

United States Department of the 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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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 certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Mark Twain Elementary School [preferred]

other names/site number Harney Heights Elementary

### 2. Location

street & number 5316 Ruskin Avenue N/A not for publication

city or town St. Louis N/A vicinity

St. Louis

state Missouri code MO county (independent city) code 510 zip code 63115

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide X local

Mark A. Miles MAY 24, 2011  
Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles, Deputy SHPO Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_ entered in the National Register \_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register \_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_ other (explain:)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Mark Twain Elementary School  
Name of Property

St. Louis [Independent City] MO  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

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

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

<input type="checkbox"/>	private
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		district
		site
		structure
		object
1		<b>Total</b>

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

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

The St. Louis, Missouri, Public Schools of William B. Ittner

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/school

Vacant

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals/Jacobethan

foundation: STONE/limestone

Other: E ("Open") Plan Elementary School

walls: Brick

roof: STONE/slate

METAL/copper

other: Ceramic Tile

Mark Twain Elementary School  
Name of Property

St. Louis [Independent City] MO  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

Architecture

**Period of Significance**

1910-1912

**Significant Dates**

1910

1911

1912

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Ittner, William B., Architect

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: St. Louis Public Schools Archives

Mark Twain Elementary School  
Name of Property

St. Louis [Independent City] MO.  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 3.7 acres

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u>	<u>0739823</u>	<u>4286075</u>	2	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Andrew B. Weil and Jefferson Mansell, Assistant Director and Director

organization Landmarks Association of St. Louis date 1/14/11

street & number 911 Washington Suite 170 telephone 314-421-6474

city or town St. Louis MO  
State zip code 63101

e-mail [aweil@landmarks-stl.org](mailto:aweil@landmarks-stl.org) or [aweil@stlouis.missouri.org](mailto:aweil@stlouis.missouri.org)

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Photographs.**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

**Property Owner:**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name St. Louis Board of Education

street & number 801 N. 11<sup>th</sup> Street telephone 314-231-3720

city or town St. Louis, state MO zip code 63101

**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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Mark Twain Elementary School  
The St. Louis, Missouri, Public  
Schools of William B. Ittner.  
St. Louis, Independent City, Missouri

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**Summary**

Harney Heights School (renamed Mark Twain in 1918) is located at 5316 Ruskin Avenue in St. Louis, Missouri. Architect William B. Ittner designed the Jacobethan style school in 1910, construction began in 1911, and the school opened in September of 1912. The fact that the preliminary plans were approved in 1910 makes the building eligible for consideration under the Multiple Property Document, *The St. Louis Public Schools of William B. Ittner* under the sub-context "Refining of the 'Open Plan' in St. Louis Public Schools, 1902-1910." The school occupies half of city block 5141 in St. Louis' Mark Twain neighborhood. The school is an excellent example of the "open" floor plan conceived and refined by Architect William Ittner during his tenure as architect for the St. Louis Board of Education and Commissioner of School Buildings. The school meets the registration requirements for the E "Open" Plan Elementary Schools property type having corridors with classrooms on one side only. Ittner developed this design feature to provide additional indirect light to classrooms and projecting wings, which enable many classrooms to receive light from three sides directly. This property type is defined by the Multiple Property Documentation Form (the MPDF).

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Mark Twain School is situated just north of Penrose Park and immediately southwest of both Bellefontaine and Calvary cemeteries in the north, central portion of St. Louis. The surrounding neighborhood was built primarily in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a desirable middle-class streetcar commuter suburb. In addition to Ittner's classic (and un-altered) open plan, the school is lavishly ornamented with abundant stone trim, variegated brick, copper cupolas, stone gargoyles, and colorful mosaic panels. It retains its original terraced front yard and surrounding wrought iron fence as well as sparse, but orderly landscaping in keeping with Ittner's specifications. The interior of the school retains much of its original maple flooring, built-in cabinetry and even some marble backsplashes surrounding water fountains.

**Narrative**

The school building is constructed of variegated brick laid in Flemish Garden Wall bond with abundant stonework used to accent bays. This bond was frequently used by Ittner in schools of

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<sup>1</sup> Cynthia H. Longwisch, *National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: "The St. Louis, Missouri, Public Schools of William B. Ittner."* (Washington, D.C.: US Department of the Interior/National Park Service, 1992).

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this period and was specified as a component of the overall aesthetic. Further ornament is provided by Arts and Crafts inspired tile murals and terra cotta shields designed by noted ceramicist Henry Chapman Mercer at the Moravian Tile and Pottery Works in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. The school's form is a variation on Ittner's "open" or "E" shaped plan, and represents the full realization of the architect's ideas regarding school design. Designed and constructed as Ittner made the transition from Commissioner of School Buildings/Architect of the St. Louis City Public Schools to his role as "Consulting Architect," Ittner's revolutionary ideas regarding school design were reaching their full maturity at the time of the construction of Mark Twain. As such, the school is a representative culmination of the architect's ideas and work, which earned him enduring acclaim in the field of educational architecture. Having served the students of the city for 97 years, Mark Twain School closed following the 2009-10 school year as the St. Louis City Public Schools enacted measures to deal with declining enrollment and reduced revenue projections.

