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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Miner Normal School (Washington Normal School #2)
other names/site number The Miner Building

2. Location

street & number 2565 Georgia Avenue, N.W. n/a not for publication
city, town Washington n/a vicinity
state District of Columbia code D.C. county D.C. code 001 zip code 20059

3. Classification

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

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

J. W. Powell 29 August 1991
Signature of certifying official D.C. State Historic Preservation Officer Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

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

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. Patrick Ardus 10/11/91
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain: _____)

for Signature of the Keeper Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
EDUCATION/school

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
EDUCATION/college

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVAL/
colonial revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick
walls brick

roof tin, slate, slag
other limestone trim

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Miner Building is a large, three-story, symmetrically-massed Colonial Revival brick structure; it is prominently situated on a hillside on the east side of Georgia Avenue between Fairmont Street and Howard Place on the Howard University campus. Designed in the shape of an "E", its main north-south block (which parallels Georgia Avenue) is flanked at each end by identical front-gabled, slightly-projecting wings which extend to the rear (east) and widen at their easternmost end to form a square. A third wing, rectangular in shape, extends to the rear from the center portion of the main block (which has an end-gabled roof).

The main entrance to the building is reached by a grand staircase which rises from Georgia Avenue to a broad terrace just below the entranceway. From both the north and south sides of the terrace, a shorter set of steps flank a stone-capped brick retaining wall with a center window to reach a second, smaller landing directly in front of the first floor entrance.

The main (west) facade of the Miner Building is dominated by a well-proportioned three-story projecting center entrance pavilion with an unusual degree of detailing. The pavilion features a denticulated and modillioned cornice with a closed rooftop balustrade; it is divided into three bays by Ionic pilasters. Between the pilasters at the third-story level are 4/4 double-hung windows with three-part transoms and flat brick arches with keystones. Beneath the windows in the north and south bays are rectangular stone plaques with decorative stone garlands. Inscribed stone plaques frame the entrance; the plaque to the north of the entrance reads "Miner Teachers College", the plaque to the south, "Miss Myrtilla Miner, Born 1815-Died 1864; Established Education for Colored Girls in the District of Columbia. Trustees of the Miner Fund". The main entranceway has a denticulated, projecting stone cornice supported by stone brackets with acanthus-leaf ends.

The balustrade is similarly divided into three bays, with engaged pilasters. Each of the bays features a 4/4 double-hung window with plain stone surround.

8. Statement of Significance

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

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

1) Education

1913-1929

1913

2) Ethnic Heritage/Black

3) Architecture

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Significant Person

n/a

Architect/Builder

Dessez, Leon E.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Miner Building is historically significant for the role it played in the establishment of early teacher-training programs for Blacks and because it was a primary source of teachers and administrators for the segregated public schools in Washington, D.C. and other southern communities (Criterion A). It is architecturally significant because it is the work of the distinguished local architect Leon E. Dessez and because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a period, i.e.: it expresses the aesthetic and practical considerations which helped to determine the appearance of early twentieth century educational buildings in the nation's capital (Criterion C).

In addition to the above areas of significance, the property is notable because it commemorates the contributions to Black education of Miss Myrtilla Miner (1815-1864).

The History of Miner Normal School

Erected in 1913-1914, the Miner Building was originally known (unofficially) as "Miner Normal School" and (officially) as "Washington Normal School #2".

The Miner Building was built for the use of the Miner Normal School, an early twentieth century Black teacher-training institution. The Normal School, in turn, had its beginnings in the "School for Colored Girls", opened in the mid-1850's by Miss Myrtilla Miner, an idealistic white teacher who was a pioneer in the movement to educate free Blacks and to train them as teachers; it was one of the city's first high schools for Black women.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Attached

- Previous documentation on file (NPS): n/a
- 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 # _____

See continuation sheet

- Primary location of additional data:
- State historic preservation office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property 0.88 ac

UTM References

A

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 Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

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 Zone Easting Northing

D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the property are the lot lines which define Lot 830 of Square 3060.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The property has been historically associated with Lot 830 of Square 3060.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Lois Snyderman, Historic Preservation Consultant

organization n/a date 7/28/91

street & number 8804 Spring Valley Road telephone (301) 654-6423

city or town Chevy Chase state Maryland zip code 20815

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On each side of the projecting center pavilion two rows of 4/4 double-hung windows with three-part transoms break the wide expanse of the main facade, dividing it into ten bays, five on each side of the pavilion. Those at the second-story level are slightly larger than those at the third and feature stone lunettes with a brick surround and keystones. In addition, the windows at the second story level are accentuated by arched brick pilasters, giving that story more prominence.

