

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

MILNER MOTORS BUILDING, MONROE, OUACHITA PARISH, LA

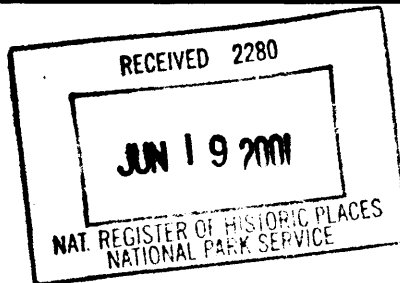
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Milner Motors

Other Name/Site Number: Milner-Fuller, Inc., McCook's



764

2. LOCATION

Street & Number 212 Walnut Street

Not for publication: NA

City/Town Monroe

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: Ouachita

Code: 073

Zip Code: 71201

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: Statewide: Locally: X

Signature of Certifying Official

Deputy SHPO Dept. of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

June 14, 2001

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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

Signature of Commenting or Other Official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

MILNER MOTORS BUILDING, MONROE, OUACHITA PARISH, LA

Page 2

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
Determined eligible for the National Register
Determined not eligible for the National Register
Removed from the National Register
Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper: Edson H. Beall

Date of Action: 7-25-01

5. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
Private: X
Public-Local:
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property
Building(s): X
District:
Site:
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing
1
1

Non contributing
0 buildings
sites
structures
objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: NA

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NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

MILNER MOTORS BUILDING, MONROE, OUACHITA PARISH, LA

Page 3

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Commerce/trade Sub: Specialty store
Current: Vacant Sub: Not In Use

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: No Style

Materials:

Foundation: Concrete
Walls: Brick
Roof: Other: tar and gravel
Other: Cast Concrete

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

MILNER MOTORS BUILDING, MONROE, OUACHITA PARISH, LA

Page 4

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Milner Motors Building is a brick structure located in the Ouachita Parish seat of Monroe. It is located on a corner lot near much-used railroad tracks within the northwest portion of the central business district. The Ouachita River runs nearby but is blocked from view by buildings standing along its shore. An "L"-shaped structure, the building was constructed in stages. Its two-story portion dates to c. 1918, while its one story section dates to c. 1924. Although the facade features a few decorative elements, the building can be said to reflect no specific style. Despite some non-historic alterations, the building retains its National Register eligibility.

The Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Monroe, as well as three historic photographs of the dealership, confirm that Milner Motors achieved its current appearance after a series of construction and remodeling projects. The salesroom and storeroom (the original portion of the building) can be dated to between 1916 and 1920 because of the circumstances of the business's founding (see Part 8) and its presence on the 1920 Sanborn Map. The discovery of a 1924 mortgage helps to date the later section. In the 1930s significant modifications were made to the lower story front (see below).

The two-story salesroom and storage building has a major facade facing Walnut Street and a minor (although longer) elevation facing Washington. As originally built (see historic photo), each elevation featured large rectangular plate glass display windows surmounted by subdivided transoms. The windows across the front and down the first side bay were separated by piers which extended above the roofline. The main entrance was located beneath a suspended canopy on the Walnut Street side of the building. (See below for 1930s alterations affecting the front portion of the building.)

Decorative elements contrast distinctly with the building's brick walls and numerous large windows because they are made of cast concrete. At the front of the building (i.e., the Walnut Street facade and the first large bay of the Washington Street elevation) these include stylized lintels above large second floor windows, thick window sills, decorative square blocks directly beneath the sills, a parapet wall topped by coping, and the treatment of the piers. The latter rise from cast concrete bases to a height a foot or more above the parapet wall. Instead of capitals, each pier features a cast concrete design resembling strapwork. Decoration on the remaining portion of the Washington Street side is limited to simple cast concrete window sills. The other side elevation is strictly utilitarian, with Italianate style windows piercing the second floor.

Around 1924 Louis Milner acquired the lot to the rear of his building and constructed a one story auto service department. Also rectangular in shape, it gave the enlarged dealership an "L" shaped footprint (see attached sketch). The repair area connects to the original portion of the business via a door cut into the earlier building's rear wall. The addition's Washington Street elevation is similar to that of the original building, except that its large windows have multiple panes instead of plate glass. The thick window sills of the original building's Washington Street elevation are repeated here, as is the coping atop the parapet wall. The western wall of the service department (which extends beyond the original building to form the lower leg of the "L") is pierced by two garage doors flanked by two large multi-pane windows. A concrete ramp begins in the exterior corner where the two portions of the building meet (see below).

