

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Sweet Briar College Historic District
other names/site number VDHR File No. 05-219

2. Location

street & number Sweet Briar Drive, 1/2 mi. W of US 29 not for publication N/A
city or town Amherst vicinity x
state Virginia code VA county Amherst code 009 zip code 24595

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this x nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property x meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally x statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Julia Thomas 2.1.95
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the
National Register
- See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the
National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain):

Signature of Keeper Date
of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- x private
public-local
public-State
public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
x district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: EDUCATION Sub: College

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: EDUCATION Sub: College

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Colonial Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE
walls BRICK
roof SLATE
other

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1906-1942

Significant Dates N/A

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Cram, Ralph Adams
Clark, Pendleton S.
Gillette, Charles

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

- 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 # _____

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

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreage of Property 27.2 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	17	669410	4158210	2	17	669720 4158120
3	17	669630	4157920	4	17	669860 4157715

x See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

=====
11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title Geoffrey B. Henry
organization Greenhorn & O'Mara, Inc. date Feb. 18, 1994
street & number 9001 Edmonston Road telephone 301-982-2800
city or town Greenbelt state MD zip code 20770

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Additional Documentation
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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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Property Owner
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title Board of Directors
street & number Sweet Briar College telephone _____
city or town Sweet Briar state VA zip code 24595

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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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Sweet Briar College Historic District
Amherst County, Virginia

SUMMARY ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Sweet Briar College Historic District consists of 27.22 acres on the campus of Sweet Briar College. Sweet Briar College is located on a rural 3,300-acre campus one mile south of Amherst in Amherst County. The nominated boundaries include 22 contributing buildings--residential, academic, and administrative--constructed between 1906 and 1931 from the design of architects Ralph Adams Cram of Boston and his firm of Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson and/or Pendleton Clark of Lynchburg, Virginia; portions of the original campus plan designed by Cram between 1901 and 1942; and the landscaping designed between 1929 and 1961 by landscape architect Charles Gillette of Richmond. The nominated boundaries were drawn to exclude buildings that predate or antedate Cram's association with Sweet Briar College, or that are not integral features of his campus plan.

The campus plan is strongly influenced by Beaux Arts theories of design and is organized around several intersecting axes. Many of the buildings are connected to each other by colonnades or stone balustrades. The contributing resources are three- and four-story, hip-roofed buildings in the Georgian Revival style laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers and limestone or wood trim. They consist of six dormitories (1906-1925), the former refectory (1906), the library (1929), two administration/classroom buildings (1906-1925), a gymnasium (1931), a student health center (1925), and ten faculty residences/apartments (1906-circa 1913). While most of the buildings have gone through several interior renovations, the exteriors have remained largely unchanged. The five noncontributing resources consist of the admissions office (Hill House), designed by Clark in the 1920s and later faced with brick, the chapel (1966), two dormitories (1956-1961), and a dining hall (1981) and are not associated with Cram, although several of them are situated as originally planned by the architect.

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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Sweet Briar College Historic District consists of 27.22 acres on the campus of Sweet Briar College. The historic resources at Sweet Briar College are located on a rural 3,300-acre campus, one-half mile south of Amherst, in Amherst County in south-central Virginia. The surrounding landscape is characterized by gently rolling hills with both open and forest land.

The principal entrance to the college campus is on the east, from U.S. Route 29, through a pair of brick gateposts. Sweet Briar Drive, a one-and-one-half-mile paved road, leads west from the gate and loops to the north of the nominated resources before terminating in a parking lot on the west side of the campus. An unnamed secondary road runs east of most of the nominated resources and circles around the faculty residences/apartments on the southeast. These roads define the north, east, and west boundaries, with a line following a change in elevation and treeline serving as the south and southwest boundary.

The nominated boundaries include 22 contributing buildings--residential, academic, and administrative--constructed between 1906 and 1931 from the design of noted architect Ralph Adams Cram of Boston and the firm of Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson and Pendleton Clark of Lynchburg; portions of the original campus plan designed and revised by Cram between 1901 and 1942; and the landscaping designed between 1929 and 1961 by landscape architect Charles Gillette.

The campus plan, despite several changes, has remained generally true to Cram's original scheme. Strongly influenced by Beaux-Arts theories of design, the plan is organized around several intersecting axes, and a strict hierarchy of spaces (see the accompanying perspective plan). The principal axis, marked by a paved sidewalk, runs east-west and terminates in the chapel (#B on the accompanying perspective plan) on the east and a roundabout on the west. Two smaller axes run north-south from the refectory (#5) and the library (#7). The faculty residences are grouped on either side of a secondary axis that extends southeast from the main academic group.

