

1167

**United States Department of Interior  
National Park Service**

**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 Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
other names/site number Northern Wisconsin Co-op Tobacco Pool Warehouse

**2. Location**

street & number 504 East Decker N/A not for publication  
City or Town Viroqua N/A vicinity  
state Wisconsin code WI county Vernon code 123 zip code 54665

**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 forth 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.)

Alicia J. Green  
Signature of certifying official/Title

September 24, 2003  
Date

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 commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Name of Property

Vernon  
County and State

Wisconsin

**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.  
\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
  - removed from the National Register.
  - other, (explain:)

*Edson H. Beall*

11.14.03

*Jon*

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 the count)		
		Contributing	Noncontributing	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)			
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	district	2	0	buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	structure			sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	site			structures
	object			objects
		2	0	total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
(Enter "N/A" if property not part of a multiple property listing.)  
None

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register  
0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
COMMERCE/TRADE - WAREHOUSE

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
COMMERCE/TRADE - WAREHOUSE

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation - STONE  
walls - BRICK  
roof - METAL  
other - WOOD

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

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Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

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**MH BEKKEDAL LEAF TOBACCO WAREHOUSE**

The M H Bekkedal Tobacco Warehouse, located at 504 East Decker in Viroqua, is one of the most significant remaining buildings related to tobacco production and processing in Vernon County. Built in 1906 by Norwegian immigrant and entrepreneur Martin H. Bekkedal, the warehouse has been the headquarters of the Northern Wisconsin Co-op Tobacco Pool since the 1930s. The M. H. Bekkedal Tobacco Warehouse is a two story commercial warehouse located on the northeast corner of Decker Street and East Avenue, five blocks from the center of the Main Street commercial district in Viroqua. Viroqua is the most populous city (about 5000 residents) in Vernon County. It is also the county seat and retail/service center of the county. A rail spur extending south from Sparta ended in Viroqua about one block from the Bekkedal warehouse. A cluster of at least six other tobacco warehouses were built over a period of 75 years in the vicinity. The most notable of these is the Fred Eckhardt Leaf Tobacco Warehouse located one block northeast of the Bekkedal warehouse. The Eckhardt warehouse is very similar to the Bekkedal warehouse in style, design and function, but not as elaborately detailed. The former Chicago, Milwaukee and St Paul railroad depot is located within a city block of the Bekkedal warehouse. Coal sheds, a power plant and lumber yard were also historically located to the east of the warehouse. Today a local lumber yard has storage buildings and yard storage adjacent to the tobacco warehouse.

The Bekkedal Warehouse has distinctive design elements that include segmented arch window lintels, brick pilasters and ornamental gable ends. The unusual curved parapet gable ends of the Bekkedal Warehouse are visually related to the Mission Revival style that was very popular in the early 1900s. The influence in this case may be more specifically drawn from Germanic influences. Architect Dockendorf had recently returned from studying in Germany where similar treatments of gable ends on warehouses had been used historically.

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**Exterior**

The tan brick rectangular warehouse is 48' wide, 160' long and 28' tall with a full basement. Exterior wall details include dark brown brick pilasters spaced at 16' intervals creating 10 bays on each side, a corbelled brick cornice under the eaves, and a curvilinear metal capped parapet wall on either end. All four corners are defined by brick pilasters that extend to the parapet on each end. The double hung wood frame windows (most are 6 over 2) are symmetrically arranged in two rows of 10 windows on each side. There are three pairs of similar windows on the north end wall. The windows have arched brick lintels and plain cut limestone sills. The rough cut limestone foundation walls extend about 5' above grade and 3-panel wood frame windows are located in each 10' bay at basement level on the east and west elevations. There is a horizontal cut limestone water table over the limestone foundation. A local newspaper article announcing the opening of the warehouse described the brick as "St Louis pressed cream brick" and the decorative limestone sills and water table as originating from "New Bedford quarries." (1) The ashlar foundation stone likely came from a local Vernon County quarry located several miles east of Viroqua.

The main facade of the building faces south. The façade is framed by two monumental piers at the corners and is capped by a curved parapet. At the center of the first floor is an 8' by 24' wood frame open entry porch which leads to the entry. The door is flanked by two sidelights; the entire composition is included under a single arch, giving the windows canted sides. To each side of the porch is a large window capped by a segmental arch. Evenly distributed on the second floor are three six-over-two windows, also with segmentally arched tops.

The "Northern Wisconsin Co-op Tobacco Pool" sign on the wall facing Decker Street is underscored with the words "Leaf Tobacco" decorated on either side with a gold colored tobacco leaf symbol on white background. The three leaf tobacco symbol is enlarged in a circular brick bordered medallion in the center of the south wall above the sign. This design is repeated on the rear (north) wall in a similar position. An inscribed date block (1906) set

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flush with the brick appears just above the medallion on the north gable end. The architectural style of the tobacco warehouse is commercial vernacular with classical decorative elements. These details include the pilasters, corbelling, segmental arch windows and the Mission Revival influenced curved parapet wall.

The gable roof is ribbed metal with two small metal ventilators along the ridge and brick chimney in the southeast corner. There are metal eaves troughs and downspouts on both sides. There is a 5' by 16' basement entry on the south end of the west wall. Adjacent to the basement entry is a wood frame platform/loading dock. A larger concrete block loading dock is located on the north end of the west wall. There is also an 8' by 10' brick basement entry on the north wall.

Exterior alterations include the replacement of the original slate roof with the current ribbed metal roof and replacement of two bays of basement windows in the southwest corner with glass block.

**Interior**

The interior includes two full floors of working space and a full basement. A contemporary newspaper article states that twenty railroad cars of western lumber were delivered for the construction of the warehouse. The same article identifies cast iron structural girders and posts providing support for the "magnificent new tobacco packing warehouse." (2) The original fir wood walls, ceiling, and maple wood flooring are intact. Windows and supporting posts and structural members are original and appear to be in good condition. Support posts extend from the basement to the second floor in two rows of 11 posts spaced 16 feet apart across the width and length of the building.

The first, or main, floor includes an entry on the south side that leads to a central vestibule/hallway. There are two offices on either side of the vestibule. The offices were originally paneled with black ash, but currently have modern plywood paneling. Just north of

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the office/hallway is the receiving room where the tobacco first arrives at the warehouse and is weighed on a large scale from an enclosed scale partition. Up until recent years, the tobacco at this point was taken to the basement where it was sorted and packed. After being packed into cases the tobacco was stored on the main and second floors. The original capacity of the warehouse was 6000 cases. Today the rear 2/3 of the main floor and the entire second floor is used for "sweating" the bundles of tobacco that are brought in by area farmers. Furnace enhanced sweating is a process that cures the tobacco and extends the storage time. By curing the tobacco on site, the co-op gained the ability to store the current crop until the market price was most advantageous for sale.(3) The receiving room on the main floor also has several informational panels produced by the co-op over the past 50 years. There are also a number of tobacco samples, tobacco processing tools and other memorabilia associated with the tobacco industry in Vernon County.

