United States Department of the 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 Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Main Street west of Greenbrier Cemetery Road NA☐ not for publication

city or town Greenbrier NA☐ vicinity

state Tennessee code TN county Robertson code 147 zip code 37073

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.)

E. Patrick McIntyre, Jr. 6-05-08
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission
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:

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

- ☐ 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:)

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- [x] private
- [ ] public-local
- [ ] public-State
- [ ] public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- [x] building(s)
- [ ] district
- [ ] site
- [ ] structure
- [ ] object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	2	buildings
1		sites
		structures
		objects
3	2	Total

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

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY: MANUFACTURING FACILITY

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT: NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: INDUSTRIAL

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation LIMESTONE; BRICK; CONCRETE
walls WOOD; LIMESTONE; BRICK; METAL
roof METAL; LIMESTONE; WOOD
other METAL

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

SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS

8. Statement of Significance

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

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

Criteria Considerations N/A
(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 graves
- ☐ **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.)

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY
COMMERCE
SETTLEMENT

Period of Significance
1885-1909

Significant Dates
1885, 1898, 1905

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked)
Nelson, Charles

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Unknown

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): N/A

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:
MTSU DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery
Name of Property

Robertson County, Tennessee
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approx. 5 acres Greenbrier, Tenn 307 NE

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	16	518719	4032160	3			
2				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 Lorne McWatters, Tonya Blades, Brian Dempsey, Katie Merzbacher, Mallory Smith
organization Middle Tennessee State University, Dept. of History date May 19, 2007
street & number MTSU, Box 23 telephone (615) 898-5805
city or town Murfreesboro state TN zip code 37132

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 Fisher Hugh Lee Et AL (Billie Lou Watts, current owner/descendant)
street & number 644 Main Street telephone
city or town Greenbrier state TN zip code 37073

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

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 2030

7. Architectural Description

Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery is located in Greenbrier (pop 5373), Robertson County, Tennessee. Constructed in 1867, but significantly expanded after 1870 when acquired by Charles Nelson, the Nelson Distillery was the largest producer of sour-mash whiskey in Robertson County and contributed directly to the settlement, growth, and development of the town of Greenbrier from 1870 to 1909, when Prohibition closed the business. The remnants of the distillery are situated on approximately 5 acres, although the operation covered a much larger area during its peak period. The existing site includes a frame warehouse sided with corrugated tin, now rusted, constructed between 1903 and 1908 (c. 1905; see 1903 and 1908 Sanborn maps). The 1908 Sanborn refers to this building (photo 1) as the "New Warehouse", a term that will be used throughout this nomination. Another contributing building, the brick and carved limestone springhouse (photo 2) was erected c. 1885 on the hillside above Rocky Fork Creek to provide fresh water to the distillery.[1] Another remaining building, the barrel house (c. 1898), is a roughly constructed frame building (photo 3) that straddles Rocky Fork Creek, which runs east-west across the property. The barrel house is non-contributing because of its seriously deteriorated condition.

Since this is an industrial property, various other features associated with whiskey production during the period from 1885 to 1909 are evident around the site. These include mostly crumbled and sometimes scattered limestone foundations that are footprints of buildings present during the active operating years of the distillery (photo 4), along with the remnants of a brick-lined mash tub (photo 5) and a concrete wall across Rocky Fork Creek (photo 6) that once served as a dam for a swimming pool and baptismal pond. Near the mash tub is a concrete structure, somewhat deteriorated, that once supported a pipe that ran south from the mash tubs and up the hillside to a pasture area at the top of the hill (photo 7). The pipe supplied waste mash to cattle being fed at the top of the hill (photo 8). The site also includes a c. 1960 rectangular, gabled, frame storage shed (NC) with a metal roof and vertical standing seam tin siding, a door and window opening, and metal sliding doors (photo 9).

The Nelson Distillery site is located on the south side of Main Street, about one mile east of Greenbrier and about eight miles southeast of Springfield, the county seat of Robertson County (photos 10 and 11). The property slopes south toward Rocky Fork Creek, then rises sharply up a hillside to the open pasture area at the top of the hill above the springhouse. As can be seen by reviewing Sanborn maps from 1888, 1893, 1898, 1903, 1908, 1913, and 1921, the new warehouse (c. 1905) was attached to a complex of buildings, now gone, and was part of an even larger operation also visible in the maps. The historic appearance of the distillery can be seen in several photos taken c. 1905 (photos 12, 13, 14) and there is also a folk oil painting of the distillery (date unknown) that offers an impression of the mill, but it is not literal and is not painted in proper proportions (photo 15).

[1] The Sanborn maps refer to this creek as Rocky Fork Creek. Other sources refer to it as Long Branch Creek.

1. New Warehouse (c. 1905, C)

Built sometime between 1903 and 1908, the New Warehouse is a four-story frame building sided with vertical boards and corrugated tin, once painted white but now rusted (photo 1), that houses a framework of wood posts and beams designed to store the barrels of whiskey. The framework was constructed from recycled and new boards, planks, and timbers mortised and nailed together to hold the heavy barrels. This framework can be seen in historic photos taken c. 1910, which show the building before it was sided with corrugated tin (photo 13).

The New Warehouse is four stories high, with a flat tin roof and sided with corrugated tin on its north elevation and on its west façade (photos 1, 16, 17). The east elevation is sided with vertical boards, while the south elevation is brick and rests on a limestone foundation (photos 18, 19, 20). As can be seen in the Sanborn maps, as early as 1888 a 1 ½-story stone and brick "old warehouse" sat on the current location of the "new warehouse." About one-half of this "old warehouse" was dismantled by 1893, leaving space for the "new warehouse" to be erected c. 1905. The brick wall that remains, then, may be part of the original "old warehouse" or a new wall constructed c. 1905 (Sanborn maps, 1888, 1893, 1898, 1903, 1908). However, the ghost of the "old warehouse," which was only 1 ½ stories, can still be seen on the south elevation (photo 19). A shed roof addition that does not appear on the 1921 Sanborn map, after the distillery was closed, runs most of the length of the south elevation. The addition is both roofed and sided with corrugated tin. Openings for four windows, now bricked in, can be seen above the addition, and the west end of this elevation shows the remnants of a brick wall jutting out. At the far west end of the south elevation is the elevator shaft with three stories of paired windows, and sided with corrugated tin.

The west façade of the New Warehouse is five bays wide and four stories high, with an elevator shaft that projects above the main roof line on the southwest corner (photo 1). Most of the first story is a series of wide doors composed of vertical boards, or vertical board-and-batten, painted red. The top three floors of the west facade are sided with corrugated tin, and each story has five window openings, each covered with a metal-hinged door that could be closed or opened as needed. Each window has a small metal awning on the top and a metal sill (photo 21). At the southwest corner of the west elevation is the elevator shaft, also sided with corrugated tin but with five window openings designed in the same manner as the others on the west, north, and east elevations of the new warehouse. The elevator shaft rises above the main roof of the building to house the machinery for the elevator's operation.

The north elevation of the New Warehouse is six bays on the first floor, with a seventh narrow bay on the top three stories at the northeast end. The windows are the same as those on the west facade. The foundation is composed of concrete blocks, wood beams, and small brick pillars (photo 16).

The east elevation is four stories tall. The upper three stories are sided with vertically nailed wood planks, without window openings, and the first floor is a series of board-and-batten doors, painted red and similar to

the doors on the west facade. The foundation of this elevation is composed of brick and limestone, with small brick pillars supporting the structure along with a more formal limestone foundation on the south end that was part of the foundation needed to support the brick south elevation of the building. The roof over the east elevation extends several feet, and part of the brick wall also extends past the end of the east elevation (photo 18).

2. Springhouse (c. 1885, C)

The springhouse is composed primarily of brick and cut limestone, with the south end built into the hillside rising from Rocky Fork Creek (photos 2, 22). The north façade is brick with an entrance surrounded by an arched limestone lintel with a keystone. The roof of the springhouse is corrugated tin, and the rafter ends are exposed. The original door has been lost, replaced with diagonally laid wood planks that have fallen into a state of disrepair. The façade and entrance utilize cut limestone, and the two stairs that lead into the building are also made of limestone. The stairs are flanked by two small brick piers capped in limestone. A small brick wall capped with limestone connects these piers to a set of slightly taller piers on each side of the stairs. These piers attach directly to another wall that is composed of brick and capped with limestone. There is an increase in the height of the wall by approximately a foot and a half before it connects to each side of the springhouse. The overall purpose of this stair and wall design was to create a courtyard in front of the building, an effect not lost on the local population as can be seen in an historic 1910 photograph of local residents having a picnic at the springhouse (photo 22). The interior of the springhouse is simple, composed of brick, and contains a channel through which the spring runs (photo 23).

3. Barrel House (c. 1898, NC)

The barrel house straddles the north and south ends of Rocky Fork Creek (photo 3). It is a rectangular frame building with a gabled standing seam tin roof and exposed rafter ends. Non-contributing because of serious deterioration, the barrel house is supported by a foundation of wood posts, four across and at least seven rows deep, although additional wood posts have been strategically inserted to reinforce the supporting structure (photo 25). Most of these large wood posts rest on small brick piers. All elevations of the barrel house are composed of horizontal wood boards nailed to the stud walls. The north façade is somewhat irregular with a large wood door at the east end and an even larger, doorless opening at the west end. Two window openings sit between these doors. The west, south, and east elevations are similar to the north facade, but have only one or two windows and no doors. The interior of the barrel house displays deteriorated wood plank flooring, unfinished walls with exposed studs, and no ceiling (photo 25), clearly reflecting its utilitarian function—to take advantage of a cool area above the creek in which to store the barrels of whiskey.