The first story is separated from the second by a stone beltcourse which extends around the building. A row of screened windows also divides the first story into ten bays, five on each side of the pavilion. The third story windows have the same flat brick arches and keystones found on the windows in the entrance pavilion.

The double rows of windows on the north and south facades of the end wings (six-pane casements with four-pane transoms) appear to be original.

The slightly-projecting wings at each end of the main block have classically-detailed pediments at both the front and rear and the same fenestration as the main block.

There are four small arched dormers on the front roof of the side-gabled main facade, two on each side of the center pavilion; the dormers are repeated on the other sides of the building also. Those at the rear and on the north and south sides have retained their original small, 12-pane, casement windows.

At the rear of the Miner building, handsome two-story arched windows with divided lunettes, brick surrounds, and keystones provide light on the north and south sides of the center wing and in the ells between the three wings. Each window is divided into three sections horizontally and each section consists of three six-pane casement windows.

The entrance facade of the center wing at the rear of the building (which houses the gymnasium and the auditorium) is divided into three bays at the second and third story levels by arched brick pilasters; the right and left bays contain a narrow, triple-hung, 12-pane window with a flat brick arch; the middle bay has been bricked-in. Above each of the 12-pane windows is a divided bulls-eye window with a brick surround and keystone. Entrance is through matching one-story, classically-columned and pedimented porticos with denticulated cornices; one portico is located at the northwest corner of the wing and the other at the southwest.

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There is a large, square, corbelled brick chimney at the rear of the south wing and octagonal louvered cupolas at both the north and south ends of the main block. The corners of the building feature expressed brick "quoins".

The original plans for the Miner building, dated October 15, 1912, show a classically-columned "Boys' Entrance" to the north of the main entrance pavilion and a similar "Girls' Entrance" to the south, at the ground floor level. The two entrances were never built, but their existence in the plans is a reminder that, in the early years of the city's school system, there was separation of the sexes; the separate entrances represent a continuation of that policy. An additional entrance to the building from the terrace level was also omitted. The 1912 plans also show stone quoins, instead of the existing brick; an open balustrade over the entrance pavilion, instead of the existing closed balustrade; and a more elaborate cornice over the main entrance to the building.

The interior of the Miner Building is simple and utilitarian, but it reflects architect Leon Dessez's concern for ample light and space, with high ceilings and large expanses of window. The plan is linear, with classrooms lining the corridors on either side of the entranceway on the first and second floors. On the first floor, directly opposite the entrance, is the auditorium and stage; at the basement level, the space is utilized as a gymnasium. Administrative offices are located opposite the entrance on the first floor, and stairways to the upper floors are located on either side of the auditorium.

Except for the division of some of the larger rooms to create more classroom space, reversible window changes on the main facade, and the addition of fire escapes at the rear, the Miner Building is unaltered and has retained its architectural integrity; its prominent, hilltop setting also remains. The most noticeable change in the setting has been the loss of residential structures which originally stood nearby on Georgia Avenue. Within the last 20 years, they have been demolished and replaced by University buildings, a change which has made the Miner Building appear to be a more integral part of the Howard University campus.

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Born in 1815 in Brookfield, New York, Myrtilla Miner developed an abhorrence of slavery while teaching at a school for planters' children in Mississippi in the 1840's. Determined "to spend her life in the humanitarian cause of uplifting the Negro through education", Miss Miner opened a school "for free girls of color" in Washington in 1851.¹ She selected the District of Columbia because it was the "common property" of the nation and a fitting location for what she hoped would become a model teaching facility for Blacks.

