

**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 Wilson Power and Light Company Ice Plant

other names/site number Arkansas Power & Light Co, Delta Ice Service, Site #CT0048

2. Location

street & number 120 E. Broadway Street

not for publication

city or town West Memphis

vicinity

state Arkansas

code AR

county Crittenden

code 035

zip code 72301

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.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

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): _____

Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant
Name of Property

Crittenden County, Arkansas
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

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

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION/
Manufacturing Facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION/
Manufacturing Facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY
AMERICAN
MOVEMENTS/Commercial Style

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
walls BRICK
roof TAR
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more 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

(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 grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
- 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.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

Local

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

INDUSTRY

Period of Significance

c.1930-1960

Significant Dates

c.1930

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

Architect/Builder

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

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):

- 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

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Record # _____

Wilson Power & Light Company Ice
Plant

Name of Property

Crittenden County, Arkansas

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than one

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>756592</u> Easting	<u>3892968</u> Northing	3	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

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 Brian Poepsel, National Register Intern, Edited by Ralph S. Wilcox, National Register & Survey Coordinator
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date Jun 2009
street & number 323 Center Street, 1500 Tower Building telephone (501) 324-9787
city or town Little Rock state AR zip code 72201

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 Thomas J Burns
street & number 1002 Brookdale telephone 870-732-9632
city or town West Memphis state TN zip code 72301

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 Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property **Wilson Power & Light Company
Ice Plant**

County and State **Crittenden County, AR**

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)

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SUMMARY

The Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant has been used continuously as an ice house since its construction circa 1930. Used for the production and distribution of ice, the building is located on the north side of Broadway Street, the historic commercial district of West Memphis, Arkansas. The brick building rests on a concrete foundation, and features high style details on its main façade that make this unusual industrial building unique in the area.

ELABORATION

The Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant is unique among industrial and commercial buildings along the historic route of US 70, known as Broadway Street as it passes through West Memphis. It is a prime example of a 1930s ice house, and it maintains unique details of commercial buildings from this period.

Many original details and materials remain intact, although modifications have been made to modernize the ice manufacturing process to meet current trends in refrigeration needs. Still used today for the production of ice, the Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant is unique among the numerous historic commercial buildings that line the West Memphis stretch of the US 70 corridor.

Front/South Façade

The front of the ice house building facing Broadway Street is dominated by a loading dock for ice distribution. On the right side, one bay of the building is pulled forward to the edge of the dock. A corrugated metal awning, which replaced an earlier awning of a darker color, covers the loading dock. Opening to the dock are three doors and two windows: from left, a boarded up opening, an original single door, a double door opened in the 1980s, an original awning window that goes to the ceiling, another double door opening expanded in the 1980s, and a triple-wide awning window. In the center of the building, a recently

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installed mechanical lift services the dock, with concrete steps to the right of the lift.

In the portion projecting out, a triple bay awning-style window covered by an asphalt shingle awning is centered on the front. The window is framed by a stepped recess in the brick pattern. A door also opens on the side to the building's front dock. All the fenestration is made of multi-pane, metal-framed windows original to the building.

Distinctive features on the front façade of the building include decorative brickwork around an integrated original "Wilson Power & Light Company" sign and an articulated cast-stone capped parapet. Stone sills are at the base of each window. The building's bay structure is indicated by subtle brickwork that creates regular vertical banding ordering the façade. The concrete foundation is visible along the bottom of the building. The brickwork is in an American bond, where a row of stretchers is incorporated every seventh course to lock the double-wall brick construction together.

Side/West Façade

Along the side of the building, the taller decorative parapet turns the corner before giving way to a lower simple one with a terra cotta coping. Although without windows, the decorative stepped brickwork continues in the front part of the building, along with the exposed concreted footing. On the left half of this elevation, the red brickwork gives way to a blonde-colored glazed block which extends to the ground. Four windows in the taller rear section of the building are all closed in, although the original sills remain visible. Roof scuppers and downspouts articulate the rest of this side elevation.

Side/East Façade

This elevation of the building is shortened, as the back of the building protrudes in an L shape on the west side. Composed of brick with an exposed concrete

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foundation, the façade is divided into four equal bays with stepped brick detailing. The first, third, and fourth bays each have large, original awning windows. The second bay has a doorway. An equipment loft extends the last bay up to two stories in the northeast corner of the building, with another window of similar proportions in this small second story. Scuppers and downspouts are arranged with the brick bay articulation, draining the flat roof. A metal awning shades the far left window (closest to the front of the building).

