

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

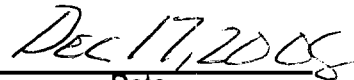
**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

1. Name of Property	
historic name	<u>Wellston J.C. Penney Building</u>
other names/site number	<u>J.C. Penney Store 1396</u>

2. Location	
street & number	<u>5930 Dr. Martin Luther King Drive</u> [n/a] not for publication
city or town	<u>St. Louis</u> [n/a] vicinity
state	<u>Missouri</u> code <u>MO</u> county <u>St. Louis [Independent City]</u> code <u>510</u> zip code <u>63112</u>

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

Mark A. Miles / Deputy SHPO

Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [].)

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
I hereby certify that the property is:		
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register See continuation sheet [].	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet [].	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, explain see continuation sheet [].	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		contributing	noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	1	0 building
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	0	0 sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	0	0 structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	0	0 objects
		1	0 total

Name of related multiple property listing.

(n/a)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register. 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

COMMERCE/department store

Current Functions

VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification

MODERN MOVEMENT/International Style

see continuation sheet [].

Materials

foundation concrete

 walls brick
stucco

 roof asphalt
 other _____

see continuation sheet [].

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet [x]

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

Property is:

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

Periods of Significance

1948-58

Significant Dates

n/a

Significant Person(s)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

McMahon, William P. & Sons/architect
Cousins, George L. Contracting Co./builder

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State Agency

Federal Agency

Local Government

University

Other:

Name of repository: Landmarks Assoc. of St. Louis

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis (Independent City), MO

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than 1 acre

UTM References

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
<u>15</u>	<u>736 400</u>	<u>4283 880</u>			
C. Zone	Easting	Northing	D. Zone	Easting	Northing

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Tom Duda/ Intern

organization Landmarks Association of St. Louis date August 2, 2006

street & number 917 Locust Street, 7th floor telephone (314) 421-6474

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63101

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

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

name Realty Renaissance Resources c/o Fred Lewis

street & number PO Box 23636 telephone n/a

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63112

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Summary

The Wellston J.C. Penney Building, built in 1948 and located at 5930 Dr. Martin Luther King Drive (formerly Easton Avenue) in St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri, reads as a three-level International Style department store with full basement and roof level. Faced entirely in white stucco, the 200 by 100 foot reinforced concrete and brick structure employs many features that typify Modern design, including cylindrical columns, narrow bands of horizontal ribbon windows and a floating cornice. Designed by the firm of William P. McMahan & Sons, the building is the product of a masterful collaboration between William P. McMahan and his son, Bernard, who each brought unique strengths to the project. Extensive glazing on the first level fills the inset entryway, which has a terrazzo floor and granite faced columns. On the rear, a second entrance faces a two-tiered parking lot located across an alley. The east and west elevations lack windows and are completely unadorned. Vacant for thirty years, the building retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

Site

The Wellston J.C. Penney Building has a rectangular footprint that runs 100' along Dr. Martin Luther King Drive and 200' toward an alley at the south end of the site. The primary façade stands even with the sidewalk, maintaining the building line of nearby commercial structures. At the rear of the approximately 100' by 234' site, a staircase projects from back entry doors to a 15' wide alley that forms the southern boundary of the site. Grass fills the ground between the building and the alley on either side of the rear staircase. Across the alley, a two-tiered concrete parking lot at 5937-57 Wells Avenue has a footprint of 234' by 240'. City Block 3837 slopes upward from south to north and from west to east.

Exterior

William P. McMahan & Sons's design for the Wellston J.C. Penney typifies the International Style of Modernism through its rejection of ornamentation, incorporation of horizontal ribbon windows with cantilevered surrounds and dependence on regularity to organize the primary façade rather than axial symmetry. On the street level, a plate glass display window (now boarded) with granite base and two cylindrical granite-faced columns divide the primary façade into four bays (see photo 1). A narrow section of

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 2

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

stucco wall with incised grid and granite base frames the easternmost corner of the display window, while a smooth stucco wall with granite base punctuated by a boarded-over opening frames the western corner of the first floor. The inset primary entrance with two sets of double doors (now missing), a black terrazzo floor and angled display windows atop granite bases fill three bays west of the large display window.

The second and third levels of the primary façade are identical. On each level, a horizontal ribbon of metal sash windows with projecting surrounds punctuates the wall above the inset entrance. Metal sash windows of two widths comprise the glazed band; two mullions frame a hinged panel above a horizontal bar in each window. Stucco on the façade's westernmost bay is smooth, while an incised rectangular grid divides the three easternmost bays into panels. Cantilevered window surrounds on the horizontal band of ribbon windows begin flat against the smooth stucco wall on the west and gradually project outward from west to east, echoing the site that slopes upward from west to east.

