

“Preserve America”: A Grounded Study of History,
Heritage, and Tourism in a Small Town

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Abstract

In 1960, the town of Weston, Missouri, began preparing for exponential population growth over the next thirty years. When the town's population did not balloon by the start of the 1980s, business and municipal leaders in Weston were forced to redirect their focus toward revitalizing and addressing the present day's decay. In very little time the efforts to revitalize and bring the citizens the services and amenities they needed and required took a backseat to the larger goal of becoming a site of attraction for tourists. The solution favored by Weston, and many other real and fictional small towns, was to delve into and market their local history. Weston was not the first town in the United States to try and succeed at heritage tourism; heritage tourism has been a saving grace for small towns and even bigger cities for well over one hundred years. Where we also witness success in heritage tourism is on television. Fictional small towns have illustrated dire need in the wake of decay, eventually turning to tourism. Much like Weston, these towns create historical museums, plan large festivals, and coordinate reenactments of significant historical moments. Fictional or not, small towns are expected to solve their blight on their own, by turning to local businesses, municipal taxes, and an ever-shrinking pot of federal funds. This shift from preservation for the sake of local and national memory fits into the larger framework of neoliberalism as it demonstrates preservation and the commodification of history as one of the only economic tools available to struggling small towns and ignores the larger economic processes at work that largely disadvantage rural small towns. This paper argues that Weston's shift in focus from revitalization toward establishing an economy of heritage tourism is based on the neoliberalization of historic preservation and is presented as the only route to economic and population growth. Further, this reliance on heritage tourism as the primary solution for small

towns facing economic struggles is so embedded in the idea of “small town America” that as it is occurring in small towns across the country, it is also being simulated in popular television.

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Introduction

“Today family traditions left behind by Weston's early pioneers have remained a common thread among the residents of this romantic hamlet in Northwest Missouri. New houses are being built and old ones lovingly restored. The downtown and uptown business areas are thriving. The town and region look forward to sustained, orderly growth that makes it possible to retain the feel of a small town.”

— “Weston’s Historic Past,” Weston, Missouri

Weston, Missouri is a town of 1,728 souls located 34 miles north and slightly west of Kansas City, Missouri along the Missouri River.¹ One spring day, this author was invited to join a few friends on an outing to Weston’s local wineries. I was not sure what to expect from Northwest Missouri’s wine region or the small town of Weston. Upon arriving in this town, I was struck by the number of visitors to the town and its wineries, as well as the charm and antiquity of the town’s businesses and homes. As I walked along the cobbled, bricked, and in some places concrete, pathways I could feel the town trying to pull me into the past—I just couldn’t figure out how far back it was trying to take me. Some of the buildings were reminiscent of early Anglo settlement of the West, in other spots I was reminded of downtown landscapes constructed in the 1940s by the likes of Norman Rockwell and Walt Disney. And when I caught a glimpse of the antique car gathering at the South end of Main Street, I felt like looking around the town for Francis Ford Coppola, Ron Howard, and the rest of the *American Graffiti* (1973) team. While the various pasts merged into an amalgamation of time, the goal of embracing the local history and pride was well apparent.

Among the historic landscape is an active retail industry. The town’s Chamber of Commerce-sponsored website boasts: “There are great restaurants, live music, wineries, an Irish Pub and brewery, seasonal events, museums, galleries, historic home tours and shops offering

¹ “Weston city, Missouri,” United States Census Bureau, last accessed February 25, 2021, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=1600000US2978856>.

unique home decor, gifts, garden, antiques and apparel.”² This bustling retail industry attracts countless visitors to Weston. Locally, residents of Kansas City visit for antiques, festivals, and the numerous alcohol tours. Regionally, Weston has received the following accolades:

Voted #1 Best Day Trip 14 years running! - Ingram's Magazine

Voted #1 Best Overnight Destination - Visit KC.com

Voted Best Day Trip - The Pitch

Voted Favorite Day Trip - Visit KC Visitors Choice Award

Voted Best Day Trip & Beautiful Town- Rural Missouri Magazine

Voted Best Small Town in Missouri - AAA Midwest Traveler Magazine

Voted Most Beautiful Town in Missouri - Expedia Viewfinder Travel Blog

Weston has a reputation as a boutique small tourist-attraction town getaway in the Kansas City metro area and the state of Missouri. Because of this the town operates at full steam largely on the weekends, Thursday through Sunday. However, a Tuesday visit to Weston is much different than a Saturday visit. On a Tuesday morning there is no hustle and bustle of tourists, many shop windows are darkened, and doors closed as its residents live their ordinary lives as families, parents, and workers outside the downtown space.

The sight of darkened, empty storefronts and closed doors is an actuality for many American small towns. Small town America is quickly receding into memory.³ Population decline and the resulting economic downturn have been a fear in Weston since its major

² “Weston,” Weston Chamber of Commerce, accessed February 25, 2021, <https://www.westonmo.com/>.

³ Patrick J. Carr, Daniel T. Lichter, and Maria J. Keflas, “Can Immigration Save Small-Town America? Hispanic Boomtowns and the Uneasy Path to Renewal,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 641 (2012), 39; Beau Dure, “Millennials Continue Urbanization of America, Leaving Small Towns,” *NPR.org*, October 21, 2014, last accessed March 1, 2021, <http://www.npr.org/2014/10/21/357723069/millennials-continue-urbanization-of-america-leaving-small-towns>.

population decline between 1860 and 1880. After the Civil War, several fires, a flood that shifted the course of the Missouri River three miles away from this port town, and failed railroad speculation, Weston's population halved by 1880. During Weston's bustle and growth in the 1850s and 1860s, the town hovered around 3,000 inhabitants, but by the 1870 federal Census, the town was home to 1,615 people—only 26 people shy of their present-day population.⁴

Since then, Weston's population hovered around 1,000 between 1890 and 1960, falling to around 991 in 1920.⁵ For most of the twentieth century, some Weston residents and leaders were concerned that their hometown would dissolve and disappear from the Missouri landscape. Death, dying, and decay, were words frequently used to describe their fears. As early as 1942, residents were worried that their small town and its accompanying way of life were dying. Prominent Weston newspaper woman, Bertha Bless, went so far as to write to President and Mrs. Roosevelt and publish these letters and their replies in her family's local newspaper the Weston Chronicle. In 1942 World War II preoccupied much of the nation and world's attentions. Bless' fear was that these war efforts—though considered just and supported by the residents of Weston—were endangering the future of small towns across America. She contends that the war has not only plucked able-bodied young men from the family tobacco farms, but that it has also encouraged young workers to leave small towns in search of factory work in bigger cities. She says that all of this “sums up to a dislocation of small community life to an extent which holds

⁴ 1850 United States federal census, Platte County, Missouri, population schedule, Weston, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed February 25, 2021, <http://ancestry.com>; 1860 United States federal census, Platte County, Missouri, population schedule, Weston, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed February 25, 2021, <http://ancestry.com>; 1870 United States federal census, Platte County, Missouri, population schedule, Weston, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed February 25, 2021, <http://ancestry.com>.

⁵ 1850 United States federal census; 1860 United States federal census; 1870 United States federal census.

frightening implications so far as the future of rural life is concerned.”⁶ So important to Bless was the preservation of small towns and their way of life that she pleads with the President, asking “Will America awaken in time to save her rural communities?”⁷

According to population data, Weston has had steady, measurable population growth since the 1970 census, with its largest period of growth reflected in both the 1970 and 1980 Censuses.⁸ This “boom” was attributed to the growth of the Kansas City metropolitan area and the construction of the Kansas City International Airport in Platte County.⁹ In 1966, Congressman William R. Hull, Jr., a native of Weston, corresponded with Larkin and Associates regarding an overhaul of Weston’s local water works in order to prepare for the expected population growth in the area. The report details the population projections for Weston suggesting that by 1990 the city and township population will increase to 3,000.¹⁰ This projection fell quite short as the 1990 Census tallied around 1,500 residents.

Based on census demographics, Weston, Missouri stands as an anomaly to the established pattern of small-town population decline (See Figure 1). As Weston’s website explains, “The town and region look forward to sustained, orderly growth that makes it possible to retain the feel of a small town.”¹¹ As growth is not typically associated with the goal of keeping something

⁶ Letter from Bertha I. Bless to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 14, 1942, C1740, #20, 260-262, Papers of Bertha Bless, The State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Weston, MO,” *Population.us*, last accessed March 10, 2021, <https://population.us/mo/weston/>.

⁹ E.A. Torriero, “Weston, Mo.: Residents differ on town’s need to change image.” *The Kansas City Times* (Kansas City, MO), April 17, 1982.

¹⁰ William R. Hull, Jr. Papers, Historic Papers Collection, The State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

¹¹ “Weston,” Weston Chamber of Commerce.

small, Weston has made decisions on how the town will grow by factoring in how Weston can maintain its identity as a small town.

Year	Population of Weston (including all free and enslaved people)
1850	3,278
1860	2,996
1870	1,615
1880	2,158
1890	1,134 ¹²
1900	1,019
1910	1,019
1920	991
1930	1,030
1940	1,122
1950	1,067*
1960	1,057*
1970	1,267*
1980	1,440*
1990	1,528*
2000	1,631*
2010	1,641*

Figure 1. Population of Weston.¹³

During the last two years, I have wandered in and out of Weston; wandering at times as a tourist and at times as a researcher, yet always as an American studies scholar. I chose Weston, Missouri as my research location based largely on the manner in which I first encountered the

¹² State census records were destroyed in a warehouse fire in 1921; this number comes from Wikipedia.

¹³ Data compiled from the Decennial U.S. Federal Census.

town. Since my friends brought me to the town as a tourist of the local wineries, I feel like my initial visit was not in the name of research, but rather was an experience like many others who visit the town. The friends who brought me on the day trip, had also been before and served as my tour guides, providing me with a particular and situated view of Weston. After some cursory research on Weston, I discovered just how popular it is.

Research Question

While at the beginning of my graduate school career I was interested in small towns and their nostalgic components, I have since fine-tuned my investigation of small towns. After my visit to Weston, I was curious about how the town employed nostalgia to attract tourists. Yet during my time spent in Weston at various events and among its archival materials, I determined that the scope of my project was one of process and history, specifically asking how Weston developed its tourism industry and where that industry intersected with history.

Even though Weston's town motto is: "Not Just Another Historic Town," the observations and analysis presented here will not paint Weston as a small town with a unique set of challenges, boasting a unique history. In fact, Weston's early efforts to revitalize and fight encroaching extinction were in response to the death and decay of so many small-town communities across the Midwest and the United States. Not entirely unique, but not entirely ubiquitous however, was just how the town won its fight. The economic downfall of small towns and their reliance on history and preservation is such a commonplace scenario that it not only affects numerous American small towns but also appears with some frequency in popular American television shows. These fictional small towns not only highlight the charm and idyllic experience so often attributed to small town life, but they also capture the significant threats to

small towns and frequently imitate the same tools for tourism as Weston has: historic preservation of buildings, the creation of festivals, and the development and reliance on heritage tourism.

Weston, Missouri and the development of its heritage tourism industry shows how a small town's past can be harnessed for economic gain and how this town staved off dissolution and maintained a tourist economy over the last 30 years. Also important is the impact of a tourist economy on the services and amenities available for the community. Since the 1980s, Weston's focus moved from revitalizing their downtown space for its residents toward the creation of a downtown that caters to a transient tourist population. This shift fits into the larger framework of neoliberalism as it demonstrates preservation and the commodification of history as one of the only economic tools available to struggling small towns and ignores the larger economic processes at work that largely disadvantage rural small towns. This paper argues that Weston's shift in focus from revitalization toward establishing an economy of heritage tourism is based on the neoliberalization of historic preservation and is presented to many small towns as the only route to economic and population growth. Further, this reliance on heritage tourism as the primary solution for small towns facing economic struggles is so embedded in the idea of "small town America" that as it is occurring in small towns across the country, it is also being simulated in popular television.

Literature Review

Small Town Defined

The American small town is difficult to define. Its characteristics, demographics, and economies differ from region to region, state to state, and even county to county. Though they

usually share some things in common like distance from an urban center (though this distance can be as close as twenty miles and as far as a thousand) and a small population (though this can also range from eight to 50,000 residents). In some cases, small towns are defined by their having a central Main Street that serves a community big enough to contain one and small enough that Main Street is only several blocks long.¹⁴ There are very few definitions of small towns and almost no universally accepted parameters. It is even suggested that population is not a necessary aspect of the definition of small towns, and more important is an understanding of “the *small* town as a social and cultural entity, a definite type of community with special social and cultural and economic characteristics.”¹⁵

The United States Census Bureau does not have one sole category for small towns. In general, they work to categorize places based on whether they are rural or urban. There are very distinct parameters for being an urban area (more than 50,000) or an urban cluster (more than 2,500 people, but less than 50,000). For a block to be urban it needs to have a population density of 1,000 people per square mile.¹⁶ Yet in a Census Bureau geography brief intended to clarify the distinction between urban and rural, the report offers no parameters for establishing rurality. The report repeats the idea that “after defining individual urban areas, rural is what is left”; “the rural definition remains all the territory, persons, and housing units not defined as urban”; “Rural is defined as all population, housing, and territory not included within an urbanized area or urban

¹⁴ Richard V. Francaviglia, *Main Street Revisited: Time, Space, and Image Building in Small-Town America* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1996), xx.

¹⁵ John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 73.

¹⁶ Michael Ratcliffe, Charlynn Burd, Kelly Holder, and Alison Fields, “Defining Rural at the U.S. Census Bureau,” *U.S. Census Bureau*, 2016, last accessed February 26, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2016/acs/acsgeo-1.html>.

cluster.”¹⁷ The Census Bureau also notes that within the classification of urban or rural, there are even smaller subdivisions of place.

In the Census Bureau manual defining places in the United States, another term is introduced: incorporated place. An incorporated place is a grouping of people in a named area that has some municipal powers or functions that is also not a part of another named area. A vast majority of Americans live in an incorporated place, with those who do not living in “small settlements, in the open countryside, or in the densely settled fringe of large cities.”¹⁸ From the 2014 population estimates from the Census Bureau about growth in small town United States, researchers note that there were 19,509 incorporated places in the United States in 2014, “a majority of which were small.”¹⁹ The researchers explain that 16,486, or 85% of these places, had populations of less than 10,000 residents. In yet another, more recent, Census Bureau article on small towns, it is explained that in 2020, 76% of unincorporated places had populations of 5,000 or less.²⁰ These two articles suggest that the threshold for a small town could be either 5,000 or 10,000 residents. I have worked under the assumption that small towns have a population under 10,000. However, other scholars who have researched the small town have

¹⁷ Ibid., 1-3.

¹⁸ Bureau of the Census, *Geographic Areas Reference Manual* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2018), 9-1.

¹⁹ Sarah Gibb and Rodger Johnson, “Growth in Small Town America,” *United States Census Bureau*, May 21, 2015, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2015/05/growth-in-small-town-america.html>.

²⁰ Amel Toukabri and Lauren Medina, “Latest City and Town Population Estimates of the Decade Show Three-Fourths of the Nation's Incorporated Places Have Fewer Than 5,000 People,” *United States Census Bureau*, May 21, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/05/america-a-nation-of-small-towns.html>.

worked under a different, yet still fairly subjective, definition of the small town, while others never define the size at all.²¹

For the purposes of this project, “small town” is a label self-adorned by a real or fictional location. The primary site of research for this project fits within that parameter and those suggested by the United States Census Bureau as having less than 10,000 or even 5,000 residents.²² However, as this project expands the discussion of small towns to include a number of fictional sites, it becomes more difficult to identify population size. This is when it becomes necessary to rely on a place’s social and cultural characteristics.

Small Town Landscapes

Over the last 170 years, urban theory has made room for explorations of exploitative labor practices, social interactions, ethnic and racial differences, and rather slowly, gender identities. Urban theory has also carved out room, or at least allowed for theoretical “sprawl” leading to suburban studies. We can see even in how small towns are defined that their definition and identity is first tied up with the city. We must first locate the city—the centers of population, business, vitality—before we can determine all those not-cities, all those rural towns. The study of the urban has been far more popular than the study of the rural. There is important scholarship however that examines this place and recognizes its value to the American landscape, popular imagination, and popular culture.

The small town is a vital part of the vernacular landscape of the United States. There are moments in history where highway travel popularized the landscape, and the small town was a

²¹ Orvell, *The Death and Life*, does not address size, while Francaviglia, *Main Street* defines a small town population as fewer than 12,000.

²² Toukabri and Medina, “Latest City and Town Population,” and Gibb and Johnson, “Growth in Small Town America.”

ubiquitous sight along America's freeways. In these times one small town may look like another, their differences becoming indecipherable while traveling the nation.²³ Despite the previous pervasiveness of the small-town landscape, the small town is rapidly disappearing from the landscape, yet still continues to hold on as an understood and meaningful location in the popular imaginary.

Small town America plays an important role in the collective imagination. In this arena, the small town carries symbolic value. It has been well-argued that there are mythologies that accompany the American small town.²⁴ Small towns carry a particular ethos that conjures notions of community, simplicity, and the pastoral. The small town is also the origin site of American heroes from Superman to a number of United States presidents.²⁵ In these cases, the small town is the birth site of ideals of virtue and strength and American exceptionalism. These ideals are certainly not found in every small town, and for many cast to the margins of society, the small town is not an ideal place.

Small predominantly white towns in the American South, and almost every other region of the United States, were sites of danger and violence for African-Americans before, during, and after the era of Jim Crow.²⁶ The tight-knit communities of the small-town ideal were in some instances bigoted machines of vigilante violence and injustice. The closeness of small town communities and the popular attitude that "everybody knows everybody," can be threatening as it others and excludes outsiders whether they are people of color, people from outside the

²³ Jackson, *Discovering*, 67.

²⁴ Miles Orvell, *The Death and Life of Main Street: Small Towns in American Memory* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

²⁵ Francaviglia, *Main Street*, xix.

²⁶ James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: Touchstone Press, 2006).

community, or people within the community who reject LGBTQ identities.²⁷ The support and acceptance tied to an idyllic small town, for example like the one seen in a film like *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946) that depicts a small community rallying around a beloved neighbor and offering him whatever money they could spare, is an ideal that does not extend to everyone and in white-majority towns is extended to those whose identities uphold whiteness and heteronormativity.

In trying to understand the small-town landscape, and Weston's place in it, it is necessary to examine the geographic history of the region. The defining lines of the Midwestern region are not a stable border separating the inside from the outside. There was a time where the original thirteen colonies considered everything beyond the Appalachians to be the West, with no differentiations like Midwest, Southwest, or Northwest. As the United States formed, the Middle West or Midwest initially described the two-state area of Nebraska and Kansas. The definition of the Midwest was often based on the geographic location of the speaker or writer. The term Middle West was also being used to describe the larger area of the former Northwest Territory (Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota). Eventually the region of the Midwest was understood to be a twelve-state area combining the Kansas-Nebraska Midwest, with the Old Northwest states, and adding the Dakotas, Iowa, and Missouri. While geographers and the United States census have defined the Midwest, to many inhabitants of the region and

²⁷ Mary L. Gray, Colin R. Johnson, and Brian J. Gilley, eds. *Queering the countryside: New frontiers in rural queer studies*, (New York: New York University Press, 2016).; Wendy Hulko and Jessica Hovanes, "Intersectionality in the lives of LGBTQ youth: Identifying as LGBTQ and finding community in small cities and rural towns," *Journal of homosexuality* 65, no. 4 (2018): 427-455.

those outside, the Midwest is still difficult to define and is largely affected by the individual's position within the region.²⁸

Along with lacking a consensus regarding the geographical confines of the Midwest, the region lacks a clear cultural identity. Early regionalist writings of the twentieth century portray the Midwest as the location for a moral, hardworking, agrarian society. Cultural geographer, James R. Shortridge, argues that Sinclair Lewis' depiction of the fictional Gopher Prairie, Minnesota as a small Midwestern town of moral superiority, driven by capitalism, and without independent thought, turned the previous cultural image of the Midwest on its head. This break from the Midwest's "self-righteous" self-image precedes decades of confusion, from outsiders and insiders alike, about the Midwest's cultural.²⁹

Small Towns in Popular Culture

Popular culture has worked hard to simultaneously weld virtues and positive ideals to the popular depiction of small towns, while also exposing the small town's less idyllic side.³⁰ There are countless works of literature, film, television, and music that depict the small American town as simple, virtuous, and communal. The suburbs have long been critiqued for the vulgarity of their sameness, for their contribution to both the decline of small town and urban life, and for their complacency and participation in racial and economic segregation.³¹ At the same time, small towns have been accused of the same transgressions, but treated with more historical

²⁸ James R. Shortridge, *The Middle West : Its Meaning in American Culture* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Orvell, *The Death and Life*, 75.

³¹ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster, 2001), 208; John Brinckerhoff Jackson, "The Many Guises of Suburbia," in *Landscapes: Selected Writings of J.B. Jackson*, edited by Ervin H. Zube (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970).

significance. Small towns are attractive for the past they represent and reflect and the memories they reveal.

In popular descriptions of the small American town, there is a tendency to talk about small town America as an anywhere-place, as interchangeable, with an “If you’ve seen one, then you’ve seen them all” attitude. This tendency can also be extended to the heart of the small town, its Main Street. It is precisely this attitude that appears in Sinclair Lewis’ *Main Street*, when explaining the fictional setting of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota: “This is America... But its Main Street is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere. The story would be the same in Ohio or Montana, in Kansas or Kentucky or Illinois, and not very differently would it be told Up York State or in the Carolina Hills. Main Street is the climax of civilization...”³² Lewis sees Main Street as the common thread running through the Midwest and other regions of American rurality. The small town and its Main Street also serve as important locations for Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, Thornton Wilder’s play *Our Town*, and Garrison Keillor’s stories about Lake Wobegon³³.

In the early pages of *Winesburg, Ohio* Anderson includes a fairly nondescript map of Winesburg to serve as a guidepost for his readers. This map features a north-south running Main Street twice intersected, once by the railroad track and another time by Buckeye Street. Anderson marks noteworthy locations with numbers 1 through 8, which correspond with the legend provided below. These locations central to his stories are the local newspaper, the grocery, the hardware store, Biff Carter’s Lunch Room, the railroad station, the New Willard House, the

³² Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street*. (New York: Signet Classics, 1920; repr., 1961)., 3.

³³ I reluctantly include Garrison Keillor’s literary work in this discussion and stand in support of those who have accused him of sexual misconduct.

fairground, and the pond.³⁴ The newspaper and retail locations are situated on Main Street along with what appears to be a church, a few houses, and several other storefronts. This simple map really argues to the centrality of Main Street for the many characters in *Winesburg, Ohio*.

Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* script describes the meta-setting of Grover's Corners in the early 1900s. Despite the play's primary setting of a theatre, the actors are expected to act out daily life in this town and along its own Main Street. The stage manager, who ushers the audience through the experience of watching a play about a town without the assistance of a backdrop or props, starts his monologue by setting the scene and describing the location of each church, street, and enclave in Grover's Corners.³⁵ Like Anderson's map, the play's setting is oriented around knowing where Main Street is. Main Street is a named landmark for the audience of *Our Town*, and important in their imaginations' construction of Grover's Corners.

Langston Hughes' debut novel, *Not Without Laughter*, published in 1930 is set in Stanton, Kansas, a small town modeled after Lawrence, Kansas. Hughes paints a picture of a poor Black family living in small-town Kansas.³⁶ This novel interjects a Black voice and perspective amongst regionalist literature of the time, largely written by white men. For Hughes the setting reflects his early years in Lawrence, Kansas, and for Black readers the story reflects the importance of the Great Migration for generations of African-Americans in the early 20th century.³⁷

³⁴ Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1999), 25.

³⁵ Thornton Wilder, *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts* (Samuel French, Inc., 1965), 6.

³⁶ Langston Hughes, *Not Without Laughter* (New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1995).

³⁷ Angela Flournoy, "How Langston Hughes Brought His Radical Vision to the Novel," *The New York Times*, January 2, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/02/books/review/angela-flournoy-langston-hughes-not-without-laughter.html>.

Garrison Keillor's fictional setting of Lake Wobegon has been described in print, in song, and in film. In *Lake Wobegon Days*, Keillor spends the first twenty-three pages describing, in great detail, the place and pace of Lake Wobegon, Minnesota. Keillor's description of the Main Street in Lake Wobegon goes far beyond naming buildings and cross streets: "It is a quiet town, where much of the day you could stand in the middle of Main Street and not be in anyone's way—not forever, but for as long as a person would want to stand in the middle of a street... The double white stripe is for show, as are the two parking meters."³⁸ By describing the little traffic on Main Street, Keillor describes the slow, meandering pace of life in Lake Wobegon.

Popular depictions of small towns reveal and respond to a widely accepted view of small-town life. Through these depictions one can see the emphasized physical elements of a small town as well as the shared social and cultural values of small-town America. In the television show *Gilmore Girls*, the mother-daughter duo Lorelai and Rory live in Stars Hollow, Connecticut, a town of only 9,973 residents, all very proud of its colonial past.

CBS's *Northern Exposure* (1990-1995) follows young doctor Joel Fleischman (Rob Morrow) as he sets up residency in Cicely, a town with a population of 839 deep in the heart of "the Alaskan Riviera." Cicely, Alaska is a remote town located many miles from Alaska's larger metropolises. The town's main street offers the townsfolk all they appear to need, a general store, a barber, the Brick tavern, the KBHR radio station, and of course, a doctor's office. *The Andy Griffith Show* of the 1960s was set in the fictional Mayberry, North Carolina. A small town of about 5,360 people, Mayberry had plenty of kind-hearted townsfolk and very little crime, despite featuring the daily goings-on of Sheriff Andy Taylor (Andy Griffith). The town of Mayberry has been referenced in popular culture for decades, often evoking a longing for a simpler time and

³⁸ Garrison Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days* (Penguin, 1990), 3.

lifestyle. The pop country band Rascal Flatts have gone so far as to eulogize Mayberry in an eponymous song: “I miss Mayberry / Sitting on the porch drinking ice-cold cherry Coke / Where everything is black and white.”³⁹ Art house filmmaker David Lynch created *Twin Peaks* for television in 1990. This series focuses on the murder of a teen girl in Twin Peaks, Washington, a small town. The underbelly of the town and the secrets of its 51,201 residents are slowly revealed as the local police and FBI investigator try to uncover the mystery of the murder. Twin Peaks, Washington was originally a town of 5,120, but network executives believed that life in such a small town would be unfathomable to audiences, so the population was changed to 51,201. However, the characters and setting paint a town and lifestyle much more in line with Lynch’s original scale and the population of the town North Bend, Washington where the series was filmed.

American society may find it difficult to define the small town, but it is possible that most people “know it when they see it,” due to popular imaginings and renderings of the American small town. These fictional locations vary in size, location, and story lines, but there are still many similarities running through these depictions. Some of these similarities rely on their shared physical characteristics, while others rely on the characteristics of the communities. Even where television shows are attempting to show the negative side of small-town life, they are intentionally playing off the audience’s expectations for a small town, in order to upend their understanding of small-town life.

³⁹ Rascal Flatts, “Mayberry,” Track 4 on *Melt*, Lyric Street, 2002, CD.

Decline of the Small Town

One of the more popular contexts in which small town America is discussed is in reference to economic decline and community decay. Small towns in the United States can and have disappeared for a number of reasons. The small mining towns of the West disappeared after resources were tapped and railroad lines instead of mineral deposits, began to dictate settlement.⁴⁰ The ghost town is a Western site quite different than the boarded up Main Streets of the Midwest. Midwestern small towns lingered on longer than the ghost towns of the West until a number of them could no longer stave off a plummeting local retail economy, large corporate ownership of farmland, and a retreating youth population.

It is no surprise that the rise of retail shopping centers coincided with the rise of the automobile. No longer restricted to the retail offerings and pricing of Main Streets across the country, small town residents' mobility expanded their retail options.⁴¹ This shift delivered a crushing blow to Main Street shops, businesses, and department stores. Even before the ubiquity of the automobile, small town merchants and retailers were already being pushed out by mail-order companies and chain stores neither of which had particular ties to the small-town communities they were in and both of which threatened the livelihood of merchants who were unable to match their selection or pricing.⁴² Yet even this new system of retail could not withstand the forces of the concentrated, commercial shopping centers that were to come. While consecutively dealing with the desertion of young men and women enlisted to fight or

⁴⁰ Ibid., 47.

⁴¹ Allison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 80-81.

⁴² Charles Magee Adams, "Exit the Small Town," *The North American Review* 239, no. 2 (1935), 157; Orvell, *The Death and Life*, 50-51.

manufacture during World War II, small towns fared no better in the post-War period as suburban communities and shopping malls began to freckle the American landscape.⁴³

Youth outmigration from small towns to the suburbs and cities has had a tremendous impact on small towns. This trend is not recent and has actually been a threat to small town America since before World War II. In the 1930s there was a growing concern that the automobile was taking young people out of town and they were not likely to return.⁴⁴ Though the more familiar depiction of youth dissatisfaction with small towns is usually situated in the 1950s, like in the film *American Graffiti*. The more education young people receive, the less likely they are to stay in their rural town. When young people leave small towns, they also leave behind an aging population who are often less educated. Members of the aging population that remains in the town are not likely to start new businesses or create economic and career opportunities that would entice young professionals to move to the area.⁴⁵ This cyclical, “hollowing-out” of the Midwestern heartland accounts for the high median age in non-metro, rural counties compared to metro counties.⁴⁶

Today rural, youth outmigration has been dubbed “millennial flight,” and demonstrates the continuation of the long trajectory of small-town population decreases and the whittling-away of a major population sector.⁴⁷ Young adults are leaving small towns to attend universities in larger areas and rarely returning to start their careers in their hometowns. There are many towns, counties, and states that are trying to encourage the migration of young professionals to

⁴³ Isenberg, *Downtown America* 174; Orvell, *The Death and Life*, 51; Francaviglia, *Main Street*, 164-167

⁴⁴ Adams, “Exit the Small Town,” 156.

⁴⁵ Carr, et al, “Can Immigration Save,” 39.

⁴⁶ Ibid.; Haya El Nasser, “More Than Half of U.S. Population in 4.6 Percent of Counties,” *United States Census Bureau*, October 24, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2017/10/big-and-small-counties.html>.

⁴⁷ Dure, “Millennials Continue Urbanization.”

small towns. Some towns are offering loans, attractive mortgage rates, tax breaks, and even free land (such is the case in Plainville, Kansas).⁴⁸ The state of Michigan created a large marketing program and revitalization initiative called “Cool Cities Initiatives” which encouraged young professionals to relocate to small towns in Michigan’s northern region.⁴⁹

As both cities and small towns struggled with the suburbanization of the United States in the 1960s, the 1970s and 1980s saw the effects of the American farm crisis on small towns, especially in the Midwest. The 1920s and 1930s experienced an early farming crisis before and during the Great Depression. As farmers began to lose their land and livelihood to banks, the small towns that served nearby farms lost business and people.⁵⁰ The Great Depression forced many American farmers to apply for welfare aid or find work, where it was available, in another industry. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, American farmers saw a significant increase in the value of their land and at the same time they were encouraged by federal policies to mass-farm and produce. These policies worked in favor of large, corporate farms and forced smaller operations to take on significant debts to keep up with production. All of this very quickly led to agricultural surplus, price cuts, and bank foreclosures of small farms. The consolidation of agriculture at this time and the move toward corporate farming resulted in significant population loss for many rural counties and small towns. The corporate greed of the 1980s significantly impacted a number of industries and our national economy and in the case of rural agriculture, it changed the American rural landscape. Where there had once been 6.8 million American farms in

⁴⁸ Orvell, *The Death and Life*, 48.

⁴⁹ Carr, et al, “Can Immigration Save,” 40.

⁵⁰ Orvell, *The Death and Life*, 48.

1935, by the mid-1980s there were only 2.2 million farms left.⁵¹ Main Street's windows were shuttered as small banks failed, local retail shops closed, and residents began to leave.

Historic Preservation

In the fifty-three years since the start of the United States' federal historic preservation efforts, a lot has changed, but in staying true to preservation, much has stayed the same. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 codified an interest in preserving historically significant buildings and sites. At the time the rubric for historically significant was narrowly defined and emphasized architectural significance more than cultural significance.⁵² Though in recent years, the cultural significance and how a site or building relates to almost any moment in history have become the more popular interpretation. Historic preservation is no longer about preserving the materiality and stories of politically relevant, wealthy white men of the past, but can now encompass more commonplace pieces of history, like the preservation of diners, auto shops, and gas stations along Route 66 or inner-city neighborhoods and housing.⁵³ The preservation movement has also expanded to include Native-Americans,⁵⁴ working class communities,⁵⁵ and African-Americans.⁵⁶

⁵¹ "1980s Farm Crisis," Iowa PBS, last accessed March 1, 2021
<http://www.iptv.org/mtom/classroom/module/13999/farm-crisis>.

⁵² Robert E. Stipe, *Richer Heritage* (2003), 23.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ S. Rheagan Alexander, "Tribal Consultation for Large-Scale Projects: The National Historic Preservation Act and Regulatory Review," *Pace Law Review* 32, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 895-921.

⁵⁵ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1995).

⁵⁶ Price, Clement Alexander. "The Path to Big Mama's House: Historic Preservation, Memory, and African-American History." *Forum Journal* 28, no. 3 (2014): 23-31.; Robert Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation, 1947-1997* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2000); Logan, Cameron. *Historic Capital: Preservation, Race, and Real Estate in Washington, D.C.* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).; "National Trust for Historic Preservation, Lowe's Expand Efforts to

Where early efforts of historic preservation focused on fighting off large-scale government development and urban sprawl, more recent concerns are private development and the sustainability of preservation and its environmental impact.⁵⁷ The issue of funding has been a long-standing aspect of historic preservation with earlier efforts funded by private donors, then federal grant programs, and more recently a combination of tax incentives, government funding, and private matching grants.

Heritage Tourism

Heritage tourism often relies on the initiatives and work of historic preservationists, as tourism at historic sites is heritage tourism. In order for a heritage tourism economy to flourish there must first be historic preservation. A burgeoning field, heritage tourism can be defined as “travel directed toward experiences the arts, heritage, and special character of a place,” where visitors explore “museums, historic sites, dance, music, theater, book and other festivals, historic buildings, arts and crafts fairs, neighborhoods and landscapes” relevant to that place.⁵⁸ Heritage tourism is often under researched and not widely distributed. There is more research conducted

Save African-American Landmarks With New Grants for Rosewald Schools,” *Lowe’s*, June 23, 2010, <https://corporate.lowes.com/newsroom/press-releases/national-trust-historic-preservation-lowes-expand-efforts-save-african-american-landmarks-new-grants-rosenwald-schools-06-23-10>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.; Norman Tyler, Ted J. Ligibel, and Ilene R. Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles, and Practice*, 2nd ed (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009); Erica Avrami, “Making Historic Preservation Sustainable,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* (2016), 82:2, 104-112.

⁵⁸ Kimberly Craine, ed. “A Position Paper on Cultural and Heritage Tourism,” President’s Committee on Arts and the Humanities, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2005.

on site-specific tourist attractions in the private sector, like Disneyland and Disneyworld. There is also research on ethnic tourism, like that in Holland, Michigan and the Flora Macdonald Scottish Highland Games in North Carolina.⁵⁹ Ethnic tourism differs from heritage tourism in that it relies on particular cultural practices of a particular ethnic group, whereas heritage tourism relies on the particular history of a particular place. Yet, the data surrounding heritage tourism—who travels, what sites are frequently visited, how much money is spent—can be of great use to communities trying to grow their tourism industry.⁶⁰ Beyond the practical uses and considerations for heritage tourism are the larger theoretical and academic questions that arise from how places choose to portray a historical event or person, and whether those portrayals are authentic.⁶¹ With concerns about authenticity comes a discussion about heritage tourism’s relationship to postmodernity.⁶²

Methodology

Grounded theory

Initially, I believed this project would take the form of a traditional ethnography, one that involved my living in Weston and writing a monograph of small-town life. Though after sitting

⁵⁹ Michael Douma, “Tulip Time and the Invention of a New Dutch American Ethnic Identity,” *American Studies* 53, no. 1 (May 30, 2013): 149–168, last accessed April 27, 2021, <https://journals.ku.edu/amsj/article/view/4526>; Deepak Chhabra, Robert Healy, and Erin Sills, “Staged authenticity and heritage tourism,” *Annals of tourism research* 30, no. 3 (2003): 702–719.

⁶⁰ Craine, ed. “A Position Paper.”

⁶¹ Ibid.; Wiendu Nuryanti, “Heritage and postmodern tourism,” *Annals of tourism research* 23, no. 2 (1996): 249–260.; Chhabra, et al, “Staged authenticity”; David B. Weaver, “Contemporary tourism heritage as heritage tourism: Evidence from Las Vegas and Gold Coast,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 38, no. 1 (2011): 249–267.; Stephen Williams, *Tourism geography*. Routledge, 2002.

