Remembering a Workplace Disaster:
Different Landscapes—Different Narratives?

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by

Glenn E. Stubbs

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The landscape of contemporary America is awash with public memorials constantly reminding its population of selected events from their past. Types and purposes of memorials are wide-ranging. National government sanctioned landscapes of memory, like the National Mall in Washington D.C., focus on inspiring patriotism and nation building through memorials to national heroes and historic events. At the state level, one common method of remembering places, people and events of historic significance is a roadside marker program. Spontaneous memorials, placed directly by the public, are a method for local communities to self-memorialize. Events that trigger humans to respond emotionally in favor of memorialization are wide ranging. One such trigger is tragic or disastrous events.

Humans emotionally respond to a tragic workplace accident was, and still is, evident in the southeastern Ohio community of Millfield, where, on November 5 1930, an explosion deep in the local coal mine killed eighty-two, the most ever to parish in a mining accident in Ohio. Attendees at the 2012 annual Millfield mine memorial service recounted that while rescue efforts were underway, members of the community vowed they would remember that day with an annual service. Indeed, there was a large memorial service within the month, but it was the last formal service for the next forty-four years. Commemorating this event has proven to be a long and difficult process and thereby invites study.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, major changes came to the Millfield community with the onset of corporate coal mining. Just to the east of town, the coal company
built housing for its workers and ultimately gained control of Millfield. Therefore, it is impressive that both areas continue to exist seven decades after the mine closed (Mould 1985). Even to this day, many residents still consider the Millfield area to be a mining community. However, since the massive explosion of November 5, 1930, Millfield is a mining community unique in Ohio’s Appalachian coal region. On that day, the infamous mine explosion cast a defining shadow over the community that continues to linger. Thus, it is safe to say the two mine disaster specific landscapes of this community, the site of the mine and the site of the monument in Millfield, reflect the culture of a unique community.

By exploring the landscapes of Millfield’s coal mine-related memory, I strived to understand what they divulge about local emotions concerning the mines and the infamous accident. On the surface, these cultural landscapes appear to tell conflicting and contrasting narratives about the community and its emotional connection to the mining disaster. To determine if my initial impressions of the cultural landscapes are accurate, I focus on the history of those landscapes, on how they were developed and on how they evolved into their modern-day states. More specifically, what do these different narratives reveal about the community’s historic and contemporary emotions surrounding the mine and the accident?

Remembering a person or event is the most obvious reason for memorialization. However, memorials do more than only remember they also define memory through the narrative(s) they tell. So who gets to determine the narrative of a memorial? Who gets to answer the critical question of what is included, and what is not, determines, “the way we look at the world… how we relate to it” and what future generations will know of us (AAG 2013).

This thesis consists of six chapters. After the introduction, chapter two examines the scholarly background of this thesis. I consider established discourse pertaining to the topics
essential for this project: sense of place, cultural landscapes of memory and memorials, and sense of relocated place during the industrial revolution. Chapter three describes the history of the case study of this thesis, the southeastern Ohio areas of Millfield, East Millfield and Poston/Sunday Creek Coal Company’s #6 Mine site. Chapter four considers the cultural landscape of the mine site and the monument site in the town and the narratives each site tell. In chapter five, I link my geographical erudition to my working class background as I analyze these two landscapes of memory. Chapter six is a conclusion.
CHAPTER 2

Memory, Landscape, and the Working Community

**Cultural Landscape of Memories and Memorials**

For all of recorded history, humans have demonstrated a need to accumulate their memories and to share them with others. These shared memories create a collective memory within a group. Evidenced by ancient hieroglyphic symbols, humans were relaying their collective memories on the durable landscape and thereby building collective histories for as long as they have been communicating (Foote 2003; Doss 2010; Schama 1995; Kammen 1991; Harvey 1985). Regardless the physical structure, collective memories entrusted to memorials and the associated monuments narrate and preserve collective memories about events significant to a community. Personal and group sacrifice, tragic and/or violent events, and heroic individuals are a few types of events that are commonly memorialized (Savage 2009; Foote 2003; Doss 2010; Loewen 1999).

Despite brief periods of resistance, the popularity of memorials has grown and continues to grow (Doss 2010). Rationales underlying memorialization’s popularity are multi-faceted. Temporary memorials provide an instantaneous outlet for grief and mourning while permanent memorials provide a means of honoring specific events. However, permanent memorials always tell a distorted, often blatantly so, narrative (Foote 2003; Doss 2010; Hoelscher and Alderman 2004; Harvey 1985; Loewen 1999). Some memorials become honored sites, well remembered for their cultural and economic benefits and others become forgotten, outdated, and detrimental to their locales (Foote 2003; Post 2009; Doss 2010). Therefore, understanding the narrative a
memorial communicates about the collective memory of those who created it requires more than an understanding of memorials and the remembered event; it is also necessary to consider the people and cultural landscape of that particular community.

The landscape is a common cache of collective histories. Shared histories within any group of people facilitate the development of traditions, customs, lifestyles, culture, a sense of being, and a sense of place (Nora 1989; Doss 2010; Schama 1995; Hoelscher and Alderman 2004). Yi-Fu Tuan explains that humans display sense of place when they, “apply their moral and aesthetic discernment to sites and locations” (Tuan 1979 p 446). Human geographers generally recognize two categories of landscapes, natural and cultural (Lewis 1979; Mitchell 2008). Natural landscapes, those unaltered by human intervention, are rare in the contemporary world, if they exist at all. One could juxtapose the notion of finding a natural landscape with Nora’s assertion that collective memories distort personal memory and therefore, places of true memory no longer exist on earth (1989). Humans have trodden on landscapes as remote as Mount Everest, simply because they are there (Lewis 1979). Similarly, humans have told, shared and merged memories so that no place could portray an unbiased narrative or exist on an unaltered landscape (Lewis 1979; Nora 1989). Therefore, it would seem acceptable to assume all places are cultural landscapes that tell an “unwitting autobiography” of the humans who created them as well those who altered them as an expression of power and control of place (Lewis 1979, 12; Nora 1989).

For those who take the time to read it, a cultural landscape “provides strong evidence of the kind of people we are, and were, and are in the process of becoming” (Lewis 1979, 15). To be sure, the routine actions of human’s everyday life played a major role in forming the local cultural landscape (Lewis 1979; Mitchell 2008; Sopher 1979). However, what/who controls the
everyday changes to the landscape? Peirce Lewis contends that the average person acts with free will when they modify the landscape. He asserts these changes are done “unwitting[ly]” can tell much about the person who made them and about the culture she/he belonged to (1979). Several years later, Don Mitchell revisited Dr. Lewis’ argument. Dr. Mitchell believes the making of and alteration to the cultural landscape by everyday people is “not so much our ‘unwitting autobiography’ (as Lewis puts it) as an act of will” (2008, 34). He believes instead of an act of free will, it is an act of forced and organized will created by social or corporate influences. In other words, entities of power and influence actually control the course of the cultural landscape. Both of these opinions seem to have merit. Within urban areas, regulations regarding management of the landscape are commonplace. On the other hand, rural counties with no zoning regulations are widespread. Therefore, it would be necessary to explore the perception of free will. Can a person have a will that is devoid of outside influences?

If a person or a group of people actually acted out of free will or controlled by imposed will, it remains true that through telling their history on the landscape, the evidence revealed about them can be paramount. The specific event(s) a community of people memorialize gives insight into their lives, lifestyles, value systems—indeed their very moral fabric. Similarly, what a community opts not to remember also presents strong cultural evidence of its value system (Lewis 1979; Mitchell 2008; Doss 2010, Foote 2003; Post, 2009).

Memorials and their associated monuments, markers, and/or statues purposefully and securely placed on the landscape are not just an acknowledgment of historic events, they also function to tell and maintain select collective histories (Hoelscher and Alderman 2004; Foote 2003; Doss 2010; Loewen 1999; Lowenthal 1979). Fueled by a growing desire to honor heroes and heroic acts, the need to understand and reconcile tragedies and the desire to establish the
historic narrative, the modern American landscape has become awash with public memorials
(Foote 2003; Doss 2010; Savage 2009; Kammen 1991; Alderman 2003). The United States has
not always been enthusiastic about public memorials.

Early in America’s history, the dominant perception of the upper echelon was disdain for
statues and/or monuments to tell the nation’s history. The new America was to be a nation
where an educated and enlightened citizenry could create and maintain a national historic
conscience through dialogue. Well into the mid-nineteenth century, official vision for a non-
memorial national memory lingered (Savage 2009). By that time, however, the populace was
succumbing to the spatial and material lure of physical public memorials (Savage 2009; Doss
2010). Thankfully, the homogenously social and educated citizenry that some early American
leaders assumed would dominate their new nation never materialized. Contemporary America is
a nation of citizens from extremely diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds
(Savage 2009; Doss 2010; Hoelscher and Alderman 2004; Harvey 1985).

Tragic events and violent acts stress the very moral fabric of a community. Kenneth
Foote realized that communal responses to tragedies follow a pattern. By establishing the
specific classifications of sanctification, designation, rectification, or obliteration, Dr. Foote was
able to add depth to the reading of landscapes of memory (2001). When a community
remembers a tragic event by placing a durable memorial on the landscape, in a public location
and honoring it with a dedication service followed by regular services of remembrance, the site is
one of sanctification. Designation of a site occurs when the community marks the site as
important to their collective memory. Designated sites may be dedicated but there is no regular
service to reanimate the memory of the event. Rectification comes about through the cleaning,
repairing and reuse of a site. While the memory of tragedy may be dear to the community,
ongoing need often mandates reuse of the site. Rectification is common following workplace accidents. Finally, obliteration of a site of tragedy or violence is the total destruction and removal of all aspects of the landscape that might trigger memory. Obliteration is common at sites of horrific events such as a mass murder. With the exception of obliteration, these classifications can be fluid, especially over time. A workplace disaster is a prime example. While initially it may command reuse, the site’s classification may later change to designation or even sanctification (Foote 2003).

Following a workplace disaster, the most common response is to cleaned up, repair and resume work. Through this process, the evidence of an accident can be lost or altered making it difficult to recall the event over time. Blue collar workers understand that all safety rule and procedures are written in blood. Therefore, the influences of exceptional bad accidents often only linger through work procedures rewritten to prevent future accidents. For that reason, if there is any durable memorialization to a workplace accident, it usually occurs many years after a disaster and is extremely rare (Foote 2003).