The 22 contributing buildings consist of six dormitories, the former refectory (now an art gallery and library), the library, two administration/classroom buildings, a gymnasium, a student health center, and ten faculty residences/apartments.

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The contributing buildings are two- and three-story red brick structures built in the Georgian Revival style and are in a good state of preservation. They feature Flemish-bond brickwork with glazed headers, wood and/or limestone trim, and much classical decoration on both the interior and exterior. Many of the buildings are connected to each other by colonnades or stone balustrades. While most of the buildings have gone through several interior renovations, the exteriors have remained largely unchanged. Four dormitories were built as the northern half of a quadrangle on the far eastern side of the campus. Moving east to west these buildings are:

Randolph dormitory (built in 1908--#1 on the accompanying perspective plan) is a three-story-and-basement, nine-bay-long, three-bay-deep brick building with a slate hipped roof and two chimneys with corbelled caps. There are slightly projecting gable-roofed bays at the north and south ends and at each corner. There is a wide classical wooden cornice, as well as stone and brick belt courses marking each story. The principal entrance is on the west, entered under a brick colonnade; it consists of a central door with sidelights. There are additional entrances on the east and north elevations. All windows are topped by brick jack arches and have stone trim and ledges. Windows on the second story are set within brick blind arches, some of them stuccoed, and have either double-hung sash or are tripartite. The interior features two sitting rooms, a central stair hall, and bedrooms on the first floor, with bedrooms on the second and third floors. The south sitting room has a fireplace with Georgian Revival-style mantel.

Manson dormitory (built in 1910--#2 on the plan) is connected to Randolph by a two-story colonnade. It is a three-story-and-basement, nine-bay-long, three-bay-deep brick building with a slate hipped roof and two chimneys with corbelled caps. There are slightly projecting gable-roofed bays at the east and west ends and at each corner. There is a wide classical cornice, as well as stone and brick belt courses marking each story. The principal entrance is on the south, entered under a brick colonnade, and consists of a central door with sidelights. There are additional entrances on the east and west ends. All windows are topped by brick jack arches and have stone trim and ledges. Windows on the second story are set within brick blind arches, some of them stuccoed, and either have double-hung sash or are tripartite. The interior features two sitting rooms, a central stair hall, and bedrooms on the first floor, with bedrooms on the second and third floors. There is a mail room and post office in the basement.

Carson dormitory (built in 1906--#3 on the plan) is a six-bay long, three-bay deep,

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three-story, brick building with a slate-covered hipped roof, paired end chimneys, and entrances on all four elevations. There are slightly projecting gable-roofed bays at the east and west ends and at each corner. There is a wide classical wooden cornice and stone belt course, as well as stone keystones above some of the windows. Windows on the first story have either double-hung sash or are tripartite and are set within stuccoed blind arches. A pedimented portico on the north is a 1991 addition.

Gray dormitory (built in 1906--#4 on the plan) is connected to Carson dormitory by a colonnade. The dormitory is a six-bay long, three-bay deep, three-story, brick building with a slate-covered hipped roof, paired end chimneys, and entrances on four elevations. There are slightly projecting gable-roofed bays at the north and south ends and at each corner. There is a wide classical wooden cornice and stone belt course, as well as stone keystones above the windows on the first and second stories. Windows on the first story either have double-hung sash or are tripartite and are set within stuccoed blind arches. Windows on the first and third stories lack the arches. A brick arcade topped by a stone balustrade connects Gray dormitory with the bell tower popularly known as the Cupola, an open brick-and-stone pavilion with a copper domed roof.

Equidistant between Randolph and Gray dormitories and connected to them by arched colonnades, is the former Refectory (built in 1906--#5 on the plan), now the Anne Gary Pannell Center, containing classrooms, an art gallery, and offices. The refectory is a tall, three-story, gable-roofed brick building oriented north-south. It features a three-bay pedimented facade with brick pilasters topped by stone Ionic capitals marking each bay. The first story is clad with cut stone laid in regular courses. The central entrance has a metal double door and is topped by a flat architrave. Windows on the second story have 20/20 double-hung sash set within stuccoed blind arches topped by a stone keystone. The windows on the third story are round and have stone trim. Short false fronts project on either side of the main section, and have brick aedicules, presumably designed to hold sculptures. Atop the building is a tall wooden tower with classical trim, arched louvered windows, and a domed top. The interior of this building was remodeled in 1986 for use as an art gallery and library.

