



**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 Barr Building  
other names \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Location**

street & number 910 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  not for publication  
city or town Washington, DC  vicinity  
state District of Columbia code DC county \_\_\_\_\_ code 001 zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
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 certifying official/Title 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 the Keeper Date of Action  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

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

**number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/Office Building

COMMERCE/TRADE/Office Building

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/Academic Gothic Revival

foundation Concrete and limestone

walls Limestone

roof Slag

other

**Narrative Description**

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

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## Description Summary:

The Barr Building is a soaring, eleven-story Gothic Revival-style office building located in the heart of the city’s business district overlooking Farragut Square. The 1927 building, sandwiched between two more recent “K Street Box” office buildings, is one of the oldest surviving buildings to front on Farragut Square and is representative of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century skyscrapers, namely in terms of its Gothic style and detailing. Named for its developer John L. Barr, the Barr Building is located on the west side of 17<sup>th</sup> Street, mid-block between I and K streets and directly across from Farragut Square park. Although not as tall as its neighbors flanking it, the building’s delicate structural skin, vertical emphasis, and Gothic detailing gives the impression that the building rises higher than its surrounding building stock.

## General Description:

The Barr Building, with its irregularly shaped polygonal footprint, generally measures 75 feet wide by 157 feet deep. It is constructed of concrete having a reinforced concrete frame and concrete floors with 12”-deep curtain walls of brick. The façade is clad in limestone and elaborately detailed in high Gothic ornamentation. The building is eleven stories in height, rising 110 feet with a Gothic detailed elevator shaft rising up above the main roof and set back from it. The façade spans five equal bays that are vertically divided by implied buttresses with Gothic spires at the top. Like the Chicago-school skyscrapers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Barr Building presents a tri-partite horizontal arrangement of base, middle and top. The base of the building is formed by the lower stories, the middle by floors 4-10 and the top by the uppermost floor of the building and its cornice. The Barr Building is characterized by its overall Gothic Revival style ornamentation including spires, pointed arches, niches, and trefoil window detailing.

The front elevation, facing east onto Farragut Square, is divided into five equal bays, separated by implied buttresses, or pilasters that extend from the ground level to the cornice with Gothic ornamentation reserved for the base and top. The center bay of the façade holds the principal entrance to the building and consists of a grand double-story entry. The entry includes a wide double door on-grade with multi-light transom above, recessed into the wall plane by a heavily revealed door surround. A double-height window rises above the door, and both this window and the door are enframed by a limestone surround with Gothic-style stone carvings.

The entry itself features a pair of multi-paned heavy metal doors and a multi-paned transom above with deep and well rounded ogee profile moldings forming the edge to smooth side reveal walls. The building name, Barr Building, appears in raised Gothic lettering of limestone in a rectangular panel above the entry door that separates it from the double-height window bay

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above. Highly articulated Gothic ornamentation flanks the door and includes at the base, pointed-arch blind arches above which are statuary niches. Though no statues are set within the niches, the carved bases appear ready to receive some. Two pulpit-like carvings are located above the actual niches and flank the sign above the entry.

The double-height window bay above the sign is composed of two floors of three windows, each one having plate glass separated by wide metal stiles. Metal panels with raised *bas reliefs* on-center of each of the three panels separate the floors. Metal Juliet railings span the full width of the triple set of windows at both levels. The entry bay is flanked by Gothic-styled pilasters (implied buttresses) that are identical to those separating the other bays of the façade. These pilasters all feature pointed-arch blind arches with heavily sculpted garland-type friezes culminating the arch. Sculpted heads, recalling acroteria, are located at each of the arch corners. The bays to either side of the central entry, separated by the pilasters as described above, include store front show windows on the ground floor and double-height windows above.

A limestone band visually separates the base of the building from the “shaft” above and extends the full width of the facade. At each bay and on-center, the stringcourse paneling holds a sculpted shield in front of a garland. Each of these *bas relief* shields appear different, though they are heavily worn and not clearly discernible. Above this, several floors of the building rise with little ornamentation. Regular bands of windows across the façade—four, single 1/1 windows in the center bay and three, 1/1 windows in the flanking bays—increase the window to wall ratio accentuating the Gothic-style delicacy of the building. Beginning at the top of the seventh floor, and spanning the full eighth floor are niches with faceless, but figurative statues under Gothic hood moldings. Whether or not these figurative sculptures were meant to be figures, or just appear as such is not apparent. At the top of the building forming the cornice are large spires culminating each pilaster and smaller spires in between.