⁶² Nuryanti, “Heritage and postmodern tourism.” ; Chhabra, et al, “Staged authenticity”; Weaver, “Contemporary tourism heritage.”; Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

with the idea for some time, the ethnographic monograph, as a final product of this research, would certainly paint a vivid and detailed account of life in Weston, but it would not thoroughly address the scope I identified, as my interest in Weston is one guided by questions of process. Asking how Weston developed its tourism industry and where that industry intersected with history cannot be answered with an ethnography of the present. In thinking this way, I chose a grounded theoretical approach to my research question and through the flexibility of this approach, I was also able to employ ethnographic and historical research methods.⁶³

This study used a grounded theory methodological approach to investigate this process. Wherein I used observations, informal interviews and interactions, and artifacts gathered from residents, businesses, municipal offices, public communications, and historical archives to interrogate the role of Weston's history in its present tourism efforts. As is the nature of grounded theory, I have not tested a hypothesis or a particular field of literature against the data collected, instead I relied on an interpretive tradition of theorizing that analyzes the relationship between Weston and its history and situates my data analysis into larger conversations and literatures of place, tourism, and heritage. I developed a research plan that guided me through the process of cursory data collection via informal interviews and observations, coding and memoing this data for larger themes, more directed data collection, and theorizing my analysis. Grounded theory is a fitting methodological home for investigating a question of process, like how Weston constructs identity through heritage, as it permits the researcher to take a constructivist approach to the data and ultimately the theory.⁶⁴ This methodological approach sits squarely within the field of American Studies, as it acknowledges the role of the researcher and their subjects at

⁶³ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

every step of data collection and theorization, paying particular attention to positionality, power, and interpretation.⁶⁵

Necessary across qualitative research methods is reflexivity. Charmaz writes, “Qualitative research of all sorts relies on those who conduct it. We are not passive receptacles into which data are poured... We are not scientific observers who can dismiss scrutiny of our values by claiming scientific neutrality and authority.”⁶⁶

I have the privilege of being a domestic researcher who was welcomed and treated kindly by everyone I met; I believe largely because of the normative identities my body carries. While it might be easy to generalize my treatment as “small town hospitality,” I can imagine not everyone is given the same treatment considering how the small town landscape has been previously researched as a site of exclusion.⁶⁷ Sundown towns for example rely on implicit and in some instances, explicit, threats and acts of violence to deter people of color from being in the town after dark.⁶⁸ Indigenous Americans have been violently removed from many small town spaces as a result of their founding by white settlers; such is the case in Weston. William Paxton, in writing the annals of Platte County in the late nineteenth century remarked “No Indian village was ever established, and scarcely a wigwam erected on our soil. Though the Iowas and the Sacs and the Foxes set up claim to our lands, their titles were shadowy, and not supported by prescription.”⁶⁹ Based on the language demographics of Weston, 96.7% of the population speaks only English.⁷⁰ Racially, Weston is comprised of 96.9% white-identifying citizens.⁷¹ The

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁷ Loewen, *Sundown Towns*.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ William Paxton, *Annals of Platte County* (Hudson-Kimberly, 1897), 1.

⁷⁰ “Weston city, Missouri.”

⁷¹ “Weston city, Missouri.” See Table 1.

dominance of white racial identity in Weston reflects a population in which my white identity will blend. Weston’s population breakdown by sex denotes their female population at 52.0%, a statistic that again places my body amongst a notable portion of the population.⁷² My normative gender expression, and my years of well-practiced Midwestern niceties also allowed me to blend in among townspeople and visitors. Reflecting on the identity I display, I believe I was afforded a level of acceptance that may not exist for someone with a non-dominant subject-position.

Race	Number	Percent
White	1,590	96.9
Black or African-American	6	.4
American Indian and Alaska Native	2	.1
Asian	6	.4
Some other race	9	.5
Hispanic or Latino	39	2.4
Total population	1,641	

Table 1. Racial demographics for Weston, Missouri as reported in the 2010 U.S. Decennial Census.⁷³

I think my tourist approach was an especially strategic decision given what I overheard one day in the Weston Coffee Roastery shop. One of the town’s aldermen was speaking to a colleague about the benefits of annexation.⁷⁴ Another resident was sitting at a nearby table doing computer work and spoke up about his interest in volunteering or involving himself in town issues. The colleague, an older man, warned the younger resident, “You’ve got to move

⁷² “Weston city, Missouri.”

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ It was unclear whether this annexation discussion was about Weston’s being annexed, or the town annexing township property.

carefully.” The alderman shook their head in agreement. He continued, “It takes 50 years to be a local. And I’ve only been here for 49.” I do not think my advisor, my project, or my intellectual drive could withstand the length of time it would take to gain “insider” or local status in Weston.

My use of grounded theory relied on participant observation, site visits, interactions, archival research, and follow-up site-visits. Initially, I applied for and was granted approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Kansas to conduct human subject research in Weston. I proposed around a dozen formal interviews, but after completing an informal interview with a resident of the town in an effort to figure out just who to interview, I realized that formal interviews were not the best way to investigate my question. From my formal interview it was suggested that local people fell into different camps on the issue of tourism and that some of the people who played a role in the early development of tourism in Weston were sick or deceased or had moved away. In order to understand tourism in Weston, I decided to instead focus on conducting site visits during advertised tourism events.

Initial participant observation

After serendipitously discovering Weston and electing this town to serve as the site of my research, I began visiting and touring the town more regularly. My life and duties as a graduate student kept me headquartered in Lawrence, Kansas, so each visit to Weston involved a two-and-a-half hour, round-trip journey. My initial visits to the town usually coincided with Chamber of Commerce-sponsored events, like the Weston Moonshiner’s Classic Car meetings downtown every 4th Saturday, Applefest, Weston’s Irishfest, and the Candlelight Homes Tour. My role while attending these events felt at times like a tourist, at other times a spy, and at others a

researcher. I listened carefully to the sounds around me; I watched people and their actions with more deliberation than I usually do.

My field notes began to fill up with notes about “overheard conversations” and detailed accounts of my own interactions with people in the town. During the first day I visited Applefest,⁷⁵ I overheard a conversation between a visitor and booth operator at the Chamber of Commerce booth. The Chamber of Commerce booth displayed informational brochures as well as bags of apples, which seemed to be offered for free to visitors. The visitor asked where the apples came from. The woman operating the booth said, “I don’t know. These are whatever apples they had at the grocery store.” While visiting Irishfest with a few grad school friends—who joined after a bribe of beer and burgers—we visited Jeff’s Architectural Salvage and Variety Shop. Thankfully, in addition to being a salvage-yard, it is also home to a cold beer fridge and a patio. Sitting in a half-open, non-operational Volkswagen car, we met some other visitors who “Rock, Chalk, Jayhawk!”-ed us upon learning we were visiting from Lawrence. During a visit with my partner and my parents, I became the proud owner of an autographed copy of *Ghost Tales of Weston*. A stack of books was placed next to the cash register at the Main Street Galleria and Upstairs Tea Room. My mother, a very helpful research assistant, quietly pointed them out while we were buying chocolates. We bought one, only to realize that the woman cleaning the candy display was the author and the business-owner. She told me the book was twelve years in-the-making and that she is considered the keeper of ghost stories around Weston.

My goal with these initial visits was to become more comfortable with the layout of the downtown, familiarize myself with and frequent the Main Street shops and services, and

⁷⁵ This conversation occurred while walking through the festival booths, which was some time after watching the parade and witnessing the “Trump Truck.” A truck with trailer attachments shaped like elephants boasting signs endorsing candidate Donald Trump for President and a hopeful endorsement for Ivanka Trump in 2020.

participate in and observe the events. On most of these occasions, friends or family members joined me. In time, I discovered (to the great happiness of my friends), my favorite restaurant, the Tin Kitchen, and their best burger.⁷⁶ I amassed a number of pamphlets, brochures, and books on Weston. And by the time my parents visited from out-of-town, I was able to walk them confidently through downtown and its many shops and into the Tin Kitchen with relative ease and aplomb. At this point I recognized that my Weston comfort circle was well-studied and needed expanding.

Interactions

After becoming gradually more familiar with Weston, I started to ask more questions of the people I met. As a visitor in the town, I interacted with retail workers, event volunteers, and staff in the Chamber of Commerce. I casually asked questions related to the events I was attending in order to find out how popular given events were, how much business they brought to different store owners, and overall impressions of the event.

At Beverlin's Statuary, where a concrete Yeti greeted me at the door, I found a pictorial history book of Weston on display. I asked the woman working where I could buy this book. She said there is a blue book and a brown book, and both should be for sale at the Museum or the Chamber of Commerce. At the Chamber of Commerce, I asked a woman working how many people had visited Weston during this year's Applefest. She said their best guess was 35,000 over the two-day weekend. We then segued into an interesting conversation about ghosts and the

⁷⁶ The "TK Burger" is a must-eat. Beef burger patty, topped with cheese, house-smoked pulled pork, and onion straws, all on a brioche burger bun. Sitting next to this wonderful creation is a large helping of house cut French fries. You're welcome.

ghost that haunts the Chamber’s office.⁷⁷ In the historical museum I asked a volunteer docent about how the museum is structured and where they store their archives. During another visit to the Chamber’s office, I spoke with a town alderman who was volunteering their time. They answered my questions about Applefest and chatted with me about why history is important. They then referred me to the town’s unofficial historian, Carolyn Bless Larsen, an author of several books and pamphlets whose great-grandfather, Bartholomew Bless, Sr. started the *Weston Chronicle* newspaper in 1886 and whose grandmother, Bertha I. Bless, was not only president of the National Federation of Press Women and an editor of the *Chronicle*, but in her later years she authored a history of Weston titled *Weston—Queen of the Platte Purchase: 1837-1900 The Rise and Fall of a River Empire* (1969).⁷⁸ Through these interactions I was given answers, names, and locations creating a research scavenger hunt. With each conversation, new ideas and more questions emerged. For example, in searching for the “blue book” and the “brown book,” I went to the Chamber of Commerce, and was told they only carry the “brown book”—a pictorial history of Weston extending from 1837-2000. Apparently the “blue book” was published in 1992, but they still have copies at *The Weston Chronicle* newspaper offices. Well, with that information I learned not only that Weston had a newspaper, but that in my search for the newspaper offices, there seemed to be a business district to Weston on Highway JJ several streets beyond the quaint storefronts aligning Main Street.

⁷⁷ “I’ve named her Heidi. Get it? *Hide-ey?*”

⁷⁸ I was told that Carolyn Bless Larsen, the local historian, was hospitalized for an illness in the spring of 2017. My plan was to wait until she returned home and returned to better health before contacting her. While researching in the Weston City Hall archives in January of 2018, I asked after Larsen’s health and was told she was homebound but doing just fine and that I should give her a phone call. Unfortunately, as I sat down to write this section and verify the family tree on ancestry.com, I discovered that Carolyn Bless Larsen passed away on February 6, 2018. Though never able to speak with her, for four years I have known her words, her love for Weston, and her important role in the community.

I met a local who was incredibly passionate about Weston and eager to answer my questions. He spoke with me at length about Weston's festivals, the early days of the Weston Development Company (WDC) (now known as the Weston Chamber of Commerce), and several local issues that were big topics in the newspaper and among townsfolk but were not advertised or on display for tourists and visitors like myself. He spoke with me about the state of Weston in the early 1980s and what has and has not changed in the town. He told me about the tensions surrounding tourism in the town. As a visitor confined to Main Street shops and services, I was not aware how encroaching some of the large tourist events were on the lives of people who live in Weston, or how the ways Weston caters to tourism come at a cost for the town's citizens. And from these conversations arose the title and theme of one of this project's chapters, as I was told, "Weston is a town built on sin."⁷⁹

Themes and Archival Research

From my interactions with people in Weston, I soon identified themes and resources that guided my project to its final state. After a year of visiting Weston for various events, and on days when no tourist events were held, I began to understand the significant role tourism played in the community. I proposed and was granted funding through the University of Kansas graduate school to visit the State Historical Society of Missouri archives at the University of Missouri in Columbia to investigate the development of a tourism industry in Weston. At that time I understood the tourism to be based in local history, so I also wanted to review documents related to Weston's historic preservation projects.

⁷⁹ Interview.

In the State Historical Society of Missouri archives I explored the Bertha Iseman Bless collection since she played a significant role as local historian and an early leader of local historic preservation and tourism. In Congressman William R. Hull, Jr.'s papers and correspondence I read about the urban renewal efforts in Weston to understand some of the economic concerns and challenges present in the early 1970s. I also examined the papers of Dr. George Erlich, a professor of art history at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and an expert in regional architecture. This collection showcased some of Weston's historic preservation efforts and included research files and slides from his visits to Weston. *The Weston Chronicle* microfilms contained an important trove of information on Weston. Through these newspapers, I was able to follow community conversations about historic preservation and tourism.

After finding such useful information in the state's archives, I then went to find local records in Weston's City Hall archives. In this archive I was able to access meeting minutes from the Weston Historic Preservation Committee and the Planning and Zoning Commission. Also saved in this archive were packets of information on every grant and award the town of Weston applied for, including the Preserve America Grant, the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, and other smaller awards.

I observed how historic preservation played an important role in Weston's tourism industry and develop that as a theme for this project. Though from my research into historic preservation I finetuned the theme of tourism and was able to identify heritage tourism as a practice and a field of academic research. This theme developed as a result of my archival research and opened up an area of research for this project.

Chapter Summary

Through my employ of grounded theory, three themes emerged from my visits, observations, and archival research: Weston's roots in a vice economy; the deployment of heritage tourism as a solution to decay; and the economic potential of heritage. Chapter 1, "Weston: A Town Built on Sin," will discuss Weston's history and its economies of hemp, tobacco, and alcohol. This chapter will also argue that in addition to this economy of vices, Weston's earliest "sins" were that of settler colonization and fervent use of slave labor, though only some of these "sins" are incorporated into the town's historical narrative. Chapter 2, "Preserving Weston," will focus on the renewal and revitalization efforts of the Planning and Zoning Commission, Historical Preservation Commission, and Weston Development Company (WDC) throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This chapter will also look at how and where decisions were made about renewal and revitalization in Weston and how these decisions adhered or challenged state and national preservation efforts and set the stage for a shift in economic priority. In Chapter 3, "Weston: Performing Heritage and 'Preserving America,'" I will examine how heritage and history are performed in Weston for tourism and how this fits into a larger postmodern framework of place and history. In Weston, efforts to revitalize the town for its residents were overtaken by efforts to commodify and exploit the historic aesthetic of the town. This chapter will also put recent heritage tourism initiatives in conversation with neoliberalism as the "heritage as business" model has become more popular. Congruous to this investigation of Weston, is an analysis of fictional small towns in popular culture. Chapter 4, "Historic Preservation and Heritage Tourism in Television Towns" will analyze historic preservation, economic struggles, and heritage tourism in fictional small towns, illustrating portrayals of small towns that reinforce a reliance on historic preservation and heritage tourism as they have been

repackaged for economic purposes. While merely reflecting the experiences of small-town America on the screen, these fictional, television settings have had a real, financial impact on a number of actual small towns by encouraging televisual tourism.

Chapter 1: Weston: A Town Built on Sin

“In this fragmentation of Weston’s past, sometimes glorious, sometimes desolate, there is a pattern of today weaving itself into a future that will eclipse all her past and her present.”

—Bertha I. Bless in *Weston: Queen of the Platte Purchase: The Rise and Fall of a River Empire, 1837 – 1900*⁸⁰

Introduction

Weston bills itself as charming, historic, an antidote to urban life. The Weston of today looks quite different from its early days of Anglo-settlement, though in some respects Weston has not changed at all. Weston’s historic downtown district relies on a particularly curated aesthetic of historic charm, one that highlights the many restored antebellum homes of Weston’s pre-Civil War glory, Weston’s historic downtown district, and its roots in agriculture, all of which creates an anachronistic amalgam of pastness. The town of Weston relies on this pastness—an aimless nostalgia, a generic “historic” period—to attract visitors to its many events, shops, and restaurants.

This chapter, “Weston: ‘A Town Built on Sin,’” will historically situate Weston’s present by examining its past. Today, Weston relies so heavily on its past in order to guarantee its future. This chapter will explore the history of Missouri, Platte County, and Weston while investigating the histories and moments most favored in Weston’s tourism narrative. Weston’s history is rooted in its original sins: colonization of native land and slavery of Africans and African-Americans and fostered through its—as one newspaper described it—“economy of vices,”⁸¹ a reliance on cultivating hemp and tobacco, and manufacturing liquor. Yet, only some of these sins and vices are incorporated into the town’s historical narrative to be preserved, displayed, and consumed allowing for a particularly curated historic experience for tourists.

⁸⁰ Bless, *Weston: Queen*, v.

⁸¹ Torriero, “Weston, Mo.”

Some of Weston's sins, hemp for example, have fallen by the wayside and are no longer at the forefront of their local economy. Others are still relied upon to varying degrees in the tourism industry today. There is no longer a huge emphasis on tobacco in town, yet the former tobacco warehouse is home to a weekly arts, crafts, and other goods market, and located just below the market is the Weston Tobacco shop. With its active distillery, three active wine shops featuring boutique wines, and a brewery, alcohol has continued to have a large presence in Weston. Alcohol is not always the only reason visitors come to town, but it is usually incorporated into tourists' visits. Weston's colonial sins—slavery and Native American removal—are rarely included in Weston's presentation of heritage for tourism.

The purpose of heritage tourism is to attract visitors to a town's unique history. Though in the example of Weston, visitors come to the town (some for the express purpose of viewing the historic, antebellum homes) and encounter a particularly curated version of Weston's history that downplays the cruelties of its white founders. It would seem that for tourists who are mostly white, this version of Weston's history is easier to digest, making it a better sell for the town. Though there are mentions, and at times, discussions, of slavery and indigeneity in Weston's museums and publications, frequently the mentions of slavery in Weston suggest a cooperative and valued relationship between the enslaved and their owners, a relationship of loyalty, not bondage.

The choices in how Weston's history is sold to tourists are indicative of the postmodern and neoliberal moment. Heritage tourism, an economy built on selling history, and usually nostalgia, is a symptom of this moment where history is fragmented and turned into an affective nostalgia to be consumed and within which the economic and social factors of history are lost to a privatized, consumerist history.

Weston's Historians

While many residents of Weston are familiar with the town's history, it seems that the duty of recording this history has fallen on the shoulders of three notable residents of the town, and one of Platte County, in which the town sits. William M. Paxton was a lawyer born in Kentucky in 1819 who eventually settled in Platte City within the county of the same name.⁸² He was trained as a lawyer before later becoming a merchant. He is most well-known for his lengthy and detailed work: *Annals of Platte County, Missouri, From Its Exploration Down to June 1, 1897: With Genealogies of Its Noted Families, and Sketches of Its Pioneers and Distinguished People*. Though not entirely focused on Weston, *The Annals of Platte County* reveals a great deal about the early life and events of the white settlers in the area. The focus of *The Annals* is mostly on the notable white settlers, businessmen, and slave-owners of the county with very little attention paid toward the enslaved population except where their value as property is calculated. As will be discussed, where Paxton writes of the Indigenous Peoples in the area, he does so with disregard. As the preeminent historian of the county, his work has often been cited and relied on by subsequent generations of local historians.

Bertha Iseman Bless (1889-1977) was resident of Weston, Missouri for almost her entire life, having moved there as a young child to live with her aunt and uncle. She graduated from Weston High School as class valedictorian, and afterward she attended Liberty Ladies College in Liberty, Missouri and the Kansas City Business College. Soon after marrying Bartholomew (B.J.) Bless, son of the local newspaper publishers, in 1910, Bertha and B.J. Bless took over *The*

⁸² Barbara Whitters, "Annals of Platte County, Missouri," The Kansas City Public Library, Missouri Valley Special Collections, published December 2006, http://kchistory.org/sites/default/files/MVSC_PDFs/SCs/SC67%20Annals%20Platte.pdf.

Weston Chronicle. Despite having little knowledge of newspaper publishing, Bertha excelled and eventually took over editorial responsibilities for the paper. She organized and founded the Missouri Women’s Press Club in 1937 and the National Federation of Press Women in 1940.⁸³ In 1969, at the age of 80, she published the first book of Weston’s history titled *Weston, Queen of the Platte Purchase: 1837 – 1900 The Rise and Fall of a River Empire*, in which she notes her goal of writing “a Paxton-like book” on Weston, though her 96 page book is nowhere near the length of Paxton’s *Annals*, a point she acknowledges.⁸⁴ Despite its brevity, *Weston, Queen of the Platte Purchase* weaves together published data and local lore to tell the story of Weston’s glory days.

Bless also championed local history in her efforts to open the town’s first historical museum in 1960 and in researching and drafting the town’s application for admission to the National Register of Historic Places. Her passion for Weston’s history was shared with her granddaughter, Carolyn Bless Larsen (1940-2018), who researched and published several histories on various aspects of the town like the cemetery and the free and enslaved people buried within it, and who also worked with the Weston Historic Preservation Committee and the Weston Historical Museum.

Indigenous Platte County and Weston

Necessary to a discussion of the histories of Weston and Platte County is a discussion of a Hopewellian people who settled the “floodplain at the confluence of the Platte and Missouri

⁸³ “Bertha Bless Papers,” *The State Historical Society of Missouri*, last accessed January 25, 2021, <https://shsmo.org/manuscripts/columbia/c1740.pdf>.

⁸⁴ Bless, *Weston: Queen*.

Rivers” in the Middle Woodland era, around 100 BCE.⁸⁵ The presence of this prehistoric culture was of great interest to the early white settlers of Platte County who discovered skeletal remains, structures of mounded earth, tools, and ceramics on their newly acquired farmlands.

Paxton observed in his written history of the county:

In 1877, a party of antiquarians, from Kansas City, opened four mounds on the Peter Benner farm, below Parkville, and found stone enclosures eight feet square and four feet high. A number of human skulls were uncovered, some indicating large, and others very small, people. They suggested an earlier race than the Indians, but scarcely above them in intelligence.⁸⁶

Several white settlers in the area found traces of the Hopewellian society that was at one time present in the area on their newly settled lands and looked upon these remains with curiosity and oftentimes an appreciation for ancient man. From Paxton’s perspective, it would seem that the Hopewellian people and their artifacts were far enough removed in time from the settlers and the Indigenous Peoples of the American Plains and West. These relics could be appreciated and were valued, though perhaps only superficially. The settlers took a far different attitude regarding the inhabitancy of more recent Indigenous Peoples in the Platte region. In 1897, Paxton wrote:

Platte County has little to inspire the rhapsodist, or to kindle the enthusiasm of the antiquary. Our native rocks have no rude inscriptions; no chronicler records the prowess of our aborigines, and few remains attest the high civilization of a race now extinct . . . *Relics* [sic] are rarely found. I have never, myself, picked up an arrow-head, but I have seen several collections of arrow-heads, tomahawks, and mills, or mortars . . . Except on

⁸⁵Daniel Pugh, "The Aker Site (23pl43): Lithic Economy and Ritual Aggregation among the Kansas City Hopewell," *Plains Anthropologist* 46, no. 177 (2001): 269.

⁸⁶ Paxton, *Annals*, 1.

the bluff at Iatan, and in the extreme southeastern corner of the county, no mounds appear. No Indian village was ever established, and scarcely a wigwam erected on our soil. Though the Iowas and the Sacs and Foxes set up claim to our lands, their titles were shadowy, and not supported by prescription.⁸⁷

Paxton writes with some deference to the Hopewellian culture, though his attitude toward the tribes who had recently occupied the county reflects a settler-colonial attitude by which land ownership is only clear and legal when conducted between white settlers and their government. These tribes were twice removed to this territory via treaty, yet Paxton comments that their claims and titles were questionable and a surmountable obstacle for settlers.

The Hopewellian and later Native American presence in the area is a crucial piece of Weston's, and Platte County's, larger history. Yet Weston's history as it is shared with tourists conflates the two cultural histories when it chooses to mention them at all. For Weston, local history begins with the arrival of settlers from Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Local historians are keen to point out the Platte Purchase as a key moment in Weston's story, but use this event as a starting point to the history, not a middle point in a much larger history of indigeneity in the area.

The Platte Purchase

The Prairie du Chien Treaty and Indian Removal Act, both of 1830 set in motion a policy of extinguishing Native American tribal titles to lands west of the Mississippi River, creating a new delineation at the Missouri River.⁸⁸ In the early 1830s several tribes were relocated and

⁸⁷ Paxton, *Annals*, 1.

⁸⁸ H. Jason Combs, "The Platte Purchase and Native American Removal," *Plains Anthropologist* 47, no. 182 (2002): 265-274.

given titles, in perpetuity, to land in what is now the northwest corner of Missouri: the Platte Territory. Today this former territory is home to Andrew, Atchison, Buchanan, Holt, Nodaway, and Platte counties, all of which were organized by westward traveling white settlers between 1838 and 1845.⁸⁹ Historian Howard I. McKee notes several reasons that this territory was originally overlooked when establishing Missouri's boundaries and statehood. McKee states "The exclusion of the Little Platte region from the original State boundaries was evidently due to a lack of geographical knowledge, the desirability of straight lines for state boundaries, and the absence of an immediate demand for land by settlers."⁹⁰ However within a decade, settler attitudes had changed, and this land was desired for its fertility and proximity to the Missouri River. Under the pretense of fear of war and conflict, the state of Missouri pushed for the dismissal of the claims and titles given in the Prairie du Chien Treaty and renegotiated the land rights away from the Sac, Fox, and Iowa tribes.⁹¹

Despite Weston's reputation as "Queen of the Platte Purchase," the details of this significant purchase are little discussed in town histories. William Paxton notes that inclusion of the Platte region was proposed to the Missouri State Legislature in 1834 and 1835, but was approved in 1836 "conditioned upon the extinguishment of the Indian title . . . This acceptance was given by the Legislature December 16, 1836."⁹² The Purchase was finalized by William Clark, then superintendent of Indian affairs, and signed by representatives of the Iowas, Sacs, and Foxes. The United States government promised \$7,500 and a new place to live in the Kansas

⁸⁹ Combs, *Platte Purchase*.

⁹⁰ Howard I. McKee, "The Platte Purchase," *The Missouri Historical Review* 32, no. 2 (1938): 133.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Paxton, *Annals*, 14.

Territory in exchange for the tribes' titles.⁹³ Geographer Jason Combs details the debates and decisions surrounding the Platte Purchase and the ramifications of this government intervention on the newly relocated Native Americans in the Platte region.⁹⁴ Combs explains that the Platte Purchase is unique in that it extinguished the titles of the earlier Native American inhabitants of the land as well as those who had recently been forcibly relocated to the region.⁹⁵ Superintendent Clark described the negotiations: "The terms were the best which, under all the circumstances of the case, could be obtained, and will place the Indians after their removal to the strip of country assigned to them, in a situation somewhat, though not materially, better than their present one."⁹⁶ The idea that sovereignty and the rights to valuable agricultural land was somehow worse than being removed and assigned a much smaller, less agriculturally valuable section of land is a hard notion to comprehend, though in the context of the government's paternalist rhetoric when dealing with Native Americans, it is easier to understand.

As described in local histories and on the town's website, Weston was settled in 1837. Weston's website explains that after the Platte Purchase of 1836, two million acres of land were "opened."⁹⁷ In both editions of Weston's pictorial history, 1837 marked the year that advertisements of land and opportunity in the Platte region began to attract settlers from the East.⁹⁸ An older history of Weston mentions the ratification of the Platte Purchase in 1836 and specifically mentions the extinguished titles of the Native Americans living in the area.⁹⁹ I suggest these local histories gloss over or ignore the earlier occupants of the area because a

⁹³ McKee, *Platte Purchase*, 143.

⁹⁴ Combs, *Platte Purchase*.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁹⁶ Clark cited in Combs, *Platte Purchase*, 272.

⁹⁷ "Weston History," Weston Chamber of Commerce, accessed January 25, 2021, <https://www.westonmo.com/history>.

⁹⁸ Miller, *Memories*, 5; Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 4.

⁹⁹ Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 2.

“white washed” narrative is more easily sold and consumed in a small town with an overwhelmingly white population. Heritage tourism studies has bemoaned places that ignore the histories of the poor, the indigenous, and the enslaved, while also grappling with how best to discuss violent and traumatic aspects of a place’s heritage. The post-modern tourist is not expected to consider or interact with “real” history: as a tourist they meet only a place as it is presented for consumption.

Missouri Statehood

In 1819, non-voting representatives of Missouri introduced a statehood bill to Congress. As one of the first states to be carved out of the Louisiana Purchase Territory, the stake of precedence regarding Missouri’s statehood was unsurprisingly high. Anti-slavery sentiment was growing in the Northern states, while the expansion of slavery and economic prosperity in Southern states also grew.¹⁰⁰ On February 13, 1819, New York Republican congressman, James Tallmadge, ignited the great Missouri statehood debate that ultimately resulted in the passage of the Missouri Compromise in 1820.¹⁰¹ Tallmadge proposed an amendment to the Missouri statehood bill that prohibited slavery within the Missouri state boundaries and freed current enslaved people over a term of years.¹⁰² After a series of intense debates between Northern and Southern congressmen, the Missouri Compromise was enacted in February of 1820. This compromise tied together the fates of Missouri and Maine by allowing Maine admission to the Union as a Free-State and Missouri as a slave-state, while also creating a boundary whereby no

¹⁰⁰ Robert Pierce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath : Slavery and the Meaning of America*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, accessed August 9, 2018 via ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 35-36.

slave states could be made from territories north of the 36'30" parallel. Further, the Missouri Compromise inextricably tied Missouri and its citizens to the biggest sectional issue of the time: slavery.

Historian Robert Pierce Forbes argues that one can walk a direct path from this amendment to the start of the Civil War. Forbes writes, "The Missouri debates ripped the facade of national consensus from American public life . . . the Missouri controversy can perhaps best be understood as a flash of lightning that illuminated the realities of sectional power in the United States and ignited a fire that smoldered for a generation."¹⁰³ It seems only fitting that Missouri, a state with cultures and histories that straddle the division between the North and South, be at the heart of these debates. Though, in carving out its territory for statehood, Missouri had to reconcile its newly established claim to the state's lands with the claims and titles held by Native American tribes.

Weston's Settlement

Weston has a colorful and contentious past. Before its founding, Weston was located within the Platte Territory in between the newly founded state of Missouri and the Kansas Territory. The Platte Territory is comprised of land that had been occupied by indigenous cultures for centuries (and even millennia), this legacy was complicated and eventually severed by Anglo-American colonization of the American West in service of domestic imperialism. The founding of Weston, Platte County, and Missouri were all embroiled in conflict. The impact of the Missouri Compromise, the Platte Purchase, and the Civil War was acutely felt, and this impact has left an inflexible mark on Weston. The melee surrounding Missouri's entrance into

¹⁰³ Ibid., 5.

the Union as a slave state played a large role in Weston's history and economy, as well as gave rise to the Kansas-Missouri border wars exploding in towns like Weston up and down the Missouri River. This liminal position fostered intense conflict that had an enormous impact on Weston's founding and future.

Weston's settlement began on rather precarious grounds after the Platte Purchase rendered the previous Prairie du Chien Treaty of 1830 void and forced the removal and relocation of the Sacs, Foxes, and Iowas onto newly designated lands in the Kansas Territory.¹⁰⁴ After the Platte Purchase of 1837, sanctioned white settlement began in Weston. Previously, Weston provided a temporary resting spot for soldiers traveling to and from Fort Leavenworth and French and Native American traders.¹⁰⁵ The passage of the Platte Purchase provided Joseph Moore, a former Dragoon at Fort Leavenworth, an opportunity to lay claim to the area.¹⁰⁶ Moore employed Tom E. Weston—from whom the town gets its name—another Dragoon from close to Fort Leavenworth to lay out and settle the town of Weston. In a letter, First Sergeant Weston described the early development of Weston:

I had erected a small log shanty on Main Street for an office and was employed in surveying the town when two strangers rode up and introduced themselves. One was Bela M. Hughes, the other his cousin, Ben Holladay . . . The town I named Weston, as it was at that time the farthest town west in trade . . . The town grew fast; men came in to erect stores for business ventures.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Combs, *Platte Purchase*, 266.

¹⁰⁵ Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 9.

¹⁰⁶ Miller, *Memories*, 5.

¹⁰⁷ Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 9. Tom E. Weston, the obvious namesake for Weston, provides another reason behind Weston's naming.

Within a year, General Bela M. Hughes purchased a half interest in Moore's claim to Weston, as Moore and Weston's attempt at establishing a town failed to take off as fast as Hughes and Holladay's businesses did.¹⁰⁸ By 1840, Weston was home to between 300 and 400 residents.¹⁰⁹ Over the next several years, Weston's business owners and residents worked hard for official municipal recognition by the state of Missouri and the United States. The town of Weston filed its plat with the government in 1844.¹¹⁰

After its incorporation and platting, Weston became a Missouri River boomtown. Given its position along the Missouri River and proximity to Fort Leavenworth, Weston grew quickly. In its first decade and a half as a town on the Missouri, Weston was well on its way to surpass St. Joseph and Kansas City in population size and eventually became the second largest town in Missouri after St. Louis.¹¹¹

Weston's growth and success were entirely dependent on being an active port along the Missouri River. Weston soon gained a reputation as a busy port town, "docking as many as 225 steamboats a year."¹¹² In 1850 Weston's population had grown to 1,400 residents with the Platte County population rising to just under 16,000.¹¹³ Through association with the Missouri River, Weston became a pass-through on many settlers' journeys West. The town recovered from the loss of at least 40 residents in 1849 who left Weston in search of California gold; Platte County as a whole lost over three hundred residents to the enterprise.¹¹⁴ This number of 49ers from Weston and even Platte County left little mark on an area that was booming. Though the 49ers

¹⁰⁸ Miller, *Memories*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 6; Miller, *Memories*, 6. These sources differ.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*; Miller, *Memories*, 6. These sources differ.

¹¹¹ "Weston History," Weston Chamber of Commerce.

¹¹² Miller, *Memories*, 6.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*; Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 7.

¹¹⁴ Paxton, *Annals*, 110.

would eventually leave their mark, one of decay, on the many abandoned, ghost towns of the West. Since then, the term “ghost town,” has been lifted from the context of gold mining and been applied to Midwestern agricultural towns that have been depleted of resources and people in the later decades of the twentieth century.¹¹⁵

The settlers who founded and remained in Weston had arrived largely from Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia. William Paxton described these early settlers: “Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee sent thousands of their sturdy, intelligent, and enterprising citizens—constituting a population equal morally and superior physically to any other people on earth.”¹¹⁶ The 1850 Census for the Platte Region recorded 7,828 settlers from Kentucky, 2,728 from Tennessee, and 2,728 settlers from Virginia, accounting for 55% of the Platte Region’s settlers.¹¹⁷ Given Missouri’s position as a pro-slavery state, Platte County and Weston subsequently received an influx of settlers from states with long legacies of slavery. The resettlement of these Tennesseans, Kentuckians, and Virginians ultimately affected they type of crops grown and the use of slave labor present in Weston, Missouri.¹¹⁸

Bleeding Kansas

The Kansas-Missouri border wars, also known as Bleeding Kansas or Bloody Kansas, had a tremendous impact on Weston, as the town sat at the center of the conflict.¹¹⁹ Vehemently pro-

¹¹⁵ Philip E. Graves, Stephan Weiler, and Emily Elizabeth Tynon, “The Economics of Ghost Towns,” *The Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy* 39, no. 2 (2009), 139, accessed January 25, 2021, DOI: 10.22004/ag.econ.132433.

¹¹⁶ Paxton, *Annals*, 18.

¹¹⁷ H. Jason Combs, “The South’s Slave Culture Transplanted to the Western Frontier,” *The Professional Geographer* 56, no. 3 (2004): 364.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 369.

¹¹⁹ Though different than “The Border War,” a college sports rivalry, between the University of Kansas and the University of Missouri (when they were still in the same

slavery Missouri state senator, David Rice Atchison, was firmly rooted in Platte County where he moved in 1841 from Liberty, Missouri;¹²⁰ he served in the Missouri House of Representatives, and as a circuit court judge for the Platte region,¹²¹ before filling the former Senator Lewis F. Linn's vacant seat in the United States Senate.¹²²

While serving in the Senate, Senator Atchison aligned himself with some of the South's most influential politicians. Originally, Atchison arrived in Washington as a young senator, junior to Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton, who was originally "'much pleased' with Atchison's appointment."¹²³ Upon Atchison's arrival in Washington, Benton found housing for the junior senator near his own home on C Street. Though close in policy and in dwelling, Atchison soon moved further and further away from Benton.¹²⁴ Atchison began to settle into his own politics, while steadfastly representing the desires of his Platte County constituents. On the question of slavery, Atchison was in favor, despite not owning any slaves himself. This position, as well as others, placed Atchison in favor with South Carolinian Senator John C. Calhoun. As researched by Alice Elizabeth Malavasic, Calhoun developed a mentor relationship with David Rice Atchison of Missouri, Andrew Pickens Butler of South Carolina, Robert M. T. Hunter of

conference), the named sports rivalry certainly recognized and conjured up this particularly bloody history. It is also significant that the Kansas men who raided and burned down farms in Missouri were called Jayhawkers and an armed, Confederate militia in Columbia, Missouri was called the Fighting Tigers. See Lisa Rodriguez, "Civil War Origins Of The Kansas Jayhawk And Missouri Tiger," *Kansas City Public Radio*, December 19, 2014, <https://www.kcur.org/post/civil-war-origins-kansas-jayhawk-and-missouri-tiger#stream/0>.

¹²⁰ Paxton, *Annals*, 44.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 25, 35.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 56.

¹²³ Alice Elizabeth Malavasic, *The F Street Mess: How Southern Senators Rewrote the Kansas-Nebraska Act* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 42.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

Virginia, and James Murray Mason of Virginia. Together these four senators wielded control over the Thirty-Third United States Congress largely due to the four men's friendship and their living together at 361 F Street in a home they purchased together in 1853.¹²⁵ Malavasic argues that this "friendship became a priority over policy" and greatly influenced the Kansas-Nebraska Act and Atchison's actions in the Kansas-Missouri border wars.¹²⁶ Presented as a compromise between slave and free states, or the North and the South, the Kansas-Nebraska Act gave statehood to the two new states carved out of the Nebraska Territory and instead of admitting one as a free state and one as a slave state, as was done with the Missouri Compromise, both states were given democratic sovereignty to vote on the issue of slavery in their states. This upset a number of people who saw this act as undermining the Missouri Compromise.