The first building used by the School for Colored Girls was a small rented house on Eleventh Street; the first class was made up of six young women drawn from the "best colored families of the city". Although there were a number of small privately-run schools for free Blacks in the District at the time, the School for Colored Girls appears to have been the only one devoted solely to teacher-training.

From the beginning, there was strong opposition from those who feared that the school's presence would encourage the migration of free Blacks to the District. It also had its supporters, including such prominent figures as Mrs. William H. Seward, (whose husband, a Senator from New York State, was later to become Lincoln's Secretary of State), Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin, and the Reverend William Henry Channing, the prominent Unitarian minister and abolitionist. Liberal northern organizations such as the Quaker Society of Friends in Philadelphia provided financial and moral support and a steady stream of visitors came to see what was being accomplished. Pleased with the progress being made, Miss Miner publicly disparaged the widely-held belief that Blacks were uneducable, arguing that "she could find no difference of native talent, where similar advantages are enjoyed, between Anglo-Saxon and Afro-Americans."²

In the first years of its existence, the "Miner School" (as it soon came to be called) occupied several different locations. In 1853, with the help of a \$1000 contribution from Harriet Beecher Stowe, Miss Miner purchased a three-acre lot at 20th and N Streets, N.W. with the intention of constructing a new school building. Although the new

¹ Bernard Nelson, "Miner Teachers College: The First Century, 1851-1951" (D.C. Teachers College: Master's Thesis, 1973) p. 8.

² Henrietta Hatter, "A History of Miner Teachers College" (Howard University: Master's Thesis, 1939) p.10.

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building was never erected, the school utilized one of the existing buildings on the site for a time; 20 years later, funds from the sale of the lot were used to establish the Miner Fund for the support of Black education in the District of Columbia.

By 1858, her health failing, Miss Miner relinquished her post and left for California to recuperate; she never resumed her school duties. Miss Miner died in Washington in 1864 and is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery.

The contributions made by Myrtilla Miner to Black education in the District of Columbia were of considerable importance. She was "unquestionably a pioneer in the education of Negro women for the teaching profession"³ and a catalyst in the establishment of teacher-training programs for Blacks in Washington. She viewed Black education as a national, rather than local, problem, and was an early advocate of the use of public funds for Black schools. She argued for equality in education long before it became a major issue and helped to demonstrate the Black potential for intellectual achievement. And the small school which Miss Miner established in 1851 eventually became Miner Normal School and Miner Teachers College, focal points for Black teacher-training in the District of Columbia for many years.

In 1863, in order to perpetuate Myrtilla Miner's "mission", the Miner School was incorporated as the "Institution for the Education of Colored Youth in the District of Columbia" and a Board of Trustees (which included the well-known Black abolitionist and educator Frederick Douglass) was set up to oversee its affairs. In 1871 the Institution became affiliated with the Normal Department at Howard University (established in the late 1860s). The decision to affiliate was in response to the growing need for skilled Black teachers, a need which had increased sharply in the preceding decade, when, for the first time, public funds were made available for the support of the city's Black schools.

Joint control over Howard's teacher-training program was exercised by a committee composed of representatives of both the University and the Miner School Board of Trustees. The Miner Fund (created in 1872 when the Board of Trustees sold the three acre lot which Miss Miner had acquired for \$4000 in 1853 for \$40,000) was used to help support the program.

³ Nelson, p.19.

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In 1875, the arrangement with Howard was terminated by mutual agreement, and the Miner Normal School (as it was then called) began to function independently once again. As before, the school was faced with the problem of finding suitable quarters, and, for a time, it occupied leased space at 1613 P Street, N.W. In 1877, recognizing the need for a more permanent site for the Black normal school, the Board of Trustees of the Public Schools, (the forerunner of the District of Columbia Board of Education) allocated \$37,000 for the construction of a three-story, twelve-room brick building on 17th Street between P and Q Streets (since demolished) for Miner Normal School use. Named the Miner Building in a ceremony participated in by school trustee Frederick Douglass, the structure also provided space for a Black high school and an elementary school, in addition to the normal school.

Under an innovative agreement, control of Miner Normal School remained in the hands of the Miner Board of Trustees while the building itself was owned and administered by the Board of Trustees of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia.

