

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic name: John G. Epping Company Bottling Works

Other names/site number: FAE 1143

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 264 Walton Avenue

City or town: Lexington State: KY County: Fayette

Not For Publication: NA Vicinity: NA

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following

level(s) of significance: ___ national ___ statewide X local
Applicable National Register Criteria: X A ___ B ___ C ___ D

<p>_____ Signature of certifying official/Title: Craig Potts/SHPO Date _____ Kentucky Heritage Council/State Historic Preservation Office _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____ Signature of commenting official:</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
<p>_____ Title :</p>	<p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
1	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
_____	_____	Total
1	_____	

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Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: Manufacturing Facility

Current Functions

COMMERCE/TRADE: Restaurant

7. Description

Architectural Classification

Early 20th Century American Commercial

Materials:

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: Concrete

Walls: Brick

Roof: Flat, Built-Up Roofing

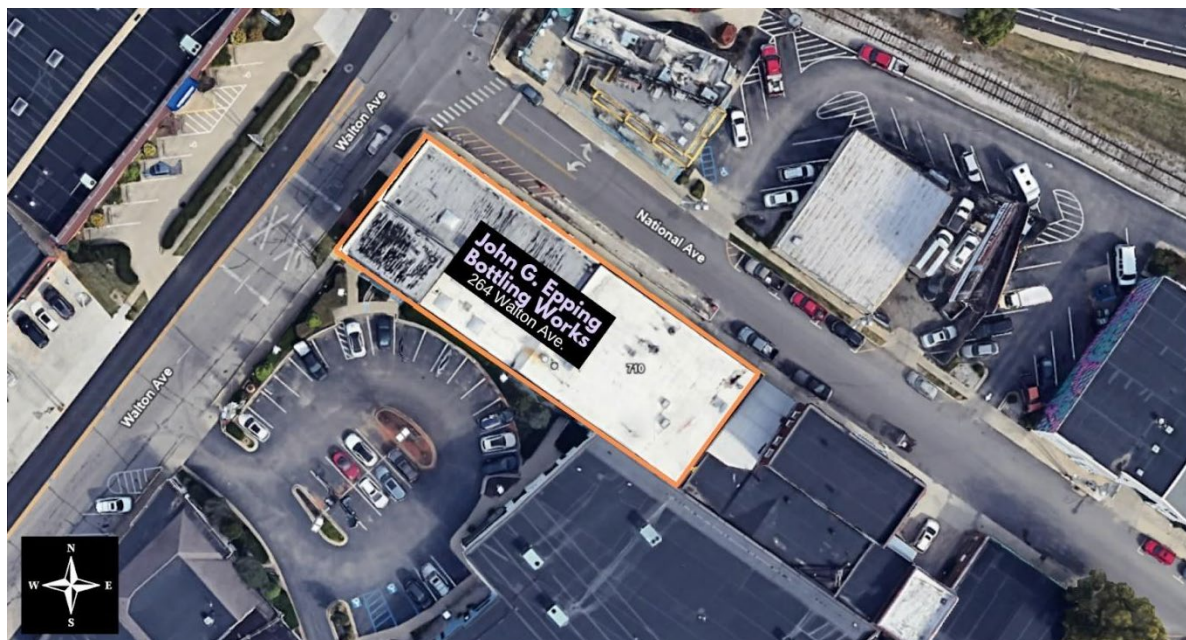
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Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

The former John G. Epping Company Bottling Works (FAE 1143) at 264 Walton Avenue in Lexington, Kentucky, Fayette County, is a two-story industrial building located in what is now known as the Warehouse Block district of Lexington. Built ca. 1933, the 7,482-square-foot brick industrial building occupies a prominent corner lot at the intersection of Walton Avenue and National Avenue. The building is an example of industrial architecture with brick construction and practical design. The interior has been adapted for restaurant use. The exterior retains its character-defining features from its period as a bottling facility. The area proposed for listing includes 0.24 acres and one contributing building.



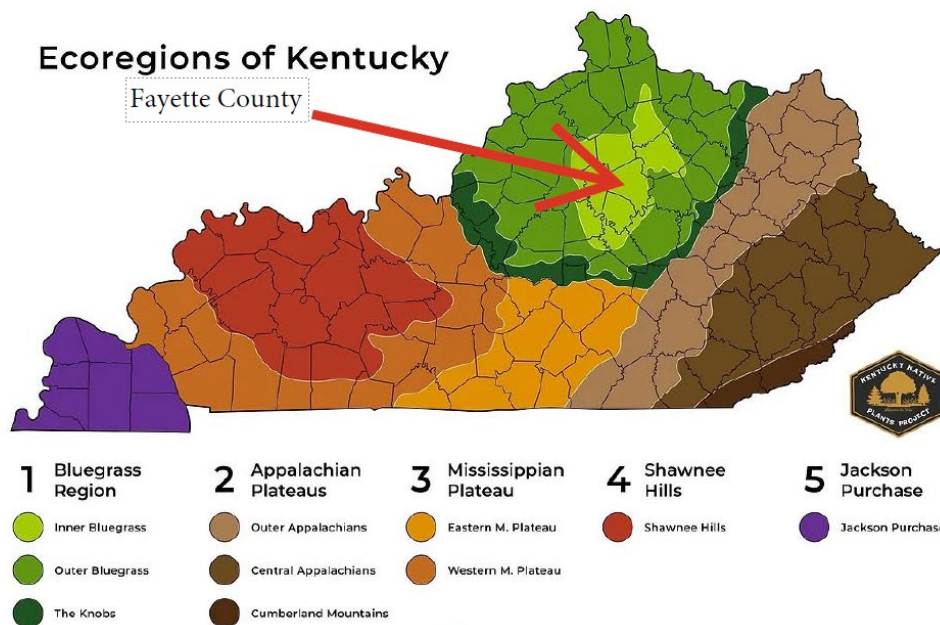
John G. Epping Company Bottling Works, Fayette County, KY
Latitude: 38.040877° Longitude: -84.480071°

Site Description

The former John G. Epping's Bottling Works building is located in Lexington's Warehouse Block district. Lexington, the second-largest city in Kentucky, is situated in the heart of the Bluegrass region, known for its rolling hills, horse farms, and history. The city lies roughly 75 miles south of Cincinnati, Ohio, and 80 miles east of Louisville, Kentucky, the state's largest city.

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Within Lexington, the Warehouse Block is positioned just northeast of the city's downtown core and several historic residential neighborhoods. The John G. Epping's Bottling Works building sits at the intersection of Walton Avenue and National Avenue, two of the primary thoroughfares that run through the Warehouse Block.

The property is bounded by Walton Avenue on the west and National Avenue on the north. It is situated within a historic industrial corridor that developed in the early twentieth century. The building's location provided strategic access to the nearby railroad infrastructure, crucial for transporting materials during its operational years.

