UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

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7 **DESCRIPTION**

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Kemper Hall is a group of cream brick buildings constructed over many years in an additive way. The complex is sited in the center of seven acres of shady, landscaped grounds on the shore of Lake Michigan. The buildings are Gothic Revival in style, except for the oldest structure in the complex, the Durkee House. This 2-1/2-story mansion was constructed in 1861 in the Italianate style. The windows are long, elliptically-arched openings with continuous brick moldings and stone sills and keystones. A belt course divides the second story and the attic, which is lit by small eyebrow windows. On the west facade the attic window is an elliptical, stone-trimmed bull's-eye under a curved Renaissance Revival roofline. The south facade features a projecting central pavilion with returned eaves and a bull's-eye window. In the southwest corner between the pavilion and the main mass of the house is a small frame entrance porch with carved spandrels on arched soffits. This is the last remnant of a large veranda which until sometime after 1891 wrapped around the west and north facades of the house. On the north is a two-story polygonal bay. The whole is covered by a very low, hipped roof. Since the first class graduated in 1874, each class has inlaid a copper box, faced with stone, into the brick walls of the Durkee mansion. These hold traditional graduating class records and memorabilia.

In 1871, a three-story wing at the east end of the building was completed, making the east-west length 175 feet. At the same time the inside structure of the third story of the front (west) part was entirely remodeled. This enabled the Durkee building and wing to house dormitories, classrooms, and offices.

In 1875, the chapel was built north of the Durkee mansion. It is in a Ruskinian version of the Gothic Revival style, popular with the Episcopalian ministry. The chapel features light-colored stone window trim and red brick polychromy in the form of string courses and window moldings in contrast with the cream brick walls. Architectural details include a steeply-sloped roof with parapet gables, wall buttresses, pointed-arch openings and a polygonal narthex. In 1906-1908 the original bell tower was removed, stone coping was placed on the front parapet gable, a baptistry was added to the narthex, and the interior was altered.

The following summer the cloister-music house was added, linking the Durkee house and the chapel. This 89-by-20-foot structure is a simple, 1-1/2 story, gabled building with a row of narrow dormers. The lower story retains seven original music rooms but the upper story has been converted into an infirmary.

In the early 1890's a small wing for the parson's study was added to the southeast of the existing structures. This little Gothic Revival building with a polygonal end is the only architecturally significant structure on the lake (east) side of the complex. In 1894, a large, four-story dormitory building was built to the south of the Durkee complex. It is very simple in design with flat stone lintels and a five-story octagonal observatory tower.

In 1901 this structure, with stone drip moldings on the windows and an arched passageway, was extended further south. This extension connected the older part to the new Simmons gymnasium, a four-story building with a symmetrical Gothic Revival facade having carved stone window trim, a decorative brick cornice and stone string courses.

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A parapet gable crowns a projecting central pavilion with a two-story frame bay and a castellated entrance. Inside, a painted adaptation of the Bayeaux tapestries adorns the walls.

Behind the entire complex (to the east) is a functionally-designed boiler room, added in 1905. In 1911 a convent was erected to the north of the complex. This three-story structure was also Gothic Revival in style. Three parapet gables adorn the front, with two-story castellated bays flanking a projecting central entrance porch supported by stone columns. Stone also was employed for copings and drip moldings over the windows. A one-story cloister (1911) links the nun's residence to the chapel. This flat-roofed structure has a five-bay facade with stone-trimmed pointed-arch windows, and a cornice decorated with carved stone plaques.

Finally, a one-story bakery was built in modern times. Almost hidden, on its west facade, is a large mosaic composed by one of the past art teachers of Kemper Hall.

