

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Big Chief Restaurant
other names/site number Big Chief Dakota Grill

2. Location

street & number 17352 Old Manchester Road [N/A] not for publication
city or town Wildwood [N/A] vicinity
state Missouri code MO county St. Louis code 189 zip code 63011

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [])

LaVerne Brondel 2/19/83
Signature of certifying official/Title LaVerne Brondel/Deputy SHPO Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
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:

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:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure
	<input type="checkbox"/> object

Number of Resources Within Property		
Contributing	Non-contributing	
1	1	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing.

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

COMMERCE/TRADE: Restaurant

Current Functions

COMMERCE/TRADE: Restaurant

7. Description

Architectural Classification

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Mission

Spanish Colonial Revival

Materials

foundation Concrete

walls stucco

roof Ceramic Tile

other Wood

Narrative Description See continuation sheet [x].

See continuation sheet [x]

**Big Chief Restaurant
St. Louis County, Missouri**

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.

Criteria Considerations

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

See continuation sheet [x].

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

See continuation sheet [x].

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

Areas of Significance

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1928-ca. 1949

Significant Dates

1928

Significant Person(s)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

**Big Chief Restaurant
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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4.7 acres

UTM References

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
15	703849	4272676			
C. Zone	Easting	Northing	D. Zone	Easting	Northing

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Debbie Sheals

organization Private Contractor date October, 2002

street & number 406 West Broadway telephone 573-874-3779

city or town Columbia state Missouri zip code 65203

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 FOP for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Todd DeVille
 street & number 1318 Clarkson-Clayton telephone 636-391-1122
 city or town Ballwin state MO zip code 63011

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Big Chief Restaurant
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Materials, continued

roof Asphalt

Summary: The Big Chief Restaurant is located at 17352 Old Manchester road, in the historic community of Pond, Missouri, which is now part of the town of Wildwood. It was built in 1928 to serve as the restaurant for a tourist cabin complex named the Big Chief Highway Hotel. The large Mission Revival style restaurant building is the only surviving resource from that early complex. It has white stucco walls, terra cotta tile roofing, and an arcaded front porte-cochere. The main block of the building is two stories tall, with a curvilinear parapet centered in the upper part of the facade, and wide wing walls at the first floor which have similarly rendered curved tops. The ground floor of the west side wall has large arched openings which are original. The openings are intact, although the early multi-light windows and doors they once contained have since been replaced with dark wood paneling. The porte-cochere has three arched openings across the front, and single wide arches over the driveway. A large one-story rear ell has a low gable roof; although the ell is early, the roof structure is modern. An open patio off the back of the building is sheltered by a separate gable roof. The building occupies a level lot and sits close to the road. The only other resource on the property is a one story commercial building which is located further back from the road, near the side of the lot. That building, which dates to the 1960s, is non-contributing. The Big Chief building, which was returned to its original function in 1995, looks and operates today much as it did in the 1930s.

Elaboration: The Big Chief is located in the historic community of Pond, Missouri, which is now part of the city of Wildwood. The building sits facing north, on a long deep lot which has a narrow frontage on Old Manchester Road. That road was U. S. Routes 50 and 66 when the building was erected. The property is abundantly landscaped, and fringed by mature trees. Paved drives on either edge of the lot lead to paved parking beside and behind the building; they are linked by the paved driveway which runs under the porte-cochere. The only other building on the property is a concrete block commercial building which sits west of the restaurant back from the street. That building is one story tall, with a flat roof and stucco walls. A shed roof which was added along the facade in the 1990 has ceramic tile roofing which matches that of the historic restaurant. (See boundary map in section 10 for site details.)

The restaurant has many design features which are typical of the Mission Revival style, including arched openings, white stucco walls, and a Spanish tile roof with exposed rafter ends. (Most of the stucco had to be replaced in the early 1990s; the tile roofing and rafters are early or original.) One of the most immediately recognizable features of the style, the use of curved parapets which mimic those found on early Spanish missions in the southwestern United States, is also a feature of the Big Chief. The large mission-shaped parapets of the Big Chief dominate the facade.

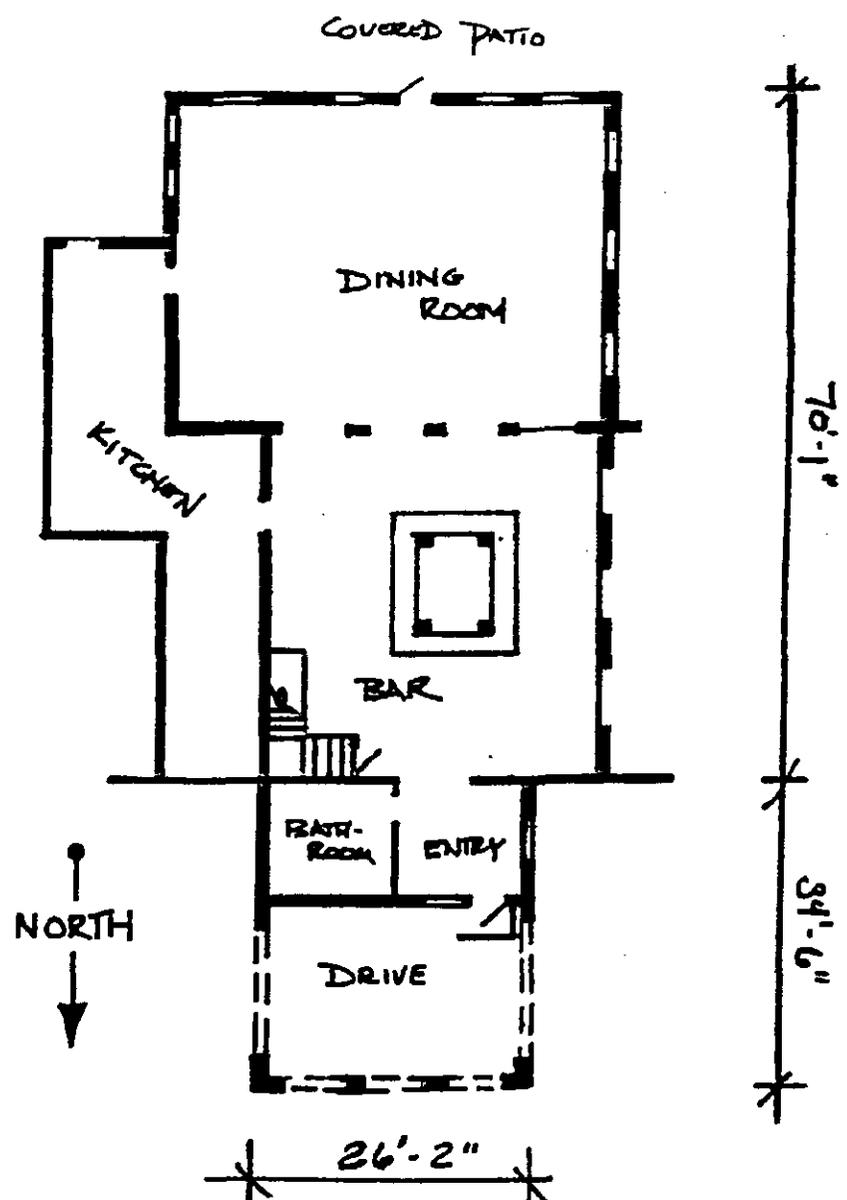
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The restaurant building has a two-story central section which is surrounded by one-story wings. Wide windows are set into the front and side walls at the second story. Most of those openings are original; the windows themselves are modern. That central section has a prominent tile roof, which is hipped with small end gables. (See photos 1-7.) The wide roof overhangs are accented by exposed rafter ends. A tall curved parapet extends up past the front edge of the roof. A doorway topped by arch-shaped trim is centered beneath the parapet. The doorway is early or original; the door itself is modern. The door leads out to an open balcony which is formed by the flat roof of the porte-cochere and the one-story front section of the building. The balcony has an open wooden balustrade which replaces an earlier solid stucco wall.

