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The Legend of Tobacco

In many ways tobacco and related products have made a powerful impact on the community of Weston, Missouri. Tobacco has not only has it helped finance businesses through the difficult times, it has also helped Weston expand and become a well-known town. Tobacco has forever transformed the lives of those who lived in the town and Weston's tobacco and tobacco barns still serve as a physical memory of its legacy.

The product of tobacco has affected many lives in what once was the little town of Weston. The process of harvesting the cash crop is very lengthy and requires much needed help. This led to the creation of jobs. Helping with the process of producing tobacco products was an opportunity for people to make some money and start their new lives in Weston. In the rush of the holiday season, boys and girls would work in the warehouses and helped set up for the market. According to the book "The Tobacco Auction", "Girls helped by handing the tobacco to the packers and packed the tobacco, but the men are needed to run the baskets to the hogshead and pull it to the hydraulic press for increasing the capacity of the hogshead. After school in the afternoon, students who are able to keep up their grades up head down to the ware houses to lend a hand. The money earned was often spent on holiday gifts or clothes." Marketers from all over the United States came to the tobacco auctions to judge and buy the product. The economy begins to grow, and thus new businesses begin to sprout.

Weston expands and grows as a community. The first known immigrants were from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia and with the new arrivals the southerners brought new

customs. When the Platte Purchase was opened, the early settlers burned down trees to clear areas of the land to grow tobacco. Records show that the beginning of tobacco started in 1840 when the tobacco was sent down the Missouri river on rafts to Glasgow to be packed in hogsheads and later shipped to eastern markets. Around 1840 as few as 300 people settled in Weston. The numbers quickly grew to 5,000 people by 1850.

Throughout the years tobacco businesses have had economic ups and downs with the sales, but if it was not for the many farmers, Weston would not have turned into the town it is today. The annual amount of tobacco produced in Platte County before 1861 was 25 million pounds. Today the annual tobacco production is 2.8 million pounds. Due to the tobacco buy out of 2004, the product now has been sent to the southern markets. When the government ceased to regulate tobacco, many farmers became only a few major farmers. Quoted from the book "The Tobacco Auction", Louis Smithers states, "There used to be three to eight companies following the auction system, but now we have no major tobacco company purchasing Missouri tobacco 'upfront' or for the production of cigarettes." Until 2001, Weston had the only tobacco market west of the Mississippi. A few of the tobacco barns of Weston are still being used today, others remain vacant and dark. However all the buildings serve as a physical memory of what tobacco once was, a thriving industry.

The tobacco production opened up new doors for the new settlers and community, and because of the production of tobacco in Weston, it had transformed the town that now exists today. Tobacco has changed many lives of Weston by creating jobs and expanding the town. To this day, the town still cherishes the memories of what once was a thriving industry and will forever remember the legacy it left behind.

Resources

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