With the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska act in early 1854, pro-slavery Missourians began to worry about how popular sovereignty might affect the fates of both Kansas and Nebraska. In reaction to this act, Senator Atchison, with several prominent businessmen in the county and Weston, formed the Platte County Self-Defense Association in July of 1854. This organization adhered to the following oath: "We, the members of the Self-Defensives, do solemnly pledge ourselves to go to the call of our brethren across the river and will drive from their midst the Abolition Traitors."¹²⁷ This organization considered itself an antidote to the aid societies back East who were sending abolitionist settlers to Kansas.¹²⁸ "Blue Lodges or Self-Defensives"

¹²⁵ The closeness of their relationship and living quarters garnered them the title of the "F Street Mess." This group's power over the Senate was enviable with the F Street Mess holding the offices of "president pro tempore and the chairmanships of Finance, Foreign Affairs, and Judiciary" in the Thirty-Third Congress, *Ibid.*, 10; *Ibid.*, 15.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹²⁷ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 10.

¹²⁸ Paxton, *Annals*, 184.

functioned as “secret societies [working] to extend slavery to Kansas.”¹²⁹ Etcheson remarks that the Platte County Self-Defense Association was one of the most prominent in Missouri and that behind their goals of maintaining a Missouri slave economy and promoting slavery in Kansas was a fear that “opposition to slavery threatened white upward economic mobility.”¹³⁰

In a matter of months, the relationship between Kansas and Missouri settlers went from collegial to adversarial. Paxton writes of the impending famine in January of 1854, wherein “Crops were short in Missouri, but nearly a failure in Kansas” and Kansans “came over to solicit supplies for the starving people of Kansas; and liberal contributions were made.”¹³¹ However, when a drought plagued the area in July of 1854, because “the winter had been remarkably dry, yet early corn sprouted and produced more than a half crop; but not one grain in five planted in May came up,” Paxton noted that, “Southern men were helped by their Missouri friends, and the Free State men were supplied by contributions from the North.”¹³² In his January entry regarding the crop shortage, Paxton was also very quick to point out that 1854 may have started with a famine, “But the year is more memorable as the beginning of the border warfare, that ended in the civil war between the North and South.”¹³³

Despite the Platte County Self-Defense Association’s menacing on each side of the border, many residents of Weston gathered on September 1, 1854, to admonish the actions of the local Self-Defensive. They also “affirmed the equal rights of all men in the territories according to the Kansas-Nebraska Act.”¹³⁴ These 174 residents of Weston favored law and order and disliked the

¹²⁹ Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³¹ Paxton, *Annals*, 175.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 185.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹³⁴ Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 34.

disruptions and “mob law” of the Self-Defensives.¹³⁵ At the same time, Northern abolitionist organizations like the New England Emigrant Aid Company (NEEAC) began funding Free-State settlers in their move to the Kansas Territory.¹³⁶ Paxton detailed the conflict in his *Annals*:

The Legislature of Massachusetts chartered a company by this name, which was never organized. But February 25, 1855, The New England Immigrant [*sic*] Aid Society was chartered, and went into operation, with Eli Thayer as president. They were active in promoting the settlement of Kansas with Free Soil men.¹³⁷

Feeling even more threatened by the influx of Northerners and abolitionist values, pro-slavery Missourians like the Platte County Self-Defense Association and similar groups, incited violence and vengeance. The already-amplified year swiftly turned into 1855 and the mob violence from both Missourians and Free-Staters continued.

In March of 1855, federal officials appointed by President Franklin Pierce organized the popular vote to decide the fate of Kansas. This election was fraught with voter fraud as 5,427 pro-slavery votes were cast in a territory of 2,905 eligible voters.¹³⁸ The voter fraud was encouraged by Senator Atchison even though Southerners in many states saw the efforts of the pro-slavery Missourians as an affront to popular sovereignty and American democratic values.¹³⁹

With an inconclusive and contested election, Kansans began to use extralegal measures to create their own Free-State government and Missourians answered with threats and violence. The

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³⁷ Paxton, *Annals*, 177.

¹³⁸ Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 59.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 59-60. While reading about the voter fraud of 1855 that undermined Kansas’ right to popular sovereignty, I was reminded of the many false claims of voter fraud made by Kansas Secretary of State and gubernatorial candidate, Kris Kobach. Voter fraud in Kansas actually occurred due to anti-black fears and this recent “epidemic” of alleged voter fraud is playing off these same fears by undermining the sovereignty of many Kansans.

editors of the *Industrial Luminary* published in Parkville, Missouri, expressing the following sympathies to the plight of the Free-Staters (as written in Paxton's *Annals*):

There is virtually no law in Kansas, and no security for life or property, save in the sense of honor and justice cherished by every true pioneer. This may save the country from bloodshed; but the Government is held up to ridicule and contempt, and its authority disregarded. Judges of elections have been displaced, and new ones appointed; the polls have in some instances been guarded with pistols and bowie-knives; and some of those elected are going to the governor, swearing that if he does not give them certificates of election immediately, they will "cut his throat from ear to ear." Is the flag of our country to be no longer protected; or are individuals or companies to declare we will, and it must be so, without regard to law? Is this what the authors of the Nebraska-Kansas bill meant by squatter sovereignty?¹⁴⁰

The editors, George S. Park and W. J. Patterson, were soon met with threats of violence by the Kansas League, "a subsidiary institution [meant] to carry into effect the decrees of the Platte County Self-Defensive Association."¹⁴¹ The Kansas League members made plans to throw the *Industrial Luminary's* printing press into the river and drive Park and Patterson from the state. Under the threat of hanging, they left the state of Missouri.¹⁴²

As brushes with violence became more frequent, the Free-Staters acquired more weaponry. In June 1855, at a meeting of abolitionists in Lawrence, Kansas, William Paxton writes "Arms

¹⁴⁰ Paxton, *Annals*, 198-199.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 199. Paxton notes that the leaders of this mob were sued by Park and forced to pay \$2,500 in damages. Both men moved away and acquired wealth and respect in their new communities. Park later returned to Platte County and founded Park College, "the grandest and noblest educational enterprise of the West."

are received by them from friends in the East.”¹⁴³ Though throughout 1855 anti-slavery/pro-slavery violence was minimal, it increased as the Civil War approached.¹⁴⁴

In Weston, the Platte County Self-Defense Association began to terrorize local Free-State sympathizers, including clergymen. Reverend John McNamara, whose time on the Missouri-Kansas border he documented in *Three Years on the Kansas Border*, was denied his appointment as an Episcopal minister for “Fort Leavenworth and parts adjacent.” His predecessor, the Episcopal minister for the area, including Weston, found out that McNamara made anti-slavery sermons in Chicago and was seen traveling aboard a steamer in the company of members of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, though he had only just met the Free-Staters.¹⁴⁵ McNamara and his family tried to settle into nearby areas, but found themselves turned away. Eventually, they returned to the East and published their account of life on the border.¹⁴⁶

Reverend Frederick Starr, born in Rochester, New York, met a similar fate. An abolitionist, though not outspoken about it, he was referred to as the “Yankee Preacher” after failing to denounce abolition or join the local Self-Defensives. Starr was charged with teaching slaves to read and fraternizing with an enslaved woman. After defending himself in court, the case was laid to rest. However, Senator Atchison and others in the local Self-Defensive disparaged Starr in the newspapers, and eventually most local goodwill turned against the Starr family; they were forced to leave their church and the town of Weston.¹⁴⁷

Dr. John W. Doy and his son Charles were escorting thirteen runaway slaves to Nebraska or Iowa when they were confronted and captured because two of the runaways did not have free

¹⁴³ Paxton, *Annals*, 202.

¹⁴⁴ Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 78.

¹⁴⁵ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 11.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

papers. The party was taken to Weston, where the runaway slaves were returned to their masters and the doctor and his son were moved to the prison in Platte County to await their trials. Charges against Charles Doy were dropped and Dr. Doy was sentenced to hard labor on one count of kidnapping the slave of Weston's mayor. While awaiting his sentencing before the Supreme Court of Missouri, Dr. Doy was rescued from prison by Charles and a group of abolitionists.¹⁴⁸

One of Weston's favorite former residents, William "Buffalo Bill" Cody, briefly lived in Weston with his uncle, Elijah Cody.¹⁴⁹ "Buffalo Bill"'s family stayed with the Elijah Cody family for a brief time before Isaac Cody, Bill's father, decided to move to Kansas. On September 18, 1854, the day Isaac Cody moved his family to Kansas, Isaac Cody was attacked for his abolitionist sympathies. In front of a Leavenworth, Kansas general store, Cody spoke of the pro- and anti-slavery tensions during which time Charles Dunn, a man who worked for Elijah Cody in Weston, stabbed Isaac Cody several times with a Bowie knife.¹⁵⁰ "Buffalo Bill" Cody, his sister, and his mother helped Isaac back to Elijah's home in Weston where he convalesced. Isaac Cody and his family returned to Kansas and established the town of Grasshopper Falls, its mills, and its school.¹⁵¹

The tensions at the Kansas-Missouri border, as well as all other events leading to the sectionalist divide of the nation, ushered in the American Civil War. Given Weston's location at

¹⁴⁸ Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 203.

¹⁴⁹ Weston also claims its status as home to President Abraham Lincoln's "Other Mary," a woman he courted as a young man, though he later found her unattractive and wrote as much in several letters. Yet feeling bound by an earlier promise to her family to propose, he did, and she rejected it. The letter he wrote to her explaining this is copied down in several places in Weston.

¹⁵⁰ Robert A. Carter, *Buffalo Bill Cody: The Man Behind the Legend*, New York: Wiley Publishers, 2000, last accessed January 30, 2021, <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/samples/wiley031/00020368.pdf>.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

the hotbed of some of the earliest sectional conflicts, one would anticipate that the town and its people played an equally active role in the Civil War's armed conflicts. Though it would send its men to both sides of the war, Missouri's status as a slave state *not* in active rebellion, Weston's involvement in "Bleeding Kansas," and their close proximity to Fort Leavenworth all but guaranteed their local involvement would be minimal. Some Weston residents still rebelled in their own ways and those stories have long been part of the local lore.

Weston and the Civil War

Weston was entrenched in the precipitating events of the Civil War, given its border location. Yet Weston was no more involved in the Civil War and its battles than any other locations. A majority of Weston's young men served the Confederacy in battle though some turned against local sentiments and served the Union.¹⁵² Bless writes, "But the glow of Weston's most prosperous days remained to color its life long after the peak was reached and the decline set in about 1858."¹⁵³ Of the many business areas in town, only Main Street withstood the decline and the War. During the Civil War, most of Weston's businesses were shuttered and occupied by Union soldiers from Fort Leavenworth.¹⁵⁴

Weston's local history is colored with small acts of rebellion during the Civil War. These stories are favored among town historians and featured in the museum and local publications. Families protested the seizure of their homes and businesses by the occupying Union troops, and Elizabeth Williams, a supporter of the Confederacy, went to retrieve her stolen horse from Union soldiers and left their company loudly singing "Dixie." Legend has it that the soldiers were so

¹⁵² Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 20.

¹⁵³ Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 35.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 36.

impressed with Williams they applauded her as she rode away.¹⁵⁵ The Missouri Bushwhackers and the Kansas Jayhawkers were still very active at this time and some of their violent skirmishes affected the residents of Weston. There were reports of violent threats, farms and homes burning, and even murders.¹⁵⁶ A local story highlights the rebellion of another local woman who stood between her Southern-sympathizing husband and the Union troops who had come to confront him about his allegiance with plans to execute him at his doorstep. This woman announced to the Union soldiers, “If you kill my husband you will kill me first,” an action that ultimately saved her husband’s life. The battles of the Civil War raged on elsewhere, but it scarred many locations and lives near and far.

Weston and the Legacy of Slavery

Weston’s agricultural demands were served by a large slave population. The success of hemp and tobacco farming called for an increase in slave labor. Paxton notes that “in 1840 there were not 200 negro men in the county. This number had quadrupled before the war came on.”¹⁵⁷ Geographer Jason Combs notes that along with agricultural preferences for hemp and tobacco, Southern settlers in Platte County also transplanted enslaved people from their former locations.¹⁵⁸ By bringing slaves with them, the white settlers of Platte County had the exploited-labor force they believed was needed to settle the area and begin a local and regional agricultural

¹⁵⁵ Miller, *Memories*, 54.

¹⁵⁶ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 20; Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 41.

¹⁵⁷ Paxton, *Annals*, 37.

¹⁵⁸ Combs, *Platte Purchase*, 368. Combs further explains the Missouri slave market, based in Boone County, saw buyers most frequently from the same county. He also notes that according to the 1850 Slave Schedules, Platte County’s enslaved population was comprised of 23.8% persons labeled “mulatto.” This number is far higher than the national average at the time, around 7.7%, because it was believed that enslaved people with darker skin worked harder, so they remained enslaved in the Deep South, where the tobacco and hemp enterprises were more laborious.

industry (See Figure 1). A pictorial history of Weston compiled and published by *The Weston Chronicle* and the Weston Chamber of Commerce in 2000 illustrates the early efforts of enslaved people in Weston:

Weston's White farmers purchased land and planted hemp seed. The Black man worked the land and performed the labor it took to turn the plant into strong lengths of rope. With hemp profits, the White man purchased lots and materials to begin construction of the town. The Black workers mixed clay and horse hair to form brick and then worked side by side with their owners to create homes, streets and commercial buildings.¹⁵⁹

The brick making and laying completed by many enslaved people in Weston laid the literal foundation of Weston's tourist industry, for Weston is home to over 100 homes designed in the antebellum style and constructed of brick.

¹⁵⁹ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 24.

Year	County Population	Enslaved Population	Value of the Enslaved People as Assessed by County
1840	9,771	858	\$223,620
1850	16,845	2,045	\$714,195
1852	16,488	2,559	
1853			\$934,585
1854			\$1,323,300
1855		2,935	\$1,264,860
1857		3,122	\$1,704,755
1860	18,294	3,313	\$1,414,010
1862		2,318	\$319,770

Table 2. County population and enslaved population data collected from Paxton's *Annals of Platte County*.

Weston's Floods

The Missouri River was incredibly fickle and also frequently unkind to the river town set up on its bank. In the early years of white settlement, Weston experienced its most aggressive river flood. The flood of June 1844 extended from the Platte River to the Missouri River, forcing out any settlements in between. This flood covered “the highest grounds in the Missouri bottoms,” areas that previous and future floods failed to cover.¹⁶⁰ The flood brought illness to the people and destruction to the crops.¹⁶¹ Weston recovered from this flood and sailed into its glory days, until the flood of 1858. This flood dealt a devastating blow to the town, when the Missouri River changed its channel and as a result ruined the port.¹⁶² Weston lost a lot of steamboat traffic

¹⁶⁰ Paxton, *Annals*, 61.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 259.

at this time but attempted to recover.¹⁶³ In 1871 Paxton notes a bar of sediment forming in the Missouri River at the port of Weston.¹⁶⁴ Finally, in 1881 the river flooded and returned to an old course two miles west of Weston.¹⁶⁵ Visiting Weston today, one would never believe Weston's former reputation as a busy river port. Main Street, which used to lead to the port now ends in a former rail yard just before an open field. What the Missouri River gave Weston—people, industry, fortune—it also took away.

Weston's Agriculture

With its agricultural industry taking root, Weston began to make its mark. Weston was a busy port-town and used that position to ship out millions of pounds of hemp and tobacco. As a popular river port, Weston docked 225 to 265 (accounts differ) steamboats a year.¹⁶⁶ Noted Missouri journalist and publisher of the *Weston Chronicle* from 1915 to 1948, Bertha Iseman Bless found that in 1848 the “receipts for hemp exceeded \$200,000 and Platte County became the second county in the state in both wealth and population.”¹⁶⁷ The town website remarks that “the annual tobacco yield in Platte County prior to 1861 was 25 million pounds,” which brought a considerable amount of money and business to the county and to the town of Weston.¹⁶⁸

Since its decline, Weston has tried to hold onto its former glory by relying on its agricultural industry, primarily focusing on growing tobacco and apples, and distill alcohol. These industries, though not as impactful on the state or country as they had been, show how Weston continues to hold onto a way of life that can withstand population decline and stagnancy.

¹⁶³ “Weston History,” Weston Chamber of Commerce.

¹⁶⁴ Paxton, *Annals*, 510.

¹⁶⁵ Miller, *Memories*, 66; “Weston History,” Weston Chamber of Commerce.

¹⁶⁶ “Weston History,” Weston Chamber of Commerce; Miller, *Memories*, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 18.

¹⁶⁸ “Weston History,” Weston Chamber of Commerce.

Not only does Weston continue these traditions, but they have also found a way to market these traditions for tourists, bringing in money and reputation.

Hemp

Hemp was an early staple of Platte County agriculture. The earliest settlers grew and harvested this cash crop. Paxton writes: “We became wealthy by its culture. No soil on earth, whether timber or prairie, is better adapted to hemp than Platte County.”¹⁶⁹ Paxton also noted the intense labor required to plant, clean, and harvest hemp, a fact which supported the county farmers’ use and promotion of slavery.¹⁷⁰ As Weston settled into its status as a booming river town, agriculture expanded. Waylaid by weather, illness, and issues with claim jumpers in the early 1840s, 1846 marked “the transition period from financial distress to financial prosperity.”¹⁷¹ Hemp brought \$100 per ton in 1848; by 1862 the price per ton had more than doubled.¹⁷² After the abolition of slavery there was a labor shortage, and by 1875 hemp was no longer produced in the county.¹⁷³ The final shipment of hemp left Weston in 1885.¹⁷⁴

Tobacco

Along with hemp, the Southern settlers introduced tobacco to the Platte Region of Missouri. While this crop of tobacco was not of the quality Southern farmers were used to, tobacco soon became a booming industry in Weston.¹⁷⁵ Weston tobacco farmers exploited

¹⁶⁹ Paxton, *Annals*, 37.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁷² Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 19.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Miller, *Memories*, 16.

¹⁷⁵ Paxton, *Annals*, 36.

enslaved persons to plant, care, and harvest the tobacco. Inevitably, Weston's tobacco industry faded after the abolition of slavery at the end of the Civil War, until its resurgence in the mid-twentieth century. Some local farmers can trace their tobacco-farming roots to the first tobacco farmers of antebellum Weston.¹⁷⁶

With the disappearance of Weston's hemp industry following the Civil War, area farmers invested in the second-most profitable crop, tobacco. Soon after the turn of the twentieth century, many Weston farmers were working hard farming tobacco. Weston farmers primarily plant Burley tobacco, a strain popular in cigarette tobacco.¹⁷⁷ The planting, tending, and harvesting of tobacco was labor-intensive; after Emancipation, all members of farming families, including children, were expected to participate in the tobacco farming. After the tobacco left the fields, it was stored and dried in a warehouse. In the early 1900s, Weston farmers built several tobacco warehouses, two of which are still standing in Weston today. Other warehouses were lost in large fires or fell into disuse.¹⁷⁸ Today, the remaining warehouses are part of the National Register of Historic Places.¹⁷⁹

Both Platte County and Weston have a reputation as tobacco country, though this reputation has been threatened and rendered almost extinct in recent decades. Until 2001, Weston was the only tobacco market west of the Mississippi River. Weston hosted regular tobacco auctions in the winter months from 1912 through 2001,¹⁸⁰ with an annual Tobacco Show and Festival occurring

¹⁷⁶ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 48.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

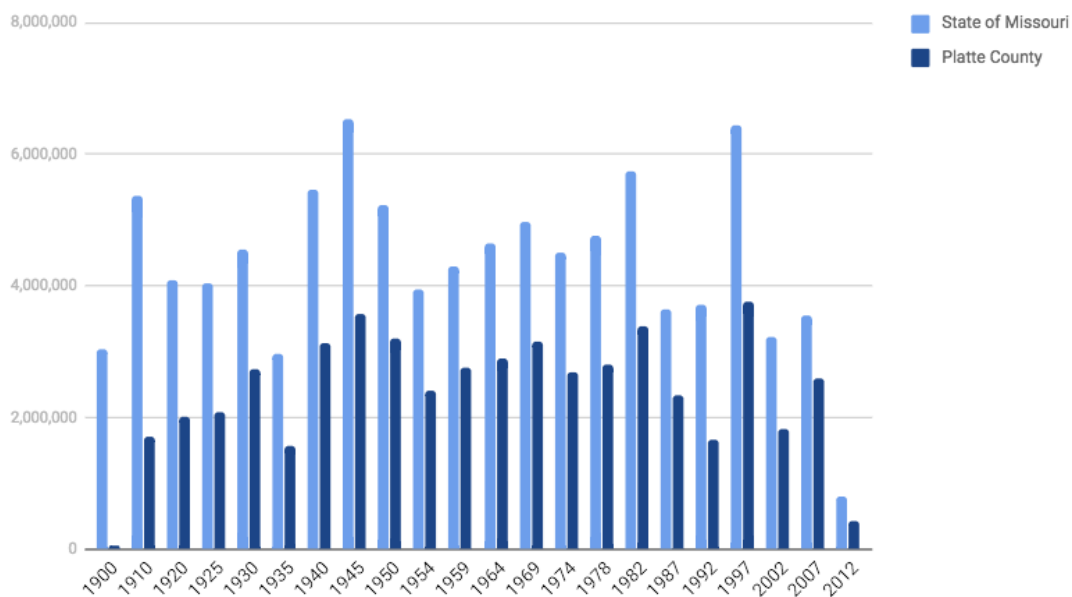
¹⁷⁸ Miller, *Memories*, 16-17.

¹⁷⁹ "Weston Historic District," *National Register of Historic Places*, National Parks Service, last accessed January 30, 2021 <http://dnr.mo.gov/shpo/nps-nr/72000727.pdf>.

¹⁸⁰ Martha Zirschky, "Weston: Small town with a big history," *The Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), December 16, 2015.

annually between 1929 and 1956.¹⁸¹ The Tobacco Festival is no longer a regular community event in Weston, yet a smaller, private Tobacco Festival held at the Weston Tobacco shop has been an annual event in recent years. Since 1920, Platte County has harvested at least 50% (and in some years as much as 73%) of Missouri’s total tobacco yield (See Figure 3). Weston is still proud of the rich tradition of tobacco farming in the area, as are the families in Weston who have been farming tobacco for over 150 years. However, in the most recent 2012 Census of Agriculture, Platte County reported 16 farms, 237 acres of tobacco planted, and a yield of 435,153 pounds.¹⁸² This data has decreased significantly since the height of Weston’s tobacco industry. Yet, like so many things in Weston, it holds on.

Pounds of tobacco produced by state and Platte County



¹⁸¹ Miller, *Memories*, 19.

¹⁸² “Missouri-Field Crops,” *2012 Census of Agriculture – County Data*, Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2012, last accessed January 30, 2021, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2012/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_County_Level/Missouri/st29_2_025_025.pdf.

Figure 1. Platte County and Missouri tobacco production in pounds, compiled by the author from the Federal Agricultural Censuses 1900-2012.

Apples

To a lesser degree than tobacco, apples have played a role in Weston's economy. Once a popular crop in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, apples are no longer a profitable crop in Weston or the county. According to the 2012 Agricultural Census, only 9 acres in Platte County are dedicated to growing and harvesting apples.¹⁸³ When the Weston Development Company (now the Weston Chamber of Commerce) established the annual Applefest in 1990 there were around 200 acres of apple orchards in Weston.¹⁸⁴ Though few apple orchards exist today, the annual Applefest is in its 30th year (Applefest was known as the Lost Arts Festival for its first two years).¹⁸⁵ This festival is named after the once abundant fruit, but more significantly, it celebrates Weston's past. The festival's ties to apples and lost arts and handicrafts surround the festival with nostalgia for a simpler time and perhaps one more innocent than Weston's history of slavery, hemp, tobacco, and alcohol allows.

¹⁸³ "Missouri-Other Crops," *2012 Census of Agriculture – County Data*, Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2012, last accessed January 30, 2021, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2012/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_County_Level/Missouri/st29_2_031_031.pdf.

¹⁸⁴ *Historic Weston Applefest Cookbook*, Middletown, MO: Luella's Front Porch Media, 2015.; Weston Historical Museum. "Congratulations to the 2014 Winners of the Weston History Essay Contest!" *Weston Historical Museum*, last accessed, February 1, 2021, <http://www.westonhistoricalmuseum.org/2014SchoolEssayContestWinners.html>. Note: Vaughn's Orchards closed in 2010.

¹⁸⁵ "2020 Weston Events," Weston Chamber of Commerce, last accessed, February 1, 2021, <https://www.westonmo.com/events>.

Alcohol

Another of Weston's "sinful" enterprises has been its production and distribution of alcohol. One of the local history books remarks, "Dubbed 'sin city,' Weston was known for many years as the liquor capital of Northwest Missouri."¹⁸⁶ In some of its earliest days Weston housed a brewery, a distillery, and six saloons.¹⁸⁷ Weston Brewing Company began in 1842 before becoming Royal Brewery in 1912. Royal Brewery closed in the 1920s due to Prohibition.¹⁸⁸ The brewery switched ownership over the years, but it is now a successful brewery and pub with their own annual Irish Fest.¹⁸⁹ The brewery's five underground cellars are in use today, one being a three-story underground bar and pub.¹⁹⁰

McCormick Distilling Company, or Holladay Distillery as of 2015, is a long-standing distillery and local employer. Famous stage-coach entrepreneur, Benjamin Holladay and his brother Major David Holladay started the Holladay Distillery in 1856 after discovering a local limestone spring on the property where the distillery still sits. Lewis and Clark had also encountered these limestone springs on their expedition through the West. The brothers, being from Kentucky, knew that the limestone spring could help them launch a bourbon distillery.¹⁹¹ Benjamin Holladay eventually left his brother to manage the distillery to move West and went on to become "the Stage Coach King," and the largest employer during the Civil War.¹⁹² Though he eventually died with little money, having been bankrupted by Black Friday of 1873.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁶ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 51.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ "Weston Irish Festival," Weston Brewing Company, last accessed February 1, 2021, <https://westonirish.com/weston-irish-festival/>.

¹⁹⁰ "The Brewery," Weston Brewing Company, last accessed February 1, 2021, <https://westonirish.com/weston-brewery/>.

¹⁹¹ Holladay Distillery tour, author's notes, June 2, 2017.; Miller, *Memories*, 33.

¹⁹² Jack Sullivan, "Ben Holladay: "King of Wheels" (and Western Whiskey)," *Those Pre-*

Today, Holladay Distillery is the country’s “oldest distillery west of the Mississippi operating in its original location.”¹⁹⁴ Under the name McCormick’s Distilling Company, the distillery was well known for distilling and bottling a low quality and inexpensive whiskey and vodka. In a deft public relation move, McCormick’s Distilling Company reverted to their original name in 2015, distancing themselves from their bargain labels. As told to this author on a tour of the facilities, the new name honors Benjamin Holladay and gives the company a new start in bourbon-making, one that will presumably shake the shadow of the lower-quality vodkas that had made the company popular.¹⁹⁵

Weston’s Population Boom

Weston’s current website boasts a claim found in several other sources, that between 1850 and 1855, Weston was home to around 5,000 residents, a population that surpassed both Kansas City and St. Joseph, Missouri at the time, coming in second only to St. Louis.¹⁹⁶ Though my research of the original census documents puts the 1850 free population of the “Town of Weston” at 1,670, “Weston Township” at 1,104, and the 1850 Slave Schedule shows 504 enslaved people between the town and township. This puts the population roughly around 3,278 for 1850. This is certainly an increase from the previous decade when Weston was settled by white settlers, and

Pro Whiskey Men! (blog), August 30, 2011, <http://pre-prowhiskeymen.blogspot.com/2011/08/>.

¹⁹³ Miller, *Memories*, 11.

¹⁹⁴ “McCormick Distilling,” McCormick Distilling Company, last accessed February 1, 2021, <https://mccormickdistilling.com/>.

¹⁹⁵ Though it also appears to be a re-branding strategy that will distance the boutique bourbon distillery from the mass-produced, lower quality whiskeys. See Tour Notes.

¹⁹⁶ “Weston History,” Weston Chamber of Commerce; Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 34; Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 6.

subsequent censuses show 1850 as the most populous year in Weston.¹⁹⁷ If Weston's population was hovering around 5,000 residents in 1855, the 1860 Census and Slave Schedules reflect a decrease and a population closer to that in 1850 than 5,000. In 1860, the "City of Weston" had 1,708 residents, Weston township had 945 residents, and the Slave Schedule counted 343 enslaved people. All of this brings the total population to 2,996.¹⁹⁸ According to the 1850 Census, Weston proper was home to 307 families in 307 dwellings, and the township contained an additional 186 families in 186 dwellings.¹⁹⁹ The resources needed to build these homes and serve these families in Weston and its township certainly reveal an affluent and active town. Though we will soon see how a series of events precipitated the decline and stagnation of Weston.

The height of Weston's productivity and population was also the height of its prosperity. Bless notes that the steamboats "were filled coming and going."²⁰⁰ These steamboats left with the agricultural bounty of the town and returned with "ironware, crockery, work-style 'custom-made' clothes for men, 'dressed' lumber to replace hand-hewn timbers, 'milled' windows and doors and bolts of yard goods."²⁰¹ In these days houses were built with bricks fired in the local kilns;

¹⁹⁷ 1850 United States federal census; 1850 United States Federal census - Slave Schedules, Platte County, Missouri, slave population schedule, Weston, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed February 25, 2021, <http://ancestry.com>.

¹⁹⁸ 1860 United States federal census; 1860 United States Federal census - Slave Schedules, Platte County, Missouri, slave population schedule, Weston, digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed February 25, 2021, <http://ancestry.com>.

¹⁹⁹ 1850 United States federal census; Paxton's *Annals of Platte County* estimates the 1850 population of Weston Township at 3,155 (123) and the population of the Town of Weston at 1,400 in 1855 (192).

²⁰⁰ Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 34.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

masons and carpenters could scarce keep up with the demands of the over 100 homes constructed at this time in the antebellum style.²⁰²

African-Americans in Weston

Over 2,000 enslaved people were emancipated from slavery in Platte County, near 300 in Weston itself, following the Civil War. Despite the new laws, the emancipation did not happen in one fell-swoop. Missouri was excluded from President Abraham Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation" of 1863, as it was a Union-occupied state not in active rebellion.²⁰³ Aaron Astor argues that the final blow to slavery in Missouri occurred in 1864 when enslaved men were conscripted to the Union army.²⁰⁴ Paxton notes in May of 1864 that: "Slavery is not entirely extinct. It dies slowly."²⁰⁵ Local journalist and historian, Bertha Iseman Bless writes in her history of Weston:

Most of our Negroes dreaded being cast out upon an unfriendly world and begged their masters to retain them . . . Their loyalty, however, was so deep that they stayed on, suffering privation beside those who had once owned them. They labored with no complaint and many are buried in family plots on farms or in corners of the 'white folks' cemeteries.²⁰⁶

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁰³ "Transcript of the Proclamation," *The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration*, last accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation/transcript.html>.

²⁰⁴ Aaron Astor, "The Lexington Weekly Caucasian: White Supremacist Discourse in Post-Civil War Western Missouri," in *Bleeding Kansas, Bleeding Missouri: The Long Civil War on the Border*, ed. Jonathan Earle and Diane Mutti Burke (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 199.

²⁰⁵ Paxton, *Annals*, 362.

²⁰⁶ Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 41.

This narrative fits into a larger local narrative of loyal slaves and benevolent local slave-owners. Previously mentioned was the “collaboration” between enslaved people and their owners during the construction of many of Weston’s homes and roads. These two tales similarly erase responsibility and culpability from slave-owners and bondage from the enslaved. Many of the newly emancipated people of Weston remained nearby. A history of Weston mentions that after Emancipation, members of the African-American community in Weston formed “schools, churches, and social clubs.”²⁰⁷ While it has also been recorded that the African-American population was *at one time* 45% of Weston’s population, the presence of African-Americans in Weston has declined exponentially.²⁰⁸ Though Weston’s population at the time of the Census of 1870 was 1,615: 273 African-American citizens and 1,342 white-identified citizens (See Figure 2). According to another historical account of Weston compiled in 1992 “the Black people began to move away seeking employment in Kansas City, Leavenworth and St. Joseph. The last remaining families in Weston were the Dydells and the Andersons.”²⁰⁹ At this time much of Weston’s industry was based in agriculture—an industry that requires landownership and financial capital—giving reason for the flight of many African-Americans in the community toward more urban, manufacturing centers. The most recent United States Census recorded six citizens who identified as black or African-American and a non-white-identifying population of fifty-one out of the town’s 1,641.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 24.

²⁰⁸ My emphasis. This statistic is recorded in the pictorial history of Weston published in 2000. The book cites a 1968 issue of *The Weston Chronicle*, although in my own research of the decennial census documents, there was no moment between 1840 and 1940 where the black population was 45% of the total population of the city. See Figure 2.

²⁰⁹ Miller, *Memories*, 55.

²¹⁰ “Weston city, Missouri.”

The hustle and bustle of Weston began to disappear around 1858. The Census of 1860 recorded a total of 2,996 individuals living within Weston proper and Weston Township. According to this census, the “City of Weston” was home to 336 dwellings, 329 families, totaling 1,708 individuals. Weston Township contained 945 individuals in 150 dwellings and 151 families.²¹¹ The Slave Schedule of 1860 tallied 160 enslaved persons in Weston and 183 enslaved persons in the township, totaling 343 enslaved.²¹² By the 1880 Census, Weston proper had a total population of 1,329, with 399 citizens tallied as either black or mulatto. The population of Weston dropped by almost 300 residents in the 20 years between the 1880 and 1900 Federal Censuses. Throughout the twentieth century Weston’s population grew from 1,019 residents in 1900 to 1,528 in 1990.²¹³ Though a 50% increase in population, Weston never regained its former reputation as a bustling city of people, industry, and fortune.²¹⁴

²¹¹ 1860 United States federal census.

²¹² 1860 United States federal census – Slave Schedules.

²¹³ “Missouri Population 1900 – 1990,” *Missouri Census Data Center*, University of Missouri Center for Health Policy, last accessed April 19, 2021, <https://mcdc.missouri.edu/population-estimates/historical/cities1900-1990.pdf>.

²¹⁴ In in the next section, as well as in Chapter 2, I discuss the 1969 expectation that Weston would grow to over 3,000 residents by 1999.

Population of Weston proper by Race 1850-1940

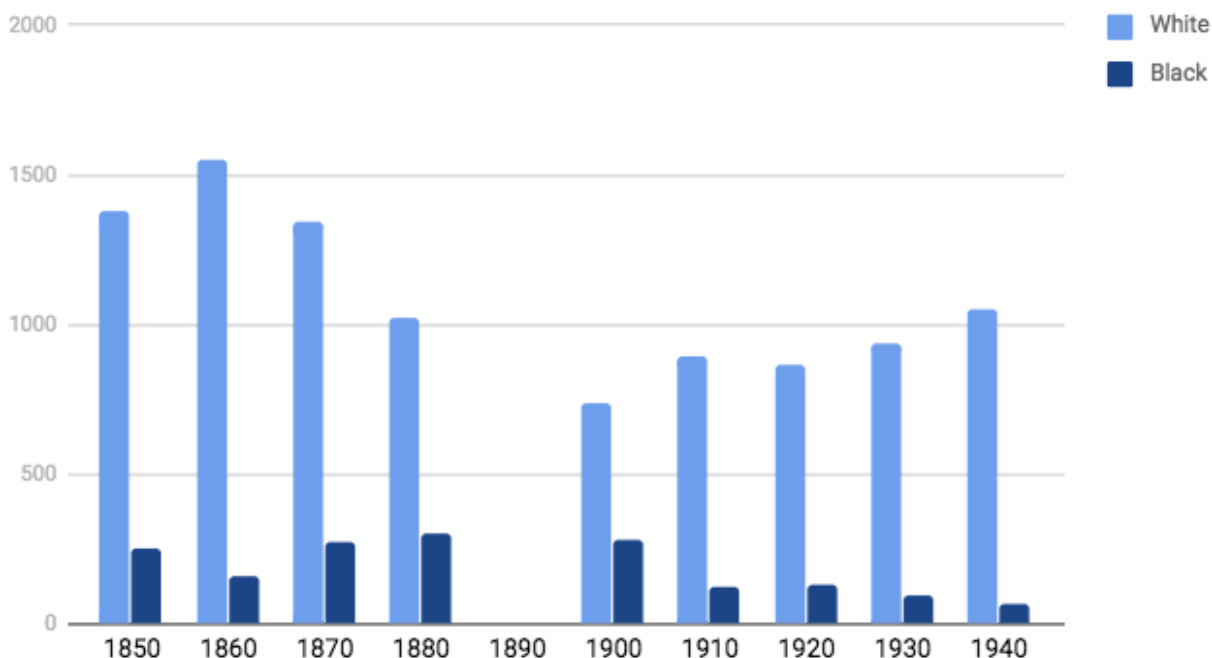


Figure 2. Population of Weston proper by Race 1850-1940, compiled by the author from U.S. Decennial Census records on Ancestry.com.

Weston's Bright Future

During the 1960s, Weston experienced significant growth resulting from the growth of Kansas City construction of the new Kansas City International Airport in their county. In 1966 Weston began preparing for the eventual influx of residents by reevaluating their water works system. Surveyors and engineers projected that while their current system served 1,650 people, in 1990 they should expect to serve 3,000.²¹⁵ In 1969 Bless writes, “Never content with what it has been or what it is Weston looks forward to new restoration. She is aware of the potentialities arising from the expansion of Mid-Continental Airport and allied facilities.”²¹⁶ Bless also added that local leaders were working with “an eminent firm of consultants out of St. Louis” to

²¹⁵ William R. Hull, Jr. Papers.

²¹⁶ Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 75.

improve tourism and “keep Weston a Queen—not of the Platte Purchase, nor of the Steamboat days but of the Williamsburgs of the West.”²¹⁷ The airport construction gave residents of Weston a renewed hope that it could once again become a town of hustle and bustle, though this time the hope did not arrive on a steamboat, but on an airplane.

