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NPS Form 10-900-b
(March 1992)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Multiple Property Documentation Form

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation* Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

__X_ New Submission ____ Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Historic Resources of Poplar Bluff, Missouri

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century Commercial Buildings of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, ca. 1880-1943
Public Buildings of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, ca. 1883-1943

C. Form Prepared by

name/title __Philip Thomason/Principal
organization __Thomason and Associates date __May 21, 1994
street & number __P.O. Box 121225 telephone __615/383-0227
city or town __Nashville state__TN zip code__37212

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Claire F. Blackwell 26 October 94
Signature and title of certifying official Claire F. Blackwell, Deputy SHPO Date

__Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

for Edson H. Beall 12.1.94
Signature of the Keeper Date

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INTRODUCTION AND ORGANIZATION

The multiple property group submittal for the commercial and public buildings of Poplar Bluff, Missouri is organized with reference to two contexts: (1) Late 19th and Early 20th Century Commercial Buildings of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, ca. 1880 to 1943 and (2) Public Buildings of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, ca. 1883 to 1943. These contexts follow a discussion of the city's geographical information.

The contexts contained within this nomination are based upon the recommendations of the "Poplar Bluff, Missouri Architectural and Historical Inventory Survey Report" prepared in 1990. This report recommended the preparation of National Register Nominations for a residential historic district, a commercial historic district, and a number of individual properties. The staff of the Historic Preservation Program of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources concurred in the report's district nomination recommendations and also identified additional properties which may meet National Register criteria. Historic Contexts identified during the survey included the following:

(1) Late 19th and Early 20th Century Residential Buildings of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, ca. 1880 - 1943;
(2) Late 19th and Early 20th Century Commercial Buildings of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, ca. 1880 to 1943;
(3) Public Buildings of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, ca. 1883 to 1943; and
(4) Industrial Buildings of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, ca. 1900 to 1943.

Due to budget and time considerations, the City of Poplar Bluff and the Department of Natural Resources were unable to fund a nomination for all identified eligible properties within the city. Instead, properties were selected which met the city's available funding and were of particular importance in overall city planning and preservation efforts. It is anticipated that additional nominations will be prepared in coming years for other National Register eligible properties.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Poplar Bluff, Missouri, is the county seat of Butler County and has a population of 16,841 residents. The city is located in the southeastern corner of the state, approximately 150 miles south of St. Louis and 180 miles east of Springfield, Missouri. Built along a series of bluffs, Poplar Bluff is surrounded by hilly terrain north and west, most of which is designated as the Mark Twain National Forest. Bordering the eastern side of the city is the Black River. Beyond the river and south are flat lands and drained swamplands which are currently used for farming activities. U.S. Highways 67 and 60 are the city's main thoroughfares with Highway 67 running north to St. Louis and Highway 60 connecting with Paducah, Kentucky and Springfield, Missouri. Just west of the Black River is the Union Pacific Railroad, which runs north and south connecting Poplar Bluff with St. Louis and Little Rock.

Butler County is part of the Western Lowland subdivision of the Mississippi Delta. This region is bounded on the west by the Ozark Escarpment and on the east by Crowley's Ridge which is an erosional remnant in the Mississippi

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Valley. A series of sand ridges separating swampy flats comprise the Western Lowland. Butler County elevations range from 300 to 600 feet above mean sea level.

Butler County is made up of a variety of agriculturally rich soils. High land soils are composed of a rich clayey loam with underlying yellow and red sand or gravelly clay. Surrounding swamplands drained during the 19th century consist of heavier clays composed of a marly humus, black, sandy loam, and alluvial soils which are well suited for the production of wheat, corn, oats, peanuts, tobacco and soybeans. Varying quantities of lead, iron, granite, marble, copper and kaolin can also be found in the area. The region's most valuable resource during the late 19th century was its forests, which were logged extensively by the early 1920s.

Poplar Bluff consists of a central commercial area with older residential areas located primarily to the north, west, and east. To the south is a commercial and light industrial area with primarily post-1940 residential development. In recent decades suburban development has extended the city's residential areas to the north and west. Post-1940 commercial "strip" development has been extensive along U.S. Highway 67 west of the downtown area.

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HISTORIC CONTEXTS

Late 19th and Early 20th Century Commercial Buildings of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, ca. 1880 to 1943.

Poplar Bluff is one of southeastern Missouri's leading manufacturing and commercial centers. Once home to the Casquina, Capahas, Osage and Cayas Indians, this region was claimed by the French following the explorations of LaSalle in 1682. LaSalle named this region Louisiana in honor of King Louis XIV. French settlement of Louisiana was sparse and in 1762, with the first treaty of San Ildefonso, the French transferred the territory to the Spanish. In 1800, with the second treaty of San Ildefonso, Spain deeded Louisiana back to France, although the transfer was not made public until two years later. In Upper Louisiana, Spain continued to administer the territory until 1804, when the territory, purchased the previous year, was transferred to the United States.