Mark Twain School is an elaborate example of Jacobethan design, and a manifestation of Ittner's refined Open Plan. The Open Plan was developed and improved by Ittner during his career with the St. Louis City Public Schools, between 1897 and his retirement to the role of "Consulting Architect" in 1910. Undergoing near constant revision due to the architect's unrelenting pursuit of improvement, the Open Plan finally reached maturity toward the end of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is defined in the MPDF.<sup>2</sup>

Mark Twain has a long central block parallel to Ruskin Avenue, a projecting wing at each end, and two small entrances located in projecting "mini-wings" formed by engaged stair-towers flanking the center point of the central block. The school retains its physical integrity; it exhibits original materials, its original characteristically-shaped plan, scale, roof shape, and fenestration. It is in its original location and retains orderly landscaping and the original dimensions of its schoolyard. The physical condition of the school is excellent with peeling paint on many window surrounds comprising the only apparent degradation of exterior features. Likewise, the interior is remarkably intact with original wood floors in classrooms, marble paneling around fixtures, iron ventilation grates, and built-in cabinetry. Interior alterations are generally minor and include non-original linoleum in corridors, drop- ceilings in some rooms, faux stone surface treatment of railings and walls in the rear stairways, and new HVAC systems. The most substantial alteration to the original fabric of the school is the fact that all windows on the rear façade (east-facing) have been replaced. The appearance of the rear elevation has also been impacted by the addition of a one-story gymnasium addition.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.5-6.

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**Physical Description**

Mark Twain School is situated in a very intact early 20<sup>th</sup> century neighborhood dominated by one-and two-story brick residences. The school is surrounded on three sides by asphalt yards which were used as both playgrounds and later as parking lots for teachers. The school's primary façade faces Ruskin Avenue and is fronted by a landscaped and terraced yard dominated by mowed grass and evergreen bushes. The planted "lawn" with the remainder of the surrounding property being paved is typical of Ittner elementary schools in St. Louis. While outside activities certainly were a component of the educational model practiced by the schools during Ittner's tenure, it seems that most structured physical education took place in the basement gymnasiums rather than on outside playgrounds. The school grounds are surrounded by an original cast iron fence and approached by stairs on both the south and west sides where the lot is substantially above grade. There is no playground equipment associated with the school, nor is there any evidence that playground equipment was part of the original facility.

The school itself is a two-story (plus raised basement and attic) Jacobethan style building constructed in 1911. The building is composed of a dominant three-story central block flanked by two-story wings, each wing terminating in two-story blocks that are pulled out beyond the plane of the central block. Two entrances frame the central block and form engaged stair towers. Limestone quoining frames the two entrances. A shallow portico consisting of Doric limestone columns and simple entablature cover the two main entrances. The top of the entablature forms a shallow balcony at the second floor. A limestone balustrade with heavy pedestals outlines the balcony. Brick quoining edges the outside corners of the building. A limestone water table encircles the school at grade.

There are four large round-headed openings with semi-circular carved limestone surrounds that illuminate the kindergarten room. Windows in these openings are multi-paned tripartite wooden casements with fixed lights in the transom. Operable six-over-twelve, single-hung wooden sash in tripartite configuration are found on the second floor of the central block's main façade. There is a limestone sill at the second floor running the length of the central block. Fenestration on the third floor of the central block consists of operable nine-over-fifteen single-hung wooden sash in tripartite configuration with wrought iron Juliet balconies. The stair towers contain multi-paned tripartite wooden casements with limestone mullions that open onto a shallow balcony. A bank of multi-paned tripartite fixed lights illuminates the stairway from the second to third floors. All fenestration in the stair towers are framed by limestone quoining and have limestone headers, sills, and transom bars. The two-story blocks contain operable six-over-twelve single-hung wooden sash in groups of five. All headers are brick soldier course except in

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the stair towers on the main façade. All other fenestration are variations of wooden single-hung or casement windows.

At roof level curvilinear Dutch gables capped in limestone terminate the two-story blocks on three sides. The stair towers terminate in octagonal cupolas in brick and contain multi-paned fixed light sash. The parapet wall of the central block continues around the cupolas and contains a limestone balcony. The parapet wall is brick in a herringbone pattern with a limestone cap. The roofs of the cupolas are sheathed in copper. Roofing material is gray slate. There are two large brick chimneys framing the central block at the ridge. There is another large brick chimney at the rear of the central block.

