

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form**

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Missouri District Warehouse

other names/site number Weston Tobacco Warehouse; Weston Burley House No. 1

**2. Location**

street & number 357 Main Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Weston [N/A] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Platte code 165 zip code 64098

**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 [ ]  
nationally [ X ] statewide [ ] locally.

( See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ]. )

*Mark A. Miles*

*MAY 27, 2010*

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**

I hereby certify that the property is:

[ ] entered in the National Register  
See continuation sheet [ ].

[ ] determined eligible for the  
National Register  
See continuation sheet [ ].

[ ] determined not eligible for the  
National Register.

[ ] removed from the  
National Register

[ ] other, explain  
See continuation sheet [ ].

Signature of the Keeper

Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**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	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district		sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site		structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		Total
		1	

Name of related multiple property listing.

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

AGRICULTURE: processing  
 AGRICULTURE: storage  
 OTHER: tobacco auction warehouse

**Current Functions**

AGRICULTURE: storage  
 AGRICULTURE: processing  
 SOCIAL: meeting hall  
 COMMERCE: warehouse  
 OTHER: tobacco auction house

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

OTHER: tobacco auction warehouse

**Materials**

foundation CONCRETE  
 walls METAL  
 roof METAL  
 other BRICK

**Narrative Description**

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

**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**

Agriculture  
Commerce

**Periods of Significance**  
1937-1960

**Significant Dates**  
N/A

**Significant Person(s)**  
N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**  
N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Hufford Construction Co.

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**Acreage of Property approximately two acres**UTM References**

A. Zone 15 Easting 336180 Northing 4263820

B. Zone Easting Northing

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 Roger Maserang/Historianorganization State Historic Preservation Office date April 10, 2010street & number P.O. Box 176 telephone (573) 522-4641city or town Jefferson City state MO zip code 65102**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 Kenneth F. Kisker/President and Sandra K. Kisker/Office Manager (husband and wife)street & number 25205 Kisker Road telephone (816) 330-3523city or town Platte City state Missouri zip code 64079

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Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 1

**Missouri District Warehouse  
Platte County, Missouri**

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### Summary

The Missouri District Warehouse (Weston Burley House No. 1),<sup>1</sup> located at 357 Main Street in downtown Weston, Missouri, is a sprawling, two-story, steel-frame building sheathed with corrugated metal. Constructed in 1937 as a loose-leaf tobacco auction warehouse and curing barn, the rectangular structure measures 125 feet along its primary southeast elevation on Main Street by 300 feet along the elevation parallel to Market Street. The slightly ramshackle building has a skylight-studded, shallow-gabled metal roof. On the long southeast to northwest axis is an enclosed side aisle. The building's sliding doors serve a dual purpose: as vehicle entrances and for ventilation as part of the burley tobacco curing process. A significant portion of the building is a 35,000 square foot sales floor with a surface of thick oak boards. An elaborate system of steel posts and rails used to hang a portion of each year's crop for curing is intact. An elevator used for moving sold tobacco from the sales floor to the basement where it was processed for shipping is intact, as is the old scale house. Modern offices have been constructed on the main floor along the Main Street elevation, but the original offices remain in the basement. If the calendar could be turned back, Weston Burley House No. 1 probably could handle another tobacco auction on very short notice. In fact burley, a variety used primarily for cigarettes, is still cured, stripped and graded here and shipped by truck to markets in other states. Although the last auction was in 2001, the building continues to reflect all of its historic, tobacco-related functions both inside and out. It retains all seven aspects of integrity.

### Elaboration

Weston's Main Street slopes downhill past Weston Burley House No. 1, ending at the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy (aka the Burlington) railroad right-of-way which runs parallel to Bear Creek. The site of Weston Burley House No. 2 (historically known as the Hull Brothers Warehouse, Independent Warehouse, etc., which burned in 1998) is parallel to the track just beyond Sur-Glo, a small commercial property. A siding curves to a loading dock in the rear of the nominated building. A gravel driveway between Sur-Gro and the warehouse starts on Main Street, circles around the back of the building and enters Market Street which runs northwest-southeast (most of Weston's streets run either northwest-southeast or northeast-southwest, having been aligned with the Missouri River when it flowed nearby). The former Burlington depot, constructed in 1922, is on the opposite side of Main Street across from the vacant lot where Weston Burley House No. 2 once stood. Weston's City Hall is in the old depot today. The historic downtown begins just northeast of the nominated property.

Although Weston Burley House No.1 is within the boundary of the Weston Historic District (NR

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<sup>1</sup>Built on the site of the Weston Loose Leaf Tobacco Warehouse which burned in 1936, the Missouri District Warehouse of the Missouri District Warehousing Corporation has been known as the Farmers' Cooperative Warehouse and the Planter's Warehouse (at least in the local press, if not officially), as well as the Missouri District Warehouse. It was named Weston Burley House No. 1 in the 1990s.

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listed 8/21/72), and the commercial significance of the tobacco warehouses was acknowledged in that document, they were not considered historic properties at the time because of their age (the focus was on 19<sup>th</sup> century residential and commercial buildings). Consequently Weston Burley House No. 1 is being individually nominated so the story of the tobacco saga and this buildings' role can be properly told.

Built in the spring and early summer of 1937 (as the Missouri District Warehouse), Weston Burley House No. 1 has a concrete foundation and a full basement with a slab floor. The contractor was the Hufford Construction Company of Kansas City, Missouri. The building's primary steel framework consists of 20 heavy supports from front to back with five across each bay, a total of 100. Twenty of the posts are on the outer wall of the loading zone and the rest extend from the roof to the basement. The sales floor is supported by additional steel posts in the basement. All of the posts rest on concrete piers with footings. Some of the side supports and other structural components are wood. A Hufford blueprint (dated March 12, 1937) indicates that concrete retaining walls—presumably from a warehouse that burned in 1936—were “patched” into the current design along the upper or northeast elevation.

Because of the sloping terrain, building height varies from façade to façade. The ridge of the shallow gabled roof is approximately centered in the primary southeast elevation along Main Street, some 34 feet above grade. The stub of an internal brick chimney projects from the ridge at the front of the building. A metal WESTON BURLEY HOUSE sign extends at a right angle from the upper portion of this 125-foot façade. There are, in effect, three tiers or courses of corrugated metal panels in this elevation, punctuated by four double-hung 6/3 window units at the basement level. These windows have been covered on the inside for safety reasons and for insulation. There is also a small square window higher up in the Main Street elevation, but the rest of the building is windowless. A former entrance into an original waiting room is covered with corrugated metal.

At the northeast end of the Main Street façade is a sliding door and the entrance to a 15-foot wide passage with a cinder surface that traverses the length of the 300-foot structure before exiting at the opposite end. Vehicles used this side aisle to access a scale house near the middle of the building where their cargo of tobacco was unloaded and weighed.

In addition to providing vehicle access, the building's various sliding doors were opened and closed as needed to facilitate the drying process. After the leaves turned from green to yellow and then to brown, moisture had to be reintroduced to make the tobacco flexible enough to be handled without crumbling. Opening the doors allowed damp air to circulate throughout the building. Steps lead from the Main Street entrance to the basement.

The roof of Weston Burley House No. 1 contains 157 fixed skylights, each measuring 4 feet by 6 feet. A tobacco sales warehouse needed abundant natural lighting because prior to an auction,

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Missouri District Warehouse  
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the tobacco had to be graded and its exact color—ideally a rich, golden brown—was an important factor in determining the amount of money that it would bring. New skylights were installed in 1955.<sup>2</sup>

The southwest elevation has three vehicle entrances with sliding doors. These entrances access the basement area where tobacco was processed for shipment to the companies of successful buyers. The entrance nearest to Main Street has a concrete loading dock measuring 21 feet by 25 feet. The middle entrance has a much smaller concrete dock with a metal awning (added in the 1980s).

The interior retains its original floor plan with the exception of five offices on the Main Street end of the sales floor, which were added in 1993. These are above a row of five original offices in the basement. The original offices consist of two buyer rooms, a pay office, a “calculatory” room and a waiting room. The waiting room (in the middle of the row) measures 14 feet by 20 feet and the other four rooms measure 14 feet by 10 feet. The double-hung windows visible on Main Street (now covered on the inside) are in these offices. The nonoriginal rooms on the sales floor are slightly larger but have essentially the same functions as the old offices, and restrooms have been installed in the waiting room. In the “conference” room, a tall safe thought to have been salvaged from the 1936 fire contains abstracts, deeds, blueprints and other historic records of the warehouse and its operations. A pay window is between the waiting room and main office. Most of the newer offices have windows with a view of the sales floor.

The original scale house, measuring 15 feet by 25 feet, is on the sales floor near the lower end of the side aisle or loading zone. The scales themselves are old, but not original. As each basket or pallet of tobacco arrived for an auction, farmers could note its weight as it was conveyed past a window before being put on the floor to be graded by government graders and sold. A freight elevator, used for lowering tobacco lots from the sales floor to the basement for packing and shipping to the companies represented by the buyers, is near the offices. Originally gravity-operated, it was equipped with an electric motor decades ago.

A basement workroom is along the northeast wall. Near the elevator, sold tobacco was compressed and placed in large barrels called hogsheads which were loaded into boxcars. The tobacco press is gone, but its concrete base (apparently constructed by Hufford Construction Company) is extant. Currently and for many years, heavy farm machinery has been stored in the lower end of the basement. City-owned vehicles are also stored in the basement.

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<sup>2</sup> Weston *Chronicle*, “Warehouse Ready to Receive Tobacco,” Nov. 18, 1955.