4. Storage Shed (c. 1960, NC)

The storage shed is a modern addition to the site (photo 9). It has a gabled metal roof and standing seam metal covering the frame walls. The shed has a small pedestrian door as well as a large set of sliding doors set on an overhead rail for vehicular access.

5. Industrial Landscape (C)

The site of Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery retains various elements of its industrial past. Limestone blocks that once served as foundations for now-destroyed industrial buildings can be seen in various locations around the site, such as those displayed in photo 4. One important remaining element is a mash tub (photo 5) used to store mash for whiskey production. This and other such tubs (see Sanborn maps) were also the source of the mash that was piped from the tubs to pastures at the top of the hill as fodder for cattle. Parts of this piping system can be seen in the historic photos (photo 13) and in a current photo (photo 7) that shows the concrete supports for the piping system that ran up the hillside. Another element of the distillery that is still present is a dam that stretches across Rocky Fork Creek. The dam created a small pool that has been used as a swimming hole and for baptisms.

The Sanborn maps from 1888 to 1908 reveal both the design and size of the distillery, with warehouses for storing grain, coal and charcoal for fuel; mash tubs and fermenting tubs for producing whiskey; barrel houses and warehouses for storage; a water system from the springhouse; and a piping system for sending waste mash to the cattle sheds at the top of the hill above the distillery. There was also a scale house, an office, a repair shop, and at least two "dwelling" houses close to the distillery. Supplementing the maps are four historic photographs (photos 12-14, 22) and a painting (photo 15) researchers have been able to locate.

Much of the area south, east, and west of the New Warehouse has been disturbed by heavy machinery when a waterworks system was run through the property. Without testing, it is difficult to determine the potential of the site to offer archaeological information. Areas around the surviving mash tub, along the creek, and up the hillside, along with the new warehouse itself, might have archaeological potential.

8. Statement of Significance

Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery, located in Greenbrier, Tennessee, is eligible for listing in the National Register for Historic Places under Criterion A for its local significance in the industrial and commercial history of Robertson County and its direct contribution to the growth and development of the Town of Greenbrier from 1885 to 1909, and under Criterion B for its association with Charles Nelson, founder of the distillery and a prominent businessman in Tennessee. The distillery is an industrial property that once housed the most significant economic enterprise in Greenbrier and which contributed significantly to the settlement and growth of the town between 1885 and 1909. In becoming the largest producer of sour-mash whiskey in Robertson County, Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery played a vital role within associated industries in the region, engaging in a symbiotic relationship with agricultural production, livestock, and the cooperage industry. As owner of the Greenbrier Distillery, as well as President of the Nashville Trust Company, Charles Nelson played a significant role in the growth and business development of the region. By 1885, the distilling industry represented Tennessee's largest manufacturing industry. During this same year, Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery produced roughly 380,000 gallons of whiskey, compared to roughly 463,000 within the entire county.[2] Although Nelson's initial land purchase included fifty acres, the original facility occupied roughly 5 acres and included three primary zones of manufacture and storage.[3] The Rocky Fork (also known as Long Branch) Creek runs through the property, serving as its primary water source. Today, the new warehouse (c. 1905), springhouse (c. 1885), and barrel house (c.1898) remain (photos 1, 2, and 3),[4] along with a variety of remnants of other buildings and structures associated with the industrial processes of the distillery.

Historical Narrative

The establishment of Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery followed a dynamic period of distilling activity. Whiskey production in Robertson County began as early as the 1790s. Thomas Woodard and Arthur Pitt maintained modest distilling operations on their properties in the area. In the mid 19th century, Thomas Woodard's son,

---

[2] Kay Baker Gaston. "Tennessee Distilleries: Their Rise, Fall and Re-Emergence," *Border States: Journal of Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association*, No 12, 1999.

[3] The 5 acres of this property include parcel 243 (1.56 acres) and part of parcel 235 containing approximately 3.5 acres east of parcel 243.

[4] Doris Moss Pike and Marjorie Hill, "The Village Green: A History of Greenbrier, Tennessee 1858-1920," (Presented to the Library, James H. Armstong, copyright 1983), 8. *The Goodspeed History of Robertson County, Tennessee*, selected reading list by Robert A. Dalton. (Serviceberry Press, Memphis, Tennessee. Originally published in 1886. New Material Copyright, 2004.) copies received from Robertson County Archives, Springfield, Tennessee, 4; Joyce Marie, Choate, "Greenbrier Distillery, Home of 'Nelson's Best,'" *Gazette* 20 November 1975, 17.

Wiley, doubled his father's operation, extending their product into southern regional markets, thereby establishing a commercial foundation for later distilling efforts. In 1841, he produced over six thousand gallons of whiskey, with total sales at over twenty five hundred dollars. In the antebellum period, whiskey production did not carry the negative stigma it assumed in the late 1880s and early 1890s. As settlers pushed the frontier further westward, whiskey played an important role in daily life. It was frequently used medicinally, and was largely viewed beneficial if taken in moderate amounts. Frederick Allen writes that "whiskey was not only a source of rare pleasure on the difficult frontier, it was also the main crop concentrated and unspoilable, and as such a kind of liquid money."[5] Generally, among ten southern states in 1840, the state of Tennessee recorded the third highest number of distilleries in the region at 1,426. It ranked second in total production behind Kentucky, with over one million gallons.[6]

The Civil War, however, halted the growth of the distilling industry in Tennessee and Robertson County, as occupying Union forces needed the corn to feed troops and associated livestock. When hostilities ended, whiskey production and the distilling industry quickly re-developed in the county. Whiskey production was relatively easy to initiate and it required little start-up capital. The natural resources in Robertson County made it a suitable location to re-build the industry. Fertile land, limestone, access to low-sulfur water sources, and an abundance of white oak each played a role in the success of Robertson County whiskey production. On October 20, 1870 Charles Nelson purchased fifty acres, including the nominated property in Greenbrier along with associated distilling implements from Travis Winham, establishing what would become the largest-producing facility of sour-mash whiskey in Robertson County. Sanborn maps indicate that the Greenbrier Distillery was built in 1867, engaging in low-production distilling efforts. Prior to 1870, the distillery, run by Charles Palmer, produced roughly five barrels per day. When Nelson purchased the property, this figure rose to thirty-one barrels per day. Nelson continued to purchase land in Greenbrier, eventually owning approximately 970 acres.[7]

---

[5] Frederick Allen, "The American Spirit," *American Heritage,* Vol. 49, Issue 3 (May/June, 1998): 82-92, pg. 85.

[6] Kay Baker Gaston, *Robertson County Distilleries, 1796-1909,* (Robertson County, Tennessee: Robertson County Historical Society, 1984), 4; (Compendium of the Sixth Census-1840): http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1840b-01.pdf.

[7] Teresa Biddle-Douglas, "Historic Distilleries." *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, Carroll Van West, ed. (Nashville, Tennessee: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 250; Kay Baker Gaston, "Tennessee Distilleries: Their Rise, Fall, and Re-Emergence," *Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association*, No. 12, 1999, pg. 2 of 5; Robertson County Sanborn Map, 1888; Gaston, *Robertson County Distilleries*, 1796-1909, p.18.; Sheila Watts. Interview by Katie Merzbacher, Lorne McWatters, Ben Hayes, (Greenbrier, Tennessee) Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 4/4/07.

Born in Hagenow, Mecklenberg-Schwerin, Germany, on July 4, 1835, Charles Nelson began his professional life working for a soap and candle company in New York City. He later moved with his family to Cincinnati, working as a butcher until 1857, and eventually entered the produce and grocery business. By 1862, Nelson opened the Nelson & Pheiffer firm in Nashville, Tennessee. This grocery business later became Charles Nelson & Co. At the time, it was common for grocers to sell whiskey in their facilities. Prior to the Civil War, the Nashville region witnessed steady increases in whiskey production. After the war, the industry re-emerged as a viable economic option in the area. Charles Nelson purchased the fledgling distillery at Greenbrier likely to bolster his business and to enter into a growing statewide industry. Due to the profitability of the distilling industry, Nelson eventually phased out his grocery business to concentrate fully on whiskey production. Having built a strong reputation as a fair and successful businessman in the region, Nelson was elected President of the Nashville Trust Company in 1889, a position he held until his death on December 13, 1891. His son, William Nelson, succeeded his father as President of the Nashville Trust Company.[8]

By 1888, eighteen years after Charles Nelson purchased the property, the Greenbrier Distillery was the highest producing facility in Robertson County. Under the headline, "A Prominent and Public Spirited Citizen Passes Away (1891)," the Nashville *Evening Herald* referred to the Greenbrier Distillery as "largest in the state."[9] In 1885, for example, the facility produced roughly 380,000 gallons per year with annual paid taxes of $341,212.50. By comparison, Woodard's Silver Spring Distillery was the second largest manufacturer in the county, producing roughly 40,000 gallons.[10] In Moore County, "Tolley & Eaton Distillery had a capacity of just 30,000 gallons a year, while Jack [Daniels] (NR 9/14/1972) was at 23,000 gallons."[11]

The Greenbrier Distillery was composed of three primary structural zones in 1888 located within roughly 5.5 acres of the original fifty acre property that year. Zone one included three attached warehouses with a combined storage capacity of eight thousand barrels. Of these three warehouses, none remain. These structures occupied an area in the northeast section of the property. Zone two included a central building with associated and attached structures differentiated by the functions within the distilling process. This complex consisted of a central mash tub building, water tanks, barrel house, grain warehouse, cistern room, steam

---

[8] "Sour Mash's Beginnings Traces to Rural Robertson," *Nashville Tennessean*, (Nashville, Tennessee) Monday October 18, 1926, p. 2-A; Nashville Trust Company, "50 Years of Stewardship, 1889-1939," Nashville Trust Company, (Nashville, Tennessee: 50th Anniversary Brochure for Nashville Trust, 1939), 6; *The Evening Herald*, Nashville, Tennessee, Monday Dec. 14, 1891, obituary; Gaston, *Robertson County Distilleries, 1796-1909*, 18.

