

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

## 1. Name

historic Healy Building, Georgetown University

and/or common

## 2. Location

Georgetown University Campus, 2501 West of Main  
street & number Entrance Gates where O Street intersects 37th street not for publication

city, town Washington vicinity of

state DC code county code

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name Georgetown University

street &amp; number Thirty Seventh and O Streets

city, town Washington vicinity of state DC

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds

street &amp; number Sixth and D Street, NW

city, town Washington state DC

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic American Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible? ☒ yes ☐ nodate 1969 ☒ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Library of Congress

city, town Washington state DC

## 7. Description

### Condition

☒ excellent  
☐ good  
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☐ unaltered  
☒ altered

### Check one

☒ original site  
☐ moved      date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Located on a bluff overlooking the Potomac River, Healy Hall is the symbol of Georgetown University. Although not the first structure on the site, this very large building was begun in November 1877 and largely finished, except for the front porches, by November 1879. Interior work took considerably longer to complete.

The building faces east and is located about 275 feet west from 37th and O Streets, NW, on a 90-acre site belonging to the University. There is a complete architectural description in the Historic American Buildings Survey collection at the Library of Congress which is condensed as follows:

This building is generally rectangular in shape. The total structure is 310 feet north-south (including the southwest stair tower) and 74 feet east-west (at the south end). At the north, because this wing contains the large auditorium, the building is 100 feet east-west. The east facade has three major divisions: a slightly projecting wing (called a pavilion by the architects) at the north and the south ends, each wing being 67 feet wide; and a central section 170 feet long with the central spire of the building at the midpoint. On the west side, Healy Hall is attached by corridor to another structure (Maguire Building, 1859), which also retains a great deal of its original integrity. Healy Hall has four main floors, a full basement, and an attic with small dormers.

The Healy Building is constructed of load bearing brick and masonry walls with interior partitions of brick. The walls on the east, north and south sides are laid in Potomac gneiss, are hammer-faced (though some have smooth cleavage) and are generally grey in color. Below the window sills on the second and third floors and at the spring level of the arches there is an even course of gneiss, smooth-faced in contrast to the rougher stone. On the west elevation above the stone basement story, brick is laid in Flemish bond with sandstone trim used sparingly. The roof is constructed of grey and red slate with cooper ridge pieces.

The building is articulated in the manner of Northern European Romanesque architecture, and in addition to the heavy stone massing also contains round arches, dormers, and towers typical of this stylistic revival. The main facade faces east and contains two entrances; the main entrance porch is located on the north end pavilion. The porch, reached by a series of granite steps, has three arched openings at the east side, and one each on the north and south. It is decorated with engaged columns with molded bases, buttresses and flaring foliate capitals with a central carved gable in sandstone containing Georgetown University's shield. The second entrance porch on the east facade is directly below the central spire. The porch has a single arch at the east side and smaller single arches on the north and south, all decorated with sandstone columns....

The fenestration is varied and differs on each facade as well as on the north and south end pavilions of the east facade. On the east central facade, the basement windows are all paired and rectangular. The first and second floor windows of the central section are round-headed with a side central mullion

## 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 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 type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1879, 1899

**Builder/Architect** J. L. Smithmeyer and Paul Pelz

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Healy Hall at Georgetown University is one of the last, large-scale High Victorian Gothic buildings in America. "Ruskinian" or Venetian Gothic, as this style is sometimes called, enjoyed a good deal of success in America, especially as it was applied to churches and institutional structures. Several of the best known of these secular "cathedrals" are Memorial Hall at Harvard by Ware and Van Brunt (1866), Chapel Hall and College Hall at Gallaudet College in Washington, DC, by Frederick Clarke Withers (1868, 1875) and Richard N. Upjohn's Connecticut State Capital (1873), all National Historic Landmarks.

In the 1860's, Americans became aware of the genius of the great French architect and restorationist, Viollet-le-Duc. His theories were reviewed in English by the American architect, Russell Sturgis and his Discourses on Architecture was translated by Henry Van Brunt, both High Victorian Gothic architects. William Robert Ware of Ware and Van Brunt founded the first school of architecture in America, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston and based its instruction on that of the Ecole Des Beaux Arts in Paris.

