

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

# DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED JUN 25 1975

DATE ENTERED AUG 15 1975

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

### 1 NAME

HISTORIC

St. Gregory's Abbey and College  
AND/OR COMMON

St. Gregory's College

### 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

1900 W. MacArthur Drive

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Shawnee

VICINITY OF

No. 4

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Oklahoma

40

Pottawatomie

125

### 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

### 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Order of St. Benedict in Oklahoma

STREET & NUMBER

1900 W. MacArthur Drive

CITY, TOWN

Shawnee

VICINITY OF

STATE

Oklahoma

### 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Office of the County Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

Pottawatomie County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Shawnee

STATE

Oklahoma

### 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Special St. Gregory's Survey

DATE

1975

FEDERAL  STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Oklahoma Historical Society

CITY, TOWN

Oklahoma City

STATE

Oklahoma

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED exterior	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> interior completely rebuilt	

---

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

From the first the Benedictines were determined to make their new school something out of the ordinary. Architect Victor Klutho of St. Louis, a devotee of Tudor Gothic, was hired. His designs were approved and the cornerstone was laid May 4, 1913. The massive building was completed in 1915 - in time to receive its first 40 students.

The decision had been made in 1911 to "devote all our energies at present to the building of the new college" and the five-story, 90 x 260-foot structure served as school, church, and abbey its first quarter-century of existence. In the early 1940s a separate church was built near by. In the mid-1950s the monks built a new abbey to the east and north.

Today, as St. Gregory's Administration Building, it is used exclusively for educational purposes. The basement contains some general purpose rooms. College administrative offices occupy the first floor, the library the second. The third floor contains general classrooms, the fourth science classrooms and laboratories. A large lecture-auditorium now occupies the Tower, originally used as a gymnasium.

Construction began in 1912 and the Benedictines demanded both durability and beauty. The Sacred Heart fire of 1901 had convinced them the building should be absolutely fireproof throughout. Floors were of concrete; the walls were of reinforced concrete faced with brick. Surplus steel rails were secured from the Rock Island Railroad to provide added underground support. These structural details in turn dictated modernization plans more than 50 years later. In 1967, when engineers and architects determined the building too solid to demolish, the Fathers spent roughly \$1 million to "gut" the interior and rebuild it completely to better serve present-day academic requirements.

The Benedictines carefully chose the brick with which they faced the outer walls of their school. From Coffeyville, Kans., they were somewhat larger than normal, and of a deep red hue, the better to highlight the building's white terra cotta embellishments. But for a needed stairwell, added in the 1967 modernization, the handsome exterior lines of the building have been scrupulously preserved.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE --CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1910 to present

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Victor Klutho

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St. Gregory's College is Oklahoma's only Catholic institution of higher learning. With some 500 students - and a solid academic reputation - the two-year school represents a century of dedicated labor in the state, in both the religious and the educational field by the Order of St. Benedict. Specifically, this nomination covers St. Gregory's landmark building, a noteworthy Tudor Gothic affair completed in 1915, the year the school moved to Shawnee from Sacred Heart, some 35 miles to the south.

\* \* \*

Ironically, the establishment of St. Gregory's, not to mention its prospering and eventual development, is a tribute, not only to the dedication of the Benedictines, but also to their perverseness and their perseverance. "The religious situation in the Indian Territory was definitely unfavorable for Catholic missionaries," says the Rev. Joseph Murphy in his centennial history of his Order in Oklahoma. Protestant missionary societies "had long regarded this area as their exclusive preserve." But the Benedictines nevertheless started Sacred Heart Mission in 1876, thereby establishing its claim to being the "Cradle of Oklahoma Catholicism."

For 67 years Sacred Heart was indeed the center of Catholic effort among the Indians. At one time the abbey had a three-story, fifty-room monastery. Best known of the boys attending the boarding school: Sac and Fox Indian athlete Jim Thorpe, and statesman/ambassador Patrick J. Hurley. The mission also operated St. Mary's Academy, a convent school for Indian girls, from 1884 to 1943.

The Sacred Heart area, however, was not ideal as an educational center. Isolation from railheads and more populous areas had already given rise to thoughts of moving the school even in the 1890s. A disastrous fire in 1901 made the move inevitable. In 1910 it was finally decided to locate the new "Catholic University of Oklahoma" in Shawnee.

St. Gregory's opened in the fall of 1915 with 40 boys - one of the state's first prep schools. For despite the grandiloquence of its originally announced name, it continued for many years to offer both preparatory work and two years of college. Not until 1965 did the school close out its highschool classes - and go co-educational. Until the mid-1950s, when separate quarters for the monks were built, the impressive building being nominated housed both St. Gregory's College and St. Gregory's Abbey. Now it is used exclusively for the two-year school.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Murphy, Joseph F., Tenacious Monks, Shawnee, Benedictine Color Press, 1974
- Ruth, Kent, Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1956, pp. 361-362, 468

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY One acre

UTM REFERENCES

4-11-75

A	14	68.5	890	391.5	51.5	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING			ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	
C						D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Kent Ruth  
ORGANIZATION

Oklahoma Historical Society  
STREET & NUMBER

Historical Building  
CITY OR TOWN

Oklahoma City

DATE

June 1975

TELEPHONE

405/884-5456

STATE

Oklahoma

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL  STATE  LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

*[Handwritten Signature]*

TITLE

SPD

DATE

19 June 75

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: *[Handwritten Signature]*  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

8/15/75

DATE

8-15-75

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JUN 25 1975
DATE ENTERED AUG 15 1975

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER No. 8 PAGE 1

Significance

St. Gregory's Abbey and College

If St. Gregory's, through its Sacred Heart origins, can boast of being the "Cradle of Oklahoma Catholicism," it can also present a claim to being the "Cradle of Oklahoma Culture." Best known Benedictine associated with the school's educational program is Father Gregory Gerrer. A young painter, he came to Sacred Heart in 1891, received wide acclaim when his canvas of Pope Pius X was selected in 1904 to hang in the Vatican. When Sacred Heart moved to Shawnee and became St. Gregory's, Father Gregory headed up its art department. His works, along with those of famous Italian artists and art objects he collected over a quarter-century, were long a feature of the Gerrer Museum at St. Gregory's. (Much of the collection is now housed in Oklahoma City, but a considerable number of his works remains at St. Gregory's.)

Its turreted tower standing a hundred feet above an essentially treeless hill northwest of Shawnee, St. Gregory's is indeed a physical landmark, readily visible - and recognizable - from busy I 40 to the north. With its gradually expanding academic capacity, and century of service to Oklahoma, it is a cultural and spiritual landmark as well. Fittingly enough, an 8-foot statue of St. Gregory will be placed in the empty niche on the tower's south facade (see Photo No. 1) later this year in connection with the school's centennial celebration.