

**United States Department of 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 an 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** Spencerian Business College  
**other names/site number** Wisconsin Telephone - Kilbourn Exchange

**2. Location**

<b>street &amp; number</b>	2800 West Wright Street	N/A	<b>not for publication</b>
<b>city or town</b>	Milwaukee	N/A	<b>vicinity</b>
<b>state</b> Wisconsin	<b>code</b> WI	<b>county</b> Milwaukee	<b>code</b> 079
			<b>zip code</b> 53210

**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.)

Signature of certifying official/Title:  Date: November 9, 2007

State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin

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 commenting official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau

Spencerian Business College

Milwaukee

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

**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.

See continuation sheet.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

*Patricia Andrews*  
Signature of the Keeper

*3/14/2009*  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

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

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

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

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

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

contributing	noncontributing
1	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	total

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources is previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)  
EDUCATION/College

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)  
DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwellings

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19<sup>th</sup> and EARLY 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/

Colonial Revival

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation Concrete

walls brick

roof synthetics

other limestone

**Narrative Description**

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

Please refer to attached sheets.

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**  
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the National Register listing.)

- 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**  
(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.

**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Education  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1951-1961  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1951  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**  
(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

BENNETT, ETHELYN M.  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

ESCHWEILER, ALEXANDER  
ESCHWEILER and ESCHWEILER  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Statement of Significance**  
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Please refer to attached sheets.

Spencerian Business College  
Name of Property

Milwaukee  
County and State

Wisconsin

### 9. Major Bibliographic References

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

**Previous Documentation on File** (National Park Service):

- 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

Acreeage of Property 1.5 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 1/6 4/2/2/7/4/2 4/7/6/8/1/8/9  
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	Gary Tipler, Tipler & Associates	date	May 14, 2007
organization	Consultant for Gorman & Company	telephone	608-286-1844
street & number	807 Jenifer Street	zip code	53703
city or town	Madison	state	WI

Spencerian Business College

Milwaukee

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

### 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.)

<b>name/title</b>	Chris Laurent	<b>date</b>	May 14, 2007
<b>organization</b>	Gorman & Company	<b>telephone</b>	608-257-4410, x338
<b>street &amp; number</b>	1244 S. Park Street	<b>zip code</b>	53715
<b>city or town</b>	Madison	<b>state</b>	WI

**Paperwork Reduction Act 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 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 Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 1

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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**DESCRIPTION OF PHYSICAL APPEARANCE**

The building is located at 2800 W. Wright Street, the northwest corner of the intersection with 28th Street, in a residential west side neighborhood in Milwaukee. The building has front yard (south) and side yard (east) offsets of ten and twelve feet respectively from the public sidewalks, and occupies the east end of a large lot that includes an asphalt parking lot. The building abuts the alley on its north side.

The building was built as the Kilbourn exchange for the Wisconsin Telephone Company. Construction occurred in three stages, beginning in 1911, with additions in 1920 and 1926, all designed by the prominent Milwaukee architectural firm of Alexander C. Eschweiler. In 1951, the same firm, then under the name of Eschweiler and Eschweiler, was the architect for the conversion of the building to classroom use for the Spencerian Business College. The original building, located nearest the intersection of Wright and 28th Street measured 40 feet eight inches fronting on Wright and 50 feet deep along 28<sup>th</sup> Street. The first addition in 1920 extended the building along 28<sup>th</sup> Street to the north by 62 feet seven inches and 40 feet deep including a rear stairwell and adjoining chimney at the rear (west side). Following the acquisition of an additional lot, the Wright Street addition in 1926 extended the building 52 feet toward the west along Wright Street, though its façade is offset from the original building by a brick width. The total area of the building is 24,000 square feet.

The main entrance of the building on Wright Street has a formal double two-sided entrance stair and landing of a concrete deck with simple iron rails set on limestone foundation walls. A smaller similar stair and landing are located at the 28<sup>th</sup> Street entrance located adjoining the north end of the building.

The three-story brick building has masonry exterior walls sheathing a reinforced concrete structure in the Georgian Revival style. The street façades and the street-visible secondary north and west sides are of a pinkish red brick with a Flemish bond. The rear elevations of a cream colored common brick. Set several feet above grade, the Wright and 28<sup>th</sup> Street façades of the building are ornamented with a limestone foundation wall, round-arch masonry openings in the first floor, limestone window sills, a belt courses between the second and third floor, ornamental limestone keystones in brick masonry window headers on the second and third floor windows, and a projecting bracketed limestone cornice with a simple brick parapet wall above. The round-arch windows have recessed inset corbelled edges. The arch above the Wright Street entrance is embellished with a bell, carved in the limestone panel, and a simple flat limestone panel fills the arch above the 28<sup>th</sup> Street door.

The Georgian Revival-styled window fenestration of the Wright Street façade of the original building (1911) was, more or less, repeated in three other locations on the building. The three large arched openings, windows and doorway, of the first floor street façades of the original corner building are symmetrically placed, with five flat-header windows on the second and third floors. Paired small window openings, located beneath the large arched windows, light the basement. The pattern was originally repeated on the north end of the 28<sup>th</sup> Street wing (1920) with an additional group of two first floor windows and three upper level windows placed nearest the original building. The pattern was repeated on the Wright Street wing (1926) façade. On the second and third floors of the 28th Street façade of the original building there are now seven windows, since one more was

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 2

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

---

added on either side of the originals in the 1951 alteration. On the upper floors of the 28<sup>th</sup> Street wing façade an additional pair of windows was installed between the two original groups of windows in the 1951 renovation. On the north side of the 28<sup>th</sup> Street wing, two of the three tall window openings of the first floor have flat headers, and the upper floors each originally had three standard rectangular masonry window openings with a center double freight door on the second level, and additional windows were installed to flank the easternmost window on the upper floors in the 1951 renovation. On the rear of the 28<sup>th</sup> Street wing, the projecting stair well has only a utilitarian door and window at grade and a window at the top, and windows on the south facing landings. Along the back of the same wing are four evenly spaced vertical windows on each floor, with those of the first floor being tall. On the west side of the Wright Street wing (1926) the three single masonry openings for lighting the basement had long been bricked up, on the first floor six tall vertical single windows, on the second floor are three vertical window and a triple ganged window, and on the third floor are a double window, two single vertical windows and a another triple-ganged window. The triple windows were expansions of an original single window in 1951. On the rear of the Wright Street wing are three seemingly randomly placed tall single windows, on the second floor are four high-placed short windows (restrooms) and on the third floor above them are four tall vertical windows. All windows on this side have segmental masonry arches. A rear door at grade is located in an alcove that is a result of the juncture of the stairwell of the original building and the 1926 Wright Street addition. Small ventilating grills were installed throughout the masonry walls during recent decades, though are not significantly notable.