Rear/North Façade

The west side of this elevation extends to Thompson Avenue, the next block up from Broadway. This extension is comprised of an addition to the building that was built sometime after 1938. The back of the building is composed of two materials – the blonde colored glazed block which covers the portion of the building extending to form an “L” and the red brick on the main volume of the building. Three windows on the building’s extension, the right two higher than the left, are infilled, though the sills remain intact. There is a window on the small second story equipment loft in the northeast corner of the building. Large ice making equipment not part of the original manufacturing process is attached to the main volume of the building, making up the rest of this blank façade.

Interior

The interior of the building has several distinct elements. The cooler towards the back of the building for storing ice has original wood plank floors. The offices on the east side of the building maintain the building’s original windows. The rest of the building is dominated by ice making equipment and warehouse loading areas.

Originally, water from a separated well house was used to fill the 434 forty-gallon vats in the floor to make 300 pound blocks of ice, which were cut and sold commercially. Today, with the demand for ice block diminished, modern plate ice

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makers are used to freeze ice cubes which are bagged and sold to the greater Memphis area.

INTEGRITY

Changes to door openings to update ice making equipment and distribution have not taken away the unique character of this commercial building. Modern ice-making equipment installed on the roof and interior of the building maintains the original function of the building. A new concrete dock replaced the wooden dock in 1986, maintaining the same form and location. Although the building has had an addition constructed on it, the addition is located on the rear of the building and appears to be at least fifty years old. The style and detailing of the addition also blends in with the original building's industrial design. Its uncommon industrial use and 1930s era details are associated with the growth of downtown West Memphis commerce before the interstate diverted traffic away from this city center district. Still in use today for ice manufacturing and distribution, the Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant represents a distinct type of commercial building indicative of 1930s economic growth in West Memphis, Arkansas.

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Summary

The Wilson Power and Light Company Ice Plant, is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion C** as a good example of a 1930s ice-manufacturing facility. The building reflects the commercial buildings being built in West Memphis in the 1930s, West Memphis' period of greatest growth and development. Ice plants from the first part of the twentieth century with this level of integrity, especially ones that are still functioning as an ice plant, are rare in Arkansas.

The Wilson Power and Light Company Ice Plant is also being nominated under **Criterion A** for its associations with the commercial and industrial growth of the City of West Memphis during the heyday of travel along US 70 before the construction of the interstate. As automobile and truck traffic increased on US 70 during the 1930s, the majority of West Memphis' industrial and commercial facilities developed along the highway for easy access to transportation routes and potential customers. The Wilson Power and Light Company Ice Plant's continuous use and maintenance, with the same function, represents an important period in the development of commercial architecture during the rise of auto culture in West Memphis.

Elaboration

In the summer of 1541, Spanish Explorer Hernando De Soto crossed the Mississippi River into what is now Crittenden County with an army of over 300 conquistadors and almost as many captured Native-American slaves. The Spanish found the land to be the most densely populated that they had seen since starting their journey on the Florida coast, two years earlier. The Spanish expedition departed Arkansas two years later leaving behind numerous old world diseases. It was one hundred and thirty years before Europeans visited this region again. The French expedition of Joliet and Marquette in 1673 found none of the towns or people that the Spanish had documented. All that remained were the many mounds that still dot the landscape along the rivers and creeks. The

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original inhabitants, like the later settlers were drawn to this region because of its fertile river bottom soil, abundant game, and thick forest.¹

The earliest recorded immigrant to the area that is now West Memphis, Benjamin Foy, was a native of Holland who was sent in 1795 by the Spanish governor of the large area claimed by Spain to establish a settlement on the Mississippi River. He chose a location across the river from present day Memphis, Tennessee. In 1797 the hamlet, designated Foy's Point, took the name Camp de la Esperanza or as translated, Field of Hope. The name remained but took on an English name, "Hopefield," when it became part of the United States with the completion the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Benjamin Foy was named to the new position of United States Magistrate of the region. Foy, noted for his honest character and extensive knowledge of the country, ran a clean and lawful town with a bright future until his death 1823.²

Crittenden County is bounded on the east by the Mississippi River and was established in 1825, eleven years before Arkansas became a state. Named after Robert Crittenden, the first secretary of Arkansas Territory, the county had a population of 1,272 in 1830. Hopefield became the eastern terminal for the Memphis and Little Rock Railroad in 1857. However the Civil War forced a halt to track construction just east of the St. Francis River in 1861.³

During the summer of 1862 Memphis fell into the hands of the Union forces. Most Confederate soldiers were ferried across the river to Hopefield, Arkansas, and surrounding farms. Many of these soldiers were moved on to other battle fronts, but some remained to harass the Union forces and disrupt river traffic. This became such a problem that on February 19, 1863, four companies of Federal forces burned down the entire town. The town of Hopefield was rebuilt after the