Ornamentation consists of a gargoyle at the porticos on main façade. Colorful mosaics found on the exterior of the school were manufactured and designed at the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works in Doylestown, PA. Rectangular terra cotta panels adorn the walls of the two-story blocks and round, multicolored mosaic tile shields depicting the arms of Spain, France, the United States, and Missouri are placed between the first and second floors of the central block and ornamental shields are placed on the end gables of the projecting side entrances.

Original interior appointments in this building appear to be largely intact. Interior casework and trim is in oak and remains largely unpainted. Some of the doors are of quarter-sawn oak. Door transoms are intact. The blackboards and coatrooms remain unchanged. There is original tongue and groove oak flooring in some of the classrooms. In addition, the interior hallway fenestration in the kindergarten room is still intact. There is an original marble backsplash by one of the drinking fountains in the hallway. The exposed truss-work in the auditorium has been painted but remains intact.

Alterations include standing seam metal roofing replacing slate on the small entry wings. The original main entrance opening sidelights and transoms have been filled in and doors replaced with commercial metal units. Brick has been re-pointed with a different color mortar on the Dutch gables. The original plaster ceilings have been replaced with dropped acoustic ceiling tile in classrooms and hallways. The most substantial alteration to the original fabric of the school is the fact that all windows on the rear façade (east-facing) have been replaced.

**Integrity**

The MPDF “The St. Louis, Missouri, Public Schools of William B. Ittner” specifies that Ittner schools listed in the National Register “must retain characteristically-shaped plans, scale, roof-



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shape, and fenestration in order to convey a clear sense of historic character.”<sup>3</sup> Mark Twain School meets these requirements. The only major change in plan from the original school is the addition of the one-story rear gymnasium, which maintains the original scale, materials, and stylistic repertoire of the school. Rear additions of one story are permissible under the MPDF. The roof shape and fenestration are un-altered, except for the fact that most windows on the rear elevation have been replaced with aluminum replicas of the originals. The roof retains its original slate shingles and the stair towers retain their original copper cupolas. The floor plans have been retained aside from the partition of some of the larger, end-wing classrooms. A very few bays have been bricked-in on the basement level of the rear elevation, as well as the small windows on either side of the projecting entryways to the end wings. Drop ceilings have been added throughout, though none project below the original upper edges of the window openings. Non-original linoleum floors have been installed in the hallways and a few classrooms, but most rooms retain original maple floors. Stair landings have been enclosed by the addition of firewalls at each floor. Ittner’s plan is essentially intact.

The MPDF further states that “Schools must be in their original locations, landscaped approximately in their original fashion. The physical condition of the buildings should be reasonably good.”<sup>4</sup> Mark Twain meets these conditions. The school is in its original location and retains minimal landscaping surrounding its primary façade in keeping with Ittner’s original ideas. The school sits above street grade atop two terraces and behind a low, original brick wall. The original iron fence surrounds the front lawn along Ruskin Avenue, as specified by Ittner.

Physically, Mark Twain School is in excellent condition. Closed for only one school year, the building has been well-maintained by the SLPS with all windows and entries secured and systems operational. Blackboards, millwork, cabinetry, wardrobes, and ventilation grates are essentially intact. Both the interior and exterior of Mark Twain School retain their historic appearance.

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<sup>3</sup> Longwisch, 1992, p. F 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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Mark Twain Elementary School  
St. Louis, Missouri, Public Schools  
of William B. Ittner  
St. Louis, Independent City, Missouri

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**Summary**

The Mark Twain School (originally Harney Heights School) is located at 5316 Ruskin Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri, and is locally significant under Criterion C in the area of architecture. William B. Ittner designed the school in 1910 in his capacity as Architect and Commissioner of School Buildings for the St. Louis Board of Education. The building is being submitted for registration under the “St. Louis, Missouri Public Schools of William B. Ittner” Multiple Property Document within the sub-context “Refining of the ‘Open Plan’ in the St. Louis Public Schools, 1902-1910.” Ittner became nationally and even internationally recognized for his ideas regarding educational architecture during and after his career with the St. Louis Public Schools in particular for his “Open Plan” design of which Mark Twain is an excellent example. The school was designed in 1910, constructed in 1911 and opened in 1912 resulting in a period of significance from 1910-1912. The neighborhood surrounding the school at the time was a rapidly developing streetcar commuter suburb on St. Louis’ north side. The elementary school was the beneficiary of Ittner’s previous thirteen years of study and innovation and was graced not only with an elaborate façade, but also state of the art facilities and systems which in many cases had previously been limited to inclusion in designs for high schools.