Figure One. Ground Floor Plan. Drawn by Debbie Sheals.



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The front section includes the porte-cochere and a small entranceway which sits between the drive and the main block of the building. (See photos 2 and 3.) The front door of the restaurant is located beneath the porte-cochere, near the west side of the building. (See Floor Plan, Figure One.) That door way appears to be original, although the door itself is not. A storefront type window seen on the north wall next to the doorway in historic photos was covered over several decades ago.

One story wings run along both side walls. They each have stucco walls and shed roofs covered with asphalt shingles. The west side wall features three large arched openings which originally contained double glass doors with multi-light sidelights. The openings remain intact; the window and door units have been replaced with dark solid wood panels. (See photo 3.) The east side wall is also stuccoed, and has no windows. (As is the case today, the east side of the building appears to have always held kitchen space, while the west was a more public area, serving as bar and dining room.)

Large curvilinear parapets top the walls which extend across the front ends of the side wings. The parapet of the west wing wall is accented with a small metal wall lamp which is early or original; the east side has only the early lamp base. (See photo 7.) The lantern-shaped fixture has a conical top and open base. It is very similar to interior fixtures shown in an early postcard of the restaurant dining room. (None of those interior fixtures survive.)

The back of the building originally had a configuration similar to that found on the west side, with a one-story shed-roofed wing and large arched windows.¹ That original back wall, which was covered at an early date by a gable-roofed rear ell, remains intact inside the building. The current rear ell combines the footprint and wall structure of that early addition with a new roof truss, which was added in the early 1990s. A large covered patio off the back wall of the building dates to the late 1990s. It has a low-pitched gable roof which is supported by heavy wooden timbers. Neither the patio nor the rear ell are visible from the street, and neither detracts from the historic appearance of the building.

The interior of the building retains its early open layout. The front door opens to a small entryway which leads to the bar and dining room. (See Figure One.) The current bar and kitchen are in the core of the building, and the dining room occupies the rear ell. The bar area is on the west, in what may have been the original dining room, and the kitchen is on the east, which appears to be its original location. An enclosed stairway in the northeast corner of the bar leads up to the second floor, which houses a meeting room, bathroom and offices.

The wall which separates the current bar and dining room is the original back wall of the building. That wall, which is more than a foot thick, is lined with four large arched openings. (See photos 8 and 9.) One of the arches retains its early door and window unit, which is now fixed in place; the others are now simple openings with no millwork. (See photo 8.) The early arched

¹ The back of the building is shown in a photo of the cabin court which appears on an early postcard in the private collection of Route 66 historian Skip Curtis.

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openings on the west wall, which are visible on the exterior, have been covered over in the current bar area.

The restaurant today looks and operates very much as it did during the period of significance. It was a restaurant when it opened in the late 1920s, and bar service was added when Prohibition ended in 1933. The alterations which have taken place over the years, many of which were needed to return it to its early function, have not seriously impacted the most important historic features. It retains many character-defining features, and clearly evokes its period of significance.

An historic photo of the building which was included on an early menu shows that the Big Chief today looks very much as it did when Route 66 passed by the front door. The main exterior change of note is the loss of a large false bell tower which originally sat at the southwest corner of the building. That structure was removed by the people who owned the building from 1950 to the 1970s, and the change may be more than 50 years old.²

The distinctive mission-shaped parapet walls, Spanish tiles and porte-cochere, however, appear today much as they did in the 1930s. The building is in excellent condition, and immediately recognizable as the restaurant which served for decades as the main building of the Big Chief Highway Hotel. △

Figure Two. Historic Photo of the Big Chief. From a ca. 1930s menu in the collection of G. Todd Deville.



² Big Chief Revels in Reincarnation as '90s Grill." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Jan. 8, 1996, p. 1W.

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Summary: The Big Chief Restaurant is located in the historic community of Pond, Missouri, which is now part of the town of Wildwood. The building is significant under Criterion A, in the area of Commerce, as an early full service highway restaurant. It was built as part of the Big Chief Highway Hotel in 1928 to serve travelers on the famed transcontinental highway, Route 66. The Big Chief Highway Hotel was a large tourist court complex which originally included 62 cabins, a gas station, the large restaurant building, and an office. Of those, only the restaurant has survived. The only other building on the property today is a ca. 1960 commercial building which is located well back from the road; it is a non-contributing building. The large Mission Revival style building housed the restaurant and tap room for the Big Chief Highway Hotel into the late 1940s, after which the restaurant closed and the cabins became long-term rental units. The period of significance for the property thus runs from 1928 to ca. 1949. Some of the cabins continued to be rented into the 1970s, while the restaurant building was used for a variety of purposes. The cabins and support buildings fell into disrepair and were demolished in the last decades of the twentieth century. The restaurant, however, survived, and in the early 1990s, was restored and returned to its original function. It operates today as the Big Chief Dakota Grill, and looks very much as it did when travelers on Route 66 were stopping off for dinner or an overnight stay in the cabins. It is a now-rare intact example of a full service restaurant built for travel trade on Route 66 in Missouri. A recent survey of historic resources on Route 66 in the state found that this is one of only three potentially eligible full service restaurants left on that roadway today.³ It is a highly significant link with the early days of commerce and travel on Missouri's first federal highways.

Elaboration: Pond is located in western St. Louis County, near the intersection of Highways 109 and 100. (See attached USGS Topo map.) The historic hamlet of Pond is actually now part of the St. Louis suburb of Wildwood. Although Highway 100, which is located a short distance to the north of the Big Chief property, now serves as Manchester Road, the road directly in front of the restaurant was part of the early path of Manchester Road. That road is now called Old Manchester Road.

Manchester Road was one of the first overland routes to be established by Anglo-European settlers in the area, and one of the first official state roads in Missouri. The early development of that road is summarized in a historical account of the nearby community of Ballwin, which is east of Pond, also on Manchester Road. That account notes that moving the Missouri state capitol from St. Charles to Jefferson City in 1826 created a demand for a good cross-state road:

One of the first things to be done was to supplement access to the capitol by land as well as by Missouri River steamboat. Soon, an overland mail route between St. Louis

³ See Becky L. Snider, PhD and Debbie Sheals, *Route 66 in Missouri: Survey Report*, (Columbia, MO: State Historic Preservation Office, 2002.) This nomination was written in association with that survey project, and general context on Route 66 and associated property types used here have been excerpted from the survey report.