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Missouri District Warehouse  
Platte County, Missouri

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### Summary

Constructed in 1937, the Missouri District Warehouse at 357 Main Street in Weston, Missouri, is significant under National Register Criterion A in the areas of AGRICULTURE and COMMERCE. The warehouse, currently known as Weston Burley House No. 1, is an important representative of the tobacco culture that once made Weston the biggest loose-leaf tobacco market west of the Mississippi River.<sup>3</sup> Each winter for decades, buyers from the major tobacco companies—Lorillard, American, R. J. Reynolds, Liggett & Myers and others—gathered here and in Weston's other sales warehouses to bid on the region's white burley crop. Because of its quality, Weston's burley tobacco (used for cigarettes) often sold for prices rivaling if not exceeding what was paid to growers in the big eastern markets including Kentucky's famed Bluegrass Region. Throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in fact, it was tobacco revenue that largely sustained Weston economically. As the last of Missouri's old tobacco sales warehouses, Weston Burley House No. 1 has statewide significance. The period of significance begins with the first auction on its sales floor in 1937 and ends in 1960, the arbitrary 50-year closing date for properties where activities begun historically continue to have importance but no more-specific date can be defined. The local burley market ended in 2002, reflecting changes in the industry and a diminishing demand for tobacco. Since then, Weston Burley House No. 1 has continued to serve tobacco farmers in Platte County as a curing barn and shipping center, but now the local crop goes directly to manufacturers or to sales markets in other states. The facility is otherwise used by its community in various ways ranging from benefits and school reunions to estate sales, square dances and the storage of heavy machinery. Despite a few minor changes, the building easily retains integrity and remains a significant and prominent reminder of Weston's once-thriving tobacco market.

### Elaboration

The Missouri District Warehouse, aka Weston Burley House No. 1, is the last of Weston's historic old tobacco auction houses, all of which apparently were located near the tracks of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad (aka the Burlington) at the foot of Main Street. Unfortunately, none of Weston's first wave of tobacco warehouses survived a 1936 fire. That blaze destroyed three big warehouses, only two of which were rebuilt—the nominated property and Hull's Independent Warehouse, more recently known as Weston Burley House No. 2. Hull's/Burley House No. 2 was itself destroyed in a 1998 conflagration attributed to an arsonist. Another tobacco outlet (New Deal Tobacco Warehouse) is extant just outside of Weston but is a relatively modern building compared with the nominated property. Built in about 1964, New

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<sup>3</sup> So far as could be determined, Weston was also the *only* tobacco market (where tobacco was sold by auction to buyers from the major tobacco companies) west of the Mississippi. Although surpassed in terms of production by other states in the "burley belt" that also includes Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, Ohio, North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia, Missouri often harvested five or six million pounds of burley tobacco annually and still produces upwards of three million pounds. The bulk of Missouri's tobacco is grown in Platte County.

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Deal burned in 1967, was rebuilt and is a feed store today.

In Missouri between Kansas City and St. Joseph, tobacco barns still dot the landscape but they are getting harder to find.<sup>4</sup> Some growers still bring their crop into Weston for curing, but many others use their own facilities as they have always done. From a distance, a tobacco barn may look much like a general purpose barn but closer inspection will show walls with hinged panels that can be opened and closed to provide air circulation and moisture as required during the highly sensitive curing process. Missouri currently harvests more than three million pounds of burley tobacco annually, and nearly all of it is grown in the clay-rich soil of Platte and Buchanan counties.<sup>5</sup> Still, this is only about half as much as was grown here during the latter part of the 1937-1960 period of significance. While there are several varieties of burley tobacco, Weston area farmers currently grow what is known as Type 31 White Burley. When cured, this variety is slightly lighter in color than much of the tobacco harvested in eastern states.

"Tobacco is often referred to as 'the golden leaf' because of its value," said Sandra Kisker, who with her husband Kenneth Kisker operate the warehouse today. "Many farms, college educations, machinery and bills in general were paid for with the proceeds of the year's crop."<sup>6</sup>

Tobacco used to be grown on the Kansas side of the Missouri River as well, especially in Atchison and Leavenworth counties, but times have changed and little or none is harvested there today. Demand is down, the U.S. government no longer provides price support, and if anything, farmers are generally encouraged not to grow tobacco at all. Today the local burley crop may be sold on contract, with a grower committing his entire output to a single buyer. Or the tobacco may be sent to an auction or marketing center in another state. But even these outlets have dwindled. With numerous lawsuits pending against the tobacco industry, further changes may be ahead.

### Historical Background

Tiny Weston, with a population of 1,631 in 2000, was important long before it became a tobacco center due to its prime location on a bend of the Missouri River. Explorers Lewis & Clark had camped in the area in 1804. Settled by Southerners, Weston—the first settlement in the Platte Purchase, a six-county area ceded to Missouri by the Sac and Fox tribes in 1836—prospered in the 1840s and through most of the 1850s, mainly as a port for the nation's burgeoning overland freight traffic. Steamboats also unloaded supplies for Fort Leavenworth, on the Kansas side, and for awhile—until it was eclipsed by St. Joseph in 1860—Weston was the second largest city in

<sup>4</sup> In 1997, there were 166 tobacco farms in Platte County, accounting for 23.2 per cent of all farms, according to a July 2000 report by David J. Peters of the Missouri Department of Economic Development.

<sup>5</sup> Doug Rich, "Wet Weather Hampered Tobacco Harvest," *High Plains Journal*, December 15, 2008. Accessed electronically on 3/31/2010 at <http://www.hpi.com/archives/2008/dec08/dec15/Wetweatherhamperedtobaccoha.cfm>

<sup>6</sup> Mrs. Kisker's comments are contained in correspondence with preparer, April 2010.

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Missouri. Local farmers shipped hundreds of tons of hemp and tobacco as well as large quantities of pork, lard, wheat and furs from Weston. The slave-based, labor-intensive hemp and tobacco cultures declined following the Civil War, and Weston's population dwindled accordingly.<sup>7</sup>

During these early years and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the tobacco favored by local growers had dark, heavy leaves and was used for chewing rather than smoking. Much of this tobacco was processed in St. Louis, which at the turn of the century led the nation in manufacturing chewing tobacco and cigars.<sup>8</sup>

By the 1890s, however, tobacco was making a strong comeback as a money crop. Growing it was as labor-intensive as ever, but the demand was great enough to make it all worthwhile again.<sup>9</sup> In 1894, Weston area farmers W. H. Berry and Canby Hawkins shipped 14,000 pounds of locally grown tobacco to Kentucky where it sold for up to \$10.75 per hundred pounds, prompting the *Weston Chronicle* to brag that "Platte County can raise anything except white black birds." Another account has a shipment from Berry and Hawkins reportedly bringing the highest price on the Cincinnati, Ohio, tobacco market in 1896. This was a significant impetus for other local growers, and in 1908, the first warehouse where tobacco purchased by speculators from individual barns could be brought in for packing and shipping was reportedly constructed in Weston by Rumpel & Bless. While the Rumpel & Bless building was not a Weston sales warehouse per se (there were no auctions), it was a strong step in that direction. An important local grower during this early period was William R. Hull, who came to Platte County from Kentucky in the 1890s. Hull and his family would build and operate tobacco buildings in Weston over several decades.<sup>10</sup>

In January 1905, the *Weston Chronicle* reported the arrival of a carload of timber to make hogsheads (barrels) for the shipment of the 1904 crop and published the following names as

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7 Compiled from various sources including W. M. Paxton, *Annals of Platte County*, Kansas City: Hudson-Kimberly Publishers, 1897; Bertha J. Bless, *Weston-Queen of the Platte Purchase*, Weston, MO: Weston Chronicle Press, 1969; *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Platte County*, Philadelphia: Edward Brothers, 1877; "Platte County, Missouri," *Weston Chronicle*, Weston, MO., and *The Landmark*, Platte City, MO., Nov. 15, 1929; *Missouri: A Guide to the "Show Me" State*, New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941; and Stephen J. Raiche, "Weston Historic District" National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, June 23, 1972 (listed 8/21/72).

8 The Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co. Building, a drying house for the huge Liggett & Myers complex in St. Louis, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on 2/10/83.

9 Opinions vary as to exactly how labor-intensive it is. Up to 600 man-hours is needed to produce an acre of tobacco compared to only around 29 man-hours for an acre of corn, according to Shirley Althoff in "The People of Missouri's Tobacco Country are Filled with Worry," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat Sunday Magazine*, February 23, 1964. Dan Morgan, who has a farm north of Weston, estimated 200 hours per acre and called tobacco farming "a dirty, tiring job that requires a constant stream of labor," as reported by Christine Metz in "Tobacco Farms Keep Plugging," *Lawrence Journal-World*, September 17, 2007. The Burley Tobacco Growers Cooperative Association reckons 150 hours per acre.

10 "Platte County, Missouri," unpagged, and *Weston Chronicle*, November 17, 1894.

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“among those who raise tobacco [in this immediate vicinity]: Canby Hawkins, John W. McAdow, B. B. Fellows, John U. Dale, W. R. Hull, John Crockett, W. H. Berry, J. B. Doran, W. L. Stephens, C. D. Hall, R. L. Graves and Jack Sturgeon. Among those contemplating raising the weed may be mentioned J. E. Wells, who has just completed a large tobacco barn; M. C. Ferrell, Lenox Fellows and Lee Murphy will also build tobacco barns.” The 1904 crop totaled approximately 200,000 pounds and netted about ten cents per pound. That year each acre had produced an average yield of about 1,500 pounds.<sup>11</sup>

The history of early tobacco auction houses in Weston is somewhat sketchy, and what follows is probably an oversimplification, but in 1911 J. B. Doran and some other partners (apparently including William R. Hull) built Missouri’s first loose-leaf tobacco market there. This building is believed to have been constructed on the present site of Weston Burley House No. 1. When buyers representing the eastern manufacturers suddenly found it worth their while to do business in Weston, local growers responded by producing increasingly large crops. In 1912, Doran and his partners built a second tobacco sales warehouse in Weston. That year’s crop, estimated at 5,000,000 pounds, sold for an average of \$11.34 per hundred.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, by the 1950s and 1960s, it was not uncommon for more than 6,000,000 pounds of white burley tobacco to be marketed in a single season at Weston, the only loose-leaf tobacco market west of the Mississippi River. The “best” market apparently was in 1944, when 6,724,405 pounds was auctioned at an average price of \$50.12.<sup>13</sup>

In 1917-18, the two Doran warehouses reportedly were purchased by W. A. Gray (an early speculator credited with persuading local growers to switch to a more fashionable, lighter variety of tobacco more suitable for smoking than chewing) and A. A. Jones. In about 1923, Gray & Jones are said to have sold their buildings to a newly-established Farmers Cooperative, then leased them back a few years later. By 1928, the Gray & Jones warehouses apparently were called Planters Warehouse No. 1 and Planters Warehouse No. 2. A third tobacco sales warehouse in Weston during this period was operated by the Hull family.<sup>14</sup> Some of Weston’s early tobacco warehouses are depicted in a ca. 1920s photo (see Photo No. 15). The Weston Loose Leaf Tobacco Warehouse Company building is at the far right (the one with a broad gambrel roof). It stands on the future site of the Missouri District Warehouse/Weston Burley House No. 1.

