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NPS MARKS PURCHASE OF HISTORIC MISSOURI AVENUE  
CITIZENS WORK TO PRESERVE ADJACENT LANDMARK SCHOOL  
Ceremony Set for Wednesday, April 23"\* at 6 p.m.

Today's Date -- April 21, 2003

On Wednesday, the National Park Service celebrates the purchase of a small, but significant silver of land on Missouri Avenue, N.W. near Fort Stevens, the Civil War site where Lincoln watched Union and Confederate forces battle for control over Washington, D.C.

Meanwhile, the fate of the adjacent landmark school, which is important to the interpretation of the area's African American and Civil War history, is uncertain, and the focus of efforts on the part of several community groups. The National Park Service ceremony takes place on the Missouri Avenue site between 13th and 14th Streets, N.W., on April 23 at 6 p.m. It marks the purchase of less than one acre of wooded, vacant land adjoining the trail to Fort Stevens. The acquisition is part of the National Park Service's ongoing effort, started in the 1930's, to link the metropolitan area's network of remaining Civil War forts.

The National Park Trust, a nonprofit organization, purchased the land last year from a private owner who wanted to build townhouses there- The Park Trust held it for transfer to the National Park Service.

"We are so grateful to the National Park Trust for making this acquisition by the Park Service possible," said Charles Powell, the president of the Military Road School Alumni Association, a "Friends" group working to preserve and protect the adjacent Military Road School. "This small piece of land is essential to preserving and interpreting the history of Fort Stevens, Rock Creek Ford Road, also a designated historic site, the old African-American community of "Vinegar Hill," and the neighborhood now known as Brightwood," Powell said.

The Military Road School sits next to the National Park Service land, and the Association wants to purchase the School for use as a community center and as a place to showcase and interpret the area's Civil War and African American history. There is currently no interpretation center for Fort Stevens. The vacant school, a designated D.C. historic landmark now owned by the D.C. government, was designed by the notable Washington architect Snowden Ashford and built in 1911. The existing school replaced the original

school, which was started in 1864 in one of the barracks from Fort Stevens.

The school was always a focal point for the residents. Vinegar Hill, the oldest community of freed Negro slaves within the District of Columbia, was first settled by former slaves around 1820. Fort Stevens was built on land taken from Mrs. Betty Thomas, a free Negro woman.

The Military Road School closed in 1954 at the end of the segregated school era in Washington and has had several intermittent, but temporary uses since that time. It has four small classrooms, and much of the interior remains unchanged since its closing.

Military Road is one of 11 surplus school buildings designated by the Mayor for use only by Charter Schools, and seven others have space available for lease, according to city documents. A city group, the Latin American Montessori Bilingual School, wants to buy the Military Road School for a yet-undisclosed price. City officials at the DC Office of Property Management, who are responsible for selling the building, have refused to meet with the Alumni Association to discuss the site.

"Military Road is such a small school, and many others are available within the city for charter school purchase or lease. We want the city to see how the Military Road School could become a magnet for tourism and a tool for the economic development of Georgia Avenue, as well as a resource for the community around it," Powell said.

"Preserving the Military Road School as a visitors' center and historic site gives the National Park Service, the City Museum, and the African American community an unprecedented opportunity to tell, not just the story of Fort Stevens, but also the story of Vinegar Hill, and the way life was lived here in the 19th century," he added.