John G. Epping's Bottling Works is located within what is now known as the Warehouse Block, a former industrial district that developed in the early twentieth century. The surrounding area retains much of its historic industrial character, with numerous brick warehouses and manufacturing buildings from the same era. The building is situated among other historic industrial properties that housed significant operations, such as the Lexington Dairy Company, Perry Lumber Company Inc., and Page Groves Concrete Manufacturing Company. The immediate streetscape consists primarily of early to mid-twentieth-century industrial and warehouse buildings characterized by brick construction, large windows, and loading dock features. The area maintains its historic density, with buildings typically constructed lot-line to lot-line, creating a unified streetscape.

Exterior Description

The building has a concrete foundation and is composed of exterior walls constructed of brick laid in a Common bond pattern (north, west, and east facades) as well as stamped or molded

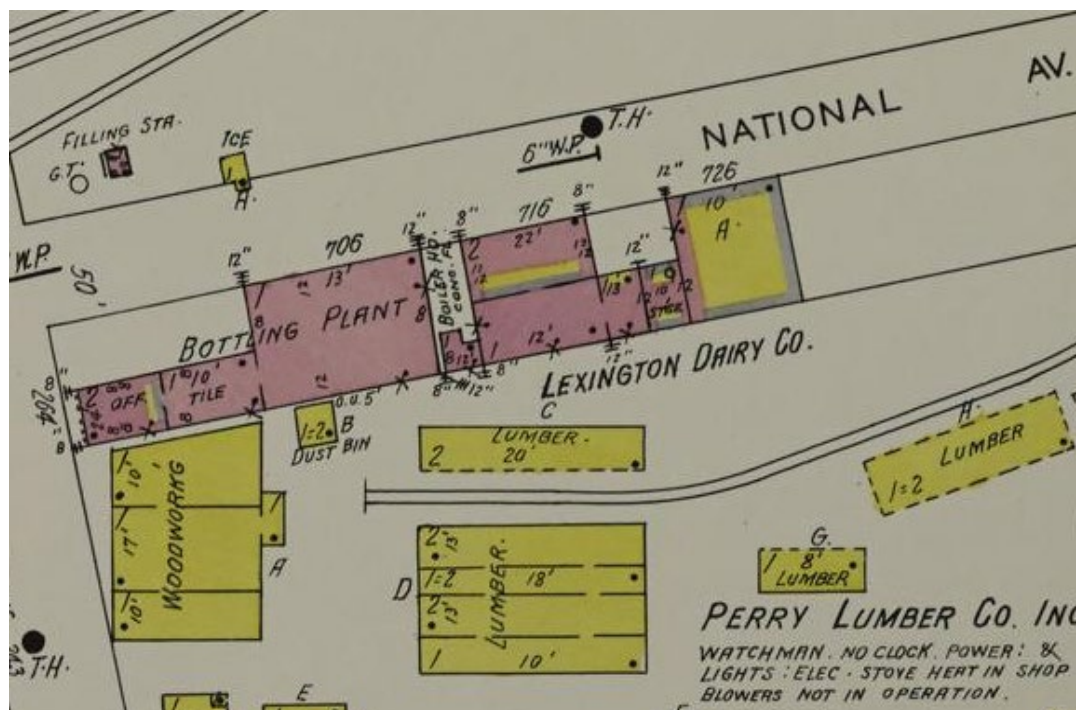
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concrete blocks (south facade). The front of the building faces northwest, but for simplicity's sake, will be said to face west. While predominantly one story in height, the building includes a prominent two-story mass at its southwest corner, which contributes to its distinctive presence at the intersection of Walton and National Avenues. Original steel-frame industrial windows are evenly spaced across the primary façade facing Walton Avenue, admitting natural light into the interior spaces. The roofline is distinguished by a stepped parapet that conceals a flat roof with very little slope beneath. The building features thirteen original wire glass skylights—nine in the main structure and four additional skylights installed in the beer storage area added in the mid-1930s.



Epping's First Appearance on Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1934. ¹

ELEVATION DESCRIPTIONS:

WEST (PRIMARY) FACADE

The primary façade of the John G. Epping Bottling Works faces west/northwest onto Walton Avenue and exhibits an asymmetrical composition reflecting its historical industrial development. The building first appears in records at 264 Walton Avenue in 1926, when it was occupied by "Perkins and Cranfill - sheet metal workers." The business later became "Cranfill and Hadden," which sold Rudy warm furnaces and roof shingles.

¹ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Lexington, Fayette County, Kentucky. 1934.

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The earliest known photograph of the building shows the west and south elevations were initially constructed using stamped or molded concrete blocks. When John G. Epping bought the building in 1933, the company made significant changes to the façade. By 1938, a beer storage section had been added to the northwest corner, and a new brick façade was installed, altering the front façade windows and overall appearance.



Cranfill & Hadden business, 1930. ²

The current façade consists of two distinct sections: a two-story portion at the southern end, originally housing offices and a lobby, and a single-story portion to the north, which was added for beer storage in the late 1930s.

² Lafayette Studios. "Cranfill & Hadden; Exterior (Rudy Furnaces, Careystone Shingles)." University of Kentucky, December 1930. https://exploreuk.uky.edu/catalog/xt702v2c8t1s_161_1.

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Front facade, John G. Epping Bottling Works, 2024. ³

Photographs from the 1930s reveal that the second-floor window configuration of the two-story section was altered during this period. The original individual window openings were replaced with a single multi-pane band, which remains in place today. The multi-pane band features segmental-arched openings and stone sills, adding a decorative element to the otherwise functional façade.

Concurrent with the window reconfiguration and beer storage addition, the entryway area of the two-story portion was also modified. A striking circular motif flooring, crafted from black and yellow marble, was likely installed during this renovation. The marbled entrance flooring, which spells out "John G. Epping, est. 1863," serves as an impressive welcome to visitors, both historically and for present-day restaurant patrons. Below the second-floor windows, there is a band of decorative brickwork, which is currently partially obscured by the white lettering of the modern restaurant signage reading "Epping's on Eastside."

The single-story portion to the north, added in the late 1930s for beer storage, features a similar architectural treatment to the two-story section. It is characterized by large industrial windows, stone banding, and decorative brickwork above the ground-floor level. A key functional element of this portion is the presence of a garage door, which was used for loading and distributing beer and soft drinks. The garage door opening, likely original to the late 1930s addition, indicates the building's industrial purpose and the practical needs of the bottling operation. The roofline of the single-story portion is marked by a corbeled brick cornice and a stepped parapet capped with stone coping, creating a unified aesthetic across both sections of the façade.

