Reynolds Building

Historical Analysis and Inventory of Significant Features

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Historical Overview

The R. J. Reynolds Company Building at 662-676 South Broadway in Lexington, Kentucky, is a two-story, brick masonry building with heavy timber framing built in 1917 to serve as a tobacco warehouse and redrying plant. In its current form, the building dates from the mid-1910s, when the Reynolds Company carried out an "entire reconstruction" of the former Burley Loose Tobacco Company warehouse. The exact relationship between the previous structure and the existing building is unclear. Documentary and physical evidence indicates that the structure was effectively built anew and that if any elements from the Burley Company building survive, they are almost surely confined to the foundations. The Reynolds Company also added a warehouse section and power plant to the rear of the building at roughly the same time as the reconstruction. The building is believed to have been complete by 1917.

The Reynolds Company's mid-1910s expansion of its Lexington plant reflected the town's rise as a center of tobacco sales and processing and the company's growing demand for Burley tobacco. Lexington boomed as a tobacco market during the early twentieth century. In 1904, Charles W. Bohmer, a native of Clarksville, Tennessee, arrived in Lexington and interested two local men, W. J. Loughridge and D. D. Jones, in building a loose-leaf auction warehouse. Bohmer sought to bring the loose leaf auction system then used in Virginia and North Carolina to central Kentucky. The trio formed the Burley Loose Tobacco Warehouse Company and immediately erected a building on South Broadway. Loose leaf auction sales began on January 9, 1905. From less than 1,000,000 pounds that year, Lexington became a leading tobacco market, with more than 18,000,000 pounds sold in 1907-08. By 1912, local boosters proclaimed the city "the greatest loose leaf tobacco market in the world."[1]

Loose leaf sales transformed Lexington's role in the tobacco economy. Previously, central Kentucky farmers had either shipped their tobacco to merchants in Louisville or Cincinnati who then packed it into hogsheads and sold it to manufactures or sold their crops directly to manufacturers' agents. Hogsheads – large barrels that weighed about 1,000 pounds each when loaded – had been used for storing and shipping tobacco since the colonial era. Hogsheads were difficult to transport and prevented buyers from thoroughly inspecting tobacco leaf before purchase. Merchants often placed inferior tobacco in the center of hogsheads, infuriating manufactures.[2]

Loose leaf auctions revolutionized tobacco marketing by offering an alternative to the hogshead system. Farmers placed their tobacco in piles on the sales floor where buyers had ample opportunity to inspect it before bidding began. Auction sales began in Danville, Virginia, in 1858

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[1] "Loose Tobacco Market," *Leader* (Lexington, KY), Nov. 16, 1903, 1; "Keep Up Good Work," *Leader*, Dec. 11, 1903, sec. 1, p. 1; "Ground Will be Broken Today," *Herald* (Lexington, KY), Dec. 14, 1903, 4; "Ground Broken," *Leader*, Dec. 14, 1903, 4; "Tobacco Sale," *Leader*, Jan. 10, 1905, 9; "First Sale of Tobacco Big Success," *Herald*, Jan. 10, 1905, 9; "Tobacco Poured in Here from Every Direction," *Leader*, Jan. 31, 1912, 1; "Lexington Looseleaf Tobacco Market Will be 35 Years Old this Sales Season," *Herald-Leader* (Lexington, KY), Dec. 1, 1940, 8.

[2] Charles Dudley Bohannan and D. P. Campbell, *A Preliminary Study of the Marketing of Burley Tobacco in Central Kentucky* (Lexington: State University Press, 1916), 193-196; Tracy Campbell, *The Politics of Despair: Power and Resistance in the Tobacco Wars* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 26. On the Louisville tobacco market, see "Tobacco Marketing in Louisville and State," *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), Mar. 25, 1913, H11.

and later spread to other markets in Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Warehouses competed earnestly for farmers' crops and buyers bid aggressively for the best leaf. Hogsheads markets lost ground as loose leaf auctions became common. By 1912, Lexington had seven loose-leaf warehouses with a combined handling capacity of 10,000,000 pounds per week.[3]

The Burley Loose Tobacco Company achieved immediate success. The first auction, held on January 9, 1905, sold 335,000 pounds of tobacco at an average price of $10.25 per 100 pounds. Between 500 and 600 people gathered to watch the proceedings. Buyers included brokers from Cincinnati, Louisville, and Richmond, Virginia; and agents representing the R. A. Patterson Tobacco Company, the Scotten-Dillon Tobacco Company, the United States Tobacco Company, and the Continental Tobacco Company.[4]