The population of southeast Missouri remained sparse until after the Civil War when commercial growth was stimulated by the construction of railroads throughout the region. Most of Poplar Bluff's early settlers moved into the area from Tennessee and Kentucky during the 19th century.[1] The region was recognized for its industry as early as 1819, when Solomon Kittrell began operating a tan yard, distillery and trading post. Because of the area's location along the Black River, several mills and dams sprang up during the early 1800s.[2] Due to surrounding forests and hilly terrain, agricultural activities remained minimal until land clearance and swamp drainage occurred during the late 1800s.

Butler County was created in 1849 with Poplar Bluff selected as the county seat. When the Civil War began, Poplar Bluff consisted of approximately fourteen buildings. Of the twelve families living in Poplar Bluff in 1860, only four remained throughout the war. One resident who stayed, James S. Ferguson, Circuit Clerk and County Recorder of Poplar Bluff, bore the responsibility of burying court records which he safely retrieved at the end of the war. Ferguson owned the largest home in Poplar Bluff which was used as a hospital for Confederate and Union soldiers. Butler County's location along the northern/southern line and its reputation as an unsettled region made it an appealing locale to renegades who destroyed several of the town's properties. Fortunately, no major battles or sizeable skirmishes were fought within Butler County during the war.[3]

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[1] *George R. Loughead, Early History of Butler County, Missouri (_____: Stinson Press, 1987), p. 7.*

[2] *Rose Barbour and Mary E. Collins, "Industry in Butler County," in Butler County Missouri, 3 vols. (Poplar Bluff, MO: Butler County Genealogical Society, 1988), 2:37.*

[3] *Deem, p. 23-25.*

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Following the Civil War, Butler County's population began to slowly but steadily increase. In 1860, the county population was 2,891. This number increased to 4,298 by 1869.[4] Area residents utilized the Black River as their primary transportation and trade route until 1872 when rail service made its way into the area. The state regulated ferries, standardized tolls and issued licenses to ferry operators. Butler County's first ferry began operating in 1849 with routes from Brannums Mill to the Indian Ford on the St. Francis River. The ferry was operated by Gabriel Davis who charged a minimum of five cents per person, horse, or "cow beast" and a maximum of seventy-five cents for a team of animals and a wagon. Although arrival of the railroad diminished the effectiveness of river transportation, several ferry operators continued to provide services into the 20th century.[5]

Plans for a major railroad to provide service to the western United States began to take shape in 1851 when the Missouri Pacific Line was established in St. Louis. The new company was chartered from the State of Missouri in 1849 to extend rail service from St. Louis through Jefferson City to the western border of Missouri. The railway was anticipated to eventually run all the way to the Pacific Ocean. In 1853 Congress granted approval for Missouri and Arkansas to construct a line from the Mississippi River at the Ohio River juncture to the Texas boundary at Fulton, Arkansas. This grant deeded to states the right to all government-owned lands for a maximum of ten years. Four months later, citizens of Charleston, Missouri held a meeting with representatives from southeast Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee to discuss construction plans for a road which would connect southeastern Missouri with the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad, originally chartered as the St. Louis & Bellevue Mineral Railroad Company in 1837. States' officials hoped that their proposal would stimulate railroad company interests and increase railroad construction in the area. To raise money for the venture, citizens created the Cairo & Fulton Railroad Company, selling shares for $25 a piece. Collected funds were submitted for development of the proposed transportation route. The new route, the Cairo, Arkansas and Texas Railroad, was constructed and graded in 1854, but did not reach Poplar Bluff until 1872 due to delays caused by the Civil War and its aftermath.[6]

In 1873, the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad purchased the Cairo and Fulton Railway, renaming the smaller line as the Cairo, Arkansas and Texas Railway. The shorter line ran from St. Louis to Little Rock, with Poplar Bluff serving as a major stop. The Iron Mountain company additionally purchased an incline and ferry used for transporting passenger cars to the east bank of Cairo, Illinois. The new line and ferry system granted Butler County residents direct access to the eastern banks of the Mississippi for the first time. Poplar Bluff quickly became one of the railroad's most popular stops between St. Louis and Little Rock, offering an abundant variety of hotel accommodations and commercial opportunities. In 1917, the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad

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[4]*Ibid, p. 105-106.*

[5]*Loughead, p. 50-52.*

[6]*Missouri Pacific Railroad, The Empire that Missouri Pacific Serves! (_____: Vaughan Hoffman Press, 1956), p. 7.*

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merged with the Missouri Pacific Railroad. The reorganized line continued to function as a major connection for Poplar Bluff to larger markets.[7]

In addition to the Missouri Pacific and its associated services, several short lines ran through the southeastern region of Missouri, including the Southern Missouri and Arkansas Railroad which later became part of the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad. The St. Louis-San Francisco service ran from Hoxie, Arkansas through Poplar Bluff to Cape Girardeau, connecting smaller communities to major cities such as St. Louis, Memphis, Kansas City and Chicago.[8] The St. Louis-San Francisco line acquired the southwest branch of the Pacific Railroad, and continued to use tracks owned by the Missouri Pacific until 1883 when the St.Louis-San Francisco company constructed its own line into St. Louis.[9] The St. Louis-San Francisco company purchased Poplar Bluff's original Southern Missouri tracks and depot during the early 1900s. Additional regional short lines which encouraged regional growth included the St. Louis, Cape Girardeau and Ft. Smith line (merged with the St.Louis-San Francisco Railroad in 1907) which ran west from Delta and Cape Girardeau to meet the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad; the Current River Railroad, a branch of the Kansas City, Ft. Scott and Memphis Railroad, which ran from Kansas to Memphis, serving primarily lumber and mining interests in the region of southeastern Missouri; and the Missouri Southern Railroad which ran from Bunker to Leeper to meet the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad. These short lines provided direct access to larger lines, such as the Iron Mountain, which transported goods to and from larger cities.