The tall, round-arch Georgian Revival windows of the first floor street façades are double-hung wood sashes with small panes and round-arch panes in the upper sash. The upper floor windows of the street façades are eight-over-twelve double-hung wood sashes. The additional windows installed in the 1951 renovation matched the original windows. The windows of the secondary sides of the building, the north and west sides, are two-over-two metal sashes, some with wire glass and obscured glass. The windows of the sides and rear elevations were originally steel two-over-two double hung-windows except for the 1951 triple windows on the west side of the Wright Street wing which match the eight-over-twelve pattern of the façades. The glazing is clear, though the original steel windows had wire embedded glass, some of which was obscured glass.

In the 1951 conversion of the building from a telephone exchange to the college created new floor layouts.<sup>1</sup> The largely open floor plans of the telephone exchange were reconfigured on the first, second and third floors to accommodate classrooms and offices served by corridors. Formerly storage, the basement was remodeled to serve as a lounge, restrooms and cafeteria. In addition to classrooms on the first through third floors, the first floor held the administrative offices in the southwest wing of the building, on the second floor were restrooms, and on the third floor, a library, while lockers lined each of the corridors.

In the 1981-1982 remodeling for the Milwaukee Urban League, the lockers were all removed, and new dropped ceilings and lighting installed. On the first floor a corridor wall and the partitions between three classrooms were removed creating one large room, and the corner nearest the intersection was divided as three separate

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<sup>1</sup> Eschweiler Coll., Wisconsin Architectural Archives, Milwaukee Public Library.

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 3

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

---

offices. On the exterior, a wood wheelchair ramp and rail was installed leading to the rear 28<sup>th</sup> Street entrance.

The most intact areas from the school era are the tiled-wall corridors of the second and third floor, most of which remain. These indicate the internal plan, arrangement of spaces, and circulation patterns that reflect the functional arrangement of the interior when it was a school. Despite a 1981 remodeling, careful comparisons of the current floor plans with pre-renovation plans indicate that many of the interior walls on the second floor and third floors and some of the interior walls of the ground floor remain. The utilitarian tile on the exterior walls below the windows throughout the building remains, though was covered with insulation and drywall in the 2006 remodeling. Terrazzo flooring remains throughout, though it is largely covered by carpeting. The original front stair retains its original configuration and stone landings.

Miss Bennett's office and the administrative offices for the college may have been on the ground floor, though that floor was simplified in the 1981 remodeling by the removal of walls and installation of carpet and dropped ceiling. However, the specific location of her office is unknown.

On the interior, the new main entrance (at the junction of the original building and the addition) features the relocated rear stair wood-and-iron rail and stone treads, while sections of the hallways retain original configuration, windows, doors, obscured glass, and tile wall and terrazzo flooring surfaces. Original windows are found throughout, which are far more apparent on the inside than the outside.

While the interior has had alterations with changes in function, it still retains those elements that identify the building with its use as a business school. The terrazzo floors, main stairs and landing, hallway configurations and tile wall surfaces all remain. In keeping with the requirements of the Secretary of Interior's Standards, those features were retained in the building's conversion to senior housing.

**2006-2007 Renovation and Addition**

The building was completely renovated in 2006-2007 in a conversion of the historic building along with the construction of a large addition to create elderly housing apartments.<sup>2</sup>

In the recent renovation the wheel-chair ramp to the rear entrance of the east elevation was removed, along with the wood panels covering the round arches of the first floor windows, and a painted sign for the Milwaukee Urban League above the Wright Street entrance. On the inside, dropped ceilings and many of the partition walls were removed.

The restoration included repair of most of the original Georgian Revival round-arch wood windows and replacement of several of them to match the original muntin patterns and dimensions. The original wood windows of the upper levels were largely restored as well. New metal clad wood windows were installed

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<sup>2</sup> Changes were approved by the National Park Service as meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Standards as part of a federal tax credit project.



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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 4

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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elsewhere in the building to replace the steel windows.

In the renovation of the building to apartments, parts of the original corridor walls were retained while new partition walls were installed throughout. Some of the original exterior walls and windows were retained along with a steam heat radiator and a children's drinking fountain from the buildings' use as a grade school. Standard modern frame and drywall partition walls were installed, along with modern plumbing, mechanicals, HVAC and lighting. Carpet, tile and linoleum cover the floors of the apartments while parts of the old hallways retain the terrazzo flooring, which is also found in the old front stair. Though the rear stair (1926) was removed in the renovation, part of the rail, synthetic stone treads and risers were used in the new lobby, which is found at the crux of the old and the new building. Dropped ceilings are found throughout except for the areas adjoining the tall colonial windows of the first floor. Modern lighting is installed throughout.

A contemporary-styled raised three-story addition was added to the rear half of the west side of the building -- extending to 29<sup>th</sup> Street to the west, and a wing at the west end of the addition extends south to Wright Street -- creating a large U-shaped building with a yard, new main entrance and drive. The new one-story entrance pavilion is at the juncture of the old and the new buildings. The three story addition has synthetic lapped hard-board siding and a contemporary brick sheathing which is similarly colored to the historic building. Projecting bays break the facade of the set-back section of the new building.

To enhance security, a black steel picket fence with brick posts was added to the perimeter of the site, offset from the public walks.

**Integrity**

On its exterior, the building retains a high level of integrity from the Spencerian Business College period. The building retains its historic period finishes, including the original doors and almost all of its windows. The only significant alteration is the recent attachment to a new building to the rear west side of the building. The primary elevations face Wright and 28<sup>th</sup> streets, with the addition attached to the rear portion of the building. Although the addition is large, the overall impact on historic integrity is minimal. As one approaches the building from the east along Wright Street toward the primary elevations, the deep setback of the addition creates the appearance that the addition is a separate building from the college and appears so distant from the building that it looks to be on a separate lot or the next block. It is only after the observer passes the main façade and looks back on the secondary elevation that it is apparent that the addition touches the college. The college was constructed as an L-shaped building and the addition is connected on the back side of the L. As a result, the addition does not detract from the historic integrity of the college. Although attached, the placement and point of attachment is such that the college building maintains a free-standing form and from the two primary elevations, the addition is not visibly attached.