To the west of Gray dormitory is Benedict Hall (built 1906--#6 on the plan), a handsome Georgian Revival-style three-story, nine-bay, brick structure with a shallow-pitched roof and a stone balustrade along the roof line. A brick colonnade distinguishes the south elevation of the first story, with two entrances set within the colonnade. The second and third stories are designed as a piano nobile with the seven central bays recessed behind a porch of stone Ionic columns. The columns are echoed to the rear

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of the porch by stone pilasters. One-bay-wide projections with a central arched window topped by a round window with Gibbes surround are at the east and west ends of this building. The interior has been completely remodeled and now contains an auditorium, classrooms, and offices. To the south of Benedict Hall is a courtyard with balustrade and stone steps leading to a terrace.

The **Mary Helen Cochran Library** (built in 1929--#7 on the plan) is to the west of Benedict Hall and is set back behind a small grassed courtyard. This three-story, seven-bay, hip-roofed, brick building has flanking two-bay, two-story wings. The most ornate of the academic buildings designed by Cram, the library features Corinthian pilasters alternating with arched windows on the south facade, a roof-top balustrade, and elaborate stone Georgian Revival-style decoration over the two entrances. These entrances are flanked by engaged stone pilasters and are topped by a broken segmental-arched head, in the center of which is a stone cartouche with swags and garlands. A two-story brick wing was added to the rear of the library in 1967. The interior is also quite elaborately decorated. The main reading hall has a plaster ceiling with garland and swag decorations, a two-story gallery on the south end, and paneled reading rooms on the first and second floors. The reading rooms feature fireplaces with Georgian-style mantels and floor-to-ceiling bookcases.

To the west of the library is **Fletcher Hall** (built 1925--#8 on the plan), a three-story brick building, different in only minor details from Benedict Hall. The three-story, nine-bay, brick building features an arched and colonnaded first story with a two-story loggia above and a balustraded roofline. Some wood trim was used around windows, a departure from Benedict Hall. The interior still features a central entrance hall with handsome Georgian Revival panelling. Administrative offices and classrooms are also located in this building. There is no enclosed courtyard or terrace on the south as there is with Benedict.

At the southern terminus of the axis leading from the refectory is **Fergus Reid dormitory** (built 1925--#9 on the plan), a three-story, fourteen-bay, brick building with a pedimented entrance portico on the north. This entrance portico features an arched entrance with flanking arched windows. The windows on the first story are set within blind arches and are topped by stone keystones. There are paired chimneys at the east and west ends of the building, as well as modified Palladian windows. The interior is the most architecturally sophisticated of all the dormitories and features a large entrance hall with full-height Georgian Revival paneling and two sitting rooms, the west one with a fireplace with a Georgian-style mantel.

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Flanking Fergus Reid dormitory and connected to it by arched colonnades are Grammar (built 1906--#10 on the plan) and Dew (built 1956--#C on the plan) dormitories. Grammar is a three-story, hip-roofed, Georgian-style, brick building with an entrance on the west elevation. The dormitory has a wide classical cornice, stone-and-brick belt courses marking each bay, and paired end chimneys. Slightly projecting gable-roofed bays are at the north and south ends, at the corners, and at the entrance. Dew dormitory is a noncontributing resource and is described elsewhere in this nomination.

The Daisy Williams Gymnasium (built in 1931--#11 on the plan) stands at the far west end of the academic group and is a large, gable-roofed, brick building with an entrance on the north and simplified classical limestone detailing around the central entrance and windows. A brick natatorium with an exterior marked by blind arches and shallow aedicules is on the west. The interior of the gymnasium has offices, a basketball court with stands, and changing rooms. A bronze roundel with a bust of Daisy Williams, in whose memory Sweet Briar College was founded in 1901, is set above the central stair hall.

Immediately to the southeast of the academic group is the Mary Harley Student Health Center (1925--#12 on the plan) a two-and-one-half-story, five-bay, hip-roofed, brick building with a pedimented entrance portico on the north facade and paired chimneys on the east and west ends. There are secondary entrances on the east and south elevations. The central entrance is set within an arch with an Adam-style fanlight and is flanked by windows set within stuccoed blind arches.