**Background**

The area surrounding Harney Heights School was primarily farmland until development commenced in earnest in the 1890’s. In June of 1892, the St. Louis Post Dispatch announced the purchase of a large tract of land in the vicinity and stated “[t]his is practically new territory, just commencing to be developed by the completion and successful operation of the Bellefontaine electric [streetcar] line out to the cemeteries.”<sup>5</sup> The area developed rapidly after this point and with it came the need for school facilities to accommodate the children of the neighborhood. St. Louis’ population grew quickly around the turn of the century, with the population increasing by more than 75,000 residents between 1890 and 1900, and by more than 111,000 between 1900 and 1910.<sup>6</sup> The growing population drove the creation of ever more streetcar commuter suburbs as the population spilled out to the north, west, and south of downtown. Harney Heights exemplified this pattern with real estate sales and development that seemed to happen overnight. In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was common to see Post Dispatch articles with titles like *Hundred Houses Being Erected in Harney Heights* and *Harney Heights Sets New Record for*

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<sup>5</sup> St. Louis Post Dispatch, *Real Estate Interests*, 23 June, 1892, p.5.

<sup>6</sup> Board of Public Service, *Rapid Transit for St. Louis*, 1926, Published by the St. Louis Board of Public Service, 1926, p. 30.

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*Real Estate Deals.*<sup>7</sup> With new neighborhoods like this developing all over the city, School Board Architect William B. Ittner was kept busy planning and overseeing the construction of new buildings.

**Elaboration**

With a foresight characteristic of the St. Louis Public School Board, a parcel of land on which a school could be situated had been purchased in advance of the apex of the building boom in what was then known as the Harney Heights neighborhood.\* By 1905, Ittner completed plans for the first temporary school facilities to be situated on the site. However, it wasn't until the summer of 1909, that two "portable" frame schoolhouses were erected upon the site. Portable schools were one of Ittner's innovations born out of the need to react quickly to the needs of a burgeoning population. The buildings were designed to be erected quickly to suit student needs in advance of the construction of a more permanent building and many if not most of Ittner's schools were preceded on their sites by these portable facilities. When the permanent school was opened, the temporary buildings were taken down and moved to another location.

Despite the fact that William Ittner resigned as Commissioner of School Buildings in the early winter of 1910, his dealings with the St. Louis Public School System were far from over. For the next few months he worked to complete the designs for schools such as Harney Heights that had already been commissioned. However, it appears that Hans Toensfeldt, the new Commissioner of School Buildings took over the quotidian duties of actually getting the schools built.

In the summer of 1910, another two portable buildings were added to the complex temporary complex at Harney Heights, indicating that the growth of the school-age population in the area was mirroring the growth of the surrounding residential district. Ittner's preliminary plans for the permanent school building were approved by the Board in October of 1910.<sup>8</sup>

Construction began on the school in 1911 and Harney Heights School opened for the first time on September 3, 1912. The school contained 24 rooms and was the only entirely new school to be added to the roster of public schools at the advent of the 1912 school year. The school, being brand new and designed at the height of development for Ittner's thinking regarding educational

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\*The school was originally named for the neighborhood (Harney Heights). When the school's name was changed to Mark Twain, the neighborhood began to be known for the school and eventually was recognized as the Mark Twain Neighborhood.

<sup>7</sup> St. Louis Post Dispatch, *Hundred Houses Being Erected in Harney Heights*, 4 September, 1910, p. A10; St. Louis Post Dispatch, *Harney Heights Sets New Record for Real Estate Deals*, 12 June, 1910, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> St. Louis Post Dispatch, *School Board Precedent is Ignored*, 12 October, 1910, p.15.

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architecture, was state of the art. In 1915, Harney Heights was listed among only 10 out of 110 schools in the system to have an auditorium (a massive third floor space with a stage and seating for 718), one of 24 that had a gymnasium (it actually had two), and one of only 16 that had showers and bath facilities. The school also had the luxury of restrooms in the basement as well as the first and second floors. In addition, it had a designated kindergarten with immense floor-to-ceiling windows and a library that was intended to serve both the students and the residents of the surrounding neighborhood as well.<sup>9</sup> The school also boasted technological innovations such as a telephone system and a central vacuum system that could be accessed by janitors in each room.

The school exterior appearance reflects some aspects of Ittner's philosophy of design as described by the architect in his 1905 report to the School Board, though his ideas continued to evolve with experience and later designs like Mark Twain displayed an increasing use of ornament. As noted in the MPDF:

[Ittner] described his use of hard red brick 'mixed as to color and laid up with a large bed joint in the garden wall or Flemish bond. Stone is used sparingly...and no attempt is made to accent any part of the building except the main entrance, which is generally dignified by fitting architectural treatment.'" However, the document does note that "[t]he stair towers on Ittner's schools were also often the subject of architectural embellishment – frequently taking the form of projecting Tudor towers" as is the case with Mark Twain.<sup>10</sup>

Also typical of Ittner's later design philosophy is the stylistic idiom in which the school is constructed. He publicly stated that he believed "the old English Architecture" to be "the best" for school buildings, seemingly coming to this conclusion following a research sabbatical in Europe.<sup>11</sup> As noted in the MPDF, it was after 1900 that Ittner,

[f]ully developed the range of 'Jacobethan' motifs for which he became so well known. His first Jacobethan school design was the Wyman School in 1900 and beginning in 1901, Jacobethan became his preferred mode of design. Fully two thirds of the Ittner Schools contracted between 1901-

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<sup>9</sup> St. Louis Post Dispatch, *Greater Use of School Buildings by Public Urged*, 26 September, 1915, p.6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. E 10.