Because the building was constructed as a telephone exchange and not as a school building, it is not a typical school in its architectural form. It did not have many of the typical school features, such as a gymnasium or an auditorium, associated with public schools or universities. The Spencerian Business College simply took an

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 5

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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existing business building and reused it for a new business, that of educating students in modern business methods.

Many interior features reflect its historic use as a business school. These elements include terrazzo floors and tiled walls, corridor arrangements, and the main stair and landings. While there were rooms in the basement during its use as a college, this space was and is very utilitarian with few finishes. It is currently used for storage. The retention of corridor arrangements, of the main stairs and landings, many of the original interior partition walls, and of the terrazzo and tile finishes in the hallways conveys the feeling of its function as a business school.

The site alteration adjoining the main façades of the building is the addition of the steel fence. The fence is a transparent, reversible feature that is not inconsistent with the building's previous commercial use. It does not impair the ability to see the historic features of the building or to understand its importance as an educational facility.

On the whole, the building retains sufficient integrity to strongly evoke its historic function as a business college and would remain immediately recognizable to those who attended the college.

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 1

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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**SIGNIFICANCE**

The building at 2800 W. Wright Street is associated with the highly respected Spencerian Business College and is eligible under Criterion B for its association with nationally recognized educator Miss Ethelyn M. Bennett who made significant contributions to business education, which have been widely adopted by higher education institutions throughout the world.

Spencerian Business College was outstanding among the Milwaukee business schools for the quality of its education, its distinguished reputation and the achievements of its graduates. Spencerian graduates were sought by leading companies and organizations in Milwaukee and across the United States. The school turned out tens of thousands of graduates who contributed to the success of Milwaukee's business, industry and organizations. The college operated an independent institution for 111 years, and was merged with Concordia College as its Division of Business Science in 1974.

Miss Bennett's ownership, operation and management of the Spencerian business College spanned a period of forty-two years, from 1923 to 1965. She was "regarded nationally as the matriarch of business education."<sup>3</sup> It was due to Miss Bennett's leadership that the college prospered. In 1950-1951, due to enormous growth in enrollment and the need to expand programs, she bought and moved the college to the centrally located Wright Street building from rented space downtown. It became one of the few private business colleges in the nation to own its buildings and facilities. The move to the spacious new facility permitted the development of the school as a full four-year degree granting institution. Among others, her most notable innovations at the Wright Street building included the Work-Study Program and the Tri-Mester Plan, which have been widely adapted by colleges throughout the United States.<sup>4</sup> The college was also on the leading edge of providing business training, continually adding new subject areas, and offering scheduling and financing opportunities in response to societal changes and student's needs.

The period of significance begins in 1951, when the college moved to this building. The period ends in 1961, the year in which Ethelyn Bennett ended her active management of the college. During this period the college initiated its Work-Study Program and the Tri-Mester Plan, expanded its leading edge business programs to become a four year degree granting school, and in 1955 achieved listing in both Lovejoy's College Guide and The College Blue Book. Also, during that period it was one of the only Milwaukee business schools approved for the GI Bill.

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<sup>3</sup> American Association of Commercial Colleges, Compass 1958:1

<sup>4</sup> United Business Schools Association, Compass 1963:5; Milwaukee Journal April 28, 1963; Spencerian College 1963; Spencerian College Circle K Campus Service Project 1965

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section 8 Page 2

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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**Background: Architecture: Alexander C. Eschweiler, Architect**

Alexander C. Eschweiler and his firm, designer of the Wisconsin Telephone Company Kilbourn Exchange,<sup>5</sup> were among Milwaukee's most important architects. They were prolific. A review of the Wisconsin Historical Society's Architecture/History Inventory shows that more than 150 properties have been inventoried in the city of Milwaukee alone (in addition to those not inventoried and those demolished). The firm designed hundreds of buildings across Wisconsin and the nation. The firm was the designated architect for the Wisconsin (Bell) Telephone Company and designed its office buildings and central exchanges in downtown Milwaukee, branch exchanges in the city, and exchanges in many of the mid-sized cities of Wisconsin.

**Background History: The Wisconsin Telephone Company, Technology, and Growth of the Telephone Business**

The structure was built in 1911, as the Kilbourn Exchange, one of several exchanges in Milwaukee of the Wisconsin Telephone Company, part of the Bell system. Branch exchanges permitted the extension of telephone service beyond the central exchange.

Alexander Graham Bell invented and demonstrated the telephone in 1876, which went into commercial use the following year. The Wisconsin Telephone Company was incorporated in 1882 and acquired an exclusive franchise from the National Bell Telephone Company. Wisconsin Telephone Company dominated Milwaukee and the mid-sized cities of Wisconsin, and owned the long-distance lines between communities.

Alexander Eschweiler's firm designed several telephone exchanges for Wisconsin Telephone Company throughout the state which were similar in size to the branch exchange at Wright Street. The Wisconsin Telephone Company's first branch exchange in Milwaukee, the Hanover Exchange, was located at 239 W. Washington Street, built in 1899.<sup>6</sup> Wisconsin Telephone Company built central exchanges in Wauwatosa (1902), West Allis (1903), Milwaukee's North Side (1905) and Cudahy (1906). In 1895 Wisconsin Telephone Co. announced plans to build four branch exchanges in Milwaukee.<sup>7</sup>

**Spencerian Business College and Miss Ethelyn M. Bennett, Overview**

The Spencerian Business College existed as a privately owned independent institution for 111 years, from 1863 until 1974, when it was merged with Concordia College. Two significant educators were associated with the college and were the college's key leaders: Robert Closson Spencer (1829-1916) who managed the college for 50 years and Miss Ethelyn Bennett (1876-1965) who revived and managed it for more than 40 years.

Robert Closson Spencer was the eldest son of Platt Rogers Spencer of Ohio who had in the mid-nineteenth century developed and disseminated the Spencerian or Semi-Angular system and style of penmanship, a nationally renowned method of handwriting. Platt Spencer developed a whole-arm movement of penmanship so

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<sup>5</sup> Eschweiler Collection, Wisconsin Architectural Archives.

<sup>6</sup> Nation Register of Historic Places data.

<sup>7</sup> Volmert, 1986; Wisconsin Inventory; Barsantee; Wisconsin State Telephone Association 1985.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section 8 Page 3

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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that a person could write for hours without tiring. The method permitted uniformity, speed and beauty, with the option for personal flourishes. He also linked the skill with high morals and intelligence. After publishing several books, the first in 1848, Spencer's script method was adopted by most schools throughout the United States, and it became the preferred style for United States government clerks. With the help of his five sons, a daughter and a nephew, Spencer opened schools to teach his system of penmanship, discipline and business skills in Geneva and Cleveland, Ohio, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Though Platt Spencer died in May 1864, three of his sons and his daughter continued his work and opened schools in other cities.<sup>8</sup> Though they were dedicated to the teachings of Platt Spencer, the schools evolved with differences in program offerings, differently particularly following the death of their founders. For several years they produced several publications furthering the work their father had initiated, as the Spencerian Authors.