Inoperable lights in the horizontal window bands frame the primary façade's two columns, which continue upward from the ground level on the interior of the building as they continue to divide the primary façade into four bays. Above the roofline, these columns support a reinforced concrete canopy that serves as a partial cornice that floats above the western half of the building; cutouts with rounded edges frame views of the sky over the two westernmost bays (see photo 2). The canopy attaches to a stair tower that projects above the roofline on the west. A square window with cantilevered surrounds punctuates the paneled wall to the east of the horizontal window band. Other features on the primary façade include a metal flagpole that projects above the roofline and attaches with brackets to the primary façade over these square windows, a non-original rolling metal grille over the ground floor windows and entrance and a ghost sign for "J.C. Penney Co." on the spandrel between the ground level and second floor window band.

The east (see photo 3) and west (see photo 4) façades lack glazing and have smooth stucco walls. On the west façade, a gap in the stucco facing (from a demolished adjacent building) reveals the structure's brick party wall. Stair towers and elevator shafts extend above the roofline on both elevations.

On the rear façade, a centered external chimney projects from the smooth stucco wall. A cantilevered, flat-roofed canopy attaches to the wall east of the chimney, covering two sets of double glass doors that serve as the rear customer entrance (see photo 5). Fifteen

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 3

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

concrete stairs with curving sidewalls and black metal railings descend from the back entrance, facing the parking lot across a 15' wide alley. Three black metal posts on the east wall of the staircase support this projecting hood, which cantilevers eastward over a large air vent in the building's south wall; three rectangular cutouts (partially covered) in the canopy frame views of the sky, as on the primary elevation's roof level canopy and floating cornice. The building's east wall extends above the roofline, serving as a parapet visible from this elevation.

Like on the other elevations, smooth stucco covers the rear façade. Industrial metal sash windows, aligned horizontally and vertically, punctuate the wall asymmetrically on either side of the central chimney and entry. Two horizontal bars divide each window into thirds, while two mullions frame a centered hopper window. The downward slope of the lot exposes the basement level on this elevation, while a rolling metal garage door provides access to this level for deliveries from the alley.

Interior

The Wellston J.C. Penney Building's unique interior volumes remain largely unchanged from their original appearance despite removal of some original asphalt tile flooring in 1967. A second floor balcony that originally served as the manager's office overlooks the large first floor, while stairs and elevators provide access to the third level and basement. Overall, the interior retains integrity from William P. McMahon & Sons's 1948 design.

Integrity

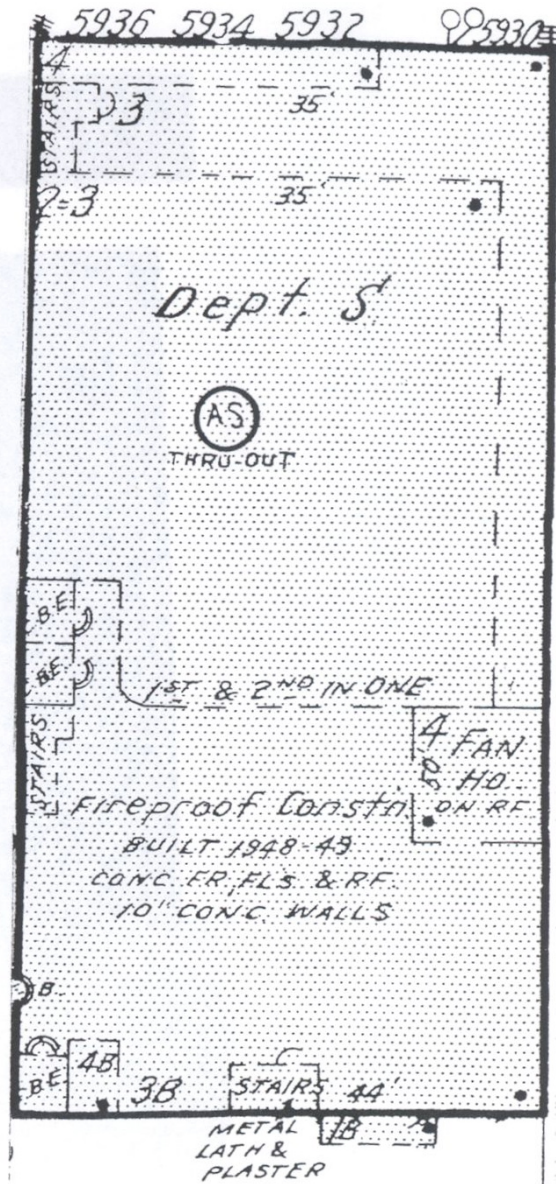
The Wellston J.C. Penney Building retains remarkable integrity despite thirty years of vacancy. With the exception of missing front doors, a few broken panes of glass, and minor water damage to the stucco façade, the building maintains its original appearance. Overall, the J.C. Penney site retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 4

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri



Wellston J.C. Penney Building Floor Plan

(Source: Sanborn Map Company. Volume 6, plate 6, 1964.)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 5

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Summary

The Wellston J.C. Penney Building, located at 5930 Dr. Martin Luther King Drive (formerly Easton Avenue) in St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri, is locally significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of COMMERCE and Criterion C in the area of ARCHITECTURE. As the only surviving post-World War II, stand-alone Modern department store building in St. Louis City, this three-story brick, white stucco, and reinforced concrete structure remains unique among older, traditionally styled buildings in the once-vibrant Wellston commercial district. Significant as William P. McMahon & Sons's only-known International Style design in St. Louis City, the Wellston J.C. Penney Building represents the sensitive application of Modern design to an urban context. One of four J.C. Penney stores in St. Louis at the time of its construction in 1948, the building reflects the company's recommitment to decentralized, neighborhood-based retailing in the City of St. Louis, a focus the company achieved decades before downtown department stores opened neighborhood branch locations. The period of significance is 1948 to 1958, the date of construction through the 50 year closing date for buildings that continue to have significance, but no more specific date can be defined.