Ten faculty residences/apartments--#13-15, 17-22, including the house known as the Deanery (#16), were built between 1906 and 1913, and are located in a double row to the southeast of the student health center. The houses on the east of the main road are large and imposing two-and-one-half-story, hip-roofed, Georgian Revival-style, brick, double residences with dormer windows, stone and wood trim, and one-story porches with elaborate classical detailing. The houses on the west side are considerably simpler in style and appearance. They are two-story, hip-roofed, stuccoed frame buildings in the American Four-Square mode, with a central dormer window on the front facade, and front and back porches.

Most of the elaborate planting and landscape features envisioned by Cram for the campus were never realized. Instead, the campus is marked by naturalistic plantings of native trees and shrubs and wide expanses of grass. Beginning in the late 1920s, landscape architect Charles Gillette prepared a number of plans for roadways, a monumental entrance, and

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plantings. Most of these plans survive and indicate the gradual move away from a formal entrance and approach to the campus toward the present one in which the academic buildings are accessed from the rear or north.

The five noncontributing buildings are located at different points throughout the campus. None were designed by Cram, but several of them stand at the locations originally designated by the architect. The buildings include Hill House (built in the 1920s--#A on the plan), a two-story brick building with an entrance on the south serving as the admissions and financial aid office. The house has been extensively remodeled on the interior and refaced with brick on the exterior. Memorial Chapel (built in 1966--#B on the plan) terminates the eastern end of the main axis. The chapel is built in the Georgian style with a pedimented portico, classical entrance, and tall central tower and steeple. Dew (built in 1956--#C on the plan) and Meta Glass (built in 1962--#D on the plan) dormitories are three-story, brick, Georgian-style dormitories that completed the southern half of the quadrangle. To the west of Glass dormitory is Prothro Commons (built in 1981--#E) a brick and glass modified Georgian-style dining hall.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The portion of the Sweet Briar College campus nominated to the National Register of Historic Places is significant on the state level as the work of architect Ralph Adams Cram of Boston and his firm of Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson. Cram (1863-1942), one of the foremost American architects of the 20th century, executed several prestigious commissions for ecclesiastical and academic buildings during his career, including the designs for the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, the chapels at West Point Academy and Princeton University, and campus plans for Princeton and Rice Institute. The buildings executed to Cram's designs at Sweet Briar College, where he served as architect between 1901 and 1942, are among the few examples of his work in Virginia, and the only classical ensemble by him in the state. They also comprise his firm's first large-scale commission for a college. Although primarily known as an exponent of the Gothic Revival style, Cram produced a complex of Georgian Revival buildings for Sweet Briar that has set the standard for collegiate architecture in Virginia for the rest of the century.

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HISTORY

Sweet Briar College, one of the first four-year liberal arts colleges for women in the South, was founded in 1901 through the bequest of Mrs. Indiana Fletcher Williams as a memorial to her only child, Daisy. The school is situated in Amherst County on the 3,300-acre Fletcher plantation known as Sweet Briar, from which the college takes its name. The original plantation house, known as Sweet Briar House, was built in the early 19th century and was remodeled in the Italianate style between 1851 and 1852. Now the residence of the president of Sweet Briar College, the house is listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places¹ and is outside the boundaries of the College Historic District.

In early 1901 the first Board of Trustees for the college (then known as Sweet Briar Institute) contracted with architect Ralph Adams Cram of Boston to prepare an architectural plan for the new school, anticipated to house and educate approximately 400 female students. Most of the original trustees were Episcopalian clergymen and were familiar with Cram through his extensive writings on ecclesiastical architecture. In particular Dr. John McBryde, first president of the Sweet Briar Institute Board of Trustees and chairman of its Executive Committee, had been impressed with an article by Cram in an issue of The New Churchman.²

At McBryde's request, Cram journeyed to Amherst County in early 1901 to assess the site. During their first meeting, McBryde indicated a strong preference for the Georgian style of architecture for the new school, a decision with which Cram concurred; in the architect's words, "history, tradition, and architectural style predetermined the course to follow."³ There followed a discussion as to whether yellow or red bricks should be used for the construction of the campus buildings. McBryde questioned the use of red brick, as he had no wish to see "red splotches on the landscape."⁴ Samples of clay from the Sweet Briar property were brought to Blacksburg to be fired into bricks. The resulting color, a muted pink-red, supposedly was pleasing to McBryde and as a result "the Board ordered estimates and plans from Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson of Boston for two dormitories, an academic building, and a refectory."⁵

Cram's drawings for the proposed Sweet Briar Institute campus were completed in 1902 and displayed in Lynchburg, the nearest large town, in the windows of the Lynchburg Traction and Light Company where, according to a contemporary newspaper account, "they can be seen by all persons who may be interested in the best of architecture and in modern ideas for educational institutions. These pictures are exceedingly handsome and attractive in appearance. That they will be greatly admired by the public

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is a foregone conclusion."⁶ The drawings were also published in the August 23 and 30, 1902, issues of American Architect and Building News, indicating the significance attached to his designs by his peers.