In 1863 Robert Spencer established the Milwaukee branch of the famous Bryant and Stratton Company Business School. Responding to mismanagement of the school at the national level, Spencer broke with the chain and named the school to reflect the Spencerian methods instituted at schools established and operated by his father and brothers. As Robert Spencer's reputation grew, he became nationally recognized. He later helped found the Department of Commerce at the University of Wisconsin. Spencer operated the school, in concert with his son Edward W. Spencer, an attorney, until his death in 1916, when Edward assumed control and ownership of the school. (By that time, another son, Robert Closson Spencer, Jr., a friend of Frank Lloyd Wright, had already become a leading writer, an early proponent and architect of the Prairie School of architecture). As early as 1895, Edward Spencer had brought his legal expertise into the school curriculum, and authored Spencer's Manual of Commercial Law. Years later, when in poor health, Edward Spencer recruited the head of McDonald College, Miss Ethelyn M. Bennett, to purchase and operate the college in 1923.

Miss Bennett was a nationally outstanding business educator and a savvy businesswoman who proceeded to build up the college, developed innovative programs and acquired a high level of independence for the school with the purchase of its facility on Wright Street. Miss Bennett actively managed the college until she reached the age of 84 in 1961, and she owned the college until her death at age 89 in 1965. Miss Bennett's innovations and successes are expanded in the section to follow.

Born on a farm near Richmond, Illinois, Ethelyn M. Bennett spent much of her childhood near Pewaukee, Wisconsin. Her career in teaching began in Illinois, but she soon came to Milwaukee where she taught shorthand and typing at McDonald College, a business college that was for a time located in the Matthews Building at Third and W. Wisconsin Avenue. During her work with Spencerian Business College, Miss Bennett pursued related academic professional endeavors as a president of the Wisconsin Association of Business Colleges, as an active member of the United Business Schools Association and the National Business Teachers' Association.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Donaldson 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Spencerian College Circle K Campus Service Project 1965; Milwaukee Sentinel Oct 11, 1965.

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 4

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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Miss Bennett owned and directed the growth of the college until her death in 1965, when her nephew Keith B. Appleby inherited it. Appleby had taught at the college in medical administration since the late 1940s. In his first year as chief administrator he began an expansion of the school and concurrently sought to improve the college's cost efficiency by cooperating with Concordia College, a private college operated by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, by sharing dormitories and course offerings. During his tenure over the next nine years, the college experienced an expansion of its facility and its debt, which, coupled with the great expansion of the publicly funded University of Wisconsin System colleges, undercut the college which depended entirely on student tuition. In 1972, following the incorporation of the college as a non-profit, in order to further that cooperation with Concordia College, Appleby undertook the construction of a new classroom building adjacent to Concordia. The fundraising campaign for the building, concurrent with a recession, did not meet its goal, and the result was the merger with Concordia in 1974, and the sale of its assets. Concordia College gained the majority of the Spencerian teaching staff, and thus greatly expanded its business programs, which had previously had only modest course offerings.

From near the beginning of the college in the 1860s until 1925, the college had rented spaces in the Old Miller Building on the northeast corner of Wisconsin and Broadway, and from 1926 to 1951 at 606 East Wisconsin Avenue. In 1950-51 the college purchased, renovated and moved to the Wright Street building where it remained until 1972.

**Business Schools in Milwaukee**

The Spencerian Business College was a superb local example of a successful business college throughout all but the last two years of the 111 years of its independent existence. The independently owned and operated business school was a uniquely American educational development. It grew out of the "writing school" of the eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, private "mercantile" or "commercial" schools initially were developed to train young men in bookkeeping and business practices. Following the exhibition of the first practical typewriter at the Centennial Exposition in 1876, these schools sold businessmen on a means of increasing the pace of business by speeding up the paperwork. Instead of personally handwriting their correspondence they could dictate their letters to trained stenographers who recorded the letters in short-hand and then prepared them using a typewriter.<sup>10</sup>

The college also stands out for its endurance, surviving as an independent institution for 111 years. When it merged with Concordia College in 1974, in essence it became a new Division of Business Science.<sup>11</sup> Concordia not only took over and maintained the business program but hired 15 of the 17 full-time Spencerian faculty to operate it.

Many proprietary business colleges existed over time in Milwaukee, but most of them lasted for a few years or a few decades before disappearing, often leaving little trace of the organization or its graduates. As Spencerian

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<sup>10</sup> Reigner 1943.

<sup>11</sup> Schmeling 1975.

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 5

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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Business College grew, it absorbed many of them. Among the first it absorbed was Professor Larigo's Milwaukee Commercial and English School in 1867 or 1868 when he was unable to operate the school in Milwaukee. With the death of Prof. Lincoln in 1867, Spencerian Business College acquired Baylie's and Lincoln's Milwaukee Commercial College. After Spencer took his college independent, the international chain of Bryant and Stratton took over part of Lincoln's Commercial College in an attempt to re-establish itself in Milwaukee, but it did not succeed and that too was absorbed by Spencerian. It was not until 1964-65 that Bryant and Stratton tried again, reopening a Milwaukee branch which still exists. McDonald College, founded in 1883 by Alexander C. McDonald, was a business college which for a time was directed by Miss Bennett, prior to her departure and acquisition of Spencerian College in 1923. With the loss of Miss Bennett, McDonald College did not survive, either.

Other Milwaukee business colleges have come and gone. A late nineteenth century broadside promoted both the Spencerian and the Excelsior Business College and Academic Institute, which also seems to have been short-lived. Historical references exist for Dr. William Bayer's Commercial College (founded in 1868), Charles Mayer's Commercial College (founded in 1876), Miss Brown's School of Business (founded in 1903 and existing through the 1940s), Milwaukee Business University (founded in 1932 and existing through the 1940s), the Business Institute of Milwaukee (founded 1938 and existing through 1950s), and Milwaukee College of Business (also known as Davenport-Detroit College and Patricia Stevens Career College opened in 1945 and closed in 1993).

