

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NR 6/4/08

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

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 Weldon Gin Company Historic District

other names/site number Site Number # JA0525

2. Location

street & number Northeast corner of the Washington Street & Arkansas Hwy. 17 Intersection ☐ not for publication

city or town Weldon ☐ vicinity

state Arkansas code AR county Jackson code 067 zip code 72112

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)

Carrie Mace
Signature of certifying official/Title

3/31/08
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

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification**Ownership of Property**
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☐ building(s)
☒ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
3	1	buildings
		sites
3		structures
		objects
6	1	Total

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

"Get Down the Shovel and the Hoe: Cotton and Rice Farm
History and Architecture in the Arkansas Delta, 1900-1955"

**Number of Contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register****6. Function or Use****Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility/cotton gin

INDUSTRY/industrial storage

AGRICULTURE/processing/cotton gin

AGRICULTURE/storage

AGRICULTURE/agricultural outbuilding

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

AGRICULTURE/agricultural outbuilding

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/Plain Traditional

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls METAL/Steel

roof METAL/Steel

other

Narrative Description

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

Weldon Gin, Company Historic District
Name of Property

Jackson County, Arkansas
County and State

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.

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 # _____

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

LOCAL

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURE

INDUSTRY

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1939-1958

Significant Dates

1939-1958

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

Architect/Builder

CONTINENTAL GIN COMPANY

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

Weldon Gin, Company Historic District
Name of Property

Jackson County, Arkansas
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Area of Property 1.75

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 15 660653 3924089
Zone Easting Northing
2

3
Zone Easting Northing
4
☐ 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 Van Zbinden, National Register Historian
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date 12 February 2008
street & number 323 Center Street, Suite 1600 telephone 501.324.9880
city or town Little Rock state AR zip code 72201

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 Ralph McDonald, Jr.
street & number 6 Cypress Street telephone
city or town Newport state AR zip code 72112

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 Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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Summary

The Weldon Gin Company has a long history in Weldon and Jackson County, Arkansas. Alvin McDonald began ginning cotton in the area of Weldon in 1833. McDonald's efforts grew to become the Weldon Gin Company. The gin was the commercial center for this small, eastern Arkansas town. It was, and is currently, the only gin in the community. The gin complex consists of six contributing buildings and structures and one non-contributing building.

Elaboration

With a gin building built approximately 1939, the current Weldon Gin Company complex is a mixture of old and new structures. Weldon is a small town in southern Jackson County. It sits in the Mississippi River Delta between the White and Cache Rivers. The gin complex sits at the corner of Weldon Avenue and Washington Streets in the middle of the town of Weldon. The company operated in this same location for over a century with newer technologies and newer buildings replacing older to meet the needs of business. After the Rural Electrification Act brought electricity to Weldon in 1936 the old steam-powered, timber-framed cotton gin was replaced with a modern, electrified, all steel cotton gin in 1939.

Continental Ginning Company built the current gin and supplied all of the ginning equipment necessary for operation. The new gin sits on a reinforced concrete foundation and features all steel construction with steel casement windows. At the same time a refuse burner was installed on the east side of the site to burn hulls, stems, and other debris. Two pre-existing buildings and one structure remained through the 1939 reconstruction: a seed warehouse on the west side of the property, a cotton warehouse on the north side of the property, and a wagon shed also on the north side of the property. The White & Black River Valley Railway, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Chicago, Rock Island, & Pacific Railroad, ceased operations through Weldon in 1940 and abandoned the railroad in 1942. This forced the shipment of seed and finished cotton from the railroad to trucks. Therefore a seed loading hopper and tower was added north of the gin in the early 1940s for loading seed into open-topped truck trailers. There is only one non-contributing building, a metal shed used for a period, outside the period of significance, as the office.

As acreage controls were removed and the amount of rice grown in Jackson County increased, it became more and more difficult for the Weldon Gin Company to gin enough cotton each year. By the early 1980s production reached about 1,000 bales per season. With operation no longer economically feasible, the cotton gin ceased operation.

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Cotton Gin

South Façade/ Front

The main gin building is an all steel building consisting of a steel frame and corrugated steel siding. The front elevation of this two and one-half story building is fenestrated by seven, six-over-three, hopper-style casement windows. Three of the windows are equally spaced on the west side of the façade and four on the east side of the façade. There are an additional four, six-pane stationary windows in the second story of the façade. Additionally there are two doors in the elevation; one is a smaller three foot door and the second is two sliding doors centered on the scale at the unloading area.