[9] *The Evening Herald,* Nashville, Tennessee. Monday, December 14, 1891, obituary.

[10] Gaston, *Robertson County Distilleries*, 19.

[11] Peter Krass, *Blood and Whiskey: The Life and Times of Jack Daniel*, (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 95.

pump, fermenting structure, a slop pipe connected to a cattle shed and associated structures. These structures were to the southwest of the warehouses. Of these structures, only remnants of the mash tub and partial concrete foundations remain. Zone three included the extant c. 1885 springhouse across the Long Branch Creek. This brick and concrete structure anchored the property, and is situated to the southwest of the warehouses. Coal and wood were the primary heat sources and were stored on the property. Sour mash capacity was 317 bushels in 1888. A repair shop, wood pile, and house were across the street, to the north of the main distilling operation.[12]

The general layout and building functions at the Greenbrier Distillery complex remained virtually the same as the 1888 complex, with minor alterations, until after 1893. By 1898, a wooden barrel house was added to the complex, lying to the south of the main warehouses (1898 Sanborn). Between 1903 and 1908, the sour mash capacity fell from 317 bushels to 250. However, the same time-span witnessed the construction of a fourth warehouse, the "new warehouse" (c. 1905) which still stands (1908 Sanborn).[13]

Despite growth at the Nelson Distillery, in the 1880s the distilling industry began a gradual decline in Robertson County. Temperance and church groups influenced this process, as did the 'four mile law' passed by the General Assembly in 1877. The law banned the sale of liquor within four miles of an incorporated school or educational facility unless the incorporated town approved these sales by charter. In 1894, an Internal Revenue report listed five Robertson County distilleries still in operation. These included Nelson's Greenbrier facility, the Pitt Brothers distillery (NR, 12/18/1973) James H. Woodard distillery, J.S. Brown distilleries, and J.R. Bridges & Son. Legislative acts in 1899 further eroded support for the sale of liquor in towns of five thousand or less, which closed the doors of smaller manufacturers. On July 1, 1909 Tennessee voted for statewide prohibition, thereby closing Nelson's Greenbrier facility as well as Pitt's distillery, which were the last two operating distilleries in the county. The remaining barrels of Nelson's whiskey were sold out of state until 1915. By 1921, the distilling apparatus had been taken out of the Greenbrier facility and the grain warehouse was converted into a storehouse for tobacco (1921 Sanborn).[14]

Between 1885 and 1909, Nelson's Distillery played a significant role in the growth and development of Greenbrier. In a given year, roughly 25 people routinely worked at the distillery. Many lived in close proximity to the complex, establishing close social and cultural ties with one another. In addition to associated economic relationships in the region, such as corn production, agriculture, and the cooperage industry, the Greenbrier distillery influenced settlement patterns and movement into the area. Greenbrier resident, Bess McMurtry, recalled, "nearly everybody in Greenbrier on up until recent years either worked at

[12] Sanborn map, 1888; Gaston, *Robertson County Distilleries*, 18.
[13] Sanborn maps, 1888, 1898, 1908.
[14] Robertson County Sanborn Map sequence, 1888-1921; Gaston, *Robertson County Distilleries, 1796-1909*, 20-22.

the distillery or were coopers and made barrels and kegs."[15] In 1886, Goodspeed wrote, "The proximity of a large distillery which furnishes work for a large number of coopers and employees, is the chief cause for the rapid growth of the town" of Greenbrier.[16] Sheila Watts, whose family currently owns the nominated property, recalled that Nelson's Distillery was a primary impetus for the construction of a railroad line and depot in Greenbrier.[17] In the 1880s, the primary businesses in Greenbrier included a dry goods store, drug and grocery stores, cooper shop, tobacco dealer, livery stable, and blacksmith. Although Charles Nelson did not live in Greenbrier, he frequently traveled the eighteen miles from Nashville to check on the facility. He conducted business primarily from his Nashville office. Ferdinand Newman managed the facility on a daily basis, while William Althauser acted as foreman and Sam Carter managed the warehouse and oversaw farm activities. Government inspectors and gaugers were also fixtures on the property.[18]

The distilling process generally involved "running the fermented liquid through a copper 'worm' and then through charcoal in a wooden vat to purify it."[19] The whiskey was then stored in barrels for up to four years in the warehouses, including the c. 1905 new warehouse. The barrels were cranked by hand onto elevators and placed onto the substantial timbers for storage. Local farmers initially supplied the corn staple to the various county distilleries, but as whiskey production significantly increased after 1865, it was necessary to import corn from outlying areas such as St. Louis. Corn and grain were stored in warehouses on the property. The leftover sour-mash was placed in a large on-site feeding trough and shed for cattle. An estimated four acres of land within Nelson's original fifty acre lot were fenced in for cattle. In the fall months, workers from the distillery drove the cattle to local points from which other crews carried them to Nashville for slaughter. After aging, the barrels of whiskey were transported from Greenbrier to Nelson's bottling and distribution warehouse on Market Street (now Second Avenue.) in Nashville. From there, the product, labeled 'Nelson's Best,' was shipped to multiple points throughout the United States. Historian Peter Krass argues that Robertson County distilleries benefited from their proximity to Nashville. He adds, "The higher profits [compared to Moore County, for example] enjoyed by the Robertson County distilleries would greatly aid them when it came time to invest in the latest technology…"[20]

As a multifaceted local manufacturing facility, the Greenbrier Distillery therefore widened its base of activity and economic impact by connecting Robertson County to the commercial, economic, and technological

[15] Pike and Hill, "Village Green," 10.
[16] The Goodspeed History of Robertson County, Tennessee, Selected reading list by Robert A. Dalton. Serviceberry Press, Memphis, Tennessee. Originally published in 1886. New Material Copyright, 2004. Copies received from Robertson County Archives, Springfield, Tennessee, 21.
[17] Sheila Watts Interview, 4/4/07, 11:00am.
[18] Goodspeed History, 21; Choate, "Greenbrier Distillery: Home of Nelson's Best," 17; Pike and Hill, "Village Green, 8; Sanborn, 1898.
[19] Gaston, *Robertson County Distilleries, 1796-1909*, 19.
[20] Krass, 96.

center of Nashville. Nelson's facility also contributed to a general branding, or name-recognition, of Robertson County Whiskey, which enjoyed a reputation for superior quality throughout the United States (photo 26).[21]

The Greenbrier Distillery, like the Pitt Distillery in Robertson County, adds significantly to the broad understanding of the distilling industry in Tennessee. Kay Baker Gaston argues that "the distillery industry in Robertson County never revived [after 1909], however, despite the fact that during most of its 113-year history more whiskey had been manufactured there than in any other county in the state."[22] While its specific contribution to the economic, social, and cultural development of Greenbrier, Tennessee, and Robertson County is clear, the Greenbrier Distillery's link to the larger distilling heritage associated with Tennessee is also evident. Between 1885 and 1909, this facility rose to dominate whiskey production efforts in Robertson County, thus generating an economic and commercial connection between its home location and Nashville. Jack Daniel Distillery (NR, 9/14/1972) and Cascade Distillery (renamed George Dickel Distillery, NR, 6/10/1994) enjoyed a post-prohibition worldwide reputation that continues to this day. They each benefit from the direct historical association with a brand-specific Tennessee product, of which Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery helped to create.

[21] Gaston, *Robertson County Distilleries, 1796*-1909, 18, 2; Choate, "Greenbrier Distillery," 17; "Sensation at the Stock Yards, A Sidewalk Scene Taken form Kentucky and Tennessee Life," *Kansas City Star* 17 January 1898. (author unknown)
[22] Gaston, *Robertson County Distilleries*, *1796-1909*, 23.

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, Frederick. "The American Spirit." *American Heritage* 49:3 (May/June, 1998): 82-92.

Biddle-Douglas, Teresa. "Historic Distilleries." *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* Carroll Van West, ed. Nashville, Tennessee: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998.

Choate, Joyce Marie. "Greenbrier Distillery, Home of 'Nelson's Best'" *Gazette* 20 November 1975.

Compendium of the Sixth Census-1840: http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1840b-01.pdf. Accessed May, 2007.

Gaston, Kay Baker. *Robertson County Distilleries, 1796-1909.* Robertson County, Tennessee: Robertson County Historical Society, 1984.

Gaston, Kay Baker. "Tennessee Distilleries: Their Rise, Fall, and Re-Emergence." *Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association* No. 12, 1999.

Goodspeed. *The Goodspeed History of Robertson County, Tennessee.* Selected reading list by Robert A. Dalton. Serviceberry Press, Memphis, Tennessee. Originally published in 1886. New Material Copyright, 2004.

Hill, Doris Moss and Marjorie Pike. "The Village Green: A History of Greenbrier, Tennessee 1858-1920." N.P. copyright 1983.

Krass, Peter. *Blood and Whiskey: The Life and Times of Jack Daniel.* Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2004.