The Directory of Private Business Schools in the United States, issued sporadically in 1943 and 1948 by the National Council of Business Schools, lists for Milwaukee, only the Milwaukee Business University, the Business Institute of Milwaukee, Miss Brown's School of Business, and Spencerian Business College. Perhaps the most reliable measure for comparing relative size and importance of these colleges is the size of their faculties. In 1948, Spencerian had the largest, with 12 full-time and 11 part-time faculty members. The Business Institute of Milwaukee had 13 full-time and no part-time; Miss Brown's School of Business had 8 full-time and 2 part-time; and Milwaukee Business University had merely 5 full-time and 3 part-time.

Milwaukee School of Engineering was different in nature from the business colleges being devoted to engineering. Milwaukee Area Technical College had an origin very different from that of Spencerian Business College. It grew out of the nation's first compulsory continuation of school law in 1911. Juveniles, who left school to work, were temporarily unemployed or in formal apprenticeships they were mandated by law to attend. Adults could attend voluntarily for personal enrichment or training for career advancement.<sup>12</sup> Spencerian Business College was the outstanding institution of its type in Milwaukee.

**The Spencerian Business College**

The Spencerian Business College was renowned for the quality of its education and its graduates were highly regarded. From its early years until its merger with Concordia College in 1974, the Spencerian Business

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<sup>12</sup> Volmert 1986.

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 6

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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College programs largely served its students in two areas of business: business administration and clerical work. Both groups, however, were known for the quality of their preparation. The college trained many of Wisconsin's business and civic leaders. College brochures touted the names of notable attendees and graduates including Lord Thomas Shaughnessy, President of Canadian Pacific Railway, and Milwaukee industrialists and business leaders Gustave Pabst, of the Pabst Brewery, Walter Harnischfeger of P&H and Harnischfeger Corporation, among others. In 1938, Karl Reynolds, Vice President of the Wisconsin State Chamber of Commerce, wrote in the 75th anniversary brochure: "I believe that the Spencerian College is the oldest and most highly reputed organization of its kind in Wisconsin and the Northwest." Spencerian graduate Linda McGuire, currently secretary to the president of Milwaukee Area Technical College, commented that graduates of Spencerian would readily get a job; the quality of the training was known to be so good.

As for the number of graduates, by 1938, the college brochure boasted of 20,000 graduates. Many more took courses but were not considered graduates. By 1958, 70,000 students had matriculated.<sup>13</sup> As for numbers of graduates of the Spencerian Business College, no additional numbers are able to be provided. However, a Google search yielded a large number of references to those who attended the Milwaukee Spencerian Business College but only three references to persons who attended Milwaukee Business University and two each who attended the Business Institute of Milwaukee and Miss Brown's School of Business, with no references to the other colleges.

In the post-World War II period, Spencerian graduates were in such demand that the college prepared a catalog with short descriptions of the qualifications of each of its new graduates and distributed it to leading Milwaukee metro area businesses. These businesses could then select those students they wanted to interview.

The Status Study Report on Spencerian Business College prepared in 1972 for the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, contains numerous letters from leading employers attesting to the quality of preparation and achievements of Spencerian graduates. These employers include F.W. Woolworth Co., Allis-Chalmers, Mobil Corporation, Schlitz Brewing, the IRS, Milwaukee Children's Hospital, and Wisconsin Blue Cross. A letter from J. B. Kearney, District Manager for Firestone Tire, mentions a 1959 Spencerian graduate who had worked for the company for 13 years and managed 13 stores and over 125 people. Two other graduates managed stores in Milwaukee with the expectation that they would advance to "top management in years to come." Kearney concluded by writing that "I am a graduate of Spencerian College, meeting a sales objective of over \$10,000,000 per year and at the present time hold the #1 position for our product in the United States."

When Spencerian Business College merged into Concordia, students were distressed that they would receive Concordia degrees which did not have the cache of Spencerian in the business job market. Walter Bretza, who had also studied at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Marquette told the *Milwaukee Journal*, "if the diploma does not say Spencerian I will be bitter....It means a lot in the business world whereas Concordia

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<sup>13</sup> American Association of Commercial Colleges 1958:1.



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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 7

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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doesn't."<sup>14</sup>

Spencerian Business College had such prestige that its lack of accreditation by a regional association of colleges and secondary schools (due to its small library and its business-focused curriculum for example), did not seem to hurt its reputation. The July 1955 issue of The Ledger, the college newsletter, contained an article on the "false implications" of accreditation, or lack of accreditation, whereby some persons might conclude that a junior college was not "educationally respectable." The article pointed out that for Spencerian to be accredited by a regional association of colleges and secondary schools, the first two years of study would have to be devoted to general education in the liberal arts and sciences, with the next two years allocated to specialized business training. The article concluded saying, "WE DO NOT THINK THIS WOULD BE TO YOUR LIKING." At the time, in 1955, only 23 of the more than 60 post-high school educational institutions in Wisconsin were accredited. Non-accredited institutions included Concordia College, Layton School of Art, and Milwaukee School of Engineering in Milwaukee; Edgewood College in Madison; and Northland College in Ashland.

The July 1955 issue of The Ledger also noted with pride that Spencerian had been accepted for free listing in both Lovejoy's College Guide and The College Blue Book, authoritative reference guides to the more than 2,100 American colleges and universities. According to The Ledger, "it is expected that these new listings will be helpful in changing the character of the school from a well-known regional school to that of a nationally attended college."

An article in the Milwaukee Sentinel, published in 1964 (apparently a Spencerian Business College promotional press release published nearly verbatim), states the college's educational philosophy. Nationally, fewer than 25% of students in four-year programs completed their education due to lack of money, frustration, or immaturity. Spencerian presented "a curriculum which is uncluttered with non-bread-and-butter subjects" to train persons to be "employable, successful and promotable." Even for a 128 credit bachelor's degree, courses in math, history and foreign languages were designed to provide greater depth in the field of business. Spencerian College's premise was that culture should be pursued throughout a person's lifetime, and when a person may have more money and time, rather than when training for employment. Spencerian's program was designed to be a highly concentrated business education with few frills. The college's promotional slogan was "Spencerian means business".<sup>15</sup>

**Miss Ethelyn Bennett's Accomplishments**

The most important of the Spencerian Business College innovations attributed to Miss Ethelyn Bennett are the Work-Study Program and the Tri-Mester Plan.<sup>16</sup> These programs were developed by Bennett to respond to

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<sup>14</sup> Carney 1974

<sup>15</sup> Botsford 1969.

<sup>16</sup> United Business Schools Association, The Compass 1963:5; Milwaukee Journal 1963; Spencerian College 1963; Spencerian College Circle K Campus Service Project 1965.

