

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NR 10-5-2009

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Lepanto Commercial Historic District

other names/site number PO0139-PO0177, PO0193, PO0194

2. Location

street & number Roughly bounded by Holmes Street on the north, the Little River on the east, Dewey Street on the south and Alexander Avenue on the west not for publication

city or town Lepanto vicinity

state Arkansas code AR county Poinsett code 111 zip code 72354

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Cathy Maddox 7/13/09
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
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 Date

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:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

- Ownership options: private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal

- Category options: building(s), district, site, structure, object

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total. Values: 26, 15, 26, 15.

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

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store, business, professional, and restaurant
RECREATION AND CULTURE/theatre

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store, business, professional, restaurant
GOVERNMENT/library

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style
MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco
OTHER: No Style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE, BRICK
walls STUCCO, CUT STONE, BRICK, VINYL/SYNTHETIC, METAL SIDING
roof ASPHALT, METAL, TAR
other

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

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B. removed from its original location.
C. birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
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.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

Local

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1915-1959

Significant Dates

1915-1959

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

Architect/Builder

Rev. Leslie Riherd, H.A. Lesmeister

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical 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 - Arkansas State Library and Archives
Federal Agency
Local Government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Lepanto Commercial Historic District
Name of Property

Poinsett County, Arkansas
County and State

Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approximately 11.90 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u>	<u>741897</u>	<u>3944010</u>	3	<u>15</u>	<u>741769</u>	<u>3944326</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>15</u>	<u>741829</u>	<u>3944326</u>	4	<u>15</u>	<u>741778</u>	<u>3944273</u>

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 Angie Clifton/ Architectural Historian
organization Panamerican Consultants, Inc. date April 2, 2009
street & number 91 Tillman St. telephone (901) 454-4733
city or town Memphis state TN zip code 38111

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 _____
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

SUMMARY

The Lepanto Commercial Historic District was once a thriving commercial center for Lepanto, which is located in the eastern section of Poinsett County, Arkansas. Lepanto does not have any buildings previously listed on the NRHP. Within the district boundaries, there are 41 buildings and 7 ancillary structures. Of the buildings within the district 63.4% (26 total buildings) maintain a high level of integrity and are contributing elements. The other 15 buildings account for 36.6% of the district and are non-contributing. Several periods of significance are represented since there are different phases of development for the town of Lepanto that occurred between 1915-1959. In addition, the three buildings constructed after 1959 are listed as non-contributing buildings within the district. The Lepanto Commercial Historic District's buildings represent standard commercial architecture from the 20th century.

LABORATION

The oldest remaining buildings in Lepanto Commercial Historic District date to 1915. Organization and development of a Main Street did not begin until 1903 when Charles Greenwood commissioned four men to survey the town. The first period of construction in Lepanto includes the buildings dating from 1915 up to 1924. This period reflects the years that Lepanto still had a large timber industry and cotton farming started to become the main staple of the economy. The second period of development includes buildings constructed between 1925 and 1939. The timber industry began to dwindle and cotton did become the main staple of the economy. The final period of development for Lepanto includes buildings constructed between 1940 and 1959. The buildings in this period are infill resulting from buildings that burned or deteriorated. Only three buildings were built after 1959, and all are municipal buildings on the south end of Greenwood. From 1959 to the present, the town has seen steady growth with a fairly stable commercial downtown area.

1915-1924

The architecture of downtown Lepanto in the first period of its development can be described as standard early twentieth century commercial architecture. These brick buildings vary between one and two stories in height and feature rectangular plans, with the exception of two buildings constructed in this time period. The ca. 1915 Portis Gin No. 1 (PO0153, contributing) located at the southeast corner of the district east of the John Deere Building (PO0152) and west of the Little River was in operation until 1992, but the structure is still owned by Portis Mercantile Company. The cotton gin still has the scale and the scalehouse with original windows and has retained almost all of its architectural integrity. The building has three ancillary structures, which include a seed house, a granary with three hoppers, and a small shed by the vents near the east elevation. The ca. 1920 Arkansas Power and Light Building (PO0139, contributing) located at 320 Greenwood Avenue is a brick triangular-shaped structure with a wrought-iron balustrade on the two-story section of the front facade. The building postdates the Tyronza Central Railroad that ran along the northeast side of the structure until the 1960s, which explains its irregular shape. The building has functioned as the J.C. Portis Company since the 1940s. The ca. 1920 Barton's of Lepanto (PO0177, contributing) located at 111 Berny Street was originally a lumberyard. The two-story brick structure was originally a wood-framed building

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

with a large entrance in the front and back of the building that customers could drive through when they picked up lumber they had purchased. The building changed ca. 1955 and was bricked and enclosed in the front for the purpose of having a hardware store. Thirty-one buildings, or 76% of the district, were constructed in this phase of development. Twenty-seven of the buildings from this period of development are located on Greenwood Avenue. The ca. 1920 J.E. Murphy Hardware Building (PO0164, contributing) located at 219 Greenwood Avenue is a double storefront, one-story brick structure that now houses the Connor Family Restaurant. The ca. 1920 Portis Mercantile Company (PO0166, non-contributing) located at 211 Greenwood Avenue remains the longest continuously operated family business in the entire district. The ca. 1920 Jones Drug Store (PO0149, contributing) located at 216 Greenwood Avenue has continuously operated as a drugstore since it was built. The building still has original brick and the interior has original cabinets, counters, stools, and tin ceiling tiles. This phase of development represents a time of prosperity and growth for Lepanto by being the time when the majority of the district was built.