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and Jefferson City was established. The winding route of post rider, at first a narrow bridle trail, and perhaps originally, an Indian trail, through the general area of western Bonhomme Township, was the subject of successive improvements. In 1836 it was dignified by the state legislature into a coach road and called various names, prominent among which were "old state road" and later, the Manchester Road.⁴

By the time the area was mapped for a county atlas in 1878, Manchester was a well-established county road which passed through many small communities, including Pond.⁵ The road continued to serve as a major thoroughfare into the early 20th century, when the Missouri Highway Department made it part of the state highway system. A state highway map published in 1924 shows that the road through Pond was by then paved, and had the dual designation of Highways 14 and 12.⁶ Those roads separated west of Pond, at Union. Highway 12, which roughly followed the old St. Louis to Jefferson City road, headed east to Jefferson City, and Highway 14, which followed another St. Louis connector, the St. Louis to Springfield Road, headed south at a diagonal across the state. (See Figure Three; Pond is west of Ballwin, below the words "St. Louis" on the map.)



Figure Three. Detail from a 1924 Highway Map of Missouri.

⁴ Caverly Scott Wallace, *A History of Ballwin, Missouri*, (Ballwin: City of Ballwin, 1979) p. 11.

⁵ Pitzman, Julius. *Atlas of the City and County of St. Louis*. (Clayton, MO: Julius Pitzman) 1878. That map shows Manchester going through Pond, which had a post office by then, and also shows the "Old State Road" branching off Manchester just east of Pond, which indicates that Manchester was rerouted through Pond sometime between 1836 and 1876.

⁶ Missouri State Highway Commission. "Missouri's Road System: Map Showing Construction Progress." January, 1924. (From the collections of the State Historical Society of Missouri.)

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Although it continued to be known locally as Manchester Road, that highway received yet another set of designations in the late 1920s, when it became part of a new transcontinental highway network, serving as U. S. Highways 50 and 66. U. S. Highway 50 replaced State Highway 12, and U. S. Highway 66 took over the path of State Route 14. Those two routes, along with 10 others, were formally confirmed as federal highways by the state of Missouri in 1927.⁷

The federal highways in Missouri were part of the nation's new interstate highway system, which developed largely in response to the explosive growth in automobile use and ownership which occurred in the first decades of the 20th century. Automobiles first began to appear in cities across the United States in the 1890s, and within twenty years, there were more than one million cars on the nation's roads. This exponential growth, combined with poor road conditions, fueled a nationwide movement to improve the country's road system. In response to this demand, two key pieces of legislation passed by Congress, the Federal Road Act of 1916 and the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1921, created the infrastructure and funding for the development of the Federal Highway System.

Of the two federal highways which passed through Pond, Route 66 became the best known, and most widely traveled. Route 66 was the only interstate highway commissioned by that act to cut diagonally across the country, connecting two of the nation's most important cities, Chicago and Los Angeles. Like Manchester Road, other parts of the Route 66 roadway had been in use for decades before they were developed for automobile traffic. The pathway of 66 in Missouri has been known by many names over the years. Most of it was established centuries ago by Native American tribes as a hunting and trading route, known as the Osage Trail. As Missouri saw Anglo-European settlement and road construction in the early nineteenth century, this route was called the St. Louis to Springfield Road. Later, during the Civil War, when telegraph poles were installed along the road, it became known as the Old Wire Road. In 1921, the Centennial Road Law was passed by the Missouri Legislature, to create a system of state highways, after which the route from St. Louis to Joplin was designated State Highway 14.

The section of the highway which passed through Pond was one of the earlier sections of the new Route 66 to be paved. Although Route 66 was officially commissioned in 1926, it was actually several years before travelers could go all the way from Chicago to Los Angeles on pavement. Route 66 in Missouri was not completely paved until 1931, and the paving of the entire route was not completed until 1938. The road through Pond, by contrast, was paved all the way into St. Louis at least two years before it became part of the federal highway system.

As the shortest route from the Midwest to California, Route 66 soon became one of the country's most traveled highways. The number of cars registered nationwide continued to increase

⁷ James R. Powell, "Route 66 Timeline-With an Emphasis on Missouri," Show-Me Route 66 Magazine, Fall 2001, 3-15.

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at a remarkable rate, from just over 1.2 million in 1913 to more than 19 million in 1925.⁸ There were comparable jumps in Missouri, where vehicle registrations rose from just over 16,000 in 1911, to more than 750,000 in 1931, the year paving of Route 66 was completed in Missouri.⁹ That growth in automobile ownership, paired with the availability of good roads, ushered in an era of individual mobility which had never before been possible. Automobile tourism grew nearly as fast as did the rate of automobile ownership.

Millions of travelers experienced Missouri via Route 66, and the highway became an interstate conduit for business and income. As the State of Missouri Book reported in 1932 "The improvements of state highways has resulted in a very large increase in the number of tourists passing through the state. Estimates based on traffic counts made several years ago indicate that 5,000,000 visitors come to this state during the touring season."¹⁰

Proximity to Route 66 provided local businesses with a ready-made clientele, and the highway often became an essential element of the local economy. Most of the roadside businesses which opened while Route 66 was in use did so because the highway was there. The Big Chief was no exception; a history of the business which was published in a local history of the nearby town of Ellisville recognized the highway connection. That article, titled "Big Chief Hotel," noted that Highway 66 connected Chicago to St. Louis, and then on its route west it followed Manchester Road...West of Ellisville the road passed through Pond and it was here that an innovative hotel was built that became a landmark to the traveling public.¹¹

A short newspaper article about the construction of the complex which was published in 1928 also shows that the property was developed with travelers on Route 66 in mind. That article, which was titled "Something New in Hotels," noted that the hotel was "being built to cater to the tourist trade. We are informed that several more installments similar to this are to be built, the next to go in Illinois and number three to be near Springfield, Mo."¹² The locations of those planned, but apparently never built, additional highway hotels, indicate that travelers on Route 66, were

⁸ Frederic L. Paxson, "The Highway Movement, 1916-1935," The American Historical Review, 51, no. 2 (1946) p. 238.

⁹ Wilson Bell, Secretary of State, Official Manual of the State of Missouri (Jefferson City: Mid-State Printing Co., 1946) p. 827.

¹⁰ H. R. Walmsley, ed., The State of Missouri, (Kansas City: Lewis Printing Co., 1932) p. 206.

¹¹ Charlene Jahn Daub, Golden Anniversary of Ellisville, (Ellisville, 1983) p. 214.

¹² "Something New In Hotels," Pacific Transcript, Friday September 28, 1928, p. 1.

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being targeted as a client base.¹³

Although there is no evidence that the plans for a chain came to fruition, it is known that the Big Chief was in Pond much longer than was the highway which inspired its construction. In 1932, the path of Route 66 was rerouted to a more southern path through St. Louis, leaving Pond far from the transcontinental roadway. The community did not lose all federal highway service, however. U. S. Route 50, which remained in its original pathway until 1955, continued to serve as a direct route from St. Louis to Jefferson City and points west, bringing thousands of automobile travelers past the front door of the Big Chief every year.

The 1928 newspaper article also described the layout of the new tourist court. "Sixty-two units each unit consisting of a garage and sleeping room are built facing a nicely decorated park, with an uptodate (sic) restaurant at the entrance."¹⁴ The sleeping units were laid out around the deep courtyard to optimize the long rectangular lot and narrow street frontage. The cabins lined three sides of the narrow courtyard, and the restaurant, which was flanked by one-story gas station and office building, was centered along the street frontage. As the largest building on the property, the restaurant served as a visual anchor for the complex, and at least one historic postcard titled it the "Main Building" of the complex. (See Figure Four.)