A publication of the 1870s, distributed by the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad, described Poplar Bluff as follows:

> The town, situated upon the hills, contains upward of one thousand inhabitants; and though many new buildings have been constructed, no vacant houses are found. The site is excellent, the rich lands produce food cheaply, water and fuel are at hand, transportation of raw and finished material is good both by water and rail...Heavy growths of timber make lumbering along this line a prominent industry...Oak, elm, catalpa, gum, cypress, and other trees are often found exceeding

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[7]*Norbury L. Wayman, St. Louis Union Station and its Railroads (St. Louis: The Evelyn E. Newman Group, 1987), p. 60.*

[8]*Thomason and Associates and Cynthia Price, "An Overview of the Ozark Foothills Regional Planning Area" (unpublished document on file at the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Jefferson City, MO, April 1991), p. 80-81.*

[9]*Wayman, p. 62.*

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four feet in diameter, and one oak has been found eleven feet in diameter...[10]

Here one sees evidence of increasing interests in the region's rich reserves of timber which contributed a great deal to Poplar Bluff's early growth and development. Lumber companies which had exhausted Michigan reserves of white pine were particularly interested in Missouri's abundant supply of long-leaf and short-leaf yellow pine, considered to be one of the nation's best grades of lumber. Mills and lumber companies along the Black and St. Francis Rivers primarily produced oak, ash, hickory and cypress logs and lumber. Finished products were either used locally or exported. Butler County forests largely consisted of cypress and short-leaf pine which were used for ships' masts, mine timbers and railroad ties. Other types of lumber included sweet and red gum which were used for furniture and housing materials, and oak which was used for barrels, house interiors and railroad ties.[11] Long-leaf pine, superior to the short-leaf variety, was used for interior trim, veneers, wood frames and sashes, siding, house framing, floors, silos and barns.[12]

Butler County attracted loggers not only because of the area's extensive lumber resources, but also because of a good local labor supply, a mild climate which permitted year-round logging, the low cost of area timber, and the proximity of Missouri via the railroad to markets in Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and the Indian Territory. By 1870, more than fifty lumber mills operated in and around Butler County.[13] The county's earliest lumber companies included the Poplar Bluff Lumber and Manufacturing Company which specialized in basket and "butter dish" production, the Brooklyn Cooperage Company, Gallaway-Pease Lumber Company, H. Alfrey's Heading Factory, Quercus Lumber Company, Hargrove and Ruth Saw and Planing Mill, and the F.G. Oxley Stave Company. Renamed as the H.D. Williams Cooperage Company, the Oxley complex was noted during the late 1800s to be the largest plant of its kind in the world.[14] The Oxley complex was located just west of the railroad along County Road Drive. In 1892, the company consisted of four drying kilns, two stave sheds, a warehouse, factory complex, cooper shop, stave mill and several loading platforms. Handle manufacturers including Putnam Handle Works, Turner Day & Woolworth Handle Company and Parma Handle Company, set up factories near many of these lumber companies.

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[10]*St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railway, The Favorite Route to all Points in the South-West (St. Louis: James W. Nagle, n.d.), p. 8-9.*

[11]*Thomason and Associates and Price, p. 89-91.*

[12]*Jerry Ponder, Grandin, Hunter, West Eminence and the Missouri Lumber and Mining Company (Doniphan, MO: Ponder Books, 1989), p. 14.*

[13]*Thomason and Associates and Price, p. 89-90.*

[14]*Deem, p. 29.*

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Shipment by railroad was not limited to lumber and building supplies. Additionally, the lines were used to transport agricultural products. Roads remained in poor condition, necessitating a reliable form of transportation for trading purposes. Cattle, hogs, horses, wheat, poultry, eggs, and corn comprised a few of the items transported by the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad in 1891. Additionally, Poplar Bluff residents could now look forward to cast iron stoves, building supplies, and canned goods from other parts of the country. By 1910, Poplar Bluff had grown to a total of 6,916 citizens, surpassing its previous total of 4,321 in 1900. The population again increased by more than 1,000 to 8,042 in 1920.

As loggers cleared the land, farmers moved into the area, substantially increasing Poplar Bluff's agricultural production. For the first time in Butler County's history, agricultural products became important commodities with the production of corn, cotton, wheat, oats and potatoes. Additional efforts to reclaim land for agricultural use led county officials to contract with the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad to construct levees along the Black River for the drainage of swamplands and creation of new farmland. In 1913, the Inter-River Drainage District was incorporated to drain 127,000 acres located between the Black and St. Francis Rivers. This included land in Butler County, extending east to the state line. Other drainage districts created during the mid 1910s and early 1920s included the Little River, the Mingo and the Black River Drainage Districts. Over 30,000 acres in Butler and Ripley Counties were drained by these programs alone. As a result, a series of ditches, levees and drainage systems were created opening new lands and road systems.

