

1989

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for M. Carey Thomas Library, Bryn Mawr College

Bryn Mawr College

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

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**1. Name of Property**

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historic name: M. Carey Thomas Library, Bryn Mawr College

other name/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. Location**

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street & number: Bryn Mawr College campus, bounded by Morris, Yarrow,  
Wyndon and New Gulph Roads

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Bryn Mawr

vicinity: N/A

state: PA county: Montgomery

code: 091

zip code: 19010

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**3. Classification**

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Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 1

Name of related multiple property listing: Bryn Mawr College Historic District

\*\*\*\*\*

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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 Keeper Date of Action



Significant Person(s): M. Carey Thomas  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Walter Cope and John Stewardson  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.  
 X  See continuation sheet.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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X  See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- x  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:

- x  State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- X  University
- Other -- Specify Repository: Archives of Bryn Mawr College

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of Property: slightly more than one acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A 18 473160 4430540 B \_\_\_\_\_  
C \_\_\_\_\_ D \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The "boundary" of the Thomas Library on the Bryn Mawr College campus is indicated as the dotted red line on the accompanying map entitled "Physical Features Map, Bryn Mawr College." The nominated property is roughly 190' x 250' in size. The southeast corner of the building is 315' diagonal to the junction of Merion and Yarrow Avenues in the town of Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. The boundary is formed by the paved surfaces immediately outside the building on the North East, and West sides, a line drawn 10 feet parallel from the building's South side.

Boundary Justification: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes setting appropriate for historical environment.

=====  
**11. Form Prepared By**  
=====

Name/Title: Dr. Page Putnam Miller, Director, NCC

Organization - National Coordinating  
Committee for the Promotion of History

Date - September 25, 1989

Street & Number - 400 A Street, SE

Telephone (202) 544-2422

City or Town - Washington

State - DC ZIP - 20003

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7

M. Carey Thomas Library

Page #1

=====

DESCRIPTION OF SITE:

The M. Carey Thomas Library, completed on the Bryn Mawr College campus in 1907, is built of gray stone in the jacobean gothic style of the seventeenth century. At a memorial talk acknowledging the achievements of the architect, Walter Cope, M. Carey Thomas boasted that the building possessed more "romance" and "charm" than any except the most beautiful of the older colleges at Cambridge and Oxford.<sup>1</sup> The library forms three sides of an enclosed quadrangle surrounded with cloisters. The main building contains a three-story stack with accommodations for 88,000 volumes. Above the stack area was the glory of the library, a spacious great hall. This area originally served as the study room. The ceiling is high and has huge lead-paned windows that let in sunlight, creating a cathedral-like effect.. with, with main building facing east, opposite and parallel to Taylor Hall with its principal entrance facing Taylor. This main section is 174 feet long, and includes many of the details used in Wadham College, Oxford, including the tracery of the lead-paned windows that run the length of the high-ceilinged hall, and the oak paneling of its walls. The entrance porch is an exact copy of the entrance porch of Oriel College, Oxford, as it appears in drawings before it was rebuilt after the fire of 1752. The teakwood doors leading into the great hall were given by the undergraduate students in 1904-5 as a memorial to Mary Helen Ritchie, the former Secretary of the college, who died during the year. The class of 1899 raised the money for the large bronze clock in the great hall.

The north and south wings, running parallel to each other, are each about 200 feet in length. They once held magazine/newspaper reading rooms, lecture and seminar rooms, offices, and laboratory space on the first floor of the south wing. They are still used today as offices.

One of the striking aspects of the M. Carey Thomas Library is the outdoor cloistered area in the center of the structure, with an electrically powered fountain, and grotesques carved by English sculptor Alec Miller.

In 1970, the bulk of the M. Carey Thomas Library's holdings were transferred to the larger Miriam Coffin Canaday Library. In recognition of Thomas' appreciation for art, the renovated Thomas Library now houses the books and study materials for the departments of Art History, and Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology. The renovation involved conversion of stack areas to academic offices and classrooms but no changes were made in the grand spaces or the gothic details. Along with the faculty offices and classrooms of these departments, the library also contains the Division of Visual Resources, and the Quita Woodward Memorial Room for recreational reading with recent books on literature, art, religion, current affairs, as well as many classics.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7

M. Carey Thomas Library

Page #2

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The great hall which had once been the reading room has become the Thomas Great Hall and is now used for lectures, concerts, and student gatherings.

