

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

1. Name of Property

historic name J. Milton Turner School

other names/site number n/a

2. Location

street & number 238 Meacham Avenue and 245 Saratoga Avenue [n/a] not for publication

city or town Kirkwood [n/a] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county St. Louis code 189 zip code 63122

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 [1.])

Signature of certifying official/Title Claire F. Blackwell/Deputy SHPO

17 July 02
Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
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

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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
See continuation sheet [].

Signature of the Keeper

Date

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing.

n/a

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function
Education/school

Current Functions
Commerce/Trade/specialty store

7. Description

Architectural Classification
Moderne

Materials
foundation limestone
walls brick

roof asphalt
other wood
concrete

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history
- B** Property is 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

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.

Areas of Significance

Education

Ethnic Heritage--Black

Periods of Significance

1937-1954

Significant Dates

n/a

Significant Person(s)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Bonsack & Pearce

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.7 acres

UTM References

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
15	726320	4271500			
C. Zone	Easting	Northing	D. 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 Esley Hamilton

organization St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation date December 19, 2000

street & number 41 South Central Avenue telephone 314/615-0357

city or town Clayton state MO zip code 63105

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

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 Lloyd Farrow

street & number 14400 U. S. Highway 67 telephone _____

city or town West Alton state MO zip code 63386

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1J. Milton Turner School
St. Louis County, MO**Description**

The J. Milton Turner School is a two-story, U-shaped brick building with a squared rubble, broken course foundation and a flat roof concealed by a parapet. In style it is typical of public schools from the 1920s through the 1940s, basically utilitarian but with some features associated with the modernizing styles of the era, particularly the banding and simplified buttresses of the Moderne. The school occupies most of a city block in the largely residential Meacham Park neighborhood, bounded north by Meacham Street (from which it takes the address 238 Meacham), east by Milwaukee Street, and south by the now-abandoned right-of-way of Saratoga Street (from which derived the former address 245 Saratoga). To the west is the rear boundary of a large new retail development. The rest of Meacham Park has undergone substantial upgrading and reconstruction since it was annexed by the City of Kirkwood in 1992, including a new child care center on the site of the school playground to the south of the school. The school's primary entrance faces south, but other well articulated entrances are approximately centered in the asymmetrical east and west elevations. The grounds are landscaped with trees to the north and east, while the south and west areas are paved for parking. Although the building has not been in school ownership since 1980, its condition remains fairly good, and it retains most of its original features inside, including the glazed tile wainscot and the metal lockers recessed in the corridor walls.

The present building is the result of a sequence of additions and demolitions by the Kirkwood School Board, beginning in 1924 and continuing to 1948. Surviving architectural drawings show that the north portion of the building was designed in 1937, while U-shaped south front of the building dates from the final period of construction. Without these drawings and related records, these two periods of construction would not be easily differentiated, since they were designed by the same architectural firm, Bonsack & Pearce, using the same design vocabulary and materials.

Phase I included an auditorium/gymnasium with tiered seating on one side and a stage on the other. Also on the first floor were three classrooms, toilets for boys and girls, and two staircases. The second floor provided four more classrooms and a boys' toilet. The basement housed heating and ventilating equipment, including a coal storage room.

The Phase II portion of the basement accommodated more public uses, including a large play area and a cafeteria, since its windows opened onto railed light wells. Other basement spaces were for the kitchen, food storage, and custodian quarters. The first floor had a kindergarten, three other classrooms, and the school offices, which included a vault. The second floor added three more classrooms and a girls' toilet. As completed, the school had 15 classrooms, ranging in size from about 550 square feet to 13,200 square feet.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 2J. Milton Turner School
St. Louis County, MO

Description (continued)

Construction of Phase I consisted of a steel structure and hollow tile form lines for the concrete floors. In Phase II, this floor structure was steel bar joist, concrete floor slabs, with support from the interior and exterior masonry walls.