Just as America has evolved into a nation of citizens from extremely diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, so too have local communities (Doss 2010). Stressors of old tragic and violent acts do not always endure the test of time (Post 2009a; Doss 2010; Foote 2003). Memorials to such events, especially those designed to manifest a skewed narrative often outlive their purpose, as they no longer tell a historical narrative relevant in the present day (Post 2009a; Doss 2010; Foote 2003; Hoelscher and Alderman 2004). These memorials do not seem to fit into any established classification (Foote 2003). Once designated as worthy of memorialization on the cultural landscape such sites have lost their ability to attract attention from a public seemingly grown ambivalent about their existence (Post 2009a). For those who
would take the time to read these memorials on the landscape, they could fill in an historic segment of who we were (Lewis 1979). Unfortunately, for these memorials there seems to be little interest in them.

Control of a memorial’s narrative is coveted, contentious, and too often controlled by entities of wealth and power (Foote 2003; Doss 2010; Loewen 1999; Hoelscher and Alderman 2004). As America’s population grows more diverse, so does anguish for narrative control (Doss 2010). Historically, specific histories from oppressed communities: racial and social minorities, socioeconomic disadvantaged, the working class, and immigrants (to name only a few) have been largely absent from the national discourse (Doss 2010; DyLyser 1999; Peet 1996; Post 2008; Loewen 1999). In recent times, exclusionary rhetoric from the dominant power structure results in marginalized groups experiencing a deepening sense of isolation and despair, frequently resulting in “an obsession with issues of memory and history and an urgent desire to express and claim those issues in visibly public contexts” (Doss 2010, 2). Although rarely an easy task, influencing the narrative of memorials is one approach marginalized groups can use to insert their voice into the national narrative and onto the cultural landscape (Doss 2010; Foote 2003; Hoelscher and Alderman 2004).

Different landscapes of memory associated with one event often tell different and powerful narratives by what is included and excluded (Foote 2003; Post 2009; Doss 2010; Hoelscher and Alderman 2004). However, when a memorial blatantly distorts the historic event it represents, the interpreted narrative can rouse anger (Foote 2003; Peet 1996). Memorialization of the infamous Haymarket Riot is an example of a memorial’s distorted narrative and the power it can wield.
In 1886, the union workers at one of Chicago’s major industrial plants walked off their jobs as part of a nation-wide campaign for the eight-hour work day. Initially the protests were peaceful but on the third day, after the company brought in replacement workers, a riot erupted. Police intervention resulted in the deaths of at least two workers. The next day, near the end of a peaceful rally at the Haymarket Square, police reacted to the crowd’s alleged use of threatening language. The resulting confrontation quickly escalated to shear pandemonium when a bomb exploded within the police ranks. The police responded with gunfire. Details of who threw the bomb or of how many were injured remains unknown because many in the crowd fled the scene. However, police gunfire killed four demonstrators and injured hundreds of others. Additionally, seven police officers died and sixty injured. In a trial called “one of the greatest travesties in American justice,” seven of the eight accused union leaders were sentenced to death (Foote 2003, 135). Four of the seven were executed, two had their sentences commuted to life sentences, and one died from a suspicious suicide (Foote 2003; Dabakis 1994).

A social tragedy the magnitude of the Haymarket Riot unquestionably lends itself to memorialization and in doing so, the city exacerbated tensions between the police and much of the citizenry. Through a monument on Haymarket Square dedicated to the police, the city told a narrative of the police being martyrs and defenders of the city, while omitting the rally attendees, many of whom were Chicago citizens. At the same time, the city officials forbid the building of a monument to the laborer’s “martyrs” and their burial of within the city limits. To counter this ban, the labor unions built a monument at the burial site of their martyrs just outside Chicago’s limits in Forest Park.

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1 In 2004, the city of Chicago finally dedicated a new monument on the site of Haymarket that includes both narratives.
The purposefully voiced praise for the police and erasure of the crowd outraged much of the Chicago public. Consequently, the police monument has a long history of relentless damage and defacement until its relocation to the police academy, thereby never achieving its intended narrative of citizen containment. On the other hand, the labor monument in Forest Park remains a revered memorial landscape (Foote 2003; Dabakis 1994).

**Sense of Relocated Place in the Industrial Revolution**

Geographers have grappled with the concepts of space and place for more than two thousand years (Relph 1997). Simply put, for human beings, space is their physical surroundings, while place is their emotional connection to that space (Tuan 1996; Relph 1997). By interacting within the space they find themselves in, they develop both logical perceptions of that space, as well as emotional attachments to that space. Logical perceptions and emotional attachments to their space are the foundations for a principle human emotional condition known as sense of place (Tuan 1996; Post, 2011; Relph 1976; Hay 1998). A place becomes “part of a person” as she/he senses “feeling at home and secure there, with feelings of belonging for the place being one anchor for his/her identity” (Krupat 1983 p 1; Hay 1998 p 6). The phenomenon of sense of place is at the very core of humanistic geography study (Tuan 1979; Larsen & Johnson 2012).

The traditional thought was development of sense of place only came from years of residence. Furthermore, maintaining a viable sense of place required constant interaction with the location (Hay 1998). However, recent research is bringing into focus that relocated people can and do develop a strong sense of belonging and place (Tuan 1996; Post, 2011; Relph 1976; Hay 1998). For most of human history, people lived in close proximity to the places of their
childhood (Relph 1976). Traditionally long-term place residence constructed a sense of being rooted in place that evolved over one’s lifetime and was influenced by multi-generational understandings of ancestral history and cultural influences (Hay 1998). Therefore, relocation from one’s traditional space would disrupt this evolutionary process thus leaving only a fragmented sense of place. Childhood experiences, then, no longer could act as a baseline for perception of place. While connections to the place of one’s upbringing remain important, they become “more nostalgic in character” (Hay 1998, p 6).

By the mid-nineteenth century, widespread economic changes, prompted directly and indirectly by the Industrial Revolution, forced large segments of the population to migrate for employment (Harvey 1985; Pollard 1965). This unprecedented movement of people tested traditional acceptance of long-term place residence as being a necessity for establishing sense of place. Unexpectedly, relocated workers and their families frequently developed a strong sense of place for their new environments (Post 2011; Mould 1985; Marsh 1987; Robertson 2006).

The majority of contemporary Americans are members of the working class (Zweig 2011). The advent of the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent shifting from primarily individual and/or small group work environments to large industrial work environments radically changed the mode of production of goods as well as the lives of workers who produced goods, and by doing so, created a new class of workers (Harvey 1985; Pollard 1962). Centrally located factories were able to produce goods much faster and much cheaper than the former system of localized individual work or small shops. Around the same time, a transformation of the nation’s transportation system, first through a system of canals and subsequently through a system of railroads, allowed for greater efficiency in distributing goods over wide areas. Ultimately, large-
scale manufacturing coupled with a rapidly improving mass transportation system presented un conquerable odds that greatly reduced localized production (Shackel & Palus, 2006).

For generations, prior to industrialization, an individual’s livelihood resulted from work performed on a small scale, usually within their immediate community (Pollard, 1962). Workers were actually artisans who used their collective store of memories and histories acquired from mentors and personal experience to specialize in one craft (Nora, 1989; Pollard, 1965). In addition to being able to make their living from what was, most likely, a gratifying vocation, the skilled worker lived within the same community their entire life (Harvey 1985; Pollard 1963). This combination of stability in vocation and location afforded one a traditional long-term sense of place that is important to human emotional stability (Hay 1998). In the end though, large-scale industrialization presented unassailable economic advantages that forced the downfall of widespread small localized production, thus driving thousands of idled workers to the factories where they were converted from skilled individuals—who had relied on collective memories and knowledge to exist—to “things…mere cogs in a system” (Harvey, 1985 p 49; Nora, 1989).

For all but the most remote groups, the relatively rapid transformation to factory and mechanized labor created a paradigm shift in how workers worked (Harvey 1985; Pollard 1963). No longer was an occupation an avocation that defined oneself; work in the factory was, by design, performed without mental engagement (Harvey, 1985; Pollard 1965; Braverman, 1975). Moving from vocation to mere employment necessitated rejection of old work traits like self-determination and using collective memory and necessitated acceptance of new work demands like obedience and following job rules/procedures (Pollard, 1965; Harvey, 1985; Nora, 1989). David Harvey uses the word “inculcation” to describe how the factory establishment transformed former independent workers into “mere cogs in a system” (1985, p 49).
For the worker who had known the independence of self-driven vocation, the regimented work environment of the factory was a foreign concept that was difficult to accept. Driven by economic need, workers endured factory management’s inculcation techniques of fear, force, and compulsion in the forms of repeated threats, intimidation, training, and incentives for creating a new discipline (Harvey, 1985; Pollard, 1965). The management’s approach of discipline proved to be somewhat successful but fully acclimatizing factory workers to their new working conditions would require continuous discipline. Therefore, what factory supervision needed and actively sought was a panopticon way to (trans)form workers into a new class of working people who would self-control themselves on the job (Harvey, 1985; Pollard, 1962, Foucault, 1977). To that end, management launched a crusade to create a new class of workers who would adhere to an ethic of “values of honesty, reliability, respect for authority, obedience to laws and rules, respect for property and contractual agreements.” Avenues of education, religion, loyalty, patriotism and humanitarianism were some of the means used to achieve this new work ethic with a little “paternalism of the industrialist often thrown into the balance” (Harvey, 1985 p 49; Pollard, 1965).