¹ Smith, Sandra Taylor. "West Memphis Commercial Historic District, West Memphis, Crittenden County, Arkansas." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. From the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, 2007.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

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war but never regained the prominence it once held in Crittenden County. Hopefield was eventually destroyed by flood in 1912 through a change in the course of the Mississippi River.⁴

Crittenden County needed a new center for government and business after the Civil War. In 1884 the town of West Memphis was platted by second-generation Crittenden County residents, two sons of Robert Vance. Robert Vance, Jr., with his brother William Vance were among the first settlers of the region in the 1830s. Within a year the town had grown to over two hundred residents. Robert Vance was appointed postmaster of West Memphis in 1885. By 1888 West Memphis had three businesses owned by the Winchester brothers, the Richard brothers and C.B. Givin.⁵

Because of the vast resources of massive old growth forests surrounding the young town of West Memphis, the lumber industry became the fuel for its progress into the twentieth century. In 1904, Zack Bragg moved to West Memphis and opened Bragg Mill. With the construction a railroad bridge over the Mississippi River in 1892, the rail line that had once passed through Hopefield moved to Hulbert, a small farm town owned by a Memphis attorney on the edge of West Memphis. Bragg was able to ship his milled lumber and logs by rail and by river. In 1914, P.T. Bolz of St. Louis opened the Bolz Slack Barrel Cooperage plant.⁶

With the coming of the automobile age, the first automobile bridge across the Mississippi River at Memphis was constructed in 1917. This heralded the growth of the small industrial town of West Memphis as its main street, Broadway Avenue, became a U.S. Highway and an influx of traffic began streaming through the town.⁷

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

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West Memphis was officially incorporated in 1923 and continued to grow to become the largest city in Crittenden County. The availability of river and rail transportation transformed West Memphis into the manufacturing and distribution hub of the county. Although in the 1930s West Memphis, along with the rest of the Mississippi Delta had fallen on hard times due to the national economic depression and the devastating 1927 flood in the Mississippi River Valley, the city grew and developed at a record pace. However, the most notable export of West Memphis from that era became its original Blues music. At one time Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin' Wolf, Mr. Lockwood, and B.B. King all called West Memphis home.⁸

Ever increasing automobile traffic and demand for the industrial products produced and shipped through the West Memphis rail and river traffic even during the hard times of the 1930s and war years of the 1940s instigated the growth and development of the city's main commercial thoroughfare, Broadway Avenue. Tourist courts, restaurants, hotels and other amenities geared toward the traveler began to be constructed along the traffic corridor through West Memphis. During the World War II years, transportation of soldiers and goods through the roads, river, and rail lines in the Memphis/West Memphis area created the need for lodging and human services. Construction of a second automobile bridge across the Mississippi River connecting Memphis and West Memphis in 1949 created another influx of automobile traffic through West Memphis.⁹

With the completion of a new bridge across the Mississippi and the construction of Highway 70 through town, West Memphis boomed as a roadway destination in pre-Interstate automobile travel. From the 1930 to the 1940 census, the population of the city quadrupled. Many businesses serving motorists, as well as

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

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industries including a sawmill, two gins, and a cottonseed oil mill lined US 70, which became Broadway Street in West Memphis' downtown district.¹⁰

As West Memphis' Main Street, Broadway Street thrived with businesses benefiting from highway travel. Gas stations, restaurants and motels filled the corridor to serve the growing numbers of motorists. Offering ice to food carrying trucks before refrigerated transportation, the Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant's Broadway address was the place to be in the development boom of the 1920s and 1930s.¹¹

In the early history of the United States, any ice that was used in domestic or commercial ventures was produced naturally and harvested from ponds. The ice used in the South was often shipped from Boston after being harvested on New England rivers and lakes. In 1879, when the first comprehensive report on the American ice industry was commissioned, it was estimated that approximately eight million tons of ice were harvested annually. Of that amount, only about five million tons made it to the consumer – the rest was lost through melting during shipping and storage.¹²

However, natural ice production depended on the weather. In fact, in 1879, New York and Philadelphia suffered an "ice famine" in which the warm weather destroyed the ice harvest on the Hudson River and on New York lakes, and the price of ice rose from \$4 to \$5 a ton. However, in Maine, the ice was fifteen to twenty inches thick and could be shipped to New York for an estimated \$1.50 a ton.¹³

¹⁰ Writer's Program of the Works Projects Administration. *The WPA guide to 1930s Arkansas*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1987.

¹¹ Ms. Barbara Dodge, Sister of Roy W Morley, former owner. Interviewed by Beau Butler, Main Street West Memphis. 2003.

¹² Weightman, Gavin. *The Frozen Water Trade*. New York: Hyperion, 2003, p. 9.