Though this new growth promised great things for Weston, it did not deliver as anticipated. By the late 1970s, Weston’s downtown was crumbling. The downtown economy was at “an all time low”; the commercial services of downtown were being replaced by shopping centers in the Kansas City suburbs.^{218 219} By 1981, fourteen of the forty-two downtown buildings were vacant.²²⁰ The first years of the 1980s mark a significant and long-lasting intervention in Weston’s economy.

Weston’s Age

As of the 2010 census, the population of 0–18-year-olds in Weston was about 23.9% of the total population. The median age for Weston was 42.0 years old in 2010, and current estimates suggest the median age has increased to 43.6 years old. This data suggests that Weston’s population is not getting younger and as a result, the enrollment in the school district will most likely continue to decrease. Neighboring cities and counties, like Kansas City in Jackson County and Leavenworth in Leavenworth County, Kansas reveal far different trends. Weston’s population data reflects a high median age. In 2017, the United States Census Bureau reported that the national median age was continuing to increase: in 2000 the national median

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*; I believe Bless is referring to Williamsburg, Virginia, one of the most popular heritage tourist sites in the country.

²¹⁸ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 124.

²¹⁹ “Weston—A Chronology” by Weston Development Company, n.d., Facts and Figures Folder, Weston City Hall Archives, Weston, MO.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

average was 35.3 and in 2016 that number was 37.9.²²¹ Kansas City in Jackson County, Leavenworth in Leavenworth County, Kansas, and Platte County stay close to this national average, while Weston skews significantly higher. Certainly, Kansas City’s lower median age can be attributed to its urban environment, size, and availability of opportunities. Leavenworth, Kansas is home to a United States Army base, which can account for an influx in young residents and families.

Weston’s population data shines a spotlight on its youth drought and the failed deliveries of the Comprehensive Community Plan. The plan projected a significant increase in the school-aged population and “the number of older persons will decrease as a proportion of the population.”²²²

	Median Age (2017 estimate)	Percentage of 0–18-year-olds	Percentage of 65+ year olds
United States	37.8	23%	15%
Rural United States	40	23%	28%
Weston	43.6	21.3%	22.8%
Platte City	34.5	25.7%	10.9%
Platte County	38.2	23.9%	13.5%
Kansas City	35.2	23.1%	12.4%
Jackson County	36.6	23.9%	14%
Leavenworth, Kansas	34.8	25.5%	11.1%
Leavenworth County, Kansas	37.3	24.1%	13.2%

Table 3. Comparative Age Data for Weston, Missouri, Platte County, and neighboring cities and counties.

²²¹ “The Nation's Median Age Continues to Rise,” United States Census Bureau, last accessed February 6, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2017/comm/median-age.html>.

²²² General Planning and Resource Consultants, Inc., *A Comprehensive Community Plan, Weston, Missouri*, (St. Louis, MO: General Planning and Resource Consultants, Inc., 1969), 7.

In 2018, the West Platte School District (#083002) reported a K-12 enrollment of 604 students, a number significantly lower than the 1969 population projections for the area.²²³ Platte County is divided up into four separate school districts: North Platte County R-I, West Platte County R-II, Platte County R-III, and Park Hill (See Figure 2). The Park Hill School District and Platte County R-III are closest to Kansas City in areas that have reflected the growth that Weston was expecting, while Platte County R-II (Weston's) and Platte County R-I have far fewer students.

There is an interesting anomaly in the financial data between each of these school districts (See Table 1). Platte County R-II, which serves Weston, is valued at \$212,429,138. The district valuation is substantially higher than each of the other districts in terms of value per enrolled student. West Platte School District has benefitted greatly from a now defunct Kansas City Power and Light power plant located just north of Weston. The plant's property and equipment are locally assessed and have generated "the highest cash reserves of any school district in the state, estimated at about \$25 million" in 2015.²²⁴ The valuation and assets for a school district that has shown spurts of growth in the last nine years, while averaging a 6.5% decrease in enrollment, is impressive. Yet the school district that anticipated serving many more students, will most likely continue to decrease as the median age of the community increases.

²²³ West Platte Co. R-II District Report Card, 2018.

²²⁴ Jeanette Browning Faubion, "West Platte's facility upgrades will start with new stadium," *The Platte County Citizen* (Platte City, MO), February 25, 2015.

	Park Hill	Platte County R-III	West Platte County R-II	Platte County R-I
K-12 Enrollment	11,282	4,083	604	602
Enrollment growth since 2009	12.9%	29.7%	-6.5%	-6.9%
District Valuation	\$1,698,107,954	\$533,631,962	\$212,429,138	\$61,687,311
Value per student	\$105,514	\$130,696	\$351,703	\$102,470
Percentage of funding from local taxes (2018)	71.42%	61.76%	85.51%	52.08%

Table 4. School districts serving Weston, Missouri.

In 1982, *The Kansas City Times* featured Weston in its “Our Towns” series. Author E.A. Torriero remarked, “many Weston residents say their town always will live and die on the economics of vices—liquor, wine and tobacco homegrown in their little town.”²²⁵ These still present agricultural recall and reinvigorate Weston’s history by bringing elements of their history to the present. The following chapters will examine how this town’s history was harnessed for economic benefit and employed to counteract a decline in population, relevance, and economy.

²²⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 2: Weston’s Preservation of History and Heritage

“Nestled in the beautiful hill country above the Missouri River, you find Historic Weston. Untouched by the course of modern urban America, 1600 residents still enjoy the romantic memories and family traditions imbedded in the culture of this sleepy community by the early settlers. Those who have worked diligently to preserve the unique natural of historic Weston, invite you to explore and enjoy this unspoiled treasure, a diverse mix of historic architecture that bespeaks a small-town life that has nearly evaporated.”
 — “The Historic Weston Experience: Driving Tour” booklet, 2016

Introduction

When visiting the Weston information office on Main Street, one is inundated with countless brochures and signs advertising various events and sites. These brochures advertise the information office’s sponsor, the Weston Chamber of Commerce and their calendar of monthly events like the Weston Tobacco Festival, the Candlelight Homes Tour, the Burley House Market, Applefest, Irishfest, and the Weston Moonshiners Car Club. On the credenzas and tabletops are pamphlets sharing details of tasting tours at the Holladay Distillery, a lengthy printout describing Weston’s brief history and all that it has to offer the inquiring tourist, printed maps detailing suggested stops along Main Street, and even a leaflet advertising the sale of the Bowman Home (whose brochures I found in several other places around town over the two years of my visits). The information office makes it abundantly clear that Weston has more than enough history to share with each tourist that visits. While Weston has always had a history, it has not always had such a preserved and curated history to share with its visitors. This office is a testament to the hard work of its citizens, their government, and local businesses and it is a reflection of Weston’s resolution to endure.

In this chapter, “Weston’s Preservation of History and Heritage,” I will focus on the renewal and revitalization efforts of the Planning and Zoning Commission, Historical Preservation Commission, and Weston Development Company (WDC) throughout the second

half of the twentieth century. This chapter will situate the local projects within the larger timeline and the historic preservation movement that was also at work on state and federal levels. This chapter will also look at how and where decisions were made about renewal and revitalization in Weston and how these decisions and plans attempted to remedy economic stagnation. Necessary to a discussion of how Weston's historic preservation and heritage tourism efforts began is a discussion of the national and state movements that opened up opportunities for small towns like Weston. Weston's interest in preservation of their local historic sites and materials coincides with the historic preservation efforts simultaneously occurring on a state and federal level. Stemming from national fears of a waning way of life, changes in "American values," and urban sprawl, Weston paralleled historic preservations at work in Missouri and the United States. Historic preservation is a necessary, early step in the direction of a heritage tourism economy that soon followed these earlier efforts.

National Efforts in Historic Preservation

Some of the earliest national efforts toward historic preservation were led by women's leagues and associations. Concerning themselves with the moral precarity of the nation, upper class, nineteenth century white women attempted to combat the rapid urbanization with calls for temperance and moral reform. By the mid-nineteenth century, historic preservation was added to their long list of social and moral causes.²²⁶

²²⁶ Barbara J. Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation: The Legacy of Ann Pamela Cunningham," *The Public Historian* 12, no 1 (1990): 32, last accessed February 8, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3378321>.

The late 1800s heralded the arrival of several women's voluntary associations concerned with the national identity and history of the United States. In April of 1890, the Colonial Dames of America (CDA) was founded when:

Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer and Mrs. John Lyon Gardiner were spending the day with Mrs. Archibald Gracie King at her home at Weehawken; after luncheon, when walking on the Bluff, near the spot where General Hamilton fell in the fatal duel, Mrs. Van Rensselaer said: "Let us found a patriotic society of women, descended from Colonial ancestry."²²⁷

To this day, the organization, whose membership is granted by invitation only and a demonstrated link to a political or military appointee in the Colonies, is governed by the credo, "*Colere Colonialum Gloriam*, to preserve the ideals of the Colonies."²²⁸ The organization has acquired a number of historic properties related to Colonial America and works to fund other related projects.

Just six months after the founding of CDA "during a time that was marked by a revival in patriotism and intense interest in the beginnings of the United States of America," the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) was established.²²⁹ Their three founding ideals were: historic preservation, education, and patriotism.²³⁰ Built right into the structure of the organization was the project of historic preservation and the notion of American exceptionalism that so often

²²⁷ "History," The Colonial Dames of America, last accessed February 10, 2021, <https://cda1890.org/aboutcda/>.

²²⁸ "Historic Preservation Projects & CDA Mission," Colonial Dames of America, last accessed February 10, 2021, <https://cda1890.org/cda-programs-and-awards/historic-preservation01/>.

²²⁹ "DAR History," Daughters of the American Revolution, last accessed February 10, 2021, <https://www.dar.org/national-society/about-dar/dar-history>.

²³⁰ "Celebrate 125!" Daughters of the American Revolution, last accessed February 10, 2021, <https://www.dar.org/national-society/celebrate-125/celebrate-125>.

guides the project. And shortly after the introduction of the DAR, another women's organization interested in the Colonial era formed, the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America (NSCDA). The group boasts a confusingly similar name to the CDA and tenets quite similar to the DAR: "Celebrating 125 years of education, historic preservation, and patriotic service."²³¹ Though smaller in number than the DAR, the NSCDA has worked on a national level to establish historic homes museums in over forty U.S. states, including four historic home sites in Ste. Genevieve, Missouri.

Antiquities Act

One of the nation's first federal attempts at historic preservation was the Antiquities Act of 1906. The primary purpose of this Act was punitive and meant to curtail theft from indigenous archaeological sites. Established in 1906 under President Theodore Roosevelt, this law provided the first protections of the nation's cultural resources.²³² The Antiquities Act was the result of government and scholarly intervention, as numerous archaeologists and anthropologists supported the law.²³³ Through this legislation the President can designate "historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest."²³⁴ The first landmark designated under this law by President Theodore Roosevelt was Devils Tower in Wyoming. President Barack Obama designated an unprecedented twenty-six landmarks, and despite threats to review and potentially dismantle the Antiquities Act, President Donald Trump

²³¹ "Our History," National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, last accessed February 10, 2021, <https://nscda.org/our-history>.

²³² "American Antiquities Act of 1906," Archaeology Program, *National Parks Service*, last accessed February 10, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/archeology/tools/laws/AntAct.htm>.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

established the latest landmark in Kentucky in October 2018.²³⁵ Aside from the preservation of historic and prehistoric sites, one of the most important effects of the Antiquities Act is that it established a precedent of administering historic preservation through the Secretary of the Interior.²³⁶

Though the Antiquities Act led Roosevelt to established eighteen landmarks, these landmarks did not have federal, administrative protections, so they were vulnerable to private interests. Though these sites were deemed landmarks of significant value, there was no federal organization charged with caring for the landmarks or protecting them from private enterprise or looters. In 1913, the Hetch Hetchy Valley of the Yosemite National Park was dammed by the City of San Francisco with approval from Congress. To prevent further irrevocable damage to these lands, conservationists sought to create a bureau to oversee the national parks.²³⁷ Chicago businessmen and outdoors enthusiast Stephen T. Mather worked with an aide from the Department of the Interior, Horace M. Albright to campaign on behalf of creating a national parks bureau. The two men courted support from Congress, *National Geographic Magazine*, the Museum of Natural History, prominent writers, and the Southern Pacific Railroad Company by taking a group of men on a camping trip through Sequoia and Yosemite Parks.²³⁸ After this outing, Mather and Albright had funding for a successful and impactful press strategy that led to

²³⁵ “American Antiquities Act of 1906 Monuments List,” Archaeology Program, *National Parks Service*, last accessed February 10, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/archeology/sites/antiquities/MonumentsList.html>; However, Trump did reduce the size of the Bear Ears landmark in Utah established under President Obama.

²³⁶ Tyler, et al, *Historic Preservation*, 32.

²³⁷ Barry Mackintosh, “Wildlands Designated...But Vulnerable,” Parks and People: Preserving Our Past For The Future, *National Parks Service*, last accessed February 10, 2021, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/sontag/sontag2.htm.

²³⁸ Barry Mackintosh, “Creating a Service to Manage the System,” Parks and People: Preserving Our Past For The Future, *National Parks Service*, last accessed February 10, 2021, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/sontag/sontag3.htm

President Woodrow Wilson signing a bill establishing the National Park Service (NPS) on August 25, 1916.²³⁹

National Park Service

In the 1930s the National Park Service (NPS) authorized the Historic American Buildings Survey, a project to identify and catalogue historic sites within the United States.²⁴⁰ The Survey was administered by the fairly new federal agency and was a source of federal job creation during the Great Depression. The NPS and the Civilian Conservation Corps, a New Deal-funded group of unemployed photographers and architects, carried out the survey, creating a significant archive of historic American architecture.²⁴¹ This survey set an example for the Historic Sites Survey which was authorized in 1935 with the passage of the Historic Sites Act.²⁴² The legislation “reinforces the role of the federal government and its National Park Service in the preservation of historic places and the need for federal preservation activities to extend beyond the boundaries of national park units.”²⁴³ While the NPS oversaw a number of natural historically significant sites, this survey shifted focus toward the built environment and historical materiality, the tangible traces of the past. The expansion of the scope of federal preservation would

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Charles E. Fisher, “Promoting the Preservation of Historic Buildings: Historic Preservation Policy in the United States,” *APT Bulletin: The Journal of Preservation Technology* 29, no. 3/4 (1998): 7, accessed February 10, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1504604>.

²⁴¹ Diane Lea, “America’s Preservation Ethos: A Tribute to Enduring Ideals,” in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Robert E. Stipe (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 8.

²⁴² Fisher, “Promoting the Preservation,” 7.

²⁴³ Russell V. Keune, “Historic Preservation in a Global Context: An International Perspective,” in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Robert E. Stipe, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 358.

eventually lead to a multitude of programs and agencies focused on historic preservation who would support cities and towns like Weston in their endeavor to preserve their histories.

National Trust for Historic Preservation

The National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) has become the primary nonprofit spearheading the historic preservation movement in the United States. The NTHP was chartered by Congress in 1949 as the “leader of the private historic preservation movement.”²⁴⁴ At first a small organization of four people, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and its impact on preservation has grown significantly. Around 2003, the NTHP had an annual operating budget of \$40 million and managed only twenty Historic Sites. According to their 2017 Annual Report, the NTHP stewards twenty-seven National Trust Historic Sites on over 4,000 acres.²⁴⁵ They also have an operating revenue totaling \$63 million, half of which is achieved through donor contributions.²⁴⁶ The organization involves itself in legal battles to protect historic sites and publishes an annual list of the “Eleven Most Endangered Historic Places,” a list which in 2018 contains such sites as the Route 66 Highway, Mount Vernon, Virginia, and the Isaiah T.

²⁴⁴ J. Myrick Howard, “Nonprofits in the American Preservation Movement,” in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Robert E. Stipe (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 322.

²⁴⁵ “2017 Annual Report,” National Trust for Historic Preservation (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2017), 14, last accessed February 12, 2021, https://nthp-savingplaces.s3.amazonaws.com/2017/10/20/11/18/38/180/NTHP_AnnualReport_2017_VIEW.pdf.

²⁴⁶ “2017 Annual Report,” National Trust, 21. On the 2017 Annual Report’s list of donors are President George W. Bush and Laura Bush, who committed to an annual donation between \$100,000 and \$249,999. They are joined by Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Bruckheimer and Gloria and Emilio Estefan. The American Express Foundation takes top billing on this list, committing \$10 million dollars.

Montgomery Home in Mound Bayou, Mississippi.²⁴⁷ The National Trust for Historic Preservation works in conjunction with state historic preservation offices, and has helped states create and staff these offices in the past. With the growth that the NTHP has continually shown since its inception, the National Trust for Historic Preservation should build upon its reputation as the nonprofit leader in historic preservation.

The White House Conference on Natural Beauty

In a speech to Congress in February of 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson sparked a national movement for national beautification efforts. “Three years, to the day, after the White House Conference on Conservation was called by the late President Kennedy,” one thousand conferees attended The White House Conference on Natural Beauty.²⁴⁸ In his remarks on May 25, 1965, President Johnson reminded the attendees of his duties as Commander-in-Chief overseeing the “problems in Viet-Nam and the Dominican Republic.”²⁴⁹ He also spoke of his fondness for the American countryside and how “The force of natural beauty—its meaning to the life of man—infuses art and culture throughout the Western civilization . . . And nowhere has it played a greater role than here in our beloved America.”²⁵⁰ Johnson’s speech places conservation and natural beauty as one of the nation’s most important virtues and treasures. In so doing he also

²⁴⁷ National Trust for Historic Preservation, “Discover America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places for 2018,” (Washington D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, June 26, 2018), <https://savingplaces.org/stories/11-most-endangered-places-2018#.XBE9IxNKhTY>.

²⁴⁸ Charles E. Randall, “White House Conference on Natural Beauty,” *Journal of Forestry*, 63, no. 8 (August 1965), 609, accessed April 19, 2021, <https://doi-org.www2.lib.ku.edu/10.1093/jof/63.8.609>.

²⁴⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks to the Delegates to the White House Conference on Natural Beauty,” (speech, Washington, D.C., May 25, 1965,) The American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-delegates-the-white-house-conference-natural-beauty>.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

points to the evils threatening to steal this virtue, the primary being urbanization. In keeping with the urgency and militarism of the time, Johnson stated:

Today, natural beauty has new enemies and we need new weapons to fight those enemies . . . Urbanization is another modern threat . . . Cities themselves then grow and spread, often devastating the countryside . . . And far too often we finish the marvels of progress, only to find that we have diminished the life of man.²⁵¹

Johnson commended the attendees for their dedication to beautification and conservation and gave particular thanks to notable philanthropist and conservationist, Laurance Rockefeller. He urged the attendees to contact their local and state officials and promised to take the recommendations of the conference to Congress.²⁵² And he did: the day after the conference had adjourned, President Johnson sent several legislative proposals to Congress urging for highway landscaping and billboard-removal funds.²⁵³ With the help of Congress, the President and First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson, established a federal program for highway beautification with the Highway Beautification Act of 1965. Though this and other significant conservation projects resulted from the conference, one of the most significant moments of the national historic preservation movement was also conceived of at The White House Conference on Natural Beauty.

With Heritage So Rich (1966) was started by a special Committee on Historic Preservation formed during The White House Conference on Natural Beauty.²⁵⁴ This special committee, in tandem with the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and funded by the Ford Foundation, produced *With*

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Randall, "White House Conference," 609.

²⁵⁴ Lea, "America's Preservation Ethos," in *A Richer Heritage*, 10.

Heritage So Rich, a book about the historic preservation crisis of the time.²⁵⁵ This two-hundred and thirty page book contains numerous images, essays by prominent architects, preservationists, and historians, and a foreword by First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson. Though hastily published, *With Heritage So Rich* “was a clarion call” for preserving our nation’s historically significant buildings and sites.²⁵⁶ The book “was a significant and well-planned step in obtaining Congressional approval for new Federal legislation establishing a program for the preservation of additional historic properties throughout the nation.”²⁵⁷ The immediate effect of this book’s publication in 1966 was the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of the same year. The final chapter of the book offers findings and recommendations. It is these same findings and recommendations that formed the main goals and implementations of the NHPA.

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 changed the course of American heritage and national memory. This Act fought to preserve historically significant architecture and sites and offered financial incentives for preservation. No other single piece of legislature has had such an impact on the landscape of historic preservation and public memory. This Act was a federal response to the rapid construction of the suburbs, highways, and city centers.²⁵⁸ This law also created national standards by which historic sites would be measured and an organizational framework for the identifying, surveying, nominating, and preserving of historically significant sites.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 11.

²⁵⁷ Frederick L. Rath, “With Heritage So Rich: A Report of a Special Committee on Historic Preservation under the Auspices of the United States Conference of Mayors with a Grant from the Ford Foundation (Book Review),” *New York History* 48, no. 1 (1967), 115.

²⁵⁸ Fisher, “Promoting the Preservation,” 7.

Through this legislation, the National Park Service became the federal agency charged with administering and maintaining the National Register of Historic Places, a catalogue of the nation's most historic sites. The National Park Service had previously administered the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings of 1935, so national historic preservation was a familiar arena for the organization.²⁵⁹ Along with the National Register came the Historic Preservation Fund, which offers “matching grants-in-aid” toward eligible preservation projects through its work with State Historic Preservation Officers.²⁶⁰ The language of the NHPA also called for the creation of “an independent federal agency,” so the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) began.²⁶¹ The primary scope of the ACHP is that it assists other federal agencies in their historic preservation projects.²⁶² The Council is composed of twenty-three federally appointed, members some from the public, some experts, and others representing different cabinets of the government. Together the council manages an office focused on education, preservation initiatives, federal program oversight, and Native American affairs. Given the widespread involvement of many federal departments in historic preservation, the ACHP is critical to coordinating efforts between agencies as well as managing their own funding projects like the Preserve America grant program.

The fervor for historic preservation was spreading—ignited by this new legislation and the nation's impending bicentennial celebration.²⁶³ Initially, government officials believed that the National Register of Historic Places would be a static list, that once identified, nominated, and

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 8.

²⁶¹ Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, “ACHP Fact Sheet,” (Washington, D.C.: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, 2018).
https://www.achp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2018-06/AboutTheACHPFactSheet2015v3_1.pdf

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Lea, “America's Preservation Ethos,” in *A Richer Heritage*, 12.

approved, the catalog of the nation's historically significant sites could be concretized, and the focus of government agencies could shift from tallying to preserving the set register. They did not expect the National Register of Historic Places to be a dynamic, ever-expanding catalog—a list that changed and morphed as our definitions of “historically significant” developed. Upon realizing this, the President Nixon issued an executive order instructing federal agencies to begin preservation and restoration efforts on any federally owned sites or buildings on the register.²⁶⁴ However, funds for restoration and preservation for the remaining, non-federal properties were limited and overstretched leaving many historic sites and buildings in need of repair.

One of the most significant changes to the historic preservation movement of this time was the implementation of tax credits and incentives for historic preservation. For the first ten years of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the federal tax code created more economic benefits for new construction than it did for preservation or reuse.²⁶⁵ Once the federal tax code was amended to favor preservation and reuse, “rehabilitations that preserved the historic character of a building could be certified for tax credits.”²⁶⁶

As a result of the changes in federal tax code, the costs of restoration and preservation began to match those of new construction, making the task of preserving historically significant buildings much more affordable. In addition, the federal tax code removed some of the financial incentives of demolition, thereby curtailing some of the nation's urban sprawl.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 10.

²⁶⁵ Fisher, “Promoting the Preservation,” 8.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Lea, “America's Preservation Ethos,” in *A Richer Heritage*, 12.

Federal Historic Tax Credit and National Economic Benefits

Since 1978 and through 2015, the \$23.1 billion dollars in the Federal Historic Tax Credit (HTC) generated \$120.8 billion in historic rehabilitation, created 2,361,000 jobs, and added \$134.7 billion to the nation's GDP.²⁶⁸ In the most recent National Park Service HTC report from 2017, the tax credits helped create 106,846 jobs and \$5.8 billion in private investment.²⁶⁹ The 2017 HTC annual report and the 2015 HTC economic impact report also investigate the impact of the HTC on housing. There were concerns in the early years of the HTC that these credits would support gentrification of urban neighborhoods, when really the tax credits have created over 160,058 low- and moderate-income housing units since 1977.²⁷⁰ Despite the forward-moving, future-focused attitudes of the 1960s, the National Historic Preservation Act encouraged both the public and businesses to consider the historic value of American material culture and to invest in the past, not just the future.

The federal tax code reforms and the HTC not only incited growth of the historic preservation movement and a paradigm shift away from demolition and new construction toward preservation, but these tax reforms mark “a significant shift from public-sector involvement to private-sector initiative.”²⁷¹ Whereas the government's legislating bodies and previous Presidents, like Johnson, saw historic preservation as the project and duty of the state, these tax

²⁶⁸ Center for Urban Policy Research, “Annual Report on the Economic Impact of the Federal Historic Tax Credit for FY 2015,” Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy (Rutgers, NJ: The State University of New Jersey, 2016), <https://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives/taxdocs/economic-impact-2015.pdf>,

²⁶⁹ Technical Preservation Services, “Federal Tax Incentives for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2017,” (Washington, D.C.: National Park Services, 2017). <https://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives/taxdocs/tax-incentives-2017annual.pdf>

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*; Fisher, “Promoting the Preservation,” 8.

²⁷¹ Tyler, et al, *Historic Preservation*, 54.

reforms and credits place much of the responsibility of preservation in the hand (and pockets) of private investors.

National Nostalgia

With both the Cold War and the Vietnam War increasing the anxieties of the nation, the historic preservation movement, with its new federal legislation, worked to mollify some of these wartime anxieties by focusing on the nation's former greatness. Historic preservation is a political project and for the United States, one rooted in nationalism and an ideology of United States supremacy.

In choosing to preserve, one must also choose what to preserve. When national preservation efforts begin, the choices made reflected the ideologies, values, and goals of the state. The project of memory and commemoration is political and “the practice of historic preservation and the (re)creation of places of memory provide a means through which the nation and national territoriality are produced and reproduced.”²⁷² Memory has long been used to stir up nationalism. Pierre Nora observes that the rise of the “memory boom” in the late nineteenth century was synchronous with the rise of nationalism in Europe. For Nora, history, memory, and the nation are in “symbiosis at every level.”²⁷³ That and how and what a nation chooses to remember shape the national identity and reinforce particular ideologies, most often those of superiority and/or exceptionalism.²⁷⁴

²⁷² Joshua Hagen, “Historic preservation in Nazi Germany: Place, memory, and nationalism,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 35, no. 4 (2009), 693.

²⁷³ Pierre, Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire,” *Representations*, no. 26 (1989), 10.

²⁷⁴ Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, eds. *The Collective Memory Reader*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

During the uncertainty of the 1960s, this movement emphasized anchoring our national present in its past by focusing less on new development and growth, and its urban sprawl and highway expansions, and more on retaining the landmarks and materiality of the past. The first section of the NHPA states:

The Congress finds and declares that—

- (1) the spirit and direction of the Nation are founded upon and reflected in its historic heritage;
- (2) the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people;
- (3) historic properties significant to the Nation's heritage are being lost or substantially altered, often inadvertently, with increasing frequency;
- (4) the preservation of this irreplaceable heritage is in the public interest so that its vital legacy of cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic, and energy benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans;
- (5) in the face of ever-increasing extensions of urban centers, highways, and residential, commercial, and industrial developments, the present governmental and nongovernmental historic preservation programs and activities are inadequate to insure future generations a genuine opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the rich heritage of our Nation . . .²⁷⁵

At once this section of the NHPA establishes a link between the citizens of a nation and their past and future. This section expresses urgency in protecting and preserving any aspect of national cultural heritage with “cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic, and energy

²⁷⁵ National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, Public Law 89-665, USC. 470 (1966).

benefits.”²⁷⁶ The interest in preserving aspects of national heritage deemed “inspirational,” suggests how important the myth of American exceptionalism is to the national identity and history. It also seems antithetical to the United States’ military attitudes at the time that Americans should be discouraging haphazard growth and expansion in favor of preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration. Though this single piece of legislation put in motion an unceasing movement for historic preservation.

Much like the heavy emphasis on American Colonialism as cherished by the early women’s voluntary associations, the federal legislation of the 1960s still encouraged a narrative of American exceptionalism and a national nostalgia for early America. These memories and the preservation projects often left out women, the enslaved and their descendants, the indigenous, the poor, and more recent immigrants. It was not until later in the twentieth century that historic preservationists and the federal government began to expand the interpretations and the definition of “national heritage” for the United States.

Missouri’s Historic Preservation

Early Historic Preservation Projects

Though an impetus for faster and further preservation acts, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 was not the starting point for Missouri’s historic preservation movement. Starting in the 1920s with the support of the state organization of the DAR, Missouri’s historic preservation campaign began. The Missouri chapter of the DAR petitioned and raised funds to save the Old Tavern of 1834 in Arrow Rock, which once served travelers along the Santa Fe Trail. The state chapter’s project clearly fell in line with the goal of historic

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

preservation set forth by the national organization. Even though Missouri was established well after the American Revolution, the parameters of history worth preserving was expanding past the Revolution, which gave states in the West an opportunity to preserve their moments of early white settlement. With the funds earned, the organization partially restored the tavern.²⁷⁷ The Missouri chapter of the NSDCA acquired several homes in and helped establish the French-colonial historic district of Ste. Genevieve, Missouri. Similar private organizations worked to recognize and restore other buildings and sites significant in Missouri's history, while the Missouri Park Board acquired over a dozen landmarks and buildings related to famous Missourians, significant battlefields, and prehistoric archaeological sites.²⁷⁸

Missouri Historic Buildings and Sites Survey

In 1957 the State Historical Society of Missouri began a survey of Missouri's historic buildings and sites. The State Historical Society had a goal in mind when they embarked on this survey. They were interested in "collect[ing] and [preserving] . . . a record of the tangible reminders of Missouri's past for the use of present and future historians."²⁷⁹ Moving this survey along was "the increasing interest . . . in searching out the evidence of their historic past as it is preserved in buildings, monuments, and markers."²⁸⁰ There was a national call from the President of the American Association for State and Local History for state and local action. It was assumed that the more historical sites surveys conducted would reveal more important histories and sites that could fight against "the land condemnation and utilization activities of the

²⁷⁷ Missouri State Park Board, "Foundations from the Past," (Columbia, MO: State Historical Survey and Planning Office, 1971), 16.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Dorothy Caldwell, ed., *Missouri Historic Sites Catalogue* (Columbia, MO: The State Historical Society of Missouri, 1963), vii.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

new Federal Interstate Highway System.”²⁸¹ Though there was a clear and practical reason for instituting state and local historic sites surveys across the country, the cultural context of the Cold War points to a moment of renewed interest in the project of American exceptionalism.

The State Historical Society of Missouri relied on previous historic preservation projects and practices for this survey. They relied on the evaluation procedures and standards used in the American Buildings Survey of the 1930s when creating their own process for evaluation and documentation.²⁸² The State Historical Society received 1,716 photographs and information on 2,391 sites in the state before compiling and publishing an abridged version of the survey as the *Missouri Historic Sites Catalogue* (1963). This book and archive would become one of the earliest and most important in Missouri’s historic preservation history.

State Historic Preservation Office

Following the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, state governments were required to fall in line and establish a State Historic Preservation Officer, or Office. In Missouri, then Governor Warren E. Hearnes chose Joseph Jaeger, Jr., who was Director of the Missouri State Park Board, to serve as the State Liaison Officer for compliance and implementation with the NHPA.²⁸³ In 1968 the Missouri State Historic Survey and Planning Office was created through the Historical Division of the Missouri State Park Board. By 1971, this office had catalogued over 3,500 historic sites and properties, 130 of which were nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.²⁸⁴ The first successful nomination from the Historic Survey and Planning Office was the Lohman’s Landing Building built in 1834 in the Missouri

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Missouri State Park Board, “Foundations from the Past,” 8.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 11.

capital, Jefferson City. The Lohman's Landing Building was the site of Jefferson City's earliest enterprises and governance. This historic building is three-stories tall and was once the tallest building in the state's new capital. It housed a tavern, hotel, grocery store, telegraph office, and warehouse. After Jefferson City's business and river activity diminished, the site was less useful and became a storage facility. Later in the twentieth century, it became home to a shoe factory and was eventually purchased by the Missouri government to be demolished and paved for a municipal parking lot in the 1960s. Concerned and active citizens fought to place the building on the National Register of Historic Places, to which it was added in February of 1969.²⁸⁵ For Missouri, the Lohman's Landing Building is the symbol of historic preservation and was adopted as the state's bicentennial preservation project in 1974, opening its newly restored doors to the public on July 4, 1976.²⁸⁶

As outlined in many early government reports, Missouri's primary goal in the historic preservation movement was to hold on to the materiality of the state's past. In the first report of the Missouri State Historical Survey and Planning Office, Governor Hearnes discusses how important "evidence of the pre-historic and historic peoples" of Missouri is and why "these tangible remains represent the archaeological, architectural, and historical features of the State and reveal the ambition and perseverance of former Missourians."²⁸⁷ The state of Missouri's priorities regarding preservation aligned well with the national goals of the time, though for

²⁸⁵ State Historic Preservation Office, "Our Sense of Place: Preserving Missouri's Cultural Resources, Missouri's Comprehensive Statewide Historic Preservation Plan," (Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Department of Natural Resources, 2017), 6.

²⁸⁶ "Jefferson Landing State Historic Site," Missouri State Parks, last accessed February 16, 2021, <https://mostateparks.com/page/55184/jefferson-landing-state-historic-site>; "Lohman's Landing Building," *National Register of Historic Places*, National Parks Service, last accessed February 16, 2021, <https://dnr.mo.gov/shpo/nps-nr/69000094.pdf>.

²⁸⁷ Missouri State Park Board, "Foundations from the Past," 3.

Weston, historic preservation was obviously about preserving the local history, and more importantly, it was about assuring a local future.

In keeping with the parameters of the NHPA, the Missouri State Historic Survey and Planning Office published a report, “Foundations from the Past: Missouri’s Historic Preservation Program,” in 1971. This report was the first from the newly established office and outlines the status of historic preservation in the state and projects its future. The opening essay gives a brief timeline of historic preservation legislation and warns that “The fate of Missouri’s tangible heritage ultimately rests with individual property owners. If this heritage is to survive, all Missourians must come to realize the value it holds for present and future generations . . . Hopefully it is not too late.”²⁸⁸ The following essay highlights Missouri history while also explaining that the great progress the state has made in “rapidly [transforming] from rural to urban” might actually be at the root of the historic preservation crisis they were facing.²⁸⁹

Economic Benefits to Missouri

The economic benefits of historic preservation in Missouri have been significant. These benefits from preservation have a direct relationship with the state’s growth in heritage (or cultural) tourism. Though the federal historic tax credit that was introduced in the 1970s has been useful to Missouri’s preservation movement, the statewide historic tax credit, introduced in 1998, has made an immense impact on the economy of the state. Missouri offers a “25 percent tax credit for rehabilitation projects for both income-producing and residential properties listed in the National Register.”²⁹⁰ In a 2002 report from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources’

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁹⁰ State Historic Preservation Office, “Our Sense of Place,” 54.

State Historic Preservation Office, based on research funded by the Missouri Downtown Association, and carried-out by the Center for Urban Police Research at Rutgers University, this Missouri historic tax credit totaled \$74 million in investment in its first three years. Subsequently, this investment led to a total rehabilitation investment of \$295 million, 6,871 jobs within Missouri, \$121 million in income, \$283 in gross state product (GSP), \$25 million in state taxes, \$40 million in federal taxes, and \$249 million in in-state wealth.²⁹¹

The state and federal tax credit programs, in conjunction with the historic preservation enterprises on national, state, and local levels, have also led to a substantial growth in heritage tourism. For the state of Missouri, the economic impact of heritage tourism, in the same 2002 report, has caused in-state wealth totaling \$506 million, 20,077 jobs, \$325 million in income, \$574 million in GSP, and taxes amounting to \$148 million.²⁹² The Missouri Division of Tourism estimates that between 2015-2017 Missouri received an average of 5,196,840 visitors per year who participated in an activity related to arts and culture. The Division of Tourism defines these activities as visiting “art galleries, historic sites/churches, museums, musical theaters, Native American ruins, local/folk arts and crafts, old homes/mansions, or attending theater/drama performances, symphony/opera/concert events and other musical performances/shows.”²⁹³ The State Historic Preservation Office estimates that since 2011, preservation projects in Missouri have been awarded \$1,374,389 and Missourians have invested \$2,269,579 in historic preservation, all of which has led to 236 new listings in the National Register of Historic

²⁹¹ State Historic Preservation Office, “Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation in Missouri,” (Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Department of Natural Resources, 2002), 11.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁹³ Lorinda Cruikshank, “The Arts & Culture Traveler in Missouri During Fiscal Years 2015 – 2017,” *Missouri Division of Tourism*, March 26, 2018.

Places.²⁹⁴ While there is no more recent report on the economic impact of historic preservation in Missouri than the Rutgers study, the 2011-2017 Comprehensive Statewide Historic Preservation Plan produced by the State Historic Preservation Office boasts an overall investment of \$5,407,163,481 since the inauguration of the statewide historic tax credit. Filling in the gap years between the 2002 and 2011 reports, the ongoing impact of the Missouri historic tax credit is undeniable.