Transitioning from tradition work to factory work not only brought radical changes to the ways workers worked; it also brought radical changes to the ways they lived. David Harvey observes, “[w]orking and living cannot entirely be divorced from each other. What happens in the workplace cannot be forgotten in the living place” (1985, p.48). Traditional occupations like the domestic workshop or domestic farming trades had allowed a working/living place, where activities of home and work blended to form a homogeneous life experience. Leaving domestic occupations for employment in the new industrial system alienated the workplace from the living place (Harvey, 1965; Pollard, 1963).
Accepting David Harvey’s explanation of what happens in the workplace will always influence the living place; the radical changes workers experienced in the workplace caused radical changes their living place (1985). Changes in home life, and their accompanying stressors were invasive, but arguably, the greatest change many families faced was relocation—often to different countries and continents (Pollard 1965; Krupat 1983). Edward Relph coined the term “placelessness” to describe the condition where humans cannot fulfill their need to associate with familiar places (1976). As laborers and their families entered the industrial workforce, they often faced dual anxieties, first from a sense of placelessness that accompanies most any relocation, and second, from being forced into a controlled model of community living—the company town (Dinius and Vergara 2011; Heord 2011; Mould 1985).

Company towns, at their most basic, are communities built and controlled by employers, usually corporate, to house workers for a particular industrial operation (Dinius and Vergara 2011; Heord 2011; Mould 1985). These communities were environments designed to manipulate both the spatial and social aspects of the community thereby establishing a paternalistic influence over their worker/residents (Dinius and Vergara 2011; Herod 2011). Company towns are stereotypically considered (often rightfully so) to be places of dehumanizing conditions, poverty and despair. Therefore, on the surface it may seem surprising that recent research indicates company town residents, through intense spatial experience, often developed a sense of belonging, a sense of home—a sense of place, as strong as childhood based ones (Post 2011; Mould 1985; Marsh 1987; Robertson 2006). In fact, this sense of placeness could be so robust that many company towns continue to exist as communities long after the company leaves (Mould 1985; Post 2008; Post 2011; Robertson 2006; Dinius and Vergara 2011).
Methods of Research

Memorialization of any tragic event takes time to manifest. The September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the crash in the Pennsylvania are tragedies where popular consensus centers on how to memorialize, not if. Even so, final recognition on these landscapes took ten years be realized. When placing memorials to local tragic events, especially those of workplace origins, the time span between the event and final memorialization may take several decades (Foote 2003). The mining accident associated with my case study occurred in 1930. However, it was not until 1975, forty-five years later, that the local community finally erected a permanent monument in the village listing the names of the victims.

Considering this project’s historic nature, archival researching was my primary source of data. The United States is rich with archival collections and libraries and most research done today in historical geography is archival (Grim, Rumney, and McIlwraith 2001). My principal objective in researching archival resources, especially the aforementioned newspaper articles, will be for statements of opinion from the public.

A person who seeks out new pathways for the sole purpose of seeing where they go and what is along the way has the makings of a geographer—that is me. Introduced to geography in the fifth grade, it soon became my favorite subject. I was fascinated with lands foreign to me (outside southwestern Ohio), their people, and their landscape. However, after high school I followed the legacy of my working class community and my blue collar family into the mills—in my case a steel mill. Even during my one year as a full-time, traditional aged college student, I opted for an industry based program, never realizing that geography was an option. Fortunately, the local industrial facility I choose was one that survived, thus allowing me to retire. Soon after retirement, I went back to school where, this time, I decided to pursue geography.
My thirty-year tenure in the steel industry plays an important role in this thesis. I worked in the coking facility, a dangerous and toxic operation that handles, stores, and uses coal. I have been in coal bins, and below underground conveyor lines. I know what it is like when, at the end of the day, the only clean place on your body is respirator shaped. I know what it is like to work in such environment before respirators. I know what it is have the same co-workers day-after-day for years and I understand that the resulting comradery that develops from this type of contact is not unlike that of a family. I understand the mindset of blue-collar workers. I know the jargon. Most importantly, I was a safety representative who responded to and investigated serious and fatal accidents. I comprehend the loss of fellow workers in the same facility, including ones I knew personally. Therefore, coupling my growing awareness of geographical concepts concerning human-to-landscape and landscape-to-human associations with my experience as a blue-collar worker, positions me well for this study.

One method I used to determine a sense of local opinion concerning the memorialization of the local workplace disaster was field research that included semi-structured interviews. Interviews, while a small part of the data-gathering segment of this project, resulted in data that is significant for determining how the explosion and memorialization influences the community. All interviews were voluntary and resulted from chance meetings with residents of the study communities. I saw no need to collect any identifying data for any of these interviews, as the goal is to achieve a subjective sense of the interviewee’s connection with the study memorial. Semi-structured interviews have an advantage of being able to obtain knowledge of an interviewee’s perceptions (Anderson 2004).

Obtaining a blue collar interviewee’s perceptions is a difficult task. Charles Spencer understands the reluctance of the blue collar worker be interviewed by outsiders:
But how does the professional, bent on studying the world of work, break through the blue collar’s deep-seated mistrust of investigators? Is it surprising that they (the blue collar workers) suspect they are being hustled even when the most charming interviewer solicits their views about matters which they have never before been consulted? And that their responses are guarded or geared to what they conceived to be the fixed rules of the game? Give ’em what they want (Spencer 1977 p. 10).

I was successful in establishing a connection with such interviewees by acknowledging my own working class background, my thirty years in the steel industry and my experience with workplace tragedy including fatal accidents of workers, some I knew personally. Once they were at ease with me, nearly all the people I talked with in Millfield were open and willing to engage in conversation, especially when the topic was the memorial and the mine.

One impressive example using the archival research method is Dydia DeLyser’s work on the first woman to stake a claim in the Oklahoma land rush (2008). The story of this woman and her method in staking her land claim evolved into a local folk legend. Juxtaposing the legend with archival data allows Dr. DeLyser to portray an historic event accurately that is uncommonly enjoyable to read. For me, mixing archival data with first-person narratives from local interviews provides an unusual historical research opportunity.

As with any research method, archives are not without problems. Being predominantly historic written and photographic documents, one pitfall associated with archival research is any narrative of history changes with each (re)telling and (re)writing (Nora 1989). Minimizing the chances for misinformation in the archives will require researching different documents from different sources as much as possible to be able to detect inconsistencies and find communalities.
Unfortunately, for the Millfield case study, archives are limited. Finding enough collaborating accounts of events to accurately detect inconsistencies and find communalities proved that be somewhat problematic. Therefore, I had to accept some archival data at face value.

Again, understanding a memorial’s potential influence on its local community requires more than an understanding of memorials and the remembered event; it is also necessary to consider the people and cultural landscape of that particular community. Establishing a way of knowing that is appropriate for reading the people and the cultural landscape often requires a blending of accepted geographic approaches (Aitken and Valentine 2006). Humanist geography focuses on interactions between people and the landscape, thus forming the cultural landscape (Entrikin and Tepple 2006; Rodaway 2006; Lewis 1979, 12; Mitchell 2008). Studies of cultural landscapes, like the one of Millfield, that result, primarily, from capital intervention of industrial activity and the resulting influx of labor, are best understood by a Marxist approach (Henderson and Sheppard 2006; Harvey 1985). Establishing an understanding of how memorialization of a workplace disaster defined and continues to define a local community required a blending of Humanist and Marxist approaches.
CHAPTER 3

Historic Background of a Mining Disaster

Millfield

The United States achieved independence in 1783 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris. In addition to granting freedom from British rule, the treaty allocated previously claimed lands located west of the colonies to the new country. Both American citizens and new immigrants began migrating to the Northwest Territory including the Ohio country. One Massachusetts-based land company, The Ohio Company of Associates, acquired initial Anglo European control of 1.2 million acres in what is now southeast Ohio for settlement by New Englanders. Therefore, the ethnic makeup of the first Anglo-European settlements in the area was similar to that of the New England colonies, primarily western European—English, German, Irish and Welsh². The southeastern region of Ohio was settled early (Wilhelm & Noble 1996). In fact, growth in this area was so dynamic that by 1803, a mere twenty years after American independence, Ohio became a state and by 1804 the population was sufficient to support the regions first institute of higher education, Ohio University.

Founded in 1818, Millfield is located in the southeastern Ohio county of Athens. The initial population of Millfield, named for its large grist mill, was an ethnically consistent group of New Englanders who quickly created a diverse commerce landscape, one well suited for self-sufficiency. By 1823, in addition to the mill, local businesses included two blacksmith shops, two stores, a wagon shop, a cobbler shop, a coffin factory, a tanner shop, a carpenter shop and a coopers shop (Kozma n.d.). A survey of Sanborn Maps for mid-nineteenth rural eastern Ohio villages reveals such diverse commerce was typical. Millfield, however, did not keep its thriving

² This brief and generalized account focuses only on Anglo-European settlement. This narrative is in no way inclusive of all people or situations involved at this geographic place and in this historic moment.
commerce landscape for long. While there is photographic evidence of the grist mill operating as late as 1900 (Figure 1), a major fire sometime around 1824 destroyed “most of the businesses” and were “never rebuilt” (Kozma n.d. p. 35).

![Figure 1: Mill at Millfield around 1900](image)

**Figure 1: Mill at Millfield around 1900**
Source: The Little Cities Archive

After the fire, it is unclear how Millfield economically survived without the businesses that never rebuilt. It is safe to assume that vital businesses returned. Completion of the railroad through town during that time played a role in Millfield’s survival. Farming was, and still is, a minor player in the area’s economy. The old and depleted soils of southeastern Ohio combined with the rugged topography limited access to valley and ridge top areas and made farming difficult (Redmond 1996). One key resource the Appalachian region of Ohio had was coal. Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, private mines dotted the landscape of the Hocking Coal Field (Figure 2). Operated by individuals or families, these mines were usually small ones
operated to provide heat, for cooking and possibly operate a family business. Some of the private mines were large enough to supply coal to the local market, including the university ten miles to the south.