During Missouri's era of 19th century land reclamation, cotton became an agricultural commodity for the first time in the state's history. Although cotton had always been a mainstay of southern agriculture, it was not until after land drainage occurred during the 1870s that the crop was successfully grown in southeastern Missouri. Butler and Ripley Counties led the numbers in production, reaching peak production around 1880. Commercial cotton production encouraged new arrivals of sharecroppers from Alabama and Mississippi who came to the area in search of employment.[15] Wholesale grocery companies established businesses along both railroad lines, demonstrating Poplar Bluff's shift toward agricultural production which stimulated the creation of new markets in northern cities such as St. Louis and Chicago.

Poplar Bluff's increasing manufacturing and commercial activities led to the construction of dozens of brick commercial buildings throughout the 1870s and 1880s. In 1892, the town's commercial district was concentrated south and west of the courthouse square, covering approximately two blocks along Main and Vine Streets. Businesses in 1892 consisted of hardware stores, drugstores, general merchandising firms, a bank, barber shops and an opera house. Hotels dominated one block of Pine Street directly across from the courthouse. Early manufacturing plants were constructed along the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad and the Black River while residential neighborhoods were established further west. At least two fires occurred during these decades, one of which destroyed the original St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad depot. This building was replaced in

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[15] *Thomason and Associates and Price, p. 49-50.*

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1910 by an impressive building with red and gray brick walls and a Spanish tile roof. The town's most destructive fire took place in 1909, demolishing an entire city block between Poplar, Vine, Main and Fourth Streets. The burned block remained virtually unimproved until 1941.

Residential growth during the late 19th century included the addition of many new homes in Poplar Bluff. The Moore-Dalton House at 421 N. Main Street, is one example which aptly reflects rapid changes taking place during the town's most prosperous years. This dwelling was constructed in 1883 by Thomas H. Moore who designed the house as a modest one-story dwelling. Moore added a second story to the house in 1890. In 1896 the house was purchased by one of Poplar Bluff's most prominent citizens, James L. Dalton. Dalton made extensive additions to the dwelling, including remodeling the house to reflect Neo-classical styling. Dalton is best remembered for his establishment of the Dalton Adding Machine Company which manufactured the nation's first patented adding machine. Although Dalton was forced to relocate his business to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1914, he retained ownership of the Poplar Bluff residence where his family returned following his death in 1926.

By 1905, Poplar Bluff's downtown commercial district had extended west to 5th Street and south to Cedar Street. Manufacturing firms along the railroad included the Poplar Bluff Ice Company, Poplar Bluff Foundry and Machine Shop, Poplar Bluff Bottling Works, Hartzell Light and Milling Company and J.V. Porter Lumber Company. Many hotels were located along the railroad as well, including the Quinn, Wright, Central, Riverside and VanWinkle Hotels. In 1901, the Southern Missouri and Arkansas Railroad made its way to Poplar Bluff, running north between 5th and 4th Streets with a depot located between Maple and Cherry Streets. By the mid 1910s, residential dwellings east of the courthouse square along Second Street had virtually disappeared as factories and manufacturing firms set up businesses along the railroad and the Black River. Commercial buildings were constructed south from Pine Street to Cherry Street and Park Avenue, covering four blocks west from the courthouse square to 5th Street. Many lumber companies continued to operate throughout the 1910s, as did wholesale grocery firms. The largest of these early agricultural warehouses was the Barnes Grocery Company Wholesale located along the St.Louis-San Francisco line between 5th Street and Park Avenue.

Poplar Bluff's railroads and growing population attracted a number of manufacturing companies during the early 20th century. By 1907, fifty-four manufacturing plants were operating in the area including several handle factories, oil supply companies, a distillery, wagon factory and concrete block plant.[16] One of the largest companies to operate in Poplar Bluff was the International Shoe Company which took over the Dalton Adding Machine Company building constructed in 1909. These diversified manufacturing concerns continued to attract residents, and the city flourished well into the 1920s. Among local individuals shifting their investments from lumber to alternative modes of production were Albert and Hugo Boeving--two of Poplar Bluff's most prominent citizens. The Boevings began their trade in the lumber business, taking over their father's company at Fagus, Missouri, in 1911. In 1928, the

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[16]*Barbour and Collins, p. 37.*

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Boevings successfully switched to cotton production, operating the district's first cotton gin.[17]

World War I further stimulated economic growth within Poplar Bluff. Increasing needs for manufactured goods proved of great benefit to several local firms. The Bimel Ashcroft Manufacturing Company is one example of a local business which benefitted greatly during the war. This factory manufactured steel spokes used for automobile production. Joseph Ashcroft, owner of the business, took it upon himself to increase production during the early days of World War I. While many companies were unable to fill orders during the war, Ashcroft's foresight enabled the Poplar Bluff factory to fill every order placed by the government.[18]