The elevator shaft, set well back from the façade of the building and only visible from the east side of the park, features blind Gothic arch arcading and cornice spires consistent with the main block of the building.

### Interior:

The central entry of the Barr Building leads directly into the first floor lobby of the office building; the storefront entries to either side lead into separate first floor stores not accessible from the lobby. The lobby is a relatively grand, though simple space with a tall ceiling, marble floors and marble walls. The ceiling is ornately plastered with central quatrefoils and a crown molding with a series of shields, perhaps repeating those found on the exterior elevation. A bank of three elevators is aligned along the south side wall at the center of the lobby, while a brass

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mailbox and marble water fountain occupy the opposing north wall. A door at the rear of the lobby leads to a hallway off of which are retail shops and other services, such as a dry cleaners.

A desk for a security guard is located in the lobby, behind which is a collection of historical memorabilia relating to the Barr Building. Included in this collection is a large-scale version of the architectural rendering of the Barr Building, illustrated in the 1927 *Book of Washington*.

The office spaces in the floors above the lobby include a combination of single-room, two-room, three-room, and other office configurations all off of a central, double-loaded corridor. Five office rooms, corresponding with the five exterior bays of the building, occupy the front of the building. These offices, immediately next to the elevators and with a view of the park, are clearly the premier offices in the building.

### Integrity:

The Barr Building maintains a high degree of architectural integrity. The building has not undergone any major change or addition. All of the building's features, except its windows, are intact, and all of its materials, including interior treatments, are original. The building's association with early office buildings and its feeling as an historic office building are palpable. Though not original, the building's 1/1 replacement windows appropriately diminish the weight of the building wall, and thereby respect the Gothic emphasis on the "void" rather than the "wall."

**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 pattern of our history.
- B** Property 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)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or 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.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

**Area of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1927

**Significant Dates**

1927

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

B. Stanley Simmons

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

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

**Previous documentation on files (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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## Summary Statement of Significance:

The Barr Building is an eleven-story office building on the east side of Farragut Square in downtown Washington, D.C. constructed in 1926-28. Developed by prominent real estate developer John L. Barr and designed by architect B. Stanley Simmons, the Barr Building is executed in a soaring Gothic Revival style of architecture, a style rare for this city's commercial building fabric. Now one of the oldest buildings surrounding Farragut Square, the Barr Building illustrates the initial wave of 20<sup>th</sup> century commercial development in the city when older 19<sup>th</sup>-century residential buildings were replaced with larger office buildings catering to the city's growing business community.

The Barr Building is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C with Architecture as the Area of Significance. The Barr Building is an excellent example of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century academic Gothic Revival style as executed for commercial buildings. Although the style was favored for commercial buildings in other cities during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as New York, the style was less common in this city for buildings other than ecclesiastical ones. Indeed, the Gothic Revival style and detailing of the Barr Building give the building a distinct verticality reflective of the much taller Gothic Revival skyscrapers of the period, including the Woolworth Building (1913) and the Chicago Tribune Tower (1922), both of which likely inspired architect B. Stanley Simmons in his designs for an important commercial building in the city.

Further, the Barr Building is the result of the close and long-established working relationship that architect B. Stanley Simmons had with developer John L. Barr and his developer father Lester Barr. Under their patronage, B. Stanley Simmons designed some of his greatest architectural achievements in this city. B. Stanley Simmons is credited with the design of over 280 buildings in the city from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The Barr Building provides an important illustration of Simmons' maturation as architect as he moved away from the Victorian-era aesthetic in the 1880s and 1890s, to a more academically studied aesthetic of the City Beautiful Movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Period of Significance for the Barr Building is 1926-1928—the beginning and end dates of the building's construction. The Barr Building maintains a high degree of integrity.



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## Resource History and Historic Context:

### Farragut Square and the Barr Building:

The Barr Building was constructed in 1927-28 on the west side of 17<sup>th</sup> Street, overlooking Farragut Square, mid-block between I and K streets, N.W. The building, which replaced a pair of 19<sup>th</sup> century residential buildings on its site, is indicative of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century wave of commercial building activity in downtown D.C. During this period, historically residential areas in the city's downtown were transformed into commercial ones as city dwellers left the downtown area for residential neighborhoods further north and west and the large Victorian and pre-Victorian dwellings were replaced with multi-storied office buildings. However, in this particular case, the Barr Building was the first office building on Farragut Square to follow the trend, as most of the office buildings around Farragut Square were not constructed until the 1960s.