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 8

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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changing needs of its students that increased the college's competitiveness and improved accessibility to working students and veterans of military service. The Work-Study Program was a unique system which initially programmed upper level course-work into the morning and lower level course-work into the afternoon, allowing students to work a half day or longer. The program not only permitted them to work, since the majority of them were employed, but also encouraged them to do so in order to gain business experience. This schedule also allowed business and community professionals to teach part-time at Spencerian while pursuing their careers elsewhere.

The Work-Study Program development was spurred by the increased enrollment following WWII, which initially lead to the rental of night class spaces near the old Wisconsin Avenue facility. This permitted the non-accredited courses to be moved from the day-time schedule, and allow a more intensive use of the facility for the curricular program attendees. Following the move to the Wright Street facility, the night time courses were incorporated into the curriculum, as an option for work-study students.<sup>17</sup>

The Work-Study Program, "a distinctive feature of the courses in the School of Business Administration and the School of Secretarial Studies" permitted a student to have practical experience, with pay, in a Milwaukee-area business or industry. Placement was generally provided by the school. The intent of the program was "based on the principle that theory and practice should be taught concurrently and should be coordinated." A school prospectus promoted that a graduate of the Business Administration program had not only the equivalent of the business theory of a typical college full-time four year program, but also a full year of industrial or business experience.<sup>18</sup>

The Tri-Mester Plan of three sixteen-week semesters per calendar year, provided year round schooling with two week breaks. Most of the subjects repeated three times a year, which made it possible for students to easily get back into the curriculum programs, if out of school for a semester or more at a time. The plan permitted veterans, among others, to acquire a baccalaureate degree, typically a four-year course, in only two years and eight months, while a student pursuing an associate degree could complete the program in one year and four months. The Tri-Mester plan also provided year-round employment for its teachers, who otherwise sought summer employment. These programs were developed at the Wright Street building shortly after the college moved into it and have since been widely adapted by schools and colleges throughout the United States.<sup>19</sup>

According to retired Major General Vance Coleman, a 1963 graduate, these programs were the reason he enrolled at the college. The school's Work-Study Program offered course scheduling options for fulfilling requirements toward a degree while he worked a full-time second shift job, and as importantly, the school was one of the few Milwaukee schools that was approved for the GI Bill. (Coleman had the distinction of returning to the Wright Street building in the mid-1980s to work for the Milwaukee Urban League prior to his career with

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<sup>17</sup> Spencerian Business College, Evening School Bulletin 1953-1954: 8.

<sup>18</sup> Spencerian Business College, Bulletin of General Announcements 1954-1955: 2, 13.

<sup>19</sup> Spencerian Business College, Bulletin of General Announcements 1954-1955:2.

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 9

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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the Milwaukee Redevelopment Authority and the Department of City Development.)

There were other important and innovative programs of the college that Miss Bennett developed. The college provided life-time job placement services. Students could return at any time during their lives for counseling and assistance in obtaining a job. Graduates could return at any time to retake courses for free. To recruit students, Miss Bennett used direct mail advertising to high school seniors, the first time such an approach had been used for colleges in Milwaukee.

Under Bennett's direction the areas of business training flourished, particularly with the move to the Wright Street building, where the four year programs were first developed. The college's primary areas of study were in business administration and secretarial studies. The School of Business Administration offered four-year programs that lead to the Bachelor of business Administration Degree (B.B.A.) in Accounting, General Business, Sales and Marketing Management and Transportation-Traffic Management (added in 1959). The School of Secretarial Science offered programs of study that lead to the Degree of Associate of Arts (AA): Secretarial Administrative Assistant, Court and Convention Reporting, Legal Secretarial, Executive Secretarial, Medical Secretarial, Stenography, and Clerical and Business Machines; and a Bachelor of Science in Commercial Education (B.S. in C. ED) in Commercial Teacher Training.

In 1955, the Spencerian Business College was on the leading edge of business training with programs of study in medical secretarial, engineering secretarial, business communications technology, and aviation secretarial work.<sup>20</sup> By 1954, the court reporting program was fully developed, one of only a few such programs in the country. Spencerian continued to innovate, adding new subject areas in response to a changing society, adding transportation and traffic management. Following an established tradition of innovation, in 1969 the college addressed the needs of poor students. It announced that it would provide 60 persons receiving welfare benefits with an intensive six-week basic business course completely free of charge.<sup>21</sup>

Miss Bennett had achieved recognition as a national leader in business education, as owner, later titled president, of the college from 1923 until 1965. In 1958, the Compass, the official publication of the American Association of Commercial Colleges, stated that Miss Bennett was "regarded nationally as the matriarch of business education."<sup>22</sup> Up to 1963 she was the only woman to receive the "Man of the Year Award," (in 1958), from the National Council of Business Schools. She served as president of the Wisconsin Association of Business Colleges and was active in the United Business Schools Association, National Business Teachers Association, and the Milwaukee Council for Adult Learning. (Milwaukee Sentinel Oct 11, 1965). When she acquired the college in 1923, enrollment had dropped to only 25 students, leading Miss Bennett to go door to door, recruiting students. At the time of her death the college had grown to 1,200 students. (Milwaukee Journal, April 28, 1963).

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<sup>20</sup> Spencerian College 1955:5.

<sup>21</sup> Milwaukee Journal 1969.

<sup>22</sup> American Association of Commercial Colleges, Compass 1958:1.

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section 8 Page 10

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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It was due to Miss Bennett's leadership that the college prospered and enrollment grew, and in 1951 the college moved from rented space downtown, and for the first time occupied a building that it owned. The Eschweiler and Eschweiler firm completely redesigned the interior of the 2800 Wright Street building, customizing it for the Spencerian Business College. The newly renovated building gave the growing college more space. The Spencerian Business College became one of the few private business colleges in the nation that owned its buildings and facilities.<sup>23</sup>

The college had long claimed that its two-year program of studies leading to a Bachelor of Business Administration (B.B.A.) was equal to four years at other colleges. However, in 1951, in association with the move to the new building, Spencerian College became a "full four-year degree granting institution with a curriculum requiring 120 credits to graduate," an educational development that was related to the move.<sup>24</sup> This accomplishment, along with its innovative and new programs, and ownership of the building became the crowning achievement of Miss Bennett's career.