Butler County's lumber boom ended during the 1920s as timber reserves were depleted. According to a history by Robert Douglass, most of the Ozarks' pine was timbered by 1910, with lowland hardwoods expended by 1920. Missouri's lumber production peaked in 1899 with a total cut of 716 million board feet per acre and slowly but steadily declined over the next two decades.[19] Lumber mills closed as timber vanished but mills continued to operate as timber was transported in from surrounding areas.[20] Once the cost of shipping lumber from outlying areas became prohibitive, sawmills and large lumber companies moved on in search of new forests, not bothering to undertake any type of replanting or conservation efforts. Over 90,000 acres in Butler County alone were denuded of their timber by the 1920s.[21]

As in many areas of the country, it was not until New Deal relief arrived during the 1930s that lands were replenished. Smaller railroad lines, unable to stay in business without financial backing from large lumber companies took up their tracks. Economic woes followed as the number of residents soon exceeded available employment. Overproduction of crops and submarginal soils led to a decrease in the area's farm population. The outmigration in southeastern Missouri was reflected in Poplar Bluff's population which declined from more than 8,000 residents in 1920 to 7,551 residents in 1930.

Poplar Bluff's character was transformed in 1927 when a tornado demolished or damaged many of the city's commercial buildings. More than one hundred individuals were killed, four hundred were injured, and damages were estimated at over four million dollars. The tornado hit Fifth Street, curving east and north through the business

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[17]*Deem, p. 128-129.*

[18]*Ibid, p. 118.*

[19]*Robert Sidney Douglass, History of Southeast Missouri (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1912), p. 125.*

[20]*Ibid, p. 89.*

[21]*Ibid, p. 339.*

section of downtown, and crossed the Black River near the Vine Street bridge, destroying dozens of buildings and residences. Every building along Main Street and Broadway was damaged and numerous buildings were also destroyed on Vine Street. Buildings east of Main Street and south of Vine Street were spared, including the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad Depot, and many of the area's hotels. The St. Louis-San Francisco Depot was damaged beyond repair and a new brick depot was completed in 1928 on the site of the original building. The 1887 courthouse was badly damaged and had to be razed. A new Neo-Classical style courthouse was constructed in 1928 which still stands today. Many other buildings were torn down including the New Melbourne Hotel, the Elks Club building, the Bilkey Building on South Fifth, and the East Side School.

Many of Poplar Bluff's original commercial businesses were destroyed or damaged during the 1927 tornado. Most of the damaged buildings were repaired with simple brick facades, while those beyond repair were razed. Because of economic woes experienced during the 1930s, many property owners did not rebuild until after World War II. An industrial park was established south of the city in 1945 and a number of manufacturing companies began operating in the city during the 1950s and 1960s. After 1950, a few new construction projects occurred within the downtown area, however, most new commercial activity took place along the automobile oriented corridors of U.S. Highways 67 and 60. Downtown buildings were frequently remodeled with new storefronts and upper facades in attempts to economize and attract business. Within recent years, the Briggs and Stratton Corporation opened a large assembly plant south of the city. Several other companies have built new plants as well. Today, many of the city's business activities are located along Highway 67 in 1970s and 1980s "strip" developments.

Recent efforts to revitalize downtown and inner city neighborhoods include the establishment of the Harwell Art Museum in the Moore-Dalton House, enlargement and updating of library facilities, renovation of the St.Louis-San Francisco depot into a railroad museum, and development of a park and recreation area along the Black River. Poplar Bluff retains many of its early 20th century commercial buildings which are typically two-part commercial type structures with large glass storefronts and brick piers or cast iron pilasters. Masonry upper facades display brick corbelling at the roofline and arched or rectangular one-over-one sash windows. Vine, Broadway, Fifth, and Poplar Streets contain the largest concentration of late 19th and early 20th century commercial buildings, many of which retain much of their original character. The downtown area also boasts of two early 20th century train depots, the St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern Depot (now known as the Union Pacific) and the St.Louis-San Francisco Depot. The St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern Depot continues to function as a working freight depot and the St. Louis-San Francisco Depot has been renovated into a train museum. The decline of passenger rail traffic in recent decades resulted in the razing of almost all of Poplar Bluff's downtown hotel buildings. Only the Zehe Building, completed in 1911 on Poplar Street, remains from this era. Interest in the preservation and rehabilitation of the downtown area has increased in recent years, and the city has employed a full time Main Street manager to assist in these efforts.

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Public Buildings of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, ca. 1883 to 1943.