Background

The Wellston J.C. Penney store became the 1,396th location of a national chain of department stores founded in 1902 by Hamilton, Missouri native James Cash Penny (1875-1971). As a young man, Penney's first job was as a janitor and window washer at the J.M. Hale & Brother dry goods store in Hamilton, where he earned \$2.27 a month. Advised by his father to seek opportunities in the west, Penney moved to Kemmerer, Wyoming, where he started his first business at age 26 with \$500 in personal savings and a \$1500 loan.¹ As a one-third owner of the Kemmerer store (known as the "Golden Rule Store"), Penney earned a considerable return on his investment. In 1907, he opened additional stores in other western states, launching his national chain.² Penney, in an interview with the *Globe-Democrat*, attributed his company's early successes to "[b]asically, only three things—one-price pricing, profit sharing and the selection of the right man and giving responsibility to them."³ In addition, Penney's national distribution

¹ James A. Cockrell, "Genius Isn't Needed to Be Successful, Penney Declares," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 16, 1962.

² Mary M. Stiritz, "J.C. Penney Co. Warehouse Building," NR Nomination, listed 12/31/1998.

³ Quoted in *ibid.*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 6

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

system⁴ enabled his chain to quickly deliver quality goods at moderate prices to stores across the nation. By 1927, the company's Silver Anniversary year, J.C. Penney stores were in 45 states.

During the 1920s, Penney's expanded at a remarkable pace, opening nearly 1200 additional locations, including its first in St. Louis at 2604 North 14th Street.⁵ Opened in 1928, this modest 35 by 100 foot store marked the company's initial foray into St. Louis's urban market; it served the neighborhood north of downtown from renovated quarters in a two-story brick commercial building.⁶ In 1929, the company opened an additional St. Louis location at Morganford and Gravois, which catered to developing residential neighborhoods in southern areas of the City. Penney's expanded to the Wellston Loop commercial district (named for a streetcar line terminus) near the western City Limits in 1930 with its third St. Louis location at 5976 Easton Avenue. At this point, Penney's had three neighborhood locations that served neighborhoods north, south, and west of downtown.

Unlike St. Louis's three largest department stores, Stix Baer & Fuller, Scruggs-Vandervoort Barney and Famous Barr, J.C. Penney chose not to build a central store downtown. Instead, Penney's focused on a decentralized model of retailing along the lines of Woolworth's and other national chains by locating multiple stores in neighborhoods where its customers lived. By the 1940s, as downtown department stores began to open branch locations, Penney's made new investments in its stores to help the company better compete for the post-war consumer's dollar, repositioning itself as a more direct competitor with local department store chains.

Elaboration

Like Penney's original St. Louis location on North 14th Street, the Wellston store (known by the company as store 1396) initially served customers from a storefront leased from nearby resident Lawrence O. Goedde. Despite the Great Depression's ravages, the Wellston location posted sales of \$263,759 in 1932, the year of the national retailer's

⁴ J.C. Penney opened the company's second national distribution warehouse in 1929 at 400 14th Street in downtown St. Louis (NR 12/31/1998).

⁵ "Store History: JC Penney in St. Louis, Missouri," Jerry Probst, JC Penney Archivist, to Cynthia Hill Longwisch, Assistant Director of the Landmarks Association, facsimile: June 29, 1998. (Hereafter cited as "Store History")

⁶ James A. Cockrell, "Penney's Finds Growth And Top Execs Here," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 9, 1962.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 7

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

thirtieth anniversary.⁷ Top selling items at the store included: children's shoes for \$2.98, men's suits for \$19.75, women's silk dresses for \$14.75, and sheets for \$1.19. Managed by Roy Johnson, a former assistant manager from Penney's in Marshalltown, Iowa, the Easton Avenue store dramatically increased sales of these and other items to a total of \$1,170,437 in 1942.⁸ By 1946, continued success and limited opportunities for expansion of the store's prosaic quarters at 5976 Easton Avenue (near the city limits) led the manager, in conjunction with company officials, to begin planning for a modernized and expanded Wellston facility that would appeal to the area's burgeoning population of suburban, automobile-driving consumers.⁹

Laurence E. Mallinckrodt, President of Scruggs-Vandervoort Barney, described the changing retail environment after World War II:

...[D]epartment stores...felt the impact of expanded purchasing power...from the great middle market's increased war production income. The post-war period of high production, expanding population and new residential construction in suburban areas, accelerated the establishment of branch stores. The increased use of automobiles and traffic congestion encouraged the development of shopping centers....branches [served customers better] through... easier access of these units to shopper's homes and the availability of large free parking facilities.¹⁰

Although Mallinckrodt specifically discusses the rationale for adding suburban branch locations of downtown department stores, his observations speak to the conditions facing all department store retailers and commercial developers at the end of the 1940s. Penney's decision to build a new Wellston store with a dramatically reconfigured and Modern design remained consistent with these post-war retail development trends. The new Wellston facility helped to reposition the retailer as a direct competitor with the downtown stores' new branch locations, of which the nearest was a stunning 1948 Moderne Style Famous Barr designed by Samuel A. Marx of Chicago located three miles southwest in Clayton.¹¹

⁷ "Store History."

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Mirroring this trend, the Morganford J. C. Penney also proved too small to meet demand; the company's "first suburban shopping center location" at Hampton Village replaced it in 1949.

¹⁰ Laurence E. Mallinckrodt, "Department Stores Meet New Retailing Challenges," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, August 10, 1956.

¹¹ Famous Barr, the only downtown department store chain to locate a branch location in the City, opened the Southtown Famous Barr in 1951; the marble-clad, Moderne Style building featured a dramatic rounded edge at the prominent corner of Kingshighway and Chippewa in south St. Louis. As the only other stand-

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 8

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Goedde Real Estate

Goedde Real Estate, a firm led by retired pharmacist and area resident Lawrence O. Goedde, was Penney's landlord at 5976 Easton. Known for his "ability to analyze the real estate situation accurately," Goedde began developing property in 1930, coming to amass a considerable portfolio by the 1940s.¹² Goedde, as a resident of nearby Vinita Park, had a vested interest in the continued success and viability of the Wellston commercial district, so he worked closely with Penney's executives to retain the store as an anchor tenant among his numerous commercial holdings in the area.¹³

The conditions that made the original store at 5976 Easton overcrowded were the exact reasons the company chose to locate the store's new building on the same block. Situated at a nexus of transportation modes, City Block 3837 had ready access to streetcars on its north and west in addition to being located near suburban automobile thoroughfares. Proximity to the Hodiament and Wellston streetcar lines, which terminated less than one block to the west, was an essential consideration in the decision for the store to remain in the Wellston Loop.¹⁴ Given that streetcars would not serve more far flung suburban locales, Lawrence Goedde and Penney's executives agreed that the location's assets were such that relocating the store to another community would be inappropriate.¹⁵

Goedde approached the J. C. Penney assignment with passion, acquiring property at 5930-36 Easton in two transactions on July 5, 1946 and later transferring the parcel to his holding company LOG Investment in 1948.¹⁶ At this time, the site contained two-story commercial buildings constructed only a few decades earlier. On February 28, 1948, demolition permits for the existing "brick stores and tenement" granted Aalco Wrecking permission to begin clearing the site for new construction. Shortly thereafter, both the *Post-Dispatch* and *Globe-Democrat* reported that construction of the new Wellston J.C. Penney store was underway. Two months later on May 19, 1948, building permit 10674

alone, post-world War II Modern department store building in St. Louis City, its demolition in December 1994 for a proposed big box development marked the end of an era for city retailing.

¹² Charles Goedde, Lawrence Goedde's son, quoted in "L. O. Goedde Sr. Left \$1,540,354 Estate," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 16, 1956.

¹³ City of St. Louis Assessor's Office Deed Abstracts.

¹⁴ Clarissa Start, "Ding-Dong Dollies of the Wellston Line," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 25, 1962.

¹⁵ This decision, of course, is unique to the Wellston store, as the company chose to relocate the Morganford location (the second St. Louis Penney's) to a parcel on Hampton in 1949. The company's fourth St. Louis location at 2715 Cherokee Street opened in 1935 in a south side commercial district well-served by transportation.

¹⁶ City of St. Louis Assessor's Office Deed Abstracts.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 9

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

articulated the scope of the new construction project: a “two story brick department store” would soon rise, providing Modern quarters for the neighborhood store.¹⁷ May 20, 1948 brought news in the *Daily Record* that George Cousins Contracting would build the 100 by 200 foot structure to a design by local architect William P. McMahon, who at this time collaborated with his sons.

William P. McMahon & Sons

Fresh from wartime drafting work at Laister-Kauffmann Aircraft Corporation, seventy-three year old William Preston McMahon (1875-1955) accepted the 1948 Wellston J.C. Penney commission, which would become a masterwork of his career.

