

CRUCIFIX OF MEMORY: COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY IN GREENVILLE,
PENNSYLVANIA 1796-PRESENT

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Introduction

“Once upon a time it was a wonderful place,” says one resident of ninety-five years when asked what she wanted to tell visitors to the small town of Greenville in western Pennsylvania.¹ This simple statement encapsulates both the mood of the current community and sums up the history while opening up a world of complexities and questions. From this statement we recognize two things: that in terms of memory, at one time Greenville was a pleasant small town to live in, but a shift occurred that negatively changed the impression of the modern populace.

“Crucifix of Memory” encapsulates the meaning and symbolism of this work. At its base value a crucifix is a cross, with memory at the intersection of community on the horizontal axis and identity on the vertical. The memory is what ties both parts together and is the thread of the narrative. Yet the idea of a crucifix is more than a cross or juncture, it represents the Christian idea of redemption carried out by Jesus’ death on the cross. Memory acts in a redemptive sense for people, it brings meaning to the fore of events which changed individuals and collective alike. Memory for the Greenville community has the power to redeem their sense of themselves and foster a greater sense of cultural heritage and collaborative neighborly lifestyle. This crucifix, the power of memory to redeem when tied to notions of community and identity is developed throughout this work.

A number of questions will be explored in regards to the history of Greenville. How was the town a wonderful place? What happened that has caused a shift in the minds of the modern

¹ Jane L. Cooper, interview by author, Greenville, PA, October 31, 2014.

populace? More importantly, how is the identity of the modern community linked to the history of the town? In an increasingly globalized world communities may find it difficult to make sense of the changes around them which disrupt their sense of place and local or regional traditions which compose their identity. Within this study I refer to community as both a noun and a verb. Community as a noun is a group of people living in proximity together and can be organized as a town. However simply because people live in a community does not mean they live *in* community. Community as a verb is the actions of a group of people living in collaboration, through collectively sharing and assisting each other to overcome challenges to the whole group. Digging into the history of communities may provide answers as to how people create identities and aid people around the world in forming new identities when their cultural traditions are disrupted through globalization or other modern factors.

Utilizing methodologies laid out by Carolyn Kitch in *Pennsylvania in Public Memory: Reclaiming the Industrial Past* (2012), and Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo in *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown* (2002), this thesis will examine how community memory affects the identity of a typical American midwestern small town. *Steeltown* focuses on the nearby city of Youngstown and how the people there struggled with their sense of identity after the steel industry collapsed. For Youngstown, steelmaking was not simply an economic means but the work was “a source of identity for the community” in addition to representing “virtue, expertise, power, and conflict” as the mighty steel workers molded the infrastructure of the nation.²

The story of Greenville is both similar and unique from that of Youngstown. Located in western Pennsylvania, Greenville emerged as an industrial crossroads in the late nineteenth

² Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown* (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press: 2002), 132-33.

century linking Pittsburgh, Erie, and Cleveland via three railroad lines. After the relocation of several industries during the 1980s and 1990s Greenville fell into decline and has since struggled. In May 2002 it was designated “a fiscally distressed community” by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (Act 47).³ The Greenville Historical Society portrays the character of Greenville as a transportation town, based on its history along an Erie Canal route and later as a hub for railroads. Yet for the modern denizens, this ‘transportation town’ identity is but a shell of the past and a bitter reminder of what once was. Since deindustrialization in the late twentieth century, there is a disconnect between the modern reality lived by the community and the historical identity reflected via local public history. Like Youngstown, Greenville’s personality is as an industrial town. But for those still living there, the rusty fences and abandoned multi-acre cement pads are not in accordance with an identity of industry. What is next for the people of Greenville? They face the same dilemma of Youngstown, but *Steeltown* provides at least a sense of direction: “for a fragmented community uprooted by deindustrialization economically, culturally, and geographically, the recovery of a positive memory of itself is the first important step toward reconstructing a sense of place, belonging, and ownership.”⁴

While Youngstown represents the rise and fall of American industry, the story of Greenville contains part of the American story of industry. In a way this work is an addendum to *Steeltown*, in that it studies a town similarly affected by deindustrialization related to the steel industry and role that memory plays in the identity and history of a community. Greenville adds on to the story of industry in America, and in part tells the overall American story. It goes

³ Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, “Municipalities Financial Recovery Act Plan Amendment: Greenville Borough, Mercer County, Pennsylvania, June 2011,” Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, http://www.newpa.com/webfm_send/2728 (accessed January 9, 2015), 7.

⁴ Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown USA*, 4.

beyond the story of industry and tells the frontier story of white settlers seeking new land for their families. It also relates the American ethos of overcoming trials and adversity when Greenville was devastated by a fire in the 1870s. The events and stories of Greenville are those of America, of the small communities which built the nation. Yet while the Greenville story is common throughout America: every town has a frontier story, most towns suffered a disaster, one of the most famous being the Chicago Fire in 1873, and the ‘Rust Belt’ is aptly named for the plethora of communities suffering from deindustrialization, the Greenville also has a unique story to tell. Chicago, Baltimore, and Boston all had major fires in the 1870s, each city has a different story to tell. The narrative of Greenville is important not just because it contains part of the American story experienced by many, but also that it tells a unique variation of the story as every community is different.

Employing oral histories in comparison to other primary and secondary sources, such as newspapers and town and county histories, this thesis will examine several elements centered on community memory and small town history by focusing on how the populace makes sense of its past and the importance of the town’s history to the Greenville’s identity. Taking a ‘bottom-up’ approach and focusing on the community as central to the story by drawing from social histories like David J. Russo’s *Families and Communities: A New View of American History* (1974), where he suggests that until the twentieth century, the “local community exerted the most profound and comprehensive influence on the lives of Americans,”⁵ *Crucifix of Memory* will examine three pivotal points within the history of Greenville. Chapter one will discuss the early settlers and first families who arrived in the late 1790s and the early development of the town

⁵ David J. Russo, *Families and Communities: A New View of American History* (Nashville, The American Association for State and Local History, 1974), 1.

and how the beginning is perceived by the locality today. Chapter two will utilize the great fire of 1873 that destroyed the downtown as a flashpoint which ironically pushed the town into a ‘golden age’ of industry and prosperity as means of discussing the interplay between oral histories and newspapers and town histories. Chapter three will wrestle with the issue of deindustrialization that occurred in the 1980s and how the community has dealt with it by letting the Greenville people tell its story in their own words. The first two chapters deal with topics largely unremembered by the residents who have little to say in regards to that part of their history, but in the third chapter the people are given a voice and their voices drive the story because it focuses on what is most important to them at this time. In this way the third chapter takes the approach of Kenneth J. Bindas in *Remembering the Great Depression in the Rural South*, where his use of oral histories allowed for “the profundity of their voices, their stories, their lives; rather than altering these to fit my own agenda,” and “decided to let them tell the story.”⁶

The topics for each chapter were chosen to reflect pivotal periods and events that crafted the identity of the Greenville. The story told by the Greenville Historical Society varies from the topics chosen, namely because their mission is “to create an awareness and an appreciation of the history of the Greenville area and its people.” The exhibits on display at the historical society reflect the principle of their headline, “Pride in the Past, Faith in our Future!” in remembering aspects of which the community is proud.⁷ Among the exhibits are extensive displays on war veterans from the American Civil War through the Second World War. An entire room is dedicated to doctors and hospitals throughout Greenville’s history, in part because the historical

⁶ Kenneth J. Bindas, *Remembering the Great Depression in the Rural South* (Gainesville, University of Florida Press: 2007), 3.

⁷ Greenville Museum Alliance, “Mission Statement,” Greenville Historical Society, <http://www.greenvillehistoricalsociety.org> (accessed January 7, 2015).

society is located in the Waugh House and one of the first doctors in the area lived there after the Waugh brothers. Also, one of the main features of current Greenville is its healthcare system, with two nursing homes and a hospital in addition to the new neuroscience facility on Main Street, thus having a room in the Waugh House dedicated to health demonstrates the pride of the local populace in their facilities.

The historical society curators start the story of Greenville with the coming of the Erie Extension Canal in 1840. I leave out the story of the canal for a few reasons. First of all, the story of Greenville starts with the first white settlers to the area in 1797. The traditional story told in Greenville mentions these settlers but omits the intervening period of forty years leading up to the canal. While the canal is certainly important in the development of Greenville, it is a part of the industrial aspect of the story which is partly told in chapter two. The canal helped Greenville get on its feet, but until the railroads come through it is still largely an agrarian community. The railroads are what transform Greenville into a modern industrial town. The first chapter emphasizes how the settlers operated in the forty years before the canal. I shift the focus away from the artificial forces of technology and instead onto the humanity of the residents and the individuals who shaped its history.

The fire discussed in chapter two is also missing from the displays in the historical society. Perhaps the curators saw no need to tell the story of the disaster. But from the historian's point of view, the fire is a critical event establishing the industrial heritage of Greenville. In addition, many towns experienced devastating fires in the 1870s and it is remarkable that such disasters all across the nation occurred within the same years and shaped the towns and cities through today. The topic of the third chapter of deindustrialization which occurred in the 1980s and 1990s was also recent and not present in the historical society, because it is a painful subject

for Greenville today. The story told in this body of work aims to get to the heart of the community, to the essence of what made the community what it is today. The historical society is run by volunteers and while they have certainly created a center to celebrate the past in an effort to communicate local pride and heritage, by so doing some aspects of the history were glossed over. This work seeks to amend the gap and bring pivotal events to the forefront of the story. The disparity of topics chosen by a historian and volunteer members of a historical society and events remembered by the residents may shed light on how memory and history interact in communities today.

The problem of cultural heritage remembrance in Greenville is multifaceted. The locality seemingly is connected to the past with three different museums linked together through the Greenville Museum Alliance, which “coordinate[s] shared activities for the benefit of the 3 museums.”⁸ Historic preservation and presentation in the community is managed by the Greenville Historical Society, Greenville Railroad Park and Museum, and the Greenville Canal Museum. Yet besides being connected to their industrial transportation heritage, awareness of other aspects of the local history is lacking. For example, several stories abound for why the place is called Greenville. Known as West Greenville until 1865, the community petitioned to simplify it to Greenville once it was discovered “no other post offices in Pennsylvania [were] called Greenville, West Greenville, or East Greenville.”⁹ It was probably known as West Greenville at first because the original town was built on the west side of the Shenango River. From this known fact, one story is “the west side of the Shenango was covered with hemlocks,

⁸ Greenville Museum Alliance, “Greenville Museum Alliance,” Greenville Museum Alliance, <http://www.greenvillemuseumalliance.org> (accessed January 9, 2015).

⁹ Roy C. Beaver, “A Brief History of Greenville,” *Greenville, PA. 125th Anniversary: 1838-1963* (Greenville: The Anniversary Committee, 1963), 8-9.

whose green foliage suggested the idea of a ‘Green-villa.’”¹⁰ Another resident of Greenville suggested three reasons for the name of Greenville, the first echoing the previous story, that it was “because of green trees.” The second being that it was named for Revolutionary War hero General Nathaniel Greene, which is the namesake for several Greenvilles in the United States. The third reason was given most credence, “that it was named West Greenville after East Greenville, a very old settlement in Montgomery County from which many of the early settlers came.”¹¹ Of course this story challenges the idea that the name changed from West Greenville to Greenville in 1865. In addition, the records indicate that the first settlers came from Westmoreland County, not Montgomery County.¹² Prior to moving to Westmoreland some lived in Lehigh County or came directly from Germany. As will be discussed in chapter one, these first settlers had enormous influence on the development of Greenville. My hypothesis regarding the naming of Greenville derives from the origin of the first families in Westmoreland County. The county seat of Westmoreland is Greensburg, which is named after Nathaniel Greene. Surrounding townships of Greensburg are Hempfield and Salem. Curiously enough, Greenville is also surrounded by Hempfield Township and West Salem Township. When the first settlers arrived on the banks of the Shenango River, they lived in Salem or Hempfield Township, and must have taken names they were familiar with in Westmoreland. The borough of Greenville did not come about until many years later, and when it did, they dropped the burg and made it Greenville.

¹⁰ *History of Greenville, Pennsylvania*. (Chicago, C.S. Homer: 1922), 3. Found and located at the Greenville Historical Society.

¹¹ “Greenville, Pennsylvania,” located at Greenville Historical Society, under Greenville History, under History Greenville, 2.

¹² The first families are discussed in Chapter 1. The Christys, Kecks, and Loutzenhisers all lived in Westmoreland County prior to moving to north for new land. It is likely the Klingensmiths also lived in Westmoreland County, as Chapter 1 illustrates. They were intermarried with the Kecks and Loutzenhisers. This process of intermarriage occurred prior to moving, as at least Catherine Klingensmith and Joseph Keck were married in Westmoreland in 1797, right before their journey.

Although the narrative of the populace is contained in a few core memories of their past, the identity of the denizens has shifted throughout the various histories written on Greenville. Many of the early histories emphasized a town of progress and advancement, but more recent histories reflect a locality fondly remembering the past and hoping for the future. The pride of the town reflected in more recent histories comes from past successes and not current ones, though the anniversary histories do their best to be optimistic about the present and the future.

In the 1909 Mercer County History, Greenville is portrayed as being a modern town with all the comforts and amenities of large cities.¹³ Its identity is one of being an advanced small town with modern improvements, such as brick paved roads, sewers, gas, electric lights, and telephones. The brick paved Main Street was said to be the finest in Western Pennsylvania in 1892.¹⁴ It also had a hospital and a paid fire department. In 1909, then, the county history contends that the identity of Greenville was a modern locality with all the necessities unrivaled in the county.

In the mid twentieth century the identity of Greenville, as reported in the 1963 Greenville 125th Anniversary History, is one of progress. Much like the earlier histories, the 125th anniversary celebrated the town and its modernity. However, a new element missing from previous histories was the religious aspect of the community, grounded in the church.¹⁵ Even in the early years with a small population, there were seven congregations by 1838.¹⁶ The caveat in this identity of progress and improvement is in 1963 the town was faced with modern problems

¹³J.G. White, ed., *A Twentieth Century History of Mercer County, Pennsylvania: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People, and its Principal Interests*, vol. 1 of *A Twentieth Century History of Mercer County, Pennsylvania: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People, and its Principal Interests*, (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1909), 113.

¹⁴White, *A Twentieth Century History*, 116.

¹⁵Beaver, *Greenville PA. 125th Anniversary*, 18.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 19.

of parking and traffic congestion despite being a small town.¹⁷ It is a history written to instill pride in the community while looking forward to the future – confident that the town will continue growing in “all aspects of community life.”¹⁸ In addition, special medals were made and sold to commemorate the 125th anniversary. The features chosen to illustrate the town are particularly telling on how Greenville wanted to portray its identity. The small liberal arts school, Thiel College, was represented by a book, a pencil, and a diploma. The four railroads which brought prosperity and growth to Greenville were represented by railroad tracks while a set of gears symbolized the industry of the town. A tree and a covered bridge represented the big trees shading the surrounding local society while the bridge is Kids Mill Bridge, the last covered bridge in the county. The text etched onto the medals displays the identity in short form as “Historical, Educational, Industrial” and “attend your church.”¹⁹

Much like the 1963 history, the 1988 Greenville 150th Anniversary History was a celebration of how the town had progressed and advanced. In addition to echoing the 1963 character of a religious community, the 1988 version introduced a new persona, that of a retirement community, which emerged as Greenville lost industries and population.²⁰ Served by two nursing homes, Whitecliff and St. Paul Homes, during the 1970s the local populace increased its capacity to care for the elderly.²¹ The local schools are also emphasized more than they were in previous memories, but in total the identity presented is one of a well-rounded community. The 150th anniversary history illustrates a locality with a fondness for the past but struggling with the withdrawal of the railroads which they know will change the town. A

¹⁷Ibid., 22.

¹⁸Ibid., 25.

¹⁹Ibid., 26.

²⁰Earl C. Miller, “History of Greenville, Mercer County, Pennsylvania,” *Sesquicentennial History* (Greenville: Greenville Sesquicentennial Corporation, 1988), 27.

²¹Miller, “History of Greenville,” 50.

monument boulder was dedicated for the anniversary and the seal represents the personality of the community in 1988, “Reaching Toward the Future, Rooted in History.”²² The town is still hopeful for the future and has pride in its past, despite the loss of one of its principle industries.

Current memory of the past is reflected through the work of the Greenville Museum Alliance, made up of the Greenville Historical Society, the Greenville Canal Museum, and the Greenville Railroad Park. The Alliance identifies the town rooted in transportation and industry. The memory of Greenville’s past is based on its prosperity between the 1840s to the 1980s which was driven by modes of transportation. The Greenville Canal Museum contains a replica of the first canal boat launched from Greenville and is fully devoted to communicating the role of the canal in Greenville’s past. The Greenville Railroad Park is small and has little in terms of a museum, but a preserved train engine is present and used for demonstrations. Fully visible along Main Street, the engine serves as a daily reminder how Greenville was built by railroads. Less visible on a daily basis but still on prominent display in the Greenville Historical Society Museum is an Empire Car built by the Steel Car Company. These three displays are a poignant example of how the current identity as reflected by the efforts of the Greenville Historical Society is that of a transportation town.

Yet the traditional narrative of Greenville has not dealt with the changes and difficulties that now face the modern residents, and as such the identity of the community as told by the Greenville Museum Alliance is one rooted in past glory and not the present. The current memory of the past is one of prosperity from transportation and industry and the historical narrative affirms this memory. However, the railroads which brought such industry and economic success to the town are but ghosts. Only one train occasionally passes over one of the four tracks which

²²Ibid., 58.

once were hosts to the Pennsylvania Railroad, the Penn Central, and the Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad companies.²³

Although Greenville can have pride in being a railroad hub and a center of industry in the past, deindustrialization made the memory bittersweet and thus tears down a collaborative society rather than building a common identity. If the current memory is insufficient in creating a workable identity for the community, then remembering the past will help provide perspective for locating its current situation within an overall framework. The first two chapters focus on people and events that have been forgotten, but play a role in forming the current identity. By discussing the early families and disaster in 1873, I am not only providing a backdrop to chapter three on deindustrialization but also illustrating how identity changes over time in the community of Greenville.

Throughout this work I refer to Greenville as a small town. In the 2010 Census, the borough of Greenville had just under 6,000 people.²⁴ Most residents of the surrounding townships of West Salem and Hempfield consider themselves as Greenvillians and from the same census Hempfield had 3,700 and West Salem 3,500. Hempfield shares a school system with Greenville and Hempfield residents especially consider themselves as part of Greenville, while West Salem shares a school system with several other townships. Based on the 2000 census, 31% of Greenville residents are of German descent, the next highest being Irish with 13.7%, English at 13.4%, and Italian at 11.7%.²⁵ All told the borough and surrounding rural areas of Greenville include over 13,000 people, which far exceeds the Environmental Protection

²³Ibid., 10.

²⁴ United States Census Bureau, "Greenville borough, Pennsylvania, Population," American Fact Finder, <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>, (accessed January 9, 2015).

²⁵ United States Census Bureau, "Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000," American Fact Finder, <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>, (accessed January 9, 2015).

Agency's definition of a small town in its legislation of "an incorporated or unincorporated community with a population of less than 2,500 individuals."²⁶ But by small town I mean more than the geographical size of a populated area. Inherent in the term *small town* are a number of symbolic meanings, or an overall ethos of a locality. Part of what makes a small town just that is the presence of a *main street*. The concept of *main street* is intricately tied to that of *small town*, as *main street* not only "denot[es] the commercial strip of a small town, but...the heart of the small town, is also a synecdoche for the small town itself."²⁷ Small towns are defined by the people that live there, who create a nostalgic place where everyone knows everyone's business and the neighborly people seem to exist isolated from the troubles of the world.

As a study of memory and community, the thesis draws on the theories of oral history and memory as laid out by Lynn Abrams' *Oral History Theory* (2010). A number of past and present residents of the local area were interviewed to ascertain their memories about Greenville, keeping in mind that there is "a shared authority" between the historian and the public for the responsibility of the history. In *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (1990), Michael Frisch points out that working with the memory of public community results in a more "widely shared historical consciousness."²⁸ The interviews utilized open-ended questions to gently prod the memory of Greenville residents. The questions were formatted into three primary sections, drawing from the work of Paul Thompson.²⁹ The first

²⁶ U.S. Government Printing Office, "Section 6908: Small Town Environmental Planning," United States Code, 2006 Edition, Supplement 4, Title 42 – The Public Health and Welfare, 5994. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2010-title42/pdf/USCODE-2010-title42-chap82-subchapI-sec6908.pdf> (accessed January 10, 2015).

²⁷ Miles Orvell, *The Death and Life of Main Street: Small Towns in American Memory, Space, and Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 4.

²⁸ Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (New York: University of New York Press, 1990), xxii.

²⁹ See Paul Thompson, "Chapter 4: The Interview," in *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 2000).

section focused on basic demographic information and early childhood memories simply to warm up the interviewee and allow their memories to start flowing. Part two concentrated on topical questions related to the themes of the three chapters: the early families, the 1873 fire, and deindustrialization. Part three included more general open questions to allow the interviewee to talk freely about anything they thought was important to the history of Greenville. Interviewees were selected based upon age, to give a diverse range in memory. Residents were solicited through a Facebook forum for Greenville and both people from within the borough and the surrounding townships participated. Twenty interviews were conducted with adult members from ages 18 to 95 from a variety of backgrounds in order to determine how memory interacts with the populace across a variety of factors. Most had lived in Greenville their whole lives, but a few interviewees grew up elsewhere and moved there later. A few interviewees no longer lived in Greenville due to the lack of economic opportunity. Couples, parents and children were also taken into account to ascertain how memory within a community works within families and across generations. The interviews were recorded on mp3 and transcribed to documents, both of which will be donated to the Greenville Area Historical Society for preservation.

An impetus for *Crucifix of Memory* is bridging the division between popular community memory and academic history through oral historical analysis and comparative memory studies. As a process, the interview itself acts as a bridge because it is “an opportunity to stimulate others, as well as ourselves, to a higher degree of self-scrutiny and self-awareness; to help them grow more aware of the relevance and meaning of their culture and knowledge”³⁰ because “the self is unstable, performative, and draws heavily upon culture.”³¹ By allowing the interviewee to

³⁰ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 44.

³¹ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 59.

tell stories about his or her self, the interviewer is involved in the process of self-formation with them.³² Although specific events are discussed in each of the chapters, the oral history adds to the treatment of history because it “tells us less about *events* than their *meaning*.” The validity of oral history concerning the factuality of what is told by the interviewee is a moot point because the meaning of history for the community is the aim, not a journalistic rendition of a step-by-step chronicle of their past: “memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings.” By studying the memory, we are able to ascertain the identity of an individual or even a group of people, because “oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.”³³

Approaching the collective identity of Greenville via these pivotal points in their history, this thesis draws upon the work of Alberto Melucci in “The Process of Collective Identity” (1995), who describes collective identity as developing out of a shared set of traditions, active relationships, and emotional interaction that come together to form unity within a group.³⁴ Thus I will look at the traditions, relationships, and interactions within the memories of the community as the process of collective identity to determine how the people of Greenville make sense of themselves, their community, and by extension, the larger history of the United States.

³² Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 36.

³³ Portelli, *The Death of Luigi*, 50-52.

³⁴ Alberto Melucci, “Chapter 3: The Process of Collective Identity,” in *Social Movements and Culture: Social Movements, Protest, and Contention*, eds. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, Vol.4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 41-63.

Chapter 1: The Locks of the Family, 1795-1870

Introduction

Although the impression of the frontier experience in America is a pivotal myth of the American experience, the interpretation of the experience is not a constant. The idea of “conquering” the wilderness as an individual braving the wild transfixes and embodies the American ethos. Lynda Schneekloth writes that “the frontier is an invention rather than a description of any place,” but “its emergence as a dominant mythic structure since the European settlement of the Americas is an important fiction for the national psyche.”¹ There are other ways, however, to view the frontier experience. A recent virtual simulation in the form of the computer game *Banished* provides an alternative perspective on how America was settled by the Western World.²

In *Banished* the player is in control of a group of settler families wanting to start anew. They set off with a few supplies but in the simulation they must build a town with the objective of staying alive. The player is told to keep in mind the necessities of life: shelter, food, and warmth. The story told in *Banished* is one built around a community. No one individual builds the town itself. It is a group of settlers working together. The player must assign tasks to separate members of the families to work for the collective good. Different members of the settlement must farm the fields, collect lumber, tend to orchards, hunt, fish, herd in pastures, build new structures, become a blacksmith, cleric, tailor, or run the tavern etc. In sum, the town works

¹ Lynda Schneekloth, “The Frontier is Our Home,” *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol. 49 No. 4 (May, 1996): 210.

² Luke and Joseph Hodorowicz, “Banished,” *Shining Rock Software* (2014).

together to build a community and if any are derelict in their duty then the whole community suffers, even to the point of the settlement dying due to the families failing to overcome their circumstances.

In many ways the story simulated by *Banished* is more akin to the actual American experience than the myth of the individual in the wilderness. The simulation in *Banished*, however, varies from the story of a real community in a few poignant manifestations. The small town of Greenville, Pennsylvania started off similarly to the simulation with a core group of four families moving to the area at the close of the eighteenth century. These families brought very little with them and like players of the game, their first tasks were to find shelter, food, and warmth. Yet unlike the simulation these families did not build their houses adjacent to each other. In fact their shelters were spread apart, because the early settlers came to northwestern Pennsylvania for land. The idea of building a town from scratch was not in the forefront of their minds. The families were largely agrarian and were seeking new farmlands. As the early community of settlers grew through rapid birthrate and new families also seeking a new start, the town began to form. The birthrate of the early settlers multiplied the community much faster than the code in the simulation. The growth and formation of the community was very organic, an aspect partly present in the simulation. For example, when the settlers in *Banished* need clothes, then it is helpful to create a tailor. Similarly, the early families of Greenville lacked the resources to build a town all at once. Instead, the town took shape as necessity dictated, organically. This description of an organic community is contrasted with that of modern housing developments, where the entire complex is constructed and then filled with people. Outside of the farms surrounding what would become the town of Greenville, the residents first built a mill for grinding the grain, a distillery for creating spirits and a tavern for dispensing the spirits. The

tavern became the central hub of the early community, where the first church met for years and residents built additional buildings in the area surrounding the tavern. The story of early communities then was an experience of collaborative community oriented work, but it was an organic creation with no one individual designing the community, unlike the human player of *Banished*.

As the memory of the national frontier experience varies from that experienced by the settlers of Greenville, what is the memory that modern Greenville has of their own frontier experience? The national memory is one of the individual, the picture painted by the game *Banished* is one of a collaborative community, and the story of Greenville is similar to that of *Banished*. This work explores the memory that modern Greenville has of its founding and how the memory of the origins of Greenville have changed over time. The formation of a memory is closely related to developing a sense of ourselves, both individually and collectively.³ As identity and memory are inextricably linked, when one changes, so too does the other. Thus, by exploring the memory of Greenville, the identity of the community will also be revealed. Yet a look into the history of the town and the memory of the past shows a disconnect between what is remembered and the actual frontier experience. This chapter discusses the memory and identity of a community through several steps: (1) The memory of Greenville will be discussed to illustrate how it has changed over time and as a result so too has its identity, (2) the current identity of Greenville that results from the memory is at odds with the current state of the modern populace and is a problem, (3) a portion of the history of Greenville is missing from the memory and will be discussed, (4) as memory and identity are linked, this early experience not only can shape a new identity for Greenville, but the story of the early settlers also illustrates

³Ross Poole, "Memory, Responsibility, and Identity," in "Collective Memory and Collective Identity," special issue, *Social Research* Vol. 75, No. 1 (2008): 282.

how community is formed, (5) this new picture of how community is formed differs from the traditional frontier memory but I argue is a more accurate representation and can be used to realign the national memory, thus changing the national identity, (6) and finally I conclude that the identity of a community is vital for it to continuing living collaboratively.

This study of the community of Greenville draws from the new social history of the 1970s-1980s, which included several studies on early communities in the United States.⁴ Those studies, however, were largely demographic and while they provided a view of early America which differed from the national narrative, they did not include oral history and memory of the particular communities. Looking at the frontier experience in America provides a window into how communities form identity and the role that culture, institutions, traditions and modern memories play in creating that identity.

The early community of Greenville is just one window among thousands into this problem of identity and community. Like the settlers in *Banished*, communities must live in community to survive and thrive. Only by working together were the early families able to grow and create the future town of Greenville. Further, a collective identity is vital for communities to successfully live in community because members of the community must have a sense of a unity despite adversity. The memory of this collaborative community life is less apparent in the record in Greenville and the nation as a whole, and needs to be amended.

Although similar studies tend to draw from cultural identity theory, I will be adapting collective identity theory to look at the early community of Greenville. The original voices of the early settlers are absent from the record, but evidence of their influence and community life is

⁴See John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1986), Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1970), and Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town the First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, INC, 1970).

still present in the town, despite being absent from the official memory. After presenting the methodological framework and issues within this study, I will then describe the memory of Greenville and how it has changed over time. After the discourse on the town's memory, I will provide the narrative of the settlement and development of the community through the lens of three generations of families and their influence on the town. The connections between these families formed the identity for the first few years, but by the third generation these families were no longer the majority of the community and a shift in identity was necessary for the town to continue living in community. A close look at the connections themselves will shed light on the identity and the ways in which the group built a sense of place. The memory of a community not only shapes identity, but the identity further shapes community and how it functions in a continuing cycle.

Methodology and Historiography

The study of Greenville, Pennsylvania builds on the social history of communities conducted in the 1970s and 80s. Part of the first wave of community history was a work on colonial Andover, Massachusetts, *Four Generations* by Philip Greven Jr. In that work, Greven traced the development of Andover through the lives of four generations of families. It was largely descriptive with little explanatory analysis of the implications of what Greven calls “embryonic kinship groups,” in that the community of Andover was largely joined through the bonds of marriage between the generations.⁵ Greven's work on Andover is demographically rich and full of detail about the lives of ordinary people and set the stage for the new history of the family. David J. Russo built on the work of Greven and took a broader view of history, shifting focus from the nation to the family as the core element of America's early history in *Families*

⁵Ibid., 73.

and Communities: A New View of American History.⁶ Like Russo the family plays a central role in the story of Greenville, because “what determines a community’s actual size and shape is its existence as a social unit, a human creation with definite structures, functions, and values as well as physical space; in short, not an abstraction, but a ‘social reality.’”⁷

New England towns were the foci of these new studies on communities, although in the 1980s the field expanded to the frontier. In *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie*, John Mack Faragher wrote about the community of Sugar Creek in Illinois, which developed in the first half of the nineteenth century but only exists as a memory of the frontier past, as it is no longer a location. Like Greven, Faragher emphasized the family as principle role in the story of Sugar Creek, but again it was largely a descriptive work. The story of Sugar Creek however was one of change and development, and Faragher identifies community as the core which held the town together through the changes which occurred throughout the nineteenth century in central Illinois. Further, for Faragher the community was made up of the “relations between kinship, neighborhood, and church” and the family was the “essential building block” of community.⁸ Although the new history of family linked family and community together, it neglected to identify *how* community is developed and maintained throughout change.

Adopting collective identity to take social history in a new direction, I argue that the act of community arises from a common identity. Collective identity is defined as “an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community.”⁹ Generally collective identity theory has been used to explain political and social movements, such as the Civil Rights

⁶See David J. Russo, *Families and Communities: A New View of American History* (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1974).

⁷ Russo, *Families and Communities*, 5-6.

⁸Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, 237.

⁹Francesca Polleta and James M. Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 21, (2001): 285.

Movement in the 1960s. It explains that groups have a common goal which supersedes all other differences, and thus certain movements bring people together from seemingly opposing viewpoints. As long as those in the movement share the same goal, or collective identity, then they will continue to participate despite differences that normally would separate them. Viewing living in a community as a social movement then, we can join collective identity theory with oral history to help explain the identity of the community of Greenville.

Further, identity itself is shaped by memory, and in turn collective identity is shaped by collective memory. A collective memory does not have a memory per se, but rather is composed of the memories shared by the group of individuals. The memory of the individual is what forms the common bonds between members of a group. For groups to be in accordance with each other then, they must all share a common memory. The memory of the frontier experience in America is significant for us today, because “just as our individual memory provides a sense of our existence through time, so our national memories provide us with a sense of belonging to a community that exists through time.”¹⁰ But if the national memory is not in accordance with the actual experience, then the sense of belonging to the community is absent.

Overview of Greenville, Pennsylvania

Like thousands of communities across the United States, the geographic position of Greenville was a pivotal component of its rise in the mid-nineteenth century. The town grew around the point where the Shenango and Little Shenango Rivers join before flowing down to the Beaver River. Besides basic water needs, the rivers were vital for providing power to the grist mills and later industries.¹¹ The rivers also formed a portion of the Erie Extension Canal, linking Pittsburgh to Lake Erie. In the canal period Greenville became a hub of industry and a resting

¹⁰ Poole, “Memory,” 274-276.

¹¹ “A History of Greenville,” History, G to R, Subject Drawer 2; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania: 1.

place for travelers, due to its central location between Pittsburgh, Erie, and Cleveland. Greenville was in a prime spot for growth at the crossroads of the Erie Extension Canal and a highway which led to Warren, Ohio.

When the first pioneers settled around the banks of the Shenango, they were in Allegheny County, which stretched from Pittsburgh north to Erie. In 1800, Allegheny was carved into several counties, and the settlers found themselves in the newly formed Mercer County.¹² Originally all the settlers were in Salem Township, which later split into several smaller townships. This study does not only focus on the borough of Greenville, but on those living in the townships around it because they are all part of the community. In addition to the present-day borough of Greenville, the larger community comprises the townships of West Salem, Hempfield, Greene, Sugar Grove, Salem, and Otter Creek.

The memory of the early settlement of Greenville is repeated in multiple texts about the town and county history. Through the efforts of the Greenville Historical Society and anniversary celebrations, the memory of Greenville has become canon, though various aspects of the community's history have been emphasized over time. Common themes are present throughout all the narratives and the general story is as follows.

In the spring of 1797, four families moved to the Shenango Valley in the area where the Shenango and Little Shenango meet. These families are considered to be the first in the area, though there may have been other individuals. Joseph Keck, Andrew Christy, Daniel Klingensmith and Peter Klingensmith had come the previous autumn to scout the area and then

¹²J.G. White, ed., *A Twentieth Century History of Mercer County, Pennsylvania: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People, and its Principal Interests*, vol. 1 of *A Twentieth Century History of Mercer County, Pennsylvania: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People, and its Principal Interests*, (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1909), 16.

came back with their families in 1797.¹³ Jacob Loutzenhiser also came in 1797 and was the miller, managing a series of mills until his death in 1821. Other individuals and families arrived soon after 1797, notably the Williamsons and Beans. The first building in what was to become Greenville was Tobias Shanks' tavern at a ford on the river. Several of these first settlers participated in the War of 1812, and forever after Andrew Christy was known as Colonel Andrew Christy. Outside of these core families, little is mentioned about the community in the early years of Greenville until the town was incorporated as a borough in 1838, the same year the Erie Extension Canal was built through town.¹⁴

With the coming of the canal in 1838, the fledging community went through a period of boom and prosperity. Coal was found in West Salem Township and was one of the principle exports traded on the canal.¹⁵ Prior to the canal, transportation operated on a road from Mercer to Meadville and bypassed the Greenville area, but with the canal, traffic suddenly shifted and new industries sprung up along the Shenango Valley. Due to the shift in traffic, Greenville became the hub in Mercer County and grew rapidly. Until the railroads were built in the 1860s the canal remained the premier transportation route of raw materials, goods, and people.¹⁶

Context: Northwestern Pennsylvania in the Early Republic

Northwestern Pennsylvania was largely uninhabited by Europeans in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War. Most of the land between Pittsburgh and Lake Erie was divided into what were called "donation lands," or payment to men who fought in the war. As the early republic had little in the means of funds, it promised land to men who volunteered. After the war land was

¹³*History of Greenville, Pennsylvania.* (Chicago, C.S. Homer: 1922), 3. Found and located at the Greenville Historical Society.

¹⁴Fred J. Brenner, *The Erie Extension Canal: A Hike with History* (Sharpsville: Shenango Conservancy, 1967). I have seen conflicting dates for the Erie Extension Canal, all ranging between 1838-1842.

¹⁵"The Record-Argus 125th Anniversary Edition." Greenville, PA, Saturday, June 29, 1963. Greenville History; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania.

¹⁶White, *A Twentieth Century History*, 69-70.

sectioned off and auctioned off through lots to veterans. The line between these donation districts is still present in the county boundaries, for example, the northern line of Mercer County was the line between districts five and six. Few veterans, however, took land in what would become Mercer County and in the early 1790s it still was unsettled. To amend the problem, the State of Pennsylvania sold the excess land to settlers willing to cultivate it based on a warrantee that the land would be improved within five years.¹⁷ Despite opening up the lands for sale to the public, few took advantage of the cheap land before 1795.

The main deterrent to settlers was the Native Americans living in the area. In 1794 however, General Anthony Wayne defeated the confederation of Native Americans at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, near Greenville, Ohio. With the defeat, all the Native Americans trudged westward and settlers pounced on the vacated land. One of the early settlers in what would become Greenville, Pennsylvania, was James Williamson, a Revolutionary War veteran. Whether or not James Williamson acquired the land for his services in the Revolutionary War is uncertain, since he came to the area in 1797 after the land was opened to the public but being a veteran on donation lands lends to the likelihood that his property in Mercer County was his reward for the war.¹⁸ Despite the Battle of Fallen Timbers breaking the spirit of Native resistance to settlers, a few small groups of Lenapes Indians were still in Mercer County in the area until 1811.¹⁹ Outside of James Williamson and a scattering of other veterans, most of the land was not occupied by settlers in part because the land was set aside as donation lands. Also, the presence of Native Americans were a deterrent to land settlement. By the late 1790s, settlers were already

¹⁷Ibid., 8-10.

¹⁸Raymond Martin Bell and Edna Marian Miller, *The Williamson Family of Cumberland County, Pennsylvania; Washington County, Pennsylvania; Ohio County, West Virginia* (Williamson Family Folder; Genealogy Drawer 2: MC-Z; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania: 1986), 59.

¹⁹Roy C. Beaver, "A Brief History of Greenville," *Greenville, PA. 125th Anniversary: 1838-1963* (Greenville: The Anniversary Committee, 1963), 4.

moving down the Ohio River into the Ohio valley, and the amount of people in this westward movement into the region beyond Pennsylvania is reflected by the fact that Ohio joined the union in 1803, just six years after the first settlers moved to the Greenville area in Northwest Pennsylvania.

The story of Greenville then is not the glamourized version of the frontier most often remembered. The early settlers did not have the issues of negotiating with Native Americans nor were they far from a growing metropolis, in the shape of Pittsburgh. But the story of those that founded Greenville is one of ordinary people in a typical place, and this provides an alternative memory of how places were settled differing from the idealized nostalgia often associated with the American frontier.

The Families and “the Family”

As the story goes, there were four main families which came to the area in 1797. Although there were a few individuals in the area prior to the migration of these families, the coming of the four families initiated a community and the development of a town. The movement of the four families to the area was led by Jacob Loutzenhiser, whose father and brothers arrived three years later.²⁰ Fellow German families were led by Joseph Keck and David Klingensmith. One Ulster family under Andrew Christy also was part of the migration to the area in 1797.

With the arrival of these families, the community population expanded rapidly for several reasons. In the early republic, birthrates were quite high and this continued through the early nineteenth century. The second reason was that most of the clan migrated together. Joseph

²⁰*History and Genealogy of the Loutzenhiser Family*. Compiled by Mark S. Painter. Genealogy Drawer 3; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania: 4.

Loutzenhiser, father of Jacob, and Jacob's brothers John and Peter, followed in the wake of Jacob Loutzenhiser to the area. John was already married and came with his wife and two sons. Peter remained unmarried and died soon after arriving in 1802. Jacob Loutzenhiser was also married and came with his wife and son. John produced eleven children in total with his wife Margaret. Jacob and Mary had nine children by the time Jacob died.²¹ Joseph Keck came with his wife Catherine, his parents George and Helen, brothers Peter, Abraham, Daniel, and Jacob, and sister Catharine. Joseph and Catherine eventually had ten children, Abraham and his wife Magdalena had eleven, Peter and Christina seven, Daniel and Rebecca eight, Jacob and Elizabeth seven, and Catharine and Frederick also had seven. Two generations after George Keck there were fifty Kecks, with most in the Greenville area.²² The genealogical record of the Klingensmiths is not as complete, but the patriarch of the family was Daniel Klingensmith and he brought his sons John and Peter, and daughters Catherine, Magdalena, and Mary. All his daughters married into one of the other families and their offspring has already been noted. John and his wife had sixteen children by 1820 and Peter and his wife ten.²³ The Christy's that came to Mercer County was the patriarch John Christy and his wife Margaret, their sons Andrew, John, and Samuel, and daughters Nancy and Jane. Andrew married soon after arriving and had eleven children with Susan, while John and Mary had seven children and Samuel remained a bachelor his entire life.²⁴ The record of the daughters Nancy and Jane has not been fully explored, but one gets an idea of how the coming of the four families brought a community simply by their arrival.

These early families were predominantly farmers, but right from the start some members

²¹"Loutzenhiser Family." Joseph Loutzenhiser Family Folder; Genealogy Drawer 1: A-L; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania: 1-3.

²²"Keck Family – Mercer County." Keck Family Folder; Genealogy Drawer 1: A-L; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania.

²³ 1820 Census, West Salem Township, Mercer County. Censusrecords.com.

²⁴"Christy." Christy, John Folder; Genealogy Drawer 1: A-L; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania.

worked as millers or had distilleries. Jacob Loutzenhiser first lived in what is now Orangeville, and built a mill there. In 1802 he moved to the Shenango River and bought the Williamson Mill in 1806. He built a grist mill in 1815 and was the principle miller for the community until his death in 1821.²⁵ His role as the miller was vital for the town's success because it was far easier to transport grain to market after it had been ground into flour rather than travelling miles away to grind it. Joseph Keck ran one of the first distilleries on his farm south of town on the Shenango, which may have supplied Tobias' Shanks tavern up river.²⁶ Over time, other facilities and amenities were added as the area grew from a small agrarian community to an industrial town.

Tracing the genealogies of these families illustrates how interconnected they were. The Kecks and the Klingensmiths were already joined through marriage prior to their arrival. Joseph Keck and Catherine Klingensmith were married in Westmoreland Co. in 1797 before migrating north later that year. His brother Abraham married Catherine's sister Magdalena, cementing the bond between the Kecks and the Klingensmiths.²⁷ In the next few years a giant family of kin developed within the community. Jacob Loutzenhiser married the third daughter of David Klingensmith, Mary, and the three German families bonded.²⁸ Some of the bonds became more convoluted as time went on. For example, Jacob Keck, son of the patriarch of the Kecks, George, married Elizabeth Loutzenhiser, the daughter of Jacob Loutzenhiser and Mary Klingensmith. In this situation, Jacob Keck married the daughter of his sister-in-law's sister, since his brothers were married to Mary Klingensmith's sisters. Although most of the marriages were likely formed

²⁵“Loutzenhiser Family.” Joseph Loutzenhiser Family Folder; Genealogy Drawer 1: A-L; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania: 1-3.

²⁶Kathyran McElhaney Lewis, “History of Early Greenville,” Greenville – By Kathyran McElhaney Lewis; Subject Drawer 2: G to R; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania: 3.

²⁷“Keck Family – Mercer County.” Keck Family Folder; Genealogy Drawer 1: A-L; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania.

²⁸“Loutzenhiser Family.” Joseph Loutzenhiser Family Folder; Genealogy Drawer 1: A-L; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania.

out of necessity, due to the lack of residents in the area, they also formed bonds that transpired into good business relationships. For example, Jacob Loutzenhiser's sister Elizabeth Loutzenhiser, married John Probst. Probst ran a land company with John Walker and Benjamin Lodge which had bought up most of the land in Mercer County. When Jacob Loutzenhiser and his future father-in-law David Klingensmith were looking for new land, they bought it from Jacob's brother-in-law Probst. The four original families gradually intermarried, forming one giant family of kin, which I call "the family."

The genealogies also illustrate how new comers to the area were brought into "the family." As mentioned earlier, two other notable families also moved to the area soon after the initial four, the Williamsons and the Beans. The Williamsons joined with the Christys when Andrew Christy married Susan Williamson, daughter of James Williamson, in 1803.²⁹ The Beans were brought into the fold through bonds with the third generation of the original families. Hugh Bean married Esther Keck, daughter of Joseph Keck and Catherine Klingensmith, while William Bean married Polly Loutzenhiser, daughter of Jacob Loutzenhiser and Mary Klingensmith. The Christys only joined "the family" indirectly, through the Williamsons. Oliver B. Christy, son of Andrew Christy, married Mary K. Williamson. Another bond was formed by Henrietta Williamson, granddaughter of the patriarch James Williamson, when she married Jacob Loutzenhiser, the grandson of the miller Jacob Loutzenhiser.

The Identity of the Early Community

The interconnectedness of the families into one "family" gave the early community a sense of identity as a community of kin. The ties between the families and individuals in the community to each other were largely formed through the bonds of kinship via marriage. The

²⁹ "Christy." Christy, John Folder; Genealogy Drawer 1: A-L; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania.

early community was one knit together as kin which brought the community together despite their differences.

Three of the original families were German, yet their ethnic bonds were overshadowed by the inclusion of outsiders as kin. Early on, the three German families joined through bonds of kinship. The various nationalities present may explain why the Ulster-Scot families of the Christys and Williamsons were not brought into “the family” until later, when ties back to Europe faded. As the community became joined through kinship, an identity based on nationality faded and was replaced by being a member within the larger community, in which daily life was lived alongside not only brothers and sisters, but uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, and even those related more distantly.