Construction of other loose leaf warehouses followed. In 1906, Silas Shelbourne erected one on the west side of South Broadway at Hayman Avenue and Luther Stivers and Morgan Gentry built another nearby. In 1909, the Fayette Tobacco Warehouse Company erected a warehouse at the corner of Mill and Bolivar streets and the Central Tobacco Warehouse Company erected another on South Limestone Street. By 1916, Lexington had thirteen tobacco warehouses in operation.[5]

Redrying plants followed close behind. By the early twentieth century, buyers sent most tobacco purchased at market to redrying plants, where mechanical redryers – large ovens, in effect – removed excess moisture and made tobacco suitable for extended storage. Redrying plants became common wherever tobacco auctions took place. By 1914, Lexington had ten in operation.[6]

In 1912, the R. J. Reynolds Company of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, purchased the former Burley Loose Tobacco Company Warehouse and announced plans to convert it into a redrying plant. Four years earlier, Bohmer had transferred ownership of the warehouse to the newly established Farmers Tobacco Warehouse Company, which had maintained and operated the warehouse largely as before. Reynolds paid approximately $40,000 for the building, which lay in the heart of Lexington's tobacco district. The purchase expanded Reynolds's operations in Lexington and showed new commitment to producing smoking tobacco products. Reynolds had begun in the mid-1870s as a manufacture of chewing tobacco. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it produced about a quarter of flat-plug chewing tobacco consumed in the United States. Following the success of Prince Albert, a canned pipe tobacco introduced in 1907, Reynolds moved aggressively into cigarette production. By the early 1910s, the company's need for Burley tobacco had risen dramatically, necessitating expansion of its operations in Kentucky.[7]

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[3] On the history of tobacco marketing, see E. H. Matewson, *Tobacco Marketing in the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913); Nannie May Tilley, *The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 1860-1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), chaps. 6-7.
[4] "Tobacco Sale," *Leader*, Jan. 1, 1905, 9; "First Sale of Tobacco Big Success," *Herald*, Jan. 10, 1905, 9.
[5] Bohannan and Campbell, *A Preliminary Study of the Marketing of Burley Tobacco in Central Kentucky*, 194; E. T. Robards, "Lexington Tobacco Market," *Leader*, Oct. 5, 1913, sec. 3, p. 8.
[6] "Tobacco Men Say Redrying Plant Not a Factory," *Leader*, June 5, 1914, 1. On the importance of redrying and processes involved, see Tilley, *Bright-Tobacco Industry*, 309-325.
[7] "Bohmer Sells to R. J. Reynolds Co.," *Leader*, June 11, 1912, 1; Farmers Tobacco Warehouse Company to R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, May 15, 1912, Deed Book 167, 107-109, Fayette County Clerk's Office, Lexington,