" . . . it was demonstrated that the Miner Corporation and the public school authorities of the District of Columbia could cooperate for a common purpose . . . the provision and improvement of facilities for teacher-training for Negroes in the District of Columbia."⁴

In 1879, the Miner Normal School became a semi-public institution under an agreement with the Board of Trustees of the Public Schools whereby the Board and the Trustees of the Miner Fund shared (for the first time) in the management of the school. Teachers' salaries were paid by the Miner Fund and its Trustees were authorized to select the staff, subject to the approval of the Trustees of the Public Schools. In return, the agreement stipulated that

"the school might furnish yearly those specially trained for teacherships in the Public Colored Schools of the District . . . The graduates . . . shall be given preference over all other candidates for the position of teacher in the primary grades of Public Colored Schools of Washington and Georgetown."⁵

⁴ Nelson, p.38.

⁵ Nelson, p.18.

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This "preferential hiring" stipulation, which continued until the mid-1930s, helped establish a close relationship between Miner Normal School and the Black public schools of the District of Columbia.

In 1887 the Miner Fund withdrew its financial support and full control of Miner Normal School passed to the Trustees of the Public Schools; the year 1887-1888 marked the Normal School's first full year of operation under the government of the District of Columbia. The Miner School had become part of the public school system, a significant milestone in the Black community's struggle to secure public support for teacher-training facilities. Officially renamed Washington Normal School #2, but always known in the community as Miner Normal School, it was (according to Dr. Paul P. Cooke, President of D.C. Teachers College from 1966 to 1974) one of the earliest publicly-supported institutions in the nation for the training of Black teachers. For almost 70 years, it functioned as the Black counterpart to Washington Normal School #1, established in 1873 to train teachers for the city's white schools.⁶

By the turn of the century, the foundation of the Black normal school system in the District of Columbia had been laid and Miner Normal School had (according to one of its biographers)

" . . . won admiration and respect in educational circles. Its influence upon the education of Negroes in the District of Columbia was clearly recognized and supporters of the school contended that it was a major factor in the general improvement in school efficiency . . ."⁷

In the years from 1900-1929, Miner Normal School struggled with the problems created by the need for better physical facilities, higher standards for admission and graduation, and a broader curriculum. Graduates of its two-year teacher-training program (expanded from the original one-year program in 1897) were qualified to teach kindergarten and the first three grades of elementary school, with the expectation that, with experience, they would be eligible to teach the upper grades. As the curriculum expanded, students could choose from a wider variety of courses of study, with seven programs available in 1914 as opposed to two in 1901. Instruction in such areas as teaching methods and modern languages was added, and an in-service teacher-

⁶ Interview with Dr. Cooke, August 1990.

⁷ Nelson, p.66.

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training program was considered, but approval was delayed until the establishment of Miner Teachers College in 1929.

After the turn of the century, the supply of jobs in Washington's Black school system diminished, even as the number of Black normal school graduates -- and the demand for admission to Miner Normal School -- increased. Although it had been established primarily to serve local teacher-training needs, the school sought a broader mission as early as 1899, when it turned its attention to "preparing teachers to fulfill a national need"⁸. By the early decades of the twentieth century, a School Board member described Miner Normal School as

"a national institution when we judge it . . . by the sources of its financial support and by the universality of the service its graduates render the course of public education in America."⁹

From about 1900 until the advent of school integration in the mid-1950's, Miner Normal School (and, later, Miner Teachers College) provided hundreds of teachers and administrators for Black schools in Washington and throughout the South.

After 1913, an added justification for the addition of new programs was the need to fully utilize the new school building on Georgia Avenue, the present Miner building. As Nelson notes,

"the most tangible evidence of the physical growth of Washington Normal School #2 in the period from 1900-1929 was the erection of a new, modern building . . . The need had been very obvious since 1898, when the normal school, because of overcrowding, was compelled (to move once again) . . . The basic need in 1902 of both Washington Normal School #1 and #2 was for new buildings, properly located, substantially built, and suitably fitted."¹⁰

Congressional funding permitted the erection of new buildings for both the white and Black teacher-training institutions in 1913, with the facility for whites, Normal School #1, to be erected at 11th and

⁸ Nelson, p.58.