**Summary of Significance**

The building at 2800 W. Wright Street is locally significant under Criterion B for its association with nationally recognized educator Miss Ethelyn Bennett who made significant contributions to business education. The Spencerian Business College was outstanding among the Milwaukee business schools for the quality of its education, its distinguished reputation and the achievements of its graduates. The school turned out tens of thousands of graduates who contributed to the success of Milwaukee's business, industry and organizations. Under Miss Bennett's leadership the college prospered. Her innovations included the Work-Study Program and the Tri-Mester Plan, which have been widely adapted by colleges throughout the United States. The college was on the leading edge of providing business training, scheduling and financing opportunities in response to societal changes. It became one of the few private business colleges in the nation to own its buildings and facilities. The Spencerian Business College is the property most closely associated with Bennett and her area of significance.

**Recent History**

Following the move of the Spencerian Business College from the Wright Street building in 1972, the Milwaukee Public School system acquired the building and used it for several years as an annex for the Clarke Street grade school located a block north.

In 1981-1982, the Milwaukee Urban League, at the time located in a former funeral parlor at 10th and Center Streets, bought the Wright Street building, remodeled it and moved in. In the Wright Street facility, the League's programs were greatly expanded and staff almost tripled over the next four years. New programs, including Manpower, an apprentice program, and a teenage pregnancy program that won a national honor from

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<sup>23</sup> Spencerian College 1964.

<sup>24</sup> Spencerian College 1963: 4.

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 11

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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the National Urban League, according to former director Bernard Benn, were run from the site. Program director Shirley Sharp noted that in 1987 the League published Milwaukee Today: A Racial Gap Study on mortgage lending and segregation that was lauded by the National Urban League and broadly embraced among Urban Leagues throughout the United States.<sup>25</sup> Since then the organization has continued to pursue its mission "to enable African Americans to secure economic self-reliance, parity and power, and civil rights" which has put them at the forefront of a myriad of changes in employment, education and civil rights during its tenancy in the building. Presently, the Milwaukee Urban League remains in its building on Wright Street.

**Criteria Consideration G**

The period of significance extends to 1961 to fully reflect the period in which Miss Bennett was actively directing the programs and development of the Spencerian Business College. It was up to this date that Miss Bennett oversaw the college and its daily operation.

In 1958, the Compass, the official publication of the American Association of Commercial Colleges, stated that Miss Bennett was "regarded nationally as the matriarch of business education." (American Association of Commercial Colleges, Compass 1958:1) Also in 1958, she received the "Man of the Year Award," from the National Council of Business Schools. During this period, to keep up with professional demands, she added the transportation and traffic management program. (Milwaukee Sentinel. Spencerian Plans Traffic Control Study. August 27, 1961)

She relinquished daily operations in 1961 following a broken hip, though as president of the college until her death at age 89 in 1965 she continued to help plan new courses and classrooms, and to recruit new faculty members. (Milwaukee Journal April 26, 1963)

While there is no recent scholarship evaluating the significance of Ethelyn Bennett and her leadership of the business school in the broader historical context of Milwaukee business schools, , it is clear she was a noted Milwaukee educator during her years in this building. The business community held the institution in high regard and, with the move to this building, the Spencerian Business College was able to expand to a four year degree-granting institution. As noted above in the section on business schools in Milwaukee, the Spencerian Business College was the longest running institution of its type in the city. Its success, popularity, and endurance were due to Miss Bennett's role in running the college and the changes she instituted to adapt with the changing times and the needs of its students and of the business community. During the period of significance, Ethelyn Bennett instituted programs that became nationally accepted in higher education. These

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<sup>25</sup> McNeely, R.L. and Kinlow, Melvin R., Milwaukee Today: A Racial Gap Study. Milwaukee Urban League, Milwaukee: 1987.

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section 8 Page 12

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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included work study and the trimester. Because of her direct involvement in the school and its programs through 1961, it is clear that Miss Bennett is exceptionally significant to the history of business education in Milwaukee. Since she was celebrated by her peers as a "national matriarch," and her contributions to business education extend a scant three years past the 50 year guideline typically used to determine the end date of National Register periods of significant, it would seem arbitrary to not recognize the last three years of her extraordinary career. Her work was exceptional in the local context of Milwaukee, since no other local educational administrator achieved the success of Miss Bennett in business education, and none developed programs that became widely adopted national models.

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section 9 Page 1

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 2

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 3

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section 10 Page 1

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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**BOUNDARY DESCRIPTIONS**

Legal Description: Parts of Blocks 4, 5 and 6 of Germania Park, SE quarter, Section 13, Township 7, Range 21, Block 5, Lots 21-29, City of Milwaukee, County of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The property is bounded by 28<sup>th</sup> Street on the east, Wright Street on its south, 29<sup>th</sup> Street on its west and an alley on its north sides.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The present property boundary has remained unchanged since the early 1950s. Originally the land west of the building was acquired for parking, since the oldest part of the building was built in 1911. The boundary corresponds to the legal parcel.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section photos Page 1

Spencerian Business College  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

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The following information is the same for all photographs:

**Spencerian Business College  
2800 West Wright Street  
Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin  
All photos by Gary Tipler, May 2007  
Negatives at the Wisconsin Historical Society**

Photo 1 of 10  
Main entrance, west and front façade (facing northeast)

Photo 2 of 10  
East and south facades (facing northwest)

Photo 3 of 10  
East façade and alley on north side (facing south by southwest)

Photo 4 of 10  
Original main entrance, south elevation (facing northeast)

Photo 5 of 10  
2007 addition, south elevations (facing northwest)