Some windows have been boarded up by the current tenants, and others were bricked in during the building's use as a school, but surviving windows are double-hung. Most are 12-over-12, but those at the south ends of the wings are 9-over-9, with single windows flanking groups of three. Windows on the east and west sides are generally grouped in twos. At the south end of the west side is a first-floor bay window.

The stone foundation rises to the base of the first-floor windows, where it is capped by an ashlar water table that continues around the building, broken only by doors and some north-side basement windows. The cap and brick recesses of the parapet make similarly strong horizontal gestures. The east and west doors step out from the plane of the wall in a series of buttress forms, while the south door is flanked by brick piers that frame the arched inscription panel above the second-floor triple window: "J. Milton Turner School."

Considering the age of the building and its uncertain existence over the past twenty years, its condition is better than average. Roof leaks were remedied by installing new insulation and single-ply roofing. No structural cracks are evident. The major interior change is that the gymnasium tiered seating and stage have been removed, thus making the unobstructed floor area of that space almost twice as large as originally. This also removed the locker rooms for girls and boys that had been under the tiered area and a storage area for chairs and tables that had been under the stage. Temporary partitions have been installed in several rooms to accommodate the uses of the new tenants, who have included two lumber companies and a guitar repair shop.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 3J. Milton Turner School
St. Louis County, MO**Statement of Significance**

The J. Milton Turner School, earlier called the Meacham Park School, was opened in 1925 by the Kirkwood School District for its African-American students in the southeast part of the district, and particularly for those in the Meacham Park Subdivision, which was an unincorporated area (within the school district but outside the city limits) that had been developing as a largely African-American neighborhood since 1892. In spite of changes in use, the J. Milton Turner School is the most important school building remaining in St. Louis County from the period of segregated school systems. It is thus eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A and the category of Education, in that it embodies the broad theme of segregation in public education. The school is also significant in the category of Ethnic Heritage -- Black, in that it is the last significant building associated with Meacham Park, which had an independent identity within St. Louis County for a century, from its founding until its annexation by the City of Kirkwood in 1992. The school closed before 1980 and has been subject to a variety of efforts to preserve it in the twenty years since then, but plans are currently under way to restore the building and adapt it for use as a community center.

Schools for Blacks in St. Louis County

Although Missouri did not join the Confederacy, it was a slave state, and its racial attitudes resembled those of the South. Prior to the Civil War, education of blacks was expressly forbidden by statute; an 1846 law stated that "no person shall keep or teach any school for the instruction of Negroes or mulattos." The penalty was a fine of \$500 and/or six months imprisonment.¹ The state constitution of 1865 legally required public support for black education, but the following year, the state legislature passed a set of school laws which required that separate schools be provided for Negro children, where they numbered more than 20 in a district.²

The segregated school system was thus enshrined in law at an early date, and in practice the black schools were always inferior in equipment and facilities. The Kirkwood School Board, which served Meacham Park, was typical in this regard. The election authorizing the district was held on April 3, 1865. The new temporary school building for white children opened September 24, 1866, but classes for black children didn't open until a year later, and then only in space rented in the local African-American church. When the new permanent school building for whites opened in 1869, the black children inherited the temporary building, which was moved to

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 4J. Milton Turner School
St. Louis County, MO

Statement of Significance (continued)

a new site. It was named the Booker T. Washington School in 1908. When this building was torn down in 1914, it was replaced by portable buildings until finally closed in 1950.³

Nearly all of the school buildings that were eventually constructed for African Americans across St. Louis county were disposed of by their districts in the 1950s as the 78 rural districts merged into the 23 present districts and as the Supreme Court decision of 1954 mandating school integration was implemented. The survey undertaken in 1991 by the St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation, "Schools Built Before 1941 in St. Louis County," was able to find only five identifiable historically black school buildings still standing. John A. Wright's 1994 book, *Discovering African-American St. Louis: A Guide to Historic Sites* (Missouri Historical Society Press) added three later schools to this list. Since then, two of these have been demolished.⁴ Two other schools have been converted into residences for the elderly, in the process giving up much of their historic appearance.⁵ Of the two surviving one-room schools, the Chesterfield Black School at 16906 Wild Horse Creek Road is now the garage wing of a house that has been standing unoccupied and condemned since the flood of 1993. The Turner Elementary School at 9601 Lilac, not established until 1949 by the Riverview School District, has been altered almost beyond recognition as an industrial office building.