The second floor has walls, floor, ceiling and windows similar to the main floor. A gas furnace on the second floor can raise the temperature in the sweating rooms to over 115 degrees. The walls on the second floor and the curing area of the first floor are insulated with fiber board insulation. The original motor driven lift/elevator still carries people and materials from the basement to the second floor. Next to the elevator is a narrow stairway connecting all three floors. The second floor is partitioned into three areas; a large sweating room on the north end, an elevator/landing area and a smaller sweating room on the south end.

The nine foot basement walls are exposed five feet above grade to enhance the natural lighting. Sets of three 6 over 2 wood frame double hung windows are located in each of the 16' bays. Two plate glass windows flank the rear basement entrance. The stone walls are finished inside with smooth mortar. Full dimensional 2"x12" floor joists support the main floor. The north part of the basement was used for many years as a tobacco sorting and packing room. It was here that the workers, mostly women, had the laborious task of cutting and sorting the tobacco. It is no longer used for this purpose but still has the original tin ceiling and wooden sorting tables. Lavatories, furnace room and storage room constitute the rest of

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Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

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the basement area. There is also a partitioned room in the southeast corner of the basement that serves as the manager's office. The basement originally included "the steam heating plant, lavatories, cloakroom and sanitary closets." (4)

**Alterations**

Exterior alterations are noted by comparing a post card and photo from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with a contemporary photo. The original blueprints called for a slate roof. (5) It is difficult to ascertain in the period photo whether the roof is asphalt shingle or slate. Today the roof is metal. The four decorative cupola-like roof ventilators have been replaced and the sign located between the two central ventilators has been removed. The multi-paned circular window on the south and north gable end has been covered up by the logo of the Northern Wisconsin Co-op Tobacco Pool. A sign identifying the building as the tobacco pool building was added below the circular window. The two southern-most triple section basement windows were replaced with glass block. Most of these alterations likely took place within the past fifty years are relatively minor and do not significantly alter the historic or architectural character of the warehouse.

Interior alterations are noted mainly in the wall, ceiling and floor finish in the offices and updating of the heating system with gas fired furnaces for the sweating process. The structure, interior and exterior finish and mechanical systems appear to be sound and still very functional. This warehouse is notable in that it preserves much of the equipment and design used in tobacco storage and processing over the past 100 years. As of mid-2002, the Northern Wisconsin Tobacco Pool Warehouse continues to operate and serve the purpose for which it was originally designed and built.

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**Additional Structure – Tobacco Warehouse #2**

The parcel that the tobacco warehouse is sited on is approximately 117' wide and 314' deep. On the north end of this parcel is another tobacco warehouse built by the Northern Wisconsin Co-op Tobacco Pool in 1945. This second warehouse is situated about 50' north of the Bekkedal warehouse and is identified as Warehouse #2. This two story glazed tile block building was built on a concrete slab and has an arched metal roof with stepped gable end walls. The west wall is 60', north wall 150', south wall 100' and the east wall has two sections; one running north/south about 20' and the other running southwest about 60'. The irregular shape is due to the location of the warehouse close to a rail spur that formerly ran northeast/southwest. The warehouse was built close to the rail spur to facilitate loading directly from the warehouse into railroad cars. The grade or basement level has 7' tile walls, concrete floor, fixed sash windows, metal support posts and two doorways. There is a built-in scale and standard incandescent lighting.

A stairway on the north end provides access to the upper floor. The second floor has unusual clear span web truss arched rafters that eliminate the need for support posts. The truss members are 2'x8's covered with pine board sheathing. The completely open floor plan provides an ideal warehouse space; free of walls and posts. The floor is solid western fir supported by 2'x12' joists. The second floor walls are 8' tall with fixed sash windows at roughly 20' intervals. There is an outside stairway that leads to a 7'x7' swing-up door in the middle of the south wall. On the southeast wall are two 7'x7' doors that lead to loading docks facing the railroad spur. (The railroad was discontinued in the 1970s, but the rails adjacent to the warehouse are still in place.) A painted brick sign on the west (East Street) side identifies the "Northern Wisconsin Co-operative Tobacco Pool" with "No. 2" flanked by a representation of a tobacco leaf on each side.

According to Tobacco Co-op manager George Nettum, at the end of World War II the tobacco co-op anticipated the need for extra storage capacity in Viroqua. Building materials were scarce and the co-op was fortunate to obtain the needed materials for Tobacco

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Warehouse #2, especially the popular web truss rafters. There was no sweating of tobacco in this auxiliary building; its' primary use was for storage and shipping. (6) This is an astylistic commercial building. The only architectural detail of note is the glazed tile capped stepped gable parapet walls on the west and east ends. Tobacco Warehouse #2 is located on the same legal description as the Bekkedal Warehouse and is currently used for miscellaneous storage by the co-operative. This building is included in the nomination because it is in good condition and essentially unaltered. Also, it is located adjacent to the Bekkedal Warehouse and is functionally and historically complimentary.

Endnotes - Description

- 1) "Great Credit to Viroqua," Vernon County Censor, January 31, 1906.
- 2) Ibid.
- 3) George Nettum-Manager, Northern Wisconsin Co-op Tobacco Pool, Interview January 18, 2002.
- 4) Vernon County Censor, January 31, 1906.
- 5) Original Blueprints of Bekkedal Tobacco Warehouse, Parkinson and Dockendorff. 1906. Many of the original building plans drafted by the firm of Parkinson and Dockendorff are owned and preserved by:  
    Kratt Associates, Architects, Inc.  
    742 Moore Street  
    La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601 -
- 6) George Nettum Interview.

Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Name of Property

Vernon  
County and State

Wisconsin

### 8. Statement of Significance

#### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the 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 a birthplace or grave.
- 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.

#### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Industry  
Architecture

#### Period of Significance

1906-1952

#### Significant Dates

1906  
1922

#### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

#### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

#### Architect/Builder

- Parkinson and Dockendorf

#### Narrative Statement of Significance

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

See continuation sheets.

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Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

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**MH BEKKEDAL LEAF TOBACCO WAREHOUSE**

**8) Statement of Significance**

The Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse in Viroqua is one of the few remaining, large scale tobacco processing warehouses in Wisconsin. The warehouse was at the center of the western Wisconsin tobacco industry. This exceptional warehouse is nominated under Criterion A in the area of industry as the property associated with the buying, packaging and distribution of leaf tobacco, both as a private business and under the tobacco pool, in the city of Viroqua. It is also nominated under Criterion C as a well preserved example of a building type. The period of significance is 1906 to 1952. It begins with the construction of the building and ends at the 50 year historic period.

Located in the railroad/warehouse district on the northeast side of Viroqua, the Bekkedal/Tobacco Pool Warehouse is a well preserved reminder of the importance of tobacco raising for the economy and culture of Viroqua and surrounding communities. The building is also a visible example of the importance of Norwegian/American entrepreneur Martin Bekkedal of Westby and the farmers' tobacco marketing co-op in Vernon County history. Although at a much reduced volume, the warehouse continues to process, store and ship tobacco from area farmers who still belong to the Northern Wisconsin Co-op Tobacco Pool.