Butler County was originally part of Missouri's Wayne County which had Greenville as its county seat. Residents of southeastern Missouri found the journey thirty miles north to Greenville to be difficult and dangerous due to rocky and hilly terrain, heavy forests and the St. Francis and Big Black Rivers. Ferries provided the only means of river transport and road systems, more often than not, were merely rough trails.[22] As nearly every citizen found it necessary to make several trips each year to Greenville, southeastern residents desired to establish their own county which would allow easier access to the county seat. As a result, Butler County was created in 1849, named after William O. Butler, a prominent lawyer from Carrollton, Kentucky.[23] Three non-resident commissioners were assigned by the General Assembly to select an appropriate site for the new county seat which would cover 50 to 150 acres. A public hearing was called to allow citizens to express their views about the site. A stretch of property along the Black River was unanimously approved by the board and Butler County residents in 1849.[24]

Because Poplar Bluff was originally located on government-owned property, cash payment had to be made before citizens could begin building their new town. Although the purchase price was a mere $180, county officials met with great difficulty in obtaining funds from area residents. Cash was scarce in southeastern Missouri with most settlers relying on barter or trade to support themselves. Citizens were encouraged to loan the county money which would be paid back at 10% interest once lots were sold. Seven citizens donated a total of nearly $100. Additional funds were raised by borrowing money from the county's road and canal improvement fund which had been set up by the state. Within five months, Butler County residents raised enough cash to purchase the site which became known as "Poplar Bluff," named after the many tulip poplar trees growing along the banks of the Black River.[25]

Layout of Poplar Bluff's town square defied typical north/south right angle street patterns. Streets ran in northeast/southwest directions, parallel with the Black River. The original town square was bounded by Eighth Street on the west, by the Black River on the east, by Henderson Avenue on the south and a northern line drawn parallel with the river.[26] In 1850 the county appropriated funds to construct a $200 courthouse. According to an

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[22]*Loughead, p. 7-8.*

[23]*Ibid, p. 12.*

[24]*Ibid, p. 27-29.*

[25]*Ibid, 32-33.*

[26]*Ibid, 36-38.*

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early history by Judge D.B. Deem, this courthouse was constructed as a temporary structure.[27] Apparently several frame and log structures were used for court sessions prior to 1850, including several homes of county residents who received payment for their services. Jesse A. Gilley was selected to plan and supervise construction of the official 1850 courthouse which was a two-room, lumber plank building located on the southeast corner of the public square. Weatherboard siding of cypress or yellow poplar was added to the structure in 1851.[28]

In 1858, a court order was issued to raise $10,000 for a permanent brick courthouse. With very few residents residing in Poplar Bluff, there was little hope of obtaining funding through taxation. County officials attempted to raise additional funds by selling surrounding swampland at $1 per acre, achieving minimal success. William N. Ringer began construction on the building in 1859 but his efforts were soon stopped due to slow land sales and outbreak of the Civil War.[29] The 1859 building survived the war years, and was completed in 1866 following acceptance of an $8,500 bond. In January 1867, the 1850 courthouse was sold and ordered to be removed from the public square. The 1859 courthouse remained in use until 1886 when it was destroyed by fire. The burned building was replaced by a two-story courthouse constructed by L.B. Walker in 1887 for approximately $11,000.

During the late 19th century Poplar Bluff became one of the leading commercial centers of southeast Missouri. Incorporated in 1870, the city gained prominence as a rail center and for its many timber-related industries. The city's population grew to over 4,000 residents by 1900, and this number would increase almost 7,000 by the end of the decade. The growth of the city resulted in an expansion of city services such as the construction of a water works on Second Street. In 1902, a new city hall and fire station were built in the downtown area. Brick sidewalks were laid in 1912 and brick roads were constructed in 1913. In 1914, electricity was transferred from individual ownership to a centralized electric company and one of its most impressive public buildings, the Poplar Bluff Post Office, located at the corner of Poplar and 4th Streets, was constructed.[30] A public library was established in 1915 and although it was not until 1936 that a permanent building was constructed for the library, its substantial holdings and support of local citizens reflect the organization's importance to the growing community.

The 1927 tornado which destroyed much of the downtown area, also took its toll on the city's public buildings. Although severely damaged, the Post Office was repaired and stood until recent decades when it was razed for a parking lot. The 1887 courthouse was also badly damaged and had to be razed. A new Neo-Classical style

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[27]*David Bruce Deem, History of Butler County, Missouri: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People and its Principal Interests (Poplar Bluff, MO: Poplar Bluff Printing Company, 1925), p. 23.*

[28]*Loughead, p. 43-45.*

[29]*Ibid, p. 120-121.*

[30]*Ibid, p. 70.*

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courthouse was constructed in 1928 which still stands today. The original city hall building was not extensively damaged by the tornado, but it too was razed for the construction of a modern facility. Although few in number, Poplar Bluff's public buildings are significant to the growth and development of Poplar Bluff.

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INTRODUCTION

Property types identified in the 1990 Poplar Bluff survey included residential buildings, industrial buildings, commercial buildings, railroad depots, and public buildings. All of the property types included within this initial submission fall into the categories of commercial buildings, railroad depots, or public buildings.

NAME OF PROPERTY TYPE - COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

Description:

Historic commercial buildings in Poplar Bluff are typically two- and three-story brick buildings constructed during the early 1900s. Commercial buildings are concentrated primarily in the historic downtown area along S. Main, Vine, Broadway, and adjacent streets. The only other historic commercial area located outside downtown Poplar Bluff is a small commercial district on the east side of the Black River on Bartlett Street. These buildings were constructed from 1910 to 1930 and include examples of the Art Deco style. Other commercial buildings from the early 20th century are scattered throughout the city and include examples of corner neighborhood grocery stores and gas stations.