A large overhanging awning with combination shed and gable roof extends the length of the elevation and protected the unloading area from the elements. Centered on the building is the scale and pneumatic unloading equipment. The scale rests in the ground along the center of the building. The combination of pipes and lifters used for unloading cotton is housed under an unusual, dual cross-gabled porch roof.

East Façade/ Side

The east façade is clad in corrugated steel and has two fenestrations. A wide sliding door provided equipment access into the interior of the gin. One four-over-two, hopper-style casement window provided light into the work space. Two pipes lead away from this façade toward the refuse burner further toward the east.

North Façade/ Rear

The north façade is fenestrated by several six-over-three, hopper-style casement windows in the second story. There is one three foot door allowing access to the rear of the building from inside. Additionally piping extends from the rear of the building to the seed loading hopper installed circa 1942. There is also a large diameter vent extending from the elevation on the first floor for exhaust air from the vacuum, blower, and dryer systems.

West Façade/ Side

A wide, shed-roofed awning at the first story extends the width of the building. This provided shelter for the loading dock that extends from this west side of the building. The elevation is fenestrated with two, six-pane stationary windows on the second floor and one six-pane stationary window on the first floor. A large sliding door provided access from the balers, housed on this end of the building, to the loading dock.

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The loading dock is approximately two feet high and made completely of reinforced concrete. It features a simple I-beam crane and lifting system for loading finished bales of ginned cotton and unfinished bales of un-ginned cotton.

Seed Warehouse

South Façade/ Side

The seed warehouse is a frame structure sitting on brick piers. It pre-dates the 1939 gin building and was used to load railroad cars with seed for transport to the cotton oil mills. The south elevation has no fenestrations and is clad in wood lap siding. The roof is corrugated steel, cross gable.

East Façade/ Front

This side is fenestrated by one wooden, four-foot door. The siding is lap siding.

North Façade/ Side

Like the south façade there are no fenestrations in the north elevation.

West Façade/ Rear

The west façade faced a siding of the White and Black River Valley Railway. The side is fenestrated by three, four-foot doors equally spaced from the center of the elevation. The doors, mounted on the interior, are wooden and glide on iron trackwork.

Cotton Warehouse

South Façade/ Side

The cotton warehouse pre-dates the 1939 gin building. It was originally used primarily for storage of cotton prior to ginning. The building has a gabled roof covered with corrugated steel. It is a frame building sitting on brick piers. The south façade has no openings and is clad in wood lap siding.

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East Façade/ Rear

The east façade has no openings and is clad in wood, lap siding.

North Façade/ Side

The north façade has no openings and is clad in corrugated steel with the lap siding intact underneath.

West Façade/ Front

The west façade is fenestrated by a single door, centered on the building. The elevation is clad in wood, lap siding.

Wagon-Trailer Shed

The wagon-trailer shed is a third structure that pre-dates the 1939 gin. It is simply a pole structure with gabled, corrugated steel roof. On the east and west ends is a frame wall with corrugated steel siding. This shed was used to store wagons and later trailers during the off season. During the harvesting season, loaded cotton wagons and trailers were stored in this shed to protect them from the rain.

Refuse Burner

The refuse burner sits to the east of the main gin building. It was constructed as part of the 1939 upgrade of the mill complex. The Industrial Burn-O-Matic was made by the Industrial Blow Pipe Company of Memphis, Tennessee. The burner is a cylindrical steel frame structure that sits on a concrete foundation. The exterior sheeting is welded steel. On top of the refuse burner is a fine steel grate to prevent cinders from blowing away and causing wildfires. There is a large diameter vent on the west side of the burner that was part of the pneumatic system which delivered stalks, hulls, and other refuse to the burner.

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Seed Loading Hopper

The cotton seed hopper just north of the rear of the gin was used to load cotton seed into trucks after the railroad ceased operation in 1940. The structure is a steel, I-beam, exterior frame with diagonal cross braces on the east and west ends surrounding two all steel hopper boxes. The hopper boxes are sealed by a mechanical door on the bottom of each box. The hopper boxes have pyramidal roofs and two foot wide walkway with pipe hand rail. The east and west facades have access doors cut into the hoppers for cleaning and or repair. The hopper was connected to the gin building by a pneumatic pipe that delivered seed.