³ Friis, Erica. *Photograph of John G. Epping Bottling Works - Front Facade 1*. October 2024.

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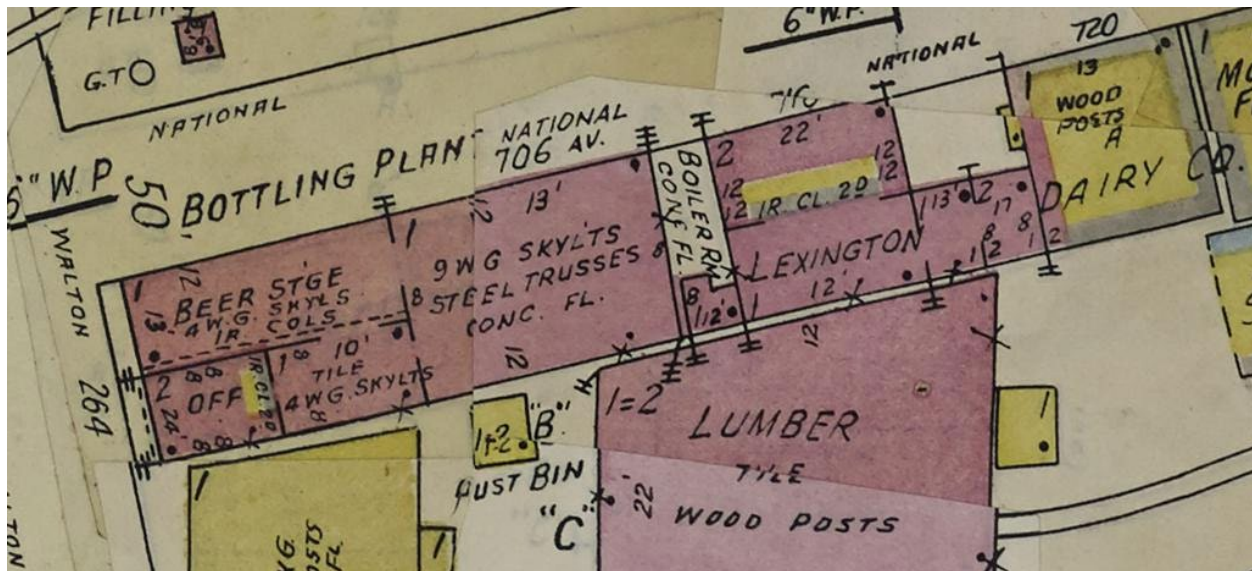
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Front facade, John G. Epping Bottling Works, Year of Opening - 1933. ⁴



Addition of the beer storage, Northwest corner, 1950. ⁵

⁴ Studios, Lafayette. "John G. Epping Bottling Works, 264 Walton Avenue; Exterior." University of Kentucky, June 1933. https://exploreuk.uky.edu/catalog/xt702v2c8t1s_1951_1.

⁵ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Lexington, Fayette County, Kentucky. 1950.

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Front facade, John G. Epping Bottling Works, 1943. ⁶



⁶ Studios, Lafayette. "John G. Epping Bottling Works, 264 Walton Avenue; Front Exterior of Building." University of Kentucky, January 1943. https://exploreuk.uky.edu/catalog/xt7z348gg90h_4_539.

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Marbled entrance flooring, Main entrance, October 2024.⁷

NORTH ELEVATION

The north elevation of the John G. Epping Bottling Works, facing National Avenue, consists of two distinct sections: the single-story northwest portion, which is the beer storage addition completed prior to 1938, and the single-story northeast portion, which the 1934 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map identifies as part of the building's original configuration.



North Elevation, 1938.⁸



North elevation, 2024.⁹

⁷ Friis, Erica. *Photograph of Epping Bottling Entrance*. October 2024.

⁸ Lafayette Studios. "John G. Epping Bottling Works, 264 Walton Avenue; Trucks and Car Parked in Front of Building." University of Kentucky, May 1938. https://exploreuk.uky.edu/catalog/xt702v2c8t1s_5051_1.

⁹ Friis, Erica. *Photograph of North elevation*. John G. Epping Bottling. Dec 2024.

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The single-story northwest portion is characterized by its exposed, unpainted brick exterior and decorative stonework. This section is divided into five bays, each featuring a set of three large industrial windows, totaling 15 fenestrations. The windows are set within jack-arched openings with stone sills.

The brick in this portion is laid in a common bond pattern, with decorative banding of angled, corbelling brickwork above and below each set of windows. This corbelling brickwork adds visual interest and texture to the otherwise functional facade. A stone band runs horizontally across the elevation, further emphasizing the industrial character of the addition.

The single-story northeast portion of the north elevation, which is part of the original building, is distinguished by its painted brick exterior, currently a blue color. This portion is characterized by a more functional appearance, with minimal decorative elements compared to the northwest portion. This portion features two large garage door openings used for loading and unloading materials during the building's operational years as a bottling works. These openings are set within flat brick lintels, in contrast to the jack-arched window openings of the northwest beer storage addition.

The roofline of the northeast portion is defined by three distinct parapets. On either side of the elevation, simple flat-topped rectangular brick parapets. Between these, a pedimented parapet — rising to a low central peak — features a recessed brick panel that once displayed the Epping name in large lettering, as documented in historic photographs from the 1930s and 1940s; the recessed panel remains visible today as an inset field of brick set slightly behind the surrounding parapet face. The two large garage door openings on this portion, used for loading and unloading materials during the facility's operational years, are set within flat brick lintels — in contrast to the jack-arched window openings of the northwest beer storage addition. The varying heights and profiles of these parapets, combined with the recessed sign panel, speak to the commercial identity of the original 1933 building.



Beer storage addition of North facade, 2024.¹⁰

¹⁰ Friis, Erica. *Photograph of beer storage addition of North elevation*, John G. Epping Bottling. Dec 2024.

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Detail of corbelled brick banding, north elevation (beer storage addition, pre-1938). Notably, the pre-1938 addition features more ornate decorative brickwork than the original 1933 building visible to the right, reflecting the company's investment in its expanded facility during a period of post-Prohibition growth. December 2024."North elevation, 2024."¹¹

The north elevation, with its combination of the single-story beer storage addition and the two-story original building, showcases the evolution of the John G. Epping Bottling Works over time. The layered façade, with exposed brick and decorative stonework on the pre-1938 addition and the more utilitarian painted brick of the original 1933 building, signifies the facility's physical response to the post-Prohibition expansion of the beverage market — most notably the surge in demand for beer distribution following Repeal in December 1933, which necessitated dedicated refrigerated storage capacity that the original 1933 structure had not been designed to accommodate.

¹¹ Friis, Erica. *Detail of decorative banding of angled brickwork, North elevation*. John G. Epping Bottling. Dec 2024.