1925-1939

The buildings from Lepanto dating from this second period in its construction reflect a time period of decline with crop prices falling and the Great Depression hitting. Only four buildings were constructed during this period. The ca. 1925 Lepanto Police Department (PO0174, contributing) located at 113 Greenwood Avenue is a two-story brick structure built by H.A. Lesmeister on the northern section of the district boundary. An addition was made to the east side of the building in 1947, and the entire building is original except for replacement doors. The other three buildings built during this time are the ca. 1925 Building at 257 Greenwood Avenue (PO0154, non-contributing), ca. 1925 Building at 114 Berny Street (PO0176, non-contributing) and the ca. 1925 Cotton Boll Theatre (PO0151, non-contributing) located at 202 Greenwood Avenue. The Building at 257 Greenwood Avenue is a non-descript one-story standard commercial brick structure. The Building at 114 Berny Street has been completely altered with a ca. 1980 gable roof and concrete block walls. The 1926 Sanborn map shows the building as an office space. The Cotton Boll Theatre was altered the first time in 1951 by combining the Cotton Boll Theatre and Lamb's Beauty Shop into one building when First National Bank was in the building. Little River Bank moved into the building the same year, and it was altered again in 1996. The four buildings only represent 10% of the entire district.

1940-1959

There were only three buildings constructed within the boundaries of the Lepanto Commercial Historic District in the years between 1940 and 1959. Two of the buildings in this time period are located on the south end of Greenwood Avenue and are infill from buildings that were either torn down or burned. Beasley's Café (PO0156, non-contributing) located at 253 Greenwood Avenue is a one-story brick structure that is nearly identical to the ca. 1940 Building at 255 Greenwood Avenue (PO0155, non-contributing). The only modifications made to these buildings are their shared ca. 1980 asphalt-shingled awning. One of the most unique buildings in the entire district is the 1943 Lepanto School Auditorium and Gymnasium (PO0194, contributing) located on Alexander Avenue southeast of 111 Berny Street. The building reflects an Art Deco influence with its curved parapets on the shed roof sections and the inlaid decorative stonework on

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

the front façade. The building was designed by Rev. Leslie Riherd, and German Prisoners of War being held at Marked Tree provided the labor to construct the building. The gymnasium also held concerts, and on March 22, 1957, Johnny Cash played a packed show there. The three buildings represent 7% of the entire district.

1959-Present

Only three or 7% of the buildings have been constructed within the boundaries of the district in the last fifty years. All three of the buildings are municipal buildings located on the north end of Greenwood Avenue next to the Lepanto Police Department. The 1966 Lepanto City Hall (PO0171, non-contributing) and the 1990 Community Court Building (PO0172, non-contributing) located at 117 Greenwood Avenue are both plain one-story brick structures with shed roofs. The Lepanto City Hall has functioned as city hall since its construction, as well as the south end of the building having a volunteer fire department. The 1984 Emergency Medical Facility (PO0173, non-contributing) located at 113 Greenwood Avenue on the east side of the Lepanto Police Department (PO0174) is a plain one-story brick structure with a shed roof. These buildings do not necessarily interrupt the continuity of the district, for all of them are located at the north end of the district and are set back from the historic section of Greenwood Avenue.

INTEGRITY

With 63.4% of the resources contributing to the integrity of Lepanto Commercial Historic District, it has a strong visual connection to its period of significance. Interruptions in this district are related to a few factors. The main factor was highways and automobiles making the world outside of Lepanto more accessible. The majority of the population before the 1960s were cotton farmers, who were mostly sharecroppers. The collapse of tenant farming and the mechanization of agriculture also led to fewer opportunities for those living in Lepanto, making the town a bedroom community. The Lepanto Commercial Historic District still has many businesses open in the historic district with only 12 buildings (or 29%) vacant. Many of the alterations on the buildings are minor with only storefronts changing, although a few structures have had roofs replaced or a front façade rebricked. The lack of alterations on the structures in the Lepanto Commercial Historic District has helped a great deal in preserving the architectural integrity and continuity of the district.

United States Department of the Interior
 National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

Resource	Address	Current Occupant	Map ID#	C/NC
PO0139	320 Greenwood Avenue	J.C. Portis Company	1	C
PO0140	306 Greenwood Avenue	Stanley and Company Crop Insurance	2	NC
PO0141	310 Greenwood Avenue	Lepanto Museum	3	NC
PO0142	244-246-248 Greenwood Avenue	Tyler Insurance Agency	4	C
PO0143	240 Greenwood Avenue	Goldsby Library	5	NC
PO0144	238 Greenwood Avenue	Vacant	6	C
PO0145	230-232 Greenwood Avenue	DeWailly's Fishing and Hunting	7	C
PO0146	228 Greenwood Avenue	Vacant	8	C
PO0147	226 Greenwood Avenue	The Cozy Nook/The Tea Shoppe	9	C
PO0148	220-222 Greenwood Avenue	Delta Chronicle/Maters 'N' Taters	10	C
PO0149	216 Greenwood Avenue	Pharmacy	11	C
PO0150	214 Greenwood Avenue	Florist Gallery	12	C
PO0151	202 Greenwood Avenue	Little River Bank	13	NC
PO0152	South end of Greenwood Avenue across from 320 Greenwood Avenue	Vacant	14	C
PO0153	Southeast corner of district east of John Deere Building and west of the Little River	Vacant	15	C
PO0154	257 Greenwood Avenue	Vacant	16	NC
PO0155	255 Greenwood Avenue	Pizza Place	17	NC
PO0156	253 Greenwood Avenue	Vacant	18	NC
PO0157	247-249 Greenwood Avenue	The General Store	19	C
PO0158	239-241-243 Greenwood Avenue	Vacant	20	C
PO0159	237 Greenwood Avenue	Turner's Martial Arts	21	C
PO0160	235 Greenwood Avenue	Vacant	22	C
PO0161	231-233 Greenwood Avenue	This and That Store	23	C
PO0162	225 Greenwood Avenue	Mike's Place	24	NC
PO0163	223 Greenwood Avenue	The Wooden Closet	25	C
PO0164	219 Greenwood Avenue	Connor's Family Steakhouse	26	C
PO0165	215 Greenwood Avenue	Lepanto Auction	27	C
PO0166	211 Greenwood Avenue	Portis Mercantile Company	28	NC
PO0167	209 Greenwood Avenue	Vacant	29	C
PO0168	207 Greenwood Avenue	Vacant/Parking	30	NC
PO0169	205 Greenwood Avenue	Vacant	31	C