The institution of the church worked to unite those from various ethnicities into a cohesive whole. The first church formed was United Presbyterian in 1802, and initially met in Shank’s Tavern or outdoors until it acquired its own building. For over twenty years this was the only church in Greenville, until the Presbyterian Church formed in 1825, followed by the Methodist Episcopal in 1828, and the St. Michaels Catholic Church in 1838.³⁰ Although the Williamsons and Christys were Irish, they were Ulster-Scots and Presbyterians like the Kecks, Loutzenhisers, and Klingensmiths³¹. Through the act of worship the early community came together weekly at Shank’s Tavern.

³⁰ Kathyran McElhaney Lewis, “History of Early Greenville,” Greenville – By Kathyran McElhaney Lewis; Subject Drawer 2: G to R; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania: 3.

³¹ White, 240.

Influence of “the family” on modern Greenville

Collective identity is also formed through cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is an encompassing term to describe all of the artifacts which survive and refer to the past.³² These cultural artifacts are present in every community but usually only at work in the subconscious level. The typical small town downtown architecture in America was all built in the late nineteenth century. It is readily recognizable for all who are familiar with small towns, yet little thought is given to how and why these places all use the same style. Through cultural artifacts such as these, people from many places have a sense of belonging to the larger community.

Besides architecture, another cultural memory derives from road and street names. There are some common names, such as “Washington St.” which unite communities throughout America in remembering one of the founding fathers. But individual communities each leave their own markers of those who influenced its past. One of the most striking memories of early Greenville is the records they left on road and street names. Although none of the initial four families are represented on the names of roads, the names stand as an example of the formative years. The Williamsons are represented by Williamson Road, a key artery which crosses Hempfield Township. Leech Road intersects Williamson Road, and is named after James Leech, who married Anna Loutzenhiser, the granddaughter of Joseph Loutzenhiser. The daughter of James Williamson, Isabel, married Francis Beatty, after which Beatty School Road is named. Donation Road is a reminder that the lands were set aside as Donation Lands.

Memory of the Families in Town Histories

As discussed earlier, the early history of Greenville tells the story of four families who came to the area looking for land. Besides the initial efforts to settle the land, little is mentioned

³² Poole, 279.

about the town until it was incorporated as a borough in 1838. The picture of a community living *in* community is not one overtly emphasized in the traditional accounts. Looking at the town and county histories, we can see in what ways the early settlers and founders are remembered and what that tells us about the role the early history plays in the identity of the community today.

Greenville is located in Mercer County, and several county histories provide an insight of how the early settlers were remembered by later generations. The author(s) of the 1877 history mention several descendants as their sources of information in the Greenville area, including Jacob Loutzenhiser, Jr. and James Williamson, son of John Williamson, which explains why there are several specific stories told which were left out in later histories. The leaders of a company of settlers to the region were listed as Andrew Christy, Peter Klingensmith, Jacob Loutzenhiser, Joseph Keck, and Daniel Klingensmith. These men were described as “men of limited fortune, but imbued with a spirit of indomitable perseverance, and a determination to better their condition in life.”³³ The county history mentions that Andrew Christy married Susan Williamson and fought in the War of 1812 as colonel where “his regiment was noted for their courage and discipline.”³⁴ Christy lived in what is now Hempfield Township, and the first school there met in a log cabin built by him. The 1877 county history also recognized him as the first justice of the peace in the county.³⁵ The Klingensmiths on the other hand settled in West Salem Township and were described as “men of unusual energy, and took up very extensive tracts, as Peter Klingensmith gave each of his four sons 300 acres and each of his daughters 100.”³⁶ It was said that Peter Klingensmith was the “avowed enemy” of the “Indians [who] were inclined to be

³³ 1877 *History of Mercer County, Pennsylvania: with Illustrations Descriptive of its Scenery, Palatial Residences, Public Buildings, Fine Blocks, and Important Manufactories, From Original Sketches by Artists of the Highest Quality* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts & Co., 1877), 42.

³⁴ 1877 *History of Mercer County*, 43.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

mischievous” and he “was in the habit of barring his door securely every night, and kept a savage dog by his bed-side to protect him.”³⁷ Peter also fought in the War of 1812 but tragically he drowned in 1842 in Big Run, a tributary of the Shenango River.³⁸ One of the few women mentioned in the county histories, it was said of Mary Loutzenhiser (formerly Mary Klingensmith) that during the winter of 1800, an “ice gorge backed the water of the Shenango to a great height” and she fled with the children into their loft to escape “where she kept warm for twenty-four hours by making a fire in a large iron kettle.”³⁹ Of her husband Jacob Loutzenhiser, the county history remembers him as a miller, first in Orangeville and then in Greenville. The 1877 county history not only was very cognizant of who the founders were and their legacy for the town but also recorded several accounts and stories from their descendants that were passed around and formed a sort of myth about the early men and women to Greenville.

The 1909 county history is organized by subject, such as education, manufacturing, and railroads in addition to a singular chapter on the towns in the county, so the history of Greenville appears throughout the volume in patchwork rather than all in one narrative. The traditional narrative of the four families is partially present in the history of Hempfield Township, rather than in that of Greenville because they lived in what became Hempfield Township.⁴⁰ The founders are listed as Andrew Christy, Jacob Loutzenhiser, Joseph Keck, and Daniel and Peter Klingensmith who were “the leaders of the colony which came here from Westmoreland county in 1796” and are given praise as “men of more than ordinary enterprise, and the activities of themselves and their descendants have been a permanent influence in this and the adjoining

³⁷ Ibid., 83-85.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁰ White, 173.

townships of northwest Mercer county.”⁴¹ There is only brief mention of how the early community was linked through family, by “Jacob Loutzenhiser, who, with his father-in-law, Daniel Klingensmith, had purchased a large tract of land along the Shenango” and Andrew Christy who married Susan Williamson which “connected his family with that of another noted pioneer of this region, whose career furnishes points of history for Greenville and vicinity.”⁴² The county history instead highlights the story of progress: the construction and operation of civic duties, businesses and industries, in which some familiar names play a central role. For instance, Jacob Loutzenhiser built up the community through several roles during his lifetime. He was part of the first grand jury, in addition to at least two other residents of Greenville, James Waugh and Alexander Bean.⁴³ Jacob Loutzenhiser was also one of the first millers in the county, having built a mill near present-day Orangeville in 1798 before relocating to Greenville in 1802 and acquiring John Williamson’s mill in 1806.⁴⁴ Loutzenhiser’s sons carried out the miller tradition after his death in 1821, while one of his other mills was operated by Joseph Keck. John Williamson not only operated one of the grist mills in Greenville, but was influential in forming the civic government of Mercer County as a trustee in 1800 and fighting in the War of 1812.⁴⁵ Joseph Keck is mentioned as building a distillery in 1801 and he is credited as the first distiller in the county. Joseph Keck also gave a parcel of land to the town in 1826 which now constitutes the downtown area. One of his descendants, John Keck, Jr. also donated to the borough in 1868, four lots on Main Street at the juncture of Penn St. which became the town’s central park.⁴⁶ A different John Keck served on the first board of trustees of Thiel College when it was moved to

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 109, 174.

⁴³ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 47, 49.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 19, 291.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 110-111, 118-119.

Greenville in 1869 from Phillipsburg, PA.⁴⁷ The Christys were remembered for Andrew's role in the War of 1812, where he served as a colonel.⁴⁸

While the 1909 county history does not tell the story of the four families being one family, it does paint a picture of a collaborative community in some instances. For example, in order to provide for one of the three necessities of shelter, food, and warmth, "neighbors of a certain community would combine their interests and one would be selected to convey the grain and bring back the flour for them all," as settlers would come to the mills in Greenville from twenty miles away, as they were some of the first mills in the county.⁴⁹ The 1909 county history remembered several of the leading men from the first families and commemorated their roles in creating a place to live for their descendants through industry and business.

Town histories appear in commemorative publications produced for anniversaries, and although the anniversary celebrations were all about having pride in the past, they still are useful sources because we know their perspective. Keeping in mind the town histories were all about glorifying the achievements of the community, the absence of remembrances is revealing because the contents of these anniversary accounts point to what was important to the town. The 125th anniversary, the history starts, like the others, with the same men arriving in the area with their families. Yet there is no indication from this history that these men were all related to each other. The story revolves around what land each man bought and what they built, such as with Daniel Klingensmith, who "purchased two 400-acre tracts of land from Lodge, Probst and Walker, comprising two of the original tracts on which Greenville is situated."⁵⁰ No comment is made on the nature of the men as in earlier accounts. In the 1963 history they are simply men

⁴⁷ Ibid., 123.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁰ Beaver, "A Brief History of Greenville," 7.

who came and bought land and built industry, but nothing is said of their character. Jacob Loutzenhiser and John Williamson are remembered for their mill operations, but while a distillery is mentioned as being in Greenville in 1801, Joseph Keck was no longer remembered for operating it, “a distillery was established at Shenango in 1801 and there have been several distilleries and breweries in Greenville.”⁵¹ Although the story of progress is told as more industry and business’ were built in Greenville, few names of the men who started further industries are provided and the efforts of the first families and their descendants make no difference after 1820.

The 150th anniversary of Greenville was celebrated in 1988 and the history written for that was compiled from previous accounts, with some notable changes. The typical men are again given credit as the first settlers, but again there is no indication that they were related to each other. However, it is interesting to note that the topic of the first distillery is given consideration, since Tobias Shank’s tavern was in operation in 1797 and Joseph Keck did not establish his distillery until 1801. Instead, a new character is mentioned of John Patterson. It is thought that Patterson was a Revolutionary War veteran who lived in the area before the families from Westmoreland arrived and operated a distillery “which apparently was intended to slake the thirst of the area’s many Indians.”⁵² This story illustrates that although there were a few settlers and Revolutionary War veterans in the area before the four families of the Loutzenhisers, Klingensmiths, Kecks, and Christys, they are often forgotten because industries and the shape of the town did not take place until the four families arrived.

⁵¹ Ibid., 7-10.

⁵² Earl C. Miller, “History of Greenville, Mercer County, Pennsylvania,” *Sesquicentennial History* (Greenville: Greenville Sesquicentennial Corporation, 1988), 8, 29-30.

Memory of the Families in Community Today

While the memory of the four families faded over time through town and county histories, what do the people of today know about of the first settlers? What role do the first families play in the memory of the community? Oral histories can illustrate what aspects of a place or time people think are important, and as people derive their identity from their strongest memories, we can see what influence the families have on the community today.

Several residents were asked if they heard anything about why Greenville was founded or who the first families were. The original families are largely forgotten in the modern memory. Some residents confess they know nothing of the history but that you can find it all at the historical society, “I do not, but at the Waugh House they have all that information...I just know that it was basically pioneers, settlers, whatever, and they called it West Greenville for some time.”⁵³ “The names are very familiar,” says Kevin Jeffries, a recent graduate of the high school. “Some of my classmates in school had those last names.”⁵⁴ A fellow classmate also knew little of the early families. “I heard very little about the founding families of Greenville. I had heard about the canals and railroad, but that’s about all.”⁵⁵

The older generations know more about early Greenville than the younger. An elderly resident of ninety-five knew where some of the first families lived, “well the Kecks and Loutzenhisers were on the west bank of the Big Shenango. My folks, the Demarses and the Nelsons were on this side.”⁵⁶ A recently retired middle school math teacher recalled why Greenville was able to develop, “well most was commerce related, the Shenango and part of the Erie Canal, it was established. And Greenville was split into West Greenville and East

⁵³ Frederick A. Kiser, interview by author, Greenville, PA, October 31, 2014.

⁵⁴ Kevin Jeffries, interview by author, Facebook, March 16, 2015.

⁵⁵ Jerianne Larson, interview by author, Facebook, March 16, 2015.

⁵⁶ Jane L. Cooper, interview by author, Greenville, PA, October 31, 2014.

Greenville.” He also knew some of the families which helped build the area, “there’s you know some of the same names, Loutzenhiser, Kooter, Moss. The Kecks go back several generations.”

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Although the original four families are not remembered, when asked about early Greenville several residents recalled the Waugh brothers, “Not too much, we know about the Waughs, the first families of course we know Dr. Waugh who is the Waugh House,”⁵⁸ but sometimes the facts remembered about the brothers are not as clear. The Waugh brothers are remembered because their house is preserved and is the site of the present-day historical society, but few know why they are remembered outside of one brother was a judge and the other was postmaster. Former borough manager, Marie H. Julian, recalled the Waugh brothers as very important for the history of Greenville. “But people settled, they came from the east most of them, Pennsylvania, and came out there to settle. And then see the Waugh House, the two brothers, and that the two brothers that built that house. And they were very involved in the community. I mean one was the first cashier of the First National Bank, which there was only the First National Bank then, and then was the third president of the First National Bank. And one was the first postmaster of Greenville, one was on the committee, I mean there was about three or four men who started the Shenango Valley Cemetery, he was on that. And then one was a judge. I mean they were just very involved in the community, that’s why we wanted to keep that house, and we got that whole history of them up there.”⁵⁹ One resident said of the Waugh House museum, “and I know that house was one of the first houses built.”⁶⁰ William Waugh was remembered in the 1909 county history as a Mercer County judge in 1842 and as an early

⁵⁷ Kelly Jones, interview by author, Greenville, PA, October 31, 2014.

⁵⁸ Jill K. Jones, interview by author, Greenville, PA, October 31, 2014.

⁵⁹ Marie H. Julian, interview by author, Greenville, PA, November 13, 2014.

⁶⁰ Frederick A. Kiser, interview.

graduate of the University of Pittsburgh who later organized the First National Bank of Greenville in 1864.⁶¹ A.P. Waugh was the first postmaster in Greenville when the post office was organized in 1828.⁶² During the Civil War, a Corporal Waugh was killed at Bristoe's Station in 1863 as part of the 39th Regiment sent by Mercer.⁶³ James Waugh fought in the War of 1812 alongside John Williamson.⁶⁴

Conclusion

The early community of Greenville was originally composed of four separate families who became one family through the bonds of matrimony. Other families also became linked to “the family” as they built a community of kin. This identity of being linked through kinship caused the area to grow exponentially in the second generation as members of the families stayed close to each other. However, by the third and fourth generation, many moved further west to found the next series of towns across America. The Erie Extension Canal brought commerce and prosperity to the area, but broke down the bonds of kinship which had previously linked the area into a collaborative force living in community. After the canal the families no longer had as obvious a presence and they faded from the limelight.

The canal caused a disruption in the identity of a community based on kin and without conscious acts to continue living in community; the area became just another stop on the canal. The common goal of building a community and a place to live no longer was necessary with the incorporation of the town and the advent of the extension canal, which brought unprecedented prosperity to the community. The challenge and adversity of creating a place was no longer there

⁶¹ White, 200.

⁶² Beaver, 8.

⁶³ White, 183.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 291.

and personal interests won out over collective identity. Whereas past generations were a part of the collective identity in creating a community, the successive ones no longer felt that bond and left the community to follow their own interests. It is surprising that people would leave the community at a time when it started booming and had many newcomers, but supports the fact that the collective identity shared by the first two generations no longer was viable in the changing community.

In addition to their collective identity no longer being necessary, other factors were at work which aid in explaining why in contrast with the first two generations, the third and fourth generations moved onward to create places elsewhere. One important factor was that of land. Many of those in the “family” were agrarian, and moved to the area for new farmland. As the first and second generations split up their land among the sons, and newcomers bought up the remaining land, the plentiful land for farming was no longer available. By the third and fourth generations the family homestead was only enough for the firstborn son and was no longer split among several children. Those in these generations who wanted to continue an agrarian lifestyle had to move elsewhere in search of land.

As the bonds of kinship dissipated, and the goal of creating a place no longer was necessary, the identity of Greenville shifted. No longer identified as a community living in community, Greenville became a prosperous town full of industry and modern conveniences. Yet as the modern community struggles with leaving its prosperous past, looking to the formative period of development may provide an answer on how to continue living in community. The early years of the area were one of a community working together. Although this picture of the frontier is absent from the memory in the town histories, it is important for the community to see how its ancestors lived together before its prosperous period.

The memory of the early settlers slowly receded over time. The memory of the early families never focused on their bonds of kinship in building a town, but rather on the story of progress based around what they did for the community, instead of how they lived as a community based on kin. The people of Greenville today see the early families as playing little role in the history of Greenville, for they are not remembered. While some of the older residents know of the early settlers, their heritage is not being passed down to the younger generations. The lack of memory about the early families in the Greenville memory today illustrates no recognition of their role in shaping Greenville. But remembering the early families and how they lived in community with each other can help the Greenville community understand how and why it is the small town it is today.

Just as the modern community of Greenville can look to its past to understand where it came from and craft a new identity, so too can communities around the world draw from this study. Communities around the world can look to the early settlers of Greenville and draw from their practices in how they built a sense of place in order to live in community. In a wider sense, the memory of the early development of Greenville may not be a story of progress, but it illustrates how people lived and built a place. Communities throughout America were built in the same way, contrary to the individualistic notion of the frontier. Our memory of the early settlers therefore is formative in creating modern identity for small communities around the world.

Chapter 2: Refining Fire, 1870-1970

Introduction

On the cold wintry night of January 15, 1873, a dispatch sent to Cleveland from Greenville, Pennsylvania, over seventy miles away, read: “An excessive fire is now raging here. It commenced in the St. Charles Hotel, in the heart of the village, and several large buildings and mills are already destroyed. At midnight a general alarm was given and Meadville sent one of her fire companies by a special train. The fire is increasing. The loss cannot be estimated at this hour.”¹ A great fire devastated the small town of Greenville, despite the aid of Meadville volunteers, who came over twenty-five miles to help fight the inferno. While the community stood in the ashes and attempted to make sense of the event, news of the fire spread far and wide, as the above dispatch initially printed in Cleveland later appeared in *The New York Times*.

The Great Fire of 1873 was the largest in the history of the community and was a pivotal event in shaping the future of the town. Many of the town’s businesses in the downtown were destroyed, but the community overcame the disaster and emerged stronger than before. Although the community had been growing during the thirty years prior to the fire, due to its location along the Erie Extension Canal, ironically the inferno was a redefining event which ushered in a ‘golden age’ for the community. By 1873, faster, more modern railroads replaced the canal; with

¹ “A Town on Fire: The Village of Greenville, Penn., in Flames,” *The New York Times*, January 17, 1873, (accessed October 21, 2014), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/93288705?accountid=11835>.

the intersection of three railroad lines in town, Greenville developed into a modern industrial center after the 1873 fire.²

The fire was a sort of blessing for the community, in that it enabled them to construct the more modern brick buildings which still dominate the downtown today.



**Figure 1. Main Street
Greenville, PA.** ³

In addition, along
with the brick

buildings, by the early twentieth century Greenville's roads were paved with brick and an electric light plant was built in the 1890s in Greenville.⁴ The education facilities were also upgraded with the West Side School built in 1878, the Columbia Avenue School in 1893 and Mercer Street School in 1903.⁵ Greenville children had more opportunities available to them in

² Earl C. Miller, "History of Greenville, Mercer County, Pennsylvania," *Sesquicentennial History* (Greenville: Greenville Sesquicentennial Corporation, 1988), 10.

³ "Modern Main Street, Greenville, Pennsylvania," Personal Photo, December 4, 2013.

⁴ J.G. White, ed., *A Twentieth Century History of Mercer County, Pennsylvania: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People, and its Principal Interests*, vol. 1 of *A Twentieth Century History of Mercer County, Pennsylvania: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People, and its Principal Interests*, (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1909), 114.

⁵ *History of Greenville, Pennsylvania*. (Chicago, C.S. Homer: 1922), 6. Found and located at the Greenville Historical Society.

these new buildings and the emphasis on education in the community was attractive to families and businesses alike. While still a small town of less than ten thousand, it featured the amenities and convenience of a large city, which attracted several companies related to transportation and based around the steel industry centered in nearby Pittsburgh. One of the primary railroads, the Bessemer and Lake Erie, placed its corporate headquarters in Greenville due to its central location between Pittsburgh, Erie, and Cleveland. The Empire Car Company based out of Indianapolis built a production plant in Greenville in the nineteen-teens, though its production of automobiles was brief. The Chicago Bridge and Iron Company also operated a plant in Greenville from 1911 to 1984 and made water towers and bridges for railroads. Another railroad subsidiary, the Greenville Steel Car Company, manufactured railway cars from 1916-1986 in central Greenville. In 1922 Richard Werner created the R.D. Werner Company in Greenville, which later became the Werner Company and primarily produced aluminum ladders. These companies and industries made Greenville one of the fastest growing towns in the country in the early half of the twentieth century and brought much prosperity to the community.⁶

While many current residents point to the 1940s through 1970s as the ‘golden’ years of Greenville, the industries which made it a wealthy area existed long before the Second World War. The war, however, did add another source of income, when the federal government built the Shenango Replacement Depot (or Camp Reynolds as it was later known) three miles south of town which served as a temporary camp for soldiers before deployment overseas.⁷ The men stationed at the camp had only a few weeks before they left the country, and they flocked to Greenville on leave to carouse and relax. The thousands of servicemen patronized the shops and

⁶ Miller, “History of Greenville,” 13-35.

⁷ Ibid., 19.

movie theatres in downtown Greenville during the war, and the businesses flourished in addition to the industries aforesaid mentioned.

It is clear then that the Great Fire of 1873 was a pivotal event in the history of Greenville, because it enabled the community to modernize and attract industries, despite its small size. Yet while the fire was significant in its time and acted as a furnace which refined the community and emerged as ‘gold’ from the process, how does the community today view the event? Typically a town or community that suffers a catastrophe, overcomes it, and emerges stronger than before, remembers the event through memorials and is proud of surviving it. Some events are so powerful that the entire nation unites around the devastation as a rallying call and remembers it for generations, such as the Chicago Fire which occurred in 1871.

Chicago stands as the epitome of rebuilding and modernizing after devastation in the nineteenth century. Attempts to place a monument to old Chicago failed because in the aftermath the people of Chicago were “prospective, not retrospective.”⁸ In 1873, just two years after the fire, Chicago hosted the Inter-State Industrial Exposition in its own version of the Crystal Palace to “promote the commercial possibilities of the states of the Old Northwest as well as Chicago” and “displays of the fine arts and natural history,” but the real exhibit was the “resurrected city.”⁹ And in just twenty years, Chicago had rebuilt and modernized itself so grandly that it hosted the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893.¹⁰

Like Chicago, Greenville underwent its own revitalization and rebuilding program. The “dominant imaginative interpretive view of the [Chicago] fire was based on the ideas of resurrection, purification, revival, and renewal,” but did Greenville respond to the event

⁸ Carl Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, The Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 95.

⁹ Smith, *Urban Disorder*, 95.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

similarly?¹¹ By looking at the rhetoric of how newspapers reported the fire in Greenville, how town and regional histories remember the event through the decades, and how the modern community of Greenville remembers the fire through living memories¹², we can see what role the fire plays in the identity of the community and how it has changed over time.

Methodology

The identity of a community and how the memory of an event influences that identity over time is important not only for communities attempting to make sense of their place in an ever-changing world but also for how public historians present and memorialize people and events within communities. The memories of events are the bonds that link all Americans, such as 9/11, but while some memories link individuals and communities to the national identity, other memories add to local and regional pride and aid in helping communities maintain unique identities for themselves within the national framework.¹³ Public memories are closely linked to traditions, such as the Thanksgiving holiday and national remembrance of the Plymouth Pilgrims, and while collective national memories shape “a nation’s ethos and sense of identity,”¹⁴ on the local level public memories of a community shape their own ethos and sense of identity. As memories of events are passed on through generations, the memories are subject to distortion whether told through oral history or via newspapers and local histories, which often have an ulterior motive.¹⁵ While the public memory of an event changes, so too does the identity which derives from the remembrance of that event.