Nashville Trust Company. "50 Years of Stewardship, 1889-1939." Nashville, Tennessee. 50th Anniversary Brochure for Nashville Trust, 1939.

Reid, Yolanda, Historian. Robertson County Archives, 4/4/2007, Springfield, Tennessee, interview by Brian Dempsey.

Sanborn Map Company, Robertson County Sanborn Maps. 1888, 1893, 1898, 1903, 1908, 1913, 1921.

"Sensation at the Stock Yards, A Sidewalk Scene Taken from Kentucky and Tennessee Life." *Kansas City Star* 17 January 1898. author unknown.

"Sour Mash's Beginnings Traces to Rural Robertson." *Nashville Tennessean.* Nashville, Tennessee. Monday October 18, 1926. 2-A.

The Evening Herald. Nashville, Tennessee. Monday December 14, 1891. Obituary.

Watts, Sheila. Interview by Katie Merzbacher, Lorne McWatters, Ben Hayes. (Greenbrier, Tennessee) Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN. 4/4/07.

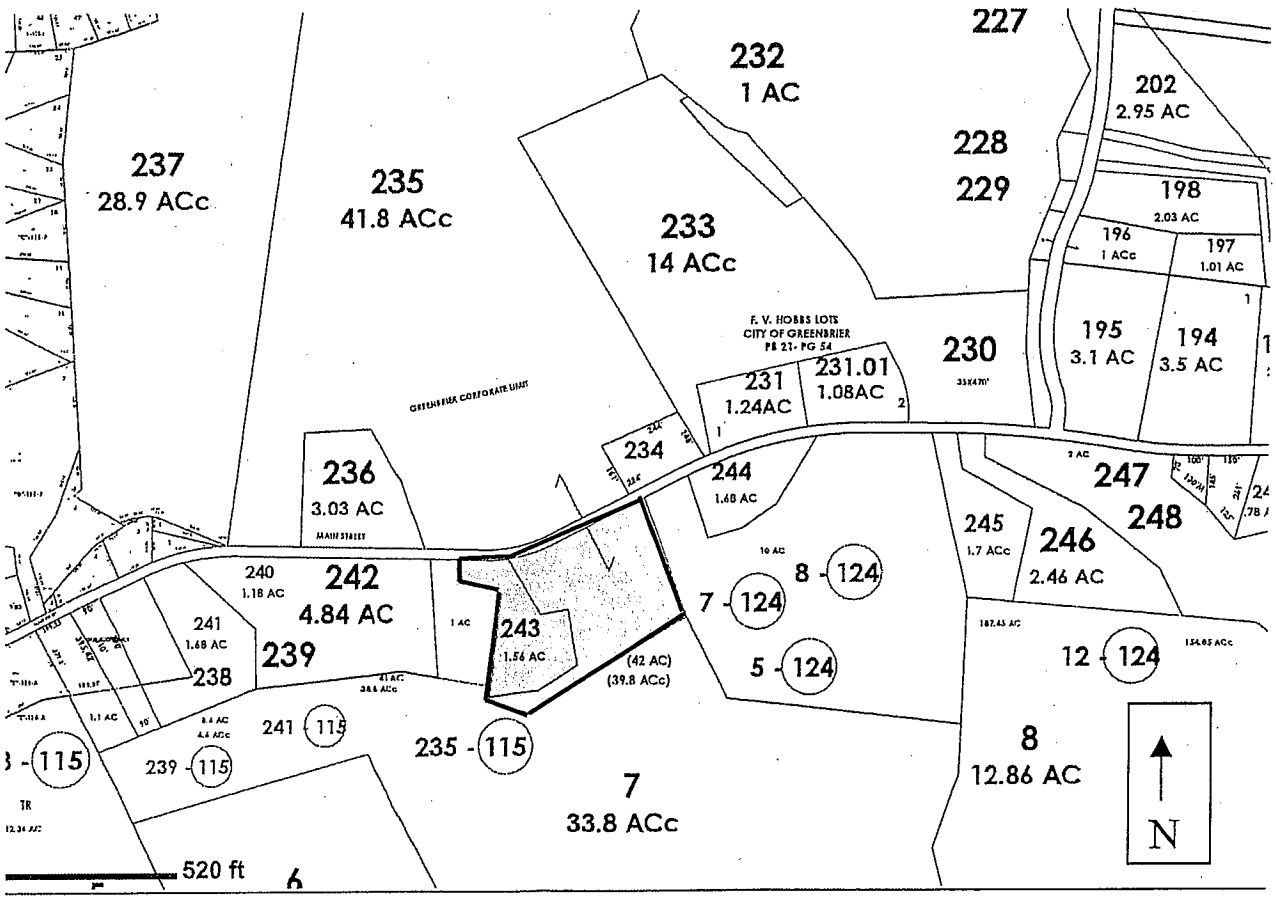
10. Geographical Description

Verbal Boundary Description

The Nelson Greenbrier Distillery is located at 644 Main Street, Greenbrier, Tennessee, as marked as parcel 243 (1.56 acres), and the portion of parcel 235 south of Main Street (approximately 3.0 acres east of parcel 243) on Robertson County Tax map 115. About one mile east of downtown Greenbrier, the property is approximately 5 acres and slopes south from Main Street to Rocky Fork Creek, then rises up a hillside. The scale of the map is 1"=520' and is the best available for this area.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries for the nominated property include all of the approximately 5 acres of land associated currently and historically with Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery.



PHOTOGRAPHS
Photographs by: Lorne McWatters
MTSU Department of History

CD and Positives: Tennessee Historical Commission
Nashville, Tennessee

Dates taken: February-April, 2007

New Warehouse, west façade, facing east
1 of 26

New Warehouse, northwest corner, facing southeast
2 of 26

New Warehouse, north elevation, facing south
3 of 26

New Warehouse, east elevation, facing west
4 of 26

New warehouse, southeast corner, facing northwest
5 of 26

New warehouse, south elevation, facing north
6 of 26

New warehouse window, west façade
7 of 26

Main Street, facing east
8 of 26

Springhouse, north façade, facing south
9 of 26

Springhouse, interior, facing south
10 of 26

Barrel House, west elevation, facing east
11 of 26

Wooden barrel house, foundation, west elevation, facing east
12 of 26

Wooden barrel house, interior, facing east
13 of 26

Limestone foundations of previous warehouses
14 of 26

Mash Tub
15 of 26

Concrete Wall that crosses Rocky Fork Creek, facing west
16 of 26

Concrete structure that supported mash tub pipe, facing north
17 of 26

View of south hillside
18 of 26

Frame storage shed, northeast elevation, facing southwest
19 of 26

Main Street, facing west
20 of 26

Greenbrier Distillery whiskey bottle
21 of 26

Historic photo of interior of New Warehouse, circa 1905
22 of 26

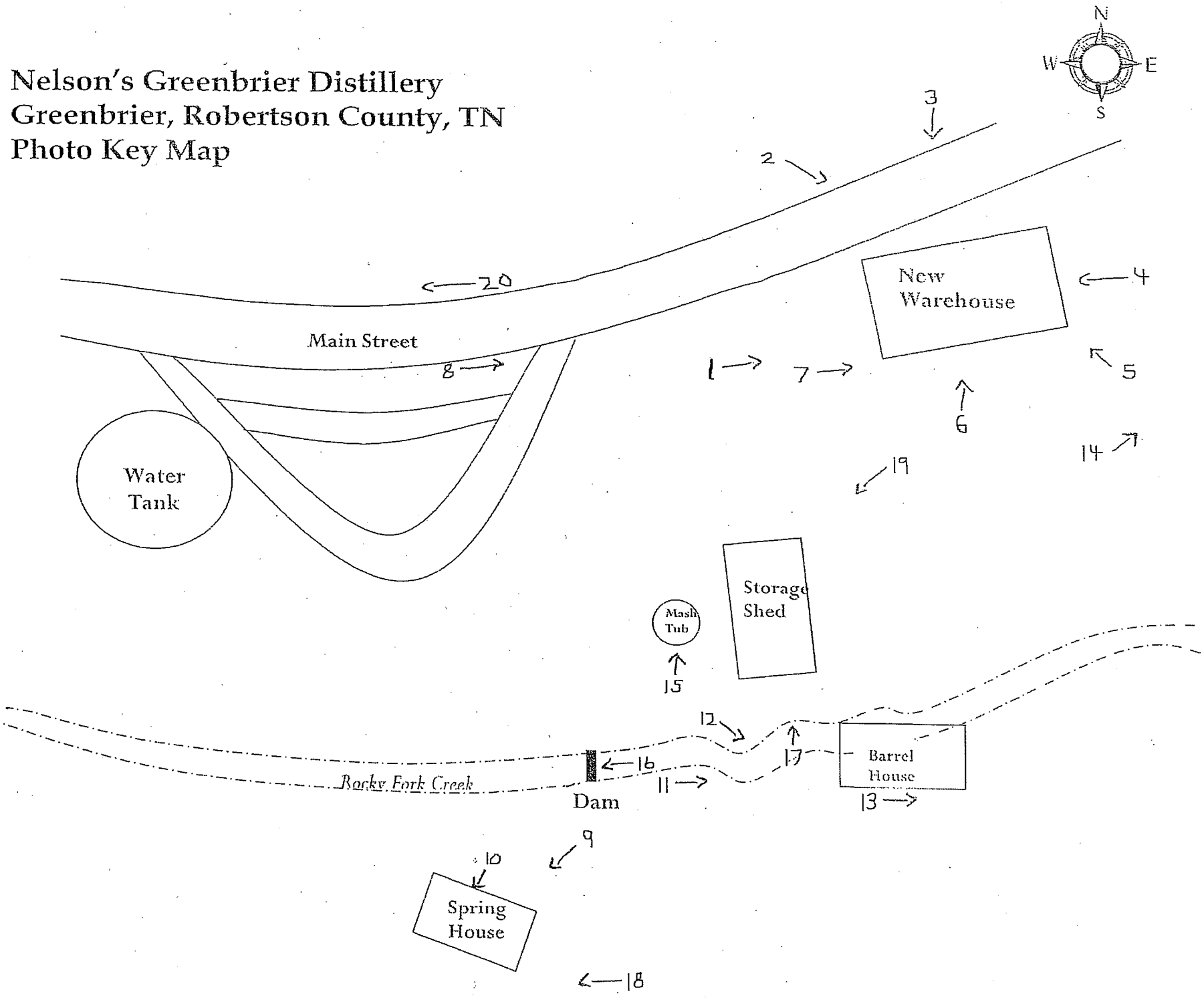
Historic photo of distilling complex, circa 1905
23 of 26