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 5

PO0170	127 Greenwood Avenue	Tyler's Real Estate	32	NC
PO0171	117 Greenwood Avenue	Lepanto City Hall	33	NC
PO0172	117 Greenwood Avenue	Community Court Building	34	NC
PO0173	113 Greenwood Avenue	Emergency Medical Facility	35	NC
PO0174	113 Greenwood Avenue	Police Department	36	C
PO0175	Holmes Street just east of 202 Greenwood Avenue	Bill's Barber Shop	37	C
PO0176	114 Berny Street	Residence	38	NC
PO0177	111 Berny Street	Barton's of Lepanto	39	C
PO0193	218 Greenwood Avenue	Vacant	40	C
PO0194	Alexander Avenue southeast of 125 Berny Street	Storage for Barton's of Lepanto	41	C

Chart Key:

C = Contributing
NC = Non-Contributing
IL = Individual Listing

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

SUMMARY

The Lepanto Commercial Historic District is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** for its association with early development and commercial activities in Lepanto. The district is being nominated with **local significance**. The Lepanto Commercial Historic District exemplifies the growth of the town through its height in the 1950s. The period of significance extends from 1915-1959.

ELABORATION

Lepanto is located in the eastern section of Poinsett County, Arkansas. Poinsett County is located in northeastern Arkansas, and is in the heart of the "Delta" region of east-central Arkansas in an area known as the Mississippi Embayment, which is a depression reaching over 200 miles from southeast Missouri to Helena caused from the ancient flow of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers.¹ Lepanto is located on the Left Hand Chute of the Little River North of the town of Marked Tree in the Holocene region in an area that has alluvial deposits of local streams.²

Poinsett County was named after Arkansas Congressmen Archibald Yell's friend, Joel Roberts Poinsett from South Carolina, who served as Secretary of War during Van Buren's presidency. The county formed February 28, 1838, as the 37th county in Arkansas,³ and it formed from territory taken from Green and St. Francis counties. When the county was formed there were no towns, only scattered settlements. In 1859, a large portion of the north section of the county was taken to form Craighead County. Part of the southern section of the county was taken to form Cross County in 1862, but land to the east was added to Poinsett County at this time. This added section included the "sunk lands." The New Madrid earthquake occurred December 16, 1811, and lasted for several months. The area known as the "sunken lands" formed during the earthquake when a large area of land sunk beneath the level surface. This caused flooding to occur every spring making it impossible to farm until the late nineteenth century when the initiative was taken to build levees.⁴

The first known permanent settlers in Poinsett County were Charles and Rebekah Shaver and their family, who arrived in the fall of 1824. Settlers slowly migrated into the county. It is recorded that a few Indian villages still existed, and even buffalo still roamed the prairies.⁵ The first county seat was the town of Bolivar, and its first courthouse was built in 1839. In 1856 an election was held where county citizens voted to move the county seat somewhere between townships 9 and 10 in the center of the county, so the county seat was moved to Harrisburg.

¹ Smith, Sandra Taylor. "Tyronza Commercial Historic District, Poinsett County, Arkansas." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. From the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, 2009.

² Haley, Boyd R. *Geologic Map of Arkansas*. 1976, rev. 1993.

³ Siler, Andrea. "Poinsett County: Rich in History." *The Modern News, Tri-City Tribune, and the Trumann Democrat*. Thursday, May 14, 1992.

⁴ Poinsett County Historical Society. *Poinsett County, Arkansas: History and Families*. Turner Publishing Company: Paducah, Kentucky, 1998, 11-12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

By the time the Civil War began, it is estimated that there were only 40 slaves living in the county. This might explain one of the reasons why Poinsett County delegation voted against seceding from the Union during the first convention in Little Rock. The economy began to turn around once the railroads arrived in Poinsett County in the early 1880s. This helped the economy tremendously by allowing the area to ship and receive products. The first railroad, called the Texas & St. Louis Railroad, arrived in 1881 and went through the towns of Weiner and Fisher. The St. Louis & Iron Mountain Railway arrived in 1882 and went through White Hall, Harrisburg, and Greenfield. The Kansas City, Fort Scott and Memphis Railway ran along the east side of the county and came through Tyronza and Marked Tree in 1883. The railroads allowed access to large industrial centers. Soon after, Poinsett County began to see considerable growth.⁶