Farragut Square was improved as a park beginning in 1871 when Congress selected the site to receive a monument to Navy hero David Glasgow Farragut. The actual statue was put in place in 1883. At that time, Connecticut Avenue which had bisected the square was re-routed, converting the former pair of triangular open-spaces into a true square. As the park was improved during the 1870s and 1880s, the neighborhood surrounding it became a social and diplomatic hub, architecturally grounded by a stately Italianate house built in 1858 by George W. Riggs on the 1600 block of I Street. During the 1870s, British Minister Sir Edward Thornton rented the Riggs mansion where he apparently entertained lavishly until moving to the British Embassy at Dupont Circle. In the 1870s and 1880s, Adolph Cluss and Alexander "Boss" Shepherd lived on the square in two of the three Cluss-designed stone dwellings lining the north end of the square on K Street and known as "Shepherd's Row."<sup>1</sup> During this same time, two military leaders, Brig. Gen. Albert Myer, and Capt. Nathan Sargent also lived on the square. In 1883, Sargent commissioned noted architect Joseph Hornblower to design a stylish Romanesque Revival-style/Queen Anne brick house that faced the square from the east side.<sup>2</sup> By 1888, all sides of the square were framed by large, attached three-story dwellings while even more substantial freestanding ones occupied the corner lots.

In 1891, the Army-Navy Club built its headquarters at Connecticut Avenue and I Street south of the square, making Farragut Square an unofficial gathering place for Washington's military men.<sup>3</sup> Two decades later, the Army Navy Club expanded its headquarters to accommodate a

<sup>1</sup> James Goode, *Capital Losses: a Cultural History of Washington's Destroyed Buildings*, Second Edition, Smithsonian Books: Washington, D.C., 2003, p. 183-185.

<sup>2</sup> Goode, p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> "Farragut Square (Reservation Number 12)," The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS No. DC-671).

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growing membership, and moved north of I Street, to the east side of the square. In erecting this building<sup>4</sup> in 1911-1912, the club razed a substantial dwelling at the southeast corner, signaling the beginning of the neighborhood's gradual shift from residential to commercial.

In 1926, local developer John L. Barr purchased lots 819-829 on Square 126, contracted with architect B. Stanley Simmons and proceeded to develop the lots with the substantial eleven-story Barr Building on the site today. From 1927 until 1963, the 110-foot-high Barr Building with its cornice spires rose above its older neighbors and dominated its streetscape and the park frontage. In the 1960s, however, ten large, boxy office buildings were built in the vicinity of Farragut Square, including the 13-story office building abutting the south side of the Barr Building. As a result, the Barr Building, along with the Army and Navy Club now stand as the oldest buildings on the square. Though shorter than and sandwiched between two bigger, non-descript contemporary office buildings, the Barr Building feels the taller, with its Gothic spires evoking the imagery of the country's first commercial skyscrapers.

At the time of its building, the Barr Building was hailed for its design and innovative features. Just prior to its opening, The *Washington Post* wrote about the building in its article entitled, "Seventeenth Street Structure to Have Fastest Elevators in the Capital."<sup>5</sup> One week later, the same paper published elevational drawings of the building. The 1927 *Book of Washington* had a full-page advertisement on the Barr Building with an elevation drawing and caption noting "Washington's Most Beautiful Office Building."

The Barr Building opened on June 1, 1927. Within its first years, the building houses a variety of business offices including those of engineers, trade associations, lawyers, governmental committees, real estate and construction companies. Of particular note, the Barr Building provided offices for the National Rifle Association, the Society of Women Geographers and the Republican National Committee. Upon the building's opening, the Republican National Committee established its headquarters in the fourth floor, and in August 1928, the colored voters' division of the Republican National Committee moved in to the building's first floor offices.

<sup>4</sup> The Army and Navy Club building is a DC Landmark.

<sup>5</sup> "New Barr Building Costs \$1,250,000: Seventeenth Street Structure to Have Fastest Elevators in the Capital," The Washington Post, May 8, 1927, p. R4.