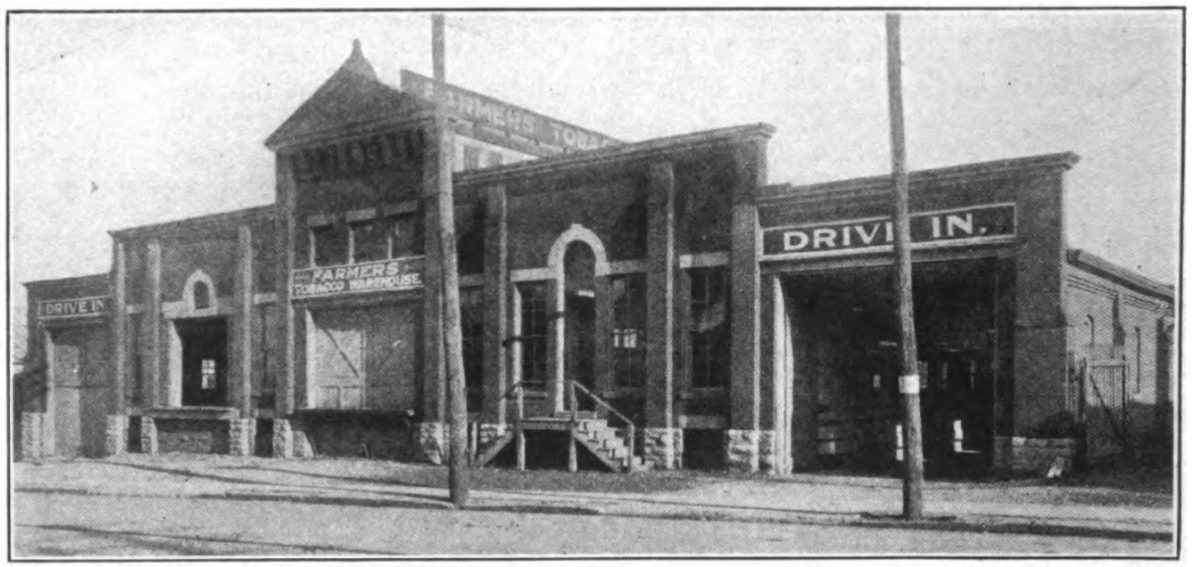

FIG. 6.—Exterior of a loose-leaf tobacco auction warehouse, Lexington, Ky.

Figure 1. Farmers Tobacco Warehouse building, ca. 1910. From Mathewson, *Tobacco Marketing in the United States*, p. 52.

At the time of the Reynolds purchase, the building was a one-story brick structure with a rectangular footprint and Romanesque-influenced façade. It fronted 160 feet on South Broadway and stretched more than 450 feet toward the University of Kentucky campus to the east. The façade featured a stepped parapet and a front-facing gable with heavy corbelling. Large open bays at each of the outer edges allowed wagons access to covered loading and unloading areas; signs set immediately above read "DRIVE IN" to guide sellers. Another large opening lay at the center of the façade, immediately below the gable, shuttered by swinging wooden doors. The adjoining bay to the north also featured a large portal that opened to the street. On the other side of the center bay, its counterpart featured three tall windows and a door set below a narrow arch. The building appears to have rested on a limestone foundation, and a combination of limestone trim and decorative brickwork gave it Romanesque accents.[8]

In form, appearance, and organization, the Farmers Tobacco Warehouse Company building typified tobacco auction warehouses throughout Virginia, the Carolinas, and Tennessee. Most such buildings possessed abundant floor space, huge skylights and windows, covered driveways

KY; "Redrying Plant," *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), June 12, 1912, 7. On the ownership transfer from the Burley Loose Leaf Tobacco Company to the Farmers Tobacco Warehouse Company, see "Two Firms," *Leader*, Aug. 9, 1910, 5; Burley Loose Tobacco Warehouse Company to C. W. Bohmer, Aug. 9, 1910, Deed Book 161, 318-320, and C. W. Bohmer to Farmers Tobacco Warehouse Company, Aug. 9, 1910, Deed Book 161, 215-219, both in Fayette County Clerk's Office, Lexington, KY. On the early history and development of the Reynolds Company, see Tilley, *R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company*, chaps. 1-6. During the 1910s and 1920s, R. J. Reynolds's Camel-brand cigarette, introduced in 1913, drove the company's growth. Camel blended burley, bright-leaf, and Turkish tobaccos with a heavy dose of sweetener. It became an immediate success. During its first year of production, the brand sold 425 million cigarettes. By 1917, Camel was the most popular cigarette in the United States, and by 1925, more than half of all cigarettes smoked in the U.S. were Camels. See Tilley, *R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company*, 210-225.

[8] The only known photo of the building appears in Matthewson, *Tobacco Marketing in the United States*, 52.

for loading and unloading, and overnight accommodations for horses, wagons, and drivers became common after the 1860s. Most also featured open sales floors (free of columns or other supports) under roofspans that required considerable skill to construct. With more than 70,000 square feet on the first floor, a full basement below, and the utilitarian organization of its façade, the Farmers warehouse exhibited features characteristic of the genre and provided ample space for tobacco auctions and storage.[9]

R. J. Reynolds immediately announced plans to install $20,000 worth of redrying equipment in the building.[10] At the same time, the Lexington *Leader* reported that the company would begin construction of a "mammoth brick warehouse" in the rear of the new property. The planned structure was to be two stories tall with a basement and stone foundation. It is unclear if work proceeded as quickly as planned, for the following year, in May of 1913, the *Leader* reported that Reynolds planned to make extensive improvements to the property, including construction of a three-story warehouse, a new power plant, and "the entire reconstruction" of the former Farmer's Tobacco Company building. The contract for the latter project went to the Congleton Lumber Company and called for removal of the old roof, raising the walls to allow interior headroom of fifteen feet, removal of all interior "posts," and installation of fifteen steel trusses spanning the floor space. The new storage warehouse was to be built in the rear of the building and would be three stories tall with a basement (as opposed to the two stories announced the previous year).[11]