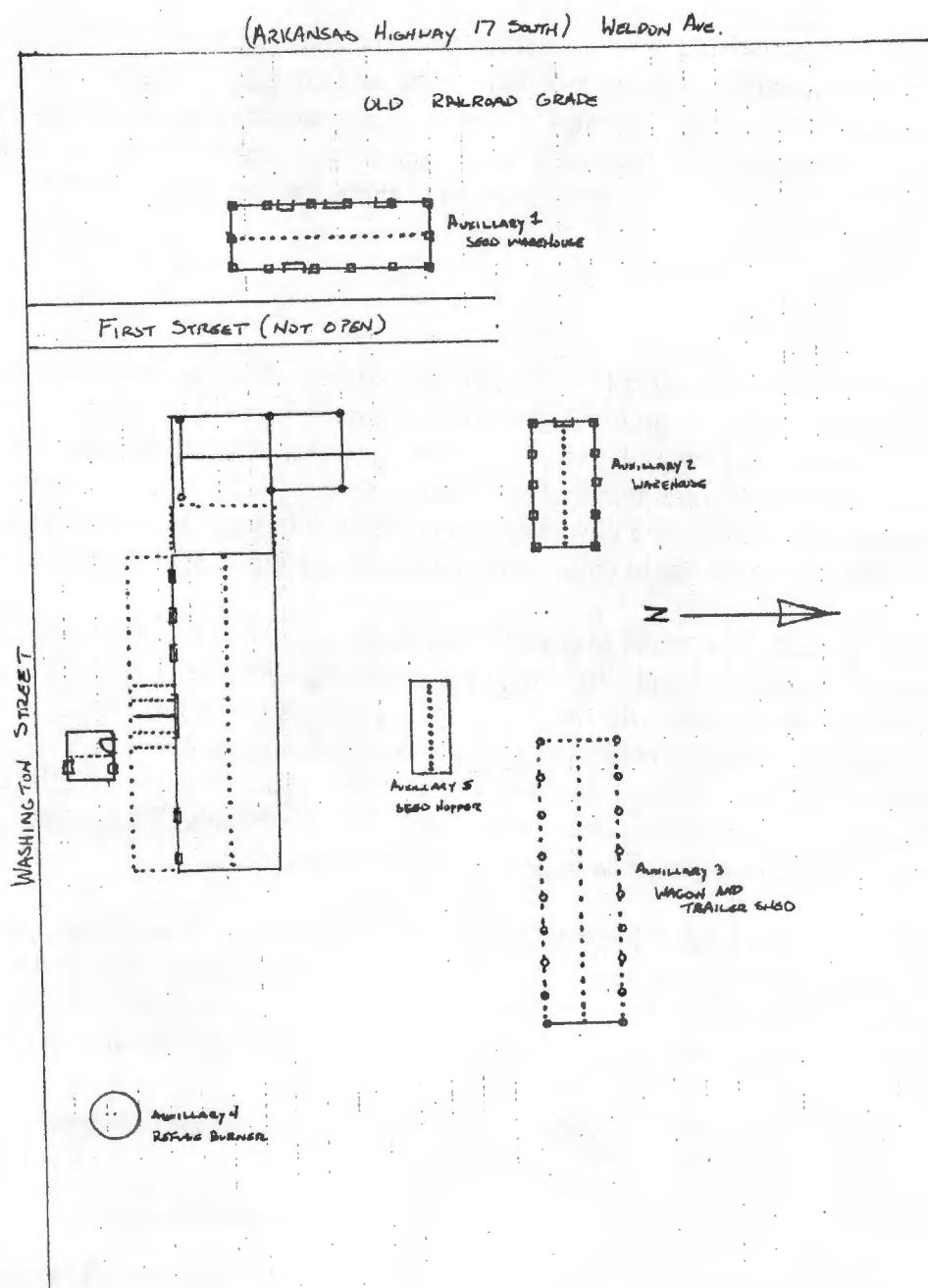
Integrity

The Weldon Gin Company complex is still remarkably intact. No changes have been made to the gin structure itself and all of the ginning machinery is still intact. No changes have been made to the auxiliary buildings and none are in a great state of disrepair. The town of Weldon is much the same as when the gin was constructed. Agriculture is still the primary occupation of the people of Weldon; though the primary crop is now soybean or rice and not cotton. The Weldon Gin Company complex remains a good example of a cotton ginning operation in Arkansas's Mississippi Delta.

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Summary

The Weldon Gin Company Historic District is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion A** for its association with the farming economy of the town of Weldon. It is also being nominated under **Criterion C** as the only example of cotton gin architecture and technology in Weldon. Additionally the Weldon Gin is being nominated in conjunction with the multiple property submission, "Get Down the Shovel and the Hoe: Cotton and Rice Farm History and Architecture in the Arkansas Delta, 1900-1955."