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

MILNER MOTORS BUILDING, MONROE, OUACHITA PARISH, LA

Page 5

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

The floorplans of the original salesroom and the later repair shop are both very simple. The salesroom consists of a large open space whose ceiling is supported by wooden posts. The ceiling is made of pressed metal; interestingly different patterns are used in two places. The floor is made of terra-cotta colored tile. As constructed, an elevator (now removed) rose to the second floor from one side of the building, and small spaces for restrooms, storage, etc. still line another wall. The previously mentioned concrete ramp changes to wood as it continues its rise inside the building to the second floor. The latter area, where automobiles were stored until sold, is also open except for wooden poles which support the roof. The ramp rises to a corner, where it makes a sharp turn to access the second floor level. The repair shop is one huge room whose roof is supported by wooden posts. The roof features wooden trusses and is pierced by skylights.

The previously mentioned Sanborn maps and historic photos help to trace the alterations experienced by the building over the years. For example:

1. The 1920 Sanborn Map shows a large canopy extending from the southern (side) elevation, with a concrete platform existing beneath it. An early historic photo of the building clearly shows this element, with the lettering "Milner Motor Co" visible on the canopy. This must have been an early gas station, for an old gas pump is visible in the image. In addition, the 1920 map refers to the building as the "Ford Service Station." Milner had removed the gas station and accompanying large canopy by 1926.
2. Sometime in the 1930s Milner decided his operation once again needed a filling station. To create the necessary space, he opened up the front of the building by removing the plate glass display windows from the facade and the first bay of the side elevations. He then rebuilt the facade, using recycled materials, in a new, recessed location, although he did slightly change the fenestration pattern. Of course, the small entrance canopy was not replaced. Portions of the building's original pressed metal ceiling and tile floor (once inside the salesroom) covered and paved the newly opened area, where several gas pumps were installed. Later, when drivers began hitting the piers' lower sections with their auto bumpers, Milner placed metal protectors on each pier corner. This open space, with the gas pumps removed, remains part of the building today.

Alterations to Milner Motors since the 1930s remodeling are as follows:

1. the subdivision of one side of the remaining still large sales room by wooden partitions and the associated formation of a low mezzanine above the offices created by the dividers. The millwork suggests the subdivision could have taken place any time between the 1930s and 1950s. The partition is now in disrepair.
2. the elimination of the old elevator and the use of its former space as restrooms.
3. the loss of the painted sign which in the 1930s covered the entire upper floor of the south, utilitarian elevation. In addition, changes have been made to the lower floor of the exterior south wall. A later historic photo (perhaps dating to the early 1950s) shows that a parking shed had been attached to this area. Its removal left scars which are still visible. In addition, windows have been filled in and doors cut into this wall.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

MILNER MOTORS BUILDING, MONROE, OUACHITA PARISH, LA

Page 6

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4. the construction of low brick flower boxes to serve as a partial wall enclosing the 1930s gas station, the installation of decorative metal fencing above the flower boxes, the addition of painted signs on one front pier advertising the building's then use as McCook's used furniture store, the filling with a wooden wall and door of one lower story window on the Washington Street elevation, and the addition of protective wooden coverings over many (although not all) of the building's large windows and transoms. (For the record, the windows survive behind the covering.)

5. the addition of metal roof trusses to the service area.