Given this, the documentary record and physical evidence suggests that the Reynolds Building, as it exists today, dates from the 1913-17 period and was substantially complete by 1917. Although a report in the Louisville *Courier-Journal* published in September 1917 stated that the Reynolds Company was contemplating $100,000 in improvements, no evidence exists to show that it carried out these plans, and the company's described intention of "enlarging its plant with the addition of a three-story building, with greatly increased redrying facilities, and . . . [expanding] the warehouse capacity by the erection of other buildings upon the unimproved 'city dump' property, immediately adjoining the present warehouse," is dubious for two reasons.[12] First, the mention of the new three-story building and expanded redrying facilities mirrors the May 1913 article in the Lexington *Leader*, and it is unlikely that the same combination of improvements would have been needed again four years later. Moreover, Reynolds's activities in Lexington, particularly the volume of Burley tobacco needed for its new cigarette products, would have necessitated construction in the early 1910s, not several years later. Second, Reynolds never built on the "city dump" property. That site, located a short distance to the east, became home to the University of Kentucky's new school of education (today the Taylor Education Building) in 1930.[13]

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[9] Tilley, *Bright-Tobacco Industry*, 203.
[10] "Redrying Plant," *Courier-Journal*, June 12, 1912, 7.
[11] "New Warehouse for Reynolds Co.," *Leader*, June 10, 1912, 7; "R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company Will Make Big Improvements Here," *Leader*, May 18, 1913, 1; "3-Story Storage Warehouse," *Leader*, May 29, 1913, 1.
[12] "$100,000 Improvements Planned," *Courier-Journal*, Mar. 21, 1917, 3. On R. J. Reynolds's operations during the 1910s, see Tilley, *R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company*, chaps. 7-9.
[13] "Teachers' Building at U. K. Major Structural Project of Year, *Leader*, 1; "Training School at University to be Opened Thursday, Sept. 11," *Leader*, Aug. 31, 1930, 1-2.

Further evidence to confirm the 1917 date is provided by the stone lintel above the main door of the building, which reads "R. J. Reynolds Co./Incorporated/Lexington Leaf Department/A.D. 1917." Although this does not confirm the date of construction, it nonetheless indicates that the reconstruction of the former Farmer's Tobacco building had been completed by that date.

As for the apparent discrepancy between the multiple buildings described in 1910s-era newspaper articles and the extant structure, analysis of the Reynolds Company's use of the building provides clarification. The 1934 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Lexington shows that Reynolds used the first floor of the former Farmers Tobacco Warehouse building for "sticking," a process whereby workers took the bundles of leaf purchased at market and placed them on tobacco sticks, which were then hung on racks for temporary storage while awaiting redrying. By the early twentieth century, tobacco sticks had evolved from the relatively simple wooden shafts of earlier years to fit specially designed rack systems used for storage and redrying ovens. Although no information about the sticking technology that the Reynolds Company used is available, it is likely that the sticks employed fit the drying ovens at the Lexington facility.[14]

Redrying took place on the second floor of the building, in long ovens that stretched for 100 or more feet. Offices were located at the front end of the second floor, nearest South Broadway. A cooperage for making hogseads occupied the second floor immediately past the firewall located about two-thirds of the way down the length of the building. Hogshead storage took place on the first floor in the rear, in the L-shaped space at southeast corner of the structure and running approximately fifty feet across the full width of the building immediately behind the firewall. This space had a maximum capacity of 1,000 hogsheads. The northeast corner of the building was occupied by the boiler and associated facilities.[15]

Considered alongside the newspaper articles from the 1910s, the usage scheme suggests that R. J. Reynolds Company officials may have considered, or at least referred to, the building that exists today as three separate structures. Further evidence is provided by several surviving features, including: the firewall that divides the western two-thirds of the building from the easternmost portion; the unusual roof configuration at the same location; the differing floor grades in the basement; the shift in fenestration at the firewall; the configuration of exterior walls at the northeast corner of the building; and differences apparent in the masonry used at that location. While the building reads when viewed from the south (Scott Street elevation) as an early twentieth-century industrial plant structure with a later rear addition, close analysis suggests a different sequence of development (see Figure 2).