Like many towns, Weston had its fair share of fires. But what the Platte City *Landmark* called “the worst fire in the history of Weston” occurred on the afternoon of August 4, 1936. The day of the fire, a Tuesday, had been hot and windy, and Mrs. Emma Margaret Beach Frye, then a high

<sup>11</sup> Weston *Chronicle*, January 12, 1905.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> “Barker’s Tobacco Report Received,” Weston *Chronicle*, April 29, 1949. The newspaper cited a 1948-49 report compiled by the R. M. Barker Tobacco Co., Inc., of Carrollton, Kentucky.

<sup>14</sup> Weston *Chronicle*, January 12, 1905.

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school student, remembers it vividly. Sparks from either a trash fire or a locomotive were believed to have ignited scrap tobacco in Planter's Warehouse No. 2, the newspaper said, although various rumors also flew. The commercial center was spared, but the blaze thoroughly gutted the tobacco district. Fire departments from Leavenworth, St. Joseph and Platte City joined local firefighters and were credited with keeping the inferno from doing even more damage.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of the cause, Mrs. Frye said, the fire apparently started at the Hull warehouse and traveled up the hill to the other warehouses.<sup>16</sup>

One of Mrs. Frye's classmates who watched the conflagration along with the rest of the townspeople was Jesse A. Pepper, who in 1962 became an owner of the nominated property when it was still known as the Missouri District Warehouse. Sandra Kisker, Jesse's daughter and one of the current owners, said that when her father spoke of the fire, he would jokingly refer to it as "the hottest election day that Weston ever had!" (Pepper, who grew up on a Weston tobacco farm, would have helped with small tasks such as carrying water, working with the plants and weeding the tobacco beds from the tender age of five or six, if not earlier. He was graduated from high school in 1938 and got married in 1941.)

The fire destroyed all three of the town's tobacco sales warehouses, a large curing barn, most of an ice plant, an apartment building, a small house, several outbuildings, more than 500,000 pounds of tobacco, approximately 100,000 tobacco sticks and \$10,000 worth of miscellaneous equipment. The destroyed warehouses were identified as Planters Warehouse No. 1 (built in 1911), Planters Warehouse No. 2 (built in 1912), and the Independent Warehouse (built in 1924 and expanded in 1929). The farmer-owned "planters" warehouses were operated by the Missouri District Warehousing Corporation. Warren E. Hall, a director of the corporation, was the manager. The Independent Warehouse had been built by William R. Hull. The large curing barn (built in 1934) was also owned by the Hull family. Nothing was adequately insured, but plans were made to rebuild at least two of the three warehouses.<sup>17</sup>

Actually, a new Hull Brothers Independent Warehouse was completed in time for the 1936-37 tobacco market, and a new Missouri District Warehouse (Weston Burley House No. 1) would be completed in time for the 1937-38 market. The Hull warehouse was somewhat larger but the new structures were of generally similar construction with corrugated metal walls, broad gable roofs with lots of skylights, vast amounts of floor space and numerous sliding doors to facilitate proper curing. Together, these two warehouses would serve the Weston tobacco market throughout the period of significance and beyond.

Apart from the fact that half a million pounds of tobacco went up in smoke that summer, the

<sup>15</sup> "Fire at Weston," Platte City *Landmark*, August 7, 1936.

<sup>16</sup> Mrs. Frye was interviewed by Mary L. Pepper, secretary and co-owner of Burley House No.1, in February 2010.

<sup>17</sup> "\$200,000 Fire Sweeps Tobacco Sales Area," Platte City *Landmark*, August 7, 1936. At least two current Weston residents, Mrs. Emma Margaret Beach Frye and T. J. Beach, still remember the 1936 fire.

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1936-37 market turned out to be a good one in all other respects. The opening day sale reached \$100,000 and averaged \$35 to \$36 per pound, a record. Altogether, grateful farmers sold 1,973,308 pounds of tobacco from the floor of the brand new Hull Warehouse for \$677,656. The average price was \$34.34 per pound.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile the Hulls, who basically saved the season by getting their new sales warehouse ready in time for the annual auction (the Weston tobacco market began each November or December and often continued into February) basked in glory: "The farmers are unusually well satisfied this year and general admiration and congratulation is being expressed for the Hull Bros., who took a chance and won," said the Weston *Chronicle* in a wrap-up story. "Unassisted they rallied their family finances together after the disastrous fire and in six weeks had a complete and new warehouse to take care of the farmers of this area. They hit a fine year and are already making plans to invest in an addition to the present building, in order to take care of the next crop."<sup>19</sup> The "Hull Brothers" referred to in the newspaper apparently were W. Browning Hull, George Hull, William Hull and Owen Lee Hull. Their father, William R. Hull, reportedly committed suicide in 1926.

As the 1936-37 tobacco season drew to a close, W. Browning Hull predicted a tobacco shortage and consequently an exceptionally profitable season in 1937-38, when the new Missouri District Warehouse would be back on line as well: "The opportunity of a lifetime presents itself to the tobacco grower next year," Hull told the *Chronicle*. "With something like fifty million pounds of tobacco lost in the Kentucky floods, and with a market already short, tobacco of a good quality should bring high prices next year. This is not an encouragement for growers to plant more than they can care for well, but it is a bid for every grower to give unusual attention to his crop—get it planted early, take good care of it, house it at the right time and bring a good quality leaf to market. ....It's the persistent, careful grower that comes out ahead at tobacco sales."<sup>20</sup>

#### Missouri District Warehouse/Weston Burley House No. 1, 1937-1960

As the last of Missouri's old tobacco sales warehouses, the Missouri District Warehouse, aka Weston Burley House No. 1, has statewide significance under National Register Criterion A in the areas of AGRICULTURE and COMMERCE. The building is the only link to the tobacco culture that once made Weston a bustling loose-leaf tobacco market west of the Mississippi River. Although the local tobacco amounted to only about one percent of the nation's burley crop, that was enough to pump millions of dollars into the area's economy, year after year, for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The two-story, metal-sheathed building today has a somewhat

18 "Warehouse Closes After Eventful Season," Weston *Chronicle*, Feb. 5, 1937. The *Chronicle* reported market results for each day, individually for each warehouse, including total weight of tobacco sold, total amount of money involved, high basket price and its seller, highest crop average and its grower.

19 Ibid.

20 "Warehouse Closes After Eventful Season," Weston *Chronicle*, February 5, 1937.

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ramshackle appearance which is exactly the way that a historic, 73-year-old tobacco auction house is supposed to look. The building is well-endowed with skylights to provide maximum natural illumination which was vital for precise grading of the burley that flowed across its sales floor. Sliding doors not only admitted vehicles but were opened for ventilation to facilitate drying initially and then to introduce moisture so the cured tobacco would be damp enough for handling without risk of damage. The first tobacco auction occurred here in 1937, the year of construction. The period of significance ends in 1960, the arbitrary 50-year cutoff date, but tobacco auctions continued in this building until a few years ago. Some Platte County growers still bring their crop here for curing in the late summer and fall, or to be processed for shipping, and its vast sales floor and basement are still used for various community functions.

With completion of the new Missouri District Warehouse in 1937, the Weston tobacco market immediately returned to its previous level of activity. While there was one less sales warehouse than before the 1936 fire, the two new warehouses were sufficiently large, with some 130,000 square feet of floor space between them, to more than compensate for the unreconstructed building. The new Missouri District Warehouse cost \$44,474.18, and equipment to make it operational cost an additional \$6,039.43.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the 1937-1960 period of significance, and beyond, the Missouri District Warehouse and the Hull Warehouse served area growers by providing a stage where, for several weeks each year, everything came together—the tobacco crop, government graders, auctioneers, local growers, and buyers representing the major tobacco companies—and the annual drama that originally put Weston on the nation's tobacco map could be played out. In a good year, five or six million pounds of burley, a thin-bodied, air-cured form of tobacco used for cigarettes, would be sold at Weston in the range of fifty or sixty cents a pound. With so much money changing hands, the opening of the Weston market (which roughly coincided with the start of the Christmas shopping season) was an exciting annual event attended by thousands. The crowd included many visitors who jammed the tobacco sales aisles, sharing in the drama along with growers, buyers and independent brokers.

Unlike the privately owned Hull Warehouse, the Missouri District Warehouse was a cooperative which had formed on December 3, 1923. The Missouri District Warehouse was owned throughout the period of significance by hundreds of stockholders, most of whom were also tobacco raisers. In a letter to the stockholders, dated September 1, 1945, President Warren E. Hall described the organization as “the world's only co-operative tobacco marketing agency in operation at this time.” Hall's letter stated that in the past [1944-45] season, the operation resulted in a net profit (after depreciation) of \$21,687.55. This money was used to pay off the last of the mortgage debt as well as provide dividends of three cents per share (the maximum allowed by law) plus a patronage dividend of twelve and one-half cents per hundred pounds of tobacco delivered during the season. Dividend checks were enclosed. Officers during this period

<sup>21</sup> This information was included as part of a financial statement in a notice to shareholders of the Missouri District Warehousing Corporation, dated October 26, 1943.

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in addition to Hall were J. W. Farley, R. S. Burns, Lee Murphy and Floyd Coons. The cooperative functioned until November 1962, when the stockholders voted to sell the business to an out-of-state firm.