¹¹ Ibid., 98.

¹² By living memories, I mean memories which have a life of their own and are passed down through generations or throughout a group of people. In this way, memories can take on personalities and identities as they continue in their lifespan.

¹³ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 384-87.

¹⁴ Kammen, *Mystic Chords*, 13.

¹⁵ Ibid, 32.

The collective memory of a community is related to cultural identity, which is illustrated through cultural heritage. Cultural heritage results from a number of variables which are dependent upon time and place, but the attitude of a group towards its past reflects not only how it portrays itself but also the values and institutions which are the foundation of the community.¹⁶ Collective memory is one aspect of cultural heritage and a means of preserving the past for the future. The attitude of the community of Greenville will be analyzed through the memories of the Great Fire of 1873 to discern what traditions and values compose the identity of the town.

Oral history allows historians to tap into the collective memory of an entire community, and understand how the community created their identity through their elaboration of various memories. While oral history can be used to construct a narrative, the subjectivity of the memories often puts the authenticity of the stories in jeopardy and one must be careful about the ways in which oral history is used as evidence. Concerning the construction of identity in relationship to collective memory, the subjectivity of memories is in itself a tool and whether or not the stories are accurate is not an issue when the memories are analyzed in relation to their role in forming identities, because they are not “static recollections of the past but are memories reworked in the context of the respondent’s own experience and politics.”¹⁷ The very mistakes and reworking of details or absence of certain memories gives clues about how the individual (or group) makes sense of the past. The historian must ask *why* certain things are remembered and not focus on *what* is actually retold, except that the *what* gives clues to the *why*.¹⁸

The collective memory of a community derives from the overlap of individual memories and how these memories are told communally. When particular memories are consistent or

¹⁶ Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, eds. Jan Assmann and Tonio Hölscher (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 133.

¹⁷ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 7.

¹⁸ Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 23.

similar stories are retold from multiple individuals then the historian is able to access the collective memory of the whole.¹⁹ The historian focuses on *how* the group remembers the past to answer the *why* of *what* is told. In essence, even the basic stories that are remembered are clues about what is important to an individual or community. No one can retell every memory, but the ones chosen are significant in some way to the respondent.²⁰ In the case of the Great Fire of 1873 in Greenville, the language used to describe the fire informs the historian about what role the fire plays in the community's identity. Whether or not the fire is even remembered at all frames what meaning the fire has for the community to the historian.

Collective memory also circumvents the inherent issue of looking at how the Great Fire of 1873 is remembered, in that no one who lived through the event is still alive today. Utilizing newspapers and town histories is a partial solution, but oral history remains the key to collective memory. Communities have a shared cultural memory of certain events and the memory is passed on through generations through stories of parents to offspring, community commemoration, and in the case of memories of the national community, media such as books, film, and music.²¹ For example, I have a shared memory of the Great Depression, because my grandfather told me stories about how as a teenager he supported his mother and siblings on a farm through that time. I now have a memory of the 1930s, because of the stories passed down to me, though I was born long after the period. Memory then is a sort of living history, a "remembered past that exists in the present."²² The history of a community exists within its collective memory and the members of the community share in the authority for "making new

¹⁹ Ibid., 96-97.

²⁰ Ibid., 151.

²¹ Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," 129.

²² Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), xxiii.

sense of the past in the present” with the historian they select which memories and stories inform their identity.²³

The connections between memory and identity in Greenville, Pennsylvania, will inform other communities of the processes involved in creating identity, even up to the national community with memories that link every American. Until the twentieth century, the local community had the most influence on Americans, and by studying the memory of Greenville I am by extension studying the memory and identity of America through the lens of a small community.²⁴ The experiences of the community of Greenville and their remembrances form a picture of how America developed and modernized after the Civil War. Local events exerted a greater influence on the common men and women of America than national events before 1900 because “the ‘nation’ was an abstraction whose significance to their lives was far less than that of their town or city or state.”²⁵ The Great Fire of 1873 was one such event which directed the course of Greenville throughout the following century.

The memory and identity of Greenville also represents working-class America. As the center of the steel industry in the twentieth century, Pennsylvania represents the industrial backbone of America and the history of workers in the state is the story “of all working people in the United States.”²⁶ As a regional center of industry in western Pennsylvania, Greenville then not only represents the story of Pennsylvania but of working-class America.

The connections between memory and identity were explored in the nearby post-industrial center of Youngstown, Ohio, just across the border from Greenville by Sherry Lee

²³ Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, xxiii.

²⁴ David J. Russo, *Families and Communities: A New View of American History* (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1974), 1.

²⁵ Russo, *Families and Communities*, 5.

²⁶ Carolyn Kitch, *Pennsylvania in Public Memory: Reclaiming the Industrial Past* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 16.

Linkon and John Russo. The story of Youngstown as an industrial center parallels that of Greenville, and Linkon and Russo examined how Youngtown's identity revolved around the steel industry and how the community now struggles to make sense of its place in the world without it.²⁷ While Linkon and Russo seek to explain how Youngstown's identity remains unresolved, I am exploring other sources of identity for the post-industrial community of Greenville by investigating the role of the catalyzing event. By investigating how and why certain events play a role in the formation of community identity, historians may have to rethink which events we choose to emphasize in history if they hold little meaning for the public.

The singular event of the 1873 fire and how the memory of it changes over time illustrates how the identity of a community develops, and with it the community's sense of their place in the world. Linkon and Russo maintain that community memory "defines the memory of place both now and in the future," and in a constantly changing world communities are continually faced with threats to their identity.²⁸ One way communities can ground themselves is by remembering their history and fostering a community memory that transcends time and change.

The Great Fire of 1873 will be looked at starting with the reports of the fire in Greenville's newspapers, and then moving to how other newspapers of the day recorded the event. Then the ongoing memory of the event as it appears in successive newspapers and town and regional newspapers for a century afterwards will be discussed to see how the memory of the event changed over time. Finally, the modern memory of the event through oral histories with

²⁷ Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 2.

²⁸ Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 66.

living members of the Greenville community will be addressed to tie up the analysis of memory and identity in Greenville, Pennsylvania.

The Great Fire in Newspapers

Looking at the fire from the perspective of the town newspapers, it was an event that affected the entire community. The headline of the *Greenville Argus* read “A Little Local Boston! Central Greenville in Ashes,” comparing the conflagration to the Great Boston Fire that occurred two months prior in November, 1872.²⁹ The article detailed how the fire spread from building to building on Main Street; in total thirty-one buildings were destroyed and fourteen families displaced from their dwellings. The efforts of the volunteer fire fighters were also valiantly praised for responding to the alarm at eleven on Wednesday, the 15th through two in the morning of the 16th. “Our boys met and fought the flames manfully at this point, but it was of no avail.”³⁰ The reporter even empathized with the Chicago and Boston communities, “We meditate upon the misfortunes of the people of Chicago and Boston, but feel it the more keenly when it comes to our own household.”³¹ The bulk of the article listed the damages to the property on Main Street, which amounted to \$90,000, and today would cost \$1,800,000.

Despite the staggering property damage, the community rallied around those who suffered losses and helped them get back on their feet. The *Greenville Argus* article, printed only three days after the Wednesday night fire, included the names of twelve shopkeepers who, by the beneficence of other businesses, were relocated to temporary spaces and continued business as usual. The fourteen families left without dwellings also received the support of the community,

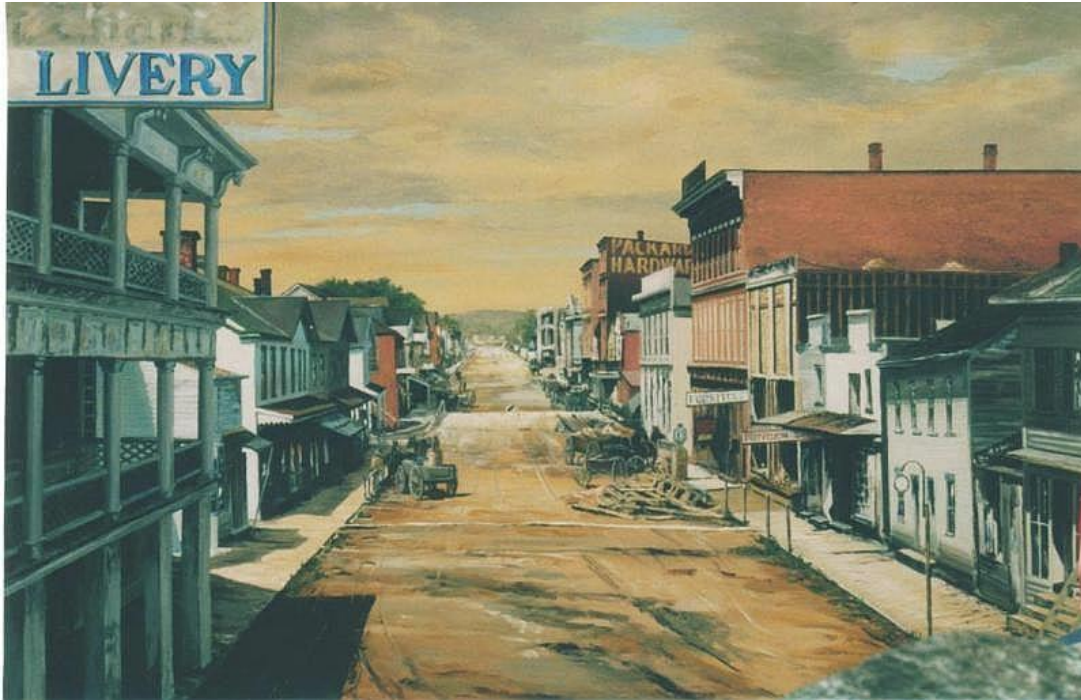
²⁹ “A Little Local Boston! Central Greenville in Ashes,” *Greenville Argus*, January 18, 1873, (accessed October 10, 2014), <http://www.newspaperarchive.com/us/pennsylvania/greenville/greenville-argus/1873/01-18/>.

³⁰ “A Little Local Boston!”

³¹ *Ibid.*

“The fourteen families that are rendered homeless are cared for by those having commodious residences.”³²

Figure 2. Greenville, PA 1868. ³³



Greenville received offers of aid from Pittsburgh, Meadville, and Sharon, Pennsylvania, but according to the *Greenville Argus* the town refused the aid because the whole community provided for the survivors. The most interesting part of the Saturday article is the optimism that Greenville would overcome the catastrophe and eerily predicted what occurred in the years following: “In a short space of time we expect to see Greenville arise from her ashes, Phoenix like of course, and present to the visitor a much more substantial appearance than of old.”³⁴ The actions taken by the residents of Greenville in the aftermath of the burnt carnage epitomize the

³² “A Little Local Boston!” page 3.

³³ “Greenville, PA, 1868.” Northern Mercer County Facebook Group, <https://www.facebook.com/NMCPA/photos/a.292955447564341.1073741828.292946607565225/310337509159468/?type=1&theater>, (accessed December 11, 2014).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

positivist attitude of the Progressive Era. Their determination and denial of aid exemplifies the “American mythology of starting over, of reinventing the self,” which stemmed from the aftermath of the costly Civil War where “the entire country was faced with the task of starting over.”³⁵

The Advance, printed a week after the fire, illustrates how the community moved forward and responded to the event. Much of the article repeats that of the *Greenville Advance* from the previous weekend, such as a list of whose stores and homes were destroyed and the property damage. One important detail, which in part answers how the shop-owners overcame the financial loss, was that the damages were less than the original \$90,000 estimated, coming to \$83,000. The uninsured damages amounted to \$33,000, which is equivalent to \$600,000 in uninsured property damages by today’s standard.³⁶ Of these damages no more than \$6,000 was to a single owner, or \$120,000 in 2014 dollars. The burned district in the downtown was three hundred by one hundred and twenty feet on the south side of Main Street and also three hundred feet long on the north side.³⁷ The most telling aspect of *The Advance* edition is a short article explaining that the town businessmen already decided that no more wooden buildings would be allowed on Main Street in Greenville: “We understand that our borough authorities are of the opinion that...The burned district on Main street should be built up only with brick buildings.”³⁸ These brick buildings are still the central feature of the downtown of modern Greenville, a direct consequence of the Great Fire of 1873. Two other short articles from the same edition illustrate how the people of Greenville strove to prevent a future catastrophe. One article pondered the

³⁵ Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009) 1.

³⁶ “The Recent Fire,” *The Advance*, January 23, 1873, (Accessed October 10, 2014), <http://www.newspaperarchive.com/us/pennsylvania/greenville/greenville-advance/1873/01-23/page-3>.

³⁷ “The Recent Fire.”

³⁸ “No More Wooden Buildings,” *The Advance*, January 23, 1873, (Accessed October 10, 2014), <http://www.newspaperarchive.com/us/pennsylvania/greenville/greenville-advance/1873/01-23/page-3>.

question of “Can Steam Set Fire to a House?” while the adjacent column described a new idea for “Fire-Proof Buildings,” where structures should be built akin to a steam boiler, which “would withstand any heat that could be brought against it.”³⁹ The printed stories in this newspaper show how the Greenville community adapted and explored ideas for preventing future infernos as they looked forward to a brighter future.

The *Greenville Argus* printed the following week added little new information about the fire, but provides some evidence about how other communities responded to the event and lessons learned from the fire. A story reprinted from the Lawrence *Guardian*, based in New Castle, Pennsylvania, detailed the urging of the New Castle community to prepare a proper fire fighting force to respond in the event that a fire should take place in their town.⁴⁰ Besides reprinting the story of the fire and losses suffered, the *Greenville Advance* updated the community on future plans for rebuilding. This issue, printed just ten days after the fire, chronicles the plans of seven shop owners to rebuild shortly, including the acquisition of building materials by John Keck, a grandson of one of the original settlers: “John Keck has purchased a large quantity of brick for building purposes,”⁴¹ already following the new building ordinance which was passed the previous Monday, just five days after the fire: “At a meeting of the Town Council on Monday evening...prohibiting the further erection of wooden buildings on Main street.”⁴² In an article titled “The Lessons of the Fire,” we can see the immediate consequences and action taken by the community to prevent future disasters who determined to

³⁹ “Can Steam Set Fire to a House?” and “Fire-Proof Buildings,” *The Advance*, January 23, 1873, (Accessed October 10, 2014), <http://www.newspaperarchive.com/us/pennsylvania/greenville/greenville-advance/1873/01-23/page-4>.

⁴⁰ “The Lesson,” *Greenville Argus*, January 25, 1873, (accessed October 10, 2014), <http://www.newspaperarchive.com/us/pennsylvania/greenville/greenville-argus/1873/01-25/>.

⁴¹ “The Late Conflagration: Rebuilding,” *Greenville Argus*, January 25, 1873, (accessed October 10, 2014), <http://www.newspaperarchive.com/us/pennsylvania/greenville/greenville-argus/1873/01-25/>.

⁴² “The Late Conflagration: No More Wooden Buildings,” *Greenville Argus*, January 25, 1873, (accessed October 10, 2014), <http://www.newspaperarchive.com/us/pennsylvania/greenville/greenville-argus/1873/01-25/>.

no longer build wooden buildings, acquire a fire engine of any type, but particularly a steam one, and organize an official fire department.⁴³ These accounts from the local newspapers demonstrate the unity and collaboration of the community, which was not able to stop the blaze on that fateful night of January 15, but worked together in the ensuing days to provide for those who lost property and agreed on specific changes to better prepare and rebuild stronger than before.

The Greenville fire was reported in towns across the nation as far away as New York, but these articles were brief and emphasized the aid that Meadville sent to put out the fire. *The New York Times* story was simply a reprint of the dispatch sent to Cleveland, but demonstrates that even in the metropolis of New York City, they were aware of the plight of Greenville, and was in a column alongside stories from St. Louis, Little Rock, Albany, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Concord, and Chicago.⁴⁴ A week following the fire, south of Pittsburgh, *The Somerset Herald* printed a summary of the fire taken from the Greenville extra and mentioned the damages and the fact that the Meadville fire department came to the aid of Greenville.⁴⁵ The Somerset story is a short copy from the *Greenville Advance*, and does not illustrate how the people of Somerset viewed the fire, but at least shows their awareness of the event. The most interesting printing of the Greenville fire from another town appears in *The Forest Republican*, from Tionesta, Pennsylvania, two weeks following the event. The brief summary left out any mention of the devastation of the fire, reported only on the assistance provided by the Meadville fire department, and mentioned the Atlantic and Great Western Railway which transported the

⁴³ "The Lessons of the Fire," *Greenville Argus*, January 25, 1873, (accessed October 10, 2014), <http://www.newspaperarchive.com/us/pennsylvania/greenville/greenville-argus/1873/01-25/>.

⁴⁴ "A Town on Fire."

⁴⁵ "Greenville, PA: Conflagration," *The Somerset Herald*, January 22, 1873, (accessed October 10, 2014), <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026409/1873-01-22/ed-1/seq-2.pdf>.

Meadville crew to Greenville at no charge.⁴⁶ The principal significance of these accounts in various newspapers is that there was a general awareness between communities of their circumstances and the fire in Greenville was important enough to be printed as far away as New York.

The Great Fire of 1873 was remembered in Greenville's newspapers a few times since the event. In 1923 *The Evening Record* printed a story about the fire for the fiftieth anniversary of that night, and echoed the original story of the *Greenville Advance*, correlating the fire to the infernos of Chicago, Boston, and Baltimore: "It was to Greenville what 'The Fire' was to Chicago, to Boston, and to Baltimore."⁴⁷ The rest of the article reprinted an edited version of the extra from January 16, 1873, but just the simple fact that the fire was remembered fifty years later points to its significant role in the town's history leading up to 1923. As it was an edited version of the original extra, it is noteworthy that a list of those who suffered losses in the fire was still included, but without the individual costs, only the collective damage of \$80,000 was mentioned. This disparity in recounting the damages illustrates that between 1873 and 1923, the individual responsibility from the fire was deemed no longer important, all that mattered was the collective. In 1923 the children and grandchildren of the business owners would have been living in the community, and the names listed in the article were a memorial and way for the 1923 community to honor those most closely affected by the fire.

In 1976 the *Greenville Record-Argus* remembered the Great Fire in a serial on the history of the Greenville Fire Department. The serial used similar language which harkened back to the original descriptions of the fire in 1873 as the "Little Boston," illustrating that at least the author

⁴⁶ "Local and Miscellaneous," *The Forest Republican*, January 29, 1873, (accessed October 10, 2014), <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026497/1873-01-29/ed-1/seq-3.pdf>.

⁴⁷ "Greenville Had Its Big Fire 50 Years Ago," *The Evening Record*, January 18, 1923. Evening Record, Jan.18, 1923 "Great Fire" 1873, Fire, Subject Drawer, Greenville Historical Society.

understood the magnitude of the fire on Greenville in 1873.⁴⁸ In this account of the fire, the author chose to list what businesses survived, rather than what was destroyed. Most likely this switch in the memory is due to an attempt to conserve print space in the newspaper, but the consequences of leaving out those who suffered are twofold. First, building off the earlier point of the 1923 article memorializing the “losers,” the absence of their inclusion denotes a shift away from the community pride of helping the afflicted. The second is that the 1976 story remembers the event as a force of nature, with the only “human” element embodied in the assistance of the Meadville Fire Department in putting out the fire.⁴⁹

The Great Fire in Town and County Histories

Town and county histories also provide clues as to the memories of the Great Fire, but it must be kept in mind that “local histories frequently extol a ‘tradition of progress’ that seems absolutely central to the community’s evolution”⁵⁰ when reading these texts. The *1877 History of Mercer County* describes the fire as a “terrible conflagration” but only devotes one sentence to the event. After describing three other big fires in the history of Greenville, the county history says the fires were not “unmixed misfortunes,” because “a new Greenville has arisen from her former ashes” and the business district is “the best built of any town on the river.” The new brick and stone buildings are described as “metropolitan,” as opposed to the former “dilapidated wooden structures.” It further describes Main Street as “the pride of the citizens.”⁵¹ The 1877 county history provides a view that although the fire was devastating, the community benefited from it and within a few years built themselves a downtown of which they were proud.

⁴⁸ Fred Palmiter, “Little Boston Was Worst: Borough’s Early Years Marked by Major Fires,” *Greenville Record-Argus*, May 27, 1976, page 16, 81.13.11, 80.1.26. Fires, Subject Drawer, Greenville Historical Society.

⁴⁹ Palmiter, page 16.

⁵⁰ Kammen, *Mystic Chords*, 14.

⁵¹ *1877 History of Mercer County, Pennsylvania: with Illustrations Descriptive of its Scenery, Palatial Residences, Public Buildings, Fine Blocks, and Important Manufactories, From Original Sketches by Artists of the Highest Quality* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts & Co., 1877), 97.

The 1888 county history drew heavily from the extra printed regarding the fire in 1873. It called the fire of 1873 the “Chicago conflagration of the town.”⁵² The account is much more detailed than the 1877 and lists the individuals affected by the fire and their property damages. But the 1888 version made no comment on the condition of the town since the fire, and focused primarily on the damages. It appears that the authors of the 1877 version visited Greenville and reported on the condition of the town, while the 1888 history simply pulled facts from the newspapers, and the 1888 history is no help in understanding the role of the fire in the formation of identity in Greenville.

The 1909 history of Mercer County is more useful than the 1888, although like the other histories it is written from an outsider’s perspective. This history tells us that the old residents of Greenville at that time called it the ‘big fire,’ and was the “event by which previous and subsequent time is often reckoned.”⁵³ The Meadville Fire Department was attributed with eventually putting out the fire and the history recognizes that Main Street was completely reconstructed after the 1873 fire. There is no mention of the individuals who lost property in the fire, just a total assessment of the damage to the community. This account of the fire reveals that already in 1909, only the older generation of Greenville remembered the fire, but it was so significant that other events and memories were referenced around it.

Some histories of the town were written for various anniversaries through the years. The 125th anniversary history describes the fire with one sentence, that both sides of Main Street were destroyed and consumed thirty-five buildings in all. The author of the 1963 history claims their main significance of the fire as an “impetus to the organization in 1880 of a real volunteer fire department.” He does state that the fires in the town’s history “do have the advantage of clearing

⁵² *History of Mercer County, 1888* (Brown, Pank & Co., 1888), 444.

⁵³ White, *A Twentieth Century History*, 114.

out some old and obsolete buildings to make room for new and better structures, thus improving the appearance of the town.”⁵⁴ The 1963 history describes how Greenville changed over time, but does not provide any interpretations as to how the town was able to progress. In 1963, the role of the fire in the identity of Greenville was solely that it motivated the town to create a fire department and provided space for more modern, attractive buildings.