Born in St. Louis on March 17, 1875 to Irish immigrant and painting contractor John McMahon, William P. McMahon began studies at age 17 in drafting at Ranken Technical College.¹⁸ Later serving as a draftsman for local architect Ernest Preisler beginning in 1893, he opened a private architectural practice in the Wainwright Building (NHL 5/10/1968) in 1907.¹⁹ He received commissions for single-family homes and multiple dwelling tenements in revival styles throughout the 1910s, working primarily in the west central and northern portions of St. Louis City and nearby areas of St. Louis County including the Parkview subdivision of University City.²⁰ A two-story brick store and tenement building at 5752-54 Easton Avenue from 1909 reflects the undistinguished nature of his early commercial designs.²¹ Despite being rejected by the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects for membership in 1917, McMahon continued to have a successful career, designing many noted cultural and religious facilities, including Annie Malone’s Poro College for cosmetology products education in the Ville neighborhood of St. Louis.²² Another important institutional commission was Our Lady of Lourdes Church in University City, which McMahon designed in 1917 during a brief collaboration with architect Guy Study.²³

¹⁷ City of St. Louis Microfilm Department.

¹⁸ Landmarks Association staff interview with William P. McMahon, Jr., grandson of Wm. P. McMahon, 5/5/1982, on file at the Landmarks Association. (Hereafter cited as “Interview.”)

¹⁹ *ibid*; Landmarks Association architect files: William P. McMahon.

²⁰ St. Louis City Building Permits; Parkview National Register Nomination

²¹ 2006 Landmarks Association Architectural Survey of Dr. Martin Luther King Drive

²² Poro College (demolished), located at Pendleton and St. Ferdinand, was the hub of Mrs. Malone’s successful business. She became St. Louis’s first black millionaire after developing and selling popular cosmetics and hair treatments especially for blacks.

²³ Esley Hamilton to Tom Duda, correspondence, 7/26/2006.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 10

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

With the onset of World War I, McMahon took a job at a local steel company as a draftsman, designing industrial facilities for wartime production.²⁴ Upon the conclusion of the war, he returned to private practice only to suspend work for one year during the Great Depression. Following this suspension of work, he closed his downtown office and began to operate out of his home.²⁵ By 1932, McMahon relocated to Clayton and opened a new office on Forsyth, which he operated with his son Bernard, who was a recent graduate of the Washington University School of Architecture.²⁶ During this time, the firm received commissions for institutional projects, including renovations to the University City Hall and plans for the St. Mary Magdalene School in St. Louis. In the early 1940s, the McMahons designed renovations to the rectory and school at St. Joseph's Church in Clayton.²⁷

During World War II, a lack of private commissions led William P. McMahon to take a job with Laister-Kauffmann Aircraft Corporation, manufacturer of innovative cargo gliders.²⁸ Just as he had done during World War I, McMahon put his drafting and design expertise to work in a modern industrial setting. Between 1941 and 1945, the Laister-Kauffmann Corporation had contracts with the Army Air Corps to produce its innovative "Trojan Horse" cargo glider, which could land in a shorter space than powered cargo planes and more efficiently load and unload cargo through a back hatch below its fixed wings.²⁹ Following his work drafting aerodynamic modern aircraft, William P. McMahon approached the Wellston J.C. Penney Building commission with vigor, aggressively conveying his mastery of Modern design. In collaboration with his son, Bernard, William P. McMahon would apply his newfound appreciation for Modernism in the design of Wellston's 1948 J.C. Penney Store.

The Modern Store

As the first-known post-war building design by William P. McMahon & Sons and one of few International Style structures in the City of St. Louis during this period,³⁰ the

²⁴ Landmarks Association staff interview, 5/5/1982.

²⁵ April 1982 Landmarks Association staff interview with William P. McMahon, Jr.

²⁶ Esley Hamilton to Tom Duda, electronic mail, 7/26/2006.

²⁷ Interview, 5/5/1982.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ David W. Ostrowski, "The Trojan Horse from St. Louis," *Journal of the American Aviation Historical Society*, Fall, 1992: 191-200.

³⁰ The 1941 Post-Dispatch Printing Building (NR 8/29/1984) was the first International Style structure in the City of St. Louis; although there is no comprehensive survey of Modern buildings in St. Louis City, a restrictive building code discouraged many architects from attempting innovative designs that relied upon

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 11

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Wellston J. C. Penney reflects many Modernist influences. Unquestionably, William P. McMahon's wartime experience as a draftsman of streamlined gliders enhanced his skills as an architect, for the J. C. Penney building exhibits many refinements lacking in his pre-war attempts at Modern design. His 1925 design for St. Mary Magdalene School is one such example. A three-story brick structure, the building contains few features of note, standing as a large volume with flat roof stripped of most ornament and defined by large windows. In contrast, the greater complexity of the J. C. Penney design reflects the beneficial effect of William P. McMahon's collaboration with his son Bernard.