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EAST ELEVATION

The east elevation of the John G. Epping Bottling Works is a solid brick wall that shares a common bond pattern with the north elevation. This wall directly abuts the adjacent business to the east, as the two buildings were constructed close to one another. This efficient use of space is consistent within the dense urban fabric found throughout the rest of the industrial district.

The east elevation is largely obscured from view due to its proximity to the neighboring structure. However, a glimpse of the northeast corner, where the east and north elevations meet, reveals the continuation of the brick masonry and the building's rectangular massing. The roofline of the east elevation appears to be a simple, unadorned parapet, consistent with the functional, utilitarian character of the building's less prominent facades.



Corner of North and east elevation, 2024. ¹²

SOUTH ELEVATION

The south elevation is made of stamped or molded concrete blocks. The southwest portion shows the two-story mass where the office and lobby once were. The current owner added the exterior second floor emergency exit and staircase in order to be up to code regarding fire safety. The second-floor emergency exit door is directly above a first floor door appearing to be original to

¹² Friis, Erica. *Photograph of Corner of North and east elevation*, John G. Epping Bottling Works. Dec 2024.

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the building. The single-story mass on the southeast portion of the elevation contains five original windows and another door at the southeast corner. The elevation is now painted with a mural advertising the current restaurant.



South elevation, 2024. ¹³

Changes to the Property Since the Period of Significance

Since the end of its period of significance in 1967, the John G. Epping Bottling Works has passed through several owners and uses before arriving at its current condition. Following the sale of the property by Epping's estate to Kentuckiana Bottlers, Inc. in May 1967¹⁴ and its subsequent sale to Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company in September of that year,¹⁵ the building continued in beverage-related use under Pepsi's ownership until 1981, when it was sold to Sunshine Development Company.¹⁶ The property then passed to John T. Perry Jr. in 1984,¹⁷ who used the adjacent 710 National Avenue property as a construction office. The building at 264 Walton Avenue was subsequently occupied by ASAP Restoration, a contractor business, followed by Tucker Marble and Tile. The building was acquired by Randell T. Walker in 1999¹⁸

¹³ Friis, Erica. *Photograph of Corner of North and east elevation*, John G. Epping Bottling Works. Dec 2024.

¹⁴ Louisville Trust Company to Kentuckiana Bottlers, Inc., May 22, 1967, Deed Book 898, Page 425, Fayette County Clerk's Office, Lexington, Kentucky.

¹⁵ Kentuckiana Bottlers, Inc. to Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company, September 1, 1967, Deed Book 909, Page 210, Fayette County Clerk's Office, Lexington, Kentucky.

¹⁶ Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company to Sunshine Development Company, September 17, 1981, Deed Book 1281, Page 579, Fayette County Clerk's Office, Lexington, Kentucky.

¹⁷ Sunshine Development Company to John T. Perry Jr., June 19, 1984, Deed Book 1345, Page 282, Fayette County Clerk's Office, Lexington, Kentucky.

¹⁸ John T. Perry Jr. to R.T. Warehouse Company, July 2, 1999, Deed Book 2065, Page 290, Fayette County Clerk's Office, Lexington, Kentucky.

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and subsequently became the anchor property in Walker's redevelopment of the surrounding area into the Warehouse Block, a mixed-use commercial district.

The building's most significant physical changes relate to its conversion to its current use as a restaurant. The interior has been fully adapted for restaurant use while retaining much of its industrial character, including its open floor plan, brick and concrete construction, and original skylight openings. On the exterior, the south elevation has been painted with a mural advertising the current restaurant, Epping's on Eastside. The current owner also added an exterior second-floor emergency exit and staircase on the south elevation to comply with fire safety codes. On the west facade, modern restaurant signage reading "Epping's on Eastside" has been applied below the second-floor windows, partially obscuring the band of decorative brickwork original to the building.

The changes are largely confined to the interior and the less prominent south elevation.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- 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.

X Criteria Considerations

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

INDUSTRY

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1933-1967

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Significant Dates

1933

Significant Person

NA

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

UNKNOWN

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Statement of Significance

Summary Paragraph

The John G. Epping Company Bottling Works (FAE 1143) at 264 Walton Avenue in Lexington, Kentucky, meets National Register Criterion A. Its significance is understood within the historic context, “Soft Drink Beverage Production in Central Kentucky, 1920–1970.” It played an important role in the industrial and commercial history of Lexington, Kentucky, and the broader Bluegrass region from 1933-1967. Built in 1933, the property shows the successful expansion of a major regional bottling enterprise during a pivotal transition in the American beverage industry. As the Lexington branch of a family business dating to 1863, the facility exhibits an important bottling operation that adapted and grew during the post-Prohibition era, when changing regulations and consumer demands transformed the American beverage industry. Under the Epping name from 1933 to 1967, the bottling works operated first under Colonel Epping's direct leadership and, following his death in 1943, under the management of his estate, playing a crucial role in the distribution of both national brands like 7-Up, Orange Crush, and Miller High Life, and local products such as Kentucky Club Ginger Ale and Epping's Club Soda throughout central Kentucky. The property's development also contributed significantly to the industrial growth of Lexington's Warehouse Block district, where its strategic location near railroad infrastructure supported the efficient distribution of beverages throughout a 135-mile radius. The Lexington facility's commercial arc positions it as one of the most completely documented examples of a middle-period regional bottler in Central Kentucky. The property derives its significance from its leadership in beverage industry trends and from what it documents about how regional distribution networks were built, sustained, and ultimately absorbed into larger networks during the mid-twentieth century.

Historic Context

The following historic context draws substantially from the research and framework established by Wes Cunningham and Joseph C. Pierson in their nomination of the John G. Epping Bottling Works, Louisville, Kentucky (National Register of Historic Places, 2023, Section 8, hereafter Cunningham & Pierson). Additions and adaptations pertaining to Lexington and the Central Kentucky regional context are by Erica Friis.

Soft Drink Beverage Production in Central Kentucky, 1920–1970

The Constraints of Early Transportation and the Local Bottler, Pre-1920

The soft drink bottling industry that emerged in Kentucky in the mid-nineteenth century developed within a landscape defined above all by the difficulty of movement. Prior to the widespread improvement of Kentucky's roads in the 1910s and 1920s, the state's terrain, broken by creek valleys, ridgelines, and unpaved rural routes that turned to mud with seasonal rains, imposed severe limits on where a producer could sell and deliver goods. For most producers, the practical world of commerce extended no more than ten miles from their place of operation, unless a navigable river or rail line ran through their town and connected them to wider markets.