![Figure 2: The Hocking Coalfield](image)

**Source:** Coal Campus USA

Corporate coal mining came to Millfield in 1903 when the Poston Coal Company opened their #7 coal mine. Named for the #7 coal vein it exploited, this mine was a slope mining operation. The slope mining technique retrieves coal from a relatively shallow vein. Slope mining is an underground operation that uses a sloped passage way from the surface to the vein. On the surface, access to the mine was through a tunnel opening in the side of the hill or a hole in the flat ground. A sloped passage eliminates the need for complicated hoisting apparatuses that a shaft mine requires. All miners can gain entry to the work area at the same by walking the slope. Additionally, the slope allowed the extraction of coal by means of horse or mule power—some small operations actually used dogs. Ultimately, the workable coal face of the #7 vein was too far from the opening and hard to access, therefore, Poston sunk a shaft at #7.
Mostly forgotten today, the #7 mine operated for approximately thirty years and brought three major changes to Millfield that play vital roles in redefining the community. First, to transport its product to the market, the Poston Company had to construct a two mile long railroad spur track up the Jackson Run creek valley to tie in with the main railroad line south of Millfield. This railroad spur was later instrumental in both deciding where to place the #6 mine and for businesses that would follow the closure of the mines. Second, staffing the mine required a larger workforce than the local area could provide, therefore in addition to constructing the mine, the company built a housing community between the mine site and the existing village. Third, an influx of mostly eastern Europeans immigrates arrived to work the mine and occupy the company houses, thereby changing the ethnic makeup of the area. Overall, 1903 was more than the beginning of corporate mining in Millfield, it was also the inception of dynamic social and economic changes that would shape the community from that time forward.

From its very beginning, Millfield was a town reliant on a large business operation, the grist mill, but was not a company town in the purest sense. The grist mill was still in operation when the Poston Coal Company opened their #7 mine and built East Millfield, their company housing community. East Millfield was unlike most other company built housing towns in that it had no support infrastructure for the residents. Poston all but took over the existing village of Millfield to supply the needs, both material and social, of their workers. One woman, an elementary school student in 1930, told me that the camp (East Millfield) had public water wells at every other street corner, but for all everything else, you had to “cross the crick” as the Sunday Creek runs north to south between Millfield and East Millfield. Millfield became the social and economic center of mining community. In other words, the non-company town of Millfield
became a “transformed company town,” reliant on two large business operations, the mill and the coal mine (Porteous 1970, 131).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most company towns associated with mining in the Appalachian area, including southeastern Ohio, were actually two or more small separate sub-communities, ones that were racially and/or ethnically segregated (Buckley 2004). The company backed living arrangements at Millfield were no different. Not only was there separate housing for those of Western Europeans ancestry in the Millfield proper and Eastern Europeans ancestry in East Millfield (still referred to by many residents I talked to as “Hunky Town”), but there was also a settlement for Africans and those of African descent. No visible sign of the latter remains today and residents can only guess of its approximate location.

With the exception of the time spent in the workplace, segregated sub-communities within larger single communities allowed for little ethnic interaction. Intense spatial interaction is at least as powerful in shaping a sense of relocated place as childhood spatial interaction is for developing initial sense of place (Post 2011; Mould 1985; Marsh 1987; Robertson 2006). While segregation by ethnicity and isolation by location was surely dehumanizing and demoralizing for the residents, the sub-community arrangement may have contributed to the relatively rapid development of a sense of place that occurred in company towns. The Millfield company town(s) arrangement was one of segregated living locations combined with one common area for all social and economic activities. Thus, the residents could experience spatial immersion in their living areas while, at the same time, interacting with the other local ethnic groups. Ultimately, this combination provided residents to not only develop and sense of home place for their living area, but a sense of community place for the entire Millfield area.
The survivors of the mine disaster era who grew up in East Millfield remember an enjoyable childhood, which is rare, but experienced in a few company towns (Post 2009). At the annual service in 2012, one woman reminisced about the pleasant times she had growing up in East Millfield. She recalled how families would meet and visit in the evening at the corner water wells, about neighbors gathering on front porches and the fun she had had playing and sledding with her friends on the coal waste piles (gobs). Another youngster of the town, who later become a miner in the #6 mine, spends the majority of his autobiography fondly recalling his childhood in East Millfield.

By 1909, The Poston Coal Company was looking to increase production and access a different grade of product. Lying about 125 feet directly under the #7 vein was the #6 coal vein. Poston took advantage of their existing mining and railroad infrastructure when deciding where to locate a new mine. Therefore, they reworked the existing infrastructure of their #7 mine, sunk a new shaft and opened the new #6 mine in 1911.

The United Mine Workers of America union initially represented the mines who worked the #6 mine and when a contract expired in 1927, the workers went on strike. The company and the union never agreed on a settlement so the strike lasted until union-supplied benefits ran out at the end of 1928. Poston then reopened #6 early in 1929 as a non-union mine. The mines remained non-union until the enactment of the National Recovery Act of 1933 when the mine once again unionized and remained that way until it permanently closed in May of 1945 (Millfield Mine Disaster 1977).

Poston’s #6 mine at Millfield, according to the Millfield Mine Disaster booklet, was “the largest, best and most completely equipped coal mine operating in the Hocking Valley” (1977, 4). Millfield was like most mining communities in that as the mines fared, so fared the villages.
The success of the local mines translated into Millfield once again supporting a thriving and diverse economic landscape. Bert Kozma recalled in his memoirs, “[w]hen the mines were working good in the early twenties, there were seven grocery stores, a barber shop, blacksmith shop, soda and ice cream parlor, pool room, two churches, one saloon, one auto repair garage and a ball park with a grandstand. The company store was the biggest” (35).

By the mid to late 1920s, the largest, best and most completely equipped mine was beginning to suffer from age and lack of maintenance. At the same time, being idled by a strike resulted in a period of no upkeep from early April 1927 to the beginning of 1929 which exacerbated the deteriorating condition of the mine. In September of 1929, when the Sunday Creek Coal Company assumed ownership of Poston #6, it was in very poor condition. Twenty-four years earlier, five major coal companies consolidated to form the second largest coal company in the world—the Sunday Creek Coal Company. Consequently, when Sunday Creek took over the operations of Poston #6 in 1929, they had the fiscal ability to restore and improve it. That is exactly what they did.

**Sunday Creek Mine #6 Explosion**

Sunday Creek mine #6 was getting back on track by late 1930. In the early twentieth century, there was little stockpiling of coal. Mines operated only when there was demand so it was common for coal mines to be idle for most of the summer. Throughout October, the mine operated only three days each week. Sunday Creek used the late summer and early autumn slow time to complete repairs to the mine. By early November, the company had addressed all items cited by the state inspector. In addition to repairs, the new company’s focus on safety required
other renovations including a new air supply shaft. Only one item remained unfinished, the fan for the new air shaft (Crowell 1995).

On an unseasonably cold Wednesday, November 5, 1930, the president and vice president of the Sunday Creek Coal Company, the president’s assistant, the mine’s superintendent, the mine’s chief engineer, the superintendent of Ohio Power, the superintendent of Columbia Cement and his assistant joined 231 workers assigned to mine #6. The president and his party were there to inspect the recent repairs, new safety improvements and an old work area that was to reopen. For the miners, it was another day of routine work. At approximately 11:45 AM, a rock fall in an unused area of the mine severed the electrical cable for the trolley system. The electric cable dropped onto the steel trolley rail creating in a short circuit\(^3\). The resulting electrical arc ignited a buildup of methane gas and coal dust with great explosive force.

The explosion resulted in the largest loss of life in any mining accident in Ohio’s history—eighty two. At most any other time of the workday, this explosion would have resulted in a larger death count. As it was, not all the workers had yet reentered the mine after the lunch break. Only two miners died directly from the explosion. Six others died from burns and afterdamp\(^4\) while the other seventy-four died of afterdamp, including all in the official party. The other one hundred forty in the mine survived the explosion (Ohio Department of Commerce).

Sunday Creek mine #6 had the reputation of being one of the safest mines in the Hocking area. To be sure, top officials of the company would not have invited guests to accompany them

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\(^3\) While contrary to the physical evidence, the possibility a worker’s open flame (carbide) light triggering the explosion never was ruled out.

\(^4\) Afterdamp is a deadly buildup of irrespirable gases consisting of primary carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen that follow an explosion in a mine. Radom House Dictionary of the English Language 2nd ed, s.v. “afterdamp.”
if they had any bit of reservation regarding their safety. Ironically, the safety feature the official party most anticipated inspecting, the new air shaft, was the one not yet in service.

Investigators from Ohio’s Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Mines found several conditions coalesced to intensify the explosion. The electric power to the trolley system in unused sections of the mine remained energized when “there was no reason whatever for power being on the line” (42). Maintenance work performed a week earlier necessitated removal of a brattice.⁵ An automatic door designed to replace the brattice was on-site but uninstalled. These two situations caused a short-circuiting of air that allowed gas to build. Finally, regular inspections of old and idled parts of the mine did not happen. The explosion occurred in one of these areas.

No one directed blame in the direction of the visit by company officials. However, contributing circumstances to the accident may have resulted from their planned visit. The mine foreman insisted his fire bosses not make routine inspections of old work (idled) areas so they could “do more important things” (Ohio 29). From personal experience, I know that postponing preplanned work to prepare for official visits is commonplace, especially in inherently dirty workplaces. The Ohio Department of Commerce’s final report cited the lack of inspection in the old work area as possible contributing factor to the explosion and addressed it in their final list of recommendations (see appendix A).

The Aftermath of the Explosion

The community of Millfield reacted quickly to the initial news of the explosion and speculation that everyone underground was dead. Ohio Bell employees acting on their own

issued and coordinated distress calls for outside help as the community dropped what they were doing and gathered at the mine’s tipple area to await word from below. Relief swept throughout the crowd when a group of six emerged from the new air shaft, proving incorrect the initial rumor of no survivors. However, anxiety quickly returned as the miner’s first-hand account of the situation below was bad, very bad. Sigmund Kozma, a survivor who reached the surface three hours after the explosion, recalled the scene at the tipple (Figure3):

Immediately after the explosion, it was chaos, as you can imagine because so many families had lost a member of the family in the explosion. Of course, you know, even when one person dies, the rest of the neighbors and friends and relatives are all there and they try to support you as best way they can. But when there are so many, so much of it, so many of them—you can imagine what a chaotic time that was (Zimmerman 2008).

Figure 3: Community waits for news from below
Source: The Little Cities Archive

Outside response to the distress calls was phenomenal. One resident, a grade school student that day, told me the traffic caused by outsiders was so heavy, all the students had to wait in the schoolhouse for the police to come escort them across the road. Rescue teams and
equipment from the Bureau of Mines along with a specially trained team from West Virginia coordinated to bring victims out of the mine. In donated hospital railroad cars, an army of volunteer doctors and nurses staffed a MASH-like operation. Two companies of the National Guard aided the nearly 3000 people, many were family members of miners, waiting for news from below and to see who the rescue teams retrieved next (Figure 4).