<sup>1</sup> "Architectural History of Bryn Mawr College," (1985) Bryn Mawr College Archives.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

M. Carey Thomas Library

Page #1

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HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Although by pleasant coincidence the library being nominated bears the name of M. Carey Thomas, it has been selected because it best illustrates the achievements of M. Carey Thomas who broke new ground in women's education by establishing at Bryn Mawr College academic opportunities for women that paralleled the highest standards in male higher education. Within the context of the National Historic Landmarks program thematic framework, the M. Carey Thomas Library has national significance under theme: XXVII. Education (C) Higher Education 4. Research, Graduate, (H) Special Populations 3. Women's Education.

As President of Bryn Mawr, Thomas pursued a far reaching building campaign, which culminated with the construction of the M. Carey Thomas Library. With the adoption of the Jacobean Gothic architecture used in the distinguished men's colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, Thomas led Bryn Mawr in building the first in the United States of what would become known as the "collegiate Gothic" style. Of the seven buildings -- four dormitories, a science hall, the gymnasium, and the M. Carey Thomas Library -- built in the new "collegiate Gothic" style, it was the M. Carey Thomas Library which most embodied Thomas' dual contribution of academic and architectural excellence. In convincing the board of trustees of the value of original scholarship in a college for women, in which the library is the centerpiece, Thomas also convinced them of the importance of creating splendid spaces for living and studying that combined dignity with dramatic effects.

Bryn Mawr College opened in 1885 and M. Carey Thomas served as the first dean. From the beginning it was clear that the officers and trustees intended Bryn Mawr to be notably different from the other women's colleges in existence. Most significantly, the college was to have serious graduate programs with fellowships available for research, and no faculty would be hired without an advanced degree in their field. There was every intention of preparing women for professional academic careers. As M. Carey Thomas later said, "A college without graduate students never occurred to us."<sup>1</sup>

Born in 1857 to a wealthy Quaker family in Baltimore, M. Carey Thomas was the eldest of ten children. Early on, her mother encouraged her to pursue her ambitions, and Thomas excelled in her school, acquiring a first-rate preparatory education. In 1875, Thomas entered Cornell University as a junior, and received an A.B. two years later. She was accepted to Johns Hopkins University to do graduate work, but was not allowed to attend classes with the male students. Evidently frustrated by this restriction, Thomas journeyed to Germany with her close friend Mary Gwinn to attend the University of Leipzig. After Leipzig refused to grant an advanced degree to a woman, Thomas transferred to University of Zurich. In 1882, Thomas earned a Ph.D. summa cum laude in Philology, (a form of literary analysis) becoming the first woman and the first foreigner to do so at the University of Zurich.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

M. Carey Thomas Library

Page #2

=====

In the United States at this time, Joseph W. Taylor had bequeathed funds to found a women's college in the Quaker tradition. Thomas' father and some of her relatives were named to the board of trustees. On the credit of her success at Zurich, Thomas wrote to the trustees requesting that she be considered for the presidency of the new college. Believing her too young (she was 27 years old) and inexperienced, the trustees named her Dean and professor of English.<sup>2</sup>

Thomas' personal mission to prove that women could be the academic and professional equals of men, was instrumental in Bryn Mawr's goal to be the highest academic institution for women of its day. Her views were notably firm on this subject, "One man's mind differs from another man's mind far more widely than all women's minds differ from all men's."<sup>3</sup> From her early years working with first president James E. Rhoads to her tenure as the second president from 1894 to 1922, Thomas initiated a series of standards and programs that would create an environment of serious academic training for women. This included entrance exams for all students and proficiency in Latin and Greek, subjects normally required only of men entering prestigious universities. Thomas created a curriculum that offered an elective system of groups of related courses in rigorous subjects, including economics, politics, and history, courses that had previously been unavailable to women.

With this same spirit, in 1915, Bryn Mawr established the first graduate department for social work in the country, and by 1920, the program offered both a masters degree and a doctorate in the field.

