

FORM B - BUILDING

In Area no.	Form no.
	31 D 33+45

752

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, State House, Boston

1. Town Northampton

Address Green Street, Smith campus

Name Mendenhall Center for the Performing Arts

Present use college facilities for theatre, dance, and music library

Present owner Smith College

3. Description:

Date 1968

Source Smith College Archives

Style modern Finnish- heavily infl. by Alvarr Alto

Architect Westermann, Miller, & Assoc.

Exterior wall fabric brick

Outbuildings (describe) complex of adj. buildings around a courtyard

Other features rough textured dark brick, white mortar; poured concrete trim; interior oak paneling

Altered no Date \_\_\_\_\_

Moved no Date \_\_\_\_\_

5. Lot size:

One acre or less \_\_\_\_\_ Over one acre \_\_\_\_\_

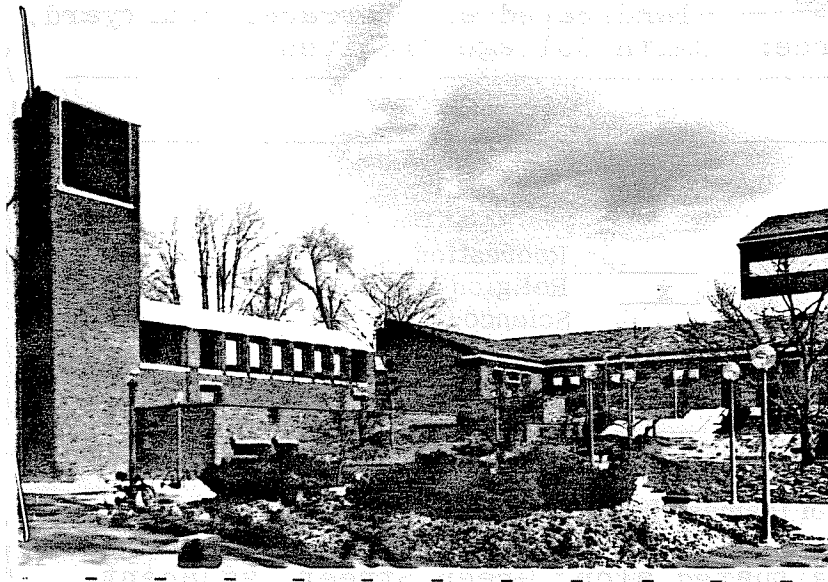
Approximate frontage \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate distance of building from street \_\_\_\_\_

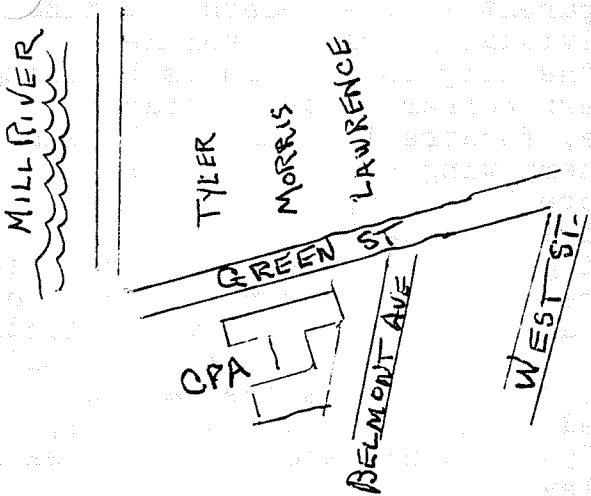
6. Recorded by Ann Gilkerson

Organization Northampton Historical Commission

Date April 13, 1977



4. Map. Draw sketch of building location in relation to nearest cross streets and other buildings. Indicate north.



DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE
USGS Quadrant _____
MHC Photo no. _____

(over)

The individual buildings are massed in combinations of simple cubes, half cubes, and steeply pitched roofs. These geometric forms are repeated, in varying sizes and groupings, throughout the complex. Window and door lintels are of pored concrete, in contrast to the dark brick wall surfaces. The wall surface is further articulated by a cornice of horizontally laid, stepped patterned brick, perhaps a faint echo of classical forms. Dani handblown glass light globes interspersed with wooden benches populate the landscaped and terraced courtyard.

Original use same as present Source: Smith College Archives

Subsequent uses (if any) and dates \_\_\_\_\_

8. Themes (check as many as applicable)

Aboriginal	_____	Conservation	_____	Recreation	_____
Agricultural	_____	Education	<u>X</u>	Religion	_____
Architectural	<u>X</u>	Exploration/ settlement	_____	Science/ invention	_____
The Arts	_____	Industry	_____	Social/ humanitarian	_____
Commerce	_____	Military	_____	Transportation	_____
Communication	_____	Political	_____		
Community development	_____				

9. Historical significance (include explanation of themes checked above)

Named for Smith President (1959-1974), the Thomas Corwin Mendenhall Center for the Performing Arts is situated along Green Street, adjacent to Sage Hall. The complex, completed in 1968 at a cost of over \$4.5 million, consists of a "U" shaped cluster of buildings grouped around an elevated central courtyard. New York architect Helge Westermann, Danish born and Scandinavian trained, designed the Center for the Performing Arts in the style of the modern Finnish master Alvar Aalto. Characteristics of this style include the use of dark, rough textured brick, white mortar and interior natural oak paneling. Also apparent in the modern Scandinavian organic approach is the massing of individually defined volumes which when tied together do not overshadow the neighboring campus buildings.

Five main facilities comprise the Center: Werner Josten Library, Hallie Flanagan Studio Theatre, Eliot Alcove, Theatre 14, and the Berenson Studio. Josten Library, occupying the southern wing of the complex, houses over 20,000 books, 29,000 musical scores, and 35,500 records, in addition to a reading room and individual listening booths. This library was named for Werner Josten, a distinguished composer and conductor, and Professor of Music 1923-1949. To the rear of the library is the two level Eliot Alcove, which includes display cases for an extensive collection of theatrical memorabilia and books given to the College by Samuel A. Eliot, Professor of Theatre 1918-1961. Adjacent to the Alcove is the Hallie Flanagan Studio Theatre (capacity 180), named for Hallie Flanagan Davis, Chairman of the Theatre Department (1942-1955) and initiator of the Theatre major at Smith. The majority of the upper level of the east wing is taken up by the main theatre, Theatre 14 (capacity 460), given by an anonymous member of the Class of 1914. At the northwest end of the Center is the Berenson Studio, two dance studios and dressing rooms named for Senda Berenson Abbott, first director of Physical Education at Smith (1892-1911).

In addition, the Center also incorporates a two story student lounge, the Gamut, given by the Smith College Parent's Committee. Also included are a television studio, a scene shop, faculty offices, and a green room. Next to the Berenson Studio is a belltower housing an octave of bells cast in Whitechapel, London, by the same foundry which cast the Liberty Bell.

Constructed of brick with a reinforced concrete and steel framework, the Center exemplifies the modern movement in architecture in the freeflowing interior volumes of space and the liberal use of glass to permit the maximum entry of light. Deeply inset, single pane windows of ample vertical proportion and varying widths are placed at regular intervals along the planar brick surfaces. (continued at top of page)