Before levees and drainage ditches were built, Lepanto was a merely a small rise in a vast cane-breaking swamp. The first known settler was a pioneer named "Uncle" George Nichols. He came from Dunklin County, Missouri, in 1858, and he mainly hunted, trapped, and raised cattle. Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Miller came from middle Tennessee in 1870. They settled on what later became John Potter's land, where Potter's cemetery and mound is located. Dan Seely Buck opened the first trading post in the area on his two-deck houseboat. Mr. Buck became tired of traveling 50 miles down the Little River to get to the post office in Marked Tree, and he established a post office in 1894 on Buck's Landing and served as postmaster until 1910. Lepanto was picked out of the names Mr. Buck sent for his request to the Postal Department in Washington, D.C. Lepanto is named after a seaport in Greece located on the north shore of the entrance of the Gulf of Corinth of Lepanto.⁷

By the turn of the century, more settlers started coming to Lepanto to homestead. The first cotton gin was built by Steve Ralph and H.S. Portis in 1902 making it possible to gin locally and not have to send cotton by steamboat to Memphis to be ginned. The timber industry flourished between 1900 and 1919. The first sawmill in Lepanto was owned by W.C. Dawson and opened in 1905. Another mill was the Grismore-Hyman Mill, based out of Memphis that opened in 1911. The "Ox Log Spur" was a logging camp located between Lepanto and Marked Tree that operated around the same time. Chapman and Dewey Lumber Company built a railroad going from Marked Tree to Lepanto in 1905 called the Tyronza Central, which was later bought by the St. Louis San Francisco Railroad Company.⁸ A depot was constructed in 1912 at the intersection of Alexander Avenue and Elm Street. In the beginning the railroad would make two trips a day and had a smoker, an express car, and several passenger cars. Later, it decreased to three trips a week, and eventually due to roads being opened and the automobile, it turned into a railroad that was strictly freight. The 1912 Frisco Depot was razed in 1965.⁹

⁶ Poinsett County Historical Society. *Poinsett County, Arkansas: History and Families*. Paducah, Kentucky: Turner Publishing Company, 1998, 11-12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

Charles Bryan Greenwood came to Lepanto from the Harrisburg area at the turn of the century and set out to prove that the land where Lepanto is now was livable. He commissioned four engineers to help him plat the town in 1903. The streets of Lepanto now carry the names of the surveyors and Greenwood: Miles Street, Bernie Street (now spelled Berny), Alexander Avenue, Holmes Street, and Greenwood Avenue. The town of Lepanto was legally incorporated in 1909. The first mayor of Lepanto was W.W. Lamb. The first bank established was the Bank of Lepanto in 1910. J.T. Lee, Sr., organized the bank and was its first president. Originally, the bank was housed in a framed building before a permanent brick structure was constructed. The Lepanto Telephone Company opened the same year with Layton Seymour as president.¹⁰

Before ferries and bridges, the only means of transportation in Lepanto and the surrounding area was via the Little River. In 1910 Layton Seymour opened a ferry business on the Little River, and at that time was the only means of transportation across the river. It cost 75¢ for a one-way trip with a wagon and two mules and \$1.25 for round-trip. In 1919, the Little River Bridge was built with metal girders and lumber from the area. At the time, it was the only bridge existing on the east chute of the Little River. The State Highway Department maintained the bridge. In 1957 the bridge had deteriorated and was replaced in 1963.¹¹

By 1912, Lepanto was an established town with a bank, a hotel, sawmills, gins, several dry goods stores, a drug store, meat market, lumber and implement stores, a jeweler, a telephone system, a barber shop and a blacksmith. The *Marked Tree Gazette* commented on Lepanto's Main Street April 1915 by saying that "The Bank of Lepanto, Marcom Brothers, and H.S. Portis have plans for a solid block on Main Street."¹²

Dan F. Portis, Sr., came to Lepanto around 1911. He opened Portis Mercantile Company with J.E. Murphy Sr. Mr. Portis operated the seed, feed, and dry goods side of the business, and Mr. Murphy operated the hardware store. Their partnership ended in 1915, and Mr. Portis built the Portis Mercantile Building (PO0166) that stands today. His business became one of the biggest sources of credit for farmers in the community. After World War I farm prices began to collapse when cotton dropped from \$1 a pound to 4-5¢ a pound. Flooding occurred in 1927 and 1928 destroying crops. The Portis Mercantile Company, as well as the farmers, suffered greatly from this financial loss. Dan F. Portis, Sr., died in 1931, and Dan F. Portis, Jr., took over the company. The Portis families soon recovered from their losses, and by 1947 were operating five cotton gins (Gin No. 1 (PO0153), Gin. No. 2, Gin No. 3, the Bonds Gin, and the West Ridge Gin) in the area. In the year 1947, they ginned 23,000 bales of cotton. During this time, the only crop was cotton, and this did not change until the 1960s. Dan Portis, Jr., died in 1990, but his family still runs the business today. The company consists of Portis Farms, Inc., Portis Mercantile of West Ridge, Inc., D.F. Portis Trust, and approximately 20,000 acres of land remains in the Portis family. The company is now managed by H.G. Watkins III, the grandson of Dan F. Portis, Jr. The Portis Mercantile Company no longer gives credit

¹⁰ Siler, Andrea. "Poinsett County: Rich in History." *The Modern News, Tri-City Tribune*, and the *Trumann Democrat*. Thursday, May 14, 1992.

¹¹ Poinsett County Historical Society. *Poinsett County, Arkansas: History and Families*. Paducah, Kentucky: Turner Publishing Company, 1998, 125.