**Tobacco Raising in Vernon County**

Tobacco raising in Vernon County has long been associated with the Norwegian farming community. However, the early Norwegian immigrants had no experience with tobacco in their native land. Tobacco raising was introduced by Yankee farmers arriving from

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Connecticut to settle in Rock County, Wisconsin in the mid 1850s. W T Pomeroy of Edgerton is credited with growing the first crop of tobacco in 1854. (7) The first wave of Norwegian immigration came to Vernon County in the late 1840s, but they did not bring the tobacco culture with them. It was the later arrivals who worked on farms established by their Yankee landlords a decade earlier who brought tobacco to western Wisconsin. Many of these Norwegian tenant farmers moved from the Koshkonong settlement in Dane County north and west to the Coon Valley and Westby area in Vernon County in search of farms of their own. It was in this area of Vernon County that tobacco was first raised as a cash crop in the 1860s.(8) Tobacco growing was taken up by many newly arrived Norwegian settlers as an opportunity to raise cash on the new homestead. The labor intensive crop was well suited to the large immigrant families who looked forward to the lump sum tobacco payment which usually came in mid-winter, often just in time to pay real estate taxes. Tobacco was often called the "mortgage lifter."

Two decades after first being introduced, tobacco raising was well established in Vernon County. In 1880 Vernon County was fifth in the state in tobacco production and Viroqua became the center of warehousing and distribution for tobacco grown north of the Wisconsin River. Tobacco raising continued to be an important farm activity in Vernon County throughout the 19th century and on into the 20th century. Several generations of Vernon County farm families have experienced the challenges and rewards of planting-to-market of their tobacco crop. The social and cultural experience of cash reward for hard work has a special association with tobacco raising in Vernon County. (9) Functional and unused tobacco curing barns can still be seen throughout the county; they are evidence of the former importance of tobacco raising in the area.

Cultural historians have shown that the dispersion of tobacco culture in Wisconsin followed the settlement patterns of Norwegian immigration throughout the state. From Dane, Rock, and Jefferson County in the south to Barron and Chippewa County in the north, the first

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tobacco farmers were predictably Norwegian.(10) The raising of tobacco was often an indication of a farmer's "Norwegianess" in Vernon County. For over 100 years the culture of tobacco was an important aspect of rural life in the Coon Valley/Westby/Viroqua area.

**Martin H Bekkedal - "The Tobacco King"**

The pre-eminent figure in the development of the tobacco industry in Vernon County was Martin H Bekkedal of Westby. Martin Bekkedal was born near Fejring in the Gudbrandsdal region of Norway in 1862 and came to America as a young man in 1884. He made his way to Westby in Vernon County and worked initially as a day laborer clearing land, and later as a lumberjack and cattle buyer. In 1892 he married Amanda Anderson, the daughter of the proprietor of the Westby Hotel, and continued his sales career in horses and cattle. He ventured into the tobacco trade after becoming acquainted with out of state Yankee tobacco buyers who stayed at the Westby Hotel. Martin was a quick study; by 1895 he was buying tobacco as an independent agent and began selling to large tobacco firms in Chicago and the East Coast. Bekkedal became very successful as a middleman between the local Norwegian farmers and the large speculators. He was able to trade with his countrymen in their native tongue (an advantage that the Yankee buyers did not have) and he gained the trust of the local farmers and respect of the powerful out of state buyers.

Martin....had all the important qualifications of a good tobacco man; he established good relationships with both farmers and speculators; he was a skilled dickerer with a reputation for honesty; he had cultivated obligatory relationships so that people were beholden to him for favors rendered; but most importantly he was an immigrant Norwegian like the growers themselves.(11)

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In 1897 Bekkedal bought his first tobacco warehouse in Soldiers Grove, and by 1902 he was the largest single tobacco buyer in the region. He ultimately owned 19 tobacco warehouses in a six county area of western Wisconsin, six of them in his hometown of Westby. However the biggest, most expensive and most modern warehouse was built in Viroqua in 1906. Earlier, Bekkedal had gained the confidence and support of two Viroqua merchant/bankers: W F Lindeman and Frederick Eckhart.(12) By 1906, he consolidated with the New York tobacco giant, Rosenwald Bros. He was then able to concentrate on buying and packing and left the selling to his out of state partners. In 1906, Martin Bekkedal bought and packed the largest quantity of tobacco of any single buyer in the state. He was at the zenith of his tobacco career when the tobacco warehouse on Decker Street in Viroqua was built at a cost of \$30,000. When the warehouse opened for business in early 1906, it was praised in the local newspaper as a "great credit to Viroqua" and "the finest tobacco packing institution in the state":

Viroqua owes Martin H Bekkedal a debt of gratitude for locating this magnificent tobacco works in our city. Few men would make so large a financial stake in other than their own town ..... (13)

Like many entrepreneurs of the day, Bekkedal diversified into other ventures. Two of his sons entered into the business with him and they purchased standing timber and a lumber mill near Rice Lake, Wisconsin. At the urging of his Viroqua financial backers, Bekkedal bought the failed Westby Exchange Bank in 1922. He also invested in 1,300 acres of farmland surrounding Westby in anticipation of residential development.(14) By the late 1920s, the Bekkedal enterprise was valued at over 2 million dollars and Martin was at the peak of his personal fortune. However, the stock market crash of 1929 brought an end to his financial empire. The bank, lumber mill and tobacco business all went under. In spite of this, he still held the respect and admiration of his friends and neighbors in Westby who revered him as a fellow countryman who had succeeded in America. The Bekkedal legacy in Westby can be seen today in his well maintained Queen Anne style home at 200 West State Street

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(now the Westby House Victorian Inn), the Bekkedahl/Unseth Block at 100 North Main Street (now the Fortress Bank), and Bekkedal Avenue where several of his former tobacco warehouses still stand. Townspeople and historians remember Martin Bekkedal primarily as a tobacco man. The Bekkedal Tobacco Warehouse on Decker Avenue in Viroqua is the most notable building associated with this industrious Norwegian/American entrepreneur.