In 1941, the New Deal Federal Writers' Project volume titled *Missouri: A Guide to the "Show Me" State* described, in evocative prose, Weston's tobacco market just four years after the nominated building was constructed:

During the winter months, when tobacco is graded and sold, great farm wagons and trucks, loaded high with the year's crop, crowd the highway and winding dirt roads. Buyers for Eastern tobacco companies descend on the village, and everyone is interested in the quantity, quality, and expected prices of White Burley. Activity centers around the Tobacco Warehouses (open 8-5 weekdays), two large, corrugated-iron structures on Main Street. Here the baskets of tobacco are placed in long rows, forming aisles for the auctioneer and buyers. The auctioneer moves slowly, chanting his peculiar, sing-song jargon. About him are the buyers, examining the tobacco leaves and indicating their bid by a wink, a nod, or some other sign known only to the initiated. Approximately a quarter of a million pounds of Burley tobacco are sold each day, until the three-to five-million-pound crop is exhausted. Then the auctioneer, the buyers, and the trucks disappear. The tense atmosphere is dispelled, and the town sinks once again into its quiet ways, waiting for next year's crop, when prices will surely be good.<sup>22</sup>

While the two warehouses were in competition (they received a commission for all of the tobacco sold off their floors, which amounted to three percent in the 1960s), there was generally plenty of business to go around. Not that the competition had always been sweet and lovely prior to the 1937-1960 period of significance. For a stretch in the early 1930s, according to local legend, rival managers George Hull (of the Hull Warehouse) and Warren Hall (of the Missouri District Warehouse) "carried guns for each other" although apparently no shots were ever fired in anger. And there was a legal squabble in 1951 when the Missouri District Warehouse Corporation sued nine tobacco companies and owners of the Hull warehouse, claiming they violated anti-trust law to control prices and conditions of the burley tobacco market—but the case was settled out of court and is now water over the dam.<sup>23</sup> Certainly over the past several decades, according to Mary L. Pepper, wife of longtime owner Jesse A. Pepper, competition between the two historic warehouses has always been friendly.<sup>24</sup>

Exactly as W. Browning Hull had predicted, the 1937-38 season was memorable. Quantity-wise, the burley crop marketed at Weston that year was considered normal at roughly five million

<sup>22</sup> *Missouri: a Guide to the "Show Me" State*, p. 495.

<sup>23</sup> "Tobacco Suit to Trial Here," *Weston Chronicle*, June 7, 1951; "Hull Brothers Sued by Mo. District Co. Inc.," *Weston Chronicle*, June 15, 1951; "Tobacco Suit is Dismissed; Settled," *Weston Chronicle*, November 30, 1951.

<sup>24</sup> Mary L. Pepper, secretary and co-owner of Weston Burley House No. 1, has been directly associated with the property since 1960 when her husband Jesse A. Pepper became one of the stockholders. Two years later, in 1962, Pepper and two partners purchased the warehouse to keep it from being sold to an out-of-state company.

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pounds, but it turned out to be a banner year price-wise. As always, the crop had started in March and April when tiny tobacco seeds were sown in specially prepared beds. When the plants were tall enough (less than a foot), they were transplanted into the fields (generally May through June) where they grew to heights of six or seven feet. In August, the stalks were cut and hung in special barns for air-curing. After a couple of months or so, once the tobacco had dried and then regained sufficient moisture so it could be handled without crumbling (was "in case"), the leaves were stripped from the stalks, tied, and taken to one of the auction warehouses in Weston, either the Hulls' Independent Warehouse or the Missouri District Warehouse. Alternately, some farmers brought their uncured stalks of tobacco directly to a Weston warehouse for curing. Although tobacco is considered a tough old weed, like everything else in agriculture, a farmer's expertise in growing it was important as were other factors beyond his control including not enough or too much rain, hail and strong winds.

Opening day was always special. But there was probably more excitement than usual when the Weston market opened on Thursday, December 9, 1937. It was going to feature the first sale in the new Missouri District Warehouse since the previous year's devastating fire, and the *Weston Chronicle* reported that "an intense air of expectancy [had] hovered over this town for more than two weeks." Plus with the return of representatives from auction houses in Kentucky after the opening sales there, "there was rumor that Weston would top the Kentucky market—and it did!" It was also the first time that the opening was broadcast by radio (over Kansas City station WHB). "So there was jubilation among the tobacco growers here yesterday as they pushed and shoved their way through hundreds and hundreds of visitors who listened but knew little of what it was all about."<sup>25</sup>

In addition to Platte County, the opening market that season included tobacco from Buchanan, Clay, Clinton, Ray and Cooper counties in Missouri, and from the towns of Easton and Wathena, in Kansas. Over the full season that began in December 1937 and ended early in February 1938, tobacco growers using the Weston market represented five states (Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Iowa); 48 Missouri counties (Adair, Andrew, Atchison, Barry, Bates, Boone, Buchanan, Butler, Caldwell, Carroll, Cass, Chariton, Clay, Clinton, Cole, Cooper, Dallas, DeKalb, Grundy, Henry, Hickory, Holt, Howard, Jackson, Johnson, Knox, Lafayette, Lewis, Linn, Livingston, Mercer, Miller, Newton, Nodaway, Pettis, Platte, Polk, Ray, Saline, Schuyler, Shelby, St. Clair, Stone, Sullivan, Taney, Vernon, Webster and Wright); and 127 Missouri towns. Buyers represented the Southwestern and Lorillard tobacco companies of Lexington, Ky.; Falls City and American of Louisville, Ky.; R. J. Reynolds of Richmond, Va.; Liggett & Myers of St. Louis; and independent buyers and speculators. (The *Chronicle* described the "buying personnel" as "undoubtedly the strongest this market has had the opportunity to serve in all the years of its history.") The auctioneers were M. H. Griffin of Rocky Mt., N.C., S. L. Boone of Mt.

<sup>25</sup> "Opening Sale Broadcast for First Time in History of Market," *Weston Chronicle*, December 10, 1937.

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Sterling, Ky., and C. C. Layton of Weston.<sup>26</sup>

Following tradition, a coin was flipped to determine which auction house would see the first action. Hull won, so the 1937-1938 auction began in their warehouse where crowds reportedly hindered the buyers and auctioneer and "it was impossible to finish the sale early enough to do much more than begin the floor at the Mo. Dist. Whse. Corporation house late yesterday afternoon." The *Chronicle* noted that about 125,000 pounds of tobacco had been on the Missouri District Warehouse floor at the opening of the sale and about 100,000 pounds remained to be auctioned off at the start of the second day. From both floors, approximately 250,000 pounds of tobacco were sold on opening day for \$67,333.65, for an excellent average of \$26.92 per hundred pounds.<sup>27</sup> Sales were held daily at both warehouses during the week, usually Monday through Thursday.

Prices remained high. They were so good that one farmer "couldn't believe his own eyes when a basket of green tobacco that looked like good for nothing but fertilizer, sold for [illegible] cents a pound," said the *Chronicle*. "He laughed and joked, thinking the buyers had made an error. But it was pointed out that this year was one of those '[once] of a lifetime' seasons when [even if the color isn't the best, the leaves can be used so long as they are thin]." Another grower, Tom Bishop, brought a very small crop to market but nonetheless took home enough money to make the last payment on his farm near Rushville in Buchanan County: "Mr. Bishop expressed himself as delighted with the sales here, having realized \$300 from a 4-acre tract."<sup>28</sup>

The 1937 burley crop sold for more than a million dollars for only the fourth time in the history of the Weston market. The total amount, \$1,133,304.69, was surpassed only by the 1928 burley crop which sold for \$1,199,588.39. Other million-dollar crops had been harvested in 1922 and 1930.<sup>29</sup> In fact, the local 1937 crop was so good that the average price on the Weston floors was surpassed only by the nation's top market at Cynthiana, Kentucky. While the U.S. average price that year was \$20.09 per hundred pounds based on 419,594,504 pounds overall, the Weston market average was \$23.84 based on 4,752,309 pounds, ending up second in average in the nation, and surpassing all burley markets with the exception of Kentucky. The burley market at Cynthiana averaged \$24.03.<sup>30</sup>

For the 1937 season, 3,083,385 pounds of tobacco were sold at the Hull Warehouse for \$746,784.06, with an average per hundred pounds of \$23.84. Sales at the Missouri District Warehouse that year totaled 1,668,924 pounds for \$386,520.63, for an average price of \$23.15 per hundred pounds. While the Hull Warehouse generally outsold the Missouri District

26 Weston *Chronicle*, December 10, 1937 and February 4, 1938.

27 Weston *Chronicle*, December 10, 1937.

28 "Bits About Tobacco," Weston *Chronicle*, December 17, 1937.

29 "Fourth Million-Dollar Tobacco Sales Pays Growers in Five States," Weston *Chronicle*, February 4, 1938.

30 "Weston Tobacco Market Ranks Second in U.S.," Weston *Chronicle*, April 1, 1938.

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Warehouse (it had more floor space and was used exclusively by the large Hull family which included many local tobacco growers), the Missouri District Warehouse might surpass it in one way or another on any given day. For example, on January 21, 1938, the largest sale of the day (2,730 pounds for an average of \$22.25) was made by H. I. Lipscomb on the Missouri District Warehouse floor. On January 24, 1938, Jack Simmons of Tarkio sold 1,416 pounds for \$27.00 (the day's highest average) on the Missouri District floor.<sup>31</sup>

The federal government became involved with all aspects of tobacco beginning with the Agricultural Adjustment Act of May 1933. Under the act—a key part of New Deal farm legislation—the Secretary of Agriculture was authorized to set production quotas on tobacco and other staple commodities and also provide subsidies. By law, the choice of whether or not federal support would be continued was determined by burley growers in a national referendum every three years. The amount that could be sold in a single day was regulated, and before tobacco could be auctioned it had to be inspected and graded as to quality by a government expert as mandated under the Tobacco Inspection Act in 1935. Most small tobacco farmers probably preferred the system of quotas and price support, but in 2004, with the support of the tobacco companies, Congress passed the Fair and Equitable Tobacco Program which eliminated controls and support effective in 2005. Fair and Equitable included \$10.4 billion for buyouts, as the government proceeded to disassociate itself from the tobacco industry. Today, each tobacco farmer is basically on his own in a free—but rapidly diminishing—market. Many farmers have stopped growing tobacco. A grower with a contract for selling his entire crop to a specific company is probably lucky. Only a handful of auction houses were still in business last season, one in Tennessee and four in Kentucky.

Before an auction started, a government grader would have evaluated and indicated the government's support price on each basket of tobacco. Once it started, a warehouse sale (hopefully) went quickly as the auctioneer moved down the rows of tobacco, soliciting bids from the buyers—who had their own system of grading, which apparently varied from company to company. A warehouse representative followed along, calling out the prices marked by the government grader.