Weston's Historic Preservation

There is no doubt that earlier in the twentieth century, citizens of Weston celebrated its history in some fashion, though the bulk of their historic preservation began in the late 1950s, coinciding with, or perhaps launched by, the Historic Buildings and Sites Survey. The statewide survey of historic sites initiated by the State Historical Society of Missouri included a number of sites from Platte County, with most featuring Weston. Of the forty-six listings from Platte County in the *Missouri Historic Sites Catalogue*, twenty-two are from Weston. The listings feature a number of Weston's antebellum homes, especially those tied to Benjamin Holladay, churches, and the Holladay Distillery.²⁹⁵ The overwhelming number of listings from Weston, compared to towns like Platte City and Parkville, demonstrate an organized zeal for Weston's history on the part of its citizens, since the survey relied on them to send in written information and photographs on the historic sites. It was most likely not the first time, and certainly not the last time, that Weston's citizens celebrated and shared its history.

²⁹⁴ State Historic Preservation Office, "Economic Impacts," 16.

²⁹⁵ Caldwell, *Missouri Historic Sites Catalogue*, 133-135.

Weston's Impending Death

For most of the twentieth century, some Weston residents and leaders were concerned that their hometown would dissolve and disappear from the Missouri landscape. Death, dying, and decay, were words frequently used to describe their fears. In Bertha Iseman Bless' history of Weston, she discusses the early fears that Weston would disappear after the Civil War. She notes that people left, stores were boarded up, and churches "succumbed to financial distress."²⁹⁶ Yet Weston held onto its people and agricultural tradition as best it could.

In 1942, when Weston's population was showing a considerable increase since the low of around 991 in 1920, residents worried that their small town and its accompanying way of life were dying. Prominent Weston newspaper woman, Bertha Bless, went so far as to write to President and Mrs. Roosevelt and publish these letters and their replies in her family's local newspaper the *Weston Chronicle*. In 1942 World War II preoccupied much of the nation and world's attentions. Bless' fear was that these war efforts—though considered just and supported by the residents of Weston—were endangering the future of small towns across America. She contended that the War had not only plucked able-bodied young men from the family tobacco farms but that it had also encouraged young workers to leave small towns in search of factory work in bigger cities. She says that all of this "sums up to a dislocation of small community life to an extent which holds frightening implications so far as the future of rural life is concerned."²⁹⁷ So important to Bless was the preservation of small towns and their way of life that she pled with the President, asking "Will America awaken in time to save her rural communities?"²⁹⁸ Weston survived the War, though with its population decreased. The town

²⁹⁶ Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 65.

²⁹⁷ Letter from Bertha I. Bless to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 14, 1942.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

grasped tightly to their tobacco industry, which produced the largest yield in the state, accounting for more than half of Missouri's annual harvest throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.

Weston Historical Society and Museum

In 1959 a group of Weston residents got together and formed the Weston Historical Society; Bertha Iseman Bless, who wrote a still-referenced history of Weston in 1969, was appointed President of the organization.²⁹⁹ Within a year this group had already raised funds and established the Weston Historical Museum. The museum was dedicated and first opened at the inaugural Historic Homes Tour on October 23, 1960.³⁰⁰ The Weston Historical Society's efforts mark a noticeable turn toward tourism as 3,500 visitors attended the first Historic Homes Tour.³⁰¹ The early contents of the museum are detailed by Bless in her book. She writes, "The focal point as one enters is the mural at the rear"; this mural was painted by Dr. R. J. Felling who served as the Museum's first President. Bless notes that Felling also constructed two dioramas (one being the "Prehistoric Platte County" diorama discussed in Chapter 1) and "arranged most of the exhibits."³⁰² In addition to Felling's original contributions were numerous material donations from Weston families. Bless writes, "Every object in the Museum was a part of the religious, educational, cultural or business life of Platte County, largely from the Weston area."³⁰³

Among the celebrated pieces of early Americana are photographs, maps, documents related to early steamboat enterprise, an American flag sewn by a local Confederate sympathizer who

²⁹⁹ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 122.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 95.

³⁰³ Ibid., 96.

flew the flag upside down at a local mill during the Civil War, old newspapers, another flag that traveled from Platte County to a battle during the Mexican-Indian Wars, a Bible containing a register of slave births, and “dishes used by Abraham Lincoln during his law school days.”³⁰⁴ Lincoln’s ties to Weston are a source of local pride as Weston was home to his “other Mary,” a woman who twice rejected his offer of marriage when he was a young lawyer in Illinois.³⁰⁵

Weston on the National Register of Historic Places

In the following decades, Weston’s interest and work toward a reputation as a tourist destination became more pronounced. These plans and projects coincide with state and national preservation endeavors. Following on the heels of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, Weston began research and preparation for their National Register of Historic Places application to the National Park Services. The twenty-five-page application contains thirty attached images which illustrate the proposed Weston Historic District, a twenty-two-block area of downtown. According to the application this proposed area of historical significance includes “approximately 200 structures of various age, design and function.”³⁰⁶ In late July of 1972, the application was prepared with assistance from the Missouri State Park Board and its submission to the National Park Services in Washington, D.C. was followed by several letters of support from Senators Stuart Symington (1953-1976) and Thomas F. Eagleton (1968-1987) of Missouri, and Congressman William R. Hull (1955-1973), a Weston native.³⁰⁷ Within a month, Weston’s

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ A new headstone was recently added to her gravesite and reads: “Abraham Lincoln’s Other Mary . . . Here Lies Mary Owens Vineyard who rejected Abraham Lincoln’s proposal of marriage in 1837.”

³⁰⁶ “Weston Historic District,” *National Register*, 2.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

application was approved and the Weston Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Weston Fends Off Death

At this time, Weston's downtown was in need of change. Several storefronts sat vacant or featured "For Sale" signs and a number of vital businesses were moving to the outskirts of town. The Bank of Weston, a prominent downtown fixture for decades, moved two miles from downtown onto Missouri Highway 45, so it could be near the town's only grocery store and pharmacy. Weston had very little retail shopping, so residents headed to the shopping malls of Kansas City's suburbs. There was very little nightlife to offer, especially with bars serving only beer, and the nearest movie theater was in Leavenworth, Kansas. Dr. Felling, president of the Weston Historical Museum, describes how insulated Weston was, even as Kansas City's growth and development began encroaching on their county. Dr. Felling noted that Weston could not house much industry, "because of the lack of a sewage system to handle such capacities."³⁰⁸ Though Weston would eventually grow some as a result of families looking to move out of Kansas City.

The more prominent debate discussed in the article is how to improve Weston's downtown. Some residents remarked on Weston's charm and how there needs to be "an effort to tell people what this town has to offer," while others in town emphasized Weston's agricultural roots. A local tobacco farmer stated, "This town is made of tobacco . . . Take away tobacco and Weston ain't much."³⁰⁹ The article continues on to note that so much of Weston's industries are tied up in vice, "many Weston residents say their town always will live and die on the economics of

³⁰⁸ Torriero, "Weston, Mo."

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

vices—liquor, wine and tobacco homegrown in their little town . . .”³¹⁰ While tobacco had long been an important crop and industry for Weston, it seems that a number of people in town were preparing for the eventual absence of tobacco in Weston. Through the efforts in the 1960s to celebrate Weston’s history and heritage in a museum and accompanying historic homes tours, Weston’s industry gradually shifted to include not only tobacco and alcohol production but also tourism.

Downtown Weston Revitalization

In 1981, the Downtown Weston Revitalization Task Force (comprised of local business owners, town leadership, and interested citizens) was working on evaluating the specific needs for a downtown revitalization project. The town aldermen and the Weston Planning and Zoning Commission employed the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), a “nonprofit association of city and county governments and the metropolitan planning organization for the bistate Kansas City region,” to survey the downtown area, business owners, and residents.³¹¹ In March and April of 1981, MARC drafted two surveys and findings reports: one titled “Weston Residential Shopping Habits and Opinion Survey,” and the other, “Downtown Weston Parking and Traffic Condition Survey.”³¹² The goal of the shopping survey was to determine the habits and needs of downtown residents and the obstacles faced when shopping in downtown Weston. The Task

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ “What is MARC?” Mid-America Regional Council, last accessed February 6, 2021, <https://www.marc.org/About-MARC/General-Information/What-is-MARC>.

³¹² Downtown Weston Revitalization Task Force and Mid-America Regional Council. *Downtown Weston Parking and Traffic Condition Survey*. Mid-American Regional Council. Kansas City, MO: Mid-America Regional Council, 1981; Downtown Weston Revitalization Task Force and Mid-America Regional Council. *Weston Residential Shopping Habits and Opinion Survey*. Mid-American Regional Council. Kansas City, MO: Mid-America Regional Council, 1981.

Force and MARC sent out letters and postage-included surveys to 550 Weston households.³¹³

The letters express the urgency of the survey and expected revitalization: “. . . economics and neglect are threatening the future vitality of our downtown. Local businesses are closing, historic buildings are decaying, and fewer people are coming downtown . . . Downtown Weston is dying.”³¹⁴

The results of their survey help paint a picture of downtown Weston in the early eighties. Of the responding surveys, the report concludes the following age distribution in Weston: 40% of households identified as “elderly” or over 60 years old and almost evenly split between single and double occupancy homes; 35% of the households identified as families; 13% identified as two adults between 19-60 years old; 7% identified as single adult households; and another 5% identified as “others,” meaning a multi-generational household or adults living with the elderly.³¹⁵ The survey also tracked income distribution with 45% of those surveyed identifying as low income, or under \$20,000 a year; 45% as middle income or between \$20,000 and \$40,000 a year; and 10% as high income, or over \$40,000 a year.³¹⁶ One of the key findings apparent from the survey was “the general attitude Weston residents displayed towards their downtown . . . the residents of Weston are truly [*sic*] concerned about their downtown [which] . . . is still an important shopping area for many residents although the goods and services available downtown are limited.”³¹⁷ The town pride was certainly apparent, but so were the frustrations about how little the downtown had to offer its residents.

³¹³ Downtown Weston, *Weston Residential Shopping*.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Figure A.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Table A.

³¹⁶ Downtown Weston, *Weston Residential Shopping*, 3. The survey yielded a 28% response rate (208 surveys returned) in its first stage of mailing. The team concluded that they had a sufficient cross-section of the town represented in the responses.

³¹⁷ Downtown Weston, *Weston Residential Shopping*, 2.

The MARC survey and report made a number of conclusions about and recommendations regarding parking, traffic, and shopping in the downtown district of Weston. The research noted that parking congestion and unavailability was keeping a number of residents from making the downtown district their primary shopping stop: “Street parking, especially along Main, is full from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. creating a shortage of convenient public parking spaces . . .”³¹⁸ The report also comments on the parking shortages during seasonal activities like the annual tobacco market and the historic home tours. The traffic conditions fared better in that they allow normal daily usage except during the tobacco market and the home tours. Though the report commented that the physical road conditions do need improvement.

The MARC report on the shopping habits of the town features a table with a list of respondents’ problems with shopping downtown. The biggest issue is parking, followed by “narrow unsafe streets—dirty, unmarked,” and “unattractive downtown area—dirty, deteriorating.”³¹⁹ The outcome of this survey offers a clear, and somewhat gloomy, depiction of the condition of downtown Weston in the early 1980s. In addition to this bleak view of Weston, there were debates among residents as to how or what Weston should improve.

A year after the MARC survey and report were completed, *The Kansas City Times* published an article on Weston with the headline: “Weston, Mo.: Residents differ on town’s need to change image.”³²⁰ This article was the twelfth in a series “peering into the state of our towns, checking the pulse of mid-America.”³²¹ This article opens with a quote from Barbara Bless, granddaughter of Bertha I. Bless and one of the many Bless family members who worked for the

³¹⁸ Downtown Weston, *Downtown Weston Parking*, 3.

³¹⁹ Downtown Weston, *Weston Residential Shopping*, Table E.

³²⁰ Torriero, “Weston, Mo.” This article was first found in the George Erlich collection at the SHSMO.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

Weston Chronicle. In this quote, Bless speaks to the sentiment that the more Weston changes, “the more it stays the same.”³²² The story continues with a quote from a recent emigrant to the area who “fled Kansas City” for life in a small town. After these kind words about Weston, the article begins to discuss the feelings of others in town who find that Weston does not change and is far behind the times. For example, in 1981 and 1982, local tavern owners were battling with the mayor and aldermen over the municipal prohibition against selling liquor by the glass. Bar-owners could only sell beer by the glass, and local tavern-owner, Sharon Cain commented on this ordinance: “The people in this town think they are living in the early 1900s . . . It’s no wonder when kids grow up they get out of here. What’s in Weston to keep them?”³²³

Since the 1980s, Weston has seen consistent population growth and an enlivened interest in local history. Weston’s downtown shop windows have been at full occupancy for a while though the businesses anchoring Main Street do not necessarily speak to the needs expressed by residents in the MARC survey.

Weston Development Company, Later, the Chamber of Commerce

Following the eighteen-month MARC study commissioned by the Weston Planning and Zoning Commission, a local non-profit civic organization was suggested. In order to create new business to replace the deteriorating downtown center, some business owners and municipal leaders in Weston focused on growing local business and tourism and established the Weston Development Company (WDC) in 1982. The primary goal of the WDC was to “revitalize downtown Weston and to do so they would promote tourism, look for new business, and apply for grants to aid the improvement of the physical appearance of Weston.”³²⁴ In the October 15,

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ *The Weston Chronicle*, “W.D.C. . . .” (Weston, MO), October 15, 1982.

1982 edition of *The Weston Chronicle*, the WDC's immediate and long-term goals are outlined for the residents of Weston. The "expressed intention of the civic-minded organization" was "the promotion and revitalization of Weston."³²⁵ The article discussed the group's plans for their first sponsored event, the Historic Weston Craft Fair, a plan to create locally-based tours, as the present tours are usually conducted by people from Kansas City who bring in groups of tourists, a proposed gas tax that would generate income for the upkeep of the downtown area, and the WDC's stance on the controversial liquor-by-the-drink ordinance.³²⁶

The organization, "composed of local businessmen and women and interested citizens" agreed on a few main ideas and those were: that Weston's history should be an important part of its economic future, that the liquor-by-the-drink ordinance should be passed so as to encourage business downtown, and that revitalization of the downtown was an absolutely necessary step to secure their position as a tourist destination.³²⁷ McCormick Distillery, now Holladay Distillery, awarded the Weston Development Company a \$10,000 grant with the purpose of promoting the town's tourism.³²⁸

The WDC spearheaded a facade study of the downtown district with funds procured from a Missouri state historic preservation grant. This study highlighted the areas needing the most improvement and also promoted the use of tax credits through the Neighborhood Assistance Program of Missouri.³²⁹ Soon after, the Weston Development Company worked with the City Council to establish a Historic Building District by ordinance.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 124.

³²⁹ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 125.

The City of Weston Bill 988 explains that Chapter 89 of the Revised Statutes of Missouri gives the town the power to create and enforce historic preservation standards. The ordinance also explains that “The preservation of historic landmarks promotes the public welfare and serves a public purpose by providing education, enrichment and inspiration to the residents of the City, and by maintaining a civic cultural environment conducive to the conservation of property values.”³³⁰ The ordinance affected two city blocks downtown and established the Planning and Zoning Commission as the arbiters of historic preservation in Weston.

Before 1983, Weston’s Planning and Zoning Commission, comprised of the Mayor and several town aldermen and some community members, had largely tackled issues relating to the construction and zoning of new buildings as well as the general upkeep of the downtown area. With the passage of Bill 988 in 1983, the Planning and Zoning Commission birthed the Weston Historic Preservation Commission, a group whose primary goal was to improve the appearance of downtown Weston. Much of their early work as a Commission involved arbitrating (and often instigating) debates about loose dogs, signage, and paint colors downtown.

Community Development Block Grant

In 1985, Weston was awarded a Community Development Block Grant that offered city and state money (\$1.00 from each) for downtown maintenance (street lights, sidewalks, parking lots, etc.) for every \$2.00 spent on renovating or preserving a building downtown.³³¹ The city of Weston matched the grant funds and contributed \$124,000 toward the renewal of the

³³⁰ *The Weston Chronicle*, “Historic Building District Is Proposed for Downtown,” (Weston, MO), September 23, 1983.

³³¹ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 125..

downtown.³³² In its first four years, the Weston Development Company helped support downtown business growth, which grew from 36 business owners to 62.³³³

During its tenure, the WDC, which changed its name to the Weston Chamber of Commerce after 2000, has sponsored numerous events to encourage tourism. Some of the annual events are Applefest, the Candlelight Homes Tour, and other events like antiques shows, quilting fairs, and craft fairs.³³⁴ As a result of events like these and a renewed and fervent interest in promoting Weston's historic charm, 92 new businesses opened, more than 30 building facades were restored, more than 20 buildings were completed renovated, and 60 part- and full-time jobs were created in the first ten years of the Weston Development Company and the Historic Preservation Commission.³³⁵

The WDC has been incredibly successful at most of these goals and by 2018 has instituted monthly and yearly events that bring in thousands of visitors and created tourist sites and events based on Weston's history, all with funds from numerous grants. Weston has received Community Block Development Grants through the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Preserve America Grant.

Funding for Tourism

In 2003, the Weston Chamber of Commerce proposed a half-cent sales tax to support a Weston Information Center for tourists. It was estimated in the article that this tax could bring in as much as \$75,000 a year for the information center run by the WDC. At this time, the WDC's sole source of revenue were its three annual events and as reported in this article, two of the three

³³² "Weston—A Chronology" by Weston Development Company.

³³³ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*, 125.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ "Weston—A Chronology" by Weston Development Company.

events did not generate enough revenue in the previous year, so the WDC was unable to create an operating budget for the following year. The matter was proposed in a bill to the Missouri Legislature, that was, at the time of the article, passed and only in need of the Governor's signature.³³⁶ Upon endorsement by the Governor, the residents of Weston would then need to vote on the matter. The tourism sales tax passed and at present Weston collects two and three-eighths cents and allocates three-eighths of a cent to tourism and two-thirds of that to the Chamber of Commerce. The tourism sales tax paints a picture of Weston's economic growth and tourist activity over the last fifteen years. The City Clerk, Kim Kirby, noted that the tourism sales tax is a retail tax that is paid by residents of Weston and tourists alike. Despite the source, the numbers point to an upward trend of retail business and tourism in the town.

³³⁶ Scott Lauck, "Bill gives boost to Weston tourism," *St. Joseph News-Press* (St. Joseph, MO), May 27, 2003.

Year	Tourism Sales Tax Revenue	Funds to the Chamber of Commerce
2004	\$17,637.37	\$11,758.25
2005	\$51,242.24	\$34,161.49
2006	\$56,133.71	\$37,422.47
2007	\$62,161.53	\$41,441.02
2008	\$64,053.90	\$42,702.60
2009	\$61,950.79	\$41,300.53
2010	\$57,113.79	\$38,075.86
2011	\$58,766.85	\$39,177.90
2012	\$63,352.62	\$42,217.08
2013	\$61,805.81	\$41,203.87
2014	\$65,170.53	\$43,447.02
2015	\$79,546.88	\$53,031.25
2016	\$80,250.94	\$53,500.63
2017	\$82,773.45	\$55,182.30
2018	\$79,373.66	\$52,915.77

Table 5. Weston's Annual Tourism Tax Revenue and Portion Given to Chamber of Commerce, in U.S. Dollars.³³⁸

Weston's interest in its own historic preservation has been a largely economic endeavor. This falls in line with some of the ideas and goals of the national movement for historic preservation, though it seems the earlier national efforts namely the National Historic Preservation Act, while emphasizing America's greatness and the strength of its past, did not consider just how economically beneficial historic preservation and the resulting heritage tourism industries would be to small towns like Weston. In the next chapter I will showcase particular events in Weston and connect them to larger discussions of heritage tourism, neoliberalism, and postmodernism.

³³⁸ "Tourism Tax" spreadsheet from e-mail correspondence with Weston City Clerk, Kim Kirby on April 30, 2019.

Chapter 3: Weston: Performing Heritage and “Preserving America”

“Weston is one of the most unique communities in Platte County, nestled in the hills along the Missouri River valley. It’s 1840’s-1850’s historic business district and surrounding area was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. Weston has become a regional destination by promoting its heritage. Weston features bed and breakfast inns, antebellum and Victorian homes, museums, churches, McCormick’s Distillery, and Pirtle Winery (house in an 1867 church). The recent renovation of the 1847 St. George Hotel, where steamboat captains once stayed has had a major effect on the economic vitality of Weston’s historic business district this year.”

— Letter from U.S. Representative Sam Graves in support of Weston’s Preserve America grant application³³⁹

Introduction

Weston may not have the boarded up Main Street storefronts like so many small towns do, but their storefronts reveal something else. The storefronts do not tell the story of a downtown that serves the needs of its residents. Downtown Weston’s Main Street sports several bed and breakfasts and hotels, two wine and alcohol tasting rooms, at least a dozen boutique shops, a number of which specialize in antiques, one that specializes in Celtic wool sweaters, one that sells hand poured candles of every fragrance, and another that exclusively sells yarn, fabric trimmings, beads, and buttons. There are two museums and a few art galleries. These Main Street blocks do not look like the Main Street that served the downtown residents of Weston for many years; this is not a downtown that helps its residents run their homes. There are a hardware shop, a law office, a church, restaurants, and a wholesale plant food and fertilizer warehouse that may cater more to the daily needs of the residents of Weston. Facing downtown decay, leaders in Weston thoroughly examined the need for revitalization and despite input from the town and outside planners about the specific needs of the residents in the area, Weston’s downtown has developed around its tourists and not its residents.

³³⁹ Letter from U.S. Representative Sam Graves to the Mayor of Weston, November 8, 2005, Historic Preservation Committee Folder. Weston City Hall Archives, Weston, MO.

In this chapter, “Weston: Performing Heritage and ‘Preserving America,’” I will examine how heritage and history are commodified in Weston for tourism and how this commodification fits into a larger postmodern framework of tourism, history, and capitalism. This chapter will discuss Weston’s eventually abandoned efforts at downtown revitalization in order to establish a tourism economy. I will also demonstrate how these decisions and this eventuality stem from larger shifts toward neoliberal handlings of preservation and the postmodern nature of tourism. Seen as a solution to economic struggles facing Weston and many small towns across the United States, the development of a heritage tourism economy relies on the neoliberal relationship between the private and public spheres resulting in economic gain. In Weston, efforts to revitalize the town for its residents were overtaken by efforts to commodify and exploit the historic aesthetic of the town. Local history was no longer being preserved so as to not be forgotten; it was being preserved so it could then be sold and consumed. A heritage tourism economy relies on a postmodern experience of history while largely serving the interests of business owners under the guise of keeping the town alive.

Heritage Tourism

While it showed up on the academic radar of scholars researching tourism, culture, and leisure in the early twentieth century, heritage tourism has only recently, or since the 1980s, taken off as a study in its own right.³⁴⁰ Heritage tourism research not only has a place in tourism studies journals, but also “journals in geography, sociology, political science, anthropology,

³⁴⁰ Dallen J. Timothy, “Making sense of heritage tourism: Research trends in a maturing field of study.” *Tourism Management Perspectives* 25 (2018), accessed February 16, 2021, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.11.018>.

archaeology, cultural studies, theater, history, economics and architecture.”³⁴¹ The field, though young, has matured and with this growth and development has come specialized journals, conferences, and associations in heritage tourism studies. Weaver explains that early heritage tourism “was initially construed in simple supply-side terms as visited spaces deemed, usually by experts, to constitute or contain the heritage of a destination.”³⁴² Timothy suggests that heritage tourism has had an already measurable impact on tourism studies and the tourism industry. He notes that “staged, whitewashed and stereotyped heritage” was the industry standard, but this staged heritage has made way in some places, particularly in the United States’ South, for “more balanced memories and impartial narratives.”³⁴³ The inclusion of narratives from enslaved people and an emphasis on the living and working conditions of the enslaved in the South reforms some plantation tourist sites, which previously spotlighted the lives of the enslaving aristocracy.³⁴⁴

Timothy provides a “generally accepted definition of heritage” as “that which we inherit from the past, use today and pass on to future generations.”³⁴⁵ Though Nuryanti traces the more generally accepted definition to a more specific origin of the word heritage, writing: “The word heritage in its broader meaning is generally associated with the word inheritance . . . heritage is viewed as part of the cultural tradition of a society.”³⁴⁶ In 1999, Amy Jordan Webb described heritage tourism programming as “rooted in a local landscape,” often located outside of urban centers, and usually addresses “the built environment and the cultural landscape” with a

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

³⁴² Weaver, “Contemporary tourism heritage.”

³⁴³ Timothy, “Making sense,” 179.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁴⁶ Nuryanti, “Heritage and Postmodern Tourism,” 249.

particular emphasis on historical context.³⁴⁷ What is clear in heritage tourism is the relationship between past, place, and preservation. Heritage tourism needs not only a place to mine for history and to attract visitors, but it also needs a past to share with the visitors. All of this brings up larger questions of heritage: whose heritage is worth preserving? How is heritage communicated and sold, especially when that heritage is Black or Indigenous?

A number of more recent opportunities for historic preservation and establishing a heritage tourism trade rely on a mutually beneficial relationship between local history and local business. Earlier efforts to preserve relied mostly on philanthropic or local support, yet more recently, the language of the Preserve America initiative encourages a neoliberal understanding of historic preservation and its value. Whereas previous legislation emphasized preserving heritage for heritage's sake, this initiative emphasizes the economic potential of heritage. Though for many urban centers and small towns, the only way to afford and promote historic preservation is by focusing on the economic benefits of potential heritage tourism.

National Heritage Tourism Efforts

There are several organizations that have worked on or are currently working on the study of cultural and heritage tourism in the United States. The federal government does not have one single office or department designated to heritage tourism, though heritage tourism affects a number of departments. Since the federal government owns and manages many acres of land that people often tour and visit, heritage tourism is more pervasive than it may seem. The Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management, National Parks Service, and National Register of Historic Places, the Department of Defense, the Department of Agriculture's United States

³⁴⁷ Amy Jordan Webb, "A Decade of Heritage Tourism," *Forum Journal & Forum Focus* 13, no. 4 (2015), last accessed February 16, 2021.

Forest Service, the National Scenic Byways branch of the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Commerce's Travel and Tourism Office and Office of Atmospheric Administration all have a stake in heritage tourism in the United States.³⁴⁸ Yet the attempts to organize and partner have started and stopped several times and are usually initiated by professionals at conferences, and though the partnerships have been productive, there is still no coordinated research initiative into the United States heritage tourism sector of the economy.

In 2005 the United States Department of Commerce and the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities held the 2005 U.S. Cultural and Heritage Tourism Summit. My research indicates that this is the first and only Summit on heritage tourism to be sponsored by a department of the federal government. The 2005 Summit was born out of the 1995 White House Conference on Travel and Tourism, where attendees and Commerce officials proposed lobbying for federal legislation establishing a national tourism office. The urgency of recommendations at the Conference stemmed from a four-year decline in foreign tourists and the need for more concerted advertising efforts.³⁴⁹ The 2005 Summit recognized the value of cultural and heritage tourism and the beneficial relationship between the heritage and historic preservation industry and the tourism sector.³⁵⁰ The report states, "Every place in America—rural area, small town, Native American reservation, urban neighborhood and suburban center—has distinctive cultural and heritage assets that can potentially attract visitors and their spending."³⁵¹ Research spurred by the Summit noted a 13% increase in cultural and heritage tourism in the years between 1995 and 2005. Despite these industry events and the recommendations and movements they

³⁴⁸ Phone call with Judy Rodenstein; "Partners in Tourism," *CulturalHeritageTourism.org*.

³⁴⁹ Edwin McDowell, "The White House Conference on Travel and Tourism produces a series of recommendations," *The New York Times* (New York City, NY), November 8, 1995.

³⁵⁰ Craine, "A Position Paper."

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

proposed, it appears that there is still no official cultural and heritage tourism body in charge of a national message of tourism. While the State Department facilitates tourism and travel, it does not oversee targeted advertising for cultural and heritage tourism. There is a National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO) that works in conjunction with the Department of Commerce and the International Trade Administration that focused on compiling data about trade and travel. Their goal is to “enhance the international competitiveness of the U.S. travel and tourism industry and increase its exports, thereby creating U.S. employment and economic growth.”³⁵² The National Travel and Tourism Office website was shut down as a result of the 2018-2019 federal government shutdown during my research, and upon its reopening, the low-quality website merely lists the organization’s mandate and a list of its staff and their contact information. Also included in this list are the areas of research covered by each of the research analysts in the office. These are the areas related to travel and tourism that this office researches:

- International Arrivals to the U.S.
- Canada-U.S. (inbound and outbound)
- Forecast of International Travel to the United States
- Lodging Industry Data
- Aviation Data (airlines and airports)
- Survey of International Air Travelers (SIAT)
- National Reports/Custom Reports (inbound/outbound)
- International Air Traffic Statistics (APIS/I-92) (inbound/outbound)
- U.S. Citizen Outbound Traffic
- International Arrivals to the U.S.
- Mexico-U.S. (inbound and outbound)
- International Visitor Spending (inbound/outbound)
- Travel & Tourism Satellite Account (economic impact)
- Travel Industry Employment Estimates
- I-94 Visitor Arrivals Program - International Arrivals to the U.S.
- Contracting Officer’s Representative (COR) for Acquisition Program

³⁵² “Contact the National Travel and Tourism Office,” U.S. Department of Commerce, last accessed February 16, 2021, <https://travel.trade.gov/about/overview.html>.

It is unclear where the data related to different sectors of the tourism industry would be, or if that data is collected at all by the NTTTO.³⁵³ A bigger concern for U.S. tourism is how to attract overseas visitors who may be deterred by the security obstacles in getting the required travel documents.³⁵⁴

Brand USA is a marketing initiative that advertises the United States as a tourist destination in foreign markets. One of the latest trends in tourism promotion is encouraging foreign travelers to visit less popular tourist sites in an effort to spread tourism around the United States. For example, in a recent paper from the Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration, the large number of Chinese travelers to the United States has created an opportunity to promote travel to locations outside of New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, the sites most frequented now.³⁵⁵ This can be a challenge as private tourist attractions, like Disneyworld and Disneyland, have their own marketing initiatives to attract overseas travelers.³⁵⁶

Brand USA's specific mission is to "increase incremental international visitation, spend, and market share to fuel the nation's economy and enhance the image of the USA worldwide."³⁵⁷ The organization was established through the Travel Promotion Act of 2009 and started operating in 2011.³⁵⁸ Brand USA works with local organizations and businesses to arrange visits from international journalists and travel agents, while also marketing specific tourist locations in

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Phone call with Judy Rodenstein.

³⁵⁵ "China – Travel and Tourism," U.S. Department of Commerce, July 30, 2019, <https://www.export.gov/apex/article2?id=China-Travel-and-Tourism>.

³⁵⁶ Phone call with Judy Rodenstein.

³⁵⁷ "Who We Are," BrandUSA, last accessed February 18, 2021, <https://www.thebrandusa.com/about/whoweare>.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

various states in promotional materials and at trade shows.³⁵⁹ In December of 2019 it was announced that legislation supporting the funding of Brand USA was reauthorized and signed into law “with strong bipartisan support,” funding the organization through the year 2027.³⁶⁰

In one of the current initiatives of Brand USA, they solicit videos made by local people for inclusion in their larger “Ask a Local” video which will show people from across the country speaking about their hometown. The call for submissions provides local communities interested in participating with tips on what to include in their video submission:

Is it real, honest and unscripted? (We want it.)

Silly or quirky? (Yep, want that too.)

Family fun and adventure? (Of course!)

Full of pride and emotion. (Do you even have to ask?)

Something you wouldn’t find in a travel guide? (Now we’re talking!)

Is it highlighting specific places visitors can go see and experience? (Abso-freakin’-lutely!)

Does it make us want to get on a plane right this instant? (Yasss.)

Is it warm and welcoming? (That’s the whole idea.)³⁶¹

These parameters, though loose, paint a picture of what aspects of a place are most interesting to tourists and most useful for creating a national tourism brand.

³⁵⁹ Brand USA, “How Brand USA Promotes Missouri,” Washington, DC: Brand USA, n.d.

³⁶⁰ Brand USA, “Brand USA Celebrates Reauthorization Through 2027,” Brand USA, December 19, 2019, last accessed March 7, 2021 <https://www.thebrandusa.com/videos/industry-communication/brand-usa-celebrates-reauthorization-through-2027>.

³⁶¹ “Ask a Local,” Brand USA, last accessed March 7, 2021, <https://www.thebrandusa.com/ask-a-local/information>.

Missouri's Department of Tourism and some local tourism boards and visitors' bureaus have partnered with Brand USA to promote locations like St. Louis, Springfield, Hannibal, St. Charles, Independence, and the city of Cuba. While their research and resources are not outwardly geared toward heritage or cultural tourism, their partnerships with places like St. Charles (the third oldest city in Missouri and a site visited by Lewis and Clark) and Hannibal (the birthplace of Mark Twain) demonstrate that Brand USA is willing to work with locations that offer historic and cultural attractions.

Missouri and Heritage Tourism

Most cultural and heritage tourism data is collected on a state level. The state of Missouri saw an annual average of 5,196,840 tourists who participated in a cultural or heritage activity between 2015 and 2017. This reflects a 12.7% share of the tourism pie for cultural and heritage events, which is slightly higher than the national average of 12.1%.³⁶² A Missouri Division of Tourism report from 2013 shows that Platte County had the 10th biggest economic impact from tourism in the state. They are also the 10th largest employer in tourism-related industries.³⁶³ Given Weston's proximity to Kansas City and the airport, and its reputation as a popular weekend or day trip location in Missouri, it is more than likely that Weston's tourist trade contributes significantly to the \$318,594,848 tourism-related expenditures for Platte County.

³⁶² Lorinda Cruikshank, "The Arts & Culture Traveler in Missouri."

³⁶³ Missouri Division of Tourism, "FY13 Economic Impact Analysis by Region and County," Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Division of Tourism, 2013.

Most Popular Activities of the Arts & Cultural Traveler By Percentage of Travelers' Participation			
Arts & Culture Activities		Top Other (Non-Arts & Cultural) Activities	
Musical performance/show	36.2%	Shopping	28.9%
Museums	31.6%	Rural sightseeing	18.2%
Historic sites/churches	20.8%	Fine dining	14.5%
Musical theater	19.9%	Urban sightseeing	11.8%
Theater/drama	14.5%	Theme/amusement/water parks	10.2%
Local/folk arts/crafts	8.6%	Visiting relatives	9.9%
Art galleries	8.3%	State park/monuments/recreation areas	8.6%
Old homes/mansions	6.5%	Visiting friends	8.1%
Symphony/opera/concert	6.3%	Zoos/aquariums/aviaries	6.9%
Native American ruins/rock art	0.9%	Gardens	5.1%

Table 6. The Arts & Culture Traveler in Missouri, 2015-2017.

(Please note that these activity percentages cannot be added together because travelers could report participation in multiple activities.)

Revitalization

Definitions of revitalization usually reference “life,” or “vitality,” and explain that revitalization is about returning, or bringing new life or vitality to something (from the Latin, *vita*: “life”). Revitalization in urban planning and development would seem to be the antidote to decay. Though in Weston’s case, the efforts toward revitalization did not bring new life to the town—at least not permanent new life. Instead, the push toward revitalization became a push for tourism. While success at tourism can, and for Weston, did, bring great things to a town, tourism does not bring long-lasting or permanent revitalization to a town. The needs of tourists differ greatly from the needs of residents.

Revitalization and tourism can, and often do, go hand-in-hand; what this chapter argues is that they each serve different masters. Revitalization serves the long-term residents of a particular area by providing important goods and services. While tourism can also benefit those

residents with added local tax revenue, it is primarily focused on benefiting local businesses that will continue to serve the needs of the tourist over the needs of the resident.

Weston's Attempt to Revitalize

In July of 1969, the Weston Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) released "A Comprehensive Community Plan" for Weston. This report was requested by the PZC, partially financed with a Housing and Urban Development grant, and researched by the General Planning and Resource Consultants firm in St. Louis over the previous twelve-month period. The scope of this project was to analyze Weston's existing conditions as they relate to growth, and with that, make projections and suggestions for Weston's future going out twenty years. This report generated its recommendations and projections for growth around the development of the new Kansas City International Airport and the accompanying development of Interstate-29.

This report made three population projections based on previous and current local, state, and national trends and expecting the highest amount of growth, that suggested Weston's population could potentially balloon from its 1,057 residents in 1960 to 6,500 residents in 1990, with over 40% of the population being school-aged.³⁶⁴ The middle-ground projection suggested a population of 4,800 by 1990, and the low-end projection estimated 3,300 resulting from "inadequate or inappropriate community planning and development."³⁶⁵ It should be noted that in 1968, Weston had a population around 1,260, showing a 16% increase in eight years; more rapid growth than the town had seen in sometime, so it would stand to reason that Weston would expect to ride this wave of growth over the next two decades. The report notes that "Although Weston has not enjoyed an excessive growth in population, it is expected that the surrounding

³⁶⁴ General Planning, *Comprehensive Community Plan*, 7.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

rural population will be moving to Weston seeking better job opportunities and a higher standard of living.”³⁶⁶ Though that is not what happened at all.

The report also makes note of the potential for growth stemming from preservation of Weston’s already historic assets. The report highlights a “virtually undeveloped” tourism economy centered on Weston’s history and architecture:

The historical significance of the county, which is best demonstrated by the City of Weston, has not yet been developed into a recognized asset . . . Promotion of site tours, festivals, restaurants, resorts, motels, and entertainment facilities would bring into realization a potentially large economic activity for Weston. As an example of the impact of the tourist trade in an area, the median family income within the Missouri Ozark area increased by 130% from 1949 to 1959, according to the U.S. Census.³⁶⁷

The report boldly claims that “If the data in this report is properly employed, the community can expect an increase in its ability to meet the problems and opportunities generally associated with urban growth and development.”³⁶⁸ And on this point, the report accurately predicted Weston’s future.

Where Is the Revitalization?