The plan prepared by Cram for the new college was striking in its sophistication and originality. The original scheme was for a grand classical arrangement of 17 Georgian Revival brick buildings around a great quadrangle with parterres and formal plantings, fountains, and pools. While it was not strictly symmetrical, the plan was formal and axial. The principal axis ran east-west and terminated on the east end with a chapel. Two smaller axes ran north-south. The eastern side of the campus was designed to be largely residential; the western side was dominated by the academic buildings, including a refectory, library, fine arts center, and a "commencement hall." Dormitories were organized in a quadrangle arrangement; each dormitory group was bilaterally symmetrical. Commencement Hall, designed with an impressive dome and connected to flanking buildings by colonnades, served as the central focus of the architectural complex. A secondary axis ran south from the hall to a semi-circular court, around which were a science building, library, gymnasium, and industrial building.

The central focus of Cram's landscape plan was the oval pond and roundabout at the south end of the composition. Arcades and colonnades defined and enclosed the composition and provided a transition between the buildings and the balustraded terraces. The principal entrance to the campus was from the south, by way of a road that circled around the campus from the north and west.

Cram's original plan saw many alterations and he was forced to redesign the campus layout several times during his tenure as architect for the college. This was largely due to lack of funds, as well as a general preference on the part of Sweet Briar officials and the president for a simpler, less formal layout. Thus, although many of the buildings as originally planned were executed, the formal approach and landscaping were largely abandoned.

The style chosen by Cram for the buildings at Sweet Briar was Georgian, not a style for which he was particularly well known during his architectural career, but the only one he felt was appropriate for a school in rural Virginia. Cram described Virginia's Georgian style as "ample, courteous and generally aristocratic," and the architecture of the antebellum Southeast as "the style that may really be called almost indigenous to America."⁷ On the other hand, he shunned meticulous copying of earlier American colonial prototypes and regarded buildings that attempted

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archeological accuracy as "stupid." Instead, Cram designed the buildings at Sweet Briar to be individualistic, yet united by a sure sense of proportion, classical detail, and quality of execution.

H. Stafford Bryant, in his article "Classical Ensemble," suggested several English prototypes as inspiration for some of the buildings designed by Cram for Sweet Briar College. The small domed brick pavilion that terminates the colonnade leading from Gray dormitory, the so-called "cupola," has been compared to Lord Pembroke's bridge at Wilton built to the design of Robert Morris. Fletcher and Academic (now Benedict) Halls show similarities with the Queen's House at Greenwich and the Banqueting House in London, both designed by Inigo Jones. Both the refectory, built in 1906, and the library, built in 1928, feature a giant order of pilasters alternating with arched windows, similar to the Senate House at Cambridge, dating from 1722.⁸

The inspiration for Cram's campus plan and layout for Sweet Briar College is more difficult to trace and is based on both the history of college architecture in the United States and then-popular Beaux Arts theories of design. Cram, who made many detailed studies of American campus designs throughout his career, was influenced by New England prototypes as well as several southern colleges, particularly South Carolina College at Columbia, and Thomas Jefferson's University of Virginia.

The campuses of most New England schools are arranged around either a quadrangle, as at Harvard University, or along a row, as at Yale University. Some colleges, such as Dartmouth College (originally constructed along a row) combined features of both plans. The plan of such southern colleges as Washington College (later Washington & Lee University) and South Carolina College also combined features of the row plan and quadrangle popular at several New England colleges.

At the University of Virginia a strongly architectural focal point was established at the Rotunda, from which the academic and residential buildings developed on either side of a long allee. Not only was the comprehensive and cohesive arrangement of spaces at University of Virginia revolutionary for its time, but the symbolic and didactic qualities of the Roman classical architecture chosen by Jefferson made it a uniquely personal architectural masterpiece.