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## The Collaboration of Developer John L. Barr and Architect B. Stanley Simmons:

### **John L. Barr:**

John L. Barr (1887-1969), like his father Lester A. Barr (1854-1937) before him, was active in the real estate and building industry in the city from 1916 through the early 1960s. At his death in 1969 at the age of 82, John Barr was remembered as a prominent developer in the city. He was recognized for the construction of apartment buildings of the 1920s, but most notably for the eponymous Barr Building, which the press identified as the “first uptown high rise office building.”<sup>6</sup> John Barr’s father, Lester Barr, who moved from Hagerstown, Maryland to the city as a child before the Civil War, became an important Washington developer by the 1880s. During this time, Lester A. Barr co-founded the real estate firm of Barr & Sanner with partner Franklin T. Sanner. The partnership, along with the partners acting independently, was actively engaged first in building speculative row houses in the city, and later, apartment buildings. Lester Barr’s obituary credits Barr with the 1890 construction of the Mount Vernon apartment, described as “one of the first buildings of this type in the city.”<sup>7</sup> The firm, whose work was noted for its quality of design and materials, often engaged the architectural services of architect B. Stanley Simmons to design its buildings.<sup>8</sup> This collaboration between the developer and architect appears to have been a successful one, given the large number of buildings that the team worked on together. As further evidence of this, Lester Barr hired Simmons to design his own house at 2120 Leroy Place in 1906, and in a series of phases beginning in 1909, Barr again contracted with Simmons to design the Wyoming Apartment building. The Wyoming Apartment is considered Lester Barr’s single greatest achievement as Washington developer.

John L. Barr, was born in Washington and attended Sidwell Friends School before heading off to Harvard where he obtained his undergraduate degree in 1910. John Barr returned to D.C. to earn his law degree from George Washington University in 1915. In 1916, with the help of his father, John Barr entered the real estate business. John Barr’s his first recorded project involved a major addition to the Wyoming Apartment building, originally built by his father to the designs of B. Stanley Simmons. For the addition, John Barr (listed as owner and builder on the building

<sup>6</sup> “John L. Barr, 82, Builder in District,” *The Washington Post*, Nov. 27, 1969, p. C14.

<sup>7</sup> See Lester A. Barr, Realty Dealer is Dead at 83,” *The Washington Post*, January 18, 1937. The Mount Vernon Apartment which stood at 9<sup>th</sup> and New York Avenue, N.W. is no longer extant. Although the Mount Vernon Apartments was an early apartment building in the city, it was by no means the first. The Portland Flats, built in 1879, is considered the city’s first apartment building.

<sup>8</sup> The newspaper entries on Barr & Sanner’s houses, designed by Simmons, accentuate the quality design and materials, such as in this October 1892 entry: Barr & Sanner are building from plans completed by Architect Simmons two houses to cost \$14,000 on Q street, between Sixteenth and Seventeenth streets. They will be three stories and cellar, have square bays finished with red slate towers, Indiana limestone will be used up to the second story, the remaining stories to be built of pressed brick.” *The Washington Post*, October 16, 1892, p. 10.

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permit), not surprisingly hired architect B. Stanley Simmons to design this new phase of the building.

During the 1920s, John Barr built several row houses, an apartment building, an automobile showroom, a downtown post office, and the eleven-story Barr Building on Farragut Square. For this major undertaking, John Barr again engaged B. Stanley Simmons as architect. As completed, the Barr Building was hailed for its Gothic style, and for being “one of the finest and handsomest office structures.” The building also won praise for its “most modern features” including “three high-speed elevators capable of traveling 600 feet per minute, which is the fastest elevator service in the city.”<sup>9</sup> The local press was quick, too, to point out the high cost of the Barr Building: “Constructed at a cost said to exceed a million and a quarter dollars, the new Barr Building, 910 Seventeenth Street northwest, is being hurried to completion...”<sup>10</sup> The Barr Building opened in June 1927. One year later in July 1928, the building was apparently 98% leased with the entire fourth floor occupied by the Republican National Committee.

Despite the essentially full occupancy of the Barr Building, John L. Barr had clearly over-extended himself financially, and in November 1928, had filed for bankruptcy. At the time of filing, the Barr Building was listed as his single greatest asset.<sup>11</sup> John Barr eventually recovered from his financial losses and continued to develop buildings in the city. In 1937, at the death of his father, John Barr and his relations inherited the \$972,674 estate of Lester A. Barr. At his death in 1969, John Barr maintained his offices and residence at the Wyoming Apartment building.<sup>12</sup>

## B. Stanley Simmons:

Architect B. Stanley Simmons (1872-1931) was born in Charles County, Maryland in 1872, but came to Washington as a child where he later established his career in architecture. Simmons received his architecture degree at the University of Maryland, and later studied architecture at M. I. T. His career spanned several decades from the 1880s to the 1930s during which time he established himself as an extremely prolific architect, designing more than 280 buildings in the city. Simmons also worked with every major developer, though he appears to have had a particularly close working relationship with Lester A. Barr and later his son, John L. Barr with whom he designed some of his best known commissions (i.e. the Wyoming Apartment building and the Barr Building). Simmons was incredibly versatile, designing a variety of building types

<sup>9</sup> See “New Barr Building Costs \$1,250,000,” *The Washington Post*, May 8, 1927, p. R4 and Display ad, *The Washington Post*, August 14, 1927, p. R10. See also, “Rush Completion of Barr Building,” *The Evening Star*, May 21, 1927, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> “New Barr Building Costs \$1,250,000.”