<sup>11</sup> St. Louis Post Dispatch, *New Ideas in This St. Louis School House*, 11 November, 1900, p. A 14.

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1910 use some variation of this eclectic mix of Tudor and English Renaissance elements.<sup>12</sup>

Ittner's embrace of the Jacobethan style and the growing influence of the Craftsman movement combined to generate an increasing departure from the architect's original modest philosophy of ornament as his career moved into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

An interesting and rare feature of the ornamental vocabulary of the school is the use of colorful tile mosaics on the façade. Designed and executed by ceramicist William Chapman Mercer at the Moravian Tile and Pottery in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Mark Twain is one of 11 schools in St. Louis that feature Mercer's artwork. It is unclear how Ittner came into contact with Mercer, or why he decided that the artist's work would be suitable for his school designs. While speculation, it is possible that Ittner was first exposed to Mercer's work at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904 where Mercer was awarded one of three Grand Prizes in the category "Original Objects of Art Workmanship."<sup>13</sup>

Just three years later (1907), Mercer's tiles appeared on the Ittner-designed Henry Shaw School in St. Louis.<sup>14</sup> Over the next eight years, Mercer's work would be used by Ittner ten more times across the city. While the architect commissioned the work, it appears that the matter of content was left up to the artist as well as other officials within the St. Louis Schools. In the archives of the Spruance Library of the Bucks County Historical Society is correspondence showing Ittner dealing with Mercer's agent John Ingham in Philadelphia regarding the school, while Mercer himself is writing to the architect's immediate successor as Commissioner of School Buildings, Hans Toensfeldt.

Regarding the mosaics Mercer wrote:

I have taken great interest in the composition and color of these panels which I have produced in the form of flat rather than relief mosaics, as you wished, filling in the entire background with colored clays and contrasting glaze and unglazed colors throughout.

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<sup>12</sup> Longwisch, 1992, p. E 11.

<sup>13</sup> Missouri Historical Society, Library and Records Center, St. Louis, Missouri, Louisiana Purchase Exposition, Awards Department of Art, Series III, Sub-Series II, Folder 7 MSS.

<sup>14</sup> Moravian Pottery and Tile Works archives, Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Schools by William B. Ittner MSS.

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The theme is the history of Missouri as suggested by the land transfers represented by the Arms of Spain, France, the United States and Missouri on the outer walls and the Discovery of America inside.

Here limited to two large panels I have taken for the first the thought of the departure of Columbus, as a central pattern surrounded by four smaller designs, standing for the dreams and fears of the Pre-Columbian navigator to which the sea monster destroying a ship in the Sea of Darkness from Olaus Magnus, Macrobius map of the world, the Fountain of Youth, and the "El Dorado" as the fatal golden vision which ruined Spain and destroyed her empire.

In the second panel, with the landing of Columbus as a central pattern are shown as sub-panels, designs representing the accomplished facts of the discovery. Indians healing the sick in Hispaniola, Peruvians worshipping the sun, Indians fishing and sailing a raft, the city of Cuzco and Lake Titicaca of the Incas.

The panels are surrounded by a border from the Aztec Codex found by Alexander von Humboldt and named after him. All the pictures are, (Like the El Dorado, Fountain of youth and landing patterns) designs in the spirit of or (like the others) closely modified from original woodcuts of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The outer wall emblazonments were entirely redesigned and in many cases conventionalized to suit the case.

I feel that the theme of the discovery belongs perhaps more properly in an American School than anywhere else in the world. The Spaniards, masters in the art of tiles and pottery had stopped in their craft before this time, and never attempted to tell thus of their last and most wonderful achievement. But I have thought that if any theme could properly form a subject of American decorative art it would be this dramatic, wonderful and inspiring series of events...

15

As a final touch, Mercer left his stamp on the school by creating a tile shield to be installed above the northern entrance. The shield prominently displays the artist's favorite Latin motto "Plus Ultra," meaning "more beyond" along with the Pillars of Hercules. Also the national motto of Spain, "Plus Ultra" fits coherently with the theme of exploration and Columbus' discovery of the New World depicted by the school's mosaics. According to myth, the Pillars of

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<sup>15</sup> Henry Chapman Mercer to Commissioner of School Buildings Hans Toensfeldt, 1911, Henry C. Mercer Papers, Job File Number 1911-54, The Spruance Library of the Bucks County Historical Society, Doylestown, PA.