The Reynolds Company sold the building to the Commonwealth of Kentucky for use by the University of Kentucky on June 25, 1959.[16]

The foregoing has been prepared without consulting any records held by the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. According to an inquiry placed with the

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[14] Sanborn Map Company, Fire Insurance Map for Lexington, Kentucky, 1934, p. 213; Tilley, *Bright-Leaf Tobacco Industry*, 74-79.
[15] Sanborn Map Company, Fire Insurance Map for Lexington, Kentucky, 1934, p. 213.
[16] R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company to Commonwealth of Kentucky, June 25, 1959, Deed Book 676, 150-154, Fayette County Clerk's Office, Lexington, KY.

company, no corporate records are currently available to the public or academic researchers. The opportunity to examine any surviving records may yield additional information about the Reynolds Building and its history.

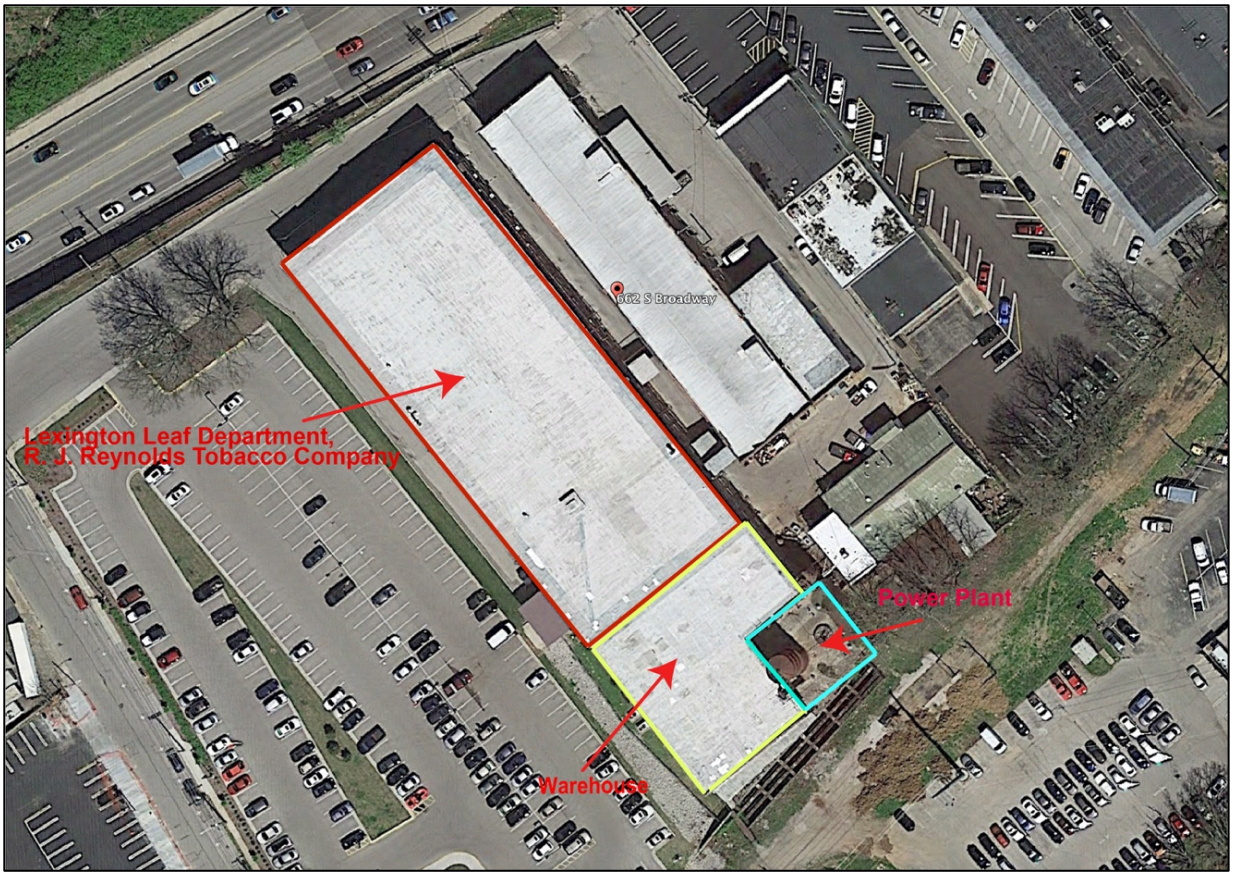

Figure 2. Aerial view showing individual building components, as discussed in 1910s-era newspaper reports.