⁹ Minutes (Board of Trustees of the Public Schools, 1924-1925) p. 90.

¹⁰ Nelson, p.86.

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Harvard Streets, N.W., and the facility for Blacks, the Miner Building, at 2565 Georgia Avenue, N.W.

Upon completion of the Miner Building in 1914, there was general agreement that it should be named for someone who had contributed significantly to the development of Black education in the District of Columbia. As the selection committee noted, the decision was made to name the building in honor of Myrtilla Miner because

"The new building should bear the name of one whose name, character and standing . . . are commensurate with the purpose and high aims of the school . . . Its name should be one that will not require a card of introduction or an explanation or an apology to the educators of the country."¹¹

The Miner Building was occupied in 1914 and formally dedicated three years later, on Lincoln's birthday.

"Thus, after a lapse of more than thirty years, the Normal School for Negro youth in the District of Columbia was to bear the name Myrtilla Miner Normal School for the second time."¹²

In 1929, in response to longstanding demands from both whites and Blacks for the upgrading of teacher-training programs in the District of Columbia, the Congress voted to expand both normal schools into four-year, degree-granting institutions; Washington Normal School #1 became Wilson Teachers College and Miner Normal School (Washington Normal School #2) became Miner Teachers College. With the establishment of the college, Miss Miner's dream of a publicly-funded, advanced teacher-training program for Blacks in the District of Columbia was finally realized.

Miner Teachers College played an important role in the preparation of Black teachers for almost 30 years, until, with the advent of integration, it merged with Wilson Teachers on July 1, 1955. It was the only publicly-funded college in the District of Columbia specifically established to train Black teachers for the District's segregated schools, and it provided them with hundreds of teachers and

¹¹ Nelson, p 92.

¹² Nelson, p. 19.

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supervisors over the years, including three public school superintendents (Floretta Dukes McKenzie, Andrew E. Jenkins III, and Benjamin Joseph Henley, Jr.).

Miner Teachers College and its predecessor, Miner Normal School, played a significant role in the development of the Black school system in the District of Columbia in the years from 1890 to the mid-1950's, when Miner graduates had a virtual monopoly on teaching jobs in Black schools. As the number of Miner School graduates increased, many found jobs in Black schools in other parts of the country, effectively expanding the scope of the school's influence.

On August 31, 1977, D.C. Teachers College, the Washington Technical Institute and Federal City College were consolidated to form the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). The Miner Building (which served as the site for D.C. Teachers College from its inception in 1955 to consolidation in 1977) became part of UDC, although still physically located on the Howard University campus. In recent years, the building has been used for a broad range of community education programs, in addition to the teacher-training classes which have been continuously offered there since it opened in 1914.

The History of the Miner Building

Planning for the existing Miner Building began in 1910, when, after a decade of lobbying by the Black community, Congress authorized the purchase of a site for the construction of a new building for the training of Black teachers. Officially called Washington Normal School #2, it was also known as Miner Normal School; \$34,000 was appropriated for the purchase of land and \$200,000 for construction. A similar amount had previously been appropriated for a new building for Washington Normal School #1, the normal school for white teachers. The Georgia Avenue site was selected in 1912 (most likely because of its proximity to an established Black educational facility, Howard University), and construction began in 1913.

The location of the new building provoked some controversy, with Black ministers objecting to its proximity to Howard University on the grounds that Howard's male students would "contaminate" the morals of the normal school's female students. Its location seems historically appropriate, however, in light of the fact that an earlier building, a dormitory, was also named for Myrtilla Miner; it stood on the campus

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from the 1870's to the 1950s, when it was demolished. The existing Miner Building is, therefore, the second building on the Howard University campus named in honor of Miss Myrtilla Miner (and the only remaining building in the city with her name).