Elaboration

Two very disparate events occurred in the early 1830s that would have an effect on the construction of a cotton gin over a century later. In 1831, Alvin McDonald moved from Tennessee to Jackson County, Arkansas, and settled near the town of Newport. After establishing himself and purchasing a farm he began the operation of a small gin in 1833. Several hundred miles away, Daniel Pratt, settled in Autauga County, Alabama, and began the manufacture of cotton gins in his small blacksmith shop. A century later the companies that both of these men began would collaborate to build a new gin in Weldon, Arkansas.¹

Jackson County was newly formed when Alvin McDonald emigrated in 1831. The sixteen year old came to Jackson County with his family and they originally settled northeast of the present town of Newport. Settlement of Jackson County began in the early 1800s and the county was formed in 1829 by the Arkansas Territorial Legislature. The county was named for Andrew Jackson who was, at that time, President of the United States. The predominance of low, often flooded woodlands and lack of roads meant the county was sparsely settled in those early years. The first census records only 333 inhabitants of the county. There were no towns or villages until the establishment of Litchfield as the first county seat.²

Through the antebellum period, travel and settlement in the county was focused primarily along the White and Black Rivers. Towns like Elizabeth and Jacksonport served as the primary economic and social centers for the county. As the population grew—1,045 in 1840, 3,086 in 1850, 10,493 in 1860—smaller communities were formed and took on some of the social and economic functions of the larger towns.³

¹ Ralph McDonald, Jr., interview with author, telephone, Little Rock, AR, 7 February 2008. Willie Redden and Tommy Brown eds. "Pratt Gin Factory: Prattville Factory Timeline," by E. T. Waldron available online at http://www.pratthistory.com/pratt_gin_factory.htm accessed 11 February 2008.

² Robert D. Craig, "Jackson County," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture* available online at <http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/> accessed 11 February 2008.

³ Ibid. In 1850 Jackson County's population was 2,517 white, 6 free African Americans, and 568 slaves United States Department of the Census, *The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850* (Washington, DC: Robert Armstrong, 1853), 535; hereafter referred to as *Seventh Census*.

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By the late antebellum period, Alvin McDonald was farming over 900 acres just south of the current town of Weldon. Survey maps and federal land records of the period show McDonald paid \$1.25 an acre for just over 930 acres.⁴ Like many of his peers in Jackson County, McDonald's farm income was supplemented by cotton, not supported by cotton. Antebellum Jackson County farmers primarily raised cattle and swine. They grew over 100,000 bushels of corn, they grew both sweet and Irish potatoes, but they only ginned 870 bales of cotton in 1850.⁵ With such small production of cotton it was more common for each farmer to gin his own cotton. Smaller farmers who could not afford to build their own gin depended on their neighbors but larger farms and plantations often built and operated ginning facilities.

It was not until after the Civil War that southern agricultural economy began to shift toward cotton. In Arkansas, between 1866 and 1900, the price of cotton per acre dramatically outpaced the price of other commodities. Cotton sold at an average of \$22.00 per acre compared to \$9.80 for corn. If one figures in the cost of seed and other non-labor costs—fertilizer, implements, marketing—cotton still brought \$18.95 per acre. With prices this high many farmers abandoned general farming and worked toward specialized farming.⁶ At the end of the nineteenth century Arkansas farmers had 1,700,578 acres cultivated in cotton. While this was only about eight percent of the total agricultural lands, it represented an increase of sixty-three percent in the decade. This amounted to 691,494 bales of cotton harvested in 1889 alone. Jackson County farmers had over 33,000 acres planted in cotton and grew 12,594 bales in 1889.⁷

With the growth of cotton farming in the latter nineteenth century the demand for ginning of raw cotton also grew. It became economical for merchants and farmers to operate commercial cotton gins. It was no longer necessary that the gin operation be subsidized by the other farm income. Men like Alvin McDonald and his son Alvin McDonald, Jr., were able to convert their farm gin operations to local gin operations. In 1889, Goodspeed Publishing Company recorded that there were cotton gins in Tuckerman, Olyphant, Centerville, Auvergne, and a seed and oil mill and compress in Newport. Though Goodspeed doesn't note the presence of a cotton gin in Weldon—simply noting "etc."—there was a cotton gin operated by Alvin McDonald, Jr., and his associates. This gin was a frame structure that was operated by a large steam boiler and engine.⁸

⁴ Bureau of Land Management, United States of America to Alvin McDonald, Certificate No. 4604 (1 September 1856); United States of America to Robert H. McDonald, Certificate No. 5112 (1 September 1856). Bureau of Land Management Records available online at <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/PatentSearch/>; accessed 11 February 2008.