Partly due to Stanford White's reconstruction of the Rotunda and subsequent additions to the college grounds, the University of Virginia was "re-discovered" by architects at the turn of the century. Many followers of the Beaux Arts school of design admired Jefferson's vision of a unified

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whole created out of a wide variety of classical parts, as well as the inspired use of a central unifying focus. To Jefferson's single-axis plan, they often added a series of cross axes and secondary spaces to create a hierarchy of spaces and reinforce the primacy of the central focus. Some early examples of collegiate architecture that follow these principles include the American University in Washington, D.C., by Henry Ives Cobb (1899), and the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh (1900) by Henry Hornbostel.⁹ Another variation, developed at New York University, rotated the axis of the space so that it was perpendicular to the axis of the principal building. This plan was generally followed by Cram at Sweet Briar, with Commencement Hall placed near (but not directly at the center) of the long axis.

Cram admired the plan of Jefferson's University of Virginia and incorporated the colonnades of that school into the design of Sweet Briar. However, he generally deplored the architecture at the University of Virginia, describing the buildings as having "unnecessarily unreasonable classical porticoes with columns, entablatures, and pediments complete--and all built of pine boards framed up in the semblance of a newly discovered paganism."¹⁰ To him, the ideal was what he considered the more refined classical architecture of Columbia University or Stanford White's New York University: Cram described Columbia as "the noblest type of the pure classical idea."¹¹ Cram also undoubtedly studied the campus plans of such colleges as Stanford University in California and Trinity College in Washington, D.C., which were both largely executed from the design of a single architect.

Cram's original intentions for Sweet Briar College were followed in many respects but modified in others. The individual building designs were generally followed, although building materials were sometimes altered; for example, wood was substituted for limestone trim in some of the later buildings. Considerations of cost necessitated the scaling back of the original extensive campus plans, and several buildings were never erected, including Cram's pivotal Commencement Hall. Other buildings, including the chapel, which was built in 1966 long after Cram's death, were built on the sites planned by the architect and closely followed the architect's original designs. The most significant changes occurred in Cram's landscape plan, which from the beginning was considered overly formal and ill-suited to a rural setting; one early account acknowledged that there was a "diversity of opinion about having a quadrangle out in the country."¹² The design for clipped hedges and tall cedars, elaborate pools, and flower gardens was abandoned in favor of a more naturalistic English style of landscaping.

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The Richmond landscape architect Charles Gillette, who was employed by Sweet Briar beginning in 1929, may have been responsible for this naturalistic appearance. The influence of the Beaux Arts school was evident in the way in which Cram subdued natural changes in terrain under rigid terraces and flights of stairs. Instead, these hills and slopes were simply allowed to grow over in grass and descend gently from the southern end of the campus. Most importantly, Cram's grand entrance from the south was never attempted (visitors today approach the college from the north and their first views are the backs of the buildings); instead a more leisurely and less formal approach is made from the west, and the campus buildings now look out upon cultivated fields and lawns. It is unlikely that this approach will be abandoned in favor of a new approach from the south.

With Cram's architectural drawings accepted by the college authorities in 1902, initial cost estimates and contracts were prepared. According to a history of Sweet Briar College, when Cram's first estimates for the college buildings arrived, they seemed inordinately high to the college authorities. Dr. McBryde knew a contractor in Blacksburg, Virginia, to whom he submitted the plans and got an estimate that was approximately half that of Cram's. When Cram came for a visit "he was astounded at . . . (the low price of the work) as compared with the cost of similar work in the North." ¹³ Despite the contractor's reasonable prices, he was soon replaced (for no known reason) by J. P. Pettyjohn, of Lynchburg. One of Lynchburg's most prominent builders and contractors, Pettyjohn may have been responsible for suggesting the appointment of Pendleton S. Clark, also of Lynchburg, as associate architect for Sweet Briar College. Clark, sometimes with his associate Walter Crowe, served in this capacity throughout Cram's association with the college. After Cram's death in 1942, Clark's firm of Clark, Nexson & Owen continued as principal architect for Sweet Briar until the recent present.