Weston did not develop into the 6,500, or 4,800, or even 3,300 resident-town as this 1969 planning report envisaged. It is clear across the board that Weston was less affected by Kansas City’s urban outgrowth than other parts of Platte County, which continued to grow. For example, the Comprehensive Community Plan anticipated an influx of young families with school-aged

³⁶⁶ General Planning, *Comprehensive Community Plan*, 9.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, ii.

children, estimating that the number of children in K-12 in 1990 would fall somewhere between 1,320 to 2,600, which would put a serious strain on the current school facilities that were accustomed to housing 544 to 823 K-12 students in the 1950s and 1960s.³⁶⁹ Some young families moved to Weston, but not in the droves expected.

Population/Age/Education

The Comprehensive Community Plan initiated in 1969 attempted to recast Weston as a suburb of Kansas City, Missouri, instead of acknowledging that the problems facing rural communities all over the country (suburban exodus, decline in small-scale agriculture, decay) were going to keep affecting Weston. The rural population of the early United States was 95% rural in the first United States Census. That number has continued its steep decline—never growing, only sometimes stagnating—and now 21% of the United States population resides in rural or small-town areas.³⁷⁰

Retail/Services

The gradual shift away from historic preservation as a piece of the revitalization puzzle and toward historic preservation as it serves tourism is revealed in the businesses and services available in Weston. Revitalization takes shape when communities invest in businesses and services which support the members of the community and draw them to areas previously run-down or seldom used. Tourism is focused on bringing large numbers of visitors outside the community to a notable location or event for a brief period of time. Some goals for each of these

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 55.

³⁷⁰ Housing Assistance Council, “Social, Economic, and Housing Conditions in Rural America,” Washington, DC: Housing Assistance Council, 2010.

enterprises overlap—improving the physical appearance of an area, attracting new businesses—but the ultimate difference is in the benefit. Community members benefit from revitalization; business owners benefit from tourism.

The 1969 Comprehensive Community Plan noted that Weston’s retail scene downtown was deteriorating. Even worse, “A significant percentage of all retail purchases are made outside of Weston.”³⁷¹ As a result, Weston’s retail industry was missing 20-30% of all grocery purchases, 85% of furniture purchases, 80% of automobile sales, 80% of clothing purchases, and 50% of large appliance purchases.³⁷² The research for the Plan revealed that most residents of Weston were patronizing businesses in and around Kansas City and St. Joseph, Missouri and Leavenworth, Kansas. The team behind the Plan identified retail as a problem and a drain down which local money was flowing, yet in the MARC survey of 1981, the same issues arose surrounding Weston’s retail industry.

At the time of the survey, and at present, there were two areas of concentrated retail space in Weston, one is downtown and the other is along Highway 45. Table C in the MARC survey notes that when not shopping downtown or along Highway 45, the surveyed residents shop in Leavenworth, Platte City, St. Joseph, and Kansas City. The MARC shopping survey was focused primarily on downtown Weston. The results of the survey highlighted the goods and services most people were using downtown for:

³⁷¹ General Planning, *Comprehensive Community Plan*, 18.

³⁷² *Ibid.*

Shopping Items	Percentage of Total Shopping Trips
Drugstore Goods	20.2%
Hardware/Building, Materials	14.4%
Beauty/Barber Services	14.2%
Doctor Services	11.1%
Banking	8.4%
Dental Services	7.0%
Food	5.2%
Auto Supplies/Repair	5.2%
Eating/Drinking out	4.9%
Tobacco/Liquor	3.3%
Laundry Services	2.9%
Entertainment	1.2%
Home Furnishings	1.2%
Hobby/Craft Supplies	.2%
Clothing	.1%
Department Store Goods	.1%

Table 7. "Ranking of Goods and Services Shopped for in Downtown Weston" from the MARC Weston Residential Shopping Habits and Opinion Survey, 1981.

The respondents paint a picture of what downtown Weston was like and what services there were in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The 1969 Plan noted that most clothing and home furnishing sales took place in other cities, and Table 3 reflects the continued absence of those services from downtown, and Weston at large. Respondents were asked to identify reasons they were not primarily shopping in downtown Weston. The two biggest reasons were: too little parking (107 responses) and "lack of business activity" (76).³⁷³ There were a number of problems reported (smell, condition of streets, narrow alleyways, dirtiness, loose dogs and cats³⁷⁴) related to various aspects of neglect³⁷⁴ and decay downtown. These are precisely the concerns that the Downtown Weston Revitalization Task Force and the Planning and Zoning Commission were trying to defeat.

³⁷³ Downtown Weston, *Weston Residential Shopping*, Table E.

³⁷⁴ The issue of loose dogs was often discussed in town planning meetings. From the minutes it seemed that one citizen was spearheading the discussion, and even offered to enlist his personal rifle to help.

When taking the survey, the respondents were encouraged to offer suggestions for services and businesses they would like to see downtown. Chief among these suggestions were retail stores and entertainment for families. These businesses were deemed the most requested and those that suggested a path toward downtown revitalization. Further proof that revitalization efforts took a backseat to tourism efforts is the fact that neither downtown Weston, nor the whole of the town, are home to the top suggested businesses in the survey. Yet the downtown Weston of present day has several antique shops (located very low on the number of responses, See Table 4), a hotel (located very low on the list), a law office, no library, no bank, and no post office as these last three services moved to Highway 45.

While there was some discussion of tourism in the MARC survey report (1981), the general consensus of respondents was that they desired improvements to the downtown that would positively impact their daily lives. Though in a few spots in the report, there were a few suggestions related to tourism. The majority of responses to the “Suggested Businesses” question focused on goods and services primarily used by residents: department store (105 responses), dry cleaners (42), community center (33), shoe repair (24), bakery (20), grocery store (12), hardware store (16), bank (5), etc. There were however, 11 responses for “Tourist Services (information, gifts/crafts).³⁷⁵ In addition to the request for tourism services, there were also a few more tourist-related responses: hotel (2), antique shop (4), good eating place (14), and good entertainment (13). In another section of the report though, there were 76 responses that indicated “Lack of Business Activity—inconvenient hours, low selection and stock, little capitalization on tourism” as an “Identified Problem” downtown.³⁷⁶ Also reported was a summarized written comment that

³⁷⁵ Downtown Weston, *Weston Residential Shopping*, Table F.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Table E.

said, “Downtown should capitalize on its antiquity and historic atmosphere and encourage tourism.”³⁷⁷

These survey responses indicate an interest in developing the downtown to serve tourists, but the interest pales in comparison to the number of problems and suggestions addressing the need for revitalizing downtown business for the residents’ use.

Suggested Business	Number of Responses
Department Store	105
Clothing Store	51
Movie Theatre	46
Dry Cleaners	42
Community Center	33
Bookstore/Craft Shop	29
Ice Cream Parlor	28
Fast Food	28
Shoe Repair	24
Bakery	20
Jewelry Store	17
Pool/Skating Area	17
Hardware Store	16
Flower Shop/Nursery	15
Good Eating Place	14
Good Entertainment	13
Grocery Store	12
Tourist Services	11
Appliance Repair	10
Keep Post Office and Bank Downtown	8
Parking Lot	7
Drugstore	6
Auto Repair	6
Furniture Store and Repair	6
Second Hand Store	5
Bank	5
Antique Shop	4
Deli	3
Nice Bar/Lounge	3

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 6.

Taxi Service	3
Industry	3
Hotel	2
Keep Library	2
Sports Store	2
Dentist	2
Barber	2
Medical Clinic	1
Doctor	1
Legal Office	1
Day Care Center	1
Veterinary Clinic	1
Lawn Mower and Repair	1
Farm Supplies	1

Table 8. “Downtown Weston Residential Surveys Suggested Businesses” from the MARC Weston Residential Shopping Habits and Opinion Survey, 1981.

Youth Outmigration

Age played an important role in the MARC survey as there were a number of comments about the age of local merchants and the desire for activities and businesses that would serve youth interests. In the “Identified Problems” table, there were 7 responses indicating a “Lack of Events for Younger People” and 12 responses about “Old Merchants—with no younger replacements.”³⁷⁸ Residential responses for “Suggested Improvements” focused first on the overall appearance and ease-of-use downtown: More Parking Space and Parking Control (73), Repair Buildings (46), Cleanup Litter, Junk Yards (45), but the next most popular response was “More Businesses with Young Owners, Activities to Keep Young People in Town” (31).³⁷⁹ A number of these suggestions, while of interest to residents of the area are also necessary to developing tourism.

The concern about youth flight, or youth outward migration from Weston speaks to the purpose of revitalization, bringing new life, new vigor. Young adults who remain in the town or

³⁷⁸ Ibid., Table E.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., Table G.

return to the town will ultimately replace the older population. When small towns remain centered on their elderly population, they all but ensure a population decline usher in the potential dissolution of the town.

Weston Establishes Heritage Tourism

It is clear that Weston has been aware of its heritage and celebrated its history well before the town's tourist economy took off. Since the 1980s, Weston has implemented a number of events and activities that fall under the umbrella of heritage tourism. From the early days of the Weston Historical Museum's sponsoring of the Historic Homes Tour, to the thirty-year history of the Applefest, to the more recent Irish Fest, Weston has married the goals of preserving its past and encouraging tourism, though there are times the latter goal has taken priority over the former.

Weston's Display of Indigeneity

Weston has highlighted their most historically significant stories and artifacts from the past, while large swathes of their history are seen as existing outside their heritage. Despite the fact that the influence of the Indigenous cultures in the area is indelible from Weston's founding, the historic artifacts and narrative of this time is consistently situated as existing before Weston's history began. Nowhere is this segmentation clearer than the Indigenous Peoples content in the Weston Historical Museum.

As one of the museum's founding trustees, Dr. R. J. Felling constructed a diorama of "Prehistoric Platte County." This diorama is still on display today and depicts the Felling's conception of the Hopewellian culture that occupied a majority of Platte County several

thousand years ago. The diorama has been prominently displayed in the museum since it was established in 1960. The diorama depicts dark, brown-skinned figurines with black hair wearing what is to be understood as garments made of animal-skin. The figurines are in a cave-like dugout near the bank of the river. In the two-dimensional background, there is a mural depicting the river's course and the green bluffs and trees along the river's banks. Several male-presenting figurines are wielding weapons: a bow, a club, and stone blades or tools. The female-presenting figurines are few and they stand off to the side. There are several animal skulls on display in this communal area, as well as the stretched-out pelt of an animal. A carved wooden canoe rests on the bank of the river; a smattering of pottery freckles the ground.

The diorama itself has now become an artifact of Weston's history, detailing an early moment in Weston's preservation history. On several visits to the museum, this author was directed toward the display as a main cornerstone of the museum. There are a placard and photograph that highlight Felling's feat in designing and painting the diorama and describe him as instrumental to the founding of the museum. Despite this, the information and contents of the diorama are still presented as an active and unchanging exhibit with no reflexive commentary or critique of its depiction of Hopewellian culture.

Nearby the diorama, there is a display case featuring stone tools created by the first peoples present in the county, which were later unearthed by the early white settlers. These tools are on display with an accompanying placard that explains a brief history of the Indigenous people who occupied the land of Weston and Platte County. This placard covers a several thousand-year history in a few short paragraphs. It begins with a discussion of the Hopewell villages and their cave homes and mounded burial sites and moves seamlessly into discussing the Native American tribes present in the area at the time of white colonization, skipping over thousands of years.

Platte County is described as a middle ground where tribes like the Sac, Fox, Potawatomi, Shawnee, Kickapoo, Osage, Missouri, Kansa, Iowa, Sioux, and Dakota met and warred.³⁸¹ Eventually, with the dissolution of the Missouri tribe's stronghold over the area, the Sac and Fox were more prominent in the area. The Iowa had also lived in the Platte Country. The museum placard then explains the agreements made in the Platte Purchase of 1836 between the Sac, Fox, and Iowa tribes, and the United States federal government as described in the first chapter.³⁸²

The dates (as defined by the museum) in this particular display reflect the "Paleo Period 1300 to 8000 [*sic*] B.C.," "Woodland Period 1000 B.C. To 800 A.D.," and the more modern eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁸³ The lack of specificity employed in the discussion of "Prehistoric Platte County" places the first peoples of North America in conversation with their descendants, several thousand years later. The significant time spanned in this display does not happen in any other sections of the museum, specifically with information relating to white people in Weston and the county. This area of the museum creates a false narrative of Indigenous history in the county and attempting to group all Indigenous presence as one-in-the-same. By creating this erroneous connection and showcasing prehistoric artifacts alongside those of the more recent Native American tribes (the Iowa, the Sac, and the Fox) who were present in this county through the mid-nineteenth century, indigeneity has now been cast as part of a "prehistory" of this town, marking its "history" as the moment white settlement began.

³⁸¹ Author's photo, May 22, 2018, IMG_4399.

³⁸² Paxton, *Annals*, 1.

³⁸³ Author's photo, May 22, 2018.

Black History in Weston

Some details on the historical Black experience in Weston can be found in the Weston Historical Museum and in the *Memories of Weston* book series. Though the details found in the book series rely heavily on information and photographs already presented and on display in the museum. Though antebellum agriculture, the Kansas-Missouri border wars, and the Civil War playing such large roles in Weston's historical narrative and identity, little about slavery and the lives of those enslaved is discussed. It is frequently noted that before the Civil War ended, Platte County had over 2,500 enslaved people

The second volume of the *Memories of Weston* series, published in 2000, offers more reflection on the inequities, injustices, and violence of the era of slavery in Weston. Despite this the responsibility and culpability of white residents of Weston remains glossed over. There also exists a narrative of despair for the town and its hemp farmers. In several spots the announcement of the end of slavery in Weston is coupled with the end of the once active and booming hemp industry. On the outdoors timeline display—a series of five large placards affixed to the bricked exterior of the Weston Chamber of Commerce building at Short Street and Main Street—the timeline note for 1861–1865 reads “Civil War ends slavery and dooms hemp industry in Weston.”³⁸⁴ The timeline ends in 2012 with the 175th anniversary of Weston. In the museum's “Black History” exhibit, a detailed placard titled, “African ~ American [*sic*] History Weston, Platte County, Missouri” reads

Weston's early slaves were brought to the area by owners from the Southern states. These early settlers were hemp growers and slaves were an essential part of their business. The difficult task of turning the plants into rope was so labor intensive, farmers were reluctantly

³⁸⁴ Author's photo, October 11, 2016, IMG_6600.

[sic] to give up the profits that would be used to employ workers. Consequently, the end of slavery was also the end of the hemp business.³⁸⁵

This coupling reframes Emancipation not as a moment of celebration and freedom for those formerly enslaved, but as a moment of strife and doom for Weston and its white hemp farmers. The “Weston History” section of the Weston Chamber of Commerce website also remarks on Weston’s failing economy as a result of the emancipation of the enslaved at the end of the Civil War, noting “The Civil War tore Weston apart, dividing its residents and ending its slaved-based economy.”³⁸⁶

In 2014, Carolyn Bless Larsen published *We, Too, Lived: A Genealogy of the African-Americans in a Midwest Cemetery: 1850 – 1950*, a book on the Black residents of Weston buried in the Laurel Hill Cemetery. This exploration expands her previous history on the cemetery to discuss the designated “colored” section of the cemetery and the lives of those interred there. Larsen makes a point to engage with the history of enslavement in Weston and even includes raw data from the federal census and slave schedules listing the white enslavers of Weston.

Weston’s Historic Homes Tour

Beginning with the inauguration of the Weston Historical Museum, Weston also started their quadrennial “Old Homes Tour” or “Historic Homes Tour.” The historic homes tours regularly featured around ten antebellum homes near Weston’s downtown. Visitors purchased tickets and upon arrival were given tour booklets with maps and details on each home. Visitors were able to enter the homes on the tour and learn about each home from the booklet and the current owner. This model was eventually phased out in 1988 as insurance concerns became cost

³⁸⁵ Author’s photo, October 11, 2016, IMG_6917.

³⁸⁶ “Weston History,” Weston Chamber of Commerce.

prohibitive.³⁸⁷ A “Heritage Festival” accompanied some of these historic homes tours and featured “lost arts and crafts.” The tours of the 1960s (1960, 1964, and 1968) were quite successful and as Bertha I. Bless notes in her 1969 history of the town, “Weston’s warmest bid for appreciative visitors is its more than 100 antebellum homes, circa 1840-1855 . . . Weston has had more favorable publicity than any town of equal size in the Midwest. Tourism has doubled over and over during the past eight years, since the tours of Old Homes and the Historical Museum are offered to the public.”³⁸⁸ Though I have been unable to substantiate these claims, it is clear that the seed for tourism in Weston was planted in the 1960s.

The press in *The Weston Chronicle* leading up to the 1972 “Old Homes Tour” was full of excitement and preparation as Weston expected a large number of visitors for this event, in part due to the press coverage on Weston’s latest inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The weekly newspaper featured column-inches dedicated to discussing preparation. The town prepared for an onslaught of traffic and encouraged *Chronicle* readers to beautify their yards and storefronts, even if they were not on the tour. The excitement of the press preceding the event is nothing compared to the article published right after the event. The headline reads: “City Strains with 40,000 Visitors” followed by the first line of the article: “HOW ABOUT THAT !?!?!?”³⁸⁹ The article describes the event, which despite parking concerns, seemed to go off without a “hitch,” though a horse-drawn wagon did become spooked and caused some minor damage to a nearby car.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ *The Weston Chronicle*, “Homes Tour Dead,” (Weston, MO), October 5, 1994.

³⁸⁸ Bless, *Weston: Queen*, 75.

³⁸⁹ *The Weston Chronicle*, “City Strains with 40,000 Visitors,” (Weston, MO), October 13, 1972.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Weston's Historic Homes Tours continued every four years through 1994 (though the 1994 tour was held only two years after the previous tour in 1992). This event was one of the main fundraising events for the Weston Historical Museum, but, because its success fostered a positive model for tourism, it eventually ended, seeing too much competition from other tourist events in Weston and the surrounding areas. An article, under the headline "Homes Tour Dead," from an October 1994 edition of *The Weston Chronicle* concluded that "With success came imitation. Homes tours are now held in every major town in the Kansas City area."³⁹¹ The article also notes the changes in format that might have limited the event to the point of its end.

Heritage Festival

During the Historic Homes Tours in Weston, the Weston Historical Museum also sponsored a Heritage Festival where local craft vendors sold goods, other vendors sold food and drink, and activities involving apple butter- or apple cider-making. The Heritage Festival started with the first Historic Homes Tour, which later was overpowered by other festivals and crafts fairs hosted by the newly formed Weston Development Company.

In 1982, a year with no Historic Homes Tour or Heritage Festival, the Weston Development Company (WDC) held its first ever event, the "Historic Weston Craft Fair." This event was complete with handicrafts vendors, food vendors, and interactive activities like face-painting during the day and a rib roast and street dance in the evening.³⁹² *The Weston Chronicle* reported there were one to two thousand visitors at this inaugural event. This was certainly not the first event in Weston to showcase the town's history, or to call itself historic, but it is the first of a long run of events produced by the Weston Development Company (later called the Weston

³⁹¹ *The Weston Chronicle*, "Homes Tour Dead."

³⁹² *The Weston Chronicle*, "Craft Fair Is Successful," (Weston, MO), October 22, 1982.

Chamber of Commerce) to promote tourism and economic development in Weston. In 1983 the WDC hosted its then second annual “Historic Weston Craft Fair.”³⁹³ In 1984 it appeared that most of the focus was spent on the Historic Homes Tour and Heritage Festival, an event that brought only 4,000 visitors to town, though the following year’s announcement referred to the fourth annual Historic Weston Craft Fair.³⁹⁴ The 1985 fair would be rained-out and postponed to the following weekend discussed in *The Weston Chronicle* under the headline: “No Crowds, Plenty of Crafts.”³⁹⁵

The Lost Arts Festival

Despite this, the town hosted a Lost Arts Festival, featuring apple butter making, quilting, and a scarecrow contest two weeks later. The following year, both the fifth annual Historic Weston Crafts Fair and the Lost Arts Festival were organized by the WDC. There was significant overlap in the two festivals: with both events held in the fall, in September and October, the primary difference between the two events appears to be the type of arts and crafts featured and sold; the Craft Festival sold crafts that relied on more contemporary handicraft styles, while the Lost Arts Festival highlighted “crafts no longer widely practiced.”³⁹⁶ The Historic Weston Crafts Fair featured almost sixty vendors of “unique crafts, musicians, funnel cakes” and the Lost Arts Festival included a play-acted Old West “shootout” on Main Street with vendors selling apple

³⁹³ *The Weston Chronicle*, “Tobacco Festival Celebrates Heritage,” (Weston, MO), September 16, 1983.

³⁹⁴ *The Weston Chronicle*, “Homes Tour Preparations Done,” (Weston, MO), October 4, 1984; *The Weston Chronicle*, “Craft Fair To Draw 42 Booths,” (Weston, MO), September 12, 1985.

³⁹⁵ *The Weston Chronicle*, “No Crowds, Plenty Of Crafts,” (Weston, MO), October 3, 1985.

³⁹⁶ *The Weston Chronicle*, “Lost Arts Festival,” (Weston, MO), October 22, 1987.

cider and apple butter.³⁹⁷ In 1987, the Lost Arts Festival included Civil War reenactments as part of sesquicentennial events. The Historic Weston Crafts Fair returned in 1988 in the month preceding the Historic Homes Tour and Heritage Festival. And in 1989, there was no mention of the Lost Arts Festival or the annual Historic Weston Crafts fair. Instead, the Weston Development Company introduced a newer and demonstrably longer-lasting event in 1990, Applefest.

Applefest

The lore, as communicated to me by my primary informant, is that the Lost Arts Festival transformed into Applefest after a few town leaders met with an “ad man” who explained that festivals needed to be centered around a food. The “ad man” asked the representatives of Weston what food was unique to their town and at that time there were large apple orchards on the outskirts of town, so the idea of Applefest took off from there. Applefest has been and continues to be the most successful of the events sponsored by the Weston Chamber of Commerce (WDC). On the front page of the September 19, 1990 edition of *The Weston Chronicle*, encourages town participation in the first ever Applefest by recruiting volunteers, bake-off participants, and “Apple Seedling Kids” to dress up and walk in the parade. Also on the front page is a brief article under the headline “First Census Report Shows Overall Growth in Platte County.” This article notes that not only is Platte County’s population up since the 1980 Census, but Weston’s population has also grown from 1,440 to 1,522.³⁹⁸ It is telling that the Applefest announcements

³⁹⁷ *The Weston Chronicle*, “Tobacco Market To Open November 24,” (Weston, MO), October 23, 1986.

³⁹⁸ *The Weston Chronicle*, “You Can Still Be A Part Of Applefest,” (Weston, MO), September 19, 1990.

share the front page with the Census report. The relationship between Weston's tourism efforts and the resulting growth of Weston is clear.

I have attended Weston's annual Applefest twice in the last three years. The first visit was arguably the most informative. I arrived in Weston on a Saturday morning in October of 2016 with a friend. After difficulty finding parking, we found a sitting area alongside the Main Street parade route. Since it was 2016, there were a number of political parade floats, but there were also more local floats and participants. The high school marching band and cheerleaders walked the route, a group of Girl Scouts throwing candy sat in a trailer pulled by a truck, two clowns walked the route passing out stickers, a Johnny Appleseed impersonator pushed a wheelbarrow full of apples while wearing denim overalls, a cooking pot on his head, and sadly, shoes on his feet, the township's fire trucks drove through the route, as did a string of classic cars. Of the more interesting parade features were the Trump Truck,³⁹⁹ a look-a-like Army Jeep with two men in camouflaged clothing and face paint wielding (hopefully fake or at least unloaded) machine guns, and the 360 Vodka truck (a popular line of flavored vodkas produced by the Holladay Distillery).

After the parade ended, the crowd of people made their way down Main Street and in the direction of the vendor booths that lined both sides of three downtown blocks. The street vendors sold mostly handmade goods like holiday decor, yarn crafts, pottery, woodwork. There were some vendors of canned foods or cottage kitchen treats, in addition to the food vending trucks or stands that sold classic fair food—elephant ears, corn dogs, turkey legs, kettle corn.

There were volunteers asking for an admission donation of at least one dollar at every entrance. The Weston Chamber of Commerce had an informational booth and sponsored the

³⁹⁹ The Trump Truck is a traveling truck shaped like an elephant. This particular truck also included a smaller elephant on whose body was a sign that read: "Ivanka 2024."

mini hay-baling and apple butter-making booth. Near the apple-making area, they also had a raised platform of bags of apples they were giving away for free. I overheard someone ask one of the booth's volunteers something about the apples to which the volunteer replied, "I don't know. These are whatever apples they had at the grocery store." It seemed that the local tie to apples was one in name only, a fact confirmed by my informant who said there are not any local apples. Considering that the apple economy, once popular in Weston, had all but evaporated in the 21st century, it was not surprising that the apple cider they sell at the festival comes in jugs from Louisburg, Kansas.

I stopped by the Weston Chamber of Commerce offices on Main Street two weeks later on a tour of town with my partner and my parents. I told the woman working the desk that I had been in town for this year's Applefest and asked how many people they recorded in attendance. She said they do not sell tickets, but their best estimate is that 35,000 showed up over the course of the weekend. Last year I was unable to attend Applefest, though the report in *The Weston Chronicle* proclaimed, "Applefest A Hit,"⁴⁰⁰ with "thousands of people" in attendance.

In 2018, I traveled from South Carolina to Weston to attend Applefest and it was unlike my previous visit. Unfortunately for Weston, this year's Applefest was almost rained-out on both days, and on Sunday, vendors were even told they could leave early if they would like to. Nonetheless, a shop employee at The Peddler antique store told me that they did as much business on Saturday as they had the same Saturday last year, another rainy first day of the festival. Without a count, I could still observe that this year's Applefest was much smaller than ordinarily expected, especially compared to my first Applefest in 2016. The parking was still a challenge, but I managed to find free, on-street parking on both Saturday and Sunday, when

⁴⁰⁰ *The Weston Chronicle*, "Next-Up Irishfest," (Weston, MO), October 17, 2017.

previously, I had had to pay to park in residents' yards. The streets were far less crowded, and I was able to walk right into Tin Kitchen for lunch and find a table to myself. Due to the rain, it appeared that the Main Street shops had more traffic as plenty of people were seeking refuge from the rain and the cold.

The Economics of Weston's Heritage Tourism

Preserve America Program

On March 3, 2003, President George W. Bush issued Executive Order 13287 "Preserve America," calling for a renewed and strengthened relationship between the federal government and the management of historic properties. Executive Order 13287 emphasizes heritage tourism and the economic potential of historic properties. The Order states, "The Federal Government shall recognize and manage the historic properties in its ownership as assets that can support department and agency missions while contributing to the vitality and economic well-being of the Nation's communities and fostering a broader appreciation for the development of the United States and its underlying values."⁴⁰⁴ What began as a "White House initiative" in 2003, was permanently authorized by the 110th Congress and President Obama in the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. This legislation designated up to \$25 million in funds for the program.⁴⁰⁵

The Preserve America grant program was administered by the National Park Service in partnership with the ACHP and the Secretary of the Interior. Behind this federal initiative was not only the President but then First Lady Laura Bush. First Ladies of the United States

⁴⁰⁴ U.S. President, Executive Order, "Preserve America Executive Order 13287 of March 3, 2003." *Federal Register* 68, no. 43 (March 5, 2003): 10635.

⁴⁰⁵ Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, "Preserve America Grant: Assessment of Effectiveness," Washington, D.C.: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, 2009.

undertake particular causes during the duration of their time in the White House. One of Laura Bush's passions was, and is, historic preservation.⁴⁰⁶ The biggest goal of the Executive Order was to inventory the number and type of federally owned historic properties and buildings. The second goal of the Order was to make available matching-grants for communities selected from across the United States. The first Preserve America communities were named in 2004. Between 2004 and 2010, more than 900 communities were designated as Preserve America Communities.⁴⁰⁷ Awards totaling over \$21 million were used in 281 grant projects across the United States.⁴⁰⁸ Weston was one of 17 Missouri cities, towns, and neighborhoods to receive the designation. Since 2006, the annual funds for the Preserve America grants fell between \$5 and 7.3 million dollars.

In 2006, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation published the first report on the impact of this Executive Order. Chairman John L. Nau, III writes that the Preserve America initiative works to “develop public-private partnerships that support heritage tourism and heritage education, and contribute to the local economy.”⁴⁰⁹ The report emphasizes that American historic sites and buildings are “valuable assets” that have the potential to “stimulate local economic development.”⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁶ Lauren Walser, “Back Story: Laura Bush on Creating a Legacy of History Preservation,” *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, November 1, 2013, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/back-story-laura-bush-on#.YDUmzGpKg-R>.

⁴⁰⁷ “Preserve America Grants,” National Parks Service, last accessed February 22, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/preservation-grants/PreserveAmerica/>.

⁴⁰⁸ “Preserve America Communities,” Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, last accessed February 22, 2021, <https://www.achp.gov/preserve-america/preserve-america-communities>.

⁴⁰⁹ Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, “The Preserve America Executive Order Report to the President,” (Washington, D.C.: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation 2006), iv.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

In a 2009 report, the ACHP described the benefits of the Preserve America grant program to local communities. The report stated that there were no other federal grants that work in the same way as Preserve America grants and that these grants provide “seed money for developing economically sustainable business and other plans for historic properties and communities.”⁴¹¹ After announcing the Preserve America grantees of 2009, Congress defunded the program from the 2009 appropriations bill. The program was instructed to provide a report assessing the effectiveness of the program. The report was submitted in June of 2009 and the funds for that year and the next were approved. Those were the last year the program grants were funded. Currently, the program is still authorized through the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, but the funding has yet to be appropriated in any subsequent federal budgets.⁴¹²

Former First Lady Michelle Obama was asked to be an honorary chair for the Preserve America program, but she had causes and interests outside of historic preservation, so the Preserve America program while not defunded from 2008 to 2016, was not a White House focus.⁴¹³ The Obama administration was interested in conversations about whose history and heritage was being preserved and cooperating more with Native Americans in preservation work.⁴¹⁴ It is still possible that the program could be funded in the future via an Omnibus spending bill, wherein all federal department budgets are packaged. President Trump also appointed a new chairperson, Aimee Jorjani, to the ACHP, who previously worked for the Department of the Interior during the Bush administration. The Senate has yet to confirm this

⁴¹¹ Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, “Preserve America Grant: Assessment.”

⁴¹² Email correspondence with Judy Rodenstein, 26 Feb 2019.

⁴¹³ Phone call with Judy Rodenstein.

⁴¹⁴ Phone call with Judy Rodenstein.

position, leaving the status of the Preserve America program and the direction of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) still “in limbo.”⁴¹⁵

Weston Preserves America

For towns like Weston, who have long seen their local history as an economic asset, the language of the Executive Order 13287 and the Preserve America initiative was not a new hurdle, but a new funding opportunity. In May of 2006, Mayor Howard Hellebuyck, with the help of citizen volunteers, submitted a lengthy grant application to the Preserve America Grant Committee in which the town proposed a grant-funded project to accomplish several large items: signage, a walking tour brochure and accompanying CD, a Lewis and Clark exhibit and short documentary, and an educational outreach for local second- and fourth-graders. The funds applied for totaled \$124,605.90: \$54,055 would be provided through federal funds, the other \$70,550.90 would be matched by the city of Weston, the Chamber of Commerce, and donated time, services, and materials from the project’s many partners: Platte County, Platte County Parks and Recreation, William Jewell College, West Platte R-2 School District, the Weston Historical Museum, and the Platte County Visitor’s Bureau. All of these organizations wrote letters that highlighted their commitment to history and supporting local economic development.⁴¹⁶

The Preserve America application created by the ACHP asks applicants to demonstrate a past of successful participation in a historic preservation project with a public-private funding

⁴¹⁵ “President Announces Intent to Nominate New ACHP Chairman,” Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, March 13, 2018, last accessed February 22, 2021, <https://www.achp.gov/news/president-announces-intent-nominate-new-achp-chairman>.

⁴¹⁶ “Application for Preserve America Grant,” Preserve America Folder, Weston City Hall Archives, Weston, MO.

partnership. The application also asks that the applicant cities and towns keep an inventory of their historic properties, have a local museum or archive, and have a local historic preservation law or ordinance.⁴¹⁷ The dossier of documents related to this grant application are held in the City Hall's archives, and include notes and documentation related to how best to prepare the town's application. Among these notes are the town's failed application from 2005 and the Preserve America website features on Leavenworth, Kansas and Frederickstown, Missouri, both awarded the designation and funding in 2005.

Weston used its *Preserve America* funds to complete two major initiatives: a driving tour of the historic homes with signage and the Lewis and Clark Exhibit. The Weston Historic Museum and the Chamber of Commerce information office on Main Street both carry stacks of booklets entitled, "The Historic Weston Experience: Driving Tour," under which there is a large logo for the Preserve America program. Originally, these booklets were accompanied by a CD recording that narrated the booklet and shared the details of the driving tour with those in the car. Tucked in the back of the booklet is a map of the town and surrounding areas with ninety-one markers and a corresponding key that names each of the historic sites. The content of the booklet bears many similarities to the booklets produced for the museum's Historic Homes Tours. It appears as though many of the sites overlapped and their descriptions borrowed from the previous booklet. Despite the inclusion of the historic homes, this new driving tour also highlights the historic sites down- and around town. It even provides details about the history of Platte County and some of its historic places and people.

As told to me during a visit to the Museum, these driving tour booklets are very expensive to make, but the Preserve America grant money paid for the CD and the printing in its

⁴¹⁷ "Preserve America Communities Program: 2005 Community Application," Weston Historic Preservation Committee Folder, Weston City Hall Archives, Weston, MO.

first run, and they have subsequently stopped including the CD. They still offer the driving tour booklet for free, and its printing is now funded jointly by Platte County Parks and Recreation, the City of Weston, the Weston Chamber of Commerce, and the Weston Historical Museum.

In the former train depot, and behind the current city hall offices, sits Weston's "Lewis and Clark and Historic Weston Exhibit" established in October 2008. The exhibit was funded in part by the Preserve America grant in honor of the anniversary of Lewis and Clark's stop in the area. This one-room exhibit provides visitors with an informational video, three tri-boarded kiosks, and three walls of hanging placards. According to local history, Captain Meriwether Lewis and Second Lieutenant William Clark's expedition of the West landed in the area later known as Weston, Missouri on July 2, 1804. Lewis and Clark's expedition "repaired a broken mast on their keelboat and later set up camp for the night."⁴¹⁸ The company continued their journey over the next several years, and in the 1830s Weston's fate would be tied up in William Clark's role as Superintendent of Indian Affairs.⁴¹⁹

The informational video explains the significance of Weston's being a site along the Lewis and Clark journey and highlights the important history of exploration and expansion. The tri-boarded kiosks are interactive and geared toward a younger visitor. One kiosk asks its reader what they would pack if they were to take a journey like Lewis and Clark's. Another kiosk points to the local wildlife that the company would have encountered during their brief stay. Another kiosk advertises the Weston Historical Museum, the driving tour, and the Weston Bluffs walking trail that takes you to the approximate site of Lewis and Clark's stop.

⁴¹⁸ Miller, *Memories Vol. II*; This information is also found in placards at the Lewis and Clark exhibit.

⁴¹⁹ Placard, "Native American Heritage: The Platte Country," (Weston, MO: Weston Historical Museum).

The Lewis and Clark Exhibit in Weston contains more interactive and at times more inclusive discussions of history when compared to Weston's museum of local history. While the information contained in the more up-to-date Lewis and Clark Exhibit does include brief discussions of Native American presence in the area and the Platte Purchase, the exhibition, which is closed during the winter, is not nearly as popular as those in the museum, which is located further up Main Street and open all year round.

Weston's inclusion in the Preserve America collection of communities speaks to several pieces of the town's identity. The first, as a chosen site, Weston highlights the values/ideals stressed by the program namely, a passion for preservation, a cultural heritage worthy of preserving, and a previous record of funding historic preservation efforts. Former First Lady Laura Bush writes in her congratulatory letter to Weston, "The preservation and enjoyment of your historical and cultural resources celebrate an important part of our nation's heritage."⁴²⁰ For the White House and the ACHP, Weston's endeavors are not only preserving their local history but are important for maintaining and preserving a national heritage. Second, Weston's previous efforts at heritage tourism mark the town as a safe bet upon which the ACHP can place their funding, though that financial burden is largely carried by the town and its partners. Through their hard work beginning in the 1960s with the Weston Historical Museum and the Homes Tours, Weston has demonstrated a track record of sustainable historic preservation projects.

Heritage Tourism: Postmodernity and Neoliberalism

In Weston, revitalization made way for tourism, prioritizing the economic potential of heritage over reinvigorating Weston's original economy and services. Early legislation

⁴²⁰ Letter from First Lady Laura Bush to the Citizens of Weston, January 31, 2006, Historic Preservation Committee Folder, Weston City Hall Archives, Weston, MO.

encouraged the preservation of sites without emphasizing the economic potential. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 did not include the language about tax incentives in its initial bill. Though the shift ties history and money together in a way fitting this moment of post-modern, late capitalism.

Tourism has long since been married to the postmodern moment, and so when combined with ideas like history and heritage, this version of tourism becomes even more cemented in this moment. Since heritage tourism seeks to emphasize a particular place's particular past to convey to visitors, postmodernism is made apparent in the attempt to call history back to the present.⁴²¹ This action is even more postmodern when one considers that not only is heritage tourism about bringing the past to the present, but it is primarily focused on the consumption of this present-past.⁴²² Heritage tourism is only successful when the consumption of the present-past is believable or affective. Heritage tourism has long been preoccupied with authenticity.⁴²³ While authenticity is unachievable in postmodernity, the illusion of authenticity suffices for many tourists.⁴²⁴ It is this illusion on which nostalgia rests. History is diluted at the point of nostalgia, because nostalgia looks to the past and brings it back without context.