The large size and prominent location of the restaurant building made it a long-term focal point for the operation. A description of the property which was written a half century after the 1928 newspaper article shows that the restaurant was still a dominant feature in 1980.

It was a U-shaped motor court with attached rooms and garages. Across the front of the property (were) the office, the restaurant and the gas station in three separate buildings. A porte-cochere, fronting a two story restaurant with a tile roof and small scalloped parapet, gave it the look of a large Spanish Colonial house.¹⁵

The choice of Mission Revival style for the building may have been a nod to California and the southwestern states through which Route 66 passed. As one analysis of Spanish Colonial designs noted, "revival of what were taken to be forms from Colonial Spain had special appeal in

¹³ There is no evidence that another Big Chief Highway Hotel or anything similar was ever built in or near Springfield, and a cursory check of Illinois travel guides also failed to identify another Big Chief. It also should be noted here that two sources claimed this was built as a Pierce Pennant facility, an assertion which further research found to be unlikely.

¹⁴ "Something New in Hotels," p. 1.

¹⁵ Quinta Scott, Along Route 66, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000) p. 62. That description accompanied a photo taken in 1980.

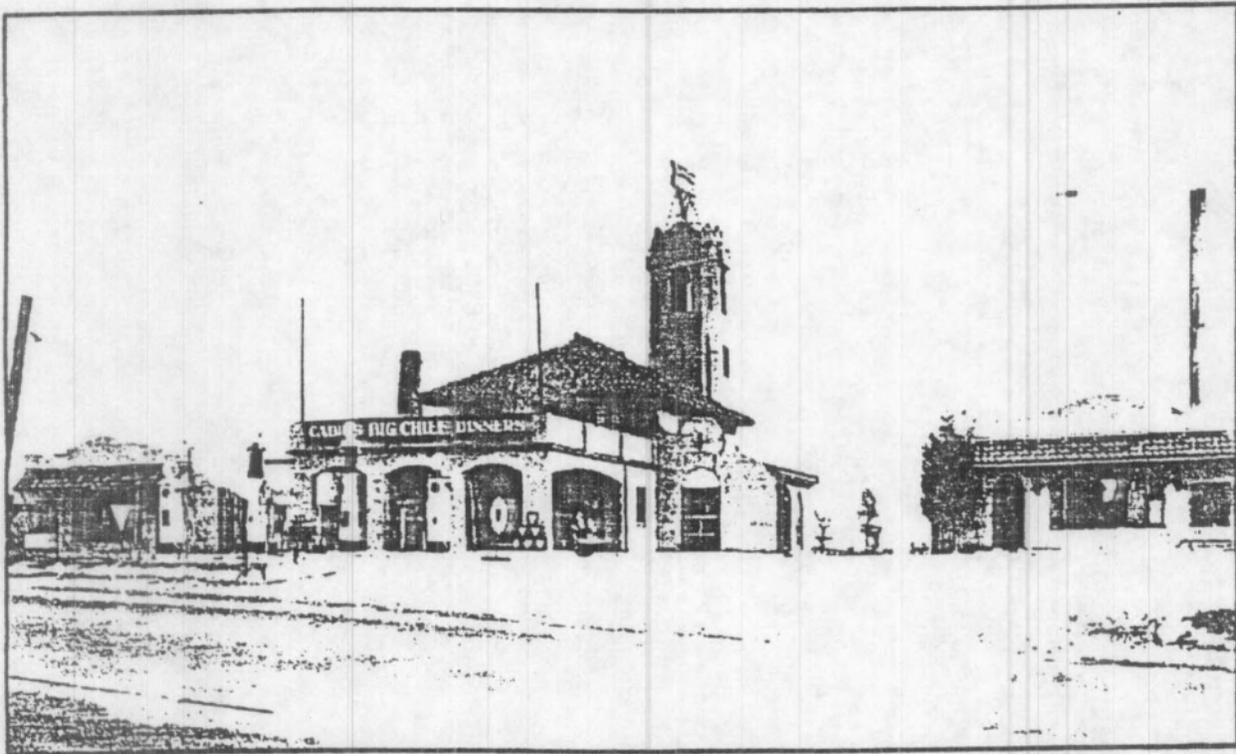
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Florida, the Southwest and California."¹⁶ Common characteristics of that style include stucco walls, terra cotta tile roofing, dark stained or painted woods for exposed rafters and/or interior beams, and round arched openings, all elements found on the Big Chief.¹⁷

Figure Four. An early postcard for the Big Chief Cabin Hotel. From the personal collection of Skip Curtis, Springfield, MO.



MAIN BUILDING OF BIG CHIEF CABIN HOTEL
ON HIGHWAY 50, AT POND, MO., P. O. ADDRESS GLENCOE, MO., 24 MILES WEST OF ST. LOUIS, MO.

¹⁶ Alan Gowans, *Styles and Types of North American Architecture*, (New York: HarperCollins Inc. 1992) p. 236.

¹⁷ Gowans, p. 235.

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The Mission Revival movement, which drew inspiration from the historic Spanish Missions of the Southwest, was one of the earliest subtypes of the Spanish Revival style. One of the most important features of the Mission Revival subtype was the use of curvilinear parapets which echoed the lines of those used on early Mission buildings. As Alan Gowans put it, "To general Academic Colonial Spanish, Mission added some elements copied, adapted or supposed to be derived from the California Missions, such as facades with prominently scalloped outlines and clearly recognizable parapets."¹⁸

Mission Revival buildings started appearing around 1890, and continued to be built into the 1930s. The style became popular along many parts of Route 66, especially in the southwestern states. One of the better-documented early motel chains in Texas, the Alamo Plazas, for example, modeled their design after the distinctive and easily recognized Texas icon, the Alamo. As one source explained that design decision: "it was an age of expanding visual communication, and the Alamo was widely recognized not only in Texas but nationally as well."¹⁹ The Spanish Revival style was also used for roadside architecture in Missouri, although generally in a less specific manner, blending stucco walls and tile roofing with more general Craftsman stylistic elements. Clear cut examples of Mission Revival along Route 66 in Missouri are rare; less than a dozen of the 348 properties surveyed there fit that classification.

Although the Big Chief used the name "Hotel," it was actually a cabin court, which was at that time the latest thing in roadside lodging. (Later ads and newspaper articles frequently use the name Big Chief Cabin Hotel.) As was the case for other types of roadside businesses, twentieth century developments in the lodging industry were closely linked to the rise in popularity of the automobile. Although the modern hotel had been around for decades when the automobile came along, it was not until about the time the Big Chief opened for business that full service roadside lodging facilities became common.

The modern hotel industry is an American invention. The full service Tremont Hotel, which opened in Boston in 1839, has been widely recognized to be the first hotel ever opened.²⁰ The Tremont pioneered a number of features associated with modern hotels. It was, for example, the first to offer washing facilities, including what was at that time a rare commodity, soap, in every room. The Tremont was instantly a hit, and soon imitated throughout America and Europe. Hotels became a standard feature in communities across the country, and were often regarded as objects of civic pride, with communities competing to have the biggest and best hotel of the day.

¹⁸ Gowans, p. 236.