Crowded aisles were often a problem, especially on opening day. For example, on December 7, 1938, the opening day of the 1938-1939 market, the Missouri District Warehouse was so crowded that "the auctioneer and buyers had a difficult time being heard, and by eleven o'clock, M. H. Griffin changed places with Levi Boone, the opening crier of sales. Starters had to plead with people to give the auctioneer room. A sale to be good must be snappy and it cannot be kept snappy when the crowd retards the constantly moving coterie of buyers and the auctioneer."<sup>32</sup> The opening day crowd was estimated at from 4,000 to 5,000 people.

<sup>31</sup> "Nearly Five Million Pounds of Tobacco for One Million Dollars," *Weston Chronicle*, January 28, 1938.

<sup>32</sup> "Demand at Opening," *Weston Chronicle*, December 9, 1938.

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Buyers had to bid at least a dollar more per hundred pounds than the government price or the tobacco was sold to the government “pool” under its price support program. Alternately, if a grower suspected that he could get a better deal by waiting, he could disapprove the sale. This happened but rarely. For example, on December 7, 1938, out of a floor of 1,200 baskets, only 12 were rejected by dissatisfied farmers.<sup>33</sup>

“Farmers had the option to reject a bid up to thirty minutes after an auction but this rule was never strictly adhered to—sometimes it was several hours later!” recalled Mary Pepper, a veteran of scores of Weston auctions. Farmers doing business with the Missouri District Warehouse were paid as quickly as possible after a sale, she said, by clerical employees (called “Burley Girls”) who prepared their checks in the building’s basement offices. The checks were passed to the farmers through a small window between the main office and a waiting room. Other basement rooms, all of which are intact, were set aside for buyers.<sup>34</sup>

Theoretically, World War II was a particularly good time to be a tobacco farmer because the demand for tobacco increased during wartime, thus driving up prices. But despite higher prices, there was a manpower shortage so that it cost more to bring in the burley crop than during normal times, offsetting profits. Competition for labor was so keen in 1942 that tobacco strippers were paid as much as \$5 and \$6 a day. As one grower commented to the *Chronicle*, “You have mighty little left at that rate.”<sup>35</sup>

A new record for the largest single day’s sale in the history of the Weston market was set on Thursday, December 3, 1942. On this date 362,754 pounds of tobacco was sold for \$136,406.73, an average of \$37.60. This easily surpassed the previous record set in 1936, when the opening day market reached \$100,000. The *Chronicle* noted that pre-holiday sales (the market closed for two weeks or so over Christmas) also had been exceptionally good in 1918-1919, but the amount of warehouse space then was much smaller: “The entire warehouse space then would not approach that of one of the two present warehouses.”<sup>36</sup>

The December 1943 market was even better. It not only benefited from an excellent crop, but the price ceiling was raised about \$2.50 per hundred pounds on nearly all grades of tobacco. “With crop after crop producing 60 cents [per pound] baskets and crop lots averaging 50 cents [per pound] and better, farmers of Platte County are the happiest and most prosperous in years,” said the *Chronicle*. “With only six sales of the season past, many farmers find that the ground allocated to tobacco has brought them \$800 per acre. Farmers who haven’t been out of debt in ten years or more are not only paying off their debts, but are buying bonds, are buying farms and

33 “Demand at Opening.”

34 Correspondence between preparer and Mary Pepper, March 2010.

35 “Holds Largest Single Sale in History of Tobacco Market,” *Weston Chronicle*, December 4, 1942.

36 Ibid.

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saving money.”<sup>37</sup> That year, the quality of the burley was considered unusually good as well: “It has all the desired lightness of cigarette type tobacco, and yet it weighs heavy....The warehousemen are agreed that it is due chiefly to good housing conditions. There is very little houseburn in this year’s crop. The elements, ever since after the beginning of the season, seemed to favor the crop. Damp, cold weather in the hot-bed stage of development cut the production of plants, but once that hurdle was passed, the season was propitious.”<sup>38</sup>

The *Chronicle* was not surprised that demand was up, what with the war: “With millions of our men on the fighting fronts demanding twice their usual allotment, it is easy to see that the demand would increase. Add to this the fact that many women are smoking more and more, particularly when they are engaged in dangerous work in defense plants, and it is easy to see that consumption rises.”<sup>39</sup>

Members of the Pepper family, which would own and operate the Missouri District Warehouse from the early 1960s through the present, were among the growers whose “averages” were listed in the *Chronicle* in December 1943. Beginning with Notley Allen (N. A.) Pepper, members of the Pepper family have been associated with the Missouri District Warehouse for five generations. For several years while Parke Pepper managed the warehouse, his brother Jesse Pepper was bookkeeper and their father, Notley Allen Pepper, was a stockholder. N. A. had six brothers and one sister, and all except one grew tobacco. Their ancestors, early settlers in Virginia, were tobacco farmers as were the ancestors of Mary Ashley Pepper, Jesse’s wife.

During the 1950s, tobacco farming like agriculture in general became increasingly scientific, with a significant amount of government involvement. Varieties of tobacco were grown side by side on experimental plots, for example, with site visits arranged by the Platte County extension agent. Also during the 1950s, increased emphasis was placed on accurate stripping and sorting of the tobacco into an adequate number of grades by the growers, and demonstrations by representatives of the Federal Grading Service were presented at both the Hull Brothers Warehouse and the Missouri District Warehouse. For the first time, local growers began having their crops sprayed by plane to control insects such as hornworms. While only about a hundred acres were sprayed in Platte and Buchanan Counties in 1951 (the first year of local spraying), approximately 1,900 acres representing some 60 per cent of the tobacco acreage in both counties were sprayed in 1952.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, Platte County extension agents continued what had become an annual event, the “tobacco producer’s tour.” This involved educational visits to the farms of top local tobacco growers. In August 1952, one of the featured stops was a field on the farm of Parke Pepper. Just two months later, Pepper was hired to manage the Missouri District Warehouse.

<sup>37</sup> “Tobacco Ground Yields \$800.00 Per Acre,” *Weston Chronicle*, December 17, 1943.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> “Tobacco Crop Sprayed by Plane,” *Weston Chronicle*, Sept. 19, 1952.

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Parke Pepper, who succeeded T. Kenneth Murphy, was a good choice. Pepper “grew up in the tobacco patch and tobacco warehouse” but had been employed most recently by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a government grader at Huntington, West Virginia.<sup>41</sup> Pepper, who continued as warehouse manager throughout the period of significance, was well-equipped to assist local growers in bundling their crop more precisely in order to avoid reductions in the percentage of price support, which was the government’s way of enforcing accurate grading.

Annual “tobacco shows” also grew in popularity during the 1950s, with sponsors including Weston American Legion Post 501. Like a county fair in miniature, these events included agricultural and culinary exhibits in tents, a baby contest, musical performances by the West Platte High School Band, crowning of a tobacco queen, rides and other entertainments, and concessions. Instead of coinciding with the tobacco auctions, these affairs were more like warmups for the main event. They took place weeks earlier, in September or October, and lasted three or four days. In 1955, the site was just south of the Missouri District Warehouse. In 1956, the site was the Brill Picnic Ground southwest of the Weston High School.<sup>42</sup>

Dry weather seemed to be more of a problem than earlier, especially in 1952 when Parke Pepper became manager of the nominated property and again in 1954, but pricewise, tobacco remained a money crop throughout the decade. Despite drought conditions in 1954-55, some 5,750,000 pounds of tobacco were sold in the Weston market for “well over two million in monies.” At a one-day cleanup sale on February 24, 1955, Hull Warehouse went first and sold an additional 10,533 pounds for an average of \$50.82, bringing more than \$50,000 to tardy growers. The Missouri District Warehouse reported 15,000 pounds on its floor that day, with prices “remaining steady.” Any tobacco left hanging could be marketed the next year but would not be eligible for the government’s support price.<sup>43</sup>

In 1957, two decades after the legendary first auction in the Missouri District Warehouse, opening day promised to be as exciting as ever:

If being busy means anything, it has resulted in the warehouse floors being crowded with baskets of tobacco. Both houses have been busy as the well-known “bee” grading, weighing and sorting crops for the big Day, Monday, November 25. Truck loads have been coming in each day as many are anxious for their crop to be on the first day sale. Others, being a bit cautious are waiting for the results of the opening day before bringing in their offerings. This year, warehouse men feel, promises to be a good year and the weather previous to the cold snap this week has been just right for stripping. ....Buyers representing the different tobacco companies are arriving, office help is ready, hogsheads are being prepared, all just waiting for the coin flip.<sup>44</sup>

41 “All in Readiness for Tobacco Tour,” *Weston Chronicle*, Aug. 1; and “Warehouse Choose New Manager,” *Weston Chronicle*, Oct. 31, 1952.

42 “New Set-Up for Tobacco Show,” *Weston Chronicle*, Oct. 5, 1956.

43 “Tobacco Season Just Around the Corner,” *Weston Chronicle*, Feb. 25, 1955.

44 “Flip of Coin to Decide Opening,” *Weston Chronicle*, Nov. 22, 1957.

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And as for opening day itself:

There is always something special about the Opening of the Tobacco Market. This year with perfect weather added to the usual excitement, a crowd of about a thousand milled in and out of both warehouses. The winner of the coin flip, Parke Pepper, manager of the Missouri District, decided to take the second day instead of the first. To growers it was "old stuff" but to visitors it was new and different. ....On Tuesday Missouri District started their sales and one of the large crops was Ernest Lober and Smith Crockett. They averaged \$62.33 and 5,140 pounds for the high average on the floor. Many of the crops were in the 55 to 60 [cents per pound] average on both floors. Tobacco trucks still continue their march to the warehouses and both places remain open over the weekend to receive crops.<sup>45</sup>

So over the years while different people participated, and clothing and hair styles changed, and the tobacco was hauled to market in increasingly modern vehicles, the basic process and the auctions themselves barely changed at all. By the 1960s, in a reasonably good year, upwards of 6,000,000 pounds of burley would be auctioned in a tobacco season at Weston—and it was still likely to bring around \$60 for a hundred pounds.<sup>46</sup>

The warehouse-based auction system which, at least in Weston, ended eight years ago was exciting, dynamic, and highly competitive. Plus it helped growers get the best price for their tobacco. "Buyers could view crops from a variety of growers in one place, and they could use the grades assigned by inspectors and their own judgment to make appropriate bids based on their quality. Farmers also benefited because they had access to a broader range of offers."<sup>47</sup> Tobacco farmers today have much less security if they still want to invest the time and energy needed for growing the crop, unless they contract in advance with a tobacco-processing company or other buyer.