Dr. Lucy Moten, the Principal of Miner Normal School at the time, objected vigorously to the size of the site, noting, in a letter to Municipal Architect Snowden Ashford (written in 1911), that

" . . . the size of the plot is too small for any effective architectural work within or without. I should think (from the dimensions) it would present a box effect. The commanding elevation will make every detail stand out more prominently. A comparison of the White and colored normals will be odious, notwithstanding that there was very little difference in the amount appropriated. The White normal has decided advantages in allotted space, convenience of location, and number of rooms."¹³

Nevertheless, once the school was completed, Dr. Moten would write that "Its commodious rooms, lofty ceilings, wide corridors . . . and noble outlook have had a happy physical and spiritual influence on the student body."¹⁴

The design of the new building, which was influenced by contemporary local trends in public building architecture, was also a source of some controversy. In 1910, under an Executive Order issued by President William Howard Taft, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts was directed to review the plans for all new public buildings erected in the District of Columbia, including schools. When the plan for a new Elizabethan-style "colored normal school" was submitted to the Commission by Municipal Architect Snowden Ashford (who preferred that style for school buildings), it was rejected on the grounds that the design was inappropriate for public buildings in the District of Columbia.

The Commission was unanimously of the opinion

"that the Elizabethan style, which was the expression of an age and life quite foreign to our times . . . is ill-adapted

¹³ Nelson, p.89.

¹⁴ Nelson, p.90.

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and inappropriate for public buildings . . . in Washington . . . we should follow the traditions established by the early architecture in this Capital, which adhered to classical traditions while exhibiting great freedom in adapting to varying practical requirements, ranging from simple brick structures . . . to the White House itself."¹⁵

The Commission also urged the adoption of a uniform style of school architecture. Although Ashford objected to the Commission's recommendations, the plans for the school were revised, and the existing Colonial Revival building was erected in 1913-1914 at a cost of \$271,900.

In 1916, just a few years after the erection of the Miner Building, Central High School (now Cardozo) and Dunbar High School (demolished) were built in the Elizabethan style favored by Ashford, in spite of the recommendations of the Fine Arts Commission in the Miner Building case. The Colonial Revival style was not widely used for public school buildings in the District of Columbia until the 1920s and 1930s, when Albert L. Harris (who strongly preferred it) was Municipal Architect. The Miner Building, therefore, was an early example of the use of the Colonial style for an educational building, and, as such, may have served as a model for the schools erected in Washington in the following decades.

Nationally,

"The style was popular for school buildings around the country, particularly those on the east coast with English-colonial traditions. Some architects were partial to the style because they believed that it held an irresistible charm and possessed an eternal rather than a momentary quality. The style was thought to command the attention of laymen on whose support the maintenance of the school depended. It also bespoke a domestic character that made school as comfortable as the home."¹⁶

The Miner Building was designed by Leon E. Dessez, with Snowden Ashford as supervising architect for the project.

¹⁵ U.S. Commission of Fine Arts *Minutes*, Jan. 31, 1912.

¹⁶ Antoinette J. Lee, "Public School Buildings of the District of Columbia, 1804-1930" (Summer School Archives: manuscript, 1989) p. 37.

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Leon Emile Dessez (1858-1918) was a native Washingtonian who studied architecture in the office of the prestigious local firm of Hornblower and Poindexter, later Hornblower and Marshall. Dessez's mentor, Joseph Hornblower, was one of Washington's most influential and active architects in the 1880s and 1890s, and much of his early work was in the Colonial Revival style that Dessez used for the Miner Building.

In the early 1880s, Dessez was employed by the Army Corps of Engineers in the production of drawings for the Washington Monument and spent three years as assistant to the architect at the Navy yard. In 1886 he opened his own office in the Corcoran Building at 15th and F Streets, N.W. and quickly developed a reputation as both a skillful designer and a fine architectural engineer.

The late 1800s was a period of rapid growth in the capital, and an auspicious time for an architect to go into private practice. Dessez was kept busy designing private residences for well-to-do clients, including former Senator Francis Newlands, the founder of the Chevy Chase Land Company and the developer of the suburbs of Chevy Chase, D.C. and Chevy Chase, Maryland. Impressed with his work, Newlands hired Dessez as Chief Architect for the Land Company, and he remained associated with it in that position (and, later, as Director) until his death 29 years later.

One of Dessez's most important private commissions in the 1890s was the Raleigh Hotel at Pennsylvania Avenue and 12th Street, N.W. A luxury hotel, similar to the Willard in size, grandeur, and style, it was demolished in the early 1960s. Dessez was also the architect of the Admiral's House on the Naval Observatory Grounds in 1893, now in use as the Vice-President's residence.