Most buildings in the downtown area are one-part and two-part commercial blocks which reflect common building forms prevalent from the late 19th century to the mid-1950s.[31] One-part commercial blocks usually have large plate glass storefronts detailed with ornamental framing while two-part commercial blocks have separate storefronts and upper facades. Many of the buildings have brick piers or cast iron pilasters at the storefronts. The use of Carrara glass panels for storefront remodeling in the 1930s and 1940s was also prevalent in the downtown area. Many masonry upper facades are embellished with brick corbelling at rooflines and arched or rectangular one-over-one sash windows. A few buildings have upper facade decoration including terra cotta panels, cast iron hood molding, and sheet metal cornices.

Commercial buildings may also include hotel buildings constructed in Poplar Bluff. As a rail center, over a dozen hotels were built in and around the downtown area. These buildings largely followed the design of commercial buildings with a storefront on the first floor and masonry upper facades with arched or rectangular windows.

Significance:

Commercial buildings in Poplar Bluff may be significant under Criteria A and C for their role in the commercial history of the city and for their architectural character. Following the arrival of the railroad, Poplar Bluff grew into

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[31] *Richard Longstreth, The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1987), p. 24.*

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a thriving community driven by commercial trade and agricultural production. Late 19th century growth was stimulated by railroads and lumber companies which cleared heavily forested areas. Commercial expansion spread rapidly west and south as manufacturing firms sprang up along the railroad. Poplar Bluff was one of the railroad's most popular stops between Arkansas and St. Louis during the early 1900s, evidenced by the large number of hotels located near the railroads.

At the turn of the century the downtown area of Poplar Bluff was a regional center for business and commerce. While the small towns in the region could provide basic necessities, Poplar Bluff contained dozens of businesses which stocked goods and products imported from around the country. Its brick buildings contained a wide variety of businesses including banks, drug stores, clothing stores, jewelers, an opera house and theater. Early prominent businesses in the downtown area included the Wright-Dalton-Bell-Anchor Department store which was housed in a four-story building. This business was one of the largest of its kind in Southeast Missouri but its building was destroyed by the 1927 tornado. Other early 20th century businesses in the downtown area included the J.C. Penny and Montgomery Ward stores, Newberry's Department Store, and Garfinkels Department Store. In addition to mercantile buildings, over a dozen brick and frame hotel buildings were constructed to take advantage of the city's thriving railroad traffic.

Poplar Bluff's downtown area continues to function as an important component of the town's commerce. Recent strip development during the 1970s and early 1980s along Highway 67, has developed into the primary retail center for the city. Revitalization efforts in the downtown area include rehabilitation of the Zehe Building, promotion of the train museum in the St. Louis-San Francisco depot, and plans for park development along the western bank of the Black River.

Registration Requirements:

Commercial properties in Poplar Bluff are significant primarily because of their architecture and/or their association with the commercial history of the community. To be architecturally significant, a building must be a fine example of a particular style or possess unusual design elements and detailing. The building must also possess integrity of setting and location, design, workmanship and materials. This includes all original upper facade decoration and the majority of storefront elements or first floor detailing.

To be historically significant, a building must be the site of a business of particular importance to the community, must be associated with an individual of particular importance, or be associated with an important event or occurrence.

Commercial buildings may also meet registration requirements if they form a significant grouping which retains integrity of setting and location. To be eligible, these buildings must be contiguous at their original locations and a significant concentration must retain integrity of design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association. Buildings which retain integrity are those which have most of their original upper facade detailing and materials and retain

the feeling and association of a particular era. The storefront should also retain some original features or retain traditional storefront fenestration patterns. A grouping of buildings may also be considered significant if it collectively has particular historical significance in the commercial growth and development of the community. Districts may be eligible under Criterion A, Criterion C, or a combination of both.

NAME OF PROPERTY TYPE - RAILROAD DEPOTS

Description:

Railroad depots represent a separate property type through their form and standardized plan designs. Standardized plans were used for railroad depots throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Standardized plans allowed for rapid construction of depots as rail lines expanded and created corporate symbols easily recognizable to the traveling public. Depots were often built with wide bracketed eaves for protection from the elements and with standard interior arrangements for waiting rooms, freight offices, and ticket booths. By the early 20th century many railroad companies had depots with coordinated color schemes and distinctive brackets.[32] Particular architectural styles were also adopted by railroad companies for their depots.

Within the downtown area of Poplar Bluff are two pre-1943 railroad depots, the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Depot built in 1910, and the St.Louis-San Francisco Depot constructed in 1928. These railroad depots retain their original character and have undergone minimal changes. The St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Depot Union Pacific depot continues to operate as a freight station. This building was constructed with red and gray brick and wide eaves. The first floor of the building was built to house waiting rooms and freight storage while the second floor housed railroad offices. An elaborate iron and concrete staircase known as the Iron Mountain Staircase still remains adjacent to the building and connects the depot to S. Main Street. The St.Louis-San Francisco depot, constructed by the Gephart Construction Company of Cape Girardeau, is a Spanish Mission style building. The St. Louis-San Francisco depot, located at 303 Moran Street, is constructed of yellow glazed brick with decorative red courses. The roof is covered with unglazed red Spanish tile with copper flashing. Curvilinear arches on the northern facade are capped with cut marble slabs which have a decorative marble urn in the center of each arch. The building has been converted into a railroad museum. Both depots retain much of their original exterior character and integrity.