Bernard, as a 1930 graduate of the Washington University School of Architecture, entered his father's profession during a period in which architects became increasingly aware of the formal qualities that defined contemporary Modern architecture in Europe. Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's 1932 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art attracted widespread attention to such works by masters including Le Corbusier and Adolf Loos, whose work the two defined as representing a new International Style of Modern architecture. The *Post-Dispatch* interviewed Bernard about his work during this period:

In the late 1930s McMahon, just out of...architecture school, was a hungry and adventurous young designer who freelanced wherever he could find work. His first house, at 7 Warson Terrace in 1936 was a shocker—"You should have heard the neighbors," [Bernard said.]—in full-blown...Streamline Moderne style, with smooth white stucco walls and glass blocks.³¹

Following a 1939 trip to California, Bernard began to modulate his initially strident Modern aesthetic by softening his designs with contextual allusions. Work during the 1940s with his father, William P. McMahon, gave Bernard an opportunity to continue to mature as an architect. Their 1948 Wellston J.C. Penney Building served as an important collaborative project for both McMahons, who brought unique strengths to the design process. Bernard's mastery of Modern design and experience in articulating plaster facades ensured that the building would fully embody the principles of the International Style, while William Preston's experience designing institutional and commercial

new materials and modes of construction. In 1960, the City ushered in a new era for architects with the implementation of a "performance" building code that did not specify which materials one could use. The new code immediately prompted a flurry of design activity that led to a sustained boom of new Modern construction.

³¹ Frank Peters, "L.A.'s Black Architect And St. Louis' Early Ranch Houses," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 16, 1980.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 12

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

structures in urban areas helped give their finished building an appropriate scale and relationship to the streetscape of the Wellston Loop. In 1950, Bernard McMahan articulated his guiding philosophy of design:

I have fought long and hard for my belief in a modern-contemporary style that embodies neither the extremes of modernism nor the imitativeness of conventionalism...I have worked to develop a type of design that is creatively modern without being clinical or garish...³²

This explanation of objectives provides a theoretical basis for interpreting and understanding the distinctive nature of his and his father's design for the Wellston J.C. Penney Building.

Like other architects who worked in the International Style during this period, the McMahans chose to sheath their Modern building in stucco set on metal lath, giving the exterior a consistent white appearance. Differing contexts influence the store's primary Easton Avenue façade and the secondary rear façade, as the front employs a dynamic interplay of textures, projections, and materials that relate the structure to its sloping site. Horizontal window surrounds that gently protrude outward from west to east echo the effects of the site's grade that slopes upward in the same direction. Columns exposed on the first floor continue upward through the interior of the second and third floors, reappearing on the exterior again as supports for a slightly projecting, flat roofed cornice with unique rounded cutout above the building's flat roof. Although the *Globe-Democrat* described the Wellston J.C. Penney as an exemplary work of "functional modern design,"³³ the building proved to have contextual allusions as well.

Granite facing on the first floor columns in addition to granite and dark grey terrazzo at the base of the storefront's inset entry contrast with the stark white stucco of the primary façade's upper levels. Described by the *Post-Dispatch* as "...a novel entrance-way—a sweeping French curve inset from the front line of the building and finished with floor-to-ceiling glass panels,"³⁴ the primary storefront entrance welcomed pedestrians from then-bustling Easton Avenue (see figure). Above this entrance, the building's white stucco facing becomes dynamic, transitioning from a smooth surface on the westernmost bay to

³² Josephine Walter, "New House Built in Modern-Contemporary Style: Home at 12 Berkshire, Just Off Clayton Road, Attracting Unusual Amount of Attention and Comment—Designed by Its Architect Owner," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 18, 1950.

³³ "Start J.C. Penney Wellston Store," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 11, 1948.

³⁴ "Work Started On New Store For Wellston," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 11, 1948.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

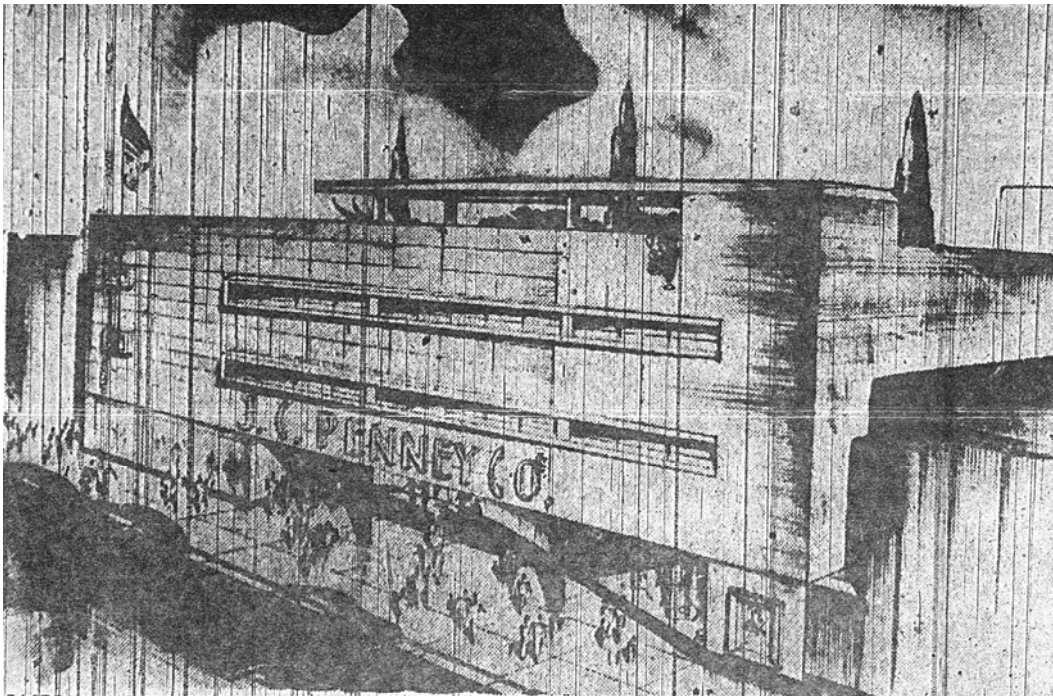
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 13