Assessment of Integrity:

Today Milner Motors on the whole looks much as it did after the 1930s remodeling. However, with the aid of the National Register's 20% tax credit, the owner very soon will be restoring the main building to its pre-remodeling appearance (as approved by the National Park Service tax credit reviewer). Using historic photos as a guide, and in consultation with NPS, the owner will enclose the now open front section with plate glass windows and multi-pane transoms, as it was when built c.1918. Whether looking as it did c.1918 or as it did after the 1930s remodeling, Milner Motors clearly reveals its historic automobile age identity. In the case of the former, the building's large plate glass windows are a character-defining feature of an automobile showroom, as is the loading ramp. As a rare surviving resource depicting the early history of the automobile in Monroe, the Milner Motors Building is an outstanding candidate for National Register listing.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

MILNER MOTORS BUILDING, MONROE, OUACHITA PARISH, LA

Page 7

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National Register Criteria: A X B__ C__ D__

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): NA
 A__ B__ C__ D__ E__ F__ G__

Areas of Significance: Transportation

Period(s) of Significance: c. 1918, c.1924, c.1935

Significant Dates: c. 1918, c. 1924, c. 1935

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Louis Milner, Sr., Architect

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

MILNER MOTORS BUILDING, MONROE, OUACHITA PARISH, LA

Page 8

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The Milner Motors Building is locally significant in the area of transportation because it is one of very few structures left to represent the historic automobile age in Monroe.

Automobiles, or "horseless carriages," were first sold in America in the last few years of the nineteenth century, but were initially a luxury that only the rich could afford. In 1900, there were only 8,000 registered vehicles in the United States, which represented less than a tenth of a percent of the population. In 1908 Henry Ford revolutionized the industry with his assembly line method of production and the introduction of the Model T, the first low-priced car for the masses. Over the next twenty years the Model T kept getting cheaper and cheaper as the American buying power was rising. By 1910, there were 468,000 registered cars in America, and by 1920 the figure had soared to eight million. Motor cars had been transformed from a plaything of the rich to an item that people of modest income could afford.

It is not known when the first automobile appeared in Louisiana. In 1909, a world's speed record of 60 miles per hour was set in New Orleans, and it is said that this event did much to popularize the new vehicles. By 1916 there were nearly 9,000 automobiles on the assessment rolls of the various parishes, and thereafter the increase was rapid. It must be remembered that prior to about 1920, very few hard surface roads existed outside the state's major cities. It was progressive Governor John M. Parker who brought Louisiana squarely into the automobile age. His administration, which began in 1920, undertook a major road building program and established the state highway system. By 1925, there were 208,779 registered cars in the state. Governor Huey Long, elected in 1928, continued the road building program, adding major automotive bridges in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. By 1940, the number of cars had increased to 375,000.

The date of the arrival of the automobile in Monroe, the parish seat of Ouachita, can be pinpointed to within several years through Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. References to wagon repair shops, harness makers, stables, etc. found in maps published in and before 1913 clearly show that horse-powered transportation was the norm. However, the 1920 map records a major change. Identifying early dealerships is difficult because they are not so labeled on the map. However, it appears that the Monroe Auto and Supply Company and Milner's own Ford Service Station sold vehicles in 1920. The map does show that Monroe supported two businesses identified as auto repair facilities and eight others identified only as "garages." All of the latter were in relatively large buildings, and the fact that some entries give the capacity of cars the garages could hold suggests that these were parking rather than repair sites. Additionally, the city had a tire shop, three other gas stations, and numerous small buildings (all labeled "auto" and all associated with dwellings) which were obviously private garages for sheltering individually owned automobiles.

By the publication date of the 1926 Sanborn map, the city's auto-related industries had increased. Four dealerships can be identified on the map: Milner Motor Company, Lemon Motor Company, Monroe Automobile & Supply Company and an unnamed Auto Sales and Service facility. However, local historians state that nine car models could be purchased within a three block stretch of Walnut Street (Milner's location) at that time. These included Ford, Chevrolet, Dodge, Durant, Overland, Willys-Knight, Hupmobile, Star and Studebaker automobiles. Of course, it is possible that one dealer sold multiple brands of cars, just as happens today.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

MILNER MOTORS BUILDING, MONROE, OUACHITA PARISH, LA

Page 9

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

In addition to dealerships, Monroe also had the following auto-related businesses in 1926: the Motor Wheel Corporation (a wood spoke and rim factory), a battery shop, an auto paint shop, a cab company, an auto supply warehouse, a "used auto yard," one identified auto repair business, and seven large garages (some probably for parking and some for repair). Interestingly, only one gas station was located downtown; either they were not clearly labeled or they had begun to move into the suburbs where the cars' owners lived.