Viollet-le-Duc's theories and French architecture in general had a widespread effect on American post-Civil War building. Frank Furness, (1839–1912) the most original practitioner of this style had acquired French theories and taste in the New York City atelier of Richard Morris Hunt (1827–1895), the first American to study architecture in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. The remarkable ornament that was used in the late 19th century was popular because it evoked a historical past but remained intensely original in the work of Furness, Ware and Van Brunt and especially in the work of Smithmeyer and Pelz – and Healy Hall is adorned with the Gothic tracery, gargoyles, Mansard roofs, polychrome details and picturesque massing unlike any earlier buildings.

The Gothic style with its demand for beautiful detail died out with the advent of the new industrialism promoted at the 1876 Centennial. The final blow to historical styles was delivered as early as 1908 by the Viennese architect Adolph Loos who condemned "decadent ornament." Plain functional buildings became the new order.

Healy Hall presents a picturesque mass on a high bluff overlooking the Potomac River and can be seen for miles. Chosen for its aspect, the point of land was "free from malaria, and was cooled by breezes off the water." Georgetown College, the oldest Catholic academic institution in the United States, was founded by the Reverend John Carroll, S. J. who was born in Upper Marlborough, Maryland in 1735. Educated in Europe, he entered the Jesuit order in Liege, Belgium. Father Carroll taught at both Liege and Bruges where he was arrested when Pope Clement XIV suppressed the Jesuit order. He managed to return to America in 1774 and settled in Maryland.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1

Quadrangle name Washington West, DC-MD-VA

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

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Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carolyn Pitts, Historian

organization National Park Service/History Division date July 22, 1986

street & number 1100 L Street, NW telephone (202) 343-8172

city or town Washington state DC

## 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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date \_\_\_\_\_

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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containing a rosette near the top. On the third floor are small round-headed paired windows with a sandstone column between them. The fourth floor has single round-headed windows divided by a slender, sandstone column. The first floor windows of the north and south pavilions have segmental arched openings with a central sandstone column supporting a block containing a bull's eye window. The second floor windows are paired, narrow, and round-headed with a column between them. The third and fourth story windows are actually two stories high with nine lights, a central column mullion, and a wood band Gothic cutout decoration marking the intermediate floor level....

The central portion of the building is covered by a north-south gable roof of grey rectangular slate. The north and south wings are covered by steep hip-ped roofs. The north wing has two hip-ped roofs, joined as one slope on the north.

Healy Building has numerous dormers, cupolas, and towers. On the east facade, pyramidal dormer-like roofs are placed above the fourth floor windows at the eaves and topped with finials. On the east side there are ten dormers with steeply pitched roofs and eleven on the west side. On the east facade of the north and south pavilions are found large stone gabled dormers each containing three arched windows above the eaves and a bull's eye window in the gable above this....

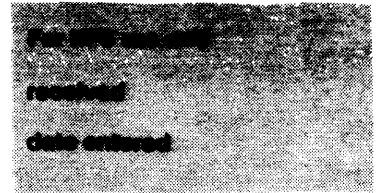
The most striking feature of the building is the central spire which rises 200 ft. above grade and is composed of a rectangular base of three stories located at the mid-point of the gable above the east facade. The first level has two slit windows and is separated from the second level by a sandstone string course on consoles. The third level contains the clock face on the east and west sides; at the corners of this level are inset columns. The lower section contains a stone gable with two slit windows and a stone cross finial above the clock face. The upper portion of the spire is separated from the lower by an open gallery with elaborate copper columns on all sides and a double finial at the apex. A secondary spire is located at the southwest corner of the building capping the stair tower....

Square stair towers on the southeast and northeast corners of the south pavilion and the southeast, northeast and northwest corners of the north pavilion contain spiral stairways designed as fire escapes. The towers are formed by a plain square tower rising from ground level and capped above the cornice level with a steep pyramidal roof which has a copper finial.

The finials of the building are particularly noteworthy. In addition to those on the dormers, gables, towers and spires, there is one at each end of the ridge on the north and south wing hip-ped roofs. There are also a number of imaginative copper gargoyles....