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 4: Recovering bodies from the Millfield mine**
Source: Athens County Historical Society

Ten hours after the accident, a group of nineteen survivors was found alive. They had sought refuge behind a brattice that protected them from the gas filled air in the passageways and main shafts. Early Thursday, the rescuers preformed a final head only to find there were still four miners missing. The last four bodies were brought up to the surface around midnight Thursday, thirty-six hours after the explosion. The community of Millfield and East Millfield was overwhelmed. As Sigmund Kozma remembers:

Everywhere you look, throughout the camp and almost every house was touched by death. You get kinda numb to the fact that there were so many dead people in one place like that and that it happened that suddenly—that was the thing that bothered me more than
anything. It was hard to realize that could occur like that—as young as I was. It was just terrible—there was so much death and so huge that everybody was numb for weeks. (Zimmerman 2008).

Local newspaper reporters grappled with the very core of their profession, words, as they attempted convey the situation in Millfield (as have I). On November 6, the day after the explosion, The Athens Messenger admitted, “No one can describe the emotion in the hearts of those who waited and prayed about the opening of that mine. It cannot be described.” The reporter was able to describe the scene in the chilling final lines of the feature, “The scenes above ground as the dead were brought to the open air are those none of us wish to ever look upon again. In the eerie light of incandescent there was movement and whispers, cries of joy and dry sobs of despair.” On November 8, the newspaper of a neighboring coal town, The San Toy Times Reporter, cut to the chase in an article about the number of (then) recent multiple death accidents in the coal mines, “…more than half of the male earning power of Millfield was snuffed out by an explosion…” Recounts of heroism continued to appear in the news for weeks. A lengthy feature in the December 28 edition of The Athens Messenger recalled how Ohio Bell operators who, on the day of the explosion, acted on their own to contact the authorities and call for outside rescue help. The same article went on to detail how Ohio Bell linesmen who, without work-orders, raced to the site to provide emergency phone service.

There was national coverage of the explosion in Sunday Creek’s #6 coal mine. The New York Times and The Washington Post followed the story for a few days. Science magazine, dated November 14, used the Millfield mine explosion in an article promoting the benefits of rock-dusting. One Millfield resident I spoke with at the memorial service seemed proud that Millfield had been in the national spotlight, at least for a short while.
A community stricken by an overwhelming tragic event naturally experiences an initial sense of helplessness and despair that coalesces to the emotion of grief. In modern times, temporary memorials appear within hours of the event as the community begins the grieving process. In 1930, a more traditional response to grief was to, immediately, organize and plan ways to memorialize and honor the victims of tragedies (Doss 2010). Erika Doss explains that this virtually immediate reaction to memorialize results from an “expression of deep emotional anguish, usually about death and loss” (2010, 80). One member of the community whose uncle perished in the mine told me that as the rescue operations were still underway, members of the community gathered to vow never to forget this day and those who had died. Additionally, the community, with the help of the United Mine Workers, held a memorial service at the Majestic Theater in Athens on November 23, 1930. The service was a huge affair with over 800 in attendance agreed to a motion to honor the victims through an annual service. Even though declaration to continue the memory of the victims occurred twice—realization of this motion, like the vows made by the community during the rescue, took forty-three years.

By 1973, one veteran of the Millfield Mine Company and a volunteer rescuer the day of the explosion had enough of watching the fifth of November past unnoticed year after year and formed the Millfield Mine Memorial Committee. The committee’s initial goal was the placement of some type of memorial on the landscape (*The Athens Messenger* n.d.). The committee consisted of several survivors of the explosion and their families. While several earlier attempts to memorialize the mine disaster, they had all ended in discouragement over not being able to secure adequate funding. This time interest in the community, aided by national interest in the nation’s upcoming bicentennial celebration, was sufficient for the committee to raise enough funds to plan a stone memorial in Millfield. The committee also organized the first
annual memorial service for the Saturday nearest to November 5 each year. Not all of the committee’s ambitions came to fruition.

One major goal of the Millfield Mine Memorial Committee was to establish a museum of the mine disaster and to build on the site of the mine. While they were never able to negotiate a means to house a museum of their desired location, they were successful in opening a museum. The museum was originally located in a building on the Hocking College campus in Nelsonville, Ohio. In 2010, Hocking College donated the building and financed a move to the village of Buchtel. The Millfield Mine Disaster museum has mostly artifacts of coal mining in the early to mid-twentieth century, a scale model of the iconic tipple and a collection of newspaper clipping surrounding the infamous explosion. The final location of this museum demonstrates the wide-ranging influence the Millfield mine disaster had on the region.

The Millfield mine disaster rewrote the history of this entire community as well as the history of miners throughout Ohio. At the 2012 memorial service, I found out how the accident unified the town when one resident started to explain how the community had been a conglomeration of three ethnically and racially divided sub communities. Another person sitting at the church table completed the thought by explaining how ethnic divisions went away that day. In 2008, Sigmund Kozma explained, “Everywhere you look, throughout the camp and almost every house was touched by death,” that day, Millfield’s definition of neighbors expanded to include all (Zimmerman).

Within one month of the explosion, Sunday Creek reopened the mine and continued operations for another fourteen and one half years. In 2008, the last living survivor Sigmund Kozma said, “but of course, eventually mining towns being what they are and how there situated and everything as far as work and living situations. Things get back to normal and the mines
open up again and they start working and eventually, gradually, people begin to live normal lives—miners lives, coal miners lives” (Zimmerman 2008).

By the 1940s, profitability of coal mining in the Hocking Coal Field was dwindling. In fact, 1945 was the terminal year for most of the larger coal mining operations the Appalachian area (Buckley 2004). On May 9, 1945, the Millfield Mine #6 ceased operations. Citing market prices, need for reinvestment, and especially union labor wage demands (See Appendix II), the company stopped mining and “abandon[ed] this operation” (The Athens Messenger May 9, 1945). In the community of Millfield, the day must have been bittersweet as the miners all lost their jobs on the same day their country declared victory in Europe. With the once impressive Poston/Sunday Creek Coal Company Mine #6 mine no longer producing coal, the mine site of the became solely the site of the Millfield Mine Disaster.

![Figure 5: Millfield mine complex](source: GenDisasters)
CHAPTER 4

Landscapes of Memory and their Narratives

The Mine Site

In the village of Millfield, the intersection of Main Street and Millfield Road and the surrounding area serves as the primary place where this community gathers on a regular basis. Lured by the community’s only church on one side of Main Street and the postal-box type post office on the other, the vast majority of this rural community’s inhabitants visit this area weekly, if not a daily. As Millfield Road exits the village to the east, it intersects this thesis as it passes though the town of East Millfield and on to the infamous #6 mine, all within a distance of one mile.

One half mile east of Millfield is the town The Poston Coal Company built in 1900 to house immigrant workers, East Millfield. Initially constructed for the first mining operation in the area, the #7 mine, East Millfield later housed workers of the #6 mine. The company housing days remain observable in modern-day East Millfield, as several of the houses are the ones that are original to the town (Figure 6).

With the mine’s tipple and smoke stack always in sight and with all its residents dependent on the company for their existence, East Millfield, like all of Millfield, was totally defined by the nearby mine. In November of 1930, the explosion that blew through the shafts of the mine also blew apart most of the households in East Millfield.
One half mile east of East Millfield stands a tall, dark roadside historic marker proclaiming an otherwise easily missed historic site as the place of the “Millfield Coal Mine
Disaster” (Figure 7). In its past, the Poston/Sunday Creek mine #6 was the largest, busiest and best maintained mining operation in the area (Crowell 1995). However, time’s transition to the present has also transitioned this once impressive mine and its surface supporting structures into a crumbing relic of a site, not unlike a scene from an apocalyptic movie. The once bustling and productive mine site is now a privately-owned quiet woods and the valley where railcars carried coal down the spur and out to the market, is now a farm field. At first glance, large round hay/straw bales stacked three high at the edge of the woods are arguably the old mine site’s most visually striking feature. Viewed from the road, volunteer trees that are only a few seasons away from besting the once impressive and towering smoke stack along with collapsing wall segments present a visual impression of communal ambivalence toward of the site. A closer examination reveals a pile of decomposing lumber that, in the past, was an impressive tipple.

David Lowenthal tells us, “As the past decays, both on the ground and in our memories, we make the most of those relics that survive” (1979, 109). From the road, it is hard to see how this community is making the best of these remaining relics. Time is taking its toll as the once impressive structures are slowly but surely self-demolishing (Figures 8 & 9).
It is not surprising the remaining relics are decaying. Built over 110 years ago, the buildings have not functioned as designed for almost seventy years. In 1903, the Poston Coal
Company leased this site, opened the #7 mine and added the #6 mine in 1911. In 1929, the Sunday Creek Coal Company acquired the coal rights and took over operations. With no claim to the physical site, when the company permanently closed the mine in May of 1945, they just walked away. At that historic moment, it was common practice in the hocking coalfield for companies to abandon their mining operations and leave the facilities to decay. On the other hand, Millfield Mine #6 is the site of the deadliest mining accident in Ohio’s history and thus is not a common mine.

On the surface, this landscape of memory seemingly narrates a history best left forgotten. With the exception of the thirty-four year old historic roadside marker, the mine site today appears forgotten and forlorn. In February of 2013, the 178 feet deep main mine shaft caved in creating a large sink hole. However, the roadside marker is a big exception, one that not only hints of the tragedy that occurred there, but suggests the existence of a deeper local emotional connection to the site.

D. W. Meinig understands that, “any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads” (1979, 34). Therefore, it is understandable that my working background influenced my initial reaction to the site. When I saw the crumbling building walls and the smokestack, I saw boilers and wondered what type they were, I saw operators and wondered what their work was like. One of my work stations was in an early twentieth century power generating station, so I felt connection there. Stepping up to read the roadside marker changed what the landscape was saying to me. I no longer was just seeing with my beholding eye, I was receiving this place’s history through the narrative that those who placed this memorial intended (Meinig 1979).
The deteriorated condition of the relics on the landscape and the short message on the
historic marker, however, limit the narrative the landscape is able to convey. Even for my eye,
skewed towards old work sites, without the marker it would be impossible to discern what type
of industry once worked there. The most identifiable feature of any mine remains hidden below
the surface. To me, the relics left on the surface would indicate a foundry or machine shop. For
this particular cultural landscape, obtaining an understanding of the memorialized event and its
connection to the community required extended research.