The relationship between nostalgia and postmodernity should be apparent; nostalgia, in its present iteration, can only exist in postmodernity. The pathology of nostalgia as homesickness and the more general time-sick nostalgia have been replaced with a nostalgia that is yearning for

⁴²¹ Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press (1991): 21-25.

⁴²² Nuryanti, "Heritage and Postmodern Tourism."

⁴²³ Chhabra, et al, "Staged authenticity," 703.

⁴²⁴ John D. Dorst, *The Written Suburb: An American Site, an Ethnographic Dilemma* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

something that was or may have never been. It is decontextualized from history and easy to consume in the present. Heritage tourism has created an industry steeped in nostalgia.

Neoliberalism is a symptom of postmodernity and this moment of late capitalism. As time has moved on and we move further into the 21st century, we can point to preservation legislation and funding that emphasizes an equal economic contribution from towns and cities asking for federal preservation funds. This shared investment in preservation reflects a neoliberal tradition that is impacting how government funds are spent while forcing previously philanthropic endeavors to prove their economic potential. Weston is not revitalized, nor has it preserved its history for history's sake, instead the town and business community have taken advantage of many opportunities to invest in Weston's tourism economy. Weston is not the only town or city to do this; they are following a path lined with many other real and fictional towns who have had to adjust to a multitude of economic realities and develop a strategy to succeed.

The emphasis on historic preservation as an economic opportunity and investment is indicative of neoliberal attitudes. Suggesting to small towns that tourism is the only way to prevent the town's death ignores larger economic consequences of a capitalist society and places the burden of survival on the town. In fending off the decay, the answer is not found in revitalization as a service to those who reside and use the town daily, but in catering to those who move in and out of the town as tourists. While the money that is earned from a tourism economy can pay for revitalization initiatives like cleaner streets, better roads, and more parking, the particular retail and services needs of residents go unaddressed because the needs of the residents do not fall in line with the needs of the tourist. The tourist needs an aesthetic and to see a place that looks unlike where they just were; pharmacies, dry cleaners, and grocery stores do not play into the tourist fantasy and are subsequently discarded in favor of boutique retail. In the

next chapter, I will examine several television towns that have also portrayed similar struggles and opportunities as those seen in Weston and other small towns.

Chapter 4: Historic Preservation and Heritage Tourism in Television Towns

LORELAI: Now, I don't know what all your plans are, but the grand opening of the Stars Hollow Museum is this morning. Any takers?

PARIS: It's always amusing when provincials grasp for legitimacy. I'm in.
– “To Live or Let Diorama,” *Gilmore Girls*⁴²⁵

Introduction

The American small town is a familiar setting for literature, film, and television. While there is research on the small town in literature and film, very little has been written about the small town as a setting for television series. Notwithstanding the lack of research, some of these television small towns are incredibly familiar to those fluent in popular culture. Sites like Mayberry, Stars Hollow, Pawnee, Smallville, and Sunnyvale have attracted televisual visitors for years. For some, these small towns feel real; their residents, their businesses, and their history are all but inseparable from the episode plots and main characters. These small towns and their television series are each portrayed as unique, though there exists a comfort and feeling of acquaintance with the small town as a setting. Audiences have expectations of what fits and does not fit in the small-town setting.

These televisual depictions of the American small town inform and influence how audiences understand and imagine small town America. For those with no experience living in small town America, these portrayals inform their understanding of the small town as a place. These portrayals show those with small town roots how others understand their location. All of these imaginings create a shared image of the American small town as quaint and mundane, full of homogenous busybodies who, despite their quirks, take pride in “the simple life.”

⁴²⁵ *Gilmore Girls*, season 5, episode 18, “To Live and Let Diorama,” directed by Jackson Douglas, written by Daniel Palladino, featuring Lauren Graham, Alexis Bledel, and Melissa McCarthy, aired April 19, 2005, in broadcast syndication, Warner Brothers, Netflix.

Though the television small town settings are no stand-in for real small towns across the country, and they cannot be understood to depict reality, these fictional small towns do experience some of the same challenges and propose some of the same solutions as small towns like Weston. Television small towns very rarely exist in a site that is unthreatened by economic decline, urban development, and a disappearing population.

In Chapter 4, “Historic Preservation and Heritage Tourism in Television Towns” I will analyze the revitalization and tourism industries in fictional small towns, illustrating that while exceptional in its own tales of heritage, Weston is but one of many small towns, real and make-believe, who have fought off dissolution and decay with festivals and heritage-focused tourism. This analysis is by no means exhaustive, as I do not have the time to view every television series set in a small town in its entirety. With the help of fan-generated content online, I have been able to narrow-in on particular episodes of these series to incorporate in this discussion. On television in particular, the small town reflects back the economic problems and heritage-based answers at work in small towns like Weston. These portrayals reinforce a reliance on historic preservation and heritage tourism as they have been repackaged for economic purposes. While parroting the problems of real small towns, these fictional settings have had a real, financial impact on a number of actual small towns by encouraging televisual tourism.

Small Towns on Film

The small town serves as a favored backdrop in films on both the big and small screens and is also present in a number of television series, though not nearly as widespread as urban locations. Far more television series are set in urban locations than in small towns. Cities like Chicago, New York, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Washington are popular

backdrops in American television. The celebration and inclusion of place on television seems to be reserved for these large, coastal urban to the exclusion of the land that connects these two coasts. Some examples of contemporary television series where the location is as much a part of the series as the characters are: *30 Rock*, *Sex and the City*, *Broad City*, and *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* all prominently feature New York City; *Homeland*, *Scandal*, and *House of Cards* are all set in the nation's capital; *Modern Family*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *New Girl*, are set in Los Angeles, and *Arrested Development* and *The O.C.* set in nearby Orange County, California. Even the reality television show, *Real Housewives* has managed to predominantly follow groups of women in Californian cities (Orange County and Beverly Hills) and cities along the Eastern seaboard (New York City, New Jersey, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C.).

There are certainly a number of reasons for the ubiquity of the city on television. The most obvious reason that so many television shows are set in or around Los Angeles for example is the city's preeminent role as a television and film manufacturer. For television shows set in California, the filming location seems an obvious choice. The state of California offers attractive tax credits to studios and production companies who film in the state.⁴²⁶ Though for television series set outside California, the abundance of studios with set-makers in the area makes it easy to transform the studio settings to be anywhere. A number of series set in New York City are actually filmed in Los Angeles, *Friends*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *Will and Grace*, and *The Nanny*. Another reason for the preeminence of the city on television might have to do with the

⁴²⁶ Bryn Sandberg, "Filming in Los Angeles Dips in 2017 But Still Ranks Second-Best Year," *The Hollywood Reporter*, January 23, 2018, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/filming-los-angeles-dips-2017-but-still-ranks-second-best-year-1077557>.

fact that 80% of Americans live in urban areas.⁴²⁷ With so much of the population living in urban areas it would make sense that an overwhelming majority of television series are set in urban locations.

Though for some in the city, they long to live in small, rural communities. According to a Gallup poll in 2018, 27% of Americans polled stated that they wished they lived in a rural area. Only 15% of those polled actually did live in a rural area.⁴²⁸ This statistic shows that though the small rural town is a difficult place to live in the 21st century, it is still appealing even to those outside its landscape. This might explain why the small town remains a popular setting for television series.

There are numerous lists on the Internet ranking television small towns or expressing frustration that the fictional small towns do not exist to visit or move to. Fictional small towns like Stars Hollow, Connecticut of *Gilmore Girls* fame, Pawnee, Indiana from *Parks and Recreation*, Andy Griffith's Mayberry, North Carolina, and *The Simpsons'* state-less Springfield all represent the struggles and challenges of small-town life while expanding and commenting on the economic potential of history and tourism.

Small Towns as the Quintessential Made-for-Television Movie Backdrop

The small town has often appeared on the silver screen, and it has been the backdrop for many television shows. Though where the small-town setting is most popular is where the silver

⁴²⁷ United States Census Bureau, "New Census Data Show Differences Between Urban and Rural Populations," United States Census Bureau, December 8, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2016/cb16-210.html>.

⁴²⁸ Christopher Ingraham, "Americans say there's not much appeal to big-city living. Why do so many of us live there?" *The Washington Post*, December 18, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2018/12/18/americans-say-theres-not-much-appeal-big-city-living-why-do-so-many-us-live-there/?noredirect=on>.

screen and the small screen meet: the made-for-television movie, specifically those on the cable television channel Hallmark. With their mass-produced Christmas-themed films, the channel relies heavily on the small town as a setting for their cable movies. Though they never reach the cinema, these made-for-television films reach well-over 60 million viewers. In the 2018 “Countdown to Christmas” programming season that usually starts in November and leads up to Christmas, 68 million viewers and an ad revenue of over \$400 million.⁴²⁹ Just this year, Crown Media (who owns the Hallmark Channel) held the title of number one cable network for female viewers aged 25-54.⁴³⁰ The network has claimed this position for four consecutive years and this past year, “Despite significantly increased competition in 2019, ‘Countdown to Christmas’ was the year’s most-watched holiday programming event on cable, surpassing audience levels of the nearest competitor by 51%.”⁴³¹

In 2010 the Hallmark Channel produced and premiered six original holiday movies though that number grew substantially by 2018 wherein they produced and premiered 36 original holiday films, totaling over 150 original holiday films since 2008.⁴³² Of the 36 original holiday films Hallmark produced and aired in the 2018 holiday season, 25 (about 70% of them) were set

⁴²⁹ Kasperkevic, Jana. “Let’s do the numbers on Hallmark’s Christmas movie empire.” *Marketplace*. December 27, 2017. <https://www.marketplace.org/2017/12/27/life/christmas-movies-netflix-hallmark-channel-prince-numbers/>; Jump PR. “Hallmark Channel Once Again Reigns as Indisputable Leader in Holiday Programming.” *Broadcasting + Cable*. January 9, 2019. <https://www.nexttv.com/post-type-the-wire/hallmark-channel-once-again-reigns-as-indisputable-leader-in-holiday-programming>.

⁴³⁰ Michelle Vicary, “Hallmark Channel Closes Out 2019 as #1 Cable Network Among Women 25-54 in Fourth Quarter,” *LinkedIn*, January 15, 2020, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/hallmark-channel-closes-out-2019-1-cable-network-among-vicary>.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

⁴³² Kasperkevic, “Let’s do the numbers.”

in small towns. This setting is pervasive on the channel and with such unparalleled viewership numbers, the fictional small-town setting is indisputably popular.⁴³³

Ahead of the 2019 “Countdown to Christmas” season, the Hallmark channel promoted 40 new made-for-television holiday films. Of the 39 films that aired that season, 28 of them, just about 72%, were set in a small town. While the Hallmark channel may seem to have a monopoly on the made-for-tv Christmas movie market, there are several other channels and streaming platforms that are picking up on the genre, and its many tropes, and entering the game of escapist holiday filmmaking. For example, the Lifetime network has provided healthy competition with their “It’s a Wonderful Lifetime” programming. While they rely on similar storytelling as Hallmark, it seems that Lifetime is more likely to take chances on showcasing diverse characters and stories. They recently announced that their 2020 “It’s a Wonderful Lifetime” season will include the first made-for-television LGBTQ+ Christmas movie and a holiday movie centered on a Chinese-American family.⁴³⁴

The ubiquity of the small-town setting in these Hallmark holiday films has not gone unnoticed by viewers and critics. A popular infographic circulated in the 2019 holiday season that called itself a “Hallmark Christmas Movie Plot Generator.”⁴³⁵ This generator is meant to poke fun at the predictably formulaic storylines of the Hallmark Christmas movies, but it also reveals the tropes viewers have begun to recognize. Readers of the chart are instructed to choose one from each of the six columns. In the first column, there are five descriptors of the main

⁴³³ Jump PR. “Hallmark Channel.”

⁴³⁴ Sarah Fox, “It’s a Wonderful Lifetime’ adds LGBTQ and Chinese-American Stories,” *Slanted*, August 16, 2020, <https://theslanted.com/2020/08/42415/lifetime-its-a-wonderful-christmas-stars-lgbtq/>.

⁴³⁵ John Atkinson, “Hallmark Christmas Movie Plot Generator,” *Wrong Hands*, November 29, 2019, <https://wronghands1.com/2019/11/29/hallmark-christmas-movie-plot-generator/>.

female character. In the next column is her profession. Readers are also encouraged to select an option from the column about what the main character's task is and what the man she falls in love with is like. Of these six columns, two columns contain only one option, indicating that these are absolute staples of the genre: "returns to her small town at Christmas time" and "and magically falls in love." While we could complicate the "small town" column with options like "small mountain village," "rural farm town," "small New England hamlet," or "small town with a working train station," the small town is still as big of a character in these films as the main male and female characters haphazardly thrown together and soon in love.

These films often showcase the dichotomy between urban life and rural life as the main character leaves the bustling, anonymous city with its stressful life and job and finds family and friends, love, and a slower pace in the featured small town. It would seem that these films are promoting the small town life over the urban, but several critics have noted that the best parts of the small town setting are actually rooted in urbanism and these films are reinforcing the qualities that make cities livable for their residents.⁴³⁶ Supporting this is the fact that a number of these movies have been filmed in Canadian cities with strong livability scores, like Vancouver and Toronto.⁴³⁷ Some of the key characteristics of these small towns is their "walkability, active public spaces, and low motor vehicle presence," all of which are touted by urbanists as fundamental to cities and small towns alike.

⁴³⁶ Linda Poon, "Why Do Christmas Movies Hate Cities So Much?" CityLab, *Bloomberg*, December 24, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-12-24/the-urban-rural-divide-of-tv-christmas-movies>; Dylan Reis, "The secret small-town urbanism of TV Christmas movies," *Spacing Toronto*, *Spacing*, December 17, 2019, <http://spacing.ca/toronto/2019/12/17/the-secret-small-town-urbanism-of-christmas-movies/>.

⁴³⁷ Poon, "Why Do Christmas."

Though some features of these towns paint a neatly urbanist view of small-town life, the social dynamics of these small towns at Christmas often reflect the rural, political conservatism that has become increasingly popular (and increasingly entrenched) in recent years. The relationship between small towns and nostalgia, as explored in Chapter 3, comes to the forefront even in fictionalized settings. Research suggests that the regions where the Hallmark Channel is most popular actually correspond with the regions of the country Donald Trump won over in the 2016 Presidential election.⁴³⁸ From this correlation, two camps have emerged: those who think viewers are escaping into these holiday movies avoid politics and the news, and those who think viewers who see these films as a realization of their conservative politics.

The small towns of Hallmark are notoriously idyllic and very white. Only four of the movies in the 2019 “Countdown to Christmas” lineup featured Black leads. Crown Media executives have promised to look into promoting inclusion in their holiday storylines, yet just last year the company pulled a Zola wedding planning app commercial for depicting a lesbian wedding after a number of anti-gay activists demanded the commercial be removed from programming. Only afterward did Crown Media apologize to the LGBTQ+ community for doing so.⁴³⁹ It is clear that small town America has a very distinct look, especially at the holidays.

Zachary Jason, for *Slate*, editorializes on the whiteness of Hallmark Christmases:

As much as these movies offer giddy, predictable escapes from Trumpian chaos, they all depict a fantasy world in which America has been Made Great Again. Real and fictional heartland small towns with names such as Evergreen and Cookie Jar are as thriving as

⁴³⁸ Zachary Jason, “White! Christmas!” *Slate*, December 12, 2017, <https://slate.com/arts/2017/12/hallmarks-21-movie-christmas-countdown-reviewed.html>.

⁴³⁹ Jeb Lund, “Hallmark’s Christmas movies are part of a culture war their viewers are losing,” *The Washington Post*, December 23, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/12/23/hallmarks-christmas-movies-are-part-culture-war-their-viewers-are-losing/>.

their own small businesses . . . They brim with white heterosexuals who exclusively, emphatically, and endlessly bellow “Merry Christmas” to every lumberjack and labradoodle they pass. They’re centered on beauty-pageant heroines and strong-jawed heroes with white-nationalist haircuts. There are occasional sightings of Christmas sweater-wearing black people, but they exist only to cheer on the dreams of the white leads, and everyone on Trump’s naughty list—Muslims, gay people, feminists—has never crossed the snowcapped green-screen mountains to taint these quaint Christmas villages.⁴⁴⁰

The idea of dreaming of a “white Christmas” takes on a different meaning during a time when the President of the United States is vocally racist, sexist, xenophobic, classist, and ableist, all the while vehemently upholding and promoting conservative Christian values.⁴⁴¹

The Hallmark small town relies heavily on whiteness and a particular brand of white nostalgia. This nostalgia is that which comes with wanting to “Make America Great Again” an utterance-turned-battle cry that began with a Ronald Reagan presidential campaign. Ronald Reagan’s presidency shaped the American national identity during the 1980s by calling upon white America’s memory of the past. Reagan planned to take America back to the conservative moment of the fifties. In *Happy Days and Wonder Years: The Fifties and Sixties in Contemporary Politics*, author Daniel Marcus states “because the Fifties always operated at an

⁴⁴⁰ Jason, “White! Christmas!”

⁴⁴¹ Axios, “Bernie Sanders calls Trump racist, sexist, homophobic and xenophobic,” *Axios*, November 14, 2018, <https://www.axios.com/bernie-sanders-donald-trump-racist-sexist-homophobic-6da0fbe8-695a-492d-883d-865fdb96af6c.html>.

imaginary level, their norms have been able to maintain a hold on America's fantasy life, to be resuscitated in conservative discourse and popular culture."⁴⁴²

During his campaigns and subsequent presidency, Reagan came to embody the glory days of 1950s America. Seeing Reagan as a manifestation "of all that is right with, or heroized by, America" was at the forefront of Reagan's 1984 reelection campaign especially when Reagan was identified with the ever-heroized cowboy.⁴⁴³ This call to the past and to an idyllic and often mythicized America permeated the American culture of the 1980s. Marcus writes:

Reagan could invoke an American past of unchanging values, and this could offer platitudinous links to historical themes divorced from a well-developed sense of cause and effect. The past and present melded into an undifferentiated testament to American goodness and superiority, which voters needed only to accept to ensure a future just as vaguely pleasing.⁴⁴⁴

This is the brand of nostalgia that has been re-popularized and re-weaponized by conservative America and Donald Trump. As has been mentioned, there is clear overlap between the "Make America Great Again" contingency of American politics and the viewership of Christmas movies on the Hallmark Channel.⁴⁴⁵

Historic Preservation on Television

A number of television small towns have had conversations similar to those happening in Weston, Missouri and in town planning and historic preservation groups across the country. On

⁴⁴² Daniel Marcus, *Happy Days and Wonder Years: The Fifties and the Sixties in Contemporary Cultural Politics* (Rutgers University Press, 2004), 2.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 85, 87.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁴⁵ Jason, "White! Christmas!"

television, there are several examples of small towns rallying together to save historic buildings and sites. In some instances, these sites are under attack by private development groups, in others, time is the only villain. However, in response to both is an emphasis on the cultural importance of the town's history and by extension the sites' history. The responses also tend to rely on a neoliberal economic solution: uniting private business interests with the needs of the town.

Parks and Recreation

In the NBC television series *Parks and Recreation* (2009-2015), the cameras create a day-in-the-life-of atmosphere following the employees of Pawnee, Indiana's Parks and Recreation Department, a minor branch of the local government. The seriousness with which the main character, Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation, Leslie Knope (Amy Poehler), takes her job is central to the series. Knope highlights the town's history and cultural significance in every step as she works hard to show the residents of Pawnee just how wonderful their town can be.

In the episode titled "94 Meetings" from season two, Leslie Knope receives a complaint from the Pawnee Historical Society regarding threats to a historic home in town. As Knope tells it, "Turnbill Mansion is one of the most beloved historic sites in Pawnee."⁴⁴⁶ Knope explains the history of the Reverend Turnbill and his home while standing in front of one of the town's several racially problematic murals depicting violence between the indigenous Wamapoke tribe and the white settlers. The crux of the episode rests on the richest man in town and his wife renting the mansion for a party and making alterations like "drilling holes, painting . . . removing

⁴⁴⁶ *Parks and Recreation*, season 2, episode 21, "94 Meetings," directed by Tristram Shapeero, written by Harris Wittels, featuring Amy Poehler, Rashida Jones, and Paul Schneider, aired April 29, 2010 in broadcast syndication, Hulu.

wainscoting . . . tearing down the gazebo.”⁴⁴⁷ Knope pleads with the wealthy man “as a member of the Parks Department, as a Pawnee, and an American” not to make changes to the structure, only to find out that they had already significantly altered the site. Knope realizes that despite her pleas, arguments, and comedic halting of a bulldozer, historical significance is often ignored by those with wealth who have a grasp on local political and economic power.

In a season five episode called, “Bailout,” Leslie Knope attempts to save the Pawnee Video Dome from closing. She claims the video store’s art house film screenings are the only times when people in town get together to be intellectual and that the site and its events have “tremendous community value.”⁴⁴⁸ Knope works with the owner and the Pawnee Historical Society on an application for historic landmark designation for the Dome which is accompanied by a tax break that could help the business. Leslie’s boss, libertarian Ron Swanson (Nick Offerman) bemoans this process and vocalizes his desire for the free market to work this out on its own. With the tax break, Knope encourages the Video Dome’s owner to invest wisely and consider how he might rent and screen more popular films than his usual art house fare. The Pawnee Video Dome is in fact saved by Leslie’s intervention and the historic site designation, though in an attempt to broaden its business, the owner of the store reopens it as a porn video rental store, since that is an area of his business that brings in more money than his art films. Leslie Knope is appalled by this turn and tells her boss, Ron, that she knows he was right, and that the government should not interfere in the market on behalf of failing businesses, though

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ *Parks and Recreation*, season 5, episode 16, “Bailout,” directed by Craig Zisk, written by Joe Mande, featuring Amy Poehler, Rashida Jones, and Aziz Ansari, aired March 14, 2013 in broadcast syndication, Hulu.

Leslie still insists there must be a way to help businesses with community value that might not be financially successful.

Gilmore Girls

Like Pawnee, Indiana, residents of Stars Hollow, Connecticut take a certain pride in their town and its history. The television series *Gilmore Girls* aired on the WB network (eventually renamed the CW) from 2000 to 2007. The series is mostly centered on the mother-daughter relationships and dynamics between the show's main characters Lorelai Gilmore (Lauren Graham) and her daughter Rory Gilmore (Alexis Bledel), and Lorelai's mother and Rory's grandmother, Emily Gilmore (Kelly Bishop). Though most often secondarily, the series also focuses on the numerous residents, sites, and happenings in the small fictional town of Stars Hollow. In the show's first season, the audience is introduced to the town's commitment to restoring an old bridge. Lorelai has volunteered to sort through Stars Hollow residents' "junk" for a rummage sale. Even the town's grumpiest and least active resident, diner owner Luke Danes (Scott Patterson) hangs a poster on the front door of Luke's Diner that reads: "Stars Hollow Annual Rummage Sale All proceeds will go toward restoring the Old Muddy River Bridge."⁴⁴⁹ An interesting detail about this sign is the Old Muddy River Bridge is written on a separate placard with an illustration and is placed on top of the sign just underneath "All proceeds will go toward restoring the," giving the impression that the annual rummage sale's cause changes each year, but is always focused on restoration (Figure 1).

⁴⁴⁹ *Gilmore Girls*, season 1, episode 13, "Concert Interruptus," directed by Bruce Seth Green, written by Elaine Arata, featuring Lauren Graham, Alexis Bledel, and Melissa McCarthy, aired February 15, 2001, in broadcast syndication. Warner Brothers, Netflix.

In an episode from season three, the Old Muddy River Bridge makes a comeback when the town selectman, Taylor Doose (Michael Winters) approaches the curmudgeonly Luke asking him to provide free coffee to participants in the upcoming twenty-four-hour dance marathon. Luke frustratedly points out, “We’ve been raising money to restore that stupid bridge for eight years,” to which Taylor replies, “We’re not raising money to restore the bridge.” After some pressing from Luke, Taylor explains that “We have that money. The Tennessee Williams look-alike contest last month put us over the top.”⁴⁵⁰ The town is now raising funds for a tarp to cover this bridge because the changing seasons will wreak havoc on the restoration process. After a successful restoration, the town starts a new fundraiser for the Old Muddy River Bridge in season seven after the newly restored bridge started to rot after an infestation of beetles. This time, the town has chosen to host a knit-a-thon to raise funds for the bridge’s second restoration. Despite grumblings among townspeople in Stars Hollow, they usually pull-together in the name of history and preservation, though none more so than the town selectman, local grocer, ice cream shop owner, and landlord, Taylor Doose.

In the episode, “Lost and Found” from season two, Luke realizes that Taylor has been systematically buying up property in town, giving him power to control the appearances of these properties. In a confrontation over the matter, Luke exclaims, “But why isn’t anyone stopping you?” to which Taylor replies, “Because, my friend, people are lazy. They don’t wanna think about the proper fabric for an awning or the correct historical color for a building. They just slap any old thing up on a wall and sleep like babies. But soon, hopefully, the city council will put an

⁴⁵⁰ *Gilmore Girls*, season 3, episode 7, “They Shoot Gilmores, Don’t They?” directed by Kenny Ortega, written by Amy Sherman-Palladino, featuring Lauren Graham, Alexis Bledel, and Melissa McCarthy, aired November 12, 2002, in broadcast syndication, Warner Brothers, Netflix.

end to that.”⁴⁵¹ Luke protests and explains that Taylor cannot tell people what color to paint their buildings, and Taylor retorts: “Well, someone has to.”⁴⁵² It is clear that Taylor sees himself as one of the few townspeople who consider historic preservation to be of utmost importance. In a later episode, Taylor Doose writes to Lorelai on behalf of the Stars Hollow Historical Preservation Society asking her to stop all construction on the historic Dragonfly Inn property that Lorelai recently purchased and planned to reopen. Lorelai is frustrated because she had plans to begin construction in just a few days.

“Well, the Dragonfly is a historical building, Lorelai.”

“Yeah, but the whole town is a historical building, Taylor. I mean, George Washington ate, slept, or blew his nose all over the damn place.”

“He only blew his nose in the park. You’ve read the sign.”⁴⁵³

As is sometimes true in Weston, and some other fictional towns, local historic preservation efforts are not always appreciated by townsfolk. In Stars Hollow, Taylor Doose and the townspeople clearly seek to preserve and showcase Stars Hollow’s history but are at odds at times about whether to prioritize the past or the present. Almost as impactful is his determination to encourage tourism in Stars Hollow.

⁴⁵¹ *Gilmore Girls*, season 2, episode 15, “Lost and Found,” directed by Gail Mancuso, written by Amy Sherman-Palladino, featuring Lauren Graham, Alexis Bledel, and Melissa McCarthy, aired February 26, 2002, in broadcast syndication, Warner Brothers, Netflix.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

⁴⁵³ *Gilmore Girls*, season 4, episode 4, “Chicken or Beef?” directed by Chris Long, written by Jane Espenson, featuring Lauren Graham, Alexis Bledel, and Melissa McCarthy, aired October 14, 2003, in broadcast syndication, Warner Brothers, Netflix.

Hart of Dixie

Stars Hollow is not the only town preoccupied with saving a historic bridge, the fictional town of Bluebell, Alabama in the CW's *Hart of Dixie* (2011-2015) took on a similar project in the first season of the series. This series follows a young doctor, Zoe Hart (Rachel Bilson), from New York City who ends up working as a physician in rural Alabama after inheriting part of a medical practice left to her by her estranged biological father. Bluebell is a town filled with interesting characters, many of whom are wary of a "big city doctor." Bluebell is a small town whose business centers around the Town Square, which features the same gazebo used in Stars Hollow's Town Square on *Gilmore Girls*.⁴⁵⁴ Near the Town Square are small businesses like Nate's Hardware store, a mini-mart, Mane Street Beauty Salon, George Tucker's Law Office, the Whippoorwill Blossom Bed and Breakfast, and the Rammer Jammer restaurant. As Bluebell is described as being about thirty miles from Mobile, Alabama, the town is fictionally situated amongst the wild bayou country of Southwestern Alabama. This geography accounts for the town's alligator, Burt Reynolds, the nearby creeks and rivers, and the town's plan to reconstruct the historic Jumping Frog Creek Bridge that stood for 105 years before it was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.⁴⁵⁵ Spearheading this campaign is Lemon Breeland (Jaime King), the daughter of the town's other doctor and lead Bluebell socialite. Lemon is also an active member of the Mobile Bay Memory Matrons, a philanthropic historical society in the area. In taking on the task of reconstructing the bridge, Lemon hopes to impress the head of the Memory Matrons and

⁴⁵⁴ Alanna Bennett, "'Gilmore Girls' & 'Hart Of Dixie' Need A Crossover," *Bustle*, April 6, 2015, <https://www.bustle.com/articles/73517-what-if-gilmore-girls-hart-of-dixie-took-place-in-the-same-universe-they-have>.

⁴⁵⁵ *Hart of Dixie*, season 1, episode 5, "Faith & Infidelity," directed by Ron Lagomarsino, written by Debra Fordham, featuring Rachel Bilson, Jaime King, and Cress Williams, aired October 24, 2011, in broadcast syndication, Warner Brothers, Netflix.

assure a prominent position in the group. Lemon Breeland's flair for dramatics is showcased in her rousing speech for the mayor by which she hopes to secure his support:

It is a matter of propriety. The Memory Matrons and our esteemed leader, Delia Ann Lee, believe that the bridge over Jumping Frog Creek deserves restoration. For 105 years, the covered bridge was the very symbol of our town. But then came the storm to end all storms—Katrina. And our beautiful bridge was taken from our warm embrace and with that Mr. Mayor, our hopes and our dreams.⁴⁵⁶

In addition to her impassioned speech, Lemon prepares a candy diorama of the reconstructed covered bridge. Despite some back-door politicking led by her fiancé, she is ultimately successful, and the mayor agrees to support the restoration. While the historic preservation projects do not extend beyond this example, the history of Bluebell is an important thread that runs through almost every episode of the series.

The Andy Griffith Show

Given these examples, historical societies play a significant role in the restoration and preservation of historical sites, but they also preserve historical narratives for local citizens. *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-1968) was set in the fictional Mayberry, North Carolina. A small town of about 5,360 people, Mayberry had plenty of kind-hearted townsfolk and very little crime, despite featuring the daily goings-on of Sheriff Andy Taylor (Andy Griffith). When not protecting the townspeople and upholding the law, Sheriff Taylor was navigating single fatherhood while raising his son Opie (Ron Howard). The town of Mayberry has been referenced in popular culture for decades, often evoking a longing for a simpler time and lifestyle. The pop

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

country band Rascal Flatts have gone so far as to eulogize Mayberry in an eponymous song: “I miss Mayberry / Sitting on the porch drinking ice-cold cherry Coke / Where everything is black and white.”

In the episode, “A Plaque for Mayberry,” the fictional Women’s Historical Society⁴⁵⁷ discovers that Mayberry was the site of a critical military defense during the American Revolution. The women of the organization explain that during the war, a Mayberry citizen heard that the British troops were coming, so he burned down the only bridge leading to town, thus saving General Washington and his troops from the British bombardment. The Women’s Historical Society even believes that a direct descendant of the brave soldier, Nathan Tibbs, is still living in Mayberry and they hope to verify this lineage and award the descendant a commemorative plaque. When Sheriff Taylor, his deputy, and the mayor find out that the descendant is none other than the town drunkard, Otis Campbell, who frequently finds himself in the town jail and under the Sheriff’s supervision. The mayor asks Andy Taylor not to tell Otis and to find a stand-in for the descendant. Sheriff Taylor objects and thinks that Otis should be given the chance to know his history as it aligns with the town’s history. By placing his faith in Otis Campbell and challenging the mayor’s directive, Sheriff Taylor places a great deal of value on preserving Mayberry’s history.

In an episode celebrating the 50th anniversary of the *Mayberry Gazette*, Opie Taylor’s grade school class is asked to research and write an essay on the historic Battle of Mayberry—a skirmish against a group of Cherokee Native Americans—and the best essay will be published in the anniversary edition of the newspaper. Opie tells his father and his Aunt Bee (Frances Bavier) about the contest. Andy and Aunt Bee remind Opie that he has a distant relative who served as a

⁴⁵⁷ Possibly a stand-in for the Daughters of the American Revolution organization.

colonel in that battle and that there are a number of other townspeople whom he can speak to about their family's participation in the historic battle. In speaking with townsfolk, Opie begins to hear a familiar yarn that each townsman has a family relation who served as a colonel in the battle and became a great war hero as a result. He even hears from a descendant of one of the Cherokee in the battle who claims that he and his family refer to the battle as "The Victory of Tuckahoosie Creek."⁴⁵⁸ While visiting the public library in Raleigh, North Carolina, Opie found the true account of the event only to discover there was no battle and the only lives lost were those of some livestock.

The Taylors are worried about how this true tale will affect the residents of Mayberry who took a lot of pride in their family ties to the epic story. In contrast to his actions in the previous example, in this episode, Andy tries to keep Opie from writing the truth of the event, but Opie carries on. Sheriff Taylor meets with Opie's teacher who is planning on awarding Opie with the prize and the publication. He shares his worries, "Well, I'll tell you one thing. You're not making it very easy for me and Opie to walk down Main Street."⁴⁵⁹ Upon reading the article a saddened resident says, "It kind of gives you an empty feeling," suggesting the power of local histories and the strong ties communities have to them. Though the story is eventually spun as another reason to be proud in the towns' ancestors.

⁴⁵⁸ *The Andy Griffith Show*, season 6, episode 29, "The Battle of Mayberry," directed by Alan Rafkin, written by Paul David and John L. Greene, featuring Andy Griffith, Ron Howard, and Frances Bavier, aired April 4, 1966, in broadcast syndication, CBS Productions, Amazon Prime.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

The Simpsons

In *The Simpsons* (1989-), the audience follows the Simpson family, Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa, and Maggie, as they go about their mediocre lives in the fictional and cartooned town of Springfield (state unknown and widely speculated). Despite their sometimes dissatisfaction with life in Springfield, the seventh season episode, “Lisa the Iconoclast,” focuses on town pride and shows each member of the Simpson family taking on a task to help celebrate Springfield’s bicentennial celebration. The school-aged children view a film that documents the beginnings of the town and its founding by Jedediah Springfield. While visiting the Springfield Historical Society (See Figure 2), Lisa Simpson (Yeardley Smith) begins to play around with some of the historical artifacts only to find Jedediah Springfield’s end-of-life confession lodged in a small flute. When Lisa reads the confession, she realizes that Jedediah Springfield may have founded the town, though before that he was Hans Sprungfeld, a “murderous pirate” who even tried to kill President George Washington.⁴⁶⁰ Upon reading this, Lisa announces, “Our town hero is a fraud!” She attempts to explain her findings to her parents, but her parents are doubtful and choose to support the local history they are most familiar with. Even Lisa’s teacher, who asked her students to write an essay on Jedediah Springfield for a bicentennial essay contest chooses to believe the original story of the town’s founding, failing Lisa for “dead, white, male bashing.”⁴⁶¹ In her attempt to correct the history and dispel the myth of Jedediah Springfield, Lisa and her father, Homer, approach local businesses with printed flyers of Lisa’s research. They are repeatedly turned away and the bar owner, Moe Szyslak reports them to the “Town Jubilation Committee,” who even suggest imprisoning them until after the bicentennial celebration. She finally

⁴⁶⁰ *The Simpsons*, season 7, episode 16, “Lisa the Iconoclast,” directed by Mike B. Anderson, written by Jonathan Collier, featuring Dan Castellaneta, Julie Kavner, and Nancy Cartwright, aired February 18, 1996, in broadcast syndication, 20th Television, Hulu.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

convinces the town historian to tell the truth about Jebediah Springfield and he encourages her to share the history in a speech to the town. Only, when Lisa looks out at the townspeople and sees their displays of town pride at the bicentennial parade, she keeps the true story to herself and allows the myth of Jebediah Springfield to continue.

Much in the way Opie Taylor researched the true story behind the Battle of Mayberry, Lisa too, has to grapple with whether to share the true history of the town's founding, or conceal it; Lisa reaches a different conclusion than Opie. Though in both series, the importance of preserving local history is at the fore of the discussion.

Economic struggles

The Simpsons

In the episode, “Springfield (or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Legalized Gambling),” the town of Springfield’s economic precarity is addressed. Early in the episode, the audience views an old news reel about Springfield’s economic boom during the 1940s and 1950s. This reel celebrates Springfield’s designation as one of the 400 fastest growing cities in the country and their exciting manufacturing industry focused on the “Aqua Car,” a car that drives in water. The film ends, “Watch out, Utica! Springfield is a city on the grow!”⁴⁶² In the present-day, Mr. Burns (Harry Shearer), the richest man in town, finds out the town has encountered economic troubles, so he begins laying off employees. The local news covers this new surge in unemployment and connects the economic downturn to the close of Fort Springfield, which has negatively impacted “the city’s liquor and prostitution industries.” The

⁴⁶² *The Simpsons*, season 5, episode 10, “Springfield (Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Legalized Gambling),” directed by Wesley Archer, written by Bill Oakley and Josh Weinstein, featuring Dan Castellaneta, Julie Kavner, and Nancy Cartwright, aired December 16, 1993, in broadcast syndication, 20th Television, Hulu.

news reporter ends his segment by saying, “Now at the risk of being unpopular, this reporter places the blame for all of this squarely on you, the viewers.” Even the illustrated, fictional town of Springfield cannot escape economic decline. And in true neoliberal fashion, the blame for this change is placed on the residents who will then be expected to find a way to turn this around or risk complete decay of the town. It is suggested that they support a measure to legalize gambling in Springfield. Mr. Burns is particularly excited as he will be the one building the casino and making more money off of the town’s troubles.