The only other potentially significant school to survive is the Elmwood Park School, which served another unincorporated black community originally promoted by Elzey Meacham. It stands at 9707 Chicago Heights Boulevard at the corner of Dielman Road, but the small original building dating from 1915 and enlarged in 1936 is dwarfed by a 1970 addition. Closed by the Ritnour School District in 1976, the school has been used as a church.

Meacham Park

The Turner School has long been the most important public building in the community of Meacham Park, and in recent years, as nearly all the original residential buildings have been replaced by newer construction or removed for retail development, it has become the most important reminder of the century-long history of the community. Meacham Park was laid out in 1892 by Elzey E. Meacham, a white real estate promoter from Memphis, Tennessee.⁶ Why the development attracted so many blacks is not entirely clear, but its lots were smaller than usual and sold for as little as ten dollars, and it lacked the racial restrictions that were written into many subdivisions in the area. The national depression of 1893 slowed development of Meacham Park, and Mr. Meacham himself moved from St. Louis by 1900, leaving his namesake community with unpaved streets, no lights, no water, and no sewers. The first store opened in 1912, owned by George Cabiness, a white man. D. M. Powell opened a grocery in 1919, the first black-owned store, on Meacham Street east of Shelby, and that intersection gradually became the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 5J. Milton Turner School
St. Louis County, MO**Statement of Significance (continued)**

business district of Meacham Park. The community maintained a white population (300 of 1365 people in 1950), and in spite of poverty and lack of infrastructure, it developed a strong civic identity, with a volunteer fire department, an American Legion post, a women's club, and six churches, each having its own building.

From the 1950s onward, however, community values were eroded by physical deterioration, abandonment and litter, and an increase in crime. The southeast corner of the neighborhood was cut off by the construction of Interstate 44, even as some of the dirt roads became impassable. As St. Louis County became more urban and affluent, on the other hand, the county government was able to direct more resources to its poorer communities. Water and sewer lines finally appeared in 1969 and 1971, respectively. New housing in the form of 80 units of Turnkey II apartments appeared in that latter year. And long-time resident Grady Woods commented, "No longer do residents carry two pairs of shoes – one for traversing rutted, muddy streets and another for walking on solid ground."

The annexation of Meacham Park by the City of Kirkwood in 1992 brought a new era of change, which is still underway. The western third of the original Elzey Meacham's original subdivision was leveled for a new retail development, and many of the remaining older houses were replaced by new construction. The school became a center of attention both for those favoring this redevelopment and for those wanting to preserve something of Meacham Park's community

spirit.⁷ After several false starts, a plan by Jim Matush to turn the old school into a community and youth center gained approval in the fall of 2000, and renovation planning is currently underway.

The Meacham Park School

The present J. Milton Turner School had its origins as the Meacham Park School. It opened in 1924 as a direct response to the pressure black parents had been directing to the Kirkwood Board of Education since the end of World War I because of the obviously inadequate educational opportunities for black students in the district. A design for a one-story, four-room, wood-frame building was submitted as early as 1922 by William B. Ittner, the leading school architect in the St. Louis region.⁸ Contracts were not awarded until March, 1924 because some parents complained that the funds could be better used to upgrade the Booker T. Washington School. Two rooms in the new building were equipped and opened before construction was completed, and a third opened in the fall of 1925. A bond issue in 1929 provided funds for the school's enlargement into an L-shaped building, with a second wood-frame wing.⁹

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 6J. Milton Turner School
St. Louis County, MOStatement of Significance (continued)The J. Milton Turner School