The 1988 Greenville history echoes previous histories in its description of the Great Fire but is more optimistic about it. Like the others it calls it the “Chicago conflagration of the town” and provides the number of buildings destroyed with no other mention of damages. The Great Fire is included in a discussion of three “history-making events” of the 1870s, along with the transplant of Thiel College from Phillipsburg to Greenville and another large fire in 1871.⁵⁵ The 1988 history acknowledges the destruction but also that some members of the community viewed the event as a “blessing” because it opened up the downtown to “more orderly brick reconstruction...which in earlier years had been built up in a rather hodge-podge fashion.”⁵⁶ By 1988 the individuals associated with the event were long forgotten, but the event still held significance in crafting the community, even as a “blessing” that was critical in creating the appearance of the downtown business district.

⁵⁴ Roy C. Beaver, “A Brief History of Greenville,” *Greenville, PA. 125th Anniversary: 1838-1963* (Greenville: The Anniversary Committee, 1963), 20.

⁵⁵ Miller, 11, 33.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

The Great Fire in Community Memory Today

Oral histories of the modern community add another dimension to the role of the Great Fire in the formation of identity. Some of the older residents are aware of the fire, and even know that it burned down both sides of Main Street, but other details are forgotten in the community memory of today. Those who were are a part of the borough government know the general history of the community and the fire is familiar to them, “yeah, and one whole side of Main Street burned. So then when they had to rebuild they had to put a brick wall between the stores because there was nothing, they were all wooden. It was on the south side of Greenville. I think

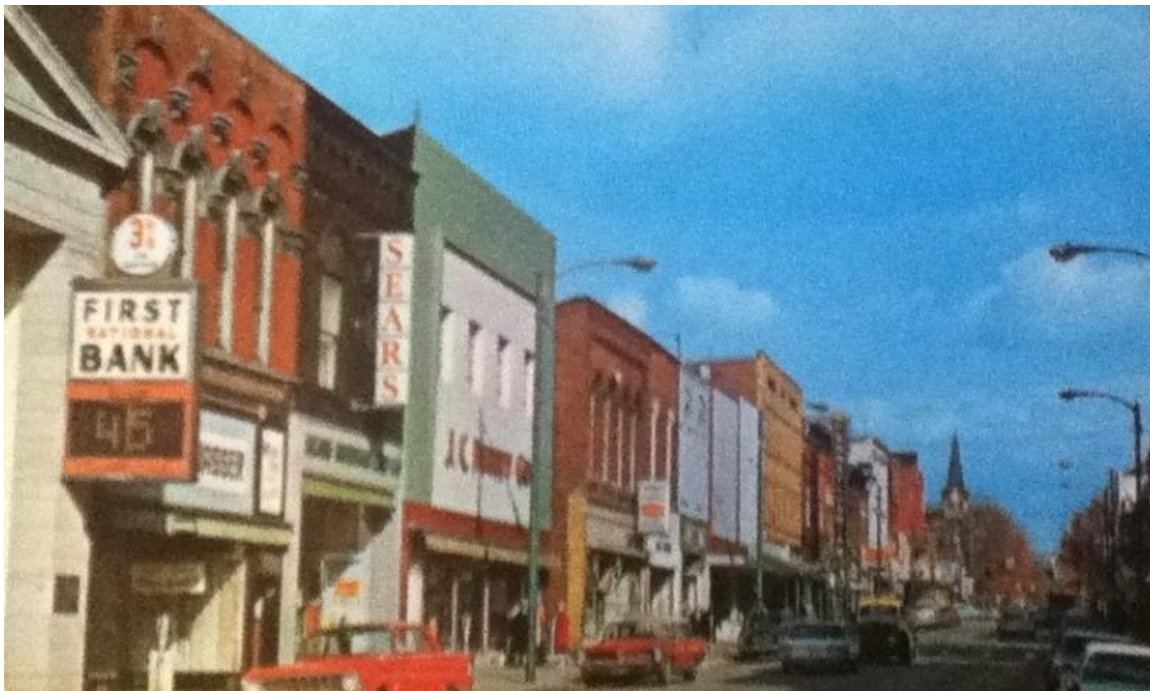


Figure 3. “Postcard of downtown Greenville, PA, from the 1950s.”⁵⁷

we have a picture. I don’t remember what caused it. I don’t know if they did know.”⁵⁸ When asked if he heard about a fire from the 1870s, the community liaison recalled “basically the whole downtown area, pretty much all the buildings were burned down. And that was sad. The

⁵⁷ “Postcard of Downtown Greenville, PA, from 1950s.” Photo taken by author in Greenville Historical Society Museum, December 4, 2013.

⁵⁸ Marie H. Julian, interview by author, Greenville, PA, November 13, 2014.

good news was they were able to put some buildings back up.”⁵⁹ One ninety-five year old attests that “we learned about it in school. In history class,” but had no memory of stories from her family, “no, I don’t recall any. But just in history you know.”⁶⁰ She learned about the fire in school, but other than remembering that it destroyed the downtown she recalls nothing more of the event, “the whole downtown of Greenville was on fire. The lower end, you know where the city building is, burned.”⁶¹ When residents of the next generation and younger were asked if they had heard of the fire, a thirty-eight year old lifetime resident of Greenville responded “not really.”⁶² Another woman also knew nothing of the fire, “Somewhat, but I’m not really familiar with, I mean, I know a little bit about the Moss Company, the opera house, but I’m not really familiar about. Yeah I don’t really remember relatives talking about that.”⁶³

Based on those samples of oral histories from the community, there appears to be a total loss of memory regarding the Great Fire. Over time the memory of the fire lost its potency and was neglected as other events took precedence in the minds of the community. Asked if, when growing up, anyone in their household talked about the fire, one person responded “no there wasn’t anybody, other than I remember my mum saying that her parents, I think told her about it.”⁶⁴ Interestingly enough, when I asked his eighty-seven year old mother what she heard about the fire, she responded “no, I don’t remember that. No.”⁶⁵ The oldest generation barely remembers hearing about the fire or reading about it at the historical society, but the memory of the fire is not being passed on to younger generations.

⁵⁹ Frederick A. Kiser, interview by author, Greenville, PA, October 31, 2014.

⁶⁰ Jane L. Cooper, interview by author, Greenville, PA, October 31, 2014.

⁶¹ Ibid.

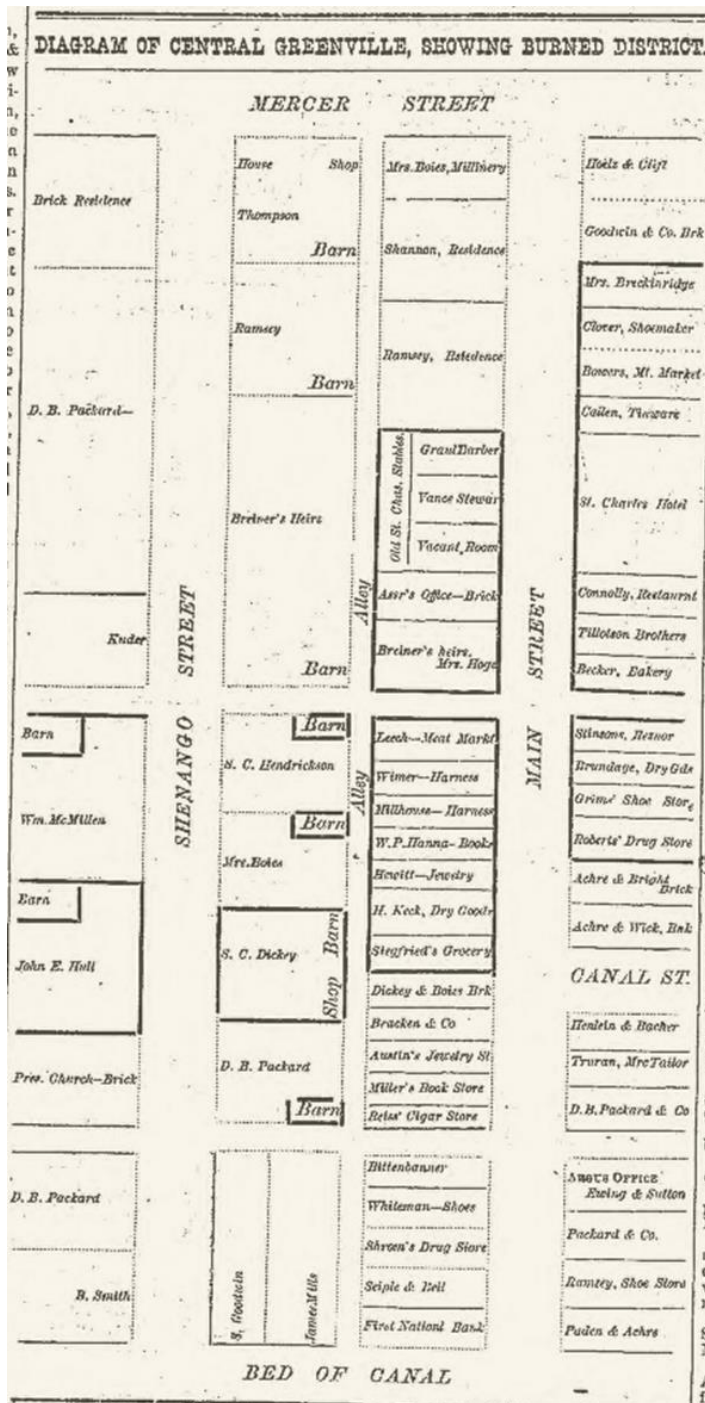
⁶² Mary Beth Smith, interview by author, Greenville, PA, November 14, 2014.

⁶³ Kathy Frederick, interview by author, Greenville, PA, November 15, 2014.

⁶⁴ Frederick A. Kiser, interview.

⁶⁵ Doris L. Kiser, interview by author, Greenville, PA, November 14, 2014.

Figure 4. "Diagram of Central Greenville", Showing Burned District.⁶⁶



Even the older generation is confused about the details of that event. Some say it was the whole downtown, others just one side of the street. A diagram from one of the newspapers ten days after the fire illustrates what really happened (Fig.4). As seen on the diagram in dark outlines, the fire raged on *both* sides of the street but did not destroy the entire downtown area. Other than an event that devastated the downtown which led to the construction of brick buildings, the 1873 fire has no meaning for the community.

Although not remembered by current residents, the original families continued their active presence in Greenville throughout the fire and rebuilding. Along with other business owners, the dry goods store of Lewis L. Keck and his uncle Henry was within the burned district (left side of

⁶⁶ "Diagram of Central Greenville," *Greenville Argus*, January 25, 1873, (accessed October 10, 2014), <http://www.newspaperarchive.com/us/pennsylvania/greenville/greenville-argus/1873/01-25/>.

Main Street).⁶⁷ Lewis L. Keck was the grandson of Joseph Keck and Catherine Klingensmith, and Lewis married Felicia Loutzenhiser. Felicia was the granddaughter of Jacob Loutzenhiser and Mary Klingensmith, so the grandmothers of Lewis and Felicia were sisters.⁶⁸ The Keck dry goods store was called H & L.L. Keck while Lewis ran it with his uncle Henry, and when Lewis' brother William replaced Henry, the store was known as L.L. Keck and Bro.

Conclusion

The Great Fire of 1873 was a significant event in the history of Greenville. As recognized by newspapers and town and county histories, the devastation of the fire enabled the community to start from scratch and rebuild their downtown in a more attractive manner. The modern appearance of Greenville combined with its location along several railroads eventually brought in several industries which made the community prosperous until the deindustrialization of the 1980s and '90s.

The memory of the fire has shifted over time. At the time of the event, it served as a trial for the community to overcome. Under pressure, the community passed through the fire and was refined into a stronger alloy ready to face the future of modernization; the fire was a catalyst for its golden age. The initial accounts of the fire concentrated on business interests and the cost of the damage. It was seen as a catastrophe well into the twentieth century as residents measured time as before or after the big fire. The community continued to remember the event and memorialized the individuals who suffered through it by recounting their names on the fiftieth anniversary of the fire. The Great Fire may have been taught in school in the early twentieth century, but over time that certainly was not the case.

⁶⁷ "Keck Family – Mercer County." Keck Family Folder; Genealogy Drawer 1: A-L; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania.

⁶⁸ Loutzenhiser Family." Joseph Loutzenhiser Family Folder; Genealogy Drawer 1: A-L; Greenville Historical Society, Pennsylvania: 1-2.

Accounts of the fire shifted away from the damages caused to individuals to simply an event that was the worst natural disaster in the history of the community. In the decades following the fire the citizens saw it as a hardship which the community came through together, but in successive generations that memory faded until it was viewed as the reason for the fire department and brick buildings. But newly organized fire departments in the nineteenth century were more than a mechanism for putting out fires. They “represented the hope that the city might not burn down, again” and “provided citizens with nothing less than the faith to build and rebuild, despite overwhelming evidence of their own destructibility.”⁶⁹ The hope that fire departments represented helped the Greenville populace stand up from the ashes but that fighting spirit is no longer remembered.

In the mid-twentieth century the fire was remembered less and less partly due to the prosperity enjoyed by the community. The troubles of Greenville-past were decades ago and a spirit of positivism dominated the town histories. The histories were written as if progress was inevitable and ongoing, without a thought as to how Greenville transitioned from a rural agrarian community to a regional industrial center over the latter part of the nineteenth century. The townspeople no longer needed the community collaboration to carry themselves through difficult times because they lived in the good times. When the ‘golden period’ ended with de-industrialization in the 1980s, the community re-evaluated itself. The discrepancy between the 1963 history and 1988 comes from the change in industry in the early 1980s. The 1963 account gives little thought to the fire, while in 1988 Greenville historian Earl Miller recognized the 1873 fire and others as “blessings in disguise,” because of how they enabled the prosperity enjoyed for

⁶⁹ Amy S. Greenberg, *Cause for Alarm: The Volunteer Fire Department in the Nineteenth-Century City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 16.

a century by enabling new construction.⁷⁰ Curiously enough the exact same language was used over a century prior on the one year anniversary of the Chicago Fire in the Chicago Evening Journal in which it was asked, “was not the Great fire a blessing in Disguise?”⁷¹

Since 1988 the memory of the fire has receded further into the corners of the community, until only town leaders are aware of much of the town’s history. This may be due in part to a few factors. One reason is due to the limited temporal horizon of collective memory. According to Assmann, this horizon of memory into the past reaches only eighty to one hundred years, or approximately three to four generations.⁷² The community today is far beyond this temporal horizon and it is no wonder that the fire is largely forgotten, it occurred one hundred and forty years ago! Too many generations have come and gone and amidst all the stories passed down from parents to children, it was shuffled out in favor of lived experiences. Another factor only revealed itself through the oral histories: the ancestors of many of the residents today arrived in Greenville after the Great Fire. While their ancestors probably heard of the fire or learned about it in school, if they did not live through the experience they are unlikely to pass it on to their descendants. A third reason reveals itself when the history of the nation and community as a whole is considered. In the decades following the fire, it was a defining event of hardship that the community overcame and so they remembered their success in prevailing through the adversity and celebrated their prosperity. The fire was most likely one of the defining moments for the community until the 1930s. But with the Great Depression as a national period of hardship for all, an event which occurred over fifty years prior ceased to hold the same meaning for the community, as they were faced with a new source of adversity. Forty years after the depression,

⁷⁰ Miller, 11.

⁷¹ Smith, 37.

⁷² Assmann, 127.

the community was hit by another defining event: deindustrialization, which undermined the community's economic livelihood. The pullout of the major industries is now the principal event that occupies the minds of the modern community. A fire which destroyed their downtown one hundred and forty years prior has little meaning for an impoverished community struggling to make sense of themselves without industry.

The transformation of the agrarian town of Greenville into an industrial force of the twentieth century demonstrates the transformation of America between the Civil War and the First World War. During this time, “a faith that equated growth with progress seized” towns and drove them to industrialize, “believing that if they did not join they would die.”⁷³ By rebuilding after the fire with new schools, new buildings, and brick paved roads, Greenville was attractive to entrepreneurs because “at the dawn of the industrial era, businessmen and politicians saw only Progress, even as the ills of industrialism afflicted their towns.”⁷⁴

As a historian, the Great Fire of 1873 is one of the pivotal moments in the history of Greenville, Pennsylvania. In the present day, the community memory illustrates that the fire has little meaning and is relegated to a quaint story of Greenville's past, if remembered at all. In the past the fire was a rallying call and the remembrance of coming through the fire stronger than before contributed to the spirit of optimism characterized by the community through much of the twentieth century. The optimism shared by the community in the aftermath of the fire is representative of the period, where all across America “in those decades, a widespread yearning for regeneration – for rebirth that was variously spiritual, moral, and physical – penetrated public life, inspiring movements and policies that free the foundation for American society in the

⁷³ Richard Lingeman, *Small Town America: A Narrative History 1620-the Present*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), 359.

⁷⁴ Lingeman, *Small Town America*, 361.

twentieth century.”⁷⁵ With the prosperity brought by industry during the ‘golden period,’ Greenville’s identity derived from the industry and not from the refining fire of 1873.

⁷⁵ Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 1.

Chapter 3: Building Bridges to the Past and Future, 1970-Present

Introduction

Chapter one details how the early settlers came to the area and established a community based on family. They lived not only in a community but *as* a community, with their familial relationships holding everyone together to build a place called home. Chapter two outlines how this community grew due to the Erie Extension Canal and the new railroads and reacted when tragedy struck. When a large fire destroyed part of what they had built together, the community responded and supported each other through the crisis, providing shelter for those whose homes burned and shop owners made space in their storerooms for shopkeepers to re-establish themselves until they could rebuild their own shops. As they rebuilt their town into a modern community with all the conveniences of a city, more industries were attracted to the area and Greenville became a hub between Pittsburgh and Cleveland, and was also coincidentally the half-way point between New York and Chicago. The fire then paved the way for the modern era as it ushered Greenville into an age of growth and prosperity.

While the first two chapters describe key moments of identity in the development of Greenville today, illustrating the change from a close-knit familial oriented society to a modern industrial community, the third part completes the arc to the present-day: the deindustrialization of the community and its struggle to maintain identity through the change. In some ways the story of Greenville is the story of America, transitioning from the colonial period after the Revolution as a society centered on the home and familial relationships to a modern industrial

nation with new technologies and infrastructure based on canals, railroads, and steel.

Greenville's story of deindustrialization is one of many communities in Pennsylvania struggling with it today, such as those in the Pittsburgh area and Scranton on the opposite side of the state.¹

Beginning in the late nineteenth century through the 1970s, America was defined by its industry and production, but the subsequent industrial decline forced the country to redefine itself.

In the community of Greenville, people look optimistically to the future as they always have, despite the changes around them. While their identity as an industrial and railroad center has declined in the last few decades, the community is working to define itself anew and once again rise like a phoenix as it did after the Great Fire of 1873. Although the perspectives in Greenville today vary, a few themes are consistent and provide us with clues to how the people of Greenville perceive themselves and their role in the world around them; or as Steve May and Laura Morrison write, "the varied and conflicting stories that downsized workers tell about deindustrialization provide the collective memory that will enable or constrain them as they attempt to re-create their lives, their conceptions of work, and their perceptions of community."²

In a post-modern world, the United States is struggling to find itself after whole communities were transformed by the shutdown of factories and industries. This final arc of the story echoes the interplay of memory and deindustrialization study on nearby Youngstown, Ohio in *Steeltown U.S.A.* by Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, who argue for the importance of memory in forming the collective identity of a place but not "imagining an idealized version of the past" because "the idea of community can provide a powerful unifying force for shared struggle and

¹ Carolyn Kitch, *Pennsylvania in Public Memory: Reclaiming the Industrial Past* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 1-2.

² Steve May and Laura Morrison, "Making Sense of Restructuring: Narratives of Accommodation Among Downsized Workers," in *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* eds. Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003) 260.

community development.”³ Besides Linkon’s and Russo’s study on Youngstown this work also draws from Carolyn Kitch’s study on memory in post-industrial Pennsylvania from the steel mills of Pittsburgh to the coal mines in Scranton, and the oil fields in Titusville to the Amish in Lancaster. All work on deindustrialization is indebted to Barry Bluestone’s and Bennett Harrison’s iconic 1982 work *The Deindustrialization of America*, in which the term deindustrialization was popularized. They defined deindustrialization as “a widespread, systematic disinvestment in the nation’s basic productive capacity.”⁴ More importantly, Bluestone and Harrison went beyond simply describing the economic implications of deindustrialization to detail how it affected America socially. Since their important work the core problem faced by a post-modern America is “the tension between the needs of capital and needs of communities.”⁵ *Steeltown U.S.A.* focuses on the search for meaning and order in Youngstown, where the steel-industry gave stability to the thousands who worked in the mills there, and when the mills closed their worlds literally crumbled around them. But “deindustrialization is not a story of a single emblematic place, such as Flint or Youngstown, or a specific time period, such as the 1980s; it was a much broader, more fundamental, historical transformation. What was labeled deindustrialization... turned out to be a more socially complicated, historically deep, geographically diverse, and politically perplexing phenomenon than previously thought.”⁶

While the search for meaning and identity is central to the final arc of the story of Greenville, I take a larger approach to the topic and sidestep the traditional framework of emphasizing the workers and their struggle by instead taking into account the friends and family and community

³ Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 240.

⁴ Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry*, (New York: Basic Book, INC, 1982) 6.

⁵ Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, “Introduction,” in *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* eds. Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003) 6.

⁶ Cowie and Heathcott, “Introduction,” 2.

as a whole, rather than just those immediately affected by deindustrialization economically. As Kathryn Marie Dudley wrote after the closing of a Chrysler plant in 1988 in Kenosha, Wisconsin, “Every participant and bystander in a local plant-closing drama is drawn into a national ‘conversation’ about cultural values. How should labor be valued? How do people demonstrate their moral worth? Who has the right to make decisions that will affect the whole community? What kind of country was America in the past, and where are we going in the future?”⁷ The arc is divided into three parts: memories of the community in the heyday before the pullout, memories of Greenville while industry packed up and left, and memories and experiences of Greenville in the years since the change occurred. Further breaking down the story, I focus on how the physical landscape was shaped by the industry and changed by its pullout, and how the industries affected Greenville economically and socially before, during, and still ongoing today and how these factors play a role in forming identity in the Greenville community.

According to Bluestone and Harrison, “deindustrialization is the outcome of a worldwide crisis in the economic system.”⁸ Through many different factors, U.S. industry experienced large profits very quickly due to the postwar boom and continued to make short-term profits by selling patents and licenses to international enterprises which “helped generate their own future competition” and ironically “came back to haunt them in virtually every major industry: steel, automobiles, shipbuilding, and electronics, to name a few.”⁹ Although deindustrialization has been going on since the 1920s in some industries such as textiles, it was not until the 1970s that “a large proportion of America’s firms chose to relocate their production to places in the U.S.

⁷ Kathryn Marie Dudley, *The End of the Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), XXV.