Beginning in the late 1890s, Dessez became increasingly involved in the design of public buildings in the District of Columbia, a role which eventually caused him to work closely with Municipal Architect Snowden Ashford. He provided designs for a number of firehouses and hospitals, and, in 1915, prepared initial studies for the "Psychopathic Ward" of the Gallinger Municipal Hospital, erected in the early 1920s and only recently demolished. Like the design for the Miner Building, the Colonial Revival plan for Gallinger was clearly

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"emblematic of the conservative municipal architectural expression envisioned in the design policy of the Commission of Fine Arts"¹⁷

As an architect, Dessez was concerned with designing buildings with a maximum amount of light and air, a concern evident in his plans for a new District of Columbia prison at Occoquan, Virginia. As Snowden Ashford notes in his tribute to Dessez in the April, 1919 issue of The Journal of the American Institute of Architects, written after Dessez's death:

"In 1918 he was employed with the Municipal Architect in preparation of plans for the workhouse at Occoquan, which has revolutionized the architecture of penal institutions and was the beginning of the so-called 'open-air' treatment for prisoners, who are housed in dormitories with abundant light and air and no cells, locks, or bars to suggest the ordinary, old-fashioned prison."¹⁸

Dessez was also a pioneer in the use of new construction techniques and is credited with designing the first office building in Washington constructed entirely of reinforced concrete, the Century Building, at 412 5th Street, N.W., in 1899; it has since been demolished.

Dessez's buildings exhibit a wide diversity of styles, but he had a particular affinity for Colonial Revival:

"The Miner Normal School of the early 1900s shows Dessez completely immersed in the (Colonial). No longer does he merely hint at classical elements; balance and order have come to dominate the structure completely . . . (similarly) . . . one can see in the correct Colonial style of the 1923 (Gallinger) building the stylistic preferences of Dessez . . ."¹⁹

¹⁷ District of Columbia Historic Landmark Application for the Gallinger Hospital, p.15.

¹⁸ Snowden Ashford, "Leon Dessez" (Journal of the American Institute of Architects, April 1919), p. 178.

¹⁹ Kevin J. Parker, "Leon Emile Dessez, Washington Architect: 1858-1918" (Columbia Historical Society, 1979) p.14, 16.

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Leon Dessez, Joseph Hornblower, and Snowden Ashford were all founding members of the Washington Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1887, and Dessez served as its Vice President in the 1890s. He was elected a Fellow of the AIA in 1896, and sat on a number of its committees, including the committee established to plan the renovation of the Octagon House.

Snowden Ashford (1866-1927) was Washington's first Municipal Architect. Born in Washington, D.C. in 1866, Ashford lived in the city for most of his life. He was educated at Lehigh University and Lafayette College, where he studied graphics and engineering, and was hired as a surveyor by the city of Williamsport, Pennsylvania after graduation. In 1887 Ashford returned to Washington and worked briefly as a draftsman for former Supervising Architect of the Treasury Alfred B. Mullett and for co-architect of the Library of Congress John L. Smithmeyer. He left Washington to set up his own practice in West Virginia, but returned to the city in the early 1890s.

In 1895, Ashford joined the staff of the District of Columbia Office of Inspector of Buildings, the agency entrusted with the administration of building laws and the design and construction of all municipal buildings, including schoolhouses, firehouses, recreational facilities, police stations, prisons, and hospitals. He was promoted to Director of that office in 1901 and became the city's first Municipal Architect in 1910, a year after the post was created by Congress in a reorganization of the building department.

During his term in the office, Ashford designed or supervised the design of more than 150 municipal buildings, including some 70 schools. He had a particular interest in school buildings, and, in 1906, visited a number of other cities to study school construction and design. In addition, he was instrumental in the revision and publication of the city's building regulations in the early 1900s. Ashford left government service in 1921 and practiced privately until his death in 1927.