Figure 3. Rear of building, showing relationship between warehouse section (left) and power plant (right).

Significant Features

As a former industrial building, the utilitarian aesthetics of the Reynolds Building are important to maintain and integrate into the proposed rehabilitation design. Specific features that should be protected and highlighted are as follows:

- Open interior volumes on all floors should be retained to the greatest extent possible, with wood columns and trusses left exposed. Where partitions are needed, they should be installed so that large expanses of space are left to appreciate the structure of the building, the scale of the interior volumes, and the visual rhythm created by the rows of vertical timber supports.

- The timber posts evident throughout the building should be treated so that signs of use and age remain visible. These speak to the uses the building originally served and its long history. Heavy refinishing should be avoided.

- The wood stair and interior partitions on the second floor at the far west end of the building (closest to the façade) appear to survive from the original offices used by Reynolds Company staff. Some elements are obscured with more recent materials. Careful removal of non-original materials should be untaken to determine the extent of the surviving interior elements, which appear to consist principally of beadboard wainscoting, hardwood doors (most of which have windows of various sizes), and decorative trimwork. If the original partitions and finishes are largely intact, these should be retained and incorporated into the new design if doing so will not adversely affect programing and space allocations.

- The narrow room on the second floor immediately west of the warehouse section of the building is the former cooperage, where hogsheads were produced for tobacco storage. This space should be maintained with the associated clerestory windows and given appropriate interpretive panels.

- The sliding firewalls on the first floor immediately inside the loading dock facing Scott Street and in the basement immediately below should be refinished and retained.

- The most important exterior features are the brick masonry walls and the windows. In combination with the building's box-like form, these are principally responsible for its outward appearance. Masonry repairs should be made using materials that replicate the appearance and performance of the original bricks and mortar. Matching bricks salvaged from comparable buildings in and around Lexington are preferred replacements.

  The windows present a more serious problem that merits immediate investigation. Discussions held to date among College of Design faculty and the building committee convened by Acting Associate Dean for Administration Jeff Fugate have generally assumed complete replacement. Selective analysis of individual units throughout the building indicates that an undetermined percentage are in good condition and show few

signs of rot or severe failure. In fact, a significant number appear fundamentally sound – in need of refurbishment, but not replacement or extensive repair. This observation applies to the frames and window sashes.

The most prudent course of action is to conduct a complete window assessment as soon as possible to determine the condition of all units and devise an economical, energy-efficient treatment plan. As architect Carl Elefante has noted, wood-frame windows are commonly and erroneously assumed to be inefficient. While insulated glass windows (often referred to as Thermopane windows) may offer excellent initial performance, their relatively short lifespan makes them a poor choice when long-term costs and environmental considerations are taken into account. Traditional wood-frame windows, if well-maintained and properly sealed, can achieve high R-values, especially if combined with interior or exterior storms. Further, innovative products such as vacuum-insulated glass provide opportunities to achieve excellent energy efficiency without compromising historical character. Moreover, the durability of hardwood frames and sashes, if kept painted and free of rot, far exceeds that of most modern windows. Put simply, determining what to do with the windows in the Reynolds Building deserves careful analysis. A thorough assessment of existing conditions and evaluation of projected rehabilitation costs is necessary for informed decision making. Replacement should not be taken as a foregone conclusion until it is clear that the existing units cannot be repaired and made reasonably efficient at moderate cost.[17]

[17] Carl Elefante, "The Full and True Value of Campus Heritage," *Planning for Higher Education* 39, no. 3 (April-June 2011), 82.