¹⁹ Jakle and Scully, The Motel in America, p. 92.

²⁰ Arthur White, Palaces of the People: A Social History of Commercial Hospitality, (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1968) p. 129.

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The hotels of the late 1800s were often located in downtown areas, to maximize access to train service and other urban amenities.

Those downtown hotels, which varied from upscale establishments to basic accommodations for traveling salesmen, did not quite meet the needs of the new breed of automobile traveler, however. Early automobile tourists, especially in the days of open cars and dirt roads, were not comfortable with the thought of traipsing through a downtown hotel lobby to secure lodging after a day on the road. Location was also an issue; the commercial center of town was usually inconvenient to the highway traveler, as it often required a trip through traffic and unfamiliar neighborhoods.

Another issue was the distance between communities large enough to have a downtown hotel. Traveling by car meant that one could stop for the night anywhere along the route that suited, but the problem was that there was often no where to stay when they did stop. As a result, many early travelers simply camped. As one history of the motel put it "They brought camping gear, found an attractive spot along the roadside at day's end, pitched a tent, lit a fire, and then slept in their own makeshift camp."²¹

By the time work began on Route 66, campgrounds for motorists, often called tourist camps, had become common features along many of the nation's roadways. Those camps were at first publicly owned and operated, and in most cases free, but as the need to charge for the services became apparent, the private sector took over the business. Tourist camp operators saw an opportunity in the making, and quickly expanded their offerings to include cabins as well as campsites.²²

The concept of individual dwelling units, many of which came complete with tiny kitchens and other comforts of home, was enthusiastically greeted by the traveling public. By the mid-1920s, the cottage court (also called the tourist court or the cabin court) was the lodging of choice for the automobile traveler in America. It has been estimated that the number of cottage courts in the nation doubled between 1920 and 1926, with a real jump in construction happening in the late 1920s and early 1930s. By 1935, there were 9,848 tourist courts in the country, of those, almost 400 were in Missouri.²³ Growth in the industry continued throughout the 1930s; the national total had

²¹ Liebs, p. 170.

²² John A Jakle, et al., The Motel in America. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) pp. 33-36.

²³ E. L. Barringer, "Uncle Sam Take Census of Tourist Courts," National Petroleum News, Dec. 15, 1937, p. 44.

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risen another 39% by 1939, to 13,521.²⁴

Route 66 in Missouri was no exception, almost all of the 1920s and 30s era lodging facilities found on the old route today are cottage courts, and lodging directories from the 1930s include numerous listings for "cottages." Survey data also shows that the Big Chief was a relatively early example of the genre in Missouri; of the 78 cottage courts left on Route 66 in Missouri today, only 6 were built before the Big Chief.

It also appears to have been one of the largest tourist courts in the state at one point. It was the largest cabin court listed in a directory of lodging facilities in Missouri which was published by Conoco in 1935. Of the more than 600 Missouri entries in that publication, only nine courts had more than 30 units; the "U-Smile Court" in Kansas City came closest to the Big Chief, with 60 units, while the next largest had 35 cottages.²⁵ A number of tourist guides from that period show that it was much more common to see a cottage court with less than 20 cabins than it was to find one even close to the size of the Big Chief.

The Big Chief also differed from the average cottage court in that it offered relatively elaborate dining; it is one of very few intact full-service restaurants left on the historic roadway today. Although it was quite common for tourist courts to offer public dining of some sort, many associated restaurants were more along the lines of cafes or sandwich shops. This is especially true of those which survive on Route 66 today. The recent survey of the highway corridor identified only about a dozen potentially eligible full service-restaurant buildings of any kind, and most of those no longer house restaurants.²⁶ (Full service restaurants were defined for that project as those establishments which offered indoor dining facilities and table service, a categorization which included businesses such as cafes which emphasized speed over atmosphere.) Most of the full-service restaurants identified during the survey functioned as cafes when they were new. The survey identified only three intact surviving restaurants which historically offered a more relaxed atmosphere, with evening meals and cocktails. They were: the Big Chief, the Red Cedar Inn, of nearby Pacific, Missouri, and the Munger Moss Sandwich Shop, (now the Elbow Inn) of Devil's Elbow.²⁷ Of those three, only the Big Chief Restaurant was associated with a roadside lodging business.

²⁴ John Margolies, Home Away From Home: Motels in America, (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1995) pp. 32-36.

²⁵ Conoco Travel Bureau, Conoco Travel Bureau Hotel and Cottage Camp Directory, (Conoco: USA, 1935) pp. 42-49.

²⁶ Snider and Sheals, 2002.

²⁷ Ibid. The Red Cedar Inn is being nominated individually in association with the survey project as well; the Munger Moss Restaurant, although reasonably intact, is less so than the others identified here.

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The concept of the restaurant, and even the term itself, can be traced to 19th century France. From the Encyclopedia Britannica:

The public dining room that came ultimately to be known as the restaurant originated in France, and the French have continued to make major contributions to the restaurant's development. The first restaurant proprietor is believed to have been one A. Boulanger, a soup vendor, who opened his business in Paris in 1765. The sign above his door advertised restoratives, or restaurants, referring to the soups and broths available within. The institution took its name from that sign, and "restaurant" now denotes a public eating place in English, French, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, Romanian, and many other languages, with some variations.²⁸

By the 19th century, the term had come into widespread use in the United States as a description of all manner of commercial dining establishments, and by the end of the century the restaurant industry was fully established in North America.²⁹

Unlike many roadside businesses, such as gas stations and cottage courts, the restaurant was an established business type long before the advent of automobile travel. It was possible to find both quick-dining and full service establishments in most settled areas of the United States by the last half of the 19th century. Quick-dining options included such things as soda fountains and lunch counters, where one could grab a quick meal at a window or a counter, while full service establishments offered indoor seating and table service. Full service settings ranged from coffee shops to formal dining rooms. Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, most full service dining rooms were located in urban settings, and were often associated with large hotel operations.³⁰

While the earliest automobile travelers in the country had to look in urban areas or the commercial centers of small towns for restaurants, dining establishments soon sprang up in more convenient locations along the new highways. By the late 1920s, a wide variety of restaurants types were available to the "autoist". Although options for roadside dining have ranged from food stands to formal dining from the earliest days of auto travel, quick service places have tended to dominate the field. Even those businesses which offered indoor dining and table service tended to be cafes or family restaurants, which focused on casual dining and quick service to get customers

²⁸ "Restaurant," Encyclopedia Britannica CD, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1999.)

²⁹ Liebs, pp. 193-195.

³⁰ John. A Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, Fast Food: Roadside Restaurants in the Automobile Age, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) pp. 22-39.

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back on the road as soon as possible.