Both of the depots in Poplar Bluff were built in standardized plans. The St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Depot is similar in design to the depot in Guthrie, Oklahoma while the Spanish Mission style was used for the St. Louis-San Francisco line's depots at Fayetteville, Arkansas and other locations.

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[32] *James B. Jones, "Railroad Development in Tennessee, 1865-1920" (unpublished document on file at Tennessee Historical Commission, Nashville, TN, 1987), p. 19.*

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Significance:

Railroad depots are significant under Criterion A for their role in transportation and for their association with the commercial development of the city. The construction of railroads through Poplar Bluff had a major impact on the city's commercial and manufacturing development. The railroads also allowed for the exploitation of the region's timber and tied the city together with the manufacturing and shipping centers of St. Louis, Memphis, Kansas City, and other urban areas. Under Criterion C, the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Depot and the St. Louis-San Francisco Depot represent a distinctive property type, an architectural symbol which immediately identified the railroad they served and which reflected the railroad's influence in the community.

Registration Requirements:

Railroad depots in Poplar Bluff are significant because of their architecture and their association with the transportation and commercial development of the community. To be architecturally significant, a depot must be a fine example of a standardized plan or particular style, or possess unusual design elements and detailing. The building must also possess integrity of setting and location, design, workmanship and materials. The retention of original interior detailing and floor plans is not necessary if the exterior of the building is essentially intact. To be historically significant, a depot must be the location of passenger or freight service for a railroad company, must be associated with an individual of particular importance, or be associated with an important event or occurrence.

NAME OF PROPERTY TYPE - CIVIC AND GOVERNMENTAL BUILDINGS

Description:

Civic and governmental buildings include those built for community improvement or for governmental operations. Civic buildings may include those of public service organizations or buildings constructed to improve the general welfare of the community. Governmental buildings may include those built for local, county, or federal governmental operations such as city halls, post offices, courthouses, and fire stations.

Significance:

Civic and governmental buildings are eligible under Criterion A, Criterion C, or a combination of both. Buildings may be significant under Criterion C if they are notable examples of an architectural style. Buildings may be significant under Criterion A if they were of particular importance in a civic or governmental role.

Registration Requirements:

Civic and governmental buildings meet registration requirements if they played an important role in local government operation; are of a particularly noteworthy architectural design; retain integrity of design, materials, craftsmanship, feeling and association; or if they retain integrity of location and setting.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

The historic resources of Poplar Bluff are located within the corporate limits of the city of Poplar Bluff, Missouri.

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SUMMARY OF IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION METHODS

An historical and architectural inventory of Poplar Bluff was completed in 1989 and 1990 as a project of the Ozark Foothills Regional Planning Commission. The project utilized federal funding through a matching grant from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. The first phases of the project were completed by a consultant and volunteers under the guidance of the Planning Commission. In January 1990, Thomason & Associates of Nashville, Tennessee were hired to refine the existing data and complete the survey. The Planning Commission assisted in typing forms and photographing properties.

In order to complete the survey, every street and road within city limits was driven and all properties were analyzed for their architectural character. Missouri inventory forms were completed for each property and data was recorded on a portable computer. Final products for each property included an inventory form, continuation sheet with architectural and historical information, street map showing the property location, and a 5 x 7 black and white photograph. A total of 413 properties were inventoried, the majority of which were residences constructed between 1890 and 1910, and Bungalows constructed between 1910 and 1930. Over fifty commercial buildings were inventoried in the downtown area, as were numerous schools, churches and government buildings. Although Poplar Bluff was a manufacturing center during the late 1800s and early 1900s, very few industrial structures remain from that period of time.

The Survey Report for this project recommended that National Register nominations be prepared for one commercial historic district, one residential historic district, and a variety of individual commercial, public, and residential buildings. This multiple property nomination is the first nomination to be prepared that nominates eligible properties in Poplar Bluff.

In order to complete this nomination, research was conducted on the overall historical growth and development of Poplar Bluff. This included examination of secondary source materials such as published histories, manuscripts, theses, dissertations, and unpublished materials in the Poplar Bluff Library and in the files of the Butler County Historical Society. Primary source material utilized by the consultant included the following:

- Sanborn Insurance Maps of Poplar Bluff (1892, 1895, 1901, 1910, 1917, 1924, and 1928);
- History of Butler County by David Deem;
- Early History of Butler County, Missouri by George Loughead;
- History of Southeast Missouri by Robert Sidney;
- Survey forms and questionnaires completed by the consultant in Poplar Bluff in 1989 and 1990; and
- local newspapers and city directories.

In addition to this multiple property nomination, six individual property nominations and a historic district nomination for the city's commercial and public buildings were prepared and accompany the multiple property nomination.

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