¹² *Ibid.*, 124.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4

to farmers, and in 1992 Gin No. 1 and Gin No. 2 closed. Portis Mercantile Company and J.C. Portis Company, Inc. partnered up to run Rabbit Ridge Gin.¹³

The Little River Bank was established in 1919. Originally named the Bank of Keiser, it was located in Keiser and owned by the Lee Wilson family. When the Great Depression hit both the Bank of Lepanto and the First National Bank of Lepanto closed. This left the town without a bank, so in 1934 the stockholders changed the name of the bank to Little River Bank and moved it into the former Bank of Lepanto Building (PO0141). Dan F. Portis became the bank's president in 1939. The bank moved to its current location in 1951.¹⁴

The first permanent school structure was a two-story brick building built in 1913 and located on Alexander Avenue. In the beginning, it served as the elementary and high school until 1948 when it was used solely as elementary school. The building was torn down in 1965. The PTA petitioned to have a school gymnasium built in 1939, and the Lepanto School Gymnasium and Auditorium (PO0194) was built in 1944. The building was designed by Rev. Leslie Riherd but was constructed by German prisoners-of-war staying in Marked Tree.¹⁵

The first American Legion organized in Lepanto in 1926. Willie Lamb Post No. 26 was named after the first Lepanto veteran to die during his service in World War I. Before they had a permanent structure, they used the Marcom warehouse and then the J.E. Murphy warehouse to hold their meetings. The building they had built in 1924 was destroyed by fire in 1937. The WPA donated \$10,000 to have a new building erected, which was constructed the following year.¹⁶ The Lepanto Terrapin Derby was created by the Willie Lamb Post No. 26 in 1930 as a fundraiser, and it was originally called the Annual American Legion Turtle Derby. Each turtle racer would pay an entry fee to race their turtle down a sixty-foot course. The finish line was lined with slices of watermelon, and the top three winners received a cash prize. The Lepanto Terrapin Derby became a major attraction for those in the Delta, and by 1937 over 4,000 people came from Arkansas, Tennessee, and Mississippi to Lepanto to see the race. Since its creation, the Derby has occurred the first Saturday in October on Greenwood Avenue. The American Legion hosted the event until 1981 when the Lepanto Museum took it over, and in 1999 the Lepanto Fire Department started hosting the event.¹⁷

Hallmark Hall of Fame Productions came to Lepanto to film a television movie of John Grisham's *A Painted House* in 2002. The movie crew built a 30' by 60' house, which was sent to the Hallmark headquarters in

¹³ Ibid., 137.

¹⁴ Ibid., 136.

¹⁵ Ibid., 127.

¹⁶ Ibid., 131.

¹⁷ Lepanto Terrapin Derby. Found at: <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net>

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5

Kansas City, Missouri. In 2003 local citizens raised money to have the house brought back to Lepanto. It now sits on the south end of town next to Portis Gin No. 2.¹⁸

The days of logging in Lepanto are long gone, but farming remains the basis of the economy today. By the 1950s large renters and mechanical cotton pickers started to replace sharecropping. Today cotton remains the main crop, but soybeans have become a major crop as well.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Lepanto Commercial Historic District is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** for its association with early development and commercial activities in Lepanto. The district is being nominated with **local significance**. The Lepanto Commercial Historic District exemplifies growth of the town through its height in the 1950s. The period of significance extends from 1915-1959.

¹⁸ A Painted House [Book and Movie]. Found at: <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net>

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 1

ADDITIONAL UTMS:

5. 15 741733E 3944266N
6. 15 741738E 3944098N
7. 15 741694E 3944098N
8. 15 741685E 3944999N

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning south of Portis Gin No. 1 (PO0139), thence proceed northwest directly west of the municipal buildings (PO0171-PO0174), thence proceed west to the rear of the Police Department (PO0174) at Greenwood Avenue, thence proceed south to Holmes Street to the Little River Bank (PO0151), proceed west to the end of Bill's Barber Shop (PO0175) at the alley, thence proceed south on the alley to Berny Street, thence proceed west to Alexander Street, thence proceed south to the end of Barton of Lepanto's (PO0177) property line, thence proceed south near the west bank of the Little River and south Portis Gin No. 1 (PO0139), which is the point of beginning.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