Thomas believed her students were mature and capable as well as intelligent, and in 1891 she agreed, when petitioned by student Susan Walker, class of 1893, to allow the students to establish the first independent self government of any college in the country. In 1892, Thomas and the Board of Trustees created a charter that would grant the students complete responsibility for their conduct outside the classroom. Although this was an unprecedented move in American higher education, a number of other schools, particularly women's colleges, quickly followed the trend.

From the early years, Bryn Mawr broke away from the tradition of educating women in one communal building or separate small home-like structures where their academic training would not compromise their femininity. "As the visible sign that truth had no sex, the Bryn Mawr campus gave no clue to the gender of its student body."<sup>4</sup> Instead, Thomas made every effort to present a campus that would physically represent the seriousness of the academics therein. Thomas was determined that the structures built during her Presidency be designed in Jacobean Gothic style, after the distinguished men's colleges at Oxford and Cambridge. "Through 'architecture by association,' Bryn Mawr became a scholar's retreat in the manner of her European ancestors, linking higher education in America with that of the European universities."<sup>5</sup> In the early 20th century, as Bryn Mawr's funding expanded, the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

M. Carey Thomas Library

Page #3

campus added new buildings and quadrangles, all constructed in collegiate gothic architecture. The M. Carey Thomas Library, four dormitories, a science hall, and gymnasium were all constructed in the new style which became a symbol of academic life that brought together architectural beauty and intellectual pursuits. John Stewardson and Walter Cope, who would carry out this ambitious plan for Bryn Mawr later were commissioned for major projects at Princeton, Cornell, the University of Missouri, Washington University in St. Louis, and the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>6</sup>

During the twenty-eight years that Thomas served as President of Bryn Mawr, she was a crusader for all aspects of women's education and equality. Although she would not jeopardize Bryn Mawr's reputation as rigorous institution of higher learning by adding a preparatory department to the college, she, along with some close girlhood friends, opened the Bryn Mawr School for Girls in Baltimore providing the arduous preparatory standards for girls prior to entering college. Thomas and this same group of friends also provided an endowment to Johns Hopkins Medical School with the stipulation that women be allowed into the program under the same requirements as men.

Throughout her adult life, Thomas actively supported the women's suffrage movement, working for a number of suffrage organizations, and speaking publicly for women's equality. She once described her perspective saying "Given two bridge-builders, a man and a woman, given a certain bridge to build, and given as always the unchangeable laws of mechanics...it is simply inconceivable that the preliminary instruction given to the two bridge-builders should differ in quantity, quality, or method of presentation because while the bridge is building one will wear knickerbockers and the other a rainy-day skirt."<sup>7</sup>

Due, in a large part to Thomas' strong belief in women's equality and abilities, and her unflagging efforts in that behalf, Bryn Mawr was a pioneer among women's colleges in all aspects of higher education, leading the way in development of the collegiate Gothic style of architecture and graduate programs. Under Thomas' leadership Bryn Mawr also focused on developing scholars in social work and education and produced a large number of accomplished and renowned alumnae.

<sup>1</sup> Labalme, Patricia Hochschild, ed. A Century Recalled: Essays in Honor of Bryn Mawr College (Bryn Mawr, PA, 1987) p. 137

<sup>2</sup> James, Edward T. ed. Notable American Women 1607-1950, Vol.III (Cambridge, MA and London, England, 1971) p. 447

<sup>3</sup> James, Edward T. ed. Notable American Women 1607-1950, Vol.III (Cambridge, MA and London, England, 1971) p. 449

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

M. Carey Thomas Library

Page #4

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4 Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz. Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's  
Colleges from Their Nineteenth Century Beginnings to the 1930's (New York, 1984) p.  
119

5 "Architectural History of Bryn Mawr College" 1985, p. 5, (Unpublished paper in  
the Bryn Mawr College Archives).

6 Ibid.

7 Horowitz, p. 119.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 9

M. Carey Thomas Library

Page #1

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Finch, Edith. Carey Thomas of Bryn Mawr. New York and London, England: Harpers & Brothers Publishers, 1947.

Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz. Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930's. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.

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