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

an incised grid on bays to the east. In contrast, the smooth stucco walls with flush metal sash windows on the rear façade present a stark image facing the parking lot. Curving sidewalls on the rear stairwell and a flat-roofed door hood with rectangular cutouts soften the rear façade's appearance, welcoming customers from the parking area. The *Post-Dispatch* described this relationship: "The store [has] no "back door." The south side of the building, facing the parking lot, [is] a "main entrance" as well as the north side, where it fronts on Easton Avenue."³⁵

In its massing, siting, and materials, the Wellston J.C. Penney represents the successful application of Modern design to a post-World War II, stand-alone urban department store. William and Bernard McMahon's sensitivity to the facility's urban, architectural and commercial contexts ensured that their masterwork would maintain its prominence in the Wellston Loop for decades after opening.



EASTON AVENUE PROJECT—Sketch from the office of William P. McMahon & Sons, architects of new store for the J.C. Penney Co., which L.O. Goedde is building on the south side of Easton avenue (west of Hamilton). General contract has been let to the George L. Cousins Contracting Co. Several small buildings were demolished to make way for the new project. (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 11, 1948)

³⁵ *ibid.*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 14

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Store 1396 Reopens

The exact opening date of the new store building is unknown, but the city issued a building permit for a \$12,000 concrete parking lot at the rear of the store on April 9, 1949. On May 3, 1949, another permit for installation of the permanent J. C. Penney sign on the spandrel above the store's inset entrance suggests that the facility was finished slightly over a year after construction began.³⁶ The *Post-Dispatch* reported:

Moving into the new building will constitute an expansion of operations for Penney, which already has a large store on Easton Avenue, a little farther west. The personnel of the company's present store will form the nucleus of an enlarged staff to be required in the new building.³⁷

Spaces in the new facility served functions specific to the new store, according to the *Globe-Democrat*: "The basement, first and second floors will be devoted to general merchandising. A restaurant will be located in the basement, and executive offices will be on the balcony."³⁸

Manager Roy Johnson oversaw the successful move from 5976 to 5930 Easton before transferring to California in 1950. Dale Patrick, a Penney's manager from Camden, New Jersey, became the Wellston manager in November of 1950 in time for the store's second holiday shopping season.³⁹ Encouraged by J. C. Penney's \$600,000⁴⁰ investment in the area, investors from other real estate firms began to purchase properties on Easton Avenue. *The St. Louis Globe-Democrat* reported on June 5, 1949 that a 100 foot wide parcel containing stores and offices just one block from the Wellston Penney's sold to a New York investment company for \$233,000, speaking to the continued vitality and vibrancy of the commercial district anchored by the new department store.⁴¹

Aided by its accessibility to customers who traveled by car, the Wellston J.C. Penney grew its customer base throughout the 1950s. By this time, Penney's had four St. Louis locations; the Wellston and Hampton Village stores were the newest and largest. To meet customer demand, Goedde Real Estate received an occupancy permit for a lower

³⁶ City of St. Louis Active Building Permit Records.

³⁷ "Work Started On New Store For Wellston," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 11, 1948.

³⁸ "Start J.C. Penney Wellston Store," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 11, 1948.

³⁹ "Store History."

⁴⁰ "Work Started..." *SLPD*, April 11, 1948.

⁴¹ "New Yorkers Buy \$233,000 Easton Parcel," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, June 5, 1949.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 15

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

tier of parking immediately south of the original parking lot in April of 1953; (the company cleared this land at 5937-57 Wells Avenue of its “two story tenements” in March of 1952).⁴² Encouraged by increased sales, the Wellston store under manager Patrick expanded product offerings beyond its core clothing business to include garden, beauty, and electronics departments, which helped Penney’s to attract even more business from downtown department stores.⁴³

In an August 10, 1956 opinion piece in the *Globe-Democrat*, Laurence E. Mallinckrodt, president of downtown’s Scruggs-Vandervoort-Barney department store, acknowledged the challenges presented by “so-called discount houses and certain national chains,” arguing:

Department stores, which because of heavy capital investments in downtown properties, were cautious in acting on the trend toward recentralization [sic], yet moved aggressively to improve their position in the face of chain and supermarket competition and more than maintain their proportion of the consumer’s dollar.⁴⁴