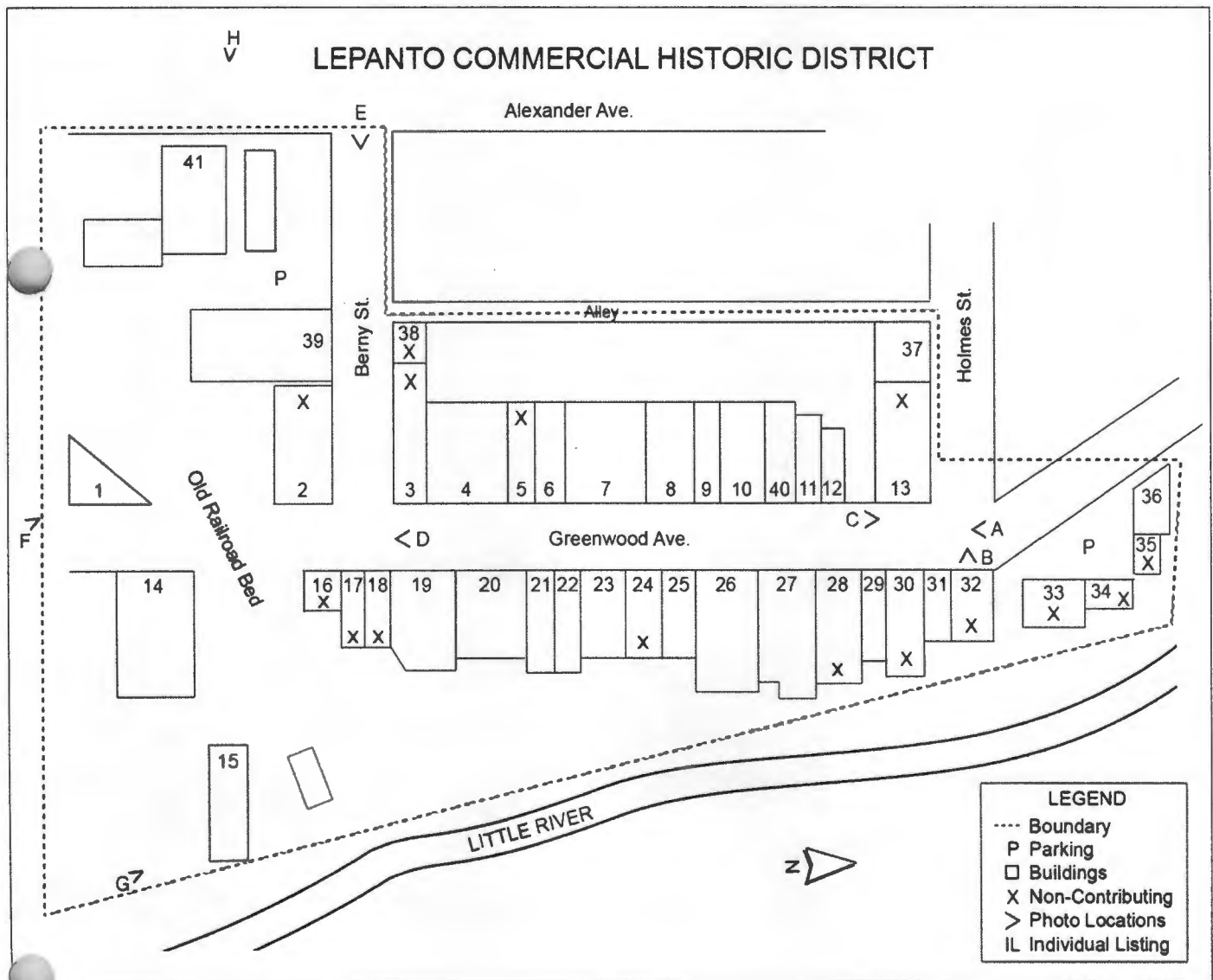
This boundary was drawn to include properties in the Lepanto Commercial Historic District with the greatest density of structures maintaining a high level of integrity.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Map Page 1

SKETCH MAP



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Historic Page 1
 Photos



Figure 1. Greenwood Avenue viewing southwest, ca. 1920. [Courtesy of Bradford, JaRue, ed. *Stories of Old and Some I've Been Told*. Lepanto, Arkansas: Museum Lepanto USA, 2005.]

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Historic Page 2
 Photos _____



Figure 2. North end of Greenwood Avenue viewing south, ca. 1920. [Courtesy of Bradford, JaRue, ed. *Stories of Old and Some I've Been Told*. Lepanto, Arkansas: Museum Lepanto USA, 2005.]

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Historic Page 3
 Photos _____



Figure 3. South end of Greenwood Avenue viewing north, ca. 1925. [Courtesy of Bradford, JaRue, ed. *Stories of Old and Some I've Been Told*. Lepanto, Arkansas: Museum Lepanto USA, 2005.]

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Historic Page 4
 Photos



Figure 4. The Bank of Lepanto (PO0141) located at 310 Greenwood Avenue viewing northwest, ca. 1920. [Courtesy of Poinsett County Historical Society. *Poinsett County, Arkansas: History and Families*. Turner Publishing Company: Paducah, Kentucky, 1998.]