⁵ *Seventh Census*, 554-58.

⁶ Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 34-6.

⁷ United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on the Statistics of Agriculture in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington: GPO, 1895), 43, 44, 53, 54.

⁸ Goodspeed Publishing Company, *The Goodspeed Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeastern Arkansas* (Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1889; reprint Easley, SC: The Southern Historical Press, 1978), 838, 839.

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The Weldon Gin provided ginning services for farmers in the area around Weldon. They shipped their finished cotton bales to the compress at Newport on the White & Black River Valley Railway. The White & Black River Valley Railway began as the Batesville & Brinkley Railroad in 1882. It ran from Brinkley, Arkansas, fifty-six miles to Newport, Arkansas. The railroad connected Tupelo, Weldon, and Auvergne to the cotton compress and oil mill in Newport. Later the White & Black River Valley became the wholly owned subsidiary of the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad—the Rock Island—which gave them access to markets well outside of the Arkansas Mississippi River Delta.⁹

The railroad helped increase the ease of shipping and opened new markets for the Weldon Gin Company but it didn't have a dramatic effect on the town of Weldon. The Rock Island's, *Rock Island Lines List of Officers, Station Agents, Etc. February 1, 1910, No. 58* shows the population of the town as being only 125. Nineteen years later the same publication shows that the town had grown by only 125 people.¹⁰ Nevertheless, at the beginning of the twentieth century the town had one hotel, two general stores, two groceries, a post office and the Weldon Gin.¹¹

The gin continued to operate at the corner of Weldon Avenue and Washington Street throughout the early twentieth century. There were ownership changes through the years but the McDonald family always held a controlling interest in the gin. Ralph McDonald, son of Alvin McDonald, Jr., operated the gin for many years with his brothers. Operation of the gin focused on ginning the cotton brought in by local farmers and selling that ginned cotton in bales to the compress in Newport. Additionally, when the Newport Cotton Seed Oil Company began operation the Weldon Cotton Gin shipped seed by rail to the seed oil company.

The Weldon Gin Company operated in this fashion into the 1930s. The McDonald Brothers Company, who operated the Weldon Gin Company, watched the cotton markets closely. As the total amount of cotton harvested increased and the price of cotton decreased through the 1920s and 1930s they found that their old steam powered gin was not capable of making an effective profit. Additionally, the increasing use of the mechanical cotton picker placed additional ginning demand on the Weldon Gin.

⁹ The White & Black River Railway was incorporated to take possession of and construct additional trackage for the Batesville & Brinkley Railroad in 1890. In 1894, the White & Black River Railway was leased to the Choctaw, Oklahoma, & Gulf Railroad for eighty years. In 1904, the Choctaw, Oklahoma, & Gulf was purchased by the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad Company. See Gene Hull, "White & Black River Valley Railway," *Arkansas Railroader* 38, no. 3 (March 2007): 2-7.

¹⁰ Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad Company, *Rock Island Lines List of Officers, Station Agents, Etc. February 1, 1910, No. 58* (Chicago: privately printed, 1910), 261. Available online at Rock Island Technical Society, <http://faculty.simpson.edu/RITS/www/> accessed 24 January 2008. Also *General Roster of Officers, Agents, Attorneys, Surgeons, Stations, Structures, Mileage, Connections, Clearances, Etc., May 1, 1929, No. 67* (Chicago: privately printed, 1929), 296. Available online at Rock Island Technical Society, <http://faculty.simpson.edu/RITS/www/> accessed 24 January 2008.

¹¹ Goodspeed, 839.

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The increasing use of mechanical pickers and tractors increased the amount of cotton to gin and shortened the amount of time in which to gin that cotton. Arkansas Power & Light and the Rural Electrification Act brought electricity to Weldon in the late 1930s. With increased demand and the possibility of gaining modern efficiencies through electrification and new technology, the McDonald Brothers hired the Continental Gin Company to rebuild the gin at Weldon.¹²

