

Worcester farmhouse may get national historic status



A farmhouse that was once part of Worcester State Hospital will be nominated the National Register of Historic Places. It was built in 1895 and stands next to the Beechwood Hotel near Plantation and Belmont street. [T7G Staff/Christine Hochkeppel]

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WORCESTER - A historic farmhouse that was once part of the operation at Worcester State Hospital has been approved for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

The secretary of state's office announced Tuesday that the Worcester State Hospital Farmhouse, which is next to the Beechwood Hotel, was nominated at a recent meeting. The nomination will be submitted to the National Register of Historic Places at the National Park Service in Washington, D.C., for final consideration and designation.

The farmhouse is owned by Dr. Charles and Janet Birbara, who also own the Beechwood.

Ms. Birbara said in a telephone interview Tuesday night that she was happy to hear the farmhouse has been moved along in the process.

"It would be a real honor to have it recognized," she said.

Ms. Birbara said she believes the farmhouse is the only remaining historic property on the campus in private ownership. She said when she and her husband originally planned the Beechwood, they wanted to convert the farmhouse to be the hotel. They quickly learned it wasn't going to be big enough or appropriate for hotel space, but they retained ownership as plans for what became the current Beechwood Hotel developed.

She said the historic buildings left on the former state hospital campus are touchstones. They are part of our past, she said. She said the building, which is currently leased as office space, has undergone extensive repairs in recent years. Major masonry work, repair to the porches, and work on the lower level of the building have been completed, Ms. Birbara said. But there is still work to be done, and she said if the property gets the final designation from the park service, the historic tax credits that come along with it would allow that work to continue.

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Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester, said the Birbaras applied for the designation for the red brick farmhouse, built in 1895 and used by patients for almost 60 years, as individual property owners. She said Preservation Worcester submitted a letter of support as part of the application.

"We're very pleased it was nominated," Ms. Packard said.

According to the secretary of state's office, the farm operation at the hospital was viewed as a way to keep patients engaged with activities and in an established routine. The farm operation continued until 1969. Patient housing in the farmhouse ended in the 1950s, when the building was renovated for use as staff dormitories. In the 1980s, the building was converted to medical office space.

The Georgian Revival-style red-brick farmhouse was designed by the prolific Worcester architectural firm Fuller & Delano. It features decorative brickwork, Tuscan-style posts, a large verandah and a two-story turreted bay window.

The farmhouse is one of five historic resources across the state approved by the 17-member board that considers historic resources eligible for the National Register four times a year. The state has more than 70,000 properties listed on the National Register, according to the secretary of state's office.

The nomination comes a month after the Worcester Historical Commission agreed to waive the city's demolition delay ordinance for four cottages located on the former Worcester State Hospital campus. The buildings will be torn down as part of the development of 44 acres by the Worcester Business Development Corp. as a bio-manufacturing park.