In 1932, overcrowding at the Washington School caused the whole sixth grade to be transferred to the school in Meacham Park, which was renamed the J. Milton Turner School at that time.¹⁰ The advent of the New Deal the next year soon produced new sources of funding for schools, and the Kirkwood district was able to take advantage of them by constructing three new schools and to enlarging three others, including Turner. Plans for a brick addition much larger than the original building are dated January 1937, and the work was completed the following year. The original wood-frame building remained attached to the east side of the new building. The Bonsack & Pearce drawings from 1937 are titled "J. Milton Turner High School," but in fact, only the junior high grades were accommodated in the new building, and black students from Kirkwood continued to travel to high schools in other districts, notably the Douglass School in Webster Groves, until 1955. An old photo shows that the Turner School's south front was detailed similarly to the present building, but with blank ends instead of wings and a slightly narrower centerpiece.

The building was brought to its present size in 1948, with enough room to accommodate the whole elementary school. The wooden wing could then be demolished. All the black students in the district were transferred to the Turner School in 1950, and the Booker T. Washington School was then demolished, too. By this time, the nationwide movement to desegregate public schools was gaining strength, and Kirkwood parents filed suit in the United States District Court in December, 1950. That suit was being appealed four years later when the U. S. Supreme Court ruled decisively in *Brown vs. Board of Education*.¹¹ Kirkwood moved rapidly to comply, but because of the continuing reliance on neighborhood school boundaries, Turner School remained predominantly black. Finally in the midst of the 1975-1976 school year, Turner's students were moved to another building inside the Kirkwood city limits and the building was closed.

An effort was then launched to turn the building into a museum and archives devoted to the life and times of J. Milton Turner,¹² but the Board sold the school to an investment company in 1980.

James Milton Turner, the man

While the name of this school does not in itself make the school eligible for listing in the National Register, it has great resonance in St. Louis and St. Louis County, where several other schools have been named for the same man. James Milton Turner was born a slave in St. Louis County. The date generally given is 1840, although Gary Kremer, Turner's foremost biographer, says 1839.¹³ Turner's father was able to purchase his freedom in 1844, and he was educated at in the clandestine school run by John Berry Meachum (1789-1854), another former slave. From about 1855 to about 1857, Turner studied at Oberlin College in Ohio. This experience motivated

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 7J. Milton Turner School
St. Louis County, MO

Statement of Significance (continued)

Turner's subsequent efforts to bring education to Negroes in Missouri. In the years immediately after the Civil War, he taught in Kansas City and Boonville and worked for the Freedmen's Bureau, a federal agency, to encourage the establishment of other schools for black children in Missouri. At the same time, Turner became increasingly active in the Radical wing of the Republican Party. His efforts resulted in 1870 in state support for Lincoln Institute, which had been founded in 1866; it became a state college in 1887 and a university in 1921. In spite of the Radical loss in the election of 1870, President Ulysses S. Grant appointed Turner as Minister to the Republic of Liberia in 1871, making him the second African-American to represent the United States in a foreign diplomatic post.¹⁴ Turner's return to the United States in 1878 did not result in the advancement he had hoped for, but in 1883 he found a new cause in the problems of the former slaves of the Cherokee, Choctaw and Chickasaw nations in Oklahoma. He promoted the Cherokee Freedmen's Act of 1888, and spent many years resolving its consequences. He also promoted a home for indigent members of the Prince Hall Masons. When he died in 1915 of complications from an injury incurred when a railroad tank car exploded in Ardmore, Oklahoma, Turner's funeral in St. Louis proved to be one of the largest ever held for a black man in that city.