An exception to that rule was the type of full service restaurant one history of roadside dining calls the "Highway-Destination" Restaurant.³¹ The authors of Fast Food describe highway destination restaurants as those which "catered not to transients seeking security and convenience, but to discerning customers seeking the unusual."³² That account noted that such places could be upscale or less pretentious, but that customers were looking for "atmosphere" which could be established through such things as exterior architecture, interior design or other features which were calculated to be "place-defining." It was also noted that after prohibition, "the sale of alcoholic beverages set the highway-destination restaurant apart from other roadside eateries."³³

The Big Chief Restaurant's role as a "Highway-Destination" restaurant strengthened its contribution to the tourist court business. Common "destination" defining characteristics include distinctive interior decorations, a dance floor, and, after prohibition, a full bar. A flyer from the hotel which was printed between 1928 and 1932 shows that the management was making a conscious effort to develop the restaurant into a "destination," especially for St. Louis residents. The flyer urged visitors to "ENJOY A DELICIOUS DINNER IN OUR SPANISH DINING ROOM," and included both an interior and an exterior view of the restaurant. The caption for the photos read:

this view shows you what to expect when driving out from St. Louis to enjoy one of our delicious "Southern Style" cooked dinners. Bring the Family and spend a very enjoyable Afternoon or Evening. We suggest that you try one of our 75 cent CHICKEN or STEAK DINNERS.³⁴

The "destination" component took on more importance after U. S. 66 was rerouted in 1932. The repeal of prohibition in 1933 spurred the addition of a "Tap Room" an event which was publicized in the local paper, along with a message from the management which reflects a desire to attract local customers. The article, which appeared in the Pacific Transcript, announced that Mrs. Edna Bartlett was the new manager and that

³¹ Jakle and Sculle, Fast Food, p. 49.

³² Jakle and Sculle, Fast Food, p. 49.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Daub, p. 214.

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The Big Chief Hotel...is giving a series of fall dances...The management invites the local people to visit their beautiful mission dining room. A very unique Tap Room is also being added which has very beautiful equipment.³⁵

Mrs. Bartlett's efforts must have paid off that season; a note in the same newspaper later that year claimed that "The Big Chief Cabin Hotel has become a popular rendezvous for the younger set for miles around."³⁶

The combination of rental cabins and a good restaurant also made the Big Chief an attractive location for large meetings and conferences. Other local newspaper articles from the mid-1930s, for example, show that the "50-66 Highway Association" held a big banquet there in the fall of 1933, and that a large group of Home Economics Extension Club (H.E.E.C.) members held a two day conference there in the summer of 1934. The front page article publicizing the H.E.E.C. conference included two large photos of the hotel, one of the cabins and one of the restaurant, and noted that the women of that organization "will enjoy two days of rest and recreation at the Big Chief Cabin Hotel."³⁷

The management may have changed by the time the H.E.E.C. club came for their event. Mr. Si Hensien managed the restaurant in the mid-1930s. Mr. Hensein, who lived to be at least 104 years old, spoke to a St. Louis Post Dispatch reporter in 1996 about his tenure at the Big Chief. That article, which was written about six months after the restaurant reopened, included Mr. Hensein's remembrances about how the restaurant functioned.

Si Hensein, now 104 years old, ran Big Chief in the 1930s. He said, "Everyone that came there got a square deal, very well fed, and got what they wanted to drink, and a good night's sleep." The dining room served 5-cent sandwiches, 40-cent blue plate specials and 75-cent steak dinners. After dinner, Hensein said, folks pushed back the tables for dancing.³⁸

Hensein also recalled that his family lived on the second floor of the restaurant while he was working there. He noted that even though business continued to be strong, he left around 1935 to

³⁵ "Mrs. Edna Bartlett Manager of Big Chief Cabin Hotel at Pond," Pacific Transcript, November 24, 1933, p. 1.

³⁶ "Christmas Dance at Big Chief," Pacific Transcript, Dec. 12, 1933, p. 1.

³⁷ "Where H.E.E.C. Women Will Spend a Two-Day Vacation," Pacific Transcript, Aug. 10, 1934, p. 1.

³⁸ Russell Ainsworth, "Big Chief Revels in Reincarnation As '90s Grill," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Jan. 8, 1995, p. 1W.

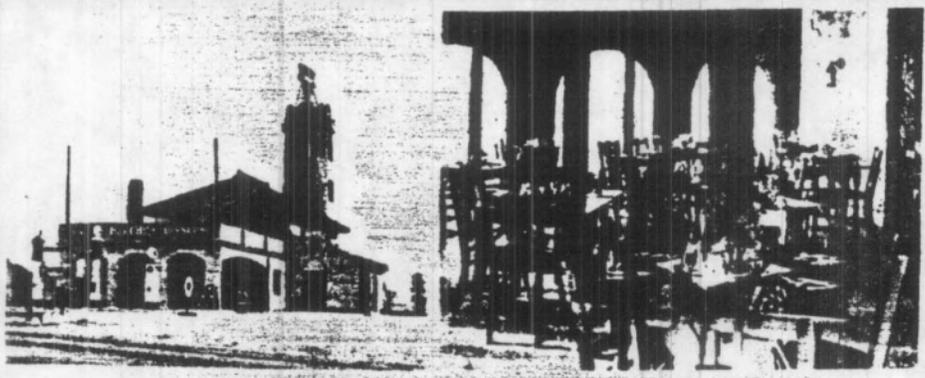
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open a similar operation
of his own.

Figure Five. A Menu
from the Big Chief. This
was printed sometime
after 1934, when a deli
was added to the
offerings, and probably
before the early 1940s,
when business began
slowing due to WWII.
Menu from the personal
collection of Todd DeVille.



"BIG CHIEF"

Phone Grover 300  Phone Main 1195

HOTEL
"FOR TOURISTS WHO CARE"

LOOK! LOOK! LOOK!

The finest and most modern of its kind. Delightful Spanish Mission designed dining room.

SPECIAL PLATE LUNCH	\$.40
STEAK DINNER	.75
CHICKEN DINNER	1.00

Also a la carte service

Accommodations for bridge parties, clubs and banquets. All the comforts and conveniences of the best hotels: 62 large steam-heated modern fireproof cabins attractively furnished. Dining room terrace and beautiful park with trees, flowers, fountain, lawn chairs, 6 large Medart swings, 6 see-saws, horse-shoes, tennis court, ping-pong, dance floor in dining room.

Cabins including private garage \$1.50 double. Gas station, artesian well 600 feet deep. Tap room, 5c sandwiches, delicatessen market, package goods, groceries, draught beer.

BIG CHIEF HOTEL, Pond, Mo.
On U. S. Highway 50, Manchester Road, 15 Miles West of
Missouri Highway 77, Denny Road.

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That same article noted that the Big Chief survived the lean years of World War II by furnishing "desperately needed housing for employees of the Weldon Spring Ordnance Works in the 1940s."³⁹ That change-over to longer term housing continued after the war, when the cabins were rented to workers at a Weldon Spring uranium processing plant. It appears that the restaurant closed for business during that period as well. The Post-Dispatch article noted that the property was purchased around 1950 by restaurateurs Marco and Rose Aceto, from St. Louis, who "acquired the property with the intention of reopening the restaurant."⁴⁰ The end of the period of significance has therefore been set at ca. 1949, the approximate date the restaurant closed for business.

The Acetos ended up living in the Big Chief restaurant building after failing to get a permit to reopen the restaurant; they did open a tavern there around 1959. It was also under their ownership that the large bell tower was removed, and later, around the 1960s, they built the modern commercial building which still sits on the west side of the property. The cabins continued to serve as longer term rentals, although in lower numbers as the years went by, and the restaurant building was used for various commercial purposes over the years. At least one area resident really extended his stay at the complex; Art Hoerig claimed in 1996 to have lived on one of the cabins there for about 15 years during the 1960s and 1970s.