Peirce Lewis informs that true understanding of an historic landscape can only come
through understanding the historic context of those who created it (1979). The historic context
of this site obviously starts with the construction of the mines and the company housing. The
miners and their families who immigrated for work and occupied the company housing may have
been ethnically different than the established residents of Millfield, but they would soon be in the
same socioeconomic class, the working class. Unique to Millfield is that residents can tell how
the across-the-community horror of the explosion unified the community. Because of this
experience, it is reasonable to assume that Millfield was more harmonious than most small
towns. Therefore, any (re)creation of culture on the landscape is indicative of the majority of the
community.

Don Mitchell complicates Lewis’ position by further detailing how when reading the
cultural landscape, it is important to understand those who (re)create it, are always constrained
by outside influences. Furthermore, those influences always skew the narrative that landscape
ultimately tells (2008). When it comes to managing the narrative of this mine site, the
community of Millfield has always been constrained by one major influence; the mine is on
private land. Privately owned property discourages community development of and involvement
with the site. In the case of Millfield Mine, the owner is very protective of the site and concerned about potential injury to the public on the property and, considering the overnight appearance of a sink hole in 2013, rightfully so (Ron Luce, e-mail message to author, Oct. 1, 2014).

From the day of the infamous explosion, the site of mine #6 has been an important landscape for the community of Millfield. The mine reopened and supported the community for almost fifteen years. After the mine closed, the non-beholding eye might assume the site contributed little to the community (Meinig 1979). That is hardly the case. The railroad spur initially installed before the turn of the century to service the mines, continued to stimulate Millfield’s economy after the closing of the mine. Beginning in the early 1950s, an aggregate distributing operation used the Poston installed railroad and by doing so, contributed to the local economy. Although no longer open, a video filmed in 2008, shows the aggregate business in operation (Zimmerman). Arguably, this business’s most important contribution to Millfield was how it to advertised its location as Millfield Mine #6. Including a connection to the mine in their advertisements kept the site of the disaster in the public discourse during the time before formal memorialization.

A tipple is the iconic visual symbol of a coal mine, not unlike the Eiffel Tower is the commonly recognized symbol of Paris or more appropriately, a large natural-draft cooling tower signifies a nuclear-fueled generating plant. In a news release dated August 19, 2009, the government of Canada announced its commitment to “inspire Canadians to develop strong and meaningful connections with Canada’s national treasures” by funding to protect the Atlas No. 3 Coal Mine National Historic Site of Canada. Preserving Atlas No. 3 Coal Mine’s tipple was a

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6 Ron Luce is the retired director of the Athens County Historical Society
major reason for federal intervention as “[t]he wooden tipple is the last of its kind in Canada, and a monument to history.” 7

The purpose of a tipple is to process all above-ground material handling and is the largest, tallest and most impressive building associated with an underground mining complex. Elevated to allow railroad access, the tipple receives coal from the mine, sorts it by size and loads rail cars for shipment to market. During its operational days, the office area of the tipple at Millfield #6 was unusually and, perhaps optimistically, painted white (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Operational Tipple at Millfield Mine #6
Source: The Little Cities Archives

In 1973, the Millfield Mine Memorial Committee held the first annual memorial service at the mine’s tipple and the local church. Two years later, the committee placed a stone monument in town, but they did not abandon the tipple. In fact, they engraved an image of the

iconic tipple on the marker. Each year the memorial service was divided between monument the church and the tipple until 1998 when the wooden relic, once a symbol of the largest mine in the Hocking Valley, deteriorated to the point where it was no longer safe to access.

David Harvey is correct in saying that “[w]orking and living cannot entirely be divorced from each other. What happens in the workplace cannot be forgotten in the living place” (1985, 48). However, I know from thirty years as a steelworker, the key word in Dr. Harvey’s quote is “entirely.” No worker is entirely the same person in the workplace as they are in the living place. For the blue collar worker, what they do in the workplace earns them a stereotypical identity of their labor—miner, steelworker, firefighter… Miners, like all workers, go down into their workplace so they can have their living place. While blue collar workers mostly accept their work identity with pride, it is his/her home identity they value the most.

The mine is a key element in the annual memorial service and during the time between the first annual service and the time the tipple, deemed too unsafe, was razed, it was part of the commemoration. The main ceremony occurred at the tipple followed by the reading of each name and an accompanying tolling of the bell at the church. In between, those congregated for the service would walk the mile between the mine and the church as part of the ceremony. In my opinion, the walk would have been the most poignant part of this memorial experience. The procession from the mine to the church passed through East Millfield and in doing so passed through the life spaces of many of the fallen miners.

In 1978, the Millfield Mine Memorial committee successfully petitioning the National Park Service to have the mine site listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. Acceptance in the National Register honors a property by recognizing its importance to its community, state, or the nation (National Park Service). For the mine site, inclusion on the registry insures national
recognition of the 1930 tragic explosion and that its memory will endure, long after the remaining relics are gone.

For the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the mine disaster, the Millfield Mine Memorial Committee, along with the Ohio Historical Society\(^8\) designated the mine site’s significance by placing the historic roadside marker (Figure 11) at the northwest corner of the mine site (Foote 2003).

![Figure 11: Roadside marker at the mine site](image)

\(^8\) The Ohio Historical Society has no record of this marker or their involvement with placing it. However, through email correspondence, Cheryl Blosser, director of the Little Cities of the Black Diamonds organization stated: “I talked to Susan Loughridge yesterday and she says the original paperwork was handled through the Ohio Historical Society. She wrote the application herself in 1980 and it was approved in the usual way.”
At that seventh annual memorial service, the guest speaker at the mine tipple, the President of the United Mine Workers District 6, participated in dedicating the black, union made roadside marker. Ironically, at a site of relics that are slowly, but so far surely, deteriorating away, the committee found a way to “make the most of those relics that survive” through the roadside marker (Lowenthal 1979, 109).

After May of 1945, the village of East Millfield still had the mine’s tipple and smoke stack in sight, but its residents could no longer depend on the mine for their existence. When coal companies close their mines, often their towns close with them. Sometimes a company would dismantle a town they had built when the work stopped. Many of the company towns that survived the wrecking crew did not survive the loss of local employment. The Sunday Creek Coal Company dismantled neither the town nor the mine. Surprisingly, with no reliable source of large-scale employment for over sixty nine years, East Millfield survives in an environment that has proven fatal to many other coal towns of the area.

**Monument Site in Millfield**

Millfield’s local post office is a small brick building that looks strangely modern in its setting, despite it being circa 1966. Within two blocks in either direction of the post office is a cultural landscape teeming with memories of the days when Millfield was thriving as the hub of a coal mining fueled economy. Remaining relics from that era include the old company store, a church and an opera house (Figure 12). Unlike the other buildings on Main Street that date back to before the turn of the twentieth century, the current post office was not a part of the company town days. Despite its out-of-place appearance on the landscape, the post office is the modern day hub of Millfield Mine disaster consciousness.
Residents in the village of Millfield receive their mail from postal boxes located in the post office. Therefore, every in-town household and business must access the post office daily to receive or send their mail. Daily trips to the post office couple with the only area church just across the street make this small area, arguably, the most visited in the community. Located amid this high traffic area, stands a stone monument reminding the community of the 1930 tragic explosions that occurred in local coal mine.

![Millfield Company Store](note stop sign for Millfield Road –route to mine site)

**Figure 12: Millfield Company Store** (note stop sign for Millfield Road –route to mine site)

*Source: The Athens Messenger*

This monument is a classic sanctified memorial site through which the community restates their commitment to preserving its depicted memory each year through an annual memorial service. The monument is located in a prominent public place; therefore, it would be
difficult to accept that any member of this community does not know of the Millfield Mine Disaster, if for no other reason than the prominent presence of this monument (Foote 2003).

At approximately 11:45 on that fateful Wednesday morning, an explosion occurred deep in the local mine. The force of the explosion in the mine located only a mile away shock the ground under Millfield and could be felt eight miles away. Twenty days later, a crowd of over 800 attended a memorial service in Athens, where they vowed to perpetuate the memories of the victims with an annual service. However, without the planning and subsiding power of the United Mine Workers union, formal annual recognition of the explosion and its victims took decades to materialize. *The Athens Messenger* reported that though the years, except for survivors and their families, the anniversary of the disaster pasted by unnoticed. Finally, after forty-three years, a local man who had helped with the rescue in 1930 decided he and the community of Millfield had waited long enough. John Law called on other survivors and together they formed the Millfield Mine Memorial Committee in 1973 (*The Athens Messenger*).

Between 1930 and 1973, numerous attempts to establish formal memorialization had always failed to secure sufficient funding. Feeling that this time it was do or die, the committee relentlessly canvassed the community and outside organizations for funding to purchase and place a monument on the durable landscape in the village to honor the victims of the mine disaster. By September 1974, the committee had secured sufficient funding to build the monument, therefore, plans for its location and design got underway. The committee was most fortunate when, in October, they were able to purchase the ideal plot of land to place the monument, an open lot next to the local post office parking lot.

The design the committee agreed on for the monument is straightforward and simple. The monument is a tall narrow column of marble has two columns naming all those who died in
the mine. Above the columns of names is an engraving of the iconic tipple of mine #6. Flanking the tipple is two Christian crosses while under the tipple are the words: “In Memory of the Millfield Mine No. 6—1205 Disaster Nov 5, 1930” (Figure 13). Standing tall in an open area next to the street and the post office parking lot, the monument has a commanding presence that is impossible to miss and hard to ignore.