Photographs

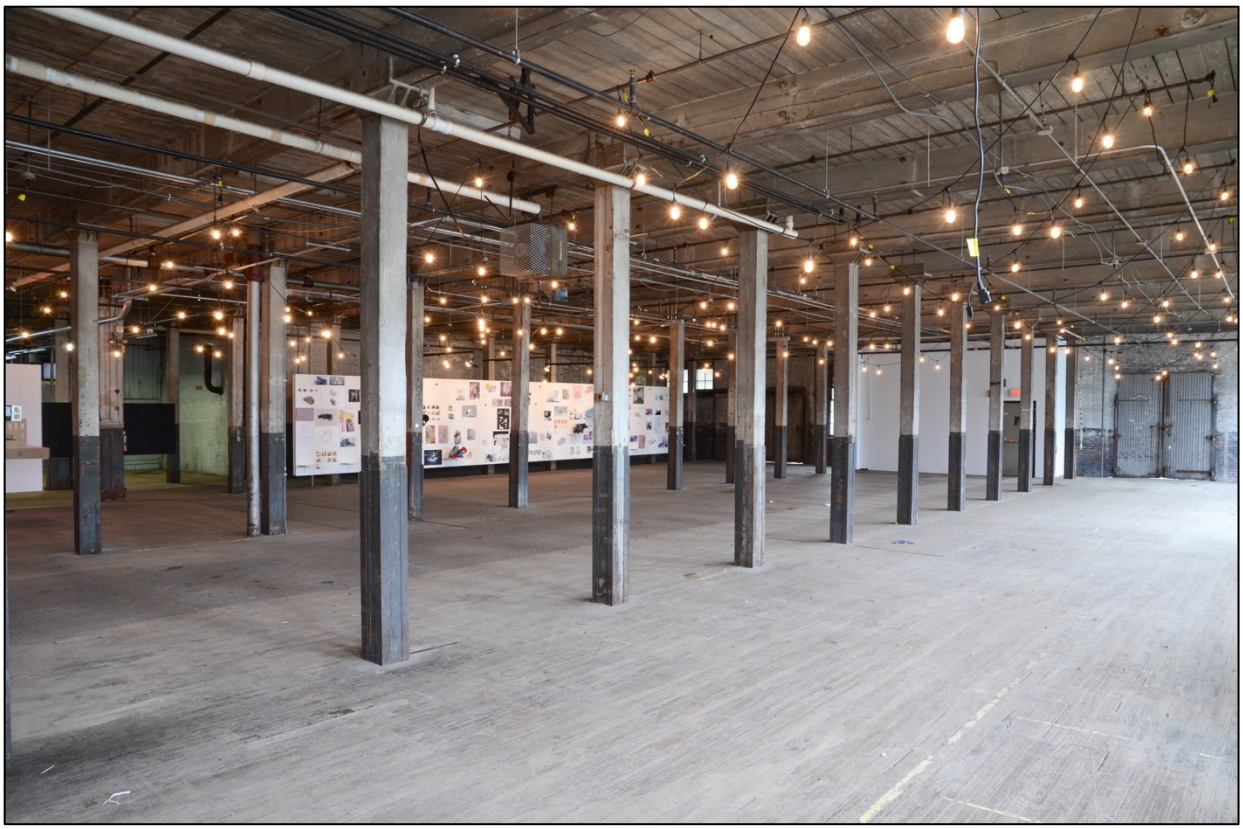

Figure 4. Former hogshead storage, warehouse section.