**The Northern Wisconsin Co-operative Tobacco Pool**

The first attempts at cooperative marketing of tobacco took place in Wisconsin from 1913 to 1918 with pooling of local tobacco harvests by individual warehouses. In 1918, the Wisconsin Growers Association was organized, but ceased operation after one year. These local pools were loose disconnected units and did not have the strength of the larger private tobacco buyers. Despite their failure, these local marketing pools established a precedent that was soon to be followed by the tobacco growers on a larger scale. (15)

In 1921, a precipitous drop in the price of tobacco in Wisconsin led to the formation of the first producer tobacco marketing co-op in the nation and ultimately a change of ownership of the Bekkedal Tobacco Warehouse. The former leaders of the early tobacco pools saw that a statewide organization could solve the farmers' marketing problems. On to the scene came an activist, California based attorney named Aaron Shapiro. He had great faith in co-operative marketing and toured the country urging farmers to organize and pool their produce in order to gain the best price possible. Emerson Ela, a Norwegian immigrant and attorney from Madison, assisted Shapiro in organizing tobacco farmers in Wisconsin. The organization was set up as a non-stock co-operative. The farmers were required to agree to sell their entire tobacco crop to the tobacco pool for a five-year period. In order to begin operation, the co-operative had to sign up farmers who controlled 75% of the tobacco acreage in the state. The effort took nearly two years. In December of 1922, the Northern Wisconsin Co-operative Tobacco Pool was officially incorporated. (16)

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At the close of the organizing campaign in 1922 led by Shapiro and Ela, the co-operative had signed up 7,200 tobacco growers who controlled 33,800 acres of tobacco. (17) The collective marketing power of this number of farmers was significant. Within a short period of time the large private tobacco buyers were faced with well organized competition that was very threatening to their market position. In Vernon County the Northern Wisconsin Tobacco Pool and Martin Bekkedal came into immediate conflict. Bekkedal claimed that the Pool was fixing prices, was monopolistic and acted in restraint of trade. Bekkedal and his agents continued to attempt to contract with farmers who had signed on with the Pool. In early 1922, the Pool went to court to prevent the Bekkedal company from buying tobacco from farmers who had a contract with the Pool. In April of 1923, Circuit Court Judge Edgar V. Werner upheld an earlier restraining order that enjoined Bekkedal from interfering with tobacco contracts between local farmers and the Pool. The decision not only upheld the legality of the co-op but prevented private buyers from attempting to undercut the marketing power of the Pool.(18)

Bekkedal may have foreseen the future of tobacco marketing in Vernon County and felt pessimistic about the outcome of the lawsuit. In December of 1922, he sold the Bekkedal Tobacco Warehouse on Decker Ave. to the Viroqua Warehouse Corporation for \$35,000. This organization likely had some connection to the Tobacco Pool. Five years later, in December of 1927, the Viroqua Tobacco Warehouse Corporation sold the warehouse to the Northern Wisconsin Tobacco Pool.(19) After the split of the Tobacco Pool in 1936 into the Northern and Southern Districts, the Viroqua warehouse on Decker Street was both the administrative and operations center for the tobacco pool in the seven county Northern District.

The tobacco producers' co-op has operated continuously in the same location since 1922. The current manager of the Tobacco Pool, George Nettum, has worked there continuously since 1957. During his service in Viroqua, he initiated an innovation in the "sweating" process

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that was emulated by other warehouses in the Midwest.(20) Nettum has worked directly with farmers, buyers, and other agricultural leaders advocating the best possible growing, storage and marketing conditions for the member/producers. Although the number of farmers and production of tobacco in western Wisconsin is a fraction of what it was in the peak years of tobacco raising, the Viroqua facility continues to function as tobacco curing, storage and distribution facility much as it has over the past 96 years. Nettum claims that the Northern Wisconsin Co-op Tobacco Pool is the last remaining tobacco marketing co-op in the United States and has speculated that this co-op may be the oldest currently operating producer co-op in the nation. (21)

**Architectural/Design Significance**

The M H Bekkedal Tobacco Warehouse at 504 East Decker Avenue was designed for Martin Bekkedal by the La Crosse based architectural firm of Parkinson and Dockendorff. Bernard Dockendorff, a La Crosse native, worked for two years in the mid-1890s for the La Crosse architectural firm of Stoltze and Schick. In 1897 he left Wisconsin to study for three years in Darmstadt, Germany. He returned to La Crosse in 1905 and formed a partnership with Albert E. Parkinson, a native of England who received architectural training from his father, as well as formal schooling in England. Their partnership lasted for nearly 50 years and they are credited with the design of more than 800 buildings in La Crosse and environs. The firm's commissions included schools, residences, hospitals, as well as other commercial and civic buildings. (22)

According to Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, the partnership of Parkinson and Dockendorff is identified as one of the notable architectural firms in the state.(23) The Bekkedal Tobacco Warehouse and the similar Frederick Eckhart Tobacco Warehouse were both designed in the first year of the partnership (1905) and were two of the earliest of their designs that were built (1906). Parkinson and Dockendorff designed several other

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Section 8 Page 8

Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

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significant buildings in Viroqua. They include the Vernon County Normal School (1919) at 410 South Center Street and several commercial buildings on Main Street. The most significant of the downtown buildings designed by Parkinson and Dockendorff is the Temple Theatre/Masonic Temple (1922) at 114-118 Main Street. At least three other commercial buildings on Main Street in the recently nominated NRHP Viroqua Downtown Commercial District (2002) were designed by Parkinson and Dockendorff.(24)

The Bekkedal Warehouse is significant in the area of architecture as an example of a building type and displays those features associated with the special design needs of a leaf tobacco warehouse. The basement of this building is elevated and with multiple windows, providing light and ventilation for the sorting and packing done at this level. With the exception of enclosed offices, most of the two upper floors consist of large open areas for the weighing and receiving, storage, and sweating of the tobacco. Support posts allow for an open interior plan, crating the maximum interior space.

Its load-bearing brick walls and raised basement with large windows, designed to admit light for sorting, distinguish it from most other surviving, smaller tobacco warehouses in western Wisconsin. The interior preserves the technology of cigar leaf production, which transformed locally produced western Wisconsin tobacco into a high quality uniform product which commanded high prices in the world market. The Bekkedal Warehouse has a floor plan and equipment which display advanced techniques of sorting, grading, curing, and marketing tobacco that were "state-of-art" for over 50 years. These techniques were made possible by the concentration of capital, expertise and commercial activity in Viroqua for nearly 20 years by M H Bekkedal and for the next 75 years by the Northern Wisconsin Co-op Tobacco Pool.

The Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory(25) identifies eleven current and former tobacco warehouses currently located in Viroqua. Seven of these existing warehouses are gable roofed rectangular metal clad storage buildings that have a simple, unornamented

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Section 8 Page 9

Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

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utilitarian appearance. They have minimal architectural distinction. One of the warehouses, located on Railroad Ave two blocks north of the Bekkedal Warehouse, had original board and batten siding, above grade basement windows and was mostly unaltered. It was torn down in November of 2000. The remaining inventoried tobacco warehouses are the Eckhart Warehouse, Bekkedal Warehouse and the Tobacco Warehouse #2 (listed as an additional building in this nomination). All three of these buildings have architectural descriptions in the survey.

**Conclusion**

The Bekkedal Tobacco Warehouse, located at 504 East Decker Avenue, is one of two well preserved, architecturally distinctive tobacco warehouses in Viroqua. It is a significant example of an early 20th century building constructed for the tobacco warehousing/processing industry. Tobacco raising was an important farm activity in south-western Wisconsin through the mid to late 20th century. The tobacco industry in the region was centered in Viroqua and provided important seasonal employment for local residents, as well as significant cash income for area farmers. Martin Bekkedal, an important businessman in this area, constructed this building to house his tobacco leaf industry in Viroqua. This warehouse was the location of the buying and packaging of this important local agricultural product. After a drop in the price of tobacco in the early 1920s, tobacco marketing cooperatives became an important force in the leaf tobacco industry. This building further reflects this trend, leaving the hands of an independent businessman and passing to a cooperative. The Northern Wisconsin Co-op Tobacco Pool was the leading tobacco buyer, processor and marketing agent during this period. The Bekkedal Warehouse remains the headquarters of the Co-op and is the most important building in the Co-op history. The cooperative continued to play the same role in the area of tobacco industry. During most of the period of significance, this building was the important location of the receipt, sorting, preparation, packaging, and distribution of the tobacco crop.