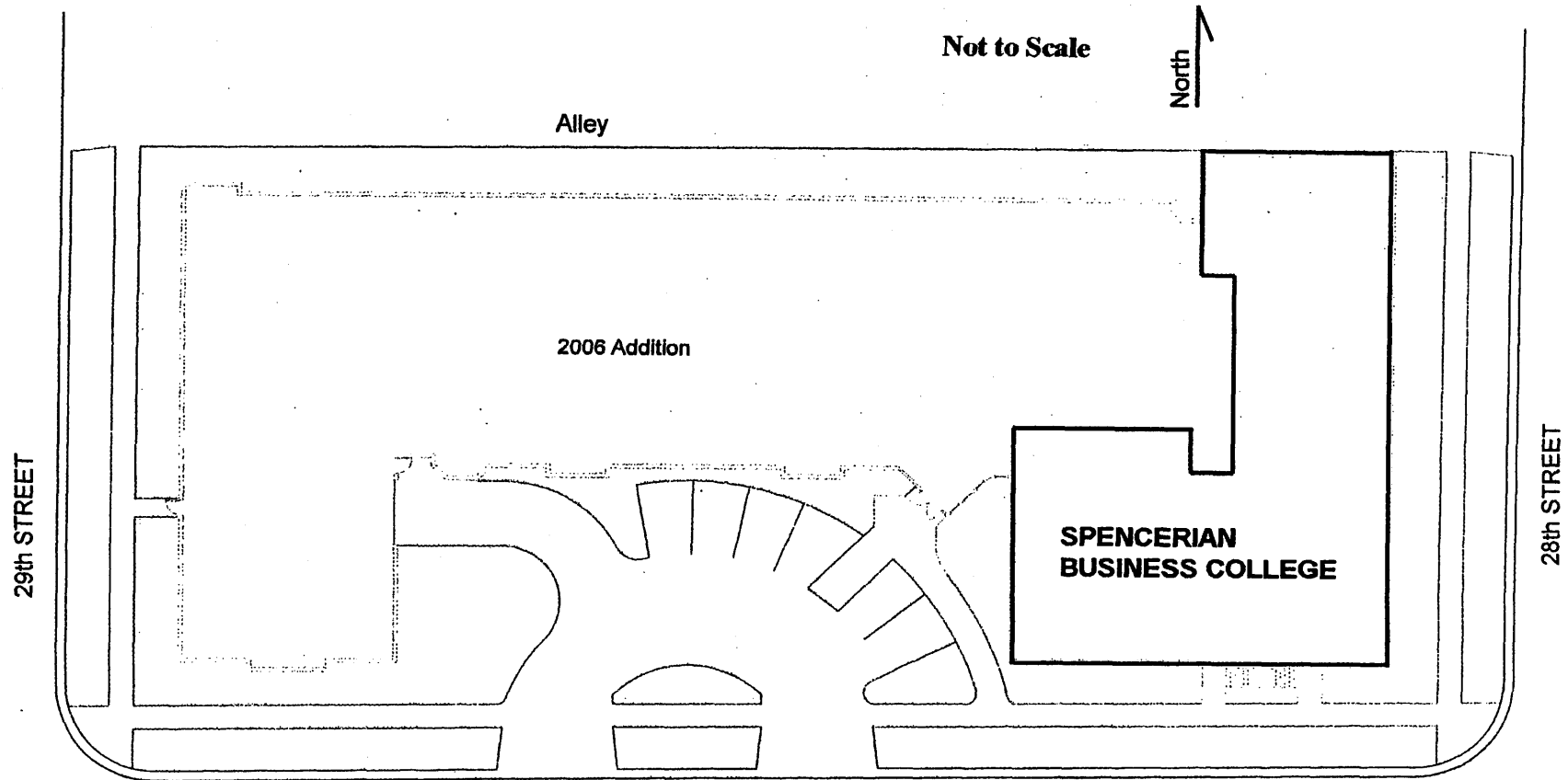
Photo 6 of 10  
Addition, Wright Street elevations (facing northeast)

Photo 7 of 10  
29<sup>th</sup> and Wright Street corner, addition (facing northeast)

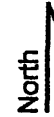
Photo 8 of 10  
Rear alley along addition (facing east)

Photo 9 of 10  
Interior, community room, 1923 wing (facing west)

Photo 10 of 10  
Interior, new main entrance, old stair in addition (facing northwest)



Not to Scale



Alley

2006 Addition

SPENCERIAN  
BUSINESS COLLEGE

29th STREET

28th STREET

WRIGHT STREET

SITE PLAN

SPENCERIAN BUSINESS COLLEGE

2800 W. Wright Street, Milwaukee, Milwaukee Co., WI

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Spencerian Business College

Name of Property

Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

County and State

Section number SLR Page \_\_\_\_\_

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)

### SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

**NRIS Reference Number:** 07001331      **Date Listed:** 3-14-08

**Property Name:** Spencerian Business College

**County:** Milwaukee County

**State:** Wisconsin

**Multiple Name:** N/A

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation, subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patrick Andrus  
Signature of Keeper

3/25/2008  
Date of Action

#### Amended Items in Nomination

##### Section 8, Statement of Significance

The Spencerian Business College has been listed in the National Register under Criterion B for its association with Ethelyn Bennett, the owner and leader of the Spencerian Business College from 1923 to 1965. The Period of Significance for the property at 2800 W. Wright Street is 1951 to 1961, reflecting the year the school moved into the building and the last year of Bennett's active leadership.

The Statement of Significance justifies Bennett as a prominent and influential educator in Milwaukee; however, it includes some claims that need further research. Bennett is credited with two important innovations: the work-study program and the tri-mester plan, both implemented shortly after the college moved into the Wright Street building in 1951 and thereafter "widely adapted by schools and colleges throughout the United States" (p. 8-8). The earliest source cited for this information is the Spencerian College *Bulletin of General Announcements, 1954-1955*, some two years after the programs were instituted at Spencerian in 1951 or 1952. A 1963 edition of the United Business Schools Association *Compass* and a 1963

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Spencerian Business College

Name of Property

Milwaukee County, WI

County and State

Section number SLR Page \_\_\_\_\_

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)

edition of the *Milwaukee Journal* were cited for the same information on page 8-1, as well as two other Spencerian publications.

In the years following WWII, innovations in higher education were rampant as returning soldiers swelled enrollments in colleges. Many schools began developing new means of increasing capacity in the 1940s, already feeling the impact of the GI Bill, passed in 1944. The implementation of the tri-mester plan at Spencerian in 1951 or 1952 was a relatively late response to the GI Bill, with educational funding ending for WWII vets in 1956. It may be difficult nearly 60 years later to determine which school in the United States first responded with a trimester plan, but claims for "the first in the nation" should only be made with substantial documentation. The nomination form does not convincingly prove this claim.

Work-study programs had been initiated at schools such as Antioch College, Lehigh University, the University of Cincinnati, and Northwestern earlier in the twentieth century. The work-study program at Spencerian may have been innovative and influential in Milwaukee, in Wisconsin, or even among business schools nationwide, but claims for national innovation are not substantiated. The characterization of the work-study program as "a distinctive feature of the courses in the School of Business Administration and School of Secretarial Studies," quoting the 1954-55 school bulletin, may more accurately describe the program (page 8-8).

Statements on page 8-1, 8-8, 8-10, and 8-11 to 8-12 attributing the work-study program and the tri-mester plan as innovations by Bennett that were "widely adopted by colleges throughout the United States" or "nationally accepted in higher education" are replaced by this Supplementary Listing Record with a more limited attribution. Until more extensive research is conducted, Bennett's innovations are understood as significant contributions to Spencerian College. Further research may prove they had an important influence elsewhere. (B. Wyatt)

### Notification and Distribution

The Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

This notice was distributed to the following:

National Register property file

Nominating Authority, without nomination attachment