The Kemper Hall complex has been abandoned due to the closing of the school which had occupied it. The buildings are all vacant, therefore, and a local private preservation group hopes to secure its preservation as a municipal facility.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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X_1800-1899	COMMERCE	EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	PHILOSOPHY	_TRANSPORTATION
	ART	ENGINEERING	MUSIC	THEATER
1600-1699	ARCHITECTURE		MILITARY	SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
1500-1599		ECONOMICS	LITERATURE	SCULPTURE
1400-1499	ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	CONSERVATION	LAW	SCIENCE
PREHISTORIC	ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	COMMUNITY PLANNING	LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	RELIGION
PERIOD	AF	REAS OF SIGNIFICANCE CH	IECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

As an institution, Kemper Hall dates to 1855, when St. Matthew's Episcopal Church and some Kenosha citizens signed a charter launching the "Kenosha Female Seminary," although it was not until 1865 that it opened temporarily under the name of St. Claire's Hall. That year the founders purchased the mansion of U. S. Senator Charles Durkee. Always supported by the Episcopal Church, the school was named Kemper Hall in 1870 in honor of Bishop Jackson Kemper, known well as an Episcopalian missionary priest in Territorial Wisconsin and as Wisconsin's first Episcopal bishop. Kemper Hall graduated its first class in 1876 in its new chapel.

Although it never had a large student body or graduated a great number of students, Kemper Hall existed as a girls preparatory school--affiliated with and supported by the Episcopal Church but never restricted to students of any creed, race, or color--for 105 years with a total of some 1600 alumnae over that period of time, some of whom became illustrious pioneers in their fields. To mention but two of several, Frances Willis, of the class of 1916, was the first woman career diplomat to be placed in charge of an American Legation. Bojan Hamlin Jennings, of the class of 1937, was the first woman to be awarded a doctorate from Harvard University. Hence Kemper Hall became prominent in young women's preparatory education. Beginning in 1970, it became a coeducational elementary school, serving well as always but unable to keep up with expenses. In December, 1974, it was announced that Kemper Hall would close in June, 1975.

Architecturally, the buildings of Kemper Hall form a picturesque and imposing complex. Individually, they present some interesting variations on the Gothic Revival style. The chapel is one of the oldest surviving churches in Kenosha. It is a notable local example of the Episcopalian predeliction for simple medieval English chapels. It also features the Ruskinian use of brick polychromy. The convent and gymnasium exemplify the turn-of-the-century version of the Collegiate Gothic. The earlier Durkee house, on the other hand, is in the Italianate style. It is one of the oldest remaining residences in the city of Kenosha and was the city's first house built in the Italian Villa style. The Durkee house is the surviving Wisconsin building most closely associated with Charles Durkee, its builder, who was a prominent Kenosha civic leader; active promoter of the development of the Kenosha harbor; Wisconsin territorial legislator; U. S. Representative, 1849-1853; U. S. Senator, 1855-1861; and territorial governor of Utah beginning in 1865, when he left Kenosha.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet.

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ORGANIZATION State Historical Society	of Wisconsin		DATE April 15, 1976
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816 State Street			608/262-2970
CITY OR TOWN			STATE
Madison			Wisconsin 53706
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<u>S.H.P.O. Signature</u> TITLE Director State	KUMD MOU	ety of Wisconsin	DATE
FOR NPS USE ONLY INEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PRO	DPERTY ISTOCODED I	N THE NATIONAL REGIS	TER DATE 6/9/96 DATE 5.28.36

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DATE ENTERED JUN 7

JUN 7 1976

CONTINUATION SHEET

See ITEM NUMBER below page 1

KEMPER HALL

9. Coleman, Linda, notes on interview with Mrs. T. A. Withey, Kemper Hall, November 1, 1971.

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- Everhart, George M., "Kemper Hall, The Rector's Final Report," Kenosha, February 1, 1878.
- Frank, M., "Some of the Prominent Events in the Life of Hon. Charles Durkee," <u>History of Kenosha County</u>, n.p., n.d., 150-159.

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"Kemper Hall: An Illustrious Past," Kenosha News, December 21, 1974.

"Kemper Hall," Kenosha News, December 23, 1974.

- Kemper Hall, Kenosha, Wisconsin, n.d. (brochure on the preparatory school)
- Kemper Hall, Kenosha, Wisconsin, n.d. (brochure on the elementary school)
- 11. Donald N. Anderson, Historian & Registrar, Historic Preservation State Historical Society of Wisconsin January 21, 1976 816 State Street 608/262-0746 Madison Wisconsin 53706



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