#### **Additional History, 1961-Present**

After a majority of Missouri District Warehouse stockholders voted to sell the business in late 1962, stockholder Jesse Pepper decided to purchase the warehouse himself as an investment and to assure that farmers would have a facility for selling their tobacco locally. Needing co-signers in order to obtain a loan from the Bank of Weston, Pepper formed a partnership with an auctioneer from North Carolina who had worked the Missouri District Warehouse floor and a North Carolina businessman known to the auctioneer. They changed the name to Weston Tobacco Warehouse.

The partnership was short-lived, however, and ended on an extremely sour note. In 1964, Jesse

<sup>45</sup> "Dollars Roll in for Tobacco Crops," *Weston Chronicle*, Nov. 29, 1957.

<sup>46</sup> Althoff.

<sup>47</sup> Charles Gerena, "Sold, American!" *Region Focus*, Spring 2004, p. 38.

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Pepper's partners were accused by the night watchman of stealing sold tobacco and putting it back on the sales floor to be resold the next day. Pepper angrily demanded that the partnership be dissolved, and ultimately the warehouse was auctioned on the steps of the Platte County Courthouse. Pepper "outbid his former partners, paid them for their interest in the building—and told them of his disgust for their evil and criminal dishonesty," according to Mary Pepper, Jesse Pepper's widow.<sup>48</sup>

Pepper formed a new partnership, this time with Ladd Hull whose family had long operated the nearby Hull Warehouse. This congenial arrangement lasted until 1978, at which time Hull sold his share in the business. Jesse's son James Pepper and his son-in-law Kenneth Kisker bought into the business at this point, so once again there were three owners. In 1994, James sold his share to his father and brother-in-law. As co-owners, Jesse Pepper and Kenneth Kisker renamed the warehouse Weston Burley House No. 1. When Jesse died in 2000, his wife Mary inherited his share in the warehouse. Kenneth Kisker, his wife Sandra (Jesse and Mary's daughter) and Mrs. Pepper continue to operate Weston Burley House No. 1, but the Weston market ended, irrevocably it seems, on January 24, 2002.

The steel-sided building looks about the same as always and still receives tobacco during the season. Although the tobacco it contains is no longer auctioned, the Weston community has found a variety of other ways to use the spacious building. Contemporary uses range from all-school reunions and estate sales to benefit auctions, square dances and the storage of heavy farm machinery. The Weston Jaycees have used the building as a haunted house. Homecoming floats are likely to be built and stored there. The Weston Lions Club holds an annual antiques and collectibles show in the building, and the Chamber of Commerce is a co-sponsor. For such events, the local Boy Scout troop helps vendors unload and cleans up afterward as a community service project. There are wedding receptions and 4-H programs. Tourists still visit and take photographs, although not so many as in the old days. This summer, a production company out of Leavenworth, Kansas, will use the interior of the warehouse to film scenes for a feature movie titled "Pawn's Move." While sometimes the owners charge a fee for use of the building, much of the time they do not.

Although the old Missouri District Warehouse still serves an important community function, some fear that its days may be numbered—if it will be razed for a parking lot. Although Weston Burley House No. 1 is a legitimate tourist destination in its own right, the town has been gaining population and growing as a tourist attraction. Parking space to serve the commercial center is at a premium, and the tobacco people can't help wondering if the ramshackle building has enough friends to see it through.

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<sup>48</sup> Mrs. Pepper's comments are contained in correspondence with the preparer, March 2010.

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Missouri District Warehouse  
Platte County, Missouri

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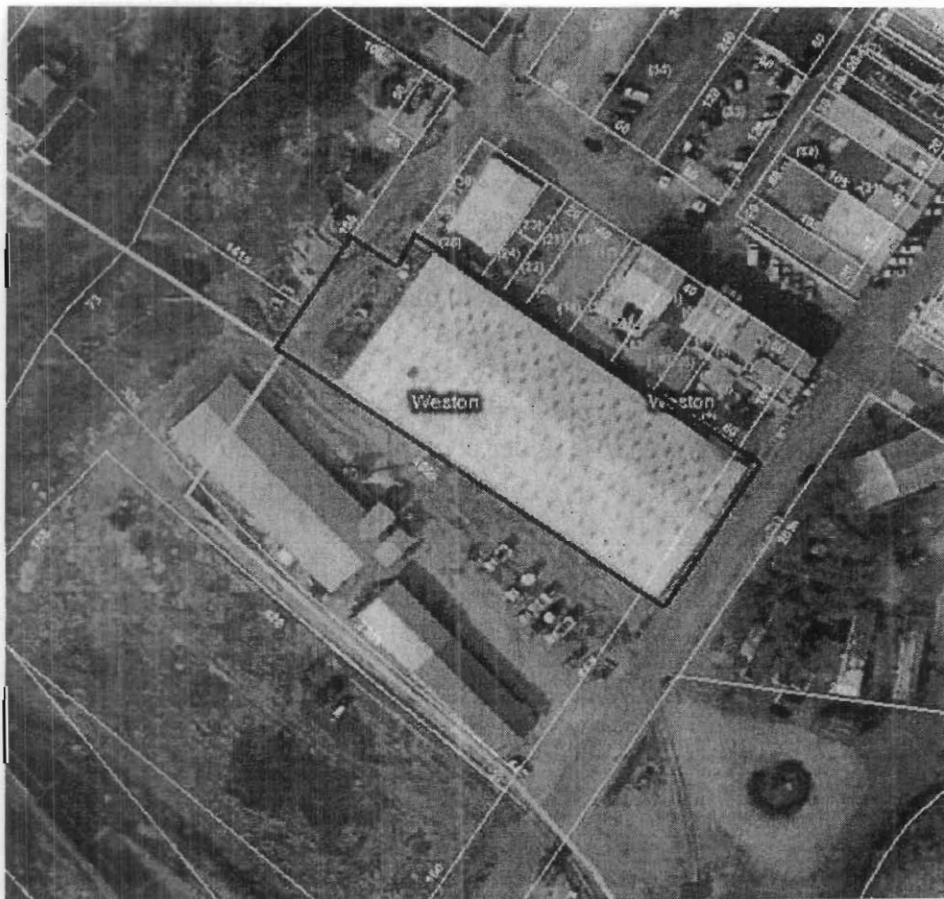
Missouri District Warehouse  
Platte County, Missouri

**Boundary Description**

The boundary of the Missouri District Warehouse at 357 Main Street in Weston, Missouri, is shown as the heavy black line on the accompanying tax map segment. The property is known as Platte County Parcel No.14-1.0-11-400-026-007-000.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes all of the historic acreage still associated with the property except for a slender, undeveloped extension between the north line of abandoned Blackhawk Street and Mill Creek. The boundary encompasses three sides of the nominated building (the primary Main Street elevation and the two side elevations) plus a few feet in the rear containing part of a gravel drive which circles around the south and west sides of the building. Acreage south of the building containing a railroad spur historically used by the Missouri District Warehouse has a different owner today (Sur-Gro), and is not included.



Scale 7/8 inch = 125 feet  
↑ N

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Missouri District Warehouse  
Platte County, Missouri

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**Photo Log**

The following is true for all photographs except as noted:

Missouri District Warehouse  
Weston, Platte County, Missouri  
Photographer: Philip Ost  
Date: September 2009  
Location of negatives:

1. Primary elevation facing southwest along Main Street
2. Primary elevation facing north along Main Street
3. Southwest elevation parallel to railroad track, facing northeast
4. Northeast elevation, view from Market Street facing southwest
5. Side aisle or loading zone, looking southeast
6. Row of original offices in warehouse basement
7. Interior of scale house
8. Sales floor with tobacco hanging from steel rails
9. Basement with tobacco being dried prior to shipment to Kentucky
10. Sales floor view of elevator
11. First floor offices (added 1993)
12. Employee hanging 2009 tobacco on rails
13. Basement view showing floor reinforcements and farm machinery in storage
14. Ca.1920s view of tobacco warehouse on site of nominated building  
(Photographer unknown; probably Weston *Chronicle* photo)
15. Ca.1920s view of tobacco warehouses destroyed in 1936 fire  
(Photographer unknown; probably Weston *Chronicle* photo)
16. Steel framework of Missouri District Warehouse under construction in 1937

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**Missouri District Warehouse  
Platte County, Missouri**

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**Figure Log**

Missouri District Warehouse  
Weston, Platte County, Missouri

Figure 1. Floor plan of main floor

Figure 2. Floor plan of basement

Figure 3. Weston as originally platted on Missouri River

Figure 4. Ca. 1957 Missouri District Warehouse newspaper ad

Figure 5. Ca. 1956 Missouri District Warehouse newspaper ad

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Missouri District Warehouse  
Platte County, Missouri

Figure 1:

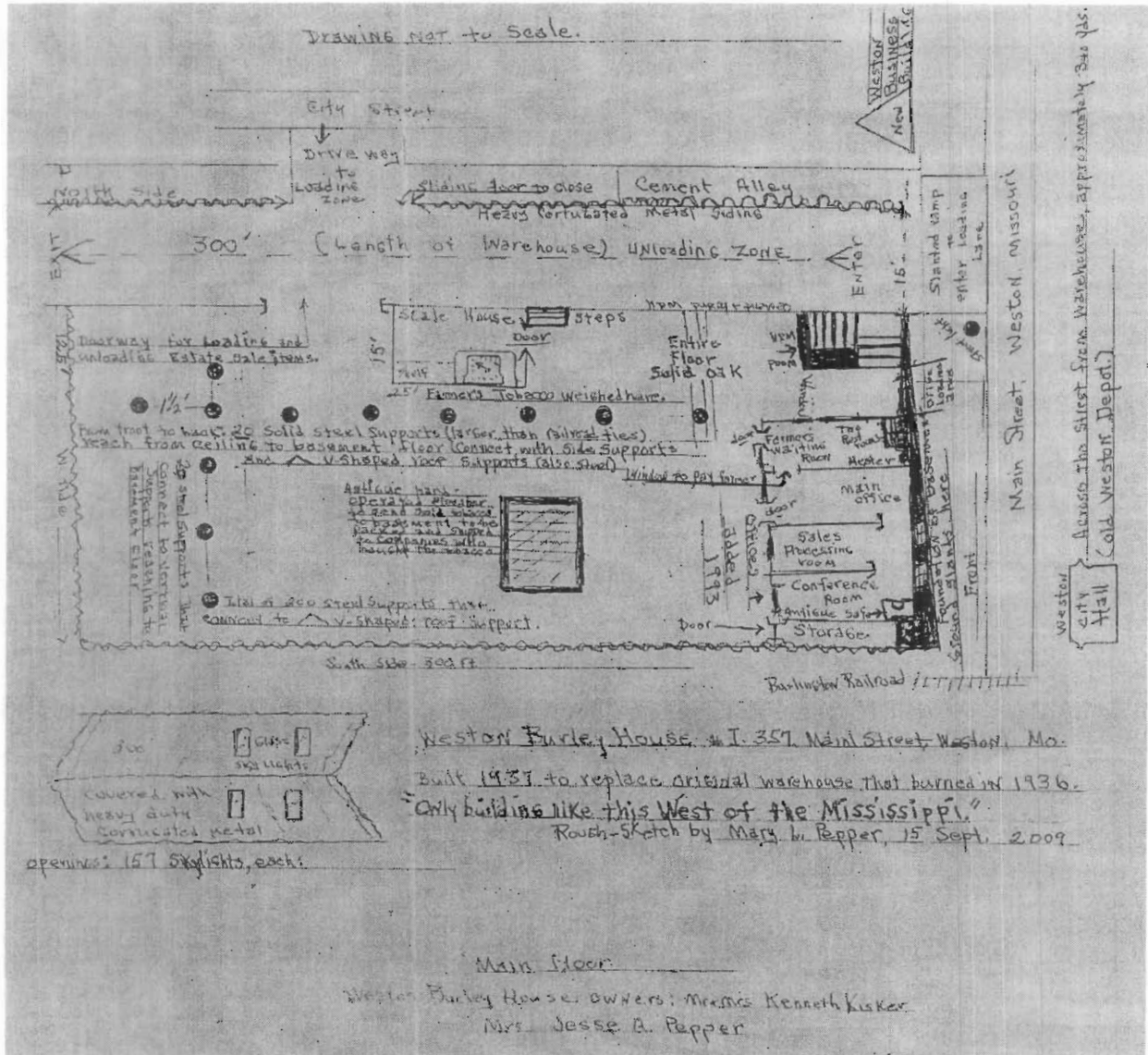


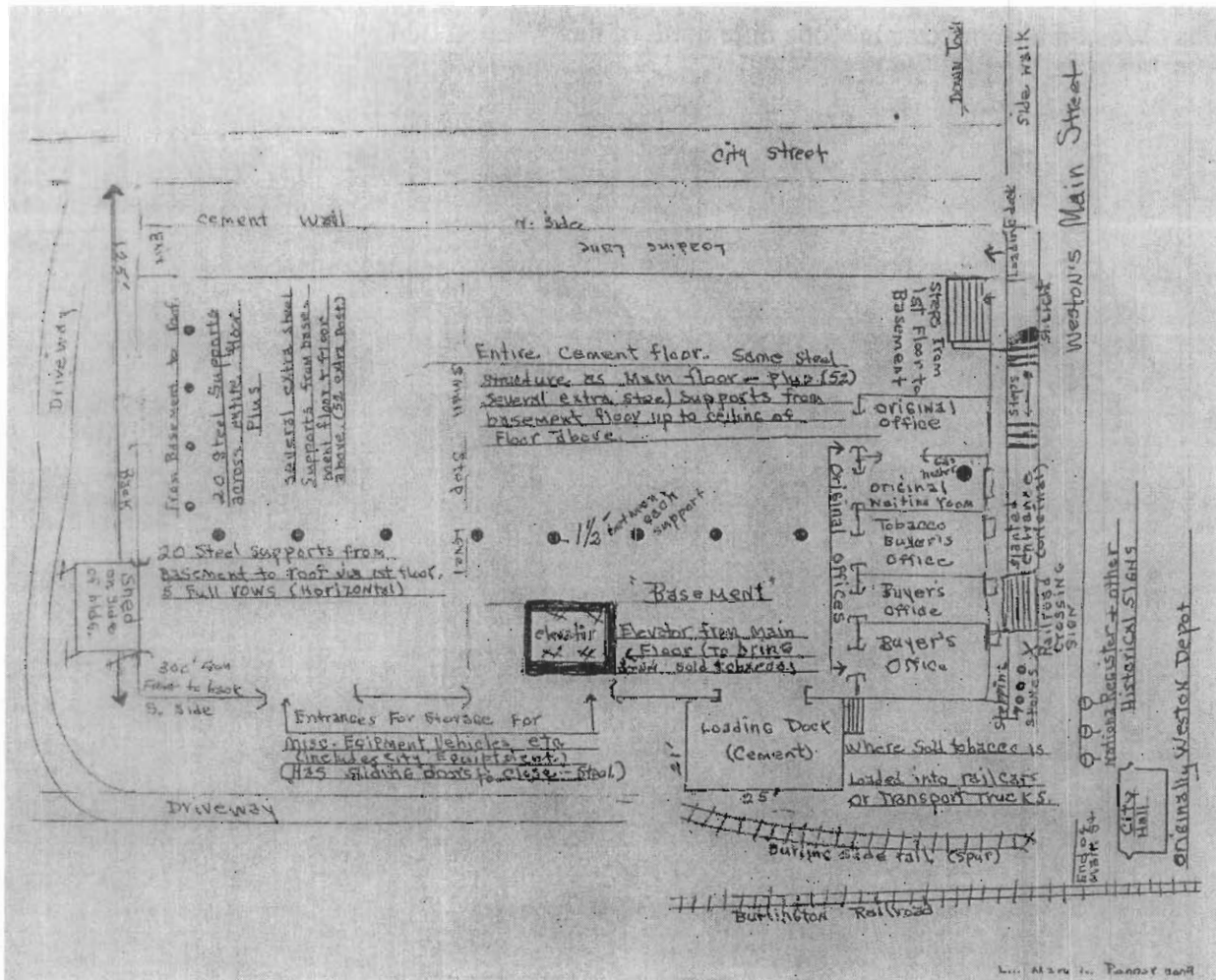
Figure 2

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Missouri District Warehouse  
Platte County, Missouri



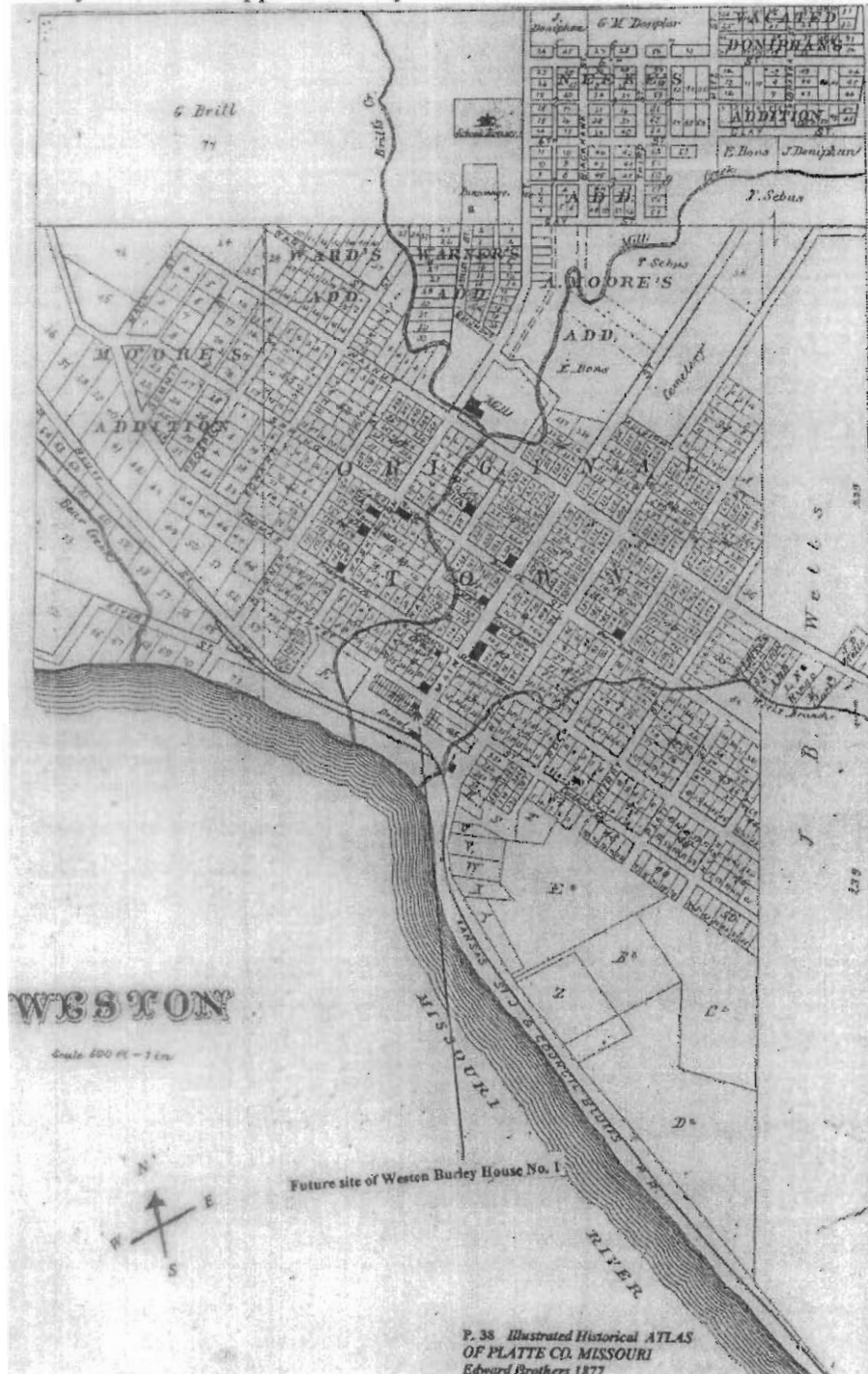
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Missouri District Warehouse  
Platte County, Missouri

Figure 3: Weston was platted on the Missouri River, which changed course in 1857 or 1858. Today Weston is approximately one mile north of the "Weston Bend."