Ultimately, the casino begins to damage the lives of all those involved with the casino; Marge Simpson showcases addictive gambling behavior, so her family suffers, Bart starts his own casino tree house, and even Mr. Burns’ mental health starts to deteriorate as he watches the casino bring him so much money. The fate of Springfield is not revealed, but what is clear is Springfield’s attempt to reinvigorate the town came at a cost to its citizens and a large benefit to the town’s richest citizen.

Gilmore Girls

Though often bustling with tourists, even Stars Hollow’s tourism industry has labored to generate tourists and money. Taylor Doose’s creative solutions to encourage tourism have generally kept the town ahead of any decay or financial troubles. Yet even Taylor can admit when the town is struggling. In the “Spring” episode of the *Gilmore Girl: A Year in the Life* revival, which aired ten years after the series ended, the neighboring town of Woodbury was chosen over Stars Hollow as a filming location for a big Hollywood film.⁴⁶³ So the town is competing with nearby small towns to attract Hollywood film stars to stay in and visit Stars

⁴⁶³ As I will soon discuss, Stars Hollow’s chance to become a filming location is certainly a familiar experience for a number of small towns, including Weston.

Hollow. Taylor Doose shares his concerns about A-list celebrities staying out of town while less famous actors stay at Lorelai's inn: "If you must know, our tax base is receding. Alarmingly. And it's the tax base that pays for gazebo upkeep, street sweeping, twinkle lights. If we want to remain a world-class tourist destination, we cannot lower our standards."⁴⁶⁴ In his concerns, Taylor has highlighted just how intertwined the historic aesthetic of Stars Hollow is to tourism is to the local economy.

Parks and Recreation

The town of Pawnee, Indiana also called on its citizens to get creative in order to save the Parks and Recreation department from a huge budget cut. Toward the end of the second season, the Parks and Recreation department is visited by two Indiana state auditors who have been tasked with significantly downsizing the Pawnee local government after the town entered a financial crisis. Pawnee is approaching "a full-blown crisis" sending Leslie Knope into a panic and Ron Swanson into a state of glee at the prospect of shrinking the size of the government. Ron shares his delight about the impending visit from the state auditors with Leslie telling her, "This government is diseased. It's like a big fat, angry slob spending money it doesn't have on crap it doesn't need . . . 'Me want more pointless social programs.'" Leslie responds, "That's what government does, Ron. It provides services. They're going to try to eliminate everything we do."⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁴ *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life*, episode 2, "Spring," directed by Daniel Palladino, written by Daniel Palladino, featuring Lauren Graham, Alexis Bledel, and Scott Patterson, aired November 25, 2016, in broadcast syndication. Warner Brothers, Netflix.

⁴⁶⁵ *Parks and Recreation*, season 2, episode 23, "The Master Plan," directed by Dean Holland, written by Michael Schur, featuring Amy Poehler, Rashida Jones, and Paul Schneider, aired May 13, 2010 in broadcast syndication, Hulu.

The auditor, Ben Wyatt (Adam Scott) delivers the harsh reality of what the town is facing, “Okay, you need to understand that just to keep this town afloat we probably have to cut the budget of every department by 40 or 50 percent. Okay?” When Leslie pushes back about asking how the auditing team can be so callous and inconsiderate of the people this would affect, Wyatt responds, “Because I didn’t cause these problems, Ms. Knope. Your government did.” This line of thinking ignores larger forces of capitalism that impact the economies of small towns across the country. The residents of Pawnee will now suffer from a lack of public and social services and for Leslie Knope, it is up to her to figure out how to save the Parks department from the budget cuts.

In order to try and save the Pawnee Parks and Recreation department’s budget, and her coworkers’ livelihoods, Leslie Knope relies on a tried-and-true money-generator for small towns: the festival. Not only is the festival a way to funnel money into a town, but as we saw in the case of Weston, the festival is an integral tool for establishing a local economy based in heritage tourism.

Heritage Tourism on Television

Frequently serving as a solution to the economic troubles of these fictional towns is a plan to market their history and their “quaintness” for tourists. While the examples discussed take place in worlds imagined and of fiction, the solution is rooted in reality. Weston has been cultivating a heritage tourism industry for about sixty years and while some of these television towns, like Stars Hollow, have long enjoyed tourists while other towns are seeing the spread of decay and vacancies of the Main Streets and are hoping a push toward tourism will keep the decay at bay. And blending the worlds of the fictional and the real, some very real towns have

benefited from being the inspiration for or filming sites of the television towns. This unique position relies on a fictional heritage to generate tourism for a very real small town.

Parks and Recreation

Leslie Knope and her staff in the Parks and Rec department fight for their jobs by planning the Pawnee Harvest Festival. This festival was a yearly event until 1987. The slogan of the revamped Harvest Festival is plastered all over city hall: “Be a Part of History, Celebrate Pawnee” (See Figure 3).⁴⁶⁶ The focus of the festival is food and entertainment, but they also incorporate informative booths and events. In the episode “Harvest Festival,” Knope estimates the attendance at 50,000 people.⁴⁶⁷ The Harvest Festival is one of the main storylines of the show’s third season. While several episodes highlight the planning of the event, there is one episode about the string of bad luck surrounding the festival on its opening day. The local news station and a number of residents attribute the bad luck to a “curse” placed on the event by the local, and highly fictional, Native American tribe, the Wamapoke because the festival is on the site of the Battle of Indian Hill, a site where a number of Wamapoke were murdered by United States cavalry. Leslie Knope tries to accommodate the Wamapoke tribe’s leader Ken Hotate (Jonathan Joss) by explaining “We put up a memorial plaque and we have a Wamapoke exhibit in the history tent.”⁴⁶⁸ Leslie Knope and Ken Hotate are aware of and comment on the racial insensitivity and inaccuracy of the “curse” while also playing into the idea by hosting a “curse”-lifting ceremony to placate the locals and the media. To get Hotate to agree to lift the “curse,”

⁴⁶⁶ *Parks and Recreation*, season 3, episode 7, “Harvest Festival,” directed by Dean Holland, written by Dan Goor, featuring Amy Poehler, Rashida Jones, and Aziz Ansari, aired March 17, 2011 in broadcast syndication, Hulu.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

Leslie promises to move the Wamapoke exhibit to the entrance of the festival, “so that you have to look at it before you start having fun.”⁴⁶⁹

Gilmore Girls

Town selectman Taylor Doose employs a variety of tactics to encourage tourism in Stars Hollow. The town frequently creates reenactments of historical events for tourists. A popular reenactment is that of the Battle of Stars Hollow. Every winter, local townspeople called “the reenactors” meet to plan their reenactment of this fateful event. According to Stars Hollow’s local history, twelve local soldiers waited with their guns ready to defend the town against the British. They waited all night and the British never came.⁴⁷⁰ So the reenactment is far from thrilling, as twelve townspeople stand in wait all night in the cold. Yet this tradition continues yearly, until “A local historian uncovered new evidence of Stars Hollow’s participation in the Revolution.”⁴⁷¹ Apparently it was discovered that local troops blocked a nearby road so that the British would have to come through town where a local townswoman sexually propositioned the British general leaving an opening for Major General Marquis de Lafayette and his troops to ambush the British. Through the planning of these reenactments, it is clear that how important it is for Stars Hollow to establish connections to the past to attract tourists and establish an identity for the town.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ *Gilmore Girls*, season 1, episode 8, “Love and War and Snow,” directed by Alan Myerson, written by Joan Binder Weiss, featuring Lauren Graham, Alexis Bledel, and Melissa McCarthy, aired December 14, 2000, in broadcast syndication. Warner Brothers, Netflix.

⁴⁷¹ *Gilmore Girls*, season 5, episode 11, “Women of Questionable Morals,” directed by Matthew Diamond, written by Daniel Palladino, featuring Lauren Graham, Alexis Bledel, and Melissa McCarthy, aired January 25, 2005, in broadcast syndication. Warner Brothers, Netflix.

In addition to the ways the town has preserved historic buildings and monuments, they have also celebrated their local history with a museum and diorama. After a beloved resident of Stars Hollow passed away and left his historic home to the Stars Hollow Historical Society “along with his ample collection of valuable memorabilia.”⁴⁷² Taylor began the project of turning the home into a museum with “multimedia dioramas depicting the history of the town.”⁴⁷³ The end result was a less-than-spectacular display of inauthentic or unimpressive artifacts like a “letter from Olivia Taft, reported grand-niece by marriage to president William Taft, written to Chester Hobart, assumed distant relative to Garret Hobart, vice-president to William McKinley,” a Civil War-era cannon ball that fell through the floor of the old house, and a “rare forty-eight star American flag” with a Sears tag still attached.⁴⁷⁴

The diorama presentation showcased a timeline of Stars Hollow from pre-historic inhabitants to the present day. The founding of Stars Hollow is depicted by the Puritan Jebediah family who were “the very first people to live on this land, besides the Indians.”⁴⁷⁵ The presentation then moves forward in the town’s history, stopping to tell the story of how Stars Hollow’s former manufacturing plant, Buff-Rite, supplied urinal cakes and sanitation items to soldiers during the World Wars. The presentation features a brief condemnation of the 1960s counterculture movement in Stars Hollow and ends with a display of “modern life in Stars Hollow” wherein a mother makes breakfast for her family and her young son exclaims, “And I

⁴⁷² *Gilmore Girls*, “To Live and Let Diorama.”

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

love Jesus!”⁴⁷⁶ Based on the reactions of Lorelai, Luke, and Sookie, it appears Taylor Doose took some liberties with his depiction of modern-day life in the town.

In a later episode, Taylor Doose stresses the precarity of the town’s heritage tourism economy and suggests adopting some strategies that have been successful in nearby towns. Taylor warns “our tourism revenue is off twenty-six percent from the previous fiscal year. In that same time, Woodbury and Cogsville’s revenue has jumped. That’s because they are highlighting their heritage, thus increasing their charm. The more charm a town has, the greater its tourism revenue.”⁴⁷⁷ In this situation, Taylor suggests returning the street names in town to their historic names. Unfortunately for Lorelai, her inn and popular tourist destination is on “Sores and Boils Alley.” Though his plans to encourage tourism are sometimes unsuccessful, Taylor Doose seems to understand that the only way Stars Hollow can stay relevant and generate revenue is to cater to tourists by cultivating charming connections to the past.⁴⁷⁸

As Seen on TV: Heritage Tourism Inspired by Television

The Andy Griffith Show

For thirty years, the town of Mount Airy, North Carolina, has hosted an annual festival, Mayberry Days, in celebration of *The Andy Griffith Show*. Mount Airy is the birthplace of Andy

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ *Gilmore Girls*, season 6, episode 6, “Welcome to the Dollhouse,” directed by Jackson Douglas, written by Keith Eisner, featuring Lauren Graham, Alexis Bledel, and Melissa McCarthy, aired October 18, 2005, in broadcast syndication. Warner Brothers, Netflix.

⁴⁷⁸ In this episode, several townspeople bemoan and mock some of Taylor Doose’s previously unsuccessful strategies to encourage tourism, like when he promised visitors a mosquito-free summer by releasing bats in the town, or when he tried to attract families to the town by “driving his van around other towns and beckoning kids with candy,” or when he planned a reenactment of the Boston Tea Party leading to EPA fines for contaminating the local water source.

Griffith and the town is believed to be the inspiration for the fictional Mayberry.⁴⁷⁹ In 1990, to commemorate the 30th anniversary of *The Andy Griffith Show*, the Mayberry Days festival began. What started as a one-day event now spans an entire week and features a parade, live music, family activities, and appearances by actors on the series (though lately there have been more family members of late actors). As a result of this popular festival, the town opened the Andy Griffith Museum in 2009 and is the site of the “Andy and Opie” TV Land statue unveiled and dedicated by Andy Griffith himself at the 2004 Mayberry Days festival.

The impact of Mayberry Days on the town of Mount Airy has been significant. The tourism data from 2018 reveals the impact on revenue for the town and the county: in 2018 “Domestic visitors to and within Surry County spent \$130.9 million,” a 5.2% increase from the previous year.⁴⁸⁰ The county estimates that in 2018, there were 860 people directly employed by the local tourism industry and \$2.83 million generated from tourist related travel in the county.⁴⁸¹ Highlighting the impact of the Mayberry legacy on local tourism, the town reported that the number of visitors to the Andy Griffith Museum in Mount Airy was up 36% over the last two years, demonstrating ““sustainable growth”” for this tourist attraction.⁴⁸² The sixty-year-old television show has helped the local economy of Mount Airy by giving the town an alternative heritage from which to draw. The popularity and familiarity of the fictional Mayberry creates an alternative heritage that surpasses the particular heritage of Mount Airy itself.

Despite the television series’ age, an active group of people and fans keep the history of Mayberry alive to experience in person, while another group of fans keeps the history of

⁴⁷⁹ “Historic Downtown Mount Airy,” Mount Airy Downtown, Inc., last accessed February 24, 2021, <http://www.mountairydowntown.org/about.html>.

⁴⁸⁰ Tom Joyce, “Local tourism still going strong,” *The Mount Airy News*, August 23, 2019, <https://www.mtairynews.com/news/76913/local-tourism-still-going-strong>.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

Mayberry alive online. The Mayberry Historical Society is an online fan wiki that houses and publishes information about *The Andy Griffith Show*. The wiki's primary focus is an episode guide that highlights the plot, characters, connections, and trivia about each of the show's 249 episodes.⁴⁸³ The adoption of the name Mayberry Historical Society speaks to the fan community that has developed around the series and the project of place-making these fans have endeavored in. While several of the television series looked at in this chapter involve fictional historical societies on screen, no other has a fan community claiming the title, though perhaps the show's age places it further back in history and in need of historical conservators.

***Northern Exposure's* Moosefest**

Northern Exposure aired on CBS television for six seasons (1990-1995) after being introduced as a midseason replacement in the summer of 1990. *Northern Exposure's* pilot episode introduces the audience to Dr. Joel Fleischman (Rob Morrow) as he reluctantly leaves New York and his fiancée for a debt-forgiveness arrangement offered by the state of Alaska. In order to pay off his medical school debt, Dr. Fleischman sets up residency in Cicely, a town with a population of 839 deep in the heart of "the Alaskan Riviera." As Dr. Fleischman adjusts to his new surroundings, he meets the tight-knit community of Cicely: a retired astronaut with grand plans for building up Cicely, Maurice Minnifield (Barry Corbin); Maggie O'Connell (Janine Turner), yuppie turned bush pilot and Joel's landlord; a young Native American orphan with a cinematic eye, Ed Chigliak (Darren E. Burrows); Holling Vincoeur (John Cullum) a former hunter and trapper who now owns the local tavern, the Brick; a soft-spoken Native American

⁴⁸³ "Main Page," The Mayberry Historical Society, last accessed February 24, 2021, https://www.mayberry.info/history/index.php/Main_Page.

woman who becomes Dr. Fleischman's office receptionist, Marilyn Whirlwind (Elaine Miles); the virile Chris Stevens (John Corbett) who serves as the town's intellectual pillar and radio DJ; Ruth-Anne Miller (Peg Phillips) the widowed general store owner; and Shelly Tambo (Cynthia Geary), a Canadian beauty pageant winner and Holling's girlfriend.

Cicely, Alaska is a remote town located many miles from Alaska's larger metropolises. The town's main street offers the townsfolk all they appear to need, a general store, a barber, the Brick tavern, the KBHR radio station, and of course, a doctor's office. It is a town where everybody knows everybody else—and everybody else's business. Remoteness has given the community a touch of spirituality, not to say weirdness. Several residents have a propensity for prophetic dreams, and ghosts have been known to walk down Main Street. So has the occasional moose. The formerly city-dwelling Fleischman begins to settle into Cicely (a feat that gets easier after he realizes he can order New York bagels via airmail delivery). Throughout *Northern Exposure's* run on television, audiences saw Dr. Fleischman grow from an outsider, reluctant to embrace Cicely as his home, to a more understanding doctor, compassionate toward and accepting of those around him.

After six seasons, *Northern Exposure* came to an end. For many fans, this end—a departure from the series' first four seasons, due to television-production politics—resulted in confusion. During the fourth and fifth seasons, the character of Dr. Joel Fleischman's was reduced as the result of a contract dispute between actor Rob Morrow and the network. Morrow and Dr. Fleischman were eventually written out of the show. Along with the exit of the series' main character, the show was moved to a less visible time slot and suffered declining ratings.

During the last weekend of July, the town of Roslyn, Washington, where *Northern Exposure* was filmed, houses a couple hundred extra visitors who have made the pilgrimage to

this small town from locations around the United States and beyond. The pilgrims are no strangers to the town, in fact each has a unique relationship with the town of Roslyn, and many of these relationships have spanned over the last two decades. These unique relationships between person and place share a common root in popular culture. For Roslyn, Moosefest (the aptly named fan festival) brings an influx of visitors hoping to revive the spirit of Cicely, the fictional Alaskan setting for *Northern Exposure*, a television show that ended twenty-five years ago. Roslyn, Washington features a small downtown area that still looks like it did in the television show's opening credits. The infamous Roslyn mural, the Brick, and the KBHR radio station storefronts are must-see downtown features for the visiting *Northern Exposure* fan. The local gift shop named after the fictional town, Cicely's Gift Shop, sells souvenirs and memorabilia related to the series. The shop owner even keeps track of where visitors come from on a map, asking visitors to leave pins marking where they come from. The result is a map with pins from many states and countries.⁴⁸⁴

Not only do these fans coming together in person, but they also maintain their community year-round with help from the Internet. *Northern Exposure* fans assemble in person and online with some frequency, despite the almost twenty-five years that have passed since the show's finale. The fans traveling to Roslyn for the yearly Moosefest have a website where they can register for the events and view photos and itineraries from past years' gatherings. The formal Moosefest, complete with celebrity guests and phone interviews with writers and cast members, meets on a biennial basis. In between these formal festivals are informal gatherings of about thirty to forty people, which consist of tours, trivia nights, and time spent watching and

⁴⁸⁴ Jordan Nailon, "Roslyn still rides 'Northern Exposure' fame," *Kitsap Sun*, February 27, 2016, <http://archive.kitsapsun.com/lifestyle/roslyn-still-rides-northern-exposures-fame-2a55ccaf-de80-69d6-e053-0100007fe30e-370405831.html>.

discussing the series. The informal and formal Moosefests are not the only times when *Northern Exposure* fans visit Roslyn, “Tourism exploded here in the early 1990s when Roslyn became the fictitious, remote Cicely, Alaska, in television’s quirky, Emmy-winning *Northern Exposure*. That boom quieted to a buzz, but another tourism jolt is likely on its way . . .”⁴⁸⁵ Featured on the downtown events calendars of this year and last are the informal and formal Moosefest celebrations, showing that even though the show is long gone, the fan community and its impact on tourism is going nowhere.

Other fictional small towns on television have sparked tourism for very real towns. Near Roslyn, Washington, for the past 29 years the towns of North Bend and Snoqualmie have hosted the yearly *Twin Peaks* Festival, a three-day event for fans of the television show *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991; 2017). Art house filmmaker David Lynch created *Twin Peaks* for television in 1990. This series focuses on the murder of a teenaged girl in the small town Twin Peaks, Washington. The underbelly of the town and the secrets of its 51,201 residents are slowly revealed as the local police and FBI investigator try to uncover the mystery of the murder. Twin Peaks was originally a town of 5,120, but network executives believed that life in such a small town would be unfathomable to audiences, so the population was changed to 51,201. However, the characters and setting paint a town and lifestyle much more in line with Lynch’s original scale and the population of the town North Bend, Washington where the series was filmed.

North Bend and Snoqualmie have both benefited from the yearly festival tourists, as well as visitors traveling outside the yearly festival weekend. Visitors and fans of *Twin Peaks* are encouraged to check out Twede’s Café, known as the Double R Diner in the show, the infamous

⁴⁸⁵ Jackie Smith, “Even more exposure for small-town Roslyn,” *The Seattle Times*, April 3, 2008, <https://www.seattletimes.com/life/outdoors/even-more-exposure-for-small-town-roslyn/>.

Snoqualmie Falls, and Salish Lodge, called The Great Northern Lodge in the series.⁴⁸⁶ The fan festival centered around these locations as well as other events, like trivia nights, screenings, and panel discussions and meet and greet sessions with former cast and crew members.⁴⁸⁷ Though in 2019, after the successful revival season of *Twin Peaks* on Showtime, the CBS network that had previously sanctioned the *Twin Peaks* Festival for the last 29 years decided to take over the planning and operations of the event. The 30th anniversary festival was scheduled for the Halloween weekend of 2020 in Graceland, Tennessee, however it was ultimately canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁸⁸

Hallmark Movies

Another place where one can see the real-life impact of a television town on local tourism is with the numerous made-for-television, holiday movies on the Hallmark Channel. Hallmark holiday movies are filmed in various locations in the United States and Canada, sometimes in and around urban areas. A quick Internet search reveals countless lists of Hallmark Christmas movie filming locations, or towns reminiscent of Hallmark's magical Christmas towns. *Country Living Magazine* shared a list of "8 Hallmark Christmas Movie Sets You Can Visit in Real Life" that recommends towns like Monroe and Marietta, Georgia, Wilmington, North Carolina,

⁴⁸⁶ "The Real Twin Peaks," Visit Seattle, last accessed February 24, 2021, <https://visitseattle.org/seattle-localist/play/the-real-twin-peaks/>.

⁴⁸⁷ "Twin Peaks Festival History Page," Twin Peaks Festival, LLC, last accessed February 24, 2021, www.twinpeaksfest.com/art-page.

⁴⁸⁸ Pieter Dom, "Twin Peaks 30: The Official Fan Celebration at Graceland [Canceled]," *Welcome to Twin Peaks*, December 18, 2019, <https://welcometotwinpeaks.com/event/twin-peaks-30/>.

Squamish, British Columbia, and Lagoon Park, Utah.⁴⁸⁹ Beyond this and other lists of small town filming locations are numerous lists of small towns who celebrate Christmas in Hallmark style.

The “Runaway Suitcase” blog through Reservations.com claims “We did the work for you and ranked some of the nicest, coziest small towns in America perfect for a Hallmark movie.”⁴⁹⁰ Among their list of “Hallmark Christmas Towns” are places like Telluride, Colorado, Santa Claus, Indiana, Fertile, Minnesota, North Pole, Alaska, and Provincetown, Massachusetts. The Matador Network’s list promotes small town weekend trips all over the country and notes that “While most of the towns in those movies are fictional, dozens of small towns around America look just as magical in the winter. Here are nine that feel just like the movies.”⁴⁹¹ These lists generated by travel websites and magazines rely on the well-known fascination with Hallmark Christmas movies to promote tourism to small towns across the country. While Weston did not make any of these national lists the town has recently been identified as a small town worthy of Hallmark status.

Hallmark Meets Weston

When faced with numerous filming challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, filmmakers Sandra L. Martin and Isaac Alongi chose to film two made-for-television holiday

⁴⁸⁹ Taysha Murtaugh, “8 Hallmark Christmas Movie Sets You Can Visit In Real Life,” *Country Living*, August 20, 2020, <https://www.countryliving.com/life/travel/g4864/hallmark-christmas-movies-small-towns/>.

⁴⁹⁰ Runaway Suitcase, “The Top 25 Hallmark Christmas Towns Index,” *Reservations.com*, last accessed February 24, 2021, <https://www.reservations.com/blog/resources/hallmark-christmas-towns-index/>.

⁴⁹¹ Matthew Meltzer, “9 charming small towns that look just like a Hallmark Christmas movie,” Culture, *Matador Network*, December 5, 2019, <https://matadornetwork.com/read/small-towns-hallmark-christmas/>.

movies in the greater Kansas City area since travel to Canada was restricted and filming in the Los Angeles area was difficult. Martin, the writer and director, and Alongi, the cinematographer, have previously worked on a film for the Hallmark Channel, but these two films are their first holiday films.⁴⁹² *My Sweet Holiday* (2020) was filmed largely in Kansas City and tells the story of Sadie and her family's chocolate shop, which is sold to a new buyer to whom Sadie teaches the tools of the trade while unknowingly falling in love with him.⁴⁹³ This film has the requisite components of a Hallmark Channel Christmas movie, but eventually aired as part of the Lifetime channel's Christmas Day schedule. Weston was chosen as the primary outdoor filming location for the film, *Christmas on Display* (working title).⁴⁹⁴ Though rights to this film have not yet been purchased, Martin and Alongi's production company, Mapelle Films, hopes the film lands "on either Amazon, Netflix, or the Hallmark Channel."⁴⁹⁵ As commenters were quick to point out on the Weston Chamber of Commerce's Facebook post announcing the movie, Weston is "the perfect location for a Hallmark movie!"⁴⁹⁶ Despite the local news stories' commitment to non-specifics regarding where the film will eventually air, the Hallmark Channel's reputation for Christmas movies set in small towns is so pervasive that the Facebook commenters could see an obvious home for the movie.

⁴⁹² Valerie Verkamp, "Movie makers in Weston," *The Platte County Landmark*, August 6, 2020. <https://plattecountylandmark.com/2020/08/06/movie-makers-in-weston/>.

⁴⁹³ The film's original title was *Chocolate Covered Christmas*. "Chocolate Covered Christmas," *IMDb.com*, last accessed February 24, 2020, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12953542/plotsummary?ref_=tt_ov_pl.

⁴⁹⁴ Verkamp, "Movie makers."

⁴⁹⁵ Pat McGonigle, "Lights, camera, Weston! Producers pick historic Missouri town for new Christmas movie," *FOX4*, August 6, 2020, <https://fox4kc.com/news/lights-camera-weston-producers-pick-historic-missouri-town-for-new-christmas-movie/>.

⁴⁹⁶ Weston MO Chamber of Commerce, "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas?" Facebook, August 7, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/visitwestonmo/posts/3084323798281634>.

Christmas on Display is not Weston's first brush with Hollywood celebrity. Weston has hosted a few documentaries, independent horror films, and even the HBO film *Truman* (1995), which is an event featured in their local history publications, as many residents were extras in the film. This year, as a Christmas movie small town, Weston businesses took advantage of the opportunity to feed their local economy, which was especially important in the midst of the global pandemic. As explained in the local news coverage, "the vast production crew has also been a real boon for small businesses, many of which just recently reopened."⁴⁹⁷ Local restaurants each took turns catering to the production crew, so the economic benefit was shared across a number of downtown restaurants and businesses. For towns like Weston, who rely on a steady stream of tourists, especially during the summer and fall months, this filmmaking project has certainly helped the local economy.

The small town as a setting within popular culture has the potential to fuel tourism in actual small towns through the neoliberal development of a heritage tourism economy. This relationship is less about heritage and more about how the small town has come to exist in the popular imagination. In keeping up with preserving their local heritage and cultivating a historic aesthetic, these small towns have created a backdrop that television shows and made-for-tv holiday films can use to their benefit, which in turn can benefit the local tourism economy. Though without the funds to preserve and the focus on growing tourism, a small town might not have this same opportunity.

⁴⁹⁷ McGonigle, "Lights, camera, Weston!"

Conclusion

At the start, this project sought to interrogate the role of nostalgia in the presentation of small-town life in Weston. Through a grounded study, the aims and focus of this project shifted slightly. Where I had thought I would embark on a theoretical breakdown of nostalgia, I instead focused on history as preserved and presented.

As stated earlier, Weston is not a town with a unique set of problems or solutions to those problems. Small towns across the country face the reality of dissolution and many have looked to commodifying their particular histories to rescue them from this fate. Weston is but one, rather successful, example of a small town whose business and municipal leaders marketed specific aspects of the town's history to be consumed by tourists.

To be successful at this endeavor, Weston needed to bring together local history and local business, both of which were not primarily concerned with revitalizing the local, lived experience in town, but instead catered to transience. These transient visitors moved through local spaces and brief moments in time, without roots in these locations or histories.

The tourism solution that works for Weston cannot and will not work for all small towns. Small towns without specific claims to "significant" moments in United States history will not be able to create and harness a distinct personality for tourism. Small towns without access to funding resources will not be able to build economic and tourism infrastructure. And small towns prioritizing the needs of residents in the precarious present may find little security in exploring an anachronous past.

The tools and solutions available to Weston though particular are not unique. As discussed earlier, small towns looking to their past to solve the worries of their future is a conclusion so expected that it appears in a number of popular television shows and films. This

ubiquity within popular film and television demonstrates just how internalized the neoliberal solution of uniting private business with public need is.

The Small Town in Popular Television

Hallmark's made-for-television holiday films are more popular than ever and this past year, the channel again aired forty holiday films during their "Countdown to Christmas" programming and set a number of them in small towns. Because of the holiday programming, Hallmark ended the quarter in first place with the most cable viewers, and the second-place spot for the most cable viewers for the year.⁴⁹⁸ The popularity of Hallmark's holiday films is nowhere near waning and while the films for this coming year have not yet been released, there will undoubtedly be over three dozen films, a majority of which will be set in a small town.

The small town in popular culture is not going anywhere soon. The small-town backdrop continues to lend itself to the television screen in currently popular, and critically acclaimed, shows. Just this year, *Schitt's Creek*, gained an enormous following and achieved notoriety after becoming one of the television binges of the pandemic.⁴⁹⁹ The Canadian sitcom follows the Rose family, Johnny, Moira, David, and Alexis, as they make a new life in Schitt's Creek after losing all of their money to a crooked money manager and the IRS. With no assets available to them, they are forced to move to the only real estate they still own: the entire town of Schitt's Creek. Living in the local motel, the family begins their journey of transformation amidst the kind and

⁴⁹⁸ "Hallmark Channel Close Out 2020 as #1 Entertainment Cable Network in Fourth Quarter and #2 For The Entire Year," *Crown Media Press*, January 6, 2021, <https://www.crownmediapress.com/PressReleaseList/Details?SiteID=-1&NodeID=302&ID=778>.

⁴⁹⁹ Mary McNamara, "Column: For families isolating together, 'Schitt's Creek' is the perfect pandemic sitcom," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2020-09-01/how-schitts-creek-became-sitcom-of-covid-19-pandemic>.

quirky townspeople. A small town in upstate New York, Sharon Springs, even created a *Schitt's Creek* pop-up experience because of existing similarities between Schitt's Creek and Sharon Springs. By transforming a Sharon Springs shop's storefront into the fictional Rose Apothecary, Sharon Springs used the fictional small town to create a tourist experience for fans of the show.⁵⁰⁰

The Political Importance of Small-Town America

As seen in the 2016 Presidential election, there is a very clear urban-rural divide in the United States. This divide is not simply entrenched in a preference of geography, but in politics and social values, "...the widening political divergence between cities and small-town America also reflects a growing alienation between the two groups, and a sense — perhaps accurate — that their fates are not connected."⁵⁰¹ The 2016 Presidential election shows the political importance of "small town America," often believed to be forgotten by those living in urban areas, and by politicians.⁵⁰² Proving that 2016 was not anomalous, the urban-rural voting divide in the 2020 Presidential election looked very similar to the previous election results showing

⁵⁰⁰ Georgie Silvarole, "Schitt's Creek is a real place, and you can visit it in upstate NY. Here's what you'll find," *Democrat and Chronicle*, September 21, 2020, <https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2020/02/07/schitts-creek-rose-apothecary-beekman-1802-mercantile-takeover-popup-sharon-springs-upstate-new-york/4684168002/>.

⁵⁰¹ Emily Badger, Quoc Trung Bui and Adam Pearce, "The Election Highlighted a Growing Rural-Urban Split," *The New York Times*, November 11, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/12/upshot/this-election-highlighted-a-growing-rural-urban-split.html?module=inline>.

⁵⁰² Eduardo Porter, "The Hard Truths of Trying to 'Save' the Rural Economy," *The New York Times*, December 14, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/12/14/opinion/rural-america-trump-decline.html?mtrref=www.google.com&assetType=REGIWALL>.

“that urban and rural voters in the US have grown yet further apart when it comes to their political preferences.”⁵⁰³

COVID-19 and An Uncertain Future for Small Towns and Tourism

Everyone the world-over has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the United States, many rural, small towns have been areas of high infection rates and low resources. Since the rural population of the United States is already older and poorer than the urban population of the United States, the pandemic has unmistakably left its mark on small town America. The population of small towns in the United States has already been hollowing out, “As a proportion of the population, rural counties were always experiencing a disproportionately high death toll. A cluster of deaths at a nursing home in a small town has a different effect, statistically and personally, then [*sic*] it does in a large city. But what's changed since the early pandemic is the number of counties that have lost residents to the virus.”⁵⁰⁴ During the fall and into the winter, small-town and rural hospitals were unable to accommodate and treat the increasing number of COVID-19 patients, leading many to die while waiting for treatment or transfer to larger hospitals.⁵⁰⁵ An issue of infrastructure and economics, “Small hospitals, understaffed and financially vulnerable before the pandemic. . . Many of the nation’s nearly 1,800 rural hospitals lack the equipment, workforce and expertise to handle a surge of COVID-19 patients. Nurses and

⁵⁰³ Alexandra Kanik and Patrick Scott, “The urban-rural divide only deepened in the 2020 US election,” *City Monitor*, New Statesman, November 11, 2020, <https://citymonitor.ai/government/the-urban-rural-divide-only-deepened-in-the-2020-us-election>.

⁵⁰⁴ Erin Schumaker and Mark Nichols, “Small towns are the new face of COVID-19 pandemic as US passes 250,000 deaths,” *ABC7 News*, November 19, 2020, <https://abc7.com/250-000-deaths-covid-coronavirus/8095155/>.

⁵⁰⁵ Ken Alltucker, “Our neighbors, our family members’: Small-town hospitals overwhelmed by COVID-19 deaths,” *USAToday*, November 16, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2020/11/15/hospitals-coronavirus-covid-19-cases-deaths/6267612002/>.

doctors are getting sick, leaving already short-staffed hospitals more desperate for workers.”⁵⁰⁶ These rural hospitals were built to accommodate general surgeries for small populations and have been pushed beyond their limit during the pandemic.⁵⁰⁷

Beyond the issue of infrastructure, small towns and rural communities in the United States have been less likely to follow the mask rules and social distancing practices encouraged by medical professionals.⁵⁰⁸ Small towns, at least in theory, are known for shared values and community, yet as some healthcare professionals are finding out, at present there is a “toxic individualism” fueling the spread of COVID-19 in small town communities, who do not see why they should be expected to compromise a personal “freedom” by wearing a mask to support their neighbors and community.⁵⁰⁹

The Small Town as a Site of Study

In recent memory, small-town America greatly impacted a Presidential election and has itself been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Prioritizing urban centers as a landscape more worthy of study grossly underestimates and overlooks a large section of the United States’ population. Even though farms and small towns are receding, the rural population of the United

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.; Frank Morris, “‘Toxic Individualism’: Pandemic Politics Driving Health Care Workers From Small Towns,” *NPR*, December 28, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/28/950861977/toxic-individualism-pandemic-politics-driving-health-care-workers-from-small-tow>.

⁵⁰⁹ Morris, “‘Toxic Individualism.’”

States has grown.⁵¹⁰ Some research suggests that we might begin to see migration from larger cities and urban areas to small towns, especially with the rise in remote work since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵¹¹ Small towns in the United States, especially in the New England region are seeing an influx of remote workers moving to their towns from expensive urban areas like New York City and Boston.⁵¹² Even before the pandemic, the biggest city in the country, New York City, saw significant outmigration, averaging a loss of 376 residents a day, over 2,500 a week in 2019.⁵¹³ In 2003 Calvin Beale, a senior demographer with the USDA predicted that “we are likely to see somewhat more people who are dissatisfied with large-scale urban life move to rural and small town areas than people going from nonmetro counties into the cities.”⁵¹⁴ While current data about the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and urban to rural outmigration is inconclusive at this point, there is still a growing interest in small town living, and plenty of space for small towns greatly impacted by the pandemic to invest in the

⁵¹⁰ Allison Tarmann, “Fifty Years of Demographic Change in Rural America,” *Population Reference Bureau*, January 1, 2003, <https://www.prb.org/fiftyyearsofdemographicchangeinruralamerica/>; “Overview,” Economic Research Service, *United States Department of Agriculture*, updated December 17, 2020, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/population-migration/>.

⁵¹¹ Adi Gaskell, “How Remote Working Can Transform Small Town Life,” *Forbes.com*, November 6, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/adigaskell/2020/11/06/how-remote-working-can-transform-small-town-life/?sh=70a12e904e27>; Researchers have even dubbed the result of this migratory moment “Zoom towns.” Philip Stoker, Danya Rumore, Lindsey Romaniello, and Zacharia Levine, “Planning and Development Challenges in Western Gateway Communities,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 87, no. 1 (2021): 21-33.

⁵¹² Jon Marcus, “Small Cities Are A Big Draw For Remote Workers During The Pandemic,” *NPR*, November 16, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/11/16/931400786/small-cities-are-a-big-draw-for-remote-workers-during-the-pandemic>.

⁵¹³ Alexandre Tanzi and Wei Lu, “Even Before Covid 2,600 People a Week Were Leaving New York City,” *Bloomberg Wealth*, December 5, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-12-05/even-before-covid-2-600-people-a-week-were-leaving-new-york-city>.

⁵¹⁴ Tarmann, “Fifty Years.”

infrastructure needed to attract urbanites and remote workers.⁵¹⁵ This suggested trend of urban to rural migration showcases the present and future significance of small-town America as a site of research. As we begin to see more people leave urban areas in favor of rural small towns, research into the appeal of small-town living as well as the development of infrastructure to accommodate this shift will become important.

⁵¹⁵ Molly Gaskin and Anita Brown-Graham, “The Great Migration? Small Town Economics and a COVID-19 Population Reshuffle,” *ncIMPACT Initiative*, University of North Carolina School of Government, <https://ncimpact.sog.unc.edu/2020/12/the-great-migration-small-town-economics-and-a-covid-19-population-reshuffle/>.

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