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The interior of the first floor is divided into three basic parts. The north pavilion has a long entrance hall with parlours on either side. The central portion of the building connects the north and south wings by a long hall about 15 feet wide with brick arches located about every ten feet of its entire length. The second floor is similar in plan to the first--the north wing stairway ascends to the hallway with Philodemic Hall to the north. The third floor contains the main auditorium (Gaston Hall) in the north wing.<sup>1</sup>

Gaston Hall Auditorium (1896-1897) is one of the most spectacular large rooms in Healy Hall. The walls are decorated with worked and painted plaster and there is an elaborate iconographic scheme for the ornament and wall paintings. The ceiling is divided into 18 large wooden coffers with gilded pendant bosses. The room is enriched with hammer beams resting on large consoles. Some of the original seating has been replaced.

On the second level below Gaston Hall are the Philodemic Hall (debating) and the current President's office which has recently been beautifully refurnished and restored.

The most elaborate room in the building is called the Riggs Memorial Library. Situated in the south end of the building, this rare book area is stacked three levels high with access by spiral cast iron stairs in the northeast and southeast corners. The stacks are of cast iron and are embellished with decorative reliefs on the shelf ends. There are also a number of cast iron slender columns at the corners of the shelf units. The HABS report describes the elaborate grill work:

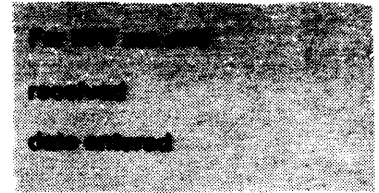
The radiators are boxed in with an elaborate open grillwork composed of a lattice with numerous flowers; with the iron shelf above, the heating pipes are completely concealed. On the dividing mullion of the paired windows of the first floor is an engaged column. Below this, as if supporting its base, is an animal grotesque. These are cast metal, about 18 inches long, and are of two types: one is feline, the other an alligator-like dragon.... Above, at the second-stack level, the capitals of these supported columns contain either a cast-metal owl or an eagle. At the top of the bookcases, next to the ceiling, are two shields colored red, silver and blue, with striding animals.<sup>2</sup>

These elaborate large rooms are connected by rather plain brick hallways with white plaster ceilings and a purple painted border. Spaced throughout the corridors are a number of large, cast iron pipe radiators. The 3-1/2" pipes are snaked around to form a mass 6 pipes high and 4 pipes deep which circulated warm water and heated air. They often are decorated with classical ornament.

The building is beautifully maintained both inside and out. Currently there is a program for stabilizing some of the porous brownstone on the entrance porch. There is ample primary source material, including both early photographs and original drawings on file at both Georgetown University and the Commission of Fine Arts, Washington, DC.

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In brief, the history of the college is as follows:

A committee of five clergymen acquired one-and-a-half acres of land from William Deakins and John Threlkeld, for which they paid only 75 pounds. The deed for the transaction was not delivered until January 23, 1789, after actual work on the buildings had already begun.

The first building was probably begun in the summer of 1788, was partially completed in 1789, and was ready for occupancy in 1791. This building, referred to as "Old South", was torn down after standing more than a century. It was a brick building, three stories high, and about 64' x 50'.

The first students enrolled in September 1791; by the end of the school year 1792, the enrollment was sixty-six students. Forty-seven new students enrolled in 1793. In that year an additional two acres was purchased from John Threlkeld to provide a site for a new building to be used as a dormitory, refectory, and apartments so that students could board at the college. (This is the Old North Building and is still in use.)

The Society of Jesus was reestablished in the United States in 1805; prior to that time, the college had been under the control of the Corporation of the Clergy of Maryland. Since 1805 Georgetown has been a Jesuit school. By the early nineteenth century the College was firmly established as a leading Catholic educational institution. In 1815 a congressional act raised the rank of Georgetown from a college to a university.<sup>3</sup>

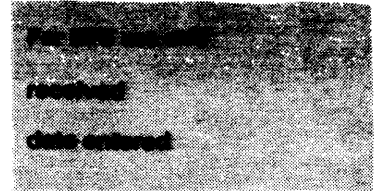
The present Healy building was erected under the stewardship of the Reverend Patrick Healy, S.J. (1783-1882) who undertook the massive fundraising needed and as a result the hall was completed in successive stages; excavation began in November 1877, and the exterior was finished, except for the front porches, in 1879. The interiors were being finished in 1881 and later; Gaston Hall in 1896-1897, Riggs Memorial Library in 1889 and the front porches were completed in the same year.