Finally, in the early 1990s, the property was purchased by G. Todd DeVille, a vice-president of a local real estate firm with a family background in the restaurant business. By then, the other buildings on the property had been demolished, and the restaurant building was in very poor condition. DeVille began a major rehabilitation of the building, and in June of 1995, the Big Chief Dakota Grill opened for business. The Dakota Grill remains in operation, and the historic restaurant of the Big Chief Cabin Hotel is once again operating in its intended capacity.

Even though the original cabins and support buildings have been lost, the "Main Building" of the historic Big Chief Cabin Hotel, the restaurant, remains. That building has always been the largest and most public of the buildings on the Big Chief property, and its relationship to the street has changed very little over the years. The 1990s rehabilitation reversed years of neglect, and returned the building to its original function. The Big Chief restaurant is one of the most intact historic full service restaurants left on Route 66 today, and is a highly significant link to the early days of roadside dining in Missouri. ◻

³⁹ Ainsworth, p. 2W.

⁴⁰ Ainsworth, p. 2W.

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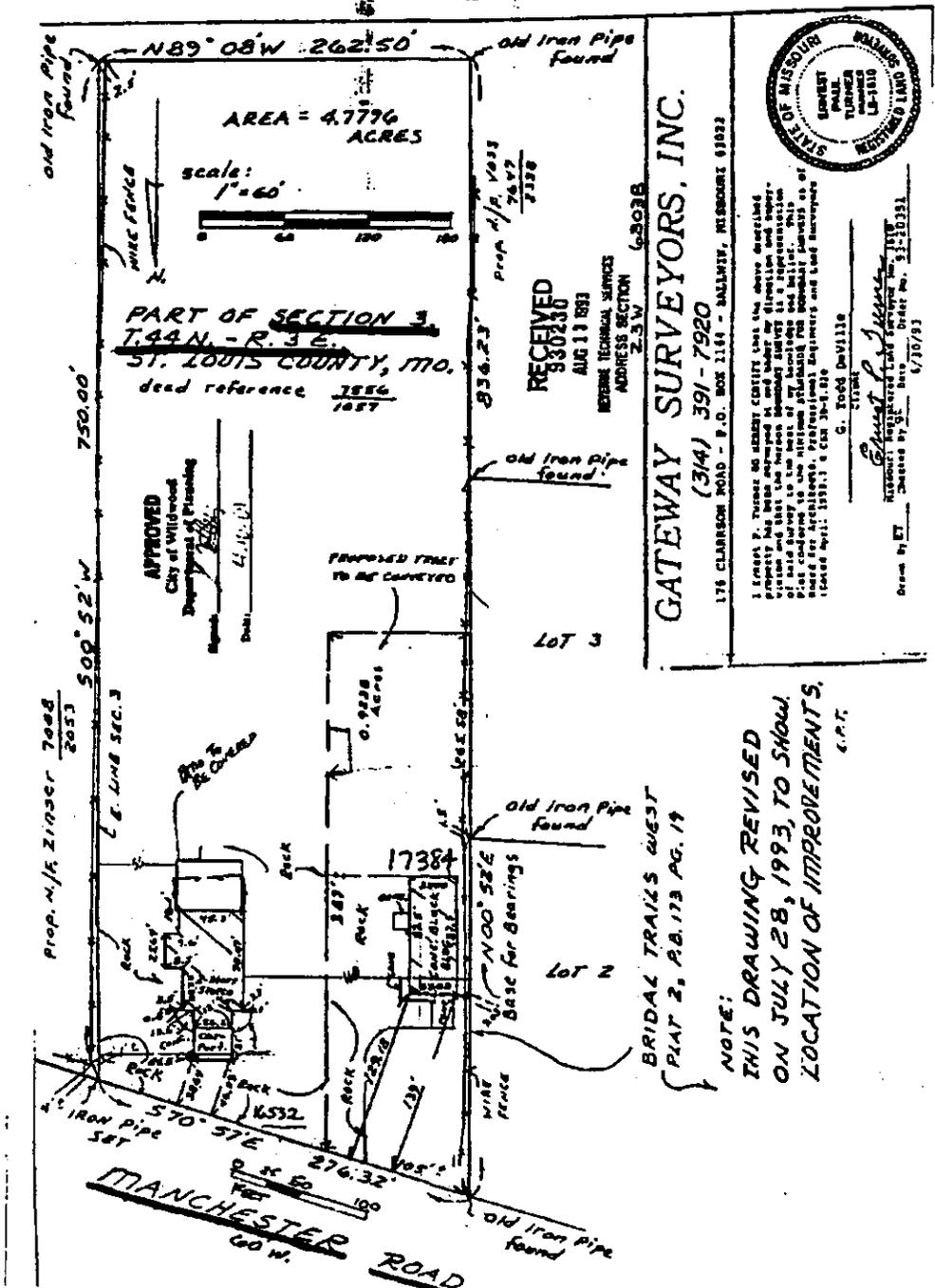
Verbal Boundary Description

Part of Section 3, T44N-R3E, St. Louis, MO; Deed Reference 7556/1057. See also the attached boundary map, drawn by Gateway Surveyors, Inc.

Boundary Justification

The current boundaries encompass all of the land currently associated with the Big Chief which retains integrity.

Boundary Map
Right.



GATEWAY SURVEYORS, INC.
(314) 391-7920
175 CLARSON ROAD - P.O. BOX 1184 - HALLWAY, MISSOURI 63022

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330236
AUG 11 1993
MODERN TECHNICAL SERVICES
ADDRESS SECTION
2-31V 6-2028

NOTE:
THIS DRAWING REVISED
ON JULY 28, 1993, TO SHOW
LOCATION OF IMPROVEMENTS.
G.T.D.

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Photographs

The following information is the same for all photographs:

Big Chief Restaurant

17352 Old Manchester Road, Wildwood

St. Louis County, MO

Debbie Sheals

August, 2002

Missouri Cultural Resource Inventory, MO Department of Natural Resources, Jefferson
City.

List of Photographs

See photo key for description of camera angles.

1. Facade, north elevation
2. Northwest corner, from the street.
3. West elevation, with porte cochere
4. Rear (southwest corner)
5. West elevation.
6. Northeast corner, from the street.
7. Detail, roof line and west front parapet.
8. Interior, early arched door and window unit.
9. Interior, original back wall, (now divider between bar and dining room).
10. Streetscape, looking southwest, with newer building in background.