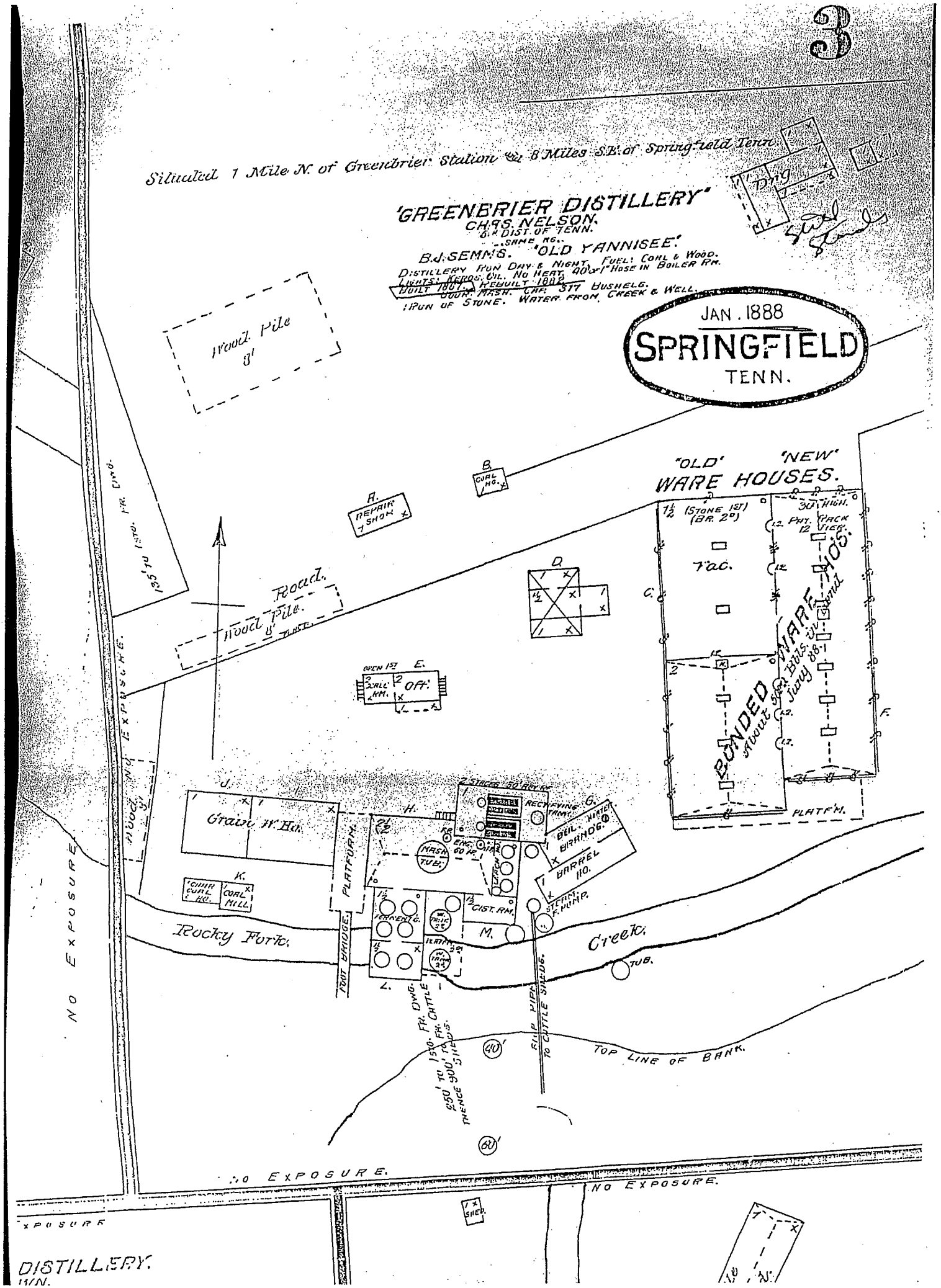
Historic photo of distilling complex, circa 1905
24 of 26

Folk painting in oil, date unknown
25 of 26

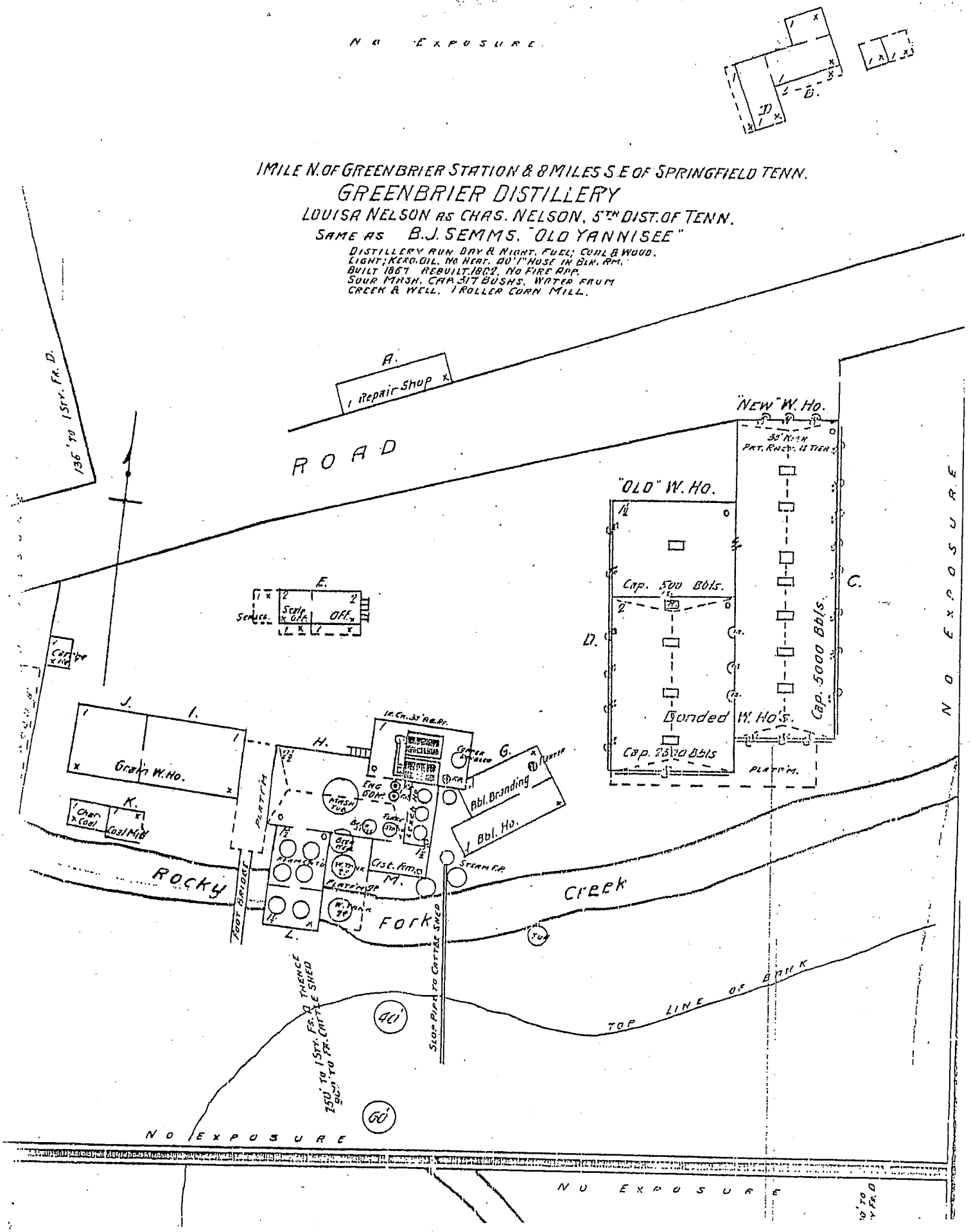
Historic photo of Springhouse, 1910
26 of 26