<sup>11</sup> “Barr Trustee Petitions Court for Instructions,” *The Washington Post*, January 16, 1929, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> “John L. Barr, 82, Builder in District,” *The Washington Post*, November 27, 1969, p. C14.

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that ranged from row houses, to fraternal clubs, to commercial and institutional buildings, though he seems to have had a proclivity for apartment buildings, having designed over 60 of them. In 1902, when he was 31, the *Evening Star* said of him:

An architect who has added to the beauty and growth of this city, he has designed some of the largest apartment houses in the city. Among the monuments to his skill and originality: the Mount Vernon, the Gloucester, the Cumberland, the Henrietta, the Veronica, the Eastern, the Franklin, and the Dupont are his most conspicuous. Mr. Simmons is capable and enterprising; these qualities added to an energetic spirit have brought to him deserved success...<sup>13</sup>

Not listed in the *Evening Star*, but also of particular note on his resume are Simmons' designs for the National Metropolitan Bank at 15th and G Streets, NW (1905); the Elks Club at 919 H Street, NW (1908, demolished); and the Fairfax Hotel (now the Ritz-Carlton) at 21st and Massachusetts Avenue, NW (1921), in addition to the Wyoming Apartments and the Barr Building.

Although he never studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, B. Stanley Simmons became a student of the Beaux Arts tradition and the City Beautiful Movement. While his earlier 19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings (namely speculative row houses) reflect Victorian styles of architecture, his later early 20<sup>th</sup>-century buildings are grander and more monumental structures that reflect a variety of academic styles inspired the City Beautiful movement. For instance, the now-demolished Elks Club at 919 H Street, NW, the Fairfax Hotel (now the Ritz) at 2100 Massachusetts Avenue, NW; the Northwest Savings Bank, at 1789 Columbia Road, all executed in a Classical Revival style, or the Charlesfred Apartment building at 1705 P Street, N.W., designed in the Renaissance Revival vein, are all indicative of the influences of the Beaux Arts tradition. Though stylistic divergent from these more Classically rooted examples, the Barr Building is similarly characteristic of a studied and academic interpretation of the Medieval Gothic style typical of the student of the Beaux Arts tradition.<sup>14</sup>

### 20<sup>th</sup> Century Academic Gothic Revival Style:

The Barr Building is designed in a 20<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic Revival style that was a sub-set of a larger trend of Academic Styles in American buildings which was itself, a response to the growing, worldwide importance of the United States. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States had emerged from its Colonial past and from the ravages of the Civil War and was *en route* to becoming one of the world's principal political, military and financial leaders. As noted by architectural historian Alan Gowans, the population of the United States in 1900, for the first

<sup>13</sup> As quoted in "Greater Logan Circle Preservation Plan," Unpublished report, Traceries, 1990, p. 78.

<sup>14</sup> B. Stanley Simmons had previously, in 1906, designed a vault for Mt. Olivet Cemetery in the Gothic style (see "New Vault for Mt. Olivet," *The Washington Post*, November 11, 1906). Simmons also used Gothic detailing on some of his apartment buildings.

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time, exceeded that of any western nation except Russia; the U.S. was becoming one the of the world’s leading exporters of food and coal and a major producer of iron and steel; the country had a financial center in New York that was rivaling that of London; and it was expanding its Navy and showcasing it on the international stage (“the Great White Fleet”).<sup>15</sup>

As proffered by Alan Gowans, the United States’ new national dignity thus demanded a more dignified artistic expression.<sup>16</sup> And, beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and continuing into the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the country began to acquire it. The provincial styles and pattern book plans of the American Victorian era were rejected in favor of “Academic” styles of architecture in the early 20th century. Academic styles, including Beaux Arts, Colonial and Classical Revivals, Medieval Revivals, Arts and Crafts, Mission, Moderne, Prairie, and many other sub-styles, were the product of designers who had trained professionally in the field of architecture, were intensely knowledgeable about past building styles, and were thus able to re-interpret them in a particularly sophisticated stylistic manner.