On the first Saturday in November each year, descendants of the miners and citizens of Millfield sanctify this memorial site with a memorial service. The service is a two-location service commencing at the church for a worship-type memorial service that includes a time for community reflection and discourse followed by the reading of each victim’s name and an accompanying toll of the church bell, eighty-two times. The second location on the memorial service is the monument. Following the church service, those in attendance cross the street to place a wreath with eighty-two flowers at the foot of the monument (Figure 14).
May 25, 1975, was the official dedication of the monument to honor the victims of the Millfield mine disaster. This dedication was a milestone in a long and tenuous journey for those who had mourned the silent passing of November 5 each year as a durable stone monument was finally in place and dedicated to perpetuate the memory of the eighty-two who died in the Millfield Mine Disaster. Yi-Fu Tuan acknowledges the power of language, “valued artifacts must be maintained by human discourse” (1980, 466). In this case, a valued artifact came to fruition due to memories, kept alive through human discourse. When time silences the human discourse of those who remember, an enduring means of memory sharing on the landscape is needed. Now firmly placed on the durable landscape, the monument in Millfield has the potential to keep those memories alive in the community’s mind. No survivors of the mine explosion are still alive.
When the annual memorial services first began in 1973, the monument by the post office was not yet part of the landscape of Millfield. The service originally split between the church in town and the tipple at the mine. The addition of the monument at the post office only added to the annual service, as the tipple at the mine site remained the vital part of the service. In time, the tipple deteriorated to the point of being too unsafe to access so the service no longer included going to the tipple. The tipple that had so long symbolized the Poston/Sunday Creek mine #6 was all but gone. Although the tipple at the mine site no longer stands, the annual memorial service continues at the foot of the symbolic tipple that is engraved on the top of the monument (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Mine tipple on monument
Source: Waymarking.com
The narrative of the monument’s location in Millfield tells of its importance to the community. The narrative of the text on the monument tells not only of the disastrous explosion that killed eighty-two in 1930, it also provides insight into the souls of those who survived the explosion and committed themselves to relaying their collective memories on the durable landscape and thereby adding to the collective history of their community. Displayed is a simple listing of two columns of eighty-two names topped by the name of the event, an image of the mine’s visual iconic symbol, the tipple and two Christian crosses. The members of the Millfield Mine Memorial Committee who designed this monument did so for one reason only, to perpetrate the memories of those who died in the mine on November 5, 1975. The monument is epideictic rhetoric in stone. It is a rare sight on a rare site, indeed.
Prompted by media coverage of the disastrous explosion within the #6 mine, the Millfield community was immediately awash with pledges of assistance to perpetuate the memories of the victims. One organization, the United Mine Workers union did orchestrate a large memorial service within the first month, even though the mine was non-union at the time on the explosion. However, by the first anniversary however, pledges of support from outside interests had faded, leaving the charge of retelling the historic narrative squarely on the local community. With the mine back in full operation, November fifths passed year after year with no official recognition. By 1973, a group of survivors and their families realized that establishing formal recognition of the victims of the 1930 tragedy was up to them. To understand how Millfield chose to remember such a traumatic event requires an understanding of the working class people who make up the community.

The evolution of humans from individuals who worked for themselves to laborers in the factories and mines was a scheme devised by early industrialists. For large-scale for industry to succeed, its management needed workers suitable for the new and unprecedented work and workplace conditions. Not only were they successful in remaking workers into factory/mine workers, they did in a relatively short time. For the capitalist to achieve such a rapid transformation of laborers’ attitudes toward work required not only successful workplace discipline, it also necessitated selecting workers with particular personality traits (Harvey 1985; Pollard 1965). An ideal individual for industrial work was one who understood the value of hard work, strived to make a living for him and his family while, at the same time, would remain...
content in doing so. For early industrial management, the latter trait was as important as any other skills since a potential worker who was a more ambitious individual might strive to get-ahead might not stay or would not stay satisfied. In the same vein, a potential worker who was less motivated might not show-up for work or not be able to achieve satisfactory work performance (Pollard 1965). Therefore, the advent of the industrial revolution and its never-before-encountered labor requirements created, by design, a trait-homogeneous group of workers and the sheer number of the group quickly became a new socio-economic class of people, the working class.

Transitioning from tradition work to factory work not only brought radical changes to the ways workers worked; it also brought radical changes to where and how they lived. Mines, for example, had to be located were the raw material was. Most often, the local area could not supply sufficient labor for a multitude of reasons as noted in the previous paragraph. To insure a sufficient workforce, a company would infuse outside workers into an area. Additionally, the company would build towns to house these workers. Workers brought in for the purpose of working in the local industry and living in the local company built towns were often from vastly different ethnic and racial backgrounds, but were all members of the newly formed class of workers created by needs of industry. Furthermore, these workers and their families frequently had migrated great distances, often with little or no means, or hope, of ever returning to their homeland. For most immigrant workers their company town, for better or worse, became home.

Possibly the most surprising outcome of the company town experience was the robust sense of place that residents often developed. The advent of the industrial revolution, and its appetite for labor in remote locations, tested the traditionally accepted theory of long-term place residence being a necessity for establishing a strong sense of place. However, relocated workers
and their families also developed a strong sense of place for their new places. To be sure, long-term place residency, for most people, does result in a strong sense of place. Company towns of the industrial revolution regularly consisted of ethnically segregated sub-communities. With the exception of the time spent in the workplace, within larger single communities allowed for little ethnic interaction that allowed for strong comradery among neighbors. In the course of immersion in their new environment that included an ethnic interconnection between neighbors, the residents of company towns developed strong sense of relocated place (Post 2011; Mould 1985; Marsh 1987; Robertson 2006). Company towns, especially the ones that survive long after the company closes, have the potential to be places where the residents are like-minded, hard-working, individuals who have a deep-rooted sense of home and place that is regularly passed down from generation to generation. Millfield is one such community.

Karen Till equates places of tragedies as haunted places in that they can conjure the ghosts of victims in the mind of the living. Admittedly, these places do not house the spirits of their victims. However, they have the potential to trigger memories in the minds of those who knew the victims, and even those who know of the tragedy (2012). Dr. Till is correct. Every time I recall the pouring station at AK Steel’s Middleton Works Concast Department, I remember Jerry who died from burns he received from ignited hydraulic fluid as it passed through a welder’s arc. The quench car at the coke plant summons Mike, crushed to death under the locomotive while installing a safety device. Unfortunately, there are others.

As I attended the annual memorial service in 2012, one thing was apparent, Millfield remained haunted by, not only the horrific coal mine explosion of eighty-two years prior, but also by the mine itself. One local resident, whose uncle perished in the mine explosion, told me that most residents of Millfield still consider their community to be a mining town, even though
the mine ceased operation sixty-seven years earlier. Another man told me simply that the monument near the post office and the annual service meant more to Millfield than I could ever know. Finally, the oldest in attendance that day were elementary school students the day of the explosion. These women later married young men who went to work in the mine. One woman recalled to all at the church lunch table not only about the day of the explosion but also about her husband and the daily strain of mining. She acknowledged that miners and families in Millfield were more acutely aware of the potential dangers associated with mining because of the explosion. That day, at least thirty-seven crowded into a church were the normal attendance numbers on the wall board read eight and twelve. It was apparent the mine and the explosion still haunt this community, and its people. Memorialization of the Millfield Mine Disaster came from this community directly, it still does.

When I first saw the mine site, I sensed abandonment. The roadside historic marker placed at the northeast corner of the site hints of past community interest, but the contemporary site suggests current community is ambivalence toward the site. The leaning marker has fallen victim to what appears to be an egging, while the only remaining structure, the smokestack, is beginning to crumble. Why would a community that still identifies as a mining community allow the mine to deteriorate to such a state? Contrary to any narrative assumed from its modern-day appearance, the community, down through the years, has never been ambivalent about the site.

In other locales, the community might have strived to find a way to take possession of the domain of the mine site for the public good. However, Millfield is a working class community, one that honors the concept of private ownership, even if the owner is reluctant to allow access except of the occasional special function. Additionally, the community could have never
afforded to maintain the site as a museum type memorial without outside assistance. None the less, the site of mine #6 is important to Millfield. On November 5, 1930 an explosion blew through this community, killed seventy-four of its residents and altered the way miners work state-wide. No, this site is not one best left forgotten. Therefore, in 1973, without outside help, Millfield stepped up with the formation of the Millfield Mine Memorial Committee to honor the mine and memorialize the tragic explosion of 1930.

In 1980, the Millfield Mine Memorial Committee worked to place a tribute, a historical roadside marker, at the mine site on the only place they could, the public road right of way. This marker left me with no doubt that I was at the right place. However, I found the text of this marker troubling. To be able to understand fully the historical context of this artifact on the landscape, it would be necessary to know who the author was, but I do not. An Athens county historian speculated it is the text of an old hand made marker found on the site, but proving it would be impossible (Ron Luce, e-mail message to author, Oct. 1, 2014). Regardless of its origin, the text of this marker illustrates why control of a memorial’s narrative is coveted, and often contested.

Considering the deteriorating condition of the physical site, it is likely in the near-future, the only visual indicator of the mine site’s history will be the roadside marker. Therefore, it is important to examine its text:

Ohio’s worst mine disaster occurred in this Sunday Creek Coal Company mine when an explosion killed 82 persons. Among the dead were the company’s top executives who were in the mine inspecting new safety equipment. Nine hours after the explosion, rescuers discovered 19 miners alive underground three miles from the main shaft. The disaster attracted national press coverage and international attention, and it prompted improvement in Ohio’s mine safety laws in 1931.
When reading the marker’s text for the first time, arguably it seems the most tragic aspect of this disaster would be that “the company’s top executives who were in the mine inspecting new safety equipment.” The deaths of the company officials are tragic to be sure, but no more so than any of the others who died that day. In addition, while it is true the company officials were there to inspect new safety equipment, it is only partially true. It is accurate that the Sunday Creek Coal Company renovated and updated the mine quickly after taking ownership, there are two big omissions in this account. One, the major piece of new safety equipment was not yet in service and that played a part in the explosion. Two, another reason for the visit was not safety related but to show their customers the quality of coal in a vein they were about to reopen. In fact, the customer representatives who died in the mine that day may be the biggest omission of the text. One assumes that of the eighty-two who died, the ones who were not “company executives” would be miners. The text of the marker writes the customer representatives out altogether.