From the original scheme, four college buildings--the Refectory, Academic (now Benedict Hall), and Gray and Carson dormitories--plus four faculty houses, service buildings, and several temporary roads were completed by 1906 with the funds immediately available. Brick for the buildings was manufactured on the Sweet Briar property from local clay. Dr. Mary K. Benedict, first president of Sweet Briar College, described her initial impressions of the college on her arrival in 1906:

My first trip through the buildings made it clear that there was much to be done on the material side before September. I remember especially my first sight of the inside of academic building. There was nothing in it except piles of plaster on the unstained floor, not even a blackboard! . . . Most of the buildings were

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sufficiently ready by the opening of college in September (1906) to make us comfortable, but it was necessary to continue work on the material side during the first year to get the necessities of living to run smoothly.¹⁴

The northeastern corner of the dormitory quadrangle was filled out by 1910 with the completion of Randolph and Manson dormitories. In 1912, Grammar dormitory began the southeastern residential group which was not completed until 1962, when Meta Glass dormitory was finished.

Fletcher Hall (a close twin of Benedict Hall), which balances one side of the north-south axis leading from the proposed library, was completed in 1925, beginning a second period of growth at Sweet Briar. It was built on the site designated on the 1902 plan as the Fine Arts Building. Both Benedict and Fletcher halls may have been based on the design of Inigo Jones's Queen's House; this prototype was also used by Cram in his design of the library at Wheaton College in Massachusetts. A rather drastic alteration to Cram's original campus plan occurred with the construction of Fergus Reid dormitory, which he designed in 1928. Located in the southeastern dormitory group, it enclosed the southern side of the composition. This resulted in the dormitory standing in the line of what was to have been a vista from the Refectory. With the vista closed, the eastern end of the campus began to resemble a courtyard and is called "the Quadrangle" today. The dormitory also differs in appearance from the earlier ones in its simpler exterior detailing and its cleaner massing. The interior, with its High Georgian entry hall, is also different from the more restrained and institutional Georgian style of Gray and Carson dormitories.

Three more development plans for Sweet Briar College were drawn during Cram's tenure as architect (after 1913 the firm was known as Cram & Ferguson, Bertram Goodhue having left the firm in that year), each one showing a tendency towards greater simplicity. While they became less formal, the scheme for a great quadrangle containing smaller courtyards remained, and is a central feature of the present campus. The designs for the buildings continued to be designed in the English classical vein--"a vein that became purer and purer . . . as the teens gave way to the 1920s."¹⁵ By that time, the references in Cram's work to Inigo Jones and Andrea Palladio became more explicit.

The last major building program carried out under Cram's leadership began with the appointment of Meta Glass as college president in 1925. She suggested that Cram's building plans include a library, an auditorium, and a gymnasium, as well as the chapel that had been planned for the eastern

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end of the campus but remained as yet unbuilt. In Cram's campus plan of 1928, the auditorium was placed on the site formerly reserved for a chapel, the chapel was placed at the western end of the campus, and a new entrance was proposed between Randolph dormitory and the auditorium. Most of this plan was never carried to fruition, with the exception of the library. The library was built on the site of the never-executed Commencement Hall, at one time the focus of Cram's original campus plan. The Fine Arts and Science buildings were shifted slightly from their original arrangement, but continued to anchor the western half of the campus.

The Mary Helen Cochran Library, completed in 1929, was the most ornate of Cram's buildings at Sweet Briar, and bears many similarities with his design of 1922 for Chapin Hall at Williams College in Massachusetts. Originally designed as a close copy of the refectory building, this plan was abandoned on the request of President Glass. According to one account, both Cram and Miss Glass sat on high stools in his Boston office while he sketched a new design for the library.¹⁶

The Mary Harley Student Health Center and the Daisy Williams Gymnasium were designed by Pendleton Clark with assistance from and approval by Cram and Ferguson. Both are Georgian-style buildings with limestone and wood trim and are similar, if simpler, versions of the earlier Cram buildings at Sweet Briar. Clark continued his association with Sweet Briar after Cram's death in 1942, although Cram's successor firm has also supplied designs for more recent construction at the school.

The sophistication and exquisite craftsmanship of Cram's buildings at Sweet Briar College undoubtedly exercised a decisive influence on local and Virginia architects. Cram is known to have submitted a design for an academic building at nearby Randolph-Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, many of whose campus buildings were designed by Lynchburg architect Stanhope Johnson. Johnson, whose scholastic work also included commissions at Chatham Hall Girls School in Chatham, Virginia, as well as Lynchburg College in Lynchburg, designed in a restrained and competent version of the Georgian style, that varies only slightly from Cram's work. The Georgian Revival became the style of choice for campuses throughout Virginia in the 1920s and 1930s including Mary Washington College, Washington & Lee University, Woodberry Forest School, Virginia Episcopal School, Ferrum College, and Episcopal High School.