¹³ Ibid.

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The ice famines that were sometimes experienced showed the weakness in the reliance on natural ice, and experiments in manufacturing ice began in the nineteenth century to address the problems. Although a few inventors created ice-making machines in the 1850s – notably Dr. John Gorrie who received a U.S. patent in 1851 and Alexander Catlin Twining who published a book in 1857 titled *The Manufacture of Ice on a Commercial Scale* – they could not compete with the natural ice harvesters, because they simply could not produce the amount of ice that was needed.¹⁴

Although the South had to rely on artificial ice during the 1860s because northern ice shipments ceased as a result of the Civil War, the natural ice industry continued to grow. The amount of ice harvested in the United States increased every year until the beginning of the twentieth century. However, things began to change after 1900. It was not until the introduction of electricity that ice could be easily and cheaply manufactured. Since electricity in homes was not widely available to keep things cool until the 1920s, the first successful “artificial refrigerators” were large industrial plants that could get large amounts of electricity to produce large amounts of ice.¹⁵ The Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant reflects the trend towards and growth in the artificial ice industry in the first part of the twentieth century.

Built c.1930, the ice plant was opened by the Wilson Power & Light Company. Later sold to Arkansas Power & Light, the utilities company operated 17 ice houses in the state, until getting out of the business in 1945. Sold to private owners Roy Morley and Vance Thompson, the business became profitable with its close relationship to highway travel. Renamed Delta Ice Company, Thompson and Morley, and later Morley’s son operated the ice house, which made 300 pound blocks in floor-recessed vats. The blocks were cut into 25-50 pound blocks and sold commercially and to individuals.¹⁶ Despite its industrial nature, the Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant is carefully articulated in

¹⁴ Weightman, pp. 213-214.

¹⁵ Weightman, p. 8.

¹⁶ Ibid.

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brick with a decorative cast stone parapet on the façade facing Broadway Street, characteristics typical of higher style buildings from this time period. The building is maintained as a good example of commercial architecture along US 70 built during the 1930s, a period of special historical significance in the city of West Memphis. The unique nature of ice manufacturing is also well preserved in the continued use of the building, with the cooler & dock still in use with the same purpose.¹⁷

The ice house continues to be used for the production of ice, although the process has been modernized under new ownership. In 1982, the Delta Ice Company was purchased by Bobby Proffitt, who switched the service to use city water instead of the natural spring well on site. Proffitt also modernized the ice manufacturing systems to meet changing trends in the refrigeration market that demanded ice cubes instead of large blocks. Since 1998, the company has been locally owned and operated by Tom and Sue Burns, who continue to distribute ice to the greater Memphis area.¹⁸

Today, the Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant is a living reminder of the development of the artificial ice industry in Arkansas in the early twentieth century. Although other ice plants have been identified in Arkansas, such as the Standard Ice Company Building in Stuttgart (NR listed July 2, 1979), the Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant is one of the last, if not the last, historic ice plant in Arkansas still in operation. The building also illustrates the growth of commerce and industry along US 70 during the first decades of the twentieth century. The survival and continued preservation of the Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant is a monument to the dedication of the current owners.

¹⁷ Bobby Proffitt, former owner. Interviewed by Beau Butler, Main Street West Memphis. 2003.

¹⁸ Tommy and Sue Burns, owners of Delta Ice Services. Interviewed by Beau Butler, Main Street West Memphis. 2003.

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Statement of Significance

The Wilson Power and Light Company Ice Plant, is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion C** as a good example of a 1930s ice-manufacturing facility. The building reflects the commercial buildings being built in West Memphis in the 1930s, West Memphis' period of greatest growth and development. Ice plants from the first part of the twentieth century with this level of integrity, especially ones that are still functioning as an ice plant, are rare in Arkansas.

The Wilson Power and Light Company Ice Plant is also being nominated under **Criterion A** for its associations with the commercial and industrial growth of the City of West Memphis during the heyday of travel along US 70 before the construction of the interstate. As automobile and truck traffic increased on US 70 during the 1930s, the majority of West Memphis' industrial and commercial facilities developed along the highway for easy access to transportation routes and potential customers. The Wilson Power and Light Company Ice Plant's continuous use and maintenance, with the same function, represents an important period in the development of commercial architecture during the rise of auto culture in West Memphis.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The subject property is identified as 120 East Broadway, West Memphis, AR. Property is legally defined as: Lots 25, 26, 27, & 28, M.L. Thompson Subdivision, City of West Memphis, Arkansas. PB 1, Pg. 42.

Boundary Justification

This boundary includes the property historically associated with the Wilson Power & Light Company Ice Plant.