⁸ Bluestone and Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America*, 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

and abroad that promised lower wage costs and weak or non-existent unions.”¹⁰ Across the nation “the impact on jobs was cataclysmic...between thirty-two and thirty-eight million jobs disappeared during the 1970s as the direct result of private disinvestment or relocation of U.S. businesses.”¹¹

In Greenville, deindustrialization occurred over a period of twenty years, starting in 1982 when the Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad Company closed its offices in Greenville and moved to Monroeville, Pennsylvania. Chicago Bridge and Iron followed suit in 1983, completely closing all its operations.¹² The Greenville Steel Car Company progressively downsized its operations as it changed hands through several holders until Trinity Industries closed it down in 2000.¹³ Although Greenville is still home to Hodge Foundry and the Werner Ladder Company, the loss of the big three companies since the 1980s crushed to the community and Werner has continued to scale back its operations at the Greenville facility, with a large round of cuts in 2003.¹⁴

A number of current and past residents of the community of Greenville were interviewed to understand their perspectives on the industrial retreat and the fate of the town. The details of the companies leaving town were not emphasized, but instead how deindustrialization affected the community. How people from various parts of the community viewed the situation were derived from the stories the respondents told about Greenville in the last fifty years. The stories that members of the community shared are important, because

¹⁰ Barry Bluestone, “Foreword,” in *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* eds. Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003) ix.

¹¹ Bluestone, “Foreword,” ix.

¹² Earl C. Miller, “History of Greenville, Mercer County, Pennsylvania,” *Sesquicentennial History* (Greenville: Greenville Sesquicentennial Corporation, 1988), 31

¹³ Michael Roknick, “Trinity to Shut Down Local Rail Car Plants,” *The Herald*, October 18, 2000, <http://www2.sharonherald.com/localnews/recentnews/0010/ln101800c.html#top>

¹⁴ Harold Gwin, “Greenville, PA. Werner Co. Will Cut Jobs in Manufacturing Move,” *The Vindicator*, July 11, 2003, <http://66.232.150.6/news/2003/jul/11/greenville-pa-werner-co-will-cut-jobs-in/?newswatch>

we construct stories to reflect on the past, to comprehend the present, and to anticipate the future. Stories weave the intricate and sometimes contradictory experiences of our lives into seemingly coherent accounts that often define us, simultaneously enabling and constraining our personal and collective memory. Not surprisingly then, the stories we create for ourselves, as well as those that are bestowed on us, powerfully shape our identities and our relationships.¹⁵

Memories of Greenville Before Deindustrialization

The industrial facilities of the Bessemer Railroad, the Greenville Steel Car Company, and Chicago Bridge and Iron were the predominant markers on the physical landscape of Greenville. One woman, Louise Anthony, who lived on a farm outside of Greenville her whole life, remarked that CB&I was “the big plant.” Her dad worked for the Steel Car Company because “the reason he got the job was the start of World War Two and they were hiring all kinds of people and he wasn’t able to go into the service so I think I know he delivered rivets somewhere.”¹⁶ She also remembered “that was a dirty place to work,” because he would return home with all the grease and grime of a railroad car production yard.¹⁷ Although the modernization of Greenville occurred in the aftermath of the Great Fire in 1873, it really took off during the Second World War. “Back in the ‘40s, ‘50s, and ‘60s,” one resident recalled, “this town just boomed because they had the Steel Car, they had Chicago Bridge and Iron, they had R.D. Werners, they had Hodge Foundry, and they had uh, Bessemer who were, their main corporate office was downtown.”¹⁸ Doris Kiser recalled that after the war her tank driver husband returned home and “worked for a little while at Steel Car but he really was a construction worker. He worked for Brusci’s Construction and Russel’s construction and he finally ended up at the borough as maintenance, driving their equipment.”¹⁹ These memories

¹⁵ Steve May and Laura Morrison, “Making Sense of Restructuring,” 268.

¹⁶ Louise Anthony, interview by author, Greenville, PA, November 13, 2014.

¹⁷ Anthony, interview.

¹⁸ Marie H. Julian, interview by author, Greenville, PA, November 13, 2014.

¹⁹ Doris L. Kiser, interview by author, Greenville, PA, November 14, 2014.

illustrate that the factories not only expanded opportunities for those unable to serve during the war but also provided a means of income for GIs returning to American community life. GIs without formal education were able to apply their skills learned in wartime to the railroad and steel industries and did not completely rely on the GI Bill.

Of course the danger of these factories was not entirely forgotten, although the prospect of having stable jobs in the communities often overshadowed the daily danger faced by the workers. “I can remember some guy, uh one of the sides of the car fell over and he was a good friend of my dad. And when it fell over it killed him. It was a dangerous place to work.”²⁰ For this resident the ominous danger of the factory was forever burned in her memory by the death of a family friend.

The outward physical appearance of the stores and businesses downtown held a special significance for some, as thirty-seven year old Mary Beth Smith always recalls the simple act of visiting a bakery with her father when she sees a special entryway that survived to this day. “I remember when I was a little girl there was a bakery right downtown and when we would go visit my dad he would take me over to the bakery and we would get a donut haha and I always loved it because the area going into the door of the bakery were all these little tiles and it was like a little ramp going into the door that v-ed in and I always found it very fascinating when I was little. And even to this day when we walk through town, I still always look for that tiled entry-way to know which store was the bakery.”²¹ Fathers often signify strength and security, and the remembrance of sharing a snack with her father conveys the comfort and stability that was experienced growing up in Greenville in a household with two parents. The physical

²⁰ Anthony, interview.

²¹ Mary Beth Smith, interview by author, Greenville, PA, November 14, 2014.

appearance of structures spark memories for the community and though the uses of buildings change over time, a simple design feature symbolizes the safety of a parent.

Working for either Bessemer, Steel Car, or CB&I was not just any old job, it was a well-paying job in the community. Retired teacher and former high school guidance counselor Fred Kiser reminisced over a conversation he had with a fellow teacher early in his career, “I remember talking to him after like a couple years, teaching salaries had gone up and we were making like \$7,000 dollars, and he said [Mr. Stone] ‘You know,’ he said, ‘those dang, those dang guys down at Steel Car, you know they’re making over \$10,000 bucks a year down there making cars and I’m here making \$7,000.’ We said if I could make over \$10,000 a year we felt like we had the world by the tail. You know the whole perspective of money.”²² Another woman recalled that the job her father had at the Steel Car Company resulted in the simple joy of enjoying a treat with the family on paydays. “Him and the neighbor guy on Friday when they got paid then they bought the groceries and took them home, and I don’t think the women ever went shopping really...And my dad, I remember my dad used to bring a bag of candy and we would sit around the table after supper and we would eat the whole bag of candy.”²³ The factories also provided an additional means of income for some of the farmers in the area, as one elderly woman recalled that her dad “worked on the railroad. And also farmed. Which was not uncommon...he was a conductor on the caboose.”²⁴ “A lot of the local farmers worked for the Steel Car, because they really liked the idea that they could still farm and work a shift and have benefits, have more pay, it took a little bit of pressure off them to really be profitable as a farm, I mean if they just wanted

²² Frederick A. Kiser, interview by author, Greenville, PA, October 31, 2014

²³ Anthony, interview.

²⁴ Doris L. Kiser, interview.

to raise beef for their family, neighbors and friends and maybe if they had a good year make some money on corn or soybeans you know what I mean?”²⁵

Besides being a hub for industry and transportation between Pittsburgh and Cleveland, Greenville was also the focal point of the county. One resident reminisced that back “then we had, as far as stores went, people came from down in the valley, they came from Grove City, everyplace to Greenville to shop! Because we had four wonderful ladies clothing stores, three men’s, real nice stores. Four shoe stores. Oh and drug stores. Five drugstores I think it was.”²⁶ The memory of the earning and spending opportunities that were available in Greenville before the decline of industries illustrates the community’s widespread prosperity. The industrial work was perceived by wives and daughters in economic terms, and the identity of the workers was in their ability to bring home a nice paycheck. For many years, skilled and unskilled work at the industrial plants was more lucrative than some jobs that required an education, such as being a teacher in the local school system. The pride in doing work well is not remembered as much as simply the prosperity it provided by those who benefited from the efforts but were not involved in the labor itself.

Many people in town had relatives and friends who worked at one of the main plants. Generally brothers and fathers from one family all worked for the same company and camaraderie in the workplace developed along familial lineages. Work in Greenville was not all about money; not only were working class people laboring with their friends and neighbors, but also with their sons and brothers. “My mother’s father and brother, which would be my grandfather and uncle, and cousins all worked at the Bessemer. And then Werner’s. My own

²⁵ Mark Cianci, interview by author, Greenville, PA, January 31, 2015.

²⁶ Julian, interview.

father worked for Chicago Bridge and Iron.”²⁷ “My uncle worked for, well, Trinity would have been Steel Car, and my dad worked for CB&I, which was Chicago Bridge and Iron.”²⁸ At the time it seemed like everyone either worked for the Greenville Steel Car Company, or “if they didn’t work there they worked at CB&I, or Werner’s, or Bessemer.”²⁹ The factory formed the basis of identity for many from the time that they graduated high school. “It was for a lot of the kids when they graduated high school, I mean some of them knew they were going to college, but for some of them it was a real choice to be made where you were going to work for one of the plants where you thought you would be there for the rest of your life.”³⁰ The workers in the plants performed the labor rituals alongside their kin and neighbors, extending the bonds of brotherhood beyond their bloodlines to those who shared in their burden: their co-workers.

In the days of prosperity, Greenville held street fairs, which Mary Beth Smith fondly remembered and associated with the overall unity of the community. “It seems like when I was a kid I remember a lot more unity in our town, like I remember having street fairs, I remember going downtown and there used to be carnival booths and you could play games and win stuff. I remember winning a water balloon shooter. You would fill the water balloon up and there was a trigger on it and you could squirt people with it, it was the COOLEST thing!”³¹ Without the economic capability to hold street fairs, the unity of the town declined without regular community events and acts which brought them together as one.

Some remember the days when the downtown was the main social hangout, “And the downtown was totally different too. We didn’t have a Wal-Mart or Jamesway or Mcdonalds or

²⁷ Jill K. Jones, interview by author, Greenville, PA, October 31, 2014.

²⁸ Kathy Frederick, interview by author, Greenville, PA, November 15, 2014.

²⁹ Anthony, interview.

³⁰ Cianci, interview.

³¹ Smith, interview.

anything those places were all farms. So anytime you wanted anything you went downtown and you walked, or rode your bike.”³² At the time Main Street was bustling with activity, “and so back then, that was when I was working for my father and everything and we were down on Main Street, you could hardly walk up Main Street it was so crowded.”³³ Others fondly remember their favorite hangout spot in the downtown. “There was a Phillips House. You know where Moss’ store was? Well Phillips’ House was across there. There was a restaurant there that was a good place. It was a boarding house. And we used to go out the back door of the Bessemer to go over to eat.”³⁴ “Isley’s ice cream,” was another favorite because of the “sundaes and milkshakes. And going to the movies, that was something because we had two movie theatres.”³⁵ The shops and stores brought the community together daily, but without them Main Street itself suffered as an idea within the community. Miles Orvell contends that Main Street is an expression of “the most familiar of values – the small businessman and the public space of the commons. Though few realized it at the time, the peculiar nature of Main Street was that it was a place for private enterprise that was also public space.”³⁶ In Greenville today, Main Street is remembered as a place to gather together as a community even though it was the private zone of the small businessmen who ran all the shops and pharmacies where relationships in the community were strengthened and extended.

Although Main Street was bustling with activity and was crowded, it still reflected a small town community in the way people interacted with each other, “And the other thing was downtown, we knew everyone...and we had all those people down there... We would, I’d go to

³²Jill K. Jones, interview.

³³ Julian, interview.

³⁴ Jane L. Cooper, interview by author, Greenville, PA, October 31, 2014.

³⁵ Anthony, interview.

³⁶ Miles Orvell, *The Life and Death of Main Street: Small Towns in American Memory, Space, and Community* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012) 36.

the stores, to Friedman's or whatever and I would take a couple dresses out and I'd go to Keller's and I'd take these things out and I never signed anything or nothing you know. I wanted to take them home and try them on I didn't want to try them on there. I took them home and try them on and take back the ones I didn't want. My dad was in business too and I'm sure they knew where to go to get the money if they wanted. But I mean it was a small town, they knew you like one of their children."³⁷

Even the daily whistle which ended the day is nostalgic for some, as one woman tells the story of going to pick up dad, because "we only had one car, and my dad was the sole bread earner. And I had a brother and sister you know so there were five of us, and so sometimes if we needed to go somewhere my mom kept the car, for the day, and then at 3:30 we had to pick up dad, no matter what we were doing. We had to go and pick up father, you know? And we would park, like a street above and because there was a lot of traffic, it was just like the high school parking lot. And as soon as that whistle blew, you wouldn't, even as a child I can remember seeing these men just running out from there like there was fire, and they had those metal lunch buckets you know and they would just be running for their cars, just racing you know, and even as a child I can remember wondering why are they acting like school-kids, you know they are grown up they are supposed to be acting like just getting off of work, but it was really literally work."³⁸ Of course the end of the workday brought about some negative aspects to the community that are not missed, "And it was in the late '70s and early '80s, you really did avoid Greenville in the 3:30-4 o'clock because of school letting out and all four factories, it was literally a traffic nightmare and it was gridlock, you were backed up for blocks and so it was part

³⁷ Julian, interview.

³⁸ Jill K. Jones, interview.

of your...yeah but you were really cognizant and you avoided going into the town of Greenville between 3:30 and 5 o'clock."³⁹ Others agreed, but also suggested that "now we want for that don't we,"⁴⁰ because it indicated that many people had jobs. The whistle which released the men dictated their working lives and is a symbol of their clocklike labor. The factories themselves had a larger than life role in the construction of Greenville, as they controlled the physical layout of the community, the economic stability and daily rhythms of hundreds of families. Greenville's steel railroad car and water tower manufactures are like steel for Youngstown, where "the town did not merely, or even mainly, make steel for America; instead steel made the town, and it is the town's past and present that are most important to publicly interpret."⁴¹ In this way the industry of Greenville shaped the identity of the town.

The companies were civic oriented and involved in sponsoring community events. "CB&I really put a lot of money into the community, and that was something my dad always talked about, the swimming pool, the skating rink, those were all because of CB&I. In fact, the Jordan theatre, every Christmas time, I could probably get some pictures. I have to get ahold of my sister because there is a picture of us kids sitting on Santa Claus' lap at the Jordan theatre, and every Christmas time they would have a big party there, and CB&I have gift bags they would give out to all the kids of different ages and whatever. And you would go up on stage according to your age and whatever and it was just filled with toys. So CB&I was very generous. They did that every year and I remember that, although I was little. It was a whole day event."⁴² Some of the companies also sponsored little league teams to allow young boys in the community to play together throughout the summer. The Steel Car Company sponsored the Reds Baseball Team in

³⁹ Kelly Jones, interview by author, Greenville, PA, October 31, 2014.

⁴⁰ Jill K. Jones, interview.

⁴¹ Kitch, *Pennsylvania in Public Memory*, 141.

⁴² Frederick, interview.

addition to contributing part of the funds for a Junior League baseball field in 1967 at the Riverside Park. At the time, the Greenville Recreation Director Joseph Couchenour, commented that “Steel Car is to be commended for its community spirit. The company’s contribution will go a long way in providing facilities for the expanding needs recreation needs of our youngsters.”⁴³ Former teacher and guidance counselor at the Greenville High School recalled that “little league baseball was a big deal” and “I played for the Steel Car Reds.”⁴⁴ The industries played a critical role in fostering a community spirit and sponsoring events where the community could gather together.

Figure 5. “Greenville, PA, Industrial Lots.”⁴⁵



⁴³ “Company Gift Helps Expand Our Play Areas,” “Company Sponsors Little League Team,” *Greenville Steel Car News*, vol.2, No. 5 (Greenville: Greenville Steel Car Company, 1967) 1.

⁴⁴ Frederick A. Kiser, interview.

⁴⁵ “Greenville, PA, Industrial Lots.” 41° 24’02.77” N and 80° 22’52.73” W. Google Earth. September 11, 2012. March 16, 2015.

Memories of Greenville During Industrial Pullout

Between 1980 and 1985, “five important industrial plants in the Greenville area fired or laid off 2,447 of their 3, 167 employees – 77 percent.”⁴⁶ As the industries left, in their wake were large open cement pads where their factories stood and empty parking lots. With the industries leaving and hundreds out of work, businesses on Main Street were unable to remain viable. “Then when industry left, a lot of the businesses left town.”⁴⁷ “Well first of all you saw, it seemed at the same time you saw, not immediately but as they left you saw shops downtown close up, you saw a variety of things happen although Wal-Mart showed up when that was all happening. That’s not a *bad* thing. And there was a lot of talk well when Wal-Mart gets there Giant Eagle is going to close, well they didn’t!”⁴⁸

In the wake of the decline of industry, stores on Main Street either closed down or changed hands and were opened as other types of shops but few stayed open more than a few years. “There have been so many places that were empty over the years it is hard to remember what was in each of these buildings. When I was a kid, the bail place was Kecks. The bail bond. It was Keck’s Department store, was a clothing store for women, it was a nice one.”⁴⁹ The former department stores are now either vacant or serving another purpose. “Now the difference is that you see a lot of used furniture and used clothes stores downtown that you did not see in the ’70s. A lot of secondhand stuff.”⁵⁰ Meeting with one woman in the only coffee shop, Fresh Grounds, she recalled that it had formerly been “JC Penny’s. I remember coming here shopping

⁴⁶ Tom Infield, “With Job Losses, PA. Town Slips into Hard Times,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* October 13, 1986, http://articles.philly.com/1986-10-13/news/26056893_1_greenville-area-steel-industry-job-losses, Accessed March 15, 2014.

⁴⁷ Charles N. Klingensmith, interview by author, Greenville, PA, January 30, 2015.

⁴⁸ Frederick A. Kiser, interview.

⁴⁹ Frederick, interview.

⁵⁰ Charles N. Klingensmith, interview.

it was three floors high.”⁵¹ With stores vacated or transformed into pawn shops from department stores such as Woolworth’s and JC Penny’s, the identity of Main Street shifted from a high-end business and shopping district of the county to a place that bitterly reminded the community of the economic opportunities of the past. Although the Greenville community gathered on Main Street in part to exchange goods, it was more a place to spend time together, a place where the community could interact *as a community*. But without a pretense for gathering, without shops to spend their hard-earned funds, the idea of Main Street as an idea in the community fell apart. The very symbol of small town America was dismembered with deindustrialization, for Miles Orvell writes that Main Street “the heart of a small town, is also a synecdoche for the small town itself” and it “encompasses the idea of community as well...Americans dream of Main Street, as an ideal place; they have also dreamed it into being, created it, and re-created it, as a physical place, the material embodiment of the dream,” because Main Street, “in its broadest significance, *is America.*”⁵²

The pullout of the Bessemer Railroad offices to a new facility in Monroeville was later deemed a mistake, but still too late for the Greenville community. One former borough manager lamented that “they went to Monroeville. And they even admitted that they had made a mistake they had built down in Monroeville, this big building. I went down there to visit and they didn’t even fill a fourth of it. I mean it was just.”⁵³ The choices of the companies did not make sense to the workers who had poured their sweat and blood into them but were left with nothing. Just six years prior, in an inset about Bessemer in booklet promoting Greenville, the Bessemer Railroad endorsed “Greenville as an ideal community in which to operate a business” and said “that the

⁵¹ Frederick, interview.

⁵² Orvell, *The Life and Death of Main Street*, 4, 7.

⁵³ Julian, interview.

area has an ample supply of skilled, conscientious workers for any industry considering a move to northwestern Pennsylvania.”⁵⁴ The former general superintendent of the Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad said Greenville was “a community that never had to worry about where the next paycheck was coming from.”⁵⁵ Choosing to move to the Pittsburgh area when the workers had been told they were doing a good job only confused the identity of the working class. Their identity as railroad workers was stable with a steady paycheck. The paycheck was more than money, it signified stability and with it the workers knew who they were, like looking down the tracks and knowing where the train came from.

The closing of Chicago Bridge and Iron was announced shortly after Bessemer declared its intent to move to Monroeville in the summer of 1982 and illustrated the conflict in identity experienced by the workers. The plant manager, Hugh Fewin, commented on what the community meant to him, “it is very difficult for me to leave people and a community who have served the company so well for so long a time”⁵⁶ and praised the workers as “an educated, motivated work force capable of high-quality work.”⁵⁷ But the workers who had served the company so well for years felt “like they’ve been hit in the head.” The workers were very confused because they “were always told we had the best productivity of all the plants, so we really don’t understand why this one would be the one they decided to close.” Their identity as quality workers who had manufactured products they were proud of crumbled to the ground “for a lot of these men, their whole world’s wrapped up in CBI.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ “Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad Company: Greenville, Pennsylvania,” *Greenville* (Greenville Area Chamber of Commerce: Windsor Publications, INC., 1976) 4.

⁵⁵ Infield, “With Job Losses.”

⁵⁶ “CBI to Close Out Local Manufacturing,” *Greenville Record-Argus*, No. 129, June 2, 1982, page 1.

⁵⁷ Jaci Carroll, “Committee Struggling to Deal with Closing,” *The Greenville Record-Argus*, June 10, 1982, page 1.

⁵⁸ “Impact Hits Hard on CBI Workers,” *Greenville Record-Argus*, June 4, 1982, page 1.

As the industries pulled out, people pointed fingers at various factors to try to understand why it happened. Some cited unions as partly responsible for the loss of industry. “For a long time people had these really good jobs, and I like I said at one time if you worked for Greenville Steel Car you made a lot more money than teachers. That now has since changed and I think that is a good thing and I’m a little biased here. The Steel Car, the CB&I, and uh Werner’s. And part of that too came about when you get unions involved, and I’m not like anti-union I know it was a good thing when we used to have horrible conditions but I think sometimes unions make demands and at some point be careful what you wish for and in the process then people move plants and move people. How many people are going to be able to move to Mexico and continue to work at Werner’s?”⁵⁹ One man pointed to forces in the bigger picture that were outside of the control of the Greenville community. “It was interesting in our curriculum that NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, what was mentioned several times and basically that’s what led to the demise of Werner’s because of that North American Free Trade Agreement that came from us, it really turned around and backfired from what they thought. It was an institution that was supposed to really help but from our perspective it really hindered the local economy and community.”⁶⁰ Others pointed to the failure of values being transcribed through the generations as the fault of the industrial pullout. “It seems to me that the people who started these businesses, then their kids took over and then their grandkids and they all ruin stuff,”⁶¹ and “as long as the Werner family had that business it was wonderful and they were very good to work with too. It was when the sons came in and they sold it out well that was the end of it...it’s sad to say but it’s true. They don’t care about the business.”⁶² *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter Tom

⁵⁹ Frederick A. Kiser, interview.

⁶⁰ Kelly Jones, interview.

⁶¹ Anthony, interview.

⁶² Julian, interview.

Infield saw the larger problem, that “try as it may, there is only so much any town can do to restore itself” because “the problems of steel were America’s problems.”⁶³ What occurred in Greenville was not specific to the small town in northwestern Pennsylvania, but was a part of a larger issue which confronted America.