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Within these constraints, Kentucky's soft drink and mineral water bottlers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were necessarily local enterprises. Their products served the immediate community and its immediate vicinity. Herman Epping's mineral water operation, established in Louisville around 1863, is characteristic of this era: a small-scale producer supplying a geographically bounded urban market, competing against other local bottlers within the same city rather than against producers from distant regions. The soft drink industry was, in this sense, a mirror of the broader Kentucky economy — fragmented, local, and shaped by the realities of what a horse and wagon could carry and how far it could travel in a day.

The Transportation Revolution and the Rise of the Regional Bottler, 1916–1945

The transformation of Kentucky's transportation infrastructure in the early twentieth century fundamentally altered the geography of commerce for producers of all kinds, including soft drink bottlers. The Federal Aid Road Act of 1916 and subsequent federal highway legislation provided the financial framework for a national program of road improvement, and Kentucky participated actively in this buildout. By the late 1920s, the state had substantially expanded its network of paved and all-weather roads. The introduction and rapid commercial adoption of the motor truck in the same period gave producers a delivery tool far more flexible and far-ranging than the railroad, which was limited to fixed routes and scheduled stops.

Together, these changes expanded the effective market radius of a capable regional producer from ten miles to one hundred miles or more. For soft drink bottlers, this meant a new competitive landscape: a producer with the capital, distribution savvy, and product line to take advantage of the expanded road network could now reach small towns and rural communities across a wide geographic area, building a regional distribution network that would have been impossible a generation earlier. Those producers who made these investments successfully became the dominant players in their regional markets during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

The Epping Organization as a Model of the Middle-Period Regional Bottler

The Epping family business, founded by Herman Epping in Louisville in the 1860s, evolved across three generations from a single-city mineral water producer into one of the most extensive regional soft drink and beer distribution networks in Kentucky. Under Colonel John G. Epping's leadership in the early twentieth century, the firm pursued precisely the kind of expansion that the new transportation infrastructure made possible. By the time the Lexington branch opened at 264 Walton Avenue in August 1933, the Epping organization operated plants in Louisville, Lexington, Campbellsville, and New Albany, Indiana, serviced by a fleet of thirty-six trucks covering a 135-mile radius. This geographic reach, anchored in Louisville but radiating outward through branch operations in secondary markets, is the organizational form that the new transportation era made possible and that characterized the most successful regional bottlers of the 1920s through 1960s. This is precisely the profile of what historians of American industry have termed the 'middle-period regional bottler' — an independent producer large enough to

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build multi-state distribution networks, yet ultimately too small to survive the nationalization of the beverage industry in the postwar decades.

The Lexington facility represented a deliberate strategic investment in the Central Kentucky market at a pivotal moment. Its opening in August 1933 coincided with the final months before the repeal of Prohibition, positioning the company to immediately expand into beer distribution as Prohibition ended that December. The facility's subsequent growth, adding dedicated beer storage by the late 1930s, expanding its product portfolio through the 1940s to include national brands like 7-Up, Miller High Life, and Orange Crush alongside regional products, and operating a workforce of over sixty employees at its peak, documents the full arc of a successful middle-period regional bottler during its years of greatest expansion and market penetration.

The End of the Regional Era: National Consolidation, 1945–1970

The same forces that enabled regional bottlers like Epping to build their distribution networks in the 1920s and 1930s continued to evolve after World War II in ways that ultimately undermined the competitive position of regional independents. The Interstate Highway System, authorized in 1956, accelerated the nationalization of transportation networks. Large national corporations — Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola, and the major beer producers — leveraged these networks and their access to national advertising to build distribution systems that could reach the same small-town markets that regional bottlers had served. The economies of scale available to national producers placed regional independents under increasing financial pressure through the 1950s and into the 1960s.

Across Kentucky and the broader mid-South, this period saw the systematic absorption of regional bottling operations by national corporations. The Epping organization's sale to Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company in 1967 is not an isolated event but part of a nationwide pattern of consolidation that transformed the soft drink industry from a mosaic of regional producers into a landscape dominated by national brands. By the time this consolidation was complete, the physical infrastructure of the regional bottling era (the branch plants, warehouses, and distribution facilities built during the middle decades of the century) was largely demolished, repurposed, or absorbed into the national system without recognition of its earlier significance.

The Value of the Middle-Period Regional Bottler in the Historic Record

The period from approximately 1920 to 1967 represents the full lifespan of the regional bottler as a viable and distinctive form of commercial enterprise in Central Kentucky. Properties that document this era are of value in the historic record because they preserve evidence of an economic structure — regional, independent, rooted in specific communities and landscapes — that has largely disappeared. The Lexington branch of the Epping Bottling Works is significant within this context not simply because it was a bottling facility, but because it documents the full arc of the middle-period regional bottler: the strategic expansion into a new market, the adaptation to post-Prohibition conditions, the development of a diverse regional distribution network, and the eventual absorption by a national corporation. As one of the most intact surviving examples of a Central Kentucky bottling facility from this period, it provides a rare

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physical record of an economic form that shaped the commercial life of the Bluegrass region for nearly half a century.

Lexington's Industrial Heritage

Lexington stood on the cusp of significant growth and expansion in the early twentieth century. A 1922 study commissioned by the Board of Commerce and conducted by a Chicago firm highlighted the city's potential for future development. Despite its relatively small population of around 42,000 in the greater Lexington area (with Fayette County as a whole having 54,644 residents according to the 1920 U.S. Census), the city had garnered a positive national reputation disproportionate to its size. Lexington's national renown was primarily attributed to its natural beauty, renowned horse industry, and 'traditional hospitality.'

The report identified several key economic assets that positioned Lexington for growth, including its thriving horse industry, robust tobacco market, proximity to Eastern Kentucky coalfields, the presence of two universities, strategic location as a railroad center, well-regarded hospitals, and a sufficient number of quality hotels. While the study noted that Lexington could maintain its current way of life and enjoy 'tolerable prosperity,' it also emphasized that if the city's residents could harness their 'constructive imagination' and capitalize on the physical advantages present, Lexington had unparalleled prospects for the future.

The city did convert that potential into measurable results in the decades that followed. From 1943 onward, employment in Lexington increased 260 percent, and by 1958 US News & World Report listed Lexington as one of the fourteen fastest-growing cities in the country.¹⁹ This sustained economic expansion provided the growing consumer market that supported beverage producers like the Epping Bottling Works throughout their period of operation, and helps explain why the Lexington branch became one of the most productive facilities in the Epping regional network.

History of the Warehouse Block

The Warehouse Block, located northwest of downtown Lexington, Kentucky, emerged as a significant industrial area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bounded by National Avenue, Aurora Avenue, Walton Avenue, and Ashland Avenue, this district's strategic location near downtown Lexington and access to the Town Branch Creek and the Ohio & Chesapeake Railway made it an ideal setting for industrial expansion. The area's proximity to essential transportation infrastructure, particularly the railroad, facilitated the efficient movement of raw materials and finished products, attracting diverse businesses.