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Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

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According to Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, (26) tobacco raising provided a lucrative supplemental cash crop for many Wisconsin farmers. The important buildings associated with this industry are worthy of survey and recognition. As noted previously in the text, the Bekkedal Tobacco Warehouse is nominated for its association with the history of the tobacco industry in the area (Criterion A) and as an example of the tobacco warehouse building type (Criterion C). The Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse is significant as one of the best remaining buildings that represents the history of the tobacco industry in western Wisconsin.

**Endnotes - Significance**

- 7) Jane Eiseley, Pomeroy and Pelton Tobacco Warehouse - NRHP nomination, 1998.
- 8) Robert Antonio Ibarra, Ethnicity Genuine and Spurious: A Study of a Norwegian Community in Rural Wisconsin. Phd. Thesis, University of Wisconsin -Madison, 1970, page 102-104.
- 9) Ibarra, page 302.
- 10) George Nettum, interview.
- 11) Karl Bennett Raitz, The Location of Tobacco Production in Wisconsin. Phd. Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1970.
- 11) Ibarra, page 302.
- 12) Ibarra, page 300.
- 13) Vernon County Censor, January 31, 1906.
- 14) Ibarra, page 303.
- 15) "The Co-operative Marketing of Tobacco in Wisconsin", page 11, Tobacco File, Vernon County Historical Museum, Viroqua, Wisconsin.

**United States Department of the Interior  
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Section 8 Page 11

Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

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16) The name "northern" is somewhat misleading. Tobacco is grown almost exclusively in southern and western Wisconsin, mostly within 100 miles of the Wisconsin River, which is the dividing line between the northern and southern Wisconsin tobacco growing regions. Type 54 tobacco is grown in the glaciated prairie soils of southern Wisconsin and Type 55 is grown in the un-glaciated soils of the driftless region north and west of the Wisconsin River. The cigar manufacturers preferred the fine, thin, good burning tobacco produced in the northern district primarily Vernon County. This preference was resented by southern growers in the Dane/Rock County area, and led to a split of the Pool in June of 1936. After that time, the Southern growers left the co-op entirely and the co-op served only farmers in the Northern District.

17) "Co-operative Marketing of Tobacco in Wisconsin" page 14.

18) "The Pool is Upheld" Vernon County Censor, April 11, 1923.

19) Vernon County Register of Deeds, Vol. 80, pg. 463, December 15, 1927.

20) George Nettum, interview.

21) Ibid.

22) Joan Rausch, Intensive Architectural and Historical Survey,  
La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1996.

23) Barbara Wyatt, ed., Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, Vol. II, pg. 6-1.

24) Timothy Hegglund, Dept of Transportation Survey-US Highway 14-Viroqua Downtown Historic District, June-August 1995.

25) Wisconsin Historical Society Website, 2002.

26) Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin.

Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Name of Property

Vernon  
County and State

Wisconsin

### 9. Major Bibliographic References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):**

- 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:**

- X State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

### 10. Geographical Data

**Acreeage of Property** one acre

**UTM References** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

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** Eric J Wheeler

**organization**

**street & number** 223 23<sup>rd</sup> Street North

**city or town** La Crosse

**state** WI

**date** July 2002

**telephone** 608-785-7383

**zip code** 54601

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

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Continuation Sheet**

Section 9 Page 1

Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

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9. Major Bibliographical References

"The Co-operative Marketing of Tobacco in Wisconsin." 1932. Article located in Tobacco File at the Vernon County Museum.

Eiseley, Jane. National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "Pomeroy and Pelton Tobacco Warehouse," Edgerton, Wisconsin, 1998.

Heggland, Timothy. Dept of Transportation Survey-US Highway 14-Viroqua Downtown Historic District, June-August 1995.

Ibarra, Robert Antoni. Ethnicity - Genuine and Spurious: A Study of a Norwegian Community in Rural Wisconsin. Phd. Thesis, University of Wisconsin- Madison, 1976.

Interview with George Nettum, Manager - Northern Wisconsin Co-op Tobacco Pool , 1/18/2002.

Raitz, Karl Bennett. The Location of Tobacco Production in Wisconsin. Phd. Thesis, University of Minnesota, July 1970.

Rausch, Joan. Wisconsin Dept of Transportation Survey-Hwy 56, History and Architecture of Viroqua, Wisconsin, April-October 2000.

Sanborn-Ferris Fire Insurance Maps; 1911, 1922, 1933, Vernon County Museum.

Vernon County Broadcaster, Viroqua, Wisconsin. 1/9/1986, 11/18/1999.

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Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

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Vernon County Censor, Viroqua, Wisconsin. 1/31/1906, 4/11/23.

Wyatt, Barbara ed., Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin. Vol. II. Madison:  
State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986.

**United States Department of the Interior  
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Continuation Sheet**

Section 10 Page 1

Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The Bekkedal/Northern Wisconsin Tobacco Warehouse property is currently described in the City of Viroqua assessment roll as the "West 35.3 feet of the north half of Lot 1 and Lots 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and the north half of Lot 9, all in Block 3, Nichols Addition, City of Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin."

The property is bounded on the south by Decker Street, on the west by East Avenue and on the north by Walnut Street. Historically the railroad tracks provided the east boundary. (see attached plat map) The parcel is approximately 120 feet, east to west and approximately 300 feet, north to south. The Bekkedal Tobacco Warehouse is located in the south and central portion of the lot and Tobacco Warehouse #2 is located on the north portion.

**Boundary Justification**

This is the historic and present boundary of the Bekkedal/Northern Wisconsin Co-op Tobacco Pool Warehouse.

Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Name of Property

Vernon  
County and State

Wisconsin

### 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.)

<b>name/title</b>	Nothern Wisconsin Co-operative Tobacco Pool	<b>date</b>	July 2002
<b>organization</b>		<b>telephone</b>	608-637-3277
<b>street&amp;number</b>	504 East Decker	<b>zip code</b>	54665
<b>city or town</b>	Viroqua	<b>state</b>	WI

**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 listings. 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 20503.

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**National Register of Historic Places  
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Section photos Page 1

Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

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**PHOTOGRAPHS**

Negatives on file with the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Photo #1 of 11

**BEKKEDAL TOBACCO WAREHOUSE**

Viroqua, Vernon Co., WI.

Photo by Eric J. Wheeler, April 2002.

Street scene of warehouse. Camera facing north.

Photo #2 of 11

**BEKKEDAL TOBACCO WAREHOUSE**

Viroqua, Vernon Co., WI.

