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The Tobacco Industry

The dictionary definition of “legacy” is something handed down from the past. In other words, what are you remembered by? What has left its mark on you? What defines who you are? Not only do you have a legacy left for those after you, but every town possesses its own defining objects and events. Weston’s legacy is a complex web of people, places, and history best personified by the tobacco industry that has given jobs to many people, been a main export, and left its mark with the fields and barns it has established.

The tobacco fields were a popular place for teenagers seeking a job. Tobacco requires about 200 hours of manual labor per acre of the crop. Dan Morgan, a current tobacco farmer, recalls that it was common for high school students to work in the end-of-season harvest. Ask just about any lifelong resident of Weston over 40 and they will most likely have worked for the industry in some way or another. You can see the evidence through their callused hands and stories they are always willing to tell. Tobacco is a crop that needs much attention and has gotten just that from countless Weston residents throughout the years.

Tobacco has been a principal cash crop and main export for Weston in past years. This town was once called the tobacco capital. In fact, Weston was the only tobacco market west of the Mississippi until 2001. Platte County still produces 65% of all tobacco in the state of Missouri. It was originally planted in Weston by the many people that moved here from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia when the town was growing. Several million dollars’ worth

of the popular crop was sold each year in its first seasons in the town. Weston benefitted from selling 25 million pounds of tobacco prior to 1861. Around Thanksgiving, auction barns such as Weston Burley House and New Deal Warehouse would be the site of six to eight week long tobacco auctions. These auctions would draw in buyers from companies all across the country, earning Weston a big profit. This profit was a huge contributor to Weston's economy, making tobacco classified as a main export and significant cash crop.

The legacy of Weston is still noticed today as you drive through town or along the old country roads outside city limits and see the numerous barns and acres upon acres of tobacco fields. Some of the larger and more well-known barns are the Weston Burley House and New Deal Warehouse that were mentioned earlier, but others include the four tobacco barns located in Weston Bend State Park as well as many others throughout Platte County. Some barns can still be seen filled with tobacco during harvest while others seem to have been abandoned. Whatever their conditions, tobacco barns still stand and are spread throughout Weston's landscape.

Even if a legacy is defined by many aspects, Weston's legacy can be recognized most prominently through the tobacco industry. If you take a moment to look around the town of Weston you will find that there are many people ready to share stories of working in the tobacco industry. They might even take a moment point out the multiple barns and fields they worked on during the scorching hot days of their teenage years. This cash crop was a main export and still is the cause for many memories of Weston. One can only wonder how one plant can shape a whole town's legacy.