The Warehouse Block's industrial roots can be traced back to the establishment of the Lexington Brick Company in 1885, which laid the foundation for the area's development as a prominent industrial hub. The company manufactured and supplied bricks for many houses and prominent buildings in the area, proving its significance as a business and establishing the area's potential

¹⁹ Ockerman, Foster, Jr. *A New History of Lexington, Kentucky*. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2021, pp. 118-119.

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for successful manufacturing.²⁰ The company's success demonstrated the district's potential for growth and paved the way for various industries to follow. As the twentieth century progressed, the Warehouse Block witnessed the emergence of steel, woodworking, concrete, and dairy production businesses. Notable examples include the Perry Lumber Company Inc., Lexington Dairy Company, and Page Groves Company Concrete Products Manufacturing.²¹ This concentration of diverse industries within the block's boundaries, along with the architectural form of the area characterized by warehouses with loading docks and garage doors, underscores its significance in Lexington's economic growth during the twentieth century, as the area transformed from scattered industrial operations to a densely developed industrial center by mid-century.

The significance of the Warehouse Block's industrial development is best understood when considered against the broader context of Lexington's relationship with manufacturing. A 1922 Board of Commerce study noted that large-scale manufacturing had 'no tradition' in Lexington, identifying a shortage of skilled labor and unfamiliarity with industrial financing as persistent obstacles to the city's industrial growth. The report's authors observed what they characterized as an 'unconscious indifference of the community to manufacture' that had caused some industries to start and then depart.²² Against this backdrop, the Warehouse Block's sustained concentration of diverse industrial operations — including lumber, concrete, dairy production, and beverage manufacturing — from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century stands as a distinctive exception to the city's broader industrial patterns, making it the most significant locus of continuous manufacturing activity in Lexington during this period.

Evolution of the Soft Drink Industry

The soft drink industry has its roots in the mineral water industry, which began as early as the 1300s when people visited natural springs in hopes of curing various ailments.²³ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, doctors and pharmacists encouraged the consumption of mineral water, leading to the development of artificial carbonation methods. In 1772, Joseph Priestly published instructions for impregnating water with carbon dioxide. By 1832, John Mathews had invented an apparatus for creating carbonated water sold to soda fountain owners, primarily in pharmacies.²⁴ The demand for mineral water grew, and proprietors of mineral springs or bottling operations sought ways to commercialize their product.

The bottling industry faced challenges in its early stages, particularly with bottle design and sealing methods. William Painter's invention of the crown cap in 1892 and Charles McManus's development of a ground cork cap liner in 1912 revolutionized the industry, allowing for more

²⁰ "Lexington Brick Co.: Sketch of One of the Most Substantial Concerns in the City - Its Bricks Used in the Handsome Structures of Today - Growth of the Plant - Brickmaking in Winter," *Lexington Leader*, December 27, 1903.

²¹ Sanborn Map Company. Lexington, Fayette County, Kentucky. 1934.

²² Wright, John D. *Lexington: Heart of the Bluegrass*. Lexington, KY: Lexington-Fayette County Historic Commission, 1982, 173.

²³ Tchudi, Stephen N. *Soda Poppery: The History of Soft Drinks in America*. New York: Scribners, 1986, p. 5

²⁴ Riley, John J. . *History of the American Soft Drink Industry: Bottled Carbonated Beverages 1807-1957*. Washington, D.C.: American Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages, 1958.

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efficient and safer production.²⁵ The growth of the bottling industry was further fueled by factors such as urbanization, the rise of grocery stores, and the introduction of the automobile, which allowed for faster and more expansive delivery networks.

The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 also significantly increased consumer confidence in manufactured food and drinks, benefiting the bottled soft drink industry. The industry experienced exponential growth in the early twentieth century, with the number of bottling plants in the US increasing from 123 in 1860 to 7,920 in 1929.²⁶ The transition from horse and wagon deliveries to truck deliveries greatly enhanced the distribution of bottled soft drinks, allowing brands to extend their reach beyond their original locale. This increased competition and the need for advertising as companies sought to gain market share in an increasingly complex economic space. The Epping Bottling Works Building played a significant role in this evolving industry, adapting to the changing trends and technologies to remain a successful player in the soft drink market.

The repeal of Prohibition in December 1933 fundamentally altered the landscape for regional bottlers, opening beer distribution as a new and lucrative revenue stream alongside existing soft drink operations. Regional bottlers who could secure distribution agreements for both beer and carbonated beverages gained a significant competitive advantage, allowing them to maximize their existing truck fleets and distribution networks across multiple product lines. Through the 1940s and into the 1950s, regional independents further strengthened their market position by securing local distribution rights for emerging national brands such as 7-Up, Orange Crush, and Miller High Life, while simultaneously maintaining their own regional product lines. This dual strategy, distributing national brands while preserving regional identity, characterized the most successful independent bottlers of the mid-twentieth century and allowed them to compete effectively against larger national producers during this period.²⁷

The competitive position of regional independents came under increasing pressure in the late 1950s and 1960s, however, as the nationalization of transportation networks and the rise of television advertising gave large national corporations (Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola, and the major beer producers) unprecedented reach into the same regional markets that independents had built. The economies of scale available to national producers made it increasingly difficult for regional bottlers to compete on price, and the period between 1955 and 1970 saw a dramatic consolidation of the American bottling industry, as regional operations across the country were systematically acquired by national corporations.²⁸ By 1970, the mosaic of independent regional bottlers that had defined American beverage distribution for four decades had been largely absorbed, leaving few physical traces of the infrastructure — the branch plants, warehouses, and distribution facilities — that had sustained it.

²⁵ Lief, Alfred. *A Close-Up of Closures: History and Progress*. Glass Container Manufacturers Institute.

²⁶ Cunningham, Wes & Joseph C. Pierson. "John G. Epping Bottling Works - Louisville, KY." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Kentucky, November 2023, Section 8.

²⁷ *History of the American Soft Drink Industry: Bottled Carbonated Beverages 1807-1957*.

²⁸ Cunningham, Wes & Joseph C. Pierson. "John G. Epping Bottling Works - Louisville, KY." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Kentucky, November 2023, Section 8.

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The Epping Family

The Epping family's involvement in the soft drink industry began with Herman Epping, who first appeared in Louisville directories as a bottler in 1864, likely learning the trade from Ernest Heinecke, a known mineral water bottler of that era. Though bottling was not yet a full-time vocation for most people, Herman established himself as a mineral water manufacturer by 1873, operating out of a two-story carriage house at 1420 Logan Street.²⁹ The business that Herman founded would pass through three generations of family stewardship, and one dramatic name change, before becoming one of the most extensive regional distribution networks in Kentucky.