Photo by Eric J. Wheeler, April 2002.

Front of warehouse. Camera facing north-west.

Photo #3 of 11

**BEKKEDAL TOBACCO WAREHOUSE**

Viroqua, Vernon Co., WI.

Photo by Eric J. Wheeler, April 2002.

West side of warehouse. Camera facing north-east.

Photo #4 of 11

**BEKKLEDAL TOBACCO WARHOUSE**

Viroqua, Vernon Co. WI.

Photo by Eric J. Wheeler, April 2002.

East side of warehouse. Camera facing south-west.

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Section photos Page 2

Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

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Photo #5 of 11

**BEKKEDAL TOBACCO WAREHOUSE**

Viroqua, Vernon Co., WI.

Photo by Eric J. Wheeler, April 2002.

Rear of warehouse. Camera facing south-east.

Photo #6 of 11

**BEKKEDAL TOBACCO WAREHOUSE**

Viroqua, Vernon Co., WI.

Photo by Eric J. Wheeler, April 2002.

Front of warehouse-detail of sign. Camera facing north.

Photo #7 of 11

**BEKKEDAL TOBACCO WAREHOUSE**

Viroqua, Vernon Co., WI.

Photo by Eric J. Wheeler, April 2002.

Detail of pilasters, windows, roof and parapet. Camera facing west.

Photo #8 of 11

**BEKKEDAL TOBACCO WAREHOUSE**

Viroqua, Vernon Co., WI.

Photo by Eric J. Wheeler, April 2002.

Warehouse #2. Camera facing north-east.

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Section photos Page 3

Bekkedal Leaf Tobacco Warehouse  
Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin

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Photo #9 of 11

BEKKEDAL TOBACCO WAREHOUSE

Viroqua, Vernon Co., WI.

Photo by Eric J. Wheeler, April 2002.

Warehouse #2. Camera facing north-west.

Photo #10 of 11

BEKKEDAL TOBACCO WAREHOUSE

Viroqua, Vernon Co., WI.

Photo by Eric J. Wheeler, April 2002.

Co-op Poster - "Advantages.....". Interior.

Photo #11 of 11

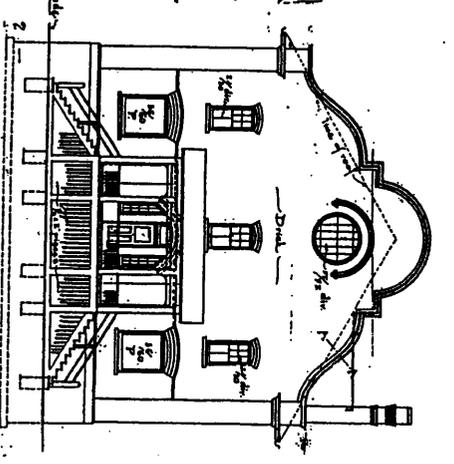
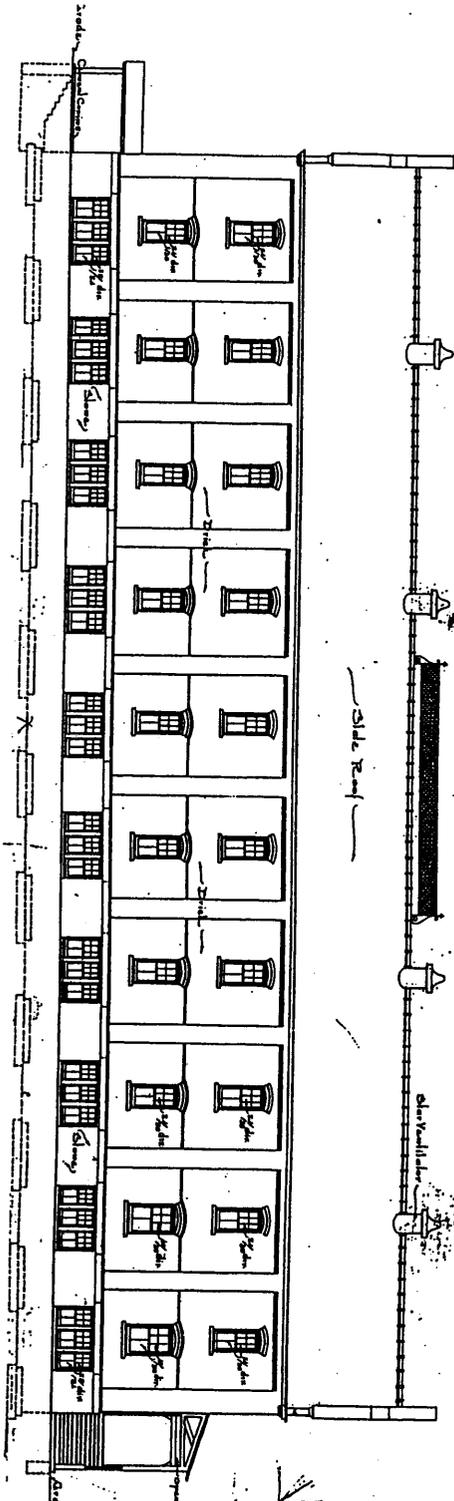
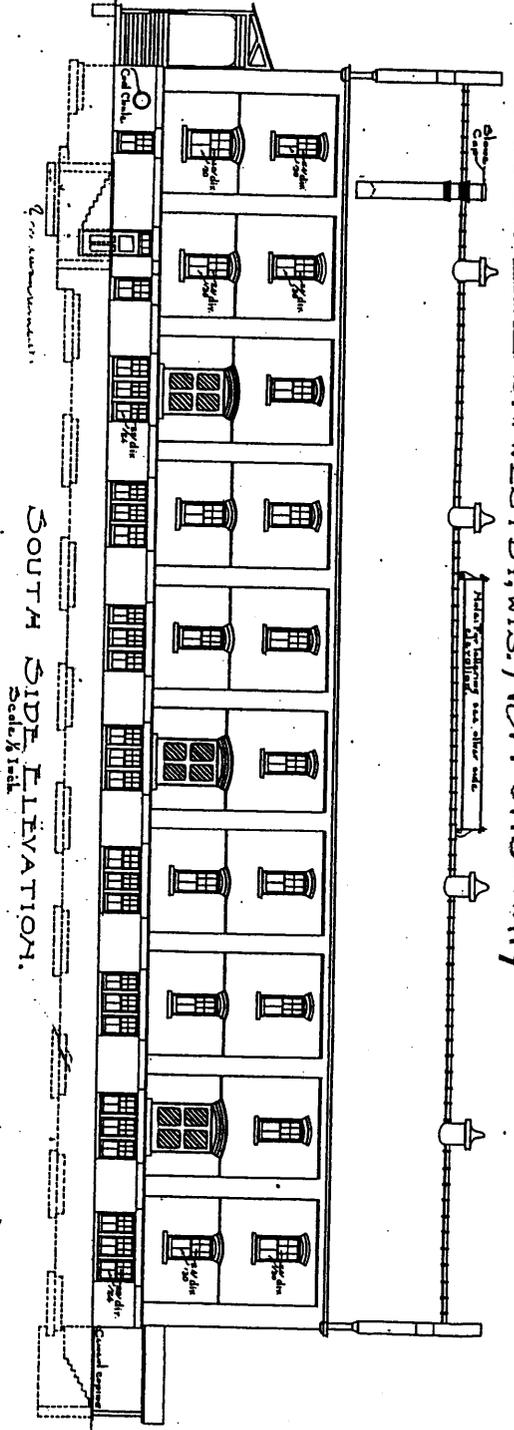
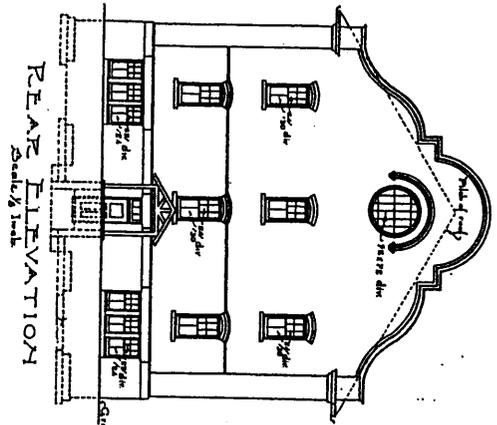
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Viroqua, Vernon Co., WI.