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Hercules once marked the edge of the known world and were marked with the words “Nec Plus Ultra” (nothing further beyond), warning sailors not to continue beyond.

The school thrived in its first few years, though it appears attendance was low with a graduating class of just 19 sixth grade students in the summer of 1915. Things changed rapidly however, probably due to a large number of new subdivisions in the vicinity being completed, because by February 19 of the next year (1916), just over four years since Harney Heights Elementary opened its doors, the school was included on a list compiled by Superintendent of Schools Blewett among those schools “in need of immediate relief” of overcrowding.<sup>16</sup>

The area surrounding the school had quickly become a populous suburb; residents were primarily middle class and had largely been born in Missouri or at least the United States. Most were one or two generations removed from German or Irish immigrants and worked at skilled jobs such as bank clerk, leather cutter at a shoe factory, accountant, supervisor at a manufacturing plant, foreman at a boiler plant, and book keeper.<sup>17</sup> These were people with means who were following the streetcar lines out to the new suburbs to escape the noise and smoke of the inner districts. In accordance with the upward mobility of the residents for whom the school was built, it is no wonder that Ittner designed a building that was both beautiful as well as functional. The school was to serve not just students, but the surrounding community as a center of social life; as such careful attention was paid to ensure that its physical form would enhance the appearance of the neighborhood.

In 1918 a decision was made to change the name of the school from the banal “Harney Heights,” which had been derived from an early subdivision name, to the more evocative “Mark Twain,” after the great literary son of Missouri who had died eight years prior. No reason for the change was given however when the Post Dispatch reported the change on May 15, 1918.<sup>18</sup> Today the surrounding area has come to be known as the Mark Twain Neighborhood because of the presence of the school.

Mark Twain School served the students of the City of St. Louis from 1912 until its closure following the 2009-2010 school year. Between 1990 and 1991, a one-story brick gymnasium was added to the rear of the southern portion of the building.<sup>19</sup> This building is a single room constructed of concrete block and faced with variegated brick, laid in Flemish Garden Wall bond

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<sup>16</sup> St. Louis Post Dispatch, *Mauch Declares City has Enough Room in Schools*, 9 February, 1916, p.10.

<sup>17</sup> U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Population. Viewed 20 November, 2010. [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com).

<sup>18</sup> St. Louis Post Dispatch, *School Board Approves Elimination of German*, 15 May, 1918, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Wayne Fisher, General Manager SLPS, personal communication, January, 2011.

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like the rest of the school. In addition, the building is encircled by a stone belt course which lines up with the stone water table of the original school. These stylistic considerations serve to camouflage the addition to the extent that an observer who was not familiar with the original floor plan and/or trained to parse the construction history of a building would likely think it original.

**Conclusion**

As an Ittner design dating to 1910, Mark Twain School is eligible to be considered under the Multiple Property Document *The St. Louis, Missouri Public Schools of William B. Ittner*, under the sub context "Refining of the 'Open Plan' in St. Louis Public Schools, 1902-1910." The school is an excellent example of Ittner's Open Plan and a superior specimen of educational architecture dating to the period when the St. Louis public schools served as a model district for cities across the nation. One of Ittner's last designs as commissioned while he served as Commissioner of School Buildings, Mark Twain was conceived at a time when the architect's notoriety for his visionary educational facilities was beginning to provide him with opportunities to design buildings in other parts of the country. In the years after the construction of Mark Twain, the St. Louis public schools would have to share their former Commissioner of School Buildings with school districts across the nation. While Ittner continued to design schools in St. Louis as a consulting architect, the ideas he developed and refined in the city, embodied by Mark Twain, had earned him a level of renown that allowed him a great deal of freedom to work for a diverse array of clients.

Today, the St. Louis public schools of William B. Ittner are a source of pride for the neighborhoods in which they stand. Thankfully, while many are no longer in service as schools, their quality of design and construction enables them to be repurposed for a diverse array of modern functions. This adaptability ensures that the buildings will continue to grace St. Louis' beautiful historic neighborhoods for generations to come.



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“School Board Approves Elimination of German.” *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 15 May, 1918.

United States Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. Twelfth Census of the United States, 1920: Population. Viewed 20 November, 2010 at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

William Chapman Mercer, Letter to Commissioner of School Buildings Hans Toensfeldt, 1911, The Papers of Henry C. Mercer, Job File Number 1911-54, The Spruance Library of the Bucks County Historical Society, Doylestown, Pennsylvania.



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All photographs are of Mark Twain School, located in the independent city of St. Louis, Missouri. All photographs were taken in January, 2011 by Jefferson G. Mansell or Andrew B. Weil of Landmarks Association of St. Louis. Digital negatives are on file with the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office, Jefferson City, MO.