After Herman's death in 1901, his wife, Katherine, carried on the business under the name "Mrs. H. Epping & Son," with her son John (born John George Broecker) helping to run the operations. During Katherine's tenure, the business maintained its course, focusing primarily on the mineral water product line developed by Herman. Following Katherine's death in 1911, John took a more active role in the business, changing his last name to Epping to strengthen his association with the company. Under John's leadership, the business expanded, and he became known for his love of baseball, sponsoring amateur teams and taking advantage of opportunities to meet professional players like Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, which he used in advertising to promote the company.³⁰

Colonel John G. Epping died on November 2, 1943, at age 66. His estate, valued at \$541,189, was probated in Jefferson County, with the bulk passing to his nephews Bob Lang and Otto Lang Jr. of Anchorage, Kentucky. The Louisville Trust Company administered the estate, and the Lexington bottling operation continued under hired management until the estate's sale of the property in 1967.³¹

Epping Bottling Works Building in Lexington, KY

The Epping Bottling Works at 264 Walton Avenue marks a pivotal moment in Lexington's industrial development, with its establishment strategically timed to coincide with the end of Prohibition in December 1933. The facility's grand opening on August 17, 1933, marked the expansion of a successful family enterprise and the modernization of Lexington's beverage industry. City directories from 1927 show that Epping had already established a presence in Lexington through the acquisition of the NuGrape Bottling Company, but the construction of this new state-of-the-art facility constituted a significant escalation of the company's commitment to the Bluegrass region.³²

The 7,482-square-foot plant embodied the era's most advanced industrial design and production capabilities. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps from 1934 document the building's original

²⁹ Cunningham & Pierson, "John G. Epping Bottling Works - Louisville, KY." Section 8.

³⁰ Cunningham & Pierson, "John G. Epping Bottling Works - Louisville, KY." Section 8.

³¹ "Two Nephews Get Bulk of \$541,189 Epping Estate," *The Courier-Journal*, November 9, 1943, 13.

³² "John G. Epping Bottling Works Adds New Trucks and Equipment for Summer Trade," *Lexington Leader*, April 24, 1937.

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configuration, which included thirteen wire glass skylights—nine in the main structure and four additional skylights installed in the beer storage area.³³ This attention to natural lighting and ventilation followed contemporary best practices in industrial design. The facility's strategic location at the Walton and National Avenues intersection provided crucial access to railroad infrastructure, enabling efficient distribution throughout central Kentucky.

From its opening, the plant demonstrated the evolution of modern beverage production and distribution methods. City directory advertisements from 1935 show the facility was already distributing Falls City Beer alongside its soft drink lines, including Kentucky Club Ginger Ale, Orange Crush, and Epping's branded products. By 1940-1941, under manager Ernest H. Hammond, the company had expanded its portfolio significantly. Directory listings from this period advertise "7-Up," "Kentucky Club" Ginger Ale, Epping's Club Soda, and "4%" among its products, documenting the facility's adaptation to changing consumer demands.



Epping's Truck Fleet on Walton Avenue, 1938.³⁴

The property's physical evolution parallels the growth of Lexington's beverage industry during a period of remarkable rejuvenation. The 1940s addition of dedicated beer storage space, documented in the 1950 Sanborn map, demonstrated the facility's successful adaptation to post-Prohibition market opportunities — a contrast made vivid by the fate of Lexington's previous major brewing operation. The Lexington Brewing Company, established in 1897 at the intersection of Rose Street and East Main Street, had been a substantial industrial enterprise featuring a 158-foot domed tower and million-brick construction.³⁵ Prohibition dealt it a fatal blow: unable to adapt, the operation shuttered, its assets passed through receivership, and the

³³ Sanborn Map Company. Lexington, Fayette County, Kentucky. 1934.

³⁴ Lafayette Studios. "John G. Epping Bottling Works, 264 Walton Avenue; trucks parked outside of building; Epping's True Fruit Drinks; Kentucky Club ginger ale" *UK Special Collections*. March 28. 1938.

³⁵ "Brewery," *Sunday Leader*, January 2, 1898.

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facility was eventually demolished sometime between 1941 and 1950.³⁶ The Epping Bottling Works tells the inverse story. Where the Lexington Brewing Company represents the destruction wrought by Prohibition on Lexington's beverage industry, the Epping facility — strategically opened in August 1933, just months before repeal — represents the industry's rejuvenation. Its dedicated beer storage addition, expanded product portfolio, and fleet of delivery trucks document how a well-managed regional operation not only survived the post-Prohibition transition but actively capitalized on it, filling the market void left by operations like the Lexington Brewing Company and establishing Epping as the dominant beverage distributor in Central Kentucky for the next three decades.



Epping's Employees, 1947. ³⁷

City directories throughout the 1940s and early 1950s trace the facility's growth under various managers, including George W. Hall, who oversaw further product line expansion to include Miller High Life Beer by 1945.³⁸ This diversification shows broader trends in the beverage industry, as local bottlers increasingly secured distribution rights for national brands while maintaining their regional product lines. Under Hall's management, advertisements from 1942

³⁶ "Old Brewery will be Sold Feb. 10," *Lexington Leader*, February 2, 1936; "Commissioner's Sale," *Lexington Leader*, January 28, 1941.

³⁷ Lafayette Studios. "John G. Epping Bottling Works, 264 Walton Avenue; group of employees gathered at front exterior of building," *UK Special Collections*, January 14, 1947.

³⁸ *Lexington City Directory*. R.L. Polk and Co., 1945.

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show the facility produced and distributed Alkalaris Club Soda and Epping's Ginger Ale alongside national brands like 7-Up and Orange Crush.

The building's significance extends beyond its role as a production facility. Through the 1940s and 1950s, it served as a distribution hub that connected Lexington to a broader regional market. The company's transport fleet expanded from horse-drawn wagons in the early years to a modern truck fleet that could efficiently serve communities throughout central Kentucky. This evolution in distribution capabilities, documented through city directory advertisements and newspaper articles, constituted Lexington's most direct participation in the broader transformation of American beverage distribution from a local to a regional industry. At its peak in the late 1940s, Epping's 135-mile distribution network, coordinating operations across four cities in two states, made it among the most geographically extensive regional bottling operations in Central Kentucky during this period.

The facility maintained its industrial significance until 1967, when Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company acquired the operation.³⁹ This transition marked the end of the Epping era but also was part of a broader pattern in American beverage industry consolidation as national corporations increasingly absorbed regional bottling operations.⁴⁰ Throughout its period of significance (1933-1967), the Epping Bottling Works participated in the modernization of American beverage production and distribution, playing a crucial role in Lexington's industrial development and economic growth.