Although the pullout hurt hundreds of workers and families, some of the older men were able to retire early and make ends meet, such as one woman’s father. “He had to retire early. He was 60 I think. He retired. We were just talking about that, my brother and I, how he did very well really for not having gobs of money. When you live through the depression you can make ends meet pretty well because you had practice at it you know? We didn’t waste anything.”⁶⁴

Greenville businessmen and the Chamber of Commerce did not stand idly by but soon after the companies withdrew they formed the Greenville Area Economic Development Corporation (GAEDC). The GAEDC’s statement of purpose was that there should be “a job for everyone who wants to work” and recognized that they could “no longer sit back and hope that the economic circumstances of national (and, indeed, world!) affairs will resolve the issue without a significant local effort by our citizenry.” They formulated a list of five attributes necessary to attract new businesses to the community based around proper sites, a skilled work force, a tax base, creating a nice place to live with “outstanding educational, recreation, and cultural facilities that will induce the owners and managers of businesses and industries to have their families reside here,” and fostering “a reputation for the community that we ARE concerned about the welfare and successes of businesses and industries in our area.”⁶⁵ What is significant about the GAEDC is that it recognized the need to maintain pride and respectability

⁶³ Infield.

⁶⁴ Jill K. Jones, interview.

⁶⁵ “Greenville Area Economic Development Corporation: Statement of Purpose,” GAEDC 1984. GAEDC, Subject Drawer G-R, Greenville Area Historical Society, Accessed March 14, 2015.

in the community. One of the efforts centered on a radio program called “Take Pride in Greenville,” which was filled with interviews of local businesses owners and was intended “to promote Greenville among its citizens as a fine place to live and work” and help the community realize they “should take pride in Greenville.”⁶⁶ Each episode of the radio program began with a jingle specially written for the “Pride that Shows” campaign. The first verse illustrates the types of things the GAEDC was urging people to have pride in and around the community which could form a new identity:

Pride, pride that shows, everywhere you look, you’ll see it growin,’ pride, pride that shows, it shows everywhere you’re goin,’ America needs more places like Mercer County, in our schools, and in our jobs, in our hearts, and in our lives, it’s all around, it’s everywhere you go! Pride, pride that shows, it’s all right here in Mercer County, pride, pride that shows, it’s somethin’ that’s been growin’ a long, long time, Mercer County, pride that shows, Mercer County, pride that shows, whether it’s home or just a vacation, try a big slice of America’s best, Mercer County, Pennsylvania, pride that shows, it’s all here, pride that shows, Mercer County!⁶⁷

The jingle urged the community to take pride in their schools, jobs, and in themselves.

Despite the boosterism of the GAEDC, the leader of the group, William D. McNeilly, had a more realistic perspective in 1985 when he stated “in no way can the major problem in this area be overstated. We have lost too many jobs in the last five years to be able to maintain the high quality of life that is most often the major reason why most of us have elected to live here...the high unemployment rate has forced many lifelong residents of our area to seek better opportunities elsewhere. Young people, after completing their education, don't even bother to look for work here. The declining tax base threatens the quality of our municipal services and

⁶⁶ “GAEDC Letter to Halcyon Mueller,” Greenville Area Economic Development Corporation, May 29, 1984. GAEDC, Subject Drawer G-R, Greenville Area Historical Society, Accessed March 14, 2015.

⁶⁷ “Pride that Shows Jingle,” Mercer County Pride that Shows Campaign, GAEDC, Subject Drawer G-R, Greenville Area Historical Society, Accessed March 14, 2015.

future education of our children.”⁶⁸ He realized that if something did not change soon, the town would further decline as it has in the thirty years since.

One identity that emerged among some in the community was that Greenville is a great place to live, even without the industries. One fellow remembered “there were people who were in the Bessemer corporate offices but they kept their houses here and they would carpool down to Monroeville so they continued to work there but they wanted their kids to graduate from school here.”⁶⁹ The owners and people in upper management positions viewed Greenville’s identity as wonderful place to raise a family, not fully understanding how their decisions would affect the community in the years to come. While the management staff was able to live in a town full of recreational opportunities, the workers that were laid off no longer had the leisure to partake in what made Greenville a great place to raise a family. Without economic opportunities raising a family was no longer so pleasant, and even some older workers who were near retirement age had to find odd jobs to survive as their pension was not enough to sustain them.

Memories of Post-Industrial Greenville

To some the changes are bitter reminders of what once was. The vast emptiness of buildings reflects the emptiness within those who remember the past. “But you know, well when you go downtown today, well, outside of Herbert’s Hardware and the Greenville Dry Cleaners, and Paxton’s Restaurant. There’s nothing left. Oh that Majestic, but that’s the pool room. But there’s nothing. There’s nothing. The diner is closed on South Mercer Street. That’s no more...I couldn’t believe the Greenville Diner was closed. But that Mexican restaurant is over there now. I haven’t eaten there yet...but there’s nothing.”⁷⁰ Another woman moved away prior to the

⁶⁸ Infield.

⁶⁹ Frederick A. Kiser, interview.

⁷⁰ Cooper, interview.

industrial decline but returned to be closer to her family. “I don’t remember much when I came back here in 1987. I just felt, I remember the whole place was really depressed when I came back. And it’s probably just been, in the last year or two, that I felt things were kinda starting to look a little better. My daughter is 26, and the whole time she was in school, all through high school I never felt like that was anything here. I can remember she must have been ten, I took her to some activity and we drove through Greenville and there was not a car parked on Main Street. And there was something blowing in the street and my daughter said to me, “Mom, you know those movies we watch on TV about the Wild West with the tumbleweeds blowing? I feel that’s what Greenville looks like. And that would have been, uh probably ’97 because I graduated from school in ’93. My daughter would have been around 10 so ’95-’97 when she made that comment. And I thought, what I kind of feel the same way let’s get out of here. It just felt very isolated and very depressing.”⁷¹

Others do not see the town as simply a shell of itself, but still a vibrant place to live, because “It sorta sprawled a bit with some of the retail things moving out of downtown. And it encompasses a pretty big geographical area too, with rural and addresses in town. So there is variety here. We have a hospital, a college, and a lot of churches. Community symphony. A great nursing home and senior center in St. Paul’s. It seems to be a support for the older generations. You know families are important here, and they tend to stay pretty geographically close.”⁷²

Although many of the older buildings on Main Street still preserve their iconic late nineteenth century architecture, other buildings on the periphery are not as well preserved and one woman laments that the town lost an important part of its history in the last few years. “Of course there was the old Jordan theatre. I think I was in 5th grade when it closed down. And I

⁷¹ Frederick, interview.

⁷² Jill K. Jones, interview.

was so, I was really sad, when First Baptist bought the Jordan and ended up having it tore down. I know that it was in bad shape but I really would have loved to see someone buy it and restore it. I think that would have been really awesome. You know. I'm all about moving forward, but I'm also all about you know restoration and appreciating those little golden nuggets of the town. And the Jordan theatre was definitely one of those that, that was just kinda priceless."⁷³

The continuing lack of economic opportunities has also caused the physical population of the community to decrease since deindustrialization. "Obviously the biggest change was simply in the population. That in the mid '70s there were 250 kids per class, so if you multiply that times 13 there were 3,000 kids in the district, and uh it went to half and below. That now several classes have about 100."⁷⁴ In the 1960 census, there were 8,765 people in the Greenville borough, and 3,134 in Hempfield Township.⁷⁵ By 2010, the borough had decreased to 5,919 while Hempfield actually increased to 3,741.⁷⁶ These records illustrate how part of the population has shifted to the township surrounding the borough while others completely left the area in search of opportunities. "Because of lack of economic opportunities, we have the under fifty people have chose to leave town in pursuit of, I don't know, I can't say better quality of life, but better economic opportunities for themselves. And that is the other reason why our

⁷³ Smith, interview.

⁷⁴ Kelly Jones, interview.

⁷⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Part 40, Pennsylvania," *U.S. Census of Population: 1960*, Vol.1 Characteristics of the Population (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963) 220.

⁷⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, "2010 Census of Population and Housing," *Summary Population and Housing Characteristics*, CPH-1-40, Pennsylvania, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2012) 76-77.

population has continued to dwindle.”⁷⁷

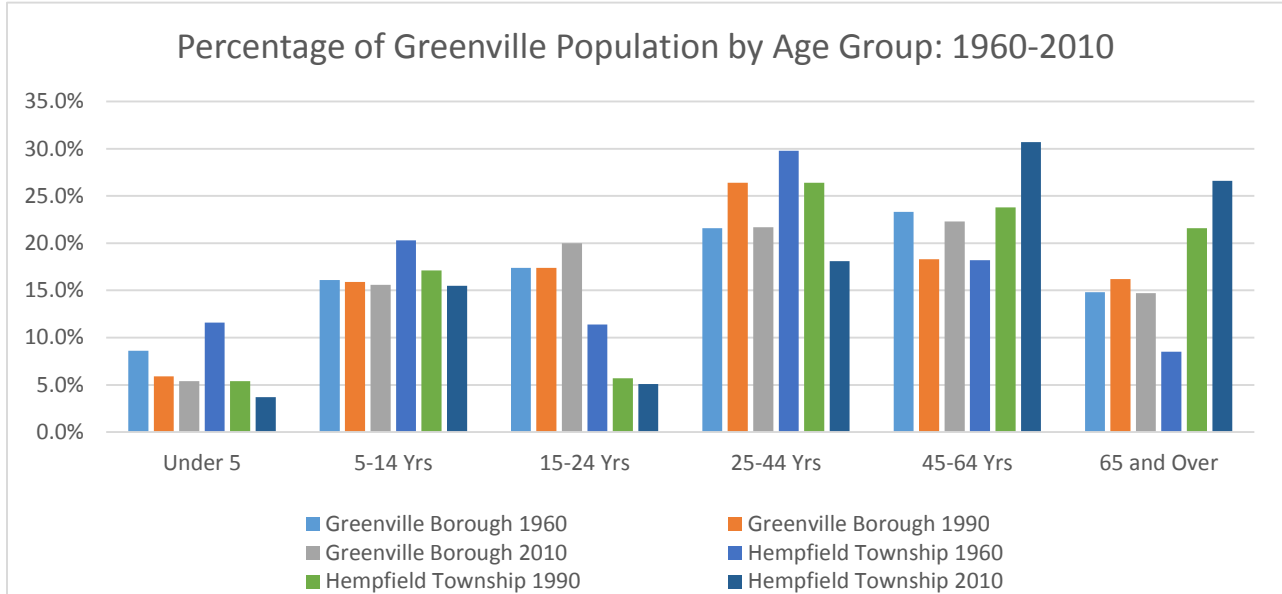


Figure 6. “Percentage of Greenville Population by Age Group: 1960-2010.”⁷⁸

Unfortunately the loss of population continued to push Greenville in a downward spiral, “because of loss of population we’re lost some things, you know, there used to be a skating rink, swimming pool, the rec center was a much more community centered activity,”⁷⁹ which caused a cyclical effect as the loss of some advantages continues to cause more people to leave for brighter pastures. The movement of younger generations to other parts of the country after graduation also denotes a shift in the community, as fewer and fewer are rooted than in earlier generations. One elderly woman recalled “there must have been a lot in our class who stayed around here, because Gail Wolfe the other day says, who was it, oh yeah he graduated with me. Marie she says, did everyone in Greenville graduate with you? I says, no, but just the ones you touch on.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Kelly Jones, interview.

⁷⁸ “Percentage of Greenville Population by Age Group: 1960-2010,” Compiled from US Census Data, “Census Population and Housing,” from 1960, 1990, and 2010. <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>

⁷⁹ Kelly Jones, interview.

⁸⁰ Julian, interview.

The physical appearance of the town has long-lasting social and economic implications for the community as a whole, but is especially seen in the neighborhood adjoining the abandoned industrial lots. “Well I think that some people don’t take a lot of pride in our community anymore, because like when Trinity left it was a huge eyesore, physically for our town, you know to have the buildings abandoned and falling apart, and then of course you have kids doing graffiti and you’ve got people who lost jobs abandoning their homes. And you know leaving the community because they have to find a job elsewhere you know, so then you’ve got some abandoned homes and trespassers so it really affected the community I think physically and therefore it really helped people not taking so much pride in where they lived anymore because it’s hard to you know...I remember when we first moved into our old house, people took care of their neighborhood and it was a pretty nice, quiet neighborhood. I noticed then, it was right around the same time we moved in, some, like a drug dealer moved in not too far from us. And the neighborhood um like a couple families got divorced, and then you had single moms or a single dad with kids and the homes started running down and people were struggling. And our neighborhood, just in itself, really the whole dynamics changed in the fifteen years that we lived there. And that was right near the Trinity site. You know and just having the site itself, because of it being abandoned and run down, it really attracted a bad scene, you know of people.”⁸¹ Thus far the empty and dilapidated industrial lots have brought further problems to Greenville in the form of increased drug and crime activity, but if the Greenville Museum Alliance educated the community on the industrial history of the town more actively, the industrial lots could be used as sources of pride rather than embarrassment and shame because industrial history is “about local identity.” Greenville can look to the Schuylkill River Heritage area, which on the surface is

⁸¹ Smith, interview.

all about tourism, but director Kurt Zwinkl explains it is “as much about restoring a local community’s pride.”⁸²

The physical appearance of the downtown reflects the loss of identity and pride in the community, but some still hope for a better future and recognize the importance of doing their part to retain the small town feel. “When I came back to Greenville I ended up coming back to North High Street and I lived in an apartment building across from St. Mike’s church. Yeah when I first came back to Greenville though that apartment building was in pretty bad shape, and I helped get it cleaned up. I really pushed the landlord so to speak because there were a lot of problems, a lot of coming and going and I think drug problems in that building, but the police helped me. I mean I was able to, uh, I started planting flowers and trying to make a difference and I think those things actually do work and do help.”⁸³ “I really hope that something good and positive can happen in the town to help boost people’s you know standard of living, so that they start caring again. It saddens me to see people not taking care of their homes. Whether it’s for one reason or another. Whether it’s for lack of income or whether they just don’t feel like it. People seem content to live in their dirt anymore.”⁸⁴ “There was once a lot of hardworking people and the area was once striving and not to just I think initial perception I think people would think people in the area are lazy and there because there is nothing here. And I look at how hard my ancestors worked in this area and the community was thriving and I would want them to remember that. For a lot of people who just left the area when things starting bearing down, they just gave up.”⁸⁵

⁸² Kitch, 43-44.

⁸³ Frederick, interview.

⁸⁴ Smith, interview.

⁸⁵ Frederick, interview.

Greenville's loss of widespread stable jobs really affected the middleclass. "And the lower middle income kind of thing. And I think because of that it has really transposed Greenville. That, you now have, a lot of double income families and they are prospering and I think economically ok, and then there are some where there are not any factory jobs that are steady working, you know you go to your job and you put your time in and you get a decent salary and a decent pension and you can take care of your family."⁸⁶ Middle class identity changed as those workers were unsure of their class status without their stable wages. Their work as the breadwinners in the community receded and the community could no longer rely on the middle class. "The economy really shifted. I mean the jobs are so limited. It feels like it is half the town it used to be. I mean job-wise and population. It's very difficult to make a living here."⁸⁷ In the larger framework of economic opportunities, the town borough as a whole was hit hard because "when all those companies left though the tax base really went down. That's when Greenville really became a bedroom community. Because all that's here is the hospital and the college and they don't pay taxes. Well the people that work there do but not the companies."⁸⁸ In addition to the hospital, Greenville has two nursing homes, Whitecliff and St. Paul's. "St. Paul's as an institution has just done nothing but grown since I came here in 1974. We first built the health center then. We actually added jobs, in fact we probably picked up some of the people who lost their jobs in the pullout. Things like the maintenance department got bigger I think they hired some guys. I think pretty much one of the things that has stayed consistent in Greenville is healthcare."⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Kelly Jones, interview.

⁸⁷ Elizabeth A. Klingensmith, interview by author, Greenville, PA, January 30, 2015.

⁸⁸ Anthony, interview.

⁸⁹ Charles N. Klingensmith, interview.

While the middle class workers were the first struck with a crisis identity, the lack of continuing economic opportunities in the area shifted the community into one centered around providing healthcare service. One member of the Committee to Promote the Greenville Area always says Greenville should “focus on what we do have, not what we don’t have. We have amazing medicine with UPMC. UPMC, is you know there have been changes to the hospital through the years, but they are dedicated to this community, and more importantly to the general area, you know, Mercer County... Yeah, ten years ago people were crying about them taking OB care out of here. Well guess what? No town with 6,000 people in America has babies delivered, it just doesn’t happen anymore, there’s just not the economies of scale. It’s taken a lot and there are still some people who talk about we don’t have that, the Steel Car, the railroad car manufacturing, you know, sorry it’s not going to happen in Greenville anymore. We still have a great presence in medicine.”⁹⁰

Part of the community today found their new identity as healthcare providers, with the hospital, the expansion of the St. Paul’s nursing home, the Greenville Medical Center, and the new neuromodulation center. But this new identity leaves out the workers from the past, whose skills were largely non-transferable to positions in healthcare and only found work in maintenance positions or freelance work. “It seemed like there were a lot more guys who tried their hand at some kind of contracting skill, whether it be carpentry, or painting or whatever. And there were a few of those guys that you know, the job that they lost, I don’t know if you can call it a crutch but until they didn’t have that job then they realized they could make it on their own as a, you know not all of them but a couple as painters and contractors.”⁹¹

⁹⁰ John O’Malley, interview by author, Greenville, PA, December 11, 2014.

⁹¹ Cianci, interview.

Wal-Mart is one of the new additions to the town since the pullout, but there are mixed feelings about it. Some point to Wal-Mart as part of the continuing problem. “They had all the banks” and “wonderful stores and Wal-Mart killed that. Every time somebody says ‘see you at Wally-Mart’ I cringe inside. No you don’t see me at Wally-Mart. You know they have this Good Shepherd. And one of the people, well people from my church work there, she was telling me that their greatest patrons are the clerks that work at Wal-Mart.”⁹² Others list Wal-Mart as one of their favorite things about Greenville, along with their church.⁹³ “Wal-Mart hasn’t made as much of a difference on the businesses downtown, because the businesses are much more specialized, so they didn’t really compete the same. Wal-Mart itself never hurt the downtown.”⁹⁴

One facility in particular which served as a memorial and was a place of social gathering has been closed for years due to the lack of economic means to support it. The Greenville Memorial Pool was named “to honor all the war vets because some people in our area who had served in the war, actually drowned, because they didn’t know how to swim. Like at the battle of Normandy. And there were a lot of people that drowned. And so that’s what the pool was dedicated for was to teach people to swim and for safety.”⁹⁵ While the lack of money forced physical closure of the pool, it has greater social implications. The pool no longer functions as gathering place in the summer for young and old and the overall safety of kids in the community are at risk who are swimming in the natural waterways instead of at the pool. More importantly, its purpose as a memorial to veterans is no longer functional. Ironically the pool only served as a

⁹² Cooper, interview.

⁹³ Anthony, interview.

⁹⁴ Charles N. Klingensmith, interview.

⁹⁵Smith, interview.

seasonal memorial, as it was only used during the summer months. But now with it being closed, its intended effect of honoring those who fought for Greenville is lessened.

Although economically the town is not what it once was, some still have hope and see the bright side. “By the way I might add: without the hospital, without St. Paul’s, and actually having the Werner Corporate folks, and then having a lot of the companies, Salem Tubes and the places down in Greenville-Reynolds has helped our schools. Without places like those who knows what would have happened. You talk about the grace of God and whatever, this place, downtown missions are wanting to do something downtown and have a presence and bless anyone who’s ever donated.”⁹⁶ While the community has shifted to one focused around providing health services, the people are still seeking to find a source of identity in their economic means, “I think that we’ve lost our vision, when the industry left I feel like that is what everybody had been leaning on for so long that they just don’t know what to do now and how to create that and I think that we need to find you know what our niche is and try to capitalize on that to make our community more prosperous.”⁹⁷

Deindustrialization also changed the community socially. When the industries left, a large part of the community left with them, changing the dynamics of the small town society. “It seems like there is no middle class anymore.”⁹⁸ This is partly reflected by the caliber of students in the schools today. “The other thing I think you would notice is maybe the IQ of the population too. Because some of those people in those industries, they had some high end intellectual people and their offspring was pretty with it.”⁹⁹ The erasure of the middle class is reflected in the grades of the students. One retired teacher remarked on the performance of students before the

⁹⁶ Frederick A. Kiser, interview.

⁹⁷ Smith, interview.

⁹⁸ Jill K. Jones, interview.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

industries left town, “I hate to generalize, but there was a if you want to say it, an “A” group grade wise or A/B, and there were not too many people in that, and there were a lot of average kids, that got the C’s and a few that were D’s and F’s. I guess when I started there was the so-called bell curve, and it was really pretty true to form. Now it is a U, you got A’s and B’s, and you got, I hate to say it, D’s and F’s. And because of industry being out there’s really aren’t too many so-called middle class or middle of the road.”¹⁰⁰

In contrast to how safe and friendly the downtown was in the past, some residents no longer feel safe. “As of today and what it was when I was growing up in Greenville, we could walk all over town and never think of anyone ever bothering us. And eleven o’clock at night we could walk around town, all the kids were always out walking.” But “now you wouldn’t go outside your door at ten at night. It’s a shame.”¹⁰¹ “I know it isn’t a problem limited to Greenville, but when I was ten or twelve my mom could drop me off at Riverside park to fish, you know and go run some errands, but I’m not so sure you would do that now.”¹⁰² One elderly ninety-five year old woman told a recent story that illustrates her position on what happened to the community: “yesterday afternoon I was out in the kitchen, and I see the fellas in the signal truck and they’re backing up, very slowly backing up on the track and I was wondering if someone has been pulling some hanky-panky. You know that happens sometimes because we have superb idiots around here. This place, as they say, isn’t what it used to be.”¹⁰³

Although overall the community is still perceived as a friendly place; one mother notes the degeneracy in behavior in the younger generations. “Now you see them wearing just about

¹⁰⁰ Kelly Jones, interview.

¹⁰¹ Julian, interview.

¹⁰² Cianci, interview.

¹⁰³ Cooper, interview.

anything to school, and not a whole lot gets done. And you see kids misbehaving, just really pushing boundaries. I think there was a bigger line between right and wrong and behavior and consequences and now I just feel like kids don't have that so much anymore, because I think like I said the self-respect of people in general I think have decreased that industry leaving town affected. And so I think overall it's really a generational thing you know with the town going in decline. People's attitudes and stuff it's really affecting not just the people that lost their jobs, it's affecting their families and their kids and of course it's going to affect their kids' kids. It just goes right on down the line."¹⁰⁴

Increased crime and drug use are also correlated to the loss of economic means and sense of identity. "I know it really affected the economy and also the social aspect of Greenville. I noticed once, uh, it seemed that once the industry left town, it seems like the like the drugs and people's standard of living, has really, like the drugs have increased and their, people's self-respect has really decreased. That were affected by the industries."¹⁰⁵ Some are more insightful about the past, and as their years go by are more inclined to contribute back to the community. One recalls his time as a basketball coach to explain his perspective on the situation, "But basketball, and some of the kids who keep in touch with me the most, they didn't play very much, some of them come back for alumni games and a lot of them are successful. I think you learn more when it doesn't work out than when you win the championship, I know for me that is the case. And so now here we are, here we are, we've lost all those businesses, I feel like it's now my time to help out however I can."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Smith, interview.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Frederick A. Kiser, interview.