Notes

1. Selwin K. Troen, *The Public and the Schools: Shaping the St. Louis System 1838-1920* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1975), p. 80. Other sources date this law 1847.
2. Troen, p. 81; Dr. Lorenzo J. Greene, Antonio F. Holland, Gary Kremer, "The Role of The Negro In Missouri History 1719-1970," *Official Manual State of Missouri 1973-1974*, ed. by Thelma P. Goodwin (Jefferson City, MO: Von Hoffmann Press, Inc., 1973), p. 35.
3. John A. Wright, *Discovering African American St. Louis: A Guide to Historic Sites* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1994), p. 155; June Wilkinson Dahl, *A History of Kirkwood, Missouri, 1851-1965* (Kirkwood, Mo.: Kirkwood Historical Society, 1965), pp. 129, 131, 274.
4. These are the Vernon Elementary School at 5764 Mable in the Ferguson-Florissant District and the L'Ouverture Elementary School at 8616 Rose in the Brentwood District.
5. These are the former Douglass Elementary School at 546 North Elm in Webster Groves and the New Lincoln School at 9717 Thomas Place in Richmond Heights (the Maplewood-Richmond Heights School District).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 8J. Milton Turner School
St. Louis County, MO

Statement of Significance (continued)

6. Lonnie R Speer, with Bill Jones and Garnet Thies, *A Brief History of Meacham Park, Mo.: 1892-1989* (Kirkwood, MO: 1998), p. 1. While much has been written about Meacham Park, this unusually well researched work remains the most important source and is used throughout this section.
7. Allyson McCollum, "Turner site a focal point," *Webster-Kirkwood Journal*, October 1, 1997, pp. 1A & 3A.
8. Speer, Jones & Thies, p. 18.
9. Dahl, pp. 308, 310-311.
10. Dahl. p. 397.
11. Dahl, pp. 400-402.
12. Dr. T. Lindsey Williams, "Grant Proposal for the Study of the J. Milton Turner School," March 3, 1980.
13. Gary R. Kremer, *James Milton Turner and the Promise of America: The Public Life of a Post-Civil War Black Leader* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1991, p. 10. The rest of this paragraph is drawn from the same source, *passim*.
14. Charles P. Henry, Book Review of Michael L. Krenn's *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-1969*, in *The American Historical Review* (Vol. 105, No. 3), published online at www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr. The first was Ebenezer D. Bassett, who was sent to Haiti in 1869.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 9, 10 Page 9J. Milton Turner School
St. Louis County, MO**Bibliography**

Dahl, June Wilkinson. *A History of Kirkwood, Missouri, 1851-1965*. Kirkwood, Mo.: Kirkwood Historical Society, 1965.

Hamilton, Esley, and Mary Webb. "Historic Buildings Survey: Schools Built Before 1941 in Saint Louis County." St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation, 1991.

Speer, Lonnie R, with Bill Jones and Garnet Thies. *A Brief History of Meacham Park, Mo.: 1892-1989*. Kirkwood, MO: 1998, pp. 15-20.

Wright, John. St. Louis Black Heritage Trail. Florissant, MO: Ferguson-Florissant School District, 1990, p. 59.

Wright, John. *Discovering African American St. Louis: A Guide to Historic Sites*. St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1994, p. 155.

Verbal Boundary Description

Lots 13 through 42, Block 14, Meacham Park Subdivision, Kirkwood, St. Louis County, MO.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes all of the land originally associated with the school. It excludes the right-of-way of Saratoga Street, which was not added to school property until 1955, and the former playground to the south of that street, which is now in separate ownership and use.



J. Milton Turner Sr. and
239 Meadham Ave.
St. Louis
St. Louis County, MO

UTM References:
15/726320/4271500

3730'

Photo Log:

Name of Property: **J. Milton Turner School**

City or Vicinity: **Kirkwood**

County: **St. Louis County** State: **MO**

Photographer: **Esley Hamilton (unless otherwise stated)**

Date

Photographed: **2000**

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 6. Main elevation looking NW.
- 2 of 6. E elevation looking NW.
- 3 of 6. W elevation looking SE.
- 4 of 6. N elevation looking E.
- 5 of 6. Interior, main corridor, photo by Ken Schaefer.
- 6 of 6. Interior, stairwell, photo by Ken Schaefer.





WORTH & BULLOCK
SCHOOL, 125 HILL



WEST COAST
HARDWOOD





EXIT