The 1932 Sanborn map shows a similar situation, except that filling stations were beginning to combine with repair and supply companies to create large auto-related businesses. According to the map, five dealerships occupied sites downtown in that year. In summary, the Sanborn maps for the early automobile era make it clear that Monroe had numerous resources associated with the new transportation technology.

Milner Motors was one of these resources. The company was founded by Louis Milner, Sr. between 1916 and 1920. A graduate of Georgia Tech's School of Architecture, Milner accepted a job with the Ford Motor Company when he could find no demand for his technical skills. He traveled as one of the company's sales representatives until an opportunity arose for him to open his own dealership. He chose Monroe because he believed that natural gas fields discovered nearby in 1916 would make people more prosperous and more inclined to buy cars. As an architect, Milner designed and later expanded and remodeled his business, choosing the corner of Walnut and Washington streets as its site. Milner appears to have taken a partner in the 1930s, because the business' name changed to Milner-Fuller, Inc. Although Milner-Fuller had many competitors, the company continued to operate at its downtown location until 1956 (see note below).

Today almost all of Monroe's historic automobile-related resources are not just closed, but gone. Only two dealership buildings dating to the 1920s remain (Milner and one competitor). A third dealership appearing to date to the 1940s or 1950s is located on the outskirts of the central business district. However, it has recently been modernized, having received a new metal awning and roof inappropriate to its period. Three historic filling stations survive, but two of these have been remodeled to the extent that their integrity is lost. This leaves the Milner Motors Building, one structure which housed a competitor, and one Streamline Moderne filling station (1940s) as the only historic automobile-related buildings which still fully convey their original character. As a rare resource depicting the historic automobile age in Monroe, the Milner Motors Building is a fine candidate for National Register listing.

NOTE: In 1956, Louis Milner, Jr. sold his interest in the dealership and sold the building to the Biedenharn family, who owned the Coca Cola bottling plant across the street. At first they used the building for storage, later leasing it to a company selling used office furniture. The current owner, RTR, L.L.C. of Monroe, purchased the building in October 2000 and plans to restore it for office use.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

MILNER MOTORS BUILDING, MONROE, OUACHITA PARISH, LA

Page 10

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Brief Historical Sketch of Milner Motors, 212 Walnut Street," by current owner; copy in National Register file.

Historic photographs of Milner Motors taken shortly after the business opened and after the 1930s remodeling; copies in National Register file.

Historic photograph showing Milner motors during the 1950s, in Purcell, Ken, A Pictorial History of Monroe, LA , n.p., 1983; copy of photograph in National Register file.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for the City of Monroe, 1886, 1890, 1893, 1898, 1903, 1909, 1913, 1920, 1926, 1932.

Site visit by National Register staff.

Windshield survey of Monroe central business district.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- ___ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
___ Previously Listed in the National Register. (partially)
___ 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
___ University
___ Other (Specify Repository):

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

MILNER MOTORS BUILDING, MONROE, OUACHITA PARISH, LA

Page 11

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreege of Property: less than an acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	15	582780	3596340

Verbal Boundary Description:

The legal property description for the parcel of land upon which the building stands is as follows:

A lot or parcel of ground in Square 2 of Stephens, Hubbard & Springer's Addition to Monroe, Louisiana, more particularly described as fronting 109 feet of the east side of Walnut Street, and running back between parallel lines, one of which is the south line of Washington Street, a distance and depth of 150 feet, more or less, to the westerly wall of the building formerly belonging to E. G. Sugar, H. D. Montgomery and Laza Caspari, bearing municipal address of 212 Walnut Street, Monroe, Louisiana 71201.

Boundary Justification:

Boundaries follow the property lines of the parcel of land historically associated with Milner Motors.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

MILNER MOTORS BUILDING, MONROE, OUACHITA PARISH, LA

Page 12

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register staff

Address: Division of Historic Preservation, P. O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

Date: April 2001

PROPERTY OWNERS

RTR of Monroe, LLC
3202 Moore Place
Monroe, LA 71201

Contact Person: John R. Schween

(318) 387-3300 (office)

(318) 388-3407 (home)

Milner Motors
Ouachita Parish, LA



Washington St.

Walnut St.