Mallinckrodt explains that downtown department stores were hesitant to embrace decentralized, suburban retailing. While downtown stores finally opened their first branch locations in the same year as the completion of J.C. Penney’s 1948 Wellston facility, Penney’s history of retailing in St. Louis neighborhoods gave it a competitive advantage in the early post-war era. *The Globe-Democrat* confirmed this trend toward suburban shopping: “From 1954 to 1958, retail sales in the central business district declined 3.3 percent, while sales in the...metropolitan area advanced 13.6 percent. Sales in the area outside the central business district rose 15.9 percent.”⁴⁵ The Wellston J.C. Penney capitalized on its location in a dense, urban commercial district adjacent to suburbs, taping the strengths of both markets.

Epilogue

At the end of 1955, Louis Benn, a Penney’s manager from Charleston, West Virginia, succeeded store manager Dale Patrick. Benn, upon his arrival, noted that the Wellston

⁴² City of St. Louis Microfilm Department.

⁴³ “Store History.”

⁴⁴ Mallinckrodt, Laurence E., “Department Stores Meet New Retailing Challenges,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, August 10, 1956.

⁴⁵ “St. Louis Area Continued Shift to Suburban Shopping in 1961,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 13, 1962.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 16

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

store was “crowded” and in need of an expansion.⁴⁶ In 1967, a warehouse addition (now demolished) on the parcel west of the store helped alleviate the overcrowding. With coincident improvements to the interior, the Wellston J. C. Penney became a “New Image” store, along with new locations at Northwest Plaza and South County Shopping Center, which came to feature the company’s highest quality merchandise.⁴⁷ Goedde Real Estate remained the owner and manager of the property, serving as an attentive steward for William P. McMahon’s exceptional building. By 1976, however, trends that enabled the Wellston store to be successful through the 1950s and 60s propelled shoppers even further westward; changing neighborhood demographics hastened the company’s departure. September 11, 1976 brought the store’s closure and the end of the building’s occupancy. Goedde Real Estate retained the property until 1998, at which time the company forfeited the deed. In 2000, the deed transferred to Realty Renaissance Resources, a company that hopes to spark renewed interest in preserving this once lively area of the city.

Integrity

The Wellston J. C. Penney retains an extraordinary level of integrity despite 30 years of vacancy. Slight water damage to the exceptional stucco façade and the removal of front doors are the primary concerns. Interior alterations dating to 1967 are non-original yet do not detract from the most significant features of William P. McMahon’s open floor plan of soaring volumes. The building located at 5930 Martin Luther King Drive in St. Louis retains integrity of location, setting, materials, workmanship, association and feeling, conveying its important role as a department store in the Wellston commercial district.

⁴⁶ “Store History.”

⁴⁷ “‘New Image’ Penny Store to be Dedicated,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 12, 1967.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 9 Page 17

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 9 Page 18

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

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William P. McMahon, Jr., grandson of William P. McMahon, interviews with Landmarks Association Staff, April 1982 and May 5, 1982, Landmarks Association Architect Files: William P. McMahon.

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 10/photo Page 19

Wellston J.C. Penney Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property at 5930 Dr. Martin Luther King occupies a 100' by 223.5' lot on City Block 3837 in the city of St. Louis, Missouri. The parcel number for the building is 13837000150 in the City Assessor's Office. The property is lot 4 on Block 5-N of Gamble's second subdivision of Rose Hill, fronting 100' on the south line of Dr. Martin Luther King Drive and 223.5' to a 15' wide alley at the rear of the site.

Boundary Justification

The nominated parcel includes all of the property historically associated with William P. McMahon & Sons's design for the Wellston J.C. Penney Building.

Photo Log:

The following is true for all photographs:

Wellston J.C. Penney Building

St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Photographer: Michael Allen

Date: December 5, 2008

Location of Negatives: Digital Images supplied on CD

1. View toward front elevation looking southeast.
2. View toward rear elevation looking northeast.
3. View toward rear elevation looking northwest.
4. View of parking lot looking slightly northwest.



(GRANITE CITY)
2961 11 NW
7 MI. TO INTERSTATE 55

3 MI. TO
5 MI. TO INTE

Wellston J.C. Penney
5930 Dr. Martin Luther King Drive
St. Louis [independent city], MO

Zone 15
Easting 736 400
Northing 11283 880



The main building is a three-story structure with a white, grid-patterned facade. It features a prominent cantilevered upper section supported by a few columns. The facade shows signs of wear, including peeling paint and exposed brick on the right side. The ground floor has several large, dark, possibly metal, roll-up doors or gates. A single light-colored door is visible on the right side of the ground floor. The building is situated on a street corner.

To the left of the main building is a two-story brick building. It has a series of vertical windows on the upper floor and a colorful mural on the ground floor. A street lamp is visible in front of it. Further left, a red brick building is partially visible. Several cars are parked along the street in front of these buildings.



Faded blue graffiti on the lower part of the building's facade.