Photo 1:  
Façade  
Camera facing S

Photo 10:  
Classroom  
Camera facing N

Photo 2:  
Stair tower  
Camera facing E

Photo 11:  
Kindergarten windows  
Camera facing NW

Photo 3:  
West end wing  
Camera facing E

Photo 12:  
Hallway  
Camera facing S

Photo 4:  
Northeast wing façade  
Camera facing E

Photo 13:  
Kindergarten  
Camera facing NW

Photo 5:  
Center section rear  
Camera facing SW

Photo 14:  
Auditorium stage  
Camera facing SE

Photo 6:  
Rear of gymnasium  
Camera facing SW

Photo 15:  
Auditorium rear  
Camera facing NE

Photo 7:  
South side entrance detail  
Camera facing N

Photo 16:  
Rear Stairway  
Camera facing E

Photo 8:  
Mural detail arrival of Columbus  
Camera facing S

Photo 17:  
Cabinetry, second floor

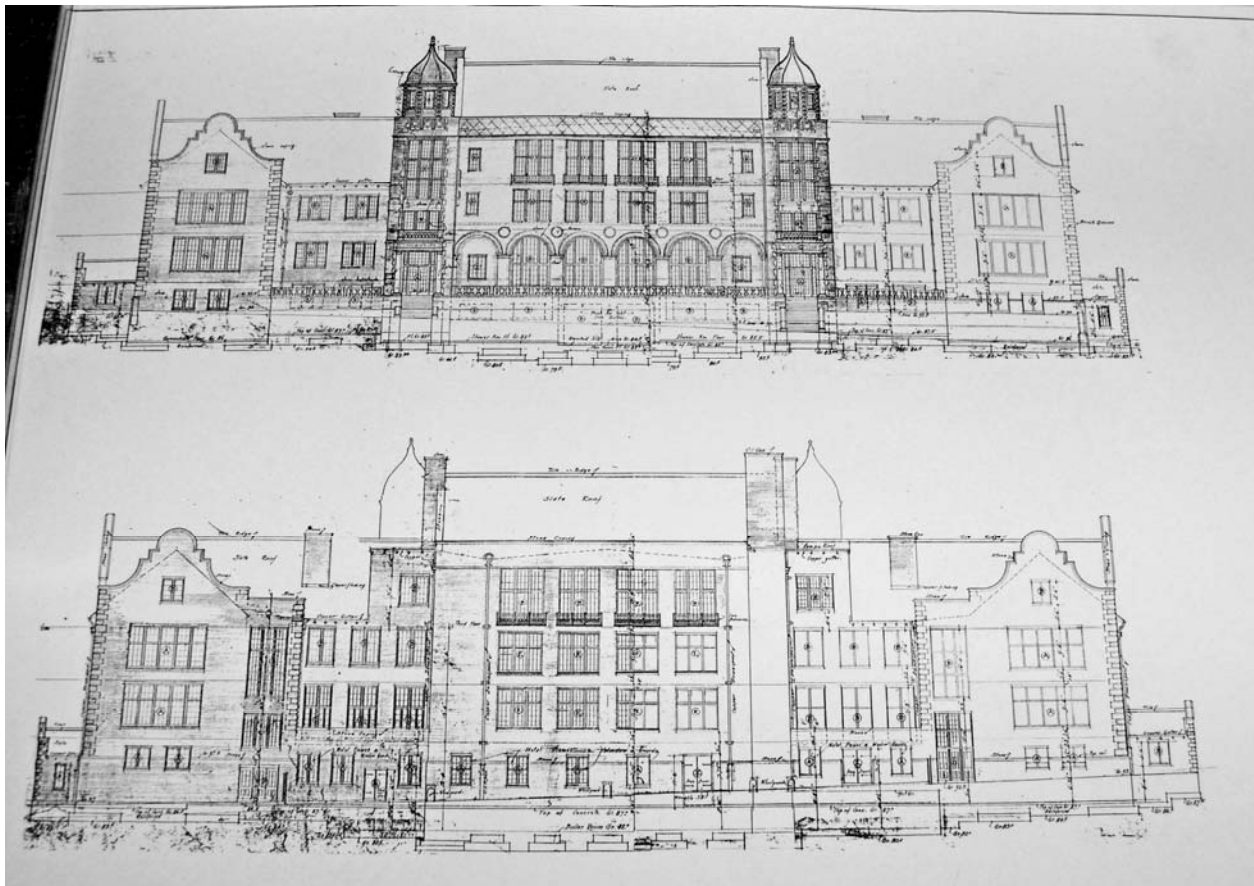
Photo 9:  
Mural detail departure of Columbus  
Camera facing N

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Figure 1: Front and rear Elevations of Mark Twain School. SLPS Facilities Archives