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Historic Page 5
 Photos

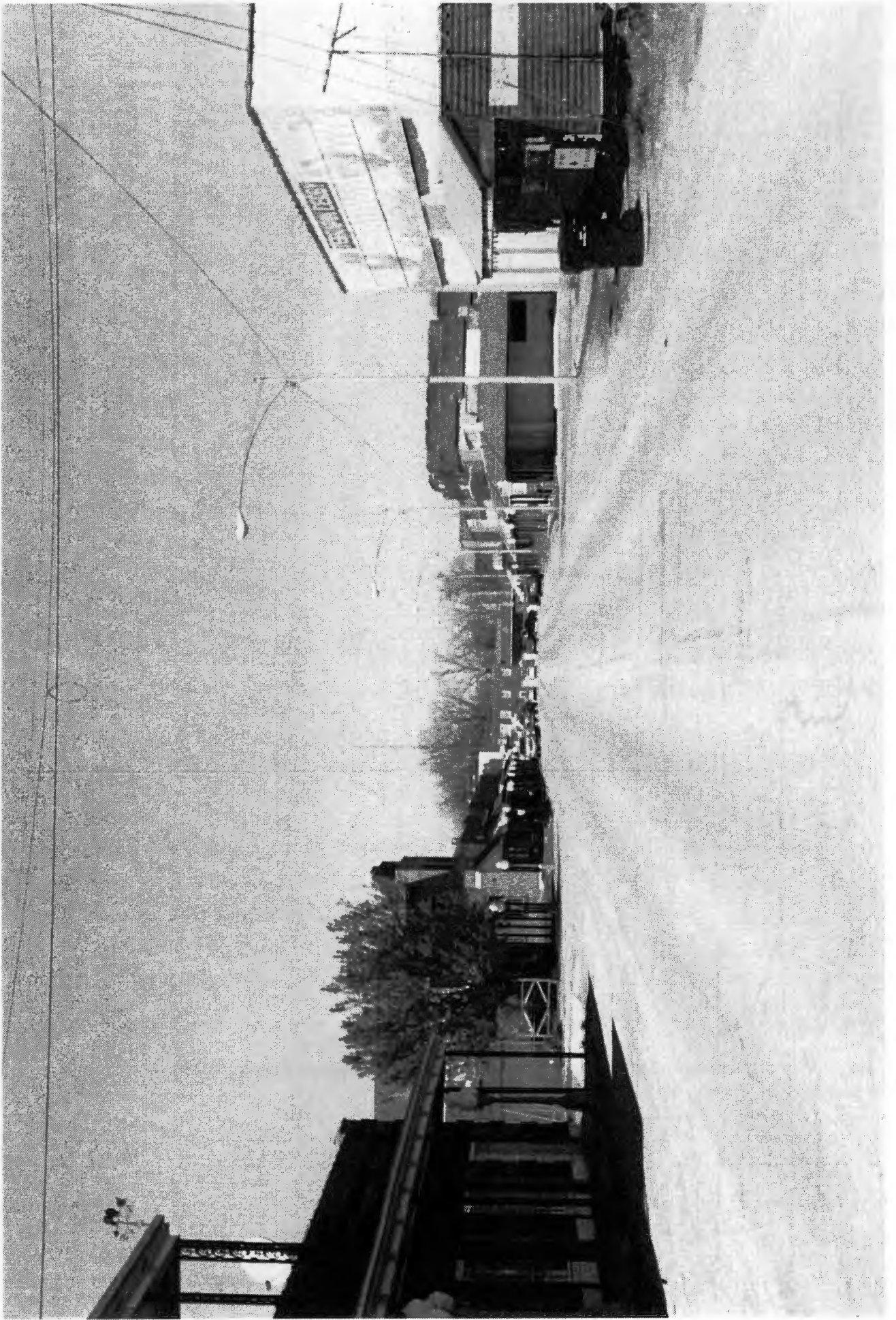


Figure 5. Greenwood Avenue viewing northwest at Henderson's Home Appliances (PO0142), ca. 1950. [Courtesy of Poinsett County Historical Society. *Poinsett County, Arkansas: History and Families*. Turner Publishing Company: Paducah, Kentucky, 1998.]

