall "exudes an even greater sense of order and rationality" than these other dormitories.

Smith's thesis provides a detailed explanation for the significance of the firm and its influence on Vermont architecture, stating that "They cemented the fact that technologically advanced monumental cosmopolitan and suburban architecture had penetrated the State's towns... The Wilson Brothers & Co.'s works marked a clear departure from existing Burlington and Woodstock architectural trends." This new type of architecture was employed in the late nineteenth century buildings of many universities and college across America. Smith also purports that Wilson Brothers & Company were also a significant firm as they provided by architectural and engineering services, which married "both structure and form more intelligently... which was offset by the firm's careful application of rich ornament and lively sculptural architectural details."

In 1899 the firm expanded to include newly minted partners Henry Wilson, John McArthur Harris and Howard Richard. Not long after in 1902, Joseph Wilson passed away and the firm was ultimately renamed Harris and Richards.

Conclusion

Converse Hall is a critical building to understanding the history of the University of Vermont. Built at a time of changing educational theory, the building utilized a monumental architectural form to provide students with a setting appropriate for furthering their education and developing

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college spirit. For over 120 years Converse Hall has served as a dormitory and the building's exterior has been minimally changed since its construction in 1895. The building's use of the Chateausque style reflects the growing wealth of UVM's alumni and their desire to give back to their alma mater in the form of monumental architectural edifices. The building stands as a monument to trustee John Converse and the use of Chateausque clearly demonstrates his wealth and desire to leave the University of Vermont with a visually striking home for future generations of students.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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“John Heman Converse, LL. D.” *The Vermonter*, v. 8, p. 293, April 1903.

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“University of Vermont Centennial, 1804-1904.” The Centennial Committee of the Associate Alumni. Burlington: 1904.

The Williams and Converse Buildings, the University of Vermont, the Gift of Edward Higginson Williams, John Heman Converse. Photograph Folio. 1895.

<https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org>

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than one acre

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Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 44.478337 Longitude: -73.194446

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of Converse Hall is the footprint of the building. It is wholly located within the University of Vermont Main Campus.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Although Converse Hall was constructed within a two+ acre parcel acquired by the University of Vermont in 1894, this parcel is now contiguous with the rest of the campus. The footprint of the building is sufficient to convey its historic significance.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Paula Sagerman, Historic Preservation Consultant

organization: for the University of Vermont Department of Campus Planning Services

street & number: P.O. Box 365

city or town: Brattleboro state: VT zip code: 05302

e-mail: pj.sage@live.com

telephone: 802-345-1092

date: December 2016

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Converse Hall

City or Vicinity: Burlington

County: Chittenden

State: VT

Photographer: Paula Sagerman

Date Photographed: July 2016 (unless otherwise noted)

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 8: Facing northeast setting of Converse Hall. Converse Hall is in center of photo (October 2014)

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2 of 8: Facing southeast

3 of 8: Facing east toward center block

4 of 8: Facing east toward front (west) elevations (October 2014)

5 of 8: Facing northwest

6 of 8: Facing northwest toward rear (east) elevations

7 of 8: Facing east toward main entrance at center block

8 of 8: Example of former study with preserved tin ceiling and fireplace projection
The October 2014 photographs were used as these views were not available in 2016 due to construction fencing.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.