While this “Academic” design attitude was first showcased at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition which highlighted the Roman Revival style on a grand scale, Academic Architecture as noted above was not limited to the Classical Revival styles. It included, among others, the Medieval styles, including Gothic Revival. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Gothic Revival style had been and continued to be a preferred style for religious architecture, but during this era of Academic Revivals, it was also promoted by architects for other building types. Ralph Adams Cram, architect of St. John the Divine Cathedral in New York City among other nationally notable buildings designed in the Gothic style, argued that Gothic architecture was not “exclusively devised to express Christian ideals.” With such encouragement, the Academic Gothic Revival style eventually came to be seen as appropriate for non-religious buildings, including public buildings, commercial structures, and, in particular, the American college campus. Cram himself designed several college campus buildings in the Collegiate Gothic style, namely the 1913 Graduate College at Princeton University.

In addition to the college campus, the Gothic Revival style provided an important expression for the country’s newest commercial buildings—skyscrapers. Unlike the load bearing churches and cathedrals of the past, these new buildings were freestanding steel frame structures. The applied Gothic ornamentation was meant to emphasize the soaring verticality of the skyscraper. The single-most famous example of the Academic Gothic Revival style commercial building is New York City’s Woolworth Building. Designed by architect Cass Gilbert and constructed 1911-1913, the Woolworth building stood as New York City’s tallest building until 1931. Upon its

<sup>15</sup> Alan Gowans, *Styles and Types of North American Architecture: Social Function and Cultural Expression*, IconEditions, 1992, p. 211.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Gowans, p. 211.

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completion, the Woolworth Building won immediate acclaim for its use of Gothic forms and detail, and served to inspire the design and construction of other Gothic Revival style commercial buildings. Two later important Gothic Revival-style skyscraper buildings are the Chicago Tribune Tower by Howells and Hood (1922); and the Cathedral of Learning (1926-27) at the University of Pittsburgh.

As implemented and inspired by the 1901 McMillan Commission Plan, Washington, D.C. was dominated by Classical building forms and styles during this period of Academic Revival styles. However, the Gothic Revival style remained dominant in the city for religious buildings and, at the same time, found expression in some of the city's schools and apartment buildings. The Chastleton Apartment (1919) building on 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Eastern High School (1921-23) on East Capitol Street are both notable and exuberant examples of the style in D.C. More often, though, the Gothic Revival style was applied in a reduced manner where Gothic ornamentation was used around door and window openings and at the rooflines, giving the impression of height in a city of height limits.

Unlike in other cities (especially New York), the use of the Gothic Revival style for commercial buildings in Washington was rare. Based upon an office building survey conducted of the downtown area, only a few fully executed Gothic Revival style commercial buildings were built, including the Barr Building (1926-27), the Mather Building (1916), the Denrike Building (1925-26), and the Securities Building (1926). Although neither the first, nor the only example of its style from the period, the Barr Building stands as an excellent example of a rare use of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Gothic Revival style in commercial Washington, D.C.

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## Major Bibliographical References:

“Another New Office Building for Washington,” *The Washington Post*, February 1, 1953, p. R6.

“Barr Building” (advertisement), *The Washington Post*, August 14, 1927, p. R10.

“Barr Building, Washington’s Most Beautiful Office Building,” *The Book of Washington*, 1927, p. 277-278.

“Farragut Square (Reservation Number 12),” Historic American Buildings Survey, DC-671.

“New Barr Building Costs \$1,250,000,” *The Washington Post*, May 8, 1927.

“Newest Office Structure,” *The Washington Post*, May 15, 1927, p. R2.

“Rush Completion of Barr Building,” *The Evening Star*, May 21, 1927, p. 21.

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## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property \_\_\_\_\_

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	Zone	Easting	Northing	3	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	Zone	Easting	Northing	4	Zone	Easting	Northing

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 \_\_\_\_\_

Organization DC Preservation League date July 2009

street & number 2000 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW telephone 202 442-8840

city or town Washington, D.C. state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

- x 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

- x Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional Items

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

## Property Owner

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

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction 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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## Verbal Boundary Description:

The Barr Building at 910 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW occupies Lots 819-829 on Square 126 in Washington, D.C. The building which fronts directly on the street and extends back to a rear alley occupies the lots in their entirety. +

## Boundary Justification:

The building has occupied these lots since its construction in 1927-1928.  
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Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)

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