Others have found ways to retain that sense of a small town community. “I was secretary of the high school alumni association for 29 years and for 9 years I was the assistant. And I have kept all those books up to date, you know, including the last graduation class and anything and if a class has a reunion I cut it out and put it in and that’s to go to the library. We still have a good library in Greenville.”¹⁰⁷ The three museums joined together to form the Greenville Museum Alliance to do a better job of conveying and preserving the history to the community. One of their on-going projects is the now-annual Heritage Days which occurs on the Fourth of July weekend, but even that has changed from being heritage oriented to more of a time of entertainment for the community. “We as three museums had decided we’re all going different ways and there is no reason. So we need to promote ourselves, so we joined, we had two from each museum appointed to it and then they were supposed to work on advertising, promoting. We got to the point that, so then when we did the Heritage Day, we started the Heritage Days, we put it out by the Greenville Museum Alliance. Because originally it was going to be about Heritage and we would showcase our three museums and so on. But that’s kinda going by the wayside because things have changed and people have different ideas. And uh so I don’t know what we’re going to do in the future.”¹⁰⁸ “Right now there are a few parades throughout the year and Heritage Days in July, which is nice but it doesn’t happen often enough to build a sense of community. They used to have weekly outdoor concerts during the summer, and it would be nice to bring those back. The town needs a place and time for people to meet one another.”¹⁰⁹ Michael Kammen discusses the importance of community events and memory as “local pride was much more likely to energize the observances that really engaged people; so place-specific activities

¹⁰⁷ Cooper, interview.

¹⁰⁸ Julian, interview.

¹⁰⁹ Kevin Jeffries, interview by author, Facebook, March 16, 2015.

served as the strongest impulse to memory in a dual sense: the celebrations not only evoked remembrances of things past...but local events tended to linger in the community's memory, to serve as moments of self-definition.”¹¹⁰

Although Greenville lost some buildings which brought the community together, such as the public swimming pool and ice rink in the park, the current high school principal suggests that the schools are integral to the unity of the area. “I think the school should be and is a central part of the community. You know from the standpoint of, we host community events here in terms of our facilities but also understanding that the school is what connects a lot of people to each other, a basketball game on a Friday night or a football game on a Friday night you know is probably the biggest social thing that is going on in a town. And for a town that has maybe, I guess depending on the census rules, might only have seven or eight thousand people, we can easily get a few thousand at a home football game. So it's something a lot of people in town identify with.”¹¹¹

Conclusion

The people of Greenville yearn for the days when industry provided economic stability, but have largely forgotten the dangers and side effects of such a life. As one woman said, no one realized how much they relied on the industry until it was gone and since then part of the community has lost its self-respect. Many are finding it difficult to have pride in a community that is but an empty shell of what it once was and their loss of hope is reflected in the decay and neglect of their homes across the town. The working middle class had pride in the work they did for the companies but when the companies left they took more than paychecks away from

¹¹⁰ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 141.

¹¹¹ Brian S. Tokar, interview by author, Greenville, PA, January 30, 2015.

thousands in Greenville, they took their pride. A brochure about the Greenville Steel Car Company had as its title above the Steel Car company logo “The Symbol of Quality and Pride,”¹¹² illustrating just how proud the workers were of their product.

Greenville had a strong identity as an industrial town and without that it is wandering, taken in different directions by various members of the community. Although some have lost hope and no longer see any prospect of Greenville returning to its former glory, others are still holding on to the belief that someday new industries will utilize the prime location of the town and open industrial spaces and bring new work for the community. There are some who have new dreams for what Greenville could be and recognize what it is today.

Despite all the economic changes suffered in Greenville over the last forty years, “It still remains the core of people who care about people, uh small town America, uh to how you know many places can you go and if you were to stand out there and go across the street in a lot of towns you would have to stand there until the cars were all gone. And uh, you know being downtown more now... And other people have mentioned this. Rita Clemente who is the marketing director at St. Paul’s she has said that the reason she moved to Greenville was because of the people. And because we still capture that small town feel and yet you can still have as much big town as you would like to have because we are right in the middle of Erie, Pittsburgh. And an hour and half to Cleveland and even closer to Youngstown.”¹¹³ Others echo the sentiment of Greenville being a great place to raise their kids, illustrating a collective consciousness in the process of forming an identity of a family friendly community. “It was a great place to grow up, it was a great place to raise children, it is a great place to raise children

¹¹² “The Symbol of Quality and Pride,” *Greenville Steel Car Company Brochure*, RSA Rail Expo 1984.

¹¹³ Frederick A. Kiser, interview.

right now.”¹¹⁴ “I think it would still be a good place to raise children. We’re close enough to Cleveland or Pittsburgh, you know geographically we’re pretty connected to some bigger areas, but yet we have the safety, or you know a small town,”¹¹⁵ and “I think that is the biggest plus, it’s a great place to raise kids. From my perspective. It’s reasonably safe, they get a decent education. They are able to pursue any of their goals, they have opportunities.”¹¹⁶ Even recent graduate of the high school, Jerianne Larson, who has moved away in search of a job feels that “Greenville is a great place to raise a family and retire.”¹¹⁷ Despite the losses economically, Greenville still “has a lot of good stuff. How many towns have the symphony orchestra, of course they come from a lot, from Youngstown areas. They come from all over, they are from Youngstown.”¹¹⁸ When asked what she would want to tell visitors to Greenville, one elderly woman remarked “that it’s a friendly little town, lots of people helping out one another.”¹¹⁹ Many in Greenville recognize that it still is a nice place to live and are enjoying the simple things in life, if they have the fortune to obtain an economic means of survival. Former Senator Bob Robbins, who grew up in Greenville, looked back at what he accomplished politically and says “I can look back and see some things that got accomplished. I’ve been involved in historical things. We were able to help various organizations by utilizing grants. We were able to help the Greenville Symphony and the Railroad Museum. Little things like that, but they’re important to the community. I’ve learned long ago, that you don’t step on people’s dreams. I’m glad I was able to help get things done.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Cianci, interview.

¹¹⁵ Jill K. Jones, interview.

¹¹⁶ Kelly Jones, interview.

¹¹⁷ Jerianne Larson, interview by author, Facebook, March 16, 2015.

¹¹⁸ Anthony, interview.

¹¹⁹ Doris L. Kiser, interview.

¹²⁰ Frank Stratiff, “Bob Robbins: It’s About Self-Worth,” *The Record-Argus*, January 28, 2015.

http://www.recordargusnews.com/news/2015-01-28/News/Sen_Bob_Robbins_Its_about_selfworth.html. Accessed March 17, 2015.

Although commemoration of the past is not as evident or prevalent as in some communities, one woman still is optimistic about the community's connection to the past, "I think we like to celebrate our history while looking toward the future."¹²¹ The three museums in town contribute to the feeling that the town is rooted in the past, although the railroad museum is frequented more often "because people still know the railroad. The railroad buffs. But see the canal that is so far outdated no one remembers that. But we have a nice canal museum."¹²² The Greenville Area Historical Society is viewed as having the main responsibility of caring for and educating the community of its history, but it only survives at the benevolence of sponsors. In an article titled, "Do Something historical for Greenville," the GAHS requested that the community "support the historical society in any way they can," so they "can keep Greenville's past, alive for future generations."¹²³ The three museums represent the transportation identity of the town, but outside of a room in the Waugh House, where the Greenville Historical Society is located, there is as of yet no public displays of commemoration to the industry and labor on which the town previously prospered.

The closing of the memorial pool illustrates the loss of a war memorial and the further distancing of the community from its past. The lack of a public heritage or memorial to the workers which sustained Greenville during its period of prosperity stands a roadblock to the community overcoming the turmoil of its conflicted identity. As Carolyn Kitch writes, "the process of naming and publicizing a heritage area also reframe local identity for the people who live in it, create a rhetorical bridge between regional character and nationality, and often situate

¹²¹ Jill K. Jones, interview.

¹²² Julian, interview.

¹²³ Geri Smith, "Do Something Historical for Greenville," *The Record-Argus*, March 7, 2015, http://www.recordargusnews.com/news/2015-03-07/Commentary/Do_something_historical_for_Greenville.html, accessed March 17, 2015.

the industrial past within grand, even mythological, ideas about landscape.”¹²⁴ Setting aside the industrial lots as heritage areas or setting up markers to commemorate the workers can help the Greenville community be proud of their past and aid in forming a new identity because memorials and plaques celebrate the “bravery and sacrifice of past workers.”¹²⁵

The memories of industry largely reflect economic yearning, but some see the consequences of the lack of steady work in the community. The emphasis in memories on economic stability represents a desire for order within the community, as if simply having industries would simply solve all the problems within society. It also illustrates a paradigm within the United States as a whole of portraying your identity as your economic status. In chapter one the community was able to derive a sense of belonging from its familial relationships and churches, in chapter two the struggle of overcoming disaster united the community, but by the end of the twentieth century all the hopes and dreams were tied into the economic welfare of the community and without that many are lost.

Greenville, Pennsylvania is part of the greater Youngstown metro area and shares the story of steel with its neighbor. Although the initial rise and periods of prosperity between the two communities are parallel, the ways in which Youngstown and Greenville have dealt with the memories of their deindustrialized pasts differ. But as Linkon and Russo point out, although both are in different positions today, the message remains the same as it is for Youngstown, “if Youngstown is to be a real community, then, it must understand its part. It must both embrace pride in what was produced here – not just steel but also a strong working class-community –

¹²⁴ Kitch, 42.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

and accept the failure to deal with conflicts involving class and race. It must understand how the history of work and struggle are linked to the landscape and people's ways of remembering."¹²⁶

In thinking about Greenville and Youngstown, they are in different situations socially and economically. Work was a source of identity for Youngstown, because it "represented virtue, expertise, power, and conflict."¹²⁷ Work in Greenville represented economic power, pride in a job well done, and stability. Although Greenville had some strikes and worker conflicts, it does not compare to the workers' struggle in Youngstown and that meaning of labor history is not evident in Greenville's story or identity. Youngstown's identity in the national picture changed to that of "Crime-Town" and "murder capital" by 1990,¹²⁸ while in Greenville "we've had a couple murders in town, but it seems like the name Greenville and murder they just don't go hand-in-hand you know and if there is a murder, then it still is top news for quite a while."¹²⁹ Due to being a small town with plenty of access to recreational activities in parks and waterways, Greenville was able to stave off the high crime of the concrete jungle of Youngstown while it is beginning to fashion a new identity around itself as a recreational center in northwestern Pennsylvania. But while the Greenville community seeks to find its niche, it is continuing to forget the past, further erasing who they are and making it increasingly difficult to understand themselves and their role in the world. Both the Youngstown and Greenville communities need to remember the past and take pride in the struggle and hardship no matter what the outcome, because like it or not the past is the basis of the community's identity. Ultimately, the history and

¹²⁶ Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 247.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 190-191.

¹²⁹ Smith, interview.

memory of a community is interlocked with pride and the formation of identity, through knowing where you came from, because “it’s about self-worth.”¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Frank Stratiff, “Bob Robbins: It’s About Self-Worth,” *The Record-Argus*, January 28, 2015. http://www.recordargusnews.com/news/2015-01-28/News/Sen_Bob_Robbins_Its_about_selfworth.html. Accessed March 17, 2015.

Conclusion

Carolyn Kitch quotes Robert Archibald on the importance of history in her book on memory of Pennsylvania industry, “History is about making useful narratives for the living...History is a conversation...about who we are, what stories we will tell. It is a search for common ground between people with diverse interpretations and experiences.”¹ The history of Greenville is a story of people coming to make a new home for themselves, working together despite their varied backgrounds. Some were veterans of the Revolutionary War. Others were just simple farmers who wanted more land for themselves and their descendants. As the town was transformed into an industrial center of northwestern Pennsylvania, it attracted the new immigrants such as Italians and Greeks who hoped to start a new life and pursue the American dream. The railroad both brought the immigrants and provided a job for them when they arrived in the burgeoning town. It is also a story of trials and triumphs. Overcoming the fire in 1873, the Greenville community entered the twentieth century with an optimistic spirit that nothing would prevent their inevitable story of progress. When their history of advancement finally ended in the 1980s, the Greenville community felt like their world was collapsing around them.

The Greenville community is suffering a crisis in identity. It was known for industry and railroads but that identity no longer fits the community. The Greenville Area Historical Society is still proclaiming the story of Greenville as one of industry and transportation, but many in town do not have any pride about their past because of the current lack of industry. The

¹ Carolyn Kitch, *Pennsylvania in Public Memory: Reclaiming the Industrial Past* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 84.

community does not see how to unite like they did after the fire in 1873. Their memory is jaded and the current issue of deindustrialization overshadows everything that came before it. The key issue is that the Greenville community is not tied to anything because it has allowed its history to be largely forgotten. Its residents are sitting in a boat without a paddle and wondering where their boat will go. Some see the boat as doomed and have jumped ship to find a new port with better opportunities. Others are trying to fashion a paddle out of what is available to the community and not worry about what they do not have. But most importantly those sitting in the boat have let go of the rope tying them to the dock. That rope was their history, their stories, their narratives of the people and events that shaped where they are today. If the community was still holding onto that rope, their boat would be anchored to something and they could unite to come ashore again. Without the rope, the people in the boat are trying to paddle in different directions.

The lack of the collective in Greenville to remember its past is significant not because it is different, but because it is similar. As historians we often point out things that in history that are unique because they are different from what we expect. In Greenville you will not find a startling revelation of how people lived or conducted their lives. Instead, the story is the story of America. You can find it where you grew up and where you live now. The story of Greenville is a microcosm of the national arc of change and transition, from the pioneer agrarian community established by the founding families to the modern industrial community of the late 19th century to the current post-industrial town. The history and events of Greenville are not isolated in some small town in Western Pennsylvania. What happened in Greenville is the American story. By understanding their struggle and search for meaning through obstacles we can better understand ourselves how to confront the circumstances of our own communities and the future unforeseen difficulties. The story is similar but that is what makes it so significant. The fact that the people

of Greenville fail to remember illustrates the failure of our nation to stay connected to our past, even down to the very events that shaped the communities we live in today. The past is what anchors us in the present, because it gives us hope and inspiration for the future.

As historians we all know how important the past is, but if we are not informing our own communities about the successes and failures in their past then how can we expect them to adapt and grow in the face of present and future challenges? As historians we also need to think critically about our work in terms of who we are reaching. If I as an historian identify the founding families and the Great Fire in 1873 as pivotal events in Greenville's history but the collective memory does not share the sentiment, then are the events as pivotal as they seem? If the events have no meaning for the modern community are they important at all? Are we as historians correct or does the community have a say? How can we humanize the actors in our stories? The community of Greenville and post-industrial America at large is struggling because there is no sense of connection to the past. Vague recollections of stories, people, and events are evident, but connections between them are missing. The founding families and the Great Fire in Greenville occur as individual happenstance occurrences in the collective memory. They hold little meaning for the people. In the same way, post-industrial America has an ethos of forgetfulness. All that seems to matter is the present. But the problems of the present do not originate in the present, but in the past.

Similarly, the solutions are found in the past. We can look to the past to understand the present. As historians we teach the youth in schools about the major national story, but generally the arc of the story is the American Revolution, the Civil War, and World War Two. Students are taught about war and how war has been used to solve problems in our nation's history. And we see today that war and violence are still ever-present. What if we instead taught on how people

worked together to come through the Chicago Fire in 1871? Twenty years after the Chicago fire they hosted the World's Fair as the greatest modern city on earth! The national story is not just what presidents did, or wars that were fought, but individuals and families striving to build a home for themselves. History is about people going through life and having hope for a better world, as Archibald said "making useful narratives for the living."

The story of Greenville illustrates the relationship between history, memory, and identity. The first chapter demonstrates the importance of community and of people in shaping the places we live in today. The original settlers had an identity of being part of a family. They were not just building a place to live with strangers, but with their relatives. The early community was built around its relationships with each other and derived its identity from that.

The second chapter demonstrates that with the tragedy of the fire in 1873, the world the people of Greenville made was erased and the community fashioned a new identity. It became a modern town and attracted industry. As the twentieth century progressed the community built its identity around what it produced. At the same time the memory of the earlier settlers changed into one of progress. The early settlers were not remembered by their relationships but only by what they did, the same as how the Greenville community perceived its own identity.

The third chapter discussed the memory of deindustrialization and how it disrupted the collective identity of the town. Suddenly an identity based on what they had built no longer seemed viable, since the fruits of their labor were no longer apparent. As the community identity shifted, so too did the memory of the past. The memory of the early settlers and the triumph of coming through the 1873 fire was built on the story of progress, but because progress was no longer evident, the memory faded from prominence. The community is nostalgic for the past, but

is struggling with how to create a new sense of themselves when their memories do not accord with the physical appearance of Greenville today.

The nostalgia for the past in the present community seems harmless because in some fashion the residents of Greenville are trying to remember their history. But nostalgia is dangerous because it is a “falsification of the past.” It demonstrates that “we have lost faith in the possibility of changing our public life and have retreated into the private enclaves of family, and the consumption of certain ‘retro’ styles.”² Michael Kammen notes that the interplay between “nostalgia and progress supplied the dual support system of the frontier myth in American culture,”³ which we saw was an idealized version of the reality of the settlers in chapter one and two. Rather than paint a picture of an idealized past, I sought to realign the memory of Greenville in hopes that the story would be remembered for what it was, a story about the American people building a home for themselves across two hundred years.

Until the people of Greenville lean on the past to confront their post-industrial reality and understand the role of the early settlers and the 1873 fire in forming who they are today, the current circumstances will continue to appear as too great a trial to overcome. Greenville’s story speaks to all of us in different ways. The first families which lived in community together speaks to the bonds we form with those around us today and to those in the past. The narrative of people joining together to overcome the fire and rebuild speaks to overcoming adversity while the lack of memory in Greenville of the fire urges us to think more critically about what identity-shaping events we are forgetting to remember. The struggle of a community beset by economic decline

² Malcom Chase and Christopher Shaw, “The Dimensions of Nostalgia,” *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, ed. By Christopher Shaw and Malcom Chase (Manchester, Manchester University Press: 1989), 1-3.

³ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 702.

and deindustrialization speaks to how we are remembering the past, are we proud or bitter? The point is not to be proud about the past or bitter about what happened, but simply to remember it.

The past is shaping us today whether we remember it or not, as illustrated by the early families and 1873 fire but we are unable to understand who we are today unless we remember what is shaping us. The people of today in Greenville are living in a post-industrial town and are unable to move on because they lost their connection to their roots. The industrial collapse is all that looms in their minds and it seems insurmountable. The events of the past are important because they shape who we are today. But if we do not remember them, then present circumstances seem insurmountable. As stated in the beginning, memory has the power to redeem. Although the residents of Greenville and other deindustrialized towns are ashamed of losing industry and only want to remember the prosperous days, remembering who came before and what the ancestors of the community did for better or worse will redeem and reclaim an identity for Greenville, Pennsylvania. History is about hope. Remembering what we have done in the past gives us hope and courage for the future. Remembering what other Americans did in the past gives us hope for future America. And remembering what humans have overcome since the dawn of time will continue to inspire us until the end of time.

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APPENDIX A

Crucifix of Memory: Community and Identity in Greenville, Pennsylvania Interview Questions

Age:

Gender:

Race:

Part I: Biographical

Where were you born?

Have you lived in Greenville your whole life? Where else did you live?

How long have you lived in Greenville?

Why did you come to Greenville?

What do you do for a living?

Do you have any idea why your ancestors came to Greenville? When did your family move to the area?

What were their occupations?

Part II: Early Memories of Greenville

Where did you go to school?

How did you get to school? (Transportation and route)

What did you do after school?

How did you spend your summers growing up in Greenville?

Part III: Key Events

Before I started my research, I didn't know anything about how Greenville was founded. *Have you heard or read anything about the early families?*

I read that the first families to come here were the Kecks, Klingensmiths, Loutzenhisers, and Christy's. *Do you have any connections to these families?*

Has anyone in your family talked about the early days of Greenville? What did they say?

Are there any ancestors you hear your family mention frequently?

What about these families today? Do you know of any still in the area?

I also read there was some sort of fire in the 1870s. *Did you have any ancestors living here during the 1870s? What did they do for a living?*

Have you heard anyone in your family mention or talk about the fire? What did they say?

Does your family have any stories about the fire?

I know the big thing in Greenville in more recent years was the closing and moving of Bessemer, Trinity, and Werners. *Did you or anyone you know work for these companies? What did you/they do? Were you/they able to find another job?*

Do you have any stories of the companies leaving town? Have you heard your family talk about the pullout? What did they say?

Part IV: Memories Important to Interviewee

If I were a visitor, what is the most important thing you would want me to know about Greenville?

If you could change anything about Greenville, what would it be?

What are some of your favorite memories of Greenville?

What are some of your worst memories of Greenville?

What stories and memories would you like to preserve for the town's history?

Is there anything else you would like to share about Greenville?

APPENDIX B
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: *Crucifix of Memory: Community and Identity in Greenville, Pennsylvania*

Principal Investigator: *Kenneth Bindas and Jobadiah Christiansen*

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Purpose:

My thesis is on the perception, memory, and identity of the community of Greenville, Pennsylvania. Part of the research for the thesis requires interviews for the memory aspect of the community study. The purpose of these interviews is to engage with the memory of the community by studying how the community makes sense of its past in relationship to their current identity and how the community overcame and are dealing with events which disrupted their identity.

Procedures

The co-investigator Jobadiah Christiansen will conduct interviews with participants such as yourself. The interview questions focus on demographic data, early memories of the town, specific memories of three events, and open-ended questions for the participant to freely speak his or her mind and share what he or she thinks is important about Greenville. The interviews are expected to take 30 to 45 minutes.

Audio and Video Recording and Photography

Audio recording will be used during interviews in order to fully capture the memories of the participants. These audio tapes will not be used or available for the public. After transcribing the tapes, the co-investigator will erase the tapes. Photography will only be used if the participant brings various keepsakes along. If so, the artifacts will be photographed to compile an archive of pieces important to the memory of the community.

Benefits

The potential benefits of participating in this study may include a greater sense of self identity within the community, an enhanced vision for the meaning of history within the Greenville community, and a contribution of personal memories of Greenville for the future of the community. Your participation in this study may also allow other communities around the world to make sense of their place in history through their memories. Also,

your aid contributes to telling the story of America from the ground level up, rather than the story of politicians and government policies. Your story is the story of America, would you care to share it with the world?

Risks and Discomforts

During the interview you may feel uncomfortable if the questions cause you to have unpleasant memories. You are free to not answer at any time if you feel uncomfortable but often the most difficult memories are the most important ones. The questions are not intended to make the participant feel uncomfortable, rather, they seek to engage in a discussion with the interviewee about his or her memories. The memories are common to the community and may be topics which the participant would recollect with friends and family in everyday conversation.

Privacy and Confidentiality

No identifying information will be collected. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from your study data, and responses will not be linked to you. Research participants will not be identified in any publication or presentation of research results; only aggregate data will be used. The audio taken will be erased promptly following transcription by the co-investigator. Your memories will be told anonymously, simply as a member of the Greenville community.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Jobadiah Christiansen at 630.890.2689 or Kenneth Bindas at 330.672.2882. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.

Consent Statement and Signature

I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

Participant Signature

Date