Cram's designs for Sweet Briar College were depicted in a number of contemporary architectural magazines and journals in addition to the aforementioned 1902 issues of Architect and Building News. These included the January 1911 issue of Architectural Record; the July 1906, July 1907, and

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November 1919 issues of Brick Builder; and an article Cram wrote for the Royal Institute of British Architects Journal in May 1912 entitled "Recent University Architecture in the United States."

Critical evaluations of the architecture and plan of Sweet Briar College have been uniformly favorable from the beginning. President Benedict observed that Cram's drawings were "a visualization of our plans for the future, and Mr. Cram's vision was one of the things that inspired us. The fact that we had a plan for a harmonious group of buildings from the beginning saved much discussion that the erection of a new building often occasions in a college, and kept the unity of architecture which is always to be desired."¹⁷

According to one critic, the success of Sweet Briar's design was obvious and yet subtle: "This campus works because of the continuity provided by its recurring classicism, its careful placement of structures, and the physical relationship emphasized by the texture of balustrade covered arcades."¹⁸

Another wrote that Sweet Briar "was one of the most successful exercises in that [Georgian] style--in perfect scale, much of it highly learned and 'authentic' in its attention to archeological sources, amenable, and attractive."¹⁹

The design of Sweet Briar has even been contrasted favorably with the University of Virginia: "The element of unification furnished by Jefferson's colonnades and arcades and much of what is best in Jefferson's designs is taken up in the plans for Sweet Briar College . . . , a truly American campus . . . the whole constituting what may appear a design more pleasing, lighter, and freer than Jefferson's work."²⁰

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19. Bryant, "Classical Ensemble", page 18.
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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

UTM References (cont'd):

E 17 669710 4157595
F 17 669590 4157840
G 17 669200 4157990
H 17 669225 4158060
I 17 669710 4158060

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is delineated by the polygon whose vertices are marked by the following UTM reference points:

A 17 669410 4158210
B 17 669720 4158120
C 17 669630 4157920
D 17 669860 4157715
E 17 669710 4157595
F 17 669590 4157840
G 17 669200 4157990
H 17 669225 4158060
I 17 669710 4158060

Boundary Justification

The nominated boundaries were drawn to include buildings that date to Ralph Adams Cram's association with Sweet Briar College, or are integral features of his campus plan. The boundaries exclude those which antedate or postdate Cram's association or are not contained in his master plan for the campus.

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Section Photo Page 21 SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE HISTORIC DISTRICT
AMHERST COUNTY, VIRGINIA

All Photographs are of:

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE HISTORIC DISTRICT
Amherst County, Virginia
VDHR File No. 05-219

All negatives are stored with the Department of Historic Resources
collection at the Virginia State Library and Archives.

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: Benedict and Fletcher
buildings; view looking
northwest
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 1 of 17

DATE: JUNE 1993
VIEW OF: Cochran Library and
Fletcher building; view
looking north
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 2 of 17

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: former Refectory (left),
Randolph Dormitory (right-center),
and Memorial Chapel (right);
view looking north
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 3 of 17

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: Cochran Library; view
looking northeast
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 4 of 17

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: Cochran Library southwest
entrance; view looking northeast
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 5 of 17

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: former Refectory; view
looking northeast
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 6 of 17

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: Fletcher building; view
looking northeast
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 7 of 17

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: Benedict building; view
looking northeast
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 8 of 17

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: Fergus Reid building;
view looking southwest
NEG. NO.: 13844
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DATE: JUNE 1993
VIEW OF: Manson Dormitory; view
looking northwest
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 10 of 17

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: Bell Tower and Gray
Dormitory; view looking north
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 11 of 17

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Section Photo Page 22 SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE HISTORIC DISTRICT
AMHERST COUNTY, VIRGINIA

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: Bell Tower and Gray

Dormitory; view looking north
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DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: Mary Harley Student Health
Center; view looking northeast
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 13 of 17

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: Deanery (Faculty
Apartments); view looking
northwest
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 14 of 17

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: Memorial Chapel; view
looking south
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 15 of 17

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: Dew Dormitory; view
looking southwest
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 16 of 17

DATE: June 1993
VIEW OF: Daisy Williams Gymnasium;
view looking west
NEG. NO.: 13844
PHOTO 17 of 17