Nelson's Greenbrier Distillery
Greenbrier, Robertson County, TN
Photo Key Map




3
Situated 1 Mile N. of Greenbrier Station & 8 Miles S.E. of Springfield Tenn.
'GREENBRIER DISTILLERY'
CHAS. NELSON.
6th DIST. OF TENN.
SAME AS.
B.J. SEMMS. 'OLD YANNISEE.'
DISTILLERY RUN DAY & NIGHT. FUEL: COAL & WOOD.
LIGHTS: KEROS. OIL. NO HEAT. 40' or 1" HOSE IN BOILER RM.
BUILT 1867. REBUILT 1882.
DOUR. MASH. CAP. 317 BUSHELS.
RUN OF STONE. WATER FROM CREEK & WELL.
JAN. 1888
SPRINGFIELD
TENN.
Wood Pile 8'
Road.
Wood Pile 8'
135' TO 1STO. FR. DWG.
NO EXPOSURE
Wood No. 3'
A. REPAIR SHOP
B. COAL HO.
C.
D.
E. OFF.
OPEN 1ST
'OLD' 'NEW'
WARE HOUSES.
1½ (STONE 1ST) (BR. 2D)
30' HIGH.
PAT. RACK 12 VIER.
Vac.
BONDED WARE HOS.
About 500 Bbls. in Bond
July 88.
PLATF'M.
F.
G.
H.
J.
K.
L.
M.
Grain W. Ho.
PLATFORM.
FOOT BRIDGE.
2 STACKS 50' RCY RF.
RECEIVING TANK.
BOIL. BRANDG.
BARREL HO.
STEAM F. PUMP.
MASH TUB.
ENG. 60 HP.
CIST. RM.
FERMENT'G.
CHAR COAL HO.
COAL MILL
Rocky Fork.
Creek.
TUB.
SLIP PIPE TO CATTLE SHEDS.
250' TO 1STO. FR. DWG. THENCE 900' TO FR. CATTLE SHEDS.
40'
60'
TOP LINE OF BANK.
NO EXPOSURE.
NO EXPOSURE.
EXPOSURE
SHED.
DISTILLERY.

1893



NO EXPOSURE
1 MILE N. OF GREENBRIER STATION & 8 MILES S.E OF SPRINGFIELD TENN.
GREENBRIER DISTILLERY
LOUISA NELSON AS CHAS. NELSON, 5TH DIST. OF TENN.
SAME AS B.J. SEMMS. "OLD YANNISEE"
DISTILLERY RUN DAY & NIGHT. FUEL; COAL & WOOD.
LIGHT; KERO. OIL. NO HEAT. 40' 1" HOSE IN BLR. RM.
BUILT 1867 REBUILT 1882. NO FIRE APP.
SOUR MASH. CAP. 317 BUSHS. WATER FROM
CREEK & WELL. 1 ROLLER CORN MILL.
A.
Repair Shop
ROAD
136' TO 1 STY. FR. D.
"NEW" W. HO.
"OLD" W. HO.
Cap. 500 Bbls.
Bonded W. Ho's.
Cap. 5000 Bbls.
C.
D.
E.
Scales
Scale Off.
Off.
J.
I.
Grain W. Ho.
K.
Char Coal
Coal Mill
H.
G.
Bbl. Branding
Bbl. Ho.
Cist. Rm.
M.
L.
Rocky
Fork
Creek
FOOT BRIDGE
PLATF'M
STEAM F.P.
SLOP PIPE TO CATTLE SHED
TOP LINE OF BANK
40'
60'
NO EXPOSURE
NO EXPOSURE
NO EXPOSURE

1898

NO EXPOSURE.

One Mile N. of Greenbrier Station and 8 Miles S.E. of Springfield, Tenn.

GREENBRIER DISTILLERY.

LOUISA NELSON AS CHAS. NELSON. 5TH DIST. OF TENN.

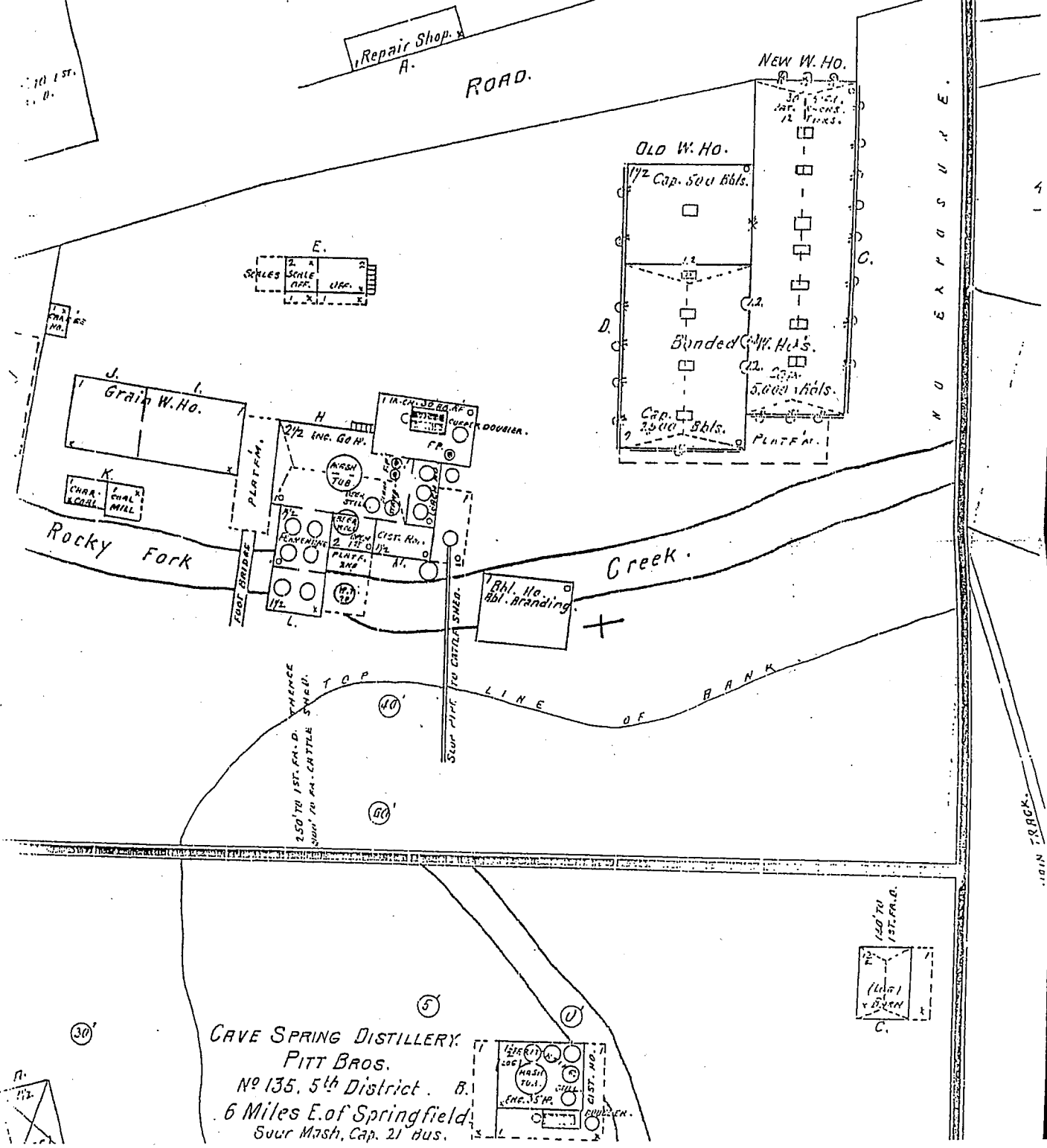
SAME AS B.J. SEMMS "OLD YANNISEE"

REBUILT 1882.

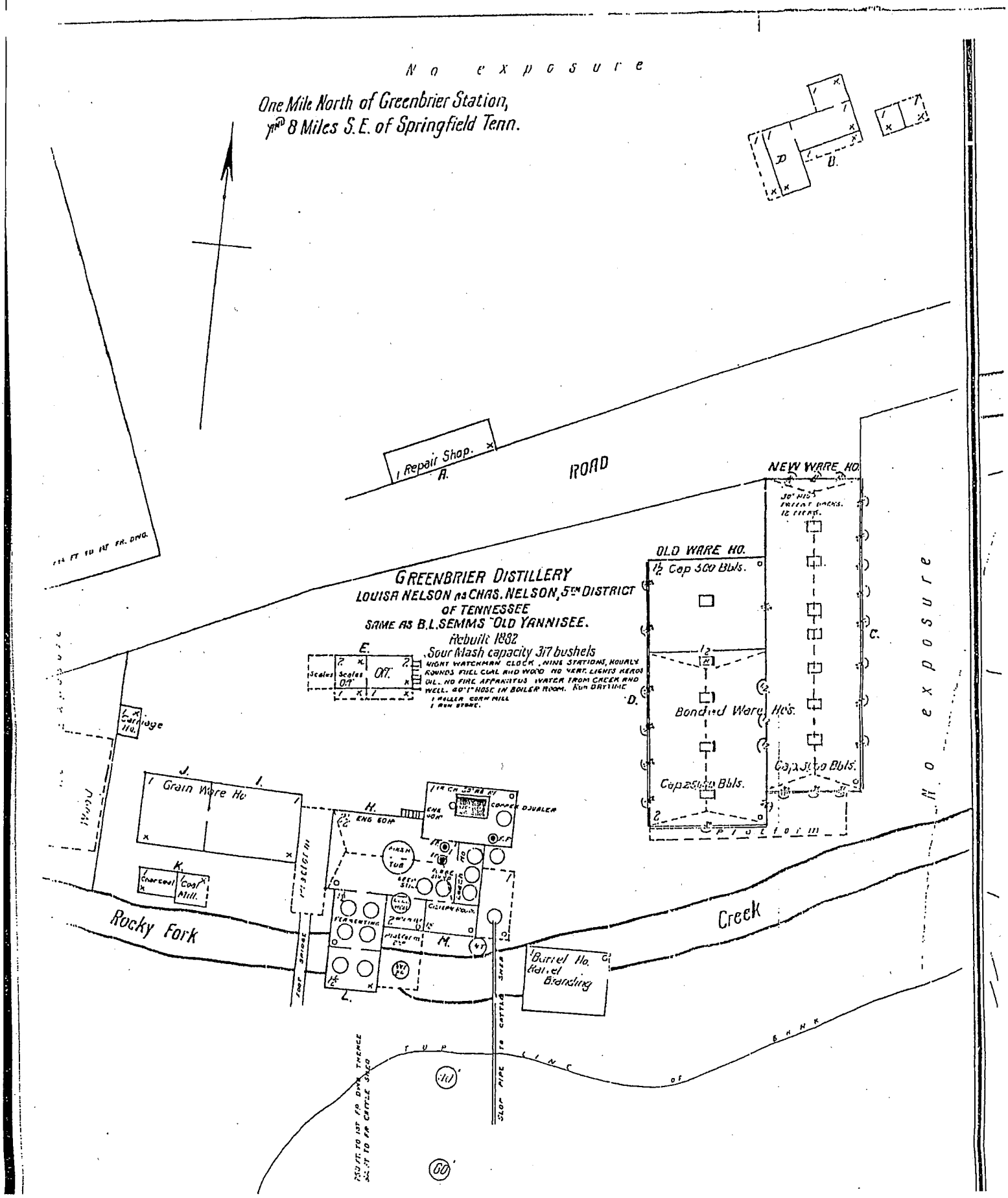
Sour Mash. Cap. 31T Bus.