Father Healy consulted a number of prominent architects and finally selected the firm of Smithmeyer and Pelz. The plans were sent to Rome for approval and ground was broken in September 1877, the cornerstone being laid on December 12. The great central tower was completed in July, 1879. The Washington architects, John L. Smithmeyer and Paul J. Pelz are noted as follows:

John L. Smithmeyer was born in Vienna in 1832. He began his American architectural practice in Indianapolis. After the Civil War he came to Washington seeking government work. The Office of the Supervising Architect appointed him an inspector of public buildings in southern states. In 1872 he resigned from this position to form a partnership with Paul J. Pelz and prepared drawings for the Library of Congress competition. The architects, after they won the competition, became involved in a controversy with the government which involved a suit against the government and finally an appeal before the Supreme Court.

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Aside from the Library of Congress and Healy Building, other major buildings designed by Smithmeyer were the Army-Navy Hospital at Hot Springs, Arkansas; Carnegie Music Hall, Allegheny, Pennsylvania; and the Hotel Chamberlain, Old Point Comfort, Virginia. Smithmeyer, who became a fellow of the American Institute of Architects, died in 1903.

Smithmeyer's partner, Paul J. Pelz (1841-1918), was born in Silesia, Germany, and studied in Breslau. He came to New York and served as apprentice of Detlef Lienau and then worked as a draftsman in his office for two years. He came to Washington as an architect and engineer for the United States Lighthouse Board, met Smithmeyer, and formed the partnership which led to the commission for the Library of Congress. Pelz designed the Administration Building at the Clinic Hospital, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.<sup>4</sup>

The Commencement at Georgetown University in 1879 must have been very exciting. Although the new building was incomplete, the hastily erected platform held the President of the United States, the Attorney-General, the Postmaster General and one of the proud architects, Mr. Smithmeyer.

Finally, the exuberance of High Victorian Gothic was outdated and replaced by the somber and massive Richardsonian-Romanesque. Healy Hall at Georgetown University is a monument to this rich, decorative episode in American architecture.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Commission of Fine Arts and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Georgetown Architecture and Early Years. Washington, DC, Georgetown University Press, 1957. pp. 20-25.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>Whithey, Henry F. and Elsie R. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects, Deceased, "Smithmeyer," p. 562; "Pelz," p. 466. Los Angeles, 1956.

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Durkin, Joseph T., S.J. Georgetown University: The Middle Years (1840-1900). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1963.

Jackson, Richard P. The Chronicles of Georgetown, DC, From 1751 to 1878. Washington, DC: R. O. Polkinhorn, printer, 1878.

Mastasi, Nicholas. "The Construction and Architectural Origins of the Healy Building." Typescript, 1962, 16 pp. (Paper written under the direction of Fr. Durkin; copy filed at the Commission of Fine Arts.)

"New College Building at Georgetown, DC, Messrs. Smithmeyer & Pelz, Architects." American Architect and Building News, vol. VII, No. 222, March 27, 1880, p. 129, and two plates (plans and south-east view).

Shea, John Gilmary. Memorial of the First Centenary of Georgetown College, DC, Comprising a History of Georgetown University. Washington, DC, 1891.

Withey, Henry F. and Elsie R. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects, Deceased. Los Angeles, 1956.

Verbal Boundary

At a point of beginning which is 10 feet North (true) of the North-east corner of Healy Hall building and thence 12 feet East; thence on a line due West 126 feet to the beginning westerly boundary of said plot (the North-west corner of the plot); thence 40 feet due South; thence due East 12 feet; thence due South 57 feet along the party wall line of Healy Hall and Old North buildings (circa 1795); thence due East 24 feet; thence due South 52 feet; thence due West 21 feet; thence due South 36 feet; thence due East 21 feet; thence due South 48 feet; thence due East 10 feet; thence due South 69 feet along the party wall of Maguire Building (circa 1830); thence due West 18 feet; thence due South 34 feet; thence due East 49 feet; thence due North 9 feet; thence due East 49 feet; thence due North 260 feet; thence due East 18 feet; thence due North 48 feet; thence due West 18 feet; thence due North 19 feet to the point of beginning. For the purposes of this description the easterly face of Healy Hall is taken as true North-South. The boundary encompasses only Healy Hall and no other building.

-FIRST-FLOOR-PLAN-