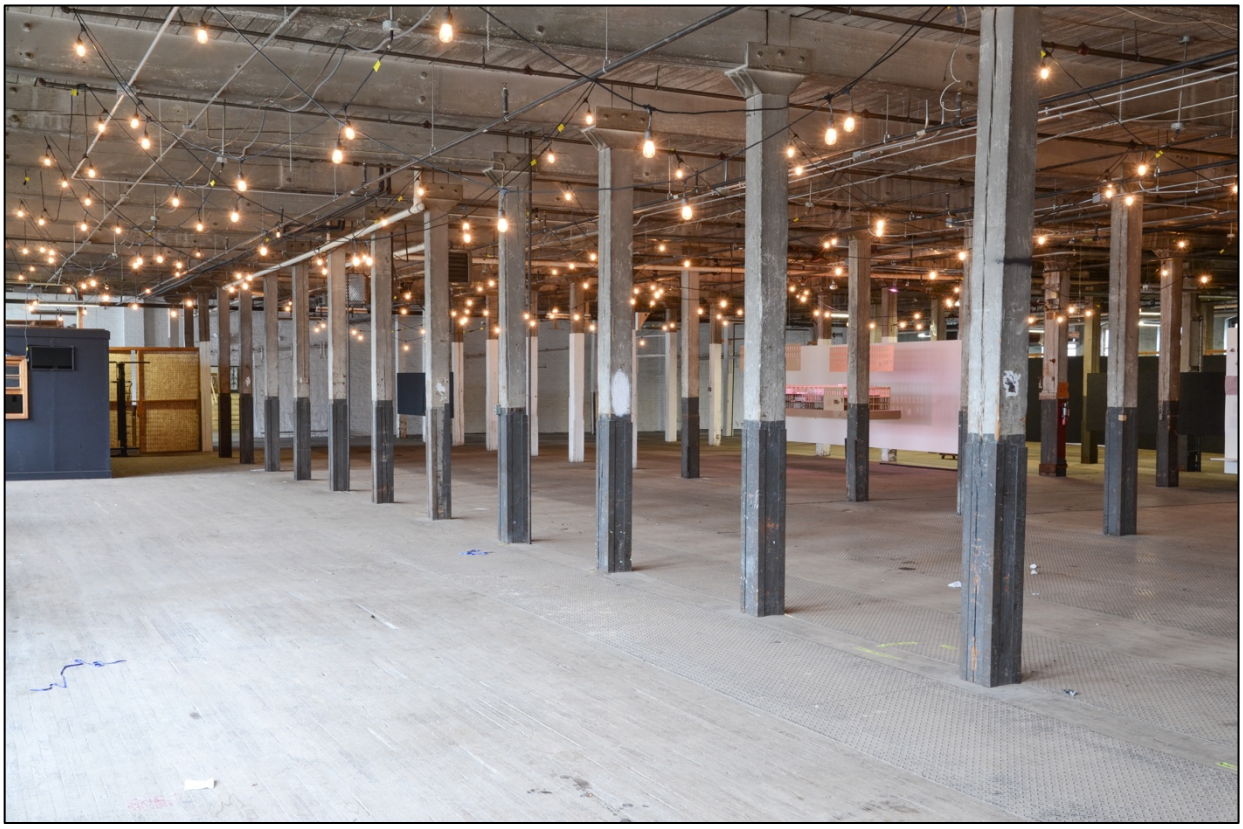

Figure 5. Former hogshead storage, warehouse section.

Figure 6. Heavy timber truss and bracket, warehouse section.

Figure 7. Sliding fire door, first floor, warehouse section.

Figure 8. Sliding fire door, first floor.

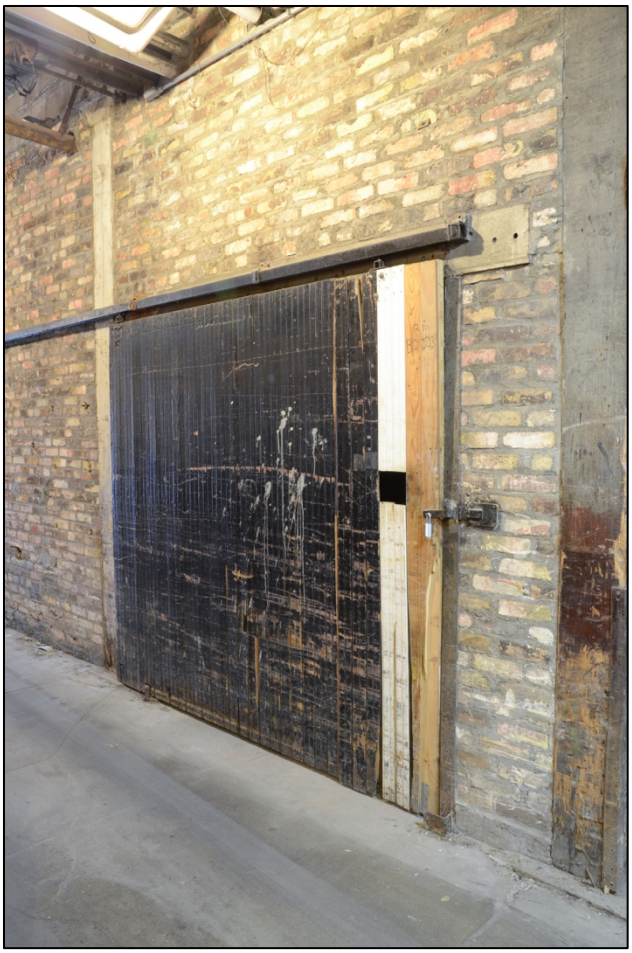

Figure 9. Sliding fire door, basement.

Figure 10. Former cooperage, second floor.

Figure 11. Former offices, second floor, west side of building.

Figure 12. Beadbord detail, former offices.

Figure 13. Trimwork, former offices.

Figure. 14. Beadboard, former offices.

Figure 15. Trimwork, former offices.

Figure 16. Trimwork, former offices.