RUN DAY & NIGHT. FUEL: COAL & WOOD. NO HEAT.
LIGHT: KEROS. OIL. 40' 1" HOSE IN BLK. RAT.
NO FIRE APP. WATER FROM CREEK & WELL.

1 ROLLER CORN MILL.
1 RUN STONE.

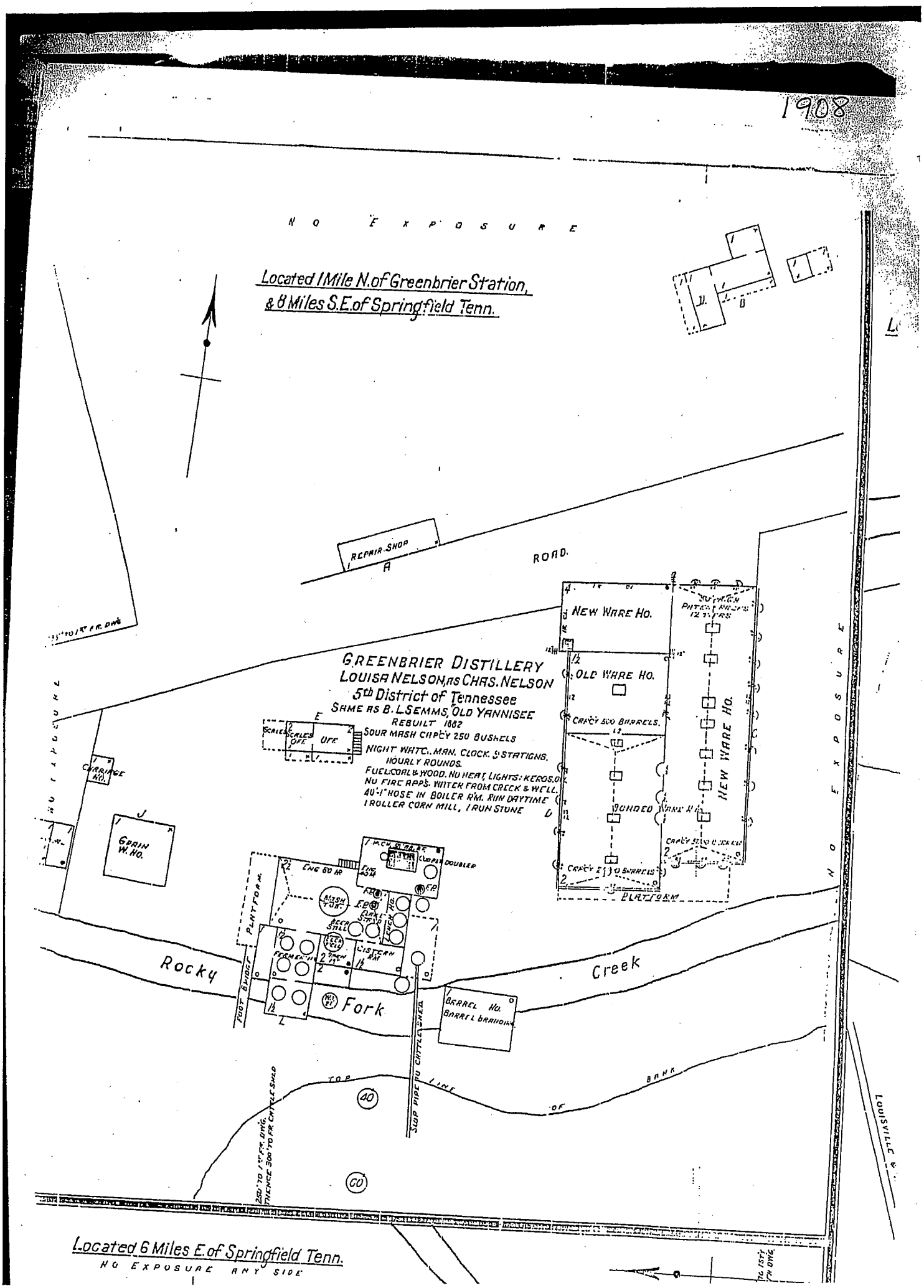


1903



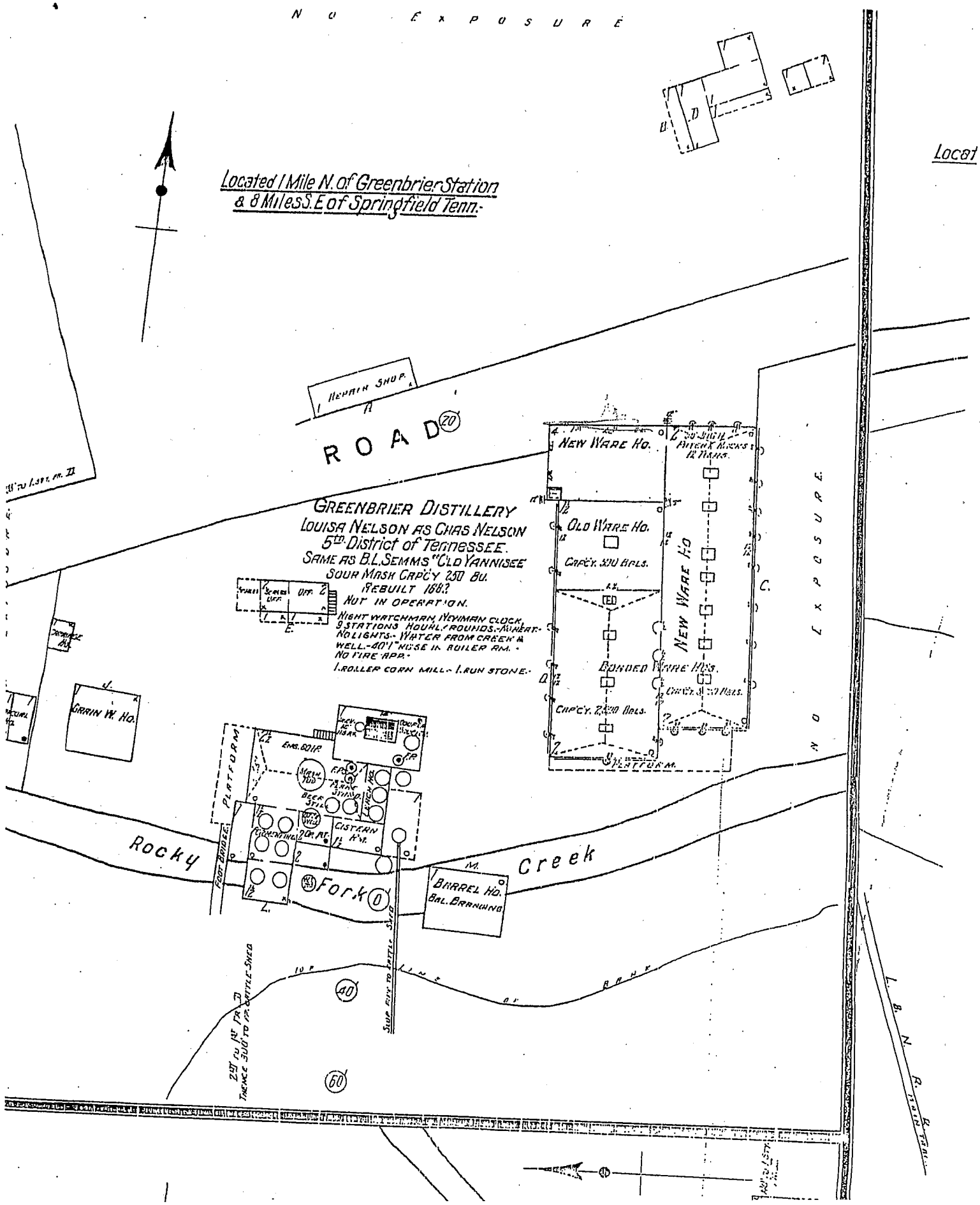
No exposure
One Mile North of Greenbrier Station,
and 8 Miles S.E. of Springfield Tenn.
Repair Shop.
A.
ROAD
NEW WARE HO.
OLD WARE HO.
1½ Cap 500 Bbls.
GREENBRIER DISTILLERY
LOUISA NELSON as CHAS. NELSON, 5TH DISTRICT
OF TENNESSEE
SAME AS B.L. SEMMS "OLD YANNISEE.
Rebuilt 1882
Sour Mash capacity 317 bushels
NIGHT WATCHMAN CLOCK, NINE STATIONS, HOURLY ROUNDS FUEL COAL AND WOOD NO VERT. LIGHTS KEROS OIL. NO FIRE APPARATUS WATER FROM CREEK AND WELL. 40' 1" HOSE IN BOILER ROOM. RUN DAYTIME
1 ROLLER CORN MILL
1 RUN STONE.
E.
Scales
Scales
OFF.
OFF.
D.
Bonded Ware Hos.
Cap 2500 Bbls.
Cap 500 Bbls.
C.
Platform
No exposure
Carriage Ho.
J.
I.
Grain Ware Ho
H.
ENG 60 HP
COPPER DOUBLER
K.
Charcoal
Coal Mill.
Platform
Rocky Fork
Creek
M.
L.
Barrel Ho.
Barrel Branding
FOOT SPIDER
SLOP PIPE TO CATTLE SHED
TOP LINE OF BANK
60'