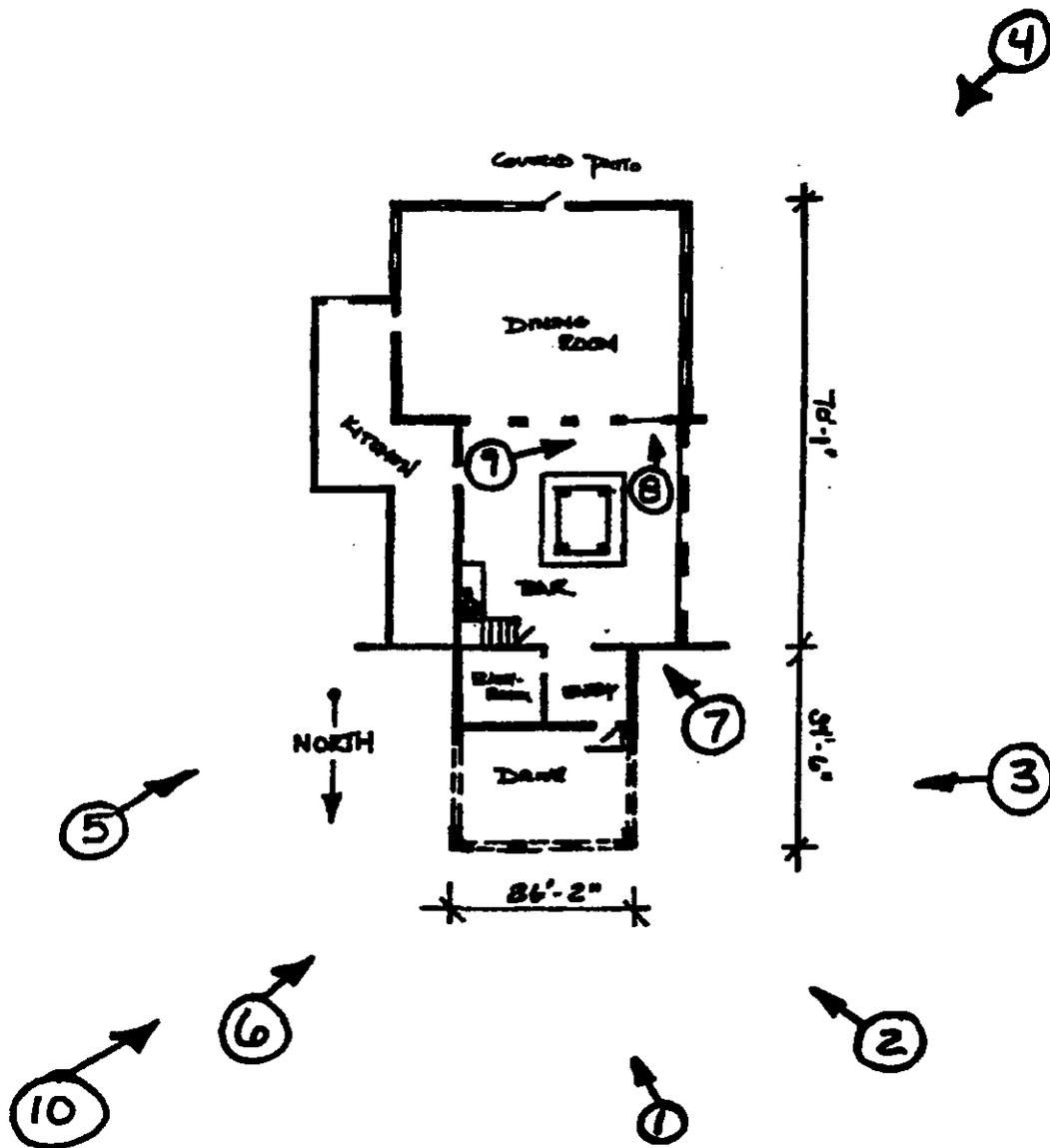
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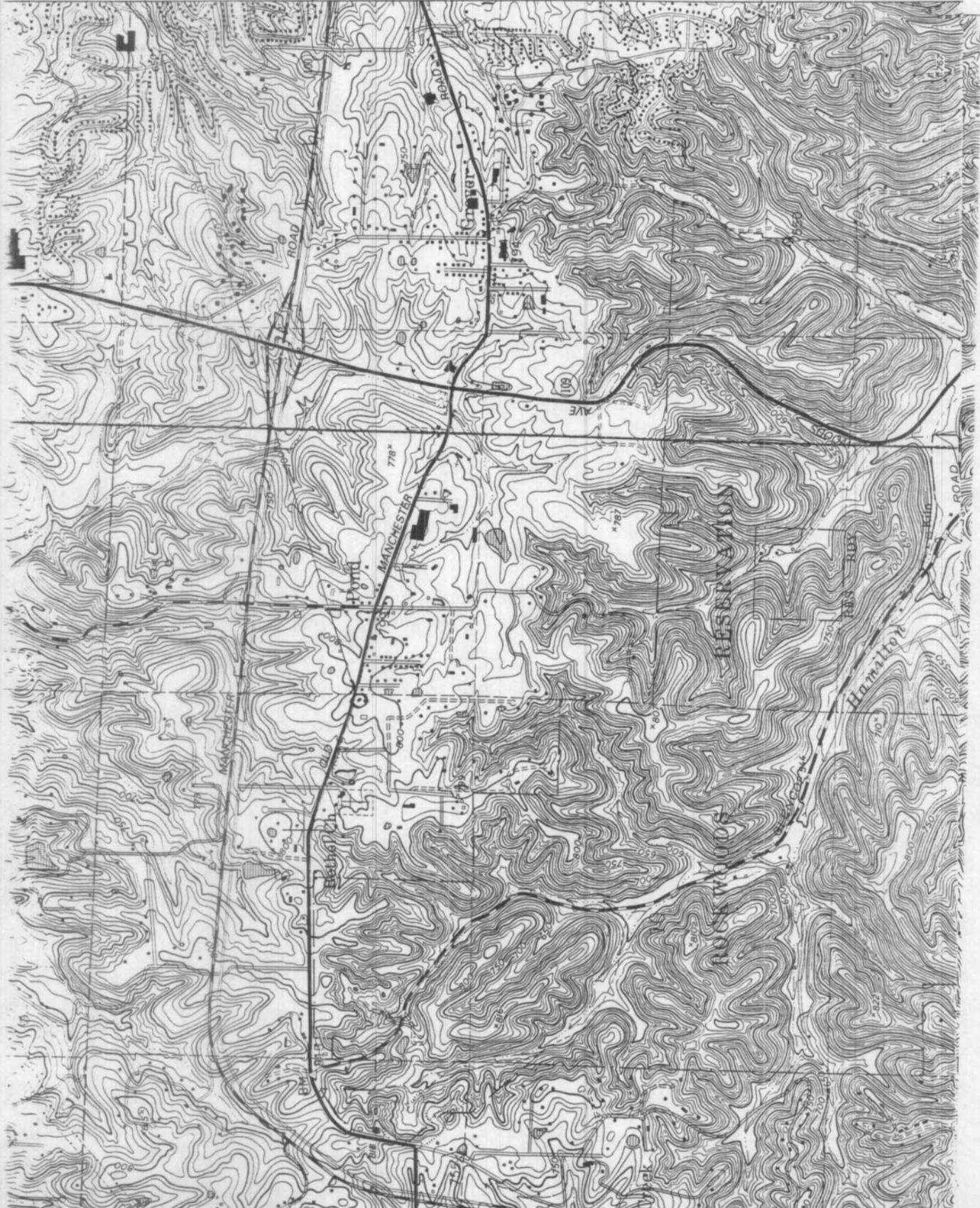
Big Chief Restaurant
St. Louis County, Missouri

Photo Key.



BIG CHIEF
RESTAURANT
17352 OLD
MANCHESTER RD.
WILMWOOD, ST. LOUIS
COUNTY, MO

15/703849/
4272676



4274

T. 45 N.

T. 44 N.

35'

ELLISVILLE 2.1 MI.
MANCHESTER 7 MI.

4272

4271

(MANCHESTER)
7861 II SE



"BIG CHIEF"
dakota grill

"BIG CHIEF"
dakota grill





1
2
3