Photo by Eric J. Wheeler, April 2002.

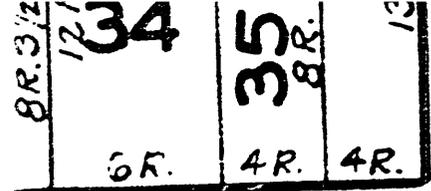
Co-op Poster - "...Pool Can Help...". Interior.

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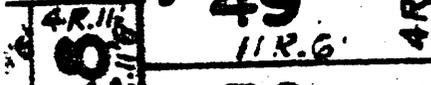
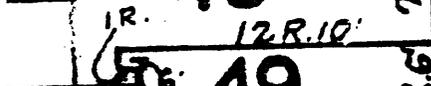
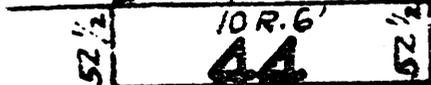
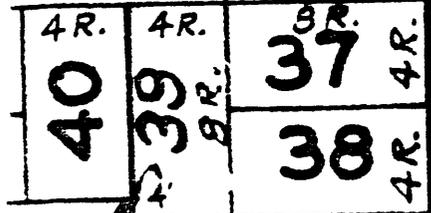


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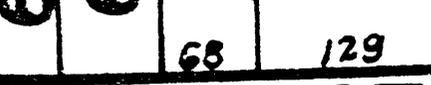
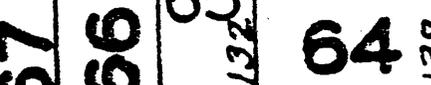
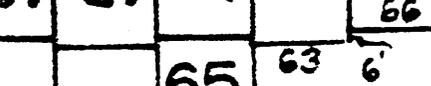
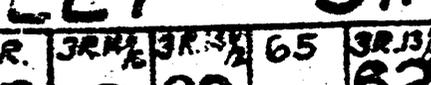
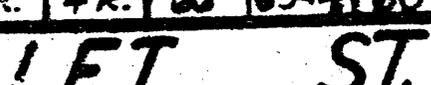
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 VIROQUA, VERNON COUNTY, WI  
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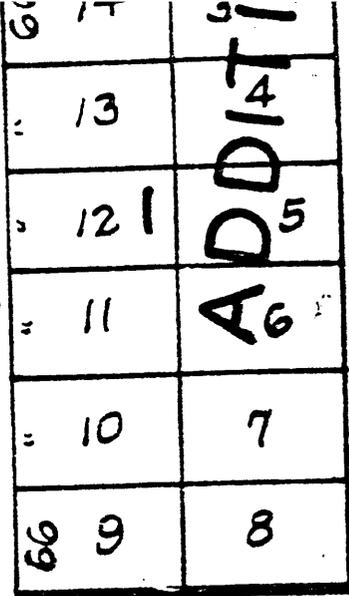
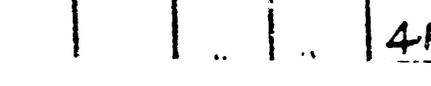
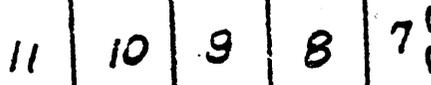