Continental Gin Company began life as six different companies. These companies were smaller gin manufacturers in Dallas, Texas; Prattville, Birmingham, and Avondale, Alabama; Bridgewater, Massachusetts; and Atlanta, Georgia. One of these companies was the Daniel Pratt Gin Company. Founded in 1833 by Daniel Pratt, the Daniel Pratt Gin Company operated a significant factory in Prattville, Alabama. In 1900, the six companies—Daniel Pratt Gin Company, Munger Improved Cotton Machine Manufacturing Company, Smith Sons Gin & Machine Company, Winship Machine Company, Eagle Cotton Gin Company, and the Northington-Munger-Pratt Company—combined to become the Continental Gin Company. Soon the company's Munger and Pratt designed gins became their most popular gins. The combination of companies allowed for the sale of complete ginning outfits from gin to elevator, pneumatic system to compress.¹³

By 1929, the Continental Gin Company was offering a one-story gin outfit made completely of steel. This new design allowed for pumps, motors, engines, and fans to be placed away from the gins themselves. This greatly reduced the maintenance on these items and increased the operational efficiencies of gins equipped with the new technology. The new all steel gin combined with combination huller-extractor-feeder machines that the company began making in 1934 presented gin operators with greatly advanced technology. Gin operators could increase production, reduce maintenance, and reduce operating costs with the new ginning system.¹⁴

It was this new system that the McDonald Brothers had installed in the Weldon Gin in 1939. The Continental Gin Company was contracted to build the gin building and install the ginning equipment. This included the battery of gins, driers, cleaners, feeder-extractors, fans, and motors and drive systems. One of the unique features of the Weldon Gin Company is the refuse burner. Installed during the 1939 reconstruction of the gin, the refuse burner dealt with the several thousands of pounds of foreign material removed by the cleaning process. The new facility had three gins powered by a 175 horsepower electric motor.

¹² For a discussion of the operation of cotton gins and the influence of mechanical pickers see Department of Agriculture, Economics Research Service, Agricultural Economic Report No. 116 *Economic Aspects of Cotton Gin Operations....MidSouth, West Texas, Far West* prepared by Charles A. Wilmut, et al. (July 1967).

¹³ James F. Sulzby, Jr. ed. "The Story of the Continental Gin Company: 1900-1952" by Algeron L. Smith available online at http://www.pratthistory.com/cgc_1st_26_years.htm accessed 11 February 2008.

¹⁴ Sulzby ed., http://www.pratthistory.com/cgc_2nd_26_years.htm accessed 11 February 2008.

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These three gins were capable of six to eight bales of cotton per hour and the gin produced about 3,000 bales per season.¹⁵

Though the McDonald Brothers were able to recover from the great depression and to make a substantial investment in new technology, the cotton economy of the county had taken severe blow. The White & Black River Valley branch of the Rock Island Railroad was no longer profitable and in 1940 ceased operation. The railroad lines were removed and the Weldon Gin Company was now dependent on trucks to get its products to the compress and seed oil factory. This required the installation of a seed hopper to load truck trailers for delivery to the seed oil company in Newport.

Business remained steady through the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s because acreage controls set by the federal government insured a steady, though at times, small harvest each year. During this same period however, rice continued to become more valuable per acre than cotton. Harvest yields per acre of rice or soybeans were greater than cotton and brought the farmer more money. Gradually the amount of cotton grown by Jackson County farmers decreased and the acreage of rice and soybeans increased. The complete removal of acreage controls in 1974 continued to reduce cotton harvests. By 1980, the Weldon Gin Company was producing only 1,000 bales a season, well below the capacity of the gins and well below previous years. Faced with such small production the Weldon Gin Company no longer felt it was profitable to operate their gin.¹⁶

Statement of Significance

The Weldon Gin Company is Weldon's only gin and represents the height of mid-twentieth century ginning technology. The company has a long history in the community of Weldon. The Weldon Gin Company complex is the most intact gin complex in Jackson County. The Weldon Gin Company Historic District is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion A** for its association with the farming economy of the town of Weldon. It is also being nominated under **Criterion C** as the only example of cotton gin architecture and technology in Weldon. Additionally the Weldon Gin is being nominated in conjunction with the multiple property submission, "Get Down the Shovel and the Hoe: Cotton and Rice Farm History and Architecture in the Arkansas Delta, 1900-1955."

¹⁵ McDonald, telephone conversation.

¹⁶ McDonald, telephone conversation.

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Weldon Gin Company Historic District
Name of Property

Jackson County, Arkansas
County and State

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Verbal Boundary Description

Lots 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 of Block 6 of the Original Town of Weldon, being a portion of Section 32, Township 10 North, Range 2 West.

Boundary Justification

The above description consists of all the land historically associated with the Weldon Gin Company.