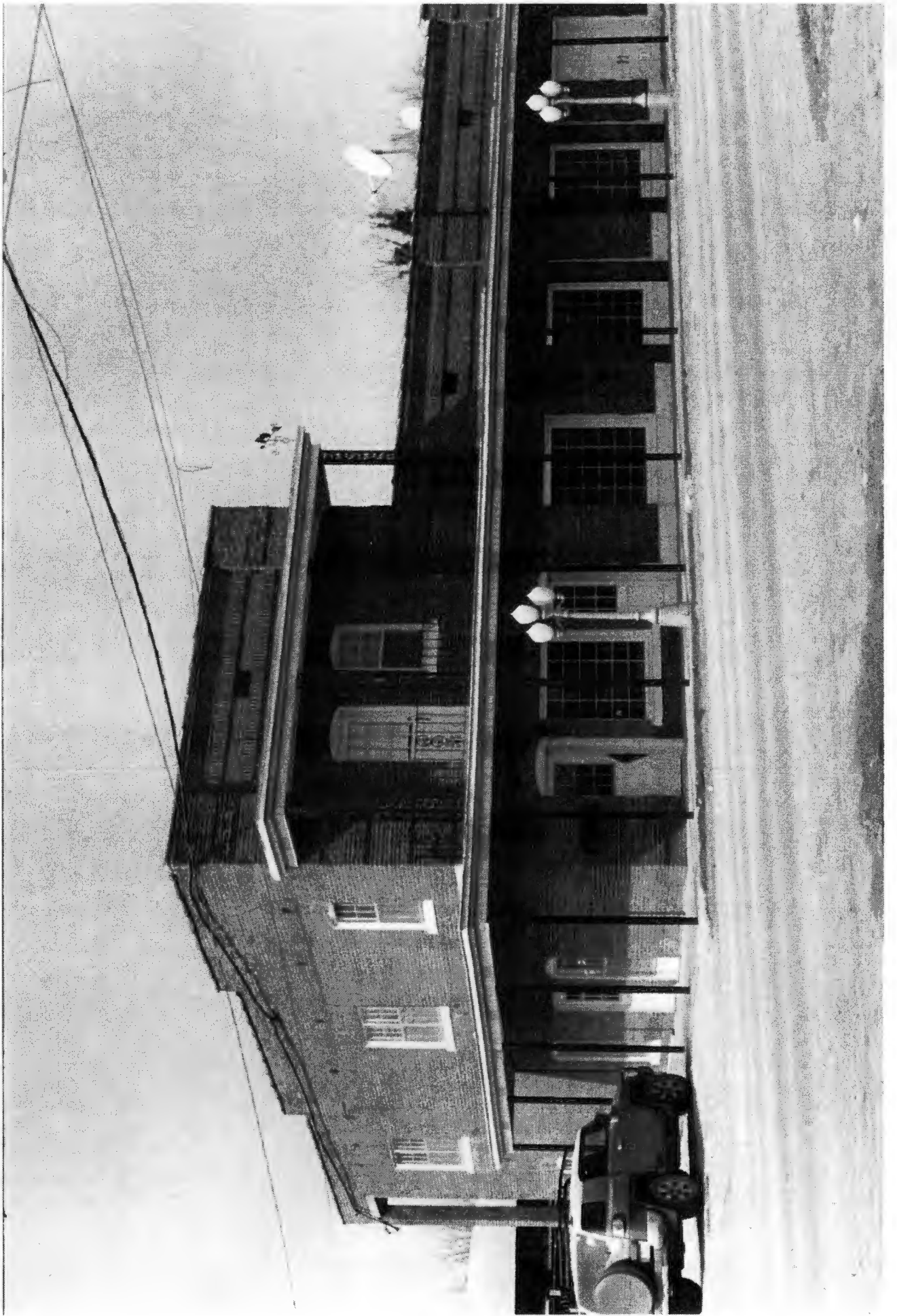






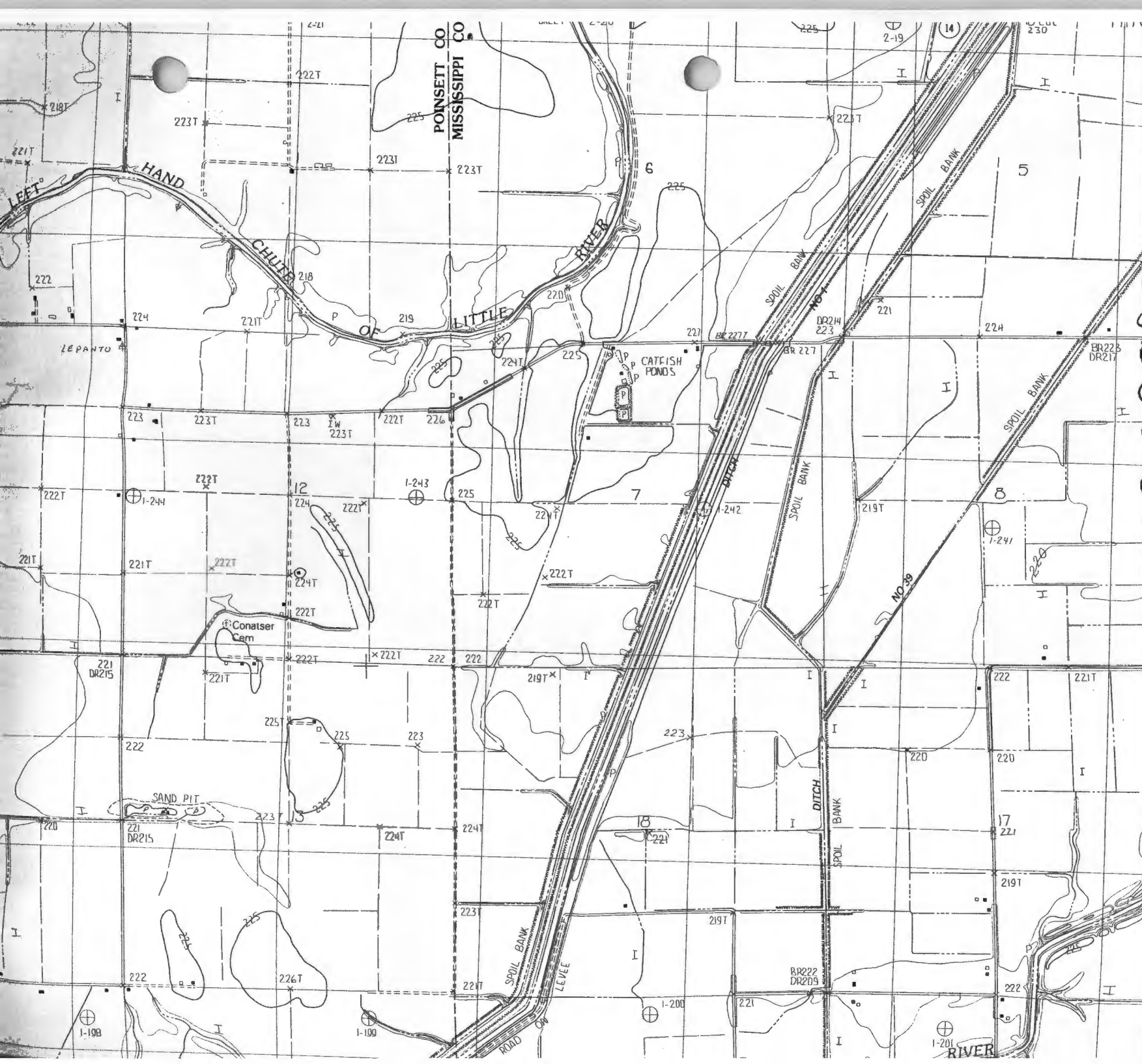












LEPANTO COMMERCIAL
HISTORIC DISTRICT,
LEPANTO,
POINSETT CO., AR

UTM REFERENCES:

- ① 15/741897/3944010
- ② 15/741829/3944326
- ③ 15/741769/3944326
- ④ 15/741778/3944272
- ⑤ 15/741733/3944266
- ⑥ 15/741738/3944098
- ⑦ 15/741694/3944098
- ⑧ 15/741685/3943999