1908



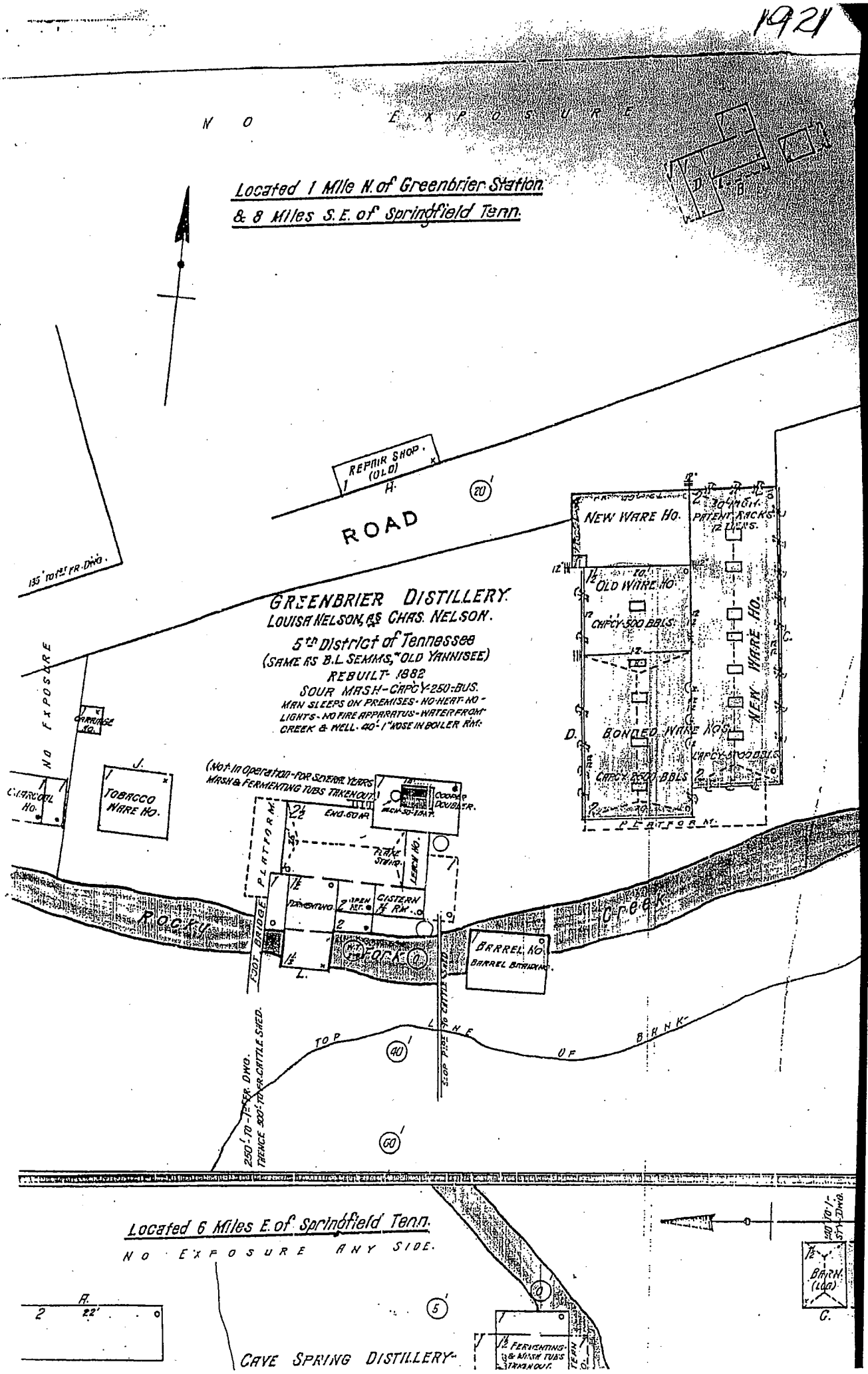
NO EXPOSURE
Located 1 Mile N. of Greenbrier Station, & 8 Miles S.E. of Springfield Tenn.
REPAIR SHOP
A
ROAD.
NEW WARE HO.
OLD WARE HO.
CAP'CY 500 BARRELS.
NEW WARE HO.
PLATFORM
GREENBRIER DISTILLERY
LOUISA NELSON, AS CHAS. NELSON
5th District of Tennessee
SAME AS B. L. SEMMS, OLD YANNISEE
REBUILT 1882
SOUR MASH CAP'CY 250 BUSHELS
NIGHT WATC. MAN. CLOCK. 5 STATIONS. HOURLY ROUNDS.
FUEL COAL & WOOD. NO HEAT, LIGHTS: KEROS.
NO FIRE APPS. WATER FROM CREEK & WELL.
40'-1" HOSE IN BOILER RM. RUN DAYTIME
1 ROLLER CORN MILL, 1 RUN STONE
E
SCALES
SCALES OFF
OFF
CARRIAGE HO.
J
GRAIN W. HO.
ENG 60 HP
COOPER DOUBLER
MASH TUB.
BEER STILL
CISTERN RM
FERMENTER
PLATFORM
FOOT BRIDGE
Rocky
Fork
Creek
BARREL HO.
BARREL BRANDING
SLOP PIPE TO CATTLE SHED
TOP LINE OF BANK
40
60
250' TO 1ST FR. DWG. THENCE 300' TO FR. CATTLE SHED
LOUISVILLE &
Located 6 Miles E. of Springfield Tenn.
NO EXPOSURE ANY SIDE

1912



NO EXPOSURE
Located 1 Mile N. of Greenbrier Station
& 8 Miles S.E of Springfield Tenn.
Locat
REPAIR SHOP
ROAD
GREENBRIER DISTILLERY
LOUISA NELSON AS CHAS NELSON
5th District of Tennessee.
SAME AS B.L. SEMMS "OLD YANNISEE
SOUR MASH CAP'CY 250 BU.
REBUILT 1882
NOT IN OPERATION.
NIGHT WATCHMAN, NEYMAN CLOCK, 9 STATIONS HOURLY ROUNDS.-NO HEAT.-NO LIGHTS.- WATER FROM CREEK & WELL.-40'1" HOSE IN BOILER RM.-NO FIRE APP.-
1. ROLLER CORN MILL.- 1. RUN STONE.-
NEW WARE HO.
OLD WARE HO.
CAP'CY. 300 BALS.
NEW WARE HO
BONDED WARE HOS.
CAP'CY. 2,500 BALS.
PLATFORM
GRAIN W. HO.
PLATFORM
ENG. 60 I.P.
CISTERN RM.
FOOT BRIDGE
Rocky Fork Creek
BARREL HO.
BAL. BRANDING
NO EXPOSURE
L. B. N. R. R.

1921



NO EXPOSURE
Located 1 Mile N. of Greenbrier Station
& 8 Miles S.E. of Springfield Tenn.
REPAIR SHOP (OLD)
ROAD
GREENBRIER DISTILLERY
LOUISA NELSON, AS CHAS. NELSON.
5th District of Tennessee
(SAME AS B.L. SEMMS, "OLD YANNISEE)
REBUILT- 1882
SOUR MASH- CAP'CY-250-BUS.
MAN SLEEPS ON PREMISES- NO HEAT- NO LIGHTS- NO FIRE APPARATUS- WATER FROM CREEK & WELL. 40'- 1" HOSE IN BOILER RM.
NO EXPOSURE
CARRIAGE HO.
CHARCOAL HO.
TOBACCO WARE HO.
(Not in Operation- FOR SEVERAL YEARS MASH & FERMENTING TUBS TAKEN OUT)
COOPER DOUBLER.
PLATFORM
FLAKE STAND.
LEACH HO.
FERMENTING
CISTERN
ROCKY FORK
FOOT BRIDGE
BARREL HO.
BARREL BRANDING
NEW WARE HO.
PATENT RACKS
OLD WARE HO.
CAP'CY-500 BBLS.
BONDED WARE HOS.
CAP'CY-2500 BBLS
PLATFORM
TOP LINE OF BANK
250'- TO 1st FR. DWG.
THENCE 500'- TO FR. CATTLE SHED.
Located 6 Miles E. of Springfield Tenn.
NO EXPOSURE ANY SIDE.
CAVE SPRING DISTILLERY
FERMENTING & MASH TUBS TAKEN OUT
BARN (LOG)