“The disaster attracted national press coverage and international attention, and it prompted improvement in Ohio’s mine safety laws in 1931,” is most interesting and discerning part of the marker to me. Within the research I did, all I found about Millfield receiving international attention after the mine explosion was the memorial service, held eight days after the event, including reading of letters of condolences from the President of France and the German and British ambassadors to the United States (Millfield Mine Disaster). While I would like to say that I do not understand the community’s fascination with this aspect of the explosion’s aftermath, I do. When I was just beginning as a safety representative, my steel mill received national media attention from ABC’s 20/20 news program, for similar reasons. As a blue collar worker, I felt that we, the community of workers at the Middletown Works as well as
the community of Middletown, were receiving notice and validation as being noteworthy. Finally, the Ohio Department of Commerce’ Bureau of Mines made recommendations to improve the safety of all Ohio miners. The Ohio Legislature acted on those recommendations in 1931 by passing sweeping changes in mine regulations. I assume some, if not all, of these recommendations could have been adapted into that rule change (See Appendix I). However, I was unable to find specific changes to Ohio’s mine safety laws as the result of this accident.

The skewed message of the historic roadside marker is problematic in a more contemporary way. Via the internet, this roadside marker is becoming the virtual iconic symbol of the Millfield mine disaster. For the most part, we If the internet continues to become the major research tool and websites continue use the image of the roadside marker and text of this marker as their image of choice; its message may well become the one and only narrative of the mine site.

Unless present conditions at the mine site change, and it seems unlikely they will, the primary landscape for remembering the tragedy of the Millfield mine will continue to be the site of the monument in the village. When I first saw the monument, it impressed me by its presence on the landscape. Standing six feet tall in an open and flat area, the monument has a commanding presence on the landscape and is a classic sanctified site of memory. The two columns of forty-one names grabbed my attention. I found the design of the monument at Millfield reminiscent of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. That monument’s design is so effective at being affective that in 2013, the Association of American Geographers named the designer, Maya Lin, Honorary Geographer of the year, “for her impact on the way we look at the world and how we relate to it.” Like the monument at Millfield, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial lists of the name of each individual who died in a single action, as do
monuments for fallen heroes in countless communities throughout America. The Millfield Memorial presents the names alphabetically, as is common to other similar memorials. However, unlike most others, Millfield presents each name without any indication of an individual’s rank or status.

Unlike the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, however, the monument at Millfield adds a little descriptive history to clarify the purpose for the names. Above the top of the name of each column appears the text, “In Memory of the Millfield Mine No. 6—1205 Disaster Nov 5, 1930” (Figure 13). This heading gives future observers only enough information to know the names of those who died in a nearby mining disaster, as well as when that disaster occurred. Centered at the top of the monument’s face is an etching of the symbol of any coal mine, its tipple. Each mine’s tipple is different and in the days of widespread mining in southeastern Ohio, miners could identify any mine by its tipple. Until it was razed for safety purposes, the tipple at Millfield Mine #6 played a major role in the annual memorial services, one of the few times the public was allowed access to the mine site. The community members who designed the monument were able to tie past to the present and span the distance between the monument and the mine site by including the tipple. Finally, the designers of the monument provided a glimpse into the moral fiber of 1970s Millfield by flanking the tipple and heading the columns of names with two crosses. I find this particular aspect of the monument, while not at all surprising, troubling. This blanketing of Christianity assumes all the names listed and the entire community to be uniform in their religious beliefs. This is particularly troubling considering the monument sits so near the post office, the primary local representation of a government founded on religious freedom,
Using Kent State’s recent addition of informational signs throughout the May 4, 1970 massacre site as a model, I suggest Millfield add signage to provide a more complete narrative of the event. This needs to be a priority while there are still community members and local historians who know, have heard and can relate the collective history of mining in Millfield and the disaster of “Nov 5, 1930.” For example, I do not know the significance of “1205” on the monument, but the community members who created the monument knew the significance of 1205.

For the contemporary community and for future visitors understanding of local mining and the horrific accident that occurred there, they will need more information than is currently related on the post office monument or the historic marker at the mine site.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Like most industrial work in the early to mid-twentieth century, underground mining was, and still is, an inherently dangerous occupation. According to the CDC, Ohio's history of mining accidents that resulted in large numbers of fatalities is low when compared to nearby states. Ohio has 14 accidents on the CDC's list while neighboring West Virginia has 160. Additionally, in West Virginia 7 accidents that have killed more than the Millfield explosion, including the worst accident in the nation's history, when on December 6, 1907, an explosion at the Monongah #6 and #8 killed 362. The accident at Millfield #6 is the 37th most deadly in the nation and was the deadliest in the nation in 1930. Nonetheless, the mining community of Millfield, Ohio was devastated when a gas pocket exploded deep in the local mine on November 5, 1930. Eighty-two souls were lost that day and the community was forever changed. In the company town of East Millfield alone, almost every household experienced loss.

A tragedy of that magnitude all but necessitates remembrance through memorialization. Focusing on the landscapes of the site of the mine itself and the site of the town’s monument, I initially set out to determine if these different event-specific landscapes of memory told different communal emotional narratives. In other words, I initially looked at these two cultural landscapes with the goal of determining if the visually obvious narratives of those modern-day landscapes accurately depict the community’s emotional connection to this event.

Indeed, my initial read of the current-day narratives of these two locations did seem to tell contrasting narratives of memory. The mine site, with the exception of a historic roadside
marker, appears to be nothing more than a forgotten and forlorn relic of some old industrial operation and exudes an initial impression of communal ambivalence concerning the site. On the other hand, the public location of the monument in the village appears cared for and exudes an initial impression commitment to preserving a memory, one that is important to the community. However, in order to understand a historic landscape of culture effectively, one must first understand the history of the landscape (Lewis 1979). After researching the history of these landscapes, it becomes apparent why “history matters” (Lewis 1979, 7).

The memorial in Millfield is a straight-forward classic sanctification of a memorial landscape to a tragic event (Foote 2003; Doss 2010). My first reading of this landscape, that it was central to the community was erected and that it remains significant, was correct. The community gathers in front of the monument every year for a wreath laying ceremony and conducts a memorial service honoring those who perished in the mine explosion. The mine site was a different matter. The historic roadside marker hints of a hidden narrative of community attachment, but the deteriorating condition of the remaining structures along with the wild vegetation denies it. However, research into the history of the mine site and the accident reveals a deep communal connection to the mine site. In fact, I feel that if the community had access to this privately-owned location, it would be the main landscape of memorialization.

Unfortunately, first-hand memory of the day of Millfield mine disaster is waning. If the vow to perpetuate the memories of those who perished is to continue, the cultural landscapes of the community, to a large degree, will do it. The memorial at the town post office will continue to remind residents that there once was a mine near town and in that mine all the names listed were people who died there in an explosion. However, this monument is pure epideictic rhetoric, designed to remember and honor victims but not to pass on the collective memories of the event.
Yet the future generations must be aware of such memories for the names on the monument to have meaning.

At the mine site, the history currently portrayed on the historic roadside marker, while true, is problematic and woefully incomplete. Therefore, the narrative of this marker needs revisiting, especially considering it is becoming the iconic symbol of the event via the internet. I feel that having a roadside marker is ideal in this historic moment. In the immediate area, there still are historians and geographers who have researched this event and could compose a more complete and accurate narrative for this landscape to tell.

During of the 2012 memorial service, a young couple in a loud, old multi-colored Pontiac Sunbird blasted their way through those gathered in the street for the wreath placing ceremony at the foot of the monument. Did this young couple know about the Millfield Mine Disaster of 1930? Did they know of the local mine? Did they wonder why there were people in the street? Will the future generations of Millfield continue to remember and honor those who died so long ago in the mine? Historic narratives told by the sites of memory, be it a memorial, monument, or cultural landscape, are critical not only to understand the remembered people and event, but to extend that collective memory to future generations.

As long as members of the community gather on the first Saturday of each November and toll the church bell eighty-two times, the rest of the village will be, at the very least, aware. In Millfield, Ohio, the memories of eighty-two who perished in Ohio’s worst mining disaster depend on it.
References


Ohio Department of Commerce. “Report of Gas and Dust Explosion In Coal Mine No. 6, Sunday Creek Coal Company, Millfield, Ohio November 5, 1930.”


APPENDIX I

Department of Commerce / Bureau of Mines
Safety Recommendations for Sunday Creek Mine #6

1. Assure adequate fan capacity and sufficient ventilation.

2. All worked out areas should be effectively sealed using strong fire-proof doors containing pipes and valves to allow sampling and pressure relief.

3. All current and future workings should have holding rooms with separate air supply.

4. Only fire-proof stoppings should be used in all mines. The use of wood and brattice cloth should be discontinued.

5. The use of doors to coursing air should be avoided and only used temporarily.

6. Overcasts should be substantially built and not allow air to flow over them.

7. No more open flame lighting.

8. Should be rock-dusted (Millfield explosion was used in an 1930 Scientific study on rock dusting).

9. Water lines, hoses and fittings should be located at every work surface.

10. All open type electrical equipment should be operated in pure air intake. Only explosion-proof equipment should be used in other than pure intake air.

11. Fire bosses shall not be assigned any work except for inspection of working and idled areas.

12. Only permissible explosives used in a permissible manner shall be used.

13. Each section of the mine shall be equipped with electrical switches so idled areas can be de-energized.
Suspensions of operations at Millfield was announced by the operators (owners) Tuesday morning, after a meeting of the stockholders and directors of Mine #6 Inc., in Columbus Monday. Approximately 250 men will be required by the decision to look for employment and the second-largest producing operation in the Hocking Valley district goes out of the market. The operations have not been profitable during the last five years and that considerable capital expenditures would be required, which the present owners are not willing to invest under the existing unfavorable relationship coal prices and the increased wage scale fixed by the union wage agreement where given as the main reasons for the decision to abandon this operation. In a statement to the Messenger, “We have discontinued mining operations at the Millfield Mine #6. During a period of five years, we have operated this mine for the benefit of the Hocking Valley and have produced two million tons of coal, and have paid our millions of dollars in wages and, for operation supplies in this area. Repeated increases in labor cost, coupled with strikes, absenteeism, official restrictions we can get for our product and three major increase of wages,” it was explained, “the last ordered increase ordered to be retroactive to April 1, have put the cost of operating this mine in excess of the selling prices.”