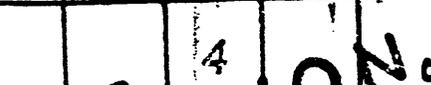
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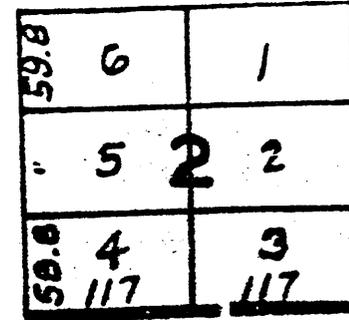
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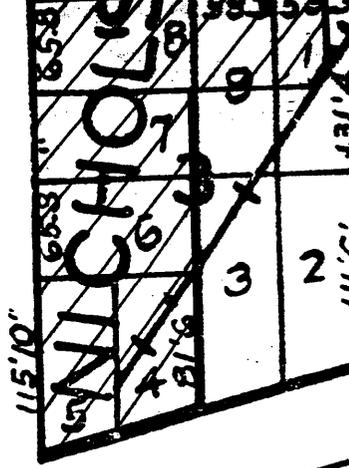
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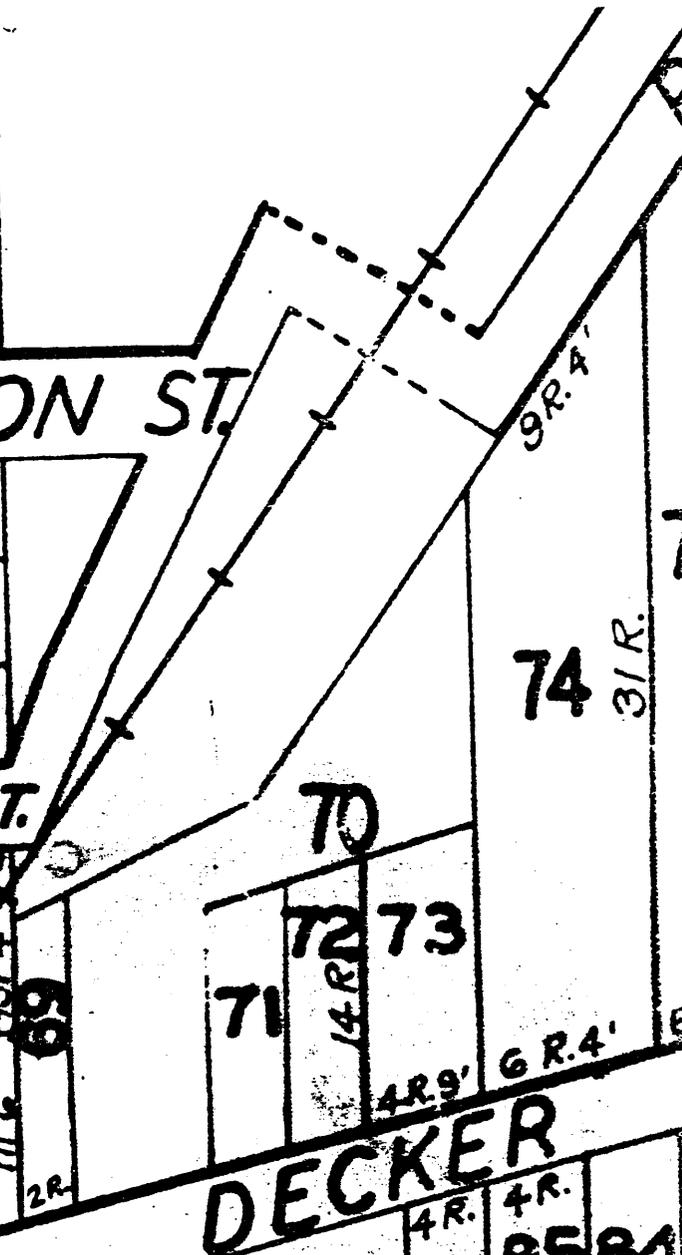
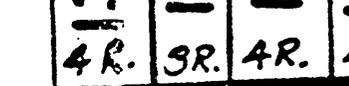
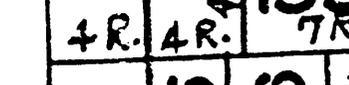
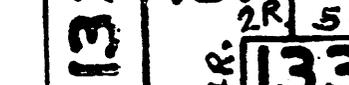
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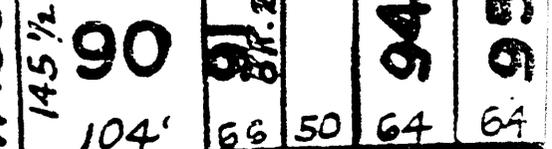
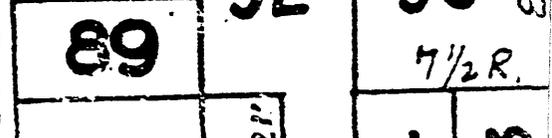
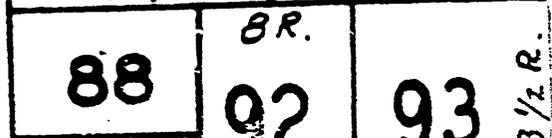
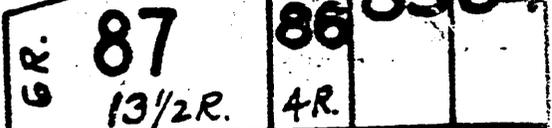
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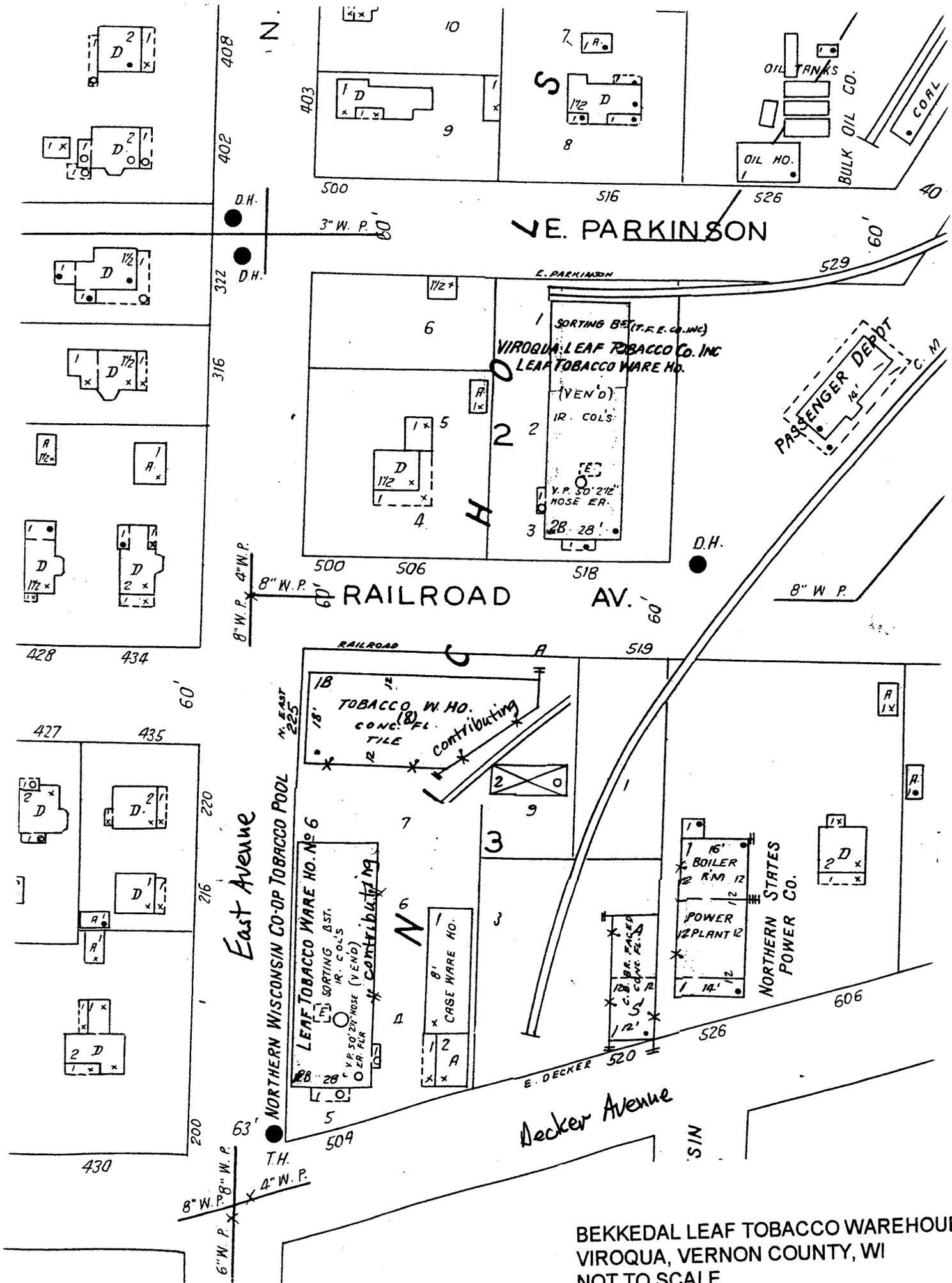


WISCONSIN AVE.



DECKER





BEKKEDAL LEAF TOBACCO WAREHOUSE  
 VIROQUA, VERNON COUNTY, WI  
 NOT TO SCALE  
 SANBORN MAP 1933