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Missouri District Warehouse  
Platte County, Missouri

Figure 4

## Tobacco Growers:

Don't gamble with your Tobacco--Sell with the *Market Leaders*. You'll like the way Parke Pepper and Jim Hornbeck "Pull and Push" to get the *High Dollar* for Every Basket of Tobacco brought to **MISSOURI DISTRICT WAREHOUSE**

Here Are Five Reasons That Will Pay You To Sell Your Tobacco with Us:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. EXCELLENT FACILITIES<br>(Good Floors, Lights, Roofs and Parking) | 3. OWNED BY THE FARMERS WHO USE IT<br>(Operated in the interest of farmers only) |
| 2. SPLENDID PERSONNEL<br>(They take personal interest in your crop) | 4. HAS CONFIDENCE OF THE BUYERS<br>(Makes bidding spirited)                      |
| 5. EMPLOYS AN EXPERIENCED AUCTIONEER                                |  |

at **Missouri District**

PARKE S. PEPPER, Mgr. — with — JAMES S. HORNBECK, Floor Mgr.

United States Department of the Interior  
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Section Additional Page 28

Missouri District Warehouse  
Platte County, Missouri

Figure 5

## MISSOURI DISTRICT

### the "Upper House"

Where your good will  
is our greatest asset.

Crop or	Lbs.	Ave.	Amount
Alice Smith & John Williams, Platte City	3,984	53.25	2,121.44
Ernest Lober, Weston & Otto Clemens, East Leavenworth	1,826	55.02	1,004.66
W. T. Hornbeck, Weston	5,020	54.09	2,715.98
Lowell D. Lawrence, New Market & Joe McMillan, Faucett	2,724	52.68	1,276.92
Norton Boydston, A. J. & Virgil Shanks, Dearborn	4,930	54.50	2,701.62
Edna Gibson, A. J. & Virgil Shanks, Dearborn	3,784	53.53	2,026.74
B. E. & D. Farm & A. L. Hart, Weston	2,346	51.20	1,201.22
P. J. Reisinger & Elgin Crockett, DeKalb	4,640	54.53	2,529.96
Everett Kincaid, Weston	1,806	60.49	1,092.48
Norman Satchell, X. C. & Vernon Wade, Platte City	1,044	50.83	530.64
C. C. Murphy, Weston & John Whelan, Platte City	2,642	55.65	1,471.04
Wallace Farley, Farley & Vernon Wade, Platte City	2,640	54.38	1,435.76
Stanley Woodruff, Weston	860	60.42	493.64
Elbert Lawrence, Wallace	1,690	54.23	917.26
W. D. Bunker & Millard Jolley, Weston	3,880	53.62	2,076.40
Egbert Wright & Don Wright, Weston	952	53.76	511.80
Otto Harpel, Est. & Kenneth Humes, Weston	2,822	53.92	1,251.92
John Hancock & Claude Mason, Platte City	410	61.54	211.80
J. A. Layton & Jack Gabbert, Weston	4,050	61.30	3,103.44
Frank Hurt, Holt, Mo.	912	55.76	508.52
C. D. Lober & R. A. Bohannon, Weston	2,576	61.10	1,317.26
T. J. Beach & Carl Perkins, Weston	3,292	62.23	3,286.22
T. C. Farris, Weston	1,248	61.78	646.18
H. G. Marotte, Weston	1,588	52.63	835.78
Brice Ross & Gene Rainey, Weston	6,438	55.04	3,736.60
Geo. D. Phillips & And McEntire, Holt	2,814	60.27	1,414.68
Lilhue Adkins, Dearborn	952	53.20	506.60
Mrs. J. W. Crockett & Mrs. Nora Anderson, Weston	2,152	60.01	1,078.10
Mrs. Minnie Lober & Omar Gline, Weston	2,670	56.62	1,311.68
B. E. & O. & Vernon Turner, Weston	1,672	52.98	881.25
Miles Hale & James Fortane, Weston	3,920	60.00	1,509.84
H. C. Harris & John C. Kyle, Weston	1,523	61.84	792.14
H. A. Baber, Holt, Mo.	726	60.88	559.42
S. C. Malleodore Est. Truman, Lee Buckler & Simson Turner, Dearborn	2,672	60.61	1,301.70
Lee Murphy & Harold Tye, Weston	1,504	54.49	819.56
Warren E. Hall & James Clemens, Weston	3,252	55.23	1,657.10
J. D. Goodpaster, Weston	1,414	54.43	770.40
Geo. Kumpel & Parker Horseman, Weston	980	53.84	526.72
Walter Cline, Weston	3,016	55.47	1,118.20

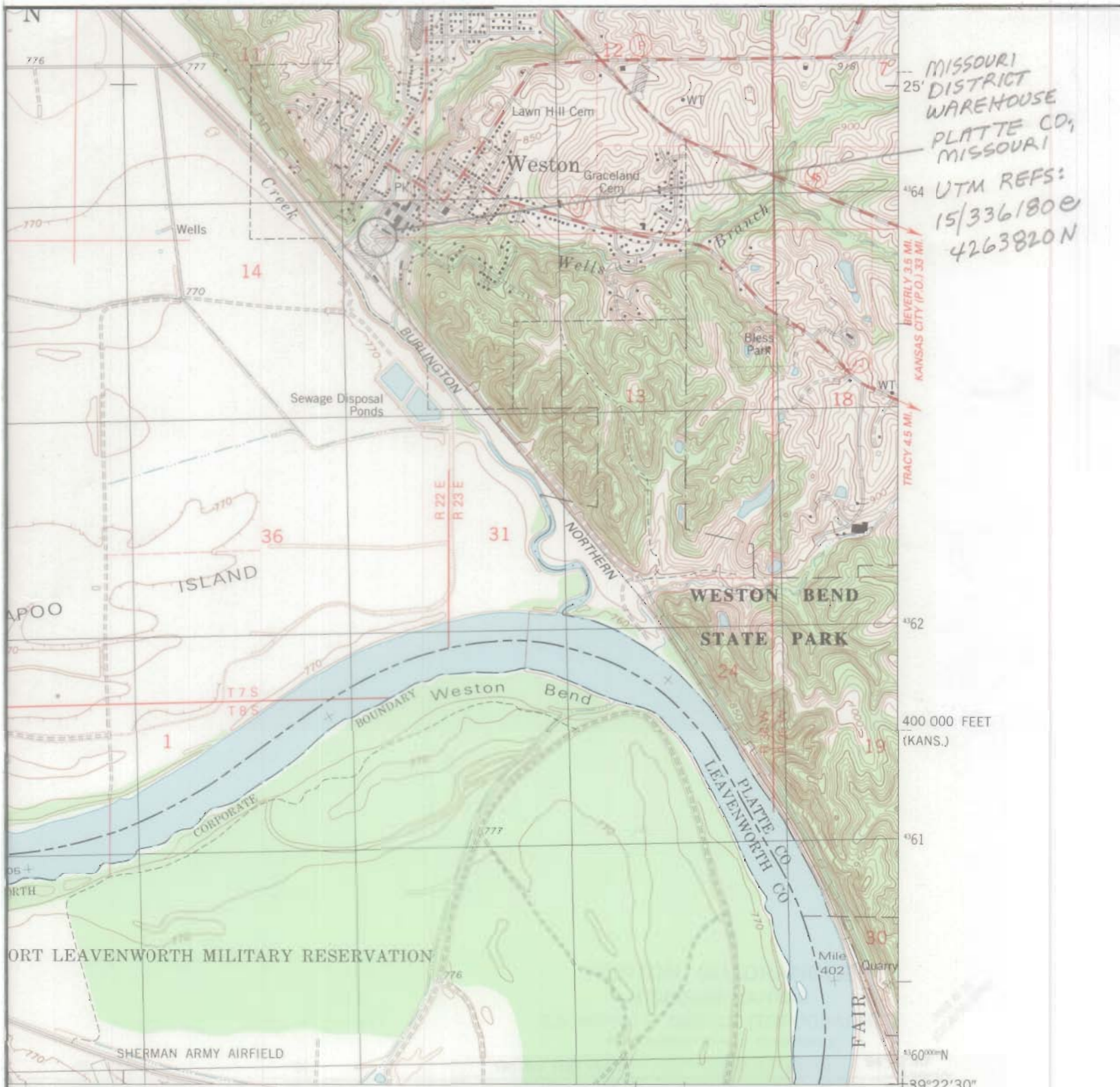
sell at

## MISSOURI DISTRICT

the warehouse of 3 "B's"

**Better Lights      Better Service**  
**Better Prices**

James S. Hornbeck      Parke S. Pepper



MISSOURI DISTRICT WAREHOUSE  
 PLATTE CO, MISSOURI  
 UTM REFS:  
 15/336180E  
 4263820N

BEVERLY 3.5 MI  
 KANSAS CITY (P.O.) 3.3 MI  
 TRACY 4.5 MI

400 000 FEET (KANS.)

061

39°22'30"

(PLATE CITY)  
 7062 IV SE

INTERIOR—GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA—1984  
 2 880 000 FEET (KANS.)

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

- Primary highway, hard surface ————
- Secondary highway, hard surface — - - - -
- Light-duty road, hard or improved surface ————
- Unimproved road — - - - -
- Interstate Route (red circle)
- U. S. Route (red square)
- State Route (red circle)

1 MILE  
 FEET



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

WESTON, MO.—KANS.  
 NW/4 LEAVENWORTH 15' QUADRANGLE  
 39094-D8-TF-024

1984

DMA 7062 IV NW—SERIES V879



WESTON BURLEY HOUSE

NO 1  
1964 10 13

SUR-GRO



WESTON BURLEY HOUSE

No. 1

3CB 741



















**BURLEY DUSA**  
**Quality Checklist**  
Sorted by stalk position.  
Proper moisture levels.  
Clean and free of non-tobacco material.  
Uniform bale lots.

WATER!  
CLEAN  
DO NOT  
KEEP

12345









PLATTE CO. TOBACCO  
WARE HOUSE CORP.