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Mark Twain School  
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Figure 2: Side Elevations Mark Twain School. SLPS Facilities Archives

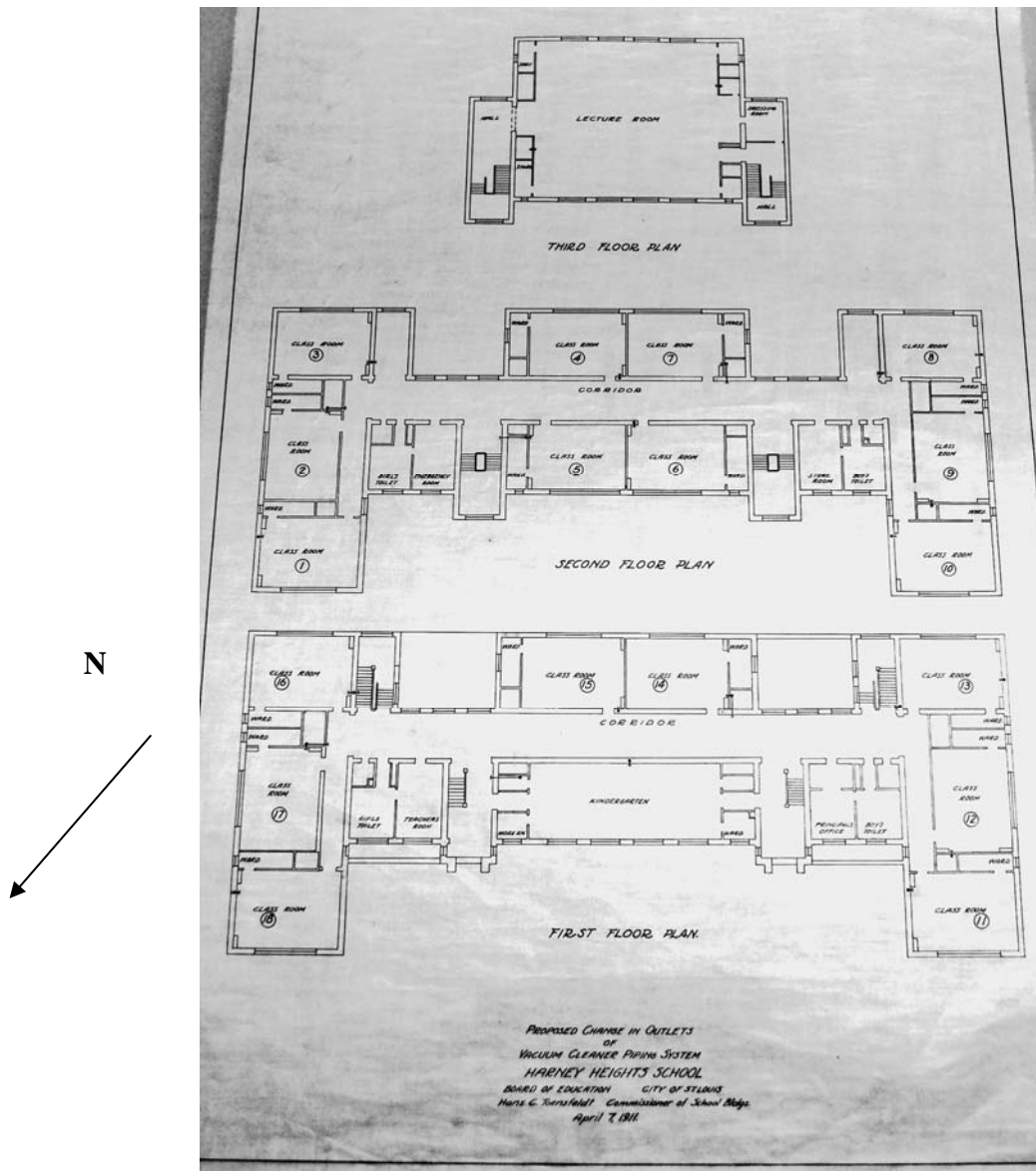


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Figure 3: Floor Plan of Mark Twain School. SLPS Facilities Archives (front elevations facing bottom of page).







90°15' 38°45' 1060000 FEET (MO EAST) '40"E '41 R 7 E 900 000 FEET (MO EAST) 12'30" '43 '44

Mark Twain  
School 5316 Ruskin  
St. Louis, 63115  
[Independent City]  
Missouri  
Zone 15

Mark Twain School  
[preferred]  
St. Louis [Ind. City]  
Missouri

Z: 15  
E. 0739823  
N. 4286075

Grange City, IL-MO  
Quadrangle























LANDING OF COLYMEVS









Spelling words

Picture  
Adventure  
Friendly  
Future  
reunited

Do Now

I have a friend  
and we like to

Homework









MARK TWAH  
SCHOOL

EXIT