In conclusion, the Miner Building is significant:

- for the role it played in the establishment of early teacher-training programs for Blacks and in the staffing (teachers and administrators) of the segregated school systems of Washington, D.C. and other southern communities (Criterion A); and

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- for its design, which is the work of the distinguished Washington architect Leon E. Dessez and an expression of the aesthetic and practical considerations which helped to determine the appearance of early twentieth century educational buildings in the nation's capital (Criterion C).

The Miner Building's significance is enhanced by the fact that it commemorates the important contributions of Miss Myrtilla Miner in the area of Black education, particularly Black teacher-training. The building also has the high degree of physical integrity necessary for conveying its architectural significance.

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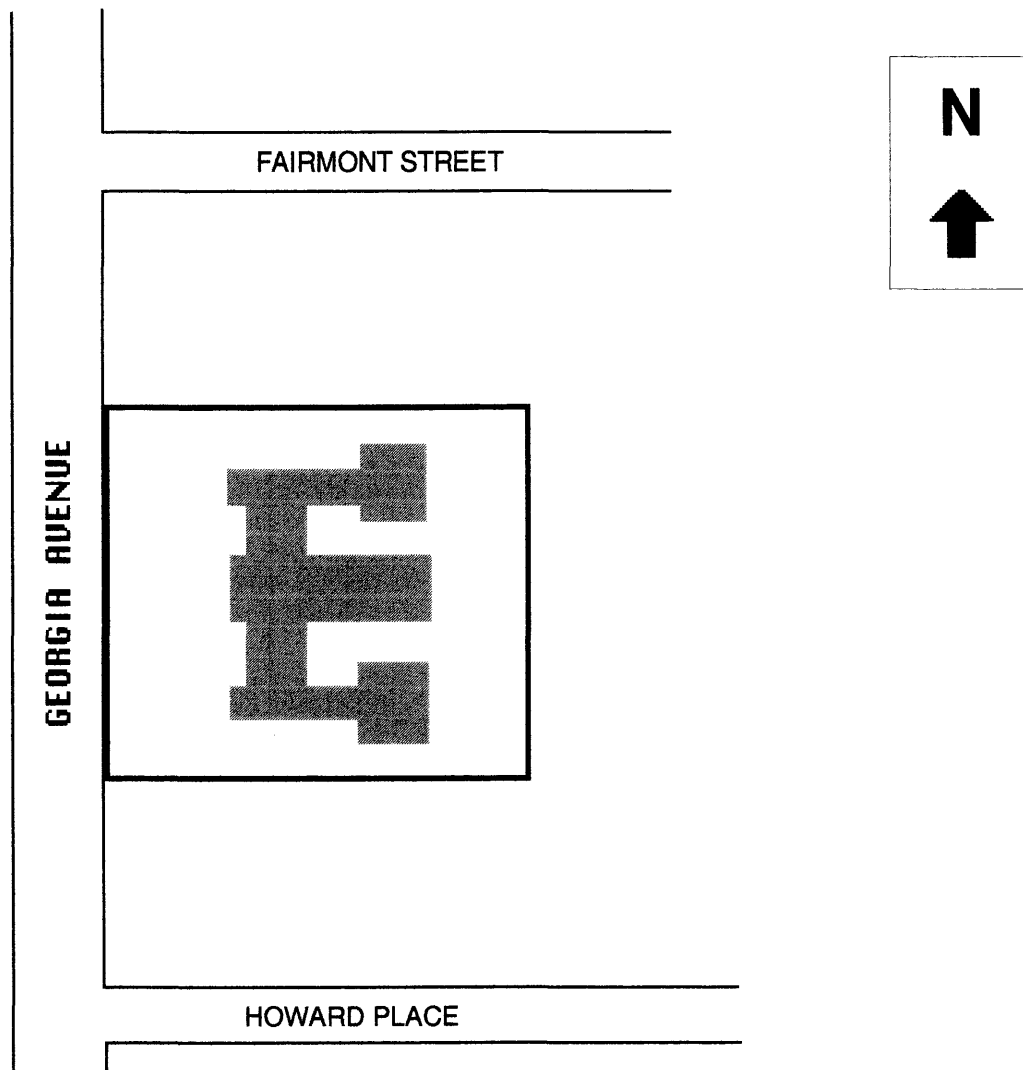
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Sketch Map



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