Lexington Herald, 1967.⁴¹

³⁹ "Pepsi Cola Buys John G. Epping Bottling Works," *Lexington Leader*, September 6, 1967.

⁴⁰ *History of the American Soft Drink Industry: Bottled Carbonated Beverages 1807-1957*.

⁴¹ "Crush That Thirst with Grape Crush! Advertisement," *Lexington Herald*, April 11, 1967.

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Evaluation of the John G. Epping Bottling Works within the Historic Context: Soft Drink Beverage Production in Central Kentucky, 1920–1970

The John G. Epping Company Bottling Works is a significant middle-period regional bottler in Central Kentucky. Its successful operation from 1933 to 1967 — spanning the post-Prohibition expansion of the beverage industry, the rise of regional distribution networks enabled by improved roads and motor trucks, and the eventual consolidation of those networks by national corporations — places it squarely within the historic context of Soft Drink Beverage Production in Central Kentucky, 1920–1970. The facility's strategic location within Lexington's Warehouse Block, its state-of-the-art design and equipment, and its diverse and well-documented product line all contributed to its role as a major regional employer and a key player in the city's industrial growth.

The significance of the Epping Bottling Works is best understood through comparison with the other regional bottling operations that shaped Central Kentucky's beverage industry during the same period. Lexington's Coca-Cola Bottling Works, originally located at 265-276 Water Street and operated by Charles Mitchell — who also maintained branch plants in Danville and Somerset — followed a strikingly similar regional multi-plant model to Epping's.⁴² Mitchell's operation expanded to a new facility on West Short Street in 1925, producing 3,000 cases per day and distributing to 36 counties.⁴³ Yet by 1963, the Blue Grass Coca-Cola Bottling Company had been purchased by W.B. Terry as part of a \$6,000,000 acquisition of five Central Kentucky bottling plants — precisely the kind of consolidation that also claimed the Epping operation four years later.⁴⁴ The West Short Street plant was subsequently demolished and redeveloped as townhouses, leaving no physical trace of its industrial past.⁴⁵ The Epping Bottling Works thus stands apart from its regional contemporaries not only in the completeness of its documentary record but in the remarkable survival of its physical fabric — making it the most intact and best-documented example of the Central Kentucky regional bottling tradition from this period, and the property most capable of conveying that tradition's significance to future researchers and the public.

Evaluation of the Integrity between the Significance of the John G. Epping Company Bottling Works and its Physical Condition

The John G. Epping Bottling Works retains a high degree of intactness regarding its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The building remains on its original site within the industrial context of the Warehouse Block, and its exterior largely retains its historic appearance during the period of significance, with minimal alterations. The 1930s beer storage addition and the changes to the facade, including the reconfigured second-floor windows and the striking marbled entrance flooring, are significant historic features that demonstrate the evolution of the facility over time. While the interior has been adapted for

⁴² "\$60,000 Plant," *Lexington Leader*, February 19, 1920.

⁴³ "Lexington as a Soft-drink Center," *Lexington Leader*, June 28, 1920.

⁴⁴ "Private Financing Set for New Coca-Cola Plant," *Lexington Herald and Leader*, October 13, 1973.

⁴⁵ Gregg Fields, "'Back to the city,' Lexingtonians say," *Herald-Leader*, September 25, 1980.

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modern restaurant use, its industrial character is still clearly legible in its brick and concrete construction, open floor plan, and ample natural light from the historic skylight openings. Together, these elements allow the property to convey its significance as a documented example of mid-twentieth-century bottling works, with strong associations with the Epping family's long history in the beverage industry. The building's survival with its primary facade intact is particularly significant given that the vast majority of Central Kentucky's regional bottling infrastructure from this period has been demolished or so substantially altered as to be unrecognizable, making the Epping Bottling Works a rare physical record of an economic form that defined the region's commercial life for nearly half a century.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Please see footnotes throughout.

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 Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): FAE 1130

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9. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 0.24 Acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 38.040877° | Longitude: -84.480071° |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The nominated property includes the parcel historically associated with the John G. Epping Bottling Works at 264 Walton Avenue in Lexington, Kentucky. The property is bounded by National Avenue to the north, Walton Avenue to the west, and adjoining commercial properties to the east and south. The boundary begins at a point on National Avenue, 125 feet east of the intersection of Walton Avenue and National Avenue, and extends easterly along the southern side of National Avenue for 25 feet. From these two points, the boundary extends southerly between parallel lines for a distance of 60 feet to the line of the former Perry Lumber Company at 250 Walton Ave.

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Epping Bottling Works, as described in Deed Book 3905, Page 727, recorded in the Fayette County Clerk's Office. The parcel encompasses approximately 0.24 acres and includes the former bottling works building and all associated historic features.

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Deed Book 3905, Page 727:

“All that lot of land beginning at a point on the new street opened by I.J. Ingle (now known as National Avenue), and connecting with Walton Avenue, hereinafter mentioned, and which said point is 125 feet east of the intersection of said Walton Avenue and said new street (National Avenue) and at the northeast and rear corner of the lot heretofore conveyed by I.J. Ingle and wife to Raymond Cranfill and Leonard M. Perkins by deed bearing date the 16th day of March, 1925, which is Lot No. 4, hereinafter described, and from said point thence extending in an easterly direction along the southern side of said new street (National Avenue) 25 feet, and thence extending back from said two points in a southerly direction between parallel lines a distance of 60 feet to the line of the Perry Lumber Company.”



John G. Epping's Bottling Works
264 Walton Avenue, Lexington, KY 40502

Parcel Number: 14965801
Acres: 0.241

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nominated boundary includes the entire property historically associated with the John G. Epping Bottling Works during its period of significance from 1933 to 1967. The boundary encompasses the bottling works building and the land historically used in association with the bottling operations, as described in the property's metes and bounds. This boundary includes all of the resources that contribute to the property's historic significance and that retain integrity from the period of significance, namely the 1933 bottling works building and the circa 1930s beer storage addition. The boundary follows historically documented property lines and corresponds to the current legal parcel associated with the Epping Bottling Works.

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10. Form Prepared By

name/title: Erica Friis

organization: Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation

street & number: 201 North Mill Street

city or town: Lexington state: KY zip code: 40507

e-mail ericafriis@gmail.com

telephone: (859) 619-7200

date: April 2026

Photographs--Photo Log

Name of Property: John G. Epping Company Bottling Works

City or Vicinity: Lexington

County: Fayette

State: Kentucky

Photographer: Erica Friis

Date Photographed: 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 6: Main (western) façade, shot to the southeast

2 of 6: north façade, shot to the northwest

3 of 6: north façade, shot to the northwest

4 of 6: eastern (back) corner, shot to the west

5 of 6: main and southern facades, shot to